

NOW WHAT?

A GUIDEBOOK FOR NEW CHRISTIANS
revised edition

RALPH W. HARRIS

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Gospel Publishing House

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

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CONGRATULATIONS!

You have just made the greatest, wisest, best decision you could ever make by accepting Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. But now what happens? Where do you go from here?

The next seven days can be the most important days of your life. You are starting a new life, and this will call for a number of changes. You will need help. This book provides for you a plan of action for the next seven days. Each chapter covers one day. Please read the chapters carefully and follow through on the recommendations given.

The suggested Bible reading each day will take you through the Gospel of John during this week (it will take less than fifteen minutes a day). This Gospel was written to strengthen the faith of new converts.

The suggested Bible study at the end of each lesson takes very little time, and it will help you learn how to study the Bible. The total time needed each day is less than half an hour.

Do your best and God will help you!

1

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 1, 2, AND 3

Just what has happened to you? That's a good question, and an important one. Knowing what happened and what it means will help you the rest of your Christian life.

It happened in a church, in your home, or somewhere else. Someone helped you, or perhaps you were by yourself. But wasn't it something like this? You felt a need, learned somehow that Jesus Christ could help you, and one way or another, asked Him to come into your life.

Now, what does it all mean? Let's put it simply. Two things have happened:

1. Jesus has become your Savior.
2. You have become a child of God.

We call this *salvation*. Perhaps someone has already mentioned that now you are "saved." Maybe you wonder what that means. Saved from what? Why did you need to be saved?

Three things are important for you to know:

1. You were a sinner.
2. You could not save yourself.
3. Only Christ could save you.

The Bible says, “All have sinned” (Romans 3:23). That includes you and me. The Bible also says, “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). This kind of death is spiritual and eternal.

We cannot save ourselves from this death by our good works, by church membership, or by trying to be good. The only way to be *saved* (there’s that word saved) from the penalty is to get rid of our sins.

Now, how can we be saved? Jesus provided the way by dying on the Cross. In doing this, He took our place and suffered our punishment. When we ask God to forgive our sins and believe Jesus died for us, God accepts us for Jesus’ sake, our sins are forgiven, and Jesus becomes our Savior.

But something else has happened. *You have become a child of God.*

A child of God? What does that mean? Look at it this way. When you were born as a baby, you received natural life from your parents. Because of this you are like them, you have many of their characteristics.

When Jesus became your Savior, He brought to you new life, spiritual life, life from God. The Bible calls this the new birth (John 3:3). By your first birth you became a child of your earthly parents; by your new, or second, birth you have become a child of God, your Heavenly Father.

This is important! You now have two natures: (1) The old nature you received when born the first time. This we can call the *self-life*. (2) The new nature you received with

the second birth. Since Jesus Christ is now living in you by His Holy Spirit, we call this new nature the *Christ-life*.

As far as your first, or natural, birth is concerned, you may be an adult, a youth, or a child. But as far as your new, or spiritual, birth is concerned, you are a newborn. You have received a new life, but it's just beginning.

During these next few days you will begin growing in your Christ-life. These will be very important days. You are establishing the pattern for the rest of your life. You are determining the kind of Christian you will become. As you follow each suggestion, you will begin to mature as a Christian.

BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY (ANSWER IN YOUR OWN WORDS)

John 1:12. What happens to those who receive Christ?

John 1:29. What did John the Baptist call Jesus?

John 2:5. What advice did Jesus' mother give to the servants?

John 3:3. What is necessary in order to "see the kingdom of God"?

John 3:6. List the two kinds of birth:

- a. _____
- b. _____

John 3:16. How can we keep from perishing?

John 3:36. What does a person have, if he believes on Jesus?

GOOD VERSES TO MEMORIZE

John 1:12; 3:3; 3:16; 3:36

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2

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 4, 5, AND 6

In chapter 1 we established that you're a spiritual newborn and that you need to mature. So where do you go from here?

It is tragic when, because of a physical affliction, a child fails to mature and mentally remains a baby all his life. It's even more tragic when a person becomes a child of God through salvation and then fails to mature spiritually.

