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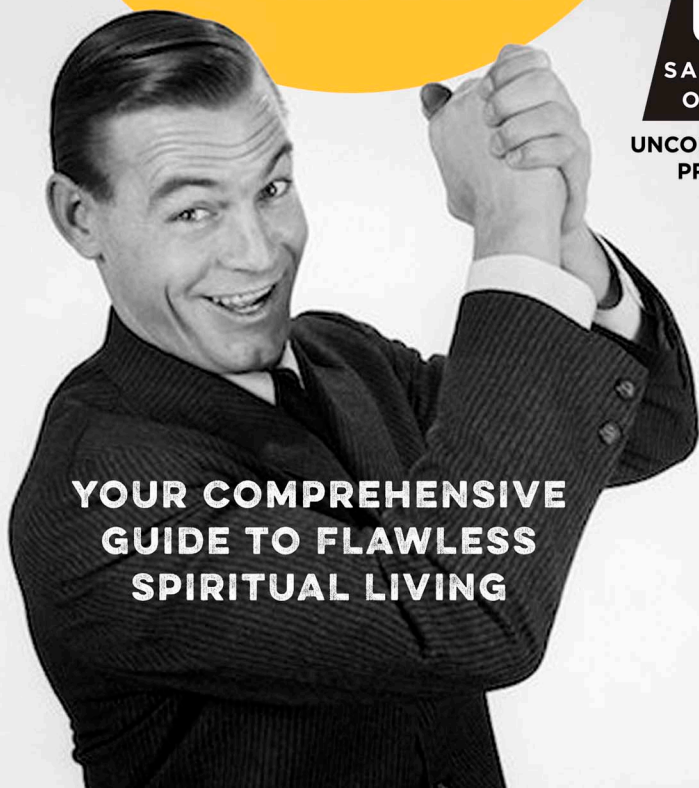
HOW TO BE A *Perfect* CHRISTIAN

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YOUR COMPREHENSIVE
GUIDE TO FLAWLESS
SPIRITUAL LIVING

HOW TO BE A PERFECT CHRISTIAN

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Introduction

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PERFECT CHRISTIAN

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If you're reading this, we want to congratulate you. In the vast sea of Christian books written by talented authors to strengthen your faith, supplement your walk with Christ, and teach you valuable truths about God and Christian living, you picked this one. Really—great job.

Maybe this book caught your eye because you just know, deep down, that you have what it takes to be a perfect Christian. Or perhaps you already feel that you're amazingly special, sinless, and beautiful, no matter what the Bible has to say about that. Or maybe you went on an impulsive Christian book-buying spree while browsing the Internet late one night and have no recollection of ordering this guide or the collected works of Karl Barth that showed up on your doorstep like magic this morning.

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Whatever brought our paths to cross, we at *The Babylon Bee* want to welcome you on a glorious adventure to become a perfect Christian—which you will assuredly be by the time you finish reading this book. The storms of life may howl and the rocks of doubt may threaten to dash you to pieces, but if you cling to the one sure hope that the potential to be perfect lies within you, you will succeed.

What is a perfect Christian? We asked three biblical scholars and theologians this question,* and in our extensive research, we found that **a perfect Christian is one who conforms to the man-made standards of the Christian faith in any given age.** Conforming to the status quo is the goal. Living out your faith in the way cultural Christianity dictates is the only way you'll truly be satisfied in your Christian walk.

So if you want to be perfect, as the great theologian Steven Curtis Chapman once said, "Saddle up your horses, we've got a trail to blaze." Let's go!

You may not know the road to Zion yet, but that's why we're here. We'll point out the way along the tried-and-true path to complete Christian perfection. We'll walk alongside you as you take each painstaking step toward igniting the divine spark within until you arrive at the peak of the Christian life, delighting in the knowledge that you are amazing. We'll be here holding your hand, like that creepy kid at junior high

* There is a chance they were all cult members in a remote compound in Idaho, but they seemed like pretty nice guys, so we are confident they are correct.

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group who would do it “as a joke” but then never actually let go through all fourteen choruses of “Lord, I Lift Your Name on High.”

