

City Life Track – Part 1



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INTRODUCTION:

How well do you know people?

Most people are called acquaintances.

The people you know personally are those you call your family and friends. You know what makes them happy, what makes them angry, what they like, what they can't stand . . . basically, everything about what makes them tick.

You like to spend time with these people and feel your life is better because they are in it.

A story told in the Gospel of Luke reveals the type of relationship that Jesus wants to have with us. It begins in the city of Jericho, where a chief tax collector named Zacchaeus had learned Jesus would be passing through the town. Luke tells us what happens next: Zacchaeus . . . wanted desperately to see Jesus, but the crowd was in his way—he was a short man and couldn't see over the crowd.

So he ran on ahead and climbed up in a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus when he came by. When Jesus got to the tree, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today is my day to be a guest in your home." Zacchaeus scrambled out of the tree, hardly believing his good luck, delighted to take Jesus home with him (Luke 19:2–6 MSG). Zacchaeus wanted to know more about Jesus, so he went to great lengths to climb a tree to catch a glimpse of Christ.

But Jesus wanted to know Zacchaeus personally, so he called up as he was passing by and invited himself to dinner at Zacchaeus's house. Jesus wants us to know him and have a personal relationship with him. As he said to his disciples, *"I no longer call you servants . . . instead, I have called you friends"* (John 15:15).

OUR PRAYER FOR YOU

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better."

EPHESIANS 1:17

FIRST, knowing God is founded on the simple but crucial understanding that –
_____. You may have memorized this truth or seen it on posters or billboards or sporting events, but nothing sums it up better than...

John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

SECOND, out of his immense love for you, God has a unique
_____. He wants you to experience the excitement, joy, and contentment that come from doing all that he created you to do. *Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).*

If God loves you and wants you to enjoy an abundant life, then why do people feel lonely, disappointed, afraid, and angry so much of the time? Why is it that so many people are not experiencing the abundant life?

Simply put, because there is a big problem. We’re separated from God by our inherent sinful nature: *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).*

God is holy, and we are not. Our sin—our selfish tendency to always want what we want, when we want it, the way we want it—gets in the way.

In our society we...

- Preserve nature ... but kill ourselves!
- Build great machines ... but have dysfunctional families!
- Conquer Space ... but can't change our habits!
- Save the whales ... but can't save ourselves!

**WE NEED A SAVIOR! THE WORLD CAN NOT FIX ITSELF,
OR WE WOULD HAVE DONE IT BY NOW!**

The Bible tells us the sinful nature leads to _____, but He wants us to have eternal life.

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

God didn’t abandon us, though, and instead sent Jesus on a rescue mission. *“God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (5:8 NKJV).*

That’s why this gift is called “_____.” We’re saved from what we deserve and given the gift of new life—an eternal life we could never provide for ourselves.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT:

In Canada, laws are made to preserve society. Ex: Don't murder or Don't speed on the highway. "Sin" is the breaking of God's eternal laws, which exist to make life better. When you break a law in Canada you must pay the fine.

Ex: Murder – Go to jail!

Ex: Break the speed limit - Pay the \$233.53 fine.

What is the penalty for sin? Answer: Death

Imagine that you broke the speed limit. Your standing in front of the judge who asks, "How do you plea?" You say, "Guilty." He then says, "Listen, laws are put on this earth for a reason, to stop people from killing themselves. You have to pay a fine of \$233.53 or go to jail!"

You look back at the judge and say, "I'm sorry for what I did, but I have no way of paying the fine." So then, the judge takes off his robe and walks toward you; he gets out his checkbook and pays it for you.

The judge didn't do anything wrong; you're the one who broke the law. But imagine that the judge is your father. He still must carry out the law, he's a judge, but because he's your father he paid the fine for you. Why? He loves you and doesn't want to see you go to jail?

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

This gift of Love or Salvation requires a _____.

However, as with any gift, we can choose to accept it, or we can leave it unopened and unreceived. So, there's a choice to be made, a commitment to be determined.

