

JOURNEY 4

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

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Knowing isn't enough. This seven-day Journey is about taking what you've learned so far and letting it change who you are and what you do.

Are you ready?

Life Hope & Truth

GETTING STARTED

HOW TO USE THIS JOURNEY

Dear Reader,

You've been through three Journeys. You learned about God, about evil and about God's plan to rescue the world from itself.

It's time to ask the obvious question:

What now?

Where do you go from here?

If you stop now, everything you've learned becomes head knowledge. Facts and figures. It won't change anything—and it won't change you.

This Journey is about the next step—about taking everything you've learned and *doing* something with it. We're going to spend seven days talking about who the people of God are, what God expects of them, and how you can join their ranks. Each day's content will consist of the following:

- That day's reading.
- Recommended verses and chapters from the Bible relating to that day's subject.
- Supplemental material from Life, Hope & Truth for digging deeper into that day's subject.

We encourage you to make your way through our three initial Journeys (“Knowing God,” “The Problem of Evil” and “The Plan of God”) before starting on this one, as we'll be referencing and building on concepts presented in all three.

Are you ready to put what you've learned into practice?

Let's begin!

All the best,

Your friends at [LifeHope&Truth](http://LifeHopeandTruth.com)

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DAY 1

THE CROSSROADS

For hundreds of years, the Jewish nation had been looking for a Messiah. They knew the Scriptures—God would send a deliverer who would “strike the earth” and “slay the wicked” (Isaiah 11:4), who would “proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound” (Isaiah 61:1). To the Jews of the first century, it seemed obvious—this Messiah would free their nation from the yoke of Roman captivity and lead their people into a golden age of peace and prosperity, ruling the nations “with a rod of iron” (Psalm 2:9) and crushing Israel’s enemies like chaff (Isaiah 41:15-16).

But they were wrong. The Messiah wasn’t coming to overthrow the Romans.

He was coming to die.

As we learned in Journey 3, the entire plan of God hinges on that sacrifice—and it was part of the plan “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8).

Today, with almost 2,000 years of hindsight, we can understand what the Jews of the first century didn’t—namely, that the Messiah promised by God would be coming to earth *twice*. His second coming, pictured by the Feast of Trumpets, will see Him returning to the earth as a conquering King (Revelation 19:11-16; Isaiah 11:4). At His first coming, though, Jesus Christ was destined to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

His disciples (who were also Jewish) had a hard time coming to terms with a Messiah who had come to die. When Jesus told His disciples that He would “be killed, and be raised the third day” (Matthew 16:21), one of His disciples rebuked Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (verse 22). Even after it happened—even after Jesus was crucified and resurrected—the disciples still had their minds on Israel’s return to greatness. “Lord,” they asked, “will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

They were missing the point. Jesus hadn’t come to the earth to establish the Kingdom just yet. But He *had* come to establish something else:

The Church of God.

DAY 1

THE CROSSROADS

During His time on the earth, Jesus made a promise to His disciples. He told them, “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). After His resurrection, He gave them specific instructions: “Tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Later, He elaborated: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to *the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8, emphasis added).

Christ didn’t intend for His disciples to sit still. His sacrifice made the plan of God possible, and now there was work to be done. The door to salvation had been opened, and the Kingdom of God was on its way. It was time for the world to know about it, so Christ gave His disciples a mission:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).

The mission has two parts—spread the gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 24:14) and nurture the Church established by Christ (John 21:15-17). Both goals were designed to build off the other. As the gospel spread, the Church could grow, and the more the Church grew, the easier it would be to spread the gospel.

Today, nearly 2,000 years later, there’s *still* work to be done. The gospel must still be preached. The Church must still be nurtured. Jesus knew He was leaving His disciples with a mission that would stretch far beyond their lifetimes—which is why He said, toward the end of His human life, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:20-21).

Faced with His own impending death, Christ’s focus was on the disciples He was leaving behind. He prayed that God the Father would give them the strength and focus to do the job they had been given—but more than that, He prayed for all those who would be coming on the scene later. He prayed for all those who would one day hear and respond to the message of the Kingdom (Acts 2:39).

He was praying, in other words, for you.

For three Journeys now, you’ve been digging into the Word of God. You’ve been discovering who He is, why evil exists and what He’s going to do about it. And now?

DAY 1

THE CROSSROADS

Now you have a decision to make.

