



# *Following Jesus*

Discipleship Program

## What Does It Mean to Be a Part of the People of God?

Al Truesdale, Hal Cauthron, Floyd Cunningham,  
Linda Alexander, and Wes Eby

**BOOK THREE**

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**JESUS Film™**  
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# Preface

The *Following Jesus Discipleship Program*, also known as *Following Jesus*, is closely associated with the JESUS film. But it does not directly depend on the film. *Following Jesus* begins where the JESUS film concludes. It begins with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The JESUS film is based mostly on the Gospel of Luke. The *Following Jesus Discipleship Program* uses the stories found in Luke for the lessons. This is called a narrative method.

*Following Jesus* is a Christ-centered discipleship program. This also means that *Following Jesus* is God-centered. The program concentrates on who Jesus Christ is. It concentrates on what following Jesus means. The program does this because we want to encourage worship of God in all things. This means that *Following Jesus* does not concentrate on being a new Christian. The program first emphasizes how the Christian is "in Christ." Then the program deals with how Christ is "in the Christian." The order is very important in the New Testament. Being a Christian means we turn away from being centered on ourselves. It means now we are centered in Christ.

*Following Jesus* asks and answers two questions: "Who is Jesus?" and "What does it mean to be His disciple?" *Following Jesus* shows the new Christian just how costly following Jesus will be. It openly presents the radical nature of discipleship.

*Following Jesus* is presented in three books:

**BOOK ONE.** The entry book introduces new Christians to the basic elements of Christian faith and Christian life. Completion of this book should prepare a person for baptism and for receiving the Lord's Supper.

**BOOK TWO.** In this book young Christians will advance to a higher level of understanding their new faith in Christ. They will learn what it means to be a part of the Church. They will learn what it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And they will learn the importance of Christian service.

**BOOK THREE.** The third book helps new Christians get an overall picture of the biblical story. It introduces them to some of the most important parts of Christian history that affect Christian belief and practice. The three books together help prepare a person for church membership.

The material that follows can be converted to other formats. Hopefully "stick men" figures will be mobilized to tell the discipleship story for pre-literate peoples. Extensive illustrations can be used in conjunction with the material. The program can be placed in video and audio format. Picture books can be employed. The material is written at the fifth/sixth grade reading level (U.S.A. levels) and can therefore be readily translated into other languages.

Each book contains several lessons. A teacher will need a minimum of one to two hours to complete each lesson. More time should be taken if needed and if possible.

The lessons, including questions and activities, are purposely designed for oral instruction. Thus, books and paper are not necessary. However, if people in discipleship groups have copies of the lessons, learning may be facilitated.

The lessons are best used in groups of new Christians. But they can be used to instruct just one new Christian. All evangelical groups may use the lessons.

# Lesson 1: What Is the Bible's Story?

## Introduction

One Sabbath early in Jesus' earthly ministry, He went into the synagogue in Nazareth. A synagogue was one of the places where Jews worshiped God. Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, and He was very familiar with this synagogue.

While in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus stood up, unrolled a scroll (a roll of paper containing stories) and read from the prophet Isaiah. It seemed to be Jesus' custom not only to worship in a synagogue, but to teach there also. The scrolls were the written forms of the books that now form the Old Testament. The scrolls were what we now call the Jewish Bible. The word Bible comes from a word that means a collection of writings. The Bible, as we have it today, is a collection of writings or "little books."

Jesus loved the Jewish Scriptures. More importantly, Jesus loved His Heavenly Father, who speaks through the Scriptures. In His words and deeds, Jesus fulfilled the promises and expectations of the Jewish Scriptures. The apostle Paul said that in Jesus, God proved himself to be faithful. Paul said Jesus is God's "yes," or God's confirmation, to all of His promises (2 Corinthians 1:18-20).

Sometimes when people read the Bible, they become confused. This is because the Bible is so big. It has many pages. Many people and events fill its pages. There are many strange names and places. The Bible covers thousands of years. We can easily get lost in its long history and in the many books it includes. The Bible contains different kinds of literature that are used to achieve different kinds of goals. The different kinds of literature work together beautifully to tell the whole story of God.

Many people who try to read the Bible become confused and stop reading. This lesson will introduce you to the Bible in a way that will help you understand it better. The Bible is not meant to confuse us. Instead, the Bible informs, guides, and inspires us. Reading the Bible should cause us to rejoice, sing, and shout because of God's majesty and nearness. There is much more to be learned beyond what this lesson contains. As long as Christians live, they should learn more about the Bible and more about God.

## A. The Bible Tells God's Story.

Christians love the Bible. For them it is the most important book in the entire world.

We call the Bible the *canon*, which means "standard, norm, list, measurement, or rule." The Bible is our rule of faith and practice. It is our standard for understanding God. Anything not in the Bible must not be received by Christians as true about God and His people. In the Bible Christians learn the story of God. In the Bible, God tells us about himself. Some of those important things are:

1. God tells us of His mighty deeds as Creator and Redeemer.
2. God tells us how He has been and continues to be with His people.
3. God tells us about the world He created.
4. God tells us how we are to live for Him.
5. God tells His people about the world's purpose.
6. God tells us of how He became one with us in Jesus of Nazareth.

Through all of this, we learn who God is. We learn what God is like. And we learn who He wants us to be. Therefore, God is the subject of the Bible. He is the reason for its existence. The Bible invites us to learn of God so we can be pleasing to Him in all ways. The Bible helps us learn how to be the people God wants us to be. When you study the Bible read it as a “love-letter” from God to you.

Christians do not study the Bible for its own sake. Rather, we study the Bible because it faithfully and truthfully introduces God to us. The Bible invites us to taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8).

Question: What is the Bible?

Question: Why is the Bible important?

Question: What are some of the ways the Bible tells us about God?

### B. God's Story Has Several Parts.

One thing we need to know is the Bible is divided into two major parts. The first part we call the Old Testament. The second part we call the New Testament. Another word for testament is *covenant*. Covenant is the word the Bible uses to refer to the relationship God established with His people.

In the Old Testament, we learn the part of the story about God that happened before the birth of Jesus. In the New Testament, we learn the story of God that He tells through His Son, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, God tells the story of himself in a way that completes and fulfills the Old Testament. Both parts of the Bible are very important. In both parts, the one and only God tells His story. So, the God that we meet in Jesus is the same God who spoke with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets. In both parts of the Bible, we meet the gracious God who loves and redeems His creation.

Question: What is the general difference between the Old Testament and New Testament?

Question: What is the meaning of the word *covenant*?

## Book Three: What Does It Mean to Be a Part of the People of God?

### C. The Old Testament

The Old Testament records the history of how God called the Jews to be His people. It tells of the covenants God made with them.

When we look at the Old Testament, we see a big collection of 39 books. The Old Testament has a long history by which the books that form it were written and collected. The books tell much of the story of Jewish history, both good and bad. It tells of Jewish worship, life, and wisdom. It tells of the many ways God chose to speak to His people and of their many responses to Him.

The way the Old Testament is organized in Protestant Bibles differs from the way the books were organized in the Hebrew Scriptures. The difference is one of organization, not content. Protestant Bibles have the order and content in the next section of this lesson. Since most Bibles are published by Protestants, we will look at this way of organizing the Old Testament. The Apocrypha is not included in the Protestant Bible for several reasons. One is that none of the apocryphal books is written in the Hebrew language, which was alone used by the inspired writers of the Old Testament. The New Testament never quotes the Apocrypha and until 1548 the Apocrypha had a secondary status, and was not regarded as true Scripture.

Question: What does the Old Testament tell about God?

#### 1. The Books of the Law

Another word for the books of the Law is *Pentateuch*, which means “five” or “five scrolls.” The books of the Law are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The Hebrew word for these books is *Torah*, which means “law.” The Law is presented in the form of a story that extends from the creation of the universe to the time just before Israel entered the Promised Land. These books tell the story of how the Holy God, the Creator of heaven and earth, chose to become involved in the life of the Hebrew people. The heart of the story of the Law or Pentateuch occurs in the Book of Exodus. Exodus tells how God helped the Hebrews escape slavery in Egypt. It also tells about the time they spent at Mount Sinai where God gave His Law or Ten Commandments to them. There, the people gained a knowledge of who they should be. After that time, all Jewish history looked back to those experiences for instruction and correction.

Question: What do the Books of the Law tell about God?

#### 2. The Historical Books

The books of history are Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. These books present different and sometimes overlapping accounts of Israel’s ancient past. Each book is shaped by the conviction that God was committed to personal dealings with the descendants of Abraham. The writers of the historical books used many different sources for their accounts.

Question: What do the historical books tell about God?

### 3. The Books of Poetry and Wisdom

The books of poetry and wisdom are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. These books are very diverse. The Book of Job asks whether or not we serve God because it is profitable to do so, because God has been good to us, or freely and simply because God is God. The Book of Psalms presents the hymns or songs of Israel. The book is also called the Psalter. It is the songbook of ancient Israel. The Book of Proverbs consists of sayings that teach persons how to wisely follow God. They teach the difference between living wisely and foolishly. The proverbs or wise saying teach people how to faithfully follow the way of the Lord. They tell us that true wisdom comes from God. The Book of Ecclesiastes gives a rather grim picture of life and death. But the author hold fast to the need of reverence for God. The Song of Solomon contains love poems, or songs, of Israel.

Question: What do the poetry and wisdom books tell about God?

### 4. The Prophetic Books

The prophets were persons to whom the Word of the Lord came in a special way. The prophets knew the Lord had called and appointed them. The call of the Lord was basic to Hebrew prophecy. The prophet's inspiration and authority came from God, not from the prophet. God disclosed His will and message to the prophet. The prophet became God's personal agent to speak what he or she heard from God. God alone was the one the prophet much obey. Not all of the prophets wrote books.

