

# INCREASING YOUR FAITH

STUDY GUIDE

*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

— ROMANS 10:17



[DCREGIONAL.ORG](http://DCREGIONAL.ORG)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
<b>Part 1: Curiously Seeking</b>	<b>3</b>
Life's Most Thought-Provoking Questions	4
Seeking Answers? Why You Should Start With Jesus	8
<b>Part 2: The Grounding of My Faith</b>	<b>14</b>
Why Am I Here?	15
How God Communicates with Us	19
The Word of God	23
<b>Part 3: Discipleship</b>	<b>26</b>
Discipleship	27
<b>Part 4: The Gospel Message</b>	<b>35</b>
What's the Problem?	36
The Good News —Jesus Is The Answer	44
I Believe! Now, What Shall I Do?	58
<b>Part 5: My Faith Community</b>	<b>66</b>
The Church	67
Unity and the Christian Community	71
A Family that Does Life Together	75
Notes	80

Copyright © 2022 The District of Columbia Regional Christian Church.

All Rights Reserved. Use with permission only.

Bible Translations used in this booklet include:

- » NIV New International Version
- » ESV English Standard Version
- » NKJV New King James Version
- » WEB World English Bible

If the Bible Translation is not cited the translation is NIV.

# INTRODUCTION

## **Hebrews 11:1**

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

## **Hebrews 11:6**

*And without faith, it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*

This booklet was written to help your faith grow.

- » If you want to know God and the Bible better — these topical studies are for you.
- » If you were raised to have faith and you need a jump-start to revive it — this book is for you;
- » If you are strong in faith and you simply want to level up your faith — this booklet is for you.

*Increasing Your Faith Study Series* is about the basic tenets of belief in God to help you develop a closer relationship with him. We need to be taught and reminded of foundational teachings for us to grow in our faith. After all, our faith is only as secure as the foundation upon which it stands.

This book is designed for you to study its contents with another believer and study the material by yourself. But, it is more beneficial for you to study along with someone else because our faith grows when we are connected with others who have faith.

The five sections of this booklet are built on each other. So studying the material sequentially is recommended. However, depending on what you are most eager to learn about, you can go directly to the topical study that is most relevant to you.

## **Part 1: Curiously Seeking**

- » Life's Most Thought-Provoking Questions
- » Seeking Answers? Why You Should Start With Jesus

## **Part 2: The Grounding of My Faith**

- » Why Am I Here?
- » How God Communicates with Us
- » The Word of God

## **Part 3: Discipleship**

- » Discipleship

## **Part 4: The Gospel Message**

- » What's the Problem?
- » The Good News —Jesus Is The Answer
- » I Believe! Now, What Shall I Do?

## **Part 5: My Faith Community**

- » The Church
- » Unity and the Christian Community
- » A Family that Does Life Together

Our prayer: *“Lord, increase the faith of everyone who reads this booklet. And, as they grow in their faith may you inspire them to share their faith with others.”*

*Daryl Reed and the pastoral leadership of DC Regional Christian Church*

# PART 1: CURIOSLY SEEKING



# LIFE'S MOST THOUGHT- PROVOKING QUESTIONS

Without asking questions there is no learning. Without learning there is no growth.

Being curious about thought-provoking questions is something we all have in common. Here are some of the questions we think about:

- » **Where did everything come from?**
- » **What is the origin of life?**
- » **What's so special about human life?**
- » **Why am I here?**
- » **What's my purpose?**
- » **Is there a right or wrong way for me to live my life?**
- » **Is there life after death?**
- » **If so, will I have to face judgment or a reward in paradise?**

Two of the most common worldviews attempt to answer these questions.

1. The Naturalistic Worldview
2. The Theistic (God-centered) Worldview

## WHAT IS NATURALISM?

**Naturalism** is the philosophical worldview that suggests only natural laws operate in the universe. There are no supernatural or metaphysical realities. Therefore, any suggestion that there is some kind of divine mind that created the universe cannot be used to explain reality because naturalism holds to the belief that there is no God.

- » Everything that came to be (all space, matter, and time) came to be from nothing.
- » Regarding the origin of life: The first living thing came into existence against incomprehensible odds by randomly coming together to form a single-celled organism from which all other life evolved.
- » Human beings are not uniquely special. Mankind is just a highly intelligent animal in a vast array of other species and creatures.
- » There is no grand purpose or meaning to life. We are just here. We live. We pass along genes. We die.
- » What we call morality is subjective and not objective. There is no universal measurement by which we can determine what is right or wrong or good or evil. The collective norms of an ever-changing society define what is moral or not. Any perceived objective moral standard is just a byproduct of evolution.
- » Regarding how we should live: In one sense it doesn't matter how we live since the universe and everything in it will be annihilated in the future by way of universal heat-death.
- » Although humans seem to be aware of their consciousness, we have no inner being distinct from our physical body. There is no soul. Humans are only physical matter.
- » Regarding the after-life: there is no life after death. No reward for living a good life and no justice for living badly. No hope of being reunited with loved ones. No heaven. No hell. Nothing. When a person dies, game over, that's it.

Intuitively we know these are insufficient answers. Why?

### **A naturalistic worldview naturally leads to despair**

Living a life with a purely naturalistic worldview leads to living a life of despair. Those who live by these ideas cannot live by them and truly be happy at the same time. To stave off despair adherents of this worldview will have to borrow ideas grounded in some alternative worldview — in

particular a worldview that is rooted in some kind of after-life or supernatural being. What is the reality?

### Any search for truth should begin with common sense

For instance, reality informs us that a building has a builder. A painting has a painter. A book has an author. A computer program has a programmer. And, when it comes to questions about the origin of life and creation — **creation must have a creator.**

The beauty of nature, the unknowable vastness of the cosmos, and even the detailed information within DNA all suggest there is some kind of supernatural and intelligent mind behind it all.

### The theistic — God-centered — worldview

It just makes sense to seek the answers to life's most thought-provoking questions from a theistic worldview — a worldview that is anchored in the belief that there is a divine creator — God.

## WHAT IS GOD? WHO IS GOD?

One simple way to view God is ...

... the **G**reatest, **O**mnipotent being, that can be **D**escribed. **GOD**

God is the maximally greatest being that could even possibly exist — a being of which no greater being can be conceived. If you could imagine a being greater than God — that being would be God.

The God that created the universe would have to be a personal mind that is immaterial and timeless. All-powerful. All-wise. The nature of God's character would be the very standard of goodness and justice.



## SEEK GOD

If you are curious about God and you want to find the answers to life's most thought-provoking questions this book can help you on your journey. Within this booklet are many Bible verses that can help you know God better.

### WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

- » The Bible is by far the most printed and widely read book in human history.
- » The biblical authors pondered and wrote about life's most profound questions.
- » The scriptures have provided humanity with wisdom for thousands of years.
- » The basic storyline in the biblical narrative is captivating. God is our creator. Humanity is God's most precious creation. And, a holy God wants a loyal love relationship with imperfect humanity. Even though humans reject God, a gracious God still provides a way for humans to be with God forever.
- » The practical teachings of the Bible have the power to transform lives, improve relationships, and provide wisdom for living a fulfilled life.
- » Understanding the message of the Bible will increase your faith
- » Learning about the central character in the Bible — Jesus Christ — will also increase your faith.

# SEEKING ANSWERS? WHY YOU SHOULD START WITH JESUS

Seeking answers about God can be overwhelming. Where does a truth seeker begin their search? There are so many philosophies, religions, opinions, and ideas.

One way to begin your search for answers would be to learn from the person who has had the greatest spiritual impact in the world. That person would be Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the most significant person in history.

That's a bold claim, but it's true.

The life of Jesus of Nazareth marks the greatest turning point in history. Think about it. Our calendar designations of BC and AD (or the more recently used BCE and CE) point to Jesus' existence. In Latin, AD stands for Anno Domini which means "In the year of our Lord", while BC refers to "before Christ."

Who is Jesus? Yeshua, (Jesus' name in Hebrew) lived over two thousand years ago at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and for a short time in Egypt. He grew up and spent most of his life in the northern part of Israel in the town of Nazareth which was in Galilee.

We get the vast majority of our information about Jesus from the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John — the four gospels. For skeptics who are hesitant to accept the Bible as reliable, it is interesting to note that many facts about Jesus can be confirmed from historical records that come from outside of the Bible — including sources that were hostile to Christianity.