This doesn't have to happen to you. As you follow these suggestions, you can begin to become a strong, mature Christian.

First of all, remember that your spiritual life comes from Jesus Christ, the Son of God. "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). (This is the *Epistle* of John toward the end of the Bible, not the *Gospel* of John.) The preceding verse says, "God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:11).

Christ lives in you. Don't forget it.

Receiving life is not enough; you must feed that life. When a baby is born in the natural, it will die unless its parents take care of it. They must feed it and nourish its physical life so it will grow.

This is also true in relation to your new spiritual life. When you feed it, it will grow; when you neglect it, it will die.

It's as simple as that. It depends on you. Now, what will cause you to grow spiritually? Here are some key recommendations:

READ THE BIBLE

Tomorrow we'll talk more about the Bible. Your use or neglect of the Bible will determine the kind of Christian you will be. This is why we're suggesting that you read three chapters each day this week. Get in the habit of reading the Bible every day. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2).

PRAY

In chapter 4 we'll talk about the various kinds of prayer and how to pray effectively. The simplest way to describe prayer is that it is talking to God and letting Him talk to us. Make time every day to pray. For many people the best time is the first thing in the morning, before starting daily activities. Talk to Him as you would to a friend—for He is your best Friend. Don't worry about using the right words. God is more concerned with your attitude than with your vocabulary.

WITNESS TO OTHERS

Tell others about what has happened to you. A witness is someone who tells others about something

he or she has learned for him- or herself. If you have learned that Jesus can forgive, let others know about it too.

Witnessing is inviting people to get acquainted with Jesus. Let them know how wonderful your new Friend can be to them. Witnessing will make you a stronger Christian.

ATTEND CHURCH REGULARLY

If you take a live coal from the fireplace and put it by itself, it will soon go out. In the same way, Christians need the encouragement of other Christians. Listening to the pastor and other mature Christians preach and teach the Word of God, praying with others, singing together, making Christian friendships—these will help you to grow (Hebrews 10:25).

BE OBEDIENT

When God asks you to do or not to do something, obey quickly. Jesus is your Master as well as your Savior. Here is a good rule for deciding what is right or wrong: Will this be pleasing to God? Make this the ruling factor in all you do or say.

Spiritual maturity does not depend on how long you have been saved. If you will follow these simple steps, you will begin to become a mature Christian, one who pleases God and one He can use.

BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY

John 4:10. What did Jesus offer to give this woman?

John 4:14. What will be the result if a person drinks of the water Jesus gives?

John 4:24. How are we to worship God?

John 5:39. What advice about the Bible did Jesus give?

John 6:35. What did Jesus call himself?

GOOD VERSES TO MEMORIZE

John 4:14; 5:24; 6:37

3

HOW CAN I UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 7, 8, AND 9

As mentioned in chapter 2, the Bible is one of the best ways by which a person can grow spiritually. There are five ways to make the Bible a part of your life.

HEAR THE WORD

The Bible is often called “the Word” because it is God’s way of communicating with us. We use our words to express ourselves to others. God uses the Bible to express himself to us.

Because hearing is one way of receiving the Word of God into our lives, it is important that you form the habit of attending church services as often as possible. There you will hear the pastor and other mature Christians preach and teach the Word of God.

Form the habit, too, of sitting near the front of the church, so you will not be distracted. Always take your Bible and look up the passages the speaker refers to. Take notes; it will help you remember helpful points.

READ THE WORD

Another way to get the Word of God into your life is to read it regularly. The kind of habits we form

determine our character, and one of the best habits you can form is to read the Bible every day.

Set a reasonable pace for yourself. Start by reading fifteen minutes in the morning and perhaps the same amount before going to bed at night. Carry a New Testament and read it during lunchtime.

You may want to use a Bible in which you can underline with a pen and perhaps write notes in the margin. See page 35 for suggestions about where to read after you have read the Gospel of John this first time.

