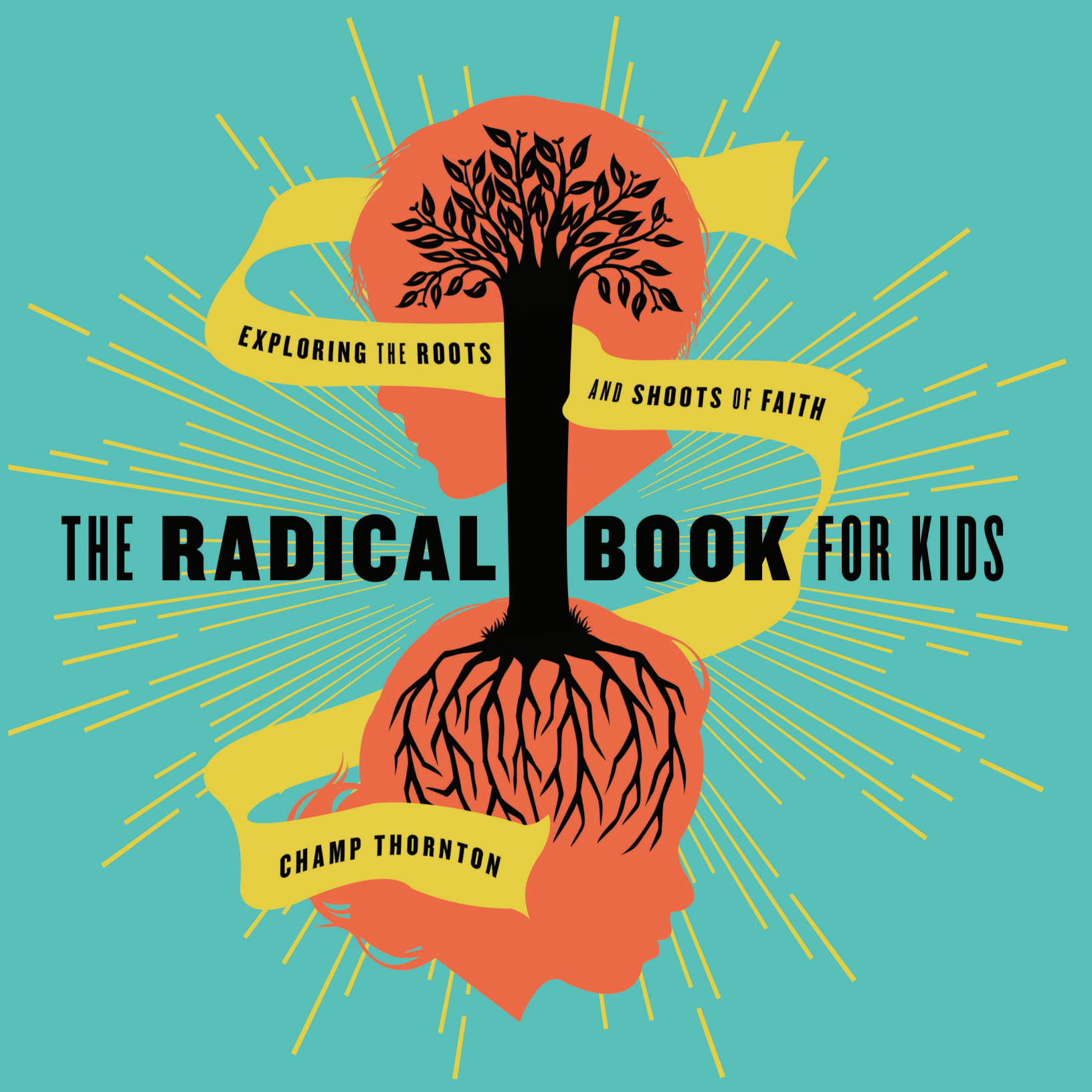

EXPLORING THE ROOTS
AND SHOOTS OF FAITH
THE RADICAL BOOK FOR KIDS
CHAMP THORNTON

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404
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PRESENTED TO:
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For Shannon
Brother, friend, and ally for the next generation

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

—*J. R. R. Tolkien,* The Fellowship of the Ring

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How to Find Anything in This Book

Acknowledgments

A Word of Explanation for Adults

I wrote this book for a reason—three of them actually (two boys and a girl). My three children are right now between the ages of six and eleven, but one day they'll be grownups, and perhaps have families of their own.