## FACTS ABOUT JESUS OF NAZARETH ACCEPTED BY HISTORIANS

- » Jesus was a Jewish man who was born and lived at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea — Palestine.
- » He was supposedly born to a virgin and had an earthly father who was a carpenter.
- » He was a teacher who taught about faith and repentance.
- » He was accused of leading Jews away from their beliefs.
- » He was considered to be a wise man.
- » He claimed to be the Messiah.
- » He had unusual powers and performed miraculous deeds. He healed the sick. He accurately predicted the future.
- » He was persecuted by the Jews for blasphemy
- » He was betrayed by Judah Iscariot.
- » He was beaten with rods, forced to drink vinegar, and wear a crown of thorns.
- » He was thought to be some sort of king of the Jews.
- » He was crucified on the eve of the Passover and this crucifixion occurred under the direction of Pontius Pilate, during the reign of Tiberius.
- » On the day of his crucifixion, the sky grew dark and there was an earthquake.
- » He was buried in a tomb and the tomb was later found to be empty.
- » His close followers and many others said, he appeared to them alive after he had died.
- » These disciples told others Jesus was resurrected and weeks later ascended into heaven.
- » Jesus' disciples and followers upheld a high moral code.

- » His disciples were also persecuted for their faith and lived and died as martyrs without ever changing their claims that Jesus had risen from the dead.

## THE MAJOR RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD ALL HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ABOUT JESUS

The major religions may differ in their opinions about Jesus — but they agree that Jesus is a figure that needs to be accounted for in some way or another.

**Judaism:** Jesus was the son of a Jewish mother. He was a Rabbi, who had disciples and who supposedly performed miracles claiming to be the Messiah but was not — evidenced by the fact that the world is not at peace.

Jews believe that Jesus was crucified on the cross by Roman soldiers — and his followers reported that he was raised from the dead.

Modern-day views of Jesus range from Jesus being a deceiver and false prophet to Jesus being a respected Jewish advocate who also helped non-Jews. Because of their strict monotheistic views, Jews don't believe Jesus was divine in any way.

**Muslims:** believe Jesus (Isa) was born of a virgin (Maryam) and is to be honored and respected as one of God's most important prophets. He wise teacher who worked miracles. Muslims believe Jesus (Isa) ascended into heaven and will come again at the second coming to judge the world as the Messiah.

Jesus is mentioned over a hundred times in the Quran. And, when his name is mentioned Muslims often say "Peace be upon him" as they would also say of other recognized prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and the Muslim Prophet Muhammad.

Muslims, however, don't believe he died on the cross or is the Son of God.

**Ahmadiyya Muslims** believe Jesus may have been born of a virgin and he was a prophet and a wise teacher who worked miracles. Differing from

Sunni and Shia Muslims, Ahmadiyya Muslims believe Jesus was crucified and died on the cross.

**Bahá'í** believes Jesus came from God, was a wise teacher who had a divine and human nature, worked miracles, and was crucified and resurrected as an atonement for humanity.

**Hindus** believe Jesus was a holy man, a wise teacher, and a 'god' — Hinduism is a polytheistic religion. The incarnation of God in Jesus is not a unique concept. Jesus is viewed as a good example of self-actualization and human progress. Many Hindus like the person of Christ but don't like "the church" as they see it.

**Buddhists** believe Jesus was an enlightened man and a wise teacher. Jesus is seen as someone who lived a compassionate and self-sacrificial life — someone who cared for those who had spiritual needs. However, Jesus to Buddhists is not divine.

**New Age ideas** maintain Jesus was a wise moral teacher.

Given that Jesus is a common feature of the world's major religions, it seems logical and important for any truth seeker to learn more about the man everyone feels the need to describe. While the world's religions account for Jesus tangentially, only one faith system (**Biblical Christianity**) is established on the authentic, attested eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life, teaching, and ministry.

If one was inclined to begin a spiritual quest for truth, it would be wise to start with the faith system that best describes the man all other faith systems find themselves compelled to explain. Biblical Christianity is founded on the reliable record of Jesus Christ and ought to be the first stop in any seeker's journey of faith.

His life and teachings have indescribably impacted our world — redefining how humans should treat each other and giving the world new standards by which we measure ethics, morality, and justice.

Following his example and teachings has the power to turn this upside-down world right-side up.

## WHAT JESUS TAUGHT

- » Jesus came teaching about the good news of the kingdom of God — the realm of God’s reign — where self-sacrificial love rules.
- » Jesus taught people should live their lives seeking the kingdom of God and eternal life.
- » Jesus’ teachings focused on people’s hearts and not external performances or appearances. Jesus taught that true religion is about the inside of a person and not about how one portrays themselves to others.
- » Jesus’ teachings lifted people who were hurting and needed help and healing.
- » Jesus didn’t show favoritism towards the proud, prestigious, or powerful. Instead, he lifted the meek and those who were marginalized.
- » Jesus’ teachings empowered people to break the chains of oppression — leading people to be truly free. Justice, equality, and anti-racism were championed by Jesus.
- » Jesus taught his followers to not live selfishly — instead, they should live to lift others.
- » Jesus taught his followers to live their lives with integrity — to love truth and hate falsehood.
- » Jesus also taught people to live sexually pure lives and he condemned sexual immorality and adultery.
- » Jesus taught his disciples to love others in the same way he loves. The radical kind of love Jesus commanded includes love for one’s enemies and forgiving those who mistreat you from the heart.
- » Jesus taught that the most important commands are to love God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love one’s neighbors as themselves.
- » Jesus emphasized that he was the true source of truth, life, and the only way to God. He called people to trust and believe in him.

## Can you imagine a world where everyone followed Jesus and his teachings?

Jesus' followers are devoted to living by his authority right now — giving the world a preview of what the world will look like when the eternal kingdom of God comes to earth.

It just makes sense to start with Jesus if you want to seek answers about God.

A photograph of a forest path covered in fallen autumn leaves. The path is made of dark gravel and is surrounded by dense green trees and foliage. The lighting is soft, suggesting a dappled sunlight effect. The text is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

**PART 2:  
THE GROUNDING OF  
MY FAITH**



# WHY AM I HERE?

What's my purpose?

How do I discover the answer to this thought-provoking question?

The best way to find out the purpose of anything is to ask the inventor to explain why they made it. It's the same with discovering your life's purpose. If you want to know your purpose you should ask your creator, "Why am I here?"

## EVERYTHING STARTS WITH GOD

### **Genesis 1:1 (ESV)**

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*

- » Everything that exists, exists because of God. Including you.
- » You are not an accident. You are not the result of chemicals materializing out of nothing and randomly coming together to make your ancestors and eventually you.
- » God created you on purpose.

### **Psalm 139:13-14**

*For you created my inmost being;  
you knit me together in my mother's womb.  
<sup>14</sup> I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
your works are wonderful,  
I know that full well.*

## GOD CREATED HUMANITY IN HIS IMAGE

### **Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)**

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens*

*and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”*

*<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

*<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

- » As image-bearers, God has given mankind the responsibility to subdue and have dominion over the earth — to multiply and fill it.

## **We matter because we are image-bearers of God**

### **Genesis 9:6 (ESV)**

*Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.*

## **HOW ARE WE MADE IN GOD’S IMAGE?**

### **We are made in God’s image SPIRITUALLY**

#### **John 4:24 (WEB)**

*“God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

- » You were not made in God’s image physically because God is not a physical being — God is Spirit. Your inner being is what is made in his likeness. Your inner being is who you are. Your spirit dwells within a physical body. When you die your body returns to dust and your soul returns to God.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> **Ecclesiastes 12:7** “... and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it”... **2 Corinthians 5:8** “...we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (ESV) **Genesis 2:7** ... Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

- » It is through your spirit that you are first made aware of God. Our universal human inclination to know more about God, and even worship him, is an indication that we were made by him.

## We are made in God's image PERSONALLY

### **Isaiah 1:18 (NKJV)**

*“Come now and let us reason together.”*

- » God is a divine person — an eternal mind that is personal. As opposed to being an inanimate force.
- » To be made in his likeness personally means, like God, you can reason, create, express desires, experience emotions, and freely make choices. And, most importantly, being made in his image personally allows you to connect with God on a personal level.

## We are made in God's image MORALLY

- » When God made man he made him “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Humanity has an innate awareness of morality — what’s good and bad. This awareness is an imprint that you and I were made by a truly righteous being. The human conscience bears witness that the character and standards of a supremely holy being are etched on our hearts. (Romans 2:15).<sup>2</sup>

## We are made in God's image RELATIONALLY

### **Genesis 1:26 (WEB)**

*God said, “Let’s make man in our image, after our likeness.”*

- » The eternal creator reveals himself as “us” and “our.” The biblical authors speak of this one God as the Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit. For some, this is maybe difficult to fully understand.

---

<sup>2</sup> **Romans 2:15** *They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.)*

However, what's taught throughout the bible is the **one divine being is a relational God.**

**1 John 4:8**

*...God is love.*

**1 John 4:19**

*We love because he first loved us.*

- » The universal human desire to love and be loved is another indication that we are image-bearers of God.

