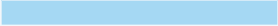


start here.



*You said yes to Jesus. Heaven threw a party.
Now what?*

What just happened, how you can know it's real, and
your first ninety days as a brand-new child of God.

Start Here: What Just Happened When You Said Yes

© 2026 Community of Hope AME Church. All rights reserved.

Sunday Worship: Crossland High School, 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748. Sundays at 10:00 AM

www.hiphopenation.com · Facebook @CmtyofHope · YouTube @hiphopenationtv

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

The road map

PART ONE: WHAT JUST HAPPENED

- 1 · You Said Yes: Now What?
- 2 · The Rescue: What Jesus Actually Did
- 3 · Brand New: What God Says About You Now

PART TWO: HOW YOU CAN KNOW IT'S REAL

- 4 · Saved by Grace, Not by Grades
- 5 · When You Don't Feel Saved
- 6 · When You Mess Up (Because You Will)
- 7 · Is God Going to Give Up on Me?

PART THREE: GOING PUBLIC

- 8 · Why Baptism?
- 9 · What the Water Means
- 10 · Sprinkled, Poured, or All the Way Under?
- 11 · Your Baptism Day

PART FOUR: WHO YOU ARE NOW

- 12 · Child, Not Customer
- 13 · New Name, Old Ghosts
- 14 · The Family You Just Joined

PART FIVE: YOUR FIRST NINETY DAYS

15 · Four Habits That Build a Life

16 · Honest Questions, Honest Answers

17 · Saved From, Saved For

CLOSING

Your First 90 Days. A Thirteen-Week Walk

A Closing Blessing

Scripture Index

You're Home

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 (NIV)

From the Community of Hope family

This book comes to you from Community of Hope AME Church, the family God planted in the DMV in 2006, in a nightclub, with eight people who believed God meant every word. Twenty years in the making. Still going. Still hungry. Still convinced that everyone has a chance.

"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

JEREMIAH 29:11 (NIV)

Whoever picked up this book, whether you said yes to Jesus last Sunday, last night, or you're still standing at the edge deciding, the welcome is the same. We don't care how you come to Community of Hope. We only care about the way you leave: empowered, saved, hopeful, renewed, encouraged. This book exists to walk you through your first steps.

Where Everyone Has a Chance.

A letter to the reader

You good? Because something just happened to you.

Friend, if you prayed to give your life to Jesus Christ, at church, in your car, on your couch at 1 AM with tears on your face, I want you to hear me clearly: that was the single most important moment of your life. Bigger than your graduation. Bigger than your wedding day. Bigger than the birth of your children, and I say that as somebody who loves his family. Every other moment changed your circumstances. This one changed your eternity.

And I also know what the enemy does next. Within about seventy-two hours, a voice shows up. *Did anything really happen? You don't feel that different. You know you're going to mess up again. Who do you think you're fooling?* Almost every believer I have ever pastored has heard some version of that voice in their first week. So we wrote you this book, so that when the voice shows up, you have the Word of God in your hands and you know what actually happened when you said yes.

Here is how to use it. The chapters are short on purpose. Read one a day, or one a week, or read the whole thing tonight because you can't put it down, all of that's fine. Stop when something stirs and talk to God about it (that counts as prayer, and you're allowed now, you're family). In the back there's a thirteen-week walk for your first ninety days. Do it with somebody if you can.

One more thing. You didn't join a program. You got adopted. Read this book like a child reading letters from home.

It's never too late to start over, begin, or keep going, and you just proved it.

With you on the road,

Pastor Tony Lee

SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

what just happened

You Said Yes: Now What?

Let's start with what happened in heaven the moment you said yes. Because you might have prayed that prayer in a quiet room, with nobody watching, wondering if it even counted. Meanwhile, somewhere you couldn't see, a celebration broke out.

That's not us being poetic. That's Jesus, describing it Himself:

"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

LUKE 15:7 (NIV)

Rejoicing. In heaven. Over you. Jesus told three stories back to back in Luke 15, a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son, and every one of them ends the same way: with a party. The shepherd calls his friends. The woman calls her neighbors. The father throws a feast for a son who came home smelling like the far country. Jesus was making one point three different ways: when a lost person comes home, God celebrates.

So before we explain anything, before the theology, before the baptism, before the ninety days, get this settled: you were the occasion for joy in heaven. Whatever you walked in carrying, however messy the road that brought you here, the God of the universe looked at your yes and rejoiced.

Now. What actually happened? In the next two chapters we'll slow it down, but here's the plain-words version. When you said yes to Jesus, God did at least four things, all at once, all in a moment:

God forgave you. Every sin: the ones you remember, the ones you've forgotten, the ones you'd never say out loud. Paid for and released (Colossians 2:13-14).

God moved in. The Holy Spirit, God in person, took up residence inside you (Ephesians 1:13). You aren't carrying a new philosophy. You are carrying a Person.

God adopted you. You went from stranger to child. Not employee. Not customer. Child, with full family rights (John 1:12).

God started something. God began a work in you and has personally committed to finish it (Philippians 1:6). You aren't the project manager of your own transformation. God is.

You may not feel all of that yet. That's fine. Chapter 5 is for exactly that. Feelings are real, but they make terrible judges. What happened to you happened whether your emotions showed up for it or not.

You said yes. Heaven threw a party. Welcome home.

TRY IT: SAY IT OUT LOUD

Somewhere today, say this: out loud, so your own ears hear it:

"It counted. God forgave me, God moved in, God adopted me, and God isn't finished with me. Heaven rejoiced over me."

The enemy will spend this week whispering that nothing happened. Beat him to the microphone.

The Rescue: What Jesus Actually Did

If somebody asked you tomorrow, "So what exactly do you believe happened on that cross?": could you answer? This chapter is so you can. Not with seminary words. With true ones.

Start with the honest diagnosis. The Bible says every one of us has sinned: missed the mark of what God made us for:

"for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

ROMANS 3:23 (NIV)

All. Not "the bad people." Not "everybody except your grandmother." All of us: flawed and struggling, every single one. And sin isn't just a list of broken rules. It's a broken connection. It separates us from a holy God, and no amount of good behavior balances that scale. If getting to God were a matter of being good enough, nobody would ever be sure they'd done enough. (Spoiler: that's the exhausting religion Jesus came to end.)

Here's where the story turns. God didn't respond to our mess by writing us off. God responded by coming down into it:

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

ROMANS 5:8 (NIV)

Read the timing in that verse. *While we were still sinners.* Not after we cleaned up. Not once we showed potential. While we were still in it, Christ died for us. The cross is God's love with receipts.

On that cross, Jesus, who never sinned, took the full weight of your sin and mine, and paid a debt He didn't owe because we owed a debt we couldn't pay. The Bible calls it this:

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21 (NIV)

The great exchange. He took what was yours, the guilt, the penalty, the separation. You get what was His, right standing with God, full access, a seat at the family table.

