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The Good Way Discipleship Course

A Twelve-Step Guide to Following Jesus and Helping Others Do the Same

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About This Book

The Good Way Discipleship Course is a twelve-step guide to following Jesus and helping others do the same.

Designed for personal study and guided discipleship, the course brings together Scripture readings, teaching, discussion questions, and practical exercises. Readers can work through the lessons in order, making time to study, reflect, and discuss each step.

This book presents the complete twelve-lesson curriculum, including the original instructional illustrations. Additional Bible commentary and study resources are freely available through The Good Way Library.

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Step 1: Begin the Journey | Christian Discipleship With Jesus

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Following Jesus With Someone Beside You

Christian discipleship begins with Jesus Christ. He calls us to know him, trust him, learn his teachings, and follow him throughout our lives. Yet following Jesus involves more than understanding Christian beliefs or developing better habits. It is a lifelong relationship with our Savior, shaped by his Word, sustained by his grace, and lived through the Holy Spirit.

The Good Way Library created this free twelve-part discipleship course to help people grow in that relationship. Together, we will explore what Christ has accomplished for us, what it means to abide in him, and how his teachings shape our daily lives. Our goal is not simply to help you complete twelve lessons, but to prepare you for a lifetime of following Jesus and helping others do the same.

The Central Truth: Jesus commands his followers to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe everything he commanded. Christian discipleship begins with his saving grace, continues through fellowship with him, and leads outward into his mission.

Welcome to The Good Way Discipleship Course

This course is designed primarily for two people: someone who wants to grow in Christian faith and a more mature Christian who agrees to walk alongside them.

We call these participants the *disciple* and the *discipler*. Both are followers or prospective followers of Jesus, and both should approach the journey with humility and a willingness to learn.

- **If you are the disciple:** Read the assigned Scripture and lesson before your meeting whenever possible. Bring your questions, speak honestly about what you believe, and remain open to learning. You do not need to impress anyone or pretend to understand something you find difficult.
- **If you are the discipler:** Read the same material and prepare to guide the conversation. This first lesson includes a complete orientation for you. The remaining eleven lessons will also contain instructions specific to each step.

You can participate independently if you cannot find a suitable discipler. However, we strongly encourage you to seek a mature Christian who can study, pray, and walk through the course with you.

This course is more than an introduction to Christian beliefs. It invites you to grow in knowing and following Jesus alongside other believers. Whether you have recently come to

faith or have followed Christ for many years, intentional discipleship can deepen your understanding of Scripture, strengthen Christian fellowship, and prepare you to encourage others in their walk with the Lord.

How to begin: If you already have a mature Christian willing to disciple you, arrange your first meeting and read Step One (this article) beforehand. You will work through Step One together during that meeting. If you do not yet have a discipler, begin reading Step One on your own, use its guidance to invite someone, and then return to the lesson together for your first meeting. After each meeting, both participants prepare for the next step by reading its assigned Scripture and lesson.

Begin With Scripture

Primary Reading: Matthew 28:16–20 (WEBU)

Before continuing, open your Bible and read these five verses carefully. They contain the Great Commission, the command that establishes the purpose of this entire course.

As you read, pay attention to three important questions:

1. **His authority:** What does Jesus reveal about himself?
2. **His command:** What does he instruct his followers to do?
3. **His promise:** What assurance does he give those who follow him?

Read the passage again before studying the explanation below. Allow Scripture itself to establish the foundation of your understanding.

Companion Readings:

- **Acts 2:37–47:** Observe how people respond to the apostolic proclamation of Jesus Christ. Notice their baptism, commitment to biblical teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer.
- **2 Timothy 2:1–2:** Notice how Paul instructs Timothy to pass faithful Christian teaching to others who will be able to teach still more people.

These passages introduce two important principles. Discipleship happens within Christian fellowship, and those who receive faithful teaching are called to pass it on.

What Christian Discipleship Really Means

The Risen Jesus Calls His Followers

Matthew 28 concludes the Gospel with the resurrection of Jesus and the mission he gives his disciples. After his crucifixion and burial, the women discover the empty tomb. An angel announces that Jesus has risen, and the risen Christ meets the women and directs his disciples to Galilee.

The eleven disciples travel to the mountain where Jesus has instructed them to meet him. Matthew records that they bow before Jesus, although some doubt or hesitate (Matthew 28:16–17). Even after everything they have witnessed, the disciples still have much to learn.

Jesus does not begin by praising their abilities or explaining how they can become successful religious leaders. Instead, he establishes the foundation of their mission by declaring his own authority.

In Matthew 28:18 (WEBU), Jesus says:

> "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth."

This statement changes how we understand everything that follows. The Great Commission is not an independent project that Christians must accomplish through their own strength. It is the mission of the risen Lord, who possesses authority over heaven and earth.

The foundation of Christian discipleship is not what we can accomplish for Jesus, but who Jesus Christ is and what he has accomplished for us.

Jesus is the promised Messiah, the eternal Son of God who became truly human, died for sinners, and rose bodily from the dead. He is our Savior and Lord, not merely an inspiring moral teacher.

Everything in this course begins with him.

Make Disciples and Teach Them to Obey

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus commands his followers to "make disciples of all nations" (WEBU).

A disciple is someone who learns from and follows a teacher. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus called people to follow him personally. They listened to his teaching, observed his life, asked questions, received correction, and learned to trust him through many different circumstances.

Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God, repentance, forgiveness, prayer, humility, service, love, and obedience. His disciples did not simply receive religious information. They learned what it meant to belong to him.

This distinction remains important today. A person may know many Bible passages, attend church regularly, and understand Christian terminology while still resisting the practical implications of Jesus' teachings.

Biblical knowledge is essential, but it is not the final destination of discipleship. **The purpose of learning Christ's teachings is to know him more deeply and increasingly live according to what he commands.**

Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 28:20. He instructs his followers to teach new disciples to observe everything he commanded.

Notice the emphasis. Jesus does not merely tell Christians to explain his commands. He directs them to teach others *to observe* those commands.

For example, someone may understand that Jesus commands forgiveness while continuing to hold bitterness against another person. Another may know the Lord's Prayer without developing a life of prayerful dependence upon God.

Discipleship connects our understanding of Scripture with the way we actually live.

Throughout this course, we will return to two foundational questions:

- **Who are you, Lord?** What does this passage reveal about Jesus Christ, his character, his saving work, and his purposes?
- **How shall I follow you?** What does this truth call me to believe, trust, change, or obey through the help of the Holy Spirit?

The first question keeps our attention upon Christ. The second reminds us that genuine understanding should lead to faithful obedience.

Baptism and Christian Fellowship Belong to Discipleship

The Great Commission also commands baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Baptism belongs to the Christian response to the gospel and the life of Christ's church. In Acts 2, Peter proclaims Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord. Those who receive the apostolic message are baptized and become part of a community devoted to teaching, fellowship, prayer, and worship.

Christian traditions differ concerning baptism's proper recipients, significance, and administration. Nevertheless, historic Christianity recognizes its importance, and Jesus explicitly includes baptism in his commission.

If you are exploring Christianity, Step Two will explain the gospel, repentance, faith, and new birth more fully. If you already trust Jesus Christ but have not been baptized, consider discussing baptism with a pastor or trusted church leader.

You do not need to wait until Step Ten, which focuses on the church, to begin participating in Christian fellowship.

Following Jesus is personal, but it was never intended to be permanently isolated.

Jesus Promises His Continuing Presence

The Great Commission concludes with one of Jesus' most encouraging promises.

Matthew 28:20 (WEBU) declares:

> "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus does not send his followers into the world and then abandon them. He promises his continuing presence as they carry out his mission. His disciples will face hardship, uncertainty, opposition, and their own weakness, but the risen Lord remains faithful.

The Christian life is therefore not a journey toward an absent Savior.

For those who genuinely belong to Christ, he is already present with them through the Holy Spirit. They are called to trust him, abide in him, and follow him throughout their lives.

This truth will become increasingly important as we continue.

Grace Comes Before Christian Growth

Many Christians approach spiritual growth with a familiar assumption: if they pray enough, study enough, improve their behavior, and become sufficiently obedient, perhaps they will finally become the people God wants them to be. This way of thinking can turn discipleship into an exhausting effort to earn what God has already graciously given. Scripture teaches a different foundation.

Ephesians 2:1–10 explains that apart from God's mercy, humanity is spiritually dead in sin. Our deepest problem is not simply inadequate religious knowledge or insufficient discipline. We need the saving work of Jesus Christ. Yet God, rich in mercy, makes believers alive with Christ. Salvation is his gift of grace, received through faith, not a reward for human accomplishment.

Paul then explains that those saved by grace are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works (Ephesians 2:10). Notice the order: **God saves us by grace, and that grace produces a new life of faithful obedience.** We do not perform good works to purchase salvation. We are called to live faithfully because Christ has saved us.

Romans 6:1–14 develops this truth further. Paul explains that believers are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Their relationship to sin's dominion has been decisively changed, and they are called to live in the newness of life that belongs to Christ. Our new life is not something we manufacture through spiritual techniques. It begins with God's saving action.

What Is Already True in Christ?

For someone who genuinely belongs to Jesus Christ, Scripture teaches several remarkable realities:

- **Forgiveness:** Christ's saving work provides forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God (Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:1–11).
- **New life:** Believers are made alive with Christ and receive a new identity in him (Ephesians 2:4–10; 2 Corinthians 5:17).
- **Union with Christ:** Christians share in Christ's death and resurrection and are called to live according to that reality (Romans 6:1–14).
- **The Holy Spirit:** God gives his Spirit to dwell within believers, assuring, guiding, and transforming them (Romans 8:9–17).
- **Adoption:** Those who belong to Christ are welcomed into God's family as his children (Galatians 4:4–7).

These blessings are not prizes awaiting completion of twelve discipleship lessons. They are gifts grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ.

However, this does not mean Christians have already attained complete maturity or sinless perfection. We continue growing in holiness, understanding, love, obedience, and dependence upon God. We also await the future resurrection and full transformation promised through Christ (Philippians 3:12–21).

The Christian life therefore involves three connected realities:

1. **What Christ has accomplished:** His saving work establishes new life, forgiveness, reconciliation, and union with him for those who believe.
2. **What the Holy Spirit is doing now:** God continues forming Christlike character as believers grow in faith, repentance, love, and obedience.
3. **What God has promised for the future:** Believers await the resurrection, complete transformation, and final fulfillment of God's saving purposes.

These truths protect us from two opposite mistakes. We should neither try to earn God's acceptance through religious effort nor assume that grace makes repentance and obedience unnecessary.

If you are not yet a Christian, these saving blessings should not be presumed to belong to you automatically. You are welcome to explore the course, examine Scripture, and ask honest questions. Step Two will explain how sinners are called to respond to Jesus through repentance and faith.

Learning to Abide in Christ

One of the greatest purposes of this discipleship course is to help you develop a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Christianity is not simply a collection of beliefs that influence our behavior. It is life with the living Christ.

In John 15:1–17, Jesus describes himself as the true vine and his followers as branches. A branch does not produce life independently. Its fruitfulness depends upon its continuing connection to the vine. Jesus uses this illustration to teach his disciples about abiding in him. **To abide in Christ is to remain in trusting dependence upon him, receiving his Word, living in his love, praying, and responding faithfully to his teaching.**

Christ does not invite us to manufacture spiritual life through greater personal effort. He calls us to remain in him, the source of genuine fruitfulness. This understanding changes the way we approach ordinary Christian activities. We study Scripture because we desire to know God and receive his truth. We pray because we have fellowship with our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. Further, we seek obedience because we love the Lord who has graciously loved us.

We also learn to turn toward Christ throughout ordinary life. We may pray while beginning our day, making difficult decisions, caring for family members, working, serving others, or facing

disappointment. Our relationship with Christ does not end when our scheduled devotional time finishes.

What Does It Mean to Listen to God?

Living with Christ includes becoming attentive to his Word and seeking his wisdom.

God speaks authoritatively through Scripture. As we read and understand his Word, the Holy Spirit helps us recognize truth, receive correction, and grow in faithful obedience. We also bring our concerns before God in prayer and seek wisdom through appropriate Christian counsel.

However, we should not assume every feeling, desire, or inward impression is a direct message from God. Our judgments must remain subject to Scripture and should be considered with humility and discernment.

Nor should we believe that spiritual growth always produces strong emotions or extraordinary experiences. Faithful Christians sometimes endure hardship, spiritual dryness, confusion, and seasons of uncertainty.

Our confidence rests in Christ's faithfulness, not in the intensity of our feelings.

We will explore abiding in Christ more deeply in Step Four. For now, remember that **Jesus himself is the foundation, source, and goal of the Christian life**.

Why Discipleship Is Meant to Be Shared

Although your relationship with Jesus is deeply personal, Christian discipleship is not intended to remain an isolated pursuit.

Acts 2:42–47 describes believers who devote themselves to apostolic teaching, fellowship, prayer, worship, and caring for one another. Their faith shapes not only their private lives but also their relationships within the church.

Paul later instructs Timothy to entrust faithful teaching to others who will be able to teach still more people (2 Timothy 2:1–2). Christian instruction is meant to be received, lived, and passed on.

This is why The Good Way Library strongly encourages you to complete the course with another Christian.

Find Someone Who Can Walk Beside You

Ideally, your discipler will be a spiritually mature Christian whose faith and character you respect. Consider a pastor, small-group leader, faithful family member, longtime Christian friend, or another trustworthy member of your church.

Look for someone who demonstrates these qualities:

- **Faithfulness to Scripture:** They are willing to study God's Word carefully and submit to its teaching.
- **Christlike character:** They demonstrate humility, patience, honesty, and love for others.
- **Christian fellowship:** They participate meaningfully in a healthy local church.
- **A willingness to help:** They can listen, pray, explain Scripture, answer questions, and continue learning alongside you.

Your discipler does not need to be a professional theologian or an experienced Bible teacher. They also do not need to know The Good Way Library beforehand.

The course supplies the material you will study together. Your discipler provides Christian companionship, encouragement, and guidance.

An Invitation You Can Send

If someone comes to mind, consider reaching out with a personal invitation. You could write:

> I am beginning The Good Way Library's free twelve-part Christian discipleship course. It focuses on knowing Jesus more deeply, understanding the gospel, learning his teachings, and growing in faithful Christian living. The course works best when a mature Christian walks through it with someone else. I respect your faith and wondered if you would consider going through it with me. You would not need to prepare the lessons yourself. We could read Scripture, discuss the material, pray together, and learn along the way. Would you be willing to talk about it?

Adapt the message to your relationship. The important thing is to make a genuine invitation rather than waiting indefinitely for someone to volunteer.

If the first person cannot participate, do not be discouraged. Consider another trustworthy Christian who might be willing to help.

A Healthy Discipleship Relationship

A discipler should encourage spiritual growth through Scripture, prayer, patient guidance, and personal example. They should never demand unquestioning loyalty, control another person's decisions, or require the disclosure of deeply personal matters.

Both participants should approach the relationship with humility and respect. Private conversations deserve appropriate care, while serious safety concerns must be handled responsibly.

Discipleship should strengthen your connection to Christ and his church, not create unhealthy dependence upon one individual.

Christians Before Us: Learning From the Early Church

Christians have been helping others learn and practice the faith since the earliest generations of the church.

The New Testament shows believers gathering around the apostles' teaching, sharing life together, praying, worshiping, and caring for those in need. This pattern continued beyond the apostolic age.

An early Christian instructional work known as the *Didache*, commonly dated to the late first or second century, includes teaching about Christian conduct, baptism, prayer, and community life. Its precise date remains debated, and it is not part of Scripture. Nevertheless, it provides historical evidence that early Christians took seriously the responsibility of teaching others how to live faithfully.

In the second century, **Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202)** demonstrated the importance of receiving Christian teaching from faithful believers and passing it on to others. As a young man in Asia Minor, Irenaeus listened to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who had known Christians from the apostolic generation. Those early experiences helped shape his lifelong commitment to preserving and explaining the Christian faith. Irenaeus eventually became bishop of Lyons in Gaul, where he taught Scripture and defended the church against teachings that distorted the identity of Jesus Christ and the message of salvation. His example reminds us that **Christian discipleship is not something we must discover or accomplish alone.** We benefit from believers who have walked faithfully before us, and as we mature, we become responsible for helping others understand and follow the same Lord. This reflects the pattern of passing on faithful teaching described in 2 Timothy 2:2.

Across subsequent centuries, Christians continued instructing new believers through local churches, pastoral teaching, Christian friendships, and summaries of essential belief such as the historic creeds.

The Good Way Library also provides studies of the Apostles' Creed, Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, Athanasian Creed, and Definition of Chalcedon through our Christian Resource Library. These historic statements explain foundational Christian beliefs handed down across generations, while Scripture remains our final authority.

Our course is not intended to invent a new Christianity. It is designed to help ordinary Christians understand and live the faith once for all revealed in Scripture and faithfully taught through the church for millennia.

How to Begin the Twelve-Step Course

The Good Way Discipleship Course is designed primarily for one mature Christian to walk alongside another person. However, independent study is possible when a suitable mentor is unavailable.

Ideally, this twelve-step course should be completed through weekly, one-on-one meetings between a discipler and a disciple over approximately three months. However, the schedule should remain flexible to accommodate individual needs, questions, and circumstances. Some subjects deserve additional time, and a thoughtful conversation is more valuable than rushing through the material.

What You Will Need

You do not need expensive materials, special qualifications, or paid resources.

- **A Bible:** The Good Way Library uses the World English Bible, Updated (WEBU), for direct quotations, but you may also read the assigned passages in your usual Bible.
- **Something for notes:** A notebook or digital document can help you record questions, passages, reflections, and prayers.
- **A regular time:** Choose a realistic schedule for reading, prayer, and conversation.
- **Christian fellowship:** If possible, arrange to meet with a trustworthy mature Christian and remain connected to a healthy local church.

Between meetings, spend time reading Scripture and considering its meaning. Bring what you learn before God in prayer, and remain open to responding faithfully in ordinary life.

These practices support your learning, but they do not determine your worth before God.

Let Scripture Remain First

Throughout this course, we will direct you toward Good Way Bible commentaries, book overviews, and other Christian resources.

However, **the Bible itself remains the foundation of everything we teach**.

Read the assigned passage before consulting our commentary. Consider what it says, what it reveals about God, and how it fits within the broader message of Scripture.

Then use the commentary to deepen your understanding. Its Walkthrough, Application, Interpretive Options, Cross-References, and Leading sections can help you explore difficult passages and prepare for discussion.

As an optional companion to the twelve lessons, consider reading through the Gospel of John. Its teaching about Jesus' identity, saving work, love, and relationship with his disciples reinforces many subjects we will study.

Where This Journey Leads

The course begins with the gospel and new life in Christ. It then develops a deeper understanding of abiding in Jesus, Scripture, prayer, walking by the Holy Spirit, repentance, and Christian love. Later lessons address belonging to the church, perseverance through suffering, and helping other people follow Jesus.

The final step returns to Matthew 28 and the responsibility of making disciples.

Consider what could happen if one Christian faithfully helped two others begin discipleship, and those Christians eventually helped two more, while earlier participants continued serving others. Under these idealized assumptions, one participant could become three after one cycle, nine after two, and 243 after five.

This illustrates the potential of discipleship multiplication, not a prediction of conversions. Real discipleship involves people, patience, prayer, and God's work rather than numerical targets.

You do not have to finish this course before beginning to love, serve, and encourage others. You can participate in Christ's mission now through prayer, kindness, Christian witness, and faithful service.

Step Twelve will help you consider how to accompany another person intentionally, but **following Jesus and loving others are lifelong callings, not rewards for completing a program**.



For the Discipler: How to Lead This Course

If you have agreed to accompany someone through these twelve steps, this section is written especially for you. Read it before your first meeting and return to it whenever you need guidance.

You do not need to be a pastor, theologian, or experienced Bible teacher. You also do not need to prepare twelve lessons yourself. The Good Way Library provides the biblical instruction, discussion questions, and suggested activities.

Your role is to **walk alongside another person as a fellow follower of Jesus Christ**. Help them encounter Scripture, understand its teaching, ask honest questions, pray, and learn to respond faithfully to Christ.

You are not responsible for manufacturing spiritual growth in someone else. God works through his Word and Spirit, while you serve as a faithful companion.

Each later lesson will contain its own shorter *For the Discipler* section. The instructions below establish the general approach for the entire course.

Before Your First Meeting

Begin by preparing your own heart through prayer and Scripture.

Read Matthew 28:16–20, Acts 2:42–47, and 2 Timothy 2:1–2 before meeting. Consider what the risen Jesus commands, what he promises, and how these passages connect discipleship with Christian fellowship and the faithful transmission of biblical teaching.

Read this lesson in full. If helpful, review the Good Way Matthew 28 commentary, particularly its Walkthrough and **Leading: The Teaching Guide** sections.

You do not need to prepare a sermon or an impressive presentation. Instead, prepare to listen, explain Scripture faithfully, and encourage the learner.

Pray that God would give you humility, wisdom, patience, and genuine concern for the person you will accompany.

Begin With a Personal Conversation

Before studying the lesson, take time to understand why the learner wants to participate.

You might ask what brought them to the course, whether they are exploring Christianity or already profess faith, and what they hope to understand about Jesus. You may also ask whether they participate in a local church.

Do not assume the person is already a Christian. Some participants have strong faith but little formal instruction. Others have attended church for years without fully understanding the gospel. Still others remain uncertain about what they believe.

Allow them to explain their background in their own words. Do not pressure them to give a personal testimony, disclose painful experiences, or claim beliefs they do not hold.

Briefly explain that the course is self-paced and aims to establish a foundation for lifelong discipleship. Encourage honest questions and continued participation in a healthy local church.

A Suggested First Meeting

A normal discipleship meeting lasts approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Your first meeting can follow this flexible pattern:

1. **Welcome and prayer (5–10 minutes):** Ask about the learner's background and hopes for the course. Begin with a brief prayer for wisdom and understanding.
2. **Read Scripture together (15 minutes):** Read Matthew 28:16–20 aloud. Ask what Jesus claims, commands, and promises. Discuss how Acts 2 and 2 Timothy 2 help explain Christian fellowship and passing on the faith.
3. **Discuss the lesson (20–30 minutes):** Work through the questions below, focusing on Jesus' authority, the meaning of discipleship, grace, and Christ's promised presence. You do not need to address every question if a meaningful conversation develops.
4. **Agree on how to continue (10–15 minutes):** Discuss meeting frequency, preparation between lessons, preferred communication, confidentiality, and healthy boundaries. Consider how participation in a local church will remain part of the journey.
5. **Pray and prepare for Step Two (5–10 minutes):** Pray together, establish the next meeting time, and invite the learner to read John 3:1–21 before continuing.

This is a suggested structure, not a rigid schedule. Some participants may need more time for questions, while others may benefit from a shorter meeting.

The important thing is to establish a welcoming relationship centered upon Jesus Christ and Scripture.

How to Guide Every Lesson

- **Review the previous step** | Begin each meeting by briefly revisiting the preceding lesson. Ask what the learner understood, questioned, or attempted to put into practice. Encourage honest reflection without grading their progress or requiring private disclosures.
- **Begin with Scripture** | Read the principal passage before relying on commentary. Ask what the passage says, what it meant in context, and what it reveals about God.
- **Keep Christ at the center** | Ask what the passage reveals about Jesus, his saving work, his promises, and the life he gives to those who belong to him.
- **Connect grace with obedience** | Help the learner understand what God has accomplished through Christ before discussing practical responses. Christian obedience flows from grace; it does not purchase God's acceptance.
- **Encourage genuine conversation** | Ask open-ended questions and allow time for thoughtful answers. You do not need to fill every silence or resolve every uncertainty immediately.
- **Pray together** | Invite the learner to bring questions, concerns, and thanksgiving before God. Never judge the sincerity of someone's faith by the length or eloquence of their prayers.
- **Use Good Way as a companion resource** | The commentaries can explain historical context, difficult verses, and interpretive questions. They should support direct Bible study rather than replace it.

What to Watch For

People bring different backgrounds, questions, strengths, and struggles into discipleship.

Some wrestle with doubts about salvation. Others are unfamiliar with Scripture or have experienced unhealthy spiritual leadership. Some face grief, addiction, significant emotional distress, or difficult personal relationships.

Respond with humility and care rather than assuming every problem can be resolved through a Bible-study exercise.

A discipler must never demand unquestioning obedience, control personal decisions, isolate someone from family or church, or insist that personal impressions carry the authority of God's Word.

Respect the learner's privacy, but do not promise absolute secrecy. Serious safety concerns, suspected abuse, immediate danger, or applicable safeguarding obligations may require appropriate assistance.

For medical, mental-health, addiction, abuse, or crisis concerns, encourage suitable pastoral support and qualified professional care. When someone faces immediate danger, appropriate emergency assistance takes priority. Serious issues require serious support, do not try to solve a problem you are not qualified to handle. Get professionals involved and/or elevate to a ministry leader for a discussion on how to go forward.

Your responsibility is to help another person follow Christ faithfully, not to become their sole spiritual authority or source of care.

Before Moving Forward

At the conclusion of Step One, do not worry about giving the learner a grade or determining exactly how spiritually mature they are.

Instead, consider whether they understand the purpose of the course.

Can they explain why Jesus commands his followers to make disciples? Do they recognize the importance of baptism, teaching, and Christian fellowship? Do they understand that salvation rests upon God's grace rather than completing twelve lessons?

Allow time for unresolved questions. Before beginning Step Two, agree on a realistic meeting schedule and encourage them to read **John 3:1–21**.

Above all, remember that both of you are continuing to learn and follow Jesus. The discipler does not stop being a disciple simply because they are helping someone else.

Discipling Children and Teenagers: The Good Way Discipleship Course is designed for adults, and we generally recommend waiting until a young person reaches adulthood before beginning this particular program. For children and teenagers, discipleship is best guided by their parents or legal guardians, who may choose to use portions of the course as appropriate. A church may also determine that the course is suitable for a supervised group setting with

appropriate safeguards. However, we do not recommend independent, one-on-one mentoring relationships between unrelated adults and minors through this program. If the course is used with minors, churches must follow their established child protection policies, maintain transparent communication with parents or guardians, and provide appropriate supervision in accountable group settings. All communication, interactions, and personal boundaries must be suitable for the young person's age and safety and should be monitored appropriately. Because this course includes personal conversations and adult discipleship responsibilities, we recommend that minors participate only through the parent-led or appropriately supervised church settings described here.

Discuss Together

Read Matthew 28:16–20 once more, then consider the following questions. If you have a discipler, discuss them together. If you are studying independently, write your responses.

1. **Jesus' authority:** What does Jesus claim in Matthew 28:18, and why should that shape our understanding of discipleship?
2. **The purpose of discipleship:** What is the difference between knowing what Jesus commands and learning to observe those commands?
3. **Grace and obedience:** How does understanding salvation as God's gift change the way we approach spiritual growth?
4. **Life with Christ:** Why is it important to understand discipleship as fellowship with Jesus rather than simply completing Christian activities?
5. **Christian fellowship:** What do Acts 2:42–47 and 2 Timothy 2:1–2 teach about learning, fellowship, and passing Christian teaching to others?
6. **Your own journey:** Are you currently exploring Christianity, beginning the Christian life, returning to faithful fellowship, or seeking greater maturity? What questions about Jesus matter most to you?
7. **Walking together:** Who might be a trustworthy Christian to accompany you, and what would help you begin that relationship?

These questions encourage understanding and honest discussion. You do not need impressive answers. The goal is to learn from Scripture and become more attentive to what Christ teaches.

Put It Into Practice

Spend Time With the Great Commission

Read Matthew 28:16–20 again during the coming week. Consider what Jesus reveals about himself, what he commands, and what he promises.

Then spend a few moments in prayer. Ask God to help you approach discipleship with humility, faith, and a desire to know Christ more deeply.

Invite Someone to Walk With You

Identify a mature Christian you trust and consider inviting them into the course. If someone has already agreed to participate, arrange your first meeting and discuss how you will study together.

Prepare a Bible, a notebook if helpful, and a realistic amount of time for Scripture reading and prayer.

Begin Praying for Another Person

Think of someone who might benefit from encouragement, friendship, prayer, or an opportunity to learn about Jesus.

Begin praying for that person. You do not need to establish another discipleship relationship immediately, but you can begin recognizing that following Christ includes concern for the spiritual well-being of others.

This is the beginning of an outward-looking Christian life. As we grow in fellowship with Jesus, his love should increasingly shape how we care for people around us.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can still work through this course meaningfully without a personal discipler. Read the assigned Scripture passages, consider the discussion questions, write down your reflections, and respond in prayer.

You may also use the *For the Discipler* section to understand the purpose of each meeting and guide your own study. You do not need to follow its meeting schedule exactly.

However, independent study should not become permanent isolation. If possible, seek relationships with mature Christians and participate in a healthy local church where Scripture is faithfully taught, worship is practiced, and believers encourage one another.

The Good Way Library can help you study, but it cannot replace the fellowship and care of Christ's people.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners and call us to follow him. Thank you that salvation rests upon your grace rather than anything I could accomplish through my own efforts. I want to know Jesus more deeply, understand his Word, and learn to live faithfully in fellowship with him. Give me humility where I need correction, wisdom where I lack understanding, and confidence in the saving work of your Son. Help me depend upon your Holy Spirit rather than my own strength. Surround me with faithful Christians who will encourage me in the truth, and prepare me to love, serve, and help others follow Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture to Remember

Matthew 28:20 (WEBU)

> "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus' promise of continuing presence is an especially fitting foundation for the course. As you begin this journey, remember that the risen Christ does not send his people into the world alone.

Return to this promise when you feel uncertain about your ability to understand Scripture, grow spiritually, or follow Jesus faithfully.

Continue Studying With The Good Way Library

The following free resources provide additional biblical explanation for Step One. Read the assigned Scripture passages first, then use the commentary to strengthen your understanding.

- **Matthew 28 Commentary: Resurrection and the Great Commission** - Explore the risen Jesus' authority, the command to make disciples, baptism, teaching obedience, and his promise of continuing presence. This is the primary commentary for Step One.
- **The Book of Matthew Overview: The King and His Kingdom** - Understand how Matthew presents Jesus as the promised Messiah and King, and how the Great Commission completes the Gospel's message.
- **Acts 2 Commentary: Pentecost and the Spirit** - Examine how the earliest believers responded to the gospel through repentance, baptism, apostolic teaching, fellowship, worship, and prayer.
- **2 Timothy 2 Commentary: Grace, Endurance, and Truth** - Study Paul's instruction to pass faithful biblical teaching to others who can teach still more people. The Leading section is especially useful for prospective disciplers.

Before the Next Step

You have begun a journey that should continue long after these twelve lessons are completed.

Christian discipleship is not about achieving religious perfection or becoming impressive in biblical knowledge. It is about knowing Jesus Christ, trusting his grace, abiding in him, following his teaching, and growing in faithful fellowship with his people.

Before moving forward, consider whether you have a trustworthy Christian who can accompany you. If possible, arrange your first meeting. If you are studying independently, establish a realistic time to continue and remain open to Christian fellowship.

Next Reading: John 3:1–21

In this passage, Jesus speaks with Nicodemus, a respected religious teacher who discovers that religious knowledge alone cannot give someone new life. Jesus explains the necessity of being born again and reveals God's saving love for the world.

Step Two: Come to Jesus will explain the gospel, the person and saving work of Jesus Christ, repentance, faith, and the new life that God gives through him. The Christian life begins with Christ, continues through Christ, and finds its ultimate fulfillment in him.

Step 2: Come to Jesus | The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 2 of 12

Knowing the Savior and Receiving New Life

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian life. Before we can understand how to follow Jesus faithfully, we must understand who he is, why he came, what he accomplished through his death and resurrection, and how we are called to respond to him.

In Step One, we explored Jesus' Great Commission and his command to make disciples. We also established that discipleship begins with God's grace rather than our own religious accomplishments. Now we come to the question beneath everything else: *What does it actually mean to belong to Jesus Christ?*

This question matters whether you are exploring Christianity for the first time or have attended church for many years. Religious knowledge, Christian traditions, and good intentions cannot replace the new life that God gives through his Son.

The Central Truth: God saves sinners through Jesus Christ, the eternal Son who became truly human, died for our sins, and rose again. We are called to repent and believe in him, receiving salvation by grace rather than earning it through our own works.

Do Not Skip This Section!

It can be surprisingly easy to spend years attending church, studying Scripture, serving others, and participating in Christian activities without carefully examining the very foundation of our faith: **the gospel of Jesus Christ.** Some assume they already understand it. Others become so focused on Christian living that they rarely return to the question of what it actually means to be saved.

Yet everything else in discipleship rests upon this foundation. Before we can understand how to follow Jesus, we must understand who he is, why we need salvation, what he accomplished through his death and resurrection, and what it means to genuinely repent and place our faith in him. *Religious familiarity is not the same as saving faith!*

Whether you are exploring Christianity, have recently believed, or have followed the Way for many years, please do not rush through this lesson. Examine the Scriptures carefully, consider your own understanding of the gospel, and be willing to address questions you may have overlooked. The gospel is not merely the first lesson of Christianity. It is the foundation upon which our entire life with Christ rests.

Begin With Scripture

Primary Reading: John 3:1–21 (WEBU)

Our principal passage records a remarkable conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a respected religious teacher. Nicodemus recognizes that God is at work through Jesus, but Jesus immediately directs him toward something more important than religious knowledge: the necessity of being born anew.

Read John 3:1–21 carefully before continuing. Pay attention to three questions:

1. **The need** | What does Jesus tell Nicodemus is necessary to enter God's Kingdom?
2. **The Savior** | What does Jesus reveal about his identity and saving mission?
3. **The response** | What does the passage teach about believing in the Son of God?

Companion Readings:

- **Romans 3:21–26** | Paul explains humanity's need for God's righteousness and how sinners are justified through the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ.
- **Ephesians 2:1–10** | Paul describes our spiritual condition apart from Christ and shows that salvation comes through God's mercy and grace, not our works.

Additional Reading: **1 Corinthians 15:1–8** | Paul summarizes the central events of the gospel: Christ's death for sins, burial, bodily resurrection, and appearances to witnesses.

These passages belong together. John explains the necessity of new birth and faith in the Son, Romans explains our need for redemption, Ephesians establishes salvation by grace, and Corinthians identifies the saving events at the heart of the gospel.

Why We Need New Life in Christ

Nicodemus: Religious Knowledge Is Not Enough

John 3 begins by introducing Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews. He belongs to a respected religious movement and carries responsibility among the Jewish people. He knows the Old Testament Scriptures and has devoted considerable attention to religious life.

Nicodemus approaches Jesus at night and acknowledges that his miraculous signs indicate that God is with him. His words are respectful, but Jesus immediately turns the conversation toward a deeper issue.

In John 3:3 (WEBU), Jesus teaches:

> "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born anew, he can’t see God’s Kingdom."

The phrase *born anew* can also carry the meaning of being born again or from above. Jesus is describing a spiritual birth that cannot be produced through another physical birth or improved religious performance.

Nicodemus initially misunderstands the teaching because he thinks in terms of returning to his mother's womb. Jesus explains that entrance into God's Kingdom requires birth by water and the Spirit (John 3:5–8).

This is an important starting point for Christian discipleship. Nicodemus possesses knowledge, religious experience, and social standing, yet Jesus tells him that he needs something only God can give.

A person does not become a Christian simply by becoming more religious. We need new life from God.

What Does It Mean to Be Born Anew?

Jesus distinguishes physical birth from spiritual birth. Human parents give physical life, but the Holy Spirit gives the new life necessary for entrance into God's Kingdom.

Jesus compares the Spirit's work to the wind. We hear the wind and observe its effects without controlling where it comes from or where it goes. Likewise, the Spirit's work is real and life-giving, even though it cannot be manufactured through human methods.

This teaching connects with God's promises in the Old Testament. In Ezekiel 36:25–27, God promises to cleanse his people, give them a new heart, and place his Spirit within them. Jesus expects Nicodemus, a teacher of Israel, to recognize the significance of these promises.

Christians have interpreted the relationship between water, the Spirit, and baptism in John 3:5 differently. Some historic traditions understand the passage as directly referring to baptism and God's regenerating work. Others emphasize the Old Testament imagery of spiritual cleansing and renewal while recognizing baptism as an important Christian practice.

These differences deserve careful study, but they should not obscure the central message: **new birth comes through God's gracious work by the Holy Spirit, not through human religious achievement.**

Titus 3:3–7 reinforces this truth by connecting salvation with God's mercy, regeneration, and renewal through the Holy Spirit. The Christian life begins with divine grace, not with our ability to make ourselves spiritually alive.

Why Humanity Needs a Savior

To understand why Jesus came, we must understand the problem of sin.

Scripture teaches that God is holy, righteous, loving, and just. He is the Creator of everything, and human beings were made to know him, honor him, and live according to his good purposes.

Sin is more than occasional wrongdoing or personal weakness. It includes rebellion against God, rejection of his authority, and failure to love and obey him as we should. Our sinful condition affects our thoughts, desires, relationships, and actions.

Romans 3:9–23 explains that both Jews and Gentiles stand under sin. No amount of religious status, personal accomplishment, or moral effort can establish our righteousness before God. His justice means sin cannot simply be ignored, while his mercy reveals his willingness to save.

This creates the central human problem addressed by the gospel: we cannot remove our guilt, overcome spiritual death, or reconcile ourselves to God through our own efforts. We need a Savior who can accomplish what we cannot.

Ephesians 2:1–3 describes people apart from Christ as spiritually dead in their trespasses and sins. That is a far more serious condition than simply needing better habits, stronger motivation, or additional religious instruction.

Yet the passage does not end in despair. It turns toward the extraordinary mercy of God, who acts to save those who cannot save themselves.

Who Is Jesus Christ?

Before learning how to respond to Jesus, we must understand who he is.

Christianity does not teach that Jesus was merely an unusually wise person, a prophet among many prophets, or an inspiring example of religious devotion. The New Testament presents him as the eternal Son of God who became truly human for our salvation.

One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

The Christian faith confesses one God who eternally exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is the doctrine of the Trinity. Christians do not worship three gods, nor do we believe that God is one person merely appearing in three different forms. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct divine persons, yet they are the one true God, sharing the same divine being.

We see these distinctions revealed throughout Scripture. At Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3:13–17, the Son is baptized, the Spirit descends upon him, and the Father's voice speaks from heaven. In John 3, Jesus describes the Spirit's work of new birth and God's love in sending the Son.

The Trinity is not a mystery Christians must fully comprehend before receiving salvation. It is the truth about God revealed through Scripture, forming the foundation of Christian worship and faith.

The Father sends the Son, the Son accomplishes our redemption, and the Holy Spirit gives new life and transforms believers. These works belong to the one God, not to competing divine beings.

Jesus Is Truly God and Truly Human

The Son of God did not begin to exist when Jesus was born in Bethlehem. He is eternal and shares the divine nature with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

John 1:1–18 teaches that the Word was with God, was God, and became flesh. The eternal Son entered human history without ceasing to be divine.

Jesus is therefore fully God and fully human, one person possessing both a true divine nature and a true human nature. He was born of the virgin Mary, experienced genuine human life, faced temptation without sinning, and willingly suffered death.

His humanity matters because he came to represent humanity and accomplish salvation through his obedient life and sacrificial death. His deity matters because he is the divine Savior whose person and work are sufficient to redeem sinners.

This is the historic Christian understanding of Jesus, affirmed in the Nicene Creed and the Definition of Chalcedon.

Who Jesus is explains why his life, death, and resurrection are sufficient for our salvation. We cannot separate the identity of Christ from the work he came to accomplish.

What Jesus Accomplished for Us

The Cross: Christ Died for Our Sins

As Jesus continues speaking with Nicodemus, he explains that the Son of Man must be lifted up so that those who believe in him may receive eternal life (John 3:14–15).

Jesus refers to an event recorded in Numbers 21:4–9. When the Israelites sinned against God and suffered judgment in the wilderness, God provided a means of deliverance through the bronze serpent raised by Moses. Those who looked in response to God's provision lived.

Jesus uses that event to explain his own coming death. Just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness, the Son of Man would be lifted up through crucifixion. His death would become the means through which God provides salvation to sinners who believe in him.

Romans 3:21–26 explains this more fully. God reveals his righteousness through Jesus Christ, and sinners are justified freely by his grace through the redemption accomplished in Christ.

Justification means being declared righteous before God. This verdict rests upon Christ's saving work rather than our moral achievements.

Paul also describes Jesus as the atoning sacrifice through which God demonstrates his righteousness. The cross therefore reveals both the seriousness of sin and the extraordinary mercy of God.

Jesus did not die merely to demonstrate kindness or inspire us to become better people. He died for our sins, accomplishing the redemption we could never secure for ourselves.

The Resurrection: Christ Is the Living Savior

The gospel does not end with Jesus' death.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:1–8, Jesus was buried, rose bodily on the third day, and appeared to witnesses. His resurrection is an essential historical and theological foundation of Christianity.

Paul emphasizes that if Christ has not been raised, Christian faith is empty and sinners remain in their sins (1 Corinthians 15:12–19).

The resurrection confirms that Jesus is not a defeated teacher whose followers merely preserved his ideas. He is the living Lord who conquered death and now reigns with authority.

His resurrection also establishes the hope of future resurrection for those who belong to him. Christian salvation is not limited to a better experience in the present life. It includes the promised completion of God's saving work when Christ returns.

This is why the gospel centers upon both the cross and the empty tomb.

Jesus died for our sins, rose again, and lives as the Savior and Lord of everyone who trusts in him.

God's Love and the Gift of His Son

John 3:16 declares God's extraordinary love for the world through the giving of his only born Son. The following verses explain that the Son came so that the world might be saved through him, while also warning that unbelief leaves a person under judgment.

God's love does not make sin unimportant, and his justice does not make his saving mercy uncertain. Both are revealed in Jesus Christ.

John 3:19–21 describes humanity's resistance to the light because evil works do not welcome exposure. The problem is therefore not merely a shortage of religious information. Sin also affects what we love and what we are willing to surrender.

Jesus calls people out of darkness and into the light. Coming to Christ means we no longer need to defend our sin, hide behind our religious reputation, or pretend to possess a righteousness we do not have.

We may come to the Savior who knows the truth about us and offers salvation through his grace.



How Do We Respond to Jesus?

The gospel announces what God has accomplished through Christ. It also calls for a genuine response.

In Mark 1:15 (WEBU), Jesus commands:

> "Repent, and believe in the Good News."

These responses belong together. They are not religious achievements through which we purchase salvation, but the appropriate response to the Savior whom God has sent.

Repentance: Turning Toward God

Repentance involves a genuine change of mind and heart concerning God. It means recognizing our rebellion and turning toward God in humble submission to Jesus Christ.

Repentance is more than feeling embarrassed, regretting consequences, or temporarily improving outward behavior. It involves acknowledging that God is right and that we need his mercy. 2 Corinthians 7 is essential here in understanding true repentance.

Importantly, repentance does not mean achieving sinless perfection before coming to Jesus. We cannot cleanse ourselves sufficiently to become worthy of his salvation. Instead, we come to Christ honestly, confessing our need and seeking the grace that only he provides.

A repentant person may still have many weaknesses and struggles. The Christian life includes continued repentance as the Holy Spirit transforms us. What changes is the direction of our allegiance: we are turning toward Christ rather than defending rebellion against him.

Faith: Trusting Jesus Christ

Faith is more than agreeing that certain Christian claims are true.

Someone may believe that Jesus existed, know the events of his crucifixion, and understand Christian teaching without personally trusting him as Savior and Lord.

Saving faith means relying upon Jesus Christ and his saving work rather than depending upon our own righteousness. It includes receiving God's testimony about his Son, trusting his promises, and entrusting ourselves to him.

John 3 repeatedly connects believing in the Son with receiving eternal life. The emphasis rests upon Jesus himself, not upon the strength of someone's emotions or the perfection of their understanding.

We are not saved because our faith is unusually impressive. We are saved by God's grace through faith in the sufficient Savior.

This also means Christianity is not merely an invitation to admire Jesus from a distance. He calls us to follow him, trust him, and live under his lordship.

Salvation Is God's Gift

Ephesians 2:4–10 gives one of Scripture's clearest explanations of how grace and spiritual transformation belong together.

Paul begins with God's mercy. Even while people were spiritually dead in their sins, God acted to make believers alive with Christ. Salvation begins in God's loving initiative.

Paul then explains that salvation is by grace through faith, not the result of human works. No one can boast that they earned acceptance before God.

Yet verse 10 teaches that believers are created in Christ Jesus for good works. Notice the order:

1. **God acts in grace** | Salvation begins with God's mercy and the saving work of Jesus Christ.

2. **We receive through faith** | We trust Christ rather than our ability to earn righteousness.
3. **We live in newness of life** | The Holy Spirit forms growing obedience and good works in those who belong to Jesus.

This is the foundation of the discipleship journey ahead. Good works do not create our salvation. They belong to the life God prepares for those whom he saves.

