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REACH
4 ✨
LIFE

This book belongs to

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How to use this book



Discover your
identity in
Who am I?

Rpg 8



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Take ...

4 epic journeys through God's Word



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That's deep

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Start or join a **Reach4Life** group

Rpg 177

QR Codes

Scan the QR codes on **Rpg 9, 23** and **129** to watch our R4L videos!

Step 1



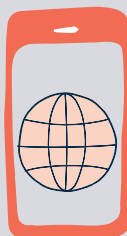
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Step 2



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Let's go!

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Hot topics



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Who am I?

One of the most important questions in life ... and one of the hardest to answer!

When you look at yourself in the mirror, what do you see? Do you sometimes feel your family doesn't know the real you? When you are with your friends, do you worry about what they think of you?



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Almost every day we are confronted with hard questions about ourselves. Probably the hardest are:

‘Who am I really?’

and,

**‘How can I be true to myself
and fit in at the same time?’**

Many people look in the wrong places. Some people spend their whole lives trying to be someone they are not. They try to live up to other peoples’ expectations, or to fit in with whatever is trending in the moment.

Other people look in the mirror and hate what they see. They have heard people they trust tell them they are ugly, or stupid, or weird or worthless. Sadly, they end up believing the lies.

When you don’t know who you are and have no plan for your life, you end up not valuing yourself. You might try to look cool and pretend you don’t care, but deep down you know you do.

When you don’t value and respect yourself, you end up making bad choices. Life feels boring, so you start looking for something to fill the hole. You experiment with alcohol, or sex or drugs, because at least that makes you feel good in the moment.

And why not? Everyone else is doing it!



Scan to watch the **Who am I?** video.

Life in the dirt

When you don't know who you are and don't have a plan for your life, you look for meaning in all the wrong places.

And then you justify your actions with excuses like ...

- ? Everyone else is doing it so it can't be that bad?
- ! If I just make myself look good enough, people will like me!
- ! I need a few drinks to relax and really be myself!
- ? I have no future anyway, so what do I have to lose?
- ? But it feels good in the moment, so who cares about the consequences?
- ! I hate myself and don't deserve to be happy anyway!
- ! If I wear the right clothes, people will think I'm cool!
- ! If I fall pregnant, I can just have an abortion!
- ! I'm not addicted, I can stop anytime I want!
- ! It shows you are a real man or woman!
- ! If I'm hurting, I'm going to hurt them too!
- ! I'm lost and alone; I'm better off being dead!

Take a closer look at this list. None of these reasons have to do with real or healthy values; they are all a response to peer pressure and lies you tell yourself.

When you don't know who you are, you do things for all the wrong reasons!

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Identity in God

There is a much better way to figure out who you are: ask the one who made you!

You aren't on your own in this quest to find out who you are, where you belong and what your purpose is.

God created you with a built-in identity and purpose!

You were created in the image of God, to love and be loved ...

So God created human beings in his own likeness. He created them to be like himself. He created them as male and female.

Genesis 1:27

You have been created and blessed by God and he wants more than anything to restore you to that original blessing.

On top of that, he has a special plan for your life.

Listen to what God says ...

'I know the plans I have for you,' announces the LORD. 'I want you to enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you. I will give you hope for the years to come.'

Jeremiah 29:11



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Created in God's image

What does it mean
when the Bible says
we were created in the
image of God?

To start with, the Bible tells us that God is love ...

God is love. Anyone who leads a life of love is joined to God. And God is joined to them.

1 John 4:16

So we were made to live in loving relationships – relationships with God, with other people, with nature and even with ourselves!

Jesus himself said that the whole law of God (in other words: God's will for every one of us) is summed up in the following two life rules:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength and with all your mind.' And, *'Love your neighbour as you love yourself.'*

Luke 10:27, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18c

Jesus at the centre

God has created many good and beautiful things that can become unhealthy or destructive if they are used in the wrong way.

Your ego is one of them. ‘What is an ego?’, you may be asking. Ego is basically what you think of yourself – or you could say: it’s your relationship with yourself.

We have already heard that Jesus said one of the two most important rules in life is to love other people as you love yourself. So loving yourself isn’t just healthy, it’s a requirement! It’s God’s will and plan for your life.

But to love yourself doesn’t mean you must think you are the centre of the universe!

If you really love and value yourself, you will do everything you can to fulfil your God-given purpose.

Like everything else in the universe, you can only become your true self and fulfil your purpose when Jesus is at the centre ...

All things have been created by him and for him. Before anything was created, he was already there. He holds everything together.

Colossians 1:16–17



Pyramids and circles

Figuring out what is most important in life.

If you don't know what your priorities are in life – what is more important in your life – you will end up being pulled in every direction.

You will be like one of those birds that is attracted by shiny objects, madly hopping all over the place, chasing the next sparkly thing that catches its eye.

There are a few ways to figure out what should be more important in life. One technique is to draw a pyramid with levels:

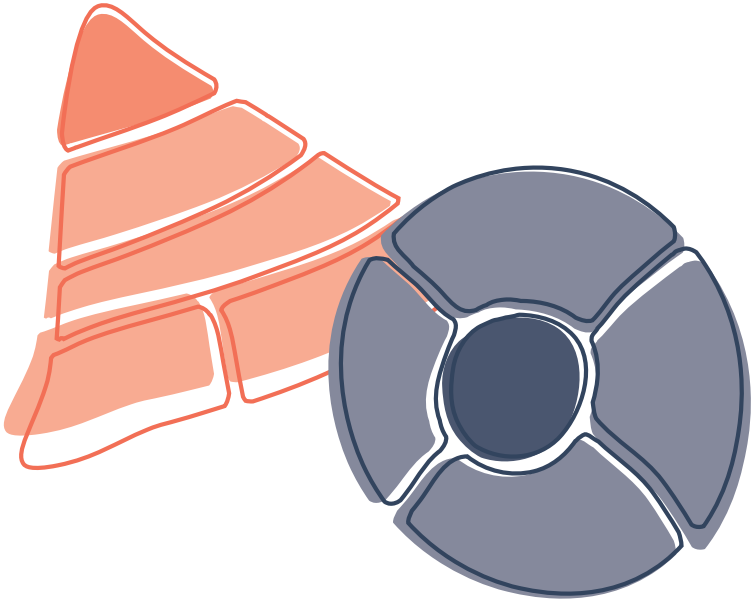
- ✓ First write down a list of the things you think are most important in your life.
- ✓ Then decide what their order of importance is.
- ✓ Now fill all the levels in order in the pyramid, starting with the most important at the top. If you are a Christian, hopefully you will put God on top!

But there is a downside to this method of sorting your priorities: maybe you feel you have to choose between things of equal importance, or maybe you feel guilty for wanting to spend more time with your friends than with God (who is supposed to be top of your list).

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So here is a better way:

- ✓ Draw a big circle divided into segments, like a pie and a small circle at the centre.
- ✓ Now write down in the segments, all the things from your list of important things in your life and put Jesus at the centre. This way you will be able to honour all of the things that are important in your life without having to choose one above the other – and Jesus will be at the centre of all of them!



Overcoming obstacles

Things that can trip you up along the way.

Even when you are on the right path and trying to be what God intended for you to be, there will be many obstacles along your way. Some of them are temptations to leave the path and follow those shiny objects mentioned earlier. Some of them are things that other people have done – or are doing – to you. And some of them are pressures and lies that the world throws at you.

Here are some things to watch out for:

Trouble at home.

Many people come from homes in which their parents are no longer together or have grown up never knowing their fathers. It can be difficult to relate to God as a father if you have never experienced having one yourself! Join a church that can become like a new family to you or find a mentor who can be a parent figure in your life.

Addictions.

You can get addicted to all kinds of things – especially drugs and alcohol. Addictions usually start out as just experimenting with a drink or a smoke (because you are curious or because everyone else is doing it). But it can quickly become something that has a hold over you. Don't even start in the first place! Or if you are using substances or doing things to mask or numb the pain in your life, get help! It's never too late!

