

beginning the christian life

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ...”

2 Corinthians 5:17-18

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, then you are a Christian. According to the New Testament, you are also a new creation. You are beginning a whole new life! And just as a newborn baby needs certain things in order to be healthy and to grow up, so do you, as a new Christian, need certain things to grow spiritually.

First, you need to be in **fellowship with other Christians**. It is through fellowship that you will learn more about God and about how to live as a Christian. You should plan to attend church regularly and join a kinship group so that you can develop close friendships with other believers. Vineyard has many kinship groups that meet on different days and in different locations throughout central Ohio. Choose one that is convenient for you so that you can be encouraged in your new relationship with God!

Second, you need to **pray**, which is simply talking to God. Prayer is how you will grow in your relationship with God and how you can begin to allow Him to work in areas of your life.

And third, you need to **read the Bible** on a regular basis. It is through the Bible that God will speak to you about Himself and your life needs.

Beginning the Christian Life Series was developed by Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Columbus for new Christians. It is a series of Bible studies that are easy to follow and can help you as a new Christian start to learn the Scripture. Each study takes one passage from the Bible and goes through it in some depth. Many basic topics are covered in this series, which should give you a good start in both understanding the Bible and your new relationship with God.

These studies can be done in a group or done privately. To do these studies alone, you do not need to have any prior knowledge of the Bible. Each study can be completed by just reading over the passage being used and answering the questions. It is best to use a modern translation of the Bible, such as the New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASB) or the Revised Standard Version (RSV). These are the most easily understood and most accurate translations of the Bible that are currently available. You should allow yourself about 30-40 minutes to do each study. (Some are longer and can

be divided into two parts if you cannot complete them in one sitting.) There is room right in the booklet to write your answers to the questions. Be sure to take enough time to think through your answers and actually write them down. You'll be amazed at what you will discover as you begin to read and study the Bible.

I hope this series of studies will spark in you a hunger to know more of God's Word and that you will begin a life-long habit of reading the Bible! Here is what the author of Psalm 1 says about a person who hungers after the word of God:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.

Whatever he does prospers!

God Bless You,

Marlene Nathan

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1

what is so special about the bible?

There are hundreds of books on the market today that claim to be important—books that are written by “experts” who insist they have all the answers—books that promise to make our lives better. What makes the bible so special? Why is it more valuable than some of these other books?

The bible is a totally unique book, different from every other book that was ever written. It is a book that is actually a collection of books, written by various people but *inspired of God*. The word “inspired” literally means “God-breathed.” This makes the bible a human book of divine origin. When you read the bible, you are reading communication from the Creator of the Universe delivered to you through the writings of men.¹ It shouldn’t surprise you that God has a book out. After all, it’s His ability to speak that distinguishes Him from false gods and idols (see Ps.115:2-8; Is.46:5-7; Jer.10:5; Hab.2:18). The phrase “Thus saith the Lord” is found 359 times in the bible and could rightly be inserted in almost every verse.

In this study you will be learning about the bible itself and the role it should play in your life now that you are a Christian.

¹ For a thorough presentation of reasons why you can believe the bible is inspired by God, refer to Section I: The Bible—I Trust It, pages 13-74 of Evidence that Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell (Thomas Nelson Publishers).

facts about the bible

The bible was written over a span of almost 1600 years. The first books (Genesis through Deuteronomy) were written around 1450 BC. The Old Testament books were formally compiled into a collection (or “canonized”) more than 400 years before the birth of Christ. The New Testament books were written from about 50 AD to 90 AD and were circulated throughout the Christian churches. They were soon accepted as authoritative but were not officially collected (or “canonized”) until the year 393 AD.

Over 40 authors from different walks of life wrote the 66 books that make up our bible. Many books in the bible are named after their authors. A few of the books have unknown authors, such as Joshua and Judges in the Old Testament and Hebrews in the New Testament. Some well-known authors of bible books are Moses (who wrote the first five books in the bible), King David (who wrote most of the psalms), King Solomon (who wrote most of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs), the apostle Paul (who wrote 13 letters or epistles in the New Testament) and the apostle John (who wrote the gospel of John, the three letters of John and Revelation).

The bible is divided into two parts, the Old and the New Testaments. Testament is another word for covenant, which is like a contract or an agreement between two people. In both the Old and New Testaments, God’s covenant with people was based on grace. In the Old Testament, God chose to show His grace to a particular people—the Jews. In the New Testament, God expanded His grace to include everyone. This “new” covenant requires a human response of faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for sin.

Contrary to popular belief, the bible is not organized chronologically. Instead, the different books of the bible are grouped by genre (type of writing):

- **Historical Books.** These books contain the history of God’s dealings with the Jewish people and the lives of Jesus and the apostles. They include Genesis through Esther in the Old Testament and Matthew through Acts in the New Testament.
- **Writings.** These books are a variety of stories (which are not necessarily historical), songs, poetry and wise sayings. They include Job through Song of Songs in the Old Testament.
- **Prophetic Books.** The prophets were people who were called by God to declare His eternal truth and His message concerning the future. These books include Isaiah through Malachi in the Old Testament and Revelation in the New Testament.
- **Epistles.** These books are letters by apostles that were written to individuals or churches. Together they form the foundation for Christian doctrine (what to believe) and Christian practices (how to live). They include Romans through Jude in the New Testament.

All of the books of the bible are divided into chapters and verses to make it easier to read and to find references. These divisions and references were completed around the 13th century AD. Sections of the bible are identified first by book title, then by chapter and last by verse. So for

example, Romans 3:22 refers to the book of Romans, the third chapter and the twenty-second verse. In your bible, the chapter number is larger and bolder than the text, and is found at the beginning of each chapter and perhaps on the top of each page. The verse numbers are placed throughout the text and are much smaller. There are common abbreviations for all of the books in the bible. It would be helpful for you to learn these. Until you become familiar with your bible, use the table of contents to locate the different books.

what christians believe about the bible

Christians believe the bible is inspired by God. The origin of the bible is divine. The word “inspired” literally means “out-breathed” or “God-breathed.” Interestingly, both the Hebrew and the Greek words for “breath” can also mean “spirit.” Christians understand this to mean the Holy Spirit influenced the biblical writers to produce authoritative scriptures.

Christians believe the bible was written by men. Unlike the writers of other religious “scriptures” (angels or heavenly beings), the writers of the bible are real, historical people. This makes the bible a historical document that can be authenticated through archaeology, ancient writings and other disciplines. It is apparent that God did not just dictate His Word mechanically to the biblical authors, but that His Word was expressed through each of their unique personalities.