We do not work our way into Christ. Through faith, we receive his saving grace and begin learning to live from the life he gives.

What If You Are Not Sure You Believe?

Perhaps you have reached this point and realize that you know about Jesus but are uncertain whether you have personally trusted him.

You may have attended church for many years or participated in religious activities without understanding the gospel clearly. Or perhaps you are encountering Christian teaching for the first time and still have serious questions.

You do not need to pretend that you believe something you do not yet understand.

Jesus took Nicodemus' questions seriously, even while challenging his assumptions and directing him toward the truth. Honest questions are not something to be ashamed of.

At the same time, the gospel calls for a personal response. Scripture does not present repentance and faith as matters that can be postponed indefinitely without consequence.

If you understand the gospel and recognize your need for Christ, you may turn to him in repentance and faith now. You do not need a special location, an elaborate ceremony, or perfectly chosen words before you can seek his mercy.

You can acknowledge your sin, confess your need for salvation, and place your trust in Jesus Christ.

A sincere prayer may express that response, but reciting a particular prayer does not automatically save someone. Salvation rests upon God's grace through faith in Jesus, not upon the repetition of a formula.

If you remain uncertain, continue reading Scripture and speak honestly with your discipler or a trusted pastor. Do not let pressure from another person substitute for genuine understanding and faith.

Beginning Life With Christ

Baptism and the Christian Community

In Step One, we learned that Jesus commands his followers to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe everything he commanded (Matthew 28:18–20).

The New Testament closely connects the proclamation of the gospel with baptism and participation in Christian fellowship. In Acts 2:37–47, those who receive Peter's message are baptized and begin sharing life with the believers.

Christian traditions differ concerning baptism's relationship to regeneration, its proper recipients, and its administration. These differences should be approached with seriousness and charity rather than allowing them to distract from the central message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

If you profess faith in Christ and have not been baptized, speak with a pastor or trusted church leader about the biblical meaning and practice of baptism. Likewise, seek a faithful local church where Scripture is taught, worship is practiced, and believers encourage one another.

The Good Way Library provides resources to support your Christian growth, but it cannot replace the life of Christ's church.

What Is Already True for Those Who Belong to Christ?

The gospel is not simply an announcement that God might accept us someday if we become sufficiently faithful.

For genuine believers, Scripture teaches that God's saving work has already established a new relationship with him.

Through Jesus Christ, believers receive forgiveness, reconciliation with God, new life, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These blessings rest upon Christ's completed saving work rather than a lifetime of religious achievement.

Nevertheless, Christians still grow in understanding, holiness, love, and obedience. We remain dependent upon God's grace as we learn to follow Christ more faithfully.

We also await the future resurrection and complete transformation promised at Christ's return.

This distinction will become central in Step Three. We will explore what it means to be united with Christ, forgiven, adopted into God's family, and assured of his promises.

For now, remember the essential order: **God saves through Jesus Christ, gives new life through the Holy Spirit, and then teaches his people to live according to that grace.**

Christians Before Us: Confessing the Gospel

Christians have carefully explained and defended the identity of Jesus Christ throughout church history. The early church understood that the gospel would lose its meaning if Jesus were reduced to a created being, a mere human teacher, or someone who only appeared to be human.

At the Council of Nicaea in AD 325 and the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, Christian leaders clarified their confession of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Nicene-

Constantinopolitan Creed affirms one God, the full deity of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and the Holy Spirit's divine identity.

The Definition of Chalcedon in AD 451 further clarified the Christian confession that Jesus Christ is one person who is truly God and truly human.

These historic statements do not replace Scripture or possess equal authority with it. They help summarize the biblical faith Christians have confessed across generations and provide useful safeguards against misunderstandings about Jesus.

In the fourth century, **Augustine of Hippo (354–430)** experienced firsthand the struggle between knowing about God and personally surrendering to him. Although Augustine was highly educated and deeply interested in questions of truth, he spent years pursuing worldly ambitions and desires while resisting the Christian faith. Through the influence of his mother Monica, the preaching of **Ambrose of Milan**, and his growing understanding of Scripture, Augustine came to recognize his desperate need for God's grace. In AD 386, while wrestling with his unwillingness to abandon his former way of life, he encountered the words of Romans 13:13–14 and experienced a decisive turning point in his conversion. He was baptized the following year. Augustine later described his spiritual journey in *Confessions*, recognizing that genuine transformation begins with God's gracious work rather than human achievement. **His story reminds us that understanding Christianity is not the same as coming to Christ.** We must personally respond to the Savior in repentance and faith, trusting the grace that only God can provide (Ephesians 2:8–10).

For additional study, The Good Way Library offers a detailed explanation of the Nicene Creed in our Christian Resource Library.

Learning to Follow Jesus: The Starting Point

The gospel invites us into a living relationship with Jesus Christ, not merely a new set of religious activities. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus has accomplished the work of salvation, and those who trust in Him are called to live in the grace they have received.

Following Jesus therefore begins with faith in His saving work and continues through growing dependence upon Him. Prayer, Scripture reading, worship, and obedience are not ways to earn God's love. They are expressions of the new life He gives to those who belong to Christ.

Grow in Your Relationship With Christ

As you begin following Jesus, remember that your relationship with Him rests upon His grace rather than your ability to maintain a perfect spiritual routine. God does not require you to demonstrate flawless obedience before you can approach Him in prayer or seek His guidance through Scripture.

Instead, learn to turn toward Christ throughout your ordinary day. Bring your concerns before Him, seek wisdom from His Word, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and obey His

commands. As you encounter difficulties or recognize areas of sin, respond with repentance and renewed trust in God's promises.

Spiritual growth is not an attempt to persuade God to accept you. It is learning to live in the grace and new life already given through Jesus Christ.

Respond Honestly to the Gospel

If you are still exploring Christianity, you do not need to pretend that you have reached convictions you do not yet hold. Begin by reading the words of Jesus carefully, considering His claims, and asking God to help you understand the truth.

You may have questions about salvation, forgiveness, faith, or the resurrection. Bring those questions into your study of Scripture and discuss them openly with a trusted Christian or discipler. Honest questions are opportunities to examine what the Bible teaches rather than reasons to avoid learning about Christ.

As you consider the gospel, remember that Jesus calls people to repentance and faith. The appropriate response is not merely to admire His teaching, but to recognize your need for His saving grace and place your trust in Him.

Share the Good News With Humility and Love

The gospel also has an outward purpose. As we come to know Jesus Christ and understand His saving work, we become better prepared to explain His message to others. Jesus commands His followers to make disciples, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that He has commanded (Matthew 28:18–20).

Think of someone who may be curious about Christianity, uncertain about who Jesus is, or struggling with questions about faith. Consider praying for that person and looking for an appropriate opportunity to listen, offer encouragement, or explain what Scripture teaches about Christ.

You do not need to have every answer or deliver a perfect presentation. Begin with the central truths of the gospel: humanity's need for salvation, Jesus' death and resurrection, and God's gracious invitation to repent and believe. Speak truthfully, respect the other person's freedom to respond, and remain willing to continue the conversation.

The goal is not to pressure someone toward a quick decision or measure success by an immediate response. Instead, seek to bear faithful witness to Jesus through both your words and your conduct.

Continue Following Jesus by Grace

The Christian life begins with God's grace and continues through dependence upon that same grace. As you move through the remaining steps of the Good Way Discipleship Course, you will explore how your identity in Christ shapes your understanding of Scripture, prayer, holiness, fellowship, and service.

These lessons are not a ladder you must climb to earn a relationship with God. They are opportunities to understand more fully what Christ has accomplished and how His followers are called to live in response.

The mission of Jesus begins with receiving His saving grace and continues as we grow in faith, learn to obey His commands, and bear witness to His love. We follow Christ not to earn the life He gives, but because He is the source of that life.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

This lesson introduces the gospel itself. Your role is to help the learner understand who Jesus is, why salvation is necessary, what Christ accomplished, and how Scripture calls people to respond. Keep the conversation centered on the biblical passages rather than trying to produce an emotional response or a rapid profession of faith.

Before You Meet | Read John 3:1–21, Romans 3:21–26, and Ephesians 2:1–10. Review the Good Way John 3 commentary, particularly the Walkthrough and Leading sections. Be prepared to explain the Trinity, Christ's death and resurrection, repentance, faith, and grace in ordinary language.

During the Meeting | Begin by asking what the learner currently understands about the gospel. Read John 3 together and follow Nicodemus' questions through the passage. Give the learner time to ask about sin, new birth, the person of Jesus, and salvation. Use the discussion questions below rather than preparing a separate lesson or sermon.

What to Watch For | Religious familiarity is not necessarily saving faith, but hesitation or uncertainty is not proof that someone has rejected Christ. Do not pressure the learner into repeating a conversion prayer or declare their spiritual condition based upon a single conversation. Keep the focus on understanding Scripture, repentance, faith, and Christ's saving work.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain the gospel in their own words and identify any unresolved questions. If they profess faith, encourage an appropriate conversation with a local pastor about baptism and church participation. If they remain uncertain, welcome continued honest study. Before Step Three, ask them to read Romans 6:1–14.

Discuss Together

Read John 3:1–21 again and work through these questions with your discipler. If you are studying alone, consider writing your responses.

1. **The need for new birth:** Why does Jesus tell Nicodemus that he must be born anew, even though Nicodemus is already a respected religious teacher?
2. **The identity of Jesus:** Why does it matter that Jesus Christ is truly God and truly human? How does his identity relate to his ability to save us?

3. **The problem of sin:** What do Romans 3:21–26 and Ephesians 2:1–10 teach about humanity's spiritual condition and our need for God's grace?
4. **The death and resurrection of Christ:** What did Jesus accomplish through the cross, and why is his bodily resurrection essential to the gospel?
5. **Repentance and faith:** How would you explain the difference between knowing facts about Jesus and personally trusting him as Savior and Lord?
6. **Grace and obedience:** Why does Ephesians 2 teach that salvation is not earned by works while also calling believers to live in good works?
7. **Your response:** Where are you currently in your understanding of Jesus Christ? What questions, concerns, or next steps would you like to discuss concerning faith, baptism, or Christian fellowship?

Put It Into Practice

Explain the Gospel in Your Own Words

Read John 3:1–21 and Ephesians 2:1–10 again during the coming week. Then write a brief explanation of the gospel in approximately six sentences.

Try to explain who God is, why humanity needs salvation, who Jesus Christ is, what he accomplished through his death and resurrection, how we respond through repentance and faith, and why salvation is a gift of grace.

If you have a discipler, share your explanation during your next meeting. This is not a test of eloquence. It is an opportunity to clarify your understanding of the good news. You will need this to share it with others later in and after the course.

Bring Your Response Before Christ

Spend time considering what the gospel means for you personally.

If you are already a Christian, thank Jesus for his saving work and consider whether you have been trying to earn God's acceptance through your own efforts. Ask him to deepen your trust in his grace.

If you are exploring Christianity, honestly bring your questions and concerns before God. Read the words of Jesus carefully, and consider what repentance and faith would mean in your own life.

If you are ready to trust Christ, respond to him sincerely rather than waiting for a particular emotional experience or a prescribed formula.

Take a Faithful Next Step

If you profess faith and have not discussed baptism, consider speaking with a trusted pastor or church leader. If you are not connected to a healthy local church, begin exploring where you might participate in Christian fellowship.

Also think of someone who might benefit from hearing about Jesus. Pray for that person and remain open to an appropriate opportunity for a respectful conversation about the gospel.

The purpose is not to secure a particular result, but to begin learning how Christ's love shapes your concern for others.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can work through this lesson independently by reading the assigned Scripture passages, answering the discussion questions, and reflecting on the gospel's meaning. The *For the Discipler* section may also help you recognize which subjects deserve additional attention.

However, questions concerning salvation, baptism, and Christian belief are worth discussing with mature believers. If possible, connect with a faithful local church where you can receive sound biblical teaching and develop Christian relationships.

Studying deeply alone is great, but it does not replace the church or personal Christian fellowship.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your holiness, mercy, justice, and love. I recognize that I cannot save myself through religious knowledge, good works, or personal effort. Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, who became truly human, died for sinners, and rose again. Help me understand the truth of the gospel and respond to you with genuine repentance and faith. Where I am uncertain, give me wisdom and lead me into a clearer understanding of your Word. Where I have trusted in my own righteousness, teach me to depend upon your grace. Through your Holy Spirit, help me know Jesus more deeply, follow his teaching, and live in fellowship with him. Prepare me to love others and bear faithful witness to your saving goodness. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Scripture to Remember

Ephesians 2:8 (WEBU)

> "for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,"

Read verse 9 as well to complete Paul's sentence. Together, these verses remind us that salvation is God's gracious gift rather than an accomplishment we can claim as our own.

As you memorize this passage, remember that Christian discipleship begins with the work of Christ, not with the effort to make ourselves acceptable to God.

Continue Studying With The Good Way Library

The following free resources will help you study the gospel more deeply. Read the biblical passages themselves before turning to the commentary for additional explanation.

- **John 3 Commentary: New Birth and Eternal Life** | Explore Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, the necessity of new birth, God's saving love, and eternal life through faith in the Son. The Walkthrough and Interpretive Options sections are especially useful for understanding the language of water and Spirit.
- **Romans 3 Commentary: God's Righteousness Revealed** | Study humanity's universal need for salvation, justification through faith, and God's righteousness revealed through the atoning work of Jesus Christ.
- **Ephesians 2 Commentary: Grace, Peace, and One New Humanity** | Examine how God brings spiritually dead sinners to life through Christ, saves them by grace through faith, and prepares them for faithful living.
- **Nicene Creed Explained: Full Text, History, Trinity, and Scripture** | Learn how historic Christians confessed the Trinity, the full deity of Jesus Christ, his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and the Holy Spirit. This resource provides helpful theological background for understanding who our Savior is.

Before the Next Step

The gospel of Jesus Christ establishes everything that follows in Christian discipleship.

We have learned that humanity needs more than improved morality or additional religious knowledge. We need the grace of God, the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the new birth brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the eternal Son of God who became truly human, died for our sins, and rose bodily from the dead. He calls us to repent and believe in him, receiving salvation by grace rather than earning it through our own works.

If you have not yet trusted Christ, take his invitation seriously and continue examining the Scriptures. If you already belong to him, remember that your new life rests upon what he has accomplished, not upon the success of your discipleship efforts. If you truly belong to him, you already have the King of Kings and the creator of the universe standing both behind and in front of you. What could ever truly stand against you?

Next Reading: Romans 6:1–14

In this passage, Paul explains that those who belong to Christ have been united with him in his death and resurrection. They are called to understand what is already true of them in Christ and to live accordingly.

Step Three: Alive in Christ will explore forgiveness, assurance of salvation, adoption into God's family, union with Christ, and the new identity believers receive through his grace.

Before we can grow in Christian maturity, we must understand the life Christ has already given us. That is where our next step begins.

Step 3: Alive in Christ

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 3 of 12

Identity, Assurance, Forgiveness, and Hope

Central Truth: Believers are united to the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. They do not earn their new identity through spiritual effort. By God's grace, they learn to trust what Christ has accomplished, live by the Holy Spirit, and grow into the life they have received. Notice that last word: *received*. It already happened. If you are saved, the life of Christ is already in you!

Have you ever felt that you were doing well as a Christian one week and failing terribly the next? Perhaps you prayed regularly, read your Bible, and resisted temptation for several days. Then you lost your patience, neglected prayer, or returned to an old habit. Suddenly, you wondered whether God was disappointed in you or whether you were really changing at all.

Many Christians experience this struggle. We sometimes begin measuring our relationship with God by our recent behavior. When we do well, we feel accepted. When we fail, we feel distant. Without realizing it, we begin living as though Christ's finished work must be supplemented by our own success.

But Scripture teaches us to begin somewhere different.

In Step Two, we learned that salvation comes through God's grace, received by faith in Jesus Christ. We considered why we need a Savior, how Jesus died for sinners and rose bodily from the grave, and why we must respond to him with repentance and faith.

Now we will consider what becomes true of a person who genuinely belongs to Christ.

The New Testament describes believers as forgiven, justified, adopted into God's family, given the Holy Spirit, and united with the risen Jesus. These are not rewards waiting at the end of successful discipleship. They are gifts of God's grace, received through faith in Christ.

The Christian life is not an effort to become accepted by God through good behavior. It is learning to live faithfully because we have been received through Jesus Christ.

This does not mean Christians stop struggling with sin or no longer need to repent. It means that our starting point has changed. Instead of asking only how we can become better people, we begin by asking what Jesus has already accomplished and how we can live in response to him.

Begin With Scripture

Before continuing, open your Bible and read the following passages. Begin with the principal reading, then read both companion passages. Read Scripture itself before consulting the explanations in this lesson or any commentary.

Principal Reading: Romans 6:1–14

Paul explains how believers share in Christ's death and resurrection, why sin no longer has rightful dominion over them, and how this new reality changes their everyday choices.

Notice the order of Paul's argument. He first explains what has happened through Christ. Only afterward does he instruct believers how to respond.

Companion Reading One: Romans 8:1–17

This passage develops the meaning of new life in Christ. It explains freedom from condemnation, the indwelling Holy Spirit, adoption into God's family, and the believer's future inheritance.

Companion Reading Two: 1 John 1:5–2:2

Read through the end of chapter one and continue into 1 John 2:1–2. John explains how Christians acknowledge their sins truthfully, receive forgiveness, and trust Jesus Christ as their righteous Counselor and atoning sacrifice.

These passages belong together. Romans 6 explains our new relationship to sin, Romans 8 explains our life in the Spirit, and 1 John explains how ongoing confession and forgiveness fit within genuine fellowship with God.

If you are reading through the Gospel of John alongside this course, continue at a comfortable pace. John's Gospel will deepen your understanding of who Jesus is and what it means to receive life through him.

Main Teaching: What It Means to Be Alive in Christ

Romans 6:1–4 | Grace Changes Our Relationship With Sin

Romans 6 begins with a question that may surprise us.

In the previous chapter, Paul explained that God's grace is greater than the sin that entered the world through Adam. Jesus Christ has accomplished what sinful humanity could never accomplish for itself. Through him, God's grace triumphs over sin and death.

But someone might misunderstand that teaching. If grace becomes greater where sin increases, why not continue sinning so that God's grace can be displayed even more?

Paul firmly rejects that conclusion in Romans 6:1–2.

His explanation is important. He does not begin by telling Christians to become more disciplined or try harder. Instead, he reminds them that something decisive has already happened to those who belong to Christ.

They have died to sin.

That statement does not mean believers are physically dead, have lost their ability to make sinful choices, or have reached moral perfection. Paul means that their former relationship to sin has fundamentally changed.

Before salvation, sin ruled over them. They stood guilty before God and could not free themselves from sin's dominion. Through Jesus Christ, that former rule has been broken.

Paul then connects this new reality with baptism in verses 3–4. Baptism identifies Christians with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. It directs our attention away from the old life under sin and toward the new life found in the risen Lord.

Historic Christian traditions differ in how they explain baptism's relationship to regeneration and the reception of grace. Yet Paul's central emphasis is unmistakable: belonging to Christ involves a decisive change of identity and allegiance that should lead to a changed life.

If you have professed faith in Jesus but have not been baptized, speak with a faithful local church about baptism. We will explore this subject more fully in Step Ten.

Grace does not give Christians permission to remain under sin's rule. Grace brings them into a new relationship with Jesus Christ, in which genuine holiness becomes possible.

Romans 6:5–7 | Your Old Identity No Longer Rules You

Paul continues by explaining that believers have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.

This teaching is often called *union with Christ*.

Union with Christ means that believers belong to Jesus so completely that his saving death and resurrection establish their new standing before God and determine the direction of their lives.

Jesus truly died on the cross for sinners and truly rose bodily from the grave. These are historical saving acts, not merely symbols of personal improvement. When someone comes to Christ in genuine faith, that person receives the saving benefits of what Jesus has accomplished.

Paul explains in verse 6 that the believer's former self was crucified with Christ so that sin would no longer hold the same power of enslavement.

The expression *old man* refers to who we were under sin's dominion. Paul is not teaching that our physical bodies are evil or that our personalities must disappear. He is describing the end of our former identity under sin's mastery.

This matters because Christians sometimes think about sin as though they are helplessly bound to obey it.

Someone who has struggled for years with anger, dishonesty, bitterness, or another destructive pattern may begin to believe that the behavior is simply who they are and that genuine change is impossible.

Romans 6 challenges that assumption for those who belong to Christ.

Their history is real, their temptations may remain powerful, and their struggles should not be minimized. Nevertheless, their past no longer determines their deepest identity. Jesus Christ has a greater claim upon them.

This does not promise immediate victory over every sinful habit. Some struggles require sustained repentance, wise boundaries, patient support, and appropriate pastoral or professional care.

But believers are no longer condemned to treat sin as their rightful master. Through the Holy Spirit, God enables them to resist sin and increasingly practice righteousness.

The old life has lost its authority, even while the struggle against old desires continues.

Romans 6:8–11 | Christ's Resurrection Defines Your New Life

Paul now directs our attention from the believer's death with Christ to Jesus' resurrection.

Christ has risen and will never die again. Death no longer rules over him. His resurrection is not a temporary escape from the grave but a permanent victory over death.

Our new life depends entirely upon this living Savior.

Because Jesus lives, those who belong to him have new spiritual life now and the promise of bodily resurrection in the future. Christian hope is not merely that the soul survives death. God promises to raise and glorify his people through the risen Christ.

Paul then gives this instruction in Romans 6:11:

> Thus consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word *consider* is important. Paul tells believers to recognize and live according to what God has made true of them in Christ.

He does not tell them to imagine that they are perfect. Nor does he suggest that believing something strongly enough will automatically eliminate temptation.

Instead, he calls them to understand the reality of their relationship with Jesus.

- **When temptation appears,** remember that sin no longer has rightful ownership over you.
- **When guilt becomes overwhelming,** remember that Christ has provided forgiveness through his sacrifice.
- **When obedience seems difficult,** remember that your risen Lord is faithful and that his Spirit works within his people.
- **When spiritual growth feels slow,** remember that God has begun a work that reaches beyond your present circumstances.

This is more than positive thinking. It is faith responding to God's revealed truth.

Romans 6:12–14 | Live According to What Christ Has Done

Only after explaining union with Christ does Paul give his practical commands.

He instructs believers not to allow sin to reign in their mortal bodies. He also tells them not to offer themselves to sinful purposes but to present themselves to God as people who have been brought from death into life.

Notice the movement of his teaching:

1. **Christ has acted.** His death and resurrection have broken sin's dominion over those who belong to him.
2. **Believers are called to recognize what is true.** They are alive to God in Christ Jesus.
3. **Believers must respond through obedience.** They are to refuse sin's rule and offer themselves to God for righteous purposes.

This is the order of grace-shaped discipleship.

Imagine that you are becoming angry with someone. Your old response may be to speak harshly, seek revenge, or refuse to listen.

Romans 6 does not instruct you merely to repeat a religious phrase and hope the anger disappears. Instead, it calls you to remember whose you are.

You belong to Jesus Christ. You can turn to him in prayer, refuse to let anger govern your speech, and choose a truthful and loving response. Do note, however, that you may need to apologize, seek counsel, or establish appropriate boundaries. Such obedience can be difficult, but it becomes possible through the grace of God.

You are not trying to make yourself acceptable to God by succeeding in that moment. You are responding to the Lord who has already shown grace to you.

Paul concludes verse 14 by explaining that sin will not have dominion over believers because they are under grace rather than under law.

This does not mean God's moral instructions have become irrelevant. It means believers no longer stand under the law's condemning verdict as their means of seeking righteousness. They belong to Christ and live under God's saving and transforming grace.

Christian obedience is active and necessary, but it follows salvation rather than purchasing it.

The remainder of Romans 6 continues this argument. Paul contrasts slavery to sin with service to righteousness and concludes by describing eternal life as God's free gift in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:15–23).

What Is True in Christ

Romans 6 teaches that believers have a new relationship to sin and to God. Other New Testament passages help us understand the blessings included in salvation.

These promises belong to those who genuinely trust in Jesus Christ. If you are still exploring Christianity or are uncertain about your faith, you do not need to claim them as personal experiences before coming to Christ. Continue considering the gospel and his invitation to repentance and faith.

Forgiven and Justified Before God

Every human being has sinned against God. Forgiveness does not mean that sin is unimportant or that God simply overlooks evil.

Jesus Christ bore our sins through his sacrificial death. Because of his saving work, those who trust him receive genuine forgiveness. Ephesians 1:7 connects redemption and forgiveness directly with Christ's blood and the riches of God's grace.

Scripture also teaches *justification*. To be justified means to be declared righteous before God on the basis of Jesus Christ and his saving work, received through faith.

We stand guilty because of our sins, but God graciously grants a righteous standing to those who belong to Christ.

Romans 8 begins by declaring that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

That confidence does not come from the claim that Christians never do wrong. It comes from the fact that Jesus has dealt with their guilt.

- **Forgiveness** | God has dealt with our sins through Jesus Christ. We do not need to earn forgiveness through self-punishment or religious achievement.
- **Justification** | God declares believers righteous through faith in Christ. Their acceptance rests upon the Savior's work rather than their own moral performance.

These truths change how we respond to accusation and failure. We can acknowledge our sins honestly without treating every failure as the loss of God's acceptance.

Adopted Into God's Family

Salvation is not merely the cancellation of a debt. God also welcomes believers into his family.

Ephesians 1:3–6 describes adoption through Jesus Christ as part of God's gracious saving purpose. Romans 8:14–17 explains that the Holy Spirit leads God's children and enables them to approach God as their Father.

The God who created heaven and earth receives believers as his children through Jesus Christ. We are not merely tolerated servants living at a distance from him.

We are welcomed into his household. Think about that! How amazing that is!

Adoption does not mean that believers become divine or share God's nature. It means that through Christ they receive a genuine family relationship with God, together with the promise of an eternal inheritance.

You can therefore come before your heavenly Father with reverence and trust.

When you are afraid, you can pray to him. When you need wisdom, you can ask him. If you have sinned, you can return to him honestly. Your heavenly Father does not measure your worth by how impressive your prayers sound or how successful your previous week has been.

He receives his children through his Son.

Indwelt and Helped by the Holy Spirit

God has not given believers forgiveness and then left them to manage the Christian life alone.

Romans 8 teaches that the Holy Spirit dwells in those who belong to Christ. Ephesians 1:13–14 describes the Spirit as God's seal and pledge of the inheritance promised to believers.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal feeling or a force that Christians learn to control. He is God, the third person of the Holy Trinity, working in perfect unity with the Father and the Son.

He gives life, helps believers resist sin, supports them in weakness, and forms Christlike character. His presence confirms that salvation is not limited to forgiveness for the past. God is presently at work in his people, preparing them for their future inheritance.

You may not always feel the Spirit's work emotionally. Scripture does not teach that every genuine believer must experience continual spiritual excitement.

His work is often evident in quieter ways: growing love for Christ, conviction of sin, willingness to obey Scripture, prayer in weakness, patient endurance, and increasing concern for others.

These things are not substitutes for faith in Christ. They are ways God's grace becomes visible in a believer's life.

Assurance That Rests on Jesus

One of the most important questions a Christian can ask is whether they can have confidence that they belong to Jesus.

Some believers struggle constantly with uncertainty. They wonder whether their faith is strong enough, whether their repentance was sincere enough, or whether a recent failure has separated them from God.

Others may claim certainty about salvation while showing little concern for repentance, truth, or obedience.

Scripture addresses both dangers.

Read John 10:27–30. Jesus describes himself as the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep, gives them eternal life, and protects them. The focus is on the faithfulness and power of Jesus.

Romans 8:31–39 similarly directs believers toward God's saving purpose, Christ's death and resurrection, and his continuing intercession.

Our confidence is not that we have become incapable of failing. Our confidence is in the Savior who is able to save.

Christian assurance is not meant to rest on how intensely we can maintain a feeling of certainty. It rests on the person and promises of Jesus Christ.

When your feelings change, his completed sacrifice has not changed. When you experience weakness, his resurrection has not been undone. This gives genuine believers a substantial reason for hope.

Assurance and honest self-examination belong together. In 1 John 5:11–13, John explains that eternal life is found in God's Son and that believers may know they have eternal life. Throughout the same letter, he connects genuine fellowship with God to belief in Jesus, love for other Christians, truthful confession, and obedience.

These are not additional payments required to purchase salvation. They are consistent expressions of a life transformed by grace.

A person who deliberately rejects Christ, refuses repentance, and embraces sin without concern should not use the promises of assurance as permission to continue. But a struggling believer who grieves over sin, desires to follow Jesus, and returns to him in repentance should not conclude that every failure proves their faith was false.

There is a difference between struggling against sin and making peace with its rule.

A Note on Christian Differences: Historic Christian traditions differ in how they explain perseverance in salvation. Reformed Christians emphasize God's preservation of all who are genuinely saved. Wesleyan and Arminian traditions emphasize continuing faith and warn of the possibility of falling away. These differences should not obscure the shared biblical responsibilities to trust Christ, continue in faith, repent of sin, and take God's promises and warnings seriously.

This lesson does not require you to settle every disagreement about perseverance. Instead, look to Christ for salvation, trust his promises, continue in his Word, and remain among his people.

Forgiveness When You Sin Again

Every Christian continues to face temptation and moral weakness. This raises an important question: what should someone do when they sin after coming to Christ?

Some respond by denying or minimizing what happened. Others become trapped in shame, believing that God must now be persuaded to accept them again.

Neither response reflects the fullness of biblical teaching.

Read 1 John 1:5–10. John teaches that God is holy and truthful. Genuine fellowship with him cannot be built upon a deliberate refusal to acknowledge sin. He also makes clear that claiming to be without sin is self-deception.

In 1 John 1:9, we read:

> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Confession means honestly acknowledging our sins before God. We do not need elaborate language or an attempt to make ourselves sufficiently miserable. We need truthfulness, repentance, and trust in God's mercy.

John continues into 1 John 2:1–2 by explaining that his desire is for believers not to sin, while directing those who do sin toward Jesus Christ, the righteous Counselor and atoning sacrifice.

Notice how these truths fit together. God does not excuse sin. Christians are instructed not to sin. When they do sin, their hope remains in Jesus Christ.

This protects us from both despair and carelessness.

Imagine that you speak harshly to a family member. You realize that your words were wrong and that you have harmed someone you love.

A faithful response begins by turning toward Christ. You acknowledge your sin before God and ask for forgiveness and help. Where it is safe and appropriate, you admit what you did to the person you harmed and seek to make things right.

Then you continue following Jesus.

You do not need to remain trapped in shame as though shame itself were evidence of repentance. Genuine repentance should increasingly produce truthfulness, humility, wisdom, and changed conduct.

Sometimes significant wrongdoing requires more than a simple apology. It may involve restitution, church accountability, protective boundaries, or qualified professional assistance. Forgiveness does not erase responsibilities or require unsafe reconciliation.

But in every circumstance, Christ remains the source of our hope.

Confession brings sin into God's light. Repentance turns us away from it. Faith returns our attention to Jesus Christ.

Already Given, Growing Now, and Still to Come

We must understand three different aspects of salvation to avoid confusion.

Some blessings have already been given to those who belong to Christ. Others are presently being worked out through the Holy Spirit. Still others await the return of Jesus and the resurrection of the body.

Already Given in Christ	Growing Now by the Spirit	Still to Come
Believers are united with Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–11).	Believers actively resist sin and present themselves to God (Romans 6:12–14).	Believers will share fully in bodily resurrection life (Romans 8:11).
Believers have received forgiveness, justification, and adoption (Ephesians 1:5–7; Romans 8:1, 15).	God forms holiness, repentance, love, and obedience in his children (Romans 8:12–14).	God's children will receive their inheritance in its fullness (Romans 8:17–25).
The Holy Spirit has been given as God's seal and pledge (Ephesians 1:13–14).	The Spirit helps believers in weakness and renews their lives (Romans 8:9–16, 26–27).	God's people will be glorified with Christ, free from sin and death (Romans 8:29–30; Colossians 3:4).

This distinction is essential.

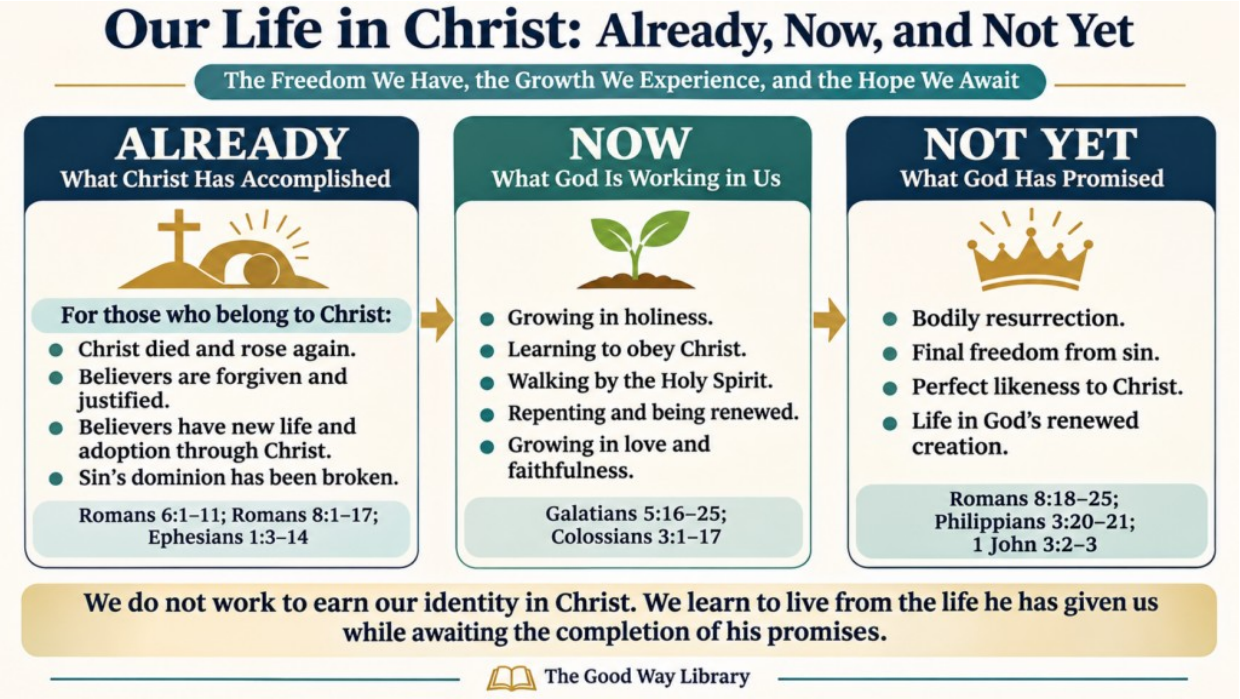
You do not need to become more justified through a successful week of Christian living. Your righteous standing before God is grounded in Jesus Christ. At the same time, you are not already perfectly mature. God is genuinely working to shape your thoughts, desires, conduct, and relationships.

And you have not yet received everything God has promised. Christians still experience suffering, physical death, and the struggle against sin while awaiting the resurrection.

Colossians 3:1–4 connects these realities. Believers have been raised with Christ in their new spiritual life, their lives are presently hidden with him, and their future glory will be revealed when he appears.

We begin from what Christ has accomplished, walk with him in the present, and look forward to what he will complete.

This gives us both humility and hope. We need not pretend that we have arrived, but we also need not live as though Christ has accomplished nothing until we become better people.



Christians Before Us: Our Hope Rests in the True Christ

Christians across the centuries have defended the identity of Jesus Christ because salvation depends upon who he truly is. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, associated with the Council of Constantinople in AD 381, confesses the Son's full deity.

The Athanasian Creed speaks even more forcefully, declaring that whoever desires to be saved must hold to the true Christian faith, especially its confession of the Trinity and of Jesus Christ as both God and man. Its solemn warning emphasizes that these are not minor theological

details, but foundational truths about the God who saves us and the Savior in whom we place our faith.

For more historical background, see The Good Way Library's Nicene Creed and our Athanasian Creed resources.

In the seventeenth century, **John Bunyan (1628–1688)** struggled deeply with questions about sin, forgiveness, and whether he truly belonged to Jesus Christ. Before becoming a well-known Christian preacher and the author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Bunyan experienced prolonged periods of spiritual uncertainty and fear. In his autobiographical work, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, he described his struggles with guilt and his gradual growth in understanding the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. Bunyan learned that assurance could not safely rest upon changing emotions, personal accomplishments, or an imagined ability to become completely free from temptation. Instead, he increasingly directed his attention to the promises of God and the sufficiency of Christ. **His experience reminds us that the foundation of our salvation is not the strength of our feelings but the finished work of Jesus Christ.** Christians should examine themselves honestly, confess their sins, and continue trusting the Savior who forgives and restores those who belong to him (Romans 8:1; 1 John 1:9).

Learning to Follow Jesus In Dependence

Knowing our identity in Christ should change the way we approach ordinary life.

The goal is not simply to understand Christian doctrine well enough to explain it. We want to know Jesus personally, trust him, and increasingly live according to his teaching.

Listen to Christ Through His Word

In John 8:31–32, Jesus instructs those who have believed him to remain in his Word. Continuing in his teaching is a mark of genuine discipleship.

This is a direct instruction from Jesus.

Romans 6:11–13 gives the apostle Paul's Spirit-inspired application of the gospel: consider yourself alive to God, refuse sin's rule, and offer yourself to God for righteous purposes. Likewise, the instruction to confess sin in 1 John 1 comes through apostolic teaching.

These instructions belong together under the authority of Scripture. Jesus commands his disciples to follow and remain in his teaching, and his apostles explain what that obedience means in light of his saving work.

Listening to God begins with receiving Scripture as his authoritative Word. The sixty-six canonical books of the Old and New Testaments provide the written standard by which Christian teaching and spiritual claims are tested.

We should read carefully, consider each passage in its context, pray for understanding, and seek wise Christian counsel where necessary.

The Holy Spirit helps believers understand and respond to Scripture. But not every private thought, feeling, or impression is a direct message from God. Our experiences must be examined in light of Scripture rather than given equal authority with it.

Learn to Depend on Jesus in Everyday Life

You can begin living consciously with Jesus in the circumstances you are already facing.

When you feel anxious: Bring your concerns to your heavenly Father in prayer. Remember that your relationship with him rests upon Christ's grace, not upon your ability to control every circumstance.

When temptation comes: Remember that sin no longer has rightful rule over you. Ask the Lord for help, recall what Scripture teaches, and choose a wise and obedient response.

When you make a mistake: Confess it honestly rather than hide from God. Receive his mercy through Christ and seek to repair harm where appropriate.

When you feel spiritually weak: Remember that God's faithfulness is not measured by your emotional strength. Continue receiving his Word, praying, and participating in the fellowship of his people.

When you experience progress: Give thanks to God rather than treating your improvement as evidence of personal superiority. The Holy Spirit is the source of genuine spiritual growth.

These are not techniques that guarantee a particular feeling. They are simple ways of turning toward the living Christ in faith.

You are not trying to persuade Jesus to come near through your religious effort. You are learning to live in dependence upon the Savior who has brought his people near to God and given them his Spirit.

Let Grace Become Encouragement for Others

Understanding our new life in Christ should also shape the way we treat other people.

You may know another Christian who feels defeated by repeated failure, burdened by guilt, or afraid that God has abandoned them. You can offer patient encouragement.

Perhaps you could read a portion of Romans 8 together, listen to their concerns, or remind them that forgiveness is grounded in Jesus Christ rather than personal spiritual performance.

Do not claim to know another person's heart or promise assurance apart from genuine faith in Christ. Instead, point them toward the trustworthy Savior revealed in Scripture.

You may also encourage someone through prayer, practical kindness, or helping them connect with a healthy Christian congregation.

We do not need to wait until the final lesson of this course to begin loving others. As we receive the grace of Christ, we become increasingly able to share his truth and compassion.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read Romans 6:1–14, Romans 8:1–17, and 1 John 1:5–2:2. Prepare to explain the difference between what Christ has accomplished, what the Spirit is forming now, and what awaits resurrection. Review the Good Way Romans 6 commentary, particularly its Walkthrough and Leading sections. Pray for wisdom to discuss assurance without minimizing sin or creating unnecessary fear.

During the Meeting | Read Romans 6 together before opening the commentary. Follow Paul's argument in order: union with Christ first, then the commands to consider, resist, and present oneself to God. Use the three-column table to distinguish completed salvation, present growth, and future glory. Invite the learner to explain forgiveness, adoption, and assurance in ordinary language. Allow time for questions and prayer.

What to Watch For | Some learners believe God's acceptance depends on their recent behavior. Others may assume grace makes repentance unnecessary. Address both concerns biblically and gently. Do not require intimate confessions, promise sinless perfection, or pronounce certainty about another person's salvation. Persistent anxiety, serious distress, abuse, or addiction may require appropriate pastoral and qualified professional support.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain why obedience follows grace rather than earns it. Confirm that they understand how confession differs from self-condemnation and why assurance rests in Christ. If substantial questions remain, revisit the passages without pressure. Prepare to explore daily dependence upon Jesus in Step Four.

Discuss Together

Read Romans 6:1–14 again before discussing these questions. If you are studying with a discipler, answer them together. You do not need to complete every question in one meeting.

1. **What Christ Has Accomplished:** According to Romans 6:1–11, what has happened to believers through Jesus' death and resurrection? Why does Paul explain these truths before giving commands?
2. **Freedom From Sin:** What does it mean to be freed from sin's dominion? How is this different from claiming that Christians will never sin again?
3. **The Foundation of Assurance:** According to Romans 8, what has God done that gives believers confidence when they experience guilt, fear, or uncertainty?
4. **Confession and Forgiveness:** How does 1 John 1:5–2:2 explain both the seriousness of sin and the continuing sufficiency of Jesus Christ?
5. **Grace and Acceptance:** What would you say to a Christian who believes God only accepts them after a particularly good week of prayer, Bible reading, or obedience?

6. **Assurance and Self-Examination:** How can Christians trust Christ's promises while continuing to examine their lives honestly? What distinguishes genuine assurance from using grace as an excuse to avoid repentance?

Put It Into Practice

These responses are opportunities to receive God's Word and live according to it. They are not measurements of your spiritual worth.

Remember What Is True in Christ

Read Romans 6:1–14, Romans 8:1–17, and Colossians 3:1–4 again during the coming week. Using the three-column table from this lesson, write one truth already given to believers in Christ, one area where the Holy Spirit is presently forming obedience, and one promise that awaits future fulfillment.

Consider how these truths shape your understanding of your identity in Christ. When your feelings, circumstances, or struggles seem to contradict God's promises, return to Scripture and remind yourself of what He has declared to be true.

If you have a discipler, discuss your observations together and consider how these biblical truths can strengthen your daily walk with Christ.

Bring Your Struggles Honestly Before God

Spend time considering whether you tend toward unnecessary self-condemnation or careless assumptions about God's grace. Do you sometimes question your standing before God because of your struggles? Or do you occasionally excuse sinful behavior because you know that salvation is a gift?

Bring these concerns honestly before God in prayer. Ask Him to strengthen your confidence in Christ while also teaching you to walk in obedience. If you need to confess wrongdoing or seek to repair harm, consider a truthful and safe response. Determine to pray to God every day for these concerns until your next discipleship meeting.

You may discuss these matters with a trusted Christian or your discipler, but you are not required to disclose private details to complete this lesson. The goal is to grow in truth, repentance, and dependence upon Christ.

Encourage Another Person With Gospel Hope

Think of someone who may be discouraged, fearful, struggling with guilt, or spiritually weary. Spend time praying for that person and asking God to help you demonstrate Christ's love through your words and actions.

If appropriate, offer to read part of Romans 8 or do Romans Road together, share a biblical promise, or simply listen with patience and compassion. Consider how the truths you have

studied about grace, assurance, and new life in Christ might encourage someone facing difficulties.

The purpose is not to produce a particular response or demonstrate your own spiritual maturity. It is to begin putting God's grace into practice by loving others and pointing them toward the hope found in Jesus Christ.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can complete this lesson meaningfully without a discipler. Read the assigned passages, write your answers to the discussion questions privately, and work through the three-column exercise. Consider sharing what you learn with a trustworthy Christian when the opportunity arises.

If questions about salvation or assurance continue troubling you, consider speaking with a faithful pastor or mature Christian. You do not need to manufacture an emotional experience or force yourself into certainty.

Continue seeking healthy Christian fellowship. God's gift of new life is personal, but he also calls his people to worship, learn, pray, and grow together.

Suggested Prayer

Father in heaven,

Thank you for the grace you have shown through your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you that salvation does not depend upon my ability to make myself righteous, but upon what Jesus has accomplished through his death and resurrection.

Teach me to understand what it means to be alive in Christ. Help me trust your promises rather than measure your love by my changing feelings or my recent successes and failures. When I struggle, remind me of your faithfulness. When I sin, lead me to honest repentance and renewed trust in your mercy.

