

FRESH FAITH

5 LIFE-GIVING HABITS FOR NEW CHRISTIANS

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INTRODUCTION

Hi, I'm Ryen, your host in the *Fresh Faith* journey. I'm 20 years old, I'm a junior, and I spent the summer as an intern for InterVarsity's Evangelism department. I love this five-part Bible study, because it encourages growth in our relationships, character, and faith. I like to focus on growth, because growing helps me become more like Jesus. I hope you have fun with this, too.

Each discussion is rooted in our favorite Jesus stories and concludes with very practical suggestions for how to live out Jesus' teachings. We hope you enjoy these habits each week, and for the rest of your lives. You get to pick how much you want to stretch at the end of each discussion. Please push yourself a little, but avoid the danger zone. Please don't burn yourself out.

Who is this for? Some of you just made new faith decisions, and some of you are seekers considering if Jesus is worth following with your whole life. I'm excited for everyone who is trying out *Fresh Faith*. Please do this with friends. We pray that God uses this to deepen your connections, your vulnerability, and your community.



OUR NEW IDENTITY

Family can be beautiful, as well as painful and confusing, but family is a huge part of our identity. When we become followers of Jesus, we become a member of God's family. This amazing, messy, real family shapes our personal identities in many ways.

As you reflect on your own new identity, consider this famous story Jesus told about a dad and two sons. Both sons struggled with the question of how closely they wanted to identify with their father. Here is the story of the younger son.



READ & DISCUSS: LUKE 15:11-24 (NIV)

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.

²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

1. The younger son demands his inheritance while his dad is still alive. How would that go over in your family?
2. How does Jesus describe the misery of hitting rock bottom? Describe how you feel when you are in a low place.
3. The son decides to go home, but he can't imagine returning as a family member. His plan is to return as a servant. If you were the father, would you treat the returning son like a servant or a beloved family member?
4. The robe and the ring represent complete family reinstatement. The ring gave access to the family's full bank account. How does this father treat his son? If you were this son, how would you feel about your value in your dad's eyes?

ROOTING OUR NEW IDENTITY IN GOD'S LOVE

God is invisible, and we may struggle to feel God's warm embrace. We can be tempted to default into a rules-based relationship. We might prefer to work for the Father as a servant instead of coming home as a beloved son. Now that the Father has welcomed you into his loving family, you can root your identity in your new status as a child of God.

SPIRITUAL HABIT: KNOWING YOU ARE BELOVED

In this story Jesus narrates a spiritual journey: at first the younger son wants nothing to do with his father, then he hits rock bottom and wants to return to his father's house as a servant. In the end, he is embraced as a beloved child. It is a great story!

It is a good habit for every follower of Jesus (and seekers) to reflect on and write out the story of their own spiritual journey, even though you may not fully grasp all that God has been doing in your life.

Use the following 3-part template to help you reflect on your own spiritual journey. Write 2-3 sentences per section.

1. Before: Describe your life before encountering Jesus and being welcomed into God's family. How did you define yourself? (Before following Jesus, people often find their value through their family, their success, their hobbies, friends, etc.)
2. Jesus: How does God's love change how you view yourself? How are you different?
3. Today: How does being embraced into God the Father's family and following Jesus shape how you live and how you see your future?

READY TO STRETCH?

Every follower of Jesus is invited to reflect God's love and light to others. Once we receive the Father's love, we can offer this same extraordinary love to the people around us. Who is one person in your life who needs to experience the love of God through you? Pray for them by name right now. Ask God to show you one concrete way you can show them extraordinary love this week.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

"Thank you Father for welcoming me into your family through Jesus. Thank you for your extravagant love."

OUR NEW FRIEND

We all desire belonging and to have relationships with others who will be close to us in the best and worst of times. When someone becomes a follower of Jesus, we don't just have a leader but a friend. That is what Jesus calls us!

As we reflect on our new friendship with Jesus, consider the following words Jesus told his disciples. Jesus compares their relationship with him to the interconnected "relationship" between a vine that provides life-giving nutrients for the branches attached to it.



READ & DISCUSS: JOHN 15:1-4, 8, 12-15 (NIV)

¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me...⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples...¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

One part of “abiding,” or remaining connected to the vine, is considering Jesus’ words as our source of life.