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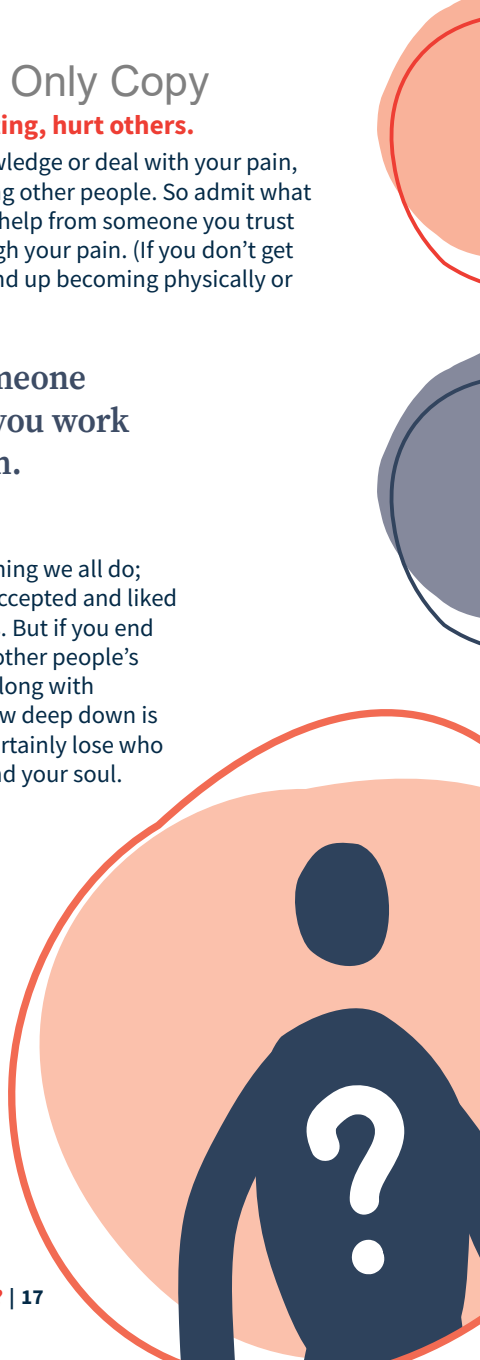
People who are hurting, hurt others.

When you don't acknowledge or deal with your pain, you often end up hurting other people. So admit what you are feeling and get help from someone you trust to help you work through your pain. (If you don't get help, you might even end up becoming physically or mentally ill.)

Get help from someone you trust to help you work through your pain.

Peer pressure.

Trying to fit in is something we all do; everyone wants to be accepted and liked by their circle of friends. But if you end up only conforming to other people's expectations or going along with behaviour that you know deep down is wrong, you will most certainly lose who you are in your heart and your soul.



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Sex.

It's one of God's greatest gifts, but sexual activity outside of marriage ends up hurting everyone involved. You might think you are mature enough to handle it, but it's worth the wait to save yourself for your one, true life partner.

God created you, he didn't make a mistake!

Bullying.

You get physical bullying, emotional bullying or even cyber bullying (like trolling on social media – when people write messages with the intention of hurting and shaming others). Bullies are examples of people who have been hurt or abused, and instead of getting help, they hurt other people to make themselves feel stronger and less vulnerable. If you are being bullied, you must get help by telling someone you trust.

Gender identity.

Gender is more than a culture's expectations of 'being male' or 'being female'. Some young people don't fit the typical idea of how their community believes a man or woman should think, dress or behave. This can lead to confusion, depression and not valuing yourself. But remember God created you, he didn't make a mistake!

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Rebelling.

Rebelling is purposely doing the opposite of what you have been asked to do. Rebelling is the opposite of conforming – both are unhealthy ways of behaving. The sign of real maturity is to be able to be your true self with other people, while at the same time fitting in with society and giving other people the space to be themselves.



Sexual abuse and rape.

Any kind of unwanted sexual advance or behaviour towards you is abuse. And any kind of unwanted penetration is rape. If you have been sexually abused or raped, know that it wasn't your fault. There are people who will believe you, so speak to someone you trust about it. With help, you can recover and find healing from the hurt.

Loneliness.

Everyone feels lonely sometimes. Learning to be content on your own is an important life skill. But if you are feeling completely isolated and all alone, you need to find a healthy, real-life community – only having online friends isn't enough! Join a club, a youth group or a church. It isn't always easy, but there are friends out there waiting to be made.

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Self-harm.

This is when people deliberately hurt themselves – by cutting themselves or punching walls – so they can feel physical pain. These are ways of coping with difficult or painful feelings. Doing these things makes some people feel better in the moment, but it's a dangerous and unhealthy way of dealing with dark feelings. It's much better to talk to someone about how you are feeling.

There is always someone you can talk to who can help you find a way through the struggle.

Suicide.

Sometimes people feel completely overwhelmed by difficult circumstances or sad feelings. When they feel trapped and alone, it may feel like there is no way out. Then they may even think about killing themselves. Ending your life is never the answer! Get help. There is always someone you can talk to who can help you find a way through the struggle.

If you are battling any of the things mentioned above, remember you aren't alone and there is help out there. Speak to someone you trust, turn to God in prayer and read the Bible to find his will for your life. If possible, join a **Reach4Life** group. See **Rpg 177**.

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Finding a good listener

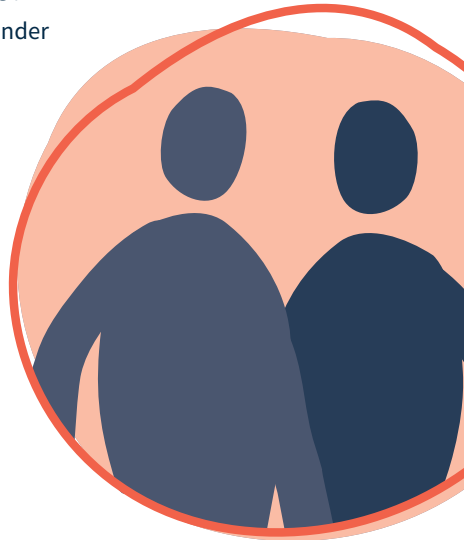
Overcoming the obstacles in your life almost always starts with finding someone to talk to, because a burden shared is a burden halved.

And when you are sharing things that are very personal, it needs to be someone you really trust!

Whether it's a family member, pastor, teacher, counsellor or trusted friend, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Find someone who:

- ✓ is mature and trustworthy
- ✓ will listen without judging you
- ✓ is preferably your own gender
- ✓ doesn't gossip and spread stories
- ✓ has your best interests at heart
- ✓ doesn't tell you what to do but helps you find your own way
- ✓ points you to a loving God.



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The story



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**Over eight billion of us means
that there are eight billion
different stories.**

Yet as different as we all are, the same themes interweave
all of our lives:

**love, betrayal, separation,
promise, sacrifice, forgiveness
and reunion**

You have a unique story!

Have you ever wondered if there is a much bigger story
playing out? One that makes sense of your story, of every
story?

There is!

It's God's story – a story of love and betrayal, sacrifice and
reunion.

Turn the page to discover how your story fits into his ...



Scan to watch **The story** video.

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Love

He is large
and in charge.
He made it all,
knows it all,
owns it all
and cares
about it all.



*In the beginning God created the heavens
and the earth.*

Genesis 1:1

He is real. He is alive and well, ablaze with energy.

*The LORD is tender and kind. He is gracious.
He is slow to get angry. He is full of love.*

Psalms 103:8

Guess what part of creation he loves most? That's right – he loves us most. But why?

It's because God created us in his own likeness (Genesis 1:27). As humans, we are unique works of art designed to reflect the image of our Creator: we think, we choose, we create and we were made to love and be loved – by God and by each other.

