



Faith Line

CONFESS & BELIEVE



therefore,

IF ANYONE IS IN CHRIST,
THE NEW CREATION
HAS COME:

**the old has gone,
the new is here!**

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

I STEPPED OVER THE

Faith Line

NAME

DATE

I WAS WITH

PLACE



Congratulations!

YOU MADE THE MOST IMPORTANT
DECISION OF YOUR LIFE!

You stepped over the Faith Line and chose to put your faith and trust in God. The Bible says you are a new creation in Christ, and the angels are rejoicing over you right now!

I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. LUKE 15:7

Prairie Lakes Church is excited and honored to celebrate this decision with you. During this incredible time, you may not know or understand everything this decision means. That's ok. We want to help you get off to a great start, and the resource you're holding will do that.

THE FIRST SECTION of this book explains what the Faith Line is.

THE SECOND SECTION includes fourteen devotions that will orient you to some of the most important topics as you start your journey with God. Take your time and pace yourself through the devotions.

Our prayer is this book will give you the clarity, encouragement and resources you need to start loving and obeying God well. Enjoy!



Design on Purpose

We believe crossing the Faith Line is the best decision you can make, but your new life in Christ is a lifelong journey. It can be bumpy and complex, but it's beautiful and worth it. The design of this book intentionally represents this journey of a follower of Jesus – abstract, colorful, uneven, hopeful and a little messy.

If you find yourself in a rut, keep your eyes focused on Jesus, who is the author and perfecter of your faith. God loves you no matter what. He is consistent, your position is secure and He will guide your steps.

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**For by grace you have
been saved through faith.
And this is not your own
doing; it is the gift of God,
not a result of works,
so that no one may boast.**

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 (ESV)



the

Faith Line

EXPLAINED

CONFESS & BELIEVE

BEFORE THE
FAITH LINE EXISTED



Everything was good!
We found our significance, security and pleasure in God.

OUR HEARTS WERE CLEAN.

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

GENESIS 1:31

WHY IS THERE A FAITHLINE?



Sin entered the world in Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve doubted and disobeyed God. Their sin created a line of division between them and God. We have inherited this division resulting in broken relationships with Him, ourselves, others and creation.

SIN HAS HARDENED & DARKENED OUR HEARTS.

Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. ROMANS 5:12

They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. EPHESIANS 4:18



I'M IN CHARGE
OF MY LIFE!



GOD IS IN CHARGE
OF MY LIFE!

WHAT IS THE FAITH LINE?

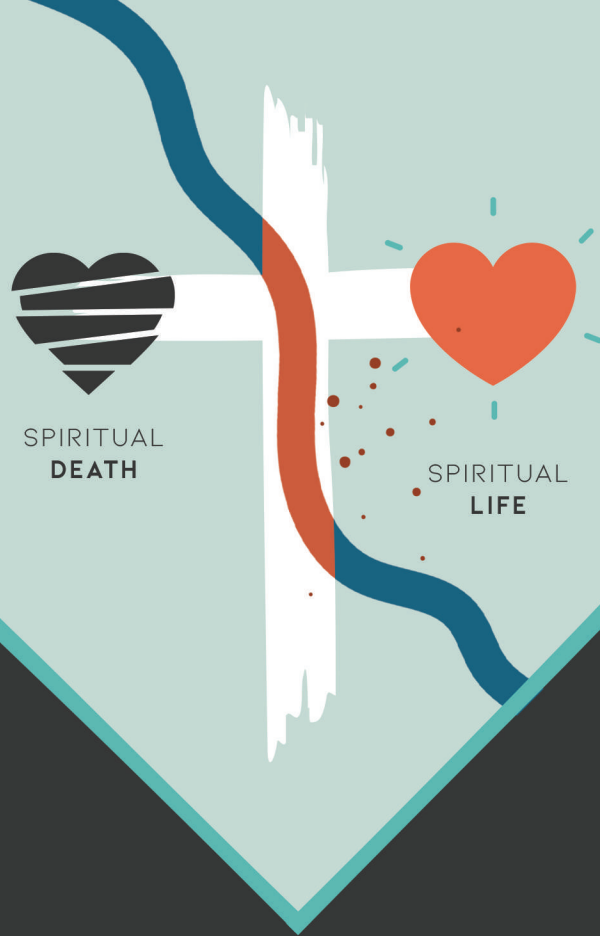
Because we inherited Adam and Eve's sinful nature, we are born into broken relationships and on the wrong side of the Faith Line.

A DIVISION EXISTS BETWEEN US & GOD.

Our natural desire is to find significance, security and pleasure in creation rather than a loving relationship with the Creator.