We divide the prophetic books into two sections. The Major Prophets are the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The Minor Prophets, or the Twelve, are the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The prophets, who spoke for God, are a diverse group of men representing a long period of time. They viewed religion, politics, society, and history through the eyes of faith. They refused to let their faith in God be dominated by a lack of faith and disobedience they saw around them. Through the prophets, God spoke against all forms of backsliding, fear, and idolatry. The prophets lived and spoke under God's rule, and they called upon their peers in all walks of life to do the same.

Question: What do the prophetic books tell about God?

## D. The New Testament

The Old and New Testaments are not two separate and unrelated accounts of God and His people. Together, in unity, they form the Bible. In both parts, God speaks. In both parts, God is revealed to be the Creator and Redeemer, the only true God. The New Testament continues the story of God. In fact, in the New Testament we learn how God fulfilled promises He made in the Old Testament.

## Book Three: What Does It Mean to Be a Part of the People of God?

The New Testament tells the story of how God sent His eternal Son into the world to redeem it (John 3:16). It tells of Jesus' earthly ministry, His death on the Cross, His resurrection from the dead, and His return to heaven. The New Testament also tells how Christ called His disciples. It tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit and how the Church began. It tells about the growth of the Early Church. It tells about its successes and some of the problems the Church faced. In the Letters we are told what it means to be Jesus' disciples and members of His Church. The New Testament also tells Christens they are to be people of enduring hope, because the future belongs to God whom we meet in Jesus Christ.

Various teachers in the Early Church wrote the 27 books of the New Testament. They were written to Christian congregations and to individuals. One purpose for the books was to provide further instruction in the Christian faith. Another purpose was to correct abuses and turmoil that were occurring in some churches. The books of the New Testament were written in the common Greek language of that time.

Question: What does the New Testament tell about God?

Question: Who wrote the books of the New Testament?

The books of the New Testament are as follows:

### 1. The Gospels

The Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are known as the Gospels. The writers of the four Gospels show us how Jesus preached and illustrated the Kingdom of God and the Gospel message in His life, death, and resurrection.

### 2. The Acts of the Apostles

The Book of Acts tells of the coming of the Holy Spirit as Christ promised and of His activity in the Early Church. It tells about the missionary work of the apostle Paul and the spread of the Christian faith to other countries.

### 3. The Letters of Paul

Paul wrote letters to some of the young Christian churches. In the letters he instructed Christians and dealt with problems in the churches. The letters in the New Testament that have Paul's name attached to them are the books of Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

### 4. Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews was written to encourage some Christians who had been Jews before becoming Christians. The author is not known. The book has much to teach about who Jesus is.

### 5. The General Letters

The general letters were not written to specific churches. So, we call them general letters. They are the books of James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude.

### 6. The Revelation

The Book Revelation was written to encourage Christians in some churches that were undergoing persecution. The book tells us Christ will have the last work in human history.

Question: What do the Gospels tell us about God and His Son, Jesus Christ?

Question: What do we learn from the Book of Acts?

Question: What do we learn from reading the Letters of Paul?

## Conclusion

Christians believe the Bible is the Word of God. Christians believe that in the Bible God faithfully and without error shows us who He is and who we are supposed to be. But most important, Christians believe Christ is the Word of God. First and last, the Word of God is a Person, not a book. Jesus Christ is the Living Word of God. In Jesus Christ, the glorious God fully reveals himself. But the Bible is the book in which the story of God, including the wonderful story of Jesus, is told. It is the authoritative and inspired story of God.

Martin Luther, one of the great reformers of the Church, spoke of the relationship between Christ and the Bible in this way. He said the Bible is like the manger in which Jesus was laid. We worship the Christ who is in the manger, not the manger itself. Today, we worship Jesus, not the Bible who tells us about Him. But we also recognize we would not know Jesus without the Bible. And without the Church to love, defend, preach, translate, and transmit it, there would be no Bible.

Activity: If there are Bibles available, practice finding different books of the Old Testament and New Testament.

Activity: Think about how God's story helps you to understand your life. Talk with your pastor or teacher about your thoughts.

Activity: Think about the importance of the Bible, and discuss this with your discipleship group.

Activity: The *JESUS* film is Book of Luke in action. Tell your teacher what your favorite part of the film was.

## **Lesson 2:**

# **How Does THE HISTORY OF GOD’S PEOPLE, THE CHURCH, HELP US FOLLOW JESUS?**

### **Introduction**

The Church of Jesus Christ is 2,000 years old. So, people all over the world have been following Jesus for a long time. In the Church’s long history, many things have happened that help us know who we are as Christians. The story of the Church teaches us how other Christians gave witness to Jesus long before us. It tells of their struggles and triumphs. During the Church’s long history, Christians have faced many crises. These crises have given opportunity to learn more clearly who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him. In all the centuries of the Church’s history, our Christian sisters and brothers have found ways to live for Christ in their settings.

Luke wrote his Gospel to give an account of all that Jesus did and taught. He depended upon reliable sources. He talked to “those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.” He “investigated” everything to make sure his account was based on the facts. He intended to give “certainty” to the things people in his time had been taught about Jesus (Luke 1:1-4).

The Bible gives us a strong appreciation for history. God revealed himself to us in history. The Old Testament describes God’s great saving acts among the Hebrews. The New Testament tells us Jesus was born under Herod and died under Pontius Pilate. The New Testament also describes how the Holy Spirit worked in the church after Jesus’ resurrection.

History is important for us also. Some past followers of Jesus preached and testified about Him. Some suffered and died for their faith. They are our examples. Other followers of Jesus were careful students of the Bible. They are our teachers.

Question: Why is the history of the Church important for us to know?

### **A. The Apostles’ Creed Is a Statement of What Christians Believe.**

By the end of the second century, the Church formed the Apostles’ Creed. The apostles of Jesus did not write it. The Creed summarizes Christian beliefs about God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes the work of Christ.

Often the Apostles’ Creed is used when an adult is baptized. The new follower of Jesus says “I believe” to these basic Christian beliefs. Here is a simplified statement of the Apostle’s Creed:

*I believe in God the Almighty Father, who made heaven and earth.*

*I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He was born to the Virgin Mary. He suffered when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. He died on a cross and was buried. On the third day after being buried, He came back from death to life. He rose into heaven. He sits on the right side of God, the Almighty Father. He will come again from heaven to earth to judge the people who are alive and those who have already died.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the Church that belongs to God and extends everywhere. I believe in the fellowship of Christians and in the forgiveness of sins. I believe after death our bodies will be given life again, and that there is life forever. Amen.*

This Creed tells us Jesus is divine. This means He is truly God. Jesus' divinity, or divine nature, is shown in how He was conceived. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, rather than by a man. His divinity is shown in how He rose to heaven, in how He now sits with God in heaven, and in how He will return to earth as Judge.

Jesus' humanity, or human nature, is shown in His being born to Mary. His humanity is shown in His suffering and in His dying. Since He suffered when Pontius Pilate was governor in Judea, we know He came at a particular time and place in history.

Just like us, Jesus was born, He lived, and He died. Like Jesus, one day we also will be raised from the dead. The Creed talks about the resurrection of our bodies, our "spiritual bodies" (1 Corinthians 15:44), when He comes again.

Jesus was born in history. He redeemed us in history. He will come again in history. There are relationships among the things mentioned in the Creed's last paragraph. The Holy Spirit gives life to the Church. The Church is the fellowship of true followers of Jesus or "saints." Within the Church, through the Holy Spirit, we find forgiveness for our sins. When others in Christ forgive us, we can really believe Christ forgives us. And we, in turn, forgive others. If we remain faithful members of His body, the Church, we will be given new and transformed bodies. Then we will have fellowship with Him and with fellow believers forever.

The Creed guards us from mistaken or false beliefs. The Creed offers only ideas that are in the Bible. But the Creed does not answer all questions Christians have about their faith. For example, how is the Son related to the Father and the Holy Spirit?

Question: How does the Apostle's Creed help us know who Jesus is?

Question: What are the biblical truths we learn from the Apostle's Creed?

Question: How can the Apostle's Creed keep Christians safe from wrong doctrine or beliefs?

## Book Three: What Does It Mean to Be a Part of the People of God?

### B. Christians Believe in the Trinity.

The Trinity is an important Christian belief. The Trinity is the relationship among the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The one true God revealed himself to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here is a simple statement of what Christians believe about the Trinity:

We believe in one God. He always has and always will exist. He is everywhere. He controls the universe. Only He is God. He creates. He governs. He is holy in nature. He is holy in character. He is holy in purpose. We believe that He, as God, is Triune—Three in One. In His inward being, He is Triune. The Triune God reveals himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The word *Trinity* does not appear in the New Testament. But the doctrine of the Trinity is true to the way the Bible speaks about God. The Bible speaks many times about there being only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; John 17:3). Yet, it also speaks of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—each as being God. If Jesus were not God, it would be wrong to worship Him. The Church has always worshiped Jesus as Lord.

We have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit described at Jesus' baptism. The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus like a dove. A voice from heaven said, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). After His baptism, Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" and remained in the "power of the Spirit" even after His temptations (Luke 4:1, 14).

Jesus told His disciples: "I am going to send you what my Father has promised." But, He told them, "Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit. The disciples received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4). Again, we read here about the combined work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Another time when the Trinity was observed was on the day of Pentecost. Peter preached and described Jesus Christ as sitting at God's right side. Peter said Jesus received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father. And now, Jesus was pouring out the Spirit upon men and women (Acts 2:33). Peter told them that Jesus, whom they had crucified, was "both Lord and Christ." They should repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:36-38). Peter described the one God, working in three Persons to bring salvation to human beings.

