

Year **3**

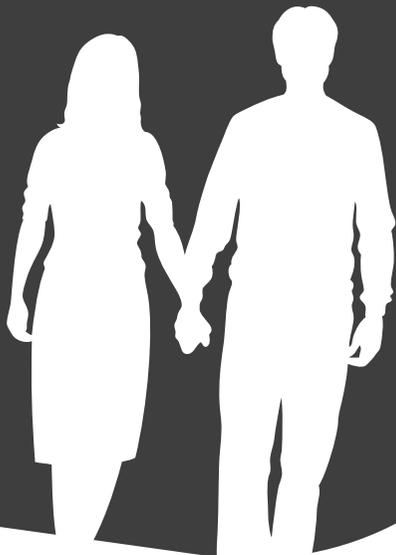
Adult • Quarter 2



# The Authority of Jesus

STUDENT GUIDE

Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven.  
Your faithfulness endures to all generations; You  
established the earth, and it abides.—Psalm 119:89–90



GOD'S WORD FOR ALL GENERATIONS



**Answers**  
BIBLE CURRICULUM

Answers Bible Curriculum

Year 3 • Quarter 2 • Adult Student

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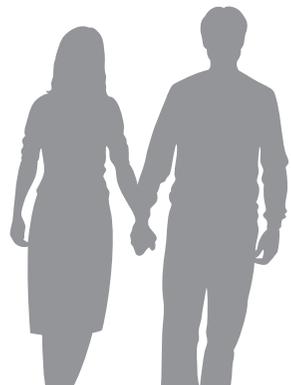
# Introduction to Answers Bible Curriculum

Jesus's ministry had begun. He lived a perfect life. And because of that, He alone could offer the redemption and forgiveness we need to be accepted by God. Because He was without sin, He could take the punishment for all sinners who would turn to Him in repentance and faith. Last quarter, we studied Jesus's birth and the start of His ministry.

This quarter we will be looking at the life of Jesus during the approximately three years of His earthly ministry. Through the next 12 lessons we'll witness His amazing miracles that demonstrated His power and deity. We'll hear His startling teaching that left the people in wonder. And we'll be faced with the high cost of discipleship that caused many to stop following Jesus. But our prayer is that you will respond as Peter did when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

We encourage you to read the Prepare to Learn section before class each week. This will provide important background information so that you will get more from each lesson.

For more information and links to online articles and videos, be sure to visit the Online Resource Page at [www.AnswersBibleCurriculum.com](http://www.AnswersBibleCurriculum.com).







# 1

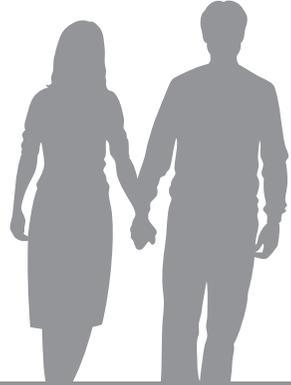
## Jesus's Mission

### Key Passages

- John 3:16–18, 12:27–28, 17:1–5

### What You Will Learn

- How Jesus glorified the Father.
- Why Jesus came to earth.



### Lesson Overview

Jesus came to earth with a purpose—a mission. That purpose was to glorify the Father. He was obedient to His Father even unto death. And His death provided eternal life with God for people who believe in Him.

### Memory Verse

#### John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

When we think of Jesus Christ and His short ministry on earth, we often think of the miracles—feeding multitudes (Matthew 14:13–21); healing the crippled, blind, and sick (Mark 2:1–12; John 9:1–7; Mark 5); and befriending sinners (Luke 19:1–8; John 4:1–26). Jesus was a man on a mission. But His mission was not merely to rid the world of hunger, pain, sickness, or sadness.

Jesus's primary reason for coming to earth was to glorify His Father. Even as a boy, Jesus spoke of this to Mary and Joseph in the Temple when He said, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). And when the hour for His death had come, He prayed that the Father would glorify Him so that He could glorify the Father (John 17:1). Another prayer demonstrated that same purpose. When He considered His approaching death, Jesus prayed, "Now My soul is troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify Your name" (John 12:27–28).

Though Jesus was God from the beginning and never ceased to be God, He willingly set aside His own glory to make Himself a humble servant: ". . . taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men . . . He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7–8). Jesus glorified the Father by finishing the work that the Father had given Him to do—even unto death (John 17:4).

The Father's will for Jesus included more than His death on the Cross. God's plan for Jesus's life, death, and

Resurrection was about saving the lost. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). We read that Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). The Apostle Paul understood this and stated it plainly in his letter to Timothy: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). He came to save sinners, and the salvation He offered would bring eternal life (John 5:24, 3:15, 10:28).

How does one receive the salvation and eternal life Jesus purchased by His death on the Cross? Being born again is a work of the Spirit, not the flesh (John 3), so we must be careful about trivializing salvation as a raised hand, a walk down the church aisle, or a repeated prayer. But receiving the gift of salvation does involve the following things: You must come to Him. Believe that He is. Acknowledge your sinfulness before God. Humbly repent of your sins, which means to turn from them and forsake them. Accept the truth that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16–18).

Jesus continues to call, seek, and save those who humbly place their faith in Him (Matthew 11:28–29).

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

What do we mean when we speak about Jesus glorifying God? To glorify God means to extol Him, agree with what He says about Himself, worship Him in the splendor of holiness, and submit to Him in humble obedience (1 Chronicles 16; John 17:4). God Himself described His glory: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Exodus 34:6). God’s glory is manifested through His marvelous attributes. And God, in His grace, chose to display these attributes to mankind through the amazing work of His Son in salvation. Everything Jesus is, everything He did on earth, was God’s glory on display.

We see God’s compassion in Jesus, who healed those who were sick; we see God’s omnipotence in Jesus, who rebuked the wind and calmed the sea; we see God’s mercy and grace in Jesus, who forgave repentant sinners; we see God’s omniscience in Jesus, who knew the thoughts of those around Him; we see God’s holiness in Jesus, who lived a perfect life without sin; and, finally, we see God’s justice and love in Jesus, who died on the Cross, taking the wrath of God against sin and providing forgiveness and eternal life for all who trust in Him.

God created us for His own glory (Isaiah 43:6–7), our good works are so others will give God glory (Matthew 5:16), everything we do is to be done for God’s glory (1 Corinthians 10:31), and God’s plan is to fill the earth with the knowledge of His glory (Habakkuk 2:14). So God is all about His own glory!

If we were to seek our own glory, we would be called proud or arrogant. So what does it mean that God seeks His own glory? Doesn’t that make Him a

narcissist? This is a frequently misunderstood subject, chiefly because we forget the difference between the infinite, eternal, holy God, and ourselves, who are finite and fallen.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer given is: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” Indeed, our failure or refusal to worship and honor God would be idolatry. So if mankind’s highest good and greatest aim in life is the glory of God, how can God have any other aim? If idolatry is worshipping anyone or anything as god, instead of the true God, then for God to seek any other end than His own glory would amount to idolatry on God’s part. Since He is the eternal, infinite Creator, He deserves all glory, so for Him to seek His own glory is not selfishness, but entirely proper.

As J.I. Packer wrote:

If it is right for man to have the glory of God as his goal, can it be wrong for God to have the same goal? If man can have no higher purpose than God’s glory, how can God? If it is wrong for man to seek a lesser end than this, it would be wrong for God, too. The reason it cannot be right for man to live for himself, as if He were God, is because He is not God. However, it cannot be wrong for God to seek His own glory, simply because He is God. Those who insist that God should not seek His glory in all things are really asking that He cease to be God. And there is no greater blasphemy than to will that. (J.I. Packer, *God’s Plans for You*, Crossway, 2001, p. 29.)

God is glorious, and He wants His fame—His glory—to be seen and enjoyed by His creatures. Jesus’s goal

was to glorify His Father, and that must be our goal too. But what does it mean to glorify God, and how do we do that in our normal, day-to-day lives?

One way we glorify God is to extol His attributes—such as His holiness, faithfulness, omniscience, omnipotence, mercy, grace, sovereignty, and love—proclaiming them to others as we tell them about the amazing salvation He alone offers.

Jesus said that He came to do the will of the Father. He glorified God by His obedience to His Father. So another way we glorify God is by living a life that pleases Him. That means we don't lie, we don't steal, we obey and respect governing authorities, we love others like Jesus did, etc.

To obey God is to glorify Him. But it is not just external acts; rather, obedience should come from our hearts. Without a vibrant relationship with Jesus, we cannot glorify God. The key to glorifying God is to be living in fellowship with Him—to be abiding in Christ (John 15). Is His life in you? Are you living in fellowship with Him who loved you and gave Himself up for you (Galatians 2:20)? Are you being conformed to the image of the one who created you (Colossians 3:10)? Are you abiding in Him and bearing fruit to the glory of God—and thereby proving to be His disciple (John 15:8)?

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

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Why did Jesus come to earth?

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Take notes as you study the following passage.

John 3:1-21

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## Glory to God

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The glory of God is on display throughout creation and in the pages of Scripture. To glorify God is to acknowledge who He is in all His fullness. What do each of the following verses teach about the glory of God?

- Genesis 1:26–27
- Isaiah 43:6–7
- Matthew 5:16
- Romans 11:33–36
- 1 Corinthians 10:31
- 2 Corinthians 4:5–6

In his book *Godless*, Dan Barker of the Freedom from Religion Foundation wrote, "Speaking for myself, if the Bible's heaven and hell exist, I would choose hell. Having to spend eternity pretending to worship a petty tyrant who tortures those who insult his authority would be more hellish than baking in eternal flames. There is no way such a bully can earn my admiration."

1. What errors about God's character are evident in Dan Barker's statement?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Based on the passages above, how would you seek to correct this misunderstanding about God, especially about the glory due to God?

Take notes as you study the following passages.

John 17:1-5

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John 12:27-28

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# Jesus Has Power Over Nature

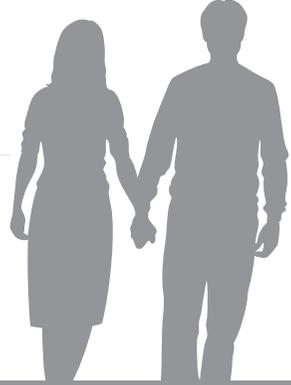
## 2

### Key Passages

- Matthew 14:22–33; Luke 5:1–11;  
Colossians 1:15–18

### What You Will Learn

- How Jesus's role as Creator connects to His power over nature.



### Lesson Overview

Jesus did miracles to show that He could control nature. He calmed a storm, walked on water, and caused Simon to catch a net-breaking, boat-sinking load of fish! How could Jesus do those things? Scripture is clear: Jesus is the Creator. Jesus IS God.

### Memory Verse

#### John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords, began his ministry with an ordinary bunch of disciples. Many had been fishermen, and there was a tax collector, a political zealot, and others that we don't know a lot about. At the beginning of Jesus's ministry, He began to perform public miracles in the presence of His disciples. All these miracles pointed to Him as the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus did not heal the sick and raise the dead for the sole purpose of removing suffering but to demonstrate who He was and that His message was true.

In John 10, Jesus stated, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:37–38). The works of Jesus were to reveal that He was in the Father and the Father in Him—that He was God in the flesh.

In the book of Colossians, Paul gave one of the most complete statements that exists anywhere in Scripture of Jesus's deity.

He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:15–20).

Jesus is the Creator of all that is. Jesus is the Sustainer of the entire universe. As Creator and Sustainer, Jesus has authority over His creation—over every atom. It is no problem for Him to change water into wine (John 2:1–11) or to multiply bread and fish (John 6:1–14).

In this lesson, we look at two of Jesus's miracles over nature that reveal Jesus is God: the miraculous catch of fish and the calming of the storm.

Luke 5 records an event early in Jesus's ministry when He called His first disciples. Simon Peter had been fishing all night long . . . but had caught nothing. In the morning, after using Simon's boat as a pulpit, Jesus told him to let his nets down into deep water. At first Simon complained, but then he obeyed. What happened next was amazing: the catch of fish was so great that the net began to break. Another boat was called in to help, and there were so many fish that the boats began to sink. Only the Lord of creation could do such a thing. Peter, recognizing that he was in the presence of no mere man, fell at Jesus's feet, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). Who can control fish, except the one who controls all things—the holy, omnipotent God?

As the disciples witnessed Jesus's miracles, they began to get a better understanding of who this man was in their midst. A defining moment for

Jesus's disciples, and particularly for Peter, was the calming of the storm, recorded in Matthew 14.