You've seen a bird's-eye view of the plan of God, but where you fit in it depends on what you do with the knowledge you've been given.

Knowledge, after all, is just that. Knowledge. It doesn't *do* anything; it doesn't *change* anything. It simply exists. What makes the difference is what we choose to do with it.

The easiest choice is to ignore it. Cram it into a mental filing cabinet and let it be nothing more than an interesting collection of facts.

But this Journey is for the person who understands that it's not enough to just know about God, that it's not enough to know why He allows evil—that it's not even enough to know His plan for the entire world.

This Journey is for the person who is ready to take that knowledge and *do* something with it.

Hopefully, that person is you.

But before we can talk about what needs to be done, we have to take a step back and understand what already *has* been done. You're a single thread in a tapestry that stretches thousands of years into the past. Before you can understand where you belong and why, it's vital to understand the threads that came before you.

As we take this Journey, we're going to look at the incredible power that has tied God's people together through the ages. And then we're going to explore just what the Church is, why God wants you in it, and what that means for you.

The Jews of the first century weren't wrong to be looking for a conquering Messiah. The Bible is clear—that Messiah *is* coming. Jesus Christ *will* return to this earth “with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). He *will* establish a Kingdom that “shall never be destroyed” (Daniel 2:44).

But that's in the future. It hasn't happened yet. It could happen soon, but there's also a chance it might not happen for some time. And that's okay—because in the meantime, Christ has given His Church a job to do.

Are you ready to get to work?

FURTHER READING

Scriptures

- [Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23](#)
- [Matthew 9:35-38](#)
- [James 1:21-25](#)

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- [What Is the Mission of the Church?](#)

DAY 2

CONNECTED THROUGH THE AGES

“Power from on high.”

That’s what Christ promised His disciples after His resurrection. “Tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49), He told them.

So they waited. They remained in Jerusalem and “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14), worshipping God alongside roughly 120 fellow brethren (verse 15), waiting for Christ to fulfill His promise.

And on the Feast of Pentecost, A.D. 31, that’s exactly what He did.

Here’s what the biblical account tells us:

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4).

As you can imagine, the sound of a rushing mighty wind and a host of voices speaking in foreign languages attracted attention:

“And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?’ ... So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’” (verses 5-8, 12).

Peter was quick to explain: prophecy was being fulfilled before their very eyes (verse 16). God was pouring out His Holy Spirit, His “power from on high,” on His people. The sound of wind, the tongues

DAY 2

CONNECTED THROUGH THE AGES

of fire, the gift of languages—all these things were happening to prove to those watching that Jesus Christ was truly the Son of God and the promised Messiah:

“This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. ... Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ” (verses 32-33, 36).

The effect was immediate. Thousands of those who heard Peter’s message were “cut to the heart” (verse 37), wondering what to do with the knowledge they’d been given. Peter explained that too: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call” (verses 38-39).

In response, roughly 3,000 people did just that (verse 41). They repented, they were baptized, and they received the gift of the Holy Spirit—the power and essence of Almighty God. What began with a mere 120 disciples waiting in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4, 15) had exploded into an astonishing 3,000-plus on Pentecost (Acts 2:41). “And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (verse 47).

But God was just getting started.

The book of Acts is a front row seat that allows us to watch the early days of the Church of God unfold. As the story continues, the focus is on the mission Christ entrusted to His disciples: preach the gospel; care for the believers.

And that’s exactly what we see happen. It doesn’t always go smoothly—in fact, it rarely goes smoothly. As the Church grows, it gains enemies—opponents who either refuse to believe the gospel message or feel threatened by it. The early Jewish disciples face persecution from the local government and from their fellow countrymen. The book of Acts shows faithful believers being thrown into prison, beaten with rods and whips, chased out of cities and, yes, even killed.

In spite of it all, the gospel continues to spread. And spread. And spread. And as it spreads, we begin to see a pattern emerge. Everywhere the gospel goes, there are those who believe it—who repent of their sins, who are baptized in the name of Christ and who receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

DAY 2

CONNECTED THROUGH THE AGES

In many ways, the Holy Spirit becomes the central fixture of the book of Acts. Key players like Peter and Paul come and go, new believers show up in new locations, some lose their lives because of their dedication to their faith—but the Holy Spirit remains a constant.

Why is that?