And then, three days later, the tomb was empty. Don't rush past that. If Jesus stayed dead, this is just a sad story about a good man. He didn't. The resurrection is God's public announcement that the payment cleared. Death itself got served notice.

"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

MATTHEW 28:6 (NIV)

That's the rescue. God saw you at your worst and gave heaven's best. Jesus died the death you deserved and offers you the life He earned. When you said yes, you weren't agreeing to an idea. You were accepting a rescue that was already accomplished, already paid for, already waiting, with your name on it.

We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically around here. People say we take this Jesus thing too far. Well. Christ took us pretty seriously when He died on the cross. That's a big deal to us.

It should be a big deal to you too. It's your story now.

TRY IT: TELL IT BACK

Practice saying the rescue in your own words: you'll need this the first time somebody asks what happened to you. Here's a starter:

"I was separated from God and couldn't fix it. Jesus died on the cross to pay for my sin and rose from the dead. I said yes to Him, and now I'm forgiven and I belong to God."

Four sentences. That's the gospel. You just preached.

Brand New: What God Says About You Now

There's a verse we put on the front of this book, and it deserves a whole chapter:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 (NIV)

New creation. Not improved. Not renovated. Not "same person, better habits." *New*. The Greek word Paul used means fresh, unused, a kind that didn't exist before. When you said yes to Jesus, God didn't repaint the house. God laid a new foundation.

Now let's be honest about what that does and doesn't mean, because this is where new believers get confused. You probably woke up the next morning feeling like mostly the same person. Same memories. Same cravings. Maybe the same attitude in traffic. So was the verse wrong?

No. Here's the difference: your *position* changed instantly. Your *condition* is catching up.

Position is how God sees you, your legal standing in heaven's court, your place in the family. That changed completely, immediately, the moment you believed. Forgiven. Righteous. Adopted. Sealed. Done.

Condition is your day-to-day living, your habits, your mouth, your temper, your healing. That's a walk, not a switch. The Bible has a word for it: growth. And God has committed to that project personally:

"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 1:6 (NIV)

God began it. God will carry it on. God will complete it. Your job is to cooperate, not to carry.

So what exactly does God say about you now? Put these where you can see them:

You are forgiven. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). The record was cleared: not sealed, not filed away for later. Cleared.

You are God's child. "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). The right. It's legal. It's yours.

You are sealed with the Spirit. "When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit" (Ephesians 1:13). A seal means ownership and security. God marked you as family.

You are no longer condemned. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). Now. None. We'll come back to this one: you're going to need it.

Here's the move the enemy will try: he'll point at your condition to make you doubt your position. *You still struggle, so you must not really be new.* Flip it. Because your position is settled, your condition has somewhere to grow. You don't behave your way into becoming God's child. You're God's child, so now you get to grow into the family resemblance.

The old has gone. The new is here. God said it. Simple.

TRY IT: THE MIRROR LIST

Write these four lines somewhere you'll see them every morning this week: mirror, phone lock screen, dashboard:

Forgiven. God's child. Sealed. No condemnation.

Read them out loud each day. Not to convince God: God already knows. To retrain you.

how you can know it's real

Saved by Grace, Not by Grades

Somewhere in your first month, an old instinct is going to kick in. It's the instinct that says: *Okay, God's part is done: now I'd better earn my keep.* Pray enough, behave enough, serve enough, and maybe God will keep me. Miss a Sunday, lose your temper, fall back into an old habit, and the math turns on you: *maybe I'm losing what I got.*

That whole system of keeping score? The Bible tears it up in two verses. Memorize these first:

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast."

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 (NIV)

Look at every load-bearing word. *By grace*, God's undeserved kindness, not your performance. *Through faith*, received by trusting, not achieved by trying. *The gift of God*, and you don't pay for gifts; you say thank you for them. *Not by works*, so the scorecard is irrelevant. *So that no one can boast*: heaven will have no VIP section for people who earned their way in, because nobody did.

Grace is the thing that makes Christianity different from every other religion on earth. Every other system says *do*, climb, perform, achieve, and maybe you'll reach God. The gospel says *done*, God came down, Jesus paid it, receive it. Religion is a ladder. Grace is a rescue. You don't climb out of a pit you were rescued from just to prove you could have.

Now, hear the balance, because grace gets misunderstood in both directions. Grace doesn't mean your choices don't matter. The very next verse says you were "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Good works are the *fruit* of your salvation, never the *root* of it. You don't serve God to earn love. You serve God because you already have it. Same actions, completely different engine.

This matters for how you'll experience the next ninety days. If you're saved by grades, every stumble threatens your standing, church becomes a performance review, and God becomes a supervisor you're scared of. If you're saved by grace, every stumble is a family matter to bring home, church becomes a family table, and God is a Father you can run to, especially on your worst day. And here's what twenty years of ministry has taught us: people grow faster in grace than they ever do in fear. Fear makes you hide. Grace makes you honest. And honest people heal.

So retire from the scorekeeping business. The grade was settled at the cross, and it wasn't your grade, it was His. Jesus got the A and put your name on the paper.

That's the gift. Stop trying to tip the Giver.

TRY IT: CATCH THE SCOREKEEPER

This week, catch yourself once in earning-mode, one moment where you think, *God must be pleased with me now* or *God must be done with me now* based on your performance. When you catch it, pray:

"God, thank You that my standing with You was settled by Jesus, not by my day. I receive Your grace: again."

When You Don't Feel Saved

Let's talk about the morning it wears off.

Maybe the day you said yes, you felt something powerful: tears, chills, a weight lifting, joy you couldn't explain. Or maybe you felt almost nothing, and you've been wondering ever since whether it took. Either way, sometime soon you'll hit a stretch where you feel absolutely nothing. Flat. Dry. Ordinary. And the voice will come: *If you were really saved, wouldn't you feel it?*

Here's the truth that will hold your weight for the next fifty years, so underline it: **your salvation rests on what Jesus did, not on what you feel.** Feelings are real: God made them, and we don't play them down around here. But feelings make wonderful passengers and terrible drivers. They respond to your sleep, your stress, your blood sugar, your season. The cross doesn't move when your mood does.

God knew we'd wrestle with this and put the answer in writing:

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."

1 JOHN 5:13 (NIV)

So that you may know. Not "so that you may feel." Not "so that you may hope on your good days." Know. God wanted your assurance anchored somewhere sturdier than your emotions, so God anchored it in the written Word. The question is never "Do I feel saved today?" The question is "Did God tell the truth?" And that question was answered with an empty tomb.

Jesus said it as plainly as it can be said:

"Whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

JOHN 6:37 (NIV)

You came. He will never drive you away. That verse doesn't have a mood clause in it.

