

How to Have a Relationship with God

If most people were asked, “How does one get to heaven,” what answer do you think they would give?

I remember asking my five-year-old that question one time. Actually, I asked her two questions. First, how is someone saved? “They fight back,” she calmly said. Smiling, I responded, “Well, sure, but I’m asking, how does someone go to heaven?” “They die,” she said, with a look on her face that clearly communicated that as an adult I should already know these things.

As funny as that moment was, most people seem to believe that in order to get to heaven, they have to “fight back” by being good, or at least good enough. When I ask people why they think that, they usually tell me that they have just always been taught that, or that it just seems to make sense.

Many of those same people will tell you that they believe this is an important question to answer and that they believe the Bible is true, but they have never looked in the Bible to see how God answers the question of going to heaven. Why not?

So, this is a brief introduction and a simple outline in order to share with you God’s plan for how one goes to heaven. In the end, I hope you see that the goal of God’s Word is not to show you how to go to heaven, but to show you how to have real life and a real relationship with the God who is the source of all life and who deeply loves you (John 3:16; 14:6)! Thus, if someone gave this to you, I pray that you realize that he or she cares for you. If you found it, I pray that you see this as a divine moment where God is trying to speak to you and invite you into a relationship with Him.

So, how do you have this real life relationship with God? To describe the answer to that question, followers of Christ often use terms like “believe in the gospel” (good news), or “be saved,” or “be born again.” All these are terms that the Bible uses in order to talk about this life-changing relationship with God whereby our lives are no longer our own but His, and He becomes our Master, our Lord, our Savior, and our King. He provides an eternal home for us in heaven, because those who experience this new life are considered His children.

Here are 4 “P”s that help explain God’s path to having that right relationship and new life in Him.

1. A Recognition of **God’s Perfection**

Most people talk about how loving God is, and he is; however, he is also a loving God who is just and holy. Look at what the last part of **Leviticus 19:2** says: “Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

Because **God is holy** and perfect, He cannot and will not tolerate or associate peaceably with sin. In other words, God treats sin as an enemy of His holiness. Since He is holy, He commands anyone who desires to have a relationship with Him to be holy and perfect.

This point is proven time and time again in the Bible. Here are a few more verses:

Exodus 3:5: “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

Leviticus 11:44a, 45: “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy...I am the LORD who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”

Isaiah 5:16: “But the LORD Almighty will be exalted by his justice, and the holy God will show himself holy by his righteousness.”

Isaiah 43:3: “For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior....”

Isaiah 54:5: “For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.”

If you want a relationship with God Almighty, then you must acknowledge Him as He has revealed Himself through His Word. He is holy.

2. A Recognition of **Our Problem**

Because God is holy, He commands anyone who desires to have a relationship with Him to be holy and perfect. One problem must immediately be recognized: **we are sinful!**

Romans 3:23: “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God....”

Let's say that you are better than the average person. After all, you're not that bad. This is the wrong perspective. That's what gets so many people in trouble. They compare themselves to those around them, versus looking at God's own Word and evaluating themselves based on His standard: His own perfection.

Imagine that you are taking a 1000-question test to pass a class. Let's say that you miss only 1 question. Did you make a perfect score? Is your test perfect? No. Regardless of how many questions are added to the test and how many more are correct, if one answer is wrong, your score is not perfect.

Just take the Ten Commandments as God's most basic standard. Have you ever lied? Lusted? Dishonored a parent? You may seek to justify the behavior by your standards, but by God's standards you have sinned. Just one sin blemishes the record, so you cannot be considered holy and you stand opposed to God.

Ezekiel 18:4: “...the soul who sins is the one who will die.”

Sin has made a separation between people and God. Look at Isaiah.

Isaiah 59:1-2: “Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”

To find salvation and experience a right relationship with God, you have to acknowledge that you cannot do it on your own. You are sinful.

3. A Recognition of God’s Provision

The whole idea of salvation implies being saved from something. That’s the good news (the gospel) that God has bridged the chasm that separates you from Him. He has solved the problem.

First, what has God provided salvation from? He has provided salvation from the bondage and penalty that sin brought.

Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sin brings with it death and bondage. Both spiritual death and physical death are ultimate consequences of our sin. In contrast, the life that Jesus brings is spiritual. It transforms our lives here and will be eternally experienced once we pass from this sinful world into His presence.

Second, how did God provide salvation from the death and bondage of sin? In the Old Testament of the Bible, time and time again sacrifices are described. Why? There are two reasons.

One, these sacrifices reveal that sins can only be paid for by the shedding of perfect innocent blood.

