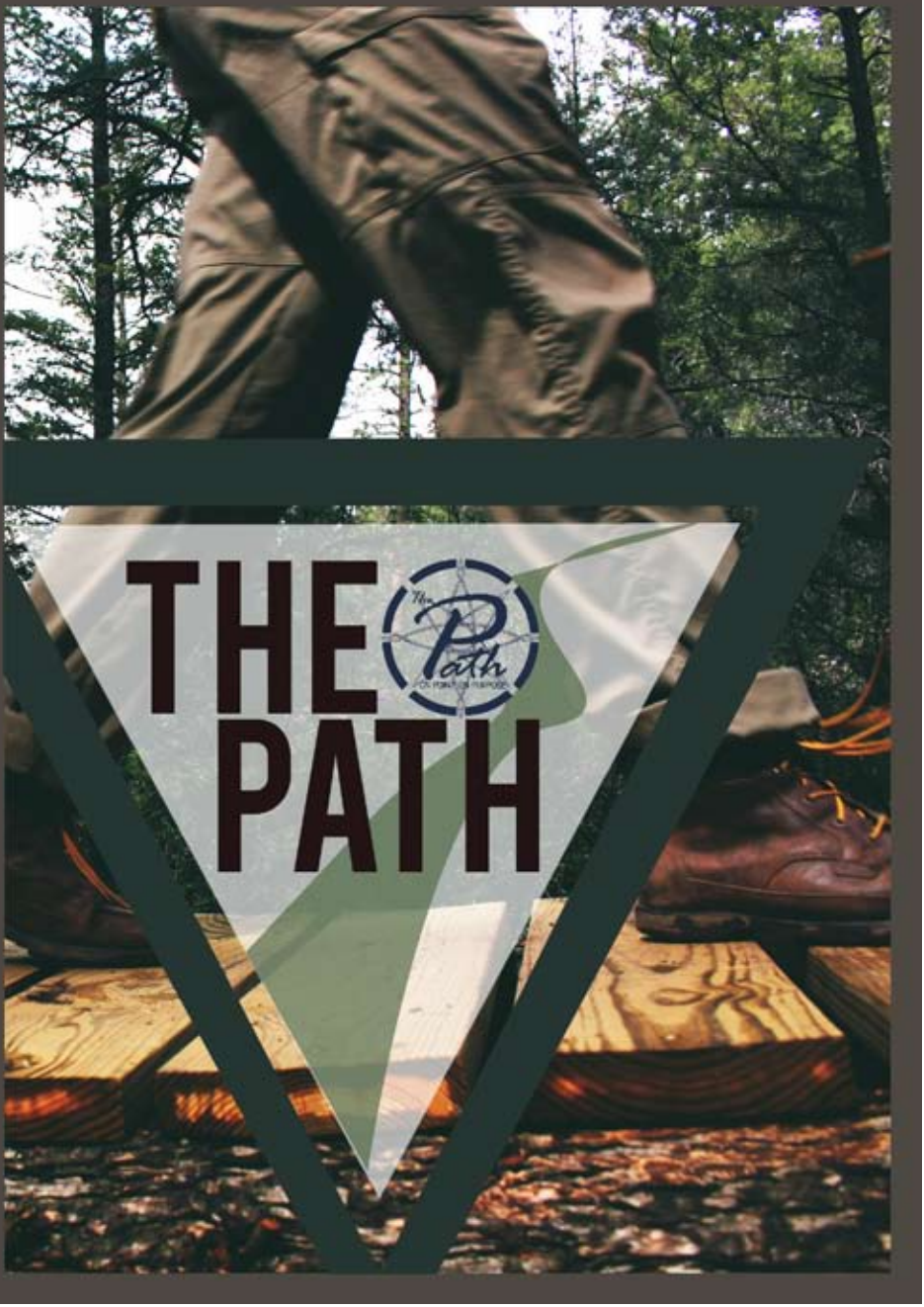

THE
PATH


The
Path
ON POINT ON PURPOSE

The Path
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Quote on page 45 from D.A. Carson, *For the Love of God, Volume Two* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999)

Quote on page 47 from Timothy Keller at https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/1240-prayer-a-14-day-devotional-by-tim-keller/day/8/ (accessed February 12, 2015)

Quote on page 57 from James MacDonald at https://www.facebook.com/DrJamesMacDonald/posts/390574800966980 (accessed February 26, 2015)

Editor: Daniel Goepfrich
Layout and Design: Caleb Young

Printed in the United States of America
Fourth Printing - 2020

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Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

("***The Road Not Taken***" by Robert Frost)



This is your story and mine. Each of us is on a journey. This journey often feels as if we are in the woods - sometimes dark, sometimes beautiful. The road we choose winds us to many other paths we cannot yet see. And one day, what may seem like ages from now, we will each get to tell our story with a sigh.

I wonder...
Will your sigh be one of contentment or regret?

Sometimes, as in Frost's poem, we do not know where our path will lead. We would love to stroll down the lane or through the woods, taking in the scene, not worried about where we will emerge or what awaits us around the next bend. As for staying on the path - where's the adventure in that? On that type of path, maps and guides and signs only hinder our quest.

But for most of us, this quest is just a dream, a fantasy that we are allowed only occasionally - maybe on vacation, when we take a break from "real life." Life with bosses and teachers, deadlines and projects, customers and in-laws - this life affords no meandering, no wistful exploring, no carefree wondering what we will find next.

Instead, we often travel the well-worn rut between home and work, school, and church. No matter whether it is a desk or a production line, sometimes "real life" is often more "care less" than carefree.