Now, a word about how feelings actually work in the life of faith, because we're not telling you to become a robot. Feelings often *follow* faith the way heat follows fire. You act on what's true, you pray when it feels dry, you show up Sunday when you'd rather sleep, you read the Word when it feels like paper, and somewhere along the way, the feelings catch up. Ask anybody who's walked with God for decades: the sweetest seasons often started as the driest ones, because dry seasons are where trust gets real. Even King David, the psalm writer, the man after God's own heart, had days he preached to his own soul: "Why, my soul, are you downcast? ... Put your hope in God" (Psalm 42:5). If David had to talk to his feelings, you will too.

So here's your protocol for the flat days, and it's one sentence: **go back to the facts**. Christ died for you. Christ rose. You believed. God can't lie. File the feelings under "weather", real, but temporary. File the facts under "climate", the thing that actually defines the territory.

You're not saved because you feel saved. You're saved because Jesus said so.

TRY IT: THE RECEIPT

Get a pen. In the back of this book, or in your Bible, or in your phone notes, write:

"On [date], I gave my life to Jesus Christ. He said whoever comes to Him, He will never drive away. That's me. It counted."

Sign it. The next time the voice asks whether anything really happened, don't argue with it. Read it the receipt.

When You Mess Up (Because You Will)

We need to have the conversation nobody had with a lot of us when we first got saved. Ready? Here it's:

You are going to sin again.

Not because we're giving you permission: we're not. Because it's true, and you deserve better than to be blindsided by it. Some habit is going to trip you. Some word is going to fly out of your mouth. Some old door is going to swing open on a weak day, and you're going to walk through it before you even think. And in that moment, the enemy will be waiting with his favorite speech: *See? Nothing changed. You're a fraud. Don't even bother going back to God: you'll just embarrass yourself.*

That speech has emptied more churches than any scandal ever did. So let's get you armed before it comes.

First, hear what God already said about this exact situation:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

1 JOHN 1:9 (NIV)

Notice who John wrote that to: believers. Saved people. Church folks. God built the repair kit into the family before you ever needed it, which tells you God wasn't surprised. *If we confess*, that means bring it to God, plainly, no spin. *He is faithful and just*, the promise holds every single time; there's no strike-out clause. *And will forgive... and purify*, not just pardoned, but cleaned.

Second, learn to tell the difference between two voices, because they show up in the same moment and couldn't be more different. **Conviction** is the Holy Spirit, and it's specific and hopeful: *That thing you did: bring it*

to the Father and let's deal with it. Come home. Conviction names the sin and points you toward God. **Condemnation** is the enemy, and it's vague and hopeless: *You're worthless. You'll never change. Stay gone.* Condemnation names you and points you away from God. Same event, opposite directions. The Spirit convicts the behavior; the enemy condemns the person. Learn those accents, because one of them is lying:

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,"

ROMANS 8:1 (NIV)

Third, change your math on falling. Before Christ, sin was your address. Now it's a pothole on a road headed somewhere else. The direction of your life has changed even when your feet slip. The Bible's picture of the righteous person isn't somebody who never goes down: it's somebody who doesn't stay down: "for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again" (Proverbs 24:16). Getting back up quickly isn't denial. It's faith. Every parent knows a child learning to walk is going to hit the floor, no good parent disowns a toddler for falling. They pick the child up, and the walking gets stronger.

So here's your protocol for the day you blow it, and we mean the *same day*: don't give shame a weekend to work on you. Go straight to God. Call it what it's, no excuses, no performance. Receive the forgiveness God already promised in writing. Ask God what the stumble is trying to teach you. Then get up and keep walking.

It's never too late to start over, begin, or keep going. That's not a slogan on our wall. That's 1 John 1:9 in street clothes.

TRY IT: THE SAME-DAY RULE

Make yourself one promise, today, while nothing's wrong:

"When I mess up, I will talk to God about it the same day. I won't let shame quarantine me from my Father."

Say it out loud. Shame's whole strategy is delay. Kill the delay, and you kill the spiral.

Is God Going to Give Up on Me?

Somewhere under all the other questions, there's usually this one, sitting quiet in the basement: *Okay: God accepted me. But what happens when God gets to know me? What happens when I fail one time too many? Is there a limit? Is God going to give up on me?*

Let's take it head-on, because your whole walk will be shaped by your answer.

Start with what Jesus said about the people the Father gave Him:

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

JOHN 10:28-29 (NIV)

Sit with that picture. You aren't holding on to God with your grip strength, hoping your fingers don't give out. You are *held*. Two hands, the Son's and the Father's, and nothing and nobody has the muscle to pry them open. Paul made the same point with a list, just to close the loopholes:

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

ROMANS 8:38-39 (NIV)

Nothing in all creation. And here's the part that should end the anxiety: *you* are part of creation. Even you can't un-love you from God. God's love for you was never based on your track record, you came in on grace, remember?, so your track record can't cancel it.

Now, an honest word, because we don't dodge hard things around here. In our Methodist family, we take free will seriously. God isn't a kidnapper and doesn't handcuff anybody to the family table. The Bible does warn about hearts that drift, and it means those warnings: walking with God is a relationship, and relationships are meant to be lived in, not framed on a wall. But hear the difference, because it's everything: **drifting away isn't the same as being driven away.** God will never drive you away: Jesus said so (John 6:37). No sin, no stumble, no bad season revokes your adoption. The child who wanders is still a child, and the Father's posture toward wanderers is the whole point of the prodigal son story: the father saw him "while he was still a long way off" (Luke 15:20), which means the old man was watching the road. Every day. That's your God.

And here's the pastoral secret about this whole question: the fact that you're even asking it's evidence of life. People who don't belong to God don't lie awake worried about losing God. The worry itself is the family resemblance showing. The Spirit inside you is the reason you care.

So live held. Not casual: held people still grow, still repent, still show up. But not terrified either. The Christian life was never meant to be lived on a ledge, white-knuckled, wondering if today's the day God quits. God began the work. God carries it on. God completes it (Philippians 1:6). Your Father doesn't have a return policy on family.

God knew everything about you before adopting you. There's nothing left to discover that would change God's mind.

TRY IT: PRAY THE GRIP

Tonight, before you sleep:

"Father, thank You that I am held, not holding on. You knew all of me when You said yes to me. Teach me to live like a child who's home, not a guest who might get asked to leave. Amen."

going public

Why Baptism?

If you've been around Community of Hope for even a few Sundays, you've seen it: somebody standing in the water, a little nervous, a lot joyful, and a whole church on its feet making noise like somebody just hit a game-winner. That's baptism. And if you've said yes to Jesus, it's for you. This part of the book, four short chapters, will walk you through what it's, what it means, how we do it, and how to take the step.

Start with the simplest reason to be baptized: **Jesus asked you to.** When He gave His church its marching orders, baptism was in the first sentence:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."

MATTHEW 28:19 (NIV)

And when the crowd at Pentecost, cut to the heart by the first gospel sermon ever preached, asked "what shall we do?", Peter's answer had two beats:

"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."