**YOU ARE HERE BECAUSE GOD WANTS  
A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOU**

Your creator already knows everything about you.

God wants YOU to know HIM.

**And, God has great plans for you as well.**

**Jeremiah 29:11-13**

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”<sup>12</sup> Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.<sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart*

# HOW GOD COMMUNICATES WITH US

We all know that two-way communication is essential to have meaningful relationships. It's the same with our relationship with God. Prayer is how we communicate with God. The question is, "How does God communicate with us?" The Bible mentions several ways God has revealed himself to us.

## CREATION REVEALS THERE IS A GOD

Through the vastness of the cosmos and within our hearts God declares, "I exist! I am here! I am your creator! Seek me! This is known as **general revelations**.

### **Psalm 19:1-4 (WEB)**

*The heavens declare the glory of God.*

*The expanse shows his handiwork.*

<sup>2</sup> *Day after day they pour out speech, and night after night they display knowledge.*

<sup>3</sup> *There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.*

<sup>4</sup> *Their voice has gone out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world*

### **Ecclesiastes 3:11**

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

### **Romans 1:19-20**

*...since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. <sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*

## **Romans 2:15 (WEB)**

... the law written in their hearts, their conscience testifying with them, and their thoughts amongst themselves accusing or else excusing them

# 10 SPECIFIC WAYS GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF

## **Isaiah 65:1**

*"I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me;  
I was found by those who did not seek me.*

### 1. God has spoken to certain people directly

- » Adam and Eve (Genesis 2); Cain (Genesis 4); Noah (Genesis 6); Abraham (Genesis 12); etc...

### 2. God has communicated through dreams

- » Jacob (Genesis 28); Joseph (Genesis 37); Pharaoh's butler and baker (Genesis 40); Pharaoh (Genesis 41); King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2); Daniel (Daniel 7); The Wise Men (Matthew 2); Pilate's wife (Matthew 27)

### 3. God has communicated by way of angels

- » Zechariah father of John the Baptist (Luke 1); Mary Mother of Jesus (Luke 1); Joseph earthly father of Jesus (Matthew 1); John writer of Revelation (Revelation 1:1)

### 4. God at one time spoke to the entire nation of Israel.

## **Exodus 20:18-19**

*When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance<sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. **But do not have God speak to us or we will die.**"*

## 5. God has spoken to us through his Son

### **Hebrews 1:1-3**

*“In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,<sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.<sup>3</sup> The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

## 6. God used prophets and Jesus’ Apostles to communicate to us

### **Acts 1:8**

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

### **Acts 2:42**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.*

## 7. God uses the wise counsel of others to speak the truth of his word to our hearts.

### **Ephesians 4:15**

*Instead, speaking the truth in love,*

### **Ephesians 4:25**

*Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor,*

### **2 Timothy 4:2**

*Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.*

## 8. God can use our past experiences, and even times of testing to get our attention so that we would listen.

### **Hebrews 3:7-8**

*So, as the Holy Spirit says:*

*“Today, if you hear his voice,  
8 do not harden your hearts  
as you did in the rebellion,  
during the time of testing in the wilderness*

## **9. God’s Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts**

### **John 14:26 (WEB)**

*But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of all that I said to you.*

**10. God communicates with us through the scriptures. The next study is all about the word of God.**



# THE WORD OF GOD

Our Creator communicates with us through the word of God. It's how we can know God. It's how we can discover our purpose. The Bible also provides much-needed spiritual nourishment for our souls.

What does God's word say about itself?

## ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED

### **2 Timothy 3:16-17**

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

### **2 Peter 1:20-21**

*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. <sup>21</sup> For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

- » All Scripture, the Old Testament, and New Testament are breathed out by God — It's his word.
- » Although scriptures were penned by humans — they were also inspired by God.

## THE WORD OF GOD IS POWERFUL

### **Hebrews 4:12**

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

## **Romans 10:17**

*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*

## **John 20:30-31**

*Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

- » The scriptures have supernatural power to change our hearts
- » Hearing and reading the Bible increases our faith.

## **THE WORD OF GOD IS AUTHORITATIVE**

### **Matthew 15:1-9 (WEB)**

*<sup>1</sup> Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Why do your disciples disobey the tradition of the elders? For they don’t wash their hands when they eat bread.”*

*<sup>3</sup> He answered them, “Why do you also disobey the commandment of God because of your tradition? <sup>4</sup> For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him be put to death.’*

*<sup>5</sup> But you say, ‘Whoever may tell his father or his mother, “Whatever help you might otherwise have gotten from me is a gift devoted to God,” <sup>6</sup> he shall not honor his father or mother.’ You have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition. <sup>7</sup> You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying,*

*<sup>8</sup> ‘These people draw near to me with their mouths, and honor me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.*

*<sup>9</sup> And they worship me in vain, teaching as doctrine rules made by men.’ ”*

- » Jesus taught that the authority of the scriptures supersedes all human authorities, including parents, preachers, pastors, priests, and popes. Scripture is the greater authority.
- » Therefore, when the teachings of revered religious leaders are in direct conflict with the word of God we must obey the scriptures rather than follow the traditions of men.

## THE WORD OF GOD WILL BLESS YOU WHEN YOU READ IT AND APPLY IT

### **Acts 17:10-11**

*<sup>10</sup> As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. <sup>11</sup> Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

### **James 1:22-25**

*<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*

A black and white photograph showing the lower legs and feet of three people walking on a concrete sidewalk. The person on the left is wearing dark pants and dark shoes. The person in the middle is wearing dark pants and dark shoes. The person on the right is wearing dark pants and light-colored sneakers. The sidewalk is made of large concrete slabs with visible expansion joints. The text "PART 3: DISCIPLESHIP" is overlaid in white, bold, sans-serif font on the left side of the image.

**PART 3:  
DISCIPLESHIP**

# DISCIPLESHIP

What is the primary focus of your life?

Many people don't know why they are here. Or, what their life's mission should be.

Everyone wants to be happy. But, we also understand that there is more to life than the pursuit of happiness. Undoubtedly, everyone wants to have loving relationships. But we also are aware of the sad reality of life's greatest pain — losing our loved ones.

So what should our life's focus be?

Jesus taught the focus of our lives should be things that transcend this life and extends into eternity. Eternal matters matter the most. Jesus came so that we could enjoy life right now and eternal life later.

Jesus also came to give us a purpose — a focus and mission for our lives.

Just so you know, God is not calling you to become a superficial religious person who just attends church services and reads their bible occasionally. God is calling you to a much higher calling. Jesus invites you to become his disciple. This is what this study is all about.

## What is a disciple?

Definition of a disciple (noun): a student; a follower; someone who learns from, imitates, and spreads the teachings of their teacher.

### **Luke 6:40**

*The student is not above the teacher, but everyone fully trained will be like their teacher.*



# THE CALLING OF JESUS' FIRST DISCIPLES

## Four ordinary fishermen become Jesus-followers

### **Mark 1:16-20**

<sup>16</sup> As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>17</sup> “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” <sup>18</sup> At once they left their nets and followed him.

<sup>19</sup> When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. <sup>20</sup> Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

## Jesus called Levi a tax collector to become a disciple

### **Luke 5:27-32**

<sup>27</sup> After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. “Follow me,” Jesus said to him, <sup>28</sup> and Levi got up, left everything, and followed him.

<sup>29</sup> Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. <sup>30</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

<sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.

<sup>32</sup> I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

- » Tax collectors were despised by their fellow Jews and were considered by them to be the worst of the worst sinners.
- » Even though Levi was a tax-collecting “sinner” Jesus called him to be his disciple anyway.

**Q:** What does Levi's calling to discipleship reveal to us about Jesus?

**A:** Jesus' call to discipleship is based on grace. And this is good news for us. Jesus invites us to follow him even though we fall short in so many ways.

**Some of Jesus' most loyal disciples were women.**

**The call of discipleship is for everyone.**

**Luke 8:1-3**

*After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. **The Twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup> and also some women** who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; <sup>3</sup> Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*

**Luke 23:49**

*But all those who knew him, including the **women who had followed him** from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.*

**Mark 15:40-41**

*<sup>40</sup> Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. <sup>41</sup> In Galilee these **women had followed him and cared for his needs**. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.*

## **6 CHARACTERISTICS AND CONVICTIONS OF DISCIPLES OF JESUS**

### **1. Disciples are devoted to Jesus' teachings**

**John 8:31-32**

*To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. <sup>32</sup> Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

- » It takes more than superficial belief to be a disciple — disciples are committed to abiding by Jesus’ teachings.