As parents, we all want what is best for the next generation—that they will love, trust, and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's my prayer that this book will be used by God to grow deep roots of faith in the children who read it.

More than this, I hope that it will also encourage young readers to keep on learning about his Word, his gospel, his church, and life in his world. If this book makes our children more curious and thirsty to know God and the good news of his Word, then it will have done its job.

The Radical Book for Kids is intended for children, ages 8–14, to read on their own. But parents or teachers may also find it helpful as a supplement for devotions or discussions. Whatever its use, may this book—like an assorted packet of seeds—fall into good soil, take root, grow up, and bear fruit—all to the praise of the Gardener.

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up. . . ." (Acts 20:32a).

WARNING: YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS A *RADICAL* BOOK.



Did you know that the word *radical* has a few different meanings? Originally it meant "going to the root" of something. So—*if you dare*—this book will take you *deep* into the ancient roots of our faith. You'll learn about God's Word—what it teaches, why you should trust it, and how you can live it. As you grow up, you should also grow *down*—letting the Bible sink its roots deep into your heart.

Radical also means "extreme, drastic, revolutionary." If a tree has a good root system, it can stand the wildest storms. So in this book, you'll learn about following Jesus and standing for him in the storms of life. You'll also meet people who did the same even when everything seemed against them. How did they do it? God gave them radical faith.

You'll also find radical ("excellent, cool") fun. You'll read about ancient weapons, create pottery, discover ancient languages, locate stars, play a board game that's 3,000 years old—and more.

So, read this book any way you'd like: skip around, or read straight through. But remember: all the roots of our faith grow out of The Tree. The one on which Jesus died in the place of sinners. May everything you read point you to him: the radical Rescuer of rebels.

THE BIBLE IN ONE SENTENCE



If someone quizzed you: "Please state the message of the entire Bible in one sentence," what would you say? Not an easy job, is it? After all, the Bible comprises 1,189 chapters divided into 66 different sections or "books." How do you cram all that into a single sentence?

You can't fit everything in. But what if all 66 books fit together like chapters in a story? Then you might try to summarize that story. Now we're getting somewhere.

So, what big story does the Bible tell? One way to learn something about a story is to read the beginning and the ending. Stories are like houses: the best way to get in is usually through the front door or the back door.

What do the Bible's beginning (Genesis) and ending (Revelation) reveal about the story of the entire Bible? What connections do you notice (see chart)?

In the beginning God made the world, and he made it all "very good" (Genesis 1:31). But it didn't take long for people to ruin what he had created. But at the end of the story, God will set everything right once more.

IN THE BEGINNING...

DAY & NIGHT ARE CREATED
(Gen. 1:5)

THE WORLD IS MADE
(Gen. 1–2)

TREE OF LIFE MADE
(Gen. 2:9)

GOD DWELLS WITH PEOPLE
(Gen. 3:8)

PEOPLE DISOBEY GOD
(Gen. 3:6)

PEOPLE BEGIN FIGHTING EACH OTHER
(Gen. 3:12)

SICKNESS AND DEATH ENTER THE WORLD
(Gen. 3:19)

SATAN (THE SERPENT) DESTROYS
(Gen. 3:1)

AT THE ENDING...