We want you to be such a great Christian that bards will write songs of your greatness for years to come. A few decades from now John Piper will use your life as an example of radical, Christ-centered, God-saturated, all-satisfying sacrifice in one of his books. Maybe a supercool worship band will even write a song about you, using a deep, esoteric metaphor about a hurricane or a blazing inferno.

See, to become perfect, you need to be baptized in the glorious waters of Christian culture. Cultural Christianity is an amazing thing. It’s a perfectly preserved bubble of everything that made the church awesome in 1950, like gospel quartets, three-piece suits, and pipe organs, with all the good vibes and positive energy from the sixties. Those who are submerged under its depths never surface, but instead they are transformed day by day into the radiant image of the modern American Jesus.

“Hold the phone!” you might be exclaiming aloud to the book you’re holding. You’re probably wondering what’s wrong with the Christian life that you’re living right now. Well, if you’re like many Christians, you struggle with sin. You aren’t ever sure that you’re good enough. You know God is a God of grace, and yet you don’t always measure up. You don’t always feel like a good Christian, let alone a perfect one.

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If reading this has made you realize your Christian walk is less than a victorious one, don't worry. You're not alone. Many Christians just trudge through life without ever attaining to the higher levels of the Christian faith. The root of your problem is that **you're not trying hard enough to become perfect by your own efforts**. You're trying to do the Christian life by the grace of God, allowing Him to gradually change you by the power of His Word. This works for some people, but it's not befitting a true believer.

No, the true believer desires one thing above all else: **conformity to the status quo of the modern church**.

Luckily for you, we're here to make that a reality in your life. We're going to get you plugged into a church that's tripping over itself to make you amazing. We're going to help you worship like a truly spiritual person, hands held up in victory and swaying like a palm tree in a hurricane. We're going to help you clean up your life from anything the modern church has infallibly declared to be a sin, like listening to secular music or doing yoga. Finally, we'll help you share your newfound perfection with others through evangelism and political outreach.

And then, when all is said and done, you'll be able to stand on top of the summit of living the perfect Christian life and lift your hands triumphantly, like the silhouettes on those stock images your church uses during the worship time.

Ugh, we're literally tearing up right now thinking about how amazing you're going to be when we're through with you.

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You'll be the poster child for Christian perfection.

Let's not get ahead of ourselves though. You'll certainly stumble. You'll certainly fall. You'll certainly lose your step and make fools of us all. But even through your imperfections, we'll be here to pick you up and speak words of affirmation into your life throughout your walk with the Lord.

Remember, as Jesus said, it is the journey to Christian perfection that counts, not the destination.

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One

JOINING THE RIGHT CHURCH

If you've ever felt a modicum of displeasure at your church, even if just for a fleeting second, get out of there immediately and find a new one.

—C. S. Lewis

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You want to be a perfect Christian, and that is a noble goal indeed. But first things first. It's impossible to get to the maximum level of holiness if you're currently attending a church that is focused on the wrong things, namely, on anything other than *you*.

Paul David Tripp once wrote that church is a place “where flawed people place their faith in Christ, gather to know and love him better, and learn to love others as he designed.” It's a nice sentiment, but it's also completely *wrong*. Flawed people? Excuse us, Paul, but we're trying to become absolutely perfect here, not hang out with a bunch of messed-up folks. We don't need that kind of negativity in our lives.

And neither do *you*—which is why you're reading this book.

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We know you may have feelings of loyalty or attachment to the humble, local expression of the body of Christ that you've been a part of for years. You need to rid yourself of these unholy emotions. It's time to step back and objectively evaluate whether or not your church is properly equipped to encourage you on your sacred quest to become the ultimate manifestation of impeccable spirituality.

So open your eyes and start looking for the red flags that indicate your church isn't a spiritually fulfilling congregation.

Some of the most common warning signs that your church isn't conducive to your personal growth into a perfect Christian include **a pastor who preaches sermons that make you feel uncomfortable, a worship experience that centers your attention more on God than on your own feelings, and a church staff who refuse to incorporate the advice from the thousands of helpful comment cards you've left over the years.** These kinds of churches are dangerous. If you find yourself treading water in a similar spiritual wasteland, it's time for your very first step toward spiritual awesomeness: church shopping.

Your journey to living a flawless Christian life begins today! Ditch that group of hopeless losers who have been holding you back and instead find a church that's built around *you*—and all of your needs and desires.