## 2. Disciples devote themselves to prayer and they are teachable

### **Luke 11:1**

*One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples*

## 3. Disciples share close relationships with other disciples

### **John 13:34-35**

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”*

- » The Greek word for this big idea is “koinonia” which means connection, fellowship, partnership, and sharing. In other words disciples value doing life together with other disciples.

## 4. Disciples practice self-denial

### **Luke 9:23-25**

*Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. <sup>25</sup> What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?”*

- » **Deny yourself:** To deny yourself means to say no to your desires that conflict with God’s will. This is how Jesus lived. For example, he prayed, “My Father if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (ref. Matthew 26:39)
- » **Take up your cross:** To take up your cross means to endure suffering and shame as you follow Jesus.



- » **Lose your life:** Be willing to change your life as well as die for Christ. In doing so you will gain eternal life.

## 5. Disciples devote themselves to Christ above everything else

### **Luke 14:25-33**

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: <sup>26</sup> “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. <sup>27</sup> And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

<sup>28</sup> “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? <sup>29</sup> For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, <sup>30</sup> saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’

<sup>31</sup> “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? <sup>32</sup> If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. <sup>33</sup> In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

- » A comparable passage provides insights: “Anyone who **loves their father or mother more than me** is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. <sup>38</sup> Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10:37-38).
- » To follow Jesus as king of your life is for one’s whole life. Therefore, anyone who wants to become a disciple should count the cost before committing to follow him.
- » Count the cost but do not procrastinate. Be urgent. Make peace with King Jesus while you can.

**Q: What are Jesus’ terms of peace?**

**A: Total surrender!**

(Verse 33) *In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.*

When we give up everything to follow Christ — God gives us back a hundred times more.

### **Mark 10:28-30**

*Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!”*

<sup>29</sup> *“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel <sup>30</sup> will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.*

## **6. Disciples embrace the mission Jesus gave them**

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*

1. **“Go make disciples:”**<sup>3</sup> The mission is to proclaim the good news and teach people to be disciples.
2. **“... of all nations”**<sup>4</sup> — every ethnic group everywhere. No favoritism. No racism. Disciples are to love and share the gospel with everyone.
3. **“Baptizing them”** — Water baptism is a command that is to be obeyed — not a suggestion that is optional. However, baptism is only for those who have been adequately taught about Christ, have come to faith in him, and have committed their lives to follow Jesus as Lord.

---

<sup>3</sup> Greek word for “Make disciples” is μαθητεύσατε (*mathēteusate*). Verb. To instruct, teach people to become followers of someone

<sup>4</sup> Greek word of “nations” is ἔθνη (*ethnē*) Plural Noun. nation; people; people groups including Gentiles

4. **“Teaching them to obey”** — The mission does not end at a person’s baptism. After the person is baptized the disciple-makers are called to disciple them afterward. Ongoing encouragement and instruction are vital to helping Christ-followers grow.

## TO BE A CHRISTIAN IS TO BE A DISCIPLE OF JESUS CHRIST

- » The New Testament uses the terms, *Christian*, and *disciple* interchangeably, to describe followers of Jesus Christ.
- » The word *Christian* is used only three times whereas the term disciple is used over two hundred fifty times.
- » The term *Christian* was most likely a derogatory nickname that originated from the persecutors of the early church to mockingly refer to the followers of Christ. Instead of being ashamed of the name, the believers embraced it.

### The 3 times Christian appears:

#### **Acts 11:26**

*So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called **Christians** first at Antioch.*

#### **Acts 26:28**

*Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a **Christian**?”*

#### **1 Peter 4:16**

*However, if you suffer as a **Christian**, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.*

- » Today, over 2 and a half billion people around the world identify their religion as Christianity. The most numerous of any world religion. And, in America, 65% of the population identifies in some way as Christian. That’s great, however, the original commitment that came to be associated with the name has changed.

- » Jesus' call to become his disciple includes those who nominally claim Christianity as their religion.
- » To be a true Christian is to be a disciple of Christ. And, to be a disciple of Christ is to be a biblical Christian.

## **VITAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR DISCIPLESHIP**

Have you been living your life as a devoted disciple of Christ?

Are you willing to take your discipleship to the next level?

# PART 4: THE GOSPEL MESSAGE



# WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

God wants a relationship with us. But we have a problem that hinders us from having a close relationship with him. We have an inclination within our hearts that leads us to rebel against our creator.

Instead of allowing God to define what is right or wrong, the overweening pride within our hearts deceives us into thinking we are the ones who determine what is right and wrong. And, instead of seeking and submitting to God's will, we hide from God and choose to live by our standards.

In other words, we sin against God. And, that's a problem.

## WHAT IS SIN?

The word “sin”, as it appears in the Bible, comes from the Greek word *Hamartia* or the Hebrew word *Hata*, which both mean “to miss the mark.” The term was often used in archery. When a person missed the center of the target, they erred, or “sinned.”

We miss the mark when we behave and act in ways that fall short of the commands and expectations of an indescribably righteous God. God's goodness is the bullseye — the measurement by which right or wrong is defined.

Having guilty feelings and having the desire to hide from God comes from falling short of God's standards — the moral expectations and obligations within us.

### **John 3:4**

*Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness.*

### **1 John 5:17**

*All wrongdoing is sin.*

» A sin of **commission** is a sin committed by doing what is wrong.

**James 4:17**

*If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them.*

» A sin of **omission** is a sin committed by neglecting to do what is right.

**There is no one who is truly righteous except God alone!****Romans 3:10-12**

*As it is written:*

*“There is no one righteous, not even one;*

*<sup>11</sup> there is no one who understands,*

*no one who seeks God.*

*<sup>12</sup> All have turned away,*

*they have together become worthless;*

*there is no one who does good,*

*not even one.”*

**Mark 10:18**

*Jesus said, “No one is good—except God alone.”*

**Romans 3:23**

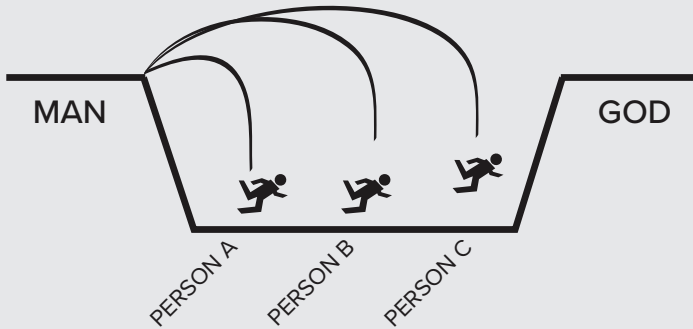
*“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”*

## FALLING SHORT

Three people tried to jump across a wide canyon. The first person (A) had no athletic ability; he/she fell straight down after leaping only five feet forward. The second person (B) was more athletic. But after leaping only fifteen feet that person also fell straight down and died as well. The third person (C) was very athletic. After leaping an amazing thirty feet this person fell to the bottom of the canyon as well.

- » Person (A) represents a very sinful person.
- » Person (B) represents a person who lived an average life – morally speaking.
- » Person (C) represents a really “good person” or a very “religious” person.

They all fall short – the terrible sinner, the average person and the “good” person.



## SIN STARTS WITHIN OUR HEARTS

### **Mark 7:20-23**

*He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”*



## **Galatians 5:19-21**

*The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, and debauchery;<sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions<sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

## **DEFINING SINS**

It's important to identify and define the sins that come out of the dark parts of our hearts.

### **Mark 7:21-22**

- » **Sexual immorality:** is all sexual acts that are committed outside of a God-ordained marriage relationship between a husband and wife.<sup>5</sup> This includes sex before marriage (fornication); sexual acts outside of a marriage relationship (adultery); homosexual sexual acts (males who have sex with males and females who have sex with females); and the like...<sup>6</sup>
- » **Theft:** The act of taking property or possessions from another without their consent, depriving them of it. i.e. shoplifting; fraud; deceptively cheating people out of their possessions; embezzlement; robbery, etc...
- » **Murder:** the morally unjustified killing of human life. Purposefully ending a pregnancy without a moral reason.
- » **Adultery:** is sexual acts between a married person and someone other than that person's spouse.
- » **Greed:** Intense and selfish desire to acquire more of something, most often money, possessions, or power.
- » **Malice:** to wish ill will towards someone or others. Hostility. Mean-spiritedness.
- » **Deceit:** Lying. Misrepresentation of the truth. Concealing truth. Not telling the truth. Suppressing the truth by believing lies. Hypocrisy.