1. Describe the relationship between the vine and the branches. How do you feel about the fact that branches cannot bear fruit by themselves?
2. What is the difference between a servant and a friend, according to Jesus? How do you feel about Jesus naming you his friend?
3. Jesus says that his disciples are no longer servants who don’t know what is happening. Jesus lets his disciples know his purposes. One purpose is that we love each other. How might that impact how we relate with Jesus? How do we relate to others?

BEING FRIENDS WITH JESUS



What if you could know what God is up to in our world and on your campus? Servants are kept in the dark, not friends. Spending time with Jesus in Scripture and prayer is like hanging out with a friend. We learn to listen to his voice. We learn to abide. And as we abide, Jesus’ words slowly shape us, prune us, and transform us. We increasingly delight in living out his wisdom. As we stay connected to Jesus and receive the nourishment of his love, we are more able to obey his command to love God and love one another. We have the honor of offering Jesus’ sacrificial love to everyone around us.

In the last study, we learned about our new identity as beloved children of God our Father. Today we are invited to embrace our identity as friends of Jesus. Abide in that identity this week.

SPIRITUAL HABIT: LISTENING TO GOD SPEAK

THROUGH THE BIBLE

Set aside 15 minutes per day to read a section of one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John). As you read, ask God to highlight one verse. Bonus: ask a Christian friend to do this with you.

THROUGH PRAYER

Another way to listen to God speak is through prayer. Prayer is an ongoing conversation with God. Use the exercise below every day this week to practice listening to God speak. God may speak to you through words, images, an internal impression, a stirring in your conscience, or a Bible verse that comes to mind. When you sense an impression, check with a trusted Christian friend that it aligns with God's character and commands in Scripture.

Pray this prayer:

"Jesus, thank you for all the new things you have been doing in my life (feel free to be specific). I have been feeling [pick one emotion]."

Anger | Loneliness | Numbness | Depression | Anxiety | Gratitude | Other

"Please speak to me about this right now." (Pause to listen for God's prompting.)

"I embrace my new identity as 'Friend of Jesus.' Help me feel your love today."

If you are praying with a partner, share out loud which emotion you picked and how you felt during prayer.



READY TO STRETCH?

Ask a Christian you know to pray with you or join a prayer group at your church.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

"Jesus, teach me to listen to you. Help me to remain in your love throughout my day so that I may grow in my ability to think and live like you do. Send me out to love those around me."

OUR LIFE TOGETHER

While every Christian's faith in Jesus is wonderfully personal, it is not really private. From the very beginning, Jesus creates a community of followers and calls them family. When we say yes to following Jesus, we join a family with all those who have ever made the same decision.

As we reflect on our relationship with other followers of Jesus, consider this inspiring story of the very first followers being transformed together into a community. Notice what happens as all of these new Christian siblings lived out their faith together.



READ & DISCUSS: ACTS 2:37-47 (NIV)

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

³⁸ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

⁴⁴ All the believers were together and had everything in common. ⁴⁵ They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. ⁴⁶ Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

1. What do you admire about the Acts 2 community? How does this compare with churches or Christian groups you have experienced?
2. Describe a time in the past when you felt a profound sense of belonging and joy in a community (sports, school, family, church). What do you think contributed to the experience of togetherness?
3. As the Spirit of Jesus fills and leads this Christian community, how do they love others? What does this teach us about the Holy Spirit?
4. If you could imitate one habit of this beautiful Christian community, which would you pick? Why?
5. How do you feel about the local church and campus ministries? Name one positive feeling, and identify one obstacle or concern you have about joining a Christian community.



JOINING GOD'S FAMILY

Christian communities are an incredible gift from God. In these communities, we all help each other grow, thrive, and belong. Growing together is so much better than just trying to follow Jesus on our own. In Genesis 2, God says that humans were not created to be alone but for relationships. We have been created by God to be a spiritual family. Unfortunately, just like in our biological families, relationships in Christian communities can be complicated.

One day the family of God will be a perfect community in which we experience the complete joy of belonging, healing, and justice. We will thrive in every way in this eternal community. Until then, the church is an imperfect version of the community to come because we are all imperfect people on this side of heaven.

Even in the book of Acts we see God working with local churches to correct, encourage, and help them experience reconciliation and healing. That same beautiful process continues to happen in Christian communities everywhere today.

Feeling like you belong in a Christian community may happen easily, or it may take effort and courage. God has a place for you in a Christian community where you can experience the same healing, friendship, prayer, and teaching that we see in Acts.