According to recent research, every single town in America has a minimum of 6,521,587 churches to choose from, so you've got your work cut out for you. You actually have a better

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chance of winning the lottery while getting struck by lightning than of picking a good church near you on the first shot. So it's a great thing you have this book to help you out.*

In the olden days of the apostles (circa 1950), there were just a few churches in town. If you wanted to visit one, you had to put on your Sunday best and build up the courage to march right in the front door without having a clue as to what to expect. **What a nightmare.** But—thanks be to God—these are the days of the World Wide Web, a magical portal to all kinds of great resources (and almost nothing bad or degrading—lots of wholesome stuff, mostly). So you get what the church fathers could only dream of: the benefit of shopping around online for a church from the comfort of your own home.

Approximately twenty years after the magical Internet sprang up out of nowhere and revolutionized modern communication and commerce, churches discovered they, too, could create a website and spread the good news through the magic of technology. So the first step in selecting a new, improved local body of Christ is to Google churches nearby and start separating the wheat from the chaff.

Try search terms like “church near me that has cool coffee

* We again commend you on your impeccable discernment in choosing this piece of literature. Some suckers are reading a Tim Keller book right now with all his C. S. Lewis quotes and Lord of the Rings excerpts. Chumps, all of them. Keller books are a dime a dozen, while this book is going to go down in the annals of history as a turning point for Christianity. Think *Pilgrim's Progress* or *The Purpose Driven Life*, then kick it up a few levels, and that's the book you're holding right now. Not quite canonical, but the next best thing.

bar” or “church near me that isn’t weird or stuffy” or “good trendy church near me that uses T-shirt cannons.” Just have fun with it. You ought to use any search terms you think will help you sift through the millions of nonpersonalized churches in your area and find a true diamond in the rough: a church that emphasizes and cultivates the historical Christian virtues of convenience and comfort.

Your search will likely return approximately four billion hits, but don’t worry—we’ll sort through them together.

The first thing to look at is the church’s name, which provides all kinds of clues to help rule out churches that stubbornly refuse to cater to your felt needs 24/7. A lame name is a big no-no.

What you’re really looking for is a church with a name that sounds like either a **retirement community** or a **natural disaster**.

Whispering Pines Community Church or Cedar Grove Church, for instance, are probably churches that are worthy of your presence. These names could easily be confused with an apartment complex, a mini-mall, or a delightful retirement community—consider this a sign that you’re on the right track.

Alternatively, the church should have a name reminiscent of a destructive act of God. For example, consider checking out churches with names like Granite Deluge of Life, Floodwaters Collective, Whirlwind Love Fellowship, or Blazing Inferno Church. If the church sounds like its name alone could crush

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you under the destructive weight of its awesomeness, you're probably going to be in for an exciting, you-centric experience.

What you should be very cautious of is any church with a name that brazenly indicates an affiliation with any of the major evangelical denominations, just hanging out there for the whole world to see. First Baptist Church, Grace Methodist Church, or New Life Presbyterian Church are examples of churches to avoid. After all, you're looking for an *organic, custom-fit experience*, not a stuffy old denomination. If the church meets you halfway with a name like Hurricane of Life Baptist, proceed, but with caution.

Speaking of Baptists, this would be a good time to get into some specifics about **denominations**. There are several denominations to choose from. So let's break down what each of them has in store for you.

If you do decide to go with a **Baptist** church, it's certainly a noble heritage. Baptist churches have been around since, well, John the Baptist. It's right in his name. This means that Baptist churches have literally been around since before the New Testament, so you know you're going to please God by attending one of His elect church denominations.

Be warned, however, that Baptist churches come with a lot of rules, even though you do get really great potlucks chock-full of superhealthy food. First of all, you can't consume any drink stronger than a Diet Mountain Dew within fifty feet of a Baptist church. Trust us, it's in the church's bylaws.

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Also, the closest you're allowed to get to dancing is an awkward swaying motion during a really powerful praise chorus or hymn, and even that's a real gray area, so be really, really careful.