ACTS 2:38 (NIV)

Repent, turn to God. Be baptized, go public with it. In the New Testament, those two moves travel together everywhere. Three thousand people were baptized that same day (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian official in Acts 8 heard the good news from Philip and stopped the chariot at the first water he saw: "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" (Acts 8:36). Nobody in the early church treated baptism as an elective for the extra-committed. It was simply the next step after yes. Believe, then be baptized, as natural as a wedding follows a proposal.

That wedding picture is worth keeping. Think about what a wedding actually is: the love already exists, the commitment has already been made in private, but the couple stands up in public, in front of witnesses, and says *this is real, this is forever, and we want everybody to know*. Nobody says the ring created the love. But nobody says the ceremony doesn't matter, either. Baptism is your wedding ceremony with Jesus. The saving happened when you believed. The water is where you stand up in front of the family and go on record.

And underline this so nobody can shake you later: **baptism doesn't save you: Jesus does.** The thief crucified next to Jesus never touched a drop of water, and Jesus told him, "today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Salvation is by grace through faith, full stop, we settled that in Chapter 4. Baptism doesn't make you saved. It shows that you are. It's not the door; it's the announcement on the door.

But don't let that truth talk you out of the water, because "it doesn't save me" was never a reason to skip it. Jesus was baptized Himself, and He had no sin to wash (Matthew 3:13-15). He did it, He said, "to fulfill all righteousness", to fully obey the Father and to stand publicly with the people He came to save. If the sinless Son of God got in the water, the question isn't "do I have to?" The question is "why wouldn't I?"

You said yes in your heart. The water is where your yes gets a witness.

TRY IT: ASK THE QUESTION

If you haven't been baptized since saying yes to Jesus, ask God one honest question this week:

"Lord, is there anything actually standing between me and the water, or just fear and delay?"

Write down what comes up. We'll deal with the common hesitations in the next three chapters.

What the Water Means

In our Methodist family we call baptism a **sacrament**, one of only two things Jesus commanded His whole church to keep doing until He returns (the other is Communion, and we'll get you to that table soon). A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. Plain words: something you can see, that points to something God does that you can't see. The water is visible. What God declares over you isn't. Both are real.

So what does the water actually mean? The New Testament stacks up several pictures, and every one of them preaches.

It means washing. The most obvious picture: water cleans. When Ananias came to a newly converted Paul, he said, "Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). The stain you couldn't scrub out yourself, God washes. Baptism acts out on your body what grace already did in your soul.

It means burial and resurrection. This is the picture Paul kept coming back to:

"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."

ROMANS 6:3-4 (NIV)

Buried with Him. Raised with Him. In baptism, God connects your story to the biggest event in history. The old you, the one who ran the show, kept the record, carried the guilt, that person gets a funeral. Nobody stands at a graveside and keeps negotiating with the person in the casket. The old you isn't on a break. It's buried. And what comes up is *new life*, the same power that raised Jesus out of a borrowed tomb, now on record over you.

It means a covenant mark. This is language our Methodist forebears loved, and it's straight from Scripture: baptism is the sign of belonging to God's covenant people, the way a ring is the sign of a marriage. Paul even connects it to the covenant sign God gave Israel (Colossians 2:11-12). It marks you as family property: in the best sense. You wear the family sign now.

It means joining the body. "For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Baptism is personal, but it isn't private. You're not just going public with Jesus: you're being publicly received by a people. That's why we cheer so loud. We're not watching a ceremony. We're welcoming family.

Here's what all four pictures have in common: in every single one, **God is the main actor.** The water doesn't do the washing, God does. You don't bury yourself or raise yourself, God does. You don't earn the covenant mark: God gives it. That's why we call it grace. Your part is to show up and say yes in front of witnesses. God's part is everything else.

Some folks wait years because they want to feel ready: clean enough, strong enough, sure enough. Friend, read the meanings again. The water is for people who *need* washing, *need* burying, *need* raising. Showing up unfinished isn't the obstacle to baptism. It's the qualification.

TRY IT: PICK YOUR PICTURE

Of the four pictures, washing, burial and resurrection, covenant mark, joining the body, which one hits you hardest right now? Tell God why:

"God, the picture I need most is _____. When I go into that water, I'm trusting You to make it true of me."

Sprinkled, Poured, or All the Way Under?

Now for the practical questions, and we're going to answer them straight, because baptism questions have kept too many people on the sidelines too long.

How much water does it take?

In the AME Church, part of the historic Methodist family, baptism happens three ways: **sprinkling** (water on the head), **pouring** (water over the head), or **immersion** (all the way under). And here's the part some folks never got told: *you choose*. All three are real baptism. All three have deep roots in church history and pictures in Scripture: sprinkling echoes Ezekiel 36:25 ("I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean"), pouring echoes the Spirit poured out at Pentecost (Acts 2:17), and immersion acts out the burial and rising of Romans 6. The power was never in the plumbing. The same God shows up in a handful of water and a whole pool. What makes baptism baptism is the name spoken over you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the grace of the God who meets you there.

A lot of folks at COH choose immersion because the picture preaches: going down, coming up, the whole funeral-and-resurrection acted out. Beautiful. Choose it if it's yours. But hear us: the grandmother baptized with a sprinkle in a country church in 1958 is every bit as baptized as the man who went under in a pool last Sunday. We won't let anybody rank what God has received.

What if I was baptized as a baby?

This one matters, so lean in. In the Methodist family, like most of the church across most of history, we baptize infants. Parents and a congregation stand up and put God's covenant mark on a child before that child can even say the word "grace", which, if you think about it, is the most grace-shaped thing imaginable: God claiming you before you could do a single thing to deserve it. Your baptism as a baby was real.

God kept every promise made over you that day, and here's the proof: *you're here*. You said yes. The seed planted in that water came up.

So no, you don't need to be re-baptized, because God didn't fumble the first one. Baptism is God's promise, and God doesn't need a do-over. What you *do* get to do, and what we'd love to celebrate with you, is **reaffirm** it: stand before the church, remember your baptism, and claim it now with your own mouth, in your own faith. It's called reaffirmation of your baptismal covenant, and for a lot of folks it's every bit as powerful as the water itself. The promise was made over you then. Now you get to sign it.

What if I was baptized years ago, then walked away?

Same answer, same grace. The baptism held. God's faithfulness didn't leave when you did. Come reaffirm it, and watch the church cheer for you like it's brand new. Because in every way that matters, it's.

And if you've never been baptized at all? Then the water's waiting, the choice of how is yours, and the next chapter is your walkthrough.

One thing we won't do at Community of Hope is let the *method* become a fight that keeps somebody from the *meaning*. Jesus didn't say "make sure everybody argues about the mode." He said go and baptize. So we go. And we baptize. Simple.

TRY IT: KNOW YOUR STORY

Figure out where you stand, it takes one honest minute:

Never baptized? Your step is baptism. *Baptized as a baby or years ago?* Your step is reaffirmation. *Not sure what happened back then?* That's okay: come talk to us and we'll figure it out together, no judgment.

Write your step down. You'll use it in the next chapter.