NO MORE NIGHT
(Rev. 22:5)

THE WORLD IS MADE NEW
(Rev. 21:1)

TREE OF LIFE CONTINUES
(Rev. 22:2)

GOD AGAIN DWELLS WITH PEOPLE
(Rev. 21:3)

PEOPLE OBEY GOD
(Rev. 21:27)

PEOPLE STOP FIGHTING EACH OTHER
(Rev. 21:24-26)

SICKNESS AND DEATH CONQUERED
(Rev. 22:4)

SATAN DEFEATED
(Rev. 20:2, 10)



So what *connects* the start with the finish? The story that fills the middle is all about Jesus. The Old Testament looks ahead and prepares for his coming. The New Testament looks back and explains his coming. The story of the Bible is the story of Jesus and why he came to earth.

"God made it, we broke it, Jesus fixes it."

Michael Williams

How to sum up the Bible in one sentence?

The Bible teaches that Jesus came with this mission: to make everything new again. Everything that sin had wrecked, he came to repair.

And that brings us back to where we started. How to sum up the Bible in one sentence? Here's one attempt. The story of the Bible is that . . . **Through Jesus, God is restoring everything that sin ruined.**

Can you think of any areas in your life that seem messed up because of your sin or someone else's sin? The sad truth is that sin touches every part of life, which makes quite a mess. And it's impossible to do much to fix our *own* lives. But nothing is too hard for Jesus. He loves to fix broken things.

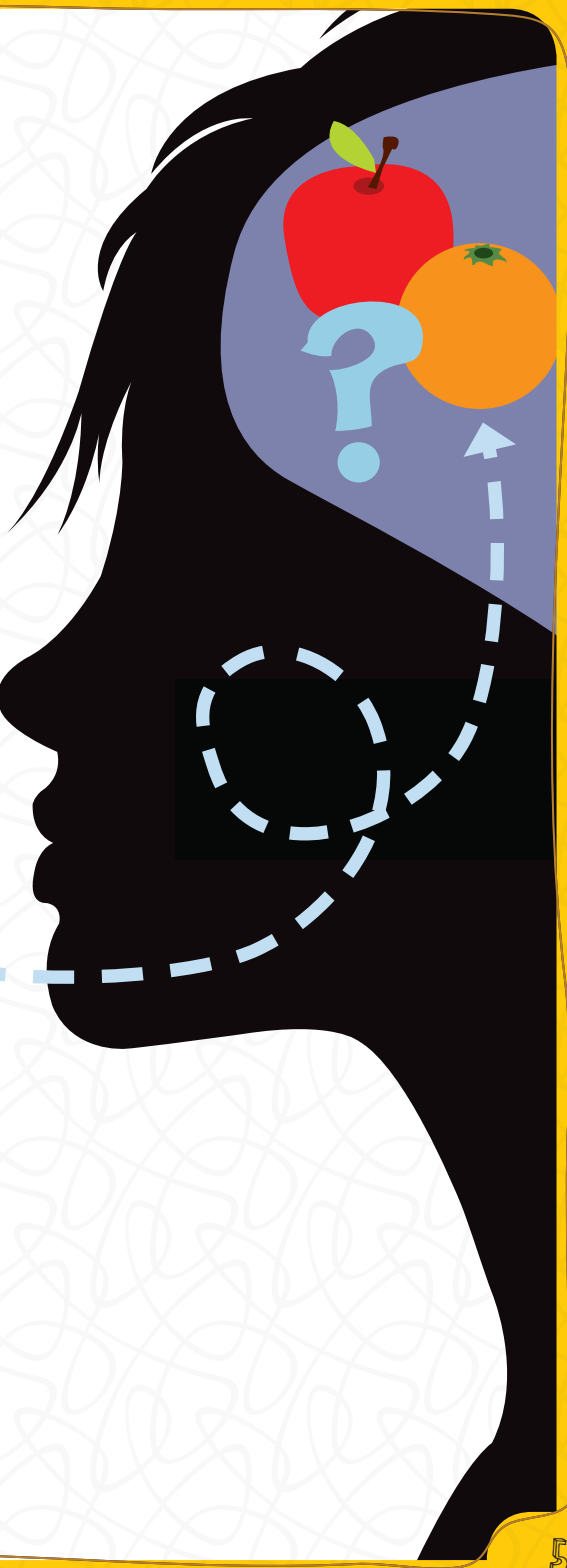
After all, the whole Bible reminds us that Jesus came to restore all things.