We need God in the same way that the earth needs the sun.

God created us to find our meaning and happiness in him. He made us for himself.

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Betrayal

Instead of looking to God to complete and rescue us, each of us has betrayed him by looking to things such as money, approval, comfort, romance, thrills and success instead.

We have chosen a lie instead of the truth about God.

*They worshipped and served created things.
They didn't worship the Creator.*

Romans 1:25

Betraying God, we break his heart. One Scripture says:

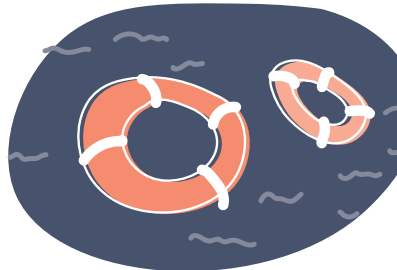
The LORD saw how bad the sins of everyone on earth had become. They only thought about evil things. The LORD was very sad that he had made human beings on the earth. His heart was filled with pain.

Genesis 6:5-6

In addition, our broken relationship with God has led us to the breakdown of all relationships: people with people (selfishness, racism and violence), people with nature (waste and pollution) and people with themselves (shame, fear and emptiness).

**In each of us is a God-shaped hole
that only God can fill.**

This is why we feel so empty sometimes, craving something more. We can try all we like to fill our lives with money, power or thrills, but we will never be truly satisfied. We were made for so much more than this world has to offer.





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Separation

Most of us aren't HIV-positive – but we all have a condition with far worse consequences – we are SIN-positive!

We have all sinned against God in thought, word and deed.

When someone commits a crime, a penalty must be paid, so what is the penalty for violating God's standards?

When you sin, the pay you get is death.

Romans 6:23

The penalty is spiritual death – being separated from God. Judgment day is real and it's coming. Choosing a life of sin means:

You are stubborn. In your heart you are not sorry for your sins. You are storing up anger against yourself. The day of God's anger is coming. Then his way of judging fairly will be shown.

Romans 2:5

Your entire life – every thought, word and deed – will be exposed and judged by God. Everything will be brought into the light. You will get away with nothing. Because God is perfectly holy.

He will punish those who don't know God. He will punish those who don't obey the good news about our Lord Jesus. They will be destroyed for ever. They will be shut out of heaven. They will never see the glory of the Lord's strength.

2 Thessalonians 1:8–9

Separated from God and all that is good. Forever. That's hell.

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Promise

Is there any hope for our broken lives and world?
Only one – the grace of God.

We betrayed God, but he didn't abandon us. Long before Jesus came, God promised again and again that he would one day win us back by sending a Rescuer.

Here is one such promise:

The Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

God has kept his promise!

2,000 years ago, God sent Jesus to this planet to rescue us. God's one and only Son became one of us.

As the God-Man, he lived perfectly, showing us what God looks like up close and personal with skin on. He stared down those who thought they were better than everyone else. He stooped down to pick up broken people and little kids.

Words of wisdom and life-changing power flowed from him in every situation. He came to offer life in all its fullness – though it cost him his life ...



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Sacrifice

On the cross, Christ sacrificed everything.
For you.

He loves you so much he would rather die than live without you – and that’s exactly what he did!

He proved his undying love for you by dying on your behalf.

Christ also suffered once for sins. The one who did what is right suffered for those who don’t do right. He suffered to bring you to God. His body was put to death. But the Holy Spirit brought him back to life.

1 Peter 3:18

God took your sin as well as the whole world’s sin, placed it on his blood-soaked Son and punished him for it.

Then the great exchange happened. He was shut out from the Father’s presence – now you can enter in.



He was broken

— now you can be made whole

He was nailed down

— now you can go free

He was cursed

— now you can be blessed

He died

— now you can live forever

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Forgiveness

Do you know what
Jesus cried out
moments before
he died?

It is finished!

John 19:30

What had he finished?

Our forgiveness and
acceptance by God. We
couldn't save ourselves,
so he saved us.

*God's grace has saved you because of your faith
in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything
you do. It is God's gift.*

Ephesians 2:8

Religions wrongly teach that we can earn our salvation
through our good deeds. None of us can ever be good
enough. It isn't good people who find God – it's forgiven
people.

The religions of the world say do, do, do.

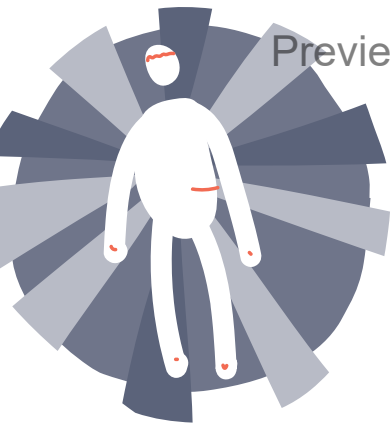
Only Jesus says done!

The only place we sinners can reunite with God is on our
knees, at the foot of the cross. There we find that:

*He has removed our sins from us. He has removed
them as far as the east is from the west.*

Psalm 103:12





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Life

The Son died on Friday afternoon, but on Sunday morning he rose from the dead. Death was defeated. Shafts of unstoppable hope shone upon our dark planet.

Ever since then ...

In his great mercy he has given us a new birth and a living hope. This hope is living because Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

1 Peter 1:3

Jesus could set people free who were afraid of death. All their lives they were held as slaves by that fear.

Hebrews 2:15

When we turn to the Risen One, we come alive to the Living God. His Spirit comes to live inside of us. The winds of heaven begin blowing through the deepest chambers of our heart.

Most wonderfully, we are given a forever-relationship with our Creator. The door into his throne room swings open. We can be up close and personal with the invisible God anytime we want.

Even though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, you believe in him. You are filled with a glorious joy that can't be put into words.

1 Peter 1:8

Wow!

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Reunion

In Christ, our past is forgiven and our present has purpose. Best of all, our future is heaven.

'Look! God now makes his home with the people. He will live with them. They will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be their God. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death." And there will be no more sadness. There will be no more crying or pain. Things are no longer the way they used to be.'

Revelation 21:3-4, quoting Isaiah 25:8

God's story will reach its high point when Jesus returns to remove all that is evil and heal all that is broken. He will bring with him a whole new world. In it, we will enjoy God and each other forever. All this world was meant to be but couldn't be because of our sin. That world will be ...

It is written that 'no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human mind has known.' God has prepared these things for those who love him.

1 Corinthians 2:9, quoting Isaiah 64:4

**So much to look forward to,
but there's no need to wait ...**



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Coming home

God's arms are open wide. He invites you to come home to him. Right here. Right now.

Some people did accept him and did believe in his name. He gave them the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

Can you feel his love drawing you like a magnet?

Why not come home?

This could be the moment your story collides with his!

Will you turn to him and trust in him?

Scripture says:

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Romans 10:13, quoting Joel 2:32

If you want to put your faith in Christ as your Lord and Saviour, don't wait another minute ...

Get alone.

Go down on your knees and pray the following simple words.

God is listening ...

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‘Jesus,

I believe you are the Son of God who came to rescue me. I want to know you. You died on the cross for my sins to bring me back to God.

Be my Saviour. Forgive me. Make me your child, part of your family now and forever.

I want to turn from my sin to you now.

I believe you are risen from the dead. Alive, large and in charge.

Come and live in me by your Spirit.

Take control of my life as I learn to trust and follow you from now on. Reshape me to be the person you created me to be.’



First steps

If you prayed this prayer, welcome home.
The adventure has begun!

Like all relationships, your walk with God will grow stronger the more time you spend with him.

God's Word gives some ways to begin growing closer to him. You can start right away ...