Your Baptism Day

Everything up to here has been the *what* and the *why*. This chapter is the *when*, because a step this important deserves a date on the calendar, not a someday in the fog.

Here's how to take the step at Community of Hope, in plain moves:

Move 1: Say the word. Tell us you're ready. Grab a leader on Sunday, or reach us at info@hiphopenation.com or 240-273-9115. Say "I'm ready to be baptized" or "I want to reaffirm my baptism." That one sentence sets everything in motion. (Nervous to say it? Read Acts 8:36 again: "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way?" Be the Ethiopian. Stop the chariot.)

Move 2: Sit with us first. Before your baptism day, we'll walk you through a short preparation: what baptism means, what will happen, what you'll be asked, and space for every question you're carrying. This isn't a test to pass. Nobody fails. It's the family making sure you step into the water informed, settled, and celebrated.

Move 3: Bring your people. Baptism is a witness, so give it witnesses. Invite family. Invite the friend who's been watching your life change and wondering what's going on. Invite the skeptic. Some of the most powerful moments we've seen in twenty years are the people in the seats at a baptism, because watching somebody go public has a way of asking everybody present, *and what about you?* Your baptism might be somebody else's beginning.

Move 4: Get in the water. On the day, you'll stand before the church. You'll be asked if you believe: Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, your Lord and Savior. You'll say you do. And then, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, the water comes: sprinkled, poured, or all the way under, whichever you chose. It usually takes less than a minute. Heaven's been waiting your whole life for it.

Move 5: Let us lose our minds. When you come up out of that water, this church is going to make some noise. Let us. We know what we're looking

at: resurrection, acted out live. We don't celebrate quietly around here and we're not starting with you.

A few honest answers for the questions people actually ask: *What do I wear?* We'll tell you in preparation, comfortable, modest, bring a change of clothes if you're going under. *Will I have to speak?* Just your yes, though if you want to share a piece of your story, we would be honored. *What if I cry?* Then you'll match half the congregation. *What if my family thinks it's strange?* Invite them anyway. Let them see your face when you come up.

And afterward: mark the date. Write it in the front of your Bible next to the date you said yes. Because here's what the old saints knew: the day will come, some hard midnight years from now, when the enemy whispers that none of this was real. And you will be able to answer him with two dates and a wet memory: *I said yes, and I went public, and the church went loud, and God was there.* Martin Luther, when the darkness pressed him, used to write two words where he could see them: *Baptizatus sum*: "I am baptized." Not "I felt something once." I. Am. Baptized. It happened. It counts. It holds.

Set the date, friend. The water's ready and so is your family.

TRY IT: MOVE 1, TODAY

Don't let this chapter close with a nod and no step. Today, before the feeling fades, send the message or make the call:

"I'm ready. Let's talk about my baptism."

info@hiphopenation.com · 240-273-9115. That's Move 1. We'll walk with you from there.

who you are now

Child, Not Customer

There are a lot of ways to relate to God, and most of them are wrong. Some people relate to God like a customer, I show up, I pay my dues, I expect services rendered. Some relate to God like an employee, keep the boss happy, dread the performance review, hope for a bonus. Some like a defendant: head down, waiting for the gavel.

Here's how God actually set it up:

"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"

ROMANS 8:15 (NIV)

Adoption. Of all the words available to describe what happened to you, God picked the one that means *chosen on purpose, brought inside, given the name, given the inheritance*. In the Roman world Paul wrote in, an adopted child had every legal right of a natural-born one, the old debts were canceled and the new family's resources were fully theirs. Paul's readers knew exactly what he was claiming: you're not on a trial membership with God. The paperwork is final.

And look at the word Paul says the Spirit puts in your mouth: *Abba*. It's the intimate, family word for father, the word a child uses climbing into a lap, not the word a citizen uses petitioning a king. That word is now your legal vocabulary. The God who spoke galaxies is the God you're invited to interrupt.

Being a child instead of a customer changes everything about how you'll walk these next months:

Children come as they are. A customer dresses up for the meeting. A child runs in with skinned knees. You never have to get presentable to pray. We covered that in *Just Talk*, and it's truer now than ever.

Children ask freely. A customer calculates what they've earned. A child just asks, because the relationship is the account. "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matthew 7:7) is family policy.

Children get corrected, in love. Hear this one early: God will correct you, and it will sometimes sting. But "the Lord disciplines the one he loves" (Hebrews 12:6, quoting Proverbs 3). Discipline isn't rejection. It's proof of relationship: nobody trains a stranger's kids. When correction comes, it means God is raising you, not returning you.

Children inherit. "Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). Everything the Father has promised has your name in the will: presence now, purpose for your life, eternity itself.

One warning while we're here: church can accidentally turn you back into a customer if you let it. You'll be tempted to measure your standing by attendance, by service, by how spiritual you look next to other people. Don't. Serve, show up, grow, but do it all as a child in the house, never as a customer keeping receipts. The house is your home now.

You didn't get hired. You got adopted. Big difference. All the difference, actually.

TRY IT: PRAY THE NEW WORD

Sometime today, start a prayer with one word: "*Father.*" Not "God, if You're up there." Father. Then just talk: about your day, your fears, your gratitude, whatever's real. End with:

"Thank You that I'm Your child, and that's not going to change."

New Name, Old Ghosts

Here's a situation nobody warned you about: you're brand new, the Bible says so, God says so, you said yes and meant it, and yet the old life still knows your address. The old habits still text you. The old crowd still calls. The old shame still has a key it thinks still works. What do you do when you're a new creation being haunted by old ghosts?

First, understand what happened at the moment of your yes, and what didn't. God gave you a new identity instantly but didn't erase your memory, your history, or your habits' muscle memory. That's the position-and-condition truth from Chapter 3, and this is where it gets practical. The ghosts are real. But hear this: **they're ghosts**. They can rattle chains. They can't sign documents. The old you lost all legal authority the day you were buried with Christ: that's what your baptism declares (Romans 6:4). What's dead can haunt, but it can't rule.

Now, the three ghosts that come for almost every new believer, and the Word that answers each one:

The ghost of shame says: *You know what you did. You know who you were. Don't get comfortable in this church thing. If these people knew, they'd put you out.* Answer it with this: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). East and west never meet: that's the point of the picture. God didn't file your past. God removed it. And as for "if these people knew": friend, you joined a church that was born in a nightclub. We are all flawed and struggling here. Your story won't scare us. It qualifies you for the family photo.

The ghost of the old crowd is more tender, because it's made of people you love. Some friendships will deepen when you change, and some will get strained, because your new direction reads as judgment to people still standing where you used to stand. Two truths, held together: you don't have to abandon people to follow Jesus: you're now the closest thing to light some of them will get all week (Matthew 5:14-16). But you may need new *load-bearing* relationships: the ones you lean on, confide in, and take direction from. "Walk with the wise and become wise" (Proverbs

13:20). Love everybody. Follow few. Choose who's in the front seat of your life.