The Spirit is there after the Samaritans are baptized (Acts 8:14-17). It's there when the disciples stand on trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8). It's there when they pray for boldness (verses 29-31), when Stephen faces an angry mob (Acts 7:55), when Philip outruns a chariot (Acts 8:29), when the early Church realizes salvation is available to the whole world and not just the Jews (Acts 11:15-18), when Paul opposes a sorcerer (Acts 13:8-11) and when he baptizes disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:6).

Throughout the pages of Acts, it becomes clear that the early Church members were guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It also becomes clear that the Spirit is not another member of the God family, but the *power* of the God family. Again and again in the New Testament, we see the Holy Spirit giving early Church members the strength and the wisdom and the ability to do amazing things and to hold fast to the truth even under intense persecution.

But Acts isn't just about those early Church members. It's about the incredible Spirit that enabled them to do what they did—*the same Spirit that's available to us today*. The very Spirit that did all those incredible things in the book of Acts—in fact, the same Spirit that God used to shape the earth at the beginning of the creation week (Genesis 1:2)—*that Spirit* is the one God gives us after our own repentance and baptism.

The takeaway? The Church of God is not just a collection of random strangers who happen to believe the same things. The Church is a *body* composed of God's called and chosen disciples, connected through the ages by the Spirit that was poured out on Pentecost of A.D. 31.

And God wants *you* to be part of it.

FURTHER READING

Scriptures

- [Luke 4:1-14](#)
- [Acts 2](#)
- [Galatians 5:22-26](#)

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- [The Spirit of Truth](#)

DAY 3

A PLACE TO GROW

Christians aren't perfect.

That's not exactly breaking news (especially to Christians), but it is worth emphasizing:

We're not.

We never have been.

To be a Christian is to believe in a perfect God who gives us a perfect set of rules for living, all while being intimately aware that we are anything *but* perfect.

We don't always do the right thing.

We have weaknesses.

We make mistakes.

We know the kind of person we want to be—and we know, better than anyone else, how abysmally far we are from actually *being* that person. The apostle Paul wrote, “For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do” (Romans 7:15).

Following God requires us to look in the mirror and come to terms with three things—who we are, who God wants us to be, and the distance between those two points.

It's hard. Christianity is *hard*. There's nothing easy about looking honestly at ourselves. There's nothing easy about setting out to overcome our character flaws and develop the traits God wants to see in us—but it *is* important. It's the reason we're here: to take on the character of God and to join His family.

On our own, that's an overwhelming, impossible task—but as we learned yesterday, the Spirit of God equips us to *do* the impossible. It's a powerful tool God gives us to grapple with our own shortcomings and develop His perfect character. But it's not the *only* tool at our disposal.

DAY 3

A PLACE TO GROW

Long ago, wise King Solomon noted in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12:

Two are better than one,
Because they have a good reward for their labor.
For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls,
For he has no one to help him up.
Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;
But how can one be warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

When we join forces with those who believe what we believe and who are going where we're going, we all benefit. We can dream bigger, work harder and climb higher than any of us ever could on our own.

And perhaps most importantly, we can *grow*.

In the Old Testament, Elijah the prophet found himself on the run from the wicked Queen Jezebel. He had exposed her pagan, Baal-worshipping priests as the frauds they were—and in return, she intended to kill him.

Understandably, Elijah was afraid. He hid himself in a cave on a mountain, where God spoke with him and asked, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings 19:13).

Elijah explained: “I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life” (verse 14).

It's not always easy to be a follower of God—and it's even harder to be the *only* follower of God. But Elijah was wrong. Yes, he had been zealous. Yes, the nation of Israel had forsaken God and turned to worshipping the false god known as Baal. But Elijah was far from the only God-fearing man left in Israel. God told him, “I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (verse 18).

What do you think Elijah must have felt when he heard those words—when he discovered he was not the very last of God's servants, but was, in fact, one among thousands?

DAY 3

A PLACE TO GROW

Relief? Peace of mind? Excitement? Whatever he felt, Elijah was not alone—and neither are you.

The Church is a community—a body composed of imperfect people striving for perfection. Their ultimate goal? To come to “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). It’s also to “grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (verses 15-16).

By coming together as a community, every member of the Church has the opportunity (and privilege) of contributing to that growth. We all come to the table with our own weaknesses and shortcomings, true—but we each also bring our own unique strengths, talents and life experiences.