Just before Jesus left the earth to return to His Father, He told His disciples: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). Here again we see that the one God is a Trinity.

A council of church leaders met in Nicea in A.D. 325. They decided upon the best way to express the church's understanding of Christ's divinity. They wrote a creed called the Nicene Creed. Like the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed affirmed that God the Father made heaven and earth. The Nicene

Creed also affirmed that Jesus Christ is “the only Son born to God.” He is born to God the Father “before all the ages.” Christ is “Light of Light” and “true God of true God.” He is “born,” not “made,” making Him “of one substance with the Father.” Through Christ “all things were made.” The Nicene Creed described the Holy Spirit as “the Lord and the Life-giver.” The Holy Spirit, Father, and Son were to be “worshiped together and glorified together.” The Holy Spirit came from both the Father and the Son.

God revealed himself to us as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These express the inner nature of God, not just how He relates to us.

The three Persons of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—all share the same “God” nature. They are one in “substance, power, and eternity,” as other creeds put it. Each has the same characteristics or “personality” as the other. None of the three Persons of God acts alone. Nor do they act differently. They do not will or intend different things. God himself is a “community” of Persons that decides and acts as one, but we believe in one God and not in three gods.

The terms *Father* and *Son* show the likeness of each to the other. One is the image of the other. There was never a time when the Son did not exist. “In the beginning was the Word,” John 1:1 says, and “the Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Both the Son and the Holy Spirit go out from the Father. Like the Son, the Holy Spirit is “eternal” (Hebrews 9:14).

The Father honors and brings glory to the Son. The Son shows us perfectly what God the Father is like. In doing so, He glorifies and brings honor to the Father. The Holy Spirit testifies and witnesses to the Son.

In a sense, we can say the Father is God above us, the Son is God with us, and the Holy Spirit is God in us. But we cannot fully comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity. It remains a mystery. What is clear is that both the Bible and Christian experience make the doctrine necessary.

Question: What is meant by the Trinity?

Question: What is the Nicene Creed? Why is it important?

Question: What Scripture helps you understand best the doctrine of the Trinity?

### Conclusion

The Church draws us back to Scripture. The Church wants beliefs that are based on the Bible, and only the Bible. But decisions the Church made long ago about what the Bible means continue to guide and instruct us. History continues to teach the Church.

Activity: If possible, memorize the Apostle’s Creed.

Activity: Discuss the importance of the Trinity for the Christian faith with your discipleship group.

## Lesson 3: Who Are Protestants?

### Introduction

Most Christians are in agreement on basic beliefs. Most accept the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed. The divinity of Christ and the Trinity are common beliefs to followers of Jesus.

However, by the year A.D.1500 some important parts of the Church neglected clear biblical teachings about salvation. Instead, some Church leaders were teaching people may be saved by good works. This means we may earn our salvation by what we do. This teaching was against what Jesus taught regarding the Gospel and how to enter the Kingdom of God.

### A. Martin Luther Started the Protestant Movement.

Martin Luther was a German monk, priest, and Bible teacher. From his study of the Bible and after a visit to Rome, Luther realized the church was very different from the church of early apostles. In the year 1517, he posted “95 Theses” (ideas he wanted to discuss) on the door of a church in Wittenberg, Germany. The theses described some of the abuses and corruption in the church. Luther's goal was to reform the church, not to leave it.

Luther read in the Bible, “For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, ‘The righteous will live by faith’” (Romans 1:17). This was the most important thesis or point for Luther. He saw the church teaching that if people would do certain good works or even pay a certain amount of money to the church their sins would be forgiven. Luther said it was only through Jesus Christ and by faith in Him we can be saved. Salvation is nothing of our own doing. Nothing we do or can do will bring salvation. Our salvation rests solely on what Christ has done for us. He gives us grace to place our faith in Him. The Bible says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

An important point for Luther was the Bible must be the only place where Christians get their basic Christian beliefs. Luther believed basic Christian beliefs should not come from other books or even the Church itself. Everything people need to know about how to be saved is in the Bible. The church, Luther learned, based many of its practices and teachings about salvation on tradition rather than on the Bible. Luther respected the past teachings of the church. He quoted from the church's respected teachers. But he believed every belief must be judged by the Bible. If there were any customs in the church contrary to the Bible, they must not be allowed. The Bible—not the church, the Pope, councils, or creeds—was the final authority on beliefs and practices. The Bible and the Bible alone must guide the church.

In 1521 the Pope expelled Luther from membership in the Catholic Church. After that, many people, including political leaders in Germany, separated from the Roman Catholic Church. Because

they *protested* abuses in the church, they were called *Protestants*. This was know as the Protestant Reformation.

Question: Who was Martin Luther?

Question: What Bible verse was the basis for Martin Luther's protestings?

Question: Why was the work of Martin Luther so important?

### B. What Protestants Believe

Protestants based their beliefs on three important principles: (1) we are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, (2) we are saved by grace in Jesus Christ and (3) the Bible is the sole guide for Christians beliefs.

Protestants also rejected other Roman Catholic practices. For Protestants there are only two sacraments: (1) baptism and (2) the Lord's Supper. Unlike Roman Catholics, Protestants do not believe the bread and the wine (or grape juice) used in the Lord's Supper becomes the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Because our salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone and faith in Him, Protestants do not pray to Mary or other saints. Protestants teach that Jesus Christ is our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). We pray, as Jesus taught us, directly to the Father (Luke 11:2). Both Christ himself and the Holy Spirit are speaking to the Father on our behalf (1 John 2:1; Romans 8:26, 34). Therefore, we come boldly to the Father for ourselves and for the needs of others (Hebrews 10:19-22). This is called the "priesthood of believers" (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

The Bible does not teach there was anything special about the birth of Mary. It does not teach she always remained a virgin. Instead, the Bible mentions Jesus' other brothers (Luke 8:20-21). Mary was a good and blessed woman. But she was not divine. If we pray to her as a mediator, it makes her equal to Jesus.

According to Protestants, marriage does not make a person less holy. So, unlike Roman Catholic priests, Protestant ministers may marry a spouse as a wife or husband. Jesus did not demand His apostles remain unmarried. Peter was married (Luke 4:38).

Protestants disagree with the idea the Pope is the head of the entire church. Protestants disagree with the idea the Pope is unable to make errors in his teachings. These ideas about the Pope come from the church's traditions, not from the Bible.

As stated before, Protestants believe salvation comes by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. They believe in the Bible as the final authority for Christian beliefs and practices.

Question: What are the two basic beliefs of Protestants?

Question: In what ways do Protestants and Roman Catholics disagree?

## Book Three: What Does It Mean to Be a Part of the People of God?

### C. Disagreements Among Protestants.

Protestants disagree among themselves on certain beliefs or practices. These disagreements come because of different interpretations of the Bible

Protestants disagree over baptism. Luther believed the Bible taught small babies could and should be baptized. Baptism was God's offering of grace to the child. The Anabaptists, or those who "baptized again," believed baptism should be only for those who had personally believed in Christ. Since an infant is too young to believe, they should not be baptized. The Baptists agreed baptism was for believers only. They also emphasized baptism should be by immersion, which means the person is dipped entirely into the water. For Baptists, baptism by sprinkling or pouring, which some Protestants practiced, was not a true New Testament baptism.

Anabaptists and Baptists argued that mere human beings produced the creeds and formal statements of belief. Yet, God himself had spoken in the Bible. The Bible was the only book they needed for guidance in beliefs and practices. They wanted to return to New Testament practices. They believed each local congregation should govern itself. Local pastors were accountable to God and to their own people, not to bishops.

Question: What are two Christian beliefs about which Protestants disagree?

### D. Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin Were Reformers.

Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin were 16th century reformers, just as Martin Luther was a reformer. Like the Anabaptists, both Zwingli and Calvin removed any church practice that was not described in the New Testament. Luther, on the other hand, kept church practices unless they directly contradicted the Bible.

Calvin established a form of church government in which ministers of local congregations met in assemblies. There were no bishops. Ministers agreed upon statements of beliefs. Followers of Calvin began Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Many Baptists also accepted Calvin's teachings.

Calvin's ideas were very influential. He taught that human beings are totally sinful. They could do nothing to save themselves. They were able only to do evil. The human will was in bondage to sin. Since people can do nothing to save themselves, certain persons are chosen or "elected" by God to be saved. No one can reject the grace of God when it is offered. Once a person is saved, he or she cannot lose grace. Salvation depends on God's will. The saving benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ are available to those whom God chooses. Christ has "finished" our salvation, if we are among the chosen. Nothing human beings can do will defeat God's grace. These are all beliefs held by John Calvin

Question: Who were Zwingli and Calvin?

Question: What did John Calvin believe about salvation?

### E. James Arminius Was a Protestant Teacher.

James Arminius, a teacher in the late 16th century, agreed with Calvin that persons are totally sinful. They can do nothing to save themselves. The human will is in bondage to sin. But Arminius said God gives grace to people to allow them to freely choose Christ. God wishes all people would believe. He wants all people to be saved. Christ died for all people. His grace extends to all, so anyone who believes will be saved. Salvation depends on a person's hearing the Good News, repenting, and accepting Christ as Lord. Some people accept; other people reject. Those who continually reject Jesus Christ will be eternally lost. Those who remain full of faith in Jesus will be saved.

Question: How did James Arminius and John Calvin disagree?

### F. John Wesley Was a Protestant Leader.

In the 18th century, John Wesley, a minister in the Church of England, taught much the same way as Arminius. He agreed human beings could do nothing to save themselves apart from grace. Wesley emphasized a person could know now, for sure, that he or she was saved. Wesley also emphasized sanctification, which is the grace of God working in us. It washed or cleansed us within. By sanctifying grace, persons could walk obediently to God's will. As long as a person walked obediently, he or she was saved. Wesley formed the Methodist Society, which later became the Methodist Church. The Church of the Nazarene, the Salvation Army, the Free Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Church, and some other denominations are part of the Wesleyan family of churches.