Christians believe the bible is revelation. This means that we could not have discovered many of the truths found in the bible on our own, through natural means, such as study, research or contemplation. Some things in the bible can be found out through natural means like historical research. For example, Jesus’ death on a cross is a fact of history that we can learn apart from the bible. But the meaning of His death—that it was for our sins—requires the revelation found in the bible. We need God to *reveal* these truths to us because they are *hidden* truths that would have remained hidden if God had not chosen to uncover them for us.

Christians believe the bible is authoritative. The bible is *the* standard for the doctrine (what to believe) and the practice (how to live) of every believer individually and the church corporately. It is *the* rule by which we distinguish truth from error regarding matters of the faith. During His earthly ministry, Jesus regularly appealed to the authority of the Old Testament scriptures. The bible has the right to claim this absolute authority in a Christian’s life because of its divine authorship. This means that over against other possible “authorities,” such as the Pope, pastors, prophetic words, Christian books, what is popular, etc., the bible should have the final say in your life as a Christian.

Christians believe the bible is infallible. Infallibility means to be without error and entirely truthful. This includes the very words of the bible and not merely the ideas or principles they communicate. The bible is infallible in its entirety *as long as we correctly understand the intent of the original author.* This will at times require careful study in order to arrive at the right interpretation. Things like cultural contexts, figures of speech or symbolism must be taken into account. For example, when the bible says that God hides us in the shadow of His wings (Ps.17:8) we must not conclude that God has wings like a chicken.

1. Consider some of the books you have read. **In what ways does the Bible seem different from some of these other books?**

read 2 peter 1:16-21

2. How did Peter respond to the charge that the message he and the other apostles were preaching about Jesus (or what we know today as the four gospels) was just a made-up myth?

Imagine you were there, listening to Peter relate his personal experiences with Jesus. **How do you think you would have reacted?**

How can these first century eyewitnesses help you today as a follower of Christ?

3. Peter first argued that real flesh and blood eyewitnesses of Jesus support the truth of his message. **What else did he appeal to as a “witness” to the truth of his message about Jesus?**

What was special about the origin of the Old Testament scriptures?

What are some examples of Old Testament prophecies that bear witness to Jesus Christ?

read luke 1:1-4

4. Why did Luke say he wrote his two-volume work, the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles?

Luke was not an eyewitness to the events of Jesus' life. **What was he instead?**

What made Luke's account different from others?

Why do you think it is important to “know the certainty of the things you have been taught?”

read 2 timothy 3:10-17

5. Paul had just warned Timothy about false teachers with “depraved minds” who “oppose the truth” (3:1-9). **How was Paul different from these men?**

Paul called these men “evil,” “imposters” and “deceivers.” **Why do you think it is important to not just know whether a message is true but also the integrity of the messenger? (see Matthew 7:15-20)**

6. According to Paul, Timothy had some “safeguards” to help him deal with evil imposters and their deceptive messages. **What were they?**

Paul is referring here to just the Old Testament part of the Bible, since the New Testament was not officially put together (canonized) until 393 AD. The New Testament writings, however, were read and circulated throughout Christian churches from the first century on. We know from parts of Acts and from some of Paul’s other letters that Timothy was descended from a Jewish mother and a Greek father. He was probably taught the Old Testament scriptures at a very early age, as was customary for Jewish boys.

How did Paul view the scripture?

Translations of the Bible differ here. Some say all scripture is “inspired by God” while others say “God-breathed”. The idea, though, is clear. God didn’t just breathe upon the scriptures after they were written, but He actually breathed *out* the scriptures. The word literally is “exhaled.” And He didn’t merely give inspiration to the writers of the scriptures but He inspired the writings themselves. The Bible is a book of divine origin. How exactly God inspired the scripture, using human authors, is not clearly revealed to us.

What did he think scripture was good for?

What role should the bible play in your life now that you are a Christian? What role does it play?

read hebrews 4:11-13

7. What does the writer of Hebrews exhort us to do? What should we not do?

What do you think “rest” is referring to?

8. If we follow the example of the people of Israel, *what* are we disobeying?

How did the writer of Hebrews describe God’s Word?

Have you ever felt like the bible was *alive*? Has God ever spoken right to you and right *through* you as you read the bible? Discuss.

As a Christian, the most important book you will ever read is your bible. It is by reading your bible on a regular basis that you will grow in your relationship with God. The bible will show you how God wants you to live. It is also the primary way He will speak to you personally—words of encouragement, comfort, hope or direction for your life. But the statement of Jesus in Matthew 4:4 (see also Deuteronomy 8:3) sums up everything: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” According to Jesus, this book, the Bible, should be as important to you as the most basic necessities of life. In order for you to be healthy and to grow as a Christian, you must regularly “take in” the scripture by reading it, meditating upon it and believing it for yourself. Before long, you will discover, like many other Christians have before you, that the Bible is something that you cannot live without.

2

what is a christian?

john 2:23-3:15

To be a Christian means a lot of different things to different people. For many, being a Christian means you believe in God, attend a church, go through the rite of baptism and try to be a “good” person. But the Bible defines a Christian much differently. According to the Bible, a Christian is someone who has had a very significant, life-changing experience. The apostle John describes this dramatic experience as “passing from death to life.” (See 1 John 3:14). The apostle Paul says that we were once actually dead and that by becoming a Christian, we have been made alive. (See Eph. 2:1-5) Jesus refers to it as being “born-again” or “born from above.” It is like being born all over again! In chapter 3 of the gospel of John, Jesus had a very interesting conversation with a religious leader about what it means to be a Christian.

1. Think of some things that are true about birth and new-born babies. If becoming a Christian is to be “born again,” **what are some things you can learn from natural birth about being a Christian?** (For example, birth is how we enter this world. Being born-again is how we enter the spiritual world and a relationship with God.)

read john 2:23-3:2

2. Crowds of people were in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, an annual feast remembering the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt. (See Exodus 12) **How did these people in Jerusalem feel about Jesus? Why?**

3. **How did Jesus feel about them? Why?**

How does it make you feel knowing that Jesus knows everything about you?

4. **What are some things you can learn about this man Nicodemus from verses 1-2?**

The Pharisees were a Jewish sect who rigorously and meticulously followed Old Testament laws. They tried to remain separate (hence the meaning of their name: "separate ones") from the common people (who did not obey all these laws) so as not to become ritually "unclean." The Pharisees were regularly having conflicts with Jesus, who abhorred their behavior as hypocritical (see Matthew 23).

What do you think he thought of Jesus?

read john 3:3-9

5. **How did Jesus reply to Nicodemus' comment? (V. 3)**

His reply appears to have nothing at all to do with what Nicodemus had just said. Keeping in mind that Jesus knows all men (John 2:24-25), **what do you think He knew about Nicodemus?**

Do you think Jesus was impressed by all of Nicodemus' credentials? Why or why not?