As Solomon noted all those years ago, we’re better off together. Together, we have a good reward for our labor—we have support when we stumble, warmth when we’re cold and strength when we’re weak. The Church helps us *grow*.

But maybe you’ve had a question in the back of your mind this whole time:

“Why me?”

There are over 7 billion people in the world today. Seven *billion*. Out of all those billions, why does God want *you*, specifically, in His Church?

Good question. Tomorrow, we’ll set out to find the answer.

FURTHER READING

Scriptures

- [Romans 7:7-25](#)
- [Proverbs 24:16](#)
- [Ephesians 4:11-24](#)

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- [True Christianity: Imperfect People Striving Toward Perfection](#)

DAY 4

“WHY ME?”

Imagine a giant bowl filled with roughly 7.4 billion slips of paper. On each of those slips of paper is written the name of someone alive on earth today.

Your job is to close your eyes and—on your first try—pull your name out of that bowl.

Sound difficult? It should. One in 7.4 billion is pretty crummy odds—so let’s make it a little easier. Instead of grabbing just one slip of paper, you can grab 800. As long as one of those slips has your name on it, you’re good. Those are better odds, right?

Well ... only technically. But they’re still not great. If you crunch the numbers, it turns out you have a slightly better chance of getting hit by lightning during your lifetime.

Twice.

Okay, so let’s tilt the odds just a little more toward your favor. Instead of grabbing 800, what about scooping out 600,000 names in one go? This time, surely, you have a better chance at choosing your name. And it’s true, you do!

This time, you’re only slightly more likely to be struck by lightning just *once* in your lifetime.

In other words: there are a lot of people out there, and you’re just one of them.

As you’ve made your way through these Journeys, you probably noticed that many religious organizations flying the Christian banner aren’t necessarily teaching what the Bible teaches. Think about it—the plan of God as revealed by His feasts; the potential for every human being to not just be *with* God, but to be *like* God; an eternal kingdom to be established here, on the earth—how many organizations are teaching all that? How many even *know* all that?

Christianity might be the world’s largest religion, but in some ways it’s the world’s most confused religion, filled with beliefs that contradict the very words of the Bible—beliefs about where we go when we die, what it means to be forgiven, how God wants us to live and even our ultimate purpose in life.

DAY 4

“WHY ME?”

In the second and third Journeys, we learned about Satan and his desire to thwart the plan of God—Satan, the “great dragon ... who deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), who “transforms himself into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), who aims to “deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matthew 24:24).

Consider what that means. Satan, a “liar and the father of it” (John 8:44), a “roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8), has deceived the whole world. Not just a portion of it. Not just a handful of people. Not just those who don’t believe in God, not just those with a different religion—*the whole world*.

As hard as it might be to believe, that includes mainstream Christianity. The gospel, Paul writes, is “veiled” to a world “whose minds the god of this age has blinded” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). It doesn’t matter how dedicated or sincere we are—on our own, “the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). Between now and the return of Christ, unless God the Father specifically removes that veil (John 6:44), it’s impossible for any of us to truly understand His Word.

So ... why you?

You’ve been reading these Journeys. You’ve been digging through the Bible, the Word of God—and it’s been making sense. The pieces have been coming together, and you’ve found yourself understanding more and more. For you, the veil doesn’t seem to be there.

Why?

Out of 7.4 billion slips of paper, how did your name get pulled out of that bowl? How did you beat those odds? Are you somehow more important than all those other names? More special? More indispensable to God’s plan? Or are you just some kind of fluke?

As it turns out, none of those things are true—but there *is* a very specific reason God has opened your eyes to the truth:

He has a job for you.

DAY 4

“WHY ME?”

The apostle Paul described the Church as a “body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies” (Ephesians 4:16). He further explained that “God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased” (1 Corinthians 12:18).

If God is calling you into His Church, it means He has a place for you there. It means He has something for you to be doing; some way you can contribute toward the growth of the body.

It means there’s somewhere you belong.

Does that make you special? Absolutely. But here’s the catch: God didn’t call you because you’re special. You’re special *because He called you*. It’s not like God looked down and realized that He needed you, that He just *had* to have you in His Church. On the contrary, the Church has gone on for centuries without you, and it could carry on for centuries more just the same.