MORE TO EXPLORE

If you'd like to learn more about the story of the Bible, you may want to read *Grandpa's Box* by Starr Meade.

2

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE



The Bible tells one big story. But if you've spent any time reading it, you already know it's not like most two-thousand-page books that you can check out of the library. Instead, God's Word is more like the *library itself*: in it are many different kinds of books—poetry, letters, history, and more. Each part of the Bible has its own style.

So if you are going to understand what is written in the Bible, you must also know *how* it's written.

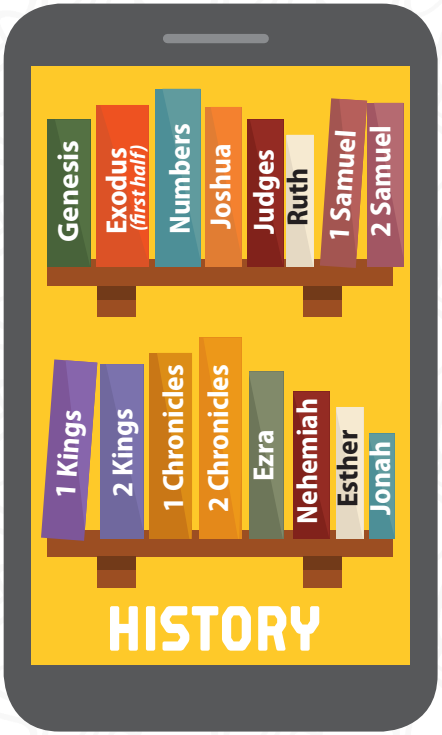
We all know that how something is put together changes the way you work with it. Oranges have rinds, and apples have cores, so you eat them differently—one, you peel; the other, you core. The same is true of books. If a story starts with the phrase, "Once upon a time," you know it's a fairy tale and that you don't read it like a history book.

The Bible is no different. If you're going to understand the Bible, you need to know the kinds of literature it contains. Then you can read them each in

the right way. These different kinds or styles are called *genres*.

But why couldn't God just have given us a book with all the same style?

Scripture contains many genres in order to help you—all of you. You have feelings, so there are parts of his Word, for example, the poetry of Psalms, that speak to your heart. You have thoughts, so there are letters, like Romans, that stretch your mind. You make choices, so there are Bible commands that challenge your obedience. Most of all, we learn from stories, so the Bible tells us many true stories (and of course all of them fit into the one true story about Jesus rescuing the world from death and evil). God's Word speaks personally to every part of your life.



Here's a basic list of genres in the Bible. (The bookshelves show which individual books of the Bible fit into which genres.)

History—The entire Bible is historically true, and about one-half of the Old Testament focuses on retelling historical events. They recount what God has done for his people: he made them, loves them, leads them, forgives them, etc. None of his people deserves any of his kindness. All his people, even the best of the kings, are filled with weakness and often fail. This means that the hero of these stories is God himself. And the Old Testament tells how one day God will send the perfect King to rescue his flawed and failing people.



Law—Right in the middle of the stories, God tells his people how he wants them to live. He is their authority. As their true King, God gives them rules that show what he loves, what he hates, and what will be best for them. Yet God's people can't obey perfectly. So they need forgiveness. And years after the Law was written, God would send Someone who always obeyed God's Law, the perfect Sacrifice for sin.

