

GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

THE VALUE OF KNOWING THE SCOOP

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-6; 1 PETER 3:13-16



The Heart of the Matter

Encouraging the disheartened is important for a body of Christians. Enduring tough times is too. And worshiping is equally essential. A church needs all three . . . but a ministry is incomplete unless there is also the presence of learning. Healthy, vibrant flocks are kept in that condition by a continual emphasis on the discovery of new truth as well as the review of old truths. Such emphases give our faith stability and substance. Growing Christians are always learning, probing, and pursuing an ever-increasing knowledge of Scripture as well as an ever-enlarging knowledge of the Lord Himself. As we shall see, learning includes an awareness of the objective doctrines as well as the practical side of putting such knowledge into action.



Discovering the Way

1. Ignorance Is Not Bliss (1 Peter 3:13-16)

Ignorance in the realm of general knowledge is nothing to be proud of. This is especially true of ignorance of spiritual knowledge.

2. Sound Doctrine Is Invaluable (1 Timothy 4:1-6)

In this passage, Paul provided a warning and reasons for the warning, stressed knowledge and faith, and encouraged the right application of words and doctrine.



Starting Your Journey

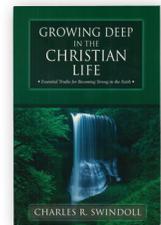
Knowledge can be dangerous when it lacks scriptural support, when it becomes an end in itself, when it isn't balanced by love and grace, and when it remains theoretical and not practical.



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DON'T FORGET TO ADD A CUP OF DISCERNMENT
ACTS 17:11-12; 18:24-28; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-12; 3 JOHN 1:9-10



The Heart of the Matter

Periodically, Scripture warns us against having knowledge as an end in itself. For example, without love, knowledge alone can be a source of pride. Without humility, it can lead us into a judgmental attitude. Without wisdom, it can result in idealism and a perfectionistic spirit. Knowledge needs a buffer . . . something to soften it, give it perspective, make it workable and real. Perhaps the very best companion for knowledge is discernment. Let's spend a little time thinking about that and discovering some ways to mix both into our lives.



Discovering the Way

1. A Few Brief Definitions

Before we can put discernment into practice, we must first understand the definitions of some key terms: *knowledge*, *discernment*, and *balance*.

2. Some Examples from Scripture

Diotrephes in 3 John 1:9-10 is an example of an individual *without* discernment. But Apollos in Acts 18:24-28 is an example of an individual *with* discernment. The Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1:10-12 is an example of a church *without* discernment. But the Berean church in Acts 17:11-12 is an example of a church *with* discernment.



Starting Your Journey

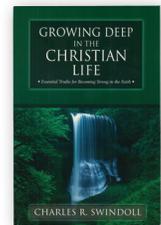
Several principles are worth remembering. First, no one person has all the truth. Second, no single church owns exclusive rights to your mind. Third, no specific interpretation is correct just because a gifted teacher says so.



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GOD'S BOOK—GOD'S VOICE

PSALM 119:98–100; 2 TIMOTHY 3:14–17; 2 PETER 1:19–22



The Heart of the Matter

Have you stopped recently to think about the benefits of having a copy of Scripture in your own language? Have you ever pondered the thought: *What if all the Bibles suddenly disappeared?* In our overabundant, more-than-enough world, such thoughts are foreign . . . too impossible to imagine. But for a few moments, try. Think of the spiritual darkness in which you would walk, the uncertainty of your decisions, the absence of absolutes, the confusion you'd feel. God's Book, the Bible, is the most reliable map available today. As its pages speak, we are wise to hear and heed. As its warnings are revealed, we dare not ignore them. But how can we know *for sure* that God's Book is God's voice? Is it really that trustworthy today? Is it really that sure?



Discovering the Way

1. Popular Crutches People Lean On

When life knocks you down, many people rely on the crutches of escapism, cynicism, humanism, and supernaturalism.

2. The Foundation Everyone Can Trust (Selected Scriptures)

The Bible testifies to its identity, its inerrancy, and its reliability.