6. Nicodemus was puzzled by Jesus' response and said that what Jesus was saying was impossible. It was impossible to enter again your mother's womb. **But what did Jesus say was impossible in verse 5?**

Think of some ways you may have thought you could enter the Kingdom of God. (For example, helping people, being good enough, going to church, etc.)

7. Jesus told Nicodemus in verse 6 that "Flesh gives birth to flesh but the Spirit gives birth to spirit." **What do you think this means?**

According to Jesus, can you create spiritual life in yourself? Support your answer from the passage.

8. In verse 8, Jesus compared spiritual birth with the wind. Jesus used a play on words here, because both the Greek and the Hebrew words for "wind" can also be translated "spirit". Think of some characteristics of the wind. **How does the wind compare with your experience of spiritual birth?**

read john 3:9-15

9. Nicodemus still did not understand what Jesus was talking about (verse 9). Jesus said that the reason he didn't understand was that he has no personal experience of these things (verse 11). **What had Jesus experienced that made Him qualified to discuss spiritual truths (verse 13)?**

Since you have become a Christian, what things do you understand now that you did not before?

10. Jesus drew a comparison in verse 14 between a story from the Old Testament (that Nicodemus should have been familiar with) and His crucifixion. **Read Numbers 21:4-9 and then list any similarities you find there with the crucifixion of Christ. What do you think Jesus meant by "believe?"**

The late Paul Little described becoming a Christian this way: "There's something to believe and Someone to receive." What we are to believe as Christians is the message of the gospel (the "good news"). The good news is Christ paid the penalty for our sins with His death on the cross. We need to make sure, though, that we not only believe the message of salvation but that we also receive the Savior into our hearts. It is in the receiving of Christ that new life is injected into us by the Holy Spirit and we are "born-again"!

Birth is an incredible event and a new baby is a wonderful thing. So is spiritual birth an incredible event, an event that changes a person's life forever by bringing them into personal contact with the living God of the universe. But as incredible and wonderful as a new baby is, it doesn't stay a baby. He or she begins a process of growing up and maturing. And so, as a "new-born" Christian, you will also not stay the same. You are beginning a life-long journey of growth, change and maturation as a child of God.

3

sin and forgiveness

1 john 1:5-2:2

The moment you believed the gospel message and received Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord, you became a Christian. Your sins were forgiven and you were declared righteous (to be without sin) by God. You were also brought into a new relationship with Him as His child. All this is a gift from God and not something you can earn or merit. As we discussed in the previous study, the bible calls this being “born-again” through the Holy Spirit.

Although you are a Christian and God has declared you righteous, you may find that you do not always feel righteous. You still sin and do things that are wrong. Does this mean you are no longer righteous in God’s sight and therefore no longer a Christian? Do you need to be saved all over again so that your sins can be forgiven? Or is sin something you don’t have to think about anymore? Now that you’re a Christian, will God just overlook your sins?

It’s important to understand what the Bible actually teaches about sin. Back in the first century, the apostle John wrote a letter to some Christians addressing, among other things, the whole subject of sin and forgiveness. Let’s take a look at what his letter had to say.

read 1 john 1:5

1. In verse 5, how did John describe God?

What are some characteristics of light and darkness?

What do you think John might want us to learn about God from this metaphor?

read 1 john 1:6-2:2

2. Three times in this passage John used the words, "If we claim." **Write down the three statements that begin with these words (v.6,8,10).**

These statements (or false claims) are three errors Christians often make about sin. Let's look at each one separately.

3. **What was the first false claim mentioned by John (v.6)?**

4. **What does the phrase, "walk in the darkness" describe? Why do you think John chose to use this phrase?**

In your own life, how is sinning like "walking in the darkness?"

5. **If we make this claim, what does that reveal about us? Why?** (refer to Is.59:2 to help you answer)

How close to God do you feel after you've sinned and disobeyed Him? Explain.

6. What is an alternative to walking in the darkness (v.7)?

In your own words, what does it mean to “walk in the light?”

7. What are the benefits of walking in the light?

Has “walking in the light” ever healed a broken relationship in your own life? Discuss.

8. Note that John said when we “walk in the light,” the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. What do you think he was assuming is true about all Christians?

9. In your own words, re-state this first error about sin that John was warning Christians about. How do you think someone might act if they believed this error?

10. What was the second false claim John mentioned (v.8)?

If we make this claim, what is wrong with us this time?

11. What alternative did John present us with in verse 9? In your own words, what does it mean to “confess?”

What has God promised to do for us if we confess our sins to Him?

Why can we have confidence that God will do these things for us?

The Bible teaches that God is faithful to do the things He promises. He can be trusted and depended upon because He does not lie. (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 6:17-18) The Bible also teaches that God is just. His judgments and decisions are always right and perfectly fair. It is just for Him to forgive us our sins not because we deserve to be forgiven but because Christ has already paid the penalty for our sin. Nothing more is owed to God. Jesus paid it all! (Romans 6:23; 3:23-26)

12. Why do you think it is important to understand that our forgiveness depends not on how moving and heartfelt our confession might be, but rather on the faithfulness and justice of God?
13. In verse 8, John used the word “sin” but then in verse 9, he used the word “sins”. Explain in your own words the distinction he wanted to make between “sin” and “sins.”

The Bible teaches that although Christians will always have a sin nature, they now have power over sin. This power is from the Holy Spirit who resides inside Christians and helps them change sinful behavior. For further reading, see Romans 8:1-17.

14. Re-state the second error about sin that John warned us about.

Think of some negative ways this error might affect your life as a Christian.

15. What is the third false claim (v.10)?

How is it different from the false claim referred to in verse 8?

What does belief in this claim reveal about us?

16. There seems to be a progression in these three claims. In the first claim, we are telling a lie. In the second, we are deluded or self-deceived. But in this last one, we are actually calling God a liar. **What do you think calling God a liar reveals about a person's heart?** (refer to Gen.3:1,4,5 to help you answer)

17. What scene do you think John was imagining as he wrote 2:1-2?

Put yourself in this scene: You are on trial. Satan is the prosecuting attorney (Rev.12:10), accusing you of breaking God's laws. God is the judge and Jesus is your defense attorney. **What else, according to John, did Jesus do besides defend you before the Father?**

18. In your own words, re-state the truths about sin you learned from this passage.

Even though you are now a Christian, you will continue to sin. You still have a sin nature that makes you prone to disobey God. The way to deal with sin before God is to be honest about it (walk in the light), not try to hide it or lie about it (walk in the darkness) and to admit it (confession) to God. Then you must trust Him to keep His promise to forgive your sin and cleanse you from them.