---

5 **Matthew 19:4-6; 1 Corinthians 7:2; Hebrews 13:4; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9**

6 see **Leviticus 18** for additional acts of sexual immorality and depravity

- » **Lewdness:** Indecency, or obscenity. Vulgar sexual behavior.
- » **Envy:** Feeling negative discontentment or resentment because someone has a possession, advantage, or quality you don't have. To covet violates one of the ten commandments "thou shalt not covet."
- » **Slander:** Making false verbal statements about another that cause harm, especially to someone's reputation. Gossip. Speaking ill of someone behind their backs, especially without talking to the person about whatever concern or grievance you might have.
- » **Arrogance:** A proud heart. Lacking humility. An overt sense of one's self-importance, or self-righteousness. Looking down on others. Self-superiority. Stubbornness. Difficulty admitting being wrong because of an unhealthy desire to want to be right. Difficulty admitting weakness. Lack of being coachable or teachable. etc...
- » **Folly:** Foolish godless choices and godless living.

### Galatians 5:19-21

- » **Sexual immorality:** is all sexual acts that are committed outside of a God-ordained marriage relationship between a husband and wife. This includes sex before marriage (fornication); sexual acts outside of a marriage relationship (adultery); homosexual sexual acts (males who have sex with males and females who have sex with females); and the like...<sup>7</sup>
- » **Impurity:** Unclean thinking results in sinful actions — impurity starts within the heart. Looking at others lustfully<sup>8</sup> comes from a dirty heart and causes one's heart to become even more impure. i.e. Pornography. Dirty videos and movies. etc...
- » **Debauchery:** to indulge in fleshly pleasures. i.e. sexual impurity, alcohol, or drug usage.

---

<sup>7</sup> see **Leviticus 18** for additional acts of sexual immorality and depravity

<sup>8</sup> **Matthew 5:28-30 (NIV):** *But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.*

- » **Idolatry:** Devotion to and adoration of anything or anyone more than God. Common idols: a person; money; jobs; sports; false religion, etc...
- » **Witchcraft:** The Greek word for witchcraft is *pharmakeia* from which we get the English word pharmacy. Closely related to witchcraft is the illicit usage of drugs that can be used to seek supernatural experiences outside of God. Witchcraft in its various forms may involve mediums, dark magic, palm readers, horoscopes, transcendental meditation, etc...
- » **Hatred:** Intense dislike and deep resentment towards someone or a people group. The opposite of love.
- » **Discord:** To sow discord is to say or do things that cause distrust, division, arguments, and fights.
- » **Jealousy:** Having ill will towards someone because you may feel that person is a threat to something you possess — oftentimes a relationship. The root of jealousy is discontentment and selfishness.
- » **Fits of rage:** Outbursts of intense unbridled anger. Emotionally exploding or angrily cursing someone out. Fighting. Threatening others. etc...
- » **Selfish ambition:** Disregarding others to pursue one's selfish desires. Self-seeking.
- » **Dissensions:** Strife, discord, and conflict that lead to a state of division.
- » **Factions:** Heretical groups that promote false doctrines and groups that cause division within the body of Christ
- » **Envy:** Feeling negative discontentment or resentment because someone has a possession, advantage, or quality you don't have. To covet violates one of the ten commandments "thou shalt not covet."
- » **Drunkennes:** Intoxication from alcohol. Lack of sobriety. The state of insobriety from illicit drug usage.
- » **Orgies:** Group sexual activity. Attending wild parties. Revelry.

**And the like...**

## LET'S TALK ABOUT IT HOW HAVE YOU FALLEN SHORT?

### **1 John 1:9-10**

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.<sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*

### **James 5:16**

*Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

## THE CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

### SIN DESTROYS EVERYTHING

#### **Romans 6:23**

*For the wages of sin is death...*

1. Sin hardens our hearts and wreaks havoc on our lives.
2. Sin kills relationships. Sin destroys marriage relationships, families, and friendships.
3. Sin stirs up the wrath of God. God punishes everyone who has sinned because God is just.
4. Sin destroys our relationship with God — resulting in spiritual death.
5. Sin sends sinners to hell— everlasting destruction and separation from the presence of God

### SIN SEPARATES US FROM GOD

#### **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9**

*He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.<sup>9</sup> They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.*

**1 John 1:5**

*God is light in Him there is no darkness at all.*

**Isaiah 59:1-2**

*Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save,  
nor his ear too dull to hear.*

*<sup>2</sup>But your iniquities have separated  
you from your God;  
your sins have hidden his face from you,  
so that he will not hear.*

**WHERE ARE YOU?**

In light of this study, do you consider yourself to be a good person? (*Hint: refer back to Mark 10:18*).

Is sin separating you from God?

The next study will provide some much-needed good news — God's solution to our problem.

# THE GOOD NEWS — JESUS IS THE ANSWER

Sin is our greatest problem because sin separates us from God. Compounding the problem is the fact that everyone has sinned. And, we cannot undo the sins we've already done: Becoming a better person is good but it doesn't make us guiltless. Saying I'm sorry is also good but it doesn't eliminate the consequences of what we've already done. A just and good God cannot let our misdeeds go unpunished and still be a just God. The wages of sin is death. The debt we owe must still be paid. This is a problem.

## JESUS CHRIST CAME TO FIX OUR GREATEST PROBLEM

### **John 1:29**

*The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

### **1 John 3:5**

*But you know that he appeared so that **he might take away our sins**. And in him is no sin.*

## Before we focus on how He took away our sins, who is Jesus?

Jesus of Nazareth was and is a real man in history. More than two thousand years ago he lived, walked, ate, and drank on earth. Our calendar designations BC and AD<sup>9</sup> or BCE and CE point to the reality that Jesus' life marks the turning point of history.

Most people believe Jesus was a great moral teacher every major religion makes such a claim. Some say Jesus was a great prophet. Some say he was an angel.

---

<sup>9</sup> BC stands for "before Christ" and AD stands for "anno domini" which is a Latin phrase that means the "year of our Lord." In recent years a push has been made to change BC and AD to BCE and CE — "before common era" and "common era." Both designations still point to the life of Christ.

Early opponents of Christ, who witnessed Jesus performing miracles, said he was a demon-possessed madman who performed acts of wonders by using demonic powers.

Jesus has always been a lightning rod of controversy.

But who does the bible say he is?

## **Jesus is the One and Only Son of God. God and Man.**

### **John 1:1-4; 14**

#### **John 1:1-5**

*In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

#### **John 1:14**

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

- » Before Jesus of Nazareth came into this world he existed before time began as the Word of God.
- » The preexisting Word was eternal
- » The Word was WITH God — the Word is distinct from God as a person.
- » The Word WAS God —the Word is the same as God in nature.
- » The Word is the uncreated creator of all creation. (Verse 3)
- » The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. (Verse 14)

## **JESUS MADE EXTRAORDINARY CLAIMS ABOUT HIMSELF**

Jesus made extraordinary claims about himself — claims no sane person would ever make — unless, of course, those claims were true. Here is a sampling of some of these claims:

**Jesus claimed to be the Messiah — the promised Anointed One talked about in the Hebrew scriptures that would fix the problems of the world.**

**John 4:25-26**

*The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”*

<sup>26</sup> *Then Jesus declared, “I, the one speaking to you—I am he.”*

**Jesus claimed to be sinless.**

**John 8:46**

*Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?*

**Jesus claimed to be the “I AM” which is the divine name of the God of Abraham. For that, the Jews wanted to stone him.**

**John 8:58-59**

*Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”<sup>59</sup> At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.*

**Jesus claimed to be The Way, The Truth, and The Life — the only way to God the Father.**

**John 14:6-7**

*Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. <sup>7</sup> If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”*

**Jesus claimed to have existed before the world began.**

**John 17:5**

*And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.*



## **Jesus claimed to have the authority to forgive people's sins against God.**

### **Luke 5:20-21**

*When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."*

*<sup>21</sup> The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

## **Jesus claimed to be a Heavenly King that came into this world to testify to the truth.**

### **John 18:36-37**

*Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."*

*<sup>37</sup> "You are a king, then!" said Pilate.*

*Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."*

## **Jesus claimed he would suffer, die and rise from the dead.**

### **Mark 8:31-32**

*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*

### **John 10:17-18**

*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down and the authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."*

## DO YOU BELIEVE JESUS IS THE ONE HE CLAIMED TO BE?

### **John 8:23-24**

*But he continued, “You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. <sup>24</sup> I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.”*

### **CS Lewis, the author of “Mere Christianity”, said ...**

*“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic--on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”*

## THE MOST CLIMATIC EVENTS IN HISTORY — THE SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each conclude their narratives by focusing on the final few days of Jesus’ life and earthly ministry.

### TAKE THE TIME TO READ MATTHEW’S ACCOUNT OF THESE EVENTS

#### **Matthew 27:11-54 (WEB)**

*Now Jesus stood before the governor; and the governor asked him, saying, “Are you the King of the Jews?”*

*Jesus said to him, “So you say.”*

*<sup>12</sup> When he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to him, “Don’t you hear how many things they testify against you?”*

<sup>14</sup> He gave him no answer, not even one word so that the governor marveled greatly.

