

*“I have never once regretted
knowing I have received
God’s gift of eternal life”*

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It's a great life!

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Originally written to assist persons who have recently come to a Christian commitment, these studies are now made available as part of a course of training for Confirmed Membership in the Uniting Church. Additional copies of this booklet are available separately from the author at the address below. Permission is granted for copies of this booklet to be made from this PDF file for local use only. For other proposed use, permission must be sought from the author.

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An important act of our worship together is the **Lord's Supper**. Jesus said, "Do this in memory of me." It is a visible reminder of the Good News and strengthens our relation to God within his family.

Over these three weeks you have been encouraged to share with someone else (or a group of people). You will already have found this of great benefit to you. Remember that the Christian life is not intended to be lived in isolation. **Fellowship** is essential. In Romans 12 Paul likens the church to a body with many parts. We are incomplete without one another. You need others and their gifts and they need you.

Those who have received the gift of eternal life will want to **share the Good News** with others. Jesus told the man who was healed, "Go back home and tell what God has done for you" (Luke 8.39). And he gave special instructions to his followers, "Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples" (Matthew 28.19). It really does bring strength to us as we learn to share the Good News.

Don't forget these basics. Then you will be open to all the good things that God has in store for you. Always remember the words of Jesus at the end of Matthew – "I will be with you always, to the end of the age." And he doesn't stop being with us then – that's the beginning of the rest of eternity for us, when we will know his presence by sight and not by faith!

Introducing...

You are alive! Heart beating, lungs breathing in and out, brain functioning! Otherwise you wouldn't be alive – and couldn't read this!

But something else has happened, something that has already changed you, made you alive in a new way. What's it all about?

It all has to do with eternal life, with your life and God. It has to do with a discovery you have made about yourself and about God, about what you have done and about what God has done for you.

Well, what is it all about? Let's find out from God's Word to us, the Bible, asking him to help us to understand what he's saying to us.

When we explore the Bible, we are doing something that will always be important in our life as God's person.

Listen to God – read the Bible and learn his plan. **Talk to God** – prayer, sharing your life, your hopes and fears, your joys and worries, your discoveries and questions.

When you complete each week's readings and put down your thoughts, the things you've discovered here and in your life, and any questions you may have. You can do this with an individual or in a group. But always remember that **fellowship** or sharing is always important for your life.

Something else important is for you to take your place in Church each week with other members of God's family. We meet to **worship God** – to give him the number one place in our life and to show it to the whole world.

It is the most natural thing for those who have received God's gift of eternal life to want to **share the good news** with others. Ask God to help you think of people he wants you to share the good news with – you will find it strengthens your own awareness of eternal life.

And a word of caution. There's someone about who isn't very happy about people accepting God's gift of eternal life – that's the devil or Satan. He wants to stop you growing in your life. Always remember that God is far more powerful than Satan. You are safe when you stay close to God in the ways we have just shared.

It's a great life! I have never once regretted knowing I have received God's gift of eternal life. We're in it together – and God is with us!

What a gift!

Each day, before you begin reading the Bible, ask God to help you understand what he is saying to you. Pray like this, "Father, this is your Word. Speak to me. Help me to understand what you are saying to me. Thank you for your gift of eternal life. Help me to show more of your love and life through my life today. For Jesus' sake, Amen."

Then read the Bible passage and write down the thoughts that come into your mind as you read, the discoveries you make and any questions you have. These can then be easily shared at the end of the week (or sooner!).

After you have read the Bible and written down your comments, thank God for what he has taught you and spend some time in prayer – some suggestions for prayer are given each day.

□ Day 1

Reading: John 3.1-16 (chapter 3, verses 1 to 16)

The main thing I've learnt is _____

An important verse to remember _____

I have a question _____

PRAYER: Thank God that he loves you so much and for sending Jesus. Think about the many different people he has used to help you to receive his gift of eternal life – thank God for them. Tell God you love him and ask him to help you today to live as his person.

Going on growing

So that's another week! Look back over what you have written. What are the things that help you to grow and be healthy spiritually? Try listing them.