I wonder...
What if there were a better way?

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry." (Jesus) Matthew 11:28-30

What if Jesus wanted life to be more like a journey, a quest, an adventure, a *pursuit* of something more?

What if he gave us a choice of paths, seemingly equal on the surface?

What if he also showed us the destination, the travel brochure describing which path will lead to a sigh of regret or the great sigh of contentment?

What if we could *rest* even when we're not on vacation?

What if we could actually choose the right path?





Welcome to *The Path*

"*May grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord!*" 2 Peter 1:2

Peace, lavish, rich - now that sounds more like it!

Most of us would love to have God's grace and peace lavished on us, our families, our churches. Yet for some reason it seems to skip us. The apostle Peter knew that struggle all too well, but he also learned the solution that radically changed him forever.

He needed a personal, growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

In the first few sentences of his second letter, Peter provided a step-by-step plan for anyone to know Jesus the way he did and be able to enjoy his grace and peace. Some might call this a discipleship process or a program, because Peter offers steps, encouragement, warnings, and rewards.

We think it's more than a program. We think it's a way of life. Peter showed us *The Path*.

Throughout these pages we will explore how you can successfully work through each of Peter's steps...*on point, on purpose*. Oak Tree Community Church is committed to helping you grow in your relationship with Jesus, to the glory of God.


The Path
ON POINT ON PURPOSE

"*Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day!*" 2 Peter 3:18

Life is full of people trying to give us direction, and way too often their directions contradict each other or are just plain wrong. Bosses give competing projects. Teachers require different methods to do the same work. Churches offer inconsistent messages. Is it possible to get a straight answer anymore?

"*May grace and peace be lavished on you as you grow in the rich knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord! I can pray this because his divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence.*"
2 Peter 1:2-3

"*Everything necessary for life and godliness*" like an all-in-one kit? Yep, and it includes all the right parts, the right tools, the step-by-step instructions, and full lifetime support.

So what's the catch?

"*Come to me...*"
"*Grace and peace...as you grow in the rich knowledge...*"
"*Everything necessary for life and godliness through the rich knowledge...*"

Could it really be that simple?

The problem with religion is that it is only that - religion. And cold, dead, lifeless religion tends to make cold, dead, lifeless religious people.

"*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly.*" (Jesus) John 10:10

Religion is a thief. It steals our time, our energy, our passion, and, eventually, our whole life. Jesus didn't die to make us religious. He died to keep us out of religion. Jesus offers real life, abundant life, eternal life.

"*Now this is eternal life - **that they know you**, the only true God, **and Jesus Christ**, whom you sent.*" John 17:3

No matter which way we look, it always comes back to **knowing Jesus**. This was the single driving focus of those who actually knew him best.

John: "*We know that the Son of God has come and **has given us insight to know him** who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This one is the true God and eternal life.*" 1 John 5:20

Paul: "***My aim is to know him**, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death.*" Philippians 3:10

Unlike Robert Frost's winding path to "who knows where," Peter's path leads us to Jesus, one step at a time, on purpose.



But a clear destination doesn't mean no adventure or excitement along the way. Like any path through the woods, *The Path* toward Jesus is filled with wonderful unknowns; dark caves and valleys, steep climbs, refreshing meadows, bright sunlight, and cool waterfalls are all up ahead.

Stray too far off the path, though, and the territory contains danger as well. Many people have found themselves lost, falling into pits and swamps and facing enemies on every side.

It doesn't have to be this way.

"*His divine power* ***has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness*** *through the rich knowledge of the one who called us by his own glory and excellence. Through these things* ***he has bestowed on us his precious and most magnificent promises****, so that by means of what was promised you may become partakers of the divine nature, after escaping the worldly corruption that is produced by evil desire.*"
2 Peter 1:3-4

Not only does Jesus offer "*everything for life and godliness*," he also offers "*his precious and most magnificent promises*." Paul called them "*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*" (Ephesians 1:3), and Peter explains that they result in "*escaping the worldly corruption*" and becoming "*partakers in the divine nature.*"

Wouldn't ***you*** like to escape this worldly corruption? It's no wonder that we can enjoy God's lavish grace and peace!

Now something with such a great reward, great encouragement, and great warning surely comes at a great price.

So what does God's grace and peace, his precious and magnificent promises, and his divine nature cost these days?

Commitment.

The person who wants to know Jesus fully and receive everything he has to offer must make three radical, life changing commitments:

An **all in** commitment to Jesus
An **all in** commitment to his Church
An **all in** commitment to spiritual growth



In case you're wondering, it's not as easy as it sounds! As with any adventure, your journey down *The Path* doesn't require all of the commitments up front.

In fact, it's not even possible to make them all at once.

The Path is a series of steps. As you take each step, on purpose, you'll discover a new understanding of those commitments and a call to embrace them again and again.

In the following pages, we will unpack Peter's eight steps, points, milestones along *The Path*. Each builds on and supports the previous one and lays the foundation for the next. None of them stands alone, and most of them will become a part of your daily spiritual growth habits.