<sup>15</sup> Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release to the multitude one prisoner whom they desired. <sup>16</sup> They had then a notable prisoner called Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" <sup>18</sup> For he knew that because of envy they had delivered him up.

<sup>19</sup> While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of him."

<sup>20</sup> Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. <sup>21</sup> But the governor answered them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

They said, "Barabbas!"

<sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do to Jesus who is called Christ?"

They all said to him, "Let him be crucified!"

<sup>23</sup> But the governor said, "Why? What evil has he done?"

But they cried out exceedingly, saying, "Let him be crucified!"

<sup>24</sup> So when Pilate saw that nothing was being gained, but rather that a disturbance was starting, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous person. You see to it."

<sup>25</sup> All the people answered, "May his blood be on us and on our children!"

<sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas to them, but Jesus he flogged and delivered to be crucified.

<sup>27</sup> Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered the whole garrison together against him. <sup>28</sup> They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. <sup>29</sup> They braided a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they knelt down before him and mocked him,

saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"<sup>30</sup> They spat on him, and took the reed, and struck him on the head.<sup>31</sup> When they had mocked him, they took the robe off him, and put his clothes on him, and led him away to crucify him.

<sup>32</sup> As they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name, and they compelled him to go with them, that he might carry his cross.<sup>33</sup> When they came to a place called "Golgotha", that is to say, "The place of a skull,"<sup>34</sup> they gave him sour wine to drink mixed with gall. When he had tasted it, he would not drink.<sup>35</sup> When they had crucified him, they divided his clothing amongst them, casting lots,<sup>36</sup> and they sat and watched him there.<sup>37</sup> They set up over his head the accusation against him written, "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

<sup>38</sup> Then there were two robbers crucified with him, one on his right hand and one on the left.

<sup>39</sup> Those who passed by blasphemed him, wagging their heads<sup>40</sup> and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!"

<sup>41</sup> Likewise the chief priests also mocking with the scribes, the Pharisees, and the elders, said,<sup>42</sup> "He saved others, but he can't save himself. If he is the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him.

<sup>43</sup> He trusts in God. Let God deliver him now if he wants him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'"<sup>44</sup> The robbers also who were crucified with him cast on him the same reproach.

<sup>45</sup> Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.<sup>46</sup> About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lima sabachthani?" That is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

<sup>47</sup> Some of them who stood there, when they heard it, said, "This man is calling Elijah."

<sup>48</sup> Immediately one of them ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, put it on a reed, and gave him a drink.<sup>49</sup> The rest said, "Let him be. Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

<sup>50</sup> Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

<sup>51</sup> Behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. The earth quaked and the rocks were split. <sup>52</sup> The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; <sup>53</sup> and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, they entered into the holy city and appeared to many.

<sup>54</sup> Now the centurion and those who were with him watching Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were done, were terrified, saying, “Truly this was the Son of God!”

## ISAIAH 52:13 - 53:12

... is a messianic prophecy about Jesus written seven hundred years before Christ. It explains why he suffered and died. It also declares the victory of the resurrection. The accuracy of this prophecy shows the miraculous inspiration of scripture. Take the time to read it. It will grow your faith.

### Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (WEB)

#### **Isaiah 52:13-15**

*Behold, my servant will deal wisely.  
He will be exalted and lifted up,  
and will be very high.*

<sup>14</sup> *Just as many were astonished at you—  
his appearance was marred more than any man, and his form more than the  
sons of men—*

<sup>15</sup> *so he will cleanse many nations.  
Kings will shut their mouths at him;  
for they will see that which had not been told them,  
and they will understand that which they had not heard.*

#### **Isaiah 53:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> *Who has believed our message?  
To whom has the LORD's arm been revealed?*  
<sup>2</sup> *For he grew up before him as a tender plant,  
and as a root out of the dry ground.*

*He has no good looks or majesty.*

*When we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*

<sup>3</sup> **He was despised**

**and rejected by men,**

*a man of suffering*

*and acquainted with disease.*

*He was despised as one from whom men hide their faces;*

*and we didn't respect him.*

<sup>4</sup> *Surely he has borne our sickness*

*and carried our suffering;*

*yet we considered him plagued,*

*struck by God, and afflicted.*

<sup>5</sup> **But he was pierced for our transgressions.**

**He was crushed for our iniquities.**

**The punishment that brought our peace was on him;**

**and by his wounds, we are healed.**

<sup>6</sup> *All we like sheep have gone astray.*

*Everyone has turned to his own way;*

**and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

<sup>7</sup> *He was oppressed,*

*yet when he was afflicted he didn't open his mouth.*

*As a lamb that is led to the slaughter,*

*and as a sheep that before its shearers is silent,*

*so he didn't open his mouth.*

<sup>8</sup> *He was taken away by oppression and judgement.*

*As for his generation,*

*who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living*

*and stricken for the disobedience of my people?*

<sup>9</sup> *They made his grave with the wicked,*

*and with a rich man in his death,*

*although he had done no violence,*

*nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

<sup>10</sup> *Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him.*

*He has caused him to suffer.*

When you make his soul an offering for sin,  
he will see his offspring.  
He will prolong his days  
and the LORD's pleasure will prosper in his hand.

**<sup>11</sup> After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light and be satisfied.**

My righteous servant will justify many by the knowledge of himself;  
and he will bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him a portion with the great.  
He will divide the plunder with the strong,  
because he poured out his soul to death  
and was counted with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sins of many  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

## THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST

### Jesus suffered PHYSICAL PAIN

#### **Isaiah 52:14**

Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness.

#### **Matthew 26:67-68**

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him<sup>68</sup> and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?"

» Jesus endured several beatings and was severely flogged before he was crucified. He also suffered the trauma of humiliation as he was stripped of his clothes, mocked, and spat upon.

#### **Matthew 27:28-31**

They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him,<sup>29</sup> and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they

said.<sup>30</sup> They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.<sup>31</sup> After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

- » The word “excruciating” originates from the Latin word for a crucifix. Jesus suffered unimaginable and indescribable pain for more than six hours as he was suspended by nails as he hung on the cross.

## Jesus suffered EMOTIONAL PAIN

### **Isaiah 53:3-4**

*He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.  
4 Surely he took up our pain  
and bore our suffering.*

- » If you have ever suffered from the wounds of emotional pain, Jesus can relate to you. He knows what it feels like to be alone, misunderstood, unloved, hated, and rejected.

### **Matthew 26:56**

*“Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.”*

## Jesus suffered SPIRITUAL PAIN

### **Isaiah 53:6**

*We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
each of us has turned to our own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
the iniquity of us all.*

- » Although Jesus never sinned himself, he suffered from the consequences of having our sins placed on him.



## “WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?!”

### **Matthew 27:45-46**

*“From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land.*

*46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”)”*

**Q:** Did his Father forsake him?

**A:** The answer is “Yes.” God did abandon his One and Only Son. And, here’s why!

### **2 Corinthians 5:21**

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

- » Our sins were transferred to Jesus — the sacrificial Lamb of God — as he hung on the cross.
- » The reason why God forsook his son was because of our sins. The greatest pain Jesus suffered was the pain of separation from his Father.

### **Isaiah 53:5**

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds, we are healed.*

- » Christ paid a debt he did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay.
- » Nails didn’t keep Jesus on the cross — his love for you did.

## **Jesus sacrificed his life for you so that you could have eternal life**

### **Romans 3:23-25**

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.<sup>25</sup> God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness*

because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

### **John 3:16**

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

### **John 10:17-18**

*The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the authority to lay it down and the authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

Here’s the point: God loves you more than you could ever know. The question is, “Do you love him?”

## **THE RESURRECTION: THE EVENT THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING**

### **Matthew 28:5-10 (WEB)**

*The angel answered the women, “Don’t be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who has been crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, just like he said. Come, see the place where the Lord was lying. <sup>7</sup> Go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has risen from the dead, and behold, he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him.’ Behold, I have told you.”*

<sup>8</sup> *They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciple’s word. <sup>9</sup> As they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!”*

*They came and took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.*

<sup>10</sup> *Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go tell my brothers that they should go into Galilee, and there they will see me.”*

**Acts 1:3**

*After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.*

**Acts 26:8**

*Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?*

**1 Corinthians 15:1-8 (WEB)**

*Now I declare to you, brothers, the Good News which I preached to you, which also you received, in which you also stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold firmly the word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

<sup>3</sup>*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to over five hundred brothers at once, most of whom remain until now, but some have also fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all, as to the child born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.*

Do you believe this good news message?

