



Connections Growth Track

Connecting to God

KNOWING GOD

DECLARING JESUS AS LORD

CELEBRATING GOD'S FEAST

BEING FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

ABUNDANT LIFE CHURCH
Love God Love People Share Christ





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LOVE GOD LOVE PEOPLE SHARE CHRIST

CONNECTIONS GROWTH TRACK

TAKING THE NEXT STEPS IN FOLLOWING CHRIST

Abundant Life Church

At Abundant Life we believe every living thing is growing. We grow by being connected to God, connected to others, and from doing life with others.

Our Connections Growth Track is designed to help you grow! Thank you for making the commitment to be a life long learner and growing in your faith.

Connections Growth Track



Connecting to God

02 - Connecting in Life

03 - Connecting to Abundant Life

04 - Connecting on Purpose

05 - Connecting in Mission

Knowing God

"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."
John 17:3 (NASB)

1. The Separation

It's your sins that have cut you off from God. Because of your sins, he has turned away and will not listen anymore. **Isaiah 59:2 (NLT)**

Our sin has created a separation between us and God. No one is innocent, we have all sinned against God, against each other, and against ourselves.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. **Romans 3:23 (NLT)**

Sin results in spiritual death which is another way of describing a life lived apart from God and an eternity without God.

Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ...having no hope and without God in the world.
Ephesians 2:12 (NASB)

For sin pays its wage--death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord. **Romans 6:23 (God's Word Translation)**



- Do you remember moments when it seemed like God was a million miles away?
- In your heart, have you seen your own sinfulness?

2. The Love of God is shown in Jesus Christ

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. **Romans 5:8 (NLT)**

This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. **1 John 4:10 (NLT)**

A long-exposure photograph of a night sky showing concentric star trails in shades of blue and white. The trails are centered around a point in the sky, creating a spiral effect. The bottom of the image shows the dark silhouette of a landscape, possibly hills or mountains.

KNOWING GOD

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whom You have sent."

John 17:3 (NASB)

The sufferings and death of Jesus on the cross was Jesus taking the punishment for our sins so that we could be forgiven.

- How do we know God loves us?
- What does it mean to you to know that God loved you enough to have Jesus pay the price for your sin?



3. God calls us to repent of our sin so that we can experience His life!

“Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;” Acts 3:19

“Therefore, I will judge each of you, O people of Israel, according to your actions, says the Sovereign LORD. Repent, and turn from your sins. Don’t let them destroy you! Put all your rebellion behind you, and find yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O people of Israel? I don’t want you to die, says the Sovereign LORD. Turn back and live! Ezekiel 18:30-32 (NLT)



- Does God want to judge people or forgive them?
- What happens to those that turn from their sin?





Repenting is not promising to live a perfect life. That is impossible. Repentance is about the direction of my life. Before repentance I was moving away from God, doing what pleased me. With repentance I am moving towards God, learning how to please Him. Repentance is continual and ongoing.



What changes in desires, values or attitudes have you experienced?

4. We Must Believe

"And that message is the very message about faith that we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved. As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced." Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved." Romans 10: 8b – 13 (NLT)

- According to this scripture what are we to believe?
- What does 'Jesus is Lord' mean?
- How do we confess 'Jesus is Lord'?
- Why is confession so important?
- Have you called on the name of the Lord?



5. The Joy

Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!

Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!


When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Psalm 32: 1-2 (NLT)



- What was the result of refusing to confess sin?
- What happens when sins and guilt are confessed to God?
- Have you experienced this kind of joy? Can you describe it?

A photograph capturing a baptism scene. A man in a black t-shirt is being baptized in a pool of water. He has his eyes closed and his hands are raised to his head, with water dripping from his hair. Two other men are present: one on the left is smiling and clapping, and one on the right is looking at the man being baptized. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, creating a dramatic and intimate atmosphere.

Repentance is a decision that can only be made by an individual. No one can make this choice for me, not even a loving family.

Declaring Jesus is Lord

In the New Testament, John the Baptist is baptizing people as they respond to his preaching of repentance. Jesus Himself, was baptized by John. Jesus commanded His followers to ‘go make disciples of all men, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’ (**Matt. 28:19**). For 2000 years those who have believed that Jesus is the Christ have taken baptism as a first act of obedience declaring to all that Jesus is their Lord. We want to join with all the faithful followers of Christ to be baptized and to understand why it is so important.

1. Jesus commanded His followers to be baptized in water.

And He (Jesus) said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." Mark 16:15-16 (NASB)

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Matt. 28:19 (NASB)

- Why do you think Jesus wanted His followers to be baptized in water?



2. Water Baptism follows your faith in Jesus and is clothing yourself with Christ.

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. **Galatians 3:26-27 (NASB)**



- What does it mean to be clothed ‘with Christ?’

3. Water Baptism is an external picture of an internal reality.

“Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection,” Romans 6:3-5

- What does it mean for a person to ‘walk in newness of life’?
- How have you sensed God’s power helping you to live differently?