Are you ready to jump in? Here is Peter's path to spiritual growth:

"*Make every effort to add to your* ***faith****, excellence;*
to ***excellence****, knowledge;*
to ***knowledge****, self-control;*
to ***self-control****, perseverance;*
to ***perseverance****, godliness;*
to ***godliness****, brotherly affection;*
to ***brotherly affection****,*
unselfish love*."* *(2 Peter 1:5-7)*



Faith

The first step on *The Path* is not just the first step; it's actually the prerequisite. Peter wrote, *"Make every effort* ***to add to your faith****."*

You might ask, "What faith does he mean? Can it be anything?" No, it can't. Peter is very specific about what faith is required for walking *The Path*. Look at how he opened his letter:

> *"From Simeon Peter, a slave and apostle of Jesus Christ,* ***to those who*** *through the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ,* ***have been granted a faith just as precious as ours****."* 2 Peter 1:1

The faith that Peter had in Jesus is the faith necessary to start down *The Path* toward Jesus. The goal of *The Path* is to know Jesus better and love him more. We can't do that if we don't know him at all.

In a sermon he preached years earlier Peter insisted:

> *"****There is salvation in no one else****, for there is no other name under heaven given among people by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:12

This is exactly what Jesus himself claimed: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* John 14:6

This is the gospel, the good news that everyone needs to hear. But how do we gain this “precious faith” that Peter had?

Then [the man] brought [Paul and Barnabas] outside and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, ***"Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved****, you and your household."* Acts 16:30-31

God requires only one thing: believe. But what must a person believe? The apostle Paul clarified what he meant by “believe in the Lord Jesus”:

“*For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received–* ***that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.***”
1 Corinthians 15:3-4

It really comes down to two things: <u>who he is</u> and <u>what he did</u>. To call Jesus “Lord” or “Christ” is to acknowledge that he is the one sent from God to rescue humanity and that he did that through his death and resurrection - nothing more, nothing less.

“*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son and through him to reconcile all things to himself by* ***making peace through the blood of his cross****– through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven.*” Colossians 1:19-20

In another conversation, Paul used the word "**repent**."

> "*Although God has overlooked such times of ignorance,* ***he now commands all people everywhere to repent****, because he has set a day on which he is going to judge the world in righteousness, by a man whom he designated, having provided proof to everyone by raising him from the dead.*"Acts 17:30-31

To "repent" means to "reconsider and act." In order to **believe** the truth, we must honestly **consider** it...the truth about ourselves and our sin, about Jesus and his death and resurrection. God wants us to change our beliefs based on the truth.

Believing in Jesus alone for salvation means that we have reconsidered our position; we have "repented," accepting the truth. We accept that only God can rescue us from sin and hell, and we embrace it. And that's all God requires for a person to get started on *The Path*.

Are you prepared to come to terms with the truth?

1) Every person is a sinner, separated from God

"*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" **Romans 3:23**

2) Jesus died for all sinners, while we were still sinners

"*God demonstrates his own love for us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" **Romans 5:8**

3) *The Path* to God goes only through Jesus

"*There is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all, revealing God's purpose at his appointed time.*"

1 Timothy 2:5-6

4) There is nothing we can do except believe

"*By grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so that no one can boast.*" **Ephesians 2:8-9**

Make a commitment

Have you ever believed in Jesus as your only way to be right with God?

Have you accepted God's terms to receive forgiveness and salvation?

Would you believe in him today, rejecting your plan and embracing Jesus?

Contact us at mynextstep@oaktreechurch.com
so we can help you take your next step on *The Path*



Excellence

"*His divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness* ***through the rich knowledge of the one who called us*** *by his own glory and excellence.*" 2 Peter 1:3

"*For if these things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in* ***your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately****.*" 2 Peter 1:8

The Path is the series of practical steps and commitments we must make to help us achieve everything that God designed us to be.

After salvation, Biblical Christianity requires both faith and work

It's like the power steering on your car. The engine gives you the power, but you still have to turn the wheel. God gives us the the power to drive our lives, but we are responsible for how we steer.

"*Continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort– for the sake of his good pleasure– is God.*" Philippians 2:12-13

Salvation is a gift from God, but living it out requires our commitment.

The Bible uses the word translated “excellence” to mean “a declaration of something,” especially in relation to God. On *The Path*, “excellence” means to declare our commitment to God.

Specifically, there are three commitments that the apostles taught are necessary before we can really see spiritual growth in our lives:

1. **Water baptism-** This is a personal, public identification with Jesus - his death, his resurrection, on our behalf. Water baptism was commanded directly by Jesus, so while there may be some extenuating circumstances, for most Christians not being baptized is disobedience to Jesus. A person cannot expect to grow toward Jesus while ignoring Jesus.

2. **Local church membership-** Now, this is different in each church, and the Bible doesn’t say exactly how it has to happen, but the concept is all over the New Testament. At Oak Tree, membership is a voluntary commitment to the leadership of the church and to the other members of the body. When a person becomes a church member, it is a public identification with Jesus’ people, a declaration that they are committed to the one organization that Jesus established and has spent the past 2,000 years building.

3. **All-in dedication-** As important as baptism and church membership are, this one is even more. In fact, not much spiritual growth is even possible until we have made this commitment.

"All-in" dedication **does not** mean:

- You'll have no more questions or doubts or you have all the answers
- You won't sin anymore or have no more temptations
- You have to go to Bible college or become a pastor or missionary

As you know Jesus better and love him more, you will certainly find answers. You should choose to sin less. You may even become a pastor or missionary. However, that's not what it means.