Bible tells us, *"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved" (Romans 10:9–10).*

- We don't do it out of duty
- We don't do it like using a password
- We do it because He loves us, and we do it from our heart

PRAYER:

Hello God, I know you're real and want to know you more. Thank you for loving me. I want a personal relationship with you, and I accept your love gift of salvation. I accept Jesus Christ and His payment for my sin. Thank you for being with me everyday. And help me to trust you, follow you and become more like Jesus. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen

WELCOME TO YOUR NEW LIFE JOURNEY WITH GOD

WHAT'S NEXT? Let's talk about Water Baptism.

"He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mark 16:16).

WHY GET BAPTIZED? It's important that any covenant is sealed in the presence of witnesses, and salvation is no different.

Baptism serves as the _____ of the Christian faith, an outward symbol of the internal commitment we've made to God.
(That's a lot of church talk right there)

Just like a public wedding... showing commitment... it's a public confession telling everyone I'm making a commitment to GOD. Jesus said, "Don't be ashamed of Him." (Matthew 10:32–33).

Jesus died, then rose again!

Baptism is when you go under the water, then come back up. We say we "die to the old life" and "receive a new life in Jesus."

1. Jesus was Baptized as our example to follow (Matthew 3:16)
2. Paul talked about following the example (1 Corinthians 11:1)
3. People in the New Testament were baptized after receiving Jesus (Acts 2:41)

HOW ELSE CAN YOU KNOW GOD?

WHAT'S NEXT?

LET'S TALK ABOUT PRAYER.

PRAYER:

How much do you enjoy talking to someone you love?

Examples: your spouse, kids, or closest friends?

What if God just wants to spend time with us, hear our hearts, and have a simple and meaningful conversation?

PRAYER CAN SEEM “DIFFICULT” AT FIRST. Other church people intimate us sometimes. Many don’t want to pray around others because they feel they aren’t smart enough to pray. That’s just wrong!

What does it take to pray?

1. A _____ willing to talk to God,
2. to _____ to him, and to hear his voice.

Prayer is about his Spirit and our spirit connecting with each other. It’s about real fellowship, open and honest heart-to-heart talks with one another. It’s about intimate conversation.

How do we hear God?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

HOW DO I START?

Conversations usually start small at first. Words like “Hi” or “Hello.” Then we ask, “What’s your name?” or “What do you do?”

God knows all about us... but we need to know Him more.

- How can we shift the way we think about prayer into something more natural and enjoyable?
- How can we let go of feeling like we’re on the witness stand or giving a speech and instead view prayer as an easy, relaxed bond shared with someone we love?

Here’s the secret: Don’t make prayer an event or an obligation. Let it simply be an ongoing conversation with God each day.

Paul reinforces this idea when he tells us, “*Pray continually*” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

It’s not a stop-start activity like physical exercise to be practiced and performed. Instead, it’s ongoing, fluid, dynamic communication back and forth between a loving Father and his children.

1. _____

2. _____

Make prayer a priority until it’s a natural part of your day.

A/ _____ Just as marriage requires effort and commitment, our relationship with God requires us to follow through on making him our number-one priority. That means we have to find time to pray.

B/ _____ The key is having a place where you know you likely won't be interrupted or distracted, where you can relax, still your soul, and talk to God.

We see that even Jesus had a special place where he regularly talked to his Father: *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed"* (Mark 1:35).

Your prayer place doesn't have to be stationary.

- Maybe walking around the neighborhood
- Or I pray in the car on the way to an appointment or to the office.

HAVE A PLAN FOR PRAYER

While it's great to share what's on your heart when you pray, it's also helpful to use some kind of structure. And don't take it from me—take it from Jesus, who taught his disciples to pray based on what we now refer to as the Lord's Prayer.

"One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of his disciples said to him, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'" Luke 11:1

"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 evil, for yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" Matthew 6:9-13

Jesus knew that the Jewish rabbis taught in outline form and that's what his followers would be used to.

1. **“Our Father in heaven”** Connect with God _____

2. Next, we are to _____ his name. **“Hallowed by Your name.”**
Why should we worship him? Because worship gets our focus off ourselves and onto God.

3. **“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”**

Praying “God’s Will” first, helps us keep the right _____.
His plans are higher, better and holier than ours. Let us surrender to His plan.