Question: Who is John Wesley?

Question: How did John Wesley and John Calvin disagree in their beliefs?

### G. Evangelicals Are Protestants.

Evangelicals are the Protestants who accept the belief Christians are saved by grace through faith alone. They teach the full deity of Jesus Christ. They defend the Virgin birth of Jesus and His resurrection. Evangelicals teach human beings are sinful. They can do nothing, without grace, to save themselves. They believe persons need Christ to be saved. They need to repent and be born again. The Bible is the final authority in all matters of beliefs and practices. Evangelicals believe Jesus Christ will come again.

Question: What do evangelicals believe?

## Conclusion

The Church is a live and diverse body. It keeps growing. Where it is wrong, the Bible corrects it. Where it is dead, born-again people make it alive again. The Church is different in every place it exists. But it remains a faithful witness to Jesus Christ.

## Book Three: What Does It Mean to Be a Part of the People of God?

Activity: Think about this question: Where or to whom should believers look for direction about what they believe? Discuss what certain groups such as Wesleyan or Calvin emphasize. Talk about the answer with your disciple group.

Activity: Discuss the beliefs that caused the Protestant Reformation. How do these beliefs affect your beliefs as a Christian?

# Lesson 4: What Does It Mean to Be an Ordained Minister?

## Introduction

One day Jesus was standing by a lake, teaching the people. So many people were around Him it seemed they would push Him into the water. Jesus had trouble seeing all of the people. There were two fishing boats at the water's edge. The fishermen who owned the boats were washing their nets. One boat belonged to Simon Peter. Jesus borrowed the boat, got into it, and asked Peter to push away from the shore. Then Jesus sat in the boat while He taught the people (Luke 5:1-11).

Afterwards, Jesus told Peter that from now on he would fish for men instead of fish. Peter was to leave his boat and follow Jesus. So, Peter left his nets and his boat, and he began to follow Jesus. Eventually, following Jesus probably cost Peter his life in the city of Rome.

Later, Jesus called other disciples who left their jobs to follow Jesus. But in many instances as Jesus traveled, He told people to stay where they were. He wanted them to serve Him as disciples in their own towns and in their own jobs. One time, Jesus healed a man who had been demon-possessed. The man asked that he be permitted to follow Jesus wherever He went. Instead of granting the request, Jesus told the man to go back and tell about Jesus in his own community. So, the man did not travel along with Jesus and the apostles, but he was a disciple in his own town (Luke 8:26-39).

## A. All People Are Called to Christian Ministry.

Today, Jesus still needs many disciples who give witness to Him in the places where they live and work. He wants them to be His disciples right where they are. The important thing is that Jesus calls all of His followers to witness about Him. No one place is more important than any other. Christ gives all Christians a ministry to fulfill in the Church and in the world. Since He is the one who decides where to place us, none of us should ever be puffed up or ashamed of the role Jesus assigns.

Jesus Christ gives gifts or abilities to Christians that should be used in their service to Him and His Church. They are many kinds of gifts. Whatever one's occupation, he or she can use it as a place to fulfill the ministry Christ has assigned. When everyone practices the ministry Jesus gives, then the Church is complete. Remember, no Christian is excluded.

Question: What does Jesus call of His disciples to do?

Question: Why does God give gifts or abilities to all Christians?

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### B. One Ministry Is the Ordained Ministry.

#### 1. What are the steps into the ordained ministry?

- a. The first step into the ordained ministry is the call. God calls some persons to fulfill the ministry of proclaiming the Gospel, administering the sacraments, and caring for God's people. When a person believes God has called him or her to engage in such ministry, certain things must happen. The person must know he or she has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. The person must know without doubt they have fully given themselves for sanctification by the Holy Spirit of God. One who intends to practice this ministry must in all things become a pattern of holy living to the people of God (2 Corinthians 6:4-10).

Question: What is meant by "the call" to Christian ministry?

- b. The second step into the ordained ministry is preparation. In most instances, the Church has a very important role to play in recognizing one's call to this form of ministry. The Church determines the process by which a person may eventually engage in public and formal Christian ministry. It sets the standards for study and abilities. The Church guides a person through the process of preparation. A keen sense of responsibility before God and the Church should mark one's preparation. This requires a person to take advantage of the best educational resources available.

The ordination requirements show how seriously the Church views the ordained ministry. The requirements show how highly the Church regards the Gospel, the people of God, and the world for which Christ died. In many ways, congregations can participate in mentoring ministers-to-be.

In most Christian communities the Church will decide whether or not a person has "the gifts and graces" he or she needs for ministry. A Christian community may not be able to identify in a person the gifts and graces a minister may have. Then the Church must help that person find another form of ministry.

Question: What role does the Church play in a person's call to the ministry?

- c. The third step into the ordained ministry is ordination. First of all the "called" person must successfully complete the preparation or course of study. Also, the Church must recognize God has given the "called" person "gifts and graces" that Christian ministry required. Then the Church, acting as God's agent, may ordain a person to and for the Christian ministry. A prop-

erly appointed church official conducts the ritual of ordination. The church then identifies the person as an “ordained Christian minister.” Sometimes these persons are called “ordained elders.” Some Christian communities practice an ordination that does not include a call to preach.

At the time of ordination, these persons receive a particular charge to fulfill. The charge includes the responsibilities that one has to both God and the Church. An ordained Christian minister, who is called to preach, will faithfully proclaim the Gospel. He or she will administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And he or she will be a shepherd of God’s people. Persons that God calls to the ordained ministry may serve as pastors of churches, as evangelists, or in some other role in the Church. An ordained Christian minister has as his or her chief responsibility to declare in many ways the whole story of God as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Question: What are two important things that must happen before the Church ordains a Christian minister?

Question: What are three duties of the ordained Christian minister?

- d. The fourth step into the ordained ministry is understanding the role of the minister as steward. A person who enters the Christian ministry becomes, in a special way, a steward of the Gospel. He or she becomes a steward of the mystery of God, which is Christ, the Messiah. A steward manages carefully what one’s master entrusts to him or her. A good steward is diligent and alert. There is no space for laziness or privilege. Good stewards recognize they are stewards only. They are not the owners. Some day they will give an account of their stewardship to the Master.

The person who serves Christ and the Church as an ordained minister must have a thirst for knowledge, especially for the Word of God. The person must show sound judgment and good understanding. The ordained minister must clearly understand God’s plan for salvation. The person must be an example in prayer and in the works of Christian piety. The Christian minister must long to see persons become disciples of Jesus. He or she must know how to lead persons into Christian discipleship and how to help them grow as Christians. The person must have the mission of God firmly planted in one’s heart. The Christian minister must urge upon all disciples God’s call for their sanctification. The person must love justice and mercy even as God does. The ordained minister must be an example of compassion.

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Question: What does it mean to be a steward of the ministry?

Question: What are some characteristics an ordained minister should have?

### Conclusion

All persons whom God calls to the ordained ministry are amazed God would select them. God's call should continue to humble and amaze them. They have a very sober responsibility before God and His people. The practice of the ordained ministry must always be seen as an act of worship and obedience. The ordained minister must always trust in God, not in himself. Christian ministers may be assured that Christ, the great Shepherd of the sheep, will equip them with everything good for doing His will. Christ will accomplish in them what is pleasing to God (Hebrews 13:20-21).

Activity: Discuss the role of the ordained minister in the Church. How can you support ministers? Talk about this in your discipleship group.

Activity: If you believe God has called you to the ordained ministry, what should you be doing? Discuss this with you pastor.

# Lesson 5: How May We Live Together in Peace as Jesus' Disciples?

## Introduction

When Jesus and His disciples shared the last Passover together, there was a conflict among the disciples. The disciples began to argue who was the greatest among them. They thought when Jesus' Kingdom was put in place they would all have important roles. They all wanted to have important jobs in Jesus' Kingdom. A heated debate began. Jesus finally told them the greatest of them must become like the one who serves. Jesus told His disciples He had come to be a servant. That was Jesus' desire for His disciples. He wanted them to become servants.

Followers of Jesus sometimes have problems working together. Like everyone else, followers have personal opinions and strong ideas about the way things should be. We discuss and debate. Like a family, we sometimes argue. This is not wrong. But when we lift ourselves up above others, it is wrong. When we fail to cooperate with others in His kingdom, it is wrong. When we do anything that hurts our brothers and sisters, it is wrong. When Christ's Church is divided and hindered, it is wrong.

There are two important ways for followers to live that will help them avoid conflicts. The first way is the way of service and humility. It is the way of the Cross. The second way is the way of righteousness.

Question: What does being a servant of Jesus mean?

Question: What are some behaviors that are wrong for followers of Jesus?

## A. We Can Overcome Conflicts by Taking the Way of the Cross.

Jesus was with His disciples at the Last Supper. It was supposed to be a deeply spiritual occasion. They had eaten together often before. But this would be the last meal before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus had given them the bread and the wine. While He was eating with them, the disciples began to argue. Certain disciples thought they should have higher positions than others in Christ's Kingdom. In these holy moments, they were arguing about who among them was greatest (Luke 22:24).

Instead of focusing on Jesus and what He was saying to them, the disciples were revealing their desire for power and position. They wanted high ranking jobs in His coming Kingdom. Perhaps they argued as to who was best suited for the highest job. Whose parents were more influential? Who was wealthiest? Who came from a better town? Who was better educated? Who was stronger? Who did Jesus trust the most? Perhaps they talked about their qualifications for leadership in the Kingdom.

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Perhaps they compared each other's spiritual power. Who had driven out more demons? Who had healed the most people?