"All-in" dedication **does** mean:

- A willingness to submit to God and obey him in everything
- The intentional surrender of all of your life to him
- An outside lifestyle showing what is true inside your heart
- The humility to let God do what he wants to do without a fight

Paul summarized “all in dedication” in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

“We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.) Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that since Christ has been raised from the dead, he is never going to die again; death no longer has mastery over him. For the death he died, he died to sin once for all, but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you too consider yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its desires, and do not present your members to sin as instruments to be used for unrighteousness, ***but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead and your members to God as instruments to be used for righteousness.***” Romans 6:6-13

The great gospel music artist, Andrae Crouch, passed away in early 2015. His short song, “My Tribute,” is not just a powerful declaration of his own faith but a simple statement of dedication that you can make to Jesus today:

How can I say thanks for the things
You have done for me?
Things so undeserved yet you gave
To prove your love for me
The voices of a million angels
Could not express my gratitude
All that I am, and ever hope to be
I owe it all to thee

To God be the glory, to God be the glory
To God be the glory for the things he has done
With his blood he has saved me
With his power he has raised me
To God be the glory for the things he has done

Just let me live my life and
Let it be pleasing, Lord, to thee
And if I gain any praise, let it go to Calvary

With his blood he has saved me
With his power he has raised me

To God be the glory for the things he has done

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Make a commitment

Have you been baptized to publicly declare your faith in Jesus?

Have you become an active, serving member of a local church?

Have you committed yourself to all-in dedication to Christ - whatever he wants to do in, with, and through you for the rest of your life?

Contact us at mynextstep@oaktreechurch.com
so we can help you take your next step on *The Path*





Knowledge

Even though this whole process of walking *The Path* is about coming to the "rich knowledge" of Jesus, Peter wrote that adding "knowledge" is a part of that. We gain this knowledge by studying the Bible. Look at what Jesus said about the Scriptures:

"*You study the scriptures thoroughly because you think in them you possess eternal life, and* ***it is these same scriptures that testify about me.***" John 5:39

"*Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that* ***everything written about me*** *in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.' Then he opened their minds* ***so they could understand the scriptures.***" Luke 24:44-45

The Scriptures were extremely important to Jesus and his ministry. He quoted them often and taught what God meant when he had them written. Just before his death Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would remind them of Jesus' teachings, and when they wrote them down, they became what we call the New Testament.

If we want to better know and love Jesus,
we must come to know and love the Scriptures.

Peter said that knowledge is one of those things that *"if these things are really yours and are continually increasing, they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately."* 2 Peter 1:8

How does Bible knowledge help us be effective and productive in our spiritual lives?

"*Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,* ***that the person dedicated to God may be capable and equipped for every good work.***" 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Notice that the Scriptures are useful to equip us to do good works. Do you know why that is important?

"*This saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on such truths,* ***so that those who have placed their faith in God may be intent on engaging in good works.*** *These things are good and beneficial for all people.*" Titus 3:8

Think about it - Scripture is useful to make us useful. God's goal is to make us like Jesus, and he gave us the Scriptures as the number one tool to accomplish that.

Our usefulness to God and this world is directly proportionate to our understanding of Scripture.

It's not a coincidence that Peter's second letter started with *The Path* and ended with:

> "Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, be on your guard that you ***do not get led astray*** by the error of these unprincipled men ***and fall from your firm grasp on the truth***. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day." 2 Peter 3:17-18

We can't know the Scriptures too much, because we can't know Jesus too much. When we study the Scriptures properly, they lead us to Jesus and make us like Jesus.

Make a commitment

Is Bible study a regular and important part of your life?

Do you need to get some help to get started in studying the Scriptures?

Are you ready to learn how to study it even deeper?

Contact us at mynextstep@oaktreechurch.com so we can help you take your next step on *The Path*



Self-control

If *knowledge* is studying the Bible, *self-control* is applying what we learn. It's like doing homework after class.

It's one thing to submit to Jesus as Savior (faith); it's another matter to submit to him as Lord or Master (all-in dedication).

Once we have determined that "Jesus will be my Lord/Master/Leader," Peter says we need to learn what he wants and then put it into action, apply it, obey it. This is actually part of a lifelong loop that will never stop until we finally see him - whether that's when we die or he returns for us.

Knowledge isn't enough. James reminded us to *"be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves"* (James 1:22).

Knowing the Bible without living it is like eating a meal without digesting it. It's only a pretend benefit.

So how do we apply what we're learning? There are at least four great options.

1. **Do a group project**. The Christian life is designed to be done together. We need to be with each other more than just Sunday mornings. Gatherings like youth group, adult small groups, and ministry teams all provide peer help. Sometimes there's nothing like having a friend in the trenches with you, helping each other, using each other's knowledge, insight, and perspective to supplement our own.

> *"Two people are better than one, because they can reap more benefit from their labor. For if they fall, one will help his companion up, but pity the person who falls down and has no one to help him up."* Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

2. **Ask for help**. Not sure what to do? Go back and read the Scriptures to remember how God said to live. Ask for input from godly teachers and counselors, someone who is further down *The Path*. Buy someone coffee or lunch and ask for advice.

What are you willing to invest to make sure that you're doing your homework well, that you're learning to obey God daily? Who are you inviting into your life to help guide you down *the Path*?

"It was he [Jesus] who gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, that is, to build up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God a mature person, attaining to the measure of Christ's full stature. So we are no longer to be children, tossed back and forth by waves and carried about by every wind of teaching by the trickery of people who craftily carry out their deceitful schemes."
Ephesians 4:11-14

3. **Memorize the principles**. Doing homework requires knowing the lesson, and memorizing Bible verses and passages can be extremely helpful when we don't have the opportunity to open the Bible right away or ask another for help.

"In my heart I store up your words, so I might not sin against you." Psalm 119:11

Every sin comes back to disobedience of some kind. Memorizing the Scriptures helps us know Jesus better and love him more. The more we know and love him, the less we will want to disobey him. The less we disobey, the less we sin.