After many days of teaching and ministry, Jesus sent His disciples by boat to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He remained behind for some much needed time with His Father. In the middle of the night, the disciples were facing a storm on the sea—strong winds and tossing waves. During “the fourth watch of the night” (3–6 a.m.), Jesus came to His disciples, walking on the water. The disciples were afraid and thought Jesus was a ghost. But Jesus calmed their fears, reassuring them that it was He. It was then that impetuous, bold Peter showed his faith. He said to Jesus, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water” (Matthew 14:28). Jesus commanded Peter to come, and Peter proceeded to walk on the water. Wow! What faith! Peter is often derided for his lack of faith that caused him to sink, but none of the other disciples got out of the boat.

At the end of this episode, Jesus got into the boat and commanded the storm to be still—and it obeyed its Creator. The disciples were astonished. The account finishes by telling us that “those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, ‘Truly You are the Son of God!’” (Matthew 14:33).

Yes, truly Jesus is the Son of God—God in the flesh—the Creator of all that exists. He has power over nature. He walked on the water! He calmed the sea! He produced an overwhelming catch of fish. These things, and so much more, He did so we would KNOW that He is the Son of God. He alone deserves all our worship and praise! And He has all power to do whatever He wills in heaven and on earth.

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

The four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) record about 35 separate miracles Jesus performed. These were not the only ones He did, but these specific ones the writers picked out, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to represent Jesus's power and to show us who He is.

The most important thing about the miracles of Jesus recorded in the New Testament is what they teach us about Jesus Himself. Jesus's miracles authenticate His claim to deity. They demonstrate the following: God was with Jesus (John 3:2; Acts 10:38); Jesus was from God (John 3:2, 9:32–33); God had sent Jesus (John 5:36); Jesus had authority on earth to forgive sins (Mark 2:10–11; Matthew 9:6–7; Luke 5:24–25); Jesus was approved by God (Acts 2:22); the Father was in Jesus and Jesus was in the Father (John 10:37–38, 14:11); in Jesus the kingdom of God had come (Matthew 12:28; Luke 11:20); and Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God (Matthew 11:1–6, 14:25–33; John 10:24–25).

The miracles we read about in the pages of the Gospels are examples of the power that belonged to Jesus; they validated His message and demonstrated that He was God in the flesh. Jesus had one dominating purpose in life—to fulfill His Father's will. This is brought out clearly in John's Gospel (see John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38). Jesus did not regard any of His works as His own; they were the Father's works (John 5:19, 9:3–4). And the final work of God—the final act of obedience of the Son to the Father—was the death of Jesus on the Cross. He willingly became the perfect substitute, taking God's wrath against sin, and giving His

righteousness to all who will come to Him in repentance and faith.

At the end of John's Gospel, he writes that there were many other signs Jesus did in the presence of His disciples, which are not written. But the things that are recorded are there "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31).

During the past several hundred years, scholars have tried to deny the miracles of Jesus. A major attack against the Bible was the "higher criticism" that arose in Germany around the end of the 17th century, continuing into the 20th century. The promoters of higher criticism, such as Bultmann, Graff, Eichhorn, and Wellhausen, insisted that the Bible was a human product, brought about by the church to express what individual men had to say about God. These critics had been affected by European rationalism—the belief that human reason, unaided by divine revelation, is adequate for attaining all truth. They did not approach the Bible from a believer's standpoint, one of trusting in the authority and accuracy

of God's Word. No, instead they put the Bible under the microscope of a rational, skeptical point of view—a point of view biased heavily by a faith in atheism. These critics had decided that miracles were impossible, and therefore, any miracles in the Bible were either natural phenomena wrongly interpreted by the biblical writers or were inserted later by men who wanted to "beef up" the resumé of Jesus, to present Him as more than He really was.

Thankfully, God raised up conservative, evangelical scholars, such as Hodge, Warfield, Machen, and Allis, to take these critics head-on. They demonstrated the historical accuracy of the Bible and the reliable textual history of the New Testament, and they defended the biblical worldview—a world where God is very much alive and involved in the affairs of men.

Praise God that He has inspired and preserved the true account of Jesus. We can trust God's written Word, and we can trust God's living Word—our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

Are there any miracles in the Bible that you don't believe?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Matthew 14:22-33

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Luke 5:1-11

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## Accepting Miracles

Follow your teacher's instructions as you fill out the Accepting Miracles worksheet.



## God's Word in the Real World

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1. How has connecting the role of Jesus as Creator to His power over nature helped you understand these miracles more fully?
2. How does the inclusion of miracles like the ones we discussed today help you to trust more fully in the truthfulness of the Bible?
3. As you talk to unbelievers, what role does the existence of miracles play in explaining the truths of Scripture?
4. Since we live in a time where many people are very skeptical of miracles and look to natural explanations to explain the world, should we avoid bringing up miracles as we seek to share the gospel with them?
5. What truth have you learned or been reminded of today that you can use throughout the week to offer praise to the Father and the Son?



## Prayer Requests

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# Jesus Has Power Over Disease

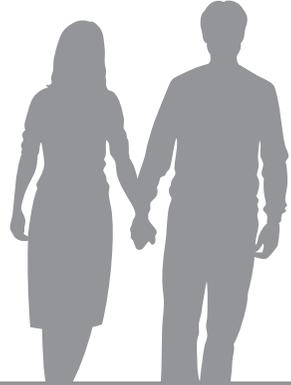
## 3

### Key Passages

- Mark 2:1–12; John 9:1–7

### What You Will Learn

- The two ways Jesus healed the paralytic.
- Why Jesus healed the blind man.



### Lesson Overview

Jesus was compassionate and loving toward people who were sick. He often showed His compassion by healing them. But this was not the main reason Jesus healed. Jesus healed so others would see the power of God in Him, and God would be glorified. Not only did Jesus heal physical disease, but He was able to forgive sins—healing men's souls for all eternity!

### Memory Verse

#### John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



## Prepare to Learn

### SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Jesus came to do His Father's will. Part of that mission was to present who He was and who had sent Him. The miracles He performed confirmed these things. Jesus truly was God in the flesh, the Creator, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

The Gospel of Mark reveals Jesus as the compassionate, suffering servant who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). He often revealed His servant's heart and compassion to the people He ministered to, especially those He encountered who were sick (Mark 1:41, 5:19, 6:34, 8:2).

But Jesus was not concerned primarily with physical healing. He came to do His Father's will. And that included providing a way for sinners to have eternal life (John 5:24). This could only be accomplished through spiritual healing—through the forgiveness of sins wrought by sincere repentance and faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The account of Jesus healing the paralytic is an example of His ability and desire to heal physically as well as spiritually. As Jesus preached in a house in Capernaum, a large crowd had gathered and the house became full (Mark 2:2). Four men came to the house with a paralytic friend on a bed, presumably to be healed. Seeing the crowded house, they went up on the clay roof, dug a hole in the roof, and lowered their friend down to Jesus (Mark 2:3–4). Jesus saw their faith and said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven you."

Jesus ignored the physical condition of the man and spoke directly to the man's more serious problem—the sin in his heart. The scribes immediately

accused Jesus of blasphemy as they considered that no one can forgive sins except God (Mark 2:6–7).

Jesus answered, "Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise, take up your bed and walk?'" There is some irony here. It is easier to say the words, "Your sins are forgiven you," since the forgiveness cannot be seen. And yet, forgiving sins is the more difficult of the tasks since only God can forgive sins—and the price He demands for that forgiveness is immeasurable.

Jesus continued in order to confirm plainly that He is God. He told the man to rise, take his bed, and go home (Mark 2:11). This healing revealed and confirmed that Jesus, as God, not only has power to heal but to forgive sins and grant eternal life!

Another healing miracle of Jesus is recorded in John 9. This miracle concerned a man who had been blind from birth. The disciples wondered if the reason that this man was born blind was because he or his parents had sinned. Jesus replied, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him" (John 9:3). This man's blindness was not a direct result of personal sin, but rather that Jesus might heal his blindness, and thus display the glory of God, and His own deity.

Jesus showed His compassion and His mercy to those who were both physically sick and spiritually sick. He has power over disease and sickness. And He can forgive sins! He is truly God.

And for all who receive Him, repent of their sins, and accept the forgiveness He offers, there is a greater promise: that one day, our lowly bodies will be transformed to be like His glorious

body. In heaven sin will be conquered, and there will be no more sickness, sorrow, or death (Revelation 21:4).

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

There are those today who claim that God's will is for everyone be healed. They assert that physical healing is guaranteed to believers based on Jesus's death on the Cross. All we have to do is believe—to name it and claim it. But is this what the Bible teaches? Is it God's will that everyone be healed of sickness during their earthly lives?

We know that in God's original creation there was no sickness or death. God created everything "very good." But when Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the world, and it is now under bondage to corruption (Romans 8:20–22). Now people get sick and die. There are natural causes of disease, such as viruses, bacteria, defective genes, and so forth. Then we have war, accidents, and disasters that may result in injury, paralysis, and disfigurement. The record of Scripture, history, and our own experience tells us that believers are not exempt from any of these difficulties.

Were believers in the New Testament always healed? The answer is "No." There are several biblical examples where God did not heal people. Take the Apostle Paul, for example. He had a "thorn in the flesh" from Satan that afflicted him. He prayed three times that the Lord might heal him of this infirmity, but God did not (2 Corinthians 12:9). Timothy was another who suffered from an ailment. We don't know the exact nature of it, but Paul encouraged Timothy to "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23).

In 2 Timothy 4:20, Paul says, "Erastus stayed at Corinth, but Trophimus I have left in Miletus sick." Paul, who had healed others, could not or did not heal Trophimus. He left him sick. Paul no doubt prayed for Trophimus, but for some reason God chose not to heal him. And then there was Epaphroditus, a helper to Paul and servant to the Philippians. He was sick to the point of death, but the Lord spared his life (Philippians 2:25–30). Why did God allow this righteous servant of God to almost die? When he finally recovered, Paul said it was because "God had mercy on him."

If it were God's will that all believers be healed, then why would God not heal these men of faith? Why doesn't God heal everyone? There are several biblical reasons.

First, God does not always respond to our desires in the way that we would want Him to. He frequently allows circumstances that we would not have chosen for ourselves. We call this sovereignty. God is sovereign over His creation, over us, over our circumstances. God sovereignly directs the circumstances of our lives and allows or permits things as He wills (Daniel 4:35; Psalm 115:3). As the potter, He has the right to do with the clay (us!) as He wishes (Jeremiah 18; Romans 9). Is God supposed to give us what we want, even if He knows that something else is better? Doesn't God reserve the right to give us the best possible good according to His wisdom and knowledge (Romans 8:28)? Maybe more than being healed, God wants us to see and understand life from His perspective—something we cannot do as long as we think the world revolves around us.

A second reason that God may choose not to heal is to reveal His power in another way. Paul asked God to remove his thorn in the flesh. God

responded, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul understood that the weakness caused by his infirmity was an avenue for God’s power to be shown in his life. He wrote, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). Suffering can be a tool of sanctification, like rough sandpaper that smooths and finishes.

A third reason that God may not heal us is because our physical condition is not His primary concern. Our Father’s first priority is His own glory. Sometimes He may be best glorified when someone is healed, as in the case of the man born blind in John 9. But sometimes God’s glory may be better revealed by how a child of His responds to difficulties, sicknesses, and trials. Throughout history, God has been glorified and honored in the lives of faithful

saints who have clung to Him no matter the difficulty, pain, or distress.

A fourth reason that God may not heal us is to equip us to help others. When we undergo suffering and trials, we are comforted by God. And that comfort that we receive is not just for ourselves, but we are to comfort others who are experiencing the same things with the comfort that we have received from God (2 Corinthians 1:3–11).

And finally we must realize that if we are believers, we can look forward to the day when God will wipe away our tears and remove all pain and grief (Revelation 21:4). God will heal all our diseases, but that day has not yet come. We are still in our mortal bodies, subject to pain, disease, and death. And there is a present purpose for our suffering as it shapes us, challenges us, conforms us to the image of Christ, reveals God’s power in weakness, and draws our hope toward eternity (James 1:2–4; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

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What type of healing did Jesus bring?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Mark 2:1-12

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Luke 5:17, 5:25

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John 9:1-41

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## Purpose in Suffering

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It seems that almost everyone who had a physical ailment in the Gospels was healed. As we look around today, it seems that most are not healed. But does God heal everyone who asks? Does He heal everyone who trusts in Him? Work through the questions below, looking to Scripture to help you formulate a biblical understanding of healing.

1. Some people teach that disease or disorders are always the result of sin in the life of the individual and that they will not receive healing until they repent of that sin. How do John 9:1–4 and 1 Corinthians 11:27–30 give a biblical understanding of sin leading to sickness?
2. We know that God is able to heal because He is omnipotent. We see that expression as a leper worships and speaks to Jesus in Matthew 8:1–3. What important aspect does this leper acknowledge about healing?
3. There are many examples in the New Testament of God not healing people, even those closely connected to Paul (e.g., 2 Timothy 4:20; Philippians 2:25–30). How is God's willingness to heal when we ask related to His sovereignty, wisdom, and love?
4. There are instances in Scripture where healing was connected to the faith of an individual (Mark 5:34). And James 5:14–15 instructs us to pray for healing as we have faith that God can heal. Does this mean that someone who is not healed of a disease after prayer is lacking faith?