Holy Spirit, help me resist what dishonors God and increasingly live according to the new life you have given. Where I have failed, lead me to repentance without despair. Where I have become careless, give me humility and a renewed desire to obey.

Help me know Jesus more deeply, trust him in ordinary circumstances, and encourage others with the hope of his gospel. Keep my heart fixed on Christ as I grow, and strengthen my hope in the resurrection and the life to come.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture to Remember

Romans 6:11 (WEBU)

> Thus consider yourselves also to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Try to remember this verse throughout the week. Its purpose is not to make you ignore temptation or pretend that you have become perfect. It reminds you that your relationship with sin and with God has changed through Jesus Christ.

As you learn the verse, consider the meaning of each part. Christ has broken sin's dominion, and you are called to live before God as someone who belongs to the risen Lord.

Continue Studying With Good Way

The following resources will help you study these biblical teachings in greater depth. Begin with Scripture itself, then use these commentaries to clarify the text and consider its application.

1. **Romans 6 Commentary: Dead to Sin, Alive to God** | Begin here for a deeper explanation of union with Christ, baptism, freedom from sin's rule, and the relationship between grace and obedience. The Walkthrough of verses 1–14 is especially useful for understanding this lesson's central passage.
2. **Romans 8 Commentary: Life in the Spirit** | Explore God's promises concerning freedom from condemnation, the indwelling Holy Spirit, adoption, assurance, and future resurrection. Pay special attention to verses 1–17 and the later discussion of Christ's intercession and God's enduring love.
3. **Ephesians 1 Commentary: Chosen, Sealed, and Exalted** | Study the spiritual blessings God gives through Christ, including redemption, forgiveness, adoption, and the Holy Spirit's seal. This chapter provides a broader understanding of the believer's identity within God's saving purpose.
4. **1 John 1 Commentary: Fellowship in the Light** | Learn how fellowship with God involves truthfulness, repentance, and reliance upon the cleansing blood of Jesus. This commentary is especially helpful for understanding why confession remains part of Christian life without becoming an effort to earn salvation again.

The Good Way Library's commentaries are intended to serve your study of Scripture, not replace it. After reading an explanation, return to the biblical passage and consider how its teaching directs you toward Jesus Christ.

Before the Next Step

You have now considered one of the most important foundations of Christian discipleship. Those who belong to Jesus are not trying to create a new spiritual identity through religious effort. Christ has already acted for them through his death and resurrection.

They are forgiven, welcomed into God's family, and given the Holy Spirit. They are also called to continue growing, confessing sin, resisting temptation, and living faithfully before God.

There is much still to learn, and none of us has reached final perfection. But the Christian life begins with God's grace, continues through his grace, and looks forward to the glory he has promised.

Before Step Four, read John 15:1–17.

In that passage, Jesus describes himself as the true vine and his followers as the branches. We have learned what it means to have life in Christ. Our next question is how we continue living in conscious dependence upon him.

How do we remain close to Jesus during ordinary days? How do prayer, Scripture, obedience, and the Holy Spirit's work belong together? What does it mean to abide in Christ when we feel weak, distracted, or spiritually distant?

These questions lead us into **Step Four: Abide in Me**.

The Christian life is not merely a life changed by something Jesus accomplished in the past. It is also a life lived today in fellowship with the risen Savior. And because you belong to him, you are invited to keep walking with him.

Step 4: "Abide in Me"

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 4 of 12

Living With the Present Christ

Central Truth: Christian fruitfulness does not begin with self-effort. Jesus gives his people life, and as they remain in him, his Word and Spirit shape their faith, obedience, and love.

Learning to Live With Jesus

A branch cannot produce grapes by trying harder. It bears fruit because it belongs to a living vine. Jesus uses this familiar picture to explain something essential about following him: we cannot create spiritual life or lasting fruit apart from him.

Many Christians know that salvation comes by grace, yet they approach spiritual growth as though everything now depends on their determination. They want to pray more faithfully, resist temptation, understand Scripture, and love others. Those desires are good, but they can become discouraging when we treat ourselves as the source of the strength we need.

In Step Three, we considered what God has already accomplished for those who belong to Christ. Now we will learn what it means to **abide in Christ**: to continue trusting him, receiving his Word, depending on his Spirit, and living in his love throughout ordinary life. Jesus calls us into real obedience, but he never asks us to become spiritually self-sufficient.

Begin With Scripture

Principal reading: John 15:1-17. Read the entire passage before studying the explanation below. Notice what Jesus says about the vine, the branches, the Father's care, his words, love, commandments, joy, and fruit. Pay particular attention to what he gives or promises before considering what he commands.

Core companion readings: Open both of these passages during this step, preferably before your meeting.

- **John 14:15-27:** Jesus promises the Holy Spirit to his troubled disciples. This explains how Christ continues to be present with his people after his departure from ordinary human sight.
- **Colossians 2:6-10:** Paul tells believers to continue walking in the Christ they received. This guards us against replacing Christ with religious methods or imagined higher levels of spirituality.

If you are reading the Gospel of John throughout the course, spend extra time in chapters 13-17. They show how Jesus prepares his disciples for his death, resurrection, and continuing work through the Holy Spirit.

Main Teaching: Remaining in the True Vine

Jesus Prepares His Disciples (John 13-15)

John 15 belongs to Jesus' final extended teaching before his arrest. In John 13, he washes his disciples' feet, speaks of betrayal, and commands them to love one another. In John 14, he comforts their troubled hearts and promises another Counselor, the Holy Spirit. Then he describes their continuing relationship with him through the picture of a vine and its branches.

The disciples are about to face the cross and the apparent loss of their Teacher. Jesus does not tell them to continue without him. He teaches them how their life and mission will depend upon him even after his resurrection and ascension. The eternal Son, truly God and truly human, will give his life for sinners, rise bodily from the dead, and send the Spirit to dwell with his people.

This setting helps us read the passage correctly. Abiding is not a detached method for feeling peaceful. It describes the ongoing relationship of Jesus' disciples with their crucified and risen Lord.

The Father Tends the Vine (John 15:1-3)

Jesus identifies himself as the true vine and his Father as the one who tends it. The Old Testament had already pictured Israel as God's vine or vineyard (Psalm 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7). Those passages describe God's care for his people and his rightful expectation of fruit. By calling himself the true vine, Jesus places himself at the center of the fruitful people God is gathering.

The Father removes branches that do not bear fruit and prunes fruitful branches so they bear more. Pruning pictures purposeful care, including the ways God's truth exposes sin and redirects our lives. Yet we must not assume that every illness, disappointment, or painful event is a specific punishment or pruning we can confidently explain.

Jesus also tells his disciples that his spoken word has already made them clean. Before commanding them to remain in him, he points to what they have received. This is the pattern of grace: the Lord provides life and cleansing, then calls his people to live accordingly.

The Branch Depends on Christ (John 15:4-8)

A branch has no independent supply of life. It bears fruit only while it remains in the vine. In the same way, a Christian does not produce Christlike love, holiness, or faithful witness through self-reliance. All genuine spiritual fruit depends upon the life received from Jesus.

To abide in Christ is to continue in trusting fellowship with him. It means receiving his teaching, relying upon his grace, and responding to him in faith and obedience. It is neither a secret spiritual technique nor an excuse to avoid effort. We really do pray, repent, serve, make decisions, and resist sin. Yet we do these things as people who need the Lord, not as people trying to become independent of him.

Jesus connects abiding with having his words remain in us. His teaching shapes what we believe, desire, pray for, and do. In that setting, his promise about asking in prayer is not permission to demand any outcome. Prayer grows increasingly consistent with his words and the Father's glory as we learn to follow him.

Fruit includes obedience, Christlike character, love, and faithful witness. It cannot be reduced to a busy church calendar or impressive ministry numbers. The Father's glory, rather than our spiritual reputation, is the purpose of fruitful discipleship.

Jesus Gives a Serious Warning (John 15:6)

Jesus warns that a branch which does not remain in him withers and faces judgment. We should take this warning seriously rather than treat an outward connection to Christian people or activities as proof of genuine faith. Christ calls people to himself, not merely to the appearance of discipleship.

Christians differ over how this warning relates to the perseverance of genuine believers. Some understand fruitless branches as those who were outwardly associated with Christ without possessing saving faith. Others understand the passage as a warning against turning away from a saving relationship. These differences deserve careful study of the whole New Testament and an openness to different interpretations.

Nevertheless, the warning does not teach that a believer is cast away after a difficult week, a missed prayer, or a season with little spiritual feeling. Jesus calls his followers to enduring faith, not to a performance that earns salvation. If you are still considering whether you belong to Christ, the right response is not to pretend certainty, but to come to him in repentance and faith. Then, to simply trust that he holds you, as he promised.

Remain in His Love (John 15:9-11)

Jesus moves from the vine to the love shared between the Father and the Son. He tells the disciples that he has loved them and calls them to remain in that love. His command rests upon love already shown, not upon a demand to win his affection.

Jesus then connects remaining in his love with keeping his commandments. Obedience does not purchase God's acceptance; it expresses genuine faith and love. We cannot claim to honor someone while deliberately dismissing what that person has said. In the Christian life, trusting Christ and listening to him belong together.

Jesus also speaks of joy. His joy is not a promise that every day will be happy or emotionally intense. A believer may experience grief, weariness, or difficulty while continuing to trust the Savior. The joy Jesus describes grows from fellowship with him and confidence in his goodness, even when circumstances remain painful.

Loved First, Then Called to Love (John 15:12-17)

Jesus brings the teaching into focus by commanding his disciples to love one another as he has loved them. He speaks of the love shown when someone lays down his life for friends. Shortly afterward, he will demonstrate that self-giving love through his own death upon the cross.

He also calls the disciples friends because he has made known to them what he heard from the Father. This friendship does not remove his lordship, but it shows the closeness and grace of the relationship he gives. Jesus is not a distant example whom we must imitate without help. He is the Savior who has made God known and welcomes his people into fellowship with him.

In verse 16, Jesus reminds these disciples that he chose and appointed them to bear lasting fruit. His words apply directly to those he had called into his mission, while also revealing a wider principle: fruitful service begins with divine grace rather than human boasting. The passage ends where this relationship leads, with the command to love one another.

Learning to Follow Jesus In Every Way

Bring Ordinary Moments to Christ

Jesus' command to remain in him reaches into work, relationships, responsibilities, and difficult decisions. We cannot consciously think about Jesus every second, nor should we neglect the duties before us. But we can learn to turn toward him naturally instead of treating fellowship with God as something confined to a devotional hour.

Imagine receiving stressful news at work. You might feel anxious, become impatient, or rush into a decision. Before reacting, you can quietly pray, *Lord Jesus, you know what is happening. Help me remember what is true and respond with wisdom and love.* Then consider what Scripture teaches, carry out your responsibilities, and entrust the outcome to God.

Later, you may thank him, confess where you spoke harshly, or ask for renewed patience. The value lies not in completing a sequence correctly but in returning to your Savior amid real life. The same dependence can shape parenting, caregiving, travel, conflict, and even ordinary household tasks.

Listen Through Scripture, Prayer, and Wisdom

John 14:15-27 promises the Holy Spirit, who will dwell with Christ's people. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct persons of the one true God. The Spirit is not merely a feeling or a force. He teaches and reminds Christ's followers of the truth, works through the apostolic witness preserved in Scripture, and shapes our understanding and obedience (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Listening to God begins by receiving what he has actually spoken. The 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are our authoritative Scriptures. Read them in context, pray honestly

about what you understand, and ask for wisdom when questions remain. Seek sound counsel from mature Christians, knowing that the Spirit's help never makes biblical truth unnecessary.

A sudden thought or strong feeling might draw your attention to a real concern, but it does not automatically become a personal command from God. When facing a major decision about work, money, relationships, or health, test your impressions against Scripture and responsible counsel. Consider your obligations and the available facts. Neither a mentor nor an inward sensation has authority equal to God's Word.

When God Seems Distant

Some days prayer feels difficult, Scripture seems dry, or your heart is weighed down by grief. Such seasons can be discouraging, especially if you expect abiding to produce a continuous sense of warmth or certainty. But a lack of vivid feeling does not, by itself, prove that Christ has abandoned a genuine believer. Nearly every Christian will experience seasons of what feels like spiritual drought. These are useful periods for God to work on us.

Return to what Jesus has revealed about himself. Speak honestly to God, even if your prayer is brief. Continue receiving biblical teaching and worshiping with his people. If you have sinned, confess it and turn toward Christ rather than hiding from him or trying to punish yourself into spiritual maturity.

If emotional distress persists, seek care from trusted church leaders and, where appropriate, qualified medical or mental-health professionals. A serious struggle should not be dismissed as a failure to pray correctly. The invitation of John 15 is to remain in Christ, not to manufacture a particular emotional state.

Love Is the Outward Fruit

John 15 repeatedly directs our attention toward other people. Jesus commands his followers to love one another, and that love belongs to his ongoing mission. Abiding in Christ is deeply personal, but it never becomes a reason to withdraw from the church or ignore our neighbors.

The fruit may appear in an unremarkable moment: a parent responding patiently, a worker refusing dishonest speech, a church member encouraging someone who feels forgotten, or a neighbor offering practical help. Each response should arise from love rather than a desire for admiration. Genuine fruit does not require a public platform.

You can take part in Christ's mission now. Pray for someone who needs encouragement and look for a suitable act of service. When an honest conversation opens, speak gently about Jesus rather than pressing for a particular response. Love and witness flow outward from our dependence upon him, not from a quota of spiritual results.

Christians Before Us: Brother Lawrence and Francis de Sales

Brother Lawrence was a seventeenth-century Carmelite lay brother who spent many years working in a monastery kitchen in Paris. He was not a famous preacher or influential church leader. His responsibilities included preparing meals and eventually repairing sandals. Although he initially disliked kitchen work, he learned to approach these ordinary duties as opportunities to serve God. He prayed before beginning his tasks, sought God's help throughout the day, and offered his labor as an expression of love. His conversations and letters were later collected in *The Practice of the Presence of God*, which encourages Christians to remember God even during the most ordinary responsibilities.

Another Christian teacher, Francis de Sales (1567–1622), emphasized that a life of devotion to God was not reserved for monks, priests, or those separated from everyday society. In *Introduction to the Devout Life*, he explained that **Christians could faithfully pursue holiness while raising families, working in trades, serving others, and fulfilling their daily responsibilities**. He warned against forms of religious devotion that neglected the legitimate duties God had given a person. Genuine devotion, he argued, should strengthen our faithfulness in those very responsibilities.

Together, these examples remind us that **abiding in Christ is not limited to formal prayer, church gatherings, or leadership roles**. Whether washing dishes, working a difficult job, caring for children, or serving in an unnoticed position, believers can continually depend upon Christ and seek to honor him. *Our ordinary responsibilities do not have to separate us from fellowship with Jesus.* As we remain in him through faith, prayer, and obedience, even the smallest acts of service can become expressions of our love for God and neighbor.

What Is True in Christ

Abiding in Jesus begins with understanding that **Christ himself is the source of our spiritual life.** We do not create fellowship with God through religious effort or maintain it through perfect performance. Those who genuinely trust in Jesus have received new life through his saving grace and are called to continue living in dependence upon him.

Our Life Is Found in Jesus Christ

In Galatians 2:20, Paul describes his life as one now shaped by Christ living in him. His confidence rests not in his own spiritual accomplishments but in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him. This is an extraordinary truth for every Christian to consider: *following Jesus is not simply imitating someone who lived long ago. It is living in fellowship with our risen Savior.*

Because Christ is our life, our relationship with him reaches beyond church gatherings, Bible reading, and scheduled prayer. We belong to him throughout our ordinary responsibilities, relationships, decisions, and struggles. His grace sustains us as we learn to trust and obey.

Christ Provides What We Cannot Produce Alone

Jesus teaches in John 15:5 that branches cannot bear fruit independently of the vine. Likewise, Christians cannot produce genuine spiritual maturity through determination alone. We need his Word, his grace, and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit.

This dependence should produce humility rather than discouragement. **We are not called to prove that we can live without Christ, but to learn how completely we need him.** As we remain in his teaching and love, he forms in us the obedience, patience, and love that should increasingly characterize those who belong to him.

First John 4:19 reminds us that our love begins with God's love for us. The Christian life therefore moves from receiving Christ's love toward expressing that love to others. Abiding in Jesus is never merely an inward experience. It produces fruit that reaches into the lives of the people around us.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read John 15:1-17 and John 14:15-27, then review Colossians 2:6-10. Notice how Jesus connects branches, fruit, words, love, and commandments. If helpful, read the Good Way John 15 commentary, especially its Walkthrough and Leading sections. Prepare a simple example of turning to Christ during work or family life without making your own devotional habits a model everyone must follow.

During the Meeting | Begin with a short prayer and read John 15 together. Let the learner explain the vine image before you offer clarification. Trace the passage from Christ's provision to his commands, then discuss a realistic daily situation. Spend two minutes praying together about it, allowing silence if either person prefers. Use the single discussion set below rather than introducing a separate examination.

What to Watch For | A learner may confuse abiding with uninterrupted spiritual feelings or turn it into another productivity streak. Others may treat inward impressions as unquestionable instructions. Bring the conversation back to Scripture, prayer, sound counsel, and responsible action. Do not require private disclosures or pronounce judgment on another person's salvation. Significant distress or danger calls for appropriate pastoral, safeguarding, or professional help.

Before Moving Forward | Ask the learner to describe one way to turn toward Jesus during a normal responsibility and explain why fruit depends on Christ. Encourage healthy church fellowship. Prepare for Step Five by showing that remaining in Jesus includes receiving and obeying his written Word.

Discuss Together

Read John 15:1–17 again as needed. Discuss these questions with your discipler, or write thoughtful responses if you are studying alone.

1. **The Vine and the Branches:** What does this picture teach about Jesus? Why does the branch need the vine, and what does that reveal about genuine Christian growth?
2. **Abiding in Christ's Love:** How are Jesus' words, love, and commandments connected? What changes when we obey because Christ has loved us rather than trying to earn his acceptance?
3. **Depending on Jesus:** Where are you tempted to rely mainly upon yourself? What might dependence on Christ look like in an ordinary responsibility or relationship?
4. **Prayer in Everyday Life:** What could you pray during a stressful moment? Which biblical truth might guide your next responsible action?
5. **Discerning God's Guidance:** How should Christians evaluate a strong inward impression about a decision? What roles should Scripture, prayer, wise counsel, and practical facts play?
6. **Faith Beyond Feelings:** How can someone remain in Christ when spiritual feelings seem absent? How might continuing dependence upon him lead to patient love for others?

Put It Into Practice

These activities are invitations to respond to Jesus and grow in your daily fellowship with Him, not tests of your spiritual worth or standing before God.

Remember Christ Throughout Your Day

Choose three natural moments during your day when you can intentionally turn your attention toward Jesus. These might include beginning work, preparing a meal, traveling somewhere, or getting ready for bed.

At each moment, offer a brief prayer and remember one of Jesus' promises or commands. Thank Him for His presence, ask for wisdom, or simply acknowledge your dependence upon Him. Then continue with your responsibilities, trusting Him to guide you as you walk in obedience.

The goal is not to establish another rigid schedule or religious obligation. Instead, practice recognizing that your relationship with Christ continues throughout ordinary life, not only during formal prayer or Bible study.

Return to John 15

Read John 15:1–17 at least twice more during the coming week. As you read, pay attention to how Jesus describes abiding in Him, bearing fruit, receiving His words, keeping His commandments, and loving others.

Consider what the passage teaches about the relationship between dependence on Christ and practical obedience. How does Jesus describe the source of spiritual fruit? What does remaining in His love involve? How might these teachings shape your understanding of daily Christian living?

Write down one truth that encourages you and one area where you would like to grow. If you have a discipler, discuss your observations during your next meeting. Allow Scripture itself to guide your understanding before consulting additional commentaries.

Respond to One Need With Prayerful Love

During the coming week, pay attention to a situation where you face difficulty or notice someone who needs encouragement, assistance, or compassion. Before responding, take a moment to pray and consider what Scripture teaches about loving God and others.

Then take one appropriate action. This might involve speaking patiently during a disagreement, helping someone with a practical need, encouraging a discouraged friend, or showing kindness to a neighbor.

Do not feel that you must wait for a supernatural sign before doing what Scripture already identifies as good and loving. Instead, act with wisdom and humility, trusting the Holy Spirit to guide you as you follow Christ.

The purpose is not to prove your spiritual maturity or manufacture visible results. It is to practice depending upon Jesus and allowing His love to shape your ordinary decisions and relationships.

If You Are Studying Alone

Read the three assigned passages and consider the six questions privately. You may write a short reflection about one ordinary occasion when you remembered Christ and sought to obey him. If a major decision or troubling spiritual impression arises, seek counsel from a trustworthy Christian or pastor. Continue toward healthy local-church fellowship, since a website cannot replace worship, pastoral care, and life with Christ's people.

Suggested Prayer

Father, thank you for giving life through your Son and for receiving sinners by grace.

Lord Jesus, you are the true vine, and I need you in every part of my life. Teach me to trust your love, receive your words, and obey you without trying to earn what you have already given to those who believe.

Holy Spirit, help me understand Scripture and remember Christ during ordinary responsibilities. When I am anxious, guide me toward wisdom. When I sin, lead me to repentance and renewed trust. Grow patience, truthfulness, and love in me, and help me care faithfully for the people

around me. Keep me close to Christ, among his people, and ready to serve others. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture to Remember

John 15:5 (WEBU):

> He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Remember this whenever you feel pressure to manufacture your own spiritual strength. Jesus calls his disciples to bear fruit through dependence upon him, not apart from him. Even our ministry and acts of service must remain rooted in fellowship with Christ. We may accomplish visible activities through human effort, but genuine spiritual fruit comes from abiding in Jesus. He must remain our first, highest, and final priority.

Continue Studying with Good Way

Open Scripture first. Then use these published Good Way Library commentaries for deeper study, clarification, and thoughtful application. The Walkthrough explains the passage, Interpretive Options addresses disputed questions, and Leading offers help for those discipling another person.

- **John 15 Commentary: The True Vine and Witness:** The primary study for this lesson. Read its explanation of the true vine, the warnings about fruitlessness, and the commands to remain in Christ and love one another.
- **John 14 Commentary: The Way, Spirit, and Peace:** Understand Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit and how his disciples live with confidence in his presence after his departure.
- **Colossians 2 Commentary: Fullness in Christ:** Explore Paul's call to continue walking in Christ and resist spiritual systems that promise fullness apart from him.

Before the Next Step

Jesus is not merely the one who begins the Christian life. He remains its source. As you pray, work, worship, repent, and love others, keep returning to the Lord who saved his people and gives them his Spirit. Your dependence on Christ is not an obstacle you must eventually overcome; it belongs to faithful discipleship for the rest of your life.

Next: Step 5, Know Christ Through His Word. Jesus connects abiding with having his words remain in us. We will now learn how to read Scripture in context, understand what God has revealed, and respond to his truth.

Step 5: Know Christ Through His Word

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 5 of 12

Read, Understand, Remember, and Obey Scripture

Central Truth: Scripture is God's authoritative Word, given to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and equip us for faithful living. We read the Bible to know the Lord, understand his truth, trust his promises, and learn to obey him.

Growing Closer to Jesus Through Scripture

Imagine receiving a letter from someone you deeply love. You would not read it simply to collect information. You would pay attention because the person matters to you. Their words would help you understand their character, their thoughts, and what they wanted you to know.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ is far greater than any human relationship. Yet the illustration helps us understand something important about Scripture. The Bible is not merely a religious textbook. It is God's written Word, through which he reveals himself, his saving purposes, and the life he calls us to live.

In the previous step, we learned what it means to abide in Christ, depending upon him rather than attempting to produce spiritual life through our own strength. Now we will consider one of the most important ways we continue in that relationship: receiving, understanding, remembering, and obeying his Word.

Perhaps you have read the Bible for years. Perhaps you have never finished an entire biblical book. Some passages may seem beautiful and comforting, while others leave you confused. You might even wonder whether you are understanding what God intended or simply finding meanings that appeal to you.

These are worthwhile questions. **Learning how to study the Bible faithfully begins with humility and a desire to know the God who has spoken.** You do not need to become a biblical scholar before you can know Jesus, but you should learn how to listen carefully to what Scripture actually teaches.

Begin With Scripture

Before continuing, open your Bible and read the three passages below. If you are studying with a discipler, consider reading them aloud together. These are the core readings for Step 5.

1. **2 Timothy 3:14–17** | **Principal Passage:** Read these four verses, then examine the surrounding chapter. Notice what Paul says about remaining faithful, the Scriptures Timothy learned, and the purpose of God's Word.

2. **Psalm 119:9–18** | **Companion Reading:** Observe the writer's affection for God's Word. Notice how seeking God, remembering his commandments, praying for understanding, and resisting sin belong together.
3. **James 1:22–25** | **Companion Reading:** Consider the difference between hearing God's Word and putting it into practice. Pay attention to the illustration James uses to explain obedience.

Keep these passages available as you study. Later in this lesson, we will practice interpreting James 1:19–27 in its larger context.

Main Teaching: Understanding God's Word

Scripture Comes From God and Carries His Authority

Our principal passage comes from Paul's second letter to Timothy, a younger Christian leader whom Paul had helped prepare for ministry. Paul writes during a period of hardship and opposition, warning Timothy about false teaching and the corruption that can hide behind outward religion.

In 2 Timothy 3:1–9, Paul describes people who pursue selfish desires while maintaining an appearance of godliness. He then contrasts their conduct with the teaching, faith, patience, love, and perseverance Timothy had witnessed in Paul's life. Timothy must remain faithful to what he has received rather than follow those who distort the truth.

That is the setting of 2 Timothy 3:14–17.

Paul reminds Timothy that he has known the sacred Scriptures since childhood. Earlier in the letter, Paul identifies Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, as women of sincere faith (2 Timothy 1:5). Their example helps us appreciate the importance of faithful instruction passed from one generation to another.

Paul then explains why Scripture deserves such confidence. In 2 Timothy 3:16, he describes Scripture as **God-breathed**.

This means the Bible is not simply a collection of human reflections about God. Its ultimate source is God himself, who communicated his truth through human authors.

These authors wrote in different centuries, circumstances, languages, and literary forms. Moses recorded God's dealings with his covenant people. David and other psalmists composed songs and prayers. The prophets proclaimed God's messages, while the Gospel writers and apostles testified to Jesus Christ and instructed his church.

Their personalities and historical settings remain evident in their writings. Yet through these human authors, God gave his inspired Word. Therefore, Scripture possesses an authority greater than our opinions, emotions, customs, or the teaching of any individual Christian.

We do not approach Scripture merely to decide which teachings we happen to like. We approach it to discover what God has revealed and to respond faithfully.

The 66 canonical books of the Old and New Testaments form the inspired and authoritative Scriptures for Christian doctrine and life. Other ancient religious writings may help us understand history, but they do not possess the same authority.

Because Scripture comes from God, we should receive it with both confidence and humility. Difficult passages deserve careful study, not careless dismissal or invented explanations.

The Bible Tells One Unfolding Story Centered on Christ

In 2 Timothy 3:15, Paul makes an important connection between Scripture and salvation. The sacred writings Timothy had learned could make him wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Timothy's childhood Scriptures were primarily the Old Testament. Yet Paul understood that God's earlier revelation belonged to the larger story of redemption fulfilled in Jesus.

To understand this connection, we need to recognize the Bible's central storyline.

- **Creation:** God creates the world and humanity in his image. Everything begins with his goodness, authority, and purposes.
- **The Fall:** Humanity rebels against God. Sin brings guilt, corruption, suffering, and death into human experience.
- **Promise and Covenant:** God unfolds his saving purposes through Abraham, Israel, the Law of Moses, the kingdom, and the prophets. His promises reveal both humanity's need and his continuing faithfulness.
- **Jesus Christ:** The eternal Son of God becomes truly human without ceasing to be truly God. Through his obedient life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection, he accomplishes the saving work humanity could never accomplish.
- **The Church and the Holy Spirit:** The risen Christ gathers his people, gives the Holy Spirit to believers, and sends his church to proclaim the gospel and make disciples.
- **Resurrection and New Creation:** Jesus will return, raise the dead, judge rightly, and bring God's redemptive purposes to their promised completion.

This is the larger story in which individual Bible passages belong.

The Old Testament prepares for Christ through its history, covenants, promises, sacrifices, wisdom, and prophetic expectations. We should not force every verse into a hidden prediction about Jesus. Instead, we first understand each passage in its original setting and then consider how it belongs to God's unfolding revelation.

In Luke 24:25–27, the risen Jesus explained how Moses and the prophets testified to the Messiah and his suffering. **In John 5:39–40, Jesus confronted people who carefully examined Scripture but refused to come to him for life.**

That warning remains important. A person can memorize biblical information, defend Christian teachings, and recognize familiar passages without personally trusting Jesus Christ.

The Bible's central purpose is not merely to tell us how to behave. It reveals the God who saves and directs us toward the Savior we need.

As you study Scripture, look beyond isolated facts to the God who is revealing himself. Learn what the passage means, but also consider how it contributes to your understanding of Christ, his saving work, and his purposes for his people.

Scripture Teaches, Reproves, Corrects, and Trains Us

After explaining Scripture's divine origin, Paul identifies four ways it benefits God's people in 2 Timothy 3:16–17.

- **Teaching** | Scripture tells us what is true. It reveals God's character, explains salvation, establishes sound doctrine, and instructs us in faithful Christian living.
- **Reproof** | Scripture exposes error and sin. Sometimes it corrects a mistaken belief; at other times, it confronts attitudes or behaviors we have tried to excuse.
- **Correction** | Scripture does more than identify what is wrong. It directs us back toward truth, repentance, and responsible obedience.
- **Instruction in Righteousness** | Scripture trains us to live in ways that honor God. Through its teaching, the Holy Spirit shapes our understanding, character, and conduct over time.

Paul concludes by explaining that God's Word equips the person who belongs to God for every good work. Notice the order: Scripture is not given so that we can earn salvation through religious achievement. It equips God's people to live according to the grace they have received.

Consider a familiar situation. You have an argument with someone close to you, and you feel justified in speaking harshly because they treated you unfairly. Then you read James 1:19–20, which connects careful listening, restraint in speech, and control of anger with righteous conduct.

Scripture teaches you something about godly behavior. It may expose your desire to retaliate, correct the belief that hurtful speech becomes acceptable when you are upset, and direct you toward patience and self-control. A faithful response might involve prayer, a more careful conversation, or an appropriate apology.

You are not attempting to purchase God's acceptance through better behavior. You are learning to live according to his Word, depending upon the Holy Spirit for wisdom and strength.

This is how biblical truth becomes part of ordinary Christian living.

How to Study the Bible in Context

One of the most common mistakes in Bible study is taking a sentence out of its setting and assigning it a meaning the author never intended.

A verse may sound encouraging by itself but communicate something more specific when read with its surrounding paragraph. A command addressed to one historical person may not be a

command for every Christian. Likewise, a biblical narrative may describe someone's actions without approving them.

God's Word deserves careful reading.

The Bible contains history, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, Gospel narratives, letters, and other forms of writing. Each should be understood according to its literary purpose. We should not interpret a poetic image exactly as we would a historical description, nor should we treat every statement in a narrative as a command.

We must also distinguish between promises made to particular historical audiences and promises given more broadly to God's people. For example, God's instructions to Joshua concerning Israel's entrance into the promised land belong to a specific historical and covenant setting. We can learn about God's faithfulness from Joshua without claiming that every detail of Israel's commission is personally addressed to us.

A helpful principle is to **understand what a passage meant in its biblical context before deciding what it means for our lives today.**

Five Questions to Ask When Reading Scripture

You do not need complicated tools to begin studying the Bible well. Start with an open Bible, a willingness to learn, and five questions.

1. **What does the passage say?** Read the entire paragraph or narrative. Notice the main subject, repeated words, important statements, promises, warnings, and commands. Avoid rushing to application before understanding what is written.
2. **What is the context?** Consider who wrote the passage, its original audience, and its purpose. Read what comes before and after it, and pay attention to the kind of literature you are studying.
3. **What does this reveal about God?** Look for what the passage teaches about God's character, his saving purposes, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and his relationship with humanity. Let the text determine its own emphasis.
4. **How does this fit the larger biblical story?** Consider how the passage relates to creation, covenant, redemption, and God's purposes fulfilled in Christ. Follow genuine biblical connections rather than inventing symbolic meanings.
5. **What response does this truth call for?** Does the passage invite faith, repentance, worship, gratitude, obedience, wisdom, or loving service? Sometimes the response is to trust a promise. At other times, a concrete change in conduct is necessary.

These questions are not a formula that makes every difficult passage instantly understandable. Rather, they provide a reliable starting point for careful reading. With practice, they will become increasingly natural.



Let's Practice: Studying James 1:19–27

Now we will apply these five questions to a real passage.

Open James 1:19–27 and read the entire section before continuing. Then follow the explanation below, comparing each observation with the biblical text.

1. What does the passage say?

James instructs believers to listen carefully, exercise restraint in anger, receive God's Word humbly, and put what they hear into practice. He compares a person who hears without obeying to someone who looks into a mirror and then forgets what was seen. Finally, he

connects genuine religion with controlled speech, care for vulnerable people, and moral integrity.

The passage is not merely about listening to sermons. It concerns receiving God's truth in a way that changes how we live.

2. What is the context?

James writes to believers facing various trials and temptations. Earlier in chapter 1, he urges them to seek God's wisdom and explains that every good gift comes from him. Verse 18 describes God giving his people new birth through the word of truth.

That context matters because the call to obey follows an explanation of God's gracious work. James is not teaching that people can manufacture new birth by doing enough good deeds. He is explaining what it looks like to receive God's Word sincerely.

The following chapter develops this further by addressing favoritism and explaining how genuine faith becomes evident through action.

3. What does the passage reveal about God?

God cares about the truthfulness and integrity of his people. He is concerned not only with what we profess but also with how we speak, respond to others, and treat those who are vulnerable.

His Word exposes our needs, instructs our conduct, and directs believers toward a life shaped by his character.

4. How does this relate to Christ and the larger biblical story?

James identifies himself at the beginning of the letter as a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. His teaching agrees with Jesus' commands concerning sincere obedience, mercy, truthful speech, and love for our neighbors.

James also connects obedience with the new life God gives. His instructions therefore belong to the response of those who have received God's truth, not to an alternative path of earning salvation.

5. What response does this truth call for?

Perhaps you struggle with interrupting others or reacting quickly when frustrated. Scripture calls you toward careful listening and restraint. Perhaps someone vulnerable needs practical help, and James reminds you that genuine Christian faith must not neglect mercy.

Or perhaps you have repeatedly heard a biblical teaching while refusing to consider what obedience would require.

The appropriate response is not simply to underline another verse. It is to turn toward Christ, acknowledge the truth, ask for his help, and act faithfully.

It is important to recognize that **Scripture communicates God's unchanging truth, yet that same truth may speak to different people in different ways**. One person may be convicted of

a particular sin, while another may find encouragement, direction, or a call to serve others. Our circumstances, struggles, and stages of spiritual growth differ, so the same passage may reveal different areas of our lives that need attention. *The meaning of Scripture does not change with the reader, but its application can vary.* We should therefore remain open to the fullness of what God teaches through his Word, rather than assuming that what stands out to us personally is all the passage has to offer.

This exercise demonstrates how a passage becomes clearer when its words, context, theology, and application are considered together. You can use the same approach in Genesis, Psalms, the Gospels, Paul's letters, and the rest of Scripture.

Reading, Hearing, Studying, and Remembering God's Word

Christians encounter Scripture in several complementary ways. Each helps us give attention to God's truth, although none should become a test of our spiritual worth.

- **Reading** | Regular reading helps us become familiar with biblical books and understand how their messages unfold. Reading complete chapters and books guards against an understanding built entirely on isolated verses.
- **Hearing** | Scripture is also meant to be received in Christian fellowship. Public reading, faithful preaching, church teaching, and conversations with mature believers help us learn from one another.
- **Studying** | Careful study allows us to examine context, compare related passages, investigate difficult questions, and develop a more accurate understanding of what God has revealed.
- **Meditating** | Biblical meditation means thoughtfully returning to God's Word, considering its meaning, and reflecting on how it directs our faith and conduct. It is an intentional focus on revealed truth rather than an attempt to receive hidden messages.
- **Memorizing** | Remembering Scripture helps us carry God's truth into ordinary circumstances. A familiar passage can remind us of Christ's promises, correct a mistaken attitude, or strengthen us when we face temptation.

Psalm 119:9–18 brings several of these practices together. The psalmist seeks God, treasures his Word, meditates on his instructions, and asks for understanding. In verse 11, he explains that hiding God's Word in his heart serves the purpose of resisting sin.

Then, in verse 18, he asks God to open his eyes so that he may understand the wonderful things in his law. The writer desires Scripture while recognizing his dependence upon God for understanding.

That is a healthy attitude for every disciple.

You may benefit from reading a chapter each morning. Someone else may listen to Scripture while traveling to work, while another person may need to read a shorter passage because of family responsibilities, illness, or reading difficulties.

The particular schedule matters less than receiving God's Word faithfully. If you miss a day, simply return to Scripture without treating the interruption as a spiritual failure.

A manageable reading rhythm that repeatedly brings you to Christ is more valuable than an ambitious schedule that becomes a source of pride or condemnation.

For those who would like a longer reading journey, The Good Way Bible Challenge provides an optional plan for reading all 66 canonical books in approximately one year. You may adjust the pace to fit your circumstances.

You can also continue reading through the Gospel of John alongside this course. Its account of Jesus' life, teachings, death, and resurrection provides a wonderful way to become more familiar with the Savior. Returning to John 13–17 is especially helpful as you learn to abide in him.

Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and Wise Discernment

How does God guide us through Scripture?

The Holy Spirit works within believers, helping them understand and respond to God's truth. In John 14:26, Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them and bring his words to their remembrance. This promise has particular significance for the apostolic witness to Christ.

More broadly, the New Testament teaches that the Spirit opens believers' understanding, convicts them of sin, strengthens faith, and forms Christian character. As we read Scripture prayerfully, we depend upon his work rather than assuming we can produce spiritual understanding through intelligence alone.

However, we must distinguish the authority of Scripture from our personal impressions.

For example, while reading a passage about forgiveness, you might become convinced that you need to apologize for something you said. That conviction may agree with biblical teaching and deserve a thoughtful response.

But suppose you experience a strong inner impression that God wants you to abandon important responsibilities or make a major financial decision immediately. The intensity of that feeling does not establish that God has spoken a new command.

God's written Word is the authoritative standard by which teachings, impressions, and proposed actions must be examined.

We can pray for wisdom, study relevant biblical principles, consider the circumstances, and seek guidance from trustworthy Christians. The Holy Spirit forms wisdom and discernment without requiring us to treat every feeling as divine revelation.

This is one reason Christian fellowship matters. In Acts 17:10–12, the Bereans examined the Scriptures while receiving Paul's teaching. Their example reminds us that even respected teachers should be heard with a willingness to test what is taught against God's Word.

That includes pastors, disciplers, websites, and commentaries.

A trustworthy Christian mentor should welcome thoughtful biblical questions rather than demand unquestioning agreement.

Christians Before Us: Scripture in the Early Church

From its earliest generations, the Christian church placed great importance on reading, understanding, and obeying Scripture. Around AD 155, **Justin Martyr** described Christian worship in his *First Apology*, chapter 67. Believers gathered to hear readings from the apostolic accounts and the prophets, followed by instruction, encouragement, and prayer. Justin also described the congregation's care for widows, orphans, and others in need. **Scripture was not merely something to hear; its teachings were meant to shape how Christians lived and treated others.**

In the fourth century, **John Chrysostom**, a prominent preacher in the early church, encouraged ordinary Christians to study Scripture for themselves. In his *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, he urged believers to read upcoming Gospel passages at home, consider their meaning, and identify anything they found difficult to understand. They would then arrive at church better prepared to learn. His example reminds us that *careful Bible study is not reserved for pastors, scholars, or theologians*. Every Christian should seek to grow in understanding God's Word.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430) provides another powerful example. In his *Confessions*, Book VIII, chapter 12, Augustine described a moment of deep spiritual struggle when he opened the apostle Paul's letter to the Romans and read Romans 13:13–14. The passage confronted the sinful desires and divided loyalties that had troubled him. Rather than treating Scripture as interesting information, Augustine recognized the need to turn decisively toward Christ. His experience illustrates that **understanding God's Word should lead us toward repentance, faith, and obedience**, not merely greater knowledge.

These historical examples demonstrate that Christians have long approached Scripture as something to **read, understand, remember, and live out in their life**. As you develop your own habits of Bible study, remember that *the goal is not simply to know more about the Bible, but to know Christ more deeply and live faithfully according to his Word*. Study carefully, learn alongside other believers, and ask God to help you put what you discover into practice.

What Is True in Christ

Jesus Christ did not treat Scripture as merely a collection of religious teachings or moral advice. Throughout his ministry, he affirmed its authority, explained its meaning, and demonstrated what faithful obedience looks like. When tempted in the wilderness, Jesus responded with Scripture (Matthew 4:1–11). After his resurrection, he explained how the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms pointed toward him and God's unfolding plan of redemption (Luke

24:44–47). **If we want to understand Scripture rightly, we must learn to approach it with the same reverence for God's Word that Jesus demonstrated.**

The Bible also teaches that **Scripture ultimately directs us toward Jesus Christ**. In John 5:39–40, Jesus confronted people who diligently searched the Scriptures but refused to come to him for life. They possessed considerable biblical knowledge yet failed to recognize the Savior to whom the Scriptures testified. This is an important warning for every Christian. We can memorize passages, explain doctrines, and become familiar with biblical history while neglecting the personal faith, repentance, and obedience to which God's Word calls us. *Knowing the words of Scripture should lead us toward deeper knowledge of the Lord who is revealed through them.*

This is all closely connected to what the Bible calls **wisdom**. Biblical wisdom is more than knowing facts or remembering verses. It involves understanding God's truth and learning to apply it faithfully to the circumstances, decisions, and challenges of everyday life. A wise person does not merely ask, *"What does Scripture say?"* but also, *"How should this truth shape what I think, say, and do in this situation?"* Proverbs repeatedly connects wisdom with the fear of the Lord, discernment, and righteous living (Proverbs 1:7; 2:6–9). **As we grow in our understanding of God's Word and learn to apply it with discernment, we grow in biblical wisdom.**

Learning to Follow Jesus Through The Word

Remain in Christ's Word

In John 8:31, Jesus says:

"If you remain in my word, then you are truly my disciples."

Jesus speaks these words during a conversation about belief, truth, and freedom from slavery to sin. Remaining in his Word means continuing to receive his teaching, trust him as Lord, and allow his truth to govern our lives.

Likewise, in Luke 6:46–49, Jesus challenges those who call him Lord while refusing to do what he says. He compares the person who hears **and obeys** his words to a builder whose house rests on a secure foundation.

These are teachings from Jesus himself. He calls his followers to remain in his Word and put his commands into practice.

The apostles reinforce these commands in their writings. James teaches believers to become doers of the Word, while the example of the Bereans encourages careful examination of Scripture. These are apostolic instructions and examples that support Jesus' teaching.

For a disciple, obedience is not separate from trusting Christ. It is a response that flows from genuine faith and dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Bring God's Word Into Ordinary Life

Imagine beginning your workday already burdened by responsibilities. You read a passage concerning God's faithfulness and take a moment to consider its meaning. Instead of rushing away, you pray about the responsibilities ahead and entrust them to the Lord.

Later, a difficult conversation arises. You remember Jesus' teaching about love or James' instruction concerning speech and anger. You ask God for wisdom, listen carefully, and choose words that are truthful rather than unnecessarily hurtful.

That evening, perhaps another passage brings an attitude or decision to your attention. You may need to confess a sin, seek counsel, repair something where appropriate and safe, or simply thank God for his faithfulness.

This is how Scripture begins to shape ordinary Christian life. You are bringing God's truth into the circumstances in which you actually live.

Some days this will feel natural. Other days it will require patience, effort, and repentance. Your confidence, however, rests in Christ and the Spirit's continuing work rather than in the quality of your performance.

Help Someone Else Encounter Scripture

There is also an outward purpose to knowing God's Word.

Imagine that a friend is discouraged and asks why Christians have hope. You do not need to deliver an elaborate theological presentation. Instead, you might invite them to read a short passage from the Gospel of John with you.

Read it together and ask what it reveals about Jesus. Listen to their questions and explain what you understand. If you encounter something difficult, be willing to admit that you need to study further.

This is a simple expression of Christian love and witness. The goal is not to demonstrate that you know more Scripture than another person. It is to help someone encounter the truth of God's Word and consider the person of Jesus Christ.

You are not responsible for producing another person's conversion. You are responsible for speaking truthfully, showing love, and faithfully using the opportunities God provides.

Even before completing this course, you can begin encouraging others through Scripture.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17, Psalm 119:9–18, and James 1:22–25. Review the surrounding argument of 2 Timothy 3, then study James 1:19–27 using the five questions taught in this lesson. Consult the Good Way commentary afterward, particularly its Walkthrough and Leading sections. Prepare to explain how Scripture's authority serves knowing Christ and faithful living rather than simply accumulating religious information.