Poetry—Over one-third of the Bible is poetry. Instead of having rhyming sounds, poems in the Bible have rhyming ideas that combine to make one beautiful point. (For example, the first line of Psalm 9:9 says, *"The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed."* The second line of this poem matches and builds on the first: *"[The LORD is] a stronghold in times of trouble."* [NIV]) The biblical authors wrote in this kind of poetry to express their feelings to God—sometimes in songs, sad or happy, but always from the heart. God has promised to set everything right one day. And that promise puts every song into the key of hope!

Wisdom—A handful of Old Testament books teach how to live skillfully (wisely) before God in this wonderful, painful, and complicated world. These books, like Proverbs, often recognize that life usually follows certain God-created patterns; for example, if you do wrong, you will usually get caught.

They also remind us that wisdom comes from trusting God. None of us can do that perfectly and that's why God would eventually send the wisest Man ever, who always trusted God with his whole heart.



What is the longest book in the Bible?

(Answer: Psalms has the most verses [2,527] and chapters [150], but Jeremiah has the most letters [over 41,000 of them])



Prophecy—These books mostly record the sermons of the prophets God sent to deliver his messages to his sinful people. Sometimes the prophets spoke about what God would do in the future (they would foretell). And sometimes they would simply preach to God's people (they would forth-tell).

In these messages the prophets encouraged God's people by reminding them that God still loved them. The prophets also warned God's people to forsake their sin and turn back to God. If they refused, bad things would happen. In light of all this sin, one day God would send the perfect Person who would do for God's people what they never could do—obey and love God perfectly.

Gospels and Acts—The four Gospels report on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They feature eyewitness testimonies from people who were actually there. They record how Jesus set the perfect example and gave commands to be obeyed. Yet the good news of the Gospels (*gospel* means "good news") is that Jesus Christ lived and died, not merely as an example or teacher, but as our substitute. He was the One for whom



God's people had been waiting. Jesus lived the life we could never live, and died the death we should have died. The book of Acts follows the Gospels and continues the story of Jesus, telling how the good news spread all over the world.

Letters—The letters (also known as *epistles*) of the New Testament help explain the importance of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. What was the meaning of all God had done through Jesus? The truth in these letters helps God's people deal with temptation, error, and suffering.

Apocalyptic Literature—This genre focuses on revealing the future. ("Apocalyptic" comes from a Greek word meaning "to reveal.") In this kind of book, it's not always easy to understand the details of what will happen in the future. The writing is often mysterious. But what's crystal clear is that no matter how bad things get, no matter how much the world hates God and his people, Jesus will triumph! The story of the Bible—and the story of the world—will have a happy ending!



Remember: sometimes you will find several genres inside a single book of the Bible. For example, Exodus contains history, law, and poetry. So, in order to simplify, the books of Scripture are matched up with the category of literature they feature most.

NAMES OF GOD

In the Bible, God is known by many names. They're not just what he's called; they're what he's *like* (Psalm 68:4). Some names are straightforward, like "God" or "Jesus." Others are compound names, like "God Almighty" (Revelation 19:15) or "Lord Most High" (Genesis 14:22). Still other names are more like a description: "Holy One" (Isaiah 40:25), or "One Enthroned in Heaven" (Psalm 2:4), "The Mighty One" (Isaiah 1:4), or "The Righteous One" (Isaiah 24:1).

All of these names of God are like windows through which you can look and learn about him.

MORE TO EXPLORE If you'd like to learn more about the names of God, you may want to read *God's Names (Making Him Known)* by Sally Michael.

ANCIENT OF DAYS

The King has always existed and reigns from his mighty throne.

Daniel 7:9

JESUS

Jehovah saves. God to the rescue!