If the Baptists sound too stuffy, you could try the **Pentecostals**, who allow you to get drunk, but only on the Holy Spirit (it's not as awesome as it sounds). Pentecostalism was conceived by a group of Christians who were totally high after attending a particularly groovy ABBA concert in Southern California in the fall of '79. As a result, this denomination is totally cool with dancing, especially during worship songs, sermons, announcements, the offertory—it's pretty much *Soul Train* at all times when you're among a charismatic congregation. Just be sure to pack your own tambourine or dancing ribbon so you'll fit right in when wild, noisy gyrations begin erupting all around you.

For those of you who consider yourselves truly righteous, you might want to choose a **Presbyterian** or **Reformed** church.* These guys don't have time to mess around, so you'd better fall in line once you join their ranks. So much as a single hand raised in the air during an awesome, obscure hymn you've probably never heard of can land you a disciplinary hearing

* Of course, never, ever say you chose a Reformed church. Always say that God, in His sovereignty, predestined you from eternity past to attend said church, for His glory alone.

with the deacons—and you do not want to mess with them. There are stories of Reformed deacon boards “disappearing” problem parishioners and erasing any evidence of their existence from all public records. They’re cool with beer though, as long as it’s a craft microbrew with a high enough alcohol content to put down a mature African elephant.*

Mainline denominations can be a nice choice because they won’t really hold you to any theological standards. Mainline doctrinal statements consist solely of questions. But by the time you’ve finished reading this sentence, odds are that every mainline church near you will have closed its doors due to bleeding beliefs and declining attendance. So that’s probably not a solid option for you anyway.

If in your searching you happen to unearth a disquieting website featuring Times New Roman font, late twentieth-century design principles, several spinning GIFs of Satan’s likeness, and links to hundreds of articles about how the NIV was created by an alliance between Beelzebub and the Illuminati in an Area 51 research lab, you’ve stumbled upon a King James–only church. Feel free to check them out, but make sure you bring your ESV, NLT, or *The Message* translation with you when you go. They are really reasonable and level-headed when it comes to discussing translations other than the Authorized

* We’ll have more to say about beer later in the book.

Version from 1611, and dialoguing with these folks can be a joyful and edifying experience.*

So you could try any of the above denominations, but then you'd end up being a total weirdo and not a cool, spiritual, holy, *perfect* Christian.

Wait . . . what?

Yes, we tricked you. Did you think it would be that easy to become a perfect Christian?

If you've been paying even the slightest bit of attention, you ought to understand that you should avoid all of the crazy name-brand quacks and just jump right into a **nondenominational** paradise.

So go back to your Google search. Click on the most promising nondenom link you see with a sweet name, and let's check out their online presence.

In addition to a killer church name and a lack of denominational identity, a church that will help you achieve perfection will have a **superslick website**. Any local body that hasn't updated its upcoming-events page since the fall picnic of 2002 should be rejected out of hand. Their lack of Web 3.0 skills obviously indicates they don't care about Jesus at all. You want up-to-the-minute information telling everyone what the pastor is up to, live streaming video for those Sundays when you just

* Please note: *The Babylon Bee* bears no responsibility for your well-being should you attempt this maneuver.

don't feel like going to church, and tons of upcoming events and programs for your entertainment.

Once you manage to find a website belonging to a run-of-the-mill nondenominational church displaying acceptable web design prowess, there are a few other key indicators to look for to make sure it's the kind of place you want to be on a Sunday morning.

One of the marks of a healthy church website is the frequent use of heavily filtered stock images that perfectly encapsulate that aesthetic you need to truly worship the Lord. If the church site you're checking out has pictures of people with a realistic level of attractiveness, close your Internet tab right away and try again. Ideally, the church you target will feature several images of young, unrealistically attractive models smiling and raising their hands as if worshipping with reckless abandon or desperately trying to flag down a passing car.

Another important mark of a healthy church is that it **does not have a statement of faith**. If there is a list of dogmatic beliefs anywhere on the website, no matter how well it's hidden, run. Flee. Stay very far away. At most, allow for the church to have a vague page titled "Our Journey" or "The God Story" that lays out a very fluid set of general teachings in poetic cadence. A beliefs page that simply lists some U2 lyrics is all right by us too, as long as they're not from that awful *Pop* album.