During the Meeting | Begin by asking about the learner's experience with the Bible without assuming familiarity with biblical books or vocabulary. Read the principal passage together and identify Paul's reasons for trusting Scripture. Then open James 1:19–27 and work through the five reading questions conversationally. Let the learner make observations before offering your explanations. If time allows, consult the Good Way commentary together and compare its interpretation with the text. Note where things spoke to both of you differently than what we may have addressed.

What to Watch For | Some learners may feel discouraged by reading difficulties, unfamiliar terms, or previous experiences of being judged for limited biblical knowledge. Others may confuse a personal impression with a passage's meaning or apply an isolated promise without considering its context. Respond patiently, avoid overwhelming them with references, and never equate reading speed with holiness. Welcome honest questions and seek trustworthy pastoral guidance when necessary.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain 2 Timothy 3:14–17 in their own words and demonstrate the five questions on a short passage. Discuss a manageable way to continue reading Scripture, and identify one appropriate response of faith or obedience. The goal is growing understanding and trust, not passing an examination or maintaining a perfect reading schedule.

Discuss Together

Read the relevant passages again as needed. Discuss these questions openly with your discipler, or consider them in writing if you are studying independently.

1. **Applying Biblical Context:** Suppose someone quotes Philippians 4:13 and claims it guarantees that Christians will succeed at anything they attempt. How would you examine Philippians 4:10–13 to determine what Paul actually means? How could you explain the passage accurately and graciously to that person?
2. **The Authority of Scripture:** What does 2 Timothy 3:14–17 teach about the origin and purpose of Scripture? Why are its divine inspiration and authority essential for faithful Christian living?
3. **Understanding Biblical Context:** Why is it important to consider a passage's historical setting, surrounding verses, intended audience, and literary context? How can these details help prevent misunderstandings?
4. **Hearing and Obeying Scripture:** What does James 1:19–27 teach about putting God's Word into practice? How should genuine faith shape our speech, compassion, and obedience without turning good works into a means of earning salvation?
5. **The Bible's Larger Story:** How do creation, the fall, God's promises, Jesus Christ's saving work, and the hope of new creation fit together? Why does understanding this larger story help us interpret individual passages?

6. **Reading to Know Christ:** What is the difference between reading Scripture merely as an obligation and reading it to know and follow Jesus? How can we develop consistent habits without attempting to earn God's approval?
7. **Handling Difficult Passages:** How should Christians respond when they encounter Scripture they struggle to understand or accept? What roles should careful study, prayer, comparison with other passages, and wise counsel play?
8. **Sharing Scripture With Others:** How can you use Scripture to encourage someone who is struggling or growing in faith? What should you consider when selecting a passage, explaining it accurately, and pointing someone toward Jesus Christ?

Put It Into Practice

Deeply Study a Passage for Yourself

Read James 1:19–27 again before opening a commentary. Use the five questions from this lesson to examine the passage, writing a few notes or discussing your observations with your discipler.

Afterward, open the Good Way James 1 commentary linked below. Read its Walkthrough for verses 19–27 and compare the explanation with what you observed. Notice one place where your understanding was confirmed, deepened, or corrected, then return to the biblical text to evaluate what you learned.

Establish a Manageable Scripture-Reading Rhythm

Consider when and how you can give meaningful attention to God's Word. You may continue reading through the Gospel of John, begin another biblical book, or use a reading plan such as The Good Way Bible Challenge.

Choose a realistic approach that encourages understanding rather than hurried completion. As you read, ask God to help you know Christ more faithfully and respond to what you learn.

Invite Someone to Read Scripture With You

Think of someone who might appreciate reading a short biblical passage together. It could be a fellow Christian, a friend exploring Christianity, or someone who has recently asked a question about faith.

If the opportunity is appropriate, invite them to read a short selection from the Gospel of John. Listen carefully, ask thoughtful questions, and allow Scripture to guide the conversation. If no such opportunity is currently available, pray for someone you would like to encourage and remain attentive to ways you can lovingly serve them.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can practice everything in this lesson independently. Read the principal passage and both companion readings, then work through the James 1 exercise before consulting the Good Way commentary. Make sure to write out your answers to the discussion questions.

You may find it helpful to keep a notebook with the five study questions and write a short response after each passage. When something remains confusing, read the surrounding chapters, seek reliable Christian teaching, and consult a pastor or mature believer when possible.

Remember that Scripture is also meant to be received within the worship and fellowship of the church. Independent study is valuable, but it should not become permanent separation from Christian community. Iron sharpens iron.

Suggested Prayer

Father in heaven, thank you for giving us your Word and revealing yourself through Jesus Christ. Thank you that we do not have to discover salvation through our own wisdom or effort. You have made your saving purposes known through Scripture and fulfilled your promises in your Son.

Teach me to approach the Bible with humility, attention, and faith. Help me understand what you have spoken, recognize what is true, and receive correction without fear or pride. By your Holy Spirit, give me wisdom to understand your Word and a willing heart to obey it.

Keep me from treating Scripture as merely a collection of facts or religious obligations. When I encounter difficult passages, give me patience. If your Word exposes sin, lead me to honest repentance. When it reveals your promises, strengthen my confidence in your faithfulness.

Above all, help me to know Jesus more deeply, trust his finished work, and live according to the grace you have given. As I learn, help me share your truth with others in humility, love, and patience. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord, amen.

Scripture to Remember

2 Timothy 3:16 (WEBU)

> "Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness,"

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 together and consider memorizing both verses.

These verses remind us that Scripture comes from God and equips his people for faithful living. Memorization is not a test of spiritual worth, but a way to carry God's truth with us throughout ordinary life.

Continue Studying With Good Way

The following resources will help you develop a deeper understanding of Scripture and strengthen your daily Bible reading. Begin with Scripture itself, then use these commentaries and study tools to clarify the text, recognize its central teachings, and apply God's Word to your life.

1. **2 Timothy 3 Commentary: Last Days, Scripture, and Perseverance** | Begin here to understand the divine authority, inspiration, and usefulness of Scripture. Pay special attention to verses 14–17, which explain how God's Word equips believers for faithful Christian living. The Leading section also offers guidance for teaching Scripture to others.
2. **James 1 Commentary: Trials, Wisdom, and True Religion** | Explore the relationship between hearing God's Word and putting it into practice. The discussion of verses 19–27 is especially helpful for understanding how careful listening, obedience, and genuine faith belong together. Use this commentary to deepen your understanding after completing the lesson's Bible reading exercise.
3. **The Book of John Overview: The Son Who Gives Life** | Discover the Gospel of John's structure, historical setting, major themes, and presentation of Jesus Christ. This overview provides a helpful foundation for reading through John during the discipleship course and learning to recognize how Scripture reveals Christ's identity, teaching, and saving work.
4. **The Good Way Bible Challenge: Read the Whole Bible in One Year** | Develop a consistent Bible reading habit with a structured plan covering all 66 books of Scripture. This optional resource also explains how to use Good Way's chapter commentaries, summaries, and study features to strengthen your understanding as you read through the Bible.

The Good Way Library's resources are intended to support your personal study of Scripture, not replace it. As you read, ask God for understanding, examine each passage in its context, and consider how His Word reveals Jesus Christ and teaches you to follow Him faithfully.

Before the Next Step

You have now learned why Scripture matters and how to begin reading it with greater care. God has not given us his Word simply to fill our minds with information. He has revealed his truth so that we may know him through Jesus Christ, grow in faith, recognize error, receive correction, and learn to walk according to his will.

As you continue studying, remember that you are not seeking to earn God's love through Bible reading. If you belong to Christ, you are learning to receive and live according to the grace already given to you.

Keep your Bible open, ask honest questions, and return to the passages that challenge or encourage you. Seek wisdom from mature Christians, and allow Scripture to direct your attention continually toward Jesus.

But knowing God's Word also raises another important question: **If God speaks to us through Scripture, how should we speak to him?**

That is where our next lesson begins.

Step 6: Live With God in Prayer will explore Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:5–13. We will learn how to approach our heavenly Father through Jesus Christ, bring our needs before him, worship and thank him, confess our sins, pray for others, and continue in fellowship with God throughout ordinary life.

Before moving forward, read Matthew 6:5–13 and consider what Jesus teaches about sincere prayer.

Our journey continues not with another demand to prove ourselves, but with an invitation to draw near to the God who has already drawn near to us through his Son.

Step 6: Live With God in Prayer

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 6 of 12

Communion With the Father Through the Son in the Spirit

Central Truth: Prayer is not a technique for obtaining God's favor or controlling his decisions. It is honest fellowship with the Father through Jesus Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Learning how to pray as a Christian begins with Jesus, not with finding impressive words. We pray because the living God has made himself known and invites us to bring our lives before him. We can worship him, ask for wisdom, confess wrongdoing, thank him for his kindness, and remember others in his presence.

Yet prayer can feel difficult. You may wonder what to say, struggle to concentrate, or feel disappointed when circumstances do not change. Perhaps prayer has become a routine you perform without much thought. In this sixth step of The Good Way Discipleship Course, we will learn from Jesus why prayer matters, what to pray, and how to continue trusting God in ordinary life.

Begin With Scripture

Principal reading: Matthew 6:5–13. Read this entire passage before studying the explanation below. Then read Matthew 6:1–18 to see how Jesus connects prayer with giving, fasting, and devotion that seeks the Father's approval rather than public praise. Matthew 6 belongs to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), where Jesus teaches the character and conduct of those who follow him.

Required companion readings: Open both passages during this step. They are part of the lesson, not merely references to glance over.

- **Luke 11:1–13:** One of Jesus' disciples asks him to teach them to pray. Jesus gives a pattern of prayer and explains why his followers can ask persistently, trusting the Father's goodness rather than trying to wear him down.
- **Philippians 4:4–7:** Paul calls believers to bring their concerns to God with thanksgiving. His teaching shows how prayer and God's peace belong together when life remains uncertain.

For further reading, Psalm 27 shows prayer amid fear and longing; John 17 records Jesus praying for his people; and Romans 8:26–27 explains the Spirit's help in our weakness. If you are reading the Gospel of John throughout the course, continue at a comfortable pace and notice how Jesus speaks with his Father.

Main Teaching: How to Pray as a Christian

1. Come Before the Father, Not an Audience (Matthew 6:5–8)

Jesus begins with two warnings. Some people prayed in public because they wanted others to admire them. Others treated repeated words and lengthy speeches as though these could secure an answer from God. In both cases, attention had shifted from the Father to the person praying.

Jesus tells his followers to pray privately, where there is no audience to impress. He is not forbidding public prayer, since he prayed with others and the early church gathered to pray. He is exposing the desire to use prayer as a religious performance. A person who prays simply and sincerely may be following Jesus more faithfully than someone whose words sound impressive.

Jesus also warns against *vain repetition*, not every repeated prayer. Repeating the Lord's Prayer thoughtfully can be valuable; repeating words as a way to manipulate God is not. The reason Jesus gives is wonderfully reassuring: the Father knows what his children need before they ask (Matthew 6:8). Prayer does not inform an uninformed God. It brings us into truthful dependence upon the One who already knows us.

You do not need specialized vocabulary or a particular emotion to begin. You can speak reverently and plainly, trusting God's character rather than the quality of your sentences.

2. Put God's Name, Kingdom, and Will First (Matthew 6:9–10)

Jesus begins the Lord's Prayer by teaching his disciples to address God as their heavenly Father. For those who belong to Christ, this is the language of a real relationship established by grace. Yet the Father is also holy and sovereign. We come with both confidence and reverence, knowing he is near to his people without becoming subject to their demands.

The first requests concern God's name, kingdom, and will. We ask that he be honored, that his righteous reign be known, and that his purposes be accomplished on earth. These requests turn us outward from our immediate concerns and remind us that God's glory matters more than our preferences. They also invite personal obedience: we cannot sincerely seek his will while deliberately treating his commands as unimportant.

Imagine facing a difficult decision at work or in your family. You can ask God for a good outcome and also ask him to help you act truthfully, love others, and make a wise decision. **Prayer brings our desires before God while teaching us to trust his wisdom above our own.**

3. Ask for Daily Bread (Matthew 6:11)

Jesus teaches us to ask for the provision we need today. Daily bread points first to ordinary necessities, including food and the means of sustaining life. This is a reminder that our Father cares about daily responsibilities, not only matters we might label spiritual. Work, family needs, financial pressures, and material concerns can all become subjects of prayer.

Asking God to provide does not eliminate the need to work, plan responsibly, seek assistance, or care for others. It acknowledges that every good gift ultimately comes from him. Later in Matthew 6, Jesus calls his followers to seek God's kingdom rather than let anxiety over tomorrow rule them (verses 25–34). He promises the Father's care, not an earthly life without hardship or deprivation.

This petition also teaches gratitude. We can thank God for what he has provided while honestly asking for help where needs remain unmet. Trust does not require denying that a problem is real.

4. Seek Forgiveness and Extend Mercy (Matthew 6:12; 6:14–15)

Jesus includes the confession of sin in the prayer. We owe God faithful love and obedience, yet we fall short in thought, word, and action. His language of debts points to our moral obligation before him. We must not hide sin behind religious appearances, nor should we treat confession as a way of earning his mercy.

The Christian's hope rests in Jesus Christ, who died for sinners and rose again. Those who repent and trust him receive forgiveness by grace. Yet believers continue to struggle with sin and need to confess honestly, turn away from what is wrong, and learn obedience through the Spirit. Confession does not repeat Christ's sacrifice; it is a truthful return to the Savior whose saving work is sufficient (1 John 1:5–2:2).

Jesus immediately connects God's forgiveness with our willingness to forgive others. In verses 14–15, his warning is serious: a heart determined to withhold mercy contradicts the life of repentance and forgiveness that he commands. Forgiving others does not purchase salvation, but receiving grace must shape how we treat those who have wronged us.

Forgiveness does not mean pretending harm was acceptable. It does not require restored trust, removed consequences, or contact with an unsafe person. Abuse, violence, and coercion call for protection, appropriate boundaries, accountability, and qualified help. Christian mercy and truthful concern for safety belong together.

5. Ask for Protection and Give God the Glory (Matthew 6:13)

Jesus teaches his followers to ask for protection from temptation and deliverance from evil. He knows that disciples face weakness, sinful desires, and real spiritual opposition. James 1:13 makes clear that God does not tempt people to do evil. We therefore pray for his preserving help, wise judgment, and strength to resist sin, rather than imagining that he delights in leading us toward wrongdoing.

Suppose you expect a conversation that might provoke anger. You can ask God for patience and honesty, then respond responsibly by listening, choosing truthful words, or taking an appropriate pause. Prayer is not a substitute for obedience. It is one way we acknowledge our dependence on the Lord as we seek to obey.

The WEBU concludes Matthew 6:13 with praise of God's kingdom, power, and glory. Some Bible editions note that ancient manuscript witnesses differ about this closing doxology. Christians have long used these words in worship because they express biblical truth. Whether a church includes them when praying aloud, the petitions themselves direct us to the Father whose reign and goodness deserve our trust.



6. Learn the Many Expressions of Prayer

The Lord's Prayer gives us a pattern of priorities rather than a rigid script for every conversation with God. Elsewhere, Scripture shows believers praying in joy, fear, sorrow,

gratitude, and repentance. These expressions can help us find honest words, but we do not need to include every one of them each time we pray.

- **Worship:** Praise God for who he is, including his holiness, goodness, faithfulness, and greatness (Psalm 27).
- **Thanksgiving:** Recognize God's gifts and respond with gratitude even while bringing him genuine concerns (Philippians 4:4–7).
- **Confession:** Acknowledge sin truthfully and seek mercy rather than offering excuses (Psalm 51; 1 John 1:9).
- **Petition:** Ask for wisdom, provision, strength, and help in your own circumstances (Matthew 6:11–13).
- **Intercession:** Pray for other people, including those in need and those who do not yet know Christ (1 Timothy 2:1–4).
- **Lament:** Bring sorrow, fear, and painful questions to God without pretending to feel cheerful (Psalm 27; Psalm 13).

Some days you may have much to say; on others, a simple request for help may be all you can express. David's psalms show that genuine confidence in God can exist alongside fear or grief. Honesty before the Lord is better than performing feelings we do not have.

7. Pray Throughout Ordinary Life and Listen Through Scripture (Luke 11:1–13; Philippians 4:4–7)

Jesus encourages persistent prayer in Luke 11. His example of a midnight visitor and his teaching about a father's good gifts call disciples to keep asking with confidence in God's character. Luke concludes this section by emphasizing the Father's gift of the Holy Spirit. We are not trying to overcome divine reluctance by repeating a request enough times; we are depending upon a good Father.

Longer, unhurried times of prayer and Scripture reading are valuable, but prayer can also accompany your daily responsibilities. You might ask for wisdom before a conversation, thank God during a quiet moment, or pray for patience while caring for a family member. A sentence such as *Father, help me act with kindness in this situation* can be a sincere expression of faith. Brief prayers need not replace deeper attention to God, and neither should become a measure of spiritual worth.

Listening to God begins with giving careful attention to what he has revealed in Scripture. The Holy Spirit helps believers understand biblical truth, recognize sin, remember Christ's promises, and grow in wisdom. We can pause after reading, reflect on the passage in context, and ask how to respond. A private feeling or impression, however strong, does not have the authority of Scripture; important decisions also call for sound judgment and appropriate counsel from mature Christians.

Paul's instruction in Philippians 4 connects prayer and thanksgiving with the peace of God guarding believers in Christ. He does not say that every difficult circumstance will immediately

change. Prayer directs us to the Lord whose presence and faithfulness remain when our situation is unsettled.

8. Keep Praying When the Answer Is Difficult

It is painful to ask God for something good and not receive the outcome we hoped for. Perhaps an illness continues, a relationship does not improve, or a burden grows heavier. Scripture does not teach that disappointment automatically means we lacked faith or chose the wrong words. Nor does it authorize us to claim we know God's hidden reason for every hardship.

Jesus prayed in Gethsemane before his crucifixion, bringing his real suffering before the Father while submitting to the Father's will (Matthew 26:36–46). Paul repeatedly asked for an affliction to be removed, but received assurance of Christ's sustaining grace instead (2 Corinthians 12:7–10). These passages teach us to ask boldly without claiming control over the answer. We may continue praying, seek help, receive appropriate care, and ask fellow Christians to support us.

When words are difficult, the Psalms provide prayers of lament, and Romans 8:26–27 teaches that the Holy Spirit helps believers in weakness. **Faith does not require pretending that suffering is painless.** The Lord welcomes truthful prayer, and our hope rests in his character rather than our ability to understand every circumstance.

Christians Before Us: The Lord’s Prayer Across Generations

From the earliest generations of Christianity, believers treasured the Lord’s Prayer as a guide for both personal devotion and gathered worship. The *Didache*, an early Christian instructional writing from the first or second century, includes the Lord’s Prayer in chapter 8 and encourages Christians to pray it **three times daily**. This provides a remarkable glimpse into how early believers organized their lives around prayer. Although Scripture does not require Christians to follow this particular schedule, the practice demonstrates how seriously the early Church took Jesus’ instruction to pray.

Early Christian teachers also devoted considerable attention to the prayer’s meaning. **Tertullian**, writing around the beginning of the third century, explained the Lord’s Prayer in his work *On Prayer*, emphasizing how its brief petitions contain profound spiritual teaching. **Cyprian of Carthage**, writing in the third century, developed these themes further in *On the Lord’s Prayer*. He especially emphasized that Jesus taught believers to pray *“Our Father”* rather than merely *“My Father.”* Prayer is therefore not only about our individual needs but also about our shared life as members of Christ’s Church. When we ask for daily bread, forgiveness, and deliverance from evil, we remember the needs of our brothers and sisters as well as our own.

These ancient writings remind us that **we belong to a long fellowship of Christians who have sought to follow Jesus in prayer**. Across centuries, cultures, and Christian traditions, believers have continued to pray the words their Savior taught. Their examples can encourage us to develop faithful habits of prayer, whether privately, with our families, or alongside our

churches. Yet Scripture remains our final authority, and no particular historical practice should become a requirement Jesus never established. The goal is not simply to repeat familiar words but to approach our heavenly Father with sincere faith, understanding, humility, and love.

What Is True in Christ

Prayer is one of the great privileges of belonging to Jesus Christ. Through him, believers are welcomed into fellowship with their heavenly Father. We do not need to earn God's attention through impressive words, lengthy prayers, or perfect obedience. Hebrews 4:14–16 teaches that because Jesus is our great high priest, we can approach God's throne with confidence to receive mercy and grace. This confidence does not come from our spiritual accomplishments but from Christ, who has reconciled us to God.

We also have the help of the Holy Spirit when we pray. Romans 8:26–27 teaches that the Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for God's people according to his will. There will be times when we struggle to find the right words, feel overwhelmed by our circumstances, or do not know what to ask. In these moments, we can still turn to God. Ask the Holy Spirit to pray for you. Prayer is not a performance in which we must impress him. It is a living expression of our dependence on him. We pray to the Father through the Son, with the help of the Holy Spirit, worshiping the one triune God.

Christ also teaches us to trust the Father's wisdom rather than demand our preferred outcomes. Jesus himself prayed, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). We can bring our needs, fears, desires, and requests to God with confidence that he hears his children. Yet faithful prayer does not guarantee that every request will be granted as we expect. Jesus himself demonstrated this for us to learn form in the garden of Gethsemane. Sometimes God's answers differ from our desires, and sometimes we must continue praying while we wait. Through prayer, we learn not only to ask God for help but also to surrender our desires to his wisdom and grow in trust and obedience.

If you belong to Christ, **you do not have to wait until you feel spiritually strong to pray**. You can come to your Father in gratitude, sorrow, confusion, repentance, or joy. If you are still exploring Christianity, you can honestly ask God for understanding as you consider who Jesus is and what he calls you to believe. The purpose of prayer is not to prove how spiritual we are, but to seek God sincerely, depend on his grace, and deepen our fellowship with him.

Learning to Follow Jesus In Prayer

Jesus teaches that prayer is more than speaking words to God. It belongs to a life of faith, trust, humility, and obedience. As we grow in our relationship with Christ, prayer should increasingly shape how we respond to difficulties, treat other people, and carry out our daily responsibilities.

Pray With Sincerity and Trust

In Matthew 6, Jesus gives clear instructions concerning prayer. He teaches His followers to pray sincerely rather than seeking admiration, approach the Father with confidence, forgive others, and seek God's kingdom and will. His surrounding teaching also calls believers to practice generosity and fasting without seeking public recognition and to trust their heavenly Father rather than being controlled by anxiety.

These teachings remind us that prayer is an expression of our relationship with God, not a religious performance. We can approach Him honestly with our needs, concerns, gratitude, and confession because He is our loving Father. **Our confidence rests in Jesus Christ and His saving work, not in the length, frequency, or eloquence of our prayers.**

Let Prayer Shape Your Actions

Prayer and practical obedience belong together in the Christian life. When we ask God to help us speak patiently, we should also consider how we will respond when a conversation becomes difficult. When we confess wrongdoing, we should consider whether an appropriate and safe act of repentance or repair is needed.

Likewise, praying for someone who is suffering should encourage us to consider whether we can offer practical assistance. This might involve preparing a meal, providing encouragement, listening compassionately, or helping with an ordinary responsibility.

These actions do not earn God's favor or guarantee that our prayers will be answered as we desire. Rather, they reflect the work of God's grace as the Holy Spirit teaches us to love and obey Christ. *Prayer draws us toward God, and dependence upon Him should increasingly shape the way we live.*

Understand the Place of Fasting

Fasting is an important spiritual discipline that Christians should take seriously. In Matthew 6:16–18, Jesus said *"when you fast,"* not *"if you fast."* Just as he expected his followers to pray, he expected them to fast. Jesus also taught that after the bridegroom was taken away, his disciples would fast (Matthew 9:14–15). The early Church continued this practice, joining fasting with worship, prayer, and seeking God's direction (Acts 13:2–3; 14:23). Fasting was not an obscure tradition reserved for unusually devoted believers. It was a recognized part of the Christian life.

Biblical fasting involves willingly abstaining from food for a period of time to devote ourselves more intentionally to God. Throughout Scripture, fasting accompanies repentance, humility, earnest prayer, and dependence upon the Lord. By temporarily setting aside a legitimate physical need, we deliberately turn our attention toward our greater spiritual need for God. Fasting reminds us that we do not live by bread alone (Matthew 4:4). It can help us recognize our dependence on earthly comforts, examine our hearts, and seek the Lord with

greater seriousness. Christians should therefore be encouraged to make fasting a meaningful part of their spiritual lives rather than neglect it altogether.

However, **Jesus also warned that fasting must be sincere rather than a performance for others** (Matthew 6:16–18). We do not fast to impress people, earn salvation, or pressure God into granting our requests. We fast because we love him, need him, and desire to seek him more earnestly. Scripture does not prescribe one universal fasting schedule for every Christian, and legitimate medical or nutritional limitations must be respected. Those who cannot safely abstain from food should not endanger their health or disregard medical guidance.

As you grow in discipleship, consider how fasting can become a regular and intentional part of your walk with Christ. If you are medically able, you might begin by setting aside a meal and devoting that time to Scripture, prayer, repentance, and seeking God's will. **Do not neglect fasting simply because it requires sacrifice or feels unfamiliar.** Like prayer, it is a discipline that can help us grow in humility, self-control, and dependence upon God. Although this course does not prescribe a mandatory fasting schedule, we strongly encourage believers to embrace this biblical practice as part of a faithful and growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Consider how you could integrate fasting at some point through the remainder of your discipleship course, if your health allows.

Pray for Others and Serve in Love

The apostles extend Jesus' teaching by encouraging Christians to pray for others, including church leaders, gospel workers, and people in positions of authority (1 Timothy 2:1–4; Ephesians 6:18–20). Prayer should therefore reach beyond our personal concerns and reflect God's love for people throughout the world.

As you develop this habit, remember that you are not responsible for producing particular outcomes. You cannot control another person's response to Christ or guarantee that difficult circumstances will change. Your responsibility is to pray faithfully, love sincerely, and respond wisely to the opportunities God places before you.

As we learn to pray, we also learn to trust our heavenly Father and follow Jesus more faithfully. Prayer and fasting are important expressions of our dependence upon God, helping us seek him sincerely and grow in fellowship with him. These practices help us turn our attention toward the Lord who has already shown us grace through Jesus Christ.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read Matthew 6:5–13, Luke 11:1–13, and Philippians 4:4–7. Notice how Jesus begins with the Father's character and how Paul connects prayer with thanksgiving in uncertainty. Review The Good Way Library's Matthew 6 commentary, especially the Walkthrough and Leading sections. Prepare one ordinary example of trusting God in prayer without presenting your experience as the model everyone must copy.

During the Meeting | Start by asking what the learner understands about prayer and what questions they have. Read Matthew 6 together, then trace the requests concerning God's name, kingdom, will, provision, forgiveness, and protection. Use the single discussion section below. Close with a brief prayer grounded in the passage, inviting the learner to pray aloud, silently, or by following the Scripture. No one needs to perform.

What to Watch For | Never judge a person's faith by eloquence, emotional intensity, length of prayer, or the outcomes they report. Allow honest questions about disappointment, grief, or silence. Do not claim to know God's hidden purposes or make private impressions authoritative.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain why prayer is fellowship with the Father rather than a way to control him. Identify one natural occasion for brief prayer and one person to remember in intercession. If important questions remain, make room to continue studying before introducing the Spirit's ministry in Step Seven.

Discuss Together

Read the relevant passages again as needed. Discuss these questions openly with your discipler, or consider them in writing if you are studying independently.

1. **The Priorities of Prayer:** Why does Jesus place God's name, kingdom, and will before our daily needs in Matthew 6:9–13? How might this pattern change the way you pray about a particular concern?
2. **Sincerity Before God:** What two problems does Jesus identify in Matthew 6:5–8? How does knowing that our Father already understands our needs help us pray sincerely rather than seeking attention or relying on repeated words?
3. **Trusting God's Answers:** How can Christians pray confidently while accepting that God may answer differently than they hope? What does Luke 11:1–13 teach about our heavenly Father's goodness?
4. **Confession and Forgiveness:** Why should Christians continue confessing sin when Christ's saving work is sufficient? How should God's forgiveness shape our treatment of others, and why does forgiveness not necessarily require immediately restoring trust?
5. **Prayer in Everyday Life:** What does sincere prayer look like during ordinary responsibilities? How can brief prayers express genuine dependence upon God without becoming mechanical routines or religious performances?
6. **Prayer During Difficult Seasons:** How can the Psalms help us bring grief, disappointment, and uncertainty before God? How might praying for others also encourage us to demonstrate Christ's love through practical action?

Put It Into Practice

Pray Through Jesus' Pattern

Read Matthew 6:9–13 several times during the coming week. As you reflect on the Lord's Prayer, consider what Jesus teaches about approaching God as Father, honoring His name, seeking His kingdom, depending upon His provision, receiving forgiveness, and resisting temptation.

Choose a time to pray through the passage slowly. You may use Jesus' words directly or express each petition faithfully in your own words. Consider how each part of the prayer reveals something about God's character, His priorities, and your relationship with Him.

If you have a discipler, discuss what you have learned about prayer and whether any part of Jesus' teaching challenges or encourages you. Remember that the purpose is not to recite the words perfectly, but to grow in sincere communication with your heavenly Father.

Pray in an Ordinary Moment

Choose one natural transition during your day when you can intentionally turn your attention toward God. This might be when you begin work, prepare a meal, travel somewhere, or get ready for sleep.

During that moment, offer a simple and genuine prayer. Thank God for something He has provided, ask for wisdom concerning a decision, confess a concern, or entrust a difficulty to His care. You do not need elaborate words or a particular emotional experience to approach Him.

As you practice, remember that prayer is an expression of your relationship with God rather than a religious performance. Avoid turning these moments into a rigid schedule or measuring your faithfulness by an unbroken streak. Instead, allow prayer to become a natural part of walking with Christ throughout the day.

Pray With and for Others

During the coming week, intentionally pray for people beyond your immediate concerns. Begin by remembering two individuals who may need encouragement, guidance, salvation, or strength. Then pray for gospel workers, a need within your local church, and people experiencing suffering or hardship in other nations.

If you have a discipler, spend some time praying together during your next meeting. You may pray aloud, take turns, or remain quietly before God. The purpose is to share in prayer without pressure to speak eloquently or disclose matters you would prefer to keep private.

As you pray, consider whether there is also an appropriate way to demonstrate Christ's love through practical action. You might encourage someone, offer assistance, or reach out to a person who is struggling.

Prayer and loving service belong together in the Christian life. Trust God with the needs you cannot resolve, and remain willing to act faithfully where He has given you an opportunity to help.

If You Are Studying Alone

Read the three required passages and answer the discussion questions in writing if that helps you think carefully. A simple prayer journal may help you remember Scripture, people, and concerns, but it is optional and is not a scorecard for God's faithfulness. Seek opportunities for prayer and worship with a healthy local church, and consider asking a mature Christian to pray with you. Pray often in intercession for others for the remainder of this course, and for God to open a door for you to have other Christians to participate with in the Body of Christ.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for making a way for sinners to approach you through Jesus Christ. You know what I need before I speak, yet you invite me to pray. Teach me to honor your name, seek your kingdom, and desire your will. Provide for my needs today and help me receive your gifts with gratitude. Forgive my sins and form in me a heart that shows mercy without ignoring truth or safety. Protect me from temptation and help me obey your Word. When I feel weak or disappointed, give me courage to be honest with you and to trust your goodness. By your Holy Spirit, help me remember Christ's promises, pray for others, and love the people you place in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture to Remember

Matthew 6:9–10 (World English Bible, Updated)

> "Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. Let your Kingdom come. Let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

These words remind us that prayer begins with God's holiness and purposes. They can guide us toward trusting our Father before we ask him to change our circumstances. It should center us on what is truly important in the grand scheme of everything.

Continue Studying With Good Way

Read Scripture first, then use these published Good Way commentaries to explore difficult verses, compare related passages, and consider faithful application.

- **Matthew 6 Commentary: Hidden Righteousness and Kingdom Trust**: Follow the Lord's Prayer in its Sermon on the Mount setting, then examine its Walkthrough, Application, Interpretive Options, and Leading sections.

- **Luke 11 Commentary: Prayer, Signs, and Woes**: Study Jesus' teaching about persistent requests, the Father's goodness, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- **John 14 Commentary: The Way, Spirit, and Peace**: Understand prayer in Jesus' name, access to the Father through the Son, and the Spirit's continuing help.

Before the Next Step

You do not have to master prayer before you can speak with God. Jesus teaches you to come sincerely, to honor the Father, to ask for daily provision, to seek mercy and protection, and to trust God even when you cannot see what he is doing. Those who belong to Christ approach God through his finished saving work, not through the perfection of their words. Their growing life of prayer is one expression of the Holy Spirit's transforming grace.

Next: Step 7, Walk by the Spirit. Before beginning, read Galatians 5:13–26. We will learn more about the Holy Spirit who indwells believers, helps them depend upon Christ, and produces the fruit of godly character. The God to whom we pray is also the God who strengthens his people to live in obedience and love.

Step 7: Walk by the Spirit

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 7 of 12

Living by the Holy Spirit's Power, Guidance, and Fruit

Central Truth: The Holy Spirit is God, who dwells in those who belong to Jesus Christ. He makes Christ known, strengthens believers to resist sin, produces Christlike character, and equips God's people to serve one another. We learn to walk by the Spirit through trusting Christ, receiving his Word, and responding to his grace in everyday life.

Learning to Live by the Spirit

You may know that Jesus commands you to love others, yet still struggle with impatience. You may understand the importance of forgiveness, yet find resentment returning. Perhaps you sincerely desire to follow Christ, but your thoughts, words, and choices do not always reflect that desire.

How does a Christian actually change? Can we become more like Jesus simply by trying harder, building better habits, or exercising stronger willpower?

Jesus did not save his people and then leave them to produce holiness by themselves. He gives them the Holy Spirit, who works within them to form a new way of living. Christian growth involves real decisions and obedience, but its power comes from God rather than our independent effort.

In earlier lessons, we learned to abide in Christ, receive his Word, and approach God in prayer. Now we will consider the divine Person who makes this dependent life possible. **The Holy Spirit is not a distant religious idea. He is God present with his people, teaching them the truth, directing them toward Jesus, and transforming their lives.** If we are saved, then he promises that he dwells *within us!*

This lesson will help you understand who the Holy Spirit is, recognize his work, discern his guidance, and learn what it means to walk by the Spirit throughout an ordinary day.

Begin With Scripture

Principal Reading: Galatians 5:13–26

Before continuing, open your Bible and read this entire passage carefully. If possible, begin at Galatians 5:1 so you can understand Paul's larger argument about Christian freedom.

As you read, notice three important movements:

- **Freedom and love (verses 13–15):** Paul explains why freedom in Christ should lead believers to serve others rather than indulge selfish desires.

- **The flesh and the Spirit (verses 16–21):** Paul describes the conflict between sinful desires and the Spirit's leading, including the serious consequences of an unrepentant life.
- **Fruit and a new way of life (verses 22–26):** Paul identifies the character produced by the Spirit and calls believers to live consistently with the life they have received.

These verses are not an isolated collection of moral advice. They belong to Paul's larger explanation of salvation by grace and the new life that follows faith in Jesus Christ.

Two Companion Readings

Read both passages during this step, either before meeting with your discipler or together during your study.

1. John 16:5–15

Jesus explains the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, who will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. He also explains how the Spirit guides his apostles into truth and glorifies Christ. Notice how the Spirit's ministry directs attention toward Jesus and his saving work.

2. 1 Corinthians 12:4–13

Paul explains how the Holy Spirit distributes different gifts among believers for the common good. Notice that Christians receive different gifts but belong to one body through the same Spirit. These gifts are intended for service, not personal status or spiritual competition.

If you are reading through the Gospel of John alongside this course, spend extra time in John 16. Jesus explains why the coming of the Holy Spirit is important for his disciples and how the Spirit's continuing work will glorify him.

Main Teaching: What It Means to Walk by the Spirit

1. The Holy Spirit Is God, Not an Impersonal Force

Some people imagine the Holy Spirit as a peaceful feeling, a sudden religious excitement, or a mysterious power that helps Christians accomplish extraordinary things. Scripture reveals someone far greater.

The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity. Christianity confesses **one God eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit**. These are not three gods or three temporary appearances of one person. The Father, Son, and Spirit are personally distinct and fully share the one divine nature.

In John 14:15–27, Jesus prepares his disciples for his coming departure. He promises that the Father will send another Counselor, the Spirit of truth, who will remain with them. The Spirit will teach them and bring Jesus' words to their remembrance.

Jesus speaks these words first to his apostles during his final evening with them. Their particular calling included remembering and faithfully communicating his teaching. Through

their inspired witness, preserved in Scripture, Christians continue to receive the truth about Jesus. The same Spirit also works within believers to help them understand and obey God's Word.

Notice the relationships Jesus describes. The Son asks the Father, the Father sends the Spirit in the Son's name, and the Spirit continues making Christ known. The Spirit is not merely the influence Jesus leaves behind. He is the living God actively working among his people.

Scripture describes several aspects of his ministry:

- **He gives spiritual life.** Jesus teaches that new birth comes through the Spirit (John 3:5–8).
- **He dwells in believers.** Those who belong to Christ have received the Spirit of God (Romans 8:9).
- **He makes Christ known.** The Spirit teaches and directs attention toward Jesus and his truth (John 14:26; 16:13–15).
- **He helps us pray.** The Spirit intercedes for believers in their weakness (Romans 8:26–27).
- **He produces holy character.** Love, patience, goodness, and other spiritual fruit develop through his work (Galatians 5:22–23).
- **He equips the church.** The Spirit gives different gifts for the good of Christ's people (1 Corinthians 12:4–13).

These ministries belong together. The Spirit brings sinners to new life, strengthens believers, forms Christlike character, and builds up the church.

He does not teach a different gospel or lead us away from Jesus. Instead, he glorifies Christ and helps believers live according to the truth Christ has revealed.

Christian discipleship is more than imitating Jesus from a distance. Those who belong to him have received the Holy Spirit, who makes genuine transformation possible.

2. Freedom in Christ Leads Us to Love

Galatians 5:13–15

Before explaining the fruit of the Spirit, Paul reminds the Galatian believers that Christ has called them into freedom. To understand this freedom, we need to remember why he wrote the letter.

Certain teachers were troubling the churches by insisting that Gentile believers needed circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses to be fully accepted by God. Paul rejected making these requirements a basis for justification. Sinners receive righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ, not by earning acceptance through religious performance.

Christ has accomplished what we could never accomplish for ourselves. His saving work is sufficient, and our obedience cannot improve upon the basis of our acceptance before God.

Yet Paul knew that people could misunderstand Christian freedom. If salvation does not come through religious effort, does that mean our behavior no longer matters?

Certainly not. Paul explains that believers must not use freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. Instead, they should serve one another through love.

Consider two common misunderstandings:

- **Legalism:** Believing that enough obedience, prayer, or spiritual effort will finally make God accept us.
- **License:** Believing that God's grace allows us to disregard his commands or continue deliberately in sin.

Neither reflects the gospel Paul teaches. Legalism tries to earn salvation, while license separates salvation from the transforming work of God.

The biblical answer is that **we are saved by grace through faith, and that grace leads us into a new life of love and obedience.** Christians do not obey in order to purchase adoption. They obey because Christ has brought them into God's family and given them his Spirit. If we truly trust in God, we should also trust in his work in our lives and allow him to perform that work.

Paul connects this freedom with the command to love our neighbors as ourselves. He also warns that hostility and selfishness can destroy Christian fellowship. Freedom in Christ should produce servants, not people who use their supposed liberty to harm one another.

Jesus taught the same connection between love and obedience. In John 14:15 (WEBU), he says:

> If you love me, keep my commandments.

Love for Christ does not replace obedience, nor does obedience replace love. Through the Spirit, the two belong together.

3. The Flesh and the Spirit Are in Conflict

Galatians 5:16–21

Paul now explains why believers experience an ongoing struggle with sin. He describes two opposing influences: the flesh and the Spirit.

In this passage, *the flesh* does not simply mean our physical bodies. God created human beings with bodies, and Scripture promises the future resurrection of those bodies. Here Paul describes fallen human desires and patterns of life that resist God's will.

The flesh seeks independence from God. It places our own desires above his truth and often treats other people as obstacles to getting what we want.

Paul identifies several kinds of sinful conduct, including sexual immorality, idolatry, drunkenness, hatred, envy, jealousy, and outbursts of anger. He also names rivalry, division, and other behaviors that damage the church.

Notice how much of the list concerns relationships. Spiritual maturity cannot be measured merely by avoiding publicly visible sins. A person may appear religious while remaining deeply proud, resentful, divisive, or cruel toward others.

Paul gives a serious warning in verses 19–21. Those who continue practicing such sins as a settled way of life will not inherit God's kingdom. The warning confronts anyone who claims Christ while remaining committed to conduct that rejects his rule.

This does not mean that every failure proves a genuine believer has lost salvation. Christians still struggle with temptation and must continue repenting. The New Testament does not treat sin lightly, but it also directs repentant sinners back to the grace of Christ.

Paul explains that the flesh and Spirit oppose one another. Consequently, believers may experience desires that conflict with what they know is right.

Temptation is not itself proof that the Holy Spirit has abandoned you. The question is whether you surrender to sinful desires or respond to the Spirit's leading through faith and obedience.

Imagine someone speaking harshly to you. Your immediate desire may be to retaliate, embarrass them, or remain resentful. Walking by the Spirit does not require you to manufacture a pleasant feeling. Instead, you can acknowledge your anger, ask God for help, and remember Christ's teaching about truthful and loving conduct.

A faithful response might involve speaking calmly, refusing retaliation, or establishing an appropriate boundary. Patience does not require tolerating abuse, and gentleness does not prevent necessary correction. The Spirit teaches us to respond according to God's truth rather than simply following our impulses.

Paul's command concerns our ordinary way of life. Walking by the Spirit means learning to depend upon God as we make decisions, respond to others, and face temptation throughout the day.

4. The Fruit of the Spirit Reveals His Transforming Work

Galatians 5:22–26

After describing the deeds of the flesh, Paul turns to the fruit of the Spirit. He identifies nine qualities that together describe a life increasingly shaped by God.

Notice that Paul speaks of the *fruit* of the Spirit rather than presenting nine separate spiritual achievements. His emphasis is on the character God produces in those who belong to Christ.

The qualities are familiar, but they deserve careful consideration.

- **Love:** Seeking another person's good rather than always demanding our own way.
- **Joy:** A deep gladness rooted in God and his promises, even during difficult circumstances.
- **Peace:** The confidence that comes from reconciliation with God and shapes our relationships with others.
- **Patience:** Enduring difficulty or provocation without needless anger or retaliation.
- **Kindness:** Showing sincere concern through helpful and compassionate actions.

- **Goodness:** Choosing what honors God and benefits others rather than what is merely convenient.
- **Faith:** Trusting God and displaying dependable faithfulness. The WEBU also gives *faithfulness* as an alternative rendering in verse 22.
- **Gentleness:** Treating others with humility and restraint rather than using strength harshly.
- **Self-control:** Resisting impulses and desires that would lead us away from faithful obedience.

These qualities are not merely personality traits. Someone may naturally appear calm or friendly without possessing genuine faith in Christ. The fruit Paul describes comes from the Holy Spirit's transforming work.

Nor should we use the list as a spiritual performance chart. A Christian does not need to assign a daily score for kindness, patience, or peace. Such exercises can easily redirect attention toward personal achievement rather than dependence upon Christ.

Instead, consider the direction of your life and your desires. Are you learning to recognize sinful attitudes and turn from them? Are you becoming more willing to love, forgive, and serve? Do you desire to do so? Do you increasingly understand that Christ, rather than your own spiritual strength, is the source of your hope?

Growth may be gradual, and some struggles may remain difficult for a long time. Nevertheless, Scripture calls believers to genuine transformation rather than passive acceptance of sin.

In verse 24, Paul grounds this new life in belonging to Christ. Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. This language describes a decisive break with the old allegiance to sin. It does not mean that every sinful desire has already disappeared.

Verse 25 then calls believers to live consistently with the Spirit-given life they have received. Paul concludes by warning against conceit, provocation, and envy. The fruit of the Spirit must shape the way Christians treat one another, not merely the way they evaluate themselves.

Spiritual growth is therefore both personal and communal. The Spirit changes individual believers so that their relationships increasingly reflect the character of Jesus.

5. The Holy Spirit Assures Us That We Belong to God

Review From Step Three: Romans 8:1–17

The Holy Spirit does more than help Christians make better decisions. He also confirms their relationship with God and strengthens their confidence in Christ.

Recall Romans 8:1–17 from Step Three, where we considered the Spirit's work in our new life and identity in Christ. Paul begins by teaching that those who are in Christ Jesus are no longer under condemnation. This freedom rests upon God's saving action through his Son, not upon the believer's flawless obedience.