It's important to realize that the goal God has for your life isn't simply to repeat this process of confession and forgiveness over and over again. His goal is to actually change you and make you like Jesus (Rom.8:29). While you endeavor to obey Him, He is at work inside of you through the Holy Spirit, changing your desires and freeing you from sinful habits (Phil.2:13). Now, you are declared righteous. One day, you will actually be righteous in all of your thoughts and actions. Until then, you will have to deal with the inevitability of sin in your life.

4

am i *really* a christian?

1 john 3:11-24

For one reason or another, some Christians doubt that they are really saved. They may question whether they “did it right” the first time—whether Jesus really did come into their heart—and so they repeat the sinner’s prayer and give their life to Christ over and over again. Maybe their experience didn’t match their expectations. Perhaps when they compare themselves with someone else, they conclude that they just don’t measure up to the standard and so must not be saved.

It is possible to be really saved yet not be certain that you are. But that is not the state the bible intends for Christians to be in. We are to be saved and to be assured of our salvation. We are to know without a doubt that we are God’s, that He has forgiven our sin, that He dwells in our heart by the Holy Spirit and that we are destined for heaven when we die.

In today’s study, we will be looking at some of the ways we can assure *ourselves* that we really truly are Christians. In 1 John, the apostle lays out “tests” that we can apply to ourselves to determine that we are really saved.

1. **Have you ever wondered if you really are saved and if Christ is really living inside of you? If you have, what sorts of things make you doubt your salvation?**

read 1 John 3:11-15

2. **What did John tell us we should and shouldn't do in verses 11 and 12?**

You can read the story of how Cain killed his brother Abel in Genesis 4:1-16. **According to John, why did Cain murder his brother?**

3. In verse 13 is the first "test" that can help you determine that you are saved. **What is it?**

The word "world" in verse 13 does not refer to the physical earth or all the people living on the earth. The New Testament writers used this term to refer to the "world system" whose values and priorities are opposed to the ways and the will of God. (see 1 John 2:15-17) They taught that the world was under the leadership of the devil (Eph.2:2; John 12:31). It could include the popular culture, politics and governments, the mass media, etc.

Read John 15:18-21. **Why did Jesus say Christians would be hated?**

Why would this help assure you that you are God's child?

Since you have become a Christian, do you feel "out of step" with the rest of the world? If so, explain.

4. In verse 14 you will find a second "test" that can help you determine if you are really saved. **What is it?**

What does "passing from death to life" refer to?

Since you gave your life to Christ, what changes have you noticed in your own thoughts and feelings about other Christians?

read 1 john 3:16-20

5. According to verse 16, how do we know what is and what isn't "love?"

Why can we be confident that God loves us?

Our tendency is to look to things like our health, our financial situation, our family relationships or our job success for evidence of God's love for us. **Why shouldn't we do this? Why are these things not able to give us real assurance of God's love? Explain.**

6. How did John say we are to love our Christian brothers and sisters?

What are some ways you can show this kind of love to the Christians you know?

7. John warned that sometimes our "hearts will condemn us" (v.19-20). To condemn means to declare wrong or pronounce guilty. **What do you think he meant by "whenever our hearts condemn us?" Have you ever experienced this? Explain**

How can these "tests" help you deal with a condemning heart?

read 1 john 3:21-24

8. What is the third "test" (verse 22) that can help us determine that we are really saved (see also 2:3-5; 3:6,9-10)?

Describe how your behavior has changed since you gave your life to Christ.

How do you feel now when you've obeyed God? How do you feel when you've disobeyed God?

When do you feel most like asking God for something and why?

- 9. What is a fourth "test" that can help us determine that we are really saved (see also 4:2-3)?**

What exactly must we believe about Jesus in order to pass this test?

What is the source of correct belief about Jesus?

- 10. In your own words, state the difference between how you are saved and how you are assured that you're saved.**

In the book of 1 John, the apostle gave us tests that we can apply to our lives to assure us that we are saved—to assure us that we have been born-again and belong to God. Passing these tests won't save us. Salvation comes from placing our trust in Christ's death for our sin and by surrendering our lives to Him. But these tests can help us have confidence that we have done that.

God isn't looking for a "perfect score" on these tests (e.g., perfect love or perfect obedience). He is looking for a change in your life. He wants to see that you are moving in the direction of love for other Christians and obedience to Him. The devil will try to undermine your confidence and cast doubt on your relationship with God. Resist these attacks by using the truth of God's Word, particularly these simple tests from 1 John.

5

why is being a christian so *hard*?

You don't have to be a Christian for long to discover that it is not easy to live as a Christian. Perhaps this came as a surprise to you. Maybe you were under the impression (like many people) that following Jesus would be a breeze. God would make all your troubles go away and He would see to it that life went smoothly, effortlessly and flawlessly for you.

Many people imagine the Christian life to be easy—to be like playing a Sunday afternoon game of football. All that needs to be done once they have the ball is to run down the open field to the end zone and score a touchdown. They take off running only to be hit from the side, tackled to the ground and smashed face first into the dirt. Their problem was they failed to take into account the opposing team on the field.

Many of us fail to take into account the forces opposing us as Christians. The bible tells us we have enemies who oppose our spiritual progress as believers and try to tempt us away from following the Lord. Everyone experiences temptation from time to time, but certain temptations intensify once we become Christians because we have changed our allegiance—we are God's, and this has made us some new enemies.

In this study, we will become familiar with our three primary enemies—the world², our flesh (sin nature) and the devil. We will also learn how to become real conquerors in Christ.

² Refer to study 4 for a definition of the world.

1. Do you agree with the statement, "At times, being a Christian is very hard?" Why or why not?

Can you identify any experiences in your life since you've been a Christian in which you were tempted to do wrong? What happened?

Do you know whether the temptation was from the world, your own flesh (sinful nature) or the devil?

read 1 john 2:16

2. In your own words, what was John referring to when he used this word "world?"

What are some examples of "lust of the eyes?"

... "lust of the flesh?"

... "pride of life?"

read 1 john 2:15; james 4:4; 2 timothy 4:10

3. What did John warn us not to do?

Why do you think James said it's impossible to be friends with both God and the world?

What did loving the world do to Demas?

Although you are a Christian, are there things about the world that are still attractive to you? What are they? How do you feel tempted to love the world and be its friend?

read romans 12:2.

4. **What did Paul warn us about in this verse?**

Find definitions for the words conform and transform in a dictionary. **How would you define “conformity to the world?” How would you define “transformation by God’s renewing work?”**

5. **Describe what you think transformation should look like in the life of a Christian.**

What can we do to help this process along? What can we do to hinder this process?