Matthew 1:21

CHRIST

Messiah, anointed one

Matthew 11:12

GOD

The most common name for the Lord, Hebrew, *elohim*

Deuteronomy 32:4

LORD

Master or King, Hebrew *adonai*

Exodus 34:9

LORD

Using all capital letters, this is the name Jehovah (or Yahweh), the name God uses with his own people

Exodus 20:2

YAHWEH SABAOTH

The LORD of Hosts (Armies)

Isaiah 13:4

YAHWEH JIREH

The LORD Provides

Genesis 22:14

EL OLAM

Everlasting God

Genesis 21:33

YAHWEH ROPHE

The LORD your Healer

Exodus 15:26

EL ELYON

God Most High

Psalm 73:11

YAHWEH ZEDEK

The LORD our Righteousness

Jeremiah 23:5–6

EL ROI

The God who Sees

Genesis 16:13

EL SHADDAI

God Almighty

Genesis 28:3

Which book of the Bible doesn't mention God once?

(Answer: Esther)

GREAT NEWS!

What do you think it means to be a Christian?

- ☐ A. I'm a nice person
- ☐ B. I go to church on Sunday
- ☐ C. I try to obey God and obey my parents
- ☐ D. I read my Bible and pray almost every day
- ☐ E. None of the above

Sometimes when you ask people, "Do you want to become a Christian?" they reply, "I'm not ready. There are parts of my life I need to fix first. Then I'll become a Christian."

This person thinks that being a Christian means you have to be good enough and obey the Bible more. They think Christianity is all about following the good advice Jesus gave. But they're wrong. At its heart, Christianity is not good advice; it's good news.

Here's the difference.

Advice tells you something that would be good to do. It has not happened yet.

News tells you something that *has already* happened. There is nothing you can do about it.

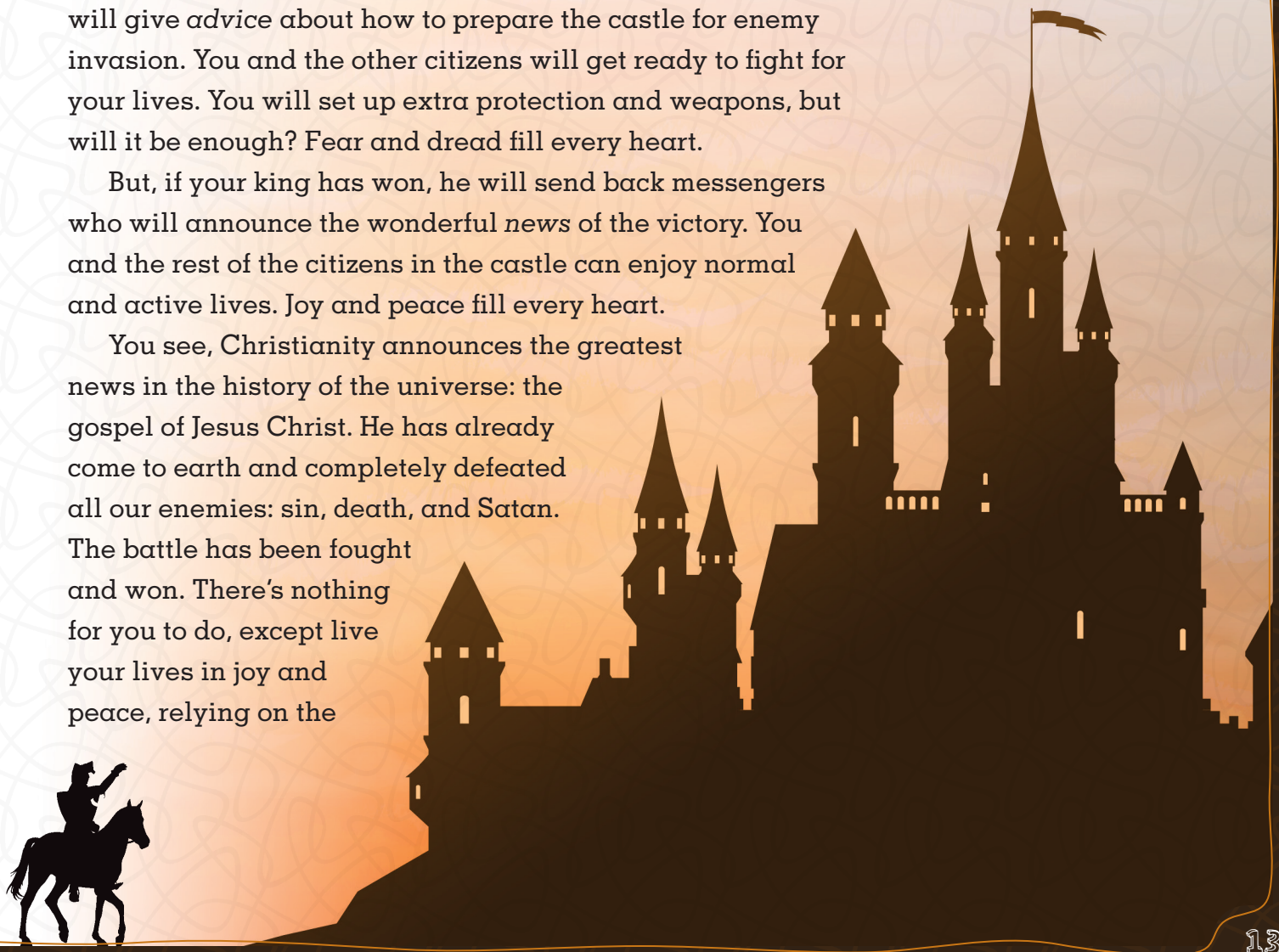
Here's an example: Pretend that you lived in a castle in the days of knights and