Starting Your Journey

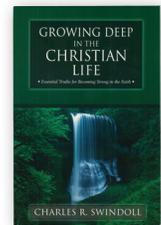
Three benefits of believing the Bible come from Psalm 119. First, you have stability in the midst of life's storms (119:98). Second, you have insight into life rather being intimidated by life (119:99). Third, you have a maturity beyond your years (119:100).



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HANDLING THE SCRIPTURES ACCURATELY
NEHEMIAH 8:1–6, 8–18; MATTHEW 15:1–14; 16:5–12



The Heart of the Matter

“You can prove anything you wish from the Bible!” Have you ever heard someone say that? Probably so. For the most part, it is true. If a person really wants to find biblical “justification” for some belief or activity and is willing to use half-verses, take passages out of context, and twist the meaning of various terms, then he or she can “prove” just about anything from Scripture. Because of this, we need to develop good habits and cultivate correct methods of handling the Word of God. There are a few rules to remember, certain techniques to employ, and several practical principles to keep in mind if we wish to interpret Scripture accurately.



Discovering the Way

1. The Problem: Mishandling the Bible

Mishandling Scripture is as old as the Bible and is a major disease in the church today.

2. Our Need: Maintaining the Meaning (Selected Scriptures from Matthew)

Jesus addressed head-on the Pharisees and His disciples in regard to the mishandling of Scripture.

3. An Example: Ezra and the Scroll (Nehemiah 8:1–6, 8–18)

Ezra is a perfect example of how to handle Scripture accurately.



Starting Your Journey

When handling Scripture, keep these five principles in mind. First, never forget *what* you are handling—God’s Word. This will keep you sensitive. Second, always remember *who* has the authority—the Lord. This will keep you humble. Third, never forget *why* you are teaching—to explain the meaning of the Scripture. This will keep you accurate. Fourth, think about *where* in life the people whom you teach are—their background, culture, and knowledge. This will keep you interesting. Finally, focus on *when* the teaching ends, thinking about its application. This will keep you practical.



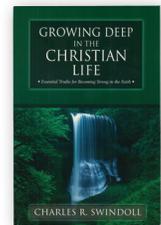
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KNOWING GOD: LIFE'S MAJOR PURSUIT
ISAIAH 6:1-5; JEREMIAH 9:23-24; DANIEL 4:33-35



The Heart of the Matter

The Puritans spoke of “following hard after God” and “setting our face like a flint toward God.” Strange-sounding phrases in today’s fast-paced world! But these words need to be remembered, especially in our generation. There has never been a time in our world’s history when more people are in hot pursuit of more things, more objects, more success. Yet, even when those goals are realized, there is still an ache of heart, an empty void. Why? Because the acquisition of more stuff was never meant to be our life’s major pursuit. These earth-bound pursuits cannot satisfy. Then what can? What, specifically, is life’s most significant and satisfying pursuit? We turn again to Scripture for our answer . . . may we never forget it.



Discovering the Way

1. The Wail of a Weeping Prophet (Jeremiah 9:23-24)

Jeremiah lived at a time not unlike our own—a time of selfish, deceitful, and evil people (Jeremiah 9:1-3). And, like those in Jeremiah’s time, we also have forgotten God.

2. The Importance of Knowing God (Selected Scriptures)

Knowing God gives me the desire to be like Him, reveals the truth about myself, enables me to interpret my world, makes me strong and secure, and introduces me to things eternal.

3. The Presence of Incomprehensible Subjects (Selected Scriptures)

There are many things about our God which remain mysterious: the Trinity, His glory, His sovereignty, and His majesty.



Starting Your Journey

God is pleased when we walk by faith. God is glorified when we worship in truth. God is honored when we obey His Word. God becomes our Father when we believe in His Son.