5. How does Paul's experience of suffering and enduring a "thorn in the flesh" (2 Corinthians 12:7–10) and James's exhortation to see trials as a source of joy (James 1:2–4) help us understand God's purpose in suffering in disease or disorder?
6. As we experience various forms of diseases and suffering in this world, how can that help us to long for heaven?
7. In light of eternity, is it accurate to say that every person who puts their faith in Jesus will be healed of every disease or disorder they experience?



## God's Word in the Real World

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1. Many people think Jesus was just a good teacher or prophet, but deny that He was God. How could you use one of these passages we studied today to show someone that Jesus is God?
2. As we think about the two types of healing we saw in our study today, which is more important, physical healing or spiritual healing?

3. What struggles have you experienced with suffering and disease in your life, and how does what we have discussed from the text today help you understand that idea better?
  
4. Other than instant miraculous healing, what other means has God provided for our healing?
  
5. When a brother or sister in Christ is not healed of a sickness, what is the danger of accusing them that they don't have enough faith or they would be healed?
  
6. Many skeptics will ask why God does not heal today in such miraculous ways. How can we respond to those who say that if God did a miracle of healing right in front of them they would believe?



## Prayer Requests

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# Jesus Has Power Over Death

## 4

### Key Passages

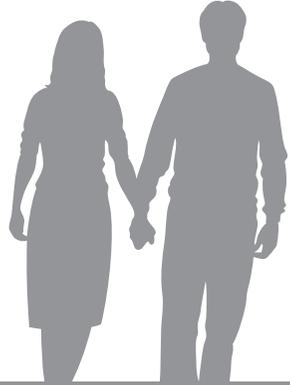
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- John 11; Ephesians 2:1–5

### What You Will Learn

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- The purpose for which Lazarus got sick and died.
- How sinners go from death to life.



### Lesson Overview

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Jesus wasn't there when Lazarus died. He knew He would glorify God by raising Lazarus from the dead. But His disciples didn't understand until Jesus called Lazarus from the grave. Jesus is God and can bring the dead to life. He can also give eternal life to those who are dead in sin.

### Memory Verse

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#### John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Jesus came to do the will of the Father and to glorify Him. He had power over nature—walking on a raging sea (Matthew 14:25–30). He had power over disease (John 9:6–7). He could forgive sins (Mark 2:5). His miracles showed that He was God in the flesh, the Creator, the Messiah, and the Son of God.

Jesus also confirmed who He was by raising the dead—something only the one true living God could do. The Bible refers to several such occurrences. Let's focus on one: the raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 11. Jesus found out by a messenger that His friend Lazarus, who was in Bethany near Jerusalem, was sick. Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary (John 11:5). And Jesus had already shown that He could heal the sick. So the announcement that Lazarus was sick was probably accompanied by a request that Jesus heal him. What was Jesus's response to this news? His first reaction was to assure His disciples that Lazarus's sickness would not end in death. In fact, Jesus knew Lazarus's sickness would result in the glory of God—that the Son of God [Jesus] would be glorified through it (John 11:4). This is the same purpose Jesus gave for healing the blind man recorded in John 9 (John 9:3).

But another purpose for this miracle is revealed by Jesus when He stated clearly that the miracle He was soon to perform would strengthen the disciples' faith in Him (John 11:14–15). And so, Jesus made His way to Bethany. Once there and amidst mourning family and friends, He took control of the situation. For the glory of God His Father and so

the people would believe God sent Him, He called for dead Lazarus to come forth from His grave (John 11:40–43).

As we reflect on Jesus's raising of Lazarus from the dead, it is good to consider the resurrection from death—in the spiritual sense—that all believers experience when we hear Jesus calling us to follow Him (Matthew 4:19). The analogy is made for us in Ephesians. Paul said that Jesus made us alive who were once dead in our trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1). Paul went on to say that because of our sin nature we were all children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). We have rebelled against the holy Creator God and are deserving of His eternal punishment (Romans 1:18–20).

But it doesn't end there, just as it didn't end in death for Jesus's friend Lazarus. No, Paul told us that God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love for us, can make us alive together with Christ. God can make a sinner alive in Christ even though he is dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:4–5). God does this through the free gift of grace through faith in the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8).

This journey from spiritual death to eternal life is available to all who will humbly accept the truth of the gospel, to all who will turn in repentance toward God and in faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21).

## HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

We read in the account of the death of Lazarus that Jesus wept. It seems a logical question to ask ourselves, why did Jesus weep? What was it that saddened the Savior? What can we learn from Christ's sorrow?

Jesus delayed visiting Lazarus when he was sick, knowing that Lazarus would die. Though He could have healed Lazarus (even from a distance), He told His disciples that He was glad He was not there. Jesus anticipated the sign He would perform for His disciples, that they might believe (John 11:11–15).

But when Jesus arrived in Bethany and saw the family and friends of Lazarus grieving, why did Jesus weep (John 11:33–35)? He certainly knew that Lazarus would soon be alive again—it was for this purpose that He had come to Bethany. A closer look at the Greek words behind this scene help us understand the emotions of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus.

John 11:33 says that “He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.” Coming to the scene of Lazarus’s tomb, Jesus intensely groaned in His spirit. The Greek word used here literally means “to snort like a horse,” implying anger and indignation. It means that Jesus wasn’t so much sad at the scene surrounding the tomb of Lazarus, as He was angry. Jesus was angry and troubled at the ravages of the great enemy of man: death. Death is an intruder, and Jesus won’t settle for this domination of death much longer. John Calvin wrote about this passage:

Christ does not come to the sepulchre as an idle spectator, but like a wrestler preparing for the contest. Therefore no wonder that He groans again, for the violent tyranny of death which He had to overcome stands before His eyes. (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, BiblioLife, 2009, p.442.)

In addition, Jesus was affected by the grief of His close friend Mary and the rest of the Jews who were lamenting with her and Martha. When we

read that we are to weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15), we can clearly see that our Lord and Savior demonstrated that kind of empathy here. However, in contrast to the loud wailing of the mourners, the Greek word used for Jesus’s weeping conveys a quiet bursting into tears. Jesus’s tears were caused both by His love for Lazarus and by His grief over the deadly and unremitting effects of sin in a fallen world. Verse 35, though the shortest verse in the Bible, is rich with meaning. It emphasizes Jesus’s humanity; He was truly “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3).

Although the passage does not tell us specifically why Jesus wept, we can infer one reason from the context: Jesus was grieved over death as the result of mankind’s sin. At the beginning of creation, “the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Genesis 2:16–17). Because Adam directly disobeyed this command, God punished all humanity beginning with Adam: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

The Apostle Paul confirmed the correlation between sin and death: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Paul also clearly wrote that “the wages of sin is death” in Romans 6:23.

As Christians, we often forget that death is an enemy. While it is true that when a fellow believer dies we do not sorrow as those who have no

hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13), we, nevertheless, must remember that death is unnatural. It is not what God created, but came about because of Adam's sin and rebellion. Let us remember and find hope in Paul's description of a time to come when death will be no more:

For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. . . . So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. (1 Corinthians 15:25–26, 15:54–56)

In raising Lazarus, Jesus showed a small glimpse of this ultimate defeat

of death. Jesus had the power to raise the dead, and soon thereafter, He went to the Cross to defeat death. Death has been abolished (2 Timothy 1:10), and one day it will be destroyed forever (Revelation 20:14).

This account of Jesus weeping at the graveside of Lazarus is most likely another example of God's grief over sin and its consequence—death. Jesus knew some would not believe. He knew that the Pharisees would now plot even harder to kill Him. He knew that everyone there (including Lazarus again) would physically die as a result of Adam's sin and their own sin. Although He was headed to Calvary to die as the sacrifice for our sin, He still knew that the consequences would continue until the time He presents "a new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

Have you ever been raised from the dead?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

John 11:1-27

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John 11:28-57

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## Spiritual Resurrection

Read the following passages and draw some connections between the account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead and the new life given to sinners who repent and believe in Jesus.

- Psalm 51:5
- Romans 5:12
- Ephesians 2:1–10
- Colossians 1:13–14
- Colossians 2:11–13
- John 3:5–8
- John 10:25–30

1. Now that we have read the account of the raising of Lazarus and these passages about receiving spiritual life, write a short summary explanation of the parallel connections between the two.
2. How does this relate to your own experience of salvation?
3. How does this understanding influence your worship of Jesus?



## God's Word in the Real World

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1. As we have discussed these passages today, what has been most helpful to you?
2. How could you use the account of Lazarus to help someone understand that Jesus was not just a man but God in the flesh?
3. How does understanding our spiritual condition before we found salvation in Christ help us to offer God the worship He is due?
4. After Lazarus had been resurrected, the Jews sought to kill him to get rid of the evidence of Jesus's miracle. In a similar way, how does the world (the enemies of God) seek to quiet or cover up the witness that a Christian has regarding their resurrection from spiritual death? What can we do about it?
5. Many people claim that seeing a miracle would surely convince them that God exists. Based on the account we read today, is this a true statement?





# 5

## Jesus Is the Bread of Life

### Key Passages

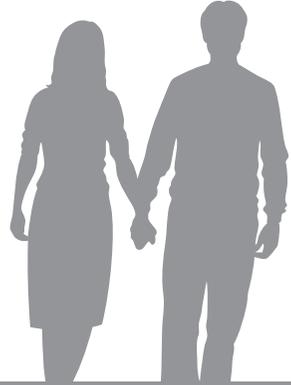
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- John 6:1–14, 6:22–66

### What You Will Learn

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- How Jesus fed the 5,000.
- What it means that Jesus is the bread of life.



### Lesson Overview

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Jesus took a small lunch and miraculously multiplied it to feed a crowd of 5,000 men and an untold number of women and children. He used the miracle to point out the spiritual hunger that physical bread cannot satisfy. Only Jesus, the bread of life, can provide the spiritual food necessary for eternal life.

### Memory Verse

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#### John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



## Prepare to Learn

### SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

The miracles Jesus performed confirmed that He was God. He had power over all creation (Mark 4:39). He had the wisdom and knowledge to teach with authority (Luke 4:32). He had the authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5). He had power over disease (John 9:6–7). And He had power over life and death (John 11). As we read these accounts and come to know Jesus better, we can understand the centurion’s response as he watched Jesus die on the Cross: “Truly this Man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Jesus’s life was characterized by miracles, service, compassion, teaching, and truth. One event that demonstrated all of these characteristics was when Jesus fed the 5,000. Bear in mind that the crowd was far larger than 5,000, as this number would not have included women and children. Jesus had been teaching, and this multitude—estimated at 20,000—followed Him. Upon seeing the crowd, Jesus had compassion on them. Knowing what He was about to do, Jesus tested Philip: “Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5). Philip responded that there were not enough funds available to even begin to feed all of them. But Jesus had a plan. They found a young boy with five barley loaves and two small fish. Jesus took this meager lunch, gave thanks to God, and passed out enough food to feed the entire crowd! Not only that but they filled 12 baskets with the leftovers. Here again, Jesus revealed who He was to those who had eyes to see (Matthew 13:16).

It was an amazing miracle indeed—one that met the physical needs of a great number of people. But Jesus

would soon make a claim that would prove to be more amazing than even this miracle. He would claim that He Himself is the bread of life (John 6:35).

You see, the crowds continued to follow Jesus (John 6:24). But Jesus knew that they were captivated, not by Him but by His miracles. They sought Him because they had recently eaten the food He had miraculously multiplied (John 6:26). They were more concerned with filling their stomachs temporarily than satisfying their spiritual hunger eternally. So Christ’s address must have puzzled them when He said, “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (John 6:27). What food would be available that would provide eternal life?

They continued to ask for more signs and miracles and even recalled that Moses had supplied manna in the desert (John 6:31). But what God had offered through the manna was merely a hint of what was to come—the true bread, Jesus Christ. And again, Jesus surely surprised them with His answer: “Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world” (John 6:32–33).

They asked the Lord to give them that bread. And again, Jesus startled them when He said, “I am the bread of life, He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

What did Jesus mean? Again, He was not referring to physical life that perishes or to bread that temporarily

satisfies; He was referring to eternal life and spiritual bread that forever satisfies. Jesus is the living bread of life who has come down from heaven. He gives spiritual life; that is why He came. He is the only source of life. The “bread” Jesus gives is His own flesh, sacrificed on the Cross for the life of the world (John 6:47–51). He gave His precious, sinless life for the life of sinners everywhere—sinners who would one day come to Him in humility, repentance, and faith for the forgiveness of their sins.

