
first steps

beginning the disciple's journey



brandon guindon // jim putman

congratulations!

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY OF GOD! You have just made the most important decision of your life, and we are celebrating with you. By accepting Jesus into your life, you have taken the initial step of what will be a remarkable journey. The Bible calls this journey a race. By accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you have just begun an amazing race with eternity at the finish line.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

- Hebrews 12:1-2

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Because we want you to be successful in your Christian race, *First Steps* has been designed to help you process the journey of moving from believer to disciple. In *First Steps*, you will gain a basic understanding of how the world got to where it is today, how Jesus restores what is broken, and how God wants to use you to assist Him in this process. Rest assured, as you begin to understand and follow Jesus, He will change you in the process. Bottom line, *First Steps* will challenge you to grow in your passion for Jesus and His mission to save a broken world.

Making disciples of Jesus Christ by its very nature is a process that reproduces. Our hope is that there will come a day when you take someone through this workbook yourself as the mentor.

Let's get started...

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workbook expectations

This book is different from other books that you may have read. It is designed to guide you to examine biblical principles and apply them to your life. As a new follower of Christ, we want to challenge you to process through the information. We believe to get the most from this study you must not only take your time, but also have someone that is helping you walk through the information. Vital to this study, we want you to have a mentor or small group leader walk with you through the material. So, as you learn more about who Jesus is and what it means to be a disciple, we encourage you to spend time with a more mature person in the Christian faith. Allow the truths we discuss to penetrate deep into your heart.

Before you start...

Expectations for the mentor:

- Be consistent with your meeting times.
- Read ahead and be prepared by knowing the material.
- Anticipate potential questions.
- Know the Time to Reflect sections well.
- Be in prayer for those you are leading.
- Always be sensitive to what God is teaching you as well.

In your journey through First Steps, you will learn...

- how to be a “disciple”
- how to follow Christ and grow into a mature disciple
- how to recognize the changes Jesus makes in you
- how to participate in the mission of Christ

On your journey in First Steps, you will need...

- a Bible – a New Testament is included in the back of this book
- this workbook
- a mentor or small group leader
- optional - a basic Bible commentary

Success in your journey with First Steps, depends on your...

- **COMMITMENT:** Be committed to a relationship with a mentor or small group leader. Schedule a weekly meeting with your mentor to go over the week’s lessons. This should take about an hour.
- **CONSISTENCY:** Each week you will go through three days of lessons. By the end of the week, you will need to have completed the three days and be prepared to discuss the answers with your mentor or small group leader. The lessons themselves should take about 30 minutes to complete, with the lessons on Day 1 being the longest.
- **CONTROL:** Learning good study habits is crucial for growing. Do NOT skip any or some of the lessons. If life becomes too busy and you do not have your work done, please do not skip the material. Each day builds on the previous day, so take your time and finish each lesson.
- **COMPANIONSHIPS:** Do NOT try to complete this journey on your own. Relationships with other believers will prove essential to understanding the journey of moving from membership to discipleship.

Sections to note:

🕒 *Time to Reflect*

- These are intentional questions that you should process with your mentor.
- They help promote relationship along with internal reflection.

❖ *Just so you know...*

- Each page covers an issue that is frequently discussed in the Christian community.
- They explain important topics that are essential to your Christian walk.

introduction

Our starting point - Is there real evidence?

We are so excited that you have begun your journey as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We have dedicated our lives to aiding others in understanding who Jesus is, what He came for, and how we can assist Him in His mission. Our hope is that through this devotional workbook, you, too, will grow in your desire to pursue Jesus Christ with everything you've got!

It is our hope that even though our backgrounds and stories are different, you will see, through our experiences, that we are on this journey together.

JIM'S JOURNEY: From history to His-story

I started as a pastor's son in a Christian home. My parents were sincere, faithful followers of Jesus, but because sin entered into my life at a very young age, guilt and shame isolated me from them and from God. I sought to cover my shame and pain through drugs, alcohol, and sex. These left deep scars and addictions in my life. When I went to college, the professors taught me that there was no God, and that I was the product of evolutionary forces – a mere animal with instincts. I believed them and walked away from any form of a spiritual life.

When sin consumed my life and left me absolutely empty and alone, God heard the prayers of my parents and began to draw me back.

First, my father sent me books that were written by scientists that believed in God. I had been taught that to be educated meant you did not believe in the supernatural. I found the truth was that many scientists believed in God, and in fact, that science itself had proven that the world had to be designed. I began reading quotes by world famous scientists. I studied countless books, and my research led me to quotes like these:

“It is my science that drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science. It was only through the supernatural that I can understand the mystery of existence.”

- Allen Rex Sandage, *Cosmologist and Scientist*

“The best data we have are exactly what I would have predicted had I nothing to go on but the first five books of Moses, the Psalms, and the Bible as a whole.”

- Arno Penzias, *a Nobel Prize winning scientist*

(Note - The first five books of Moses are the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy)

As I came to this realization, it did not mean I believed in the Christian God, only that I was open to belief of a god.

Next, my father sent me books from noted historians claiming that the only religion that could be proved historically was Christianity. At first, I scoffed at this, but my father challenged me to look into why these historians claimed this. After some time, I began my own journey to discover if what they said was true. This journey both surprised me and changed the course of my life.

Until this time, I had always believed that the story of the Bible had been changed over time. I discovered that this was not true. Great historians believe that the Bible was written by men who walked with Jesus, and it is the same today as when it was written. I read great works by Dr. John T. Robinson of Cambridge University and Sir Fredrick G. Kenyon, Chief Librarian of the British Museum. Scholars like these men helped me see that there was actual educational research to support the Bible and what it says.

Other people had told me that the writers of the New Testament lied about what happened so that they could become famous and rich. However, as I studied that claim, I found that history proves this untrue. Every one of the New Testament writers suffered for their faith. They lost their possessions, their reputations, and in many cases, they watched those they loved die for their beliefs.

This led me to ask a very powerful question, "What would cause someone to passionately promote something with nothing in return except misery and even death?" I found that the writers of the New Testament were different than writers of any other religion in history. The writers of other religions became wealthy, prominent, and powerful, but not the first followers of Jesus.

These early Christ followers were persecuted in the following ways:

Luke was hung on an olive tree in Greece by a pagan priest.

James, the brother of John, was beheaded in 44 A.D.

Philip was scourged, thrown into prison, and then crucified in 54 A.D.

Matthew was run through with a sword in 60 A.D.

James, the brother of Jesus, was beaten with a club and then stoned.

Mathias was stoned and then beheaded.

Andrew, the brother of Peter, was crucified.

Mark was dragged to pieces by horse.

Peter was crucified upside down.

Jude was crucified in Edessa in 72 A.D.

Bartholomew was beaten and then crucified.

Thomas was run through with a spear.

Simon was crucified in 74 A.D.

Barnabas was hung in 73 A.D.

John was banished to an island to die isolated and alone.

The more I studied history, the more evidence emerged. I found the truth, or rather the truth found me. Without wavering, I fully believe Jesus is the Son of God, and that He came to tell us the truth from God's perspective. He came to tell us where we came from, how the world got this way, and what God wants us to do about it. He came to tell us that He loves us, and where we are going after we die.

Jesus came to shed light on a dark world by offering you a relationship with Himself. I am hopeful that as you go through this book you will come to understand the truth in a way that gives you hope and purpose. I continue my journey walking with God because I fully believe that the Bible is the truth. I have experienced a relationship with God unlike anything I could have imagined. I am so thankful He changed my story. I pray, hope, and believe you will let Him change yours as well.

Jim

Time to Reflect

Read the statements below and check the box that best describes you. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I have never thought about historical evidences that might exist proving Christianity to be true.
- I know that Jesus is true and desire to study the historical evidences, but I need some good resources.
- I know that Jesus is true, and I am studying some of the historical evidences. I would enjoy doing this even more.

The historical background is important for us today to know that Jesus is real, and that He really did what the Bible says He did. We encourage you to pursue a life of learning and building up your faith. The research and historical evidences are an important part of knowing your faith. Discuss with your mentor some resources that might be helpful to you.

Setting some goals

Before we go any further in First Steps, we want to help you set some goals. This will help you with self-reflection before starting this journey with us. Take a moment to answer these questions.

1. Think forward and imagine you have just finished week 6 of our study. What do you hope to take away from this study?

2. To walk closely with Jesus, what seems to be your greatest challenge right now? (i.e. prayer, bible knowledge, service in the church, busy, etc.)

3. What goals will you establish now to improve in that area?

BRANDON'S JOURNEY: Discipleship is a process

One of the things my dad taught me was how to hunt. At first, I just followed him as we hiked through the woods. I watched how he used different tools like binoculars or a knife. I learned how to read the terrain and what kinds of habitat held certain species of animals. After I got a little older, he allowed me to start carrying a gun and hunt alongside him. Before too long, I was off on my own. I began putting into practice all the skills that he modeled for me, and soon I became a successful hunter. Today, I am teaching my own children outdoor hunting principles that they can use.

One thing I have learned in the process of becoming a successful hunter is the more I learn, the less I really know. I don't know everything there is to know about hunting. While I consider myself a good hunter, I haven't mastered all the outdoorsman skills necessary to become a great hunter. I continue to do the things I've learned from my dad, but I also attempt new things in my desire to become better. It is this process, though, that brings hunting to life for me. The process of learning, growing, and passing on the skills and knowledge I have is vital to those I get to share the outdoors with, especially my children.

So how will you become a disciple? Similar to the example of my dad modeling hunting for me, we need a person to model for us what a disciple should look like. God uses relationships to help us grow, and become the disciple He intended. Christianity was never designed to be done alone; everyone needs someone to walk with him on the journey. In fact, having a group of concerned and compassionate people walking with us is even better! Jesus gave us this example in the Bible with His disciples. He called out several men to live life with Him for a period of time while He was here on earth.

First Steps follows the relationship example Jesus had with His disciples. This is why it's vitally important that you utilize First Steps with another person. A good choice would be the person who led you to Christ, or your small group leader. Throughout this book, we will call this person your mentor. Decide together a time and place – preferably weekly – to meet and discuss what you are learning. Remember, when two or three are gathered in Jesus name, He promises to be there also.

➤ Who is your mentor?

➤ When and where will you meet?

➤ If you are in a small group, who are your group members? Have them each sign here:

I am so very excited for you. The Lord of the universe chose you to be His personal disciple. Thank you for taking the “First Steps.”

Brandon

Time to Reflect

Read the statements below and check the box that best describes you.
Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I have never given my life to Christ, and to this point He has only been a religious figure to me. I want to accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior now.
- I have given my life to Jesus, but beyond Him being my Savior, I know very little about Him.
- I have given my life to Jesus and have read the Bible some. I struggle to understand, and I still have so much to learn.
- I have given my life to Jesus and I am growing in my faith. It is my sincere hope that this study will help me learn even more.

If you checked the first box, we are so excited! We want you to know that Jesus accepts you as you are. Please make sure you discuss this decision with your mentor. If you checked one of the other boxes, don't worry, you are on the right path. First Steps is designed to keep you moving the right direction.

just so you know...

What do I need to know about the Bible?

It is true and without error

The Bible is God's direct word to us, and was written by human authors who were under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. The truths of the Bible guide us and help us grow in our faith. We need the Bible. We can trust that the Bible is true and has no error in it because it is from God.

It contains many books in two major sections

The Bible is divided into two major parts, the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament was mostly written in Hebrew, and consists of 39 different books. It was written before Christ came to earth as a man, and tells about the history of the Jews. God's Son, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, comes from Jewish lineage. The Old Testament also includes prophecies about Jesus and the end times. Jesus has already fulfilled many of these prophecies, and we continue to see Old Testament prophecies come to pass today.

The New Testament begins after a 400-year silent period from God. It consists of 27 books, and was originally written in Greek. The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. These books tell us about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The rest of the New Testament gives us the history of the early church, letters from the apostles to the first churches, and insight into the end of time.

There are various versions of the Bible

So, now that you have the background, it's time to buy your own Bible. What do you think you're going to find? Well, to be honest, you may find yourself a little overwhelmed! There are many different Bible versions out there.

Let's talk about the difference between a translation and a paraphrase first. A translation of the Bible is when the words are taken from the original languages in which they were written and translated to the English language. There is obviously a little author interpretation in even a translation of the Bible, but the intent is to stay as close to the original language as possible.

A paraphrase takes an English translation of the Bible, and interprets it into an even easier, reader-friendly form. You should not use a paraphrase for in depth Bible study, but it can be helpful when you need clarity about what something means in simpler wording.

It may be helpful to own a paraphrase to use when you want to simply read the Bible, and a translation to use for reading and studying.

Below are some examples of English language translations and paraphrases that are popular today:

Translation

NLT (New Living Translation)
This is the version used in this book
NIV (New International Version)
ESV (English Standard Version)
NET (New English Translation)

Paraphrase

TLB (The Living Bible)
MSG (The Message)

Some Bibles have different features

In addition to the different versions, there are different types of Bibles available. Study Bibles have extra study guides included. In some Bibles, the words spoken by Jesus are printed in red ink. Large print Bibles are available, and there are even Bibles divided into daily reading plans.