In what ways have you been transformed since you’ve come to Christ?

read romans 7:18

6. **Imagine you are a house. When you became a Christian, you invited the Holy Spirit to come live in you. But someone was already living there! According to Paul, who is it?**

Like the word “world,” “flesh” is used in a variety of ways in the bible. It can refer to the substance of a body (1 Cor. 15:39), all of humanity (Romans 3:20), the humanity of Jesus (John 1:14), to name just a few. Often it is used to refer to our sinful nature, which is how we are using it in this study.

How would you describe this occupant living in your house?

read galatians 5:17

7. What happens inside us when the Holy Spirit moves in?

Have you ever experienced a conflict like this? Explain what happened.

read galatians 5:19-23

8. Your two house guests like very different things. **What are some of them?**

After the Holy Spirit moved in, have you noticed any changes in the sort of activities taking place in your “house?” Discuss.

read galatians 5:24-25

9. What two things are we told to do in these verses to help diffuse the internal conflict that often rages inside us?

Crucifixion is violent, painful and results in death. What does that say to you about how you ought to be treating your flesh?

What are some practical things you can start doing now to both crucify your flesh and keep in step with the Spirit?

10. Look up the following scriptures and write down the fact/facts about Satan that each passage contains.

The devil goes by many different names in scripture (Satan, the enemy, the evil one, Lucifer, god of this world, god of this age). He is an angelic being, created by God. Because of evil ambition and bitter jealousy, the devil rebelled against God, desiring the place of supreme worship for himself (read Ezek. 28:11-19 and Is. 14:12-17). Once you come to Christ, the devil declares you his enemy because of his complete and total hatred for God. His goal is to disrupt and destroy your relationship with the Lord.

Rev. 12:10

Mark 4:15

John 8:44

John 13:2

John 13:27

Acts 5:3

2 Cor. 4:4

2 Cor. 11:14

Eph. 4:26-7

Eph. 6:11-12

1 Tim. 3:6-7

1 Peter 5:8-9

1 John 3:8

From this information, answer the following questions about Satan.

11. Based on these verses, how would you describe Satan?

12. What can Satan do to people?

What do you think is his chief weapon?

Where do you think many of your battles with the devil will take place?

13. According to the following verses, what can we do as Christians to deal with Satan?

Matt. 6:13

Eph. 4:26-7

Eph. 6:10-18

1 Peter 5:8-9

1 John 5:18 with 1:9

Rev. 12:11

read genesis 3:1-13 (a fall to temptation by the devil)

14. In what form did Satan appear to Eve?

What does that tell you about how Satan may appear to you?

15. Note what Satan said to Eve in verses 1, 4 and 5. **What was he trying to do?**

What would Eve conclude about God if she believed what Satan was telling her?

Have you ever questioned God's goodness or His intentions towards you? Discuss.

What can you do to protect yourself from being deceived?

16. How did Adam and Eve behave after their sin and why?

In what ways had Satan accomplished his goal with Adam and Eve?

Have you ever had a similar experience with sin? Discuss.

It would be incorrect for us to conclude “the devil made them do it” and that Adam and Eve were innocent here in the Garden. Satan used deception and lies to excite Adam and Eve’s own sinful nature, leading them to sin (“...the woman *saw*, ...*pleasing* to the eye, *desirable*...”). It is the combination of Satan’s temptation and our own sinful nature that brings our downfall.

read matthew 4:1-11 (temptation resisted)

17. Whose idea was it for Jesus to be tempted?

According to Hebrews 4:15, why was He tempted?

18. What was the first temptation Satan presented to Jesus?

The phrase, “if you are the Son of God” should be understood “since you are the Son of God.” Satan was not tempting Jesus to prove who He was. The devil was fully aware of Jesus’ identity and why He was on earth. Satan was trying to get Jesus to sin.

Jesus had put Himself in a weakened and vulnerable state, yet He still managed to resist the devil. **How?**

19. How did the devil tempt Jesus the second time?

Does it surprise you that the devil knows scripture? Why might this be important to know?

Again, how did Jesus resist?

20. What was the final temptation?

The New Testament teaches that the whole world (all the kingdoms of the world) are under the control of the devil (see 1 John 5:19). He, therefore, could legitimately offer them to Jesus. In the end, Jesus will get all of the kingdoms of the world back from the devil (see Rev. 11:15), but by way of the cross and not by bowing to Satan.

What did Jesus say to the devil this time?

What can you learn from Jesus' example?

Why is it so important for you to know and understand the bible?

It is not possible for us to entirely escape warfare and avoid temptations from our three opponents while we are alive on this earth. But it is possible for us to resist temptations and not always cave in to them when they come at us. A useful verse to meditate on when you are tempted is 1 Corinthians 10:13:

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

6

introducing the holy spirit

John 14:15-21

If you have ever been to church, then you have probably heard the phrase, "...in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." Most people can understand the Father and the Son. These are ideas and images we are familiar with. But the Holy Spirit is another matter. He is clearly the most confusing and mysterious person of the trinity. There is nothing or no one anywhere in human experience quite like Him. The closest thing we have to the Holy Spirit today is "the Force" from *Star Wars* (e.g. "May the Force be with you").

The problem many people have with the Holy Spirit is that He is intangible. We cannot touch Him with our hands, see Him with our eyes, hear Him with our ears or even picture what He looks like. Yet throughout the pages of the bible, He is said to "fill" people (Ex.31:3; Acts.2:4), "come on" people (Judges 3:10; Ezek.11:5), "speak" through people (2Sam.23:2), even "move" people (Is.34:16; Ezek.3:14). He is referred to as the breath of God, wind, fire, living water and a dove. Add to this all the many unusual and sometimes bizarre things that have been attributed to the Holy Spirit over the centuries, and it's no wonder some people would prefer that He was kept shut up in the pages of the bible and given lip service at the appropriate times.

The Holy Spirit, however, is essential to your life as a Christian and Jesus had a lot to say about Him. During His three years of ministry, Jesus spoke often of the Father. He said that if anyone had seen Him, they had also seen the Father (John 14:9). But as His earthly ministry drew to a close, He began to speak more and more about the Spirit. In the same way that Jesus revealed God the Father, He also revealed God the Holy Spirit. As one theologian said, "Christ has put a human face on the Spirit as well."³

On the last night He was together with His disciples, Jesus began to prepare them for what lie ahead. He would be leaving and the Spirit would be coming. Naturally the disciples were upset by this news, but Jesus had words of comfort for them. He began by telling them about the Spirit, someone they would soon be meeting in person!

³ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996), p.25.

1. **What comes to your mind when you read or hear about the Holy Spirit? How do you feel when someone “invites the Holy Spirit to be present” in a meeting or small group?**

read john 14:15-21

2. Notice that throughout this passage Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as “He” or “Him” and not as “it.” **What does that tell you about the Holy Spirit?**

What are some characteristics that are true of people that are not true of things?