Paul then describes the Spirit dwelling within God's people. According to Romans 8:9, belonging to Christ and possessing the Spirit belong together. Christians do not need to earn the Spirit's presence through enough prayer, worship, or religious effort.

The Spirit also leads believers to resist sinful conduct. Romans 8:12–13 calls Christians to put sinful deeds to death through the Spirit rather than surrendering to the flesh. God's prior gift of life makes this response possible.

Paul then introduces another wonderful truth: believers have been adopted as God's children.

Through the Spirit, they can approach God as Father. Romans 8:16 explains that the Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are God's children. This assurance belongs to the Spirit's ministry, but it should not be reduced to the pursuit of extraordinary feelings.

Some Christians experience deep comfort during prayer or worship. Others pass through seasons of sorrow, spiritual dryness, or uncertainty. These experiences do not carry the same authority as God's promises in Scripture.

Our confidence must remain grounded in the Lord Jesus Christ, his saving work, and the truth God has revealed. The Spirit strengthens assurance by directing believers toward that truth and enabling them to live as God's children.

Later in Romans 8, Paul explains that the Spirit also helps Christians when they are weak and do not know how to pray. His intercession assures us that our relationship with God does not depend upon perfect words or constant emotional strength.

We still await the resurrection and complete renewal that God has promised. Until then, believers experience the Spirit's presence while continuing to face weakness, suffering, and temptation.

The Spirit's ministry gives us confidence to continue trusting Christ, even when we do not feel particularly strong.

6. The Spirit Gives Gifts for the Good of the Church

1 Corinthians 12:4–13

The Holy Spirit also equips believers to participate in the life and ministry of Christ's church.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul explains that the same Spirit distributes different gifts among God's people. These gifts are not rewards for becoming spiritually important. God gives them for the good of the whole body.

Scripture describes various forms of Spirit-enabled service, including teaching, encouragement, mercy, administration, and other ministries that strengthen the church. First Corinthians 12 also discusses gifts involving healing, prophecy, and different kinds of tongues.

Christians have historically disagreed about the continuing operation of certain miraculous and revelatory gifts. Some believe all the gifts described in the New Testament remain available in

essentially the same ways. Others believe some gifts served a particular foundational purpose during the apostolic period.

These differences deserve careful biblical examination and respectful conversation. They should not distract us from Paul's central teaching: **the Spirit gives gifts so that believers can serve one another and honor Christ.**

Different Christian traditions also understand Spirit baptism and subsequent spiritual empowerment differently. Yet an extraordinary experience or one particular gift should not become our measure of another person's salvation. Romans 8 grounds belonging to Christ in possessing his Spirit, while 1 Corinthians 12 emphasizes the Spirit's varied distribution of gifts.

Spiritual ability must never become an excuse for pride. Someone may have impressive talents yet lack patience, humility, or love. Paul addresses this danger by placing his teaching about spiritual gifts alongside the necessity of Christian love in 1 Corinthians 13.

Important Note: **Spiritual gifts belong to God, not to us.** They are entrusted to believers by the Holy Spirit, and at the end of this life, we must give an account to God for how faithfully we used what he provided (1 Peter 4:10; Romans 14:12). Therefore, again, no spiritual gift should ever become a source of personal pride.

We should also distinguish spiritual gifts from ordinary natural talents. A spiritual gift is an expression of the Spirit's work in someone who belongs to Christ, not merely an ability that person possessed before salvation. However, this does not mean every spiritual gift must appear as an entirely new skill. The Holy Spirit may also transform and empower existing abilities for purposes they never served before or amplify certain talents to new levels. What matters is that the gift comes through the Spirit's gracious work, serves the church, and brings glory to God rather than ourselves.

If you are uncertain where you can serve, begin with ordinary faithfulness. Participate in a healthy local congregation, learn from trustworthy leaders, and notice opportunities to encourage or help others.

You do not need to identify a remarkable spiritual gift before serving someone. The Spirit often works through quiet, faithful acts that receive little public attention.

7. How Do We Recognize the Spirit's Guidance?

One important question for growing Christians is how to recognize God's guidance.

You may hear someone say they felt the Holy Spirit directing them toward a decision. Others describe an inward conviction, a peaceful impression, or a strong thought during prayer.

We should neither dismiss these experiences automatically nor assume that every feeling comes directly from God. Scripture gives us a trustworthy foundation for spiritual discernment.

The Holy Spirit does not contradict the Scriptures he inspired. God's written Word, contained in the 66 canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, remains the authoritative standard for Christian faith and conduct.

Through Scripture, the Spirit teaches us about Jesus, exposes sin, corrects mistaken thinking, and helps us understand faithful obedience. Listening to God therefore begins with listening carefully to his Word.

The Spirit also works through prayer, conscience shaped by biblical truth, wisdom, and the counsel of mature Christians. These supports help us consider how God's teaching applies to particular circumstances.

When evaluating a possible spiritual prompting, ask:

1. **Does it agree with Scripture?** God does not direct us to commit sin or reject what he has clearly taught.
2. **Does it reflect the character and commands of Jesus?** Genuine spiritual guidance will not excuse pride, cruelty, dishonesty, or selfish ambition.
3. **Have I sought wise counsel?** Mature Christians and accountable church leaders can help us recognize assumptions or dangers we may have overlooked.
4. **Have I considered the circumstances responsibly?** God calls us to use wisdom, understand our obligations, and consider how our decisions affect others.

Suppose you feel strongly that God wants you to leave a job, move somewhere new, or undertake a particular ministry. Instead of immediately declaring that your impression is a divine command, examine the decision through Scripture, prayer, wise counsel, and reliable information.

There will also be situations in which Scripture has already given a clear command. We do not need an unusual impression to know that Jesus commands us to love our neighbors, tell the truth, forgive others, and follow him faithfully.

Other decisions require careful judgment. Scripture may not identify which particular job to accept or which opportunity to pursue. In those matters, we can pray for wisdom, consider biblical principles, seek counsel, and make responsible choices before God.

A strong emotion is not automatically the Spirit's voice. Likewise, the absence of an unusual experience does not prove that God has stopped guiding us.

The Spirit's ordinary ministry is wonderfully sufficient. He leads believers toward the truth of Christ and helps them live according to that truth.

Christians Before Us: The Holy Spirit in Historic Christian Faith

The early church took the identity and work of the Holy Spirit seriously. In the fourth century, **Basil of Caesarea** defended the Spirit's full divine dignity in his influential work *On the Holy Spirit*, arguing that the Spirit deserves the same honor and worship as the Father and the Son. This conviction was expressed in the **Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (AD 381)**, which confesses the Holy Spirit as Lord and giver of life, worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Son. The church did not understand the Spirit as an impersonal force, a lesser divine being,

or merely a source of extraordinary power. He is truly God, the third person of the Trinity, actively giving life and sanctifying God's people. This historic confession continues to remind Christians that knowing the Holy Spirit is essential to understanding the God we worship.

Cyril of Jerusalem, another fourth-century Christian teacher, emphasized the Spirit's personal involvement in the lives of believers. In his *Catechetical Lectures*, Cyril described the Spirit as the one who teaches, strengthens, enlightens, sanctifies, and distributes gifts throughout the church. He recognized that the same Spirit works in different people according to their needs and God's purposes. This understanding closely reflects Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12: the Spirit gives different gifts, but all come from the same divine source. **The lesson from Christians before us is that the Holy Spirit must be both honored as God and depended upon in daily life.** His presence is not something to neglect, and his gifts are never grounds for personal pride. Everything he provides is intended to draw us closer to Christ and strengthen his church.

What Is True in Christ

One of the most remarkable statements Jesus made about the Holy Spirit appears in John 16:7. As Jesus prepared his disciples for his departure, he told them, **"It is to your advantage that I go away."** He explained that his departure would lead to the coming of the Counselor, the Holy Spirit. Consider the significance of those words. The disciples had walked with Jesus, heard his teaching, and witnessed his miracles. Yet Jesus told them that his departure would be for their good because he would send the Holy Spirit. This does not diminish the importance of Christ's earthly presence. Rather, it reveals how essential the Spirit's coming would be to God's saving plan. **Jesus considered the sending of the Holy Spirit so important that he described his own departure as an advantage to his disciples.** Through the Spirit, Christ would continue his work among his people, strengthening them, guiding them in truth, and empowering them to bear witness to him (John 14:16–17; 16:7–15).

The Spirit Has Been Given to Those Who Belong to Christ

Every person who genuinely belongs to Jesus Christ has received the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13–14). His presence is not a special privilege reserved for unusually mature Christians or those who have experienced remarkable spiritual events. **The Holy Spirit dwells in every true believer**, bringing God's presence into everyday Christian life. We do not need to earn his presence through extraordinary devotion, discover a particular spiritual gift, or demonstrate an emotional experience to prove that he belongs to us. The Spirit is God's gracious gift to those who belong to Christ, and his presence reminds us that we have not been left to follow Jesus through human strength alone.

The Spirit Is Transforming and Equipping Us

The Holy Spirit does not leave believers unchanged. He works within us to produce holiness, strengthen our faith, help us resist sin, and cultivate the fruit described in Galatians 5:22–23. This transformation is often gradual, involving repentance, obedience, prayer, and continued dependence upon God's grace. **Spiritual maturity is not measured by how impressive someone appears, but by a life increasingly shaped by Christlike love and holiness.** The Spirit also distributes gifts for the good of the church (1 Corinthians 12:7–11). Some believers serve in visible ministries, while others faithfully encourage, help, teach, or care for people in quieter ways. These gifts are entrusted to us, not owned as personal achievements. We are responsible for using them faithfully, humbly, and for God's glory.

The Spirit Is the Promise of What Is Coming

Although the Spirit lives within believers now, we have not yet experienced everything God has promised. Christians still face weakness, suffering, temptation, and death. Yet Scripture describes the Holy Spirit as the **guarantee of our inheritance** (Ephesians 1:13–14) and the firstfruits of the redemption we eagerly await (Romans 8:23). His presence assures believers that God's work is not limited to improving our present circumstances. He is preparing us for the day when Christ returns, our bodies are raised, and we experience the fullness of life in God's renewed creation. The same Spirit who strengthens us today gives us confidence that God will faithfully complete what he has promised.

These truths should shape how we approach the Christian life. **We must neither neglect the Holy Spirit nor make extraordinary experiences the measure of genuine faith.** Instead, we should depend upon him daily, test our understanding against Scripture, pursue the fruit he produces, and faithfully use whatever gifts he provides. The Spirit does not draw attention away from Jesus Christ. As Jesus explained in John 16:14, the Spirit glorifies him. A life increasingly guided by the Holy Spirit will therefore become a life increasingly devoted to Christ.

If you are still exploring Christianity, remember that the Holy Spirit is not a spiritual power you must learn to obtain before coming to Jesus. Christ calls you to repent, believe the gospel, and follow him. Those who truly belong to Christ receive the Spirit as God's gracious gift, not as a reward for having already become spiritually mature.

Learning to Follow Jesus In The Spirit

The command to walk by the Spirit comes from the apostle Paul in Galatians 5. It is an authoritative apostolic instruction explaining how believers should live in light of Christ's saving work.

Jesus himself commanded his disciples to love him, keep his commandments, and love one another. In John 14, he connected this obedience with the promised ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Paul is not introducing a different Christian life. He is explaining how followers of Jesus live faithfully through the Spirit whom Christ has given.

Walking With Christ in Ordinary Moments

Imagine beginning your day with a difficult responsibility ahead of you. Perhaps you already feel worried, frustrated, or impatient.

You can turn to God in prayer, acknowledge your concerns, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember and practice Christ's teaching. Never feel that you need to create an unusual spiritual atmosphere. You are simply bringing your circumstances before the Lord.

Later, someone tests your patience. You remember that kindness and self-control belong to the Spirit's fruit. Rather than immediately reacting from resentment, you ask Christ for help and choose a response that reflects his commands.

In the evening, you recognize that you also failed in some ways. You can confess those failures honestly, trust the sufficiency of Christ's saving work, and ask for continued growth. Repentance brings sin into the light rather than hiding it or treating it as harmless.

These ordinary moments are opportunities to walk consciously with God. Over time, the Spirit forms Christian character through our continuing dependence and obedience.

This does not mean that prayer guarantees immediate victory over every struggle. Some habits require sustained repentance, careful boundaries, pastoral accountability, or qualified professional support. The Spirit's presence never removes our responsibility to seek wise help when necessary.

Yet we do not face Christian growth as though we were spiritually alone. The Lord who calls us to obey has also given his Spirit.

Let the Spirit's Fruit Bless Someone Else

The fruit of the Spirit is not given merely so that we can feel spiritually mature. Love, patience, kindness, and faithfulness should become visible in the way we treat others.

Perhaps someone in your family needs a gentler response. A fellow church member might need encouragement, while a neighbor could benefit from practical help or a listening ear. You may also have an opportunity to explain gently how Jesus has changed the way you approach a difficult situation.

You do not need an impressive ministry opportunity or a conversion quota. Ask how the love of Christ might become visible through your conduct toward someone already in your life.

The Spirit who draws believers toward Jesus also teaches them to love the people Jesus loves. This outward service belongs to our discipleship now, not merely after completing the course.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read Galatians 5:13–26 carefully, along with John 16:5–15 and 1 Corinthians 12:4–13. Recall Romans 8:1–17 from Step Three, especially the Spirit's indwelling presence and the believer's adoption into God's family. Notice how the Spirit produces Christlike character, gives gifts for the common good, and directs attention toward Jesus. Review the Good Way Galatians 5 commentary if helpful. Prepare to explain the Trinity, spiritual fruit, and discernment in ordinary language. Pray for the learner and approach the meeting as a fellow disciple rather than an examiner.

During the Meeting | Begin by reading the principal passage together. Ask what Paul means by Christian freedom and why he contrasts the flesh with the Spirit. Explore the fruit of the Spirit as God's transforming work rather than a self-rating exercise. Discuss an everyday example of patience or kindness, and connect it to Christ's prior grace. Give some of your own examples here. Allow honest questions and close with prayer, without requiring the learner to pray aloud.

What to Watch For | Some learners may believe they lack the Spirit because they have never experienced an unusual spiritual event. Others may interpret every strong emotion as divine guidance. Return gently to Scripture without demanding private disclosures or demonstrations of spiritual gifts. Respect legitimate Christian differences. Explore them openly.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain who the Holy Spirit is, how spiritual fruit differs from religious performance, and how Scripture guides discernment. Together identify one suitable opportunity for loving service and a healthy connection to church life. Prepare to examine repentance and practical holiness in Step Eight, emphasizing that these responses begin with grace.

Discuss Together

Read the relevant passages again as needed. Discuss these questions openly with your discipler, or consider them in writing if you are studying independently.

1. **Spiritual Gifts:** According to 1 Corinthians 12:4–13, why does the Holy Spirit give different gifts to believers? How should this affect Christians who feel unimportant or who compare their abilities with those of others? What are your own gifts?
2. **Testing a Spiritual Claim:** Suppose someone says, "The Holy Spirit told me to make this decision," but that decision could neglect an important responsibility. How would you evaluate that claim using Scripture, prayer, wise Christian counsel, and responsible consideration of the circumstances?
3. **Freedom Through the Spirit:** What does Paul mean by Christian freedom in Galatians 5:13–15? How is freedom to love and serve different from either earning God's favor or assuming our behavior no longer matters?

4. **The Spirit Points to Christ:** How does Jesus describe the Holy Spirit's ministry in John 16:5–15? Why is it important that the Spirit glorifies Jesus rather than drawing attention away from him?
5. **The Fruit of the Spirit:** What distinguishes the deeds of the flesh from the fruit of the Spirit? Why should we understand spiritual fruit as evidence of God's transforming work rather than a list of personal achievements?
6. **Depending on the Spirit Daily:** Think about an ordinary relationship in which patience, kindness, or self-control is difficult. What might it look like to depend upon the Spirit and respond faithfully to Christ? You do not need to share private details.
7. **The Spirit and Assurance:** How does Romans 8 help us understand Christian assurance? Why should our confidence rest in Christ and God's promises rather than requiring unusual spiritual experiences?

Put It Into Practice

These activities are opportunities to receive God's Word, grow in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and put Christ's love into practice.

Return to Galatians 5 in Prayer

Read Galatians 5:13–26 several times during the coming week. As you reflect on the passage, pay attention to Paul's description of walking by the Spirit, the works of the flesh, and the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in believers. Pray specifically for the fruit of the Spirit throughout the week.

During a quiet moment, thank God for the new life He has given you through Jesus Christ. Confess any sin you recognize, and ask the Holy Spirit to strengthen your desire to walk in truth, love, and obedience. Consider which aspects of the Spirit's fruit are especially relevant to your present circumstances.

You may find it helpful to return to this passage at the end of an ordinary day. Rather than counting successes or failures, reflect on God's faithfulness and your continuing dependence upon Him. If you have a discipler, share one observation from the passage and discuss how walking by the Spirit differs from attempting to produce holiness through self-effort.

Respond With Spirit-Dependent Love

Think of one relationship or situation in which patience, kindness, gentleness, or self-control would be a blessing to another person. This might involve a family member, coworker, neighbor, fellow believer, or someone with whom you have experienced disagreement.

Before responding, spend a moment in prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your attitude and actions, and remember a relevant command or example from Jesus' teaching. Then choose one wise and practical response, such as listening carefully, speaking kindly, offering assistance, exercising patience, or refusing to retaliate when frustrated.

Choose a situation where you can respond safely and appropriately. Christian love does not require remaining in abusive circumstances, tolerating mistreatment, or exposing yourself or others to unnecessary danger.

Afterward, consider what the experience taught you about depending upon the Spirit. Remember that spiritual growth is not demonstrated by flawless performance, but through a continuing life of faith, repentance, and obedience to Christ.

Explore Serving Within Christ's Church or a Local Mission Organization

Consider how the Holy Spirit equips believers to encourage, strengthen, and serve one another within the body of Christ. Read 1 Corinthians 12:4–27 and reflect on Paul's teaching that every member of the church has value and contributes to the well-being of the whole body.

If you participate in a local congregation or organization, consider speaking with a pastor, ministry leader, or trusted Christian about opportunities to serve. You might help with a practical need, encourage another believer, participate in a ministry, or offer your abilities where assistance is needed. You do not need to identify a particular spiritual gift before beginning to love and serve others.

If you are not yet connected to a local organization, consider taking an initial step toward finding healthy Christian fellowship where Scripture is faithfully taught and believers encourage one another toward maturity in Christ or are on mission locally for Christ.

If you have a discipler, discuss how spiritual gifts and everyday acts of service relate to the Holy Spirit's work in the church.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can study this lesson meaningfully without a mentor. Read Galatians 5:13–26, John 16:5–15, and 1 Corinthians 12:4–13. Reflect on the discussion questions, pray about what you are learning, and consider one opportunity to practice Spirit-dependent love or service. Remember that you do not need an unusual spiritual experience to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit is at work. The goal is to keep following Christ faithfully through the Spirit's help.

If you have questions about spiritual gifts, Christian assurance, or how to recognize the Spirit's guidance, consider speaking with a trustworthy pastor or mature Christian. Independent study can be valuable, but life in the Spirit is meant to be lived among God's people and the lost.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, Thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners and bring us into fellowship with you. Thank you that those who belong to him are not left to live the Christian life through their own strength. Holy Spirit, I acknowledge that you are God, and I need your help. Teach me to know Jesus more deeply, understand his Word, and recognize the things in my life that do not honor him.

Where I am impatient, teach me patience. If I am selfish, form love in me. Where I am afraid, help me remember God's promises. Where I am tempted, strengthen me to turn away from sin and choose what is right. Keep me from pride, spiritual comparison, and the desire to impress others. Give me wisdom to recognize your guidance through Scripture, prayer, and faithful Christian counsel.

Help me use whatever you have given me to encourage and serve others. Teach me to walk with Christ in ordinary moments, trusting his grace and obeying his Word. I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Amen.

Scripture to Remember

Galatians 5:16 (WEBU):

> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh.

This verse reminds us that Christian holiness does not come through independent human strength. Paul calls believers to a continuing life of dependence upon the Holy Spirit, who leads them away from sin and toward obedience to Christ.

Memorize the verse if it is helpful, but take time to understand its meaning. Return to it when you need to remember where the strength for Christian living comes from.

Continue Studying With Good Way

Begin with the biblical passages assigned in this lesson. After reading them for yourself, these Good Way Library resources can deepen your understanding.

- **Galatians 5 Commentary: Freedom, Spirit, and Love** — The primary companion commentary for Step Seven. Its walkthrough explains Christian freedom, the conflict between flesh and Spirit, and the fruit produced by the Spirit. The Application and Leading sections are useful for discussing everyday obedience and relationships.
- **Romans 8 Commentary: Life in the Spirit** — Explores the Spirit's indwelling presence, the believer's adoption as God's child, freedom from condemnation, and future resurrection. Use this study to understand how Christian assurance rests upon God's saving work in Christ.
- **Acts 2 Commentary: Pentecost and the Spirit** — Explains the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter's proclamation of the risen Christ, and the formation of the earliest Christian community. It connects the Spirit's work with gospel witness, repentance, baptism, fellowship, and church life.
- **Nicene Creed Explained: Full Text, History, Trinity, and Scripture** — Explores historic Christian teaching about the Trinity, including the divine personhood of the Holy Spirit. This study helps connect the Spirit's ministry with the church's longstanding confession of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For additional Bible study, visit The Good Way Commentary Library. You can explore the entire Bible through chapter-by-chapter explanations, then return to Scripture to examine what you have learned.

Before the Next Step

Walking by the Spirit is not a spiritual achievement we complete once and leave behind. It remains part of our continuing relationship with Jesus Christ.

As you finish this lesson, remember that the Holy Spirit does not ask you to produce holiness independently. He dwells in those who belong to Christ, and his work leads believers toward greater love, truth, and obedience.

That includes learning to recognize and turn away from sin. The Christian life is not passive, and grace never makes repentance unnecessary. Instead, the Spirit teaches us to live according to the new identity Christ has given.

In **Step 8: Put Off the Old, Put On the New**, we will study Ephesians 4:17–32 and consider what repentance and practical holiness look like in everyday life. We will explore why Christians must put away sinful patterns, how God renews our thinking, and what it means to replace destructive conduct with truthfulness, kindness, forgiveness, and love.

Most importantly, we will see that repentance is not an attempt to earn the salvation Christ provides. It is part of learning to live according to the new life he gives.

Before beginning Step Eight, read **Ephesians 4:17–32**. Notice how Paul connects the believer's new identity in Christ with practical commands for daily conduct.

Continue walking with Jesus; always trust the Holy Spirit who helps his people follow him.

Step 8: Put Off the Old, Put On the New | Growing in Holiness Through Christ

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 8 of 12

Repentance and Holiness From Grace

Learning to put off the old and put on the new is an essential part of following Jesus Christ. The Christian life involves genuine change in how we think, speak, respond to temptation, treat others, and live before God. Yet this transformation does not begin with our ability to improve ourselves. It begins with the new life God has given to those who belong to Jesus.

In our previous lessons, we explored salvation through grace, our identity in Christ, abiding in him, Scripture, prayer, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Now we will consider what that new life means when we encounter temptation, destructive habits, anger, dishonesty, and struggles within our relationships.

The goal is not to become acceptable to God through flawless behavior. We are learning to live according to what Christ has accomplished, turning away from sin and responding to his grace through the Holy Spirit. This is the biblical meaning of Christian repentance and growing holiness.

The Central Truth: Because believers belong to Jesus Christ, they are called to put away their former sinful ways, receive renewal through God's truth, and increasingly live in righteousness and holiness. Repentance is not an attempt to earn salvation, but a faithful response to the new life Christ has given.

Begin With Scripture

Primary Reading: **Ephesians 4:17–32 (WEBU)**

Before continuing, open your Bible and read the entire passage. Paul explains how Christians are to leave behind their former way of life and live according to the new identity they have received through Jesus Christ.

As you read, pay attention to three important questions:

1. **The former life** | What attitudes, desires, and behaviors does Paul tell Christians to leave behind?
2. **The new life** | What does it mean to learn Christ, be renewed in our thinking, and put on the new man?
3. **The practical response** | How should this transformation affect honesty, anger, work, speech, kindness, and forgiveness?

Read the passage a second time, noticing that Paul does not simply condemn sinful behavior. He also explains the good conduct that should replace it.

Companion Readings:

- **Romans 6:11–14** | Paul teaches believers to consider themselves alive to God in Christ and no longer surrender themselves to sin's rule.
- **Colossians 3:1–17** | Paul connects the believer's new identity with putting sinful practices to death and clothing oneself in compassion, humility, forgiveness, and love.

Additional Reading: **1 John 1:5–2:2** | John explains why Christians must acknowledge their sins honestly and continue depending upon Jesus Christ for forgiveness and cleansing.

These passages reinforce one another. Ephesians explains the practical shape of renewed Christian living, Romans grounds obedience in union with Christ, Colossians describes the character of the new life, and 1 John teaches how believers should respond when they sin.

Why Christian Holiness Begins With Grace

Remember What God Has Already Accomplished

Before examining Paul's commands in Ephesians 4, we must understand where they appear in the letter.

Ephesians begins by explaining the extraordinary blessings God gives through Jesus Christ. Paul describes believers as redeemed through Christ's blood, forgiven by grace, and sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:3–14). He later explains that God makes spiritually dead sinners alive with Christ and saves them by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:1–10).

Paul also teaches that Jesus has reconciled believers to God and brought people from different backgrounds together into one body. In Ephesians 4:1–16, he calls Christians to preserve their Spirit-given unity and grow toward maturity under Christ, the head of the church.

Only after establishing these truths does Paul turn toward the particular behaviors Christians must abandon and the new conduct they should pursue.

God's saving grace comes first. The call to holiness follows from the life and identity believers have received in Christ.

This order matters. We do not put away sinful behavior to convince God to adopt us. Those who genuinely belong to Christ have already been welcomed through his grace, and the Holy Spirit is transforming the way they live.

The Old Way of Life No Longer Defines Us

In Ephesians 4:17–19, Paul describes the former way of life associated with humanity's alienation from God. He speaks of futile thinking, darkened understanding, hardened hearts, and desires that lead toward impurity and greed.

Paul's description is serious because sin affects more than outward behavior. It also distorts what people believe, desire, value, and pursue. A person who places personal advantage above

truth may begin justifying dishonesty. Someone who regards resentment as a form of strength may gradually become controlled by anger.

Paul is not condemning an ethnicity or claiming that every non-Christian behaves identically. Many of his original readers were Gentiles themselves. His concern is the spiritual condition and former patterns of life from which believers have been rescued.

The problem begins deeper than individual actions. A heart turned away from God produces distorted thinking, and that thinking influences the choices that follow.

These patterns can become deeply familiar, but familiarity does not make them good. Paul calls believers to recognize that they no longer belong to their former way of life.

Learning Christ Changes Everything

In Ephesians 4:20–21, Paul explains that his readers have not learned Christ according to the sinful patterns he has just described. Instead, they have received the truth found in Jesus.

This language is important because Paul does not merely say Christians have learned different religious rules. He speaks about *learning Christ*.

To become his disciple is to receive the truth about him, belong to him through faith, and increasingly live according to his teaching. Christian transformation is therefore connected directly to the person of Jesus, not simply to our desire to become more respectable people.

Paul then describes three connected aspects of this transformation in Ephesians 4:22–24:

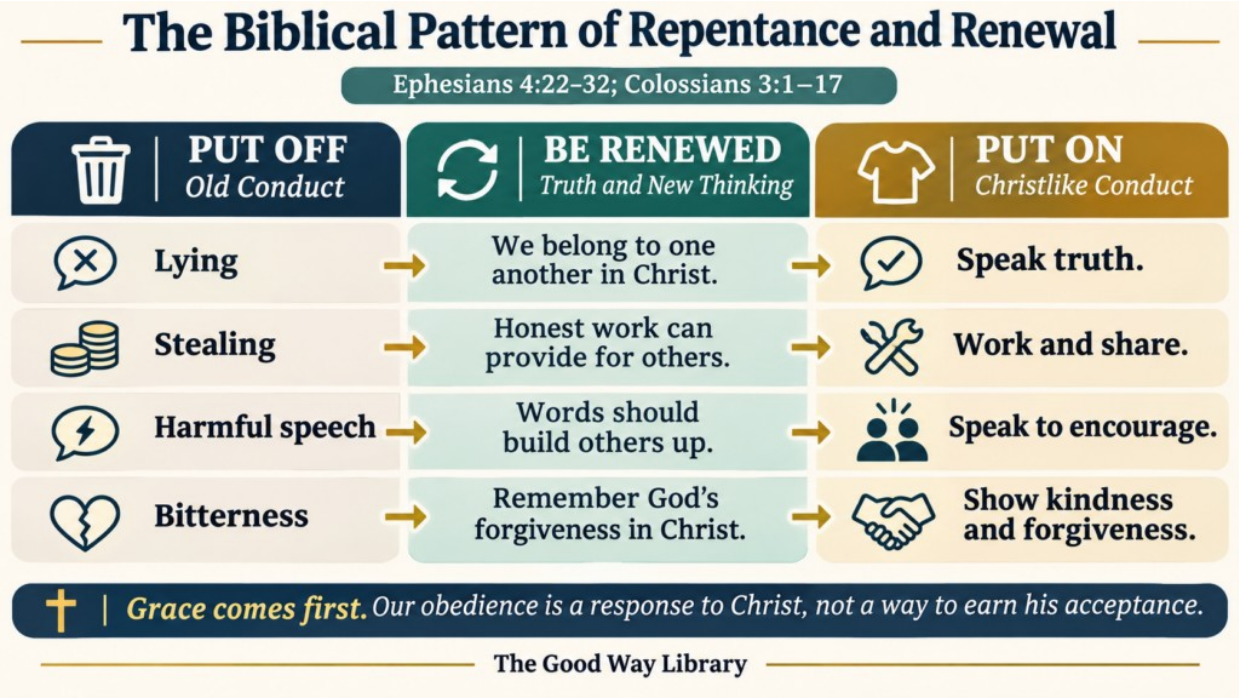
- **Put off the old man** | Reject the former way of life and its deceptive, corrupting desires.
- **Be renewed in your mind** | Allow God's truth to reshape your understanding, values, and judgments.
- **Put on the new man** | Live according to the new humanity God has created in righteousness and holiness.

The language of putting off and putting on resembles changing garments. Yet Paul's teaching is more than a picture of changing personal habits. The old and new humanity also concern the kind of people Christians have become together through Christ.

The former life damages relationships through falsehood, hostility, selfishness, and impurity. The new life builds a community characterized by truth, generosity, kindness, and love.

Christian holiness is learning to live consistently with the new life Christ has already given.

This does not mean every sinful habit immediately disappears at conversion. Believers continue to grow, repent, receive correction, and learn obedience throughout their lives. Christ's saving work is complete, but our present transformation is still underway.



Putting Off the Old and Putting On the New in Everyday Life

Beginning in Ephesians 4:25, Paul applies the new life to ordinary situations involving speech, work, anger, relationships, and forgiveness.

An important feature of his teaching is that rejecting sin is joined to pursuing righteousness. Christians are not simply told to stop doing wrong. They are taught how their conduct should be redirected toward what honors Christ and blesses others.

Replace Falsehood With Truth

Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away falsehood and speak truthfully with one another.

Paul explains that Christians are members of one another. Dishonesty therefore does more than violate an individual moral rule. It damages relationships within the body of Christ and undermines the trust that should characterize Christian fellowship.

Falsehood can take many forms. It may involve an outright lie, a misleading explanation, exaggeration intended to impress others, or withholding important facts to manipulate someone. These behaviors may appear advantageous in the moment, but they can cause lasting harm.

The positive command is truthfulness. Christians should become people whose words can be trusted, even when honesty is uncomfortable or costly.

This does not mean every person is entitled to every private detail of our lives. Wisdom, confidentiality, and appropriate boundaries remain important. Speaking truthfully does not require disclosing information that someone has no right to demand.

Jesus likewise teaches the importance of truthful speech in Matthew 5:33–37. His followers should become known for honesty rather than deception or manipulative promises.

The old pattern is dishonesty for personal advantage. The new pattern is truthfulness that strengthens trust.

Respond to Anger Without Giving Sin Control

In Ephesians 4:26–27, Paul recognizes the danger of anger. He instructs believers not to allow anger to become sinful and warns against giving the devil an opportunity.

Anger itself is not always evidence of wrongdoing. We may experience understandable anger when confronted with injustice, betrayal, cruelty, or serious harm. Even so, anger can quickly become destructive when it begins controlling our words and decisions.

A person may respond to anger through insults, threats, revenge, prolonged bitterness, or attempts to punish someone emotionally. Such responses may feel justified in the moment, but they can damage relationships and lead to further sin.

Paul's warning about not letting the sun go down on our wrath emphasizes the urgency of addressing anger responsibly. It does not establish a requirement that every conflict must be resolved before bedtime, regardless of circumstances or safety.

Sometimes the wisest immediate response is to stop an argument, establish distance, pray, and seek appropriate help before continuing a difficult conversation.

Jesus addresses anger in Matthew 5:21–26. He warns against contemptuous hostility and teaches the importance of taking reconciliation seriously. His words call us to examine our hearts rather than assuming that avoiding physical violence is sufficient.

Christians should therefore learn to recognize anger, refuse destructive responses, and seek truth and peace where doing so is appropriate and safe.

The old pattern allows anger to govern our conduct. The new pattern responds with self-control, truth, and a willingness to seek peace.

Replace Taking With Honest Work and Generosity

Ephesians 4:28 gives another practical example of Christian transformation.

Paul instructs the person who previously stole to stop stealing and work honestly. Yet the command does not end with simply earning an honest living. He also teaches that the person should be prepared to share with someone in need.

This is a powerful picture of the new life in Christ. The former pattern was taking what belonged to another person. The new pattern involves honest labor and a willingness to give.

The transformation reaches beyond avoiding punishment or maintaining a respectable reputation. It redirects the person's conduct from selfish gain toward the good of others.

Not everyone is physically able to work, and people experience different economic circumstances. Paul is not suggesting that poverty, illness, or unemployment automatically reflects spiritual failure. His concern is integrity, responsible conduct, and generosity according to the opportunities God provides.

Those who belong to Christ should seek to handle work, money, possessions, and other people's property honestly. Where possible, they should also look for ways to help those in need.

The old pattern takes for personal advantage. The new pattern practices integrity and generosity.

Use Words That Build Others Up

Ephesians 4:29 addresses the way Christians speak. Paul forbids corrupt speech and calls believers to use words that build others up according to their needs.

Speech can cause tremendous harm. A cruel remark, humiliating joke, false accusation, or repeated insult can leave lasting damage. Christians are not immune to these temptations, especially during disagreements or moments of frustration.

But Paul teaches that our words should serve the good of others.

This does not mean Christians must avoid difficult truths or speak only in pleasant language. Sometimes love requires honest correction, a firm boundary, or a serious conversation about harmful behavior. The question is whether our speech is truthful, appropriate, and directed toward what is good rather than toward humiliation or manipulation.

Paul immediately connects this instruction with the Holy Spirit in verse 30. He warns believers not to grieve the Spirit of God, through whom they have been sealed for the day of redemption.

The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is God, present and active within believers, forming holiness and strengthening Christ's church. Our conduct matters because it should agree with the life he is producing.

The old pattern uses words to injure or control. The new pattern speaks truthfully in ways that strengthen others.

Replace Bitterness With Kindness and Forgiveness

Paul concludes Ephesians 4 by commanding believers to put away bitterness, wrath, anger, outcry, slander, and malice.

These attitudes and actions can gradually destroy relationships. Bitterness keeps injuries alive in the heart, while slander and hostility allow those injuries to spread through harmful speech and conduct.

The positive alternative appears in Ephesians 4:32 (WEBU):

> "And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving each other, just as God also in Christ forgave you."

Notice the foundation of the command. Paul does not instruct Christians to forgive so that God might finally become willing to forgive them. He points to the mercy God has already shown through Jesus Christ.

For the believer, God's forgiveness becomes both the example and the reason for extending forgiveness toward others.

Forgiveness is also an act of trusting God's perfect justice. In Romans 12:19, the Lord declares, "Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay." God does not ask us to forgive because wrongdoing is unimportant or because those who harm others deserve no consequences. Rather, he commands us to surrender personal vengeance because judgment ultimately belongs to him. When we forgive, we are trusting God's promise that he will deal justly with every wrong, even when we cannot see when or how he will act. **His judgment is infinitely wiser, more righteous, and more complete than any revenge we could pursue ourselves.** We do not need to carry the burden of making others pay for what they have done. We can entrust that responsibility to the Lord, knowing that his justice will never fail. *Forgiveness does not mean abandoning justice. It means trusting the perfect Judge rather than taking vengeance into our own hands.*

This does not make forgiveness effortless. Serious betrayal, long-standing conflict, and painful experiences may require time, prayer, wise counsel, and careful boundaries. Nor does forgiveness mean pretending wrongdoing never occurred. Scripture takes sin seriously, including the need for truth, justice, and accountability.

We will explore Christlike love and relationships more deeply in Step Nine. For now, recognize that forgiveness is an important expression of the new life Christ is forming in his people.

Christian Holiness Includes Our Thoughts and Desires

So far, we have considered honesty, anger, work, speech, and forgiveness. Yet Scripture teaches that holiness also reaches the desires and intentions of the heart.

Jesus makes this especially clear in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus Calls Us to Purity of Heart

In Matthew 5:27–30, Jesus teaches that adultery is not merely a matter of outward behavior. He addresses lustful intention and calls his followers to take temptation seriously.

This teaching reveals that holiness involves more than maintaining an acceptable public reputation. God cares about our thoughts, desires, intentions, and the ways we regard other people.

Sexual holiness therefore includes learning to honor others rather than treating them as objects for personal satisfaction. It calls Christians to faithfulness, integrity, and respect for the bodies and dignity of others.

Jesus uses strong imagery about removing what causes someone to stumble. His language emphasizes the seriousness of dealing with sin, not a command to injure one's body.

A wise Christian response may involve changing habits, avoiding situations that encourage temptation, establishing appropriate boundaries, or seeking accountable support.

Scripture also calls Christians to honor God with their bodies and to turn away from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18–20; 1 Thessalonians 4:3–8). **Biblical sexual holiness is grounded in God's design for marriage and the human body.** Jesus affirms the marriage union of man and woman established in creation (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4–6), and Hebrews 13:4 calls believers to honor marriage and preserve marital faithfulness. This teaching includes chastity outside marriage, faithfulness within marriage, and rejecting adultery, pornography, and the deliberate cultivation of lust. Sexual holiness is not merely avoiding outward misconduct; it also involves bringing our desires and habits under Christ's lordship.

These commands should be taught with both **moral clarity and gospel hope**. Sexual sin is serious, but no pattern of past failure places a repentant sinner beyond the forgiveness available through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9–11; 1 John 1:9). Believers are called to confession, repentance, wise boundaries, and growing self-control through the Holy Spirit. At the same time, victims of sexual abuse must never be blamed for sins committed against them, and no disciple should be pressured to disclose intimate details to a mentor. Christian holiness calls us to truth, purity, and love, while always remembering that salvation rests upon God's grace rather than moral performance.

The goal is not to cultivate shame or fear of ordinary human experience. It is to learn to honor Christ in both our inward desires and outward actions.

Christian holiness is not merely avoiding visible wrongdoing. It involves allowing God's truth to reshape what we love and pursue.

Renewing the Mind Through God's Truth

Colossians 3:1–17 closely parallels the teaching in Ephesians 4. Paul reminds believers that their lives are hidden with Christ in God, then calls them to put sinful conduct to death and put on Christlike character.

He identifies practices such as sexual immorality, evil desire, greed, anger, malice, and dishonesty. In their place, he calls Christians to compassion, kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love.

The pattern is consistent with Ephesians: believers are called to live according to their new identity in Christ.

This transformation involves learning to recognize the false promises behind temptation. Sin often offers something that appears desirable, such as comfort, control, pleasure, revenge, approval, or escape from discomfort. Yet those promises can conceal serious consequences for ourselves and others.

Scripture helps us recognize what is true. Prayer keeps us dependent upon God, and wise Christian fellowship provides encouragement and appropriate accountability.

As we continue receiving Christ's Word and walking by the Holy Spirit, our desires and judgments are increasingly shaped by what pleases God.

How to Respond When Temptation Comes

Temptation is a normal part of the Christian struggle. Experiencing temptation does not automatically mean someone has sinned, and believers should not assume that a difficult struggle proves they do not belong to Christ.

Jesus himself was tempted, yet remained without sin (Hebrews 4:14–16). Nevertheless, temptation must be taken seriously. We should not cultivate desires that draw us away from God or place ourselves carelessly in circumstances that encourage disobedience.

The following pattern can help you think biblically when facing temptation:

1. **Recognize the temptation** | Identify what you are being drawn toward. Be honest about the desire, thought, or behavior rather than pretending it is harmless.
2. **Identify the false promise** | Consider what the temptation appears to offer. Is it control, revenge, comfort, pleasure, acceptance, or escape from something difficult?
3. **Remember what is true in Christ** | Return to Scripture. Consider what God says about the temptation and what he has already accomplished for those who belong to Jesus.
4. **Pray and respond wisely** | Ask the Holy Spirit for help, then take an appropriate action. This might involve leaving a tempting situation, choosing truthful speech, establishing a boundary, or seeking support.
5. **Receive appropriate Christian help** | When a struggle is persistent or difficult, seek encouragement from a trustworthy Christian, pastor, or qualified professional as appropriate.

This is not a guaranteed technique for immediate victory. Spiritual growth often involves ongoing struggles, repeated choices, and patient dependence upon God's grace. The purpose is to help us respond to temptation with truth, prayer, wisdom, and practical obedience.

Romans 6:11–14 provides the deeper foundation. Paul calls believers to recognize themselves as alive to God in Christ and not allow sin to reign over their mortal bodies. The command rests upon what God has already done.

Titus 2:11–14 reinforces the same relationship between grace and obedience. God's saving grace trains his people to reject ungodliness and live faithfully while awaiting the return of Jesus Christ.

We resist sin because we belong to Christ, and we are meant to overcome with him as he did. Remember that scripture often describes the fight against the flesh as a war. There will be some battles won, and some lost. Our goal is to stay in the fight, and to continue on in the war until Jesus brings us final victory.

Confession, Forgiveness, and Wise Repair

Even as believers grow in holiness, they still experience weakness and failure. Scripture does not teach that becoming a Christian means never sinning again.

The question is how we respond when sin occurs.

Confession Is Returning to the Truth

In 1 John 1:5–2:2, the apostle teaches that God is light and that fellowship with him requires honesty about sin. He warns against claiming to be without sin and reminds believers that God is faithful to forgive and cleanse those who confess their sins.

Confession means agreeing with God about what we have done. It involves abandoning excuses, acknowledging wrongdoing, and turning toward his mercy.

We should not confuse confession with repeatedly punishing ourselves through shame. God does not command believers to manufacture sufficient misery before they may seek his forgiveness.

John continues into chapter 2 by reminding Christians that Jesus Christ is their advocate with the Father. Our confidence rests upon Christ's saving work, not upon our ability to maintain a flawless record.

This also means confession should be sincere. God's grace is not permission to embrace a settled pattern of wrongdoing while refusing repentance.

When Christians sin, the faithful response is to acknowledge the truth, turn back toward Christ, and continue learning to live according to his grace.

Repairing Harm When Appropriate

Sometimes repentance requires more than private acknowledgment before God.

If we have lied, we may need to correct the falsehood. If we have taken something belonging to another person, restitution may be appropriate. When our speech has injured someone, we may need to acknowledge the harm and seek forgiveness.

These actions do not purchase God's mercy. They reflect the seriousness of repentance and a desire to act truthfully toward those affected by our conduct.

However, not every situation should be handled through immediate confrontation or direct contact. Where abuse, threats, coercion, serious manipulation, or other safety concerns are

present, a person may need protection, distance, pastoral guidance, or qualified professional assistance.

A survivor of abuse should never be pressured to resume contact with an unsafe person as proof of forgiveness. Likewise, someone who has harmed another person should not use Christian language to demand immediate trust or reconciliation.

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, Trust, and Safety

These four ideas are related, but they are not identical.

- **Forgiveness** | The Christian response of releasing personal vengeance and refusing to nurture hatred, while entrusting justice to God.
- **Reconciliation** | The restoration of a damaged relationship, which may require repentance, accountability, changed conduct, and mutual willingness.
- **Trust** | Confidence based upon a person's demonstrated reliability, which may need time and consistent evidence to develop.
- **Safety** | The responsible protection of people from harm, including appropriate boundaries, outside assistance, and separation when necessary.

Christians are called to forgive, but forgiveness does not automatically restore a relationship to its former condition.

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:23–24 calls his followers to take reconciliation seriously. Yet this command must be understood alongside Scripture's concern for truth, justice, protection of the vulnerable, and responsible conduct.