This kind of talk caused Jesus to grieve. The disciples were fighting like jealous brothers. They were bickering just like the Gentiles. They were imitating the Romans, the ones they despised for oppressing them. Had they learned nothing from Jesus about His Kingdom and its values?

The disciples did not understand what kind of a Kingdom Jesus would establish. They thought it would be a political Kingdom with Jesus as ruler or king. They did not understand it was to be a Kingdom of the Spirit. His was a Kingdom where spiritual values—the values He had taught, preached, and demonstrated—prevailed.

Jesus had not chosen the rich and powerful. He had not chosen the disciples because of their merits. Jesus began creating a spiritual community that turned the world's values upside down. He had granted “dishonorable ones” great honor in His Kingdom. But now the disciples wanted honor, glory, prestige, power, privilege, and position.

In Christ's Kingdom, those who seek things are least likely to find them from God. Jesus says our attitudes as His followers must be different from those around us. Those in the world “lord” it over people. They like to exercise authority. “But you are not to be like that,” Jesus told His disciples (Luke 22:26). Instead, in Christ's Kingdom, the one who rules should be like the one who serves. The one who is truly greatest should be like the youngest. Had not Jesus, by His own humility and willingness to serve, shown that?

The Last Supper was not the first time the disciples had argued about who was the greatest. One time earlier, they had argued about the same thing. On that occasion, Jesus took a little child and stood the child beside Him. “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me,” Jesus said. “And whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest” (Luke 9:46-48). (See also Mark 10:35-45.)

Just before this occasion, Jesus had told them that anyone who would follow Him must “deny himself and take up his cross daily.” For “what good is it for a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his very self?” (Luke 9:23, 25). If followers of Jesus lived by these teachings, they would seek the will of God together. They would not seek their own will. They would submit to one another. They would not abuse each other. They would lift each other up as they carried the cross of Christ. They would desire the Cross, not a throne. But the disciples had not learned the lesson.

Jesus' own coming to the world was not with honor and power. This is what Jesus expected of His disciples. He did not want them to seek power and authority over each other. He did not want them to have the same values as the world. Therefore, the way to overcome conflicts among us is to remember we belong to Christ. Among each other, we are quick to take up His cross and seek His will, not our own. We are servants of His Kingdom.

Question: What does it mean to take the way of the Cross?

Question: What is the meaning of the scripture: “For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.”

### B. You Can Overcome Conflicts by Taking the Way of Forgiveness.

Another way to overcome conflicts is to quickly forgive. Jesus told His followers, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6:37). Jesus still tells His followers to “forgive,” not “judge.” The Holy Spirit is the one responsible for convicting people of sin (John 16:7-8). We are not placed in the position of judging others. “Do not judge, and you will not be judged,” is Jesus’ caution. “Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned” (Luke 6:37).

Though we are not called upon to condemn, Jesus gives us the task of rebuking our brothers or sisters if we see them sinning. When we rebuke our fellow Christians, we are, in fact, doing them a favor. If they keep on sinning, they are in danger of losing their spiritual life. But “if he [or she] repents forgive him [or her]. If he [or she] sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, ‘I repent,’ forgive him [or her]” (Luke 17:3-4). We should rebuke our brothers and sisters, and then forgive them. We keep forgiving them over and over. An attitude of forgiveness will be planted in us.

In the city of Corinth, the early church punished a member for some unknown sin. The apostle Paul wrote the members that once they had inflicted the punishment, they ought to forgive the person and “comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.” Paul urged them to “reaffirm your love for him” (2 Corinthians 2:7-8). Punishment and rebuke set clear boundaries for churches. To Timothy, a pastor, Paul wrote that those who sin are to be “rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning” (1 Timothy 5:20).

When there is sin in believers within the community, there must be confession and repentance by the one who sins and forgiveness by the community. The community is commanded to forgive and restore those who have truly repented.

We are sent by the Spirit of Christ to forgive others. Forgiving is not condescending. We remember that any of us could fall. After someone was caught in a sin, Paul told the Galatians that those who were “spiritual should restore him gently.” But Paul reminded the Galatians that even the spiritual leaders who were called to restore the person might also be tempted. Paul suggested each one should test his or her own actions “without comparing himself to somebody else” (Galatians 6:1-4). Problems arise when we try to compare ourselves to each other, rather than to Jesus.

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Question: What does it mean to forgive someone else?

Question: Why do Jesus' followers need to rebuke their Christian brothers and sisters when they sin?

Question: Why are followers of Jesus not to judge other people?

### Conclusion

Forgiveness is love in action. We are sent out not simply with a message of forgiveness but to demonstrate forgiveness (John 20:21-23). We forgive by extending simple human kindness to brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. By our forgiving spirit, we restore to them grace and basic human dignity. We forgive other people's careless actions or words. Forgiveness, which is love extended, keeps no record of wrongs.

The Church, the forgiven community, must incorporate others into God's forgiveness. The *forgiven* community must always be the *forgiving* community. If we are always ready to forgive, we will keep our eyes on Jesus, the One we are following.

Activity: Pray this week that God will point out anyone or any situation with which you need to take the way of the Cross. Share your thoughts the next time your discipleship group meets.

Activity: Is there anyone you need to forgive? If so, have you truly forgiven them? Pray and ask God to help you extend forgiveness. As God's Spirit directs you, obey Him. Talk with the person who needs your forgiveness.

# Lesson 6: What Is a Christian Family?

## Introduction

When God created Adam, He did not leave Adam by himself. God created Eve, and together the two of them became parents and started a family. The stories of families are found throughout the Bible. The story of Abraham's family and his descendants make up much of the Old Testament. The New Testament opens with stories of the Holy Family—Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. Christian around the world love the beautiful story of Jesus' birth. Instruction regarding Christian families are found throughout the New Testament. Since family plays such an important role in human life and society, it is important for us to understand the family in Christian terms. We begin with a strange command from Jesus.

### A. Jesus Gave a Strange Command about the Family.

One time a large crowd was following Jesus. As the people followed Him, Jesus turned around and said something that seems very strange. He said, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:25-26).

Why would Jesus tell His disciples to "hate" their family members? The fifth of the 10 Commandments tells us to honor our mother and father (Exodus 20:12). Jesus had parents who raised Him. Did He hate them? No. Luke tells us Jesus as a child was obedient to His mother and father. He "grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men" (Luke 2:51-52).

Nothing in Jesus' life indicates He hated anyone, including His own family. In fact, there are tender scenes involving families showing Jesus' compassion and love. He had compassion on a widow whose son had died. To the broken-hearted and destitute mother, Jesus brought good news, and He raised the son from the dead (Luke 7:11-15). Jesus restored Jairus' daughter. She appeared to be dead. But Jesus took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" Then Jesus told her parents to feed her (Luke 8:40-56). Jesus cast an evil spirit out a boy. He healed the child and gave him back to his father (Luke 9:37-43).

When Jesus was crucified on a cross, His mother was nearby, grieving for her Son. The New Testament says Jesus loved His mother (John 19:26). Even in His suffering, Jesus cared for His mother. As He was dying, Jesus turned to John and asked him to take His mother into his own home. Jesus asked John to treat Mary tenderly, as though she were John's own mother (John 19:26-27).

None of this sounds as though Christ hated families. There must be some deeper meaning to His words, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother . . ." (Luke 14:25-26).

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Question: Why do think Jesus said if anyone comes to Him and does not hate father and mother, he or she cannot be His disciple?

Question: Can you name another time Jesus showed compassion for mothers, fathers, or children?

### B. The Meaning of Jesus' Strange Command.

In Jesus' time, family relationships were very important. In fact, the extended family was often seen as more important than all other loyalties and relationships. Jesus was not telling His disciples they should hate their families. Jesus meant that to become His follower one must place worship of God above all other loyalties. Jesus recognized the importance of families. But He also stressed to His disciples the Kingdom of God must rule over even the good things. Every other loyalty takes second place to the reign of God. The Kingdom of God puts all other values in their places.

This is where Christians must begin in their understanding of the Christian family. Only when a family has Christ as its Lord can the family be truly Christian. In a family there can be many conflicting values that are opposed to the reign of God. Only when love for God is the controlling value can families achieve the purpose and order God intended. Sometimes family members make their own selfishness the highest value. Sometimes that happens to power and control. Even money and sexuality can fight to be the highest value in a home. All values must be governed by the supreme value: love for and worship of God. Then all of the other family values can take their rightful places.

Question: What did Jesus mean when He said to hate your family?

Question: What should be the one controlling value of a Christian home?

### C. The Church is the "Bride" of Christ, and Christ Is Her "Husband."

One of the most important pictures of a Christian home in the New Testament is in the Book of Ephesians. There, the apostle Paul says the relationship between a husband and wife should be like the relationship between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-24). A husband and wife should love each other in the way Christ and the Church love each other. Just as Christ gives undivided devotion to the Church, so a husband should give undivided devotion to his wife and family. Out of love, Christ works always for the well being, maturity, and growth of the Church. He does not attempt to make himself strong by making the Church weak. In the same way, a Christian husband and wife should work to strengthen each other. This is the model of Christian love that should be shown to children.

Christ has one bride, the Church. His love is undivided. Just so, a husband is to have one wife, who should receive her husband's undivided love. The same is true for a wife with regard to her one husband. Marriage is an exclusive promise between a man and a woman who love each other. They pledge to give themselves to each other in a love that excludes all other human competitors. That is

one reason why adultery is sin. Adultery violates the covenant of exclusive love and attention a Christian marriage requires. A Christian marriage is most strong when a husband and wife realize their responsibility to each other is, first of all, a responsibility to Christ. In the presence of Christ, a husband is a steward of his wife. In the presence of Christ, a wife is a steward of her husband. Neither one belong to himself or herself. Both belong to Christ.