Scripture memory leads to sinning less and obeying more.

4. **Go with what you know**. Ultimately, self-control is not the "fruit of my will power" or "fruit of my memory"; it's part of the "fruit of the Spirit." If the Holy Spirit isn't producing self-control in you, it isn't going to happen.

There are times when we obey just because we know it's the right thing to do, even if it's not comfortable or it doesn't make sense. True Christianity is a life of faith. The apostle Paul said that *"we live by faith, not by sight"* (2 Corinthians 5:7). Some things we just won't understand in this life, but we obey them anyway, because they help us know him better and love him more.

This is why knowledge comes before self-control, the lesson before the lab work. We can't live right if we don't first learn right, and the Holy Spirit is our number one teacher.

> *"So then, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, continue working out your salvation with awe and reverence, for the one bringing forth in you both the desire and the effort - for the sake of his good pleasure - is God."* Philippians 2:12-13

Never forget this important point: **spiritual growth is God's project**

- He has committed to changing us to become like Jesus
- He has given us everything necessary for life and godliness
- He is giving us both the desire and the ability to "make every effort" to do our part

Jesus said, *"If anyone loves me, he will obey my word...The person who does not love me does not obey my words."*
John 14:23-24

Obedience is a natural result of loving him.

Trying to obey Jesus without knowing or loving him is just religion, and that is not the goal.

Make a commitment

Will you commit to doing whatever it takes to obey the commands and apply the principles you are learning in Scripture?

Join a peer group; find a personal guide; begin to memorize parts of Scripture.

Contact us at mynextstep@oaktreechurch.com
so we can help you take your next step on *The Path*



Perseverance

No matter how hard we try, we don't always obey, do we? In fact, you can probably think of a time this week -- maybe even today! -- that you already sinned, disobeyed God. Self-control, applying what the Bible teaches, is not always as easy as it sounds.

Fortunately, God is ready to forgive us whenever we confess our sin and line up with him again. However, that doesn't mean that he ignores our sin. Forgiveness is not the same as condoning sin or being a pushover. God is no pushover, but he does want us to trust him to help us so we don't sin next time. And that is our next step on *The Path*.

As we go through life studying the Scriptures and applying them in our daily circumstances, one of three things is bound to happen - tests, temptations, or trials. In order to successfully make it through these situations, we need to persevere or "choose to trust God in every situation."

Tests are given by God, like a school teacher with a midterm, to show us how well we are learning what he taught in knowledge and self-control. When we choose to trust him, we pass these faith tests.

"Some time after these things God tested Abraham."
Genesis 22:1

"My brothers and sisters, consider it nothing but joy when you fall into all sorts of trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance." James 1:2-3

Temptations come primarily from our sin nature. Perseverance helps us obey what we know and not succumb to the sin.

'"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires." James 1:13-14

Trials come from this world. Sometimes this is called persecution or suffering. Although we may not have it as bad as many Christians in other parts of the world, we should not minimize the reality of the constant pressure surrounding us. Perseverance helps us continue to lean into Jesus and not buckle under the pressure.

"Dear friends, do not be astonished that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in the degree that you have shared in the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice and be glad." 1 Peter 4:12-13

Discouragement isn't sin.
What we do with our discouragement can be.

Even Jesus got discouraged, but he chose to trust God in everything. Since God is shaping us to be like Jesus, we need to choose to trust as well.

The principle is not “Don’t get discouraged.” The principle is, “Don’t let discouragement stop you.” Instead, let the pressure press you into Jesus and what he wants to do in your life.

Consider what God gives us when we are suffering in this life:

1. Compassion (James 5:10-11)
2. Hope (Romans 15:4)
3. Character (Romans 5:3-4)
4. Abundance (James 1:2-4)
5. Reward (Hebrews 10:36)

Are you willing to face anything to gain all of this?

Make a commitment

Will you commit to using tests, temptations, and trials as reminders to let God be God and choose to trust him in everything?

Contact us at mynextstep@oaktreechurch.com
so we can help you take your next step on *The Path*



Godliness

"People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."

-- **D. A. Carson** (*For the Love of God, Jan. 23rd reading*)

Far more than just salvation, *The Path* is an invitation to walk with God himself, both in this life and the next.

As we **obey what we learn in the Scriptures** and **choose to trust God in every situation**, the evil desires and corruption inside us are slowly beaten back while the divine nature grows. It doesn't happen quickly or suddenly or all at once. This is part of a lifelong loop of knowledge leading to godliness (steps 3 through 6). And, frankly, most of us are not as far along as we like to think we are, so even understanding this can be difficult.

This growth of God's nature in us is the sixth step of *The Path*. **Godliness is "discovering private worship."**

The dictionary says that worship is “to give homage or reverence,” to give honor and respect to someone or something. That gets it close to the original form, *worthship*, meaning “to acknowledge something or someone’s worth.”

Worship is action based on how much we value something. When we come together to “worship” God, we’re saying, “God, you are worth my Sunday morning time, my voice to sing, my mind to study, my money to give, my heart to love and serve my fellow Christians.” The worship gathering is “worth it” because God is “worth it.”

Discovering private worship means that we prioritize God’s will, we value God’s input, more than just in a public worship service. Slowly, we grow to honor and respect him in every area.

This is more than just Bible study, obedience, and choosing to trust in difficult times. This is when the *divine nature* starts to become *second nature*, when we find ourselves thinking like Christ, acting like Christ, doing business like him, treating others like him. In other words,

Godliness is when our character, ethics, worldview, and thought patterns accurately reflect Christ.