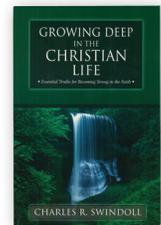
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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

LOVING GOD: OUR ULTIMATE RESPONSE

PSALM 18:46-49; 32:1-5; 37:1-9; 46:1-3



The Heart of the Matter

Knowing God is foundational to our existence. Apart from that knowledge, we are doomed to grope our way through a maze of meaningless earthly pursuits. Only those who know God will find their way to true purpose and meaning. But that is only half the story! Knowing God calls for a response that includes trusting Him, relying on Him, worshiping Him—in a word, *loving* Him. Scripture is filled with accounts of the God of heaven reaching out to His people in grace and mercy, showing Himself to be strong and compassionate. Each account is a reason to love Him with all our heart, soul, and might.



Discovering the Way

1. A Foundational Statement and Command (Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 23-24)

The *Shema* is the bedrock command for loving God.

2. God of Grace, God of Mercy (Selected Psalms)

Throughout life's ups and downs, God demonstrates His compassion to those He loves.

3. Man of Gratitude, Man of Love (Selected Psalms)

The life of David demonstrates what it means to love God.



Starting Your Journey

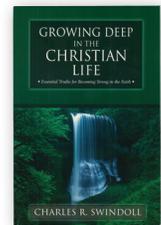
Those who truly love the Lord have experienced His power to deliver and are not fearful. Those who truly love the Lord have received His peace and forgiveness and are no longer guilty. Those who truly love the Lord have felt His presence in affliction and are loved of God.



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MARY'S LITTLE LAMB

LUKE 2:1-20



The Heart of the Matter

No birth in history can compare to that of a baby boy who was born between 6 BC and 4 BC in the little village of Bethlehem. At that time, the Roman Empire ruled most of the known world, clutching in its powerful fist the countries of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. Very few people cared about the tiny town of Bethlehem—much less the birth of a Jewish infant named Jesus. However, God saw things differently. This small baby would grow up to one day die on a cross for the sins of all humankind. So God inspired a physician named Luke to record the facts about Jesus's birth and His purposes for coming to earth.



Discovering the Way

1. A Familiar Setting (Luke 2:1-5)

Almost everyone knows the story of Jesus's birth and how it begins: "Now in those days . . ."

2. A Miraculous Birth (Luke 2:6-7)

Luke didn't try to explain the miraculous. He just gave the facts.

3. A Series of Responses (Luke 2:8-20)

The shepherds responded to the angelic message in faith. Mary responded to the birth in wonderment.



Starting Your Journey

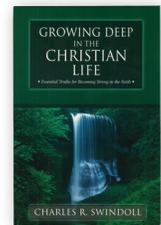
What is your response to Jesus? Is He a liar? Is He a lunatic? Or is He the Lord?



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

WHEN THE GOD-MAN WALKED AMONG US

MATTHEW 14:22-25, 32-33; MARK 1:40-42; LUKE 8:22-25; JOHN 11:32-44



The Heart of the Matter

What an epochal event it was! The second member of the Godhead came to earth as a tiny baby in Bethlehem. God became man. This is commonly referred to as the doctrine of incarnation. In the words of the apostle John, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Think about that for a while. Let’s do our best to imagine how it must have been to have seen Him, walked with Him, watched Him work, heard His words. Hopefully, we shall gain a greater appreciation for His uniqueness—both deity and humanity dwelling in one Person. Our goal is not simply to glean theological facts from Scripture but to do as Thomas ultimately did once he became convinced. He exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (20:28).



Discovering the Way

1. Who Is Jesus Christ . . . Really? (Selected Scriptures from the Gospels)

From the time of Jesus’s birth until His death, people of His day had differing opinions about Jesus’s true identity.

2. Examples of Humanity and Deity (Selected Scriptures from the Gospels)

Jesus was the God-Man—fully God and fully man residing in one Person.

Scripture	Humanity	Deity
Matthew 14		
Mark 1		
Luke 8		
John 11		



Starting Your Journey

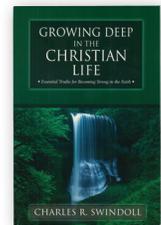
What difference does the truth of Jesus’s humanity and deity make, honestly? It means that Jesus is our God and Lord, and we must come to Him in humble faith.