They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. ROMANS 1:25

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. COLOSSIANS 1:21



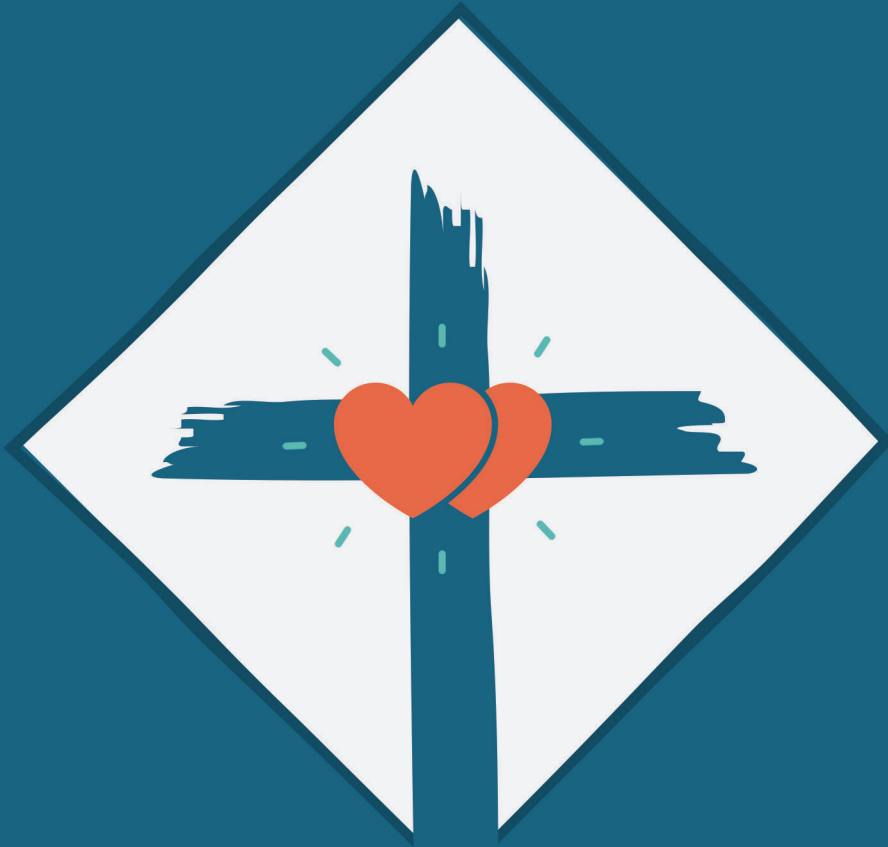
WHY DO I NEED TO STEP OVER THE FAITH LINE?

It is impossible for us to live a sinless life and bridge the division between us and God. We remain dead in our sin. Thankfully, God is on a mission to restore His relationship with us because, despite our rebellion, He deeply loves us. He sent His son Jesus who lived a perfect, sinless life and died in our place as an offering for our sin. Jesus' sacrifice has bridged the divide between us and God and provided a way to be in relationship with Him. Now, you have the decision to believe or reject what Jesus did on your behalf. The choice is life or death!

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 PETER 3:9

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

HOW DO I STEP OVER THE FAITH LINE?



Step 1 • Confess

Confess you are a sinner and in need of a Savior.

Step 2 • Believe

Believe Jesus is the Savior you need. He died on a cross as a sacrifice for your sin, and God raised Him from the dead, conquering sin and death for His glory and your salvation.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

ROMANS 10:9-10 (ESV)

YOU NOW HAVE
STEPPED OVER THE

Faith Line!

In choosing to confess and believe in Jesus as your Savior, you have stepped out in faith and into a relationship with God. The Holy Spirit now lives in you and is working for your good and God's glory. Nothing can separate you from God's love.

YOUR HEART HAS
BEEN MADE NEW!

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. ROMANS 8:26-27



**Be strong &
courageous**

DO NOT BE AFRAID
OR TERRIFIED BECAUSE
OF THEM, FOR THE

Lord your God
goes with you

HE WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU
NOR FORSAKE YOU.

DEUTERONOMY 31:6



Your First

— 14 —

Devotions



Who is God?

Is it even possible to fully describe who God is? The answer is “no,” but the Bible gives us lots of information on the nature, character and works of God and an image of who He is.

GOD’S NATURE is triune, all knowing (omniscient), all powerful (omnipotent) and all present (omnipresent). He’s a triune God which means He is one in essence and three in person—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person is fully God, but there is only one God. It’s one of those mysteries that will remain until we get to Heaven. The words “triune” or “trinity” aren’t in the Bible but are Christianity’s way of describing what’s witnessed in the Bible. For example, in Luke 3:21-22 we see all three members of the Trinity interacting.

When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”

Read Psalm 139 sometime. You’ll get a snapshot of God’s limitless power, knowledge and presence as you see His omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence in its entirety. We also get a glimpse in Psalm 147:4-5 which says,

He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

GOD’S CHARACTER speaks to the many attributes that describe what He is like. He is love, just, gracious, merciful and holy, which are just some mentioned in the Bible. In 1 John 4:16, we see God is love:

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

GOD'S WORKS help us understand what He has done past, present and future. He created and redeemed us. He sustains us in the present, and one day, He'll be the final judge over all humanity. In Romans 1:20, we see how it all comes together as God's works embody His character and nature.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

As you read, pray and learn about who God is, there's one other place to look for insight—Jesus. He is the perfect reflection of His Father, and we can learn who God is by observing Jesus.

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" JOHN 14:9

So, as you read the Bible and observe Jesus, know you are also observing the characteristics of God.

God is

GOOD PSALM 119:65-72

SOVEREIGN 1 CHRONICLES 29:11-13

WISE PROVERBS 3:19-20

FAITHFUL PSALM 89:1-8

COMFORT 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

GLORIOUS HABAKKUK 3:3-4

GRACIOUS PSALM 145:8

INTERCESSOR HEBREWS 4:14-16



Your New Identity


One of the most encouraging passages in the Bible about identity is Ephesians 1:3-14. The Apostle Paul reassures the Christians in Ephesus by elaborating on their new identity in Christ.