3. **According to Jesus, what should you do if you love Him (v.15 and v.21)? What will God do if you love Him (v.16 and v.21)?**

Why do you think loving God is an important “prerequisite” for receiving the Holy Spirit?

4. In verse 16, Jesus told the disciples He would send them “another Counselor.” **Explain in your own words the significance of this title.**

The word for “Counselor” in the Greek is “paraclete” and it means “someone who comes along side to help”. The word “another” implies “another of the same kind”.
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5. In verse 16, Jesus informed them that the Holy Spirit would “be with them forever.” **Why is this significant?**

This is quite different from anyone’s previous experience of the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament, the Spirit would “come on” someone to enable them to do a particular task, such as prophesying or performing a miracle (see 1 Samuel 10:10; 11:6; 19:23; 2 Chronicles 15:1) but would never remain permanently. Jesus is saying something completely new.

Why do you think the Holy Spirit can now remain with someone permanently?

How does it make you feel knowing the Holy Spirit will never leave you?

6. **What did Jesus call the Holy Spirit in verse 17?**

What do you think this means? (see v. 26 for ideas)

How has the Holy Spirit brought God’s truth into your life?

7. Jesus said that the world could not accept the Spirit. **Why do you think that is?**

The disciples had never met the Holy Spirit. **How could Jesus say they “know Him, for He lives with” them (v.17)?**

8. In verse 18, Jesus told the disciples that He would not leave them as orphans. Orphans are abandoned children who have no parents. But Jesus was talking to a room full of grown men! In Matthew 18:3, Jesus had told the disciples that they needed to “change and become like little children” in order to enter the Kingdom of God. **Practically speaking, what does all this mean for your relationship with God?**

9. **What can you learn about God and about the relationships between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit from verse 20?**

read john 16:5-16

10. As the disciples were trying to deal with their grief over Jesus’ departure, He told them that it is good for them that He leave. **Why would He say that?**

11. **What did Jesus say the Spirit would be doing once He came into the world (v.8-11)? In your own words, explain what each of these activities means.**

12. **According to Jesus, where does the Spirit get His message? How would you describe His role in the trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit?**

13. **From what you learned today, list all the benefits of having the Holy Spirit.**

In these passages, we saw Jesus preparing His disciples for His imminent departure. There were some rough times ahead for them, but they had a lot to be encouraged about from what He had told them. They could expect to receive “another Counselor”, someone who was just like Jesus. He would come along side each of them to help them, and He would never leave. This other Counselor

would actually be their link with Jesus and with the Father. The things Jesus had taught them and done with them the past three years this other Counselor knew all about and would remind them of anything they may have forgotten.

As Christians, each of us was given the Holy Spirit when we were born-again. He is our link with Jesus and the Father. He will be with us always, in every situation we find ourselves in. And He should not be a mystery to us. We know that as we read the New Testament and learn about Jesus, we are also getting to know the Holy Spirit, because He is “another Counselor,” one just like Jesus.

7

prayer—talking to God

matthew 6:5-13

Prayer is one of the most important things you do as a Christian. Prayer will bring you close to God and help you grow spiritually. Prayer will relieve the stress and anxiety that is so characteristic of modern life and fill your heart with peace. And it's so exciting to see God answer prayers! Prayer can change a tough situation into a positive experience.

Why is it, however, if prayer is so good and so rewarding, that it is also *so hard to do*? There seem to be so many other activities that compete for our time that prayer is often just crowded out of our lives. We resort to “shooting one up” as we race off to work and seriously pray only when there is a crisis—when there is “nothing else we can do.” How can we hope to develop the kind of prayer life that we should have as Christians?

Back in first century, the disciples knew where to go to find out about prayer. They went to the one person they had seen pray for hours, the one person who seemed to have all his prayers answered, the one person whose life was amazingly free from fear and anxiety. They went to Jesus of Nazareth.

Let's look at a section of the Sermon on the Mount in the gospel of Matthew and learn what Jesus had to say about prayer.

1. When you think about prayer, what comes to your mind? (e.g. folded hands, closed eyes, complete silence, somber mood, etc).

Write down some of your experiences with prayer, both positive and negative.

Imagine Jesus is sitting here with you right now. **What would you want to ask Him about prayer?**

read matthew 6:5-8

This passage on prayer is part of a larger teaching that Jesus may have given on more than one occasion, commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount (5:1-7:29). It is directed exclusively to followers of Christ and therefore is not really relevant for non-Christians. The sermon consists of ethical teaching that sets the standard for how a Christian is to live. Much of it is practical and straightforward, but the demands are extremely high. Jesus never intended for us to meet these requirements on our own. We need His help! (see John 15:5)

2. Jesus began by telling his disciples what not to do in prayer. **What was the first thing He told them not to do in vs. 5?**

A hypocrite is someone who is pretending to be something he or she is not. It is derived from the Greek word for "actor." In Jesus' day, actors would literally wear masks on stage to hide their faces.

What was the hypocrite in vs. 5 interested in the most?

Where might we "stand" today to be "seen by men"?

What things would we pretend? (Or what masks do we put on?)

3. **What did Jesus tell them to do instead (vs.6)?**

Jesus was not so much interested in where they prayed as much as their motives for praying.
What are some of the things that motivate you to pray?

4. Think about how you pray when others are around (e.g. at church or small group fellowship) and how you pray when you are alone. **Keeping in mind that Jesus was not condemning all public prayer, what are some of the benefits of praying alone?**

5. **What else did Jesus tell them not to do while praying (vs. 7)?**

A “pagan” or “heathen” is someone who has no knowledge of or relationship with the true and living God. The word “babble” implies meaningless, repetitive words. Jesus is not condemning long prayers (you’ll find some long prayers recorded in the Bible) or repeated requests (see Matthew 7:7-8). In contrast to believers, however, pagans prayed long prayers because they believed it would increase the chances their prayer would be answered (see 1 Kings 18:25-29). In the bible, some of the most famous prayers are actually quite short (see Ex.32:31-32; 1 Kings 18:36-37; Luke 18:13). This reveals genuine faith in God, His goodness and His faithfulness.

What are some examples of this type of praying?

6. **How does it make you feel to know that God is well aware of all your needs before you ever ask Him?**

Do you think this truth ought to affect the way you pray? Why or why not?

7. In these five verses, Jesus informed His disciples that it's not just what we say in prayer that is important, but also what our inner attitudes and hidden motives are as well. **What changes do you think you need to make in your prayer life in order to follow Jesus' guidelines?**

read matthew 6:9-13

This next section is known as the Lord's Prayer. Some churches regularly recite verses 9-13 because they believe this is what Jesus wanted done. He is not, however, telling us *what* to pray but rather *how* to pray. The Lord's Prayer is a *model* for us to follow when we do pray. In these several verses are all the essential elements of prayer, not necessarily the exact words to use when praying.