God is calling you because He *wants* you. Because He knows your heart (Acts 1:24), He knows your mind (Jeremiah 17:10), He knows everything there is to know about you (Psalm 139:15-16)—and in you, He sees someone He can work with. He sees a mind He can teach, a heart He can mold and a life He can use to shine His light into the world (Matthew 5:16).

It’s not about being qualified. In fact, here’s a little secret: none of us are qualified. Not you, not the thousands who were called before you—not even those who will be called after you. God isn’t recruiting the strongest and the smartest and the best-looking of the world. He’s recruiting the *unqualified* instead. Why? Paul explains:

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world [what the world calls foolish, J.B. Phillips New Testament] to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD’” (1 Corinthians 1:26-31).

This isn’t about what you can do. This is about what God can do *with* you. There’s a world full of intelligent, strong, beautiful people out there who don’t know God—who either want nothing to do with Him or just don’t know Him in the first place.

DAY 4

“WHY ME?”

In the previous Journey, we looked at the plan of God—a plan to rescue humanity from its sins, to restore peace to the world and to bring “many sons to glory” (Hebrews 2:10).

You get to be the proof.

When it’s all said and done, God wants to present you to the world as His child and say, “*This* is what I’m capable of. This is the change I can bring about. This is what I want to offer you too.” And at the same time, you’ll be able to offer hope to the terrified survivors of humanity’s darkest hour—and you’ll be able to tell them, “I understand. I’ve been where you are now. I’ve been overwhelmed and afraid and lost—but there’s a God who can give you strength and comfort and purpose, just like He did for me.”

There is a place for you in God’s Church, if you’re willing to accept it. There is a place for you among brethren who are seeking what you’re seeking and heading where you’re heading, if you’re willing to join them.

But where *are* those brethren? Where is the Church of God today? And, most important, how are we supposed to find it?

FURTHER READING

Scriptures

- [1 Peter 2:9-10](#)
- [Psalm 139](#)
- [Malachi 3:16-18](#)

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- [God Calling!](#)

DAY 5

FINDING THE CHURCH TODAY

There are hundreds of thousands of congregations in the United States alone, and very few of them present the exact same version of Christianity. From congregation to congregation and from denomination to denomination, you're going to encounter wildly different interpretations of what Christ did and what He said.

That's a problem.

Christ promised, "I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). If we believe that, then the Church Jesus built must still be out there today—but where? In a sea of congregations each claiming to trace its roots back to the Church founded by Jesus, how are we supposed to find the *right* one?

We can narrow the field quite a bit just by looking to the words of Jesus Himself. He told His critics, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and *they follow Me*" (John 10:27, emphasis added). Later, He told His disciples, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. ... You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:10, 14).

The apostle John emphasized that point, telling the early Church, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ... He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:3, 6). Conversely, John warns, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (verse 4).

It's a simple but important truth: Those who intend to follow Christ must follow His example and keep His commandments. If we're looking for the Church Jesus built, it's vital we start by looking for those who are walking as He walked.

Strange as it might sound, that actually crosses quite a few possibilities off the list.

DAY 5

FINDING THE CHURCH TODAY

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matthew 5:17-18).

A jot is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet, and a tittle is a small marking on a letter. Christ was making it clear that the Law and the Prophets—that is, God’s instructions and judgments regarding right and wrong, good and evil—weren’t going anywhere. In fact, as we read through His famous sermon, Christ makes it clear that the Law and the Prophets were more important than ever—that they were filled with more depth and meaning than the Jews realized (Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-32, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44). That’s a problem for any church claiming that Jesus did away with God’s law.

Here’s another problem: Jesus didn’t go to church on Sunday. All throughout the Gospel accounts, we see Him observing the *seventh-day* Sabbath. Luke even tells us that it was Christ’s custom to go into the synagogue to worship on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). It’s what He did—and it’s what His disciples did too. In the book of Acts, we are given multiple examples of Paul keeping the Sabbath—“as his custom was” (Acts 17:2; see also 13:14; 16:13; 18:4).

Christ and His disciples kept God’s feast days too. They kept the Passover together (Luke 22:15); the Church began while the disciples were gathered to observe Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4); Paul wrote about keeping the Days of Unleavened Bread (1 Corinthians 5:8)—the list goes on. Never once are we given any indication that Christ intended for His followers to stop observing these days.