Question: Why should a man have only one wife? And why should a woman have only one husband?

Question: Why is adultery a sin?

### D. The Responsibility of Christian Parents.

In one sense, the children of Christian parents belong to them. The parents are chiefly responsible for their children's care and well being. But in a more important way, the children belong to the Lord. Christian parents will recognize children are a gift of God. In the nurture of children, Christian parents will act as God's stewards. The Lord will guide parents as they care for their children. This will happen through praying, listening to the Scriptures, and participating in church. Parents and the Church share a major responsibility for nurturing children in the Christian faith.

The power and meaning of the Gospel must first shape our families. God's love that is shown to us in Jesus should characterize our homes. The New Testament will teach us how to do this. Many Christian teachers have provided additional help. Wise teachers in our churches also have much to contribute. Daily, parents should rely upon the Holy Spirit's guidance. Wisdom comes from God, not from within ourselves.

All of us have ideas about families that may not agree with the teachings of Jesus and with the New Testament. All of the values and practices we have inherited from others must be carefully examined according to the New Testament. All cultural and educational sources for instruction in parenting must be assessed and used according to Christian standards.

Question: To whom do children belong, their parents or God? Explain your answer.

Question: How should Christian parents differ from non-Christian parents?

### E. The Christian Understanding of Human Sexuality.

In many cultures, human sexuality is not understood according to biblical values. Movies, television, magazines, popular culture, and other media abuse and distort human sexuality. It becomes cheap and vulgar. Human sexuality becomes a "sick" type of entertainment. Adults and youth are misled.

Christian homes should serve as a setting for teaching children the sacred character of human sexuality. Christian parents should teach children human sexuality achieves its meaning only in the

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context of love and faithfulness. All forms of sexual intimacy that happen outside the covenant of heterosexual marriage are sinful. The practice of homosexuality is one example of how human sexuality can be distorted. Such abuses and misuses of human sexuality miss the goal God intended.

Christians should see human sexuality as an expression of the holiness and beauty God means for His creation to have. Human sexuality is one of the ways the marriage covenant between a husband and wife is sealed. In marriage alone God blesses and sanctifies human sexuality. It is a sign of the exclusive love and loyalty a husband and wife share. Human sexuality is a part of their much larger commitment to each other and to Christ.

Question: How should Christians view human sexuality?

Question: What is the role of parents in teaching human sexuality?

### F. Christian Husbands and Wives Should Be Servants of One Another.

Jesus' disciples seemed to argue quite often over who was the most important among them. Sometimes they seemed to be more concerned about their own interests than about listening to Jesus. They seemed to think gaining power and control over each other was what the Kingdom of God was all about. Clearly, in that mood they would never correctly represent Jesus as His followers.

One day the disciples were arguing again. Jesus knew the thoughts of their sinful hearts. Then He did something quite surprising. He took a little child and placed the child in the middle of the disciples. Jesus said they didn't yet clearly understand what it meant to be in the Kingdom of God. So He explained. Life in the Kingdom has nothing to do with grasping for and gaining power over other people. He went on to say, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me," (Luke 9:46-48). A child in Jesus' day had no social or political power. A child was the least of all persons. Jesus compared himself to a child. He said unless a person can recognize that He did not come to seize worldly power and position, then he or she cannot receive Him. Plainly, the disciples did not fully understand. Full understanding would come later. Jesus told them the "least among all you all—he [or she] is the greatest" (Luke 9:48).

The home and the Church are the most important settings for putting Jesus' instructions into practice. Christian parents should not act selfishly in their parenting practices. Christian parents should not act selfishly in their sexual relations with each other. Christian parents should not act selfishly in their whole marriage. Christ did not first seek to enrich or serve himself, but gave himself to the Church. In the same way, parents must model for children what it means to seek first the best for others in the family. A mean-spirited, violent, and self-serving parent can never model Jesus the Master who washed the feet of His disciples and dried them with a towel. The Holy Spirit can help us be models of Christ to our spouses and children.

Question: How did Jesus Christ model being a servant?

Question: How can Christian parents model servanthood for their children or other people?

### Conclusion

In a Christian home, a wife and husband will have no interest in controlling each other. In a truly Christian home, Christ is the model of all relationships. Power is used in mutual service and love. A husband and wife become servants of one another.

In a Christian home, other family members are not obstacles to overcome. Children are not tools for selfish parents. And parents are not tools for selfish children. In a Christian home, leadership means service for the good of the family. Greatness is not seized or demanded. It is achieved through the quality of one's love and service. This requires respect for all family members. If members of a family will live this way, then the Kingdom of God will come to and reign in that home.

Activity: Think about your home and marriage. What can you do to make your home and marriage more like Christ? Discuss this with your teacher or pastor.

Activity: Plan an activity in which you show you are a Christian servant to your spouse.

Activity: Do something special for one of your children or a child you know.

# Lesson 7:

## How May We Grow as Christians?

### Introduction

Jesus once told a story about two men who set out to build houses (Luke 6:46-49). The first man carefully planned how to build his house. He knew he would have to dig down to solid rock if the house would last a long time. This he did. First, he built a foundation on the rock. Then he began to build the house upon the solid foundation. He anchored the house on the rock. He was wise. But, the second man did not plan carefully. He thought that digging down to the rock before building was a waste of time. So, he just built his house on soft, sandy soil. The second man was foolish.

For a while, both houses looked strong and secure. Later, it started to rain. In fact, there was so much rain the land flooded. The water rose and began to flood the two houses. The first house that was built on the solid rock stood firm against the raging water. This house was anchored securely. So, when the floodwater disappeared, the house still stood. The wise man had made a wise choice. But, as the raging water rose around the second house, the sand beneath it washed away. The house did not have a solid foundation. Since the house had no place to rest, the raging flood water tore it to pieces. The foolish man had made a bad choice.

### A. We Grow as Christians by Choosing the Right Path.

Jesus said the two men and the two houses are like some people who begin to walk on the path of discipleship. Some people are careful to anchor themselves firmly into Christ. They diligently seek what it means to be a disciple. They completely put themselves under Jesus' teachings and instruction. They have chosen the right path.

Other people gladly rush to become Jesus' disciples. But, they never turn away from their sinful and foolish ways and behavior. They do not dig down deeply and anchor themselves to the Rock, Jesus Christ. They have not chosen the right path.

When the "storms" and "floods" of life come, the disciples who carefully build on Jesus will stand firm. When temptations come, they have the strength of Jesus in them to help stand against the tempter. But for people in the second group, temptations sweep them away. The storms and floods of life just bury them. When they face resentment or persecution, they just quit. When the time comes to witness for Jesus, they have nothing to say. When other people watch their lives, these people can see no difference between being Jesus' follower and being a sinner.

Question: Why was the first builder wise, and the second builder foolish?

Question: What is the right path to choose to help people grow as Christians?

## B. We Grow as Christians by Learning from the Right Teacher.

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means we will be students in His school. Christ becomes our teacher. He will walk along with us in all of life's situations. He will teach us to follow Him.

Christ calls all His followers to become like the wise man who built his house upon the rock. Christ will teach his followers how to do this. He will empower them. He will instruct all who will listen. But Jesus does not force anyone to become His disciple.

A tree sapling begins to grow and may eventually become a large tree with many limbs. What if the sapling were to say it already knows all about being a tree? What if it were to stop there? What a horrible mistake this would be. Just so, Christ wants new Christians to continue to grow in their knowledge of Him.

New Christians know Christ has forgiven and made them children of God. The new life of forgiveness is wonderful. The joy of being a Christian is real and should continue forever. That is the foundation upon which we build. But, there is so much more Jesus wants to teach us.

A person who builds a house will finally complete it. A tree finally reaches maturity and stops growing. But Christians never finish building their Christian "house." The Christian "tree" never stops growing. Christians who don't know this finally stop looking like a disciple of Jesus. Their Christian "houses" begin to look old, run-down, and unappealing. Their Christian "tree" withers, cracks, and ceases to bear fruit.

## C. We Grow as Christians by Facing and Overcoming Temptations

One thing that happens to new Christians is the devil tempts them to turn away from Christ. They are tempted to give up their new life in Christ and return to their old ways. The new way of discipleship can seem very difficult at times. Everything seems so different. The old life may beckon and tempt new Christians.

The devil tempted Jesus in the early days of His ministry. This happened after John the Baptist had baptized Jesus. (See Luke 4:1-13.) Jesus was in the wilderness or desert for a long time where He ate no food. He became hungry. The devil tempted Him to turn a stone into bread. Jesus rebuked the devil. Jesus said obeying and serving God is more important than food. He said we should live on the strength of God's Word, which is His food to us (Matthew 4:4).

Later the devil said he would give to Jesus all the kingdoms of the world. All Jesus would have to do would be worship the devil. The devil wanted Jesus to turn His trust and attention away from the Father. But Jesus said we should worship God and serve only Him.

Then the devil tried to get Jesus to leap off the top of the Temple. The tempter wanted Jesus to force God to prove that God would keep Jesus from harm. If Jesus had tried to make God act in that way, He would not have lived in trust. In this temptation, Jesus taught us that His disciples should

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not go around telling God how He should be God. They should not test God. Instead, they should live by trusting in God's Word alone. Disciples trust God's faithfulness and goodness alone. Nothing can ever happen to them that can separate them from God's love and care.

We learn several things from how Jesus faced temptation.