kingdoms. One day an enemy king invades, marching his army into your kingdom. So your king gathers his army and goes out to meet the enemy on the field of battle, miles from the castle. And now you and everyone in the castle await word from the battlefield: Did the king win or lose?

If your king has lost, he will send back soldiers who will give *advice* about how to prepare the castle for enemy invasion. You and the other citizens will get ready to fight for your lives. You will set up extra protection and weapons, but will it be enough? Fear and dread fill every heart.

But, if your king has won, he will send back messengers who will announce the wonderful *news* of the victory. You and the rest of the citizens in the castle can enjoy normal and active lives. Joy and peace fill every heart.

You see, Christianity announces the greatest news in the history of the universe: the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has already come to earth and completely defeated all our enemies: sin, death, and Satan. The battle has been fought and won. There's nothing for you to do, except live your lives in joy and peace, relying on the



"Gospel" means good news. The modern English word comes from the Old English, "gōd-spel" (gōd = good; spel = news or story). This word is a translation of the Greek word, evangelion, which literally means "good news."

victory he has already accomplished.

In other words, this gospel is the announcement that through the life, death, and resurrection of King Jesus, God is setting everything right again, including the men and women who are repenting and relying on this King as their only Rescuer from sin.

By now it should be clear that Christianity is not a religion that's a list of advice for you to do. No, instead Christianity brings news of what Jesus has already *done*. It's not about the accomplishment of your good works; it's about the announcement of *his* good works.

So, how will you respond to this great news? There are only two ways.

1. **You can reject your King and Rescuer, Jesus Christ, and try to live life according to your rules and save yourself.** This kind of person can look either bad or good by the world's standards. It doesn't matter which: both reject Jesus.

2. **Or you can live with Jesus Christ as your King and Rescuer.** Turn from living as your own king (repent) and

trust in Jesus for rescue (faith).

The second kind of person does bad things, as well as good things. But most importantly, this person has been rescued by King Jesus—from both her own badness and goodness. That's what a Christian is. And that's great news!

• • •

FOR EVERYONE HAS SINNED; WE ALL FALL SHORT OF GOD'S GLORIOUS STANDARD. YET GOD, IN HIS GRACE, FREELY MAKES US RIGHT IN HIS SIGHT. HE DID THIS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS WHEN HE FREED US FROM THE PENALTY FOR OUR SINS. FOR GOD PRESENTED JESUS AS THE SACRIFICE FOR SIN. PEOPLE ARE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD WHEN THEY BELIEVE THAT JESUS SACRIFICED HIS LIFE, SHEDDING HIS BLOOD.