There’s more. Throughout the pages of the Bible, the Holy Spirit is described as the *power* and *essence* of God (Micah 3:8; Luke 1:35; 4:14; Acts 1:8; Romans 15:19)—but never as God Himself. There’s no reference to the Holy Spirit as another person in the Godhead. Christ never taught that; His disciples never taught that—and yet the majority of Christian churches today *do* teach that.

In the span of only a few paragraphs, we’ve established some vital criteria for identifying God’s Church today. His followers will be walking as Christ walked, which means they’ll be living by God’s commandments. They’ll be keeping His law, observing His Sabbath and feast days, and viewing His Holy Spirit as the divine power that binds them all together and gives them strength.

That’s not an exhaustive list, but it is a start. How many denominations and congregations don’t meet those requirements? Quite a few—in fact, the question we have to start asking now is, “Are there any groups who *do* meet those criteria?”

DAY 5

FINDING THE CHURCH TODAY

You might be interested to know that behind these Journeys you've been reading—actually, behind all the content on Life, Hope & Truth—is a church. We're called the *Church of God, a Worldwide Association* (or COGWA for short), and we have congregations all over the world. Our goal is to continue the mission entrusted by Christ to His followers all those years ago—to spread the good news of the coming Kingdom, to teach others *how* to follow God and to provide an environment where those followers can grow.

We're doing our best to follow in the footsteps of our Elder Brother, Jesus Christ—to walk as He walked, to live as He lived, to share in His vision and His values and His character. We treasure God's law. We gather together to worship on His Sabbaths and His feast days. We submit ourselves, as best we can, to be led by His Holy Spirit as we continue to travel the path set before us.

If that's what you're seeking to do as well, we'd love to have you walk with us. You can visit cogwa.org/congregations to find the closest congregation to you, along with the name and contact info of a local pastor you can talk to about attending with us.

But the story doesn't stop here. The prophet Amos asked, “Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The answer, of course, is no. For two people to walk together, they need to be in agreement about where they're heading—and why.

So—where *is* the Church heading?

FURTHER READING

Scriptures

- [2 Corinthians 11:1-4](#)
- [1 John 3](#)
- [Matthew 7:21-27](#)

LifeHopeandTruth.com

- [The Church: A Worldwide Work](#)

DAY 6

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

For almost 2,000 years, the Church of God has been praying for the establishment of His Kingdom.

And for almost 2,000 years, the answer has been, “Not yet.”

When Jesus was resurrected, His disciples wanted to know, “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, he talked about “we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:15).

From the beginning of the Church until the present day, the return of Christ has always appeared to be right around the corner—and no wonder! Christ was the One who taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). He was the One who told us, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me” (Revelation 22:12).

Christ also described what the world would look like before He returned to establish the Kingdom. There would be “wars and rumors of wars,” there would be “famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places,” and “because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:6, 7, 12).

Every generation of the Church has had good reason to look at the current events of their time and wonder how it could possibly get any worse. From the Jewish revolts of A.D. 66 to the bubonic plague and inquisitions of the Dark Ages to the more recent examples of World War II, the Cuban missile crisis and the continual turbulence in the Middle East, there have always been reasons to believe Christ’s return could be just around the corner.

Today we have every reason to look at the world scene and believe the same thing. We have wars and rumors of wars. Terrorism continually rears its ugly head. Several nations, including the United States, seem to be teetering on the precipice of societal and economic collapse, and there’s every indication that God is setting the stage for a myriad of prophetic events to begin unfolding.

But maybe we’re not quite there yet. Maybe the end is farther off than it seems to be. And that’s the thing—we don’t know. We *can’t* know. Jesus described what the end-time world would look like, warning us, “So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!”

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STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

(Matthew 24:36). But He gave us another warning too: “Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matthew 24:36).

The Kingdom of God *is* coming. We’re promised that. It’s closer than it’s ever been—but when it comes to our day-to-day lives, the *when* of Christ’s return is irrelevant. What matters—what’s always mattered—is what we’re doing in the meantime.

Long before the Church was founded, God was working closely with a select few in the Old Testament era. When we read the stories of men like Abraham, Moses, Noah, Joseph and David, it’s clear they understood at least some aspects of God’s plan. Later, in the New Testament, we read about them again:

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:13-16).

There’s a lot to unpack in those verses. The author of Hebrews was writing about men and women who had some understanding of the coming Kingdom of God—and who clung to that understanding. They saw themselves as strangers and pilgrims; wanderers who were just passing through this life on the way to something better.