1. Jesus did not rely on His own strength. That is the way Christians should always deal with temptations. Jesus walked in daily obedience to His Father and knew Him. Christians daily grow in their knowledge of the Lord. So, when temptations come, Christ will not be a stranger to them. Jesus must be their daily companion, their daily teacher.
2. It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was sinless, and still the devil tempted Him. Sin comes from giving in to temptation, not from being tempted.
3. God will give us victory over temptation if we rely fully on Him.
4. We become stronger in the Lord as we overcome temptation. The Bible says after Jesus overcame the tempter He returned to Galilee filled with the "power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14).
5. Anyone can be tempted. If Jesus could be tempted, then so can we. Christians should never think they are so strong they cannot be tempted.
6. No matter how long we serve the Lord, we may be tempted throughout our lives. Luke tells us the tempter left Jesus alone "until a more opportune time" (Luke 4:13).

Question: What were the temptations Jesus faced and overcame?

Question: What can we learn how to face and overcome temptations from Jesus' example?

### D. We Grow as Christians by Living by Grace Alone.

In the story Jesus told about the man who built a house upon the rock, the house stood firm because it was anchored in the rock. People become Christ's disciples by His grace alone, by being anchored in Christ alone. Grace is God's loving favor He freely shows toward us. Good character, good works, or good thoughts about oneself are worth nothing. Only God's love and grace make us Jesus' disciples. We are forgiven and changed by God's grace alone.

This is the way we begin as Christians, and this is also the way we continue and grow as Christians. No matter how long a Christian lives, he or she must always depend completely on God's grace. It is possible for Christians to forget we must depend completely on God's grace. Some people begin to depend on their own good deeds or accomplishments. They begin to think God loves them because they are good and successful. When this happens, they move away from Christ. They also forget

God loves and redeems sinners. They forsake God's attitude toward the lost. No one can really follow Jesus who loses a desire to see sinners turn to Jesus (Luke 7:40-50; 15:1-32).

Jesus met some people who thought Jesus should receive them and reject the sinner named Zacchaeus. They were greatly surprised to see Jesus go home with Zacchaeus and not with them (Luke 19:1-10). Those who think God should love them but not sinners will not be compassionate as Christ is compassionate. They will not be able to witness to Christ as He wants them too.

Question: What is grace?

Question: How do Christians grow by depending on grace alone?

### E. The Gospel of Luke can help us grow as Christians.

Jesus taught His followers about growing as Christians. Here are some of His teachings.

1. Jesus said that just as good trees bear good fruit, so His disciples will bear His fruit (Luke 6:43-45). Christians do not live for themselves. They live for Christ, and their lives should show they belong to Him. This means that just as a tree's fruit tells us about a tree, a disciple's life should tell about Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches (John 15:5). So, a Christian daily grows as one who bears the fruit of Christ. A disciple grows in his or her ability to hear clearly the voice of the Lord. This happens through prayer, Bible study, and learning from wise Christians who lived long ago or others who live today. Christians are lighted lamps that should give Jesus' light to others (Luke 11:33-36).
2. Christians should grow in their ability to announce the presence and power of God's Kingdom. After Jesus had spent quite some time teaching His 12 disciples. He sent them out to proclaim the power of God and to heal. He gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases (Luke 9:1-6). Disciples who walk with and are taught by Jesus should grow daily in their ability to announce the Gospel to others. They should grow in their ability to explain the Kingdom of God with power. Jesus taught the Kingdom of God would grow and spread as yeast leavens flour (Luke 13:20-21).
3. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it" (Luke 9:23-24). Growing Christians increase in their desire and ability to identify with Jesus and not those who oppose Him. Jesus went to the Cross because He identified with sinners. The Son of God was not ashamed to identify with us. Jesus' disciples will not be ashamed of Him in the world (Luke 9:27). They will take up their cross and follow Jesus.

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Christ's disciples do not look for a life of ease. They serve Jesus and others. In return, they do not want to be served (Luke 22:24-27).

4. Growing Christians will increase in their ability to trust God and will rely less on themselves. Jesus had a lot to say about people who trust money, power, position, and possessions more than they trust God. Such persons actually worship these things as though they were gods. But Jesus said His disciples would stop trusting in the old gods. They would trust the Heavenly Father more and more.

Jesus said life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing (Luke 12:22-31). He said we should learn a lesson from birds, lilies, and grass. The birds don't sow and reap. The lilies don't toil or spin. The grass is alive one day and burned up the next day. Yet they trust God. How much more should we trust God? Jesus once met a man who wanted to be His disciple. But he could not do so. The reason was that he trusted his wealth more than he trusted God. He could not follow Jesus because he loved his money more than he loved God (Luke 18:18-30).

5. Disciples of Jesus grow in their ability to be good stewards of things that belong to God. As they do, God can entrust to them His possessions more and more (Matthew 25:14-30).
6. Jesus' disciples will grow in their compassion for the people who are oppressed. Jesus said that people who don't know what God is like seek power. They try to be friends with people they think are important. They want to gain power also. They give good things to powerful people so they can get much in return. Jesus said His disciples should be different than these people. Because Christians already have the greatest treasure in Jesus, they don't have to lust for power or riches. Jesus told His disciples they should use their power and money to strengthen the "poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" (Luke 14:12-14). Faithful disciples of Jesus should increase, not decrease, how they use their resources for the Kingdom of God (Luke 16:1-13). Jesus told about a man who thought he was a child of Abraham. But he refused to use his wealth to serve the poor. While poor Lazarus suffered, the rich man ate the best food that could be found. That man went to hell (Luke 16:19-31).

7. Disciples of Jesus grow in their ability to see all things through the eyes of Jesus. This happens because their minds are being renewed in the image of Christ. One day, Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins in the offering at the Temple. He saw rich people putting in their offerings

as well. But Jesus said the poor widow had put in more than even the rich people. The disciples missed what Jesus saw, because they did not see things through His eyes. They still had much to learn. Jesus said rich people gave from their abundance and still had much left over. The poor widow gave all she had, even her money for daily living (Luke 21:1-4).

8. Growing Christians increase in their understanding of what it means to serve Christ in the Church. Some people forget they are Christ's servant and they are to be servants in the Church. They begin to lust for positions and power in the Church. They are even willing to use the things of God for their own selfish purposes. Just before Jesus went to the Cross, He said, "The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:26b). Jesus said even He is among us as "one who serves" (Luke 22:27b). If Jesus sees himself as a servant, how then should we, Jesus' disciples, see ourselves?
9. Jesus' disciples should increase in their understanding of His crucifixion and resurrection. On the first Easter, Jesus met and walked along with two of His disciples (Luke 24:13-27). These disciples were puzzled and did not understand the events of the past few days. So Jesus began to instruct them. He began with Moses and all the prophets and explained things about himself in all the Scriptures. Later the same day, Jesus taught more of His followers. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:36-49).
10. Growing Christians will be Jesus' witnesses. They will know they have been sent by Jesus into the entire world to tell the Good News. But they can do this only as the Holy Spirit gives them the power to do so. Growing Christians will live and witness in the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:48-49).

Question: What is meant by the statement: "Christians do not live for themselves"?

Question: What does it mean to take up your cross to be Jesus' disciple?

Question: How does a Christian show trust in God?

Question: How can a Christian show compassion for oppressed people?

Question: How can a Christian be a servant in the Church?

### Conclusion

When Jesus comes to live in us, He does not leave us as He finds us. He works in us so we will daily grow in His likeness. Christians should never stop becoming more like Jesus in all parts of their lives. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would be present in us to teach us what being a Christian in-

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volves. The apostle Paul told young Christians they should put their old lives and failures behind them. Each of us should say, as Paul did: “I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

**Activity:** Think about how you are growing as a Christian. Make a list either on paper or in your mind. Discuss these ways with some other person whom you trust. Choose one way you can grow as a Christian and start working on implementing it during the next week.

# Lesson 8:

## How Will Jesus Complete His Kingdom?

### Introduction

After the angel Gabriel had announced to Mary she would be the mother of the Messiah, she sang a beautiful song (Luke 1:46-55). The song is filled with hope and excitement about what God was going to do soon. The long-expected Messiah would be born. So, with great expectation, Mary magnified God and rejoiced in Him. God was about to establish His kingdom of righteousness on the earth. Mary thought this was good reason for the world to rejoice.

The same mood of hope and expectancy fills the prophecy spoken by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. He blessed the Lord God of Israel because God had looked favorably on His people. God was about to redeem them by raising up a mighty Savior (Luke 1:67-79). When the angel of the Lord spoke to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth, his mood was one of joy and hope. He spoke of peace among persons that God favors (Luke 2:8-14).

When Jesus preached His first sermon, He spoke about promises God had made that would now be fulfilled. God would fulfill His promises in Jesus. Long ago, God had made promises through the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1-2). Now, true to His promises, God had anointed Jesus "to preach good news to the poor." He was "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind" (Luke 4:18).

The coming of Jesus was cause for great joy and hope. In Jesus, God established His long-expected Kingdom of righteousness among the nations. So, let the whole world rejoice. This is why Christians sing such beautiful carols during the Christmas season, such as, "Joy to the world! the Lord is come." The coming of Jesus meant the world did not have to be bound in evil. People did not have to live in fear. They did not have to be bound as slaves to sin. People would no longer need to guide their lives according to hate and violence. A new and better world had dawned in Jesus the Messiah. He was God's Good News. Jesus is all about hope for a world in need of hope. He is God's Word and help for a broken humanity.

### A. The Kingdom of God Has Come.

In Jesus, God established His eternal and universal Kingdom. In Jesus, the Kingdom of God came with authority and power. In the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus cast out demons and set people free. He healed the sick and raised the dead. But most importantly, He forgave sins.

One day Jesus told some people that His Heavenly Father is like a shepherd who looks for and finds lost sheep. He is like a father who rejoices when a sinful son repents and returns home (Luke 15:11-24). Jesus gave hope to many hopeless people. He gave hope to a woman who was a sinner

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(Luke 7:36-50) and a man possessed by demons (Luke 8:26-31). Jesus gave hope to grieving parents (Luke 8:40-56) and to people who were victims of anxiety and fear (Luke 12:22-34).