He tells them they've been blessed with every spiritual blessing, chosen, adopted, redeemed, forgiven, grace-lavished and unconditionally loved and accepted by God. They are pure, blameless, forgiven and sealed by the Holy Spirit. They have received the hope of spending eternity with God. How incredible is that list? What's amazing is that what was true for them is also true for you! When you are in Christ, these aspects of your identity can never be altered by what you do or don't do. This is now your identity, and that's that!

When you live out of an identity based on how God sees you, there's no longer a need to find your worth in your external circumstances. You are free to live confidently instead of changing who you are based on the opinions of others, your insecurities or your successes and failures. It gives you the opportunity to experience God's unconditional love in new and fresh ways.

It's a process, though, and life has a way of trying to knock us off this path from time to time. Temptation, suffering and frustration threaten to bring out the worst in us and cause us to question ourselves and sometimes God. Paul knew life would be tough at times, and in Romans 12:2, he challenges us to stay focused.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.



Keeping your identity in Christ at the forefront of your mind is vital. Continuing to strengthen your understanding and belief of your new identity will transform your mind and align your thoughts with God's will. It's not about attaining a level of perfection or living in a way where you never experience temptation. It's about staying committed to the ongoing journey of inward transformation as God, through His Spirit, helps you look more and more like Jesus. The problem is God often thinks more highly of us than we do. We struggle to believe the best about ourselves. Be kind to yourself as you grow in your faith and ability to see yourself as God does. You will have good days and bad. It's ok; we all do. God loves you, and nothing will ever change that!



You are

BLESSED WITH EVERY SPIRITUAL BLESSING
CHOSEN • ADOPTED • REDEEMED • FORGIVEN
GRACE-LAVISHED • UNCONDITIONALLY LOVED
ACCEPTED BY GOD • PURE • BLAMELESS
FORGIVEN • SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT
SPENDING ETERNITY WITH GOD.

SPEND A FEW MINUTES REFLECTING ON THE QUESTION BELOW AND JOT DOWN ANY THOUGHTS AS YOU CONSIDER YOUR NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST.

How would believing the truth about your new identity in Christ change the way you live?



The Bible

The Church has always understood the Bible as God's Word. It sounds wild – God wrote a book? Well, kind of. The Bible is the story of God revealing Himself and making a people through whom He would bless the world. Along the way, God inspired certain people to write down what His people were doing and how God was revealing Himself. Think about it – without God's Word, how would we know who God is or if we could trust Him or what we can expect from Him? God has been kind to us simply by allowing us to know Him more. We can now know God better through encountering Him in His Word. The Bible is powerful and able to transform us if we are intentional to read and meditate on it.

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. HEBREWS 4:12

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness 2 TIMOTHY 3:16

The Bible exists for you to know God more so you can learn to love and obey Him in all areas of your life. The goal isn't to just know more things about God but to know Him more. To help yourself along the way, consider purchasing a study Bible, which includes the full text of Scripture plus study notes to help you more fully understand what you're reading. PLC recommends the NIV Study Bible.

As you read your Bible, we suggest using a technique called COMA, which stands for context, observation, message and application. You likely already read this way while browsing websites or reading news articles. The following page will guide you through the COMA method; use it as a reference as you study God's word.

READ THROUGH YOUR SELECTED VERSES OR PASSAGE.
THEN, ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

C ♦ **Context**

WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE AND AFTER YOUR PASSAGE?
WHAT HAPPENS IN THE BOOK YOUR PASSAGE IS IN?

O ♦ **Observation**

MAKE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE PASSAGE. DON'T TRY TO INTERPRET;
JUST NOTICE REPEATED WORDS, STATEMENTS AND THEMES. USE YOUR
STUDY BIBLE TO HELP YOU.

M ♦ **Message**

IDENTIFY THE ONE MAIN MESSAGE (NO MORE) OF YOUR BIBLE PASSAGE.

A ♦ **Application**

SPECIFICALLY AND PERSONALLY APPLY THE MESSAGE TO YOUR LIFE
IN THE COMING WEEK.

Life With God

God doesn't want you to just know a lot of things about Him or even yourself; He wants a relationship with you. That's why He gives you the Holy Spirit when you step over the Faith Line. Jesus explains to us in John 16:15 that the Holy Spirit is our direct connection to God.

All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you. JOHN 16:15

The Spirit has many jobs, and one of them is helping us grow deeper in our relationship with the Father. Being "with God" simply means hanging out with Him and being aware of what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. How do we do that? It's not complicated, but it does take intentionality. Just as you would hang out with a friend to grow the relationship, you do the same with God by praying, reading your Bible, reading a book, attending a small group and serving others. **There are many ways to do this with God which are called spiritual disciplines because they are practices that help us connect with God.** When we intentionally set aside time to connect with God, we grow spiritually and emotionally which impacts other relationships like family, neighbors and co-workers.