The Bible is available online and in mobile apps

There are many apps and websites that you can use to read and study the Bible as well. These often include a variety of translations and paraphrases. Many offer daily reading plans, highlighting and sharing options, and some will even read out loud to you! A few good options are YouVersion.com and BibleGateway.com

week 1 — the problem: how did we get here?

The other day I was talking to a woman about God. She refused to even consider the facts about His existence. She believed that if there is a God, He wouldn't allow all the pain in the world. As I began to probe into her perspective, she shared that she had been abused by her father and ignored by her mother. The grandmother that had really cared for her died of cancer. She went on to talk about wars and hunger all around the world. Her conclusion? No God.

It's true that we are born into a broken world. All you have to do is look around, and you can see it. So how does this fit with a good, all-powerful God? That is what this chapter is about. Our hope is that you will discover how the world got to be this way. It is also our hope that you will see this temporary world for what it is—beautiful and broken at the same time.

day 1: ADAM'S CHOICE: SIN

God created a perfect and beautiful planet for us. He crafted a brightly shining sun, a softly glowing moon and set twinkling lights overhead. The seas were teeming with life. He filled the earth with rich soil, lush greenery, delicious fruit, and majestic animals. He designed a lovely garden where we could live in absolute peace with Him and with each other. So what happened? Adam chose to sin. In its simplistic sense, sin is doing exactly what God instructs us not to do, or not doing what He instructs us to do.

One of God's greatest demonstrations of His love for you is the gift of 'choice.' God gives us the option of choosing whom we would follow. From the beginning, God wanted us to choose him, but ultimately it was our choice. Unfortunately Adam chose sin and sin set into motion the destruction of God's perfect world. In choosing sin, Adam severed our personal relationship with God.

1. Take a moment to read Genesis 1:1-10, and then answer the questions below.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

³ Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light "day" and the darkness "night."

And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

⁶ Then God said, "Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth." ⁷ And that is what happened. God

made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens.⁸ God called the space “sky.”

And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

⁹Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened.¹⁰ God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

- Genesis 1:1-10

- During the Creation, what word did God use to describe His creation?

- List all of the things you remember that God said was good.

When things are as they were created to be, everything is good. God said several times that His creation was good. The light, the dry ground and the waters, the vegetation, the sun, moon and stars, the birds and fish, the animals, and man and woman were all deemed good by God. At Creation, the world was orderly and beautiful. God and man enjoyed a close relationship, and the relationship between Adam and Eve was intimate and safe.

2. Next, read Genesis 2:15-17. Fill in the blank below.

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.¹⁶ But the Lord God warned him, “You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—¹⁷except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”

- Genesis 2:15-17

God warned Adam and Eve that they were free to eat from every tree but one. He told them if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would _____.

God told them they would die if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
3. Now, read Genesis 3:1-13 and answer the question that follows.

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, “Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?”

² *“Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,” the woman replied.* ³ *“It’s only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, ‘You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.’”*

⁴ *“You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman.* ⁵ *“God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”*

⁶ *The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too.* ⁷ *At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.*

⁸ *When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees.* ⁹ *Then the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”*

¹⁰ *He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.”*

¹¹ *“Who told you that you were naked?” the Lord God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”*

¹² *The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”*

¹³ *Then the Lord God asked the woman, “What have you done?”*

“The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

- Genesis 3:1-13

How did sin affect the world immediately after Adam and Eve disobeyed God?

- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

You should have written something like this:

- Adam and Eve became open to sin. They were wrong and felt ashamed. Sin leads to shame and guilt.
- They immediately were afraid of God and hid from Him. Sin leads to a broken relationship with God.
- Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the snake. Sin leads to broken relationships with others.

4. God warned Adam and Eve that disobedience would lead to death in Genesis 2:15-17. Adam and Eve did not understand all that this would mean, so God explained all of the consequences in Genesis 3:14-19. Write an example of each consequence from your experience.

- a. There will be hostility between the devil and man – a spiritual war.

- b. The woman will suffer pain in child bearing.

- c. There will be a power struggle between the husband and the wife.

- d. The man will have to do hard work all the days of his life.

- e. The world will produce weeds. It is corrupted and no longer perfect.

- f. Man will experience physical death.

Hopefully, you answered these to the best of your ability. Discuss your answers with your mentor.

Time to Reflect

Which statement best describes your understanding of the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's command? Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I have no idea how Adam and Eve eating that fruit has affected the world.
- I can see how Adam and Eve's disobedience impacted the world.
- I understand how my sin not only affects me, but also others around me.

So, what caused the world to start the process of dying and corruption? Before we get into that, let's lay out some truths. God is life. He is not only the creator, but also the sustainer of life.

5. Read these verses, and then answer the question below.

*How great is our Lord! His power is absolute!
His understanding is beyond comprehension!
⁶The Lord supports the humble,
but he brings the wicked down into the dust.*

- Psalm 147:5–6

The Father has life in himself, and he has granted that same life-giving power to his Son.

- John 5:26

What do these verses tell us about God's power?

God has great power! He is the all-powerful God. He can grant life and take it away. God is also a relational God, and He allows us to choose to love and obey Him. He created us in His image—to be relational beings. He chose us and wanted us to choose Him too. Adam and Eve decided to listen to the enemy and to their own desires rather than trust and obey God.

6. Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20 and then answer the question below.

“Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster. ¹⁶For I command you this day to love the Lord your God and to keep his commands, decrees, and regulations by walking in his ways. If you do this, you will live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you and the land you are about to enter and occupy.

¹⁷“But if your heart turns away and you refuse to listen, and if you are drawn away to serve and worship other gods, ¹⁸then I warn you now that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live a long, good life in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy.

¹⁹“Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live! ²⁰You can make this choice by loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and committing

yourself firmly to him. This^{al} is the key to your life. And if you love and obey the Lord, you will live long in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

- Deuteronomy 30:15–20

How does Deuteronomy 30:15-20 speak to God’s desire for us to choose Him?

When we reject Jesus, we refuse a relationship with God, and we are condemned to live in the earthly consequences of this world for eternity. This choice keeps us separated from God. Romans 5:12 says, *“When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.”* When we choose to sit on the thrones of our own lives, we choose to reject God for who He is. Remember, God is creator and sustainer of life. If we choose to be separated from life, we will surely die.

A modern day example of this is the cell phone. As long as it’s on the charger, the charge holds. The moment it is taken off the charger, the battery begins to die.

Thank God there is good news in spite of all of this! In the next section, you will understand that when we accept Jesus, we become beloved children of God! We are restored into a full and fruitful relationship with Him.

Time to Reflect

What impacted you the most from this lesson? Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I feel overwhelmed by God’s power.
- I never realized that my choice to follow my own plan may have caused consequences in my life.
- I am relieved to know that there is good news!

← *Review*

- At creation, God said that everything was good and Adam's relationship with Eve and with God was intimate and good.
- Adam and Eve's disobedience (sin) caused separation from God and brought consequences, including death.
- When we reject God, we suffer the consequences of our sin, including death.

day 2: GOD'S CHOICE: LOVE

When Jesus came to the earth, He came to reveal the heart of God to a lost world. Because of sin and separation, the world did not understand the heart of God. Jesus explained, through stories, God's perspective of the world, and how it got that way. One such story, as recorded in Luke 15:10-32, has become renowned as *The Prodigal Son*:

"In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."

¹¹ *To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. ¹² The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.*

¹³ *"A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴ About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. ¹⁵ He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.*

¹⁷ *"When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."*

²⁰ *"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. ²¹ His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'*

²² *"But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.*

²⁵ *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, ²⁶ and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.'*

²⁸ *"The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, ²⁹ but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. ³⁰ Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!'*

³¹ “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours.’³² We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

Jewish tradition accounts that children only receive their inheritance after their fathers died. In a sense, the younger son was saying, “You are dead to me, and I could care less about your reputation, your love, or your leadership. Notice that both sons had resentment towards the father for different reasons. Neither of them was thankful for what their father had already done for them.

This story reveals not only the heart of God, but also how the world got to be the way it is. God allows us to leave in hopes that we will come to our senses and come home. He will not force us to love and obey Him. We are relational beings just like Him, and relationship is a choice. Love cannot be forced, but is received and given freely. Sometimes the most loving thing God can do is allow us to leave and experience pain. Only then will we discover that every command He gives is motivated by His love for our good.

Time to Reflect

Place a check beside the character you most identify with and tell why. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

The father

Why? _____

The younger son

Why? _____

The older son

Why? _____

1. Circle the statements below that best answer the question.

Why do you think the younger son left his father?

- He forgot the benefits of living at home and thought he was missing something the world had to offer.
- He thought the father was wrong about what would happen if he tried to do things his own way.
- He thought he could do a better job of deciding what was right and wrong.

What did the younger son discover about the world and himself when he was not under the protection of the father?

- The world isn't safe without the father's protection.
- The father knew things that he didn't, and he should trust him.
- He should have been thankful for what he had rather than wanting what the world provided.
- The world looks good until you go into it. Then you recognize that there are consequences to your actions.

What do you think Jesus is trying to say to the older brother-- the "good Jews" he represents?

- The older brother is better than the younger one.
- The older brother may not have left the father physically, but was still in broken relationship with him because of a sinful heart.
- The father cares more for the one who stayed than the one who left.
- The father cares more about the one who left than the one who stayed.
- The father's heart is to be in relationship with all of his children.

Why do you think the father allowed his son to have his inheritance early, and why did he allow his son to go?

- He didn't care about his son.
- He knew that relationship is a choice, and whether his son stayed or left, relationship had been broken because his son did not love him.
- He knew he had to allow the son to experience the consequences of his decisions to understand the heart of his father.
- The father knew that sometimes a child must experience the consequences of his decisions before he will believe his parents.

What do we learn about the father's choice for both of his sons?

- The father chose to love them both even though they had sinned in different ways.
- The father desired both sons to come into the party and experience his love.
- The father chose to run out to both sons to say come in.
- He didn't want the son who left to come home.

We're All Prodigal at some Point in Our Lives!

My oldest son, Christian, decided to reject my love and do his own thing, just like the son in the Bible story. He became a drug addicted young man who nearly lost his sanity for good. I could not protect him during that time because he would not let me. Every attempt I made to do so, he took as a threat to his freedom. Every rule I set was for his good, but he didn't see it that way. Finally, after several stays in jail and much to the distress of our family, we had to let him go.

He ended up in a homeless shelter with others that had damaged their minds, relationships, and lives as he had. Like the son in the story, it was there, in the homeless shelter, that he discovered love. His mom and I, as well as his brothers, grandparents, and others, loved him and wanted only what was best for him. While he was away, the pain in our hearts was indescribable. We dreaded that he would hurt himself or someone else while he was on drugs.

During that time, a friend of mine found out that my son was at a homeless shelter. Without asking, he went to where my son was, and took him to lunch. He spent time with him and told him how much his mother and I loved him. He sat there and prayed for my son. He sought after my son several times neither asking me nor informing me. When I later found out what this man had done, I was overwhelmed with gratefulness.

The best thing this man could do for me was to care for my son and point him back home. This is the way the Lord feels when we pursue one of his lost children. When Christian did come back home, we threw a party and celebrated his return.

While I shared Christian’s story with you, the truth is when I was young, I did the same thing to my parents. I destroyed my own life because of my hard heart and darkened understanding of the world. When my parents loved me and accepted me back, it changed my life. I discovered the heart of God towards me through my parents. However, my journey with my son revealed to me the heart of God towards His children. I understood how God feels towards His children that run from Him, and the lengths He will go to get them back. God’s choice? To love you.

Here is the good news part, folks! God loves us so much that He is willing to allow us to go our own way. Then we discover the truth about our inability to live without God. By allowing us to have our own way, God is able to preserve free will, but most importantly, teach us that He is good and right. Ultimately, we learn that we are lost without Him.

What a wonderful story about God’s love for people who have rebelled against Him. God desires that we come to our senses and come home of our own free will. If we will say, “I have had enough of my own way, and I want to come home,” He immediately receives us and begins a relationship with us. This gives us peace in this life, but more than that, it also leads us to be with our Father forever.

Time to Reflect

Check the boxes that show what you believe about God. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- God created the world broken, and we just have to live in the pain.
- God created the world perfectly, but gave us choices about what we would do with it.
- God allows us to disobey and cause ourselves and others pain because He doesn’t care.
- God allows the world to go its own way in hopes that we will come to our senses and come home.

← *Review*

- God loves us so much, that He gave us freedom to choose to love Him, the freedom to stay or to go.
- When we turn away from God, we will experience pain.
- When we choose to come back to God, He welcomes us with open arms, treats us as if we'd never left, and restores us to our original place as heirs of the kingdom.

day 3: OUR CHOICE: HEALING

In the Prodigal Son story, Jesus’ point is that we are all in need of a Savior. We are all in need of healing. This is why Jesus came. He came to save us, heal us, and restore a personal relationship with the Father!

Remember this. Just because God allows us to go our own way does not mean that He isn’t active in the world, nor does it mean He does not love us. He has a conclusion in mind for healing planet earth, and He is absolutely capable to do what He has in mind to do.

Look up the verses in your Bible. Read them, and then answer the questions that follow.

- 1. Colossians 1:15 – 17

Who created the world? _____

Who was the world created for? _____

- 2. Romans 8:34

What is Jesus doing in the world right now?