The promise of the Kingdom was more real to them than the world they lived in. It was their goal, their purpose, their reason for getting up in the morning. It was so real to them, they could almost reach out and touch it—and in the future, when God resurrects them, that’s exactly what they’ll be able to do.

These men and women—these visionaries, these heroes of faith—are our examples. They paved the way with their determination and dedication, encouraging us to follow suit: “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

The goal, the Kingdom, is ahead of us. Can you see it? Can you picture it in your mind’s eye?

If you can’t, would you like to?

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In Journey 3, we saw how the last four of God’s festivals—Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and the Last Great Day—picture the return of Christ to earth, as well as the events that follow. Christ will reign as King of Kings, Satan will be bound, humanity will experience a thousand years of peace, the whole of humanity will have the opportunity to join the family of God. And, at the end of it all, God will establish the New Jerusalem on a new earth.

The apostle John was given a vision of that New Jerusalem, and he recorded what he saw in the book of Revelation. It’s a breathtaking design—streets of pure gold, walls adorned with precious stones, gates made of pearls, and a river as clear as crystal flowing out from the throne of God (Revelation 21:19, 21; 22:1). The glory of God the Father and Jesus Christ will outshine the sun and the moon; the gates will remain open without fear; and the tree of life will grow there (Revelation 21:23, 25; 22:2).

But that’s not the most impressive part. The most impressive part is what John heard as the New Jerusalem descended from heaven to the earth: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:3-4).

John’s description gives us a glimpse of the “heavenly country” that the faithful men and women of Hebrews 11 were looking toward—and not just looking toward, but *running* toward. A city without death. Without pain and sorrow and crying. A city where the God of all creation dwells with His creation and personally wipes away all tears forever.

Can you see it?

The Kingdom of God is the destination. It’s where God’s people have been marching toward for millennia. They could have turned back at any time—they could have given up and made the things of this life their main priority.

But they didn’t. They understood the truth. This world, this life that seems so real to us, so permanent—it’s temporary. Passing away. What mattered was up ahead, and so they continued on, no matter the cost—and for many of them, there *was* a cost:

“Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were

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stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented—of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth” (Hebrews 11:35-38).

That’s a bleak passage. Scourgings. Chains. Executions. Exile. Not the kind of things we like to think about. Not the kind of things we like to entertain as possibilities in our own lives—and hopefully, not the kind of things we’ll ever have to face.

But we *will* face trials. We will at times have to choose between obeying God and compromising—maybe at work, maybe in the privacy of our own home, maybe with our most treasured relationships. And when we face those choices, whatever form they take, our job is to remember who we are and where we’re going. We’re strangers and pilgrims on our way to the Kingdom—just like those who came before us.

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us” (verses 39-40).

“Apart from us.” Consider that. These men and women are still in their graves, still awaiting their “better resurrection” as sons and daughters of God, because God isn’t finished inviting others to accept the challenge and to run the race.

Others ... like you.

This phase of God’s plan *will* have a conclusion, but not yet. God is still calling and working with His future children in this life—and He wants you to be one of them.

The road is before you; the finish line is ahead; the goal is waiting.

Will you run?

FURTHER READING

Scriptures

- [Hebrews 11](#)
- [Ephesians 2:19-22](#)
- [2 Corinthians 4:16-18](#)

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- [Understanding the Olivet Prophecy](#)
- [Run With Endurance](#)

DAY 7

THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES

You're part of a story.

You see that, don't you? It started a long time ago—back before God the Father and Jesus Christ even created the first human being. They began with a plan: “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

And so They did. Through the Word—that is, through the One who later came to earth as Jesus Christ, the One who made all things (John 1:1-3, 14)—God “created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27).

But the story doesn't end there. Adam and Eve, the very first man and woman, were created in the image of God, but they were incomplete. God made them physical, temporary creations with beginnings and ends. They may have borne a resemblance to God, but they weren't spirit like Him. They didn't think like Him. They weren't immortal, all-powerful and all-knowing like Him.

There was, in other words, still work to be done.

As we've made our way through these Journeys, we've learned a lot about that work. We've talked about who God is and what He ultimately wants for us; we've looked at what sin is and why it's so dangerous; and we've explored His feasts—a road map of His plan to rescue humanity from itself and build an eternal family imbued with His character, His power and His incomparable glory.