Hebrews 9:22: “In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

Two, they point to Jesus as the ultimate perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of those who trust in him.

John 1:29b: “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

So, throughout the Bible, God demonstrates that He is both loving and holy. In His holiness, He cannot tolerate sin and must judge it, but in His love He provides a way for you to receive forgiveness and cleansing from sin and to have your relationship with God restored to a right relationship.

So, He provided that path to restoration by sending Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, to die on a cross and be raised again as our sacrifice for sin. Jesus is the perfect and final sacrifice. In God's holiness, He judges sin. In His love and grace, He provides Jesus who takes that judgment upon Himself so that you can be restored to a right relationship with God. You can be forgiven through Jesus.

Here are a few verses that show God's provision through **Christ as the only path to salvation** from sin's curse.

Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

John 3:14-16: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'"

John 14:6: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

Acts 4:12: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

That's why the Bible calls it the new birth. It is a removal of sin and the beginning of a new relationship, a new life, with God.

John 3:3b: "Jesus declared, 'I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.'"

2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Thus, the perfect provision of God in providing deliverance from sin and restoring your relationship with God is provided by the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

Third, what must I do to receive this provision for my sin? Initially, it may be helpful to talk about how we do not receive this provision. Salvation is

- ❖ Not praying a prayer.
- ❖ Not walking an aisle at church.
- ❖ Not going to church.
- ❖ Not being baptized.
- ❖ Not having Christian parents.
- ❖ Not a simple acknowledgment of Christ's deity, sacrificial death and resurrection.

This point is hard for many people. Notice what God's Word in James says.

James 2:19: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."

It is not enough to simply acknowledge the truth. I must accept God's free gift of salvation and give my life to Jesus. That is why the Bible constantly talks of faith and repentance as the requirement to experience this new life. The new life is there, but can only be received by a repentant heart of faith.

Let's try and explain it this way. Suppose you receive a notice that you have won \$1 million, and all you have to do is go down to the local courthouse and claim your prize. Acknowledging that you have been awarded the prize does not make it yours. You have to receive it.

To receive salvation takes an exercise of repentant faith (Acts 20:21).

Repentance is a change of mind that results in a change of action.

Acts 3:19: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord"

Luke 13:3: "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."

Faith is the means of receiving God's gracious gift of salvation. It is believing on the Lord Jesus Christ as your sole means of deliverance from the condemnation and bondage of sin.

Ephesians 2:8-9: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."

To better understand this faith, think of a parachute. You can have knowledge that what you are looking at is a parachute. You can even believe that it works, but you have not demonstrated biblical faith until it is strapped on and you jump out of the plane trusting solely in it.

In other words, true biblical faith is a deep seated belief that results in a changed life.

It is a repentant faith that changes one's life. It is a faith that bends one's knee in allegiance to King Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11). It is a belief that He provides salvation and a surrender of one's will to His.

John 6:28-29: "Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?'"
Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Now, where does good works fit in? Works are a part of salvation, but not as most people think. Good works should be a necessary byproduct of a grateful heart which has experienced salvation. Thus, if you truly receive this gracious provision God has made for your sin in Christ, you will seek to live for Him, not in order to receive the gift, because it has already been given, but you will seek to live for Him out of a deep appreciation for what He has done for you.

That's why John proclaims in John 3:36, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Notice that to truly believe in the sacrifice of King Jesus is to place your life in obedience under His Lordship.

4. A Recognition of **God's Promise**

For those who repent of their sins and place their faith in the saving work of Christ as He died for their sins and rose again, God promises to restore them to a right relationship with Himself and give them eternal life.

For those who trust in Jesus' death and resurrection as the sole provision for their sins, the Bible promises to free them from the condemnation and bondage that sin brought.

In other words, if you believe on Jesus' death and resurrection as the payment for your sins, then you will be forgiven and enabled to walk in obedience. You will be saved. What a great promise!

Romans 10:9-10: "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Through Jesus' sacrifice the guilt and stain of sin is removed, making those who believe clean.

Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

Isaiah 53:6: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him [the Messiah] the iniquity of us all."

Acts 10:43: "All the prophets testify about him [Jesus] that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

1 Peter 2:24: "He [Christ] himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

God's promise is that if you repent of your sins and place your faith in Jesus as Lord, your relationship with God will be restored and you will be counted as His child and He will be your heavenly Father.

John 1:12: “Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God”

1 Peter 3:18: “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit”

Romans 8:13-17: “For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘*Abba, Father.*’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

An Invitation

So, have you had your relationship with the eternal God of the universe restored? Are you His child and is He your God? Have you trusted in the sacrifice of Jesus as payment and cleansing for your sins?