Repentance should lead us toward genuine love and integrity, not toward exposing ourselves or others to further harm.

Christians Before Us: Repentance and the Pursuit of Holiness

Martin Luther (1483–1546), the German reformer, placed repentance at the very beginning of his famous *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1517. His first point emphasized that when Jesus commanded people to repent, he intended repentance to characterize the entire Christian life. Luther challenged the idea that repentance could be reduced to particular religious acts or transactions. He also insisted that inward repentance should produce outward changes in conduct. Although his teaching emerged during debates about practices within the medieval church, its central lesson remains important for Christians today. **Repentance is not something we complete once and then leave behind.** As we continue following Christ, we discover attitudes, desires, and behaviors that must be surrendered to him. A growing Christian is not someone who no longer needs repentance, but someone who increasingly recognizes sin and responds to God's truth with humility and obedience.

John Owen (1616–1683), an English Puritan pastor and theologian, devoted considerable attention to the believer's continuing struggle against sin. In his 1656 work *Of the Mortification*

of Sin in Believers, Owen explained that Christians must actively resist sinful desires rather than simply assume those desires will disappear with time. Drawing especially from Romans 8:13 and Colossians 3:5, he emphasized that putting sin to death is not accomplished through human willpower alone, but through the work of the Holy Spirit. Owen also warned against confusing temporary restraint with genuine inward transformation. A person might avoid a particular action while continuing to cherish the sinful desire behind it. **His teaching reminds us that Christian holiness reaches deeper than outward appearances.** We must examine what we love, what we pursue, and what we allow to govern our hearts. The goal is not merely stronger self-discipline, but a life increasingly surrendered to Christ through the Spirit's power.

John Newton (1725–1807), the English pastor remembered for writing the hymn *Amazing Grace*, provides a particularly sobering example of repentance and moral transformation. Before becoming a minister, Newton participated in the transatlantic slave trade and commanded ships transporting enslaved Africans. Although he experienced a significant spiritual awakening in 1748, he continued participating in that trade for several more years. His recognition of its profound evil developed over time, and in 1788 he publicly condemned the trade in his pamphlet *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade*, acknowledging his own responsibility and supporting the movement to end it. His history must not be romanticized or used to excuse delayed obedience. Rather, it demonstrates how deeply people can rationalize wrongdoing, even while considering themselves religious. **Genuine repentance requires a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths, acknowledge the harm we have caused, and change our conduct.** Newton's story reminds us that we must remain open to correction throughout our lives, allowing God's truth to expose even those sins we have learned to justify.

What Is True in Christ

Jesus Christ calls his followers to something far greater than outward religious behavior. He does not simply command us to conceal our weaknesses, manage our reputation, or exchange a few undesirable habits for more respectable ones. He calls us to live truthfully before God, turn away from sin, and pursue the righteousness that reflects his character. **Because we belong to Christ, we can confront sin without pretending it is harmless or allowing it to become the defining feature of our lives.** Understanding this changes how we approach repentance and the daily pursuit of holiness.

Christ Invites Us to Bring Sin Into the Light

In John 3:19–21, Jesus contrasts those who avoid the light because their deeds are evil with those who come into the light. Sin often encourages secrecy, excuses, and self-deception. We may try to justify our conduct, minimize its consequences, or convince ourselves that God is not concerned about something we would rather keep hidden. Yet **Christ calls us to live openly and truthfully before God**, even when acknowledging our failures is uncomfortable.

For believers, bringing sin into the light is not an invitation to despair. Hebrews 4:14–16 reminds us that Jesus is our compassionate high priest, who understands temptation and invites us to approach God's throne of grace for mercy and help. We can confess our sins honestly because our hope rests in him. This does not require publicly revealing every private struggle or disclosing sensitive matters to someone who has not earned our trust. It means refusing to build our spiritual lives upon secrecy, denial, or false appearances. *The Christian who brings sin before Christ is not moving away from him, but returning to the Savior who calls us to walk in the truth.*

Genuine Repentance Leads to Change, Not Despair

Second Corinthians 7:10–11 makes an important distinction between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. Both may involve distress over wrongdoing, but they do not lead in the same direction. Worldly sorrow may remain focused upon embarrassment, consequences, or hopelessness. Godly sorrow produces repentance, leading us to acknowledge what is wrong and respond according to God's truth. **The purpose of repentance is not to remain trapped in guilt, but to turn away from sin and toward faithful obedience.**

This distinction matters when we recognize repeated failures. A person may become so discouraged by a sinful habit that they begin believing meaningful change is impossible. Another may feel terrible about wrongdoing but remain unwilling to abandon it. Neither response reflects the fullness of biblical repentance. Christ calls us to take sin seriously without surrendering to hopelessness. Genuine repentance involves a changed direction, which becomes visible through appropriate actions over time. We may need to abandon an excuse, accept correction, establish a healthier boundary, or take responsibility for harm we have caused. These responses do not earn forgiveness. They demonstrate that we are learning to respond faithfully to the mercy and truth of God.

Holiness Means Pursuing Christ, Not Merely Avoiding Sin

The Christian life must never become an endless exercise in concentrating upon everything we are trying not to do. In Hebrews 12:1–2, believers are instructed to lay aside what hinders them and the sin that entangles them, while looking to Jesus as they run the race before them. Notice that the passage gives us more than something to reject. It gives us someone to pursue. **The goal of holiness is not simply to become a person who sins less, but to become a person whose life increasingly reflects Jesus Christ.**

This changes our understanding of spiritual growth. We do not pursue honesty merely because lying is forbidden, but because truthfulness honors the Lord we love. We do not reject bitterness simply to feel more peaceful, but because Christ calls us to love others. We do not resist temptation merely to maintain a better reputation, but because knowing and pleasing Jesus is worth more than the temporary promises of sin. As Paul expresses in Philippians 3:7–14, knowing Christ is of surpassing value, and the Christian continues pressing forward toward

him. *Our deepest desire should not be merely to escape the old life, but to know and follow the Savior who has called us into the new.*

These truths give Christian repentance both seriousness and hope. Sin should never be excused, but neither should it become the center of our attention. **Jesus Christ is the center of Christian holiness.** As we come honestly before him, receive his correction, and learn to desire what pleases him, our lives increasingly reflect the transformation described in Ephesians 4. We are learning not simply to leave the old behind, but to walk faithfully in the new.

Learning to Follow Jesus As A New Creation

All of this material is part of learning to live in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Respond to Sin With Truth and Grace

When we recognize a sinful pattern, we can bring it honestly before him. We can acknowledge the temptation, ask for the Holy Spirit's help, return to Scripture, and seek to respond according to God's truth.

For example, a person who recognizes a tendency toward harsh speech may pause before responding in anger. Instead of trying to win an argument through insults, they can ask Christ for wisdom and choose words that are truthful and constructive.

Someone who has acted dishonestly may take responsibility and correct the falsehood. Another person who struggles with resentment may begin by praying honestly, refusing retaliation, and seeking wise help with appropriate boundaries.

These responses may appear ordinary, but Christian faithfulness is often expressed through ordinary choices shaped by God's grace.

Let Repentance Shape Our Witness

The gospel also gives repentance an outward purpose. When we turn away from harmful conduct, other people may experience greater honesty, kindness, fairness, and care.

Our witness to Jesus Christ should not consist only of what we say about him. It should also be reflected in the way we treat others.

Holiness becomes visible when Christ's grace reshapes our conduct toward God and neighbor.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

This lesson concerns repentance, holiness, and practical Christian conduct. Help the learner understand that Paul's commands arise from the new identity believers receive through Christ. The purpose is not to investigate private sins or measure moral performance, but to connect biblical truth with wise and faithful responses.

Before You Meet | Read Ephesians 4:17–32, Romans 6:11–14, and Colossians 3:1–17. Review the Good Way Ephesians 4 commentary, especially its Walkthrough and Leading sections. Prepare to explain how the commands to put away sinful behavior and pursue righteousness flow from grace.

During the Meeting | Read Ephesians 4 together and trace the movement from learning Christ to renewed thinking and changed conduct. Give a personal example of someone you know or yourself. Invite the learner to select one paired command, such as replacing dishonesty with truth or harmful speech with encouragement. Discuss a practical response without requiring personal disclosure.

What to Watch For | Do not pressure the learner to reveal intimate details involving sexuality, trauma, addiction, or personal sin. Never require reconciliation with an unsafe person or minimize abuse, serious distress, or addiction. This is a step that is most helpful for a mature Christian to handle. If the discipler is also relatively newer to the faith, or even just with limited experience in this category, it can help for them to first counsel a trustworthy mature Christian to learn examples from.

Before Moving Forward | Ask the learner to explain why repentance is a response to grace rather than payment for God's acceptance. Consider one safe, realistic example of putting away an old pattern and pursuing a Christlike alternative. Prepare to explore love and service more fully in Step Nine.

Discuss Together

Read Ephesians 4:17–32 again as needed. Discuss these questions openly with your discipler, or consider them in writing if you are studying independently.

1. **Learning Christ:** What does Paul mean when he says believers have learned Christ in Ephesians 4:20–21? How is knowing and following Jesus different from merely learning religious rules or trying to become a better person?
2. **Putting Off the Old and Putting On the New:** What does Ephesians 4:22–24 teach about putting off the old man, renewing our minds, and putting on the new man? Why must genuine Christian transformation involve both inward desires and outward behavior?
3. **Repentance and Grace:** Why does repentance remain necessary throughout the Christian life when salvation is received by grace through faith? How can we take sin seriously without falling into legalism or despair?
4. **Replacing Sinful Patterns:** Which examples in Ephesians 4:25–32 stand out to you most? How might putting away sinful behavior and practicing Christlike conduct change our speech, work, anger, or relationships?
5. **Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** How should Christians respond to anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness? What distinguishes extending forgiveness from restoring trust or pursuing reconciliation, especially when serious harm or unsafe circumstances are involved?

6. **Growing in Holiness Together:** How do the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and mature Christians help us grow in holiness? How can a discipler encourage repentance and obedience without becoming controlling or requiring private disclosures?

Put It Into Practice

Study One Paired Command

Return to Ephesians 4:25–32 and select one example in which Paul commands believers to reject a sinful pattern and pursue a better response.

Write down the old pattern, the Christlike alternative, and the reason Paul gives for the change. Consider how this teaching might shape an ordinary situation involving speech, work, anger, or relationships.

If you have a discipler, discuss your observations together. Keep the emphasis upon understanding Scripture and depending upon Christ rather than creating another spiritual performance goal.

Practice Truthfulness or Wise Repair

Consider whether there is an appropriate and safe opportunity to practice one of Paul's positive commands this week.

You might correct a misleading statement, offer an appropriate apology, speak encouragement to someone who needs it, or act more honestly in a situation where exaggeration would be easier.

If a situation involves serious conflict, abuse, coercion, or other safety concerns, do not initiate contact merely to complete this exercise. Prayer, careful reflection, and appropriate pastoral or professional counsel may be the wiser response.

The purpose is not to force reconciliation. It is to respond faithfully to God's Word with wisdom and love.

Bring a Temptation Before Christ

When you recognize temptation during the coming week, consider what it appears to promise and compare that promise with the truth of Scripture.

Bring the concern before Jesus in prayer. Ask for the Holy Spirit's help, consider an appropriate boundary or response, and seek trustworthy assistance if the struggle requires additional support.

You may also choose to encourage another person through truthful, kind speech. This is one practical way to allow your growing holiness to bless someone else.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can work through this lesson independently by reading Ephesians 4, Romans 6, and Colossians 3, then answering the discussion questions in writing. Consider one paired command and reflect upon how the new life in Christ should shape your conduct. However, ongoing struggles are often easier to address with appropriate Christian encouragement. If possible, remain connected to a healthy local church and speak with a trustworthy mature Christian when questions arise. Make sure to take the encouragements to put this into practice seriously, as that is where you will find the most growth if doing this study alone. For serious sin patterns involving addiction, abuse, trauma, or mental-health concerns, seek qualified support rather than assuming private study alone must resolve the difficulty.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the new life you give through Jesus Christ. Thank you that my acceptance before you rests upon his saving grace rather than my ability to live perfectly. I recognize that I still struggle with sinful thoughts, desires, words, and actions, and I need the continuing work of your Holy Spirit. Help me put away the patterns that do not belong to the life you have given me. Renew my thinking through your Word, teach me to recognize temptation, and give me wisdom to respond with truth and obedience.

Where I have harmed others, help me acknowledge what is wrong and pursue appropriate repair. Where I struggle with anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness, teach me to respond with humility, kindness, and wisdom. Keep me from pride when I succeed and despair when I fail. Above all, help me remain close to Jesus Christ, trusting his grace and allowing his life to shape the way I love and serve others. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Scripture to Remember

Ephesians 4:22–24 (WEBU)

> "that you put away, as concerning your former way of life, the old man that grows corrupt after the lusts of deceit, and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new man, who in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of truth."

These verses summarize the central teaching of Step Eight. Paul calls believers to reject their former way of life, receive renewal in their thinking, and live according to the new humanity God has created in Christ.

As you reflect on this passage, remember that the command to pursue holiness comes after the saving work of God. We are learning to live from Christ's grace, not trying to earn it.

Continue Studying With The Good Way Library

The following free resources provide deeper biblical teaching on repentance, holiness, forgiveness, and Christian transformation. Read the assigned Scripture passages first, then use these commentaries to strengthen your understanding.

- **Ephesians 4 Commentary: Unity in Christ** | Explore Paul's teaching about Christian maturity, the former and new ways of life, truthful speech, anger, honest work, and forgiveness. The Walkthrough and Leading sections are especially useful for this lesson.
- **Colossians 3 Commentary: Life Hidden with Christ** | Examine how believers put sinful practices to death and put on compassion, kindness, humility, forgiveness, and love. This chapter closely reinforces the central teaching of Ephesians 4.
- **Romans 6 Commentary: Dead to Sin, Alive to God** | Study how union with Christ establishes the foundation for resisting sin and living in newness of life. This commentary helps preserve the proper relationship between salvation by grace and Christian obedience.
- **1 John 1 Commentary: Fellowship in the Light** | Learn why Christians must acknowledge sin honestly, walk in the light, and continue depending upon God's forgiveness and cleansing through Jesus Christ.

Before the Next Step

Christian holiness is not simply the removal of undesirable behavior. It is the continuing transformation of people who have received new life through Jesus Christ.

In Ephesians 4, we have seen that believers are called to put away their former ways, receive renewal in their thinking, and live according to the new humanity created by God. This transformation reaches our speech, anger, honesty, work, desires, relationships, and willingness to forgive.

We have also learned that repentance does not earn God's acceptance. For those who belong to Christ, salvation rests upon his completed saving work, while the Holy Spirit continues forming holiness and obedience.

Before continuing, consider one area in which Scripture has helped you recognize the difference between an old pattern and a Christlike response. Bring that area before God in prayer and remain open to wise Christian encouragement.

Next Reading: John 13:1–35

In this passage, Jesus washes his disciples' feet and teaches them the meaning of humble service. He then gives them a command to love one another as he has loved them.

Step Nine: Love as Jesus Loves will explore how Christlike maturity becomes visible through humility, generosity, forgiveness, mercy, service, and faithful love toward others.

Putting off the old and putting on the new is not merely about what we leave behind. It is about learning to live in the love and holiness of Jesus Christ.

Step 9: Love as Jesus Loves

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 9 of 12

The Commands of Christ in Relationships and Service

Following Jesus should change the way we treat people. Our faith is not meant to remain confined to Bible study, personal prayer, or the beliefs we profess. It should become visible in our relationships, conversations, responsibilities, and concern for those around us.

Yet learning to love as Jesus loves is not always easy. We encounter people who disappoint us, misunderstand us, or treat us unfairly. Sometimes love requires patience when we would rather become angry. At other times, it requires honesty, generosity, forgiveness, or the willingness to serve someone who cannot repay us. How can we develop this kind of love without turning the Christian life into another exhausting attempt at self-improvement? Jesus gives us the answer by showing us what love looks like and where it begins.

In Step Eight, we studied repentance and the call to put away sinful conduct. We learned that believers are called to turn from dishonesty, bitterness, impurity, and destructive habits because they already belong to Christ. Now we will consider the positive direction of that new life: loving God and other people as Jesus himself has loved us.

The Central Truth: Christlike maturity is expressed through humble, truthful, sacrificial, merciful, and generous love. Jesus Christ has loved his people first, and his saving grace provides the foundation for their response. Through the Holy Spirit, believers learn to express that love in their relationships, service, and everyday responsibilities.

Begin With Scripture

Primary Reading: John 13:1-35 (WEBU)

Before continuing, read John 13:1–35 in full. Notice how Jesus' humble service, the announcement of betrayal, and his command to love one another fit together. Pay particular attention to how Jesus demonstrates love before teaching his disciples to show that same love to others.

As you read, pay attention to three important observations:

1. **Christ's love:** What does Jesus know about his approaching death, and how does he demonstrate love to his disciples?
2. **Christ's example:** Why is it significant that their Lord and Teacher performs the work of a servant?
3. **Christ's command:** What does Jesus tell his followers to do, and how will others recognize them as his disciples?

Read John 13 again before studying the explanation below. Allow Jesus' own words and actions to establish what Christian love means.

Companion Readings:

- **Matthew 5:38–48:** Jesus teaches his followers to reject personal revenge, love their enemies, and pray for those who mistreat them. Notice how his teaching extends love beyond people who are naturally easy to love.
- **Luke 10:25–37:** Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. Observe how the Samaritan responds to someone in need and how Jesus challenges the listener's understanding of a neighbor.

These passages develop different aspects of Christlike love. John 13 provides Jesus' own example and commandment. Matthew 5 shows how that love responds to hostility, while Luke 10 demonstrates its practical concern for people in need.

If you are reading through the Gospel of John alongside this course, spend additional time in chapters 13–17. These chapters reveal how Jesus prepares his disciples to live in his love, depend upon the Holy Spirit, and remain faithful after his departure.

Main Teaching: Learning to Love as Jesus Loves

John 13:1–5 | Jesus Loves His Disciples First

John 13 takes place during the final evening before Jesus' crucifixion. His public ministry is drawing to a close, and he is preparing his disciples for his approaching death, resurrection, and return to the Father.

The opening verses reveal something remarkable about Jesus. He knows that his appointed hour has arrived and understands what is about to happen, including the betrayal that will lead to his arrest. Yet instead of concentrating only on his approaching suffering, Jesus demonstrates his love for those who belong to him.

John 13:1 describes Jesus' love as continuing to the end. This introduces the central theme of the chapter: the love of Christ is faithful, complete, and expressed through action.

During supper, Jesus rises from the table, removes his outer garments, wraps himself with a towel, and begins washing his disciples' feet. To appreciate the significance, we need to understand the setting. In the ancient world, people commonly traveled along dusty roads wearing sandals. Washing someone's feet was an ordinary act of hospitality, but it was also a lowly task. It was often associated with servants or people of lesser social standing.

Jesus deliberately takes that position before his disciples.

The astonishing detail is that Jesus knows exactly who he is. John 13:3 explains that the Father has given all things into his hands and that he came from God and is returning to God.

Jesus serves from the fullness of his authority, not from a lack of it.

He is not a powerless man attempting to earn respect through humility. He is the eternal Son of God who has become truly human, possesses divine authority, and willingly chooses to serve.

This changes how we understand Christian love. Jesus does not approach his disciples as someone seeking approval or trying to prove his worth. He serves because he loves them. His actions arise from his relationship with the Father and his commitment to accomplish the Father's saving purpose.

For Christians, this provides an important foundation. We do not need to earn our standing before God through service. Those who belong to Christ have already been received through grace, and that grace frees them to serve others without constantly seeking recognition or repayment.

John 13:6–11 | Receive Christ's Cleansing Before Imitating His Service

As Jesus continues washing the disciples' feet, he comes to Simon Peter. Peter is deeply uncomfortable. He recognizes that Jesus is his Lord and cannot understand why someone of such authority would perform this lowly task.

At first, Peter refuses to allow Jesus to wash him. Jesus responds by explaining that Peter must receive what his Lord is doing if he is to have a part with him.

Peter then asks for more than the washing of his feet. Jesus distinguishes between someone who has already bathed and the ordinary need to have dusty feet washed. He also indicates that not everyone present is clean, referring to the coming betrayal.

This exchange has a meaning deeper than physical cleanliness.

Jesus is demonstrating that fellowship with him depends upon receiving what he graciously provides. Peter cannot establish that relationship through personal pride, religious accomplishment, or his own understanding of what the Messiah should do. He must receive the Lord's gracious service.

The foot washing points toward the cleansing and humility associated with Jesus' saving mission. It should not be treated as an exact explanation of every aspect of salvation, but it prepares the disciples to understand the greater sacrifice he is about to make.

We must receive the saving work of Christ before we can properly respond to his example.

Through his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has provided the cleansing from sin that we could never accomplish ourselves. Those who place their faith in him are truly washed, forgiven, and made clean before God. The example about Peter is equally about us.

Jesus did not come merely to demonstrate admirable moral behavior. He came to save sinners through his obedient life, sacrificial death, and bodily resurrection. Through faith in Christ, believers receive forgiveness and new life. They are united with him, welcomed into God's family, and given the Holy Spirit. These blessings do not depend upon achieving a certain level of compassion or completing a sufficient number of acts of service.

If you have not yet placed your faith in Jesus, his example of love is worth studying, but moral imitation cannot replace salvation. Jesus calls sinners to repent, believe the gospel, and receive life through him.

If you already belong to Christ, remember that your love for others flows from the grace you have received. We cannot manufacture the life of Jesus through greater determination. We learn to live from the new life God has given. He washed and served you, even to death. Will you now pray for a changed heart and determine to serve others?

John 13:12–17 | The Lord and Teacher Becomes a Servant

After washing his disciples' feet, Jesus returns to the table and explains what he has done.

He reminds them that they rightly acknowledge him as their Teacher and Lord. He has not abandoned his authority or denied his identity by serving them. Instead, he has demonstrated how his followers should treat one another.

In John 13:15 (WEBU), Jesus says:

> For I have given you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you.

Jesus' meaning is direct. If their Lord is willing to perform a humble act of service, his followers have no reason to consider themselves too important to serve others.

This instruction challenges our natural desire for status. We often prefer positions where our contributions are recognized, our opinions receive attention, and other people appreciate what we do. Even within Christian communities, service can become an opportunity to gain influence or admiration.

Jesus presents a different pattern. The greatest person in the room willingly takes the place of a servant.

Historic Christian traditions differ over whether foot washing should continue as a specific church ordinance or practice. Some congregations observe it literally, while others understand it chiefly as an example of humble service expressed in many ways. Whatever a church's practice, the central command must not be overlooked. Jesus expects his followers to demonstrate genuine humility and practical care.

Consider what this might mean in ordinary life:

- **At home:** A parent patiently cares for a child when exhausted, or a family member helps with an unpleasant responsibility without demanding gratitude.
- **Among friends:** Someone notices a person who is discouraged and gives them time, attention, and encouragement.
- **Within the church:** A Christian welcomes someone who is overlooked or volunteers for an important task that few people notice.
- **In the community:** A neighbor offers practical assistance to someone experiencing hardship without expecting repayment.

These actions may seem ordinary, but they reflect the kind of humility Jesus demonstrates. Not every act of service must be dramatic or publicly recognized. Some of the most meaningful expressions of Christian love happen quietly.

Jesus also teaches that understanding his example is not enough. John 13:17 connects knowing these things with actually doing them.

This brings us back to the purpose of The Good Way Discipleship Course. Jesus commands his followers to learn and observe his teachings. We are not merely collecting information about Christian love. We are learning to practice what our Lord has taught.

John 13:18–35 | Love in the Shadow of Betrayal

The remainder of John 13 adds an important dimension to Jesus' teaching.

This is not a peaceful gathering where everyone is faithful and every relationship is healthy. Jesus knows that Judas Iscariot will betray him. He also knows that Peter, despite his sincere confidence, will soon deny knowing him.

John describes Jesus as troubled in spirit when he announces the betrayal. His knowledge and authority do not make the coming events emotionally insignificant. The betrayal is real, and Jesus does not pretend otherwise. After Judas leaves, Jesus speaks about the glory that will be revealed through his approaching death. The cross is central to his mission. Through his sacrificial obedience, Jesus will accomplish the salvation of sinners and reveal the Father's saving love.

It is in this setting that Jesus gives his new commandment.

John 13:34–35 (WEBU) declares:

> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Jesus does not merely instruct his followers to be pleasant or courteous. He establishes his own love as the pattern for theirs.

This commandment is new not because the Old Testament never commanded love. Leviticus 19:18 already instructed God's people to love their neighbors. Rather, Jesus now provides the decisive example of love through his own humble service and approaching sacrifice. He has loved his disciples faithfully, taken the position of a servant, and is about to lay down his life for them.

The love Jesus commands is shaped by the love he has already demonstrated.

This is also how the world should recognize his disciples.

Jesus does not say that Christian identity will be most clearly demonstrated through impressive religious knowledge, public arguments, social influence, or ministry accomplishments. He identifies love for one another as a distinguishing mark of his followers.

That does not make sound doctrine, truthful teaching, holiness, or obedience unimportant. Rather, genuine love should shape the way those convictions are expressed. A church may explain Christian doctrine accurately and still fail to treat people with patience or compassion. A believer may defend biblical truth while speaking cruelly to those who disagree.

Jesus does not permit us to separate truth from love. His disciples must learn both.

Loving God and Others: The Commands of Jesus

Love God With Your Whole Life

In Matthew 22:34–40, a religious expert asks Jesus which commandment is greatest.

Jesus responds by identifying two inseparable responsibilities: loving God with the whole heart, soul, and mind, and loving one's neighbor as oneself. He explains that the Law and the Prophets depend upon these commandments.

This teaches us that Christian love is not merely one virtue among many. It stands at the center of the moral life God calls his people to live.

Love for God involves more than affectionate feelings or religious enthusiasm. It includes trusting his character, honoring his Word, worshiping him, and seeking to obey his will. Love for our neighbor likewise involves more than wishing people well. It means taking their welfare seriously and responding appropriately to their actual needs. The two commandments belong together.

We cannot claim to love God while consistently treating people made in his image with contempt. Nor can we reduce love for others to simple kindness while ignoring the Lord who establishes what genuine goodness means.

Christian love is rooted in God's character and revealed through his commands.

Love Your Enemies and Refuse Revenge

One of the most challenging commands Jesus gives appears in Matthew 5:38–48.

During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the human tendency to repay harm with further harm. He calls his followers to reject personal vengeance and respond differently to those who mistreat them. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus commands his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them.

This teaching reaches beyond natural affection.

Most people find it relatively easy to care for someone who treats them kindly. We are often willing to help friends, support family members, or show generosity to those who appreciate us.

Jesus calls his disciples to go further. He points to the heavenly Father's kindness toward both the righteous and the unrighteous. God's generous care provides an example for his people.

Their love should not depend entirely upon whether another person has earned it. Consider how enemy-love might appear in everyday circumstances.

A coworker speaks unfairly about you. Rather than spreading rumors in return, you respond truthfully and refuse revenge. Someone repeatedly treats you with contempt. Rather than wishing them harm, you bring the situation before God and ask for wisdom in how to respond.

A difficult neighbor may still have a legitimate need. You can consider whether a wise act of kindness would help them, even if the relationship remains strained.

Loving an enemy does not require approving wrongdoing or pretending that an offense never happened.

It means refusing to make personal vengeance the governing principle of our response.

Jesus' instruction to love enemies must also be understood responsibly. He is not commanding someone to remain in danger, tolerate continuing abuse, abandon necessary legal protection, or give an unsafe person unrestricted access to their life. Love can include appropriate boundaries, truthful reporting, seeking justice, and protecting vulnerable people.

The command is to reject hatred and revenge, not to ignore the difference between right and wrong.

Show Mercy to the Neighbor in Front of You

Luke 10:25–37 contains one of Jesus' most familiar parables: the Good Samaritan.

The conversation begins when an expert in the Law of Moses asks Jesus about inheriting eternal life. Jesus directs him toward what the Law teaches about loving God and neighbor.

The man then attempts to justify himself by asking who qualifies as his neighbor. Jesus responds with a story. A traveler is attacked by robbers on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. He is beaten, stripped, and left severely injured. A priest encounters him but passes by. Later, a Levite also sees him and continues on his way.

Then a Samaritan approaches. The Samaritan's identity matters because Jews and Samaritans had deep historical and religious tensions. Jesus deliberately places someone from a distrusted group in the role of the person who acts compassionately.

The Samaritan sees the injured traveler, attends to his wounds, brings him to shelter, and provides for his continued care. He does not merely express sympathy. His compassion becomes practical assistance.

At the end of the parable, Jesus asks which person proved to be a neighbor to the injured man.

The answer is the one who showed mercy. Jesus then directs his listener to follow that example. The lesson moves our attention away from deciding which people deserve to be called our neighbors and toward becoming people who act with mercy.

This parable does not teach that charitable behavior can replace faith in Christ or purchase eternal life. The original question exposes the limits of human self-justification, while Jesus' example reveals the kind of love God's commandments require.

We should not limit our concern to those who share our background, beliefs, social position, or personal preferences. Christ calls his people to recognize the needs of others and respond with wisdom and compassion.

That may involve helping someone who is ill, visiting a lonely person, preparing a meal, giving practical assistance, or supporting a ministry that cares for vulnerable people.

We cannot personally meet every need we encounter, and Jesus' teaching does not require reckless decisions or limitless personal resources. But we should resist the temptation to make indifference our normal response.

Christian mercy recognizes human need and seeks a faithful, practical response.

Christian Love in Everyday Relationships

The commands of Jesus reach far beyond occasional acts of generosity. They shape our character, speech, responsibilities, and relationships throughout ordinary life.

In the Sermon on the Mount, especially Matthew 5–7, Jesus addresses anger, honesty, sexual purity, reconciliation, generosity, prayer, possessions, and the motives of the heart.

These subjects are connected by the call to live under God's reign.

Speak Truthfully and Treat Others With Dignity

Christian love must be truthful.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5:33–37 that our speech should be trustworthy. We should not need elaborate promises or exaggerated claims to convince others that we mean what we say.

Paul develops this responsibility further in Ephesians 4:25–32, commanding believers to reject falsehood, speak in ways that build others up, and put away bitterness and malicious conduct. This applies to ordinary conversations, workplace responsibilities, family relationships, and disagreements within the church.

Honesty may require admitting a mistake, correcting misinformation, refusing gossip, or communicating an uncomfortable truth. Yet truthfulness does not justify cruelty. The way we speak matters as well as the accuracy of our words.

A Christian should seek to speak honestly with patience, humility, and respect.

Practice Holiness in Relationships and Family Life

Jesus teaches that righteousness involves the desires and intentions of the heart.

In Matthew 5:21–30, he addresses anger, contempt, and lustful intent. His teaching shows that sin cannot be reduced to outward actions alone. The way we regard other people matters before God.

This principle has important implications for friendships, marriage, sexuality, family responsibilities, and personal boundaries. We should not treat others as objects for our pleasure, people to manipulate, or obstacles to our desires. Christian love respects the dignity of others and seeks their good.

For those who are married, this includes faithfulness, honesty, mutual care, and responsible attention to family obligations. For those who are single, it includes honoring God's teaching about sexual holiness and treating others with integrity. Parents, adult children, friends, and coworkers likewise have opportunities to express love through patience, reliability, and respect.

These responsibilities are not fulfilled perfectly. When we fail, repentance and appropriate repair remain part of Christian life.

However, the standard is not simply avoiding obvious wrongdoing. Christ calls us to develop a character that increasingly reflects his holiness and love.

Handle Money and Possessions With Generosity

Jesus gives significant attention to money because possessions can become powerful competitors for our trust and loyalty.

In Matthew 6:19–24, he warns against making earthly treasure the center of life. He explains that a person cannot serve both God and wealth as competing masters. This teaching does not mean every Christian must possess the same amount of money or live under identical financial circumstances. It does mean that our possessions should remain subject to God's purposes.

Christian generosity may involve financial giving, but it can also include hospitality, sharing necessary goods, helping someone with transportation, providing meals, or using our abilities to meet practical needs. Matthew 6:1–4 also warns against performing charitable acts to receive public admiration. Jesus directs his followers toward generosity that seeks the Father's approval rather than human applause.

A generous Christian does not give in order to purchase God's favor or gain spiritual recognition. Generosity is a response to the grace already received.

We should also practice responsible stewardship. Providing for one's household, honoring financial obligations, avoiding exploitation, and making wise decisions are all compatible with generosity.

Someone who has little money may still demonstrate remarkable love through encouragement, hospitality, prayer, or practical service.

Christian love is not measured by the size of a donation.

Practice Love Throughout Ordinary Life

It is helpful to consider how the commands of Christ affect several ordinary areas of responsibility.

- **Marriage and family:** Practice patience, faithfulness, truthful communication, responsibility, and care rather than selfishness or manipulation.
- **Work and business:** Treat others honestly, fulfill reasonable responsibilities, refuse exploitation, and use authority to serve rather than intimidate.
- **Friendship and hospitality:** Make room for people who need encouragement, companionship, or practical assistance without seeking repayment.
- **Money and possessions:** Give wisely, care for legitimate obligations, and refuse to make wealth or personal comfort the master of your decisions.
- **Conflict and disagreement:** Speak truthfully, reject personal revenge, pursue peace where possible, and maintain appropriate boundaries.
- **Church and community:** Encourage fellow believers, serve according to your abilities, welcome newcomers, and care for people who may otherwise be overlooked.

These are not separate spiritual achievements to collect. They are different expressions of the same calling: to love God and neighbor as followers of Jesus Christ.

Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Wise Boundaries

One of the most difficult aspects of Christian love involves responding when someone has genuinely wronged us.

Jesus repeatedly teaches forgiveness. In Matthew 6:14–15 and Matthew 18:21–35, he connects the mercy we extend to others with the mercy we have received from God.

The Christian response to wrongdoing must therefore be shaped by grace. Yet forgiveness is sometimes misunderstood in ways that can cause further harm.

Forgiveness Does Not Mean Pretending Nothing Happened

Forgiveness does not require denying that someone acted wrongly.

God's forgiveness of sinners does not suggest that sin is insignificant. The death of Jesus Christ demonstrates just how seriously God treats human evil. Likewise, when Christians forgive, they need not pretend that betrayal, dishonesty, abuse, or other wrongdoing was harmless.

Forgiveness involves turning away from personal vengeance and entrusting ultimate justice to God. It is a response of faith that refuses to let revenge become the governing purpose of our lives. But forgiveness does not eliminate the need for truth, repentance, accountability, or appropriate consequences.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation Are Not Identical

Reconciliation concerns the restoration of a damaged relationship.

Sometimes reconciliation follows genuine repentance, confession, changed behavior, and mutual willingness to rebuild trust. In other circumstances, reconciliation may be unsafe, impossible, or inappropriate. For example, a person who has experienced abuse should not be instructed to return to a dangerous situation merely to demonstrate forgiveness. Someone who has repeatedly been deceived may need substantial evidence of changed conduct before trust can be restored.

Appropriate boundaries can be an expression of wisdom rather than a failure of Christian love. Romans 12:18 recognizes that peaceful relationships are not always within the control of one person. Believers should pursue peace as far as it depends upon them, but they cannot compel another person to act rightly.

Forgiveness concerns our response to wrongdoing. Reconciliation concerns the restoration of a relationship. Trust must be supported by trustworthy conduct, and safety must not be ignored.

Where serious abuse, coercion, threats, or danger are involved, seek appropriate help from qualified professionals, responsible church leaders, safeguarding authorities, or emergency services as the circumstances require.

A discipler should never demand that someone confront an unsafe person or disclose painful experiences as a condition of spiritual progress.

Seek Peace Without Abandoning Truth

Jesus instructs his followers to seek reconciliation in Matthew 5:23–24. He also commands them to reject personal revenge and love their enemies.

These teachings belong together. When we have wronged someone, we should take responsibility for our actions. Where appropriate and safe, we should confess wrongdoing, ask forgiveness, provide restitution, and seek to repair the harm. When someone has wronged us, we should refuse personal vengeance while responding truthfully and wisely. Sometimes a difficult conversation can restore understanding. At other times, distance, mediation, accountability, or legal protection may be necessary.

The Holy Spirit helps believers grow in patience, courage, and wisdom, but we should not expect every damaged relationship to be restored immediately.

Christian love does not require us to control the outcome. It calls us to respond faithfully before God.

Serving Others Through the Holy Spirit

Love Is More Than a Feeling

Christian love includes genuine affection, but it cannot be reduced to emotion.

We may feel warmth toward one person and frustration toward another. Our emotions also change with fatigue, disappointment, circumstances, and personal struggles.

Jesus' commandment is deeper than maintaining pleasant feelings. Love involves seeking another person's good according to God's truth, even when doing so requires effort or sacrifice.

Paul provides a fuller picture in Romans 12:9–21. He instructs believers to show sincere love, honor others, contribute to practical needs, practice hospitality, share joy and sorrow, and refuse revenge. These are apostolic applications of the love Jesus commands. The same letter begins Romans 12 by calling believers to offer their whole lives to God in response to his mercies. Once again, grace comes before obedience.

The Christian does not become loving through self-sufficiency. The Holy Spirit forms Christlike character while believers actively respond to God's Word.

Learn Humility From Jesus Christ

Philippians 2:1–11 provides another important explanation of Christian service.

Paul calls believers to humility and concern for others. Then he directs their attention to Jesus Christ.

Although Jesus is truly divine, he willingly took the form of a servant and humbled himself through obedience, even to death on the cross. His humility did not result from a lack of worth or authority. It was the willing obedience of the eternal Son who became truly human to accomplish our salvation. Paul presents the humility of Christ as the pattern for Christian relationships.

This does not mean believers should consider themselves worthless or allow others to exploit them. Biblical humility means refusing pride and self-importance while sincerely considering the needs of others.

A humble Christian can acknowledge personal strengths, fulfill responsibilities, establish boundaries, and speak the truth. Humility concerns how we use those abilities and responsibilities before God.

It asks whether we are seeking our own superiority or using what God has given us to serve others.

What Is True in Christ: Learning to Love as Jesus Does

Jesus measures love differently from the world around us. People often evaluate love through visible generosity, emotional affection, or the sacrifices someone appears willing to make. Yet

Scripture teaches that **genuine Christian love reaches beyond outward actions to the motives of the heart and the way we value other people.** Jesus does not simply call us to perform loving deeds. He teaches us to see others differently, examine why we serve, and recognize that even the smallest act of faithfulness matters to God.

Even Great Sacrifices Can Be Made Without Love

In 1 Corinthians 13:1–3, Paul makes a remarkable argument. A person might possess extraordinary spiritual abilities, understand profound mysteries, demonstrate impressive faith, or even give away everything they own. Yet Paul explains that these accomplishments are nothing without love. **It is possible to do something outwardly generous while lacking genuine love for the person being served.** Religious activity, personal sacrifice, and public generosity do not automatically reveal a loving heart.

This challenges us to examine our motivations. Do we serve because we genuinely care about another person's welfare, or because we want recognition, influence, or a sense of personal importance? Are we willing to help when nobody notices or when the person receiving our assistance cannot express gratitude? These questions should encourage honest reflection rather than constant anxiety about our intentions. As we grow in Christ, we should increasingly desire to love others for their good and God's glory. *The greatness of Christian service is not determined merely by what we accomplish, but also by the love with which we serve.*

Christ Does Not Measure People by Their Status

James 2:1–9 confronts another serious danger: showing favoritism based upon someone's wealth, appearance, or social position. James describes a gathering in which a wealthy visitor receives special attention while a poor person is treated with dishonor. He condemns this discrimination as inconsistent with genuine Christian faith. The passage reminds us that **the worth of another person is not determined by what they possess, how influential they are, or what they can provide for us.**

This teaching reaches into our churches, friendships, workplaces, and communities. We may naturally gravitate toward people who are successful, agreeable, attractive, or similar to ourselves while overlooking those who seem difficult, unfamiliar, or unable to benefit us. Yet Christ calls us to reject such favoritism. Every human being bears God's image, and our treatment of others should reflect the dignity he has given them. This does not mean every relationship must have the same closeness or responsibility. It means we must not allow worldly measures of importance to determine who deserves basic respect, kindness, and compassionate attention.

Christ Remembers the Love Others Never See

Hebrews 6:10 offers a beautiful encouragement to believers who serve faithfully. The writer reminds Christians that God does not forget the work and love they have shown toward his name in serving his people. Jesus likewise teaches in Matthew 10:42 that even giving a cup of

cold water to one of his disciples will not go unnoticed. **God sees the acts of faithful love that the world may never recognize.** Our service does not need to become impressive, public, or influential before it matters to him.

This truth is especially encouraging when love becomes exhausting or seems unappreciated. A parent caring patiently for a child, someone quietly supporting a struggling friend, or a Christian faithfully encouraging another believer may receive little recognition. Sometimes the person being helped does not even understand the sacrifice involved. Yet God knows our intentions, our circumstances, and the love expressed through faithful service. We should not expect every act of kindness to produce visible results or guarantee appreciation. *Our calling is to love faithfully, trusting that the Lord knows what is done in his name.*

Together, these truths challenge how we understand Christian maturity. We must not confuse impressive accomplishments with genuine love, treat people according to worldly status, or assume that unnoticed service is unimportant. **Jesus calls us to a love that is sincere in its motives, impartial in its concern, and faithful even without recognition.** As we follow him, we should ask not only what good we can accomplish, but whether our hearts and relationships are increasingly reflecting the love of Christ.

Christians Before Us: Christlike Love Throughout Christian History

Throughout Christian history, believers have demonstrated that love for Jesus must become practical concern for people in need. One remarkable example is Fabiola of Rome, a wealthy Christian woman who died around AD 399. According to an account written by Jerome, Fabiola used her resources to establish a hospital for the sick and impoverished, including people who had been neglected or abandoned. She did not limit her involvement to financial contributions. Jerome describes her personally tending the sick, feeding those who were suffering, and caring for people whose conditions others found difficult even to approach. Her example reflects the compassion Jesus teaches in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). **Christian love must not be limited to those whose circumstances are comfortable or convenient.** Fabiola reminds us that genuine mercy recognizes the dignity of suffering people and responds to their needs with practical compassion. Not everyone can establish a hospital, but every Christian can learn to notice people whom others overlook and consider how to serve them faithfully.

In the eighteenth century, **John Wesley (1703–1791)** demonstrated that devotion to Scripture and prayer should produce genuine concern for others. While studying and teaching at Oxford, Wesley joined a small group of Christians who regularly gathered for Bible study, prayer, and spiritual accountability. Encouraged by fellow believer William Morgan, they began visiting prisoners, caring for the sick, helping impoverished families, and supporting education for children in need. Wesley understood that Christian faith must influence how believers spend their time, use their resources, and respond to the needs of those around them. His example reflects the teaching of Jesus that those who follow him should demonstrate their love through practical service (John 13:14–17). **Christian love is more than understanding what Jesus**

commanded. It involves faithfully putting his teachings into practice, whether through encouraging someone who is struggling, caring for a person in need, or serving others without expecting anything in return.

In the nineteenth century, **George Müller (1805–1898)** provided another remarkable example of Christian love expressed through practical service. A German-born Christian minister serving in Bristol, England, Müller became deeply concerned about children who had lost their parents and lacked proper care. Beginning in 1836, he established orphan homes that eventually provided shelter, food, clothing, education, and Christian instruction for thousands of children. Müller was especially known for his dependence upon God through prayer, trusting the Lord to provide for the needs of the children entrusted to his care. Yet his faith was never merely a matter of private devotion. He devoted decades of his life to organizing and sustaining a ministry that gave vulnerable children opportunities they otherwise might never have received. His example reminds us that **loving our neighbors requires more than expressing sympathy or praying for their needs. When God provides the opportunity and ability, we should also respond through faithful action.** Christian love brings together prayer, generosity, personal sacrifice, and practical compassion (1 John 3:16–18).

Learning to Follow Jesus in Love

The purpose of this lesson is not simply to admire Jesus' humility or agree that kindness is important. We want to learn how to follow him in the relationships and responsibilities we already have.

That begins with remaining conscious of the Lord who has loved us.

Turn Toward Christ Before Responding

Consider a familiar situation. Someone speaks impatiently to you, criticizes your work, or makes a demand when you already feel overwhelmed.

Your immediate response may be anger, defensiveness, or the desire to answer harshly. At that moment, you can turn toward Jesus in prayer. You might ask him for patience, wisdom, and the willingness to speak truthfully without unnecessary cruelty. Recall his teaching about love, humility, and refusing revenge. Then consider what response would honor him and genuinely serve the other person.

This does not guarantee that the conversation will become easy. Nor does it mean that every disagreement should be avoided. It means you are learning to respond from your relationship with Christ rather than allowing anger, pride, or fear to govern your actions.

Afterward, you can thank God for his help or confess where you failed.