The ghost of the old habit doesn't argue theology: it just waits for a tired Tuesday. Here's the honest playbook: know your weak moments before they arrive (nobody falls at random; you fall on schedule: learn your schedule); starve the pattern (change the route, delete the app, break the sequence: "flee" is a biblical strategy, 2 Timothy 2:22, not a cowardly one); and never fight alone (a habit that survives years of private struggle often dies weeks after one honest conversation: James 5:16 says confess to *each other* for a reason). And when you do slip: Chapter 6. Same day. No shame spiral.

Above all, learn the difference between *renovation* and *identity*. The ghosts want you to believe the struggle proves the new birth was fake. Flip it, the struggle proves it was real. Dead things don't fight. The old you never wrestled with sin; it just agreed with it. The war inside you is the surest sign there's something new inside you worth warring for.

God gave you a new name. The ghosts only know the old one. When they call you by it, you don't have to answer.

TRY IT: NAME THE GHOST

Which of the three is loudest for you right now: shame, the old crowd, or the old habit? Name it to God tonight:

"Father, my loudest ghost is _____. It's dead and I'm new. You said so. Teach me to stop answering to my old name."

Then take one practical step this week: one conversation, one deleted app, one changed route. Ghosts hate practical.

The Family You Just Joined

Here's something you may not have realized you did when you said yes to Jesus: you joined a family. Not "you should join a family", you did. It's done. The same moment God adopted you, you were adopted into a house with other children in it:

"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,"

EPHESIANS 2:19 (NIV)

Members of God's household. The New Testament literally can't picture a Christian without a church. Its favorite images for believers are all plural and all connected: living stones built into one house (1 Peter 2:5), parts of one body (1 Corinthians 12:27), branches on one vine, sheep in one flock, family at one table. A brick by itself is a doorstep. A hand by itself is a horror movie. Everything you now are was designed to work *joined*.

We know what some of you are carrying into this chapter, so let's say it plainly: some of you have been hurt by church. Judged in the place that preached grace. Used, overlooked, or worse. If that's your story, we are genuinely sorry, and we won't insult you by pretending it doesn't happen. Churches are full of flawed and struggling people, and flawed people cause real damage. But hear this: walking away from *church* because one church hurt you is like refusing all food because one meal made you sick. You don't need less family. You need a healthier table. Come sit at ours and inspect the kitchen all you want.

Because here's what the family actually does: what you were saved into:

The family is where you're known. Sunday worship is powerful, but transformation happens where somebody knows your name, your story, and your face when you're not okay. "Carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2) requires people close enough to see you carrying one.

The family is where you grow. You'll learn more in a year of real community than a decade of private podcasts. "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). Sharpening involves friction. That's a feature.

The family is where you're covered. The night it all falls apart (the diagnosis, the loss, the 2 AM crisis), you'll need people who show up with prayer and a plate of food. That's not a program. That's family. We've been that for each other for twenty years.

The family is where you're deployed. God wired gifts into you. Yes, you, already (1 Peter 4:10). And gifts only make sense in a body. A gift unplugged from the family is a lamp unplugged from the wall.

And what does the family ask of you? Presence, honesty, and a next step. At Community of Hope that next step has a name: our **new members class**, the room where you learn who this church is, what we believe, how the AME family works, where the ministries are, and where you fit. It's also where this book's Part Five gets legs. Ninety days from now, you could be somebody who *attends* a church, or somebody who *belongs* to one. Different words. Different lives.

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

HEBREWS 10:24-25 (NIV)

Not giving up meeting together. That verse was written before livestreams, but it saw them coming. Watch online when you must. Pull up in person when you can. Presence is the family love language.

You didn't just get saved. You got seated. Come find your chair.

TRY IT: TWO NAMES AND A CLASS

This Sunday, do two things: learn the names of two people at church you didn't know before (and let them learn yours). Then ask a leader, or email info@hiphopenation.com, about the next new members class, and put it on your calendar.

Known by name, in the class, on the calendar. That's how attending becomes belonging.

your first ninety days

Four Habits That Build a Life

Jesus once ended a sermon with a picture of two builders (Matthew 7:24–27). Both built houses. Both houses caught the same storm. One house stood and one collapsed, and the difference wasn't the weather, the materials, or the effort. It was the foundation. The one who heard His words *and put them into practice*, Jesus said, built on rock.

Notice what that means for you, ninety days in front of you: the storm is coming to every house. Being new to faith won't exempt you; sometimes the storms actually pick up when you change direction. What you're building *now*, in the ordinary, unglamorous first months, decides what's standing later. So here are the four habits that build on rock. None of them require talent. All of them require showing up.

Habit 1: Talk to God daily. Prayer is just talking: no robe, no stage, no fancy words required. Start with five honest minutes a day: thank God, be honest, ask, listen. The goal isn't length; it's the running conversation underneath your whole life. *We wrote you a whole little book on this. Ask us for **Just Talk: A Simple Guide to Prayer**. Its 7-Day Starter is the perfect first week of your ninety days.*

Habit 2: Open the Book. The Bible is God's Word, and it reads you back. Don't start in Genesis and stall in Leviticus like everybody's cousin: start with the Gospel of John (Jesus, up close), then Acts (what happened after), then Philippians (how to live it). A chapter a day, or even a few verses honestly chewed. Ask of every passage: what does this show me about God? About me? What's my next step? *When you're ready to go deeper, ask us for **Reading the Text, Reading Your Life**: it'll teach you to study Scripture and your own seasons under the same light.*

Habit 3: Pull up Sunday and plant. We made the whole case in Chapter 14, so here it's just practice: be there weekly, in the room when you can. Worship isn't a show you attend; it's a family you feed and get fed by. Add the new members class, and within ninety days find one place to serve: greeter, tech, youth, outreach, anything. Planted beats attending, every time: "planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish" (Psalm 92:13).

Habit 4: Tell somebody. Your story is the one sermon nobody can argue with. The man born blind didn't win the theology debate; he just said, "One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (John 9:25). Start with one person who knew the old you. You're not the lawyer: that's the Holy Spirit's job. You're the witness. Witnesses just tell what happened.

And underneath all four habits, one Person: the Holy Spirit, the power in the prayer, the light on the page, the life in the worship, the courage in the telling. You can't do the next ninety days on willpower, and the good news is, you were never asked to. *When you're hungry for more of the Spirit, and you will be: ask us for* **Breath and Fire: A Spirit-Filled Life for Ordinary Disciples.** *Consider this book you're holding the front door to that one.*

Small habits. Daily deposits. Rock under the house. That's how ordinary people build unshakeable lives, and it starts this week, not someday. The full thirteen-week walk is waiting in the back of this book.

TRY IT: PICK YOUR FIVE MINUTES

Decide right now, not "sometime," now, when your daily five minutes with God will happen: morning coffee, lunch break, before bed. Attach it to something you already do every day. Then do it tomorrow, badly if necessary.