SPIRITUAL HABIT: LIVING AS SIBLINGS IN CHRIST

Whether you are brand new to Christian community or have been involved in church for some time, you can always take a step to get more involved. Consider joining a Small Group, and introduce yourself to someone you do not yet know. Invite them to have lunch with you. Also, ask your Small Group leader about opportunities to contribute to the community in some way.

READY TO STRETCH?

After you explore a church or Small Group, please invite a friend or two. Tell them a story of how Christian community is helping you grow in your relationship with Jesus.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

"Jesus, you made us for community and called us to love one another. Help me to find a Christian community where I can connect, grow, and serve by your grace and the power of your Spirit."

OUR NEW PURPOSE

Jesus says that his leadership and his values are the opposite of the world around us. He teaches his disciples that the path toward greatness is through service, not self-promotion.

Consider this amazing interaction Jesus had with his very first followers as you contemplate Jesus' call to serve in your life. In the Ancient Near East, it was important to wash your feet before reclining at the dinner table. It was a huge kindness and act of hospitality to have your feet washed prior to a meal, but no one relished this task. In fact, only the lowliest of servants could be asked to wash the feet of dinner guests prior to the meal. This scandalous story begins on Jesus' last night on earth with the disciples.



READ & DISCUSS: JOHN 13:4-15 (NIV)

⁴...[Jesus] got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.

⁵After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"

⁷Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

⁸"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet."

Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

⁹"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!"

¹⁰Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." ¹¹For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

¹²When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. ¹³"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

1. In verse 8, Peter insists that Jesus will never wash his feet. If you were Peter, why might Jesus wanting to wash your feet be confusing or offensive?
2. We are called to be like Jesus and "wash other people's feet." How do you feel about taking the role of a "servant" to others and doing messy jobs? Name any objection or barrier you need to overcome in order to serve the people around you in life.

SERVING LIKE JESUS

In this story, Jesus has re-designed the disciples' image of greatness. This is the way the world normally works: the greater you are, the nicer your office is, and the more people you have to meet your every need. Great people (like Jesus) are supposed to let us wash their feet, not the other way around.

But Jesus doesn't operate how the world does. He is the Servant King. He comes to wash our feet. He notices our needs and is willing to go beyond what is comfortable to serve us. He then invites us to do the same for others. This beautiful call to service introduces a deep and meaningful purpose into the life of every Christian.

SPIRITUAL HABIT: SERVING WHEREVER YOU GO

There are many ways you can develop the habit of serving the people around you. Look for small ways to anticipate and meet needs wherever you find yourself: with friends, roommates, classmates, and family. Wash the dishes and clean the bathroom without being asked. Introduce yourself to people who seem lonely. Join a service team at your church or in your campus ministry. Practice generosity with your finances. Bring snacks to the next community gathering.

READY TO STRETCH?

One way you can stretch your “serve muscles” is to practice sacrificial generosity with your time and money. Practice noticing people who have financial, emotional, or practical needs. Ask God how you might help meet their needs. Be open even if it is not convenient or if what you are able to give feels small in comparison to the need. For the rest of our lives, let’s be joyful givers to those around us, and to our churches.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

“Jesus, I want to follow you and be like you. Help me embrace the life-long habit of serving others in your name. Show me my new purpose in life.”



TELLING OUR STORIES

Most people love to share good news with the people around them. When your favorite sports team wins the big game, when you see a great movie, when you see a funny meme or cat video that makes you smile and laugh, you bring it up in conversation. It is normal to share something that makes you smile or joyful.

This same impulse to share good news with others is an important part of following Jesus. As Jesus brings a smile to our faces, healing in our hearts, or delight into daily activities, we can share all that with others. In fact, sharing with others increases our joy.

Check out this story about a woman who had a beautiful and confusing conversation with Jesus, who then shared what he said with all her neighbors.



John, the author of the story, tells us that Jesus encounters a woman at the hottest time of day. In the Middle East the best time to draw water is dawn and dusk. The only reason someone would want to draw water at noon is to avoid people. John is dropping clues that this woman probably wants to avoid awkward interactions.

The woman is surprised when Jesus begins the conversation, because social and religious norms state that he should not be talking to a woman or a Samaritan, an ethnic rival. Then Jesus uses intriguing metaphors to see if this woman is curious. She is indeed. At some point, Jesus makes it personal to her uncovering her difficult story. She keeps engaging.

READ & DISCUSS: JOHN 4:4, 7-19, 26-30, 39-42 (NIV)

⁴ Now he [Jesus] had to go through Samaria... Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

¹³ Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet..." "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

²⁶ Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."...²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him...