As you spend time with God, you'll grow in your ability to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. It won't necessarily be an audible voice, although God can certainly do that. It's more like learning what thoughts, emotions and nudges are from God instead of your own. It's learning to pick up on the subtle messages the Holy Spirit is giving you. It could be something to encourage, coach, teach, convict or comfort you. Sometimes you'll hear God correctly, and other times you'll misunderstand Him. It's ok. It's a lifelong process of learning to be "with" God and hear His voice. The important thing is to not lose your intentionality over time. Just as a friendship can fizzle if it's not cultivated, the same is true with your connection to God. You can feel distant, disconnected or spiritually dry if you lose your intentionality. You can avoid this by finding the spiritual disciplines that help you connect best with God and incorporate them into your daily, weekly, monthly and yearly rhythms.

As you begin or return to spending time with God, you may wonder if you're doing it right, hearing God correctly or understanding what you're reading in the Bible. This is all normal and even necessary for spiritual growth. However, at times, it can be disorienting. That's why including other Christians in your life is a good idea. You'll want and need them to help you be with God.

It's a lifelong process of learning to be "with" God and hear His voice.

It's necessary to spend time alone with God, but it's also just as vital to be around others who can encourage, guide, support and care for you along the way. Jesus wanted and needed others in His life. He modeled being with others so we could see the value of being with God in community.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

Celebration of Discipline by Richard J. Foster

The Spirit of the Disciplines by Dallas Willard

Life's Not Always Smooth

If God is so good, why do bad things happen? Ever wondered that? You're not alone. Christians and non-Christians have been grappling with how to process suffering and pain in our world for two thousand years. Maybe you've been on the receiving end of hurt and pain and you've wondered where God was. Perhaps you've even heard it said that once you step into a relationship with God you'll be protected from pain, sickness, poverty, betrayal and loneliness.

As someone who just stepped over the Faith Line, you need to consider your expectations of who God is and what He says you will or won't experience. Allow God to right size your expectations as He speaks for Himself in the Bible. As you begin to read, you'll quickly realize God's Word is not G rated, and suffering and pain abound. In Isaiah 53:2-5, Isaiah prophesied about a suffering servant who would make things right.

*He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;*



This suffering servant was unattractive, lonely, rejected, despised and eventually beaten, mocked and killed for what Isaiah calls our transgressions and sins. We read this servant's death brings peace, justice and healing for those who don't deserve it including all of humanity past, present and future.

As you continue reading your Bible into the New Testament, you'll find Jesus is the suffering servant Isaiah spoke about. In other words, God Himself experienced loneliness, rejection, betrayal, loss, pain, mocking, torture and death. If our Savior Jesus, who is God, had the human experience of pain and suffering, then why should we or anyone else be exempt? Jesus wants you to expect a life which is not always smooth, but He doesn't want you to be broken by it. He says in John 16:33

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

It can be hard to see in the moment, but often God uses our suffering and hurt to grow our faith so we can be more like His Son Jesus. Sometimes, the hard stuff ends up being the good stuff once you're able to look back and realize God was at work. When you experience suffering, trust God is working and believe He will eventually bring something good out of it. Remember, Jesus suffered too, so He knows what it's like, and He is with you in your pain. Take heart! God never says you won't suffer or hurt, but He does promise to be with you always!



Prayer

Reading the Bible provides one way to interact with or relate to God. Prayer is another and is both a conversation and an encounter with God. If you were in a relationship with someone but never actually talked or listened to them, would you really be in a relationship? Prayer is a way to deepen your relationship with God. There are no magic words or perfect ways to pray. Take the pressure off yourself to sound good or say the right things. God wants your time and attention more than perfect words. He wants to hear about what you think of Him, what you need to confess, what parts of your life give you joy, what you are grateful for and who you're thinking about. If prayer is new to you, one option is to follow the acronym ACTS which stands for acknowledgement, confession, thanksgiving and supplication.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Remind yourself who God is, what He has done and why that's great.

"God, you are the Creator and the One in charge. I can have peace because I can rest in the fact You are in control."

CONFESSION

You don't have to hide or beat yourself up any longer for the sins in your life. He already knows; just talk to Him about it.

"God, please forgive me for my selfishness."

THANKSGIVING

Be grateful. Start with thanking Him for forgiveness and go from there. What in your life is worth being thankful for?

"God, thank You for all You've provided for me today-Your faithfulness, forgiveness and all the ways You take good care of me."

SUPPLICATION

Ask God what you or others need from Him. He's a generous Father who loves to give His children what they need.

"God, please watch over my family and remind them You love them, too."



REMEMBER, PERFECT PRAYER DOESN'T EXIST.
JUST ENJOY SPENDING TIME AND CONVERSING
WITH THE GOD WHO LOVES YOU DEEPLY AND
WANTS NOTHING MORE THAN TO SPEND TIME WITH YOU.

**Do no be anxious
about anything,**

BUT IN EVERY SITUATION,
BY PRAYER & PETITION,
WITH THANKSGIVING
PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD.

**And the peace of God
which transcends
all understanding,**

WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS
AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7



THIS, THEN, IS HOW YOU SHOULD PRAY:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.**

MATTHEW 6:9-13

Acknowledgement

REMIND YOURSELF WHO GOD IS, WHAT HE HAS DONE AND WHY THAT'S GREAT.



Confession

YOU DON'T HAVE TO HIDE OR BEAT YOURSELF UP ANY LONGER FOR THE SINS IN YOUR LIFE. HE ALREADY KNOWS; JUST TALK TO HIM ABOUT IT.