So, if we’re trying to become like Jesus, what was the number one thing he did to make sure he worshiped privately? How did he intentionally value God’s priorities and input? **He prayed**.

*"Jesus himself **frequently withdrew** to the wilderness and prayed."* Luke 5:16

*"Now it was during this time that Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and he **spent all night in prayer to God**. When morning came, he called his disciples and chose twelve of them, whom he also named apostles."* Luke 6:12-13

There are very few commands in the New Testament to pray, only about a half-dozen. It seems that regular prayer was so ingrained in the early believers that the apostles just needed to remind them to pray in certain circumstances.

"Is it possible that a man or woman can come to love God for himself alone so that there is a fundamental contentment in life regardless of circumstances? Yes, this is possible, but only through prayer." Timothy Keller

Probably the phrase that sums it up the best is when Paul wrote, "Constantly pray" or "pray without ceasing." It's a pretty well-known verse, but it's actually part of a longer sentence. Even though it spans three verses, it's really short.

"Always rejoice, constantly pray, in everything give thanks. For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

If we were honest, the real issue wouldn't be, "I don't know how to pray." It would be, "It's just not a priority. I don't value it enough to do it."

But that's why this is a process. You may not be at this step yet, and that's fine, but that makes it hard to explain and understand. But know that this is where God wants to bring you, that he's committed to this process, and that he wants you to be committed to it as well.

Make a commitment

Will you commit to making prayer a regular part of your life so you can line yourself up with what God values and prioritizes in any given situation?

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Brotherly Affection

Have you come this far and become discouraged? Have you read the past few pages and thought, “That sounds really good,” but then you look at yourself honestly and think, “That seems so far away!”?

This is a process, and we don’t want you to get discouraged. You may just not be at this step yet. There may be some basic things you need to obey, like baptism or church membership. Maybe you don’t open your Bible outside of church, or you are not choosing to trust God in everything yet.

Know this: that’s fine. That’s where you are. But don’t be content to stay there. God doesn’t **want** you to stay there, and that’s the purpose of this booklet and *The Path*. It’s important for you to know that this is where God intends to bring you; he’s committed to this process, and he wants you to be committed to it as well.

> *“For this very reason, **make every effort to add** to your faith excellence, to excellence, knowledge; to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness; to godliness, brotherly affection; to brotherly affection, unselfish love.”* 2 Peter 1:5-7



Step seven is “brotherly affection” or “brotherly love.” The Greek word in verse 7 is literally *philadelphia*. It just means the love or affection someone has for family. What words or phrases would you use to describe what that looks like in your family?

Care, protect, watch out for, family bond, best interest, unity, mutual care?

Now, if all of those things can be true in a human family, how much more should that be true of the Christian family - the brothers and sisters who are joined eternally through Jesus’ death and resurrection? The bond between believers should be stronger even than between human relatives. Jesus said,

"*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”* Luke 14:26

Now, Jesus wasn’t advocating hate or throwing away our responsibilities toward our families. We cannot use this as justification to abandon our families to “serve God.” The rest of the New Testament clarifies that is not so. However, he did emphasize the importance of our spiritual family:

Pointing toward his disciples he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Matthew 12:49-50

Brotherly affection is all about building up Jesus' family, the Church.

"Encourage one another and build up each other, just as you are in fact doing." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

Now, giving and serving are ways that we can do this, but any believer can and should give and serve. That doesn't necessarily mean we're living out brotherly affection. We can't jump from step one to seven just by joining a church ministry team or putting money in a giving envelope. Peter could have said "serving" here, but he didn't. Brotherly Affection is about letting godliness flow through us - Christ's own love for his people - and that doesn't come without steps 2-6, especially the loop of 3-6, knowledge through godliness.

Brotherly affection isn't just giving and serving; it's the commitment to ministry as a way of life. When we reach this step, ministry isn't just a Sunday morning job but a daily mission.

Interestingly, the Scriptures never command us to serve on a ministry team; they say to serve. Ministry teams are a great way to do that, and they make sense in the local church structure, but that's not the only way to serve.

- How can I use my time, money, and gifts to build up another Christian today?
- God, who are you going to put into my life today that I can help walk further down *The Path*?

- Who are you going to bring to mind that I can pray for, call, write a note, encourage?
- How can I serve you with this unexpected bonus, commission, refund?

The best ministry (spiritual gifts, spiritual fruit) comes out of the godliness or Christlikeness that he is developing in us.

Ministry is the result of maturity.
We can't serve like him if we're not becoming like him.

Although a Christian may engage in serving and giving long before this step, it takes some growth and maturity before we serve with the right motivation – Christ's own love. Along *The Path* anyone can act as a guide for those around us, but at this point helping Christians grow (disciple making) becomes our purpose and passion. This is where we see "*On Point...On Purpose*" really in action.

Make a commitment

Will you commit to exercising Christ's love toward our church family by giving, serving, and getting involved in guiding your Christian family along *The Path*?

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HOMELESS
AND
HUNGRY
GOD BLESS

Unselfish Love

We're finally ready to put it all together, which is what unselfish love is about. When we reach this final step, we find our Christian life firing on all eight cylinders. This is when we are living the way God designed for us to live so we can successfully act as his ambassadors in this world.

Let's clarify what we mean:

We are not sinless • we will be sinning less
We are not perfect • we are being perfected
We don't become God • we do become godly

In his eight steps, Peter made a distinction between "brotherly affection" and "unselfish love." By its very definition, the first is limited to our fellow Christians. But that means that "unselfish love" goes beyond that. This is where Christ's love that he is developing in us overflows naturally into the rest of the world. Jesus made this connection when he said,

"Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples–
if you have love for one another." John 13:35

"One another" means fellow Christians, but there is an implication that others will be watching those of us who claim to be Christians. What does that mean for us?