STUDY THE WORD

Studying takes more time, but is a valuable exercise. A little later in this chapter you will find helps on this. For studying you will need a longer period, an hour at least—perhaps some evening you have free.

MEMORIZE THE WORD

Notice that each of these suggestions becomes more challenging. But memorization is one way of obeying the verse, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart” (Psalm 119:11).

Start with some of the verses listed in each chapter. First, look at the various parts, noticing what each means. This is very important. Then notice the important words. For example, in Psalm 119:11 the important words are “word,” “hid,” and “heart.” Memorize the references, too.

MEDITATE ON THE WORD

After you have heard, read, studied, and memorized the Bible, you have something to meditate on. In the many spare moments during the day—working around the house, waiting for an elevator, driving down the street—you can put your mind in gear and meditate on Bible verses you learned. If you can't sleep at night, try thinking about a passage or verse from the Bible.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

There's nothing mysterious about the Bible. Just think of it as God's way of talking to you. However, this outline will help you understand any part of the Bible, long or short.

Points. What does this passage or verse say? What are the various parts? What are the subjects it speaks of?

Problems. What does this verse or passage say that you don't understand? Write down the problems and find the answers later, by your study or by asking another Christian.

Parallels. What similar thoughts are found elsewhere in the Bible? The more you study, the more help you will have here.

Promises. What blessings and helps are stated or implied?

Perils. What warnings do you find?

Precepts. What commands are stated or implied for you to obey?

BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY

John 7:17. What attitude will help a person to know if certain teachings are true?

John 7:37–39. What happens to the one who believes on Jesus?

John 8:31. How can we really be Jesus' disciples?

John 8:32. What will the truth do for people?

GOOD VERSES TO MEMORIZE

John 7:37; 8:12; 8:32

4

HOW CAN I PRAY EFFECTIVELY?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 10, 11, AND 12

If the Bible can be compared to food, because it nourishes our spiritual lives, then prayer can be compared to breathing. There are two parts to breathing—inhaling and exhaling. So it is with prayer—talking to God and listening for His response.

The person who said, “I can’t find time for prayer,” was correct. You must *make* time for it. A good way is to do it along with your Bible reading. In fact, when some truth grips your heart, you may want to stop for a few moments and pray about it.

A consistent prayer life is characteristic of a solid, mature Christian.

WHAT TO PRAY ABOUT

What to pray about is one of the first problems you’ll meet. You think of your family, your friends, your associates, your own needs—and in five minutes you’ve run out of subject matter. One way to solve this problem is to aim your prayer in certain directions, a different direction each day. Page 36 of this booklet has suggestions for doing this.

KINDS OF PRAYER

Another solution to the problem of what to pray about is to recognize that there are several kinds of prayer. Basically, it is simply talking to God.

Praise. This is similar to thanksgiving but deals with Who God *is* instead of what He has *done*. Sometimes you can use one of the Psalms, reading it aloud to express how you feel about who God is.

Thanksgiving. Prayer is not just asking. Don't forget to thank God for what He has already done for you. In fact, this is a good way to begin your prayers. It builds your faith to remember what God has already done for you.

Petition. This means asking God to meet certain needs. Though some people never progress beyond the “gimme” stage, always asking God for something, there is nothing wrong with asking the Lord for His help. In fact, He encourages us to come with our needs.

Intercession. You may become gripped with the need of someone else and feel burdened to keep on praying until you have the assurance that God has answered your prayer. This is intercession, one of the greatest kinds of prayer, for in it you are thinking of others. We need more of this kind of prayer.

Take a few moments to carefully read the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9–13. See if you can identify the different types of prayer in this model prayer that Jesus taught His disciples.

HOW GOD ANSWERS

This is an important lesson to learn: God answers every prayer. Sometimes He says, “Yes,” sometimes He says, “No,” and often He says, “Wait.” But time spent in prayer is never wasted. You see, even more than what He does *for* you, God is interested in what He can do *in* you. Prayer changes you.

PRAYING IN PUBLIC

Sooner or later, someone will call on you to lead in prayer. Don't panic. Simply remember that you're praying to the Lord, not to the people. Pray as a representative of the group and express what you think are their general desires in that meeting. Don't worry about using exactly the right words.

BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY

John 10:11. Who is the Good Shepherd?

John 10:15. What has Jesus done for the sheep?

John 11:27. Who did Martha say Jesus is?

John 11:40. What is needed in order to see God's glory?

John 11:42. How often did the Father hear Jesus' prayer?

John 12:32. What did Jesus mean by “lifted up”?

GOOD VERSES TO MEMORIZE

John 10:9; 10:10; 11:25,26; 11:40; 12:25; 12:32

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HOW CAN I BE A STRONG CHRISTIAN?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 13, 14, AND 15

As a Christian, you need strength to overcome life's challenges and to serve the Lord effectively. You may feel inadequate. Good! You must recognize your need before the Lord can help you.

POWER FOR OVERCOMING

The first time you fail, you can expect the devil to tell you, "It's no use. You can't live the Christian life. You might as well give up." This is one of Satan's favorite tactics.

You may even feel defeated because you were tempted to sin—even though you didn't sin. Remember this: *temptation is not sin*. Even Jesus was tempted.

Know Your Weak Points. As a new Christian, you might still be struggling with life-controlling issues. Perhaps these are habits that have had a powerful grip on your life—a bad temper, or some other weakness. Knowing where you are weak will help you know how to pray for God's help. God understands your circumstances and will help you overcome those challenges as you place your trust in Him.

Cooperate with God. Rely on Jesus to help you overcome. A little girl said, "Jesus is stronger than the devil, so

when the devil comes to the door of my heart, I send Jesus, and when the devil sees Jesus, he goes away.”

Christ lives in your heart through His Holy Spirit, who is called “the Comforter,” meaning “one called alongside to help.” He will develop in you the nine fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22,23) which together are the character of Christ. God’s purpose is to make you like Christ. Try underlining in John 14 and 16 the things which Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would do.

An obedient attitude will help. Obey the Lord when He suggests something to you. Listen to the pastor and other mature Christians. They can help you.

Cultivate a sense of the Lord’s presence. This is part of the abiding Jesus mentions in John chapter 15. Let your thoughts go out toward Him throughout the day.

Don’t Get Discouraged. You don’t need to give up, and you shouldn’t. A baby starting to walk often falls, but it mustn’t give up. Simply come to the Lord as you did the first time, ask Him in sincerity to forgive you, and go on.

POWER FOR SERVICE

Before He returned to heaven, Jesus left a very special promise with His followers. It is called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. You can read about the promise and the experience in Acts 1:1–8; 2:1–41. Jesus promised that He would baptize His believers in the Holy Spirit. As a result they would receive power to witness unto Him. This happened on the Day of Pentecost and changed the lives

of all who received. Ask your pastor to tell you more about this.

Jesus Is the Baptizer. How do you receive? Ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit. Believe that He will, and wait patiently. He will keep His promise to you as He did for the apostles (Acts 2:39).

Stay Spirit-filled. The baptism in the Holy Spirit is not a once-for-all experience. As you continue to stay close to the Lord in prayer and reading His Word, you will receive from Him more and more of His life and blessing.

BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY

John 13:34,35. What was Jesus' new commandment?

John 14:6. What is the only way to come to God?

John 14:13,14. What is the secret of receiving answers to our prayers?

John 14:15. How do we show our love for Jesus?

John 14:27. What has Jesus promised to give us?

John 15:5. Who is the vine, and who are the branches?

John 15:18,19. What attitude can we expect from the world (those who don't know Jesus as Savior)?

GOOD VERSES TO MEMORIZE

John 13:35; 14:6; 14:14; 14:27; 15:5

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WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT OF ME?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 16, 17, AND 18

In John 16:13, you will read that the Holy Spirit “will guide you into all truth.” This truth includes blessings and responsibilities.

It's all a part of growing up spiritually. In the natural, a child has few responsibilities. But as he matures, he should assume more responsibilities. Let's review some spiritual responsibilities.