We pray for God’s will to be done in our own lives. We ask God to direct our steps, and we trust him with each of those steps we take. Again, we let go of what we so often try to control, force, or manipulate to happen so we can receive direction and guidance from the One who knows best.

4. **“Give us today our daily bread”**

We put our _____ in God to supply what we need.

What do you need today?

- Energy to make it through the day?
- More money to pay unexpected bills?
- Wisdom to talk to your teenager about a conflict?
- Patience to deal with your coworkers?

Scripture instructs us, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God”* (Philippians 4:6). Basically, we have two choices: panic or pray. And this verse instructs us to pray in every situation. We can pray about anything and everything.

5. “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors”

Jesus instructs us to make sure our _____ are right with God and right with other people.

- All of us have regrets.
- All of us make mistakes.
- All of us fall short.

Despite our best efforts, it happens again and again and again. The Bible says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).*

6. “And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.”

We are in struggle against sin and evil. Prayer helps us overcome temptation and stand for what’s right.

7. “For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.”

_____ in God’s ability.

Even when you don’t feel victorious, remind yourself of the truth of God’s Word. Don’t let your emotions dictate how and when and why you pray. Talk to God. Open your heart. Listen to him. Praise him and give him thanks for all the blessings in your life. Praise him for who he is and how you can talk to him directly.

WHAT’S NEXT?

LET’S TALK ABOUT THE BIBLE

We’re told, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16–17).*

In many ways, the Bible is God’s autobiography. It’s inspired with his breath and infused with his power. The living Word gives us his plan of redemption for all people. And the Bible speaks to us as individuals, providing a foundation for our lives.

NOTE: For those who are “new” to reading the Bible we recommend starting with the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These tell of the life and ministry of Jesus.

“These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on the solid rock.” (Matthew 7:24 the message)

1. Welcome the Bible into your life and accept its _____

We can’t have a take-it-or-leave-it attitude. The way you accept the Bible makes a huge difference in your attitude and in your acceptance of God’s authority.

We believe the Bible is divinely inspired and recorded.

All preaching, teaching, and prophesying, along with any other communication being declared in the name of the Lord, are to be subject to measurement by the content of God’s Word.

2. Include the Bible in your life on a _____

Including God’s Word in your life means regularly spending time reading it, studying it, thinking about it and meditating on it, praying it, and using it. Whether it’s in the morning, on your lunch break, before you go to bed—whenever you can best focus your mind and heart on engaging with it—make Bible reading a daily priority. If you go days or weeks without talking to a spouse or loved one, you drift apart and become disconnected. The same is true for our relationship with God if we’re not in the Word.

Our bodies require daily nourishment and so do our souls.

“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17 NKJV). By listening to God’s Word—from preachers, teachers, church leaders, and other followers of Jesus—we grow in our understanding and appreciation of everything God packs into the Bible.

Sometimes people tell me they don’t need to read their Bibles because they’re in church so often, but that isn’t a substitute for reading it yourself.

3. Don’t just read the Bible; let the Bible read _____.

Invite God to speak to you as you read his Word. Be attentive; listen to what the Holy Spirit may reveal to you about yourself and your life.

4. Look for ways to _____ the Bible in your everyday life.

God’s Word is clear: *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22).*

Whatever you’re going through, find a verse for the situation and meditate on it. Here are a few of my favorites to get you started:

- Battles—1 John 4:4; Luke 10:19; Romans 8:37 (“We are more than conquerors.”)
- Needs—Psalm 1:1–3; Philippians 4:19 (“My God will meet all your needs.”)
- Fear—Psalm 27:1 (“The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?”)

If you remember that reading the Bible is about relationship—not theology, homework, or literary analysis—then it becomes much easier. Reading the Bible is not an obligation but a privileged way to access the heart of God. Look for him in the pages, the stories, the poetry, the letters you read in his Word. Listen and allow him to speak to your heart through Scripture, nourishing your spirit, healing your wounds, comforting you, instructing you and empowering you, for as Hebrews 4:13 reminds us, “The Word of God is Alive and Active!”