A wobbly five minutes that happens beats a perfect hour that doesn't. Rock gets laid one small stone at a time.

Honest Questions, Honest Answers

Every new believer carries questions they're afraid are too basic, too doubtful, or too messy to ask out loud. We don't dodge hard things around here, so here are the ones we hear most, answered straight.

"Do I have to be perfect now?"

No, and thank God, because you can't be. You're called to be *growing*, not finished: "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion" (Philippians 1:6). The standard is direction, not perfection. Are you more honest with God than you were three months ago? Quicker to get back up? That's the walk. Perfectionism isn't extra-holy, by the way: it's just fear wearing a church outfit. Grace doesn't grade on perfect. It grows you toward whole.

"What do I do about my old friends?"

Love them, and lead your own life. You don't have to ghost everybody, you may be the only light some of them ever get close to (Matthew 5:14-16). But watch two things: who has *influence* over you, and where your weak moments live. If certain rooms always end with the old you running things, love those friends from different rooms for a while. And don't preach at them: live it. Changed is louder than church-y.

"My family thinks this is a phase. What do I say?"

Less than you think. Families have watched us start things before; let them watch you finish one. "Live such good lives among the pagans that... they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Peter 2:12), the strategy is a consistent life, not a winning argument. Be more patient at the table. Show up when you say you will. Give it a year of quiet consistency and see who starts asking questions. Some of the best evangelism is just becoming easier to live with.

"Why do I still want the things I used to want?"

Because you're new, not finished: position first, condition catching up (Chapter 3). Desire has memory. What's different now: the want no longer runs the show, and there's a new want underneath it, fighting back (Galatians 5:17). The fight itself is the evidence of life: dead things don't wrestle. Feed the new appetite daily and starve the old one, and watch which one grows.

"I have doubts sometimes. Is my faith fake?"

No: doubt isn't the opposite of faith; it's often the growing pains of it. The man who cried "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24) got his miracle, not a lecture. Thomas doubted the resurrection and Jesus didn't dismiss him. He showed up with His scars out (John 20:27). Bring doubts to God, not just about God. Faith that's never questioned anything usually hasn't carried anything yet.

"When can I take Communion?"

Now. If you've received Christ, the table is set for you. In our Methodist family the Lord's table is open, we don't check résumés at the rail. The bread and the cup are the other sacrament Jesus gave us (Luke 22:19-20), and they'll be explained every time we serve. Come hungry. It's family dinner.

"How fast should all this change happen?"

Slower than Instagram, faster than you fear. Some things change overnight: we've watched God break addictions in a moment. Most things change like harvests: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper season we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9). Plant daily. Water weekly. Don't dig up the seed every morning to check on it. Give God seasons, not just weekends.

Got a question that's not here? Bring it to us. Sunday, the new members class, or info@hiphopenation.com. You won't shock us. We were born in a nightclub, remember. Questions are welcome in this family. Simple.

Saved From, Saved For

One last truth before we send you into your ninety days, and in some ways it's the whole reason this book exists.

You know what you were saved *from*. Sin, separation, shame, the old life running the show: we've spent sixteen chapters on it. But if you stop there, you've only got half the gospel. The rescue has a direction. You weren't just pulled out of something. You were pulled *toward* something:

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

EPHESIANS 2:10 (NIV)

Read that slowly. *Handiwork*, the Greek word is *poiema*, where we get "poem." You are something God made on purpose, with intention, line by line. *Created in Christ Jesus to do good works*, your salvation came with an assignment. *Which God prepared in advance*, the assignment predates the rescue. Before you ever said yes, God had already laid out work with your name on it: people only you can reach, rooms only you can walk into, good only you are positioned to do.

This is what we mean when we say it's never too late to come to Christ and live in your *purpose*. Not just live forgiven. Live sent.

Look at how Jesus handled brand-new believers, because it's not what you'd expect. The man delivered from a legion of demons begged to stay with Jesus, and Jesus said no. "Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you" (Mark 5:19). The Samaritan woman at the well had been a believer for roughly an hour before she'd brought her whole town out to meet Him (John 4:39). Jesus doesn't put new believers in storage until they're seasoned. He deploys them while the story's still fresh, because fresh testimony is the loudest kind.

That means you, now. Not after seminary. Not once you've got it all together: we've established that day isn't coming this side of heaven. Now, as-is, in progress. Your first assignments are already around you: the coworker who's noticed something's different. The family member nobody else can talk to. The block you live on, the break room, the group chat, the barbershop, the school pickup line. Mission doesn't start when you cross an ocean. It starts when you cross a room.

And you don't go alone or unarmed. You go as part of a church that has spent twenty years going into dark places and calling it being the light: feeding families, testing thousands for HIV, doing real talk with men about mental health, standing with this community when it buries its young and when it graduates them. That's the family trade, and you just joined the firm. We aren't afraid of the dark. We feel called to be the light in it. So will you be, sooner than you think.

This is the life in front of you, friend: saved from the pit, saved for the poem. Forgiven *and* sent. Child *and* witness. Rescued *and* on assignment.

You said yes to Jesus. Now watch what Jesus says yes to through you.

The next ninety days start now. Turn the page.

TRY IT: THE FIRST ASSIGNMENT

Ask God the dangerous prayer:

"Father, who's my first assignment? Show me one person, one need, or one room You've already prepared for me, and give me the courage to walk toward it this week."

Write down the first name or place that comes to mind. Don't be surprised if it's somebody you already know. The works were prepared in advance, remember. So were you.

Your First 90 Days: A Thirteen-Week Walk

Ninety days. Thirteen weeks. One focus, one verse, one practice, and one step at Community of Hope per week. That's it, no hero weeks required. Miss a few days? Pick up where you left off. It's never too late to keep going. Do this with another person if you possibly can, the whole walk works better witnessed.

WEEK 1: IT COUNTED

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come." 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Write your receipt (Chapter 5): the date you said yes, and what was happening in your life when you did. Tell God thank You every morning this week.

COH STEP: Tell somebody at church you're new. Let us celebrate you: it's what we do.

WEEK 2: TALK DAILY

"Pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge." Psalm 62:8 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Five minutes of honest prayer daily: thank God, be honest, ask, listen. (Ask us for *Just Talk* and run its 7-Day Starter this week.)

COH STEP: Send in one prayer request: info@hiphopenation.com. Our team prays over every single one.

WEEK 3: OPEN THE BOOK

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." Psalm 119:105 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Read the Gospel of John, chapters 1–7, one a day. Underline every place Jesus surprises you.

COH STEP: Bring your Bible (or Bible app) Sunday and follow the preaching text live.

WEEK 4: PULL UP AND PLANT

"Not giving up meeting together... but encouraging one another." Hebrews 10:25 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Finish John (chapters 8–21 across the week, or take two weeks; it's a walk, not a race). Note what Jesus prays for YOU in John 17:20–21.

COH STEP: Sign up for the new members class. This is the week. Put it on the calendar.