MAKE CHRIST THE MASTER

To express their loyalty to Jesus when He was living on earth, His disciples often called Him “Lord” or “Master.” Jesus accepted this position and said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

As a believer, you now belong to Christ. You did belong to Satan, but Christ bought you with His blood. When we realize how much Jesus has done for us, how He died for us, how He saved us from hell, we are glad for opportunities to show our love for Him by obeying Him.

PUT CHRIST FIRST IN YOUR LIFE

Cultivate a sense of Christ's presence. Talk to Him in prayer—at definite times, such as in the morning

and before going to bed, and throughout the day. When reading the Bible, think of it as Jesus talking to you. Make Jesus the center of your life.

GIVE CHRIST YOUR TIME

To mature as a Christian, be sure to attend church regularly, and get involved in church activities as well. Also, establish a time for private devotions (Bible reading, prayer, etc.) and for family devotions, if you have a family. All this takes time, but it will be worth it!

GIVE CHRIST YOUR ABILITIES

Everyone can do something. If you have special talents, dedicate them to the Lord's work. You may want to take training to develop some latent ability. Besides the jobs which call for special talents, there are many other tasks where you can help. Your pastor and other church leaders will be delighted to have you volunteer. Here is a suggestion I've found helpful: promise the Lord you will try to do anything you are asked to do.

GIVE CHRIST YOUR MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

Everything you possess is from the Lord. Since He owns it all anyway, you cannot really "give" it to Him; however, by tithing—giving a tenth of your income to the church—you will help spread the gospel at home and in foreign nations. While that might sound like a lot, be assured that God will meet your needs as you are faithful to Him.

BECOME A MEMBER OF A CHURCH

You belong to a new family—the people of God. Show you belong to the family by joining a Bible-believing church. It will give you an increased sense of belonging and will provide an opportunity to help others. Through your church and its ministries, you can reach to the ends of the earth. You will find your church ministering to your own needs too.

TELL OTHERS OF YOUR FAITH

Someone told you about Christ, probably, or you would not be a Christian today. Christ commanded His disciples to tell others (Matthew 28:18–20). As you witness at every opportunity, you will become more effective. Next to your salvation, your greatest thrill will be leading someone else to Christ. Talk to someone about Him every day.

BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY

John 16:7. Why was it necessary for Jesus to go away?

John 16:13–15. Tell two things the Holy Spirit will do.

John 16:33. What will we have in the world?

In Christ?

John 17:9. What is Jesus doing for us?

John 18:38. What did Pilate say of Jesus?

GOOD VERSES TO MEMORIZE

John 16:24; 16:33; 17:3; 17:15

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HOW CAN I KNOW THE WILL OF GOD?

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 19, 20, AND 21

How to know the will of God—that's a big enough subject to rate a book in itself. And it's important. After all, if Christ is now your Master and you want to obey Him, you must know what He wants you to do.

WHEN IT'S A MATTER OF CONDUCT

It's obvious the Bible doesn't cover every detail of modern-day living. But of one thing you can be sure: the Bible contains principles that cover every situation. Below are some pointers that you will find helpful. As you read the Bible, you'll find other principles.

Avoid Legalism. Acts of sin must never be condoned; however, in matters about which the Bible is silent, God deals with people as individuals. Don't expect everyone to fit into your mold of what rules or laws you think a Christian should obey (see Matthew 22:34–40).

Consider Others. Some things which you find acceptable might cause another Christian to fail. The apostle Paul once said that if acting a certain way would cause another Christian to stumble, he'd be willing never to do it again, even though he saw no wrong in it himself (see Romans 14).

Glorify God. You are now Jesus' representative in the world. Live to bring glory to God.

There are many principles, of course, but the most important is to *be guided by your love for Jesus*. Ask yourself, "Will this be pleasing to the Lord?" If you make that the ruling question in your decisions, you won't go far in the wrong direction.

WHEN YOU MUST DECIDE WHICH WAY TO GO

Sometimes we must choose a course of action among several options—all of which are pleasing to God. How can you decide which is best?