1 **Daily – celebrate God's unfailing, undeserved love.**
It's the best thing you will ever have!
I am absolutely sure that not even death or life ... the present or the future ... or anything else in all creation ... can ever separate us from God's love.
Romans 8:38-39

2 **Find a spiritual community in a church you can call home and with some Christian friends.**
And let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope.
Hebrews 10:25

3 **Start talking to God, who is now your friend and Father, about anything and everything.**
At all times, pray by the power of the Spirit. Pray all kinds of prayers. Be watchful, so that you can pray. Always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.
Ephesians 6:18

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4 Tell your Christian friends and relatives about your decision. In fact, don't be shy to tell everyone you have decided to follow Jesus.

So we are Christ's official messengers. It is as if God were making his appeal through us. Here is what Christ wants us to beg you to do. Come back to God!

2 Corinthians 5:20

5 Read this book daily, asking God to speak to you through it. Start with **The 4 journeys (Rpg 45)**.

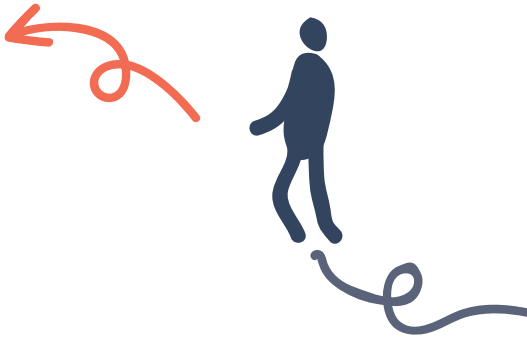
Your word is like a lamp that shows me the way. It is like a light that guides me.

Psalm 119:105

6 Your relationship with God isn't based on your feelings, but on his Word. Feelings come and go, but God's promises are unshakeable.

We live by believing, not by seeing.

2 Corinthians 5:7



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7 Although there may be some immediate changes in your life, you need to form new habits of goodness with the help of the Holy Spirit. These changes take time. When you fail, receive Christ's forgiveness and get back on your feet.

But God is faithful and fair. If we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure.

1 John 1:9

8 Don't expect life to become easier or that everyone will support your faith.

Dear friends, don't be surprised by the terrible things happening to you. The trouble you are having has come to test you. So don't feel as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be joyful that you are taking part in Christ's sufferings. Then you will have even more joy when Christ returns in glory.

1 Peter 4:12-13

9 Accept your identity in Christ.

When anyone lives in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone! The new is here!

2 Corinthians 5:17

Write down the date, so you don't forget when you turned your life over to Christ ...

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I,
(name)

came home to God on

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(date)



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The New Testament

The Bible is God's Word to all people, of all ages and in all places.

The New Testament is the part of the Bible that was written after Jesus was born.

There are 27 sections or books. These were written or approved by Jesus' original disciples.

Read one book at a time – or feel free to bounce around, you don't have to read them in any order.

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HOLY BIBLE

NEW INTERNATIONAL READER'S VERSION



THE INTERNATIONAL BIBLE SOCIETY

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Holy Bible, New International Reader's Version™ (Anglicised), NIrV™

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THE NEW TESTAMENT

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Matthew

Who was Matthew?

Matthew was one of Jesus' disciples. *Matthew 9:9.*

Matthew was his Greek name. Levi was his Jewish name. *Mark 2:14* and *Luke 5:27.*

He was a tax collector for the Roman government before he became a disciple of Jesus.

He wrote his gospel around AD 55.

Why did Matthew write his gospel?

Matthew wrote his gospel to encourage Jewish believers. He wanted to remind them that God will always be with them.

Matthew 1:23 and *28:20.*

Matthew told them that Jesus is the Messiah, the Saviour.

Jesus is the king that God promised to send.

Jesus came to earth to save them and all people from their sins.

Matthew 1:21.

Matthew told them that God has power over illness, death and Satan.

Important teachings

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. *Matthew 5 – 7.*

Jesus sends out his disciples. *Matthew 10.*

Jesus teaches seven important parables. *Matthew 13.*

What it means to be part of God's Kingdom. *Matthew 18.*

Jesus is going to come back. *Matthew 24 – 25.*

Important stories

Jesus is tempted. *Matthew 4:1–11.*

Jesus performs miracles. *Matthew 8 – 9.*

Jesus feeds five thousand people. *Matthew 14:13–21.*

Jesus is crucified, then resurrected. *Matthew 26 – 28.*

Matthew

The family line of Jesus the Messiah

- 1 This is the written story of the family line of Jesus the Messiah. He is the son of David. He is also the son of Abraham.
 - ² Abraham was the father of Isaac.
Isaac was the father of Jacob.
Jacob was the father of Judah and his brothers.
 - ³ Judah was the father of Perez and Zerah. Tamar was their mother.
Perez was the father of Hezron.
Hezron was the father of Ram.
 - ⁴ Ram was the father of Amminadab.
Amminadab was the father of Nahshon.
Nahshon was the father of Salmon.
 - ⁵ Salmon was the father of Boaz. Rahab was Boaz's mother.
Boaz was the father of Obed. Ruth was Obed's mother.
Obed was the father of Jesse.
 - ⁶ And Jesse was the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon. Solomon's mother had been Uriah's wife.
 - ⁷ Solomon was the father of Rehoboam.
Rehoboam was the father of Abijah.
Abijah was the father of Asa.
 - ⁸ Asa was the father of Jehoshaphat.
Jehoshaphat was the father of Jehoram.
Jehoram was the father of Uzziah.
 - ⁹ Uzziah was the father of Jotham.
Jotham was the father of Ahaz.
Ahaz was the father of Hezekiah.
 - ¹⁰ Hezekiah was the father of Manasseh.
Manasseh was the father of Amon.
Amon was the father of Josiah.
 - ¹¹ And Josiah was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers. At that time, the Jewish people were forced to go away to Babylon.
 - ¹² After this, the family line continued.
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel.
Shealtiel was the father of Zerubbabel.
 - ¹³ Zerubbabel was the father of Abihud.
Abihud was the father of Eliakim.
Eliakim was the father of Azor.
 - ¹⁴ Azor was the father of Zadok.
Zadok was the father of Akim.
Akim was the father of Elihud.
 - ¹⁵ Elihud was the father of Eleazar.
Eleazar was the father of Matthan.
Matthan was the father of Jacob.

¹⁶Jacob was the father of Joseph. Joseph was the husband of Mary. And Mary was the mother of Jesus, who is called the Messiah.

¹⁷So there were 14 generations from Abraham to David. There were 14 from David until the Jewish people were forced to go away to Babylon. And there were 14 from that time to the Messiah.

Joseph accepts Jesus as his Son

¹⁸This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary and Joseph had promised to get married. But before they started to live together, it became clear that she was going to have a baby. She became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph was faithful to the law. But he did not want to put her to shame in public. So he planned to divorce her quietly.

²⁰But as Joseph was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said, 'Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She is going to have a son. You must give him the name Jesus. That's because he will save his people from their sins.'

²²All this took place to bring about what the Lord had said would happen. He had said through the prophet, ²³'The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel.' (*Isaiah 7:14*) The name Immanuel means 'God with us.'

²⁴Joseph woke up. He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵But he did not sleep with her until she gave birth to a son. And Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

The wise men visit Jesus

2 Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea. This happened while Herod was king of Judea. After Jesus' birth, Wise Men from the east came to Jerusalem. ²They asked, 'Where is the child who has been born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose. Now we have come to worship him.'

³When King Herod heard about it, he was very upset. Everyone in Jerusalem was troubled too. ⁴So Herod called together all the chief priests of the people. He also called the teachers of the law. He asked them where the Messiah was going to be born. ⁵'In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied. 'This is what the prophet has written. He said,

⁶ 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are certainly not the least important among the towns of Judah.

A ruler will come out of you.

He will rule my people Israel like a shepherd.'" (*Micah 5:2*)

⁷Then Herod secretly called for the Wise Men. He found out from them exactly when the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem. He said, 'Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report it to me. Then I can go and worship him too.'

⁹After the Wise Men had listened to the king, they went on their way. The star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them. It finally stopped over the place where the child was.