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

Have you ever had someone ask you, “You don’t take the Bible literally, do you?” Usually, they ask this because they think it is ridiculous to accept some of the things the Bible says. They may follow up with, “Jesus said, ‘I am the door.’ You don’t think he’s really a door, do you?” Or, “Jesus said to cut off your hand if it causes you to sin. So why do you still have two hands?”

The problem lies with our use of the term literal. It would be best if we avoid using this term with regard to Bible interpretation. It would be incorrect to state that we take the Bible literally, in the way that the person above means it. The Bible itself gives us some principles of interpretation in 2 Corinthians 4:2 and Proverbs 8:8–9:

But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.

All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; nothing crooked or perverse is in them. They are all plain to him who

understands, and right to those who find knowledge.

In other words, we are to read and understand the Bible in a plain or natural manner. This is usually what believers mean when they say “literal interpretation of the Bible.” It means we don’t go looking for spiritual allegories everywhere or profound truths hidden under the surface of every passage. It would be better to say that we take the Bible “plainly” or in a “straightforward manner.” Reading the Bible “plainly” means that we seek to discover the meaning of a passage as the original author would have intended and as the original hearers would have understood it.

As a matchless literary work, the Bible contains many literary styles, called genres. These genres include historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, parable, and proverb. We understand that historical narrative is to be interpreted differently from poetry, which may use allegory. It’s also different from prophecy, which often uses fantastic imagery. And we know that proverbs are general truths that help us to live godly lives, not foolproof promises.

In addition to literary genres, the Bible employs a variety of figures of speech. These include simile, metaphor, allegory, hyperbole, sarcasm, metonymy, personification, anthropomorphism, imagery, and symbolism. For instance, we understand that when Jesus says, “I am the bread of life,” He’s using a metaphor—He’s not an actual loaf of bread. Similarly, when someone says, “My uncle Bob is the black sheep of the family,” we know they aren’t talking about an animal with black wool, but they mean that Uncle Bob is an odd or disreputable member of the family.

Reading the Bible plainly/straightforwardly (taking into account

literary genre, figures of speech, context, authorship, historical setting and culture, etc.) is the basis for what is called the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, which has been used by theologians since the church fathers. This method helps to eliminate improper interpretations of the Bible and allows us to plumb the depths of God's Word.

As we study the Bible and seek to rightly interpret God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15), may we follow the example of the Bereans (Acts 17:11) and carefully examine the Bible to ensure that any teaching we hear is in line with Scripture.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

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Do we always read the Bible literally?

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Take notes as you study the following passage.

John 6:1-71

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## The Bread of Life

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Using the skills you have learned, answer the question on the Bread of Life worksheet that has been assigned to you by your teacher.



## God's Word in the Real World

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1. What is the likely intent of those who desire to change miracles like the feeding of the 5,000 into everyday occurrences?
  
2. As Andrew surveyed the scene, he couldn't see how such a small amount could feed so many. Do you recognize Andrew's doubt in your own life as you follow Jesus? What is the antidote to a doubting attitude?

3. How could you use the passage we studied today to address the claim that you can't take the things written in the Bible literally?
  
4. We often think of Jesus as a meek man who only ruffled the feathers of a few religious legalists. But in this passage we see Jesus practically driving away a large group of His followers by showing them their selfish desires and calling them to submit to Him alone. How does this passage change your view of Jesus?
  
5. As you think about your own conversion, where do you see evidence of the Father drawing you to the Son by the power of the Spirit?
  
6. As you consider your walk with Christ, what "hard sayings" do you still struggle with, and how can you overcome these failures?



## Prayer Requests

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# 6

## Have You Not Read?

### Key Passages

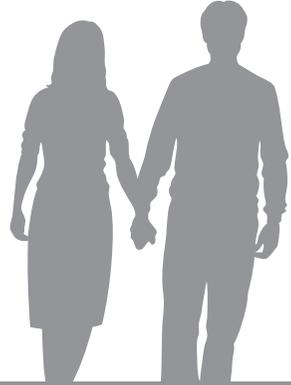
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- Matthew 15:1–20; Mark 12:18–27;  
2 Timothy 2:14–26

### What You Will Learn

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- How Jesus used Scripture to refute error.
- Why Scripture is authoritative over tradition.



### Lesson Overview

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The religious leaders of Jesus’s day—the scribes, the Sadducees, and the Pharisees—had fallen into the trap of legalism; they had made the traditions and commands of men equal to the commands of God. Jesus showed them the error in their thinking and always pointed them back to the Word of God as the authority. We, too, must stand on and use God’s Word against all forms of legalism and error.

### Memory Verse

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#### John 17:3

And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.



## Prepare to Learn

### SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

We have been studying Christ's life—His mission, His miracles, His claims, and His teachings. As we study Jesus, we turn automatically to the sacred Scriptures and confidently rely on the Bible to be our authority. We know the Bible to be the means by which God has chosen to communicate with us. And as we study Scripture, we realize that God has always desired to speak to His people. We know that from the very beginning of creation, God revealed Himself and communicated with Adam. His exchange with man did not stop there, but throughout the Old Testament we find God speaking to Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David, the prophets, and many others.

As we move into the New Testament, God confirms the importance of His Word as we see Jesus defending the truth, reliability, exclusivity, and sufficiency of the Scriptures. Jesus spoke often with the Jewish leaders—particularly the scribes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. And He did not hesitate to stand on the solid Word of God.

These religious leaders and teachers did not handle the Scriptures of the Old Testament appropriately. And they were rebuked by Jesus for their failure to rightly understand and apply what had been recorded for them by God (Matthew 5:17–48). As Jesus taught and discussed the Scriptures with these teachers of His day, He often would ask the indicting question, “Have you not read?” (Matthew 12:3, 12:5, 19:4, 22:31). And then He would point them back to the right interpretation of God's Word. In fact, these leaders had such a skewed interpretation of the Scriptures that Jesus

referred to them publicly as hypocrites. He compared them to whitewashed tombs that appear beautiful outwardly, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones (Matthew 23:27).

By all appearances, the Pharisees believed that all of what we call the Old Testament was a reliable record of God's revelation to them. They esteemed Moses and the Law and the prophets, seeking to be faithful to what God had called them to do. However, many of them had developed a zeal for obedience that was motivated by their desire to be admired by men. They had developed many oral traditions in which various rabbis (teachers) were esteemed and their teachings heeded. For example, we read of Paul's training under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), who was a highly respected member of the Jewish council (Acts 5:34).

These added traditions created a religious system with layers of laws and regulations that went far beyond God's commands. We find record of many of these traditions in the Mishnah, written in the third century BC. (The Mishnah is a collection of Jewish laws and traditions covering many topics from the various holidays, to marriage laws, civil laws, laws concerning the Temple in Jerusalem, etc.) As the Pharisees held more and more to the traditions and approval of men, their morality and zeal for obedience became more artificial. These learned men, religious leaders, and teachers had strayed so far from the truth of God's Word that they could not see the Savior before them as He fulfilled all the prophecies they had read in the Scriptures. In fact, these men led the movement to crucify Jesus on the Cross.

We must take heed. The Bible is God's only Word to us. It is living, active, and powerful. It is what divides soul and spirit. It is what discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). We are all warned not to add to God's Word lest He rebuke us and we be found liars (Proverbs 30:6). Christians are called to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2). And this can only be done by diligent and faithful study of the Bible. It is only through God's Word that we will learn His plan of redemption and His will.

As we consider how the Pharisees' desire to please men and to be honored by men led them to stray so far from the truth of God's Word, 1 Peter 1:24–25 may come to mind:

"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers and its flower falls away, but the word of the Lord endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

In the early first century, the Bible consisted only of the 39 books of the Old Testament—the 27 books of the New Testament had not yet been written. However, we can be confident that the Old Testament was sufficient for godly wisdom. We read in 2 Timothy that as the Apostle Paul was nearing the end of his life, he wanted to impart godly wisdom to Timothy, instructing him on how to lead the growing church as an elder and teacher. The letter we refer to as Second Timothy is filled with truths exhorting and guiding Timothy to fulfill his role. Paul recognized the perilous times Timothy was facing, especially from false teachers rising up in

the church and those who were against the church from the outside. With this in mind, he directed Timothy to "hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 1:13). The revealed truth from God was entrusted to Timothy, and he was to pass it on to faithful men who could teach it to others (2 Timothy 2:2).

In this important letter, Paul goes on to tell Timothy the importance of "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), so critical because of the profane and idle babblings that would increase to ungodliness (2 Timothy 2:16).

Paul warned young Timothy that the false teachers he would encounter would have influence over many (2 Timothy 3:1–7). He called Timothy to continue in the things which he had learned—even how from childhood he had known the Holy Scriptures, which alone can give wisdom for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 3:14–15).

We are still encountering false teachers and lies against God's truth. However, many Christians suggest that we should leave the Bible out of our answers to skeptics because these skeptics don't believe the Bible is authoritative. But we know by the example Scripture offers that this is not the way to defend God's honor and His Word. We can only turn to the authority of God's Word as we seek to correct those who are in error.

As we encounter these false teachers, we are instructed to share with patience and humility. In 1 Peter 3:15, Peter exhorted his readers to always be ready to give a reason for the hope they have in Christ but to do so with meekness and fear (or gentleness and respect). As we engage others around us, our distinctive Christian life should cause others to see us as different. As

we talk of the hope we have in Christ, unbelievers will have questions for us. Responding to these questions from Scripture and pointing people to the truths of the Bible is imperative—whether we are talking about marriage, sexuality, education, entertainment, or any topic.

Even in the church today, we need to check ourselves to be sure we are standing on the foundation of Scripture alone. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for the traditions they had added to God's Law, and later in history we see that the Reformers of the sixteenth century sought to correct errors of the Roman Catholic Church brought on by man-made traditions.

One of the common cries of those Reformers seeking to restore sound teaching was *ad fontes*, a Latin phrase that means "to the fountains." This was a call to go back to the Bible as the source of truth, examining the traditions that had been handed down to make sure they lined up with Scripture. Those that were not consistent with Scripture were set aside as false traditions of men.

With that said, traditions are not always wrong. Biblical Christian churches can present the truth in a different manner by their use of choir robes, pews, prayer books, statements of faith, pulpits, even music styles. However, in all things Scripture needs to be our guide. We have no biblical right to impose our patterns and practices on anyone else, unless it is a doctrine clearly taught in the Scriptures. Doing so could easily lead to the same trap of legalism and imposing regulations on others that the Pharisees and the Roman Catholics had fallen into with their lists of extra regulations and laws.

In all of this, we must always look to God's Word for truth, as Paul wrote to Timothy, and subsequently to all of us:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17).

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



# Studying God's Word

Should tradition ever trump Scripture?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

**Mark 12:18–27**

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**Mark 11:18, 12:12, 12:15**

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**Matthew 15:1–20**

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Mark 7:3–4

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Mark 7:11

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## Have You Not Read?

The world we live in is one where people tend to look away from authority and toward autonomy. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes and affirms that what everyone else is doing is right even if it is different. Morality has become relative. As Christians, we have the source of all truth in the person of Jesus Christ and the Word of God revealed to us. Just as Jesus used the text to show the Jewish leaders their false thinking and point them to right thinking, we have that same opportunity when we interact with religious people—and everyone has a religious view of life whether they believe it or not.

The Apostle Paul gave instructions to his young protégé, Timothy, and that wise counsel is available for us to learn from today. Read 2 Timothy 2:14–26 and use the questions below to gain a biblical perspective on using Scripture to correct those who are in error. Note the verse or phrase from the passage that supports your answers.

1. How does the command in verse 15 relate to the passages studied in the lesson?
2. Is it appropriate to name those who are promoting false teachings as you teach others?
3. What danger do false teachers present?
4. How should a servant of the Lord offer correction?
5. What goal does Paul identify in offering correction from Scripture?
6. As you consider this passage, how do you measure up to the standard that Paul calls Timothy to meet?



## God's Word in the Real World

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1. What key ideas can we take away from studying how Jesus responded to the Pharisees and Sadducees in these passages?

2. The Sadducees had raised certain portions of Scripture above others, arriving at wrong conclusions about what God had said. Where do similar ideas show up within the church today, and what errors does this lead to?
  
3. When you listen to those who teach the Scriptures, why is it important for you to know the Scriptures well?
  
4. Have you ever been taken in by a tradition of men and later come to find out that it was actually contrary to Scripture? How did you become aware of the error, and how did you correct it?
  