"But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess." 1 Peter 3:15

As people see the richness of life on *The Path*, the satisfaction of life done well, they will ask about it. Peter said that we should make sure we have an answer.

It's amazing that Christians are never told to argue and debate fine theological points or defend God or the Scriptures with those who do not believe, yet those are some of the biggest reasons many Christians don't share their faith.

We are told to do one thing: have an answer for the hope you possess.

If you can't tell someone about your simple faith in Jesus, how can they believe?

"Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the preached word of Christ." Romans 10:17

So how can we make sure they see a life worth asking about?

1. Our love for fellow Christians and the Church

"Everyone will know by this that you are my disciples—if you have love for one another." John 13:35

2. Our goodness toward our fellow man, even those who may disagree

"So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who belong to the family of faith." Galatians 6:10

God is good toward all people. Since he is developing his character in us, his goodness should flow through us as well.

3. Kindness that causes them to rethink their status with God

"Do you have contempt for the wealth of his kindness, forbearance, and patience, and yet do not know that God's kindness leads you to repentance?" Romans 2:4

"If we are not more loving people because of what Christ has done in our lives, something is really wrong." -**James MacDonald**

Yes, doing good and being kind is part of becoming who God created us to be, but it's also a part of our mission in this world.

"So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away– look, what is new has come! And all these things are from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us the ministry of reconciliation. In other words, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting people's trespasses against them, and ***he has given us the message of reconciliation****."*

2 Corinthians 5:17-19

Reconciliation starts with faith in Jesus, but it's more than that. On those difficult days and weeks when we wonder, "Does any of this really matter to real life?" it's so important to remember that this is really all that matters.

Marriages are healed through Christ; sin is overcome through Christ; tests, temptations, trials are conquered through Christ. This is really the only story worth telling.

It's those times when we feel like giving up that it matters most to stay on *The Path*. Not only will we grow, but we'll be able to help others grow, too. Every single one of us is a Path Guide for someone else.

There are two ways that a church should grow - internal spiritual growth and external conversion growth. We need to add people to the body and we need to help them grow and stay healthy. At this step, evangelism becomes a personal mission, rather than just a religious duty.

Make a commitment

Will you commit to living life in such a way that we see new people added to the family?

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A Final Thought

We have come to the end of our book, but there are a couple of things we **don't** want to imply.

First, we don't want to imply that this is the end; it's not. *The Path* doesn't end until we finally see Jesus, but we want you to experience *The Path* firing on all 8 cylinders. Instead of the end, this is really the culmination of the whole thing working together.

Second, we don't want to imply that this is optional. Now, it is in the sense that some people just won't do it. Many will never place their faith in Jesus, and many Christians who take that first step will never grow up or mature in their faith. So, in that sense, yes, you can make it through this life without following *The Path*.

However, if you want to grow in your faith, if you want to see God at work in your life, if you want to have a part in God's work in this world, *The Path* is not optional. **This isn't just one way to do life; it's the only way to live out genuine, biblical Christianity**. Other people use different words, and the Bible says it lots of different ways, but this is the whole package in a nutshell.

"If these things are really yours and are continually increasing,
they will keep you from becoming ineffective and unproductive
in your pursuit of knowing our Lord Jesus Christ more intimately.
But concerning the one who lacks such things– he is blind.

That is to say, he is nearsighted, since he has forgotten about the cleansing of his past sins." 2 Peter 1:8-9

Not staying on *The Path* leaves us in a world of hurt. Not only do we never come to fully know Jesus, the person who chooses to not stay on *The Path* of pursuing Jesus ends up with a wasted life. No matter what accomplishments we enjoy, we would never be effective or productive for God.

"Apart from me you can accomplish nothing."
-Jesus (John 15:8)

Even worse, we would end up living with no spiritual sight. We would be so myopic (nearsighted) that we'd be as good as blind. We would end up not even being able to see ourselves for who we truly are - sinners who have been cleansed by Jesus' blood. We would be unable to remember what is behind us and could not see anything ahead of us. We'd be lost in the woods, falling into one spiritual pit after another. That's not how God intends for it to be.

If we don't "Stay on The Path"
we will not experience everything God has for us.

"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the honor both now and on that eternal day!" 2 Peter 3:18

Join us on *The Path*, won't you? You will never regret even one mile.



Photography/artwork info

Front Cover- Lacey Raper (https://stocksnap.io/photo/A6B6CBA891)

Page 1- Bryan Rodriguez (https://stocksnap.io/photo/AA846D42E4)

Page 3- Unknown photographer (http://healthwithjessica.com/?p=341)

Page 5- Unknown photographer (http://www.pedalinn.com/faq/)

Page 6- Beata Ratuszniak (https://stocksnap.io/photo/W7BQS1FAXZ)

Page 8- Pawel Kadysz (https://stocksnap.io/photo/QT3VEK73I5)

Page 11- Martin Cehelsky (https://stocksnap.io/photo/AZ8GWV9LG8)

Page 13- Unknown Photographer (http://redcaperevolution.com/executive-coaching-atlanta/executive-coaching-individuals/please-stay-on-path/)

Page 15- Biegun Wschodni (https://unsplash.com/)

Page 22- Unknown Photographer (http://www.Kaboompics.com)

Page 29- Unknown Artist (http://bookish-ambition.blogspot.com/2013_12_01_archive.html)