Be Patient. A Bible verse states, "He that believeth shall not make haste." Learn to wait on God until He indicates His will to you. Time has a way of working things out. Don't be rash.

Seek the Advice of Others. Don't be a "loner." Let your pastor or some other mature Christian be your confidant. Be sure it is someone who will keep your confidence. Someone who is not involved in the problem can see the various angles of the problem more clearly than you can.

Commit the Matter to the Lord. A famous Christian, George Müller, used this method: He would list the reasons for and against a certain course of action and prayerfully consider the matter for a time. Then he would decide to move in a certain direction. He would remove from his mind as much of his own desires as

possible, then ask the Lord to block his path if it were not God's will. Over a period of fifty years he found this approach successful.

GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS

Getting along with others is one of the most important aspects of Christian living.

If you haven't learned this yet, you will soon discover that Christians are not perfect. As in your case, God is trying to develop their character, to make them like Jesus.

Some people you will like instinctively; others will not be particularly attractive to you. Just remember this: there are traits in you also which may not be especially attractive to some.

The most important gift you can ask from God is the gift of love—for God and for others. Love includes all the other traits God wants to develop in you. Love will keep you walking close to the Lord. Love makes you considerate of others. Love causes you to witness to others about the love of Jesus Christ. God can even give you a love for those who seem impossible to love.

BIBLE STUDY FOR TODAY

John 19:7,8. Why was Pilate afraid?

What phrase, repeated in John 19:24, 28, and 36, shows that Jesus' death was planned?

John 20:7. What item did Peter notice particularly in the tomb?

John 20:31. Why was the Gospel of John written?

John 21:15. What important question did Jesus ask Peter?

John 21:22. How did Jesus answer Peter's curiosity?

GOOD VERSES TO MEMORIZE

John 20:21; 20:31

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WHAT NOW?

Well, the first seven days are over. How did you do? Now, what about the future? Let's reemphasize some points and consider a few more tips.

Bible Reading. Read the Bible every day and all the way through once a year. It will take only ten to fifteen minutes a day. Read the Gospel of John through two more times at least; then start at Matthew and read through the Book of Acts. Now read the story portions of the Old Testament (your pastor can help you identify which stories), beginning with Genesis; then read the New Testament all the way through. Finally, begin at Genesis and read through the whole Bible.

Prayer. Prayer is the lifeline of your spiritual life. Think of God as a Great Friend you can confide in. Talk to Him about your victories as well as your needs.

The Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Seek God to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He is your Counselor and Friend who comes alongside you to help.

When You Fail. When you fail, ask God for forgiveness, just as you did the first time. He will never give up on you. But determine by His help not to fail in the same way again.

Find a Church Home. Become a member of a good church and help in every way possible.

Be Baptized in Water. The Lord has commanded water baptism. It is one of the ways you can give a public testimony to your conversion.

Become a Giver. Give ten cents out of every dollar you earn to the church you have made your church home. This is known as the tithe.

What Now? It depends on you. By following these suggestions, you will begin to mature spiritually.

PATTERN FOR BIBLE STUDY

When you study the Bible, use the following questions to help you understand the passage you are studying:

POINTS—What does this passage say?

PROBLEMS—What does it say that I don't understand?

PARALLELS—What similar thoughts are found elsewhere in the Bible?

PROMISES—What blessings may I claim?

PERILS—What warnings should I heed?

PRECEPTS—What commands should I obey?

WEEKLY PRAYER CIRCLE

Make it a habit to pray every day. Use the following prayer guide to help you focus on what to pray about:

Monday—**M** is for **Missionaries**.

Tuesday—**T** is for **Tasks**; pray about your particular work for God.

Wednesday—**W** is for **Workers**; pray for the pastor and others who work in your church.

Thursday—**T** is for **Thanksgiving**; express gratitude for what God has done for you and others.

Friday—**F** is for **Families** and **Friends**.

Saturday—**S** is for **Saints**, fellow believers.

Sunday—**S** is for **Sinners**; pray especially that God will reach those who don't know Christ through the church services.

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