8. **How did Jesus tell His disciples to address God when they pray (v.9)?**

There are dozens of ways people have addressed God in the Bible (Lord, King, Savior, Redeemer, The Almighty, etc.) **By choosing the words "our Father", what do you think Jesus wanted His disciples to understand about the nature of their relationship with God?**

Is it helpful or harmful for you to address God as "Father" in prayer? Why?

9. The first three elements of prayer concern God and not us. **What are these three elements (vs. 9-10)?**

Why do you think Jesus instructed His disciples do this before they began praying about what they wanted or needed?

10. In what ways can you “hallow” God’s name?

Names in the Bible are a reflection of the person and so are more significant than they are for us today. Hallowed literally means to treat as holy or to revere.

11. Why do you think Jesus had them pray about God’s will being done on earth?

The bible teaches that God is sovereign—in control. **Isn’t His will already being done on earth? Why or why not?**

God’s kingdom is His sovereign reign and rule over His creation, much the same way a king rules over his country. In God’s kingdom, His will (what He wants) is always done. Right now, what God wants is always done in heaven. Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 12:28 that because He was driving out demons by the Spirit of God, the kingdom of God had come to earth—it was inaugurated by His earthly ministry. But as we can see, God’s Kingdom has not yet come completely or perfectly because His will is not always being done. We are in a period of time some Christians call “the already but the not yet.” It has already come in the person of Jesus but it has not yet completely taken over. Jesus asks us, therefore, to pray that the kingdom (God’s reign) will *expand* and *grow* to include more and more of God’s creation.

What kind of prayers do you think will expand God’s kingdom on earth?

What areas of your own life do you need to pray for God’s will to be done?

12. The next three verses are requests we can make for our own needs. What are these three requests and what, in your own words, are these three needs?

13. In verse 11, do you think Jesus meant we can only ask Him for bread? Why or why not?

What other things might this request include?

What does it not include?

14. How frequently should we make this request?

Right now in your life, are you this dependent upon God? Discuss.

15. What else do we need, according to Jesus (v.12)?

How important is it for you to have forgiveness from God?

Why must you be forgiving towards others before you will be forgiven?

The second half of this verse says that we are to forgive people who sin (do wrong) against us just as God forgives us our sin against Him. Jesus is not telling us here that we earn God's forgiveness by forgiving others. Forgiveness is a free gift that we do not deserve. It is like salvation, which is also a free gift. We won't be saved, however, unless we apprehend this free gift by faith. Our faith does not and in fact cannot earn us salvation—it is simply the means by which we receive it. The same is true of forgiveness. For us to be forgiven by God we must maintain a forgiving attitude towards those who have wronged us. Keep in mind that in everything, God takes the initiative. (1 John 4:19; John 13:15; Eph.4:32; 1 Peter 2:21).

16. **Who is the “evil one?”**

What does he want with us?

What exactly are we asking for in verse 13?

Being a Christian is sometimes referred to in the Bible as being a soldier in combat (see 1 Timothy 2:3 and Ephesians 6:10-18). Imagine yourself as a soldier in battle for the kingdom of God. **Where or when do you experience the most intense fighting?**

What, therefore, are your particular areas of weakness that you should pray about?

Prayer is simply talking to God. As Christians, it is at the very heart of our relationship with Him. Jesus gives us some guidelines here in Matthew to help us develop good prayer habits. We can learn a lot about prayer from those who practice it on a regular basis. Hear how the psalmist feels about prayer in his life:

I love the Lord, because He hears my prayers and answers them;
Because He bends down and listens, I will pray as long as I live!

Psalm 116:1-2 (paraphrase)

8

do i need “the church” in order to be a christian?

1 corinthians 12:12-26

Everyone has some idea of what a church is. To many people, a church is a large, old building with stained glass windows and organ music playing in the background. You must be dressed up to go to church and you must be quiet once you get there. At church, you sit for an hour or so to watch other people say and do things that have little if any relevance to your own life. It should come as no surprise that church isn't very popular anymore.

This is *not*, however, the New Testament's idea of church. In fact, according to the bible, church is not a building or place at all—it is *people*. “Church” is all the people who have decided to be followers of Jesus Christ. Church is something you *automatically* join when you become a Christian. If you are a Christian, then God sees you as part of *the* church even though you may not be a formal member of any particular church at all! (By the way, scripture **does** encourage us to be part of a local church if we are Christians!)

So what exactly does the bible say about church and about what your role should be in it? The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Corinth to help them understand church and how they should each be involved. We'll be looking at a passage that will give you the bible's perspective on “church.”

1. Describe some of your experiences of church, both prior to accepting Christ and after.

In your own words, how would you like church to be?

read 1 corinthians 12:12-14

2. In these verses, what did Paul compare the church to?

How is the church is similar to a body?

3. Why do you think this idea of “diversity in unity” was so important to Paul?

What practical implications does this truth about the church have for your life?

4. How is it possible for a lot of different kinds of people to be part of one body (v.13)?

When Paul said that we were all “baptized by one Spirit,” he was not referring to the rite of water baptism, nor to a “second experience” often labeled “the baptism in the Holy Spirit.” He was referring to the *conversion* experience, when a person is *born-again*. It’s at this time that he or she is given the Holy Spirit. The use of the word “baptize” illustrates that we are *immersed in* the Holy Spirit. The use of the word “drink” shows that we are *filled with* the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we are both *in Christ* and He is *in us*. (see John 17:20-23)

5. What specific groups of people did Paul refer to in verse 13?

Back in Paul's time, these were the various social groups that people were divided into. **If Paul had written this letter today, what specific groups might he include?**

Does being a member of a particular group exclude you from being a part of the church? Why or why not?

What is necessary for being considered part of Christ's body?

read 1 corinthians 12:15-20

6. Still using the body analogy, Paul made another point about the church in verses 15-16. **What is it?**

What common problem do you think Paul wanted to address?

Have you ever felt the way this "foot" and "ear" felt? Explain.

7. **What truth can help Christians who feel they are not an essential part of the church (v.17,19)?**

Have you ever struggled with feelings that you were not very important in the church? ("I can't teach, I'm not good at evangelism, I'm not musical—there is nothing for me to contribute to church life!")

What do you think Paul would say to you regarding your struggles?

8. **Who, according to Paul, gets to decide how the parts (the people) of the body (the church) are to be organized (v.18)?**

Why do you think God doesn't leave it up to each person to decide for himself or herself which part they want to be?