Such prayerful dependence belongs to ordinary Christian life. You do not need to wait for a scheduled devotional time to speak with your heavenly Father.

Receive God's Word With Discernment

Learning to follow Jesus includes listening carefully to what he has revealed through Scripture.

God speaks authoritatively through the sixty-six canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. His Word establishes the truth by which our beliefs, decisions, and spiritual claims must be examined.

The Holy Spirit helps believers understand Scripture, recognize sin, grow in wisdom, and respond faithfully.

Prayer also belongs to discernment. We can bring difficult relationships and decisions before God, asking him to shape our desires and guide us toward responsible choices. However, we should not assume that every inward impression is a direct message from God.

Someone may strongly feel that they should confront another person, give away a large sum of money, or make a significant life change. Such impressions should be examined through Scripture, prayer, circumstances, and wise Christian counsel rather than treated as infallible commands.

Love must remain joined to truth and wisdom.

Serve Without Seeking Recognition

Jesus warns against practicing righteousness merely to receive public admiration (Matthew 6:1–4). Even sincere service can gradually become connected to our desire for recognition. Because our acceptance before God rests in Jesus Christ, we are free to serve without making every good deed a public achievement. The question is not whether anyone notices us, but whether we are acting from genuine love.

There may be appropriate reasons to share information about charitable activities, including accountability, coordination, and encouraging others to participate. But the desire for admiration should not govern our generosity. A helpful question is whether we would still be willing to serve if nobody praised us for doing so. Our goal is not to reject legitimate appreciation, but to learn humility that seeks another person's good and God's glory.

Let Love Extend Beyond Your Immediate Circle

Christlike love should gradually expand our concern beyond the people we naturally prefer.

We begin with the relationships and responsibilities God has already placed before us, including family, friends, coworkers, fellow believers, and neighbors. But we should also remain attentive to people who are overlooked, isolated, vulnerable, or burdened.

You may discover opportunities through a local church, community ministry, neighborly relationships, or ordinary encounters. For example, you might visit someone who is lonely, prepare food for a family experiencing hardship, offer transportation to someone who needs assistance, or support a responsible ministry serving vulnerable people.

These actions should be undertaken wisely, respecting personal boundaries, safeguarding requirements, and the actual needs of others. We do not need to impose our help where it is unwanted or assume that every problem can be solved by our own efforts.

Instead, we seek to become people who recognize opportunities for mercy and respond faithfully.

The love of Christ is not meant to remain within us. Through the Holy Spirit, it should increasingly become visible in the way we care for others.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read John 13:1–35 alongside Matthew 5:38–48 and Luke 10:25–37. Review the Good Way John 13 commentary, particularly its Walkthrough and Leading sections. Prepare to explain how Jesus' prior love and humble service establish the foundation for Christian obedience. Consider a simple example of faithful, unrecognized service without presenting your own conduct as the standard.

During the Meeting | Begin by reading John 13 together. Ask what Jesus does before giving his new commandment and why his position as Lord makes the foot washing significant. Use the shared discussion questions below to explore love, humility, forgiveness, and mercy. Invite the learner to consider one realistic expression of Christlike love in an existing relationship. Allow time for prayer and honest questions.

What to Watch For | Never equate forgiveness with restored trust or require contact with an unsafe person. Do not pressure the learner to disclose painful relationships, assume they have money or free time to give, or treat generosity as a condition of God's acceptance. Edify them. Let the Holy Spirit do the convicting for any inaction.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain how Christ's love creates the foundation for loving others. Discuss one wise act of service and one appropriate response to a difficult relationship. Encourage continued participation in a healthy local church, preparing for Step Ten's teaching on fellowship, worship, baptism, and shared Christian life.

Discuss Together

Read John 13:1-35 again, then consider the following questions. If you have a discipler, discuss them together. If you are studying independently, write your responses.

1. **Christ's example:** Why is it significant that Jesus washes his disciples' feet while knowing that he possesses authority from the Father? What does this reveal about his character?
2. **The new commandment:** What does Jesus mean when he commands his followers to love one another as he has loved them? How is this love different from ordinary affection or friendliness?

3. **Love and obedience:** Why is Christian love more than a feeling? How can genuine love involve both compassion and truthful correction?
4. **Loving difficult people:** Suppose a coworker repeatedly treats someone unkindly, yet later asks that person for assistance. How might Matthew 5:43–48 shape a response that demonstrates genuine love without abandoning wisdom or appropriate boundaries? How is this different from seeking revenge or pretending the wrongdoing does not matter?
5. **Forgiveness and reconciliation:** What is the difference between forgiving someone, rebuilding trust, and returning to an unsafe relationship?
6. **Generosity and humility:** How does Jesus' teaching about serving quietly challenge our desire for recognition? What opportunities for generosity are available even when money or time is limited?
7. **Practical love:** What does the Good Samaritan teach about noticing and responding to another person's needs? Where might you express Christlike love through a simple act of service?

These questions encourage understanding and honest conversation, not a test of spiritual maturity. You do not need to share deeply personal experiences or provide impressive answers. The goal is to understand Christ's teaching, consider its meaning honestly, and learn to follow him through the help of the Holy Spirit.

Put It Into Practice

These responses provide opportunities to practice Christ's teachings during the coming week.

Practice One Act of Humble Service

Read John 13:12–17 again. Consider someone who could benefit from practical help, encouragement, or thoughtful attention.

Choose one safe and appropriate act of service that does not depend upon receiving recognition. You might help with an ordinary responsibility, prepare a meal, offer assistance to someone in need, or give time to a person who is often overlooked.

Before acting, pray that your motivation would reflect the love Jesus has shown you. Afterward, thank God for the opportunity to serve. The purpose is not to perform something impressive, but to respond faithfully to Christ.

Pray for Someone Difficult to Love

Read Matthew 5:43–48 and consider Jesus' teaching about loving enemies and praying for those who mistreat us.

Think of a difficult relationship, if doing so is emotionally safe and appropriate. You do not need to contact the person or disclose the situation to your discipler.

Pray for wisdom, freedom from personal revenge, and the ability to respond truthfully. Where a relationship involves danger, coercion, or abuse, maintain appropriate boundaries and seek

qualified support rather than initiating unsafe contact. The goal is not to manufacture affection or force reconciliation. It is to bring your response before God and seek a faithful way forward.

Consider Generosity and Your Responsibility to Others

Read Matthew 6:1–4 and Luke 10:25–37. Reflect upon the resources, abilities, relationships, and opportunities God has placed in your care.

Consider whether there is a person or need you could serve through generosity. Your response might involve financial assistance, food, hospitality, transportation, prayer, encouragement, or volunteering through an accountable local ministry. Choose something suitable to your circumstances without neglecting legitimate family or financial responsibilities.

If You Are Studying Alone

Read John 13, Matthew 5, and Luke 10, then work through the discussion questions in a notebook or digital document. Pay particular attention to ways you can change your life to be a light to others from this step. Consider the practical exercises privately and choose responses that are safe and appropriate to your circumstances. You may also read the For the Discipler section to understand how the passages fit together.

If you are facing complicated questions about forgiveness, damaged relationships, or appropriate boundaries, consider speaking with a trustworthy pastor or qualified professional. You do not need to resolve every difficult relationship before continuing the course.

The Good Way Library encourages independent participants to seek healthy Christian fellowship whenever possible. The love Jesus commands is meant to develop within the shared life of his people, not merely through isolated personal study.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for the love you have shown through your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you that he willingly humbled himself, served his disciples, and gave his life for sinners. Help me understand that my relationship with you rests upon his saving grace rather than my ability to become sufficiently loving or obedient.

Lord Jesus, teach me to love as you love. Where I am selfish, give me humility. When I am impatient, help me respond with gentleness. If I have wronged another person, lead me toward honest repentance and appropriate repair. Where I have been wronged, give me wisdom to refuse revenge while maintaining truth and necessary boundaries.

Holy Spirit, form the character of Christ within me. Open my eyes to people who need encouragement, mercy, or practical assistance. Help me serve without seeking recognition and speak truthfully with compassion.

Teach me to remain close to Jesus throughout ordinary life. Strengthen my love for my family, my neighbors, my fellow believers, and those who are difficult to love. Help me become someone through whom others can recognize the goodness and mercy of Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture to Remember

John 13:34–35 (WEBU)

> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

These verses summarize the central teaching of Step Nine.

Jesus does not simply command his followers to love. He commands them to love according to the pattern he has established through his own life and sacrifice. As you remember these words, consider how they apply to your relationships. Think about the way you speak, forgive, serve, and respond to people who need patience or compassion.

The purpose of remembering Scripture is not merely to repeat the words accurately. It is to receive Christ's teaching and increasingly live according to it.

Continue Studying With The Good Way Library

The following free resources provide additional biblical explanation for Step Nine. Read the assigned Scripture passages first, then use the commentaries to deepen your understanding and consider how Christ's teaching applies to your life.

- **John 13 Commentary: Love to the End** | Explore Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet, his humble service, the betrayal of Judas, and the new commandment to love one another. This is the primary commentary for Step Nine. Its Walkthrough and Interpretive Options are especially helpful for understanding the foot washing and Christ's commandment.
- **Romans 12 Commentary: Living Sacrifice and Genuine Love** | Examine how God's mercy leads believers toward sincere love, hospitality, generosity, humility, peaceful relationships, and refusing revenge. This commentary connects Christlike love with practical Christian living.
- **Philippians 2 Commentary: Christ's Humility and Exaltation** | Study Paul's teaching about humility and concern for others, especially how Jesus' divine identity, willing service, obedience, and exaltation shape the Christian response. This passage provides a deeper theological foundation for humble service.
- **Matthew 6 Commentary: Hidden Righteousness and Kingdom Trust** | Consider Jesus' teaching about charitable giving, sincere prayer, forgiveness, possessions, and trusting the heavenly Father. The commentary helps explain why genuine righteousness seeks God's approval rather than public admiration.

These studies are intended to help you understand Scripture more clearly and respond faithfully to Christ. The Good Way Library's commentaries can provide historical background, explain difficult passages, present interpretive questions, and offer guidance for application.

Before the Next Step

We have now considered one of the clearest marks of genuine Christian discipleship: love that reflects the character and saving work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus loved his disciples before commanding them to love one another. He willingly took the position of a servant, knowing that he possessed all authority from the Father. He then gave his followers a commandment that would shape their relationships and reveal their connection to him. This love reaches into every part of ordinary life. It changes how we speak, treat family members, handle disagreements, use our possessions, forgive wrongdoing, and respond to people in need. It calls us to humility, generosity, patience, truthfulness, and practical mercy.

Yet Christian love does not arise from personal determination alone. The Holy Spirit forms Christlike character in those who belong to Jesus. We continue growing because Christ has already loved and saved us, not because our acts of service purchase his acceptance.

The next step will show us where much of this love is meant to develop and become visible.

Next Reading: Acts 2:37–47

In this passage, Peter proclaims the gospel of the risen Jesus, and those who receive his message are baptized and brought into the fellowship of the church. These new believers devote themselves to apostolic teaching, prayer, worship, fellowship, and caring for one another. Their love takes shape within a real Christian community.

Step Ten: Belong to Christ's People will explore baptism, the Lord's Supper, worship, Christian fellowship, spiritual gifts, and the importance of participating in a healthy local congregation.

We will see why following Jesus is deeply personal but never intended to become permanently isolated. For now, remember the example of our Lord. The one who possesses all authority humbled himself to serve. The one who commands us to love has first loved us through his saving sacrifice.

As we remain in Christ, his love should increasingly become visible in our lives. And as we learn to love one another, we prepare to participate more fully in the shared life of his church.

Step 10: Belong to Christ's People

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 10 of 12

Baptism, Worship, Fellowship, and Gifts

Christian discipleship is deeply personal, but it was never intended to be lived alone. Jesus Christ calls us into fellowship with himself, and he also gathers his followers into a community where they worship, learn, pray, serve, and care for one another. The church is not simply a building or an organization. It is a people who belong to Jesus Christ.

In earlier lessons, we explored the gospel, our new life in Christ, abiding in him, Scripture, prayer, the Holy Spirit, repentance, and Christian love. Now we will consider how those truths take shape in the shared life of God's people.

The Central Truth: Jesus gathers his disciples into his church, where believers receive biblical teaching and pastoral care, participate in baptism and the Lord's Supper, worship together, use their gifts to serve others, and grow toward maturity in Christ.

Why Christians Need the Church

Imagine a Christian who faithfully reads the Bible, prays each morning, and sincerely desires to follow Jesus. Yet this person rarely spends time with other believers. They have no congregation to worship with, no pastor to seek guidance from, and few opportunities to serve fellow Christians.

Such a person may genuinely love Christ. However, something important is missing from their experience of discipleship.

Throughout the New Testament, we find Christians learning and growing together. They gather around the apostles' teaching, pray for one another, share their resources, encourage the discouraged, correct error, and celebrate the grace of God. Their lives become connected through their common relationship with Jesus.

That does not mean every congregation is healthy or that church life is always easy. Christians remain imperfect people who need forgiveness, patience, correction, and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Even the earliest churches experienced disagreements, selfishness, false teaching, and serious failures.

Nevertheless, Scripture presents the church as an essential part of God's purposes for his people. The question is not whether Christians can ever learn or pray alone. Of course they can. The question is whether following Jesus was meant to remain an entirely private experience.

Christ calls his people into fellowship with one another, under his authority and united by his Spirit.

Begin With Scripture

Before studying this lesson, open your Bible and read the following passages. If you are meeting with a discipler, consider reading them aloud together.

Primary Reading: Acts 2:37–47

Read Acts 2:37–47 (WEBU) in its entirety.

This passage describes the response to Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost and introduces the shared life of the first Christian community in Jerusalem.

As you read, pay attention to three questions:

1. **Their response to Christ:** What happens when the people hear Peter's message about Jesus?
2. **Their new community:** What activities characterize the believers who are baptized and gathered together?
3. **God's continuing work:** Who is ultimately responsible for the growth of the church?

Read the passage again before continuing. Notice that Christian fellowship develops from the proclamation of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Companion Readings

Ephesians 4:1–16: Paul describes the church as one body under Jesus Christ. Notice how humility, patience, sound teaching, and different gifts contribute to the maturity of the whole body.

Hebrews 10:19–25: Observe how the writer connects our confidence in Christ's sacrifice with drawing near to God, holding firmly to hope, and encouraging one another through regular Christian fellowship.

These passages explain why the pattern in Acts 2 matters beyond the first congregation in Jerusalem. The church is not merely an interesting feature of early Christian history. It is part of how believers continue growing together in the grace of Jesus Christ.



Main Teaching: Life Together in Christ's Church

The Holy Spirit Forms a People, Not Just Individuals

To understand Acts 2:37–47, we must begin with what happens earlier in the chapter.

Jesus has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven. Before his ascension, he promised that the Holy Spirit would empower his followers to bear witness to him, beginning in Jerusalem and extending throughout the world (Acts 1:8).

On the day of Pentecost, that promise begins to unfold. The Holy Spirit comes upon the gathered disciples, and they begin speaking in languages understood by people from many nations. The event attracts a crowd, and Peter stands before them to explain what has happened.

Peter proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, that God raised him from the dead, and that the risen Jesus has been exalted as Lord and Christ. His message is not primarily about forming a new religious organization. It is about the person and saving work of Jesus Christ.

When the people recognize the significance of what they have heard, they are deeply convicted. They ask Peter and the other apostles what they should do.

In Acts 2:38–39, Peter calls them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. He also speaks of forgiveness, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and God's promise extending to those whom the Lord calls.

About three thousand people receive the message and are baptized that day.

Then something remarkable happens. These new believers do not simply return to isolated lives with a private religious experience. They become part of a shared Christian community.

Acts 2:42 (WEBU) explains:

> They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and prayer.

This verse provides one of the clearest pictures of the church's earliest shared life. The believers received the apostolic message, learned together, shared fellowship, broke bread, and prayed.

The church begins with what God has done through Jesus Christ, not with what religious people have organized for themselves.

The Father sent the Son to accomplish salvation. The risen Son poured out the promised Holy Spirit. Through the proclamation of the gospel, the Spirit gathered people into a community that belonged to Christ.

That same theological foundation remains important today.

A church is not simply a collection of people with similar moral values, political preferences, personalities, or social interests. It is a community gathered around the Lord Jesus Christ and his gospel.

What Made the First Christian Community Different?

Acts 2:42–47 describes several practices that characterized the believers in Jerusalem. Their shared life reflected the saving grace they had received through Jesus Christ.

- **Apostolic Teaching:** They continued learning the message given through Jesus' authorized witnesses. Their faith was grounded in the truth about Christ rather than private speculation.
- **Fellowship:** Their lives became connected through shared faith, friendship, encouragement, and responsibility for one another.
- **Breaking Bread:** They shared meals, while the language of breaking bread also connects with the early Christian practice of remembering Christ through the Lord's Supper.

- **Prayer and Worship:** They prayed together, praised God, and continued gathering regularly in Jerusalem.
- **Generosity and Care:** They shared material resources so that people facing genuine needs could receive assistance.
- **Witness and Growth:** Their shared life accompanied the continuing spread of the gospel as the Lord added people to the church.

These practices reveal a community whose relationship with Jesus affected far more than private beliefs. Their faith influenced their time, possessions, friendships, worship, and concern for people in need.

Yet we should not imagine that Acts 2 describes a perfect church. Later chapters of Acts reveal dishonesty, complaints over the distribution of assistance, disagreements, and difficult decisions. The New Testament letters likewise address divisions, immorality, false teaching, and failures of love within Christian congregations.

These problems do not invalidate the importance of the church. They remind us that Christian communities require the same grace, repentance, truth, and spiritual growth that individual believers need.

Acts 2 also describes an extraordinary period of apostolic signs and the rapid establishment of the Jerusalem church. We should not assume that every congregation must reproduce every miraculous event in precisely the same way.

For example, the believers' generosity does not establish compulsory communal ownership as a requirement for all Christians. Acts 5:4 indicates that individuals retained responsibility over their property and its proceeds. The important principle is willing generosity and responsible care for those in need.

The enduring lesson is not that every church must look exactly like first-century Jerusalem. It is that Christ's people should be devoted to biblical teaching, worship, fellowship, prayer, and practical love.

Baptism: A Command of Jesus and a Beginning of Church Life

Baptism is one of the most important practices associated with Christian discipleship.

We first encountered it in Step One, when Jesus gave the Great Commission. In Matthew 28:18–20, the risen Christ commands his followers to make disciples among the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe everything he commanded.

This is a direct command from Jesus!

In Acts 2, Peter calls his hearers to repent and be baptized. Those who receive the apostolic message are baptized and added to the Christian community. Baptism therefore belongs closely to the proclamation of the gospel, the response of faith, and identification with Christ and his people.

Romans 6:1–14 explains the believer's union with Christ in his death and resurrection, using baptism as an important reference point. Jesus died for sinners and rose bodily from the dead. Those who genuinely belong to him are called to live according to the new life they have received.

Baptism visibly directs our attention toward Christ and his saving work. It is not an achievement that makes someone spiritually impressive, nor should it be dismissed as an unimportant religious custom.

Why Do Christians Differ About Baptism?

Historic Christian traditions agree that baptism is important because Christ commanded it. However, they differ in several aspects of its meaning and administration.

Who Should Be Baptized? Some Christian traditions baptize infants within Christian households, understanding baptism in connection with God's covenant promises and the church. Others practice baptism upon a personal profession of faith, emphasizing repentance and conscious trust in Jesus.

How Should Baptism Be Administered? Some churches practice immersion in water, while others also recognize pouring or sprinkling. Their approaches reflect different understandings of biblical language, historical practice, and the significance of baptism.

How Does Baptism Relate to Salvation? Christians also differ over baptism's sacramental character and its relationship to forgiveness, regeneration, and faith. Some understand baptism as a means through which God gives grace. Others emphasize its role as a sign and public testimony of the saving work received through faith.

These differences deserve careful biblical study. They should not be ignored, but neither should they obscure the central gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Good Way Discipleship Course affirms salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ. Baptism is not a human achievement through which someone purchases divine acceptance. At the same time, Jesus' command should be taken seriously rather than treated as optional decoration.

If you have not been baptized, an appropriate next step is to speak with a faithful pastor or church leader. Ask how your congregation understands and practices baptism, and examine the relevant Scriptures together.

If you are still exploring Christianity, you do not need to pretend that you have already come to saving faith. Continue learning about Jesus, repentance, and belief while asking honest questions about baptism.

The Lord's Supper: Remembering Christ Together

Alongside baptism, Christians have practiced the Lord's Supper since the earliest generations of the church. It is also called Communion or the Eucharist, a word associated with thanksgiving.

Christian traditions sometimes call baptism and the Lord's Supper *ordinances*, while others call them *sacraments*.

The foundation of the Lord's Supper comes from Jesus himself.

During his final meal with his disciples before his crucifixion, Jesus took bread and a cup and connected them with his body and blood. He instructed his followers to continue this remembrance (Luke 22:14–20).

Paul later explains the practice in 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. The bread and cup direct believers toward Jesus' sacrificial death and the new covenant established through his blood. As Christians participate, they proclaim the Lord's death and look forward to his return.

The Lord's Supper is therefore not merely an ordinary meal with religious language added to it. It is a solemn and thankful act centered upon the saving work of Christ.

The context of 1 Corinthians 11 also teaches us something important about church life. Some believers in Corinth were treating others selfishly when they gathered. Their behavior humiliated people with fewer resources and contradicted the fellowship they claimed to share.

Paul corrects them because their manner of gathering was inconsistent with the meaning of the Lord's Supper. We cannot rightly celebrate Christ's self-giving love while deliberately despising or mistreating others within his body.

Self-Examination Before Communion

The Lord's Supper also calls believers to **reverence and honest self-examination**. In 1 Corinthians 11:27–32, Paul warns against eating the bread or drinking the cup in an unworthy manner. His concern includes the Corinthians' divisions, selfishness, and failure to recognize the seriousness of what they were doing. He therefore instructs believers to examine themselves before participating.

Christians should approach the Lord's Table with faith, repentance, gratitude, and proper regard for Christ and his people.

This warning does not mean that Christians must become sinlessly perfect before receiving Communion. **The distinction is between approaching the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner and imagining that only morally flawless people may participate.** The Supper directs believers toward Christ, whose sacrifice is the foundation of their forgiveness and hope. Participants should follow the biblical teaching and appropriate pastoral guidance of their local congregation, recognizing that historic Christian traditions differ in their understanding and administration of the sacrament.

Different Christian Understandings of Communion

Historic Christian traditions agree that the Lord's Supper was established by Jesus and belongs to the church's worship. They do, however, differ concerning Christ's presence and the precise nature of what believers receive.

Some emphasize a sacramental participation in Christ's body and blood. Others explain Christ's presence as a true spiritual communion with the risen Lord. Still others place particular emphasis on the meal as a remembrance and proclamation of his finished sacrifice.

These differences have been discussed throughout Christian history. They should be approached with biblical seriousness and charity rather than dismissed as meaningless or allowed to overshadow the gospel.

Christians also differ in how frequently Communion should be celebrated and the qualifications for participation.

Rather than attempting to administer the Lord's Supper independently as a course activity, participate through a faithful local congregation under appropriate pastoral guidance. If you are uncertain about baptism or Communion, ask a church leader to explain the congregation's practice and the biblical reasons behind it.

Both baptism and the Lord's Supper direct our attention away from personal achievement and toward Jesus Christ, his saving work, and our shared life as his people.

Worship and Teaching: Gathering Around the Living God

The earliest believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, prayer, and praise. They gathered publicly and shared meals in their homes. Their worship was not simply a social occasion. They came together as people who belonged to the living God.

Christian worship continues to have this same purpose. We gather to honor God, hear his Word, pray, give thanks, remember Christ, and encourage one another in faithful living.

In John 4:21–24, Jesus explains that true worship is not ultimately controlled by a particular geographical location. He teaches that those who worship the Father must worship in spirit and truth.

Christian worship must therefore involve more than outward attendance, impressive music, or religious ceremony. It should be sincere and grounded in the truth God has revealed.

At the same time, sincerity does not make biblical instruction unnecessary. A congregation should faithfully teach Scripture and confess Jesus Christ according to the gospel.

The New Testament gives us several important elements of gathered Christian worship:

- **Scripture and Teaching:** The Bible is read, explained, and applied so that believers can understand God's truth and follow Christ.
- **Prayer and Praise:** Christians worship the Father through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, bringing thanksgiving, confession, and requests before God.
- **Baptism and the Lord's Supper:** The congregation receives and practices what Christ established, according to its understanding of Scripture.
- **Fellowship and Encouragement:** Believers strengthen one another through conversation, hospitality, prayer, and mutual care.

- **Giving and Service:** Christians share their resources and abilities to support the work of the church and respond to genuine needs.

Not every congregation will express these elements through the same order of worship, musical style, or organizational structure.

Some churches are highly liturgical, using established prayers and ordered forms of worship. Others follow simpler services centered upon biblical preaching, congregational singing, and prayer. Christians may disagree about which practices should be included and how they should be conducted.

These differences require discernment, but the central concern remains the same: **the congregation should direct its attention toward God through Jesus Christ, faithfully receive Scripture, and build up his people.**

The Church Is One Body With Many Members

The New Testament describes the church using several images, including God's household, a spiritual building, and the body of Christ. The image of a body is especially important because it explains how individual believers belong together while having different responsibilities.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit gives different gifts for the good of the whole church. Some believers are equipped to teach, others to encourage, others to lead, and others to provide practical help or service.

The particular gifts differ, but their purpose is shared.

Paul compares the church to a human body containing many members. A hand cannot function as the entire body, and an eye cannot declare that the rest of the body is unnecessary. Likewise, Christians should not measure their spiritual importance by comparing their abilities or responsibilities with those of others.

A person who teaches Scripture publicly may serve a valuable role. So may someone who quietly visits a lonely church member, prepares food for a family in need, helps maintain the building, welcomes visitors, or prays faithfully for others.

Spiritual gifts are given for service, not for creating a hierarchy of personal importance.

Paul develops this further in Ephesians 4:1–16. He calls Christians to humility, patience, love, and unity in the Holy Spirit. He then explains that the risen Christ gives gifted servants to equip his people for ministry.

The goal is not that a few impressive individuals perform all the work while everyone else observes. Rather, the whole church grows toward maturity as its members contribute to one another's good.

Ephesians 4:15–16 describes the body growing under Christ its head as each part works in its proper place.

This means church participation is about more than receiving something for yourself. Christians gather to be taught and encouraged, but they also have opportunities to strengthen others.

How Can You Recognize Your Place in the Church?

You do not need to discover a single extraordinary ability before you can serve.

Some Christians find it helpful to consider their spiritual gifts through study, prayer, and conversations with church leaders. However, no brief questionnaire can infallibly identify what the Holy Spirit has given someone.

A more reliable approach is to remain attentive to Scripture, learn about the needs of your congregation, receive wise encouragement, and participate in appropriate opportunities for service.

You may discover that you are effective at explaining Scripture, organizing practical assistance, offering hospitality, encouraging discouraged people, or helping with ordinary responsibilities. Your abilities may become clearer through faithful service over time.

Christians differ over whether particular miraculous or revelatory gifts continue in the same way today. Those questions deserve respectful biblical consideration. However, believers across these traditions can agree that the Holy Spirit gives gifts for the good of Christ's people and that love is essential to their proper use.

Paul makes that connection immediately after 1 Corinthians 12, when he begins his well-known teaching about love in chapter 13. Without love, even impressive religious activity fails to accomplish what Christian service should express.

The Church Should Be a Place of Mutual Care

Acts 2 describes believers sharing possessions and responding to material needs. Their generosity reveals that Christian fellowship extended beyond attending the same religious gathering. They recognized responsibilities toward one another.

This principle appears throughout the New Testament. Christians are instructed to encourage those who are discouraged, help those in need, pray for one another, bear burdens, and respond to wrongdoing with truth and humility.

A healthy congregation should not expect every member to carry every burden personally. Instead, believers serve together according to their abilities, responsibilities, and circumstances.

Some people can contribute financially. Others can provide transportation, practical labor, prayer, companionship, teaching, or other forms of assistance.

A person facing illness, disability, unemployment, grief, or financial hardship may need to receive help rather than provide it for a season. This does not make them a less valuable member of Christ's body.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 12 emphasizes the importance of honoring members who might otherwise be overlooked. Christian fellowship should be marked by both giving and receiving care.

It should also include responsible correction. Scripture does not call churches to ignore destructive conduct, conceal wrongdoing, or tolerate abusive leadership in the name of unity.

In Matthew 18:15–20, Jesus teaches about addressing sin within the community of believers. His teaching encourages truth, accountability, and appropriate processes for correction. It must not be misused to require private confrontation with someone who is dangerous or abusive.

Serious wrongdoing may require action by appropriate church authorities, qualified professionals, or civil authorities. Christian love and biblical accountability must never become excuses for protecting those who cause harm.

What Makes a Healthy Christian Church?

If you are looking for a congregation, you may wonder how to recognize a healthy one.

No church will be perfect. Every congregation includes people who still need spiritual growth, repentance, and grace. However, Scripture provides principles that can help us distinguish faithful Christian fellowship from unhealthy religious control.

Consider these characteristics when learning about a congregation.

- **Faithful Biblical Teaching:** A healthy church recognizes Scripture as authoritative and teaches the gospel of Jesus Christ. It confesses the triune God and Jesus Christ as truly God and truly human, whose death and resurrection accomplish salvation for sinners.
- **Christ-Centered Worship:** The congregation directs worship toward God rather than making a pastor, personality, performance, or organization the center of attention.
- **Accountable Leadership:** Church leaders should demonstrate humility, integrity, and willingness to receive correction. Their authority remains subject to Scripture, and they should not operate without appropriate accountability.
- **Genuine Fellowship:** Members should have meaningful opportunities to know, encourage, pray for, and care for one another. Hospitality and concern for vulnerable people matter.
- **Responsible Stewardship:** Financial giving should be handled transparently, without manipulation or pressure. Members should not be told that donations purchase spiritual favor or guarantee material blessings.
- **Healthy Safeguarding:** A faithful congregation should take abuse, exploitation, threats, and serious wrongdoing seriously. It should maintain appropriate safeguards and cooperate with lawful reporting and professional assistance when required.
- **Opportunities for Service:** Members should be encouraged to use their abilities to serve others without being pressured into responsibilities they are unprepared or unable to fulfill.

These characteristics are more important than impressive facilities, large attendance numbers, or polished programs.

There are also warning signs that deserve attention. A church may become spiritually unhealthy when leaders demand unquestioning loyalty, isolate people from their families, use fear to control decisions, discourage legitimate questions, conceal abuse, or claim that disagreement with leadership is necessarily rebellion against God.

These behaviors should not be excused simply because the organization uses Christian language.

Jesus warns about false teachers and the importance of recognizing their fruit in Matthew 7:15–23. The New Testament likewise gives standards for pastoral character and accountability in passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

If you have experienced spiritual abuse or serious harm within a congregation, your concerns deserve to be taken seriously. Seeking safety, trustworthy pastoral support, and qualified professional assistance may be necessary before pursuing new church relationships.

Belonging to Christ does not require surrendering your conscience or personal safety to another human being.

A healthy congregation should help you grow in trust and obedience toward Jesus, not create unhealthy dependence upon its leaders.

Christians Before Us: The Church Through the Centuries

From the earliest generations of Christianity, believers understood that following Jesus meant belonging to a community of faith rather than pursuing an entirely private spiritual life. **Ignatius of Antioch**, an early second-century Christian bishop who wrote letters to several churches while being taken to Rome for execution, strongly emphasized the importance of Christian unity and gathered worship. In his *Letter to the Ephesians*, particularly chapters 5 and 13, he encouraged believers to remain united and assemble regularly for prayer, thanksgiving, and worship. Ignatius lived when Christian communities faced persecution, false teaching, and the possibility of division. He believed that Christians needed one another to remain faithful during these difficulties. Although his writings reflect particular early understandings of church leadership, his broader concern closely resembles the New Testament's emphasis on fellowship and mutual encouragement. **The church is not merely a place where individuals receive religious instruction. It is a community in which believers strengthen one another as they follow Jesus together.** Ignatius reminds us that unity, faithful teaching, and regular fellowship have concerned Christians since the church's earliest centuries.

In the seventeenth century, **Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705)** emphasized the importance of meaningful Christian fellowship and spiritual growth within the church. While serving as a Lutheran pastor in Frankfurt, Germany, he began organizing smaller gatherings of believers in 1670, where Christians could read Scripture, discuss its teachings, and encourage one another toward faithful living. Spener believed that attending public worship and listening to sermons were important, but Christians also needed opportunities to strengthen one another personally.

In his influential 1675 work, *Pia Desideria*, he encouraged greater engagement with Scripture, increased participation by ordinary believers in the life of the church, and a stronger connection between Christian teaching and daily conduct. Spener's example reminds us that **Christian fellowship involves more than gathering in the same building for worship.** Believers should seek opportunities to know one another, discuss God's Word, offer encouragement, and help each other grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

In the seventeenth century, **Richard Baxter (1615–1691)** demonstrated the importance of personal discipleship and spiritual care within the local church. As a pastor in Kidderminster, England, Baxter believed that preaching alone was insufficient for the spiritual growth of a congregation. He devoted considerable time to visiting households, teaching Scripture, answering questions, and encouraging believers toward repentance and faithful living. His influential book *The Reformed Pastor* emphasized the responsibility of church leaders to know and care for those entrusted to them. Baxter understood that **belonging to a church means more than attending worship services.** Christians are called to receive sound teaching, share one another's burdens, and use their gifts to strengthen the body of Christ. His example reminds us that a healthy church is a community where believers are known, encouraged, and helped toward spiritual maturity. As Ephesians 4:11–16 teaches, Christ builds up his church as its members grow together in truth and love. **We are not simply called to attend Christ's church, but to participate faithfully in its life and encourage one another in the Lord.**

What Is True in Christ

The church occupies an extraordinary place in the purposes of Jesus Christ. Scripture does not present it merely as a religious organization that Christians establish to support their personal spiritual lives. Rather, the New Testament reveals that Christ identifies himself with his people, reconciles those who were once divided, and continues exercising authority over the congregations that bear his name. **Understanding these truths changes how we view the church, how we treat fellow believers, and how we respond to the responsibilities of Christian fellowship.**

Jesus Identifies Himself With His People

One of the most remarkable demonstrations of Christ's relationship with his church appears in Acts 9:1–5. Before his conversion, Saul was actively persecuting Christians. He threatened believers, supported their imprisonment, and sought to stop the spread of the gospel. Yet when the risen Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus, he asked why Saul was persecuting *him*. Consider what this means. Saul had been attacking the followers of Jesus, but Christ identified their suffering so closely with himself that he described the persecution as being directed against him.

Jesus does not regard his church as a distant organization that simply represents his interests. He identifies himself with the people who belong to him. This gives extraordinary

significance to how Christians treat one another. When a fellow believer is suffering, that person's pain should matter to us. When someone within the congregation is overlooked, mistreated, or discouraged, we should not respond with indifference. Our brothers and sisters in Christ are not merely fellow members of an institution. They belong to the Savior we love. This identification does not mean that every church leader, decision, or institution speaks with Christ's authority. Rather, it reminds us that genuine concern for Jesus should produce genuine concern for his people.

Christ Has Made Former Strangers Into One Household

Ephesians 2:11–22 reveals another remarkable truth about the church. Paul explains that Jesus Christ has brought near those who were formerly separated and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Through his death, Christ has reconciled both to God in one body, creating a new community in which people from different backgrounds share the same access to the Father through the Holy Spirit. Paul then describes believers as fellow citizens and members of God's household, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

This means the church is something far greater than a gathering of people who happen to share similar interests, personalities, cultures, or social positions. **Jesus has brought together people who might otherwise have remained strangers or even enemies, making them members of one spiritual household.** Their unity is grounded in him, not in their ability to agree about every secondary matter. This does not erase cultural differences, personal histories, or legitimate disagreements. Instead, it gives Christians a deeper relationship that should shape how they approach those differences. We should not expect every believer to look, think, speak, or worship exactly as we do. *The church belongs to Jesus Christ, and he has welcomed people from every nation and background into fellowship through the same gospel.* Our responsibility is to receive fellow believers with humility while remaining faithful to the truth he has revealed.

Jesus Remains the Head and Judge of His Churches

Revelation 1–3 provides a powerful picture of the risen Jesus Christ exercising authority over his churches. John sees Christ among seven golden lampstands, which represent seven churches. Jesus then addresses these congregations individually, acknowledging their faithfulness, exposing serious failures, correcting false teaching, and calling them to repentance. Some churches receive encouragement for their endurance, while others are warned that their conduct contradicts the faith they profess. Even established congregations are not beyond correction.

No church belongs ultimately to its pastor, founders, elders, denomination, or financial supporters. Every congregation that claims the name of Christ remains accountable to Jesus Christ himself. This should encourage humility among leaders and spiritual discernment among members. A church may possess impressive buildings, strong attendance, generous resources, or longstanding traditions while still needing serious correction. Likewise, a small or

struggling congregation may demonstrate remarkable faithfulness to Christ. Jesus evaluates his churches according to his truth, not merely their outward appearance or public reputation. His authority should therefore shape how congregations teach Scripture, exercise leadership, protect vulnerable people, address wrongdoing, and care for those entrusted to them.

These truths give us a deeper understanding of what it means to belong to Christ's people. **Jesus identifies with his church, reconciles believers into one household, and remains its supreme Lord.** We should therefore approach Christian fellowship with reverence, gratitude, humility, and discernment. We must not treat the church as an optional social club, but neither should we confuse loyalty to Jesus with unquestioning submission to a particular institution. Our responsibility is to seek faithful fellowship, love Christ's people, and help strengthen congregations that remain accountable to his Word.

If you are still exploring Christianity, remember that participating in a congregation does not automatically make someone a Christian. The invitation of the gospel remains personal: repent, believe in Jesus Christ, and follow him. As you consider that invitation, a faithful local church can provide opportunities to hear Scripture, ask questions, observe Christian worship, and learn alongside people who are seeking to follow the same Savior.

Learning to Follow Jesus With Others

Love One Another as Christ Has Loved Us

In Step Nine, we studied Jesus washing his disciples' feet and teaching them to love one another.

In John 13:34–35, Jesus commands his followers to love one another according to the pattern of his own love. He also teaches that such love will distinguish his disciples before the world.

This command applies directly to the church's shared life. The congregation should be a place where Christlike love becomes visible through patience, humility, truthfulness, generosity, forgiveness, and concern for others.

Yet love does not mean pretending everything is acceptable. Christians sometimes need correction, protection, reconciliation, and responsible boundaries. Jesus' love is truthful as well as compassionate.

One practical response is to become more attentive to the people around you at church. Instead of thinking only about what you personally receive from a worship service, consider whether someone might appreciate a conversation, prayer, encouragement, hospitality, or practical assistance.

You do not need a formal ministry title to begin loving others faithfully.

Gather Together and Encourage One Another

Hebrews 10:19–25 connects Christian fellowship to the finished sacrifice and priestly ministry of Jesus.

Because Christ has opened the way for his people to draw near to God, believers are encouraged to hold firmly to their hope and consider how they can strengthen one another.

The passage then warns against neglecting Christian gatherings and calls believers to mutual encouragement.

Hebrews reminds us that Christian gatherings should involve more than occupying the same room. We are to consider one another's needs, encourage faithfulness, and strengthen love and good works.

If you already attend church, this may mean becoming more intentional about knowing other believers. If you have been disconnected, it may mean beginning a conversation with a pastor or exploring a suitable congregation.

For someone unable to attend physically, it might involve requesting a pastoral visit, arranging a phone conversation with another Christian, or seeking accessible forms of accountable fellowship.

The central concern is not maintaining an attendance record. It is refusing to treat the Christian life as something we should pursue entirely alone.

Let Christ Guide Your Participation

Consider what church participation looks like when approached through dependence upon Jesus rather than religious performance.

Before gathering with other believers, you might pray that the Lord would help you listen attentively to his Word and care for those around you.

During worship, you can bring your attention back to the Father, remembering that your access to him rests upon Jesus Christ. As Scripture is taught, you can consider its meaning and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom and obedience.

Afterward, perhaps you have an opportunity to speak with someone who is struggling, offer encouragement, or learn about a need within the congregation.

These ordinary moments are meaningful expressions of Christian fellowship.

You do not need to become involved in every available ministry, attend every event, or prove your devotion through constant activity. Faithful participation should be realistic and should honor your responsibilities to family, work, health, and other important areas of life.

The goal is not maximum religious busyness. It is continued fellowship with Christ and responsible love for his people.

Participate in the Church's Mission

The church also exists as a community through which Christ's gospel is proclaimed and his love becomes visible in the world.

Jesus' Great Commission calls his followers to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe his commands. This mission belongs to Christ's people together, not merely to a few professional ministers.

Local congregations participate in many ways, including prayer, evangelism, teaching, hospitality, charitable service, and support for gospel workers.

You may have an opportunity to help welcome visitors, assist a family experiencing hardship, support a local ministry, pray for missionaries, or encourage someone who is exploring Christianity.

Some forms of service, such as children's teaching, require appropriate authorization, training, background checks, and safeguarding procedures. Faithful participation includes respecting those responsibilities.

We should also remember that not every Christian is called to perform the same task. The body has many members, and each contributes according to the grace and opportunities God provides.

As you become involved in a congregation, ask where you can serve responsibly and where you can receive fellowship and instruction.

You do not need to wait until the final discipleship lesson to participate in Christ's mission.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read Acts 2:37–47, Ephesians 4:1–16, and Hebrews 10:19–25. Review Matthew 28 and 1 Corinthians 11–12 so you can explain baptism, the Lord's Supper, church unity, and spiritual gifts. Prepare to describe the common biblical convictions shared across historic Christianity while acknowledging legitimate differences. Familiarize yourself with the Good Way studies, particularly the Acts 2 Walkthrough and Interpretive Options.

During the Meeting | Begin by asking about the learner's experience of Christian fellowship. Read Acts 2 together and identify what follows the proclamation of the gospel: repentance, baptism, teaching, prayer, generosity, and shared worship. Discuss the distinction between belonging to Christ and participating in a local congregation. Explain baptism and Communion with biblical care rather than trying to settle every denominational disagreement. Help the learner consider one realistic step toward fellowship or service.

What to Watch For | Some learners may have experienced church conflict, spiritual control, or abuse. Do not minimize their concerns or pressure them to join your preferred congregation. Some may also have serious church hurt; demonstrate empathy for this, but gently encourage them to not give up on the great body of Christ. Respect conscience, personal safety, and the

need for trustworthy leadership. Never demand private disclosures or promise solutions where you can't for sure provide them.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain why Christian discipleship includes the church and identify the biblical purposes of baptism, Communion, worship, fellowship, and spiritual gifts. If appropriate, encourage a conversation with a pastor or a visit to a healthy congregation. The aim is a responsible next step toward Christian community, not a rushed membership decision.

Discuss Together

Use these questions with your discipler, family, or study group. If you are studying independently, consider writing your responses before continuing.

1. **Evaluating a Church:** Suppose you visit a congregation with energetic worship and friendly people, but its leaders discourage sincere questions and resist accountability. What biblical characteristics should you look for before becoming involved? How would you distinguish healthy spiritual leadership from potential warning signs?
2. **The Beginning of the Church:** What happens in Acts 2:37–47 after Peter proclaims Jesus Christ? What activities characterize the people who receive his message and are baptized?
3. **Belonging to Christ's People:** Why is Christian discipleship meant to include fellowship with other believers? What can a healthy local church provide that a website, book, or private study cannot fully replace?
4. **Baptism and Communion:** What do Jesus and the apostles teach about baptism and the Lord's Supper? Why should Christians understand these practices even when different traditions explain certain details differently?
5. **Worship and Fellowship:** What does Hebrews 10:19–25 teach about gathering together and encouraging one another? How does Christ's saving work provide the foundation for this shared life?
6. **Spiritual Gifts and Service:** How does Paul's description of the body in 1 Corinthians 12 challenge pride, comparison, or the belief that some Christians have nothing valuable to contribute?
7. **Your Next Step:** What is one realistic way you could participate more meaningfully in Christian fellowship, whether through worship, baptismal instruction, building relationships, or serving someone else?

Put It Into Practice

Consider Your Relationship With a Local Church

If you already participate in a congregation, reflect on whether you are connected with other believers beyond attending services. Consider whether there is a suitable opportunity for fellowship, prayer, or encouragement that would deepen your participation.

If you are not currently connected with a church, begin identifying a congregation where Scripture is faithfully taught and appropriate pastoral accountability is present. You might attend a worship gathering, speak with a pastor, or ask a trustworthy Christian for guidance.

If past harm or present circumstances make attendance difficult, take an appropriate and safe step toward trustworthy Christian support rather than forcing yourself into an unhealthy environment.

Understand Baptism and the Lord's Supper

Read Matthew 28:18–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26. Consider what Jesus commands and how the apostles explain the significance of these practices.