Thanksgiving

BE GRATEFUL. START WITH THANKING HIM FOR FORGIVENESS & GO FROM THERE. WHAT IN YOUR LIFE IS WORTH BEING THANKFUL FOR?



Supplication

ASK GOD WHAT YOU OR OTHERS NEED FROM HIM. HE'S A GENEROUS FATHER WHO LOVES TO GIVE HIS CHILDREN WHAT THEY NEED.



Essential Gifts

In God's loving kindness, He gives each of us essential gifts so we can live the Christian life effectively and be a light in darkness to those who need Him.

FAITH 1 Cor 12:8-10 & Ephesians 2:8-9

HOPE Romans 8:23-25

LOVE Romans 5:5

INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT Act 2:15-18 & Ephesians 1:13

Functional Gifts

God provides various abilities and roles for the ongoing work of building His Church. These gifts allow for structures and systems to be developed so the Church can be an effective and productive influence on earth.

ABILITIES

ADMINISTRATION 1 Cor 12:28

ENCOURAGEMENT Romans 12:6-8

GENEROSITY Romans 12:6-8

HOSPITALITY 1 Peter 4:9

KNOWLEDGE 1 Cor 12:8

MERCY Romans 12:8

WISDOM 1 Cor 12:8

SERVICE Romans 12:6-8, 1 Peter 4:11

ROLES

APOSTLE 1 Cor 12:28-30, Ephesians 4:11

EVANGELIST Ephesians 4:11

HELPER 1 Cor 12:28

PASTOR Ephesians 4:11

PROPHET Romans 12:6, Ephesians 4:11

LEADERSHIP Romans 12:8

TEACHER Romans 12:7, Ephesians 4:11

Dynamic Gifts

God still performs miracles and speaks to us directly. Sometimes He does this on His own, and other times He uses the gifting of His people. Such gifts include discernment of spirits, healing, miracles, tongues and interpretation of tongues. These gifts are all found in 1 Corinthians 12:10, 28-30

SOURCES

1 & 2 Corinthians, He Reads Truth
Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem



Spiritual Gifts

When you become a believer, you are given spiritual gifts, so you can participate in the work God wants to do in and through you. Ephesians 2:10 says

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Spiritual gifts are given to us by the Holy Spirit for the benefit of others. It's our job to understand what our gifts are and steward them well. 1 Peter 4:10 says

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

Biblical spiritual gifts include fundamental graces given to everyone (essential gifts), specific roles and abilities (functional gifts) and the miraculous (dynamic gifts).

DISCOVER YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS

GO TO [PRAIRIELAKESCHURCH.ORG/GIFTS](https://prairielakeschurch.org/gifts) WHERE YOU'LL FIND LINKS FOR FREE ONLINE SPIRITUAL GIFTS ASSESSMENTS.

Baptism

What exactly is baptism? In Greek, which is the language of the New Testament, it means “to immerse, to dip.” It was a New Testament practice of immersing an individual completely into the water for symbolic reasons. One reason was to symbolize the decision to follow a specific teacher and his teachings. Another was to symbolize the identification with a new way of life and group of people. Author Jeff Reed in his booklet *Becoming a Disciple* states it this way,

“THE PRACTICE OF BECOMING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS, AS COMMANDED BY JESUS, INCLUDED BELIEVING, BEING BAPTIZED, AND THEN BEING TAUGHT. THIS WAS THE PRACTICE OF THE EARLY CHURCHES. THE PRACTICE SYMBOLIZED TWO THINGS. FIRST, THE ONE GETTING BAPTIZED WAS PUBLICLY IDENTIFYING WITH JESUS CHRIST AND HIS MESSAGE. HE BELIEVED IT! BEING IMMERSSED IN WATER AND BROUGHT BACK UP OUT OF THE WATER PICTURED THE DEATH, BURIAL, AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST. HE WAS BEING RESURRECTED TO A NEW LIFE. SECOND, HE WAS IDENTIFYING WITH THE NEW COMMUNITY. WHEN HE CAME BACK UP OUT OF THE WATER AND EMBRACED THOSE WAITING FOR HIM, HE WAS PART OF A NEW FAMILY, A NEW COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS.”

After Jesus' resurrection, He spent time with His disciples teaching and simply being with them. He eventually ascended back into Heaven, but before He did, He gave His disciples one last command. It's recorded for us in Matthew 28:16-20:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Baptism is crucial to Jesus. He wanted to ensure all His followers went through this symbolic experience. He built baptism into the process of following Him. If it is that important to the heart of our Savior, then we ought to take it seriously. Baptism is a public declaration of an inward transformation to follow Jesus and His teachings. It's also designed to usher one into a new community of believers where they can be with others who will encourage and care for them well. It was common practice in the early church to get baptized soon after believing in Jesus.

We practice what's called "believer's baptism" which means three things. First, you must have already stepped over the Faith Line. Second, the decision to get baptized is made by you and not for you. Third, you will be fully immersed into the water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

What if you were baptized as an infant? Praise God your parents loved you and wanted the best for you. However, the decision was theirs at that time. Believer's baptism is a decision you make because you want to follow Jesus and His teachings. If you haven't received believer's baptism, we encourage you to sign up for the next baptism opportunity at your campus.

**The Lord makes firm
the steps of the one who
delights in him; though he
may stumble, he will not
fall, for the Lord upholds
him with his hand.**

PSALM 37:23-24



What is a “Next Step”?