- 3. Luke 23:42 – 43

How will your story end if you truly accept Jesus?

NOW THAT’S GOOD NEWS!

Discuss your answers with your mentor. Your answers should be:

1. "The world was created by God through Jesus."
"The world was created for Jesus."
2. "Talking to God for me."
3. "I will be with Him forever."

So you see, God has a plan to save the world and those in the world who accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. You may ask, "But how is God working right now?"

Look up these verses in your Bible. Read them, and for each passage, write in your own words what the passage says about what God is doing right now in our world.

4. John 16:5-15

Who did Jesus send into the world?

5. 1 Corinthians 10:11-13

What is God doing in the life of every believer as it pertains to sin?

6. Philippians 2:13 and Galatians 5:22-25

What is God doing on the inside of us?

7. 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 and Romans 8:28

What will God do with our hurts and mistakes?

The answers to the questions above reveal how deep God's love is for us. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit into the world to guide us. The Holy Spirit uses us to deliver the message of Jesus to others and begin making disciples. God gives us a way to escape when we are tempted, and He is working through the Holy Spirit in us to produce spiritual fruit. Lastly, He will comfort us when we have sorrow, and He works all things out for our good.

8. Psalms 38:3. In the eyes of God, sin makes us...

- Healthy
- Unhealthy

9. Psalms 30:2, Psalm 107:20. Will God heal you if you ask?

- Yes
- No

1 Peter 2:24 states, *“He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross so that we can be dead to sin and live for what is right. By his wounds you are healed.”* While it is certain that God sent Jesus here to die for us, to heal us, and to restore us, He also wanted Jesus to be able to understand us and relate to us. God allowed His Son to become like us so that by His wounds, He could help and heal us.

Like Jesus, God allows us to go through circumstances so that we can experience His healing.

10.2 Corinthians 5:18-21

When we accept God's healing, we become His ambassador. In your own words, what's an ambassador?

Our job is to share God's healing and comfort with others. One of the great things God does is empower us to deal with the things in this world, and yet have hope and joy in spite of it. When this happens, people wonder how that is possible. The greatest miracle is what God does in us.

NEVER, EVER FORGET, while you go through this life, God is working in you, through you, to heal you. In the end, He will make all things right.

Time to Reflect

Check the box that best describes you. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I don't see how God can use me for His purpose.
- I am trying to discover what I am supposed to do next in my life.
- I am excited about what I see Jesus doing in my life, and I want to share it.

Review

- God sent Jesus to save the world and the people who accept Him.
- Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to guide us, to deliver the message of Jesus through us, to rescue us from temptation, to produce spiritual fruit in us, and to comfort us.
- God wants us to share our joy and hope in Him with others.

just so you know...

Who is Jesus?

In Mark 8:27-30, Jesus has a discussion with His disciples. He asked, "Who do people say I am?" The disciples gave Him various answers like John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets. Then Jesus asked them an even more important question. "But who do you say I am?" Peter spoke up and said, "You are the Messiah."

Jesus was born in a little town called Bethlehem. He was born to Mary and Joseph, and He was the Son of God. God had come to Mary to tell her she would give birth to His Son, and she believed and was willing.

Jesus lived for 33 years on this earth. He lived the normal life of a carpenter, but was completely sinless. He performed miracles, and forgave sins. He amazed priests, and held children close. He was unlike any other man in history. He came to this earth knowing He would be sacrificed for sins He didn't commit. Yet, He loved the world so much, He came anyway.

Jesus is the Savior of the world!

week 2 — the solution: who is Jesus?

Jesus made a very bold declaration in John 14:6; He stated, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” Who is this Jesus, and what ‘way, truth, and life’ is He declaring? Without a doubt, Jesus is the most controversial figure in history. In today’s world, the attack on “who” He is, and “what” He did, remains constant and aggressive. The volume of books on “who” Jesus is, and the theology (study of God) behind it, fills libraries. So for the sake of this study, we chose a small slice to hopefully motivate you to go beyond this workbook in your understanding of the greatness and awesomeness of Jesus Christ.

day 1: THE WAY: WHAT THE PROPHETS SAID

When I first gave my life to Christ, I would often hear Christians use the term “prophecy”. I had a basic idea of what it meant, but not a very clear understanding. So, before we dive into the prophecies telling mankind that Jesus was coming, we must first answer an important question -What is prophecy?

The dictionary definition is as follows:

proph·e·cy

n. pl. proph·e·cies

- a. An inspired utterance of a prophet, viewed as a revelation of divine will.
- b. A prediction of the future, made under divine inspiration.
- c. Such an inspired message or prediction transmitted orally or in writing.
- d. The vocation or condition of a prophet.

The Old Testament is filled with prophecies about what would happen in the future. The prophets heard from God, and then they spoke and wrote the message He gave them so that everyone would hear it.

1. Let’s take a moment and look at a specific prophecy written by the prophet Isaiah. Read Isaiah 9:6-7 below.

*For a child is born to us,
a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷ His government and its peace
will never end.
He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David
for all eternity.
The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies
will make this happen!*

- Isaiah 9:6-7

“The way” simply means the direction to the goal. The prophets were foretelling that God will make a way back to Him. What Isaiah predicted came true in its entirety in Luke chapter 2. Because of this, we can trust that God will do what He said He would do. He is our Savior and Lord, and we can believe that whatever He says is true.

2. Take a guess. Isaiah predicted Jesus' birth...

- 25 years before it happened.
- 50 years before it happened.
- 100 years before it happened.
- 350 years before it happened.

This may seem astounding, but none of the answers above are correct. As stated earlier, Luke, chapter 2 records the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. The birth of Jesus in Luke 2 transpired approximately 700 years after Isaiah's prophesy.

The disciples believed because of fulfilled prophecy

One of the reasons the disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah was because of the many prophecies in the Old Testament that they witnessed in the life of Jesus.

A Messiah-Savior is coming to save Israel and the world.

All right then, the Lord himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call him Immanuel (which means 'God is with us')

- Isaiah 7:14

*But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
are only a small village among all the people of Judah.
Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you,
one whose origins are from the distant past.*

- Micah 5:2

A Messiah-Savior would suffer for the sins of the world.

*He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.
He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.
And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.
⁸ Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.
No one cared that he died without descendants,
that his life was cut short in midstream.
But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.*

- Isaiah 53:7-8

What's even more astonishing about Scripture is that Jesus' death also occurred just as Isaiah prophesied above. Exact details of Jesus' life were foretold in the Old Testament, and ALL the prophecies of the Old Testament were completed 400 years before His birth! Let's look at some additional prophecies about the birth of Jesus.

3. Look up these verses in your Bible and then draw lines below to match the prophecy with the fulfillment.

Jesus would be born of a virgin.

Revelation 5:5

Jesus would be crucified.

Mark 15:16-20

Jesus would come from the tribe of Judah.

Matthew 1:18

Jesus' virgin birth was fulfilled in Matthew. Jesus crucifixion is detailed in Mark, and Revelation tells us that Jesus came from the tribe of Judah.

Just as we talked about earlier, God is faithful and His character never changes. He keeps His promises, and fulfills the prophecies of Scripture. Because of these qualities of God, we are able to trust what He says, and believe Him.

4. Write “T” for true or “F” for false next to each statement below.
- a. ____ God knows what will happen before it happens.
 - b. ____ God is not in control, and prophetic events are coincidental.
 - c. ____ God knows what will happen in our future, so we can believe His promises today.
 - d. ____ Jesus is not alive today; there is no recorded evidence of His resurrection.

Only the *b* and *d* statements above are false. God is trustworthy. He will not let you down. So who is Jesus? The prophets predicted a Messiah would be the only way back to God, and God was powerful enough to make the prophecies of the Old Testament come true. He is powerful enough to keep all His promises. He is powerful enough to save you from your sins, and give you eternal life with Him. Hallelujah!

Time to Reflect

What part of this lesson means the most to you and why? Write your answer in the space provided and discuss with your mentor.

Review

- Jesus Christ fulfills the prophecies of the Old Testament that were written hundreds of years before He was born.
- Because we know that God kept His promises by fulfilling the prophecies of Scripture, we know that we can always trust what He says, and believe Him.

day 2: THE TRUTH: WHAT THE DISCIPLES SAW

In a court of law, they ask you to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. A lawyer will begin to ask you to testify to what you have seen. They want to know what you have personally witnessed because only a witness can really tell the truth.

In the book of Acts, the disciples that followed Jesus testified a great deal about who He was based on what they had seen. The book of Acts is a historical account of the disciples of Jesus after He sent them out to go and make disciples in all the world. Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit would come to them, and then to preach and teach what they had seen and heard. Fifty days later, as they were praying, the Holy Spirit revealed Himself to them just as Jesus had said. After this, the disciples stepped out on the roof to address thousands of Jewish people who were celebrating a festival in Jerusalem.

Take a moment and read Peter's sermon in the book of Acts, chapter 2, verses 14 through 41 (Acts 2:14-41) and answer the questions that follow.

Then Peter stepped forward with the eleven other apostles and shouted to the crowd, "Listen carefully, all of you, fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem! Make no mistake about this. ¹⁵These people are not drunk, as some of you are assuming. Nine o'clock in the morning is much too early for that. ¹⁶No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel:

*¹⁷ 'In the last days,' God says,
 'I will pour out my Spirit upon all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy.
 Your young men will see visions,
 and your old men will dream dreams.*

*¹⁸ In those days I will pour out my Spirit
 even on my servants—men and women alike—
 and they will prophesy.*

*¹⁹ And I will cause wonders in the heavens above
 and signs on the earth below—
 blood and fire and clouds of smoke.*

*²⁰ The sun will become dark,
 and the moon will turn blood red
 before that great and glorious day of the Lord arrives.*

*²¹ But everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
 will be saved.'*

²² "People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. ²³But God knew what would happen, and his prearranged plan was carried out when Jesus was betrayed. With the help of lawless Gentiles, you nailed him to a cross and

killed him. ²⁴ But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. ²⁵ King David said this about him:

'I see that the Lord is always with me.

I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me.

²⁶ *No wonder my heart is glad,
and my tongue shouts his praises!*

My body rests in hope.

²⁷ *For you will not leave my soul among the dead
or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave.*

²⁸ *You have shown me the way of life,
and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.'*

²⁹ *"Dear brothers, think about this! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn't referring to himself, for he died and was buried, and his tomb is still here among us. ³⁰ But he was a prophet, and he knew God had promised with an oath that one of David's own descendants would sit on his throne. ³¹ David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah's resurrection. He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave.*

³² *"God raised Jesus from the dead, and we are all witnesses of this. ³³ Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God's right hand. And the Father, as he had promised, gave him the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us, just as you see and hear today. ³⁴ For David himself never ascended into heaven, yet he said,*

'The Lord said to my Lord,

"Sit in the place of honor at my right hand

³⁵ *until I humble your enemies,
making them a footstool under your feet.'"*

³⁶ *"So let everyone in Israel know for certain that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, to be both Lord and Messiah!"*

³⁷ *Peter's words pierced their hearts, and they said to him and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?"*

³⁸ *Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ This promise is to you, and to your children, and even to the Gentile—all who have been called by the Lord our God." ⁴⁰ Then Peter continued preaching for a long time, strongly urging all his listeners, "Save yourselves from this crooked generation!"*

⁴¹ *Those who believed what Peter said were baptized and added to the church that day—about 3,000 in all.*

- Acts 2:14-41

1. How did God validate that Jesus was sent by Him in verse 22?

a. _____

b. According to verse 23, was Jesus crucifixion a coincidence?

(Circle one) YES NO

c. Verse 24 boldly states that Jesus is...

(Circle one) ALIVE DEAD

d. According to verse 32, is the resurrection of Jesus a myth?

(Circle one) YES NO

e. Verse 36 states Jesus _____ the Messiah!

(Circle one) IS IS NOT

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS:

a. Miracles, wonders, and signs; the Greek word *saymeon* means, "one that excites admiring awe and wonders by which God authenticates the men and women sent by Him."

b. NO; The Scriptures boldly state this.

c. ALIVE; If He rose from the dead then, He is alive today! In its simplest sense, Gospel means, "Good News." The Good News is that Jesus is as much alive today as the day He rose from the grave.

d. NO; Jesus had risen from the dead and the disciples witnessed it.

e. IS; Only the Messiah sent from God can save (Acts 4:12).

How did you do? Were your answers similar to those listed above? If not, that's ok. Remember these are "First Steps."

2. Now take a moment and write 3-4 sentences that would summarize some key thoughts you've learned so far. Don't forget to share your thoughts with your mentor.

Jesus is unique in history

Jesus did miraculous things in front of more than just His disciples. Thousands of people were able to testify to His miracles. The disciples witnessed and wrote about it often. The Bible shows that even the enemies of Christ saw Him perform miracles and could validate that He was different than any other human in history.

In your Bible, find the book of Luke and read chapter 11, verses 14 through 19 (Luke 11:14-19).

3. In the list below, check the boxes that best describe the miraculous things Jesus did.
- A. He performed a great magic card trick.
 - B. He cast out a demon.
 - C. He made it possible for a man that could not speak to speak again.
 - D. He did not do miracles and just argued with people.
 - E. He read the thoughts of those that opposed Him and told them what they were thinking.