How does it make you feel to know that God is the one who decides what part you and everyone else will be in the church?

read 1 corinthians 12:21-26

9. Paul addressed another "church" problem in verse 21. **What is it?**

Why is it wrong for a Christian to exhibit this attitude?

How can this attitude be harmful to the church?

10. **Using the physical body as a guideline, how did Paul classify the various parts of the church (v.22-24)?**

In your own words, what was the point he was trying to make?

What would you say is the proper attitude we should have towards each other in church (v.25-26)?

Think of examples when you or someone you know "suffered" with someone's troubles or "rejoiced" when someone was honored. Which do you think is harder to do and why?

11. **Based on what you learned in this study, is it essential for you as a Christian to be part of a church? Give reasons for your answer.**

According to Paul, the church is a living organism, just like a physical body. In the church we find diversity, just like we do in a physical body. We don't expect everyone to look alike or have the same function in the church. But the church is also a unity. It has one head (Jesus Christ) and it operates under His command. In the church, there is no such thing as independence, from Christ or from each other. Every member *needs* the other members, making no member more important than any other. God desires the church to be free from envy, jealousy and competition, the things we expect to find in other social groups. Instead, the members of the church are connected with the other members, spiritually and emotionally, suffering when one is hurting and rejoicing when one is honored. Begin today to ask God to show you the "part" He has made you to be in the church and how you can begin to serve!

9

what am i suppose to do as a christian?

matthew 28:16-20

If you wanted to get a message out to people worldwide, you would probably hire all kinds of media professionals and public relations experts. After all, it would be a big job and to do it right, you would need specialists. Have you ever wondered how the message of Christianity was spread? It is amazing to consider that what began as a small group of just twelve men, following an itinerant preacher through the back roads of a rural, middle eastern country during the first century, has become the world's largest and most influential religion. How did it happen? What was God's strategy to reach the world with His message?

God's strategy was to send people to do the job—average, everyday people who are followers of His Son. People just like you! Many might argue that God would have been better off to do His own public relations and spread the message Himself, but instead, He chose to use people.

Following the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples on a mountain in Galilee to tell them about a job He had for them. For the past three years, Jesus had been the one to go and to preach and to heal, but soon He would be returning to heaven. He passed the baton, so to speak, to His disciples and they have been passing it on to Christians ever since. In this last study, let's consider what this job is that God wants us to do as Christians.

1. Think back to how you became a Christian. **Who shared the message of the gospel with you?**

Why did you respond and accept Christ when you did?

How do you feel about doing the same thing with someone else?

read matthew 28:16-20

2. **Where did the eleven go (there were only 11 disciples since Judas, who had betrayed Jesus, had killed himself; 27:5) and why (see 26:32 and 28:10)?**

Why do you think Jesus made a point of telling the disciples twice to meet Him in Galilee—once before His death, and once after His resurrection?

3. **What did they do when they saw Him (v.17)?**

The Greek word for doubt in this verse does not imply unbelief but rather hesitation. The word was also used to describe Peter when he was walking on the water in Matthew 14:31.

What do you think some of them “doubted?”

The disciples had never worshiped Jesus before, even though they had spent three years with Him and had witnessed hundreds of miracles. **Why do you think they worshiped Him now?**

4. What claim did Jesus make in verse 18?

By “authority,” Jesus meant the *right* and the *power* to rule or govern. Jesus had been given *authority* over the affairs on the earth and the affairs in heaven! To illustrate this, imagine a policeman. He has the *right* to stand in the middle of the street to stop traffic but he does not have the *power* (physical might) to actually stop a moving car. Jesus has been given both the *right* to rule and the *power* to rule.

Who is it that gave this authority to Jesus?

Why was it given to Jesus? (see Phil. 2:6-11)

How does Jesus’ authority affect you personally? To what degree do you recognize His authority over your life?

5. What did Jesus tell His disciples they must do in verse 19-20?

List the four specific parts of this command.

What is the ultimate goal of Jesus’ command? What is not the goal?

Christians refer to this command as *The Great Commission*. A commission is the granting of authority to perform certain tasks (like a commissioned officer in the military) or to act in the place of another. Some refer to these verses 18-20 as “the Great Claim, the Great Commission and the Great Comfort.”

Why were the disciples (and why are we) able to fulfill the Great Commission? (In other words, what is the “therefore” in verse 19 there for?)

In what ways are they/we to "act in the place of" Jesus?

6. Jesus told the eleven to make disciples, not just converts. **Explain the difference between a convert to Christ and a disciple of Christ.**

How would you identify yourself and why?

7. How do we find people to make into disciples (v.19)?

Why do you think Jesus didn't say we could just wait for those people who are interested to come to us?

How do you feel about “going out” to make disciples? Why do you feel that way?

8. Jesus does not intend for us to "shove" the gospel down people's throats because no one can be forced into becoming a disciple. **How can you interest people in becoming disciples without "shoving it down their throats?"**
9. **Where did Jesus say they could find people to make into disciples?**

Jesus' disciples may have been surprised that He did not tell them to make disciples only from Jews. It was extremely radical for Jesus to include Gentiles in with His disciples. At first, the disciples had a problem with this (read Acts 15:1-35) but eventually they saw that it was God's plan from the beginning to unite all people in Christ, both Jew and Gentile. (see Eph. 2:11-18).

Is there a type of person that you would find it hard to share with about Jesus and/or hard to accept as a fellow Christian? If so, why do you feel that way? How can you go about correcting your attitude?

Baptism is the outward sign of the inward work of grace in a person's life. It does not produce that work of grace but it does graphically depict what happens to a person when they are saved. In the early church, baptism closely followed the conversion experience. Jesus mentions the three parts of the Godhead when referring to baptism. It is vitally important that as the disciples are making new disciples, that these new followers are united personally with the Father **and** the Son **and** the Holy Spirit.

10. How did Jesus conclude this Great Commission? Why do you think He said this?

In what ways are His words comforting?

Which part of this commission will you find the easiest to obey and why?

Which part will you find the most difficult? Why?

Christians throughout history have taken these words of Jesus to heart and have gone! Many have crossed land and oceans, racial and cultural boundaries to fulfill Jesus' command to make disciples. But you can go just across the street and still be making disciples. Wherever the love of Jesus and the gospel message has not been is where you should go! Sharing the message with others is called "evangelism"—the sharing of the "evangel." If you are unsure about how to share with others the truth about Christianity and the good news about Jesus, you may want to read a book on evangelism. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- Becoming a Contagious Christian by Bill Hybels & Mark Mittelberg
- Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary by Lee Strobel
- Out of the Saltshaker and Into the World by Becky Pippert
- How to Give Away Your Faith by Paul Little
- Know What you Believe by Paul Little
- Know Why you Believe by Paul Little