5. Why do Christians fall into the trap of legalism, making additional rules that appear to promote holiness?



## Prayer Requests

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# 7

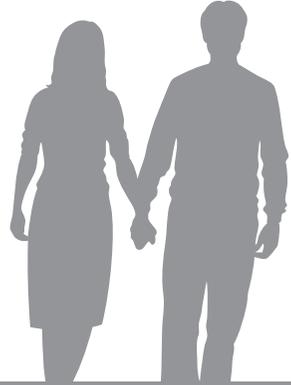
## Jesus Teaches

### Key Passages

- Matthew 5:17–30, 5:43–48; James 2:8–11

### What You Will Learn

- The role of the laws Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount.
- That God requires obedience from the heart.



### Lesson Overview

When Jesus preached, He wanted to correct what the scribes and Pharisees had been teaching. Outward appearance is not what the Lord seeks. Jesus seeks a heart that longs to love Him and obey Him. Jesus desires that His followers have humble spirits and contrite hearts. Jesus showed that it is impossible to obey the Law perfectly. And because of this truth, man is lost without the Savior.

### Memory Verse

#### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5–7 is no doubt one of the most famous passages in the New Testament. Both those inside the church and those outside have heard of it. Most people in the Western world have heard of “The Beatitudes” or “The Golden Rule,” which are both parts of this sermon, the longest recorded sermon of Jesus. But what is the essence of this sermon? Is this sermon of Christ a set of rules that must be followed to earn favor with God? Is this a description of how Christians ought to live? Is this the “manifesto” of God’s future kingdom?

There are many views on the meaning and purpose of the Sermon on the Mount, and dozens of books have been written on the matter. We will not try to fully address the topic in this short background. However, we do believe that one purpose and application of the Sermon on the Mount is clear: the hopeless condition of man in sin and his need for God’s grace through Jesus.

Before Jesus was born, the religious leaders of Israel had already decided what it meant to live righteously. Starting with the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament, they had developed a system of rules contrary to Scripture—a self-righteousness based on doing good works and following certain very specific laws. When Jesus entered the world, He gave the people an authoritative interpretation of the Law. Jesus stated that He had come not to destroy the Law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus distinguished between how the teachers had redefined the Law as a means to achieve righteousness based on works—the “You have heard that it was

said” statements—from the full meaning of the Law—the “But I say to you” statements. You see, God’s laws had always demanded both inward and outward holiness, but many of the Jews perceived God’s Law as a call to the outward appearance of holiness only. For example, in the case of adultery, the Jews recognized the need to avoid it. But they did not address the issue of the heart that would lead to the desire to commit that particular sin (Matthew 5:27–30).

They were also misguided about murder (Matthew 5:21–26). The Jews agreed that murder was a serious offense worthy of judgment and punishment. But again, the intentions of the heart were not addressed. Murder is provoked by unholy thoughts of anger, unforgiveness, hatred, and contempt toward someone. Jesus made it clear that the feeling of hatred toward another person is sinful against God, as is the murder that follows.

Jesus continued in this vein throughout much of the sermon—pointing out that adherence to the letter of the Law is not enough. To merely acknowledge that any sinful act is wrong without addressing the issue of the heart cannot bring true righteousness. And in this, Jesus taught clearly that the Law was humanly impossible to keep. What a shock for the “keepers of the Law,” who considered their “righteousness” to be perfectly acceptable to the God they claimed to worship and serve (Romans 10:3).

And how much more shocking to everyone who listened when Jesus stated in Matthew 5:20, “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the

kingdom of heaven.” This was shocking because the scribes and Pharisees were considered to be the most righteous of people. They went to the Temple regularly, paid tithes, fasted, and prayed constantly. How could Jesus say that someone must exceed them in righteousness? Clearly, Christ wasn’t impressed with their religious performance because their obedience was merely an outward performance—and their hearts were not aligned with God’s will.

As stated earlier, Jesus moved from the letter of the Law to the indwelling condition of the heart that leads to the temptation to sin. This teaching from Jesus is not a list of do’s and don’ts but a study of what is our real motivation. And again, as stated, Jesus made it clear that obeying the Law as He put forth could not be done, except by Jesus Himself.

What was Jesus’s purpose in expounding on these laws? Well, in order for Christ to do His saving work, the people He intended to save had to realize how desperately they needed Him. The Jewish religious leaders’ interpretation of the Law as a specific list of outward acts to be followed or avoided had made the Law easier to fulfill. Because they kept this list, they considered themselves righteous before God. For the sake of His saving work, Jesus had to preach the Law in its full rigor so that it would “bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). Christ expounded on the Law so that the people would know that no hope existed for them since no one could possibly keep it.

God’s standard of righteousness is such that no one can attain it. Jesus was revealing the absolute necessity of the new birth. Man must not only do right, he must be right in thought, word, and deed—an impossibility for us whose hearts are “deceitful above

all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9). It is only when we come to Christ in repentance and faith that we are given a new heart, that we are made new creations in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17). The gospel of Christ reminds us of the promise in Ezekiel 36:25–26, which speaks of God sprinkling sinners with clean water, cleansing them, putting His Spirit within them, and giving them new hearts of flesh in place of their hearts of stone. The Apostle Paul confirms this when he teaches that it is the Spirit dwelling in us that brings forth His fruit which could not be produced by the Law (Galatians 5:16–25).

Pastor Tullian Tchividjian, grandson of Billy Graham, summarizes it well:

We naturally treat the Sermon on the Mount like we typically treat the rest of the Bible—like it’s a divine self-help manual, a blueprint for having your best life now. But actually the Sermon on the Mount is intended to show that the Christian life is a glorious impossibility.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus wants to set us free by showing us our need for a rightness we can never attain on our own—an impossible righteousness that’s always out of our reach. The purpose of the Sermon on the Mount is to demolish all notions that we can reach the righteousness required by God—it’s about exterminating all attempts at self-sufficient moral endeavor.

So, in the deepest sense, the Sermon on the Mount is not a goal, but a wall we crash into so that we finally cry out “I can’t do it!”<sup>1</sup>

1. <http://www.pastortullian.com/2012/07/01/the-sermon-on-the-mount-for-those-who-have-crashed-and-burned/>

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

It has been rightly said that the Sermon on the Mount is the most famous sermon ever preached. And it is the longest recorded sermon ever preached by Jesus, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity. It is the most quoted portion of the New Testament, both by the early church fathers and in secular literature. People often refer to the Sermon on the Mount for its moral code. But, as with most secular takes on the Bible, snippets and sections are taken out of context and misapplied.

So what's the proper use of the Sermon on the Mount? First of all, as stated above, it shows us that we are all sinners and fall far short of God's righteous standard. It shows us our need for a Savior, and that Savior is Jesus Christ—the only one who ever completely fulfilled the Law of God and who offers His righteousness to us.

Second, the Sermon on the Mount gives the characteristics of the members of God's kingdom—those who have submitted themselves to God's rule and have been born again through Christ. We can examine ourselves, our actions, our motivations, and our

desires according to the high standards of God's righteousness. We will fall short, but we can press on toward the goal, leaning on Christ for strength and asking God to work these qualities in us through His Holy Spirit.

A third consideration would be the cultural impact of this sermon of Jesus. Sayings and expressions from the Sermon on the Mount have become part of our everyday language; quotes such as "do unto others," "judge not lest you be judged," "love your enemies," "turn the other cheek," "go the extra mile," and "a wolf in sheep's clothing." And many have heard of the Beatitudes, the Golden Rule, and the Lord's Prayer. By familiarizing ourselves with these common sayings, we can incorporate the Sermon on the Mount into our evangelism. When we hear people use one of these biblical phrases passed down from this sermon, we can stop them and ask if they know where that saying comes from. This can begin a conversation about what Jesus really taught about good deeds and righteousness and could lead to a candid gospel discussion of God's perfect standard and our need for a Savior.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

Did Jesus change the standard of obedience to God?

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Take notes as you study the following passage.

Matthew 5:17–30

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## Heart of the Matter

Many commentators and preachers have suggested that Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, “raised the bar” on obedience above the Law of Moses. Your task is to evaluate that claim and then come up with a summary statement of the intent of Jesus in Matthew 5:17–48 where He compares what the listeners had heard to what He told them about obedience. You will focus on the acts of hating and lusting.

### **Murder**

1. What had the Jews heard about murder (5:21)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What did Jesus say would bring the same judgment (5:22)?

3. What does Leviticus 19:17–18 teach?
4. Does Leviticus 19:17–18 align with what the Jews had heard or with what Jesus said?

## **Lust**

5. What had the Jews heard about the act of committing adultery (5:27)?
6. What did Jesus say would bring the same judgment (5:28)?
7. What does Exodus 20:17 teach about covetous thoughts regarding another man's wife?
8. What does Job 31:1–4, 31:9–12 help us understand about Job's view of lusting after a woman?
9. Do Exodus 20:17 and Job 31:1–12 align with what the Jews had heard or with what Jesus said?

## **Conclusions**

10. Based on these two points, do you agree or disagree with the statement that Jesus raised the bar on the standard of obedience above the Old Testament Law for those who heard (and now read) His sermon?

11. If you disagree that He was raising the bar, how would you describe what Jesus was doing by offering the correctives He did?
12. What is the relationship between hatred and murder? Between lust and adultery?

Take notes as you study the following passage.

Matthew 5:43-48

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## God's Word in the Real World

1. How did Jesus establish Himself as authoritative in the Sermon on the Mount?
2. How do we offer the same type of authoritative challenges as Jesus did to those we see disobeying God, whether believers or unbelievers?

3. How do you respond in your heart to the impossible standard of perfect obedience? Do you find this standard discouraging or encouraging in light of the gospel?
  
4. How can we use this same principle of perfect obedience to the Law as God's standard as we seek to share the gospel with unbelievers?
  
5. How could you respond to a skeptic who asserts that Jesus was actually changing the rules that God had set forth in the Old Testament so the Bible presents a contradiction?
  
6. How do you intend to live differently in light of what you have heard from the Word of God today?



## Prayer Requests

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# 8

## Jesus Defends God's Honor

### Key Passages

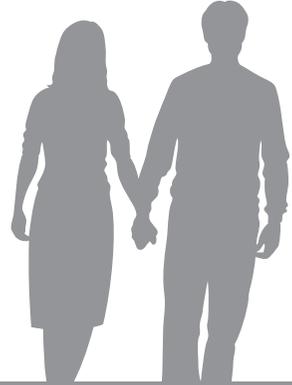
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- John 2:13–25; Matthew 23:1–36

### What You Will Learn

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- How Jesus reacted to people who dishonored His Father.
- The difference between righteous and unrighteous anger.



### Lesson Overview

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Jesus defended God's honor when He drove the sellers and money changers out of the Temple and when He confronted the religious leaders because they were hypocrites—pretending to be holy while their hearts were wicked.

### Memory Verse

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#### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

In Lesson 7 we discussed and studied Jesus's Sermon on the Mount. In it Jesus addressed the religious leaders who had distorted the Law and made it a list of good works by which self-righteousness could be attained. Many of the Jews perceived God's laws as a call to outward appearance only. But Jesus called attention to the heart issues. He insisted that real holiness comes from a heart that is striving toward obedience and holiness inwardly—a heart desiring to please God. Such a heart comes only through being born again.

We have discussed that Jesus came to earth to do the will of the Father. He was God in the flesh, possessing all of the attributes of deity, though veiling His glory. Christ's divine attributes include justice, holiness, and truth. The passages we are examining this week present Jesus as one who continued to defend the honor of His Father and who showed God's anger against the sin of distorting and maligning God's Word.

Much of the corruption Jesus encountered was among the religious leaders. They had set aside God's Law, invented their own rules, and oppressed the people in the name of God. Jesus was not afraid to address these leaders in the name of His Father. One such rebuke came in the Temple during a Passover celebration (John 2:13–25). Jesus entered the Temple where He encountered money changers and merchants selling animals (John 2:14). But why were these people in the Temple?

Those selling animals were there to provide a service to God's people. The merchants were providing animals for sacrifice during Feast time. This was a convenience for Jews traveling great

distances. They would not need to bring livestock with them; they could buy the necessary sacrificial animals right at the Temple. The money changers were also there for a service. A tax was collected from every Israelite twenty years old and up (Exodus 30:11–16). When Jews came to Jerusalem to pay their Temple tax, they could only pay it with a special coin, the half-shekel. It was the only silver coin at that time without the image of a pagan Emperor, and therefore to the Jews it was the only coin acceptable to God. The money changers exchanged unacceptable coins for these shekels. While our text does not mention it, these animal sellers and money changers were probably overcharging the pilgrims and extracting a hefty profit.

When Jesus entered the Temple, He was enraged at what He saw. God's House, His Temple, should have been a house of prayer, worship, and devotion, but they had made it into a house of merchandise. So Jesus made a whip of rope and chased them out of the Temple overturning their tables and stools. He also verbally rebuked them for the way they were dishonoring God and His Temple (John 2:15–16).