You should have checked boxes B, C, and E. Jesus did more than just cast out a demon. He demonstrated His authority over spiritual forces and being able to know the

intimate thoughts of those around Him. This is vitally important for us as followers of Christ. Why? As we put our lives in the hands of Christ, we need to have full confidence that He has the power and authority over any and everything.

“Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- Philippians 2:9-11

Let's look at other miracles that were witnessed by both the disciples and the enemies of Christ.

4. Look up the verses below in your Bible, and indicate who witnessed the miracle by placing a D (disciples), E (enemies) or a B (Both disciples and enemies) next to the verse.
 - a. _____ Mark 2:1-12 (Healing the paralyzed man)
 - b. _____ Matthew 8:23-27 (Calming the Storm)
 - c. _____ Luke 22:47-53 (Healing Malchus' ear)

The order of your answers should have been B, D, and B. Jesus showed His power to everyone. He wasn't concerned so much with who saw the miracles as He was with the conditions of the peoples' hearts. Although His enemies could not deny His power, they (like many today) still reject His message of salvation.

Time to Reflect

Read the statements below and check the box that best describes you. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I'm still not convinced that a man could perform these miracles.
- I believe He did the miracles, but I'm still not sure how that shows He is God.
- I know that Jesus has power over all things, and I believe Him wholeheartedly.

Review

- Peter and the other disciples gave eyewitness accounts to verify the message of Jesus.
- The miracles that Jesus performed, which were witnessed by many, demonstrated His unique authority over life on this earth and spiritual forces.

day 3: THE LIFE: WHAT JESUS GIVES

Try to imagine what it must have been like for those closest to Jesus, His disciples. When Jesus asked them to follow Him, they had jobs, families, even a place in the community they lived in. They left it all behind. They were often privately fighting about who the greatest of the disciples was, and what place of honor they would have in the coming Kingdom of Jesus. So you know they made it clear to everyone else that they were special.

Everything seemed to be going as planned when the city of Jerusalem opened its doors to them and people flooded out shouting hosanna to the King. The disciples gambled their entire lives on Jesus and His message, and it was paying off—or so they thought.

In the week before Jesus' death, everything seemed to spiral out of control. The hostility of the Jewish leaders intensified, and Jesus did nothing to stop it. In fact, He said things that seemed to stoke the fire. Added to that, Jesus told the disciples that He would be rejected by the leaders and killed. This did not fit into their theology concerning the Christ, so they chalked it up as a misunderstanding.

In the end, things happened just as Jesus said they would. On the night of Jesus death, the disciples were hiding from those who had killed their master.

1. Read John 20:19-23. How would you have felt if you had been in this situation with the disciples?

They were confused and broken-hearted. What did this all mean? Perhaps they were even thinking, if they could kill Jesus, they surely would kill us as well. They had lost someone they all deeply loved. Can you put yourself into the mind of the disciples that night?

After Jesus' death, the disciples felt confused and hopeless. After Jesus' resurrection, the disciples began to understand. They recognized that Jesus' death for sin was only part of the plan. Their healing truly occurred after His resurrection.

2. Read John 20:19-20. What are some synonyms for *rejoice* that describe the change in their attitudes?

a. *Celebrate*

b. _____

c. _____

3. 50 days later was the day of Pentecost seen in Acts 2, when Peter and the disciples preached. How were they different at that time?

4. Read Matthew 26:69 – 75. How would you describe Peter’s attitude BEFORE the resurrection?

5. Read 1 Peter 3:13 – 14. How would you describe Peter’s attitude AFTER the resurrection?

The disciples were terrified when Jesus was arrested, and they thought they were next! When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, they began to remember the things He had taught them while He was here on Earth.

They were reminded that Jesus didn’t come to bring them death; He came to bring them life. Death didn’t defeat Him. In His death, He destroyed death. In his life, He gave them life. By the day of Pentecost, the disciples had not only seen the risen Savior, but also had seen Him ascend back to Heaven!

It's amazing! Jesus gave them life long before they even died. Keep growing in your steps towards mature discipleship, and we promise, He will do the same for you.

Time to Reflect

What has God done in your life that has convinced you that He is who He says He is? Write your answer in the space provided and discuss with your mentor.

Review

- The death and resurrection of Jesus changed the lives of the disciples and their expectations of God. They received life from Life.
- Disciples of Jesus must count the cost of following Him.

just so you know...

Why are relationships so important to being a disciple?

“All I need is my relationship with God.” Often Christians say this about their walks with God. Unfortunately, they are missing out on a significant part of being a healthy Christ follower. From the very beginning, God makes it clear He did not design us for relationship only with Him. After creating Adam, God looked at him and said that it was not good for man to be alone. But, Adam was not alone. He was with GOD!

God created us and knows what we need. He knows that in order for humans to be in healthy relationship with God, we also need each other. Sometimes the thought that we need others can be difficult for us to accept. Yet, to be a disciple, we must understand that we need others. In fact, the very foundation of the church is based on how we live together to bring glory to God and witness to the rest of the world.

So why do we need others? Relationships are the conduits that help us heal and grow as disciples. When we are in relationships with other believers, we can better understand how God works in our lives. When we are in sound Christian relationships, we can ask questions and be held accountable to biblical truth. We have people in our lives that see things we do not see. Countless times in our walks with Christ, we have seen God use others to help us process biblical truth or hold us accountable to truth. Without it, we only have our own filters for processing life in light of God’s truth. We were not meant to do life alone!

When we look into the Bible, especially the book of Acts, we see that the early Christians did life together. They were not alone, and as a result, they grew spiritually and became a witness to the world. This is why we want you to be part of a small group. In a small group, you can know others and be known. It is here that you can ask questions and learn how God’s Word applies to your life.

week 3— the commission: what is a disciple?

Everyone and everything has followers these days. We have Instagram and Twitter. We get friend requests on Facebook. We follow athletes, politicians, and movie stars. What does it mean to follow these things and these people? How much time do we devote to keep up with what's going on? Does any of this bring us into deep relationships with others, or is it mostly superficial? Now, we're not saying these things are bad! We are able to keep up with a lot of people using these tools! The kind of following that Jesus wants is totally different. His approach was from a much deeper relational perspective.

day 1: FOLLOWING: WALKING LIKE CHRIST

Jesus' perspective of a disciple is spelled out for us in Matthew 4:19. It says, "*Jesus called out to them, 'Come, follow Me, and I will show you how to fish for people!'*" We get our definition of a disciple right out of this verse. A disciple is one who (a) knows and follows Christ, is (b) being changed by Christ, and (c) is committed to the mission of Christ.

1. Make a list of all the things or people you "follow."

By the end of this week, we want you to not only have a clear definition of a disciple, but also the stages that we all grow through in our journey to becoming a mature disciple of Jesus Christ. During this week, you will assess your own growth and understand the steps you need to take to continue healthy growth.

2. Without looking back, try to tell in your own words what a disciple is according to Matthew 4:19.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

Go back now and reread Matthew 4:19. How did you do? It is vitally important to know what a disciple is because this is what Jesus desires.

3. Now, look at these verses in the Bible, and write down what you think they tell you about being Jesus' disciple.

a. Matthew 16:24-26

b. Ephesians 4:24

c. 2 Corinthians 5:18-20

In *a*, Jesus is asking us to follow Him, and that to follow Him we must deny ourselves. In *b*, Paul, the writer of Ephesians, tells us that we are created new, or in other words, changed. Then in *c*, we see that we have been made right with God, and that we are given a mission as believers.

4. Write three additional synonyms for **deny**.

a. *Set aside*

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

5. Write three additional synonyms for **follow**.

a. *chase after*

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

If we are going to follow Christ, it's imperative that we began to deny the things that are not pleasing to God. The reason we deny ourselves, whether it is with possessions, time, destructive relationships, or anything else, is because we love God. He loved us first, and proved that by sending His Son to die on the cross. So in turn, we deny ourselves the things of our former lives because of what He did for us, and our desire is now to please God rather than ourselves.

5. Knowing that we are changed by Christ when we receive Him, how does that make you feel about your old life and habits? Do you think you can relate to others better because of what God has done in your life?

6. If God gave you a mission to do right now, what do you think it would be?

Remember to discuss all your answers with your mentor.

We have free will.

To become a disciple we must make a choice to follow Christ. As mentioned in week 1, God gave you free choice or "free will." You are not made to be a robot. God has given you the capacity to choose. When Jesus went to the disciples, He simply stated, "come follow me..." The disciples could have said, "No, we are going to stay right here and fish."

Looking back in your life, you should be able to see how God specifically worked to draw you to Himself. Somewhere in that process, you had to choose to follow. The first choice was the ultimate choice of accepting the free gift of salvation. He continues to work in your life as you pursue Him, leaving you the choice to pursue His will over your own.

7. Describe a couple of choices you've made since becoming a believer where you have decided to follow God's will over your own. Talk with your mentor concerning these.

a. _____

b. _____

8. Read Romans 12:2 and then write "T" for true or "F" for false next to each statement about

a. ____ I play no part in my mind being transformed.

b. ____ I play a part in being transformed so that I am renewed.

c. ____ I can discover God's will

Only a. is false. The process of being a disciple sends us on a journey with God that leads to incredible life transformation. In this, we learn God's will, and see the plans laid out for our lives.

Each of the verses we've read today gives us some clarity to knowing and understanding what a disciple is. This is also why we use the verse Matthew 4:19. This verse and others help us better understand and define the word "disciple."

So, let's review. In Matthew 4:19, we can see a disciple is one who:

a. Is _____ Christ

b. Is being _____ by Christ

c. Is on _____ with Christ

In the blanks above you should have written a. *following*, b. *changed*, and c. *mission*. We will continue to help you explore and understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ as you walk with Him.

Time to Reflect

Choose the statement that best describes you. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I follow everyone and everything. Following Jesus will be easy!
- I'm not sure if following Jesus is all it's cracked up to be.
- I think being a disciple of Jesus will be different than anything I've ever experienced before.
- I'm ready to be truly changed by Jesus and I am devoted to the mission of Jesus!

Review

- Because we love God and want to follow Jesus, we exchange the habits of our old life that were designed to please us, for habits that please God and bring Him glory.
- God gave us the option to choose to follow Him or not. We must choose to accept salvation and each day we make choices about how we will follow Him.

day 2: GROWING: MATURING IN CHRIST

As we grow in spiritual maturity, we can see markers, like traveling on a highway. We see many parallels to someone's physical growth in their spiritual growth. Unfortunately, many Christians can remain stuck in their growth. They become stagnant or resistant to some of the work God is doing in their lives that would cause growth. The disciples that Jesus walked with for over three years, went through stages of spiritual development. Scripture describes these stages, and compares them to the physical growth stages of life.

Our spiritual growth has nothing to do with our standing before God in Christ. In other words, God doesn't love you more, or like you better, if you're mature. Where you are in your spiritual growth doesn't change how God feels about you. He sees us in His Son as righteous and perfect.

1. Look up and read Philippians 3:9. Read the statements below and write "T" for true or "F" for false next to each statement based on the verse you read.
 - a. ____ My righteousness is based how much I know about God.
 - b. ____ My righteousness comes from my good behavior.
 - c. ____ My righteousness can only come from God.
 - d. ____ My righteousness is by faith in Christ.

In the statements above, both *a* and *b* are false. Statements *c* and *d* are true. Our righteousness cannot come from ourselves. It is God alone who makes us righteous. Our maturity in Christ does not change how God views us. Yet because of who He is, we should pursue a relationship with Him, and in that pursuit, we grow.

When we first become believers, we all are spiritual babies. Over time, and by pressing into your personal walk with Jesus, a new believer will grow in spiritual maturity. You must remember, your walk with Christ is a marathon, not a sprint. Never forget, Jesus loves us with a perfect love. He cannot love us more because we are more mature. In fact, God's Word says in Romans 5:8, "*God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.*"

2. When I read Matthew 23:27, I begin to understand that Spiritual growth may have nothing to do with...
 - How long I have been a Christian
 - How I appear in church
 - How long I have known the Senior Pastor

If you checked all the above, you are well on your way to understanding that spiritual maturity has nothing to do with how long you have been a Christian or how long you have been in your church. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3, *"I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life."* There are people who have been Christians for a very long time and are still very immature.

3. When I read 1 Corinthians 8:1, I begin to understand that Spiritual growth may not necessarily be related to...

- Basketball
- Knowledge
- The ozone layer

Spiritual growth is not related to acquiring biblical information, Scripture memorization, or biblical theology, unless that knowledge is applied and utilized so to conform your life to Christ. Knowledge does nothing but fill your mind with facts. To be honest, knowledge for the sake of knowledge can prove pretty dangerous. Why? Because the more biblical information you receive and don't apply, the more deceived you are about your true state of your maturity.

4. When I read Ephesians 2:8-9, I begin to understand that spiritual growth may not have anything to do with...

- How many ministries I participate in
- How many meetings/programs I attend
- God's grace and goodness

Spiritual maturity has to do with how much you grow in your understanding of God's grace - that is, His love for you and towards you. Works, or working in the church, is not a sign of maturity.