That's what this is all about. It's what the holy days picture, it's why the Church exists, and it's the reason *you* exist—to be made, truly and completely, into the image of God. To join His family as His child. To experience an eternity without pain or death or sorrow or crying—an eternity we can't even begin to wrap our tiny human minds around.

You are part of this story.

But, as we noted at the beginning of this Journey, you are also at a crossroads. You have a decision to make, and what happens next is entirely up to you.

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You've been given a precious treasure. Not everyone yet sees what you see; not everyone understands what you understand. The God of all creation has opened your eyes to His priceless truth, not because you are special and deserve it, but because He loves you and has a purpose for you.

The world around you is deceived and blinded by a malicious being who wants to see God's plan come to nothing. Ever since the Garden of Eden, Satan has been convincing the world to redefine the concepts of right and wrong, never realizing its own desperate need for God's guidance and deliverance.

You can see what they can't. And when the time comes—when Christ returns and the enemy is bound and the veil is removed—God wants *you* on the team that will help guide the entire world into a relationship with its Creator.

But not yet. Right now, you're imperfect. You have your own flaws and shortcomings, just like the rest of us—and before God presents you to the world as one of His children, He wants to refine you. That means bringing you through the process of repentance and baptism while giving you the strength for a lifetime of wrestling with and overcoming your own human nature.

Hence the Church. You have something to contribute to the body of Christ, it's true—but the body also has something to contribute to you. It is, after all, “joined and knit together by what every joint supplies” (Ephesians 4:16), which means you can't get everything you need on your own. That's not how being a Christian works.

The Church is a source of strength and wisdom and community for the followers of Christ. Each member brings something valuable to the body, as Paul notes: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8).

When all these gifts come together as God intended, God's people can blossom and grow exponentially—because the Church, when it functions correctly, is a beautiful thing.

And it's necessary.

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THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES

In many churches, it's not uncommon to see attendance swell around Christmas and Easter. During the rest of the year, though, attendance becomes a little more optional. Church becomes a thing people do if they have the time. If they're not too busy. If there's nothing better to do.

If they feel like it.

God asks a little more of us than that.

When He revealed His Sabbath to ancient Israel, He explained, "There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the LORD" (Leviticus 23:3, New International Version). Since ancient times, God's Sabbath day has been a time for His people to come together and worship Him—to step away from the world and focus on the things that truly matter.

Contrary to popular belief, the need to assemble didn't end with the Old Testament. The author of Hebrews encouraged the Church to "consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24-25).

In an earlier passage, he made it clear that "there remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (Hebrews 4:9). The Greek word translated "rest" is actually *sabbatismos*, which doesn't refer to a normal rest, but a *Sabbath rest*.

God never made "the assembling of ourselves" optional. He never made His Sabbath day a matter of choice. To follow Him—to count ourselves among His people—we have to start by *following His instructions*. But coming together with fellow believers isn't just an arbitrary command—it's absolutely vital for us as well.

Imagine what would happen if the Church *didn't* come together every Sabbath. Thousands upon thousands of faithful believers each fighting his or her own trials, each struggling to resist Satan and striving to obey God—each of them in isolation, separated from each other. No encouragement. No support. No guidance or comfort or compassion—just thousands of Christians doing their best to follow God on their own.

That's not what God wants. Jesus explained, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). When God's people come together on His weekly Sabbath and on His feast days, they're able to draw strength from God and from one another. They encourage and uplift each other; they help each other stay focused on their common goal of the Kingdom of God; and they

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share in fellowship and conversation and learning, reminding themselves of where they're going and why.

If these Journeys have connected with you, the next step is to *do* something about it. God calls us to take action—not sit still.

If you are ready, the Church is waiting for you.

FURTHER READING

Scriptures

- [1 Corinthians 12](#)
- [Hebrews 10:11-25](#)
- [Romans 13:11-14](#)

LifeHopeandTruth.com

- [Christian Fellowship](#)

WHAT NEXT?

From here, you have a few choices. Download our ***Change Your Life!*** booklet to learn more about how to live God's way of life, or read ***Welcome to the Church of God, a Worldwide Association*** to learn more about who we are. You can also head straight to our list of **Congregations** to contact the minister of a congregation near you, or contact us directly through our **Ask a Question** page. We look forward to hearing from you!