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

CHANGING LIVES IS JESUS'S BUSINESS
JOHN 4:7-34, 39-42; 9:1-38; 20:24-28



The Heart of the Matter

We've learned that Jesus is the God-Man. Such a study, however, could leave us with the erroneous idea that His life was merely a theological phenomenon with little practical value. Not so! As we are soon going to learn, He touched people where they were and *changed their lives*. Such changes were often dramatic, creating a stir among those who witnessed the change. Changing lives is our Lord's continual ministry. He begins with the raw material of our own humanity and, as times passes, He faithfully works with us, stays by our side, empowers us with new strength, and ultimately reshapes and remakes us into vessels of honor for His greater glory. How do we know this? Partly from our own experience . . . but mainly from the Scriptures that record one changed life after another. Here are three examples.



Discovering the Way

1. Statements Regarding Changed Lives (Selected Scriptures)

Ever since the fall of humanity into sin, God has been in the business of changing lives, and you can see this in both the Old and New Testaments.

2. Examples of Three Who Were Changed (Selected Scriptures from John)

If Jesus can change the lives of a wayward woman, a blind beggar, and a doubting disciple, then Jesus can change your life as well.



Starting Your Journey

What about you — has Jesus changed your life? Regardless of where you are in life, He can change it for the better if you'll only trust in Him.



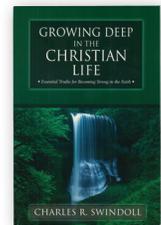
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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

THE SPIRIT WHO IS NOT A GHOST

JOHN 16:6-14



The Heart of the Matter

"I believe in the Holy Ghost. . . ." These are familiar words to those who have ever attended a church where the Apostles' Creed is recited during the service. Six words commonly heard yet seldom thought through. What, exactly, do they mean? Do we believe the Spirit is a person? But the creed calls Him a ghost. Do we believe the Spirit is present today? But Jesus has left the earth; didn't the Spirit leave with Him? And even if the Spirit is here today, how does His presence differ from that of the Father's or the Son's? Is there some distinction? In the final analysis, is the Spirit really that important? Would it be all that different if He and His influence were suddenly removed from earth? These questions (and more) are the ones that we must answer.



Discovering the Way

1. Some Things the Holy Spirit Is Not (Selected Scriptures)

When it comes to the Holy Spirit, many people get confused about the third Person of the Godhead and begin to believe errors. Let's dispel four such errors from our thinking right now.

2. Some Reasons the Holy Spirit Is Here (John 16:6-14)

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is beautifully summarized by Jesus. Basically, the Spirit ministers in two realms: among unbelievers and within believers.



Starting Your Journey

The Holy Spirit is felt in our lives in at least four ways. First, He heals our relationships. Second, He comforts us in our sorrows and guides us. Third, He gives us power and perseverance. Fourth, He controls and transforms our circumstances.



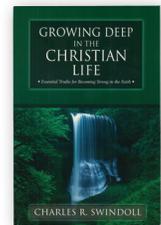
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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

FROM CREATION TO CORRUPTION
GENESIS 1:26–28; 2:15–17; 3:6–13; ROMANS 3:9–18



The Heart of the Matter

Many scholars scoff at the thought that the world was created by God in six days. But this is exactly how Scripture reveals the beginning of the universe and of humankind. In fact, God's creation of the first man and woman is one of the earliest truths recorded in the Bible. Regrettably, following directly on its heels is the sad account of Adam and Eve's fall into sin. Four simple words say it all . . . *from creation to corruption*. Instead of obeying the clear warnings of their Creator, Adam and Eve deliberately and willfully chose to rebel. And we've been living with the consequences ever since—humanity is mentally confused, emotionally afraid, and spiritually dead. The good news, however, is that God didn't abandon us in our rebellion. In mercy and grace, He provided the way out of our self-made mess—through His Son, Jesus Christ.