Maybe you prayed a prayer when you were a child, but it was uninformed and not in repentant faith.

Maybe you walked an aisle at a church, but never really trusted in Jesus and repented of your sins.

Maybe you were born into a Christian family, but have never made Jesus your Savior and Lord personally.

Maybe you never heard this message before or have heard but refused to believe. Yet something is different this time. Maybe for the first time, you see the truth of God’s provision and His promise of eternal life and you want to be saved.

Trust in His provision today. That’s it. Exercise repentant faith. Repent of your sin acknowledging that you have sinned against God and stand condemned. Believe that Jesus died and rose again and trust Him as your Savior and Lord. Believe that Jesus is the sole means of forgiveness and trust in His provision for your sin today.

If you want to express that repentant faith in the form of a prayer, that’s fine. Here is one you can pray, but remember a prayer doesn’t save you. You are saved when you receive the grace of God by faith. So, here is a prayer, but you must choose to believe what you pray.

“Dear God. I know that I have sinned against you. I believe that Jesus died as the perfect sacrifice for my sins and he rose again, so that everyone who believes on his provision for sin can have eternal life. God, I believe. I know I can’t earn my way to heaven. Please forgive me of my sins and be my heavenly Father. I surrender my life to you. You are my Lord. You are my Master. You are my God. Help me to live out my faith. Amen.”

Next Steps:

If you just made the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, congratulations. What an awesome step! You have been forgiven! You have been set free! Walk in that freedom and in your newly experienced faith.

Now, inevitably, a few more questions come up. Hopefully, this information will be found helpful.

Do I have to go to church?

Yes and no. No, your salvation is not dependent upon you going to church; however, you will not grow as God designed without it. I encourage you to find a good church. Prayerfully ask God to guide you to a place where you can worship him together with other people of like faith. Yes, churches are full of hypocrites. That’s life. Wherever there are people, there will be problems; however, God calls us to worship together and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:17-18). One of God’s key means for us to grow together is through church (Hebrews 10:25).

There are a lot of churches. How do I find a good one?

You are right. There are a lot of churches and some of them are great and some not so great. There is not a perfect way of finding a godly Bible-believing church. The search may be hard, but trust God to put you in the right place and please don’t lose heart.

First, contact the person who gave this to you. See if you can join them. If that is not an option, try simply asking some family or friends if they recommend a good Bible-focused, Bible-believing church.

One thing is that before you even visit the church, go ahead and call. See if you can get in touch with the staff or pastor. Let them know that you plan on visiting and that you have recently accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior. Ask for help and please do not let pride get in the way. The enemy would love to let your fear keep you from finding help and encouragement.

Do I need a Bible? How do I know which one to get?

Absolutely. The Bible is God’s word. It is His instructions for your life. If you do not own a Bible or have an old translation that is hard to understand, I would recommend first contacting one of the churches mentioned in the last question. Ask them for help and tell them that you need a good Bible. They would love to help with that.

You can also purchase one. Almost any store or book internet site will have a good Bible. Lifeway stores will probably have a larger selection. Concerning versions, I would recommend the New American Standard Bible (NASB), English Standard Version (ESV), or the New International Version (NIV).

How do I study the Bible? Should I start anywhere particularly?

I would encourage you to read the Bible daily. There is so much to learn and so much to experience. Before reading the Bible, pray and ask God's Holy Spirit to help guide you in his truth.

Here is a basic approach to studying the Bible. First, read a portion of the Bible (a chapter for instance) and prayerfully ask, "What does this say?" Second, think about what you read and prayerfully ask, "What does this mean?" Finally, prayerfully ask, "What difference should this make in my life?"

If you have not read the Bible before, I would recommend beginning in Matthew and reading through the New Testament.

How do I pray?

Think of prayer as talking to God. It can be done at anytime. It can be silent in your head and heart or spoken out loud. I just want to encourage you to pray a lot. Talk to God about everything. Just remember, He is not a genie in a bottle, He is God. He will not always give you what you want, but you can be confident that He will do what is best. He is good and just.

What about baptism?

While baptism is not necessary for salvation, it is an important step of public obedience proclaiming that you have died to your former life and have committed your new life to Jesus as Lord. Baptism is an extremely important act of obedience and should not be delayed. Please don't hesitate. Whichever church you end up attending, let them know that you need to be baptized as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of you may have been baptized as a child. I would encourage you to follow in believer's baptism. Throughout the New Testament the model is always baptism after a profession of faith.