Scripture also uses the metaphor of parenting for the Christian discipleship process.

What is the goal of parenting? The goal of natural parenting is to raise children to be healthy, productive adults. This is similar in spiritual parenting. Read Hebrews 5:12-6:1a in your Bible.

Stages of Growth

Taken from the book, *Real-Life Discipleship* by Jim Putman, let's examine briefly the five different stages of Spiritual growth that we see in Scripture. These are simple concepts that aid you in identifying where you are in your spiritual development, where you need to go, and what you need to do get there.

Spiritually Dead: Those who have not accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. They remain in rebellion against God and spiritually dead in their sin. This stage of the process is the front door to discipleship. The spiritually dead are characterized by their UNBELIEF towards God. Find and read Hebrews 3:14-19.

Spiritual Infant: Those who have accepted the Gospel and become born again spiritually. They often are connected to the message of salvation, but remain uninformed in the faith. They haven't had time for God to change much in their lives, but are excited about what God has done so far. Spiritual infants need close care by their spiritual parent, small group leader, and other, more mature believers.

Spiritual Child: Those who have accepted Christ and have made a basic connection with a spiritual family - the church. They are usually self-centered in their faith, and are very black and white in their thinking. Spiritual children are characterized with either being over-confident or under-confident in themselves.

Spiritual Young Adult: Those who are maturing in their faith, and are serving because God commands it, not just because it makes them feel good. They are very involved at church, and are good at putting God first, and others second. They don't think often of reproducing disciples, though. Their priorities have changed, and are continuing to do so.

Spiritual Parent: Those who understand what it means to be a reproducing disciple of Jesus Christ. They intentionally live their lives in close contact with God, and other people. They look for people to lead to Christ and disciple. They are able to feed themselves spiritually, and are living an intentional life. They are not perfect, and will readily admit to needing accountability and help from others. Spiritual parents know and take part in the mission of the church, and actively pursue these things.

In this study, we want to primarily focus on the first two stages of spiritual development. We view this much like a long distance journey. In order to successfully make your journey, you have to know the end destination, and what some of the key points are along the way. Although we will continue to mature in our faith until we reach Heaven, the stages of growth will help you navigate and understand what's needed at each point in your growth.

Time to Reflect

Circle the area below to indicate where you see yourself in these stages of growth. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

– Spiritually Dead Spiritual Infant Spiritual Child Spiritual Young Adult Spiritual Parent

We are going to specifically examine the needs of each stage of growth. As you reach each step in the discipleship process, you have a goal ahead of you. We will call this your next step. In the chart below, you will find the stages of growth that we talked about above. As you can see, there are some rows that are filled in for you, and some that you will fill in. Let's give it a try.

5. Fill in the chart and discuss your answers with your mentor.

Stage	Physical Needs	Spiritual Needs	Next Step
Dead	- brought back to life		Accept Christ
Infant			Connect in deep relationships with God and others
Child			Begin using your gifts to grow
Young Adult	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - guidance - to be equipped and trained - opportunities - freedom 		Begin to be intentional in service opportunities and raising up other disciples
Parent		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - encouragement - continued personal growth and investment - peer-to-peer relationships 	Continue to grow and lead in the church

So, where are you on this chart? What is your next step? Don't stop growing! Don't wait to take your next step! God is with you on this journey, and He is cheering you on as you grow.

← *Review*

- As we walk with Jesus, we mature spiritually. God's love for us is not dependent on how spiritually mature we are.
- Spiritual growth is not gained by passage of time, accumulation of knowledge, or doing good works.
- Knowing which stage of spiritual growth we are in can help us identify our next step and how to get there.

day 3: FOCUSING: FIXED ON CHRIST

Several years ago, a friend of mine decided to train to run marathons. His whole life he had a dream to run long difficult races, and someday possibly compete in the Ironman Triathlon. Once he began the arduous training, I watched as the priorities in his life began to change. He went from a fairly non-athletic lifestyle to a very focused and intentional life of healthy eating and strenuous training. His priorities drastically changed as he began to focus more and more on achieving his goals.

1. Tell about a time in your life where you had to train or practice for something.

2. List 3 things that inhibited or caused you to quit what you trained for.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

You may have listed things like: *injury, lost focus, other things became more important, etc.* In week 5, we will discuss how to maintain a spiritually fit life.

3. What are two additional synonyms for *focus*?

- a. *Concentrate*
- b. _____
- c. _____

Unfortunately, many new Christians view the Christian life as a long list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” They have yet to discover that the Christian life is more of a journey than a list of tasks. Walking with Christ is a long journey that should be viewed more as a privilege than a chore. Building a life that is focused on growth is much like training for a marathon, and areas of your life may have to change to accomplish that goal. Later, in week 5, we will discuss the specifics of creating a life for growth. For now we want to help you simply evaluate where you are currently at as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Time to Reflect

Circle the area below to rate your motivation to make changes in your life to grow a deeper relationship with God? Discuss your answer with your mentor.

1	2	3	4	5
not motivated				highly motivated

Regardless of your answer, we hope that over the next few days and weeks you begin to make more and more time for God in your life. Through this study, your personal time with God, and the help of your mentor, we hope you will continue to grow.

Remember, when we decide to walk with Christ, we too begin a marathon. Christianity is not a sprint, but a marathon that takes training, spiritual training. Much like my friend that now runs multiple marathons a year, we have to establish new priorities so that we can become spiritually fit.

This week, we want to set you up with getting your life ready. Scripture talks about our Christian life being a long race.

In your Bible, find and read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27.

4. Name some of the pictures Paul uses in these verses that can apply to the life of a disciple.

Paul describes the path of a disciple as a place not only to run the race, but also to train for the race. Do what you do with purpose. That is, focus on achieving the goal. Run to win. Don't pretend to train and run the race. Actually live it out, and prove that you are serious. If what you say doesn't match up with what you do, then your testimony will have no influence.

Jesus was an extraordinarily focused individual. Because of it, the author of Hebrews challenges us to have the same focus. Hebrews 12:2 says, *“We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.”*

5. Consider the following areas in your life. Number them in order of priority with 1 being highest priority and 7 being the lowest priority. Number them according to how they are now, not how you want them to be in the future.

- ___ Work
- ___ Time with God (Study, prayer, meditation, etc.)
- ___ Family
- ___ Church
- ___ Small Group
- ___ Hobbies
- ___ Watching TV

Time to Reflect

Choose the statement you most identify with. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I have viewed being a disciple as a sprint.
- I never thought as being a disciple as a journey or race at all.
- I view being a disciple as a marathon.

Processing life in relationships

In order to begin building the life of a disciple, you must realize your need for relationships. Relationships help us process Biblical truth. Healthy, Christian relationships can often help us see God’s truth in a clearer way. To help you get focused, start by writing down your priorities as they are now. Look at each one, and ask God to help you put them in the right order.

Corrective Lenses

A friend of mine told me this story about his brother.

“I will never forget this life experience. My brother and I are nine years apart. From a very early age, his eyesight was poor. He could make out shapes, colors, etc., but had a very difficult time with the definition of those shapes and images. He lived the first three years of his childhood legally blind. Through several different experiences, my parents noticed that he was not responding well to certain things, his sight just didn't seem right. So, they made an appointment with an eye doctor. The doctor tested him for what seemed like hours - it's very difficult when a child is this young. What happened next almost brought me to tears, even as a 12-year old boy. The doctor put a set of corrective lenses on my little brother's eyes...his eyebrows raised as he sat in my mother's lap. He reached his little fingers up, touched her face and said, "oh..." He began to look all over the room with a grin that you couldn't wipe away. My mother was crying, and I was emotional. His life was changing right there in front of us. What he had never seen was coming into view, and the expression and emotion in the room was electric.”

Proverbs 27:17 tells us that *“As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.”* In life, having relationships with Christ and with each other are the corrective lenses Jesus asks us to wear as we follow Him. These relationships enable us to see things we have never been able to see. They sharpen our focus on what's important. We process life best when we see through these lenses. Our relationships give us a more focused picture of how God is using our circumstances to help grow us up and mature us as disciples of Christ.

Time to Reflect

Tell about a time in your life where a conversation with a friend helped or changed your perspective. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

Biblical Case for Relationship

6. Read the following verses and write down what they say about being in relationship with others:

a. Genesis 2:15 – 18

After all that God created that was good, when it came to man He clearly states (for our purpose, not His), "It is NOT good for man to be alone." It is interesting, isn't it, that man wasn't alone at all? He was always walking with God. He had thousands of animals to play with and take care of. The truth is that God hard-wired us for relationship, not only with Him, but also with each other.

b. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

It is very clear in Scripture that two are better than one. As you can see, God has hard-wired us for relationships. Relationships are the corrective lenses that we can wear enabling us to see clearly. Relationships provide things like accountability, support, and love.

7. List the first names of three close personal friends below:

8. Do these relationships encourage you in your new commitment to being a disciple of Christ? How?

Processing life with others is a key to your maturity in Christ. It enables you to see your circumstances from several perspectives. It gives you a place to air your concerns, process frustrations, and to share your struggles.

This is very different from what the world tells us about relationship. Our world tells us to keep our struggles hidden, not to bother anyone with our issues. They are signs of weakness. Our world tells us to process life in secret, because it is safer there. The truth, however, is that God created us to live in relationship with each other. When we process life alone, we can often develop wrong priorities, wrong conclusions, and a wrong focus.

9. Tell about a time that you have been in a difficult situation, and a friend or family member helped you get focused.

10. What are some of the excuses we use when we fail to process our difficult circumstances with others?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

When you commit your life to being a disciple of Jesus Christ, you are really committing to doing life in relationship with Jesus and with others. This is the way that Jesus taught us to process life. Relationships are God designed. In good times, it is always more fulfilling to celebrate with those closest to you, with those whom you have deep relationships. In the same way, when you are struggling, it is more helpful to have someone with whom to process certain thoughts and feelings.

11. Find and read James 5:16 in your Bible. What does it say we should do with our sin?

Even when we are wrong, relationship is how we gain right perspective. Relationships are our corrective lenses. God has designed us to process all situations in life through the lenses of relationships - with God, and with each other.

← *Review*

- Our Christian walk is not a sprint, but a marathon, that requires spiritual training to achieve spiritual focus.
- Training requires us to evaluate and make changes to our priorities.
- Scripture clearly tells us that we are designed to be in relationship with God and others.
- When we experience authentic relationships with Christ and with others, we gain tremendous insight on how God is using our circumstances to mature us as His disciples.

just so you know...

What is the difference between Small Group and Bible study?

Because you are new to the church, you will eventually begin to hear terms like Sunday School, Small Group, Cell Group, Bible Study, Life Group, etc. These are all terms that have jockeyed for position in numerous churches throughout time and history. Rather than define terms, let's look at the similarities and differences between the two strongest areas, Bible Studies and Small Groups:

Bible Study

Teacher/Student

Digs deep into the Bible

Subject driven/topical

More lecture oriented

Has a start and a finish

No maximum number of participants

End result is to gain better understanding and knowledge of Scripture

Small Group

Facilitator/Group member setting

Stories of Scripture and honest conversation

Relationship driven/based on needs of the group

Discussion oriented

Has a start but no finish

Limited number of participants (3-15 is ideal)

End result is mature disciples who make other disciple

As you can see, there are some similarities. For example, both use God's Word intentionally, but for different purposes. The key is not to get hung up on terms, but to simply understand that the two work very well together. Bible Studies/Sunday Schools are intended to help with our biblical knowledge. Small Groups give us a more personable environment to mature completely in our relationships with each other. As you can see, both Bible Studies and Small Groups work hand in hand in your growth as a mature disciple.

week 4—the challenge: how do i follow Christ?

From a young age, we humans struggle for independence and autonomy. We long to be free from the authority of others and make up our own minds about what to wear, what to eat, how late we will stay up and what pleasures we will pursue. Becoming a Christ follower changes us. Suddenly, our plans no longer look all that appealing. By coming under the authority of Jesus, we are free to be saved by Him, to be used by Him for a greater purpose, and to share His love with others.

day 1: SURRENDERING MY HEART

1. Read Matthew 22:36 – 39. What are the three ways we are to love God?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

We will look at the answers for b and c in days two and three. Today we will focus on what God requires first. Did you notice that the first thing God asks you to surrender in this passage is your heart? The heart is so important to God. In fact:

- Romans 10:9 lets us know that even salvation is dependent on the heart.
- Psalm 86:12 and 111:1 shows that God wants us to thank Him from the heart, not the head.
- 1 Peter 3:15 explains that Jesus is not residing in our heads, but our hearts.

Matthew 22:36-39 is not a new declaration. God has always desired the heart of man. In the passage from Matthew, Jesus is actually quoting a very well-known Old Testament passage to the Jewish people. Read the passage from Deuteronomy 6:4-5:

“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.⁵ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

The Jewish people then, as well as today, refer to this verse as the *Shema*. *Shema* means to love the Lord with all that you are. This Scripture is very sacred to the Jewish people. It is the central prayer in Jewish culture and is often the first Scripture that a Jewish child learns. In Matthew 22:36-37, Jesus recites the *Shema* and tells the audience it is the “greatest commandment.”