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<i>Unacceptable Statement of Faith Excerpt</i>	<i>Acceptable Statement of Faith Excerpt</i>
We believe the Bible to be the Word of God, perfect in all its parts, truth without any mixture of error, and useful for all areas of the believer's life.	In the locust wind comes a rattle and hum Jacob wrestled the angel And the angel was overcome

Remember, you're going to be stuck at this place for months or, in rare instances, *years*. You want a place that's not going to pin you down too rigidly on any of your key doctrinal beliefs. Their positions should be vague enough that you can slip by with your shifting, undefined understanding of the Christian faith completely intact. We know it's difficult to pass on a church that checks all the right boxes but fails in this regard, but we're looking out for you, and you have to trust us. *The last thing you want is to be forced to take a stance on a core doctrine of the Christian faith.* This is for your own good, brother or sister in Christ!

Navigating through the website's various pages and menus, you ought to find their logo prominently displayed (ideally, it should take up the entire top half of your screen, but we won't be too rigid on this). Make sure the church has a logo that is just straight *fire*. Literally. It should have fire in it. Or water.

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Glorious, blazing fire or cool, refreshing water. But barring these two metaphorical images, something really modern and ornate is ideal. A simple cross or clip-art image of a Bible is so ten years ago and not befitting a cutting-edge body of Christ or a Christian as awesome as you.

Finally, surf your way to the part of the website where you can check out the vast array of ministries and services your potential new church has to offer. If you find only Sunday morning services, Wednesday night Bible studies, and a small group or two listed, that's just not gonna cut it. This is a huge red flag, and you've got to cut this one loose. A respectable church should offer more upcoming shindigs than any local club, venue, or arena. We're talking no less than three dozen wild events in the next month. That's a bare minimum.

Their ministries should be wide and varied, with ultra-specific groups tailor-made for every age level, walk of life, race, color, creed, nationality, hobby, gender, hair color, and species under the sun. After all, can we really call a local gathering a New Testament church if they don't offer a middle-aged male former Ping-Pong enthusiasts ministry?

Now, with any luck, you've narrowed down your search using the magic of the Internet. You've found a church that looks as though it could help you along the path to perfection. Great!

The next big step is to perform a drive-by. You want to scope the place out in person before committing to anything or meeting anybody who might want to talk to you.

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Hop into the family minivan and cruise on by your potential new Sunday gathering place. At this point, if the commute takes any more than three minutes, abort the mission. Church commutes of five, ten, fifteen, or more minutes are simply not convenient, and we've already established that convenience is what it's all about. In addition, if the church is more than three minutes away from you, why hasn't the pastor launched a satellite campus right down the road from you? Why don't they just put a big pop-up on their site saying, "We don't value you"? Any church with less than twelve satellite campuses is probably dying anyway.

Pull up to your prospective church, situated a short distance from your home, hopefully with plenty of parking and a gorgeous, well-manicured, expensive-looking property. Ideally, the main church building will be of modern construction, no older than five or six years. The more indistinguishable the structure is from a shopping mall, nightclub, or theme park the better.*

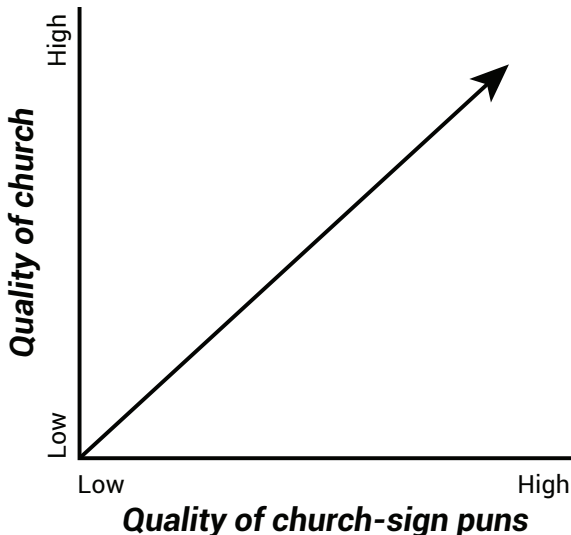
Look out for noncontemporary warning signs like steeples, crosses, hymnbooks, or any other old-looking funny business that might indicate anything traditional or time tested. Stained-glass windows or evidence indicating the pastor is preaching methodically through a book of the Bible should also raise your suspicions.