Now read back over the introduction right at the beginning of this booklet ("Introducing...") and compare your list with the things spoken of there.

During these three weeks, you have not only been learning about these things but encouraged and taught to practise them. They continue to be basic right throughout your life.

Paul emphasised to Timothy the importance of the **Scriptures**. He said that they are "useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully equipped to do every kind of good deed."

So you need to read the Bible every day. Be sure to have a good readable translation – I have been using the Good News Bible here. Daily notes such as those produced by Scripture Union can be a helpful guide in setting a regular pattern and in answering many of the little questions raised as you read. But always read with a mind open to what God is going to say to you.

Eternal life is a personal relationship with God – that is why **prayer** is also vital. And it doesn't have to be restricted to a special time in the morning and evening. God is with us all the time and we can learn to bring our requests, our worries, our confessions... to him quickly and naturally, as we noted in Philipians 4.6.

Another important activity for our growth is **worship**. This is not just a Sunday activity. It needs to become an every day attitude. Before we received eternal life we so often put ourselves as number one. Our worship with others needs to express this every day worship. And it is important! In Hebrews 10.25, we are urged, "Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more..."

I don't understand this _____

PRAYER: Most likely your situation wasn't as bad nor your change of life as dramatic as the man in today's story. But thank God for what he has done for you and ask him to help you to show what he has done and tell it to those at home and at work.

☐ **Day 7**

Reading: Psalm 100

This Psalm is all about _____

These lines especially speak to me _____

Another question _____

PRAYER: Pause and think about verses 3 and 5. In what ways have you known God's care and help in this past week? Thank him for each specific occasion you can remember. Thank him for what he has taught you this week.

☐ **Day 2**

Reading: Romans 5.6-11

This passage is saying _____

I find this verse helpful _____

I don't understand _____

PRAYER: Thank God for the human family of which you are a part – immediate and wider. Think about them and any of their particular needs of which you are aware just now. Ask God to give them strength, health, courage... according to their need. If any don't yet share the joy of eternal life, pray that God will help them to want to know of him and of the Good News of eternal life. Pray that your life will show the reality of this life.

☐ **Day 3**

Reading: Luke 19.1-10

This story is saying something about me! _____

This verse is for me _____

I want to know more about _____

PRAYER: Like Zachaeus, our lives touched many people before we came to receive eternal life. Today, think about anyone whom you may have wronged or hurt – in word or deed. Tell God that you are sorry and ask him to show you if there is anything you can and should do to make things right again. Thank God that he has already forgiven you.

☐ **Day 4**

Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.16-21

God is telling me _____

Here's a special verse _____

What does this mean? _____

PRAYER: Thank God that he has made you his friend! And there are others who aren't his friends yet, but they are your friends. Begin praying regularly for them so that they will come to accept God's friendship too!

☐ **Day 5**

Reading: Romans 12.1-8

This tells me about _____

This verse means a lot to me _____

What's this? _____

PRAYER: Think of other people in the church and of the gifts they have – gifts that have helped you know and grow in eternal life. Thank God for them. Ask God to help you see the ways in which your life can help in strengthening others and building up the fellowship of the church.

☐ **Day 6**

Reading: Luke 8.26-39

I understand clearly _____

Here's a verse for me _____

More information needed _____

PRAYER: Think of the creation, immense and intricate – God made it! And the God who made it is your heavenly Father! Isn't that fantastic? Tell him so! And thank him that you can worship him with others each week.

☐ **Day 4**

Reading: 1 Corinthians 11.23-32

I didn't know this before! _____

This verse helps me _____

What's this about? _____

PRAYER: Thank God for the body and blood of Jesus given on the cross for you. Is there any point in your life where the things you say and do are not consistent with your faith in Christ? Tell God about it, and ask his forgiveness and help.

☐ **Day 5**

Reading: Romans 6.20-23

Here is today's discovery _____

A key verse _____

More information needed _____

PRAYER: Thank God for his free gift in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank him that he has set you free from the guilt of sin. Ask him to help you in any area where you still feel a "slave of sin". Consciously tell him that he is the Lord of that part of your life.