³⁹ Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. ⁴¹ And because of his words many more became believers. ⁴² They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

1. Jesus reveals that he knows a lot of this woman's story. She engages with Jesus about her marital status. Jesus honors her for staying in the conversation with him. What might it look like for you to engage in conversations with Jesus about the painful parts of your life?
2. This brief interaction had such an impact on the woman that she eagerly shares the conversation with all the people she previously avoided. How easy or difficult do you think this was for her? What impact do you think her story had on them?



BECOMING A FAITHFUL WITNESS

In Acts 1:8, Jesus says to his followers, “you will be my witnesses” here and around the world. In a court of law, the witness takes the stand to simply tell what they saw and experienced in a given situation. In John 4, the woman was not an expert on Jesus nor in theology. But she was a faithful witness who spoke about what she had seen and experienced of Jesus that day. That’s what it looks like to be a witness.

Every follower of Jesus has experiences with Jesus and can be a witness through their words and actions. We live and serve like Jesus (washing one another’s feet) and we use our words to share our stories of what God is doing in our lives. We speak and testify to the ways that we experience his love as he enters our pain, and how his strength is made perfect in our weaknesses (see 2 Cor 12:9). You started writing down your story in Study #1. Go back, and look at it again. How do you feel about sharing your story of faith with others?

SPIRITUAL HABIT: SHARING YOUR HOPE

Telling others the stories of Jesus' work in our lives is profoundly good for us for several reasons. It helps us see and interpret our experiences with Jesus more clearly. As we talk to others about God's faithfulness to us throughout our lives, it becomes easier to trust God's goodness and love for the future.

Jesus sought out a spiritual conversation with this woman. He knew her past and how to best connect her story to his grace. Jesus knows our friends who do not yet follow him. We can ask Jesus for the best way to initiate a spiritual conversation with our friends.

Write down the names of five people you want to pray for who aren't yet followers of Jesus. Take a moment to listen for any specific ways Jesus may guide you to pray for them or speak to them.

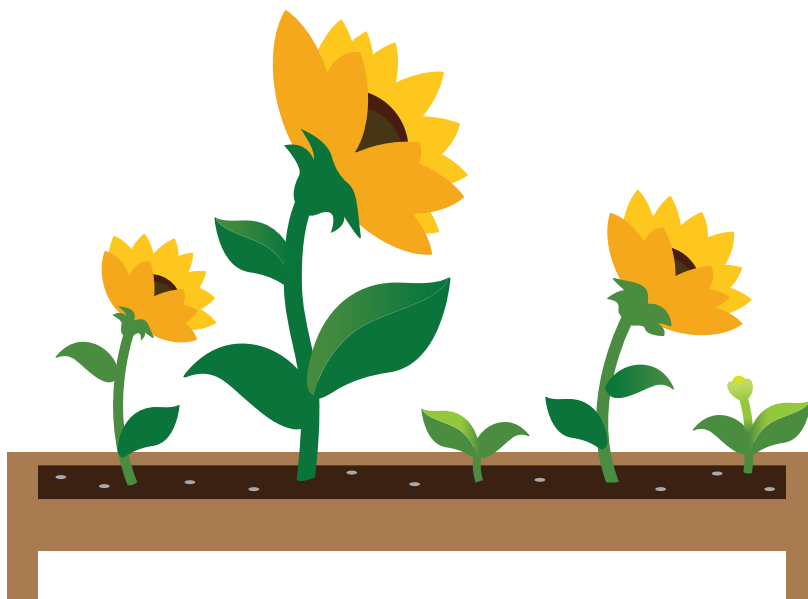
Tell a story about God's faithfulness to you to two friends this week.

READY TO STRETCH?

In the same way that it was helpful for you to explore the person of Jesus and learn more about him, invite some of your friends who are curious about Jesus to explore faith with you. Go through this *Fresh Faith* series with them. There are also a variety of classes, books, and events that help people learn more about Jesus in a non-threatening way. For example, you could read and discuss Don Everts' *Jesus with Dirty Feet*, invite them to a campus event, or read the Bible together.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

"Jesus, help me embrace your command to be a faithful witness in my words and actions. Take my fears of saying the wrong thing, being pushy, or being misunderstood. Bless my friends and family as I share my experience of being transformed by God."



*May the love of God your Father embrace you
and fill you with joy and peace and life.
May you experience all that Jesus has for you
in his beautiful Kingdom, as you walk in his ways.
May the Spirit of God be with you richly
in this new season of life and always.
Amen.*