This is a great place to tell you all about **church signs**. You

* An Ohio man once shopped at a shopping mall for over twenty years before realizing it was actually a church. That church's seeker-sensitivity game was seriously on point!

know, the marquee out in front of many churches, facing the street. The church sign is an ancient art dating back to the days of Solomon's temple (see 1 Kings 6) and is really a canvas on which pastors and other important church staff bring to life some of the modern world's very best artistic expressions in the form of puns that are equal parts witty and inviting.

A church sign might say something really clever like “Brush up on your morals to prevent truth decay!” or “1 cross plus 3 nails = 4 given.” The puns should be funny, but this is no laughing matter—there are countless stories of people being converted on the spot by anointed church-sign puns. So feel free to pass your holy, righteous judgment on any church based solely on the quality of the wordplay on the marquee. Remember: a puntastic church is a quality church.



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In any case, this might be a moot point, because the kind of church that suits you is probably too hip and avant-garde even for a sweet sign out front.

And there's only one type of church that can be awesome while lacking a church sign.

We are talking about the holy grail of modern churches, friend: **the megachurch.**

The only sign a megachurch should have is a cutting-edge modern art piece proudly declaring its name in big stainless-steel, sans-serif letters. Ideally, the church also has wacky inflatable air dancers elegantly announcing to the surrounding neighborhood: "Hey! We exist! Please come here. Please!" Balloon arches, giant rotating arrow signs, bounce houses for children *and* adults, and big inflatable gorillas are all acceptable forms of outdoor advertising as well. And they're also key indicators that the church you're looking at has big bucks to spend, meaning they're probably doing pretty well—always a definite sign of God's blessing.*

After all, you're looking for a church that can encourage you toward excellence. How are they supposed to do that if they don't have an annual operating budget larger than most third-world countries? How are they going to help you become a perfect Christian if they don't run the church like a Fortune

* Source: TBN.

500 business? On what planet could a church ever effectively declare Christ to your neighborhood without having tens of thousands of people show up for worship each week at their main campus and dozens of franchises?

If the church has a lit name, a slick website, no statement of faith, a modern building, and membership of at least fifteen thousand each week, then great! You may have found the place where God will have your material needs met and keep you entertained (at least until a cooler, more modern church comes along). But for now, slip out of your crusty old church without so much as a goodbye, and get ready to visit your new home at whichever of the nine weekend service times is most convenient for you.

We want to take a moment at this point to let you know you're doing a great job of becoming a perfect Christian. **You're well on your way.** Lots of people would have started to question whether or not choosing a church is really all about finding a place where you're comfortable and catered to. But not you—you're sticking this out because you know God wants to give you His best blessings now!

You really are special. Just sit there for a moment and think about how amazing you are. We'll wait.

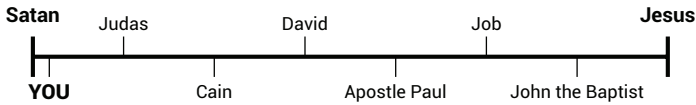
Done? Great. Then let's gear up to walk you through your first Sunday morning visit inside your potential new church!

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Holiness Progress Tracker 5000



Using patented motion-tracking technology developed in conjunction with LifeWay Research, The Babylon Bee's proprietary Holiness Progress Tracker 5000 will provide you with helpful updates as you move along on your personal path of sanctification over the course of this book.

Looks like you're somewhere between Satan and Judas at this point. Not good!

Best get to reading chapter 2 if you care about your eternal fate at all!

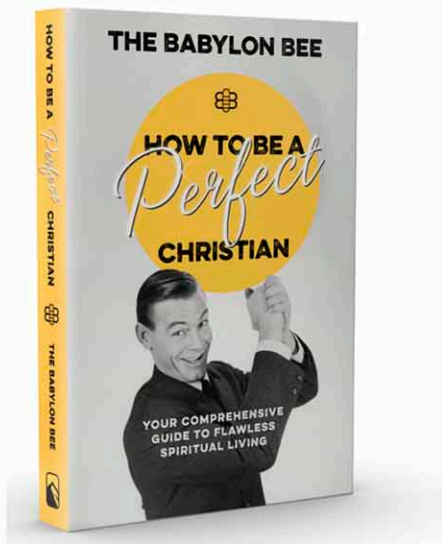
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