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus said many things about the Kingdom of God. Jesus said the preaching of the Kingdom of God began with the preaching of John the Baptist (Luke 16:16). He told us the coming of the Kingdom of God should be received as good news (Luke 8:1). He sent His disciples out to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal as a sign of its coming (Luke 9:2). He told His hearers the Kingdom of God had come near to them. To His critics, Jesus said when He cast out demons that meant the Kingdom of God was present. It was by the hand of God He showed absolute authority over the demons (Luke 11:20).

Question: How do we know the Kingdom has come in Jesus Christ?

### B. The Kingdom Is Among Us.

One day Jesus told His hearers the Kingdom of God doesn't look like other kingdoms. People should not look for the kinds of physical, political, or even military signs identifying early kingdoms. Instead, the Kingdom of God is present in the person of Jesus. The Kingdom looks just like Him. The Kingdom does not come with show or arrogance. Jesus said, "The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:20-21).

After Jesus said all of these wonderful things, His enemies killed Him on the Cross. It seemed as though all He had said about the Kingdom of God had been defeated. Jesus was dead.

Then on Easter morning, God confirmed all Jesus had said about the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom had indeed come in Jesus. God also confirmed the Kingdom had begun when He sent the Holy Spirit as Jesus had promised (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 2:1-13). The Holy Spirit came upon the disciples. They were filled with the Holy Spirit. He clothed the disciples with the power of God that made it possible for them to preach repentance and forgiveness of sin in Jesus' name to all nations.

All people who have eyes to see can see that the Kingdom of God is indeed among us. Many, many signs of redemption are among us. In the name of Jesus, many Christians are doing the work of Christ. In Jesus' power they are giving the Good News that brings hope. They are performing many acts that achieve justice for the victims of injustice. In the name of Jesus they help people gain release from hatred and violence. In the name of Jesus, Christians preach the Good News of repentance and forgiveness. They perform acts of love and compassion. Christians show mercy to those who cannot help themselves. They care for the dying and for children whose parents died of AIDS. They care for the children of mothers or fathers who are in prison. These are just some of the things Christians do in Jesus' name. They do all these things in Jesus' name to show that the Kingdom of God began in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Question: What does the Kingdom of God look like?

Question: Did the Kingdom of God end when Jesus died on the Cross? Explain your answer.

Question: How do people show the Kingdom of God is among us now?

### C. The Kingdom of God Will Come.

Jesus established the Kingdom of God people had been waiting for. And the disciples were to proclaim this Kingdom as Good News. Before His death, Jesus told His disciples what He had begun would be completed in the future. The beginning of the Kingdom looks forward to a completion. Jesus said the completion of the Kingdom had not yet happened. The completion is yet to come. Christians live in expectation of the time when Jesus will return. Even now the Kingdom of God is growing because of Jesus' presence. The Church is the sign of the Kingdom of God. The existence of the Church is also a sign of what Jesus has yet to complete in the world.

#### 1. The Second Coming of Jesus.

When we speak of the completion of the Kingdom of God, we speak of Jesus' Second Coming. The New Testament tells us one day Jesus will be revealed to all the world as the Son of God. The world that crucified Him will see that they crucified the Son of God, who is also the Son of Man (Luke 17:30).

In the beginning of the Kingdom of God, Jesus said God had anointed Him to "preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Jesus did just that. The hope that was born in Jesus' first coming is the peace that will come upon all the earth. No one who looks at Jesus' life and resurrection should ever doubt what God began to do in Jesus He will surely complete in Jesus.

Question: When will the completion of the Kingdom of God come?

#### 2. Christians long for Jesus Christ to complete the Kingdom of God.

All Christians do in Jesus' name anticipate the time Jesus will complete His Kingdom at His Second Coming. He will finish the creative and redemptive activity of God (1 Corinthians 15:20-28). Christians hope and pray for the coming of God's Kingdom (Matthew 6:10). They await "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting" (Apostle's Creed). They look for a "new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1).

The whole creation looks forward to the completion of Christ's Kingdom (Romans 8:18-25). We see much in the world that tells us Christ's work is not yet complete. Here are some examples of things that tell us the Kingdom is not yet complete: wars that kill mothers and children, hatred between races, adults who abuse children, and people who misuse and abuse God's world. In the meantime, Christ gives hope, confidence, and victory to His people (1 Corinthians 15:51-58).

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Christians long for their beloved Christ to come and to complete His Kingdom. All through the New Testament, Christians express their longing for Jesus to come again. All through the long history of the Church, Christians have longed for Jesus to return (Revelation 1:4-7; 22:20). The Second Coming has two parts: (1) Jesus Christ will be revealed to the world in all His power and glory. (2) The righteous dead will be raised to new life. The mortal natures of Christians will be changed. They will become immortal. Thus, the Second Coming is a source of hope for Christians (1 Corinthians 15:35-57).

Every time Christians participate in the Lord's Supper, they witness the Kingdom of God that began in Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). But they also bear faithful witness that Jesus will return to complete His Kingdom. The bread and the cup are signs Jesus will return, and Christians joyously await His coming again.

Sometimes Jesus' disciples wanted to know the details of Jesus' Second Coming. They wanted to know exactly what to expect. Jesus did not satisfy their desires. Instead, He told them to be faithful and to leave the details to the Heavenly Father. Christians should just faithfully do the work of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. They should be faithful and leave the details to God. Sometimes Christians become more interested in details than in faithfully doing Jesus' work.

Question: What are the two parts of the Second Coming?

Question: What should Christians do until Jesus Christ comes again?

### 3. Christ's Second Coming is cause for joy and hope.

Christians long for their Lord's coming even as a bride longs to see her bridegroom. Jesus' disciples need not fear His Second Coming. Those in whom the Spirit of God lives are the beloved children of God. Their sins have been forgiven by Christ. They are His beloved disciples. They love Jesus Christ, and He loves them. Love casts out fear and replaces it with joy and hope.

So, Christians should live in the hope of the Second Coming. Their hope is a particular kind of hope. They do not hope for something about which they are uncertain. Instead, they hope on the basis of what they already know with certainty. They already know who Jesus is and what God is like. They already know the Kingdom of God has been established. They already know God raised His Son from the grave.

Christians already know hell and the grave are defeated foes and God has had the final word. They already know the Heavenly Father will complete what He began in His Son. And they already know what the future will look like. They know what the completed Kingdom will look like. True, they don't know all the details. But they live with certainty that the completed Kingdom will look like Jesus who is their Redeemer.

Death does not have the last word for Christians. They do not fear it. Their hope is in the resurrected Christ, not in physical life. Christians know that “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

So, Christians live in confidence, joy, and hope. This fact should decide how they live in the world. They must never be found acting as those persons who have no hope. They should never treat hatred and violence as though they have the world’s last word. They should never treat God’s creation as though it is hopeless. Christians should never treat money or materials things as though they are absolute. War, greed, rape, child abuse, and disease will not be God’s last word for the world. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is God’s last word. And Christians must live in Him.

Judgment is associated with the Second Coming of Jesus. Christians should not fear this judgment. It is judgment against all that stands against God’s Kingdom of love, peace, and righteousness. Nothing, not even our greatest foes, will finally prevail against the resurrected Christ. The completion of the Kingdom of God means all the evil forces in the world will be destroyed forever.

Question: On what do Christians base their hope?

Question: Why should Christians look with expectation, instead of fear, for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ?

Question: What is meant by the Judgment?

### Conclusion

Christians, lift up your heads! The Book of Revelation is one of the most important books in the New Testament. It is important for it teaches about Christian hope. It teaches us that all evil will finally be destroyed. Even when there appears to be no hope in the world, Christians should lift their heads and hearts in hope and confidence. Their redemption will soon come. Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who was dead now lives. And He lives forever more.

The New Testament ends with a promise from Jesus: “Yes, I am coming soon.” And the Church responds: “Amen. Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). That is the covenant the Church holds and by which Christians live. Hallelujah!

Activity: Think about this question: How should Christians live in the present world as they await the completion of God’s Kingdom? Discuss the answer with your discipleship group.

Activity: Plan to share Jesus to a friend during the next week in the name of Jesus.

# Following Jesus

*Following Jesus* is a discipleship program that asks and answers two questions: “Who is Jesus?” and “What does it mean to be His disciple?” *Following Jesus* shows the new Christian just how costly following Jesus will be. It openly presents the radical nature of discipleship. The program is divided into three books:

**BOOK ONE.** The entry book introduces new Christians to the basic elements of Christian faith and Christian life. Completion of this book should prepare a person for baptism and for receiving the Lord’s Supper.

**BOOK TWO.** With this book, the young Christians will advance to a higher level of understanding their new faith in Christ. They will learn what it means to be a part of the Church. They will learn what it means to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. And they will learn the importance of Christian service.

**BOOK THREE.** The third book helps new Christians get an overall picture of the biblical story. It introduces them to some of the most important parts of Christian history that affect Christian belief and practice. The three books together help prepare a person for church membership.

## BOOK THREE: What Does It Mean to Be a Part of the People of God?

- Lesson 1 | What Is the Bible’s Story?
- Lesson 2 | How Does the History of God’s People, the Church Help Us Follow Jesus?
- Lesson 3 | Who Are Protestants?
- Lesson 4 | What Does It Mean to Be an Ordained Minister?
- Lesson 5 | How May We Live Together in Peace as Jesus’ Disciple?
- Lesson 6 | What Is a Christian Family?
- Lesson 7 | How May We Grow as Christians?
- Lesson 8 | How Will Jesus Complete His Kingdom?

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