ROMANS 3:23–25A NLT



5

HOW TO GROW AS A CHRISTIAN

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES



After you become a Christian, God wants you to *grow* as a Christian. This growing looks like trusting and obeying Jesus more and more. And this kind of growth is challenging: more like growing muscles than growing flowers. If it were easy, all of God's people would be strong, mature believers (and you wouldn't need to read this chapter).

But Christian growth is *not* easy; it takes work. It's not quick; it takes time. And it's never finished; it continues your whole life.

Thankfully, God does more than just tell you to grow, he also provides the help you need to grow. Some of these resources for growth are called "habits of grace" or "spiritual disciplines."

What are Spiritual Disciplines?

They are practices "that promote spiritual

Psalm 62:8

PRAYER

1 Timothy 4:13

GOD'S WORD

Talk with other Christians about what God is teaching you. Hebrews 3:13

SHARING

CONFESSION
("I have sinned, forgive in mercy")
Daniel 9:4–6

READ
the Bible every day
1 Timothy 4:13

SHARE
Where you've seen God at work
Acts 14:27

PRAISE
("I worship you for who you are")
Psalm 139:14

THINK OFTEN
about God's Word
Psalm 1:1–3

SHARE
Where you're struggling
Galatians 6:2





THANKSGIVING
("I thank you for what you've done")
Psalm 118:21

LISTEN CAREFULLY
to the Word of God preached and taught
1 Thess.2:13

SHARE
Where you're tempted
James 5:16

AFFIRMATION
("I rehearse what is true about you")
Psalm 27:1–3

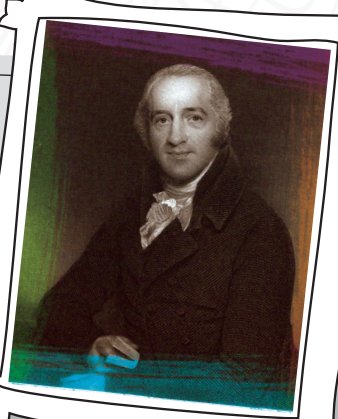
MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD
Psalm 119:11



PETITION
("I ask you for what is needed")
Matthew 6:11

Keep practicing these "spiritual disciplines"—giving your attention to the Word and prayer. This practice won't make you perfect, but over time God will help you grow. He'll strengthen you to rely more on Jesus for everything you need, and to act more like Jesus in everything you do. This is how a Christian grows.

Did You KNOW?



Christians keep growing their entire life. Charles Simeon was a pastor in London for 53 years, from 1783 to 1836. He was known as a godly man who loved God's Word, but he wasn't always that way.

He didn't become a Christian until in college, and even after he became a pastor he continued to struggle with controlling his temper.

Once while visiting Henry Venn and his family, Pastor Simeon responded harshly to another man. Mr. Venn's daughters saw it all.

After Pastor Simeon left, Mr. Venn took his daughters into their garden, and asked them to pick a young peach for him. When his girls asked why their father wanted a peach that had not yet ripened, he said, "Well, my dears, it is green now, and we must wait; but a little more sun, and a few more showers, and the peach will be ripe and sweet. So it is with Mr. Simeon."

And so it is with all of us who seek—through the sunshine and showers of the spiritual disciplines—to keep growing as Christians.

growth. They are the habits of devotion we should use, with the Holy Spirit's help, in the pursuit of Godliness."

Keep practicing these "spiritual disciplines"—giving your attention to the Word and prayer. This practice won't make you perfect, but over time God will help you grow. He'll strengthen you to rely more on Jesus for everything you need, and to act more like Jesus in everything you do. This is how a Christian grows.