It is difficult to love someone we don't know, so knowing Christ should be our first priority. Jesus expounds on the *Shema* passage by telling us to love others as well. He links these two commands into one and makes our horizontal love of others evidence of our vertical love for God.

2. What are some additional synonyms for 'surrender?'

a. *To give up*

b. _____

c. _____

Let's look at what it means to really love God with all our hearts. The story is told in Luke 10:25-37. One day, a religious leader stood up to ask Jesus a question. The man asked Jesus what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him, "What does the law of Moses say about this?" The man answered, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. And Love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus agreed that the man should do these things. Then the man asked, "Who is my neighbor?"

There was a Jewish man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On his way, robbers attacked him. They beat him, took his clothes, and left him for dead on the side of the road.

A priest was walking down the road and came upon the injured man. When he saw the man, he crossed over to the other side, and passed by without offering to help.

Next, an assistant at the Temple came by. He stopped, looked at the man lying there, and then he too passed by on the other side of the road.

A third man came travelling down this same road. He was a Samaritan, and the Jews despised the Samaritans. When this third man saw the beaten man, he had compassion. He lifted the Jewish man on his donkey, and took him to an inn. He washed and bandaged the wounded man, and paid for the innkeeper to continue his care.

So, like Jesus asked, "Who was the neighbor of this man attacked by these robbers?" The religious leader replied that it was the one who showed mercy. Jesus told him to go and do the same.

3. What stopped the priest and the Levite assistant from helping the Jewish man who was beaten?

4. What did the Samaritan man have to surrender to aid the individual?

5. Who would you say really loved the stranger in need:

- The Priest
- The Levite
- The Samaritan

Are you beginning to see the connection between “surrendering” and “loving”? The priest represents someone in a prestigious position, whereas the Levite represents someone really religious. Jesus showed us in this story that love is not about titles or positions; real love is a willingness to serve from the heart.

6. What does this story tell you about having a religion versus having a relationship with Jesus Christ?

7. In Romans 5:6-8, what did God surrender for you?

What are some things you can surrender that are hindering you from giving your whole heart to Jesus? Jesus wanted those who were listening to learn a very important lesson. No matter how important you think you are, you're still on the same page with everyone else in God's eyes. God shows no favoritism to His children. Jesus demonstrated in this story that even if someone's different than you or comes from "the wrong side of the tracks," God expects His children to have compassion for others.

As you surrender aspects of your heart to Jesus, He will begin to fill that empty area with a compassion for others. That is, the more you genuinely love and serve God, the more you genuinely desire to serve others. Compassion becomes a natural response to those who have been robbed of their joy, peace, and happiness.

Time to Reflect

How would you respond if you met someone on the street who needed your help? Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I would avoid that person, and go out of my way to get around them.
- I would judge that person, and refuse to help based on his lack of motivation to help himself.
- I may stop to help if it doesn't require much time or effort on my part.
- I would stop and talk to that person, find out what the need is, and do everything in my power to meet it.

Review

- God commands us to love each other.
- God expects us to go out of our way to help other people, even if they are different from us.

day 2: SURRENDERING MY LIFE

After surrendering our hearts in Matthew 22:36-39, Jesus then asks us to surrender our souls. For the sake of simplicity, the heart is where your passions lie, but the soul is who you are.

In our culture today, we are told that we should have the freedom to be who we want to be and to do as we please. Becoming a follower of Christ changes all this. God asks us to give up things that have taken over our lives and our identities. By coming under the authority of Jesus, we are challenged to free our lives from sin.

1. According to John 3:17, Jesus came into the world to...

- Save it!
- Point fingers at it

2. According to 1 Timothy 1:15, who did Jesus come to save?

- Giraffes
- Good people
- Sinners

A key building block for understanding why we follow Jesus is to understand “salvation.” Luke 19:10 states Jesus came to “*seek and to saved that which is lost.*” A key question here is, “Saved from what?” Understanding this will help you to know what aspects of your life you have to surrender.

Our separation from God is due to our sin. When there is sin in our lives, it becomes how we are identified. Even though Jesus has paid for it spiritually, naturally we must still give it up. While our sin no longer exists in the spiritual world, God does not want it to exist in the real world either. When we accept Jesus as our Lord, the habit of sin still exists, and it can hinder us from following Him.

3. According to 1 John 3:8, what did Jesus come to undo?

- Global warming
- The devil's work
- Really tough knots

4. Look up these verses in your Bible. Read them and then answer the questions below.

a. How does the Bible describe sin according to Galatians 5:17?

b. Who has sinned according to 1 John 3:4 and Romans 3:23?

c. What are the results of sin according to James 1:15?

Please discuss your answers with your mentor. Did you see the impact of sin? Sin does nothing to strengthen your relationship with God and others. This is why God wants you to surrender it. He does not want anything to come in between your relationship with Him.

5. Look up John 10:10 and fill in the blanks below:

The thief's purpose is to _____ and kill and _____.

My purpose is to give them a _____ and satisfying _____.

Jesus has paid the price for our sin. When we understand who Jesus is, and what He has done for us, we not only want to surrender our hearts to him (salvation), but also our souls (sanctification) to Him as well. If you surrendered your heart to Him, He is your Savior; when you surrender your soul to Him, He is your Lord.

Baptism

When we understand how amazing it is that the God of the universe saved us, our next step in following Jesus should be baptism. God has saved us from our sin, our death, and in many cases, ourselves. Because of this, one of our first responses should be a public demonstration of our surrendering through baptism.

The first public act of Jesus' ministry was baptism. Likewise, one of the first acts of surrendering our lives is to be baptized.

Read the story of the Ethiopian's baptism in Acts 8:26-40.

6. What does this passage teach us about baptism?

7. What was the reaction of the Ethiopian servant once he understood the passage of Scripture?

This story teaches us that Baptism should be an immediate reaction to the Gospel. If you have not been baptized, talk with your mentor. When we look at the Ethiopian, we see his reaction was immediate, and he even insisted on being baptized in the water that was close by.

Baptism symbolizes a willingness to surrender sin and a sinful life. It is a public declaration that our sins have been washed away and our future begins anew. We see in Scripture that those who have believed the message of the gospel, repented, and confessed Christ as Lord and Savior. Then they were baptized as a public act of following Jesus.

Time to Reflect

Check the box that describes you. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- Yes, I have been baptized.
- No, I have not been baptized, but I want to be.
- I need more information about what baptism is.

8. Here are some additional passages concerning baptism that we encourage you to read. After reading the Scripture, write a specific question to discuss with your mentor.

a. Luke 3:3

My question is: _____

b. Romans 6:1-4

My question is: _____

c. Colossians 2:12

My question is: _____

d. Galatians 3:27

My question is: _____

Review

- Sin has separated me from God, and through Jesus Christ I can be restored back to God.
- As a disciple, I have been saved, and I am learning more and more what it means to follow Jesus.
- Baptism is an intimate example of surrendering my life to Christ.

day 3: SURRENDERING MY MIND

My first reason for not accepting Christ had been intellectual ones, so my father sent me a book written by Josh McDowell-Evidence That Demands a Verdict. It challenged me to think. My father sent me books to answer my questions about evolution. At first I was skeptical about what they said, but as I questioned my professors, they had no answers to the challenges these books made. Slowly but surely, I came to believe that Christianity was based in truth.”

Jim Putman –Author, Church is a Team Sport

As we follow Christ, we will likely begin to see the world in a new way. When we first come to Christ, there are things we believe that aren't consistent with the Word of God. God wants us to love Him with our hearts (what we desire), with our souls (how we live), and our minds (how we think). An area that helps, and sometimes hurts, our relationships with Christ is our thinking.

As mentioned earlier, the word "surrender" is defined as: *to yield, give up, give over, submit, abandon, relinquish, cede, waive, or give in to*. The Bible tells us that our minds need to be transformed or renewed. In order to do that, Christ has to become our authority. We must accept new things, and surrender old things.

Romans 12:1-2 says:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

1. In the verse above, underline “give your bodies to God” and “Let them be a living and holy sacrifice.” Now circle the section of the verse that says, “Let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.”

2. Answer the following questions:

a. How do surrendering your body as a living sacrifice and being transformed relate to each other?

b. What do you think it looks like to give your body as a living sacrifice?

c. What thoughts or way of thinking is God transforming in you at this time?

The old singer *Meatloaf* had a secular song that reached number 11 on Billboard top 100. The song was called “*Two Out of Three Ain’t Bad.*” While we are not endorsing the song or artist, the message of getting “some” is better than getting “none” only holds true in the secular world. When you surrender to God, He wants three out of three. He wants you to surrender your heart, soul, and mind so that your transformation is fully complete in Him.

Chaos, by definition, is the absence of peace or harmony and it’s something God does not want you, His child, to be tormented with. What do we mean? Great question! Have you ever wanted to do something in your heart, but your head kept thinking differently? Or you were thinking about doing something good with your body (i.e., eat healthy), but your heart wasn’t in it? This chaos is an inner turmoil that Paul vividly describes in Romans 7:18-25:

And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can’t.¹⁹ I want to do what is good, but I don’t. I don’t want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.²⁰ But if I do what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong.²² I love God’s law with all my heart.²³ But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is: In my mind I really want to obey God’s law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin.

Notice in verse 23, Paul describes the inner war that resides in his mind. However, he finds deliverance in verse 25 by surrendering to Christ. Becoming a Christian and allowing God to lead you means that you have surrendered ALL to Him.

Take a moment to look up and read Romans 6:16-19. In that passage, you see that you were once a slave to sin but now you are free. You are no longer a slave to sin. Or in other words, sin is no longer your master. Jesus is your master, and as you follow Him, He will transform you.

3. Read the statements listed below. Place an “X” next to the statements that indicate a person who is following Christ and viewing Him as the authority in his life.

_____ I am not sure what to do about this difficult situation. Before doing anything, I should pray about it and talk to another Christian.

_____ My friend is sad and hurting, but I am nervous to say anything to him. I know Jesus loves him, so I am going to talk to him and encourage him.

_____ A kid in my school does not know Jesus and keeps asking me questions about the Bible. I am scared to talk to him, but I am going to anyway, because Jesus can help me.

You should have placed an “X” next to all three statements. All of these statements indicate a submission to God, trusting Him to give us what we need in any given situation. Sometimes we just do not have the answers for a given situation, but God does. Know that God can use you if you are willing to let him use you. Sometimes it might be saying a word of encouragement, other times it might be to just pray. Often we have to trust Jesus in the midst of our own insecurity. We must remember that we are yielded to Christ and that we must trust him in the midst of a difficult situation.

4. In the lines below, write a brief summary of what you learn from the above statements. What applications can you make to follow Jesus as your authority?

Hopefully you wrote about surrendering or yielding to Christ in your life. Maybe you also wrote about God using you to help or talk to others in a difficult time. God wants to mature you as a disciple so that in turn, you can turn around and help someone else. To do that, you must surrender your heart, mind, and soul to Him as both Savior and Lord.

To renew your mind you must spend time learning about biblical truth. You take out the old ways of thinking and believing, and replace them with the truths of the Bible. In week five, you will learn how to have a healthy devotional time, learning how to spend time with God. This will also help you train yourself to be reading the Bible, and asking questions about what you don't understand.

Time to Reflect

Place an X on the line below to show how well you understand what was taught today. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

I don't yet understand what it means to renew my mind.

I'm starting to understand, but I still have so much to learn.

I have been reading the Bible, and I can see how God is using it to change my thinking.

Review

- Becoming a Christian means that I will surrender, or submit, myself to God's leadership.
- God wants to use me to help others. When I yield to Him, I can trust Him to work through me.
- As I walk with God, my thoughts and actions will be transformed.

just so you know...

What does the Bible say about Heaven and Hell?

Heaven is an actual place where God lives and where believers will go to live for eternity. Jesus describes it as His Father's home which he is going to prepare for us in John 14:1-3. He goes on to say that He will come back to take believers there with Him.

Heaven is beautiful. In Revelation 21, John is given a vision of heaven, and he describes it by comparing it to the most beautiful and valuable objects on earth – gates like pearls, walls crafted of precious gemstone and streets of gold. Because we know that this world is a dim reflection of heaven's glory, we can safely say that heaven will be more wonderful than our minds can imagine.

In heaven we will have real, physical bodies like Christ did following His resurrection. We will eat and drink and recognize one another. Our bodies will be transformed and will not be bound by the limitations and decay that our earthly bodies experience. There is no death, no crying, no mourning and no pain.

The most important, most attractive thing about heaven is the restored relationship of man and God. God created us for relationship with Him and with each other. That relationship was broken in the Garden of Eden by sin, but will be restored in heaven for those who have made a commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. Heaven is where believers live after death, in the physical presence of God forever.

Hell is an actual place where those who reject Jesus will go to live for eternity. Jesus talks about bodies being thrown into hell forever in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Hell is described in the Bible as a place of darkness, a lake of fire and sulfur that burns day and night forever, a pit and a place of unending torment.

Hell is popularly characterized as a raucous, never ending party filled with sinners living it up in scandalous red costumes, hosted by king Satan. The reality of hell is that it is a place of isolation and complete separation from God and others, and there is no escape. Hell is the punishment that God prepared for Satan and his disobedient angels. Satan will not be reigning over hell. He is the chief prisoner.