Matthew 23 records Jesus's last public message before He died on the Cross. Here again Jesus showed His righteous anger at the dishonoring of God, His laws, and His Word. Jesus's rebuke was directed toward the religious leaders—the scribes and Pharisees and their religious hypocrisy (Matthew 23:27). Jesus had some very strong words for these religious leaders, calling them blind guides, fools, sons of hell, hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs full of dead men's bones! These leaders had put off God's righteousness and instead were

seeking to establish their own means of righteousness (Romans 10:3). And they were demanding others do the same—burdening the common people by insisting they abide by the rules and regulations they had developed as a means of achieving salvation.

Jesus would not have it. He would not allow His Father’s name to be dishonored by these false teachers. They focused on the externals of religion—looking pious, saying long prayers, giving tithes—but Jesus said they had “neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith” (Matthew 23:23).

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

Throughout the Gospels we see a number of Jewish religious groups mentioned. These include the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the scribes (or lawyers). Who were these groups, where did they come from, and why did many of them oppose Jesus and His teachings?

### **Pharisees**

The Pharisees were the keepers of the Law. They believed the entire Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament) to be the Word of God. They emerged from the Babylonian Exile as the chief religious faction. They understood that Israel’s exile was a result of forgetting God’s Law and living in disobedience. As a result, the Pharisees sought to present God’s Law and impose it on the people so the nation would never again be exiled as punishment for their disobedience.

However, many of the Pharisees presented a law that was greatly compromised by their belief that oral traditions of their culture passed down for generations held the same significance and authority as God’s Word. This is clearly

forbidden in Scripture (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:2). These Pharisees sought to strictly obey these traditions themselves and demanded the same from others. Many of the traditions they held to are seen throughout the Gospels (Matthew 9:14, 15:1–9, 23:5, 23:16, 23:23; Mark 7:1–23; Luke 11:42).

Many of the Pharisees were not fully devoted to all of God’s Law and had added their own beliefs and traditions to it. Because of this, they missed the Messiah when He was in their very midst. They saw Jesus’s miracles and heard His words, but instead of believing in Him, they did all that they could to stop Him, eventually calling for His crucifixion because He claimed to be the Son of God, making Himself equal with God.

### **Sadducees**

Not much is known about the Sadducees, since the only historical information we have comes from the New Testament and some writings from the Jewish-Roman historian Flavius Josephus. Sadducees were more affluent than the Pharisees. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including that of chief priest and high priest. They also made up a majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees were more sympathetic to the Hellenistic movement, a movement seeking to combine Jewish religious tradition with elements of Greek culture. They were more willing to submit to the prevailing powers (Rome) because they realized it was economically and politically advantageous for them to do so.

Religiously, the Sadducees were more conservative than the Pharisees in that they did not give oral tradition equal authority to the written Word of God. However, they were misguided

on a few other issues. For example, they denied God's involvement in everyday life. They denied the resurrection of the dead. They denied any afterlife, believing that the soul perished at death, and they denied the existence of a spiritual world (i.e., angels and demons).

Because the Sadducees were more concerned with politics than religion, they were unconcerned with Jesus until they became afraid He might bring unwanted Roman attention. Finally, they joined with the Pharisees in their opposition to Jesus.

## Scribes

The earliest scribes of Israel served as official secretaries, writing and issuing royal decrees (e.g., 2 Samuel 8:17, 20:25; 1 Chronicles 18:16, 24:6; 1 Kings 4:3). After the return from the Babylonian captivity, the scribes concentrated their activities on the Law, becoming "teachers of the law," or "lawyers."

Scribes in Jesus's time were men whose primary occupation was writing out copies of the Jewish Scriptures and teaching the people the Law. Because they copied the Old Testament books, they were familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures and were respected in society for their literacy and knowledge. The scribes took their job of preserving Scripture very seriously; they would copy and recopy the Bible meticulously, even counting letters and spaces to ensure each copy was correct. We can thank God for using the

Jewish scribes in preserving the Old Testament.

The scribes were closely associated with the Pharisees and are often mentioned together in the Gospels. Throughout the life of Christ, the scribes were among His most vigilant and determined opponents. Their many accusations are recorded in the Gospel accounts.

The scribes complained that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners (Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). When Jesus pronounced forgiveness of sins, the scribes charged Him with blasphemy (Mark 2:5–7). When Jesus cast out demons, the scribes said that He cast them out by Beelzebul, "the ruler of the demons" (Mark 3:22). They sought to accuse Jesus if He healed on a Sabbath day (Luke 6:7). And finally, the scribes took counsel with the chief priests as to how they might destroy Jesus (Mark 11:18), and when Jesus was brought before Herod, they vehemently accused Him (Luke 23:10).

These three sects of Jewish leaders often went beyond the written word of God, incorporating their own doctrines, beliefs, and traditions. And in so doing, they were blinded when the Messiah they had read about and waited for finally came.

What we can learn from these leaders is that we need to make a commitment to God's Word, with a heart for God, as our final authority by which our lives and decisions are made.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

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Is anger always a sin?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

John 2:13-25

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Matthew 21:12-17

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## Righteous Anger

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Work in groups to complete the Righteous Anger worksheet.

Take notes as you study the following passage.

Matthew 23:1-36

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## God's Word in the Real World

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1. How do the ideas we have studied today help you to love and honor Jesus as your Savior and example?

2. Does the fact that Jesus chased the money changers and animal sellers out of the Temple mean that we should not allow the sale of anything on Sunday or in the church building?
  
3. As you read the direct and sharp words Jesus has for the false teachers, what kind of reaction do you have? Do you think He is unloving? Do you think this gives you warrant to go stand on a bench and yell at all of the sinners walking by?
  
4. Do you tend to lean toward avoiding confrontation over sin and not even get angry at sin, or do you tend to get angry and lash out in a sinful way? How can you seek to find a balance between these responses and glorify God in your actions?
  
5. In light of the two different accounts of Jesus cleansing the Temple, how could you answer a skeptic who thinks the accounts contradict one another?



## Prayer Requests

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# 9

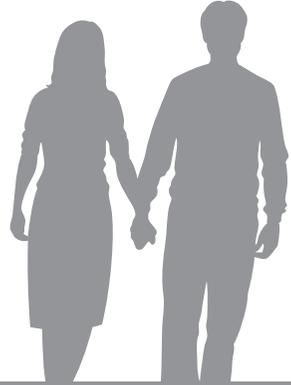
## Jesus Teaches in Parables

### Key Passages

- Matthew 13:1–23, 22:1–14

### What You Will Learn

- Why Jesus taught in parables.
- The meaning of various parables.



### Lesson Overview

Jesus taught through parables in order to separate the people who loved Him and wanted the truth from the people who really didn't care about Him or what He had to say. Today you will talk about two of Jesus's parables—the parable of the sower and the parable of the good shepherd.

### Memory Verse

#### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

One of the hallmarks of the teaching of Jesus was His use of parables. A parable is a fable or allegory to illustrate a truth or lesson. It is a story or narrative drawn from nature or human circumstances from which spiritual lessons can be made by comparison. Or to put it simply, a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Parables help the listener to discover the deeper meaning and underlying truth of the reality being portrayed.

Depending on which ones you include, between 35 and 45 different parables of Jesus are recorded in the Gospels. Some of these were longer stories, including such popular ones as the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32), and the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14–30). Other parables of Jesus were short, pithy statements, such as, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened” (Matthew 13:33).

But why did Jesus teach in parables? There are two reasons given in the Bible: to conceal and to reveal.

In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus provided an answer when asked about His use of parables:

And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?”

He answered and said to them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does

not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says:

‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, And their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.’

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.” (Matthew 13:10–16)

Jesus said that He taught in parables to conceal the truth from certain people, and to reveal it to others. By resorting to parables, Jesus effectively separated the truth-seekers from the mere curious. Those seeking the truth would say, “Explain to us the parable . . .” (Matthew 13:36), while the merely curious could easily be dismissed. They would not ask and were unwilling to receive Jesus’s message. The truths were heard by unbelievers, but the meaning was hidden because they did not want to hear.

In this way, Jesus’s use of parables was a form of divine judgment. As Jesus explained in the passage above,

“For whoever has [a good heart, listening ears], to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have [a good heart, listening ears], even what he has will be taken away from him” (Matthew 13:12). Then Jesus quoted from Isaiah 6:9–10 and explained that because the people’s hearts had become dull and because they had closed their ears and eyes, God was going to speak to them in a way that they would not understand. So Jesus taught them in parables. In a way only God could contrive, the very things which were useful to reveal and make clear the truths about the kingdom to those willing to hear were also used to conceal truths about the kingdom from those who would not believe.

About the middle of His ministry, after He had begun to receive much opposition from the religious leaders and had been accused of blasphemy, Jesus started teaching the crowds almost exclusively in parables. Mark tells us that He did not speak to them without a parable and that when He was alone with His disciples, He would explain the meaning of His teachings (Mark 4:33–34). However, those who had persisted in rejecting His message were left in their spiritual blindness. Although they heard the truths of the kingdom of God, they could not understand them; they were unwilling to hear. The Apostle Paul later described those blinded to the truth as “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). They would never hear or understand the words of Jesus (Matthew 13:13). But His disciples (except for Judas Iscariot) accepted His truth and so were given more to know, understand, and believe (Matthew 13:12).

The parables of Jesus contain great volumes of truth in very few words. The images Christ presents through them are not easily forgotten. And He has promised that for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, His truths will be revealed (Matthew 13:16).

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>**

When we read parables, we must be careful how we interpret their meaning. Sometimes, as in the Parable of the Sower, Jesus Himself provides the explanation (Matthew 13:18–22). However, most of the time, the hearers (and us) are left to discern the meaning.

A parable is really an extended metaphor, or an allegory. In fact, the Bible often uses allegory as a literary device. In the Old Testament God speaks of His people Israel using images of a vineyard (Isaiah 5:6–7) and a flock of sheep (Ezekiel 34). Jesus refers to Himself as a shepherd (John 10:11) and a vine (John 15:1–6). And Paul takes a historical event from the Old Testament (Hagar and Sarah) and uses it as an allegory for law and grace (Galatians 4:21–31). So while the Bible uses allegories to teach truth, we must not confuse the literary device of allegory with the hermeneutic of allegorizing Scripture; the two are not the same.

Soon after the completion of the New Testament, early Christians began interpreting the text allegorically. They proposed many symbolic meanings that neither Jesus nor the biblical authors ever intended.

It wasn’t until the time of the Reformation in the 1500s that a return to a more literal, historical-grammatical method of interpretation began to take hold. Luther, Calvin, and some others criticized the excesses of allegorical

interpretation, but it still remained popular among many Christian scholars and writers into the 19th century.

More recently, in the 20th and 21st centuries, there has been an increased interest in understanding the parables as the original hearers would have understood them. Interpreters started focusing on the main point of the parables—God’s kingdom coming through the reign of the Messiah.

Care must be taken when interpreting these parables. Here are a few basic principles to adapt while trying to understand the parables of Jesus and interpret them properly:

- **Determine the main point of the parable.** Most parables have one main point, though they may have a couple sub points. To get to the main point, ask yourself a few questions: Who are the main characters? What occurs at the end? What or who gets the most consideration in the parable? To whom is the parable directed? What is the context in which Jesus gave it?
- **Recognize standard imagery used in the parables.** For example, God is often symbolized as a master, a father, a judge, or a king. A vineyard or a fig tree usually refers to Israel. The harvest refers to the judgment. An enemy is typically the devil.
- **Note striking or unexpected details of the parable.** Jesus’s parables are filled with striking details, unexpected twists, shocking statements, and surprise outcomes. When such attention-getting components occur, pay attention because an important point is being made.
- **Do not press every detail for meaning.** The many details in a parable are usually given to make the story memorable and interesting. Typically there is one central figure (or two) and one main point. Attempting to interpret every individual detail will lead one to an allegorical reading.
- **Pay attention to the literary and historical context of the parable.** The authors of the Gospels often clue us to the meaning of a parable by including information about why Jesus uttered that parable or by grouping together parables on similar topics.

Jesus, the Master Teacher, used many parables in His teaching. By some accounts, about one-third of all of Jesus’s words in the Gospels are parables. We are called to be diligent to handle His Word carefully as we read it, interpret it, and teach it to others.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.

1. This material was adapted from Robert L. Plummer, “Parables in the Gospels: History of Interpretation and Hermeneutical Guidelines,” *SBJT* 13.3 (2009): 4–11.



## Studying God's Word

Why did Jesus teach using parables?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Matthew 13:1-23

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Isaiah 6:9-10

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## Unpacking Parables

When Jesus taught in parables, He was using a story as an analogy to point to a spiritual truth. As we seek to understand the parables in the Bible, we need to practice good hermeneutics (biblical interpretation) to avoid falling into error or stretching a text beyond what it was meant to convey. The following headings give some broad principles for interpreting parables along with some examples from the text to illustrate those principles. In the spaces provided, summarize your findings.