¹⁰When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. ¹¹The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw the child with his mother Mary. They bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures. They gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹²But God warned them in a dream not to go back to Herod. So they returned to their country on a different road.

Jesus' family escapes to Egypt

¹³When the Wise Men had left, Joseph had a dream. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph. 'Get up!' the angel said. 'Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill him.'

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The **4** journeys

3 easy steps

1. **Four life-changing journeys await you.**

Believe (Rpg 48), Grow (Rpg 68), Live (Rpg 88) and Change (Rpg 108).

2. **Each journey has 10 lessons.**

Make time regularly to do each lesson until you have finished the journey.

3. **Use a bookmark to keep your place.**

Tick off what you have already done so that you can monitor (or see) your progress through the journeys.

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Believe

Want to live
forever?

-
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 3. Sin and judgment **52**
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Grow

Want to grow
stronger?

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Live

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the max?

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Spiritual thirst

1

Listen

The moon revolves around the earth, while the earth revolves around the sun. The moon is peripheral to us, but the sun is central. Sadly, we tend to shrink God to moon-size, treating him as though he were something small and 'on the side'.

God is large and in charge, bright and glorious. He is the only worthy centre of our lives. He comes first. He gives meaning. He lights up our way.

Look

Read John 4:4–24 (Bpg 112).

Learn

God is like the sun, lighting up our lives. He is also like a spring, able to satisfy our deepest thirst.

Jesus met a woman at the well who had tried to replace God with other things in her life. She had had five love relationships (v16–18). She was looking for love in all the wrong places.

Jesus skilfully used her daily trip to draw water as a picture of her unquenchable soul-thirst and then he pointed to himself as living water (v10–15), able to satisfy her like nothing else ever could (v14).

There's a God-shaped vacuum in our hearts that only Christ can fill.

Many of us, like the woman in the story, think love and sex can fulfil us. Others believe that success, thrills, money, adventure and achievement can satisfy us. Try as we may, they can only provide a quick thrill and then they leave us empty and disappointed.

Believe



Material things can't fill a spiritual void.

Until we drink from the spring that is Jesus, we will never find what we are looking for.

Live

In what ways is God central or on the edge your life?

What do you replace God with?

Lastly

To learn more about spiritual thirst and how we are created to worship God and not creation, read Romans 1:21–25 (**Bpg 177**). Then read the thoughts below.

We were created to worship. When we fail to worship our Creator, we look to other things in creation as his replacement (v25). Instead of finding our joy, identity, centre, hope, strength, salvation and security in God, we try to find what we are looking for in things like sex (v24), partying, thrills, money, love, approval, success, power, comfort or our jobs.

These things aren't bad, but if we make them our gods, we will be disappointed. Only God can truly complete and satisfy us. We are lost without him.

Read **The story** on **Rpg 22**.

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Who is Jesus?

2

Listen

Imagine that you wanted to talk to a fish in a pond. The only way to do it would be to become a fish. It's the same with God and us. God took the ultimate step to make himself known to us in the clearest way possible – he became a man. Jesus is God's way of saying:

Look at my Son and you will see me.

Look

Read John 8:1–11 (Bpg 119).

Learn

What do we learn about God from Jesus in this story?

God cares about truth. We see this because Jesus was eager to teach the truth to the people (v2).

God knows our hearts. Jesus saw through the people's religious acts to the sin deep in their hearts (v7).

God is wise. Jesus very cleverly avoided the trap that had been set for him (v9).

God is loving. Jesus demonstrates this by dealing gently with the broken woman (v10).

God is forgiving. Jesus didn't condemn the woman, even though she was clearly in the wrong (v11).

God is morally pure. Jesus told the woman to sin no more. We see God in the life of Jesus!

In the past, God spoke to our people through the prophets. He spoke at many times. He spoke in different ways. But in these last days, he has spoken to us through his Son. He is the one

Believe



whom God appointed to receive all things. God also made everything through him. The Son is the shining brightness of God's glory. He is the exact likeness of God's being. He uses his powerful word to hold all things together. He provided the way for people to be made pure from sin. Then he sat down at the right hand of the King, the Majesty in heaven.

Hebrews 1:1-3

Live

What do you think God is like?

How does this story of Jesus change or challenge your view of God?

Lastly

To learn more about how to have your eyes opened so that we can see who Jesus is, read Matthew 16:13-17 (**Bpg 22**). Then read the thoughts below.

Have you ever spotted a celebrity in public? You may have seen them but didn't recognise who they were at first. Then suddenly, it's as though your eyes are opened and you realise who they are. Peter experienced this when he saw Jesus for the first time. Even though he knew he was meeting someone special, he had no idea how special Jesus was.

Today, many people still have their own ideas about Jesus. Some think he was only a great teacher, or a prophet or a good example. We desperately need to have our eyes opened so that we can see Jesus for who he really is: the one of a kind Son of the Living God sent to save us.

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Sin and judgment

3

Listen

You have an illness that's worse than HIV. All of us do. We are all SIN-positive. Sin does more than cut our lives short – it cuts us off from our Creator. Not only in this life, but forever. Even the youngest kids have these symptoms. Have you ever seen how naughty little children can be? Who taught them to disobey their parents, to lie, to steal, to hurt others? It's our sinful, rebellious hearts that lead us astray.

The word 'sin' means to miss the goal. God created us to live a life that reflects his love, goodness and purity in the world. However, if we are left to do as we wish, we miss the point and live selfish lives that hurt ourselves and those around us.

Look

Read Romans 3:10–20, 23 (**Bpg 179**).

Learn

God looks deeper than our achievements, appearances and personalities. He sees minds that don't understand him (v10) and hearts that have turned away from him (v12). He hears dishonest, hurtful words (v13–14). He sees self-inflicted pain (v16) and our lack of peace (v17–18).

How does God feel about our sin?

- ✓ He judges us according to his perfect standards (v19).
- ✓ These standards silence our excuses and leave us standing guilty before him (v20).
- ✓ We have all sinned. We have all failed to meet God's perfect ways (v23).

Believe



Is God cruel to judge our sin?

Injustice happens when judges free people who are guilty or treat people unequally. God brings about justice. He doesn't let anyone escape their deserved punishment. If he did, he would be unjust. The eternal consequences of our sin are more serious than we feared. We are more sinful than we ever realised.

In the next section, we will see we are also more loved than we ever dreamed.

Live

In what ways have you seen sin hurt people?

How do you feel about being guilty of sin before a holy God?

Lastly

To learn more about sin, judgment and judgment day, read Romans 2:5–6 (**Bpg 178**). Then read the thoughts below.

Our sin makes God angry. Sin is all the things we say, think and do – or fail to do – that contradict God's character and Word. On judgment day, we will be punished for all the ways we disobeyed God, hurt others and destroyed nature. None of us will get away with anything.

Sin is our unholy hostility to God. His anger, in response, is his holy hostility to our sin. When we say that God becomes angry with us, we don't mean that he becomes short-tempered or has a bad mood. No, his anger is brought on slowly. On judgment day he will demand our lives, our blood. There is only one way out – Jesus Christ! He saves us from God's anger and his anger is sure to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

4

Preview Only Copy Prayer

Listen

It's said that early Sudanese converts to Christianity were committed to praying every day. Each person had a separate spot in the bush where they would share their deepest and most private emotions, thoughts and secrets with God.

Over time the paths to these places became well worn. As a result, if one of these believers began to neglect their prayer time, it was soon clear to the others. They would then kindly remind the negligent person by saying: 'Friend, the grass grows on your path'.

Look

Read Matthew 6:5–13 (Bpg 8).

Learn

How should we pray?

Cut out distractions and focus on God, who is with you. He is eager to respond to your prayer (v6). Be real. Don't try to impress him with fancy religious talk (v7). Express gratitude, sorrow, curiosity, love, everything.

Why should we pray?