Discovering the Way

1. How It All Started . . . Historically (Selected Scriptures from Genesis)

The first few chapters of Genesis provide an overview for all of human history: creation and instruction, temptation and corruption.

2. Where It All Led . . . Theologically (Selected Scriptures from Genesis and Romans)

The temptation and corruption caused by sin led to tragic consequences for Adam and Eve, specifically, and affects creation today, universally.



Starting Your Journey

What does all this mean personally? It means you have a problem—you're a sinner and your end is death (Romans 5:12). That's the bad news. The good news, and the solution to your problem, is Christ died to pay for your sin and rose from the grave to give you a righteous life (5:17). Do you believe that?



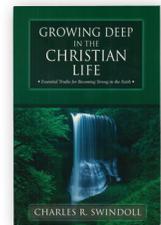
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EXPOSING THE DARK SIDE

GENESIS 6:5; PSALM 51:1-5



The Heart of the Matter

The path of humanity is littered with the trash of depravity. Instead of being shining examples of beauty, righteousness, and perfection, we have darkened the world with hostility, hatred, and unrest. War and brutality score the history of humankind. Deceit and wickedness make up our story. Even our best—courageous warriors, heroes of humanity, graceful artists—fall embarrassingly short of perfection. From one life to another, the theme repeats itself: no one measures up . . . with one beautiful, righteous, perfect exception.



Discovering the Way

1. Depravity Defined and Explained (Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:1-5)

Though humanity was created good by God, we have fallen into sin and become depraved, leaving us spiritually dead, emotionally damaged, and volitionally rebellious.

2. Humanity Surveyed and Exposed

Even the great heroes of the Bible—Noah, Moses, David, Peter, and Paul—had moments that revealed the depths of their depravity.

3. The One Exception

Only Jesus, the God-Man, lived a perfect life without sin.



Starting Your Journey

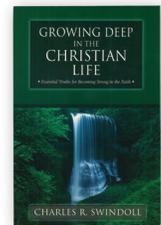
In light of our depravity, we have two options: we can opt to live as victims, or we can opt to live as victors.



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

“MR. SMITH, MEET YOUR SUBSTITUTE”

ROMANS 3:9–31



The Heart of the Matter

A substitute is someone who takes the place of or acts instead of another. In education, substitute teachers stand before a class that is usually taught by someone else. In the game of baseball, a substitute hitter or runner is commonly used to take the place of another player. Even the president of the United States, if undergoing a surgical procedure, appoints the vice president as his substitute and gives him the full authority of the presidency. What is true in the classroom, sports, and politics is also true in our relationship with the living God. We, as sinners, need someone to take our place and act in our stead. Otherwise, we cannot stand before the holy, righteous, and glorious Lord. Today, we shall meet our substitute, the one who “Himself bore our sins in His body” (1 Peter 2:24), who “though He was rich, yet for [our] sake[s], He became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9).



Discovering the Way

1. Four Major Issues (Romans 3:9–31)

Seeing Jesus as our substitute demands that we each understand the realities surrounding our condition, God’s character, our need, and God’s provision.

2. Three Crucial Questions

When we consider our salvation, we must ask and answer three questions: Is there any hope for lost sinners? Isn’t there any work for seekers to do? And is there any way to lose eternal life?

3. Two Possible Responses

When presented with Christ as our substitute, we can believe it and accept God’s gift, or we can refuse His gift.



Starting Your Journey

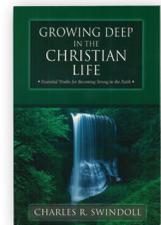
As you think about our sinful state, remember: you don’t have forever. Sin is a terminal disease.