1. Parables typically convey one main point.

Read Matthew 13:33. What is the main point? Would this point change if there were eight measures of meal? Do the three measures of meal relate to the Trinity?

2. When parables come in groups, they often teach the same point in different ways.

Look at the parables in Matthew 13:24–52. What is the common teaching of each of these parables? (Look at verses 24, 31, 33, 43, 44, 45, and 47.)

3. There are elements common to parables that are to be understood in different ways.

What does the leaven represent in Matthew 13:33? What does the leaven represent in Matthew 16:5–12?

4. Some parables have one character intended to represent God.

Read Luke 7:40–43. Which character in the parable is intended to represent God?

5. There is often one character who responds rightly and one who responds wrongly.

Read Luke 18:9–14. What two responses to God are indicated in this parable?

6. Parables are given for a reason, and the context of the parable helps us understand the teaching.

Read Luke 12:13–21. Why did Jesus tell this parable? Is this parable a condemnation of building barns?

Take notes as you study the following passage.

**Matthew 22:1–14**

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## God's Word in the Real World

1. As you think about what we learned about parables, what misconceptions do you see in how you looked at parables in the past? Or, what questions do you still have about approaching a parable to draw out its meaning?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. In what way was the use of parables a kindness to those who rejected Jesus's teaching or did not understand it?

3. What is the danger in approaching the biblical parables as allegories, seeking to draw out extensive ideas from the smallest details in the stories?
  
4. How could using the parables of Jesus be a helpful evangelism strategy with those who are unsaved?



## Prayer Requests

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# 10

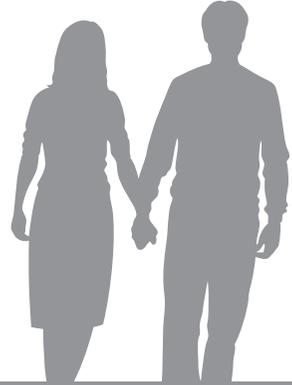
## Jesus Is the Great I AM

### Key Passages

- Exodus 3:14; John 6:35, 8:12–59, 10:7, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1, 15:5, 18:1–9

### What You Will Learn

- How Jesus claimed to be God.
- The interpretation of the word pictures Jesus used to refer to Himself.



### Lesson Overview

Jesus revealed His identity as God when He proclaimed, “Before Abraham was, I AM.” The Jewish leaders were astonished and upset because they knew Jesus was saying He was God. Jesus also described Himself with word pictures that made the claim “I AM.” I am the door; I am the way, the truth, and the life; and I am the good shepherd, to name a few. Jesus wanted people to know He was God.

### Memory Verse

#### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

We spoke in Lesson 9 about Jesus's teaching. He often taught in parables using images and analogies that those with eyes to see and ears to hear would understand (Matthew 13:16). These parables often left people wondering what He was teaching. And Jesus often privately explained the meaning and the lesson of the parable to His disciples.

However, Jesus didn't always speak in parables. He was at times direct, as we will witness in today's study.

The scribes and Pharisees were offended at what Jesus was doing and saying—especially at His claim that He came from God and was sent by God (John 8:42). The Pharisees could not fathom His teaching that those who would keep the word of Jesus would never see death (John 8:51). They claimed He had a demon and questioned how He could say such a thing since even their father Abraham was dead. Was Jesus claiming to be greater than Abraham (John 8:53)? That could not be so. And yet, yes, Jesus was claiming to be greater than Abraham. And the words He spoke stunned those who were listening to Him, because they did not really hear. He answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58).

This enraged those arguing with Him, and they picked up stones to throw at Him. They decided then and there He was deserving of death because of that claim. What exactly was the claim He was making? These scribes and Pharisees were well versed in the Old Testament. They considered themselves experts in the Word.

They were very familiar with God's words to Moses as he revealed Himself

at the burning bush when God said, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14). Of course, this is a name only the holy Creator God could have as it denotes complete independence and self-existence. In His self-existence, He is all-sufficient. He needs no one! It denotes eternity, one who always was and always will be. It could only describe the one true God. And this was Jesus's testimony—I AM God. And they hated Him even more.

Of course, Jesus would not be intimidated. And John recorded seven more instances where Jesus made the claim, "I AM," to confirm that He is God in human form and the promised Messiah who would save His people from their sins. How did Jesus, the God-Man, describe Himself?

- "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). He is essential to life—not just physical life but eternal life.
- "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). There is no other source of spiritual light or truth. He alone can explain all things.
- "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7). Salvation comes from no one else. Eternal life comes through Him alone—the only door.
- "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11; see Ezekiel 34). There is only one good shepherd—it is Jesus—who gave His life for His sheep. It is through Him alone that eternal life is gained. And through Him alone that we are guided, disciplined, comforted, and restored.
- "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). There is no resurrection or life without Jesus. He has

conquered death forever. Trusting in this truth will bring comfort in the midst of the despair, sin, sickness, and evil of this present age.

- “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus again claimed Himself to be exclusive. He alone is the only way. He alone offers the only truth. And He alone promises eternal life with God the Father.
- “I am the true vine” (John 15:1, 15:5). As we grow, Jesus, as the true vine, will continue to provide us with the nourishment and sustenance we need to persevere. We must abide in the vine—Jesus—in order to bear fruit. And just like a branch cut off from the vine cannot continue to grow, we can do nothing without abiding in Jesus Christ (John 15:4–5).

Jesus is God. His claim to be “I AM” left no doubt in the minds of the unbelieving Jews. They accused Him of blasphemy, and the Bible records several times when the Jews attempted to stone Jesus because He made Himself equal with God (John 5:18, 8:59, 10:33). They did not succeed those times. But eventually God’s perfect plan of redemption through Jesus would be fulfilled. And Christ would be crucified because of His rightful claim that He is the great I AM, God in human form, the King of the Jews (John 19:19).

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

The truth that Jesus is God in the flesh, the second Person of the Trinity, and fully divine is an explicit teaching of the New Testament. Jesus Himself claimed equality with God the Father many times (e.g., John 8). Paul spoke of Christ’s deity frequently (e.g., Colossians 1–2). The writer of Hebrews wrote

of Christ’s deity (e.g., Hebrews 1–2). And this view has been the dominant, orthodox view of the Christian church since its inception. However, there have been challenges to this truth in the past as well as today.

Arius was a teacher in the early 4th century AD. Arius did not believe that Jesus was truly God in the flesh. Arius taught that Jesus was created by God as the first act of creation, so Jesus was a created being with divine attributes but was not divine Himself. This view came to be called Arianism, and his followers were Arians. The teachings of Arius had a significant impact on the early church which resisted the heresy by creating many of the early creeds. These creeds defined the biblical, orthodox view of Jesus’s nature.

Though Arius was labeled as a heretic, his ideas did not die out completely. In fact, there are modern-day groups, which like Arius, deny the full divinity of Jesus. One of these groups is the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Founded in the mid-nineteenth century by Charles Taze Russell, this false religion claims several million adherents around the world. Like the ancient Arians, these modern-day Witnesses have demoted Jesus to something much less than He is.

Jehovah’s Witnesses believe that Jesus was the first creation of God, thus denying His deity and eternal preexistence. They also teach that before His birth, Jesus was the archangel Michael. They claim that 2,000 years ago, God transferred the life of Jesus to Mary’s womb. Though adherents to this false religion may seem sincere and persuasive, we must be on our guard against their teaching and point them to the biblical truth about Jesus.

Another group that denies the full deity of Jesus Christ is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS),

or Mormons. Mormonism teaches that Jesus was first begotten as a spirit, the firstborn offspring of God the Father (Elohim) and one of His heavenly wives. According to Mormon beliefs, God the Father dwells on a planet with His many spirit wives, producing numerous spirit children who await to inhabit physical bodies. Jesus's incarnation is taught to be the result of sexual relations between the Heavenly Father (who has a physical body) and Mary. Again, despite the good image that Mormons may have in their communities and the zeal with which they seek converts, their beliefs are opposed to God's Word, and we must seek to share the truth with them.

Hundreds of years ago, after nearly a century of debate at early church

councils, the Christian church officially denounced Arianism as a false doctrine. But it did not die out. It simply morphed and changed its name. But as we see in our lesson this week, the Bible is clear that Jesus is the great I AM. His full deity is proclaimed repeatedly in the New Testament. Jesus must be God in order to accomplish eternal salvation for sinners. The weak Jesus of the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and others (e.g., Islam) cannot offer forgiveness of sins and save sinners. When Jesus is believed to be a mere man, stripped of His deity, the atoning effect of His death is also stripped of any and all of its eternal significance.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

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Did Jesus ever claim to be God?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

John 8:12-59

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Exodus 3:14

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## Jesus—"I AM"

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In the Gospel of John, Jesus uses a phrase that points to His deity eight different times. In these passages, He identifies Himself with the name God gave to Moses as He spoke from the burning bush in Exodus 3:14—I AM. Jesus, as a member of the Trinity, is the eternal and self-existent God. Along with this name, Jesus connected other aspects of His role as the Messiah and Son of God to His I AM statements. In this activity, you will examine each of those passages and learn more about the attributes of God displayed in God the Son.

For each of the following passages, identify the metaphor Jesus uses to describe Himself (keeping the context in mind), identify any attributes of God that are connected to this description, and write a short description of what you learn about Jesus.

1. John 6:35, 6:41, 6:51, 6:58

2. John 8:12

3. John 8:58

4. John 10:7, 10:9

5. John 10:11

6. John 11:25

7. John 14:6

8. John 15:1, 15:5

Take notes as you study the following passage.

John 18:1-9

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## God's Word in the Real World

1. What did you learn about the unity of the testimony of Scripture as we examined these passages today?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. As we have worked through this lesson, what doubts or questions have come to light?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. As you consider one of the key ideas you learned today, is there a brother or sister in Christ you can share this with as a way to encourage him or her in the faith?

4. As we seek to defend the faith, we are sure to encounter someone who is going to make the claim that Jesus never claimed to be God. How can you use the passages we have studied today to show them the error in their thinking?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Once we have shown someone that Jesus clearly claimed to be God, what is the next essential step we must take?



## Prayer Requests

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# 11

## True Discipleship

### Key Passages

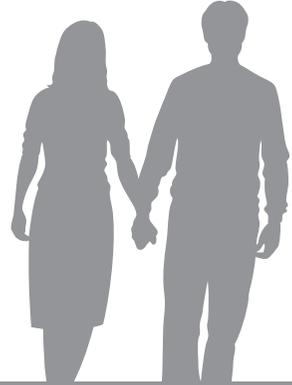
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- Matthew 10:16–39, 16:24–26; Luke 14:25–33

### What You Will Learn

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- What Jesus requires of His followers.
- The difference between making disciples and discipleship.



### Lesson Overview

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Jesus taught His disciples what was expected of them, if they were to follow Him. Following Jesus means a life of self-denial and sacrifice. True disciples of Jesus are men and women who are willing to put Him first—above all the things and people of this world.

### Memory Verse

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#### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

As we study the life of Jesus in the New Testament, we see that He was the one the prophets spoke of; His birth affirmed His humility and His eternal Kingship; He was tempted as man yet without sin; His miracles revealed His power over nature, disease, death, and more. His teachings were unlike any before Him. And we know that in His short three-year ministry, many followed Him.

But as Jesus taught, it became clear that what He asked of His followers—His disciples—was costly. And because of His demands, many turned away from Him.

What was it He demanded? What does He expect of those who would be His true disciples? Many proclaiming Christians do not know what Jesus demands, or perhaps they don't want to consider what He has told us in His Word.

First, let's consider the first and the greatest commandment according to Jesus—to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37–38). Love the Lord your God completely. That is the simple answer to this question about true discipleship. What does this love look like?

Jesus went on to tell us more explicitly what He wanted from His true disciples.

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the

whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24–26).

Jesus asks much of His followers—more than just learning about Him. He wants us to deny ourselves, to lose our lives, and to forsake the things of the world. This is a call for submission and obedience to His Word (John 14:23). This is a call to put Jesus above the people in our lives that are dearest to us—father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters—and to love the Lord Jesus Christ so much that we would be willing to give up our very lives for Him (Luke 14:26).

Jesus said, “whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:33). The biblical principle in this is not to get rid of all that you own but to live your life as evidence that you love God more than money. Jesus warned that it's impossible to have two masters, so we can't serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24). The heart of a true disciple is guarded against the love of money, and consequently, the things money can buy. The Bible tells us that love for things and money becomes the root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Jesus's disciples endeavor to live their lives so that nothing would distract from their love, obedience, and submission to their Savior and God.