☐ **Day 6**

Reading: Acts 9.1-19

In today's reading I found out _____

This verse struck me _____

I don't understand _____

PRAYER: Thank God for others in his family. Notice that today's reading speaks of God's own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, coming to fill Paul – to live within him, to guide and control him, to give him strength... This is part of God's gift of eternal life. Thank God for the gift of his Spirit. Ask him to fill you, to guide and control you, to give you strength. Thank him that he never leaves us alone.

☐ **Day 7**

Reading: Psalm 23

This Psalm helps me to _____

This verse means a lot to me _____

I don't understand _____

PRAYER: This Psalm speaks of God's care for us in all sorts of different situations. Think of the different ways in which God has cared for you in the past week. Thank him for them one by one.

☐ **Day 2**

Reading: Philippians 4.4-9

This passage tells me _____

A verse to remember _____

I would like to know about _____

PRAYER: Be joyful! Rejoice! Tell God how happy you are that you are part of his family. Is there something you are worrying about? Pray to God about it, thanking him that he knows and cares about you, that he understands and hears your prayer. Ask him to help you to fill your mind with the things that are "true, noble, right, pure, lovely and honourable."

☐ **Day 3**

Reading: John 4.1-26

In this story I found out _____

A key verse _____

Alive and well!

None of us were born into this world full-grown. Plants and trees do not spring mature from seeds. And all those who have received the gift of eternal life have to grow spiritually. The growth, of course, comes from the gift of life.

In terms of our physical life we recognise our need for good food and rest, for fresh air and exercise – these help our physical life to grow and maintain health. What about our spiritual life?

☐ Day 1

Reading: 2 Timothy 3.10-17

I learn here that _____

This is an important verse _____

I don't quite get this bit _____

PRAYER: Thank God for his Word, the Bible. Thank him, too, for the truths you have already learnt, for the errors already brought to our attention, for faults corrected, for guidance in how to live... (Think of particular instances over the past week).

Thinking about the gift

What a week it has been! Reading back over the things you have written, you will see a number of important things you have discovered about the gift of eternal life. Try listing them in your own words...

Probably one of the greatest pieces of good news most people can hear is that eternal life or heaven isn't something that anyone in this world is good enough to deserve and it isn't something that, by working at, we can somehow earn. It is a gift from God to us – it had to be that way!

We have noticed this week that "God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son..." (John 3.16) and that "God's free gift is eternal life in union with Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6.23).

And it's not just that God must somehow be a "nice guy" – so that we can have eternal life the hard way if we insist (and work for it!) or we can get it easier (as a gift). The point is that it comes as a gift because there is really no other way we can receive it – we don't deserve it and we can't earn it!

This has also come out in this week's readings. Zacchaeus and Saul (better known to us as Paul) were two very different people who came to accept the gift. Zacchaeus was only caring about himself – he broke the rules and didn't care that he was working for a foreign power. Saul was very carefully and religiously observing all the rules. In fact he was trying to get rid of Christians because he thought they were very seriously wrong. Everyone recognised that Zacchaeus didn't deserve eternal life, but most thought young Saul had earned himself a place in heaven!

But he himself wrote later in another part of his letter to the Romans, "everyone has sinned and is far away from God's saving presence" (Romans 3.23) and in one of our readings, "sin pays its wage – death" (Romans 6.23). So Paul had come to see that he was a sinner and could not save himself – it had to be a gift – even for him!

I am sure all of us have tended to think of sin as not so very serious – at least my sins aren't! But it's rather like a fungus that needs only one spore to begin its work or a poison so lethal that one drop kills as dead as a thousand!

I have found it helpful to think of it this way. Life has a purpose, a design – put there by God, the Maker of it all. Within this designed purpose, God planned for there to be a rich variety of choice – that’s what makes life so rich and interesting. Sin is when we choose outside God’s designed purpose – using our freedom to choose to make a choice we were never meant to make – to live outside God’s plan in little ways or big ways.

I might use a guitar to play a wide range of music from heavy classics to hard rock. Or I might use it for a game of cricket with the boys. The one use is its designed purpose. The other will spoil it for its designed purpose and will eventually destroy it.