A Next Step is an ongoing rhythm helping you increasingly love and obey Jesus as a No Matter follower, someone who no matter who you are, where you’ve been, what you’ve done or what’s been done to you, people can see Jesus at work in you. We’ve identified five Next Steps we believe every No Matter follower should engage in:

- ATTEND REGULARLY** Every week matters.
- SERVE PURPOSEFULLY** Make a difference with us.
- CONNECT RELATIONALLY** Share life together.
- GIVE GENEROUSLY** For you not from you.
- INVITE BOLDLY** Come sit with me.

Everyone’s journey looks different as they begin growing with God. Maybe you want to learn more about the Bible, experience worship, jump on a serving team, make new friendships or invite others into your journey with you. In John 14:15-17, Jesus gave us clear directions on how to love Him well, and He promised to give us a helper.

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

The five Next Steps give us clear pathways to keep Jesus’ commands. You’ll grow spiritually and emotionally the most when you are consistent and intentional with these rhythms. The remaining devotions in this book outline them individually and emphasize the importance of each in your spiritual growth. Engaging with these will transform your life and relationships, and we can’t wait to find out where God calls you to get started!

You can learn more at prairielakeschurch.org/next-steps



Attend Regularly


We all need a place we can call home. Somewhere we know we'll feel safe enough to take a deep breath, let our guard down and be ourselves. We exist as a No Matter church: A place where no matter who you are, where you've been, what you've done or what's been done to you, we believe God loves you, and you can look for God here.

A No Matter church is your home away from home. Every time you choose to attend, you'll be welcomed into a friendly, casual environment filled with people who are excited to see you. But even better than that, you're entering an environment designed to encourage, teach and challenge you to become who God has designed you to be. Going to church isn't about "checking the box" or a measurement of being "good." Choosing to attend regularly gives God room to speak in your heart and work in your life.

**When we choose to keep showing up,
we build new rhythms, habits and
consistency that God will honor.**

He works over time adjusting behind the scenes and under the surface. Our external lives are a reflection of our internal thoughts, feelings and beliefs, and each week you choose to attend church offers another opportunity for God to continue transforming your life from the inside out. Gathering as a community of believers and in an environment focused on God consistently reminds us of what matters most. It helps us reset and reprioritize what's important in life. It leads us to opportunities, resources and relationships we would otherwise miss. Eventually, you'll see how God has made church your home away from home.

There will be times you're on vacation, sick or have something unavoidable. That's ok. It's the intentionality of creating an ongoing rhythm that matters. The writer of Hebrews encourages this consistency because they knew the power and encouragement that comes from gathering.



**Let us hold unswervingly
to the hope we profess,
for he who promised is faithful.
And let us consider how
we may spur one another on
toward love and good deeds,
not giving up meeting together,
as some are in the habit of
doing, but encouraging one
another—and all the more as
you see the Day approaching.**

HEBREWS 10:23-25



Serve Purposefully

Serving Purposefully is about utilizing your skills, talents, spiritual gifting and personality to help others. It's a response to God's grace and love for us, not trying to earn better standing with Him. Jesus already secured our relationship with God through His life, death, burial and resurrection. Now, we are free to simply serve others out of love. This can look like volunteering on one of many teams at church, traveling on a mission trip or working with a local mission partner to make a difference in your community. Developing an ongoing rhythm of serving is important because Jesus first served us through His life, death and resurrection on the cross!

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. MARK 10:45

When you choose to serve purposefully, you'll meet people, build community and make a lasting difference. After meeting Jesus, Nathanael invites his friend Philip to meet Jesus, too. And initially, their interaction goes like this:

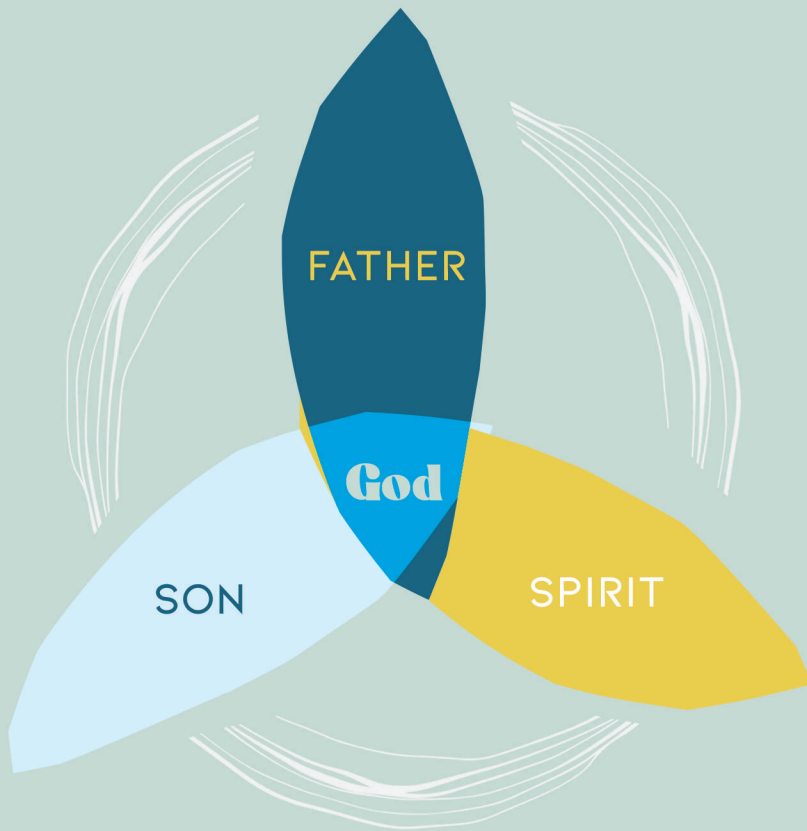
Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip. JOHN 1:45-46

Upon meeting Him, both Nathanael and Philip choose to follow Jesus and become two of His twelve disciples. They became a part of a team with a front row seat to the teaching, miracles, service and transformational work of Jesus.