WEEK 5: GO PUBLIC

"Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" Acts 8:36 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Reread Part Three of this book. Pray about your step: baptism or reaffirmation.

COH STEP: Make Move 1: tell a leader you're ready, and set the date.

WEEK 6: MEET THE SPIRIT

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." Acts 1:8 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Read Acts 1–2 slowly. Ask the Father for more of the Holy Spirit, Jesus said the Father loves to give (Luke 11:13). (Ask us for *Breath and Fire*, this is its whole subject.)

COH STEP: Ask somebody seasoned at COH to tell you their story of the Spirit's work in their life.

WEEK 7: HANDLE THE GHOSTS

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." Psalm 103:12 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Name your loudest ghost (Chapter 13) and take one practical step against it, one conversation, one deleted app, one changed route.

COH STEP: Find one person at COH you can be honest with. Ask them to check on you. That's not weakness: that's architecture.

WEEK 8: FORGIVE SOMEBODY

"Forgive as the Lord forgave you." Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Ask God to show you one person you're still carrying. Begin, begin, releasing them in prayer, daily. (Forgiveness is a process, not a performance. Deep wounds may also need a counselor. Praying people get counseling; that's wisdom, not weak faith.)

COH STEP: If the person is safe to contact, consider one step toward peace. If not, the release in prayer still counts.

WEEK 9: READ YOUR LIFE

"Search me, God, and know my heart." Psalm 139:23 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Take stock of your first sixty days: What's changed? What's stuck? Where has God clearly shown up? Write it down: you'll want this record in year five.

COH STEP: Share one piece of that answer with your honest person from Week 7.

WEEK 10: FIND YOUR GIFT

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others." 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Ask three people who know you: "What do I do that helps people most?" Listen for the pattern: gifts usually hide in plain sight.

COH STEP: Try one serving role at COH, one Sunday, one ministry, one yes. You're test-driving, not signing a lease.

WEEK 11: OPEN YOUR HANDS

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Practice generosity in all three currencies this week: time (an hour for somebody), talent (your gift, used free), treasure (give something to God's work, the amount matters less than the open hand).

COH STEP: Ask how giving works at COH and what it funds. Watch where the money goes: light in dark places. Give like family, not like a customer.

WEEK 12: TELL YOUR STORY

"One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!". John 9:25 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Write your story in three short parts: before, what happened, since. Practice saying it in under two minutes. Then tell one person who knew the old you.

COH STEP: Bring somebody with you Sunday. Just one. "Come and see" (John 1:46) is still the oldest evangelism strategy on the books.

WEEK 13: LOOK BACK, WALK ON

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.". Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

PRACTICE: Reread your Week 1 receipt and your Week 9 stock-taking. Thank God specifically for what God has done in ninety days. Then set your next-season intention: which of the four habits needs the most attention next?

COH STEP: Celebrate, at the Lord's table if Communion is served, and with your people either way. Then keep walking. Day 91 looks a lot like Day 90: talk to God, open the Book, pull up Sunday, tell somebody. You're not finishing a program. You're building a life.

Friend, you made it to the end of the book, but you're standing at the beginning of everything else.

So receive this blessing from your Community of Hope family. We mean every word:

May you never forget the day you said yes, and may you never let anybody, including yourself, talk you out of what God did in it.

May the Father's grip hold you on the days your own grip fails. May you learn the sound of the Spirit's conviction and go deaf to the enemy's condemnation. May you get up quickly, every time, all your life.

May the water of your baptism stay louder than the whispers of your past. May your old ghosts grow hoarse calling a name you no longer answer to.

May you be planted, not just present. Known, not just noticed. Deployed, not just saved. May your five minutes become an hour and your one person become a multitude, and may somebody, someday, trace their yes back to yours.

And when you stumble, because you will, may you remember the address of home and come straight there, same day, head up, because the Father watches the road.

To whatever weary, hopeful, brand-new soul the Lord placed this book in front of: you are seen. You are wanted. Heaven rejoiced over you, and so do we. It's NEVER too late.

Where everyone has a chance.

Simple.

In the name of Jesus, who rescued you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who fills you, to the glory of the Father, who threw the party: amen.

Scripture index

A handful of the most important passages behind this book. Bookmark them. Read them in context, and watch them hold your weight.

- Genesis 2:7
- Psalm 34:17-18; 42:5; 62:8; 92:13; 103:12; 119:105; 139:23-24; 145:18
- Proverbs 3:11-12; 13:20; 24:16; 27:17
- Ezekiel 36:25-27
- Matthew 3:13-17; 5:14-16; 6:9-13; 7:7-8, 24-27; 28:6, 19-20
- Mark 5:18-20; 9:24
- Luke 11:9-13; 15:1-32; 22:19-20; 23:39-43
- John 1:12, 46; 4:39; 6:37; 9:25; 10:28-29; 14:16; 17:20-21; 20:24-29
- Acts 1:4-8; 2:1-41; 8:26-40; 22:16
- Romans 3:23; 5:8; 6:3-4; 8:1, 15-17, 26-27, 38-39
- 1 Corinthians 12:13, 27
- 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21; 9:7
- Galatians 5:16-26; 6:2, 9
- Ephesians 1:7, 13-14; 2:8-10, 19
- Philippians 1:6; 4:6-7
- Colossians 2:11-14; 3:13
- 2 Timothy 2:22
- Hebrews 10:24-25; 12:5-11
- James 5:16
- 1 Peter 2:5, 12; 4:10
- 1 John 1:9; 5:11-13

Soli Deo Gloria

You're home

Most of our books end with an invitation. Yours ends differently, because if you've read this far and said your yes, you're not a visitor we're inviting. You're family we're welcoming.

Community of Hope AME Church started in 2006 in a nightclub with eight people, because we believe church should meet people where they actually live. Twenty years in the making, that hasn't changed. We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically. We go into dark places and call it being the light. And we mean our name: this is a community where everyone, everyone, has a chance.

You came with a past. You're leaving with a future. That's the whole business model of grace.

PULL UP SUNDAY

Sundays at 10:00 AM

Crossland High School

6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748

CAN'T MAKE IT IN PERSON?

Watch live on YouTube: @hiphopenationtv

Facebook: @CmtyofHope · Web: www.hiphopenation.com

READY FOR YOUR NEXT STEP?

New members class, baptism, or a real conversation about any page in this book: reach us at info@hiphopenation.com or 240-273-9115. Saying yes was your step. Walking with you is ours.

KEEP READING: THE REST OF THE SERIES

Just Talk: A Simple Guide to Prayer, your conversation with God

Reading the Text, Reading Your Life: how to study Scripture and your seasons

Breath and Fire: A Spirit-Filled Life for Ordinary Disciples, the Person and power inside you

We'll save you a seat.

— Rev. Tony Lee & the Community of Hope family

**where everyone
has a chance.**

We'll save you a seat.

WWW.HIPHOPENATION.COM

COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

Sundays 10 AM · Crossland High School