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

THE REMEDY FOR OUR DISEASE

ISAIAH 53:1-6; LEVITICUS 4:1-7



The Heart of the Matter

We live in a day when blood is seldom seen in public. Apart from a cut finger or a rare superficial wound, we don't witness the presence of blood. Surgical operations are done in secret, sterile places behind closed doors, off limits to the general public. Slaughterhouses are rarely visited by the average citizen. Most will spend their lives eating meals made from animals they personally did not kill. It has not always been so! In fact, in earlier times the slaughter of animals, the presence of blood, and the connection between these symbols, the sinner, and deliverance from that sin were common scenes . . . everyday affairs. Because we are so removed from all that, words like *sacrifice*, *shedding of blood*, and *altar* need to be explained and understood. By doing so, our appreciation for the cross where God's Lamb was slain will be enhanced.



Discovering the Way

1. A Prediction of the Substitute (Isaiah 53:1-6)

Written some 750 years before Jesus's crucifixion, Isaiah offered a prediction of the death that makes clear Jesus's position as our substitute.

2. An Explanation of the Sacrifice (Leviticus 4:1-7)

Sacrifices were made as a way for people to renew their fellowship with God after having fallen into sin.



Starting Your Journey

Jesus is the final sacrifice, an innocent lamb who died and rose again for the sins of humanity.



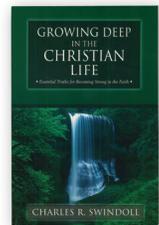
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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

HIS COMING IS SURE . . . ARE YOU?

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–18



The Heart of the Matter

Few things are clearer in Scripture than Christ's return. Once He revealed the news of His death and departure from this earth, He wasted no time in reassuring His followers that He would indeed be coming back. Again and again, God's Word includes statements, hints, symbols, implications, and undeniable predictions of the promise of Christ's return. Cynics may sneer and doubters may laugh, but our Lord keeps His promises. He will do it *exactly* as He predicted; no question. But there is a question regarding our *believing* in His return. Hopefully, this study will remove all lingering hesitation and help you to confidently confess, "Christ's coming is absolutely sure!"



Discovering the Way

1. Extremes That Block Our Balance

Two extremes threaten to overtake the discussion of Christ's return: fanatical intensity and theological ignorance.

2. Predictions That Affirm Our Assurance (Matthew 24:42–44; Mark 8:35–38)

Numerous places in Scripture prophesy—and therefore affirm our faith in—the return of Christ.

3. Scriptures That Describe Our Destiny (1 Corinthians 15:50–58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

Every Christian can look forward to being caught up into the air with Christ—the dead first, followed by the living.



Starting Your Journey

We show our readiness for Christ to come back with three distinct actions: we walk by faith, we live in peace, and we rely on hope.



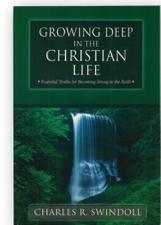
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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

UNTIL HE RETURNS . . . WHAT?

MARK 13:31-37; LUKE 19:11-27; 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26; TITUS 2:11-15



The Heart of the Matter

With all our daily activities and responsibilities, we tend to push the central doctrines of the Bible onto the back burner. But these truths are vital to our daily Christian walk. Consider the doctrine of the return of Christ. What we believe about this important doctrine affects the way we live our lives. And if there's one thing we can know for sure, it's that Jesus *will* come back to earth one day! But what do we do until then? Christ has told believers to be ready, so let's find out what that means.



Discovering the Way

1. Of These Things We Are Sure

The return of Jesus is well-documented in the pages of Scripture, seen more than three hundred times in the New Testament alone.

2. Four Commands to Help Us Prepare

In the meantime, the Bible teaches us to occupy ourselves with good deeds, purify our lives, watch out for entrapments, and worship the Lord faithfully.



Starting Your Journey

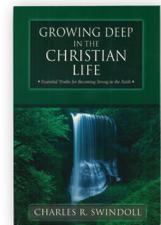
We stay alert and ready by remembering that Jesus promised His return and realizing that the promise could be fulfilled today.



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

VISITING THE REAL TWILIGHT ZONE

2 CORINTHIANS 4:14–18; 5:1–8



The Heart of the Matter

Where do we go from here? What will happen to us when life is over? What lies ahead . . . in the misty, shadowy, fuzzy world beyond the grave? What will be our final destiny? Many will say, “Death. Death ends everything.” Popular answer, but it’s wrong. Death may be the last stop in our earthly journey, but it cannot be considered our ultimate destination. Death is merely the tunnel that transports us to the very real world beyond. And the Bible is the only reliable guidebook for that journey.