Hell is a place with no relationships, the opposite of everything God created us for. Hell is where non-believers live after death, completely separated from God forever with no chance of reconciliation. Unfortunately, hell is where those that reject Jesus, as God's only Son, will reside.

week 5 — the transformation: how does Christ change me?

Being in a relationship changes us. When we follow the lives of Jesus' disciples in the New Testament, we see great change in them. For example, Peter has a very different view of Jesus from his first interaction with Him compared to his view when preaching the first sermon in Acts 2. The time they spent in relationship, and the experiences he had with Jesus changed him forever.

When we are in relationship with God and others, Christ changes us. We learn new things about ourselves, and the ones with whom we have a relationship. We gain new perspective, and often have the rough edges knocked off. That's part of why God designed us to be in relationship with one another. When we are in a close relationship with God, the same things happen.

day 1: SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

Remember what it was like when you had your first true, best friend? For many of us, that happened when we were children. We wanted to be with our friend all the time. We wanted to have our friend over to play, and we wanted to go spend time at their house also. We liked the same things. Maybe we were in the same class, went to the same church, or just lived down the same street.

For some of us who are older, we say our best friend is our spouse. When we first met, we wanted to spend every waking moment together, learning all we could about the other. Over time, the relationship deepened into love, and we were married. Over the years, though, our marriages can go two ways. We can get closer, and keep the relationship fresh, or we drift apart and feel like we don't know one another anymore.

Our relationship with Christ, however, is unlike anything we have experienced here on earth. When we first accept Christ, we are overwhelmed by His mercy and grace and love. We tell everyone we know about what Jesus has done for us. How do we keep our relationship with Christ growing deeper and stronger?

1. Read John 15:1-5 in your Bible.

What does this chapter say we must do to stay close to Jesus?

2. What do you think it would require to “remain” in Jesus?

You should have answered question 1 by talking about remaining in Jesus. As we read the Bible, and spend time in prayer, we are able to have a closer, deeper relationship with Christ. This not only affects our relationship with Christ, but also, as we remain in Christ, we begin to bear fruit. Bearing fruit means that we are living a life pleasing to God, and that we are impacting the people around us. We are sharing our faith, and growing in our relationship with Jesus. This is God’s desire for all who trust in Him.

So, what’s next? Let’s start by learning how to have a quiet time. The time we spend with the Lord should be in a place where we can concentrate, and be able to hear when God speaks. There are thousands of devotional books out there to give you a start. The main thing is reading the Word of God.

Here’s an example:

Read John 3:16-18 and ask questions about the passage:

- What does this teach me about God?
- What do these verses teach me about the Christian life?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a change in my life that needs to be made?

Your personal notes may look something like this:

John 3:16-18

- * God loves us SO MUCH he sent his son to SAVE us
- * As a believer, there is no judgment against me
- * His command is ~ BELIEVE IN JESUS!
- * I do believe, so no change is required of me from this passage. However - I should share this message with my friends and family!!!

After you've read the verses, and answered the questions, then spend some time praying. You can ask your mentor for some devotional guides that will help you.

What is prayer?

Prayer is nothing more than talking to God. Remember when we talked about our best friends? How easy was it to share all our thoughts, dreams, and secrets with that person? Jesus is now your truest, closest friend. You can tell Him anything, and He will still love you. You can be excited about something, and He will rejoice with you! You can be sad or angry, and He will hear your every plea.

There are a lot of "plans" out there on how to pray, what to pray, and so on. The truth is that there is no magic formula for how to pray. Just open your heart, and let whatever is in there come out. So, praise the Lord for His goodness. Confess your sins to the Lord, and receive forgiveness. Tell God your needs and your desires. Thank Him for hearing your prayers and for what He has already done in your life! God knows it all anyway, but praying about it gives us freedom. Talk to Him like He is your best friend. He truly does love you best, and love you most.

Let's look at what the Bible says about prayer:

3. Look up these verses in your Bible. Read them and then answer the questions below.
 - a. Matthew 5:43-45
 - b. Colossians 1:15–20
 - c. Matthew 6:5-14
 - d. Luke 18:1-8
 - e. Romans 8:26-28
 - f. Ephesians 6:18
 - g. Philippians 4:6-7
 - h. Colossians 4:2
 - i. 1 Thessalonians 5:17
 - j. James 5:13-16

What do these verses teach us about prayer?

Who can pray? _____

Where should we pray? _____

What does prayer accomplish? _____

What should we pray about? _____

Who should we pray for? _____

How often should we pray? _____

The verses above are by no means all that the Bible teaches us about prayer, but they do give us a good start in understanding the power and importance of prayer in our lives. Your answers to the questions should have included that anyone can pray at anytime, anyplace, and about anything! There are some specifics, but we wanted to show you in these verses how diverse prayer is, and that it is for our benefit. We get to come into the presence of the Holy God, and pour out our hearts to Him. What a blessing!

God wants to communicate with us. The best way to accomplish that is through Bible reading and prayer. God is rejoicing over you right now as you go through this workbook. It shows that you are serious in your newfound journey with Him.

← Review

- We deepen our relationship with God by spending time with Him.
- Reading the Bible keeps us close to God as we learn about Him and His desires for us.
- We can talk to God in prayer, just like we talk to our friends.

day 2: LEARNING FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT

In day one, you looked at how God changes you through your communication with Him. Communication with God comes through His Word and prayer. Today we want to look at how the Holy Spirit changes us, and how God can use His people to change us as well. God gave us the Holy Spirit, the Word, and the people of God to help shape us into the image of Christ. These same three gifts also play a huge part in how God works to direct us into His will.

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Before we look at how He works and changes us, we need to understand WHO He is. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the Advocate or the Helper in other translations. He is fully God, and part of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is God. He possesses a will, intellect and emotions. He is God with all His own attributes of deity. He is the third person of the Trinity, and co-equal with God the Father and God the Son. There is only one God, but He manifests Himself in three persons, whom we call the Trinity.

So why did He come to earth? The Bible says The Holy Spirit came to glorify Christ and to lead followers of Christ into all truth. Jesus told His disciples in the Upper Room, "But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative – that is, the Holy Spirit – he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you." The Holy Spirit came to enable you to know Christ through a new life and understanding. You will see that The Holy Spirit will make the Word of God relevant and meaningful when you most need it.

1. Read John 14:16-17 and 1 Peter 1:2. Take a moment now, after reading about who the Holy Spirit is and what He does, and write a summary. Share your answer with your mentor.

In your summary above, you should have included several things. First, the Holy Spirit is your Advocate. He is on your side. Secondly, He leads you into all truth. You can trust Him. Lastly, He has come to make you holy. The Holy Spirit sets you apart as a child of God, and no one can take Him away from you.

How does the Holy Spirit Change me?

Let's start today by reading some important Scriptures about how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of believers.

Look up these verses in your Bible. Read them and then answer the question below.

- a. John 14:15-17
 - b. John 14:25-26
2. Place a check mark next to the statements that best describes the Holy Spirit as described in the verses.
- The Holy Spirit is my Advocate.
 - The Holy Spirit will lead me to all truth.
 - The Holy Spirit will teach me truth.

You should have checked all three boxes. Once you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, The Holy Spirit then moves into your life and dwells within you. He begins to guide you in all of God's truth. He also starts aligning your life to the truth from the Word.

Next, notice that God gives us godly people to advise us as we search out God's will for our lives. Together, The Word of God and The Holy Spirit begin changing us to be more and more like Christ.

3. In your Bible look up these two verses.

- 1 Corinthians 6:19
- Philippians 2:13

What do these verses teach you about how the Holy Spirit works with you? Write your answers in the lines below.

You should have written something about the Holy Spirit living within you, and that He is actively working in your life.

Unfortunately for us, as humans, we can ignore this work that God wants to do in us. We still have a sinful nature within us that creates a battle. We sometimes fight with God's truth, and want our own way. This is much like a young child with a parent. The parents tell the child to do something that they know is best for the child, but the child wants what he thinks is best.

4. Read Romans 8:5-11. Describe the differences between the sinful nature and the spiritual nature.

The verses in Romans 8 tell us that living according to the sinful nature leads to death. The sinful nature is always hostile to God. It cannot please God in any way.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells in you. The Holy Spirit controls your spiritual nature. When the Spirit controls you, you receive life and peace!

Time to Reflect

Check the box that best describes your experience with the Holy Spirit. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I do not see how the Holy Spirit is working in my life at all.
- I see that the Holy Spirit has been teaching me new truth, but I struggle to apply it to my life.
- So much of my life has already changed, and the Holy Spirit is convicting me every day.

Besides the Holy Spirit, God uses other Christians to change us as well. As Christians, we are all called to use our abilities and biblical truth to help each other grow. Those who God has placed in your life (your mentor, small group leader, parent or friend) can be used by God to help shape you into who God wants you to be. You too will use your God-given abilities to help others and see that you are called to help and serve them.

5. Read Proverbs 12:15 in your Bible. What does it say a wise person does?

You should have written that a wise person listens to counsel.

Putting it all together

As we approach the Word, we ask God to speak through it by the power of His Holy Spirit. When we understand God's will in His Word, the Bible, we know what kinds of things about which to ask direction. Obviously, it does no good to ask God to do something that contradicts what He has already said He will or will not do. As we seek to know His Word, and the Holy Spirit interacts with us, we also are sharing our thoughts, discoveries, and decisions with other believers so that we can get wise counsel. If we are new believers, it is very important that we have mature disciples help us understand the meanings of Scripture. When we come to a conclusion about what we think God wants, we then begin to ask God through prayer to give us strength to do what He has told us to do. We also ask Him to open doors and show us that they are open so we can move forward. Remember that God's Word and God's Spirit never contradict. It was God's Spirit that wrote God's Word through the prophets and disciples of Jesus. Test the advice others give you by the Word, and of course, keep praying. As you begin to pray, watch to see what God does next in answer to your prayer. Sometimes God says yes, sometimes He says no, and sometimes He says wait.

Time to Reflect

Check the box(es) that describe how you feel right now. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I know God is changing me, but I'm not sure how to hear His voice.
- God has used other believers in my life to point me in the right direction.
- God's Word has been my lifeline recently. I see new truths all the time.
- I know I'm not perfect, but I know God is changing me to be more like Him.

Review

- God speaks to us through His Spirit and His people.
- Our lives have to be open to hear from God's Spirit and His people.

day 3: SHARING MY TESTIMONY

When we hear a person telling a story, we often gauge its validity based on how close he was to the actual event. A story told by a person that was not present when it happened can lessen how much credibility is given to the story. We can also sometimes “doubt” the testimony of a person we know has questionable character. The opposite is also true. When we know a person is telling the story of an event they watched, or if we know the person has trustworthy character, we give more credibility to the event. The testimony becomes more “credible”.

Every Christian has a testimony. Even if you have only been a follower of Christ for one day, you have a testimony. Often the greatest way to impact those around you is to share what God has done in your life. The credibility of God’s work in your life is both witnessed and heard by the testimony of your life. This becomes one of the most powerful ways to share what God has done. This week you will work on writing and sharing your testimony.

Look up and read the story in John 9 about Jesus healing a blind man. Then answer the questions listed below.

1. What happened to the blind man physically from his interaction with Jesus?

2. What happened to the blind man spiritually from his interaction with Jesus?

3. What was the impact on the individuals that witnessed the event?

4. As a response to the healing, what did the blind man do?

In questions 1 and 2, you should have written that the blind man was healed. Jesus healed him physically and spiritually. From that miracle, we see that the man had a testimony. In question 3, you should have answered that the impact was dramatic on people nearby, and they were able to see the power that Jesus had. This healing gave

the blind man a testimony that he could share with the world. He responded by telling those that opposed or questioned about the power of Jesus.

God is always at work in the world around us. The work that God has done in your life becomes a story much like the blind man. You may or may not have had a physical illness, but your story can have dramatic impact on those around you. Your story can teach others about God's love, amazing grace, salvation, and how He can work in the lives of those that give their lives to Him.

Time to Reflect

Check the box next to the statement you identify with. Discuss your answer with your mentor.

- I do not see how God could use my testimony.
- I do have a testimony but I am not sure how to share it with others.
- I do have a testimony and I am willing to tell others so that they can see how God has worked in my life.

Let's take a moment and evaluate your personal testimony. To do that, answer the questions below:

5. List at least 3 key people God used to bring you to Himself.

6. Describe one specific situation that you believe God was using to open your eyes to the Gospel.

7. What is a significant struggle you had when giving your life to Christ?

8. What helped you overcome that struggle?

9. List several specific ways God has worked to change you after giving your life to him. (For example: forgiving someone, apologizing for something, loving people more, starting to attend church, etc.)

Now take a moment and write out your personal testimony in 8-12 sentences. A good outline for you to use is to share what your life was like before Christ, how you came to Christ, and how your life has changed since you accepted Christ. Use your answers to the questions above to help you as well. The space provided may not be enough. Feel free to use other pages or your own notebook to write out your testimony. Share this with your mentor.

← *Review*

- The story of how God has changed my life is my testimony.
- My story can be used to encourage others to believe in Christ.
- No one can take my testimony away from me.

just so you know...

What is a tithe?