*Let’s remember whose designed purpose it is – God’s! We have often failed to understand clearly what the Bible teaches about God. Our verse from John 3.16 tells us about God’s **love** for us, but it also speaks of God’s **punishment** of sin – and we are sinners!*

We think that’s easy for God – all he has to do is forgive and forget. We take sin lightly and its consequences! But could the whole created world really work that way?

We accept that the law of gravity will always work reliably. In fact we depend on it – when we drive our car, do our washing, put groceries in the shopping trolley... No exceptions! And we know that if we slip off our roof there will be consequences, serious ones! And yet we know that life would be unbearable if that law was not reliable!

That’s true about the moral law too – although the consequences are not so immediate, but finally certain. And God is merciful and doesn’t want to punish us, but he is also just and must punish sin. What did God do?

*He sent his own unique Son, **Jesus Christ**, who **died for our sins**, took our punishment, suffered our consequences – so that eternal life and heaven could be ours as a free gift.*

That’s what John 3.16 is about. Notice what Jesus said in Luke 19.10 – “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” And Romans 5.9 – “By his (that is, Jesus’) death we are now put right with God.”

*And all of that was only possible because Jesus wasn’t just a good teacher, a fine person, a martyr to a cause – he was **the infinite God who came to live as a man within our human history**.*

What a fantastic gift! What incredible love!

But we do have to receive the gift! We read in John 3.16 that eternal life belongs to those who “believe in him (that is, Jesus).” And Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5.17 that anyone can become a new person when he is “joined to Christ” and in verse 20 that God has done everything necessary but we still

basis on which a dying thief can hear him say, “I promise you that today you will be in Paradise with me”. It is the only basis on which any of us can say with confidence, “I know I have eternal life!”

that through your faith in him you may have life." We are believing something that can really be relied on.

"Christ's death on the cross" really is at the heart of the story of Jesus. Matthew has 28 chapters. At the end of chapter 16 he began telling the disciples about his suffering and death in Jerusalem. He arrived in chapter 21 for his final week of teaching and the events leading up to his death on the cross in chapter 27 and resurrection in chapter 28.

We notice this same strong emphasis on the cross in the other three Gospels, too.

Now, on the face of it that's very strange! In fact in 1 Corinthians 1 Paul wrote about some people who found it "offensive" and other thought it "foolishness" or "nonsense". But what does Paul say? "To us who are being saved it is God's power" and "wisdom".

Some people think that Christian faith is just blind acceptance. But that's not it at all! It is dependence on something God has done. That's why it is an offence to our human pride and cleverness. As long as we think sin really isn't so bad and its consequences aren't so very serious, we figure we should be able to sort it out ourselves. But we can't! God's way is the only way.

Jesus went into the home of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7.36-50). Simon would have been quite sure that God would be very pleased with him and accept him for the good-living man that he was. Then the woman who was known to have "lived a sinful life" came in. By Simon's standards she should be rejected – after all, isn't that what you should do with people you know God would reject? But wait a minute! Why does God accept us? Because he has forgiven us.

A "good" man may refuse to see his need of forgiveness, while a person classed as "sinful" may accept forgiveness. We can never be sure if it depended on how good we make ourselves – we could never be good enough! It is only when we accept forgiveness by faith that we can "go in peace".

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul emphasises the importance of Jesus' resurrection from death. If Jesus had stayed dead, his death would have meant no more than that of any other hero or martyr. It would have been a blind hope that maybe he had purchased a place in heaven for us. "But the truth is that Christ has been raised to life, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised." So the very facts of the Good News lead Paul to have "complete confidence" (Romans 1.16) in it.

We can know and are meant to know that we have eternal life. But it doesn't depend on how good we are or on the things we do (including our religious life). It depends on God, on his love, on what he did when Jesus died for our sins, on his raising of Jesus to life again... We receive the gift and depend on it. It is the only

have to respond to the appeal, "Let God change you from enemies into his friends!"