Discovering the Way

1. Death: Its Inevitability and Effect (Genesis 3:19; Romans 5:12)

Death, which separates the soul from the body, is a reality all people must face.

2. Resurrection: Promises and Procedure (2 Corinthians 5:1–8)

Jesus will one day resurrect the bodies of the dead, rejoining those bodies with the souls of those who had passed on.

3. Destiny: Hell or Heaven (Matthew 23:25–33; 25:31–46)

All people, once dead, await their final destiny—believers receiving resurrection unto eternal life with God and unbelievers receiving resurrection unto eternal death separate from God.



Starting Your Journey

We must all account for our relationship with Jesus Christ—when we believe in Him, the result is exciting anticipation of the life to come!



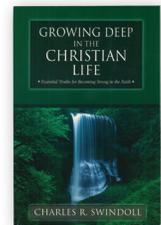
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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH ONE FROM BEYOND

LUKE 16:19–31



The Heart of the Matter

Paranormal phenomena and speculation about the afterlife usually draw immediate attention. Everyone, it seems, looks with interest when the curtain of death is lifted. Books, seminars, and television programs abound with claims of out-of-body death experiences, speaking with the dead, and so on. Are these illusions or reality? In Luke's gospel, Jesus recounts an intriguing story of one who spoke from the grave.



Discovering the Way

1. Several Death and Dying Events in Our Day

Many people have experienced phenomena at the end of life or during near-death experiences that point to an afterlife.

2. Biblical Hope for Christians to Claim

Our great, ultimate hope is the place of eternal rest and joy and unending presence of our God.

3. Ultimate Realities for Non-Christians to Face (Luke 16:19–31)

The punishment laid out for those who do not believe in Jesus consists of literal pain, full consciousness, the continued presence of memory, the total absence of comfort, and the impossibility of escape.



Starting Your Journey

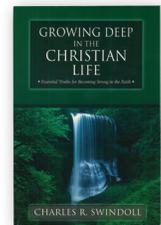
As we ponder the life after this one, believers and unbelievers alike must grapple with the major question worth answering: Where are you going to spend eternity?



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

GOD'S BODY-BUILDING PROGRAM
MATTHEW 16:13-18; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-27



The Heart of the Matter

We have examined Scripture to find out what we are to be involved in between now and when Christ returns. But what is the *Lord* doing? What is He concerned about during this present time? The answer is clear, according to the New Testament. It's the same project He's been working on since the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. Jesus said, "I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18), and that is what He has been doing. In this lesson, we will consider what building the church means, what it includes, and why it is so important. Because all who are born into God's family become members of His body, we need to understand the benefits of such a union.



Discovering the Way

1. Some Essentials about the Church (Matthew 16:13-18)

We understand the church to be an ever-increasing body of believers who comprise the family of God, under the Lordship of Christ.

2. Vital Signs of a Healthy Church (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

Any healthy church will show signs of health, such as the presence of unity, the absence of favoritism, an emphasis on individual value and mutual variety, a de-emphasis on individualism and self-sufficiency, the support of others, and the exaltation of Christ as primary authority.

3. Contagious Diseases That Cripple the Church

God's people weaken the body of Christ through pride, indifference, or an unwillingness to apply theology to daily life.



Starting Your Journey

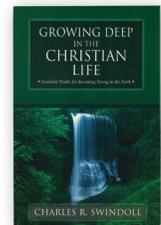
As believers, we must each ask ourselves if we are part of the problem or part of the solution in the church, recommitting ourselves to serve the Lord's goals for His glory.