4. The normal way of water baptism is by immersion, meaning to get fully immersed in the water.

The word baptism (*baptizo*) in the Greek language of the New Testament means ‘to dip’ and was used among the Greeks to signify the dyeing of a garment, or the drawing of water by dipping a vessel into another. (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words)

And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. Acts 8:37b-38 (NASB)

In the Bible there are no examples of anyone being baptized by sprinkling. Every baptism recorded in the Scriptures is by immersion.



- What should I do if the faith tradition I was raised in practiced baptism by sprinkling instead of immersion?
- How can I respect the way I was raised, giving honor to those who helped shape me, while making every attempt to put into practice clear biblical practices?

5. Water Baptism should occur after repentance.

“Repent and be baptized for the remission of sin...” Acts 2:38



- If a persons' only baptism was as an infant, what should they do?

6. Water Baptism should not be delayed after placing your faith in Christ.

“And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.” Acts 22:16

“And he took them that very hour of the night...and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.” Acts 16:33 (NAS)

- What hinders a person from following Christ in water baptism?
- How can we overcome those hindrances?



Jesus Christ set the example by being baptized (Matt. 3:13-17) so we His followers need to walk in His footsteps and do the same.

CELEBRATING GOD'S FEAST

Along with water baptism, followers of Christ have participated in and celebrated the taking of communion since the beginning of Christianity.

While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. Matthew 26:26-28 (NASB)



- What does the bread represent?
- What does the cup represent?
- How can communion help us in connecting with God?



1. Like the early Christians we take communion to remember and proclaim the grace we have received through the death and sufferings of Jesus on the cross.

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. **1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NASB)***

- **Why is it so important to remember Christ's suffering and death?**



The power of communion is in our inner, spiritual man, partaking of Christ. The physical elements do not profit us, but the Holy Spirit making Christ real does.

*"Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink." **John 6:53-55 (NAS)***

*"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoke to you are spirit and are life." **John 6:63 (NAS)***

- **How can I participate in communion in such a way that my inner man is partaking of Christ?**
- **Many times, believers experience renewed sense of grace in communion. Have you experienced any significant times in communion?**



2. In communion believers are warned to give honor to each other and to Christ.

“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.” 1 Cor. 11: 27-29 (NAS)



- How does a person examine themselves in the process of celebration communion?
- What is the difference between a Halloween type of ‘fear’ and ‘fear’ as respect and honor?
- With the proper understanding of fear, ‘How do we fear the Lord?’ in communion?

Treat every person the same.

Do not make distinctions according to social class or economic standing.

Do not partake of Communion with known, unrepented sin in your life.

Being Filled with the Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit is who made Christ and the things of God real to you!

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth..."
John 16:13a (NASB)

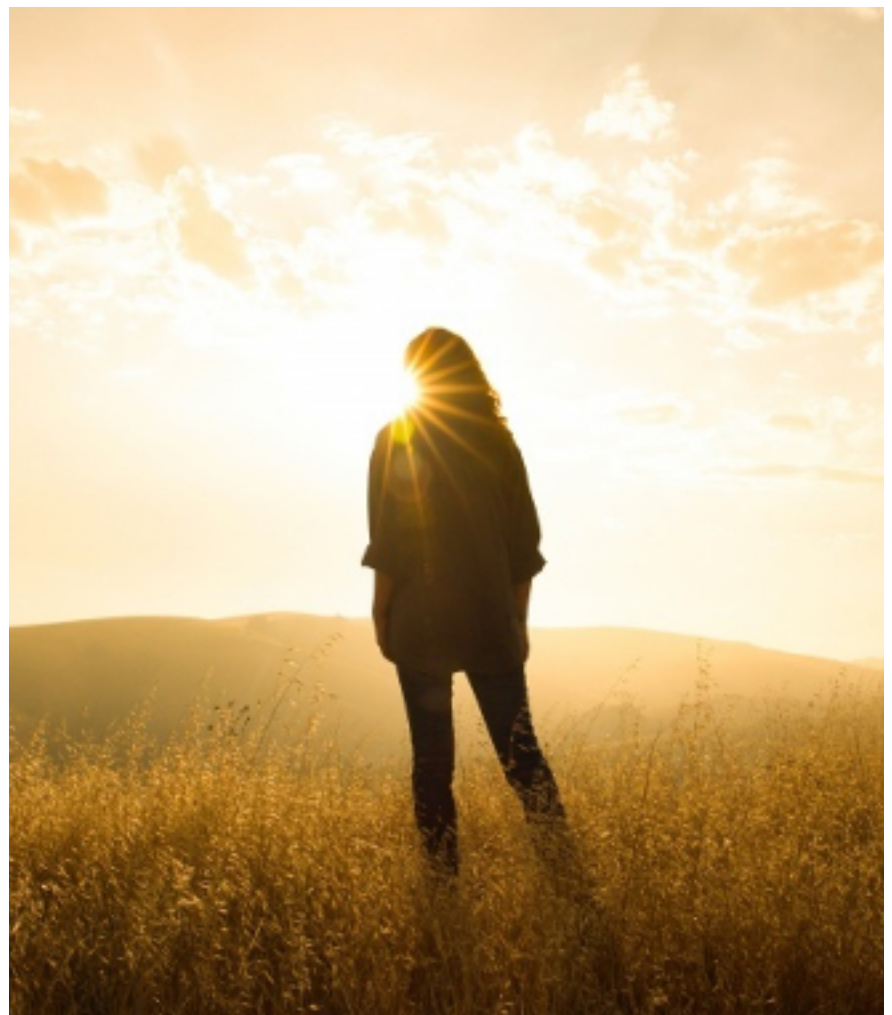
"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:5 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit is at work helping us to come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit drew us to God, convinced us that we were sinners, and directed our hearts to receive forgiveness from God through Jesus. The Holy Spirit dwells within our heart from the moment we ask Christ to be our Savior.