No topic in the church has created more controversy than financial giving. For you, as a new believer, we want to help you begin your walk with Christ with a healthy view of the biblical concept of “tithe”.

So what is a tithe? Tithe simply means “a tenth”. This was the biblical standard that God asked his people to give back to Him. God asked the people to bring a tithe back into the storehouses so that the work of God could continue. An issue often arises whenever people lose sight of the original intent of this concept. We begin caring more about our own money and materials than the One who gave it to us. So, you see, all that you have is God’s. He gave it all to you. What God asks of us is to trust Him to continue to provide and to be generous with what He has already given.

Does God really need our money? No, He does not need our money. God owns everything. Even the paper that this workbook is written on belongs to God. God asks us to tithe because He knows that whatever we treasure is what we put our hearts into. God cares so much about us that He does not want money to become our god. God wants us to treasure Him. To give Him our hearts and to have Him as Lord of our lives is way more valuable than money or any material possession.

If we understand what Jesus has done for us, then wouldn’t we want to surrender it all? Jesus asks us to be a people of generosity.

week 6—the commitment: what is my part in the mission of Christ?

The first people Jesus recruited to join Him on His mission were the 12 disciples. They were a very diverse group of men from many different backgrounds, with many different occupations, perspectives and skills. Jesus did not choose them randomly. He had a place and a plan for each of the twelve. To effectively carry out the mission, He needed a man of action, like Peter, a man who was organized and precise, like Phillip, and even a man like Matthew, who was a former tax collector for the Roman government. Likewise, we are all part of Jesus' mission for a purpose. Each of us has gifts and talents, skills and perspectives that make us unique and valuable team members.

day 1: UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH

Have you ever observed a high functioning team? Maybe it was a sports team or a mechanical team working together, each playing their part working toward an end goal. In many aspects of life, we can see teams of people working together, and when they are good at what they do, it is fun to watch.

The church is a type of team. Well, it is supposed to be anyway. People, who have decided to follow Jesus, all coming together to accomplish God's plan. There are business personnel, lawyers, landscaping professionals, financial planners, mothers, fathers and so many more. Think about it this way. The church isn't a building. It is not a place where we all assemble, sing songs, say prayers, and listen to some guy teach from the Bible. The church is a team of people, assembled for a very unique purpose - to make disciples who make disciples of Jesus Christ.

1. Take a moment and use the space provided below to write your own description of the church.

Read Matthew 16:13-18 below.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ "Well," they replied, "some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets."

¹⁵ Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. ¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

2. Fill in the blanks:

"...and upon this rock I will build my _____, and all the powers of hell will _____ it."

Peter's confession that Jesus was indeed the Son of God is the defining moment for the church. Jesus builds His church on Peter's statement, and says that all the powers of hell will not conquer it. Do you see how limited the influence of Jesus' church would be if we defined it as a building? Now, buildings are great tools we can use to gather together for worship or fellowship, but there is no power in our facilities, no power in our church's programs, no power even in our Sunday services. The power we have as a church is our personal and corporate declaration that Jesus is who He says He is.

The actual definition for the church comes from the Greek word, "Ecclesia", meaning, "the called out ones." The church, built on Peter's declaration that Jesus IS the Son of God, is a team of people with various personalities and gifts, sent out to make disciples of all nations.

3. Read Acts 2:42-47. List the things the people in the early church did together or for one another.

The early church had the right idea about relationship. They met together on a regular basis, sometimes in one place, and other times, in various homes. They prayed together, and committed themselves to learning all they could from the apostles' teachings about Jesus. They helped meet the needs of those around them. They ate together, worshiped together, and shared what they had, all because of what the Lord had done for them.

Go and Make Disciples...

Regardless of our specific gifting within the church, all of us, as followers of Christ, are commanded to make disciples. This is not a job just for paid pastors; this is the responsibility of ALL believers. As we read in the Matthew 16 passage, the powers of hell will not prevail against Jesus' church. In the process of making disciples, when we participate, we are storming the gates of hell. Once you became a Christian, Jesus calls you to go into the world and make disciples.

So what about you? Use the following list below to help you think about people that need Christ.

- Someone that lives in your home.
- Someone at work or school.
- Someone that lives in your neighborhood or community.
- A friend or family member.

Spend time praying for these people. God can lead these people to you, and as you interact with them, you can share with them about who Jesus is.

Here is an example of what we are talking about. One day while helping my (Brandon) children with homework, I received a phone call. On the other end of the phone was an old friend of mine that I had been praying for more than 3 years to come to know Christ. He was very upset and crying on the phone. He began to explain to me that his family was falling apart and that he had nowhere to turn. This allowed me to finally, after three years, share the gospel, and he was broken enough to submit his life to Christ. From that point, I was able to begin discipling him in his walk with Christ. God worked in a difficult situation and in the heart of my friend, and through a difficult time, God drew him to Himself.

Time to Reflect

Think about the mission of making disciples. What keeps you from being focused and committed to Jesus' mission for His church? Discuss your answer with your mentor.

← *Review*

- A church is not a building. A church is a team of people, unified to accomplish Christ's mission in this world, making disciples of Jesus.
- God can use difficult situations in my life to help me minister to those around me.

day 2: USING MY GIFTS

God wants us to have a personal relationship with Him, and as we do, He starts to produce spiritual fruit in our character. We are becoming like Him –more loving, kind, forgiving, etc., but we are also producing fruit in the sense that we are using our experiences, and abilities to point people to our loving God.

Our goal is to walk with Jesus so that He can shape us. He prunes off all the branches that bear no fruit. He also fills us with His knowledge and understanding of what He wants us to do with our lives, and gives us the power to do it. The first priority in every believer’s life is found in the Scripture below. Let’s see if you can find it.

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.

⁵ “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

- John 15:1–5

1. What do you think is the priority?

God wants us to bear fruit. What does this mean? Here are some examples God uses to help us bear fruit in our lives.

God’s overall will for us is to be used in His mission to save the world.

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

¹⁸ And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, “Come back to God!”

- 2 Corinthians 5:17–20

God has a place for us on His team.

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

- 1 Corinthians 12:27

Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth.

- Ephesians 4:12–14

The body of Christ is built up when we allow ourselves to be equipped. We are all a part of the body, and must play our part if God is to be glorified. We are to grow into maturity. Notice that God placed leaders in the church who will help you discover your gifts and abilities to contribute to the body of Christ. Then, they will help equip you to do the job God gave you to do.

God wants us to be available to be set apart for His work.

In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use.²¹ If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 2:20–21

When Jesus saves us, He sets us apart. If we desire to be used for important things, then all we need do is make ourselves available for His purposes. We don't have to be amazing to be used by God. We just need to be available to use whatever gifts He has given us for His glory. It is an amazing thing to watch God work when we say yes to Him. Our pains, scars, and gifts, no matter how insignificant they may seem to us or to the world, can be used in mighty ways.

 *Time to Reflect*

Write a one-sentence definition of what you believe “bearing fruit” looks like.

Write a one-sentence definition of what you believe “using your gifts” looks like. Discuss your answers with your mentor.

There are several Scriptures that tell us about the gifts God gives to those who trust Him. God gives these gifts to us for many reasons. First of all, He gives them to us so that we produce spiritual fruit. We bear spiritual fruit in several ways. Growing personally in our faith, telling someone about Jesus, and showing God’s character in our lives are examples.

Secondly, God gives us gifts to glorify Him. He wants us to live like Jesus more and more each day. When our actions, speech, and thoughts are Christ-like, we bring glory to God. Also, when we use our gifts in a way that pleases Him, we receive God’s blessings.

Lastly, God gives us gifts to build others up. The Bible tells us that we are all part of the same body. If one person doesn’t do his or her job, then the whole body suffers. When we do the things God has designed for us to do, the church is healthy and will grow. If only a few people are doing all the work of the church, then the whole body will get tired, and sick. That’s why we must identify what gifts God has given us, and use them for our good and His glory.

Look up these verses in your Bible. Read them and then answer the question below.

- a. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28
- b. Ephesians 4:11
- c. Romans 12:6-8

2. Make a list of all the gifts you see God giving.

Some of the gifts listed in these verses are *apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, leadership, showing mercy*, as well as others. Let God show you what gifts He has given you to help you grow, and also to work together with others.

← *Review*

- God intends for us to join Him on His mission to save the world.
- We all have a unique part to play in God's plan and church leaders can help equip us for the task.
- We do not have to be perfect to be used by God, we just have to be available.

day 3: FACING THE ENEMY

When a soldier goes off to war, there are things he must do to prepare. He gets the training he needs. He learns about the enemy and its weaknesses. He stocks his pack with the necessary items for battle. He studies the terrain, and plans strategy. And the list goes on.

So it also goes with the Christian life. You are in a battle. Satan does not want you to succeed in your relationship with Jesus Christ. He will attack any and all efforts to be an effective soldier in the war. If that doesn't work, he wants to make you doubt that you really are a disciple, or that God really did save you through your faith in Jesus Christ. He will tell you any lie he can to cause you to doubt.

Another one of the devil's tricks is to tempt you to commit some great sin to ruin your testimony. The devil entices you to give in to your sinful nature. When you do this, the devil then loves to accuse you of failing. He tells you that you are useless in helping others follow Christ, rendering you ineffective in God's army. The Bible calls our struggle a fight against an enemy that we can't even see. Temptation is something believers will have to deal with for the rest of our lives here on earth.

God's Word is very clear about the struggle we face on this planet. We become disappointed with ourselves and with God when we don't understand the battle we still face. We think something must be wrong with us or with God. So, we really need to understand what is happening during our time here on earth.

1. Read the statements below and write "T" for true or "F" for false next to each statement based on the verse you read.
 - a. ____ Now that I am saved, I can be perfect from now on.
 - b. ____ My past sinful desires are gone, and I will always do what God wants me to do.
 - c. ____ I am forgiven for my past sin. Though I still struggle with sin, I am forgiven because of Jesus' constant outpouring of grace into my life.
 - d. ____ The Holy Spirit is constantly helping me battle against my sinful desires and the devil who tries to lure me back into sin.
 - e. ____ The fact that I hate sin, and want to do what God wants, shows that I am a Christian.

The first two statements are false, and the last three are true. Being disciples of Jesus doesn't mean we will have lives with no problems. God just promises that He will walk through the fight with us. He's the commanding officer, and we can trust Him with the plan of attack.

Let's look at some verses that will help you understand the battle we are facing, and how to combat the enemy.

Look up these verses in your Bible. Read them and then answer the questions below.

- a. Ephesians 6:10-18
- b. James 4:7
- c. Hebrews 10:25
- d. Jude 22-23
- e. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
- f. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5
- g. John 16:33

2. In Ephesians 6, Paul talks about the armor of God. What does the armor of God do, and how does it benefit us for the battle against Satan?

3. James 4:7 gives us a way to resist the devil. What is it? What will Satan do?

4. What other way has God given us to help us face the temptations of the enemy according to Hebrews 10:25, Jude 20-23, and Ecclesiastes 4:9-12?

5. What are the strongholds and obstacles mentioned in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5? How could Satan use these to stifle growth in your relationship with Christ?

6. John 16:33 reveals the winner of this battle we face in the world. Who is it, and what does knowing this bring us?

Discuss all these questions and your answers with your mentor.

Isn't it amazing that God, in His great mercy, gave us the way to find answers to our questions, to defeat the enemy, and to have victory in our lives? The verses above give us valuable tools to help in our times of weakness and need.

Ephesians 6 talks about the armor of God. This armor not only gives us protection from the flaming darts of the evil one, it also provides salvation, truth, peace, and defense. The devil will come at us from any direction that he thinks we have a weakness. That is why we must be prepared!

What were your thoughts about resisting the devil as discussed in James 4:7? Did you write anything about being humble before God? Good! When we humble ourselves before the Father, He helps us resist. When we do this, the devil must flee. What power we hold through the relationship we enjoy with our God!

In the verses we read for question 3, God gives us another way to combat the enemy - our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ! God uses people in our lives to speak truth into us even when it hurts. As we've been learning throughout these last six weeks, we need these relationships to grow! We need to help one another put on the armor of God that we talked about in Ephesians 6. It is also comforting to know that we're not the only ones facing hard times and struggling with the enemy.

According to 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, there are some challenges we face in our walk with Christ. We have to tear these down in order to know God better. Human reasoning, false arguments, and pride can cause us to believe the lies that the world tells us are true. God wants us to be filled with the truth of His Word so that the lies are revealed, and we choose instead to believe the truth.

There is good news! Even though we go through these hard times, and battle the enemy, there is hope in Jesus Christ. John 16:33 encourages us to be strengthened with the fact that Jesus has already overcome the world. Victory!

← *Review*

- Satan tries to distance us from God through doubt, temptation and exploiting our weaknesses.
- God is more powerful than Satan!
- We can prepare ourselves for battling the enemy (Satan) by replacing the lies of this world with the truth of God's word.

← *Next Steps*

- If you're not already, get connected in a small group where you can continue to grow as a disciple.
- Find a place to serve in the church.
- Commit yourself to a consistent personal devotional and Bible study time.

We've come to the end of our 6-week journey. As we've said throughout the study, you've just begun the race. Our hope is that some building blocks have been laid for you to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. We pray that you will join us in Jesus' mission to reach a lost world for Him.

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