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

THREE CHEERS FOR THE CHURCH

PHILIPPIANS 1:1–18, 23–27



The Heart of the Matter

What a remarkable thing Christ is doing! Out of every continent, country, and nation, He is reaching out to build His body, the church. Held together by the cords of love and unity, groups of people the world over gather to celebrate their faith. But the church is not only universal in scope; it is local as well. Small parts of the whole . . . geographical segments of called-out ones, placed in suburban communities, quiet countrysides, and busy, metropolitan sites. In these places, music and message mingle to refresh sagging spirits, confront wrong, point the way, model the truth, help the hurting, hold out hope to the discouraged, rescue the perishing, and care for the dying. These places of worship are also unique for their observance of two ancient ordinances—the Lord’s Table and the act of water baptism.



Discovering the Way

1. For a Few Moments, Remember Some Churches (Philippians 1:1–11)

The Philippian church provides an excellent model for the ways that the church is tied to all aspects of the believer’s life.

2. Why the Local Church Is So Significant (Philippians 1:12–18, 23–27)

The church has significance to the world, the community, and the Christian.



Starting Your Journey

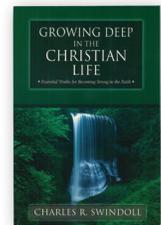
As we embrace life in the church, God has directed His people to practice two celebrations unique to those who follow Jesus—baptism and the Lord’s Supper.



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

ENCOURAGEMENT SERVED FAMILY STYLE

HEBREWS 10:19–25



The Heart of the Matter

Few things steal a church's joy like discouragement . . . especially if that discouragement comes not from outside circumstances but from inside instigators. Scripture tells us that we are to “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). But far too often we choose instead to speak words that dishearten, hinder, and deter each other from living the life God intends. Just imagine being part of a church family where everyone encourages one another, builds each other up in word and deed, exhorts each other in truth, and comforts one another. If these words and actions were to pulse through our church community, a superficial fellowship would be transformed into something far more significant: a family.



Discovering the Way

1. Encouragement Explained

At its heart, encouragement requires that we speak to one another. Encouragement cannot happen without our words!

2. The Biblical Basis for Encouragement (Hebrews 10:19–25)

The Bible teaches us that the calling of every believer is to offer encouraging words that build up, increase strength, and center on the truth.



Starting Your Journey

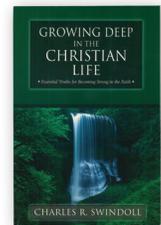
We should make it our goal to encourage everyone we meet—to take time to hear their concerns, to be slow to speak that we might be quick to bring comfort.



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GROWING DEEP IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: RETURNING TO OUR ROOTS

WORSHIP: LET IT SHINE! LET IT SHINE!

PSALM 95:1-7



The Heart of the Matter

The health of the church is dependent upon balance. Balance between evangelism and instruction. Between caring for one another and reaching out to those we've never met. Between command and comfort, encouragement and exhortation, quietness and activity, taking in and giving out. How often a church fails to maintain this essential balance! For reasons right and wrong, ministries can slip into extremes and miss the other side of a good thing. It is with this in mind that we come to appreciate worship. Desiring to get the job done or meet other expectations, a congregation can lose its primary objective: to ascribe supreme worth to our supreme Lord. Once again, the concept of balance must be kept in mind. Worship is more than meditative contemplation, the passive enjoyment of great music, or listening to a well-delivered sermon. Worship requires participation . . . a response . . . praise *and* service, celebration *and* action.



Discovering the Way

1. Rediscovery of the Missing Jewel (Psalm 95:1-7)

Worship involves connecting with God and responding out of joy and delight. We find significance in worship because it magnifies God, enlarges horizons, eclipses fears, changes perspectives, and refreshes spirits.

2. Some Often Overlooked Facets of That Jewel

Three key facets of worship are often overlooked: God seeks out the worship of His people, worship has been practiced by believers in the past, and worship is certainly needed in the present.



Starting Your Journey

We must each ask ourselves if both our public and our private worship lives up to its true significance, or if something has taken the sparkle out of worship for us.



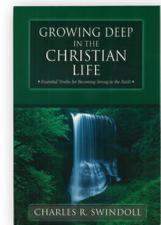
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