This is what we call **faith**. But we need to see clearly what is meant because we use this word loosely to mean many things. I've had people say, "But surely everyone believes in God!" In James 2.19 we read, "Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe – and tremble with fear." So accepting the facts, while very important, isn't the faith that accepts the gift. Many folk ask for and receive God's help in all kinds of practical ways. That's good too! But it doesn't mean they have ever trusted God for his gift of eternal life.

Faith means transferring our trust from ourselves and how good we can be (not good enough to make it!) to Jesus Christ who died for us and came alive again. He is very much alive! By faith we receive him as our Saviour and as the Lord of our lives. We agree with God that we have chosen to live outside his designed purpose for our lives, that this is wrong and must not continue (we call this **repentance**) and want to come back into his plan as a responsible part of his family forever.

Here is something special Jesus said, "Eternal life means knowing you, the only true God, and knowing Jesus Christ, whom you sent" (John 17.3). And that's not just for the future – it's for now! Don't forget to thank God each day for his love and for his gift!

Sure of it!

We can believe that God loves us, that he sent his Son who died for us... but can we really be sure that WE personally have eternal life now and will go to heaven when we die? Is it really possible to be sure? Yes, it is!

□ Day 1

Reading: John 20.24-31

This passage tells me _____

A verse to think about _____

What about _____

PRAYER: Thank God that Jesus really is alive, that he is your Lord and your God. Thank God for Thomas who wanted to be sure it was really true and for John who carefully wrote the story down for us. Tell him how happy you are that you, too, have come to believe and to receive his gift of eternal life.

□ Day 2

Reading: 1 Corinthians 1.18-25

I have learnt _____

How can we be sure?

Well, there's another week! Right at the beginning I said that it is possible to be sure that we have eternal life and that we will go to heaven when we die. Do you agree after this week's readings? The answer should be pretty clear!

Does eternal life depend on God or me? _____

What I do to receive the gift is _____

Look back through what you have written this week and last week's section, "Thinking about the Gift". Write down why YOU can be certain you have eternal life.

The gift is based on what God has done, not on what I have done, on God's faithfulness, not on mine. I receive the gift by faith, and have the gift because I believe, not because I feel on top of the world (human emotions go up and down). Time machines are (and will continue to be) a thing of science fiction. We can't turn back the clock to check the things that happened. It is important to me that there was a Thomas there who wouldn't just believe because the others said so – he wanted his own evidence. And when he saw, all his doubts were cleared away. John, one of the disciples, tells us that he wrote down the stories of Jesus "in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and

☐ *Day 7*

Reading: Psalm 1

This Psalm is telling me _____

This verse is special for me _____

I want to know more about _____

PRAYER: This Psalm speaks of the happiness of those who are living within God's design and purpose – and the final doom of those who don't. In what situations this past week have you been especially "guided and protected by the Lord"? Thank him for them one by one.

Here's a key verse _____

A question _____

PRAYER: Think about Jesus and how he died on the Cross for you. Thank God for what he has done to give you forgiveness and life.

☐ *Day 3*

Reading: Luke 7.36-50

This passage says _____

This verse is for me _____

This puzzles me _____

PRAYER: Thank God that he has forgiven you and accepted you. Is there anything you have said or done today that you know would not please him? Tell him about it. Say that you are sorry. Know that he has already forgiven you. Ask him to help you. Go in his peace.

☐ **Day 4**

Reading: Romans 1.8-17

Something I understand _____

This verse is helpful _____

I don't understand this _____

PRAYER: Thank God for the Good News which saves all who believe – including you! Continue to pray for those of your friends who haven't accepted this Good News yet.

☐ **Day 5**

Reading: 1 Corinthians 15.12-22

This is emphasising _____

A special verse _____

Another question _____

PRAYER: Thank God that Jesus really came alive again and that he is with us day by day as he promised. Thank him that Jesus' death purchased forgiveness for us here and now and a place in heaven when we die.

☐ **Day 6**

Reading: Luke 23.32-43

I have learnt _____

A verse to think about _____

What does this mean? _____

PRAYER: Who are the people today who throw off at Jesus and anyone who believes in him? Pray specifically for people like that known to you. Ask God to bring them to see that Jesus came for them too and died for them too and really is alive for them too.