# I BELIEVE! NOW, WHAT SHALL I DO?

## ***Ephesians 2:8***

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

The good news is Jesus Christ is God's gift to humanity because we could never do anything to merit salvation since we all have fallen short of God's standards. The gift of God's grace is made available for anyone who chooses to accept it through faith in Jesus' righteousness — as opposed to faith in our righteousness. After all, no one is good except God alone.

## **Peter proclaimed the first good news message in Jerusalem**

Peter preached the first message of salvation in Jerusalem on the Jewish holiday of Pentecost four weeks after the death and resurrection of Christ. This would mark the first day of the church and the very first converts to Christ.

## **What was the message? Acts 2**

### **Acts 2:22-24**

*Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. <sup>23</sup> This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.*

Peter concluded ...

### **Acts 2:36**

*Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."*

### **Acts 2:37**

*When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, **what shall we do?**”*

The first converts were cut to the heart as they came to believe that Jesus is Lord and Messiah. They wanted to know **what they needed to do to obey the gospel they had come to believe.**

## **WE BELIEVE! WHAT SHALL WE DO? ACTS 2:38-41**

### **Acts 2:38-41**

*Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

*<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

Peter replied and commanded them to ...

- 1. Repent**
- 2. Be baptized**

Peter’s instructions of repentance and baptism originated with Jesus.

### **Luke 24:46-47**

*He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

*Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> 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,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

## REPENT

### What does it mean to repent?

To repent means to turn away from sin and turn to God. Repentance starts with a sorrowful heart.

Godly sorrow leads a person to change their deeds. Changing one's deeds results in a change in their life.

#### **2 Corinthians 7:10-11**

*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. <sup>11</sup> See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point, you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter.*

Simply feeling sorrowful is not repentance because there can be two kinds of sorrow: worldly and godly.

**Godly sorrow** produces real change. Godly sorrow is evidenced by humility and openness. A godly sorrowful heart owns up to one's sins and takes full responsibility for one's actions. This leads to life.

Whereas, **worldly sorrow** does not lead to life change. Worldly sorrow often includes self-pity, excuse-making, and blaming others. Worldly sorrow wears off. And, it does not lead to salvation.

### How to turn to God and repent?

#### **Psalm 32:1-5**

*<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one  
whose transgressions are forgiven,  
whose sins are covered.*

<sup>2</sup> *Blessed is the one  
whose sin the Lord does not count against them  
and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

<sup>3</sup> *When I kept silent,  
my bones wasted away  
through my groaning all day long.*

<sup>4</sup> *For day and night  
your hand was heavy on me;  
my strength was sapped  
as in the heat of summer.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
and did not cover up my iniquity.  
I said, "I will confess  
my transgressions to the Lord."  
And you forgave  
the guilt of my sin.*

- » Recognize that God has been working on your heart all along — trying to get your attention.
- » Be open and honest with yourself and God. Don't hide from God.
- » Acknowledge your sinfulness! Don't minimize your sins. Instead, have a heart that says, "I am not a good person. I am a sinner in need of God's mercy!"
- » Acknowledge your sins specifically and not just generally. Say, "I am guilty of \_\_\_\_\_." Name it. Name them. This produces conviction.
- » Take responsibility for your sins. Don't blame others or God. Don't make excuses.
- » Make a firm decision to turn away from your sins urgently and radically.

**Matthew 5:25**

*Settle matters quickly...*

### **Matthew 5:29**

*If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

### **Matthew 5:44-45**

*But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven.*

**A question to ponder: Is there any sin in your life that you are *not willing* to turn away from?**

## **BE BAPTIZED**

When anyone places their trust in Jesus as Lord and Messiah and after they have made a decision to repent of their sins they are to obey Jesus' command to be baptized into Christ as soon as they are able. Baptism marks the ending of one's old life and the beginning of one's new life in Christ. Being immersed<sup>10</sup> in water is an act of faith that unites a person with Christ through the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit. It marks the moment someone is born again.

### **Being baptized into Christ unites us with Christ**

#### **Romans 6:1-7**

*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup> By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? <sup>3</sup> Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup> We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*

<sup>5</sup> *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with,*

---

<sup>10</sup> The Greek word for baptism comes is βαπτίζω —baptizō — which means to immerse.



that we should no longer be slaves to sin—<sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

## By faith, we are born again in the waters of baptism

### **John 3:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.”

<sup>4</sup> “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.

### **Titus 3:5**

... he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

### **Colossians 2:12**

having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

## Being baptized into Christ clothes us with Christ

### **Galatians 3:26-27**

So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith, <sup>27</sup> for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Reference: **Genesis 3:21** The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

## Three things happen at a typical baptism

### **Acts 2:38-41**

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the

*Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”*

*<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”<sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

1. Your sins are forgiven — washed away by the blood of Christ.<sup>11</sup>
2. You receive the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit of God.<sup>12</sup>
3. You are immersed by the Spirit and added into the body of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

### Should you be baptized?

If you believe, but you have never been biblically baptized — yes!

If you believe, but you have never truly *repented* — yes!

If you believe, but have never made a serious commitment to be a disciple of Jesus Christ — yes!

### And now what are you waiting for?

#### **Acts 22:16**

*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*

When someone is baptized at DC Regional Christian Church we typically ask two questions as a verbal confession of faith:

---

<sup>11</sup> **Acts 22:16** *And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*

<sup>1</sup> **John 1:7** ... *and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

<sup>12</sup> **Romans 8:9** *You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.*

<sup>13</sup> **1 Corinthians 12:13** *For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink*

**Q:** “Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, that he died for your sins, was buried, and rose from the dead on the third day?”

**A:** “Yes.”

**Q:** “What is your confession?”

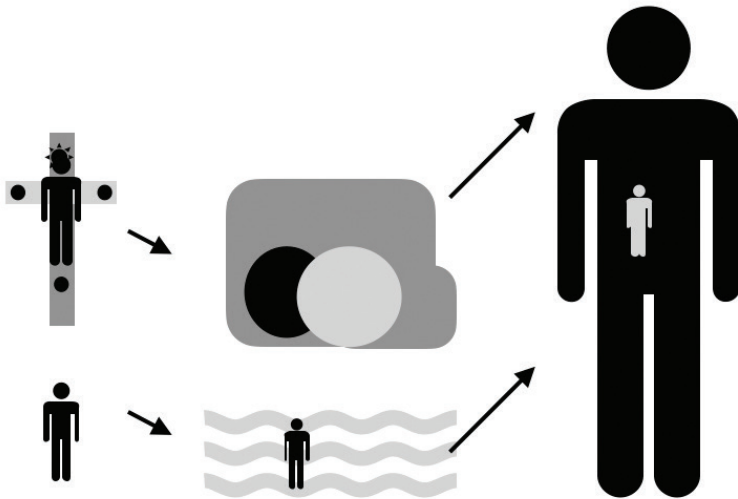
**A:** “Jesus is Lord.”<sup>14</sup>

The baptizer then usually says something similar to this ...

“With your confession, I baptize you in Jesus’ name — in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the forgiveness of their sins and to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and be added to the body of Christ. Amen!

At that moment the person is fully immersed under water and then arises as a new creation in Christ.

Are you willing and ready to begin your new life in Christ?



---

<sup>14</sup> **Romans 10:9** *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

**1 Timothy 6:12** *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

*The confession of “Jesus is Lord” means you will submit to his leadership and rule of your life for the rest of your life.*

# **PART 5: MY FAITH COMMUNITY**



# THE CHURCH

When people think of the word church they often think of a church building when in fact the church is not a building — it's a body. It's not a facility — it's a family. And, it's not a place you go — it's a people you gather with.

The Greek word for church is **ekklēsia**, which is a group of people who have been called out of their homes into an assembly — a gathering. Therefore, a Christian church is an ekklēsia of disciples of Christ who have been called out of the world to be a separate community within the world.

Jesus came to build his church — a community of his people.

DC Regional Christian Church is such a community. We have committed our lives to follow Jesus and doing life together as a family.

We love our church family.

## HOW DOES SOMEONE INITIALLY BECOME A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH?

**Baptism unites a believer with Christ and God simultaneously adds them to Jesus' church**

### **Acts 2:41**

*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*

**After baptism — they devoted themselves**

### **Acts 2:42-47**

*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate*

together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

- » The apostles' teachings — the Bible
- » Fellowship — the Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia* which means partnering, sharing, and doing life together.
- » Breaking bread — They regularly participated in the Lord's Supper to remember Jesus.
- » Prayer
- » Giving — Living selflessly
- » Joyfully worshipping together
- » Partnering with God to save others

Challenge: Be Devoted!