There are so many things to pray about:

- ✓ Focus on who God is and tell him how much you love him (v9).
- ✓ Think about what he wants for you and the world around you; then invite him to have his way (v10).
- ✓ Ask him for everything you need, even small things (v11).
- ✓ Say sorry for any sins you have committed (v12).
- ✓ Give him your pain and forgive those who've wronged you (v12).
- ✓ Ask him for protection from temptation and the devil (v13).

GROW



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When should we pray?

Pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). You can talk to God non-stop. Push through the times when it seems like he isn't listening. He is always listening.

Also realise that you don't need, nor are you ready for, everything you ask for. Be patient. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray.

Stay connected.

Live

What does your prayer life look like?

How can you make your prayer life more interesting and real?

Lastly

To learn more about prayer, read Matthew 26:36–46 (**Bpg 36**) and then read the thoughts below.

The night before he was crucified, Jesus had a time of prayer. If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we need to?

We learn a lot about prayer in these verses. Through prayer, we can share our deepest and most private emotions, thoughts, secrets and burdens with God (v38). Instead of complaining to people, we should share our grief with God. In prayer, we once again surrender our lives to God (v39). We don't pray because we think we can cope in our own strength (v40–41). Jesus' three friends chose to sleep rather than spend time with God, yet their greatest test was soon to come (v46), a test they failed miserably!

If Jesus didn't have all his prayers answered (v42), we can also expect that some of our prayers won't be answered either. If God doesn't answer our prayers, it's because he has a higher purpose. We should trust him anyway.

5

Preview Only Copy More like Jesus

Listen

A sculptor was asked how he had sculpted a bird out of a rock. He answered, 'I chiselled away everything that didn't look like a bird.' God is the Master Sculptor. He wants us to become more like his Son, Jesus, so he chips away everything in us that's not like Christ.

When we place our faith in Jesus and are born again, we share in Jesus' acceptance in God's sight. This is instantaneous. From then on God also begins to develop Jesus' character in us. This takes time. Becoming more like Jesus is a work of the Spirit, but it involves willingness on our part too.

Look

Read Galatians 5:16–25 (Bpg 227).

Learn

Jesus was and still is loving, joyful, peaceable, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled (v22–23)

That's why he is so good to others. Imagine you are a fruit tree. As you stay close to the Holy Spirit and obey him (v25), you will bear the fruit of Jesus' character.

You don't have to try to be good merely in your own strength. The secret is to stay close to the Holy Spirit. He will work in you, inspiring up new desires in you for purity and love. You will have a new hatred for sin that only gives you short-term pleasure but does long-term harm to you and others.

What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit? (v25)

It means to listen obediently to the Spirit's voice that speaks to us through the Bible and our conscience. When we are tempted, we will feel his gentle warning

GROW



in our heart. We must obey him! If we do, we will feel his peace and joy. If we disobey, we will make God's Holy Spirit mourn (Ephesians 4:30). He will lovingly urge us to repent, convicting us of our wrongdoing. We mustn't harden our hearts against him.

The more we keep in step with him, the more of him we will experience and the more like Jesus we will become.

Live

How aware are you of the Holy Spirit's work in you?

Which of the nine fruit of the Spirit do you need most and why?

Lastly

To learn about becoming more like Jesus and depending on him, read John 15:1–8 (**Bpg 129**). Then read the thoughts below.

A young boy once noticed apples growing on a large branch of a tree in the park. Not wanting to share them, he cut off the branch and took it home. He waited for more apples to grow. They never did!

In these verses, Jesus says that unless we depend on him, we will never bear the fruit of a changed life either. The gardener is the Father (v1), Jesus is the vine (v1) and we are the branches (v2). Our role is to remain in the vine (v4), filling ourselves up with his Word (v7) and constantly drawing closer to Christ by praying (v7). The Father trims all the things that hinders his work in and through us (v2). Christ pours the sap of his Spirit into us, so that we can bear the fruit of a changed life (v5, 8).

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Self-image

7

Listen

Nick Vujicic was born with no arms or legs. Depressed by all the teasing he experienced as a child, he nearly gave up. One day, he discovered the secret of looking at himself through the eyes of God, instead of through the eyes of people. He now lives a full life and works hard to overcome his disability. He shares this message with people all over the world:

No matter how unattractive, untalented or uncool people may think you are, you are special because God loves you.

Once you understand this, you will begin to rise up into your unique, God-given purpose and potential.

Look

Read Psalm 139:1–18 (**Rpg 43–44**).

Learn

God is crazy about you!

- ✓ He knows your thoughts, actions and habits better than anyone else (v1–4).
- ✓ He searches for you (v7).
- ✓ His right hand holds and guides you (v10).
- ✓ You can't escape him (v7–12).
- ✓ He made your body and soul perfectly (v13).
- ✓ He thinks you are wonderful and complex (v14).
- ✓ He has loved you since you were in your mother's womb (v15).
- ✓ He has a plan for your life (v16).
- ✓ He is with you even while you sleep (v18).

We need to learn how to see ourselves through God's eyes, not through the eyes of society and other people.

Live



Then we will realise that we are beautiful, loved and valuable and that we have a special purpose – no matter what anyone says. Knowing this will help us to stop comparing ourselves with others and begin appreciating ourselves and others more – no matter our appearance, talents, behaviour or social status.

All because God loves us madly!

Live

How do you see yourself?

How has your self-image been affected by other people's view of you?

How can you see yourself more like God sees you?

Lastly

To learn more about our self-image and our new identity in Christ, read 2 Corinthians 5:17 (**Bpg 215**). Then read the thoughts below.

The moment an orphan is adopted, they receive a new identity. In the same way, the moment we trust in Christ, God sees us in a whole new way. We may still look and feel the same, but our identity has changed.

We need to see ourselves through God's eyes now. So how does God see us? We are God's work of art (Ephesians 2:20), a child of God (1 John 3:1), a friend of Jesus (John 15:15), loved beyond our wildest dreams (Romans 8:37–39), forgiven (1 John 2:12), free (Galatians 5:1), the Spirit's temple (1 Corinthians 6:19), Christ's coheirs (Romans 8:17), adopted into God's family (Romans 8:15), righteous (2 Corinthians 5:21), washed clean (1 Corinthians 6:11), God's treasure (1 Peter 2:9), Christ's official messengers (2 Corinthians 5:20), God's co-workers (1 Corinthians 3:9), a pleasing aroma to God (2 Corinthians 2:15), never alone (Hebrews 13:5), citizens of a heavenly kingdom (Philippians 3:20), seated with (Ephesians 2:6) and complete in Christ (Colossians 2:10).

8

Preview Only Copy Money

Listen

You can't see the stars well when you are surrounded by bright lights. In the same way, you easily drift away from your devotion to God and your faith in him when you are captivated by money and the privileges it brings. You then dream of making even more money, hoping it will bring good things into your life and the respect of people.

If this is a major goal in your life, you are in real danger. You need to step back from the bright lights of money and things and see God's glory in a new way.

Look

Read 1 Timothy 6:6–11, 17–19 (Bpg 258–259).

Learn

Why is loving money and what it can give you, dangerous?

You can't take it with you to heaven (v7). Money isn't evil in itself, but the love of it causes all kinds of evils (v10). Loving money will cause you to break God's commandments in many ways because you will do anything to have it – even lie, cheat, steal or use others for your personal gain. It can make you turn away from God (v10). It promises happiness, but it brings pain, ruin and destruction in the long run (v9). It's uncertain, temporary and easy to lose (v17).

How can you use money in a God-pleasing way?

Realise that you can be content with very little (v8). Put your hope in God, not in money (v17). Enjoy everything that God gives you; see it as a generous gift (v17).

Ask God for what you need. Give generously (v18) to needy people and to the church that you are a part of.

Live



Focus on the eternal riches that come from being obedient to Christ in this life (v19).