In all of this, Jesus Christ is calling His disciples to take up their crosses daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23). Jesus requires that we put aside our own selfish desires and ambitions and that we mimic Christ in His obedience to God (Philippians 2:4–8). For His sake, we

must be willing to forsake the world and all it offers (1 John 2:15–17).

In summary, if we are to be true disciples of Jesus Christ, we must live our lives with the intention and the longing to put Jesus Christ above everything and everyone else in our lives. Our strongest desire should be to please Him—the one who died and rose again for sinners. As disciples, we should long for His fellowship and seek to know Him better each day.

The Scriptures tell us to examine and test ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). Does your life reflect the characteristics of a true disciple of Jesus Christ? Does your walk back up your talk (Titus 1:16)? Would you be willing to give up all He has given you—even to the point of death—for His sake?

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

Jesus made some pretty demanding requirements for those who want to follow Him:

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. . . . whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26–33).

If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever

is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels (Luke 9:23–26).

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it (Matthew 10:37–39).

Is it any wonder that, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66)? As we consider these strong words, how are we to respond to them? Can we “measure up” to Jesus’s demands? How can anyone possibly qualify as His disciple? The answer to these questions is found in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ.

We must realize that the gospel is not only the entry point into the Christian life but also the foundation and source for all we do as disciples of Jesus. The gospel—the good news of what God has graciously done in the birth, life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ to secure forgiveness of sins and perfect righteousness for all who trust in Him—should inform, control, and empower all we do.

“Do-it-yourself,” “pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps” spirituality has no place in Christianity! Of course, the way some of us approach our own spiritual growth as disciples might suggest otherwise. We sometimes think that sanctification is really all about what we do, how we live, and how disciplined we are. We grit our teeth and try harder. While it is true that we have an active role to play in our sanctification,

that does not mean relying on the flesh but walking in the Spirit—the Holy Spirit who indwells and strengthens us to do God’s will (Galatians 5).

Jesus does not make demands of His own without giving the ability to fulfill those commands. The Apostle Paul wrote: “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6). These words assure us as Christians that what God started in us, He will finish. While some teach that we can achieve perfection in this life and be completely free from the presence of sin, Scripture is clear that it will not be completed, or matured, until the Lord Jesus returns. As an example, even at the end of his life, the Apostle Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). While Christians should experience ever-increasing victory over sin as they mature, it is not until we are glorified at the resurrection that we will be perfectly conformed into the image of Jesus.

God’s purpose or goal for each of His disciples is Christlikeness. Paul explains God’s plan: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). One way that God conforms believers into the image of Christ is through the work and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. When we were saved, we were indwelt by the Spirit of God (1 Corinthians 12:13). The indwelling Spirit of God gives us the inner spiritual resources to overcome sin. He gives us the desires and abilities to resist temptation and overcome it.

The Scriptures often speak of our responsibility to obey Jesus, to pursue holiness, to strive for perfection, and

yet with surprising regularity they also speak of the Spirit’s role in accomplishing our sanctification. It is the Spirit who sanctifies. For example, Philippians 2:12–13 tells us to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,” and yet it tells us that ultimately it is “God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.” We work and strive, but ultimately it is not our working that brings about our spiritual growth.

The Apostle Paul spells out for believers time and again that they are transformed, sanctified, and made to increase in holiness because of what God does (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13; 2 Thessalonians 2:13).

This doctrine creates some tension to be sure. The demands of Jesus Christ on His disciples are strenuous as stated above. But those of us who accept the grace of the gospel realize that these demands provoke us to lean into God, His gospel, and the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish what He asks. The truth is, because of the influence of indwelling sin, we will continually have to fight the flesh (Romans 7:17–20). And as we meditate on these difficult truths, we understand the Apostle Paul’s proclamation in Romans 7:24–25 where he clearly shows the battle we are in, but it is a battle that must always end with the gospel message. “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

It is Christ and the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit that will ultimately grant us freedom from sin, to His praise and glory!

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



## Studying God's Word

What is the cost of being a disciple of Jesus?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

**Matthew 10:16–39**

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**Matthew 16:24–26**

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## Growing in Holiness

Contrary to a popular phrase, “Let go and let God,” God calls us to pursue our holiness as the Holy Spirit works in us. In His book, *The Discipline of Grace*, author Jerry Bridges explains what appears to be an oxymoron (how can grace require discipline?) and uses many passages from Scripture to help his readers understand what God teaches us about growing in holiness.

Working in small groups, examine the passages below and write down what they teach about our role in sanctification and the role of the Holy Spirit.

- Romans 8:12–14
- Romans 12:1–2
- Galatians 5:16–26
- Philippians 2:12–13
- 2 Thessalonians 2:13–15
- 1 John 1:8–2:6

Take notes as you study the following passage.

Luke 14:25–33

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## God's Word in the Real World

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1. As you think about your life as a disciple of Jesus, in what areas has it been the hardest for you to die to your own desires and live for Him?
2. Is it possible for someone to live like and look like a disciple of Jesus but not be a true disciple, fully submitted to Christ as Savior and Lord?
3. How does this idea of counting the cost of becoming a disciple of Jesus relate to the parable of the sower that we discussed a few weeks ago?
4. In many evangelistic contexts, those being presented with the gospel are never asked to consider the cost of being a disciple of Christ but hear only the benefits of salvation. What role should the cost of discipleship play in evangelism and seeking to call people to be disciples of Jesus?
5. We are commanded to teach others to obey the commands of Jesus. To what authority should we point them to know what Jesus commanded?
6. What role do you have in calling disciples (evangelism) and teaching disciples to obey (discipleship)?





# 12

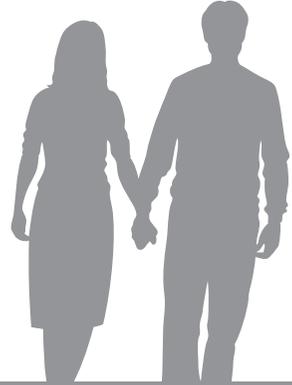
## Responding to Jesus

### Key Passages

- Luke 4:16–30; John 4:1–42, 8:58–59, 10:25–33

### What You Will Learn

- The two ways people reacted to Jesus's message.
- The importance of believing in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.



### Lesson Overview

People reacted in one of two ways toward Jesus, His teachings, and His miracles. Some hated Jesus and wanted to kill Him. Others were astonished and believed His teachings. People have those same two reactions to Jesus today. God's Word says that those who do not believe will be condemned. But those who do believe will not be condemned. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. It is only through Him that we are saved.

### Memory Verse

#### John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."



# Prepare to Learn

## SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

As we have studied Jesus Christ in the Gospels, we have seen that His life, His character, and His ministry were as diverse as they were controversial. Perhaps that is why God chose four distinct writers to tell of His life. Each one was called to present an individual portrait of Jesus. And yet, when you read them together, they display a fuller, richer picture of the God-Man, the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ!

The very sad truth of the matter is that He was not widely accepted when He lived on earth—and is still not widely accepted today. This perhaps brings to light a better understanding of Jesus’s teaching: that we must enter by the narrow, difficult gate to gain eternal life. For the broad gate leads to destruction and death, and many enter through it (Matthew 7:13–14).

Often, the reactions to His teachings were far from positive. You would think that the God-Man would be welcome in the synagogue, and His teachings would be anticipated and sought after. But that was not the case. The religious rulers repeatedly heard what He said and were filled with wrath. They were frequently stirred to intense anger by His claims, and in their anger they would threaten His very life (Luke 4:28–29).

It wasn’t just His teaching that angered them but His miracles as well. The Bible tells us that after He healed a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, the Pharisees and Jews persecuted Him and sought to kill Him (John 5:15–16). Another time the Jews were so angry they picked up stones to stone Him (John 10:31). At this point they admitted why they were moved

to murder: “You, being a man, make Yourself God” (John 10:33).

These reactions from the religious rulers were not fueled by truth, but by jealousy and hatred that someone would claim to be God—and that this Man would demand their respect, submission, and attention.

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). Those who saw their need listened and learned from the Messiah. The Bible tells us that they were astonished at His teaching, for Jesus taught as one who had authority, unlike the scribes in the synagogues (Matthew 7:28–29; Luke 4:21–22). His teaching and His miracles led believers to proclaim, “He [Jesus] has done all things well. He makes both the deaf to hear and the mute to speak” (Mark 7:37). So even while many wanted to destroy Him, those who witnessed His life, and had eyes to see the truth, were convinced that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16).

This division of belief continues today. Some people are astonished and transformed by His Word as they ponder His grace, mercy, love, and forgiveness. Others mock the Word and refuse to humble themselves before the Son of God, who came to bring eternal life to those who would know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3).

Jesus spoke clearly and directly about the truth He had come to reveal. His words were, and are still today, convicting to eternal life or condemnation.

He who believes is not condemned; but he who does not

believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

Our prayer for the unsaved, especially those we are privileged to teach, ought to be, “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion” (Hebrews 3:15).

## **HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND**

It has become popular in our Western culture to use Jesus to promote personal or political agendas. *What Would Jesus Eat?* is the title of an eating program and cookbook, touting the health benefits of a 2,000-year-old Middle Eastern diet. “What Would Jesus Drive?” is a website of the Evangelical Environmental Network, encouraging Christians to drive eco-responsible vehicles.

Others quote Jesus to promote their views on being tolerant, such as “Do not judge, lest you be judged!” or “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone,” ripping these words out of their context to make a point. In these and many other circumstances, Jesus is redefined—sometimes as a good moral teacher, an ethicist, or an environmentalist. But for those who read the Gospels in context and seek to understand who Jesus was and what He said, this trivializing of Jesus’s person and work in order to use Him to support one’s own agenda is nothing short of blasphemy.

Jesus clearly taught that He was much more than a great moral teacher.

He claimed over and over to be God. He said that He and the Father are one, a claim His audience understood to be a claim to deity (John 10:30–33). He used the Old Testament name of God I AM to refer to Himself (John 8:58). Jesus authenticated His claim of deity by miracles demonstrating power over nature, over disease, and even over death. He claimed to forgive sin and then validated His claim with physical healings (Luke 5:17–26).

In addition to His claim to be God, Jesus claimed to be the only way of salvation—the only way that sinners can be reconciled to God. He stated, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6). He also said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). And consider this: “Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God” (Luke 12:8–9).

As Christians, we must be careful not to water down the gospel or Jesus’s claims in order to promote a feel-good Jesus or a Jesus who is here merely to fix our unhealthy eating habits or to promote environmentalism. And we must not ever change the gospel in order to be seen as culturally tolerant or inclusive. It is actually more loving to tell people of sin, judgment, and salvation through Christ than it is to leave them believing a false gospel, only to have them perish outside of Christ and His great salvation.

Jesus was not just a good moral teacher or example for us to follow. No, He was the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, who

claimed to be the exclusive Savior of men and women. Jesus brings division. The gospel is a stumbling block to many. A misguided response to a false presentation of Jesus will not save anyone. But when people understand their need for a Savior because of their

sin and then recognize Jesus as the sinless Son of God, crucified and raised, then by God's grace they can repent and trust that Jesus, the God-Man, is mighty to save.

For more information on this topic, see the Online Resource Page.



# Studying God's Word

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Is Jesus really the only way to eternal life?

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Take notes as you study the following passages.

Luke 4:16-30

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John 8:58-59

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John 10:25-33, 10:39

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John 4:1-42

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John 11:45-46

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## Do You Believe?

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John ends His Gospel telling his readers of the purpose for writing about Jesus—that his readers could know that they have eternal life. But many people claim that Jesus was just a good teacher and that He really wasn't God. Those same people might also claim that different religions are like different paths up a mountain where eventually we will all meet God. But Jesus made it very clear that He is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

Read over the following passages and take some time to personally reflect on your faith. Are you truly in Christ and fully assured that He stands as an advocate for you before God? Will Jesus claim to know you on the Day of Judgment? After each passage, write down what you believe about the truths expressed in the passages with respect to your own submission to Jesus as Savior and Lord.

- Matthew 7:21–27
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- John 3:16–21, 3:36

1. In light of these passages, are you confident that you are believing in Christ alone for your salvation and that you have eternal life in Him?
2. Are there any areas in your life where you are not really submitting to Christ as Lord, and instead you are asking Him to step off the throne and setting yourself in His place?



## God's Word in the Real World

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1. In our current cultural setting, why is it so important to think through ideas like we have covered in the lesson today?
2. Many people who may not seem hostile to Jesus call Him a good teacher or a good example to follow. In calling Jesus a good teacher or a good example, what are these people claiming about the moral character of Jesus since Jesus claimed to be God and the only Savior?
3. When people claim that all religions lead to the same path, like a mountain with many paths leading to the top where we will all find God, how can we respond to them and expose their wrong thinking?