### **The church is immensely important to Christ**

Today, it is not uncommon to hear people say, "I want a relationship with God but I don't want to be devoted to church." Many people simply don't like church. Disappointedly, what many people have experienced as "the church" is actually a misrepresentation of the kind of church Jesus came to build.

The church matters. And, being an authentic church that represents Christ is immensely important.

In the New Testament, there are several metaphors for the church and each shows how valuable the church is to Christ and how vitally important it should be for anyone who follows Jesus. Here are four:

## **1. THE CHURCH IS THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST ON EARTH**

### **Matthew 16:18-19**

*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and*

the gates of Hades will not overcome it.<sup>19</sup> I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven;<sup>15</sup> whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

### **Colossians 1:13-14**

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,<sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

- » A local church community is the visible expression of the **kingdom of Christ on earth.**<sup>16</sup>

### **Matthew 6:33**

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

- » Seeking God’s kingdom should be our priority!

## **2. THE CHURCH IS THE FAMILY OF GOD**

### **Ephesians 2:19-20**

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also **members of his household**,<sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

- » Citizens of the kingdom of Christ are members of God’s household — God’s family.

---

<sup>15</sup> When Jesus gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven he tasked Peter with unlocking the doors of heaven to those who would hear and accept the good news. Peter used those keys when he proclaimed the first gospel messages to the Jews and Gentiles. [Acts 2 and Acts 10]

<sup>16</sup> **Daniel 2:44** “In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

**Daniel 7:14** He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.

### 3. THE CHURCH IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

#### **Ephesians 5:25-27**

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her<sup>26</sup> to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,<sup>27</sup> and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.*

- » Jesus loves his bride — imperfections and all. But he wants his bride to be radiant and holy.

### 4. THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST

#### **Colossians 1:18**

*And he is the head of the body, the church*

**To Christ, if you truly belong to him you will also belong to his body**



# UNITY AND THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers.

## **John 17:20-23**

*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,<sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.<sup>22</sup> I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—<sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.*

**Disunity is one of the greatest challenges to the church.**

**Denominationalism undermines unity.**

## WHAT IS A DENOMINATION?

Definition of a denomination: a subgroup with a distinctive name that identifies itself as being separate from the whole group. **de-nomi-nation**

de = of

nom = name

nation = group

Any time a subgroup of the body of Christ is more passionate about the unity of their group and less desirous about pursuing the scope of unity Jesus prayed for the entire group, God is not pleased.

## **Ephesians 4:3-6**

*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

*<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

## Why are there so many denominations?

Church history clearly shows, the further you go back in time the fewer denominations you'll find.

There were no denominations when the church began on the Day of Pentecost over two thousand years ago. There was only one church — one united group of Christ followers.

## Divisions lead to denominations. Following people more than Christ results in more divisions.

### **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**

*I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. <sup>11</sup> My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup> Is Christ divided?*

## WHAT KIND OF CHURCH IS DC REGIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH?

### We advocate for unity by focusing on restoring back-to-the-Bible Christianity

1. DC Regional Christian Church affirms that when someone becomes a baptized child of God they become a member of Christ's one body and not a denomination.
2. We are non-denominational in our identity. We are simply Christians, Christ-followers, believers, and disciples of Jesus. We don't identify ourselves by denominational names.
3. We are nondenominational regarding how our congregation is led. We are shepherded by local pastoral leaders — evangelists, shepherds, and teachers. We are not governed by any human global leader, a worldwide

council, or any representatives who cast votes to determine what doctrines we ought to teach or what practices we must follow.

4. Although we are a denominationally free church, it is our commitment to being a relationally connected church with doctrinally like-minded congregations.
5. Our roots: Jesus' church began in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost, several weeks after his resurrection. Historically and doctrinally we can also trace our roots back to the Reformation Movement of the 1500s and the Restoration Movement of the 1800s. These, "Let's get back to the Bible" Christian movements placed an emphasis on following the Bible over the traditions of men. From these movements, various Christian churches, churches of Christ, and International Churches of Christ have emerged. It is our commitment and desire at DC Regional Christian Church, to embrace fellowship with all true Christians as defined by the Bible.

## Pray for the gospel to spread throughout the DMV region

### **2 Thessalonians 3:1-2**

*...pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. <sup>2</sup> And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith.*

### **Acts 13:49**

*The word of the Lord spread through the whole region.*

## Pray for the Lord's people all around the world — especially the persecuted and the poor

### **Ephesians 6:18**

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on **praying for all the Lord's people.***

**1 Peter 5:9**

*Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of suffering.*

**Galatians 2:10**

*All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.*

**Pray for unity**

**Psalm 133:1**

*How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!*

# A FAMILY THAT DOES LIFE TOGETHER

God never meant for you to go through life alone. God made you so that you could be a part of his family. The church is God's family — a family that does life together. As in all families, it is important for our family members to meet together and be closely connected to one another.

## **Hebrews 10:24-25**

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

## **Our leadership team oversees the work of the ministry**

DC Regional Christian Church's congregational leadership consists of spiritually gifted leaders who have been appointed to oversee the work of the church: pastoral leaders and congregational servants.

## **Philippians 1:1**

*To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.*

## **Ephesians 4:11-13**

*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

## **1 Timothy 5:17**

*The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*

### **Titus 2:3-4**

*Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. <sup>4</sup> Then they can train the younger women ...*

### **Romans 16:1-2**

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon, of the church in Cenchreae. <sup>2</sup> I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.*

**The primary work of our Lead Minister** is to preach and teach the word; serve as the point leader of the pastoral team; make sure the various congregational ministries are equipped and on task, and partner with like-minded congregations to advance the gospel around the world.

### **Timothy 4:2,5**

*Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction... <sup>5</sup> But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.*

## **Get Connected Stay Connected**

We encourage our members to partner up with each other so that every member of DCRCC has at least two or three others that know them well and are accountable to each other. **Prayer partners** and **discipleship partner** relationships provide spiritual support, encouragement, and mutual accountability.

In our congregation, there are various kinds of **small groups** that meet together, including “similar stage-in-life” groups, “common interest” groups, “bible discussion groups”, and/or “service team groups.” We encourage our members to join one, host one, and/or find out how to start a new one.

We also impress upon our members the need for them to **practice hospitality** and to regularly **break bread together**. Regularly plan to schedule times to go out and fellowship over a meal or coffee/tea.

From time to time we have **region-wide gatherings** organized by counties and various local communities. Attending and participating in these kinds of local events is a great way to get acquainted with the members of DC Regional who may live in your county/community.

### **Ministry Regions:**

- » DC: SE/SW/NE/NW
- » Virginia Counties and Cities
- » Maryland Counties: Prince George's; Montgomery County; Southern Maryland and Northern Counties

We also encourage our members to attend different kinds of **conferences, camps for youth, special service projects, etc...** Some of these are sponsored by our congregation whereas others may be hosted by other churches with whom we share close fellowship.

## **GIVING. SERVING. HELPING OUT.**

### **When we give we grow**

#### **Mark 10:45**

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

#### **Acts 20:35**

*In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*

#### **John 13:14-17**

*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. <sup>16</sup> Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. <sup>17</sup> Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

## **Matthew 25:35-36**

*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,<sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'*

**As a member of God's family, God expects us to give:**

**(1) our treasures (2) our time (3) our talents**

1. Treasures: Financially giving our tithes and offerings is an act of worship that spreads the gospel and helps the poor.
2. Time: Make the time to serve in general ways. Jesus, even though he was King of kings, washed his disciple's feet. He set an example for us to serve in seemingly common ways to bless others.
3. Talent: Serving in the areas that God has uniquely shaped you for is fulfilling and effective.

## **How has God uniquely shaped you for service?**

SHAPE is an acronym that describes the different gifts God has given us for service.

**Spiritual giftedness:** spiritual gifts and natural talents God gave you.

**Heart passions and desires:** what you enjoy doing.

**Abilities:** what you are good at doing.

**Personality type:** how God uniquely wired your personality type for service.

**Experiences:** how God uses your experiences (pleasant and painful ones) to minister to others.

## **SHARING THE GOOD NEWS**

Fulfilling the Great Commission is our family's business — our mission.

## **Matthew 28:18-20**

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has*



been given to me.<sup>19</sup> 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,<sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.


### **Matthew 9:35-38**

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness.<sup>36</sup> When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.<sup>37</sup> Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.<sup>38</sup> **Ask** the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to **send out workers** into his harvest field.

1. Care — Jesus had compassion for people.
2. Prayer — Prayer is powerful and effective.
3. Share — Share your story. Share your faith. Share the good news. Go!





A photograph of a dense forest with tall, thin trees. A path or road curves through the trees on the right side, leading away from the viewer. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating dappled light on the path and the forest floor. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

*The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!"*

— LUKE 17:5