You can't take money with you to heaven, but when you invest it in the advancement of God's kingdom, you send it on ahead of you! Don't run after wealth. Rather, run after God and use any money he entrusts you with in a way that pleases him.

Live

Have you seen examples of how the love of money can be dangerous in your life or in someone else's life?

How can you use money and things in better ways to bring praise to God?

Lastly

To learn more about money and why we shouldn't put our trust in possessions, read Matthew 6:19–34 (**Bpg 8–9**). Then read the thoughts below.

Too many people put their trust in money and possessions.

Christ warns us against doing this. Our money is never secure (v19). No one can be sure that their money will grow, remain constant or increase. Often, we think we are secure financially but then something goes wrong and we lose a lot of it.

It's much better to make God the focus of our lives (v20).

God, not wealth, should be the treasure that we invest in (v21). A life that is focused mainly on money brings darkness into our lives (v23). In the same way that no one can give equal priority to two masters, we can't divide our hearts between God and money (v24). We must decide that God, not money, will be our life's focus and treasure. Then when he trusts us with money that comes from working diligently, we will spend it in a way that honours him.

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Praying more

Listen

A father wanted to move a couch. He could have done it on his own, but he asked his five-year-old son to help him. The little boy carried about 5% of the weight, while his dad carried about 95%. The boy felt very special because he and his dad moved the couch together.

God can change our world all by himself, but he has lovingly decided to allow his children to help him. We are called God's fellow workers (2 Corinthians 6:1). One major way in which we work with God is through prayer.

Look

Read Luke 11:5–13 (Bpg 86–87).

Learn

How should we pray for God to change things and people?

Pray with compassion (v6). This story is about a man who is looking for help in the middle of the night because he cares about his hungry friend.

Pray with boldness (v8). Prayer isn't overcoming God's reluctance. It's taking hold of his willingness.

Pray with perseverance (v7–9). Even though an answer may not come at first, we must keep on asking, seeking and knocking. We mustn't give up. We are assured that God will answer.

Pray with trust (v11–12). We pray to a powerful, good Father who has our best in mind.

Pray for the help of the Spirit (v13). The Holy Spirit guides us as we pray (Romans 8:26–27). When whatever we pray for is the same as that which God wants for us, he changes situations and people’s hearts (1 John 5:14–15).

Live

Can you name three ways in which you have experienced God’s answers to your prayers?

Who and what are some of the people and situations that you are praying for?

Lastly

To learn about how to pray more, read 1 Thessalonians 5:16–17 (**Bpg 249**) and then read the tips below.

Before prayer changes things, it changes us. Prayer also changes situations. Here are four tips to praying more and with greater power:

Pray some time, somewhere. Find a place and a time in your day where you do nothing but pray. If you are new to praying, set your cell phone timer for 5 minutes and pray. If you don’t know what to pray, spend some time praising God for his goodness, then asking God for his help, then praying for others.

Pray all the time everywhere. When you do pray sometime, somewhere, don’t say ‘Amen’ at the end. Keep the conversation open. Continue talking to God all day long.

Pray with others. Ask other people to pray with you.

Keep a journal of your prayers. When God answers, tick them off and give praise to God.

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Sex is everywhere



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**It's on the TV shows and in the
magazines. It's on both the big
screen and mobile ones.**

It's in the lyrics we sing along to and the latest celebrity scandal. Brands use it to sell deodorants and denims, cars and soft drinks.

Ever since 'the sex revolution' started in the 60s, each new generation tries to outdo the one before. What once shocked now hardly draws a second glance.

But look where it's got us – nowhere.

The love children of the sex revolution are broken lives and broken hearts. I misused sex and have the emotional scars to show for it – a heart torn apart by deep regret, by feelings of shame and being used. My story isn't unique. Then there's HIV/AIDS: 70 million infected mainly through casual sex, so far half of whom have died of it – my dad included.

These days, it seems our culture puts too much value on sex. But the opposite is true. We don't put enough value on it. We don't make too much of sex. We make too little of it.

When we don't know its true worth or purpose, we use sex – not realising how messed up we become in the process.

It doesn't have to be this way. If the first sex revolution turned sex upside down, it's time for another revolution – one that turns it right side up.



Scan to watch **Sex is everywhere** video.

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Sex in the dirt

How have we trampled sex into the dirt?

By having it for all the wrong reasons.

Ask the 1 in 3 teens who have sex why they do. They might say ...

“

If you love someone, you will have sex with them and I loved her.

I was afraid of what my friends would say if I didn't.

It shows you are a real man or woman.

I've been raped and abused, so what is left to keep?

Everybody's doing it and it feels so good!

My partner pressured me to and I didn't know how to say 'no'.

It makes me feel special and loved.

I was a little drunk and very horny so it just happened.

He said he would leave me if I didn't. He also promised me a pair of Levi's.

He is the man; and in our culture a man takes what he wants.

I have no future anyway, so what do I have to lose?

Movies and music make sex seem so cool. I was curious.

If I fall pregnant I can just have an abortion.

Young people have sex for all the wrong reasons!

Take a closer look at this list. None of these reasons have to do with real values. They are all a response to pressure and lies.

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Sex and God

Sex is too special to be ruined by pressure and lies.

Our Creator wants us to see sex in a whole new way.

Sex and God are two words that hardly ever appear side by side but they were never meant to be apart!

Sex is a gift from God.

As its designer, let's hear how he thinks sex should be enjoyed ...

That's why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife. The two of them become one. Adam and his wife were both naked. They didn't feel any shame.

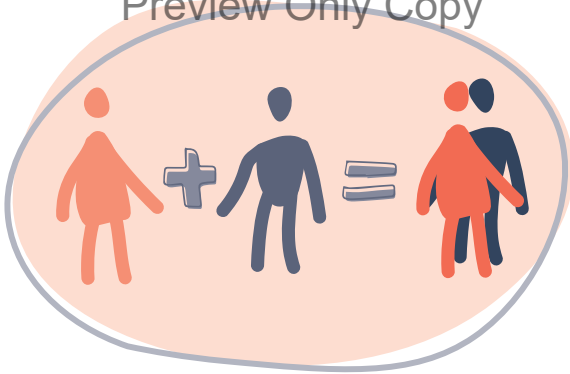
Genesis 2:24-25

See that?

Sex is designed to happen between married people.

Why?





Soul on soul

Sex is more than body on body. It's soul on soul, heart joining with heart. It's a spiritual glue designed by God to bind a man and a woman together for life.

When we have sex with someone, we give a part of ourselves to them and take a part of them into ourselves. It's a life-uniting bond between two people. It explains why break-ups with sexual partners can be so devastating. It also shows that the only safe place for sex is in the context of the life-uniting commitment of marriage. Sex is meant to be a celebration of lifelong love.

Notice also that sex and sexual attraction are God's invention. The devil couldn't create something so amazing! So he tries to ruin God's good gift with shame. Sex should bring joy and peace, not fear and shame. Although sex is a private act, it isn't something to be hidden. We can't hide it from God anyway. He smiles on sex inside a marriage covenant and weeps over sex outside of one.

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Sex, like a river

My parents split up when I was young. As a result, marriage didn't excite me as I grew up ...

When people said, 'Wait for sex in marriage', I thought they were mad. At a young age I had sex with my high school girlfriend. When we broke up it felt like a divorce. I experienced for myself how low living really has a high cost.

I realise now that sex is like a river. It can bring life to a town, but in flood – it destroys. A river needs strong banks if it is to bring life, instead of death. The two banks that make a sexual relationship safe are real friendship and real commitment. Without these, passion and romance are just not enough. When my girlfriend and I had sex, passion was there, but real friendship and commitment weren't. As a result, sex flooded us with pain, shame and regret.

Our society is being flooded because we have not saved sex for marriage.

Think of the destruction all around us: The HIV epidemic is leaving behind grieving loved ones and millions of orphans, nasty sexually transmitted infections (STI's), unwanted pregnancies and 40 million abortions per year, marriages and homes torn apart by adultery, quick thrills resulting in years of pain, and regrets that suck the joy out of life.