One of the best ways to build legitimate friendships is being on a team with people focused on a common mission. When that team is focused on serving God's mission, you are answering the invitation to "come and see" the work God is doing in Iowa and around the world. It might be helping with natural disasters, holding babies in a nursery, praying with people in another country, playing an instrument or greeting people from the parking lot. Regardless, you are getting a front row seat to God's story while being supported, equipped and encouraged by new friendships as you serve together. Besides, God is way ahead of you. He's already prepared serving opportunities for you. You just need to jump in and trust Him.

**For we are God's handiwork,
created in Christ Jesus to do
good works, which God prepared
in advance for us to do.**

EPHESIANS 2:10



The Trinity

THERE IS ONE GOD MADE OF THREE
UNIQUE PERSONS. EACH ARE FULLY GOD
BEING EQUAL, ETERNAL, WITH THEIR OWN
UNIQUE ROLE WORKING IN COOPERATION
WITH ONE ANOTHER.



Connect Relationally

In our digital world, we are more connected than ever, yet many of us feel lonely. Maybe you feel like few people really know or understand you, and you rarely feel close to others. We were designed by God to be in relationships that go deeper than our social media feeds. Connecting relationally with others focused on Jesus opens you up to developing authentic friendships with people you can depend on and who can depend on you.

From the beginning, God's nature and heart has been one of connection and relationships in love. We believe our God is a triune God, eternally existing in three persons equally as the Father (God), Son (Jesus) and Spirit (Holy Spirit). We see this in Genesis 1:26 when God says, "Let us make mankind in our image." This means God has placed that same image of connection and relationships in us! God went on to place Adam and Eve in a relationship and created families and tribes. Even Jesus placed Himself in a close relationship with twelve disciples while on earth.

One of the unique benefits of building relationships around Jesus is the trust and vulnerability created as you share life together. As we listen to one another and carry each other's burdens, we practice what the writer of Hebrews says in 10:24-25:

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Having an ongoing rhythm of connecting relationally helps us look more and more like Jesus because we encourage, equip, affirm and challenge one another. Imagine if you had people in your life consistently pushing you to be more courageous, self-aware and vulnerable before God. These relationships provide the perfect place to grow spiritually and emotionally. You will learn, include others in your life and use that learning to bless those around you.

One of the best ways to accomplish connecting relationally is to join a small group. It's an opportunity to fulfill a critical part of the wiring God has placed in each of us – to know and be known by others.

Sign up for a group at prairielakeschurch.org/connect



Give Generously

Our mission is to cover Iowa with No Matter churches, and we're able to pursue that mission thanks to the generosity of people giving financially across our campuses. However, the ongoing ministry operation of Prairie Lakes Church is not the primary reason we're encouraging you to start giving generously. In 2 Corinthians 8:9, the Apostle Paul writes:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Why do we give generously? Because Jesus was first generous to us. Jesus left Heaven, became a man, lived a perfect life and died for our sin. He demonstrated He is a God of generosity in giving His life for us. When you give generously in response to God's generosity, your heart and priorities change because you are placing your security and trust in God first.

You may hear or read, "We want this for you, not from you." And we mean it. We want you to experience the peace that comes from surrendering and trusting God with more of your life, including your finances. Money is the number one competitor for our hearts and often our biggest source of stress. If you've never given before, a great place to start is by giving 1% of your income. A great goal would be to tithe, which means 10% of your income. You can grow in your generosity over time as you experience God's faithfulness. For some, the goal is to just get started, and for others, it may be to go above and beyond a tithe.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7-8, the Apostle Paul gives us a coaching tip on giving generously.

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

REGARDLESS OF THE AMOUNT YOU GIVE, YOU ARE INVESTING IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL ACROSS THE STATE OF IOWA AND BEYOND.

Everything else you purchase or invest in on this earth will come to an end, but your investment at Prairie Lakes Church creates environments, resources and relationships for you and others to experience and come to know God's love. That's God's mission, and the impact is eternal!

Consider these questions:

WHAT DO YOU HOPE GOD DOES WITH YOUR GENEROSITY?

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF GIVING GENEROUSLY?

HOW MIGHT YOU START GIVING GENEROUSLY?



Invite Boldly

Now that you've stepped over the Faith Line, you're probably seeing God differently and experiencing hope, forgiveness and love in new and fresh ways. When you have something as good as God's love, you want to share it with the people in your life! Perhaps you're even thinking of someone you'd love to have discover the same freedom and hope you now have.