Page 30- Alejandro Escamilla (https://stocksnap.io/photo/5DDF1B315C)

Page 34- Alejandro Escamilla (https://stocksnap.io/photo/FE65E51CF9)

Page 40- Alex Jones (https://stocksnap.io/photo/469424D4C3)

Page 44- Unkown Artist (http://vindevie.me/2015/09/23/vin-de-vie-habemus-papam-separation-of-powers/)

Page 50- Unknown Artist (https://simplyjesus.wordpress.com/2013/03/28/washing-all-the-feet/)

Page 54- Unknown Photographer (http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2013/07/09/2271841/wsj-homeless-people/)

Page 60/61- Allstar/Alcon Entertainment (http://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/aug/09/hollywood-apocalypse-movies-anxiety)

Page 64- Unknown Artist (depositphotos.com)

Back Cover- Mariona Campmany (https://stocksnap.io/photo/PFOH6DYP40)

Thank you!

Thank you for joining us in exploring God's design for our spiritual growth and health.

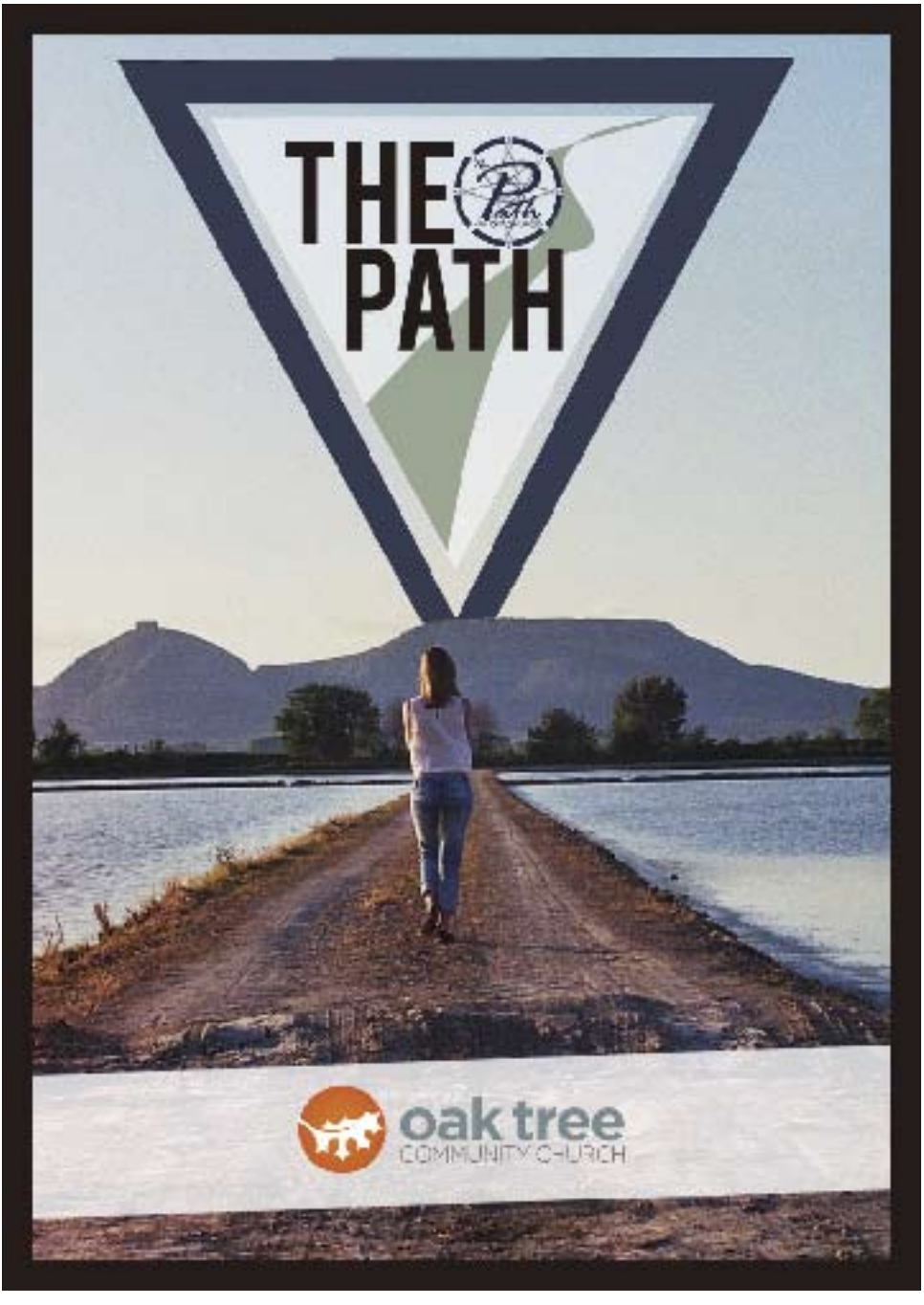
For nearly 70 years, Oak Tree Community Church in South Bend, Indiana, USA has been about ***helping people grow*** in their personal journeys ***toward Jesus Christ.*** This short book is just one way we work to fulfill that mission.

For more information about learning how to live on the Path, you may download our high resolution bookmark summarizing the eight steps and listen to our eight-part teaching series on the Path at oaktreechurch.com/thepath.

If you are interested in purchasing bulk copies of *The Path* for your church, group, or organization, or if you would like to have someone present or teach these principles for your group, please contact us through our website.

We look forward to hearing your story of how *The Path* has helped you come to know Jesus better and love him more.

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