All this devastation because we believed the lie that sex isn't worth saving.



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One man, one woman, for life

When I was 16, God gave me a new dream for my future.

A new way of thinking gripped me ...

God loves and values me.

I have a special purpose.

And somewhere out there, there's a girl that I want to spend my life with. I can do things differently to my parents. I can have a marriage based on friendship and commitment.

**On my wedding day
I would like to give her
a gift – my sexual purity.**

That will be my way of saying, 'Baby, I love you so much that I loved you even before I met you – by saving myself for you. On our wedding night, our bodies will echo the commitment we made in the wedding ceremony. We will have a lifelong adventure of sexual closeness that won't be ruined by the memories of other sexual partners. I want that. I choose this.'

That vision inspired me to restart my life sexually – to regain what I had lost, by becoming a secondary virgin. I said no to all offers of sex until my wedding night.

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The four big buts

Do you have a vision that inspires you to wait?
Or are you still not convinced? Maybe you have one
of four objections ...

1 But I will use a condom

It's true that condoms are the best way to stop HIV and STIs from being passed on. But research has proven that most people who use condoms don't use them always and properly. Also, even if used always and properly, there is still a chance of catching the virus. Besides, using a condom may protect your health, but it can never protect your heart.

2 But we won't go all the way

Foreplay includes mouth-to-sex organ and hand-to-sex organ touching. Many think that as long as the penis doesn't enter the vagina, they will be fine. But they won't. HIV and STIs can be transmitted if even a tiny drop of sperm makes contact with the vaginal area or if, during oral sex, there's a small cut in the person's mouth. Plus, foreplay is like fire. It easily gets out of control. In the heat of passion, it's all too easy to go further than planned. Instead of asking 'How far can I go?' Rather ask, 'How much can I keep special?'



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3 But we love each other

Why wait for marriage when you find someone you love? Because the average person, before they get married, has several love relationships. When these end – and they most often do – it turns out we have had sex with many people who are destined to be the wife or husband of another. Love is more than a strong feeling. It's a commitment.

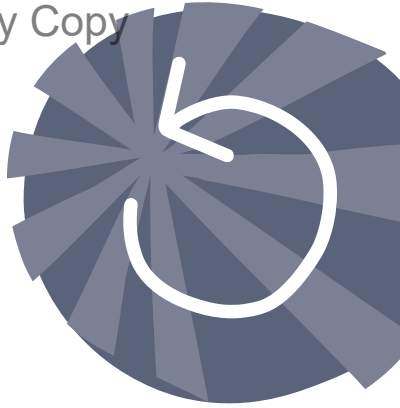
4 But waiting for sex is pointless.

No, it's not! Years of not having sex before I met my wife taught me that life can be amazing and that I can be a real man without having sex! Anyone can sleep around, but it takes a real man or woman to have the character to wait. Character is what brings respect, joy and success to a relationship. I learnt I don't need someone in order to be someone. Also, waiting for sex was worth it when I married the girl of my dreams. For two years we dated and experienced a beautiful non-sexual relationship. There was no emotional baggage in our relationship. The wait was definitely worth it!



Restart

Right across the world there's a growing God-inspired wave of young people dreaming again.



Why not join them? Why not base your sexual decisions on values – not pressure and lies.

It's not too late, no matter your past. Are you in?

If you are, here's the action plan that worked for me ...

- **Make a decision to wait for sex.** Every new direction in life starts with a simple choice.
- **Realise that it will be tough.** Your hormones, movies, music and pressure from friends will often tempt you to throw away your values.
- **Choose friends with the same values to support you.** If you always hang out with sexually active people, you will probably give in sooner or later.
- **Stay single until you are ready for marriage.** There's so much more to life than love! Focus on developing yourself. Dream dreams. Set goals. Work at them. Don't give up.
- **If you do go out with someone, make sure they share your values.** Speak boldly about your plan to save sex for marriage.

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If someone pressures you sexually, say, 'You don't respect my values or my body – so I'm out of here.'

- **Don't fill your mind with sex.** Cut out sexually-charged music, movies, places and books.
- **Avoid sexed-up parties and places.**
- **Many people have sex when they are drunk or high.** So stay away from alcohol and drugs. Come on, you are better than this!
- **If you fall, stand up again and again.** The more you fall, the harder it is to stand up again – but don't give up. Learn from your mistakes. Ask God for forgiveness and for the power to stand strong.
- **Speak to someone.** Find someone you trust and respect to speak to about any challenges along the way.
- **Write a letter to your future life partner.** Tell them you will save yourself for them. This will inspire you to keep your promise.

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- **If you have had sex before, have an HIV test.** If you are HIV-positive, knowing your status will help you live longer and keep you from hurting others. If you are positive, live positively: Take ARVs (they will keep you stronger for longer), get counselling and don't endanger anyone else's life. Find meaning in helping to stop the spread of HIV and supporting others. God still has a plan for your life, he hasn't given up on you – so don't give up either. Draw close to God and let him fill your life with new dreams, new plans and fresh hope.
- **If you have been abused or raped, realise your virginity wasn't taken from you.** You are still a virgin in God's eyes, until you choose to give it away.

Push through loneliness, temptation and tough times by remembering that God is with you.

- **God says you are beautiful, special and one of a kind.** God made you – and he never makes mistakes. This isn't sweet talk – it's the truth.
- **Spend time with God and his Word.** Find a church you can call home. If possible, start or join a **Reach4Life** group. See **Rpg 177**.

Are you in?

Hot topics



Sex

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Starting over: How?

“ Hi! I’ve been with a lot of girls. I’ve been sleeping with my current girlfriend for months. I want to start again – is it really possible?

Yes! We aren’t prisoners of our past – we are pioneers of our future. Change is possible. Here’s how.

- Deepen your conviction to wait for marriage by thinking hard about why you want to wait. Read the **Live** lesson on sexuality (**Rpg 96**).
- Make it right with God then trust him to forgive you and help you to deal with any sexual memories. Although at times you may remember your sexual past quite vividly, know that God has chosen to forgive and forget your sins. In his eyes, you are a virgin. Over time, the memories will fade – and so will the strength of your desire for sex.
- You will probably need to break up with your girlfriend or boyfriend. Once you have been sexually involved with someone, it’s almost impossible to relate to them non-sexually.
- It will take time to change your reputation. At first those close to you might mock your attempts to change, but over time they will grow to respect you. God will use you as a role model for other young people.
- Surround yourself with people who support your new values.
- Develop yourself in the other areas of life. There’s so much more to life than sex.
- Lastly, be tested for HIV and STIs (sexually transmitted infections).

It’s never too late to start again!





That's deep



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How do I figure out God's will?

This question has both a really easy and a really hard answer – easy to understand, harder to act on. To the degree that we know God, surrender our lives to him, resist ungodly influences and allow his Word to transform our way of thinking, to that degree we can know God's will (Romans 12:1-2). We should ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). However, we should ask him to help us make decisions, not ask him to make all of our decisions for us. God wants us to grow up spiritually by learning how to make wise decisions under his loving leadership. That's why there's often more than one option acceptable to God.

If you are trying to figure out what God's will is regarding a certain issue in your life, here are some useful questions to ask yourself:

What does the Bible say?

If God's Word has already spoken, then obey it – you don't need any more direction or guidance than this!

What do wise and godly people say?

It makes sense to learn from other people's mistakes and experience; to listen to their perspective when you are trying to make a big decision.

What does the Spirit seem to say?

The Holy Spirit is able to give us peace about a decision. Or, he may give us an inner warning about it. Or he may tell us to patiently wait in uncertainty until the path becomes clearer.

What does common sense seem to say?

Use the brain God gave you!

What do circumstances seem to say?

Often, but not always, God guides us by opening or closing doors for us.