In John 4, Jesus speaks to a Samaritan woman who comes to draw water from a well, a resource she couldn't live without. Jesus tells her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman is skeptical, so Jesus proves who He is by telling her He knows about her current unfaithfulness. She's seeking fulfillment and satisfaction in multiple relationships but is still thirsty. As she encounters Jesus, she gets a taste of living water for the very first time – a Savior who redefines and gives her value, worth and eternal life no matter her circumstances or mistakes. In that moment, she steps over the Faith Line.

After her encounter, the woman tells others about Jesus, and "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, 'He told me everything I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world.'" JOHN 4:39-42

Just like the woman at the well, we invite people into our real, authentic and at times messy lives because we want them to get a taste of the same living water we've found in Jesus. Our journey with God is imperfect, but if you remain honest about what you're learning, experiencing and even the mistakes you're making, your Little Iowa will see an example of authentic faith full of truth, grace and forgiveness that can't be taken away. The beauty is you don't have to be perfect; you just have to be yourself.

Big Iowa Little Iowa

WHILE PRAIRIE LAKES CHURCH IS ON A MISSION TO REACH BIG IOWA BY LAUNCHING NO MATTER CHURCHES, EACH OF US HAVE A LITTLE IOWA MADE UP OF FAMILY, FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS AND CO-WORKERS.

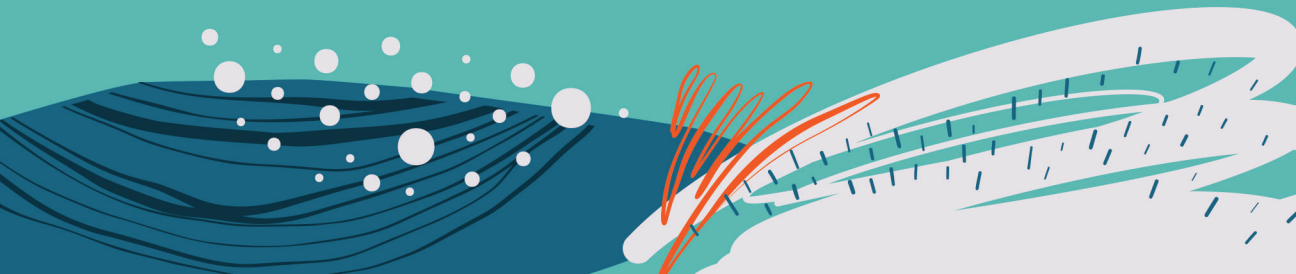
WE ARE CALLED TO INVITE THESE PEOPLE, OUR LITTLE IOWA, INTO OUR LIVES SO THEY CAN SEE JESUS AT WORK IN US.

GETTING STARTED

Sometimes, the first step is inviting people to church. Other times, it's having them over for a grill out, coffee or family get together. When you develop meaningful relationships, you have the opportunity to display God's grace in your everyday life, and church begins to feel like a natural invitation because you've shared other experiences along the way. If they say no, that's ok! **We're responsible for the invitation, not the response.** Continue inviting them into your life; you'll probably have an opportunity to invite them again.

**For I know the
plans I have for you,
declares the Lord,
plans to prosper you
& not to harm you,
plans to give you
hope and a future.**

JEREMIAH 29:11



Your journey has just begun!

Prairie Lakes Church wants you to know you are loved, and we are celebrating with you as you begin your new life with God. This devotional is just the beginning. There are so many ways for you to continue growing and develop a deep connection with God and others. Some of them you'll use once and others you will use the rest of your life. We look forward to being part of the family with you and helping you take Next Steps. Below are a few resources we recommend to help you grow spiritually and emotionally.

WEBSITES

RightNow Media

You're invited to have a free account to an exciting video library called RightNow Media. It's like Netflix for Bible studies because you'll have instant access to thousands of great videos for kids, youth, parents, married couples and more. You can view these videos from your phone, tablet or computer. Sign up for your free account today at prairielakeschurch.org/connect

BibleProject

BibleProject is a nonprofit ed-tech organization and animation studio that produces 100% free Bible videos, podcasts, blogs, classes and educational Bible resources to help make the biblical story accessible to everyone, everywhere. bibleproject.com

BOOKS

***Bible Savvy* by James L. Nicodem**

Made up of four individual volumes (*Epic*, *Foundation*, *Context*, and *Walk*), *Bible Savvy* is a foundational resource for those wanting to better understand the Bible. From the whole storyline of the Bible to the personal application of it, this set of four books is an ideal resource to increase knowledge about God's Word.

***Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter Scazzero**

This book outlines a roadmap for discipleship with Jesus that is powerfully transformative. He unveils what's wrong with our current definition of "spiritual growth" and offers not only a model of spirituality that actually works, but seven steps to change that will help you experience authentic faith and hunger for God.

BIBLES

YouVersion Bible App

New International Version (NIV) or English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible

NIV Quest Study Bible



PRAIRIE LAKES CHURCH IS A
no matter church

AND WE WANT YOU TO BE A
NO MATTER FOLLOWER OF JESUS,
WHICH MEANS NO MATTER WHO
YOU ARE, WHERE YOU'VE BEEN,
WHAT YOU'VE DONE OR WHAT'S
BEEN DONE TO YOU, PEOPLE CAN
SEE JESUS AT WORK IN YOU.

**Written, designed and edited
by Prairie Lakes Church staff.**

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No matter who you are, where you've been, what you've done or what's been done to you, God loves you, and you can look for God here.

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