"But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in spirit...Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" 1 Cor. 6:17 & 19 (NIV)



- How did you sense the Holy Spirit's work in your life in coming to Christ as Savior?
- How have you sensed His presence in your life since you've surrendered your life to Christ?



2. The Baptism in the Holy Spirit occurs after accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord.

“When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. When they arrived, they prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come upon any of them; they had simply been baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John placed their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.” Acts 8: 14-17

“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did upon us at the beginning. “And I remembered the word of the Lord, how He used to say, ‘John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ “If God therefore gave to them the same gift as He gave to us also after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” Acts 11:15-17

In your relationship with God there is a never-ending source of newness and freshness. In the two examples above both groups experienced the Holy Spirit in a new way after they believed. Whatever you’ve experienced with God there is more for you. He is always wanting to show you new things from the Scriptures and to take you deeper in fellowship with the Holy Spirit.

- Why do you think Jesus used the imagery of a flowing river to describe the Holy Spirit in the believer?
- What do you think of when you hear the phrase ‘living water’ to describe this river?



“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.” John 7: 38-39



- Why do you think Jesus used the imagery of a flowing river to describe the Holy Spirit in the believer?
- What do you think of when you hear the phrase ‘living water’ to describe this river?

3. Jesus is who baptizes us in the Holy Spirit

John the Baptist speaking; “As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”
Matthew 3:11

- **Pastors and leaders like John the Baptist can baptize people in water. Do you think it significant that it is Jesus who baptizes us with the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?**
- **You’ve already trusted Christ with your soul, can you trust Him to baptize you with the Holy Spirit?**



4. Even those with great learning need the Baptism with the Holy Spirit

“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” **Acts 1:4-5**

Jesus commanded His people to wait until they had received the Holy Spirit before they left the city of Jerusalem. They had spent three years in close proximity to Jesus, heard great teaching, experienced fantastic miracles and were eyewitnesses of the resurrection. Yet, Jesus still told them they needed the baptism with the Holy Spirit.



- **Do you think it significant that those with great teaching and the perfect example still needed the baptism in the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?**
- **Does this have any implication for us who have had weaker teachers and very imperfect examples?**

5. The Holy Spirit will give you power to live for Him and to make His Name known!

"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." Acts 1:8

There are times when we may have wanted to make a difference or engage in a conversation with some one and felt too weak or afraid to do something. The ministry of the Holy Spirit will help us overcome our weaknesses or fear so that we can indeed make a difference in this world.

- Have you ever felt weak when facing challenges?
- Have you ever wanted to say something to someone about Christ but felt too afraid?
- Have you experienced the frustration of your own inadequacies?



6. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit is for you.

“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Acts 2:1-4



- Who received this baptism with the Spirit in the above passage?
- Describe what happened when the Holy Spirit was poured out?

“While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Acts 10: 44-46

- Compare the two passage and describe the similarities and differences.
- Do you know what tongues is?



Tongues is an unlearned language that occurs in every believer who is baptized with the Holy Spirit. When seeking God for the baptism with the Holy Spirit there will come many moments when you sense His presence within you. When that happens simply embrace the ministry of Jesus, opening your heart and mouth to praise the Lord. Trust God with the process.

7. Jesus taught us to ask for the Father for the Holy Spirit.

“...How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?” Luke 11:13



- Have you spent time praying alone or with others asking the Father for the Holy Spirit?

8. We are to have faith and simply believe God.

“...did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?...Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?...So then those who are of faith are blessed...in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

Galatians 3:2b, 5, 9a & 14

Like all of God's blessings, we receive by having faith.

- Do you believe that Jesus made you worthy and able to receive this blessing?
- Why do you believe God wants to baptize you with the Holy Spirit?
- Is there anything holding you back from seeking God for the baptism with the Holy Spirit?



9. Remember – God wants you to be filled!

“...be filled with the Holy Spirit!” Eph. 5:18b (NAS)

“O taste and see that the Lord is good” Psalm 34:8



As Christians we are to earnestly seek and trust that Jesus will baptize all with the Holy Spirit! We are to pray for divine filling and empowerment to reach our world for Christ!