If you profess faith in Christ but have not been baptized, consider arranging a conversation with a pastor about baptism. If you are already baptized, reflect on how baptism directs your attention toward belonging to Christ and living in the grace he has given.

When participating in Communion, receive it according to the biblical teaching and practice of your congregation. Remember Christ's saving death and the hope of his return.

Encourage or Serve Someone in Christian Fellowship

Consider one appropriate way to encourage another believer.

You might pray with someone, welcome a visitor, offer practical assistance, share a meal, or ask a church leader about opportunities for service. Choose something suitable for your abilities and circumstances.

If you are presently unable to participate in a congregation, you can still pray for fellow Christians or offer appropriate encouragement to someone you know.

The purpose is not to add another achievement to your discipleship record. It is to allow the love Christ has shown you to become visible in your care for others.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can complete the Scripture readings and reflections in this lesson independently. Read Acts 2:37–47, Ephesians 4:1–16, and Hebrews 10:19–25. Consider the discussion questions and use the Good Way resources to deepen your understanding.

However, this particular lesson emphasizes something that independent study cannot fully provide: ongoing fellowship with other believers.

If possible, contact a local Christian congregation and ask about worship services, biblical teaching, baptism, or opportunities to learn more about the church. You may begin with a simple conversation rather than a commitment to membership.

If your circumstances make in-person attendance difficult, consider asking about accessible worship, pastoral visits, or other appropriate forms of Christian fellowship.

The Good Way Library is here to support your understanding of Scripture, but it is not intended to replace the worship, pastoral care, accountability, and shared life of Christ's church.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners and gather a people who belong to him. Thank you that salvation rests upon his completed work rather than my ability to earn your favor through religious activity.

Teach me to love the church as Christ loves his people. Help me understand the importance of baptism, worship, the Lord's Supper, fellowship, and faithful service. Give me humility to learn from others, patience when relationships are difficult, and wisdom to recognize trustworthy Christian leadership.

By your Holy Spirit, help me use whatever gifts and opportunities you have given me for the good of others. Keep me from pride, comparison, selfishness, and spiritual isolation. Teach me to serve without seeking recognition and to receive help when I need it.

Guide me toward healthy Christian fellowship where your Word is faithfully taught, your name is honored, and people are treated with truth and love. Protect those who are vulnerable, bring wrongdoing into the light, and give your people courage to act responsibly.

Help me remember that the church belongs to Jesus Christ. May my participation draw me closer to him and prepare me to encourage others in the faith. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Savior and Lord, amen.

Scripture to Remember

Hebrews 10:24–25 (WEBU):

> "Let’s consider how to provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

These verses remind us that Christian fellowship involves more than gathering in the same location. Believers are called to consider one another's needs, encourage faithfulness, and strengthen love and good works.

Read Hebrews 10:19–25 again and notice that this instruction follows the assurance of access to God through Jesus Christ. Our shared life grows from the grace he has already provided.

Continue Studying With Good Way

The following resources will help you understand the biblical foundations of the church, Christian fellowship, and serving others. Begin with Scripture itself, then use these commentaries and historical studies to clarify the text, deepen your understanding of the body of Christ, and consider your place within the local church.

1. **Acts 2 Commentary: Pentecost and the Spirit** | Begin here to explore the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter's proclamation of Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism, and the formation of the early church. Pay special attention to verses 37–47, which describe the believers' devotion to apostolic teaching, fellowship, prayer, and shared life. The Interpretive Options section also addresses important questions about baptism and the practices of the first Christians.
2. **Ephesians 4 Commentary: Unity in Christ** | Discover how Christ builds His church through unity, spiritual maturity, sound teaching, and the participation of every member. The discussion of verses 1–16 is especially helpful for understanding why belonging to a local church involves both receiving spiritual care and contributing to the growth of others. The Application and Leading sections provide further guidance for putting these teachings into practice.
3. **1 Corinthians 12 Commentary: Spiritual Gifts and One Body** | Learn how the Holy Spirit equips believers with different gifts for the good of the entire church. This chapter emphasizes that every member of Christ's body has value, purpose, and responsibility. The Interpretive Options section also introduces differing Christian understandings of particular spiritual gifts while keeping the focus on unity and mutual service.
4. **Apostles' Creed Explained: Full Text, Meaning, History, and Scripture** | Explore one of Christianity's historic statements of faith and its biblical foundations. The discussion of the holy catholic church and the communion of saints is especially relevant to this lesson, helping explain the unity and fellowship believers share in Christ. The historical sections also provide helpful background on Christian confession, baptismal instruction, and the life of the early church.

As you examine these teachings, consider how Christ calls you to participate faithfully in His church, encourage fellow believers, and use the gifts God has given you to serve others in love.

Before the Next Step

You have now explored why Christian discipleship includes belonging to Christ's people.

The church is not a collection of perfect Christians. It is a community of people who need the grace of Jesus Christ and the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Within that community,

believers learn Scripture, pray, worship, participate in baptism and the Lord's Supper, receive pastoral care, and serve one another.

Remember that Christ himself is the head of his church. No congregation, pastor, mentor, or Christian organization can take his place.

If you already belong to a healthy congregation, consider how you might participate more faithfully in its shared life. If you have not yet found a suitable church, continue seeking trustworthy Christian fellowship with patience and discernment.

But another important question remains: **What happens when following Jesus becomes difficult?**

Christians experience sickness, grief, disappointment, temptation, persecution, conflict, and ordinary seasons of weakness. Belonging to Christ does not guarantee an easy life, nor does participation in a church remove every struggle.

Jesus calls his followers to remain faithful through such experiences, trusting his presence and the hope he has promised.

Step 11: Faithful Through Every Season will explore perseverance, suffering, spiritual struggle, and the hope of resurrection. We will learn how Scripture teaches us to endure hardship without pretending that pain is insignificant or that faithful believers must always feel strong.

Next Reading: James 1:2–18

Before continuing, read this passage and notice how James connects trials, endurance, prayer for wisdom, temptation, and God's goodness.

As you begin the next step, remember that the Lord who gathers his people is also the Lord who sustains them. We follow Jesus together, supported by his Word, strengthened by his Spirit, and encouraged by the hope of his final victory.

Step 11: Faithful Through Every Season

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 11 of 12

Perseverance, Suffering, Spiritual Struggle, and Hope

Christian perseverance is not the ability to face every hardship without fear, sadness, or questions. It is learning to remain faithful to Jesus Christ when life is difficult, trusting his grace while making wise and obedient decisions. The Savior who calls us to follow him does not promise that suffering will disappear. He promises to remain faithful to his people and to complete the salvation he has begun.

Throughout The Good Way Discipleship Course, we have learned about Christ's saving work, our new life in him, abiding through Scripture and prayer, walking by the Holy Spirit, loving others, and belonging to his church. These truths are especially precious when circumstances change. This lesson explains how to respond to trials, distinguish suffering from temptation, resist spiritual opposition without fear, and look toward the resurrection that Christ has promised.

The Central Truth: Jesus calls his disciples to follow him through suffering, uncertainty, temptation, and spiritual struggle. They persevere not through self-sufficiency but through God's grace, his Word and Spirit, the support of his people, and the hope of resurrection. *As a true follower of Christ, you will face trials and suffering.* It is guaranteed (2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 4:12–13).

Begin With Scripture

Primary Reading: James 1:2–18 (WEBU)

Open your Bible and read all of James 1:2–18 before continuing. James addresses Christians living under pressure and teaches them to seek wisdom, endure testing, resist sinful temptation, and remember the unchanging goodness of God. Read the opening greeting in verse 1 and, if possible, finish the chapter afterward. James's later instruction to hear and obey God's Word shows that perseverance belongs to a life of practical faithfulness.

As you read the principal passage, notice three connected subjects:

1. **Endurance:** What does James say tested faith can produce, and why does that change how believers view trials?
2. **Wisdom and temptation:** Why should we ask God for wisdom, and how does James distinguish difficult circumstances from enticement toward sin?
3. **God's goodness:** What does James say about God's gifts and the new life he gives through the word of truth?

Companion Readings: Open both passages during this step, not simply their references.

- **2 Corinthians 4:7–18:** Paul compares believers to fragile clay vessels containing the treasure of the gospel. His suffering and his confidence in the resurrection show that Christian endurance rests on God's power, not human invulnerability.
- **1 Peter 3:13–17:** Peter addresses suffering for doing what is right. He calls Christians to faithful conduct and to give a respectful explanation of their hope, connecting perseverance with witness to others.

These readings belong together. James explains how faith responds to testing, Paul shows God's strength amid human weakness, and Peter demonstrates how Christian hope shapes our treatment of others. For deeper study, consider Luke 9:23–25, Romans 8:18–39, 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, Ephesians 6:10–18, and 1 Peter 1:3–9. If you have been reading the Gospel of John alongside the course, revisit John 16:33 and Jesus' promises in chapters 14–17.

Christian Perseverance: Following Jesus Through Trials

Jesus Calls Us to Follow Him, Even When Obedience Is Costly

In Luke 9, Jesus tells his disciples that he must suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again. Only then does he explain what following him will require. Luke 9:23 (WEBU) records his words:

> "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."

Jesus is not describing a plan for becoming impressive through hardship. In the Roman world, the cross was an instrument of execution. His command means that loyalty to him must take precedence over protecting our reputation, comfort, and personal desires at any cost. Following Christ may involve sacrifice and opposition, just as his own path led through suffering before resurrection.

This does not mean that every inconvenience is a cross to bear, or that Christians should seek pain, refuse treatment, or remain in danger. It means we must not abandon what Christ commands merely because obedience is costly. A believer may need to refuse dishonesty at work, remain truthful under social pressure, or care faithfully for someone when the responsibility is tiring. In another situation, obedience may require seeking protection from harm or asking for help rather than suffering alone.

Jesus commands us to follow him; he does not command us to manufacture suffering. He also reassures his followers that trouble does not overturn his victory (John 16:33). The risen Lord remains our Savior in seasons of joy and in seasons when faithfulness requires courage.

Trials Can Strengthen Tested Faith (James 1:2–4)

James begins with an instruction that can seem surprising: believers are to regard their various trials with joy. The WEBU uses the word *temptations* in verse 2, but verses 3–4 make clear that James is speaking here about testing that presses upon faith. He explains that tested faith

produces endurance, and he urges believers to let endurance have its full effect so that they grow toward maturity.

James is not telling people to enjoy illness, bereavement, financial loss, or mistreatment. Biblical joy is not the same as finding pain pleasant. It comes from knowing that hardship is not the whole story and that God can sustain and mature his people as they continue trusting him. A believer may grieve deeply and still possess genuine faith. Crying, asking questions, or feeling exhausted does not automatically mean someone has failed to persevere.

The maturity James describes is not sinless perfection. It is a steadier and more complete Christian life, one that increasingly rests on God's truth when circumstances become unsettled. Nor should we claim to know the particular divine purpose behind someone else's tragedy. James provides a reason to endure faithfully, not permission to tell suffering people why every painful event occurred.

Imagine someone who has lost employment. Their hardship may bring uncertainty, fear, and practical needs. Endurance could mean continuing to pray, looking for work, accepting assistance, acting honestly, and receiving support from the church. There may be no dramatic emotional victory. Faithfulness can be expressed in patient, ordinary decisions made under real pressure.

Ask God for Wisdom, Not an Explanation for Everything (James 1:5–8)

James moves directly from endurance to wisdom because trials often leave us unsure what to do. We may understand a biblical command while struggling to apply it to a complicated situation. A family decision, a workplace conflict, serious illness, or a long-term responsibility can require more than a quick answer.

James 1:5 teaches believers to ask God, who gives wisdom generously and without reproach. Acknowledging that we do not know what to do is not shameful. God invites us to seek the wisdom needed for faithful living. Prayer therefore belongs alongside careful attention to Scripture, responsible consideration of facts, and appropriate counsel from mature believers or qualified professionals.

James also warns against doubting and being double-minded. His concern is not every passing fear or honest question. The larger passage challenges divided loyalty, the person who seeks God's guidance while refusing to entrust themselves to him. Someone who says, "Lord, I am afraid and do not understand," may still be praying sincerely in faith. Someone determined to ignore God's revealed commands while asking him to approve their plan is approaching the matter differently.

We should not confuse wisdom with a private impression that settles every question. The Holy Spirit helps believers understand Scripture and grow in discernment, but a strong inward feeling does not have Scripture's authority. When making major decisions, pray, examine biblical principles, gather reliable information, and consult appropriate people. Dependence upon God and responsible judgment belong together.

Remember That Earthly Status Does Not Last (James 1:9–11)

James then addresses believers in humble circumstances and those who possess wealth. The believer who lacks earthly standing may rejoice in the honor of belonging to God. The wealthy person must remember that material success and reputation are temporary, like a flower that fades under the sun.

These verses help us recognize how easily changing circumstances can unsettle our confidence. Work, money, possessions, health, and social standing matter in everyday life, but none provides lasting security. James is not suggesting that poverty automatically makes someone holy or that possession of money proves unbelief. Both poor and wealthy people must learn to measure their lives by God's judgment rather than the world's praise.

For a Christian experiencing loss, this is a reminder that human worth does not disappear with income, ability, or achievement. For someone enjoying prosperity, it is a call to gratitude, humility, and responsible stewardship. We can fulfill practical obligations without making earthly stability the foundation of our hope.

Endurance Looks Toward the Life God Has Promised (James 1:12)

James speaks of the blessing awaiting those who remain steadfast under testing, including the crown of life promised by the Lord to those who love him. His language directs us toward life with God rather than a guarantee of improved earthly circumstances. Perseverance matters because the Christian's future is greater than the present trial.

This promise does not mean that enough suffering earns salvation. The gospel teaches that sinners are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Endurance is the continuing response of genuine faith, shaped by love for God and sustained by his grace. Christians do not achieve acceptance by remaining strong every moment.

Some believers endure hardship with remarkable confidence; others persevere while feeling exhausted, grieving, or unsure what tomorrow will bring. Neither the intensity of emotion nor the public appearance of strength determines the worth of Christ's saving work. His promises give us reason to keep returning to him.

Distinguish Painful Trials From Sinful Temptation (James 1:13–15)

James now explains that temptation toward evil must not be blamed on God. In verses 13–15, he describes sinful desire drawing a person toward wrongdoing, followed by sin and its destructive consequences. The connection with the earlier verses is important: a trial may test our faith without being an invitation to sin, though sinful temptations can arise during a trial.

For example, financial hardship is a painful circumstance, not proof that someone has sinned. Yet the same pressure might tempt a person toward deception or theft. Likewise, grief is not itself a moral failure, although someone who is suffering may also struggle with bitterness or destructive choices. We need to distinguish what has happened to us from what we are being tempted to do in response.

This passage never authorizes blaming a victim for abuse, violence, illness, or another person's wrongdoing. Jesus himself was tempted yet remained without sin (Hebrews 4:15). The presence of temptation does not mean someone has already committed the sin being considered. Christians should resist wrongdoing through prayer, biblical truth, wise boundaries, and appropriate support rather than surrendering to shame or pretending temptation is harmless.

Where a struggle involves addiction, compulsive behavior, or serious distress, spiritual care and qualified professional treatment may both be needed. Christ calls his people to genuine repentance, but neither prayer nor a Bible-study exercise should be presented as a guaranteed instant cure.

Trust the Goodness of the God Who Gives Life (James 1:16–18)

James finishes this section by reminding believers that every good and perfect gift comes from above. He calls God the Father of lights, whose character does not shift like changing shadows. After denying that God tempts people toward evil, James directs their attention to God's goodness and his saving initiative.

Verse 18 speaks of God bringing his people to birth through the word of truth. Christian faith does not begin when we make ourselves strong or spiritually mature. It begins with God's gracious action through the gospel. Those who belong to Jesus Christ have received new life, and the Holy Spirit continues teaching them to trust and obey.

James does not answer every painful question about why suffering occurs. He gives believers something firmer than a complete explanation of their circumstances: **the character of the God who has made himself known in Jesus Christ.** We may ask for relief, seek practical assistance, and lament what is wrong while continuing to trust that God remains good.

Additional Reading: We Do Not Always Know Why Suffering Happens (Luke 13:1–5)

When suffering enters our lives, one of our first questions is often, *"Why is this happening?"* Sometimes we can identify a cause, but often we cannot. Scripture does not promise that Christians will understand the reasons behind every tragedy, illness, loss, or painful circumstance. **We may never discover why a particular hardship occurred during our earthly lives.** Yet not knowing God's purposes does not mean that he has abandoned us or that our suffering is meaningless.

In Luke 13:1–5, Jesus addresses two tragedies: the killing of Galileans by Pontius Pilate and the collapse of a tower in Siloam that killed eighteen people. Jesus explicitly rejects the assumption that those who died were worse sinners than others. Instead, he uses these events to call his listeners to repentance. **The suffering of others is not evidence that they deserve greater punishment. Rather, the uncertainty and brevity of life should remind every person of their own need to turn toward God.**

Jesus makes a similar point in John 9:1–3. When his disciples encounter a man born blind, they ask whether his condition resulted from his own sin or his parents' sin. Jesus rejects both

explanations and directs their attention toward the works of God. We must therefore resist the temptation to assign specific spiritual causes to another person's suffering. Some suffering results from human wrongdoing, some from living in a fallen world, and much remains beyond our understanding.

God can use even the most painful circumstances to draw people toward himself. For those who do not know Christ, suffering can become an occasion to recognize their need for repentance and salvation. For believers, it can deepen dependence upon God, strengthen faith, and cultivate compassion for others. Yet these truths do not mean that every tragedy is a direct punishment or that we can identify God's particular purpose in every event.

First Corinthians 13:12 reminds us that our understanding remains incomplete in this life. We may never receive the answers we desire on this side of heaven, and Scripture does not promise an individual explanation for every hardship. Nevertheless, **we do not need to understand everything God permits in order to trust the God who has revealed himself through Jesus Christ.** Our calling is to turn toward him in repentance and faith, seek his wisdom, and remain faithful even when the reasons for our suffering remain unknown.

Christ's Strength, Spiritual Resistance, and Resurrection Hope

God's Strength Is Displayed Through Weak People (2 Corinthians 4:7–18)

In our first companion reading, Paul compares Christians to fragile clay vessels carrying a treasure. The treasure is the gospel's revelation of God's glory in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:5–7). The vessel is ordinary and breakable, but the treasure is precious. Paul's point is that the surpassing power belongs to God rather than to the person carrying it.

Paul speaks openly about pressure, confusion, persecution, and bodily suffering. He does not pretend that Christian ministry or faithful living makes people immune to hardship. Instead, he continues trusting the God who raised Jesus from the dead and will also raise his people. His confidence grows from the resurrection, not from a claim that suffering cannot hurt him.

Near the end of the chapter, Paul compares present affliction with the eternal glory to come. He is not minimizing pain, since his own hardships were severe. He is placing present suffering within a much larger future. **The Christian does not have to appear unbreakable in order to remain faithful.** We carry the treasure of Christ's gospel while depending upon his power in weakness.

Paul develops this further in 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. He repeatedly asks the Lord to remove an affliction, but the Lord answers in verse 9 (WEBU):

> "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

The text does not identify the precise nature of Paul's affliction, so we should not claim to know what it was. His experience teaches us that we may pray earnestly for relief without being promised the outcome we desire. God's sustaining grace is real even when a burden remains.

Receiving medicine, counseling, practical help, or the care of others is compatible with that dependence.

Stand in God's Armor Without Becoming Preoccupied With Evil (Ephesians 6:10–18)

Scripture also speaks of genuine spiritual opposition. At the end of Ephesians, Paul commands believers to be strong in the Lord and put on God's armor. This instruction follows chapters about grace, unity, holiness, family life, and ordinary responsibilities. Spiritual warfare is not presented as a separate pursuit of secret techniques. It belongs to the Christian's continuing faithfulness to the Lord.

Paul uses the picture of a soldier's armor to describe the resources God gives his people:

- **Truth:** Remain grounded in what God has revealed rather than surrendering to deception.
- **Righteousness:** Rely on Christ and practice the upright conduct fitting those who belong to him.
- **The gospel of peace:** Stand ready with the good news of reconciliation through Jesus Christ.
- **Faith:** Trust God's character and promises when fear, accusation, and temptation arise.
- **Salvation:** Remember the saving work of Christ and the hope he has promised.
- **God's Word:** Receive and use Scripture faithfully to recognize falsehood and resist sin.
- **Prayer:** Continue praying in the Spirit for fellow believers and for faithful gospel witness.

Paul's repeated instruction is to stand in the Lord's strength. He does not command Christians to interpret every setback as a demonic attack. Illness, trauma, mental-health conditions, and ordinary misfortune should not automatically be assigned a supernatural cause. Such situations deserve truthful assessment, compassion, and appropriate care.

The armor of God directs our attention toward Christ, Scripture, faith, prayer, and steady obedience. It is not a reason to become fascinated with evil or afraid of every difficulty. Our confidence belongs to the Lord who has triumphed over sin and death.

Look Ahead to Resurrection and Final Restoration (Romans 8:18–39)

Romans 8 teaches that Christians have the Holy Spirit and belong to God's family, yet still experience a world marked by suffering and decay. Creation groans, and believers themselves wait for the redemption of their bodies. The Spirit's presence is the beginning of the promised new life, not proof that every effect of sin and suffering has already disappeared.

Paul connects our hope to the future resurrection and glory God will reveal. Believers can ask for relief and grieve present losses while knowing that suffering and death will not have the final word. He also teaches that dangers, persecution, and even death cannot separate those who belong to Christ from God's love. He does not promise that such hardships will never occur; he places them beneath the faithfulness of the risen Savior.

Historic Christians have differed about particular events and timetables surrounding Christ's return. The shared biblical hope does not depend on settling those secondary questions. Jesus

will return, God will judge justly, his people will be raised, and his saving purposes will reach their promised completion. This is the future toward which Christian perseverance looks.

Christians Before Us: Faithfulness Through Suffering

The earliest Christians understood that following Jesus could involve extraordinary hardship, yet they believed that suffering and persecution could not separate them from their Savior. One remarkable example is Perpetua, a young Christian mother in Carthage, North Africa, who was imprisoned for her faith in AD 203. Her account, preserved in *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, describes the emotional distress of imprisonment, separation from her infant son, and pressure from her father to abandon Christianity. Despite these painful circumstances, Perpetua refused to deny Christ and was eventually executed alongside other Christians, including Felicity. Her story reveals that **Christian courage does not require the absence of fear, grief, or emotional suffering.** Faithfulness sometimes means continuing to trust Jesus while experiencing tremendous personal anguish. Perpetua's testimony should not cause us to seek suffering or underestimate its pain. Instead, it reminds us that Christ is worthy of our allegiance even when following him becomes costly. Her example reflects the encouragement of 1 Peter 1:6–7, where believers are reminded that genuine faith can be tested through difficult circumstances.

Centuries later, Elizabeth Prentiss (1818–1878), an American Christian writer, experienced a different kind of suffering. Throughout her life, she struggled with serious health problems, physical weakness, periods of spiritual discouragement, and the devastating loss of two young children within a few months of each other. These experiences profoundly shaped her understanding of Christian faith. Rather than presenting spiritual growth as a life free from sorrow, Prentiss explored how believers could continue learning to trust and love God through ordinary responsibilities, disappointments, illness, and grief. Her well-known book *Stepping Heavenward*, published in 1869, follows a woman's gradual growth in Christian maturity through the changing circumstances of life. Prentiss also wrote the hymn *More Love to Thee*, expressing her desire for deeper devotion to Christ. **Her life reminds us that perseverance is not limited to dramatic moments of persecution.** Sometimes faithfulness means continuing to pray, love, serve, and trust God through years of difficulties that others may barely notice. Spiritual maturity does not require us to deny our grief or pretend that hardship is easy. It involves learning to depend upon Christ even when life does not unfold as we had hoped.

In the twentieth century, Richard Wurmbrand (1909–2001), a Romanian Christian pastor, endured fourteen years of imprisonment under the communist government because of his Christian ministry. He experienced extended isolation, torture, and separation from his family. Following his release, Wurmbrand continued advocating for persecuted Christians and helped establish the international ministry known as *The Voice of the Martyrs*. His experiences became widely known through his book *Tortured for Christ*, which drew attention to believers suffering under religious persecution. Wurmbrand also emphasized the importance of refusing hatred

toward persecutors, even while opposing the evil they committed. His life demonstrates that **faithfulness to Christ can endure even when circumstances take away personal freedom, security, and ordinary opportunities for ministry.** However, his courage should never be used to suggest that Christians must remain in abusive or dangerous situations when escape and protection are possible. The lesson is not that suffering is inherently desirable, but that Christ remains worthy of our trust in every circumstance. Like the encouragement found in Romans 8:35–39, Wurmbrand's testimony reminds us that even severe opposition cannot ultimately separate believers from the love of God in Jesus Christ.

What Is True in Christ

Following Jesus does not mean that every season of life will be peaceful, predictable, or free from suffering. Scripture speaks openly about hardship, disappointment, persecution, illness, and the struggles that can challenge our faith. Yet the Bible also reveals that **God does not demand that his people pretend to be strong when they are hurting.** Christ understands human suffering, invites us to seek wisdom and help, and remains faithful even when our own strength is exhausted. These truths give us a deeper understanding of what genuine Christian perseverance looks like.

Faithfulness Does Not Require Hiding Our Pain

The Bible contains many examples of faithful believers expressing sorrow, confusion, fear, and disappointment before God. In Psalm 13, David openly questions how long his suffering will continue and pleads for God's attention. His words are not a rejection of faith, but an honest prayer offered from within a painful experience. Even Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane, experienced profound sorrow as he approached his crucifixion (Matthew 26:36–46). He prayed earnestly to the Father while remaining perfectly obedient to his will. **If Jesus himself expressed deep anguish, we should never assume that feeling overwhelmed or distressed automatically reveals a lack of faith.**

This matters because Christians sometimes believe they must conceal their struggles to appear spiritually mature. They may hesitate to acknowledge grief, anxiety, disappointment, or unanswered questions because they fear such honesty will disappoint God or other believers. Yet Scripture invites us to bring these burdens before the Lord. *Faithfulness is not the ability to maintain a cheerful appearance through every hardship. It is the continuing decision to turn toward God, even when our hearts are troubled.* We can lament honestly, ask difficult questions, and seek his comfort while remaining committed to trusting him.

Perseverance Requires Wisdom, Not Passive Suffering

James 1:5 gives an important instruction to believers facing trials: they should ask God for wisdom. This reveals something essential about Christian perseverance. We are not simply commanded to endure difficult circumstances without thinking, seeking guidance, or taking

appropriate action. **Faithful endurance includes learning how to respond wisely to the challenges before us.** Sometimes wisdom leads us to remain patient in a difficult responsibility. At other times, it may require confronting wrongdoing, seeking assistance, changing our circumstances, or removing ourselves from danger.

The apostle Paul provides an instructive example in Acts 9:23–25. When his enemies plotted to kill him in Damascus, other believers helped him escape by lowering him through an opening in the city wall. Paul did not demonstrate greater faith by remaining unnecessarily exposed to danger. His escape was entirely consistent with his calling to serve Jesus Christ. This principle is particularly important when someone is experiencing abuse, exploitation, serious illness, or overwhelming emotional distress. Seeking safety, professional care, wise counsel, and appropriate support does not mean abandoning faith in God. Galatians 6:2 instructs believers to bear one another's burdens, reminding us that Christian perseverance was never intended to be an entirely solitary experience. *Sometimes one of the most faithful decisions we can make is to acknowledge that we need help and allow others to provide it.*

Christ's Strength Is Revealed Through Human Weakness

Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 12:9–10 that Christ's grace remains sufficient even when suffering is not removed. Our weakness is not evidence that Christ has abandoned us, nor does genuine faith require us to appear invulnerable. We can acknowledge our limitations while continuing to trust the Savior whose strength does not depend upon ours.

This truth challenges the assumption that strong Christians should always appear confident, successful, emotionally steady, or capable of handling every difficulty without assistance. A believer living with chronic illness may have little physical energy. Someone grieving a loved one may struggle to concentrate or fulfill ordinary responsibilities. Another Christian may experience prolonged uncertainty without knowing when circumstances will improve. None of these experiences automatically means that God is displeased with them or that their faith has failed. In 2 Corinthians 12:9–10, Paul explains that Christ's power is made perfect in weakness. This does not promise that every difficulty will disappear or that we will always recognize God's purposes in our suffering. Rather, it reminds us that **our confidence rests in Christ's sufficiency, not in our ability to remain strong at every moment.**

These truths give us a more complete understanding of Christian perseverance. We can be honest about suffering without abandoning faith, seek wisdom and assistance without surrendering our trust in God, and acknowledge our limitations without losing confidence in Jesus Christ. **Faithfulness through every season does not mean that we never struggle, grieve, question, or grow weary. It means continuing to turn toward the Lord who remains faithful to us.** As we learn to follow him through both joyful and difficult circumstances, our hope rests not in the promise of an easy life, but in the enduring goodness and faithfulness of our Savior.

If you are still exploring Christianity, understand that Jesus does not promise his followers a life without hardship. He offers something far greater: reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, and the hope of eternal life through his death and resurrection. You do not need to resolve every personal difficulty before coming to him. Christ calls you to repent, believe the gospel, and begin following him in the circumstances of your life.

Learning to Follow Jesus Through Every Season

Bring Your Whole Life Before Christ

Jesus commands us to follow him and take up our cross (Luke 9:23–25). He teaches his followers not to be ruled by fear of human opposition and to trust the Father's care (Luke 12:4–7). The apostles then apply that life of discipleship by calling believers to seek wisdom in trials (James 1), stand in God's strength (Ephesians 6), and remain ready to explain their hope with respect (1 Peter 3).

Faithfulness often involves ordinary responsibilities rather than dramatic moments. It may mean caring for family, acting honestly at work, making responsible financial decisions, refusing harmful speech, seeking safety in a difficult relationship, or obtaining medical help. Christ's lordship reaches these everyday circumstances. Steps Eight and Nine examined many of these moral responsibilities in detail; here our concern is how to remain faithful when doing what is right becomes difficult or unclear.

When you face a difficult decision, ask what Scripture teaches, what responsibilities you have, what risks and practical information matter, and whose counsel would be wise. Pray honestly before acting. You need not wait for a special sign or treat an inner impression as though it were a new passage of Scripture. Spirit-formed wisdom involves reverence for God's Word and responsible action within the real circumstances before us.

Receive Support Without Shame

Christian perseverance is not meant to be solitary. Christ has given his people the local church for worship, teaching, prayer, fellowship, and practical care. A trusted Christian may encourage you with Scripture, help you think through a decision, or simply remain present during grief. Seeking help can be an expression of wisdom rather than a lack of faith.

Some struggles require more than a mentoring conversation. Abuse, addiction, significant emotional distress, and medical concerns may call for professional treatment, appropriate safeguarding, and pastoral support. No one should be pressured to disclose trauma, accept unsafe reconciliation, abandon necessary care, or remain in danger to prove Christian endurance. Where someone is in immediate danger, urgent local assistance takes priority.

Receiving care does not replace trust in Christ. It is often one of the ordinary ways people fulfill the biblical command to bear one another's burdens. A healthy church and discipler should encourage wise support rather than demand dependence upon a single individual.

Let Christian Hope Become Compassion for Others

Our second companion reading, 1 Peter 3:13–17, connects faithful conduct under pressure with a gentle explanation of Christian hope. Peter is addressing people who may suffer for doing right. He calls them to honor Christ, maintain a clear conscience, and respond respectfully when questioned about their faith.

This has an outward implication for everyday discipleship. When someone is grieving or suffering, our responsibility is not to explain why God allowed their pain. Avoid well-intentioned but potentially harmful statements such as *"Everything happens for a reason," "This must be God's plan for you,"* or *"God is teaching you a lesson."* Even when spoken with good intentions, these explanations presume knowledge of God's purposes that we simply do not possess. **Scripture calls us to "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15), not to explain away their suffering.** Sometimes the most Christlike response is simply to sit with someone, listen patiently, acknowledge their pain, and grieve alongside them. Offer prayer, practical assistance, and compassionate presence without rushing them toward an explanation or emotional recovery. When they genuinely ask about your hope, speak of Christ's faithfulness without pretending to know what God has not revealed.

Christian witness should never require minimizing someone else's pain. Compassion, truthful hope, patient presence, and appropriate service are ways we love our neighbors while depending on Christ. Disciple-making begins with this kind of faithful concern, even before we reach the final lesson of the course.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read James 1:2–18 alongside 2 Corinthians 4:7–18 and 1 Peter 3:13–17. Review the distinction between trials that test faith and temptation toward sin. The Good Way James 1 commentary's Walkthrough, Interpretive Options, and Leading sections can help you prepare. Be ready to explain wisdom, endurance, and resurrection hope without suggesting that suffering should feel pleasant.

During the Meeting | Read James aloud together, then ask what the passage promises and what it does not promise. Trace the movement from testing to wisdom, from temptation to God's goodness. Use the one shared discussion set below, allowing time for reflection. Close with a brief prayer that acknowledges difficulty without demanding personal disclosure or a particular emotional response.

What to Watch For | Never blame someone for abuse, grief, illness, or ongoing hardship, or claim that suffering proves hidden sin or weak faith. Do not diagnose every difficulty as spiritual attack or promise immediate healing. Do not try to explain why any particular instance of suffering occurs, just learn to listen and empathize instead. Respect privacy within applicable safeguarding limits.

Before Moving Forward | Invite the learner to explain one biblical ground of hope, name an appropriate source of support, and describe one wise response to a difficult responsibility. Reinforce that perseverance is dependence upon Christ, not a test of toughness. Prepare to connect faithful endurance with helping others follow Jesus in Step Twelve.

Discuss Together

Read James 1:2–18 once more before discussing these questions with your discipler or considering them independently.

1. **Trials and endurance:** What does James say God can produce through tested faith? What does he not promise about suffering, health, or immediate relief?
2. **Wisdom and temptation:** How does James distinguish a painful trial from enticement toward sin? Why does this difference matter when someone is already suffering?
3. **Weakness and faith:** How do 2 Corinthians 4 and 12 help us understand why a faithful Christian may still grieve, feel weak, or ask for relief?
4. **Spiritual resistance:** Which parts of God's armor in Ephesians 6 direct us toward truth, faith, Scripture, prayer, and the gospel? Why should we avoid sensational explanations for ordinary difficulties?
5. **Love for others:** How could you show the care of Christ to someone experiencing hardship without assuming you can explain or solve their suffering?
6. **Resurrection hope:** How does the promise of Christ's return, bodily resurrection, and final justice help you think about present trials and continuing obedience?

Put It Into Practice

Pray Through James 1 During a Real Difficulty

Read James 1:2–18 again and pray for wisdom. If you are facing hardship, bring the situation honestly before God, including any desire for relief. If life is relatively peaceful, consider an ordinary decision that requires patience and discernment. Ask what the passage teaches about God's character rather than trying to produce a particular feeling.

Seek Support and Make One Wise Response

Consider a responsibility or question that needs thoughtful attention. Examine relevant Scripture, gather the practical information you need, and ask a trustworthy Christian or qualified professional for help when appropriate. Then take one safe, responsible step. Faithfulness may involve acting, waiting, establishing a boundary, asking for assistance, or continuing an ordinary duty with Christ's help.

Encourage Someone With Compassionate Hope

Pray for a person who is grieving, isolated, ill, or discouraged. Where appropriate, offer practical help or a listening ear. If a conversation about faith opens naturally, explain the hope of Jesus' resurrection with humility. You are not responsible for producing a response or solving someone else's suffering; your calling is to love truthfully and serve wisely.

If You Are Studying Alone

Read the principal passage and both companion readings, then consider the shared discussion questions in writing if that helps. Psalm 13, Psalm 27, or Romans 8 may also provide words for prayer when you are struggling. Do not interpret independent study as a requirement to face serious difficulties alone. Seek worship, fellowship, and pastoral support within a healthy local church, and use qualified professional care when circumstances call for it. The Good Way Library is a companion to Scripture and Christian fellowship, not a replacement for either.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for your goodness and for saving sinners through your Son, Jesus Christ. You know the trials, fears, responsibilities, and questions that I carry. Teach me to bring them to you honestly, asking for wisdom rather than pretending I have every answer. When obedience is costly, help me continue following Jesus. When I face temptation, strengthen me through your Word and Spirit to resist what is wrong. Give me humility to receive counsel, courage to seek necessary help, and love for those who are suffering. Lord Jesus, thank you for dying and rising again and for the hope of resurrection that you have secured for your people. Keep my confidence in your grace rather than my strength. Help me remain faithful through every season and encourage others with truth and compassion. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scripture to Remember

James 1:5 (World English Bible, Updated)

> "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

This is a fitting promise for times of uncertainty. We may not know why a particular hardship has occurred or how every difficulty will end, but God invites his people to seek the wisdom needed for faithful living. Return to this verse as you pray, examine Scripture, and consider wise counsel.

Continue Studying With The Good Way Library

Read the biblical passages before using commentary. The following published Good Way studies explain the texts, their context, and their practical implications. Their Walkthrough,

Application, Interpretive Options, Cross-References, and Leading sections can also help a discipler prepare for a meaningful conversation.

- **James 1 Commentary: Trials, Wisdom, and True Religion** | The primary study for this step. Explore endurance, divided loyalty, sinful temptation, God's goodness, and new birth, especially in the Walkthrough and Leading sections.
- **1 Peter 1 Commentary: Living Hope and Holy Exile** | See how the resurrection of Jesus gives believers living hope and a lasting inheritance while their faith is tested through trials.
- **Ephesians 6 Commentary: Household Faithfulness and Spiritual Armor** | Examine the armor of God, responsible Christian conduct, prayer, and standing firm in the Lord's strength without sensationalism.
- **Romans 12 Commentary: Living Sacrifice and Genuine Love** | Connect endurance with ordinary responsibilities, sincere love, patience, hospitality, and overcoming evil with good.

Before the Next Step

In Step Eleven, we have learned that following Jesus faithfully does not require us to deny weakness or understand every painful circumstance. James calls us to seek wisdom, distinguish trials from sinful temptation, and remember God's unchanging goodness. Paul directs us toward Christ's power in weakness and the promise of resurrection. Peter shows how hope can lead us to respond with respect and compassion even under pressure.

As we approach the final lesson, remember that Christian discipleship does not end when difficulty comes, and it does not end when a course is completed. The living Christ continues forming his people through his Word and Spirit as they pray, worship, love, obey, and care for one another. Perseverance prepares us not merely to remain standing ourselves, but also to encourage others in the same hope.

Next Reading: Matthew 28:16–20 and 2 Timothy 2:1–2. Step Twelve, *Go and Make Disciples*, returns to the risen Jesus' commission and explores how a growing Christian can explain the gospel, study Scripture with another person, pray, and offer faithful companionship within the church. You do not need to become flawless or independent of Christ before serving. You need to keep learning, remain humble, and depend upon the Savior who has promised to be with his people.

Step 12: Go and Make Disciples

The Good Way Discipleship Course | Step 12 of 12

From Following Jesus to Helping Others Follow Him

You have reached the final lesson of The Good Way Discipleship Course. Throughout this journey, we have explored who Jesus Christ is, what he accomplished through his death and resurrection, and what it means to live in fellowship with him. We have studied his Word, learned to pray, considered the Holy Spirit's transforming work, and examined the commands that shape Christian life.

Yet the purpose of these twelve lessons was never simply to complete a course. Our goal has been to help you know Jesus more deeply, live from his grace, and learn to follow him faithfully. Now we return to the passage where our journey began: the Great Commission in Matthew 28.

Jesus does not call his followers to keep what they have learned entirely to themselves. He sends his people into the world to proclaim the gospel, baptize disciples, and teach them to observe everything he commanded. As believers grow in Christ, they are also called to help others know and follow him.

The Central Truth: Christian discipleship continues outward through faithful gospel witness, biblical teaching, personal encouragement, and life within Christ's church. Those who belong to Jesus are called to help others follow him, depending upon his grace and the Holy Spirit rather than their own ability. Completing this course is not the end of discipleship, but an opportunity to begin serving others more intentionally.

Begin With Scripture

Primary Readings: Matthew 28:16–20 and 2 Timothy 2:1–2 (WEBU)

Begin by reading both passages carefully. Matthew 28 records the risen Jesus commissioning his followers, while 2 Timothy 2 shows how faithful Christian teaching can be entrusted from one believer to another.

As you read Matthew 28, consider three important observations:

1. **Christ's authority:** What does the risen Jesus reveal about himself before giving his commission?
2. **Christ's command:** What does he instruct his disciples to do, and why do baptism and continued teaching belong together?
3. **Christ's promise:** What assurance does Jesus give those who carry out his mission?

Then read 2 Timothy 2:1–2. Notice that Paul first directs Timothy toward the grace found in Jesus Christ, then instructs him to entrust faithful teaching to others who will be able to teach still more people.

This order matters. Christian service is sustained by Christ's grace, not independent human strength. The message we pass along must also remain the apostolic gospel rather than becoming our own collection of religious opinions.

Companion Readings

Read both of these passages as part of this final step.

- **Acts 1:6–11:** Jesus prepares his apostles for their mission, promises the Holy Spirit's power, and describes a witness that will extend from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. This passage connects the Great Commission with dependence upon the Spirit and the worldwide scope of Christian witness.
- **Colossians 1:24–29:** Paul describes his ministry of proclaiming Christ, warning and teaching people, and laboring toward their maturity in him. Notice that Paul's goal extends beyond an initial response to the gospel. He desires people to grow toward maturity through God's power.

These passages help us understand both the beginning and the continuing purpose of disciple-making. We proclaim Jesus Christ so that people may receive the gospel, and we continue teaching believers so that they may grow in faithful obedience.

What It Means to Make Disciples

The Risen Jesus Sends His Followers

Matthew 28 concludes the Gospel with the resurrection of Jesus and the mission he gives his disciples. After Jesus' crucifixion and burial, the women discover the empty tomb. An angel announces that he has risen, and the risen Christ meets the women and directs his disciples to Galilee.

The eleven disciples travel to the mountain where Jesus has instructed them to meet him. Matthew records that they worship him, although some still hesitate or doubt (Matthew 28:16–17).

This detail is worth remembering. Even after witnessing extraordinary events, the disciples remain people who need Christ's instruction and presence. Their mission will not depend upon their personal confidence or spiritual perfection.

Jesus approaches them and announces the foundation of everything that follows.

In Matthew 28:18 (WEBU), he says:

> All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Jesus does not begin by asking his disciples to develop an impressive religious organization. He declares that he already possesses all authority. The risen King now commissions his people to carry his message into the world.

This authority belongs to Jesus Christ himself. He is the eternal Son of God who became truly human, lived in righteousness, died for sinners, and rose bodily from the grave. His resurrection confirms his victory over death and the truth of his saving work.

Christian disciple-making therefore begins with the identity and authority of Jesus.

We do not invite people to follow our personalities, adopt our preferences, or become loyal to a particular website or teacher. We direct them toward the Lord who possesses authority over heaven and earth.

The Good Way Library exists to support that purpose through accessible biblical teaching. Our materials can help someone study Scripture, understand Christian doctrine, and grow in faithful obedience. Yet the authority behind discipleship comes from Christ and his Word, not from the course itself.

Make Disciples, Baptize Them, and Teach Them to Obey

Matthew 28:19–20

Jesus commands his followers to make disciples of all nations. His instruction includes going, baptizing, and teaching people to observe everything he commanded.

These responsibilities belong together. They describe a continuing mission through which people are brought into the Christian faith and taught to live as followers of Jesus.

Consider the three connected aspects of the commission.

- **Make disciples:** Christians are called to proclaim the gospel and invite people to repent, believe in Jesus, and follow him. The mission extends to all nations, crossing cultural, ethnic, and geographic boundaries. No people group is excluded from the invitation to receive the good news of Christ.
- **Baptize disciples:** Jesus commands baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism belongs to Christian initiation and participation in the life of his church. Christian traditions differ concerning baptism's proper recipients, significance, and administration, but historic Christianity recognizes the importance of obeying Christ's command.
- **Teach them to observe:** Jesus instructs his followers to teach new disciples to obey everything he commanded. Biblical instruction should therefore lead toward a life shaped by faith, repentance, worship, prayer, love, and practical obedience.

Notice especially the third responsibility. Jesus does not command his church merely to explain Christian beliefs. He commands his followers to teach others to *observe* what he has taught.

Someone may know that Jesus commands forgiveness while struggling to respond to another person without resentment. Another may understand the importance of prayer but have little experience approaching God with personal concerns. A new believer may genuinely trust

Christ while needing instruction about baptism, church fellowship, and responsible Christian living.

Discipleship helps connect biblical understanding with faithful obedience.

Throughout this course, we have considered Jesus' teachings concerning love, prayer, repentance, service, forgiveness, integrity, and perseverance. These commands are not separate from the gospel. They describe the life that grows from belonging to Christ.

Yet we must never reverse the order of salvation and obedience. We do not become acceptable to God by completing a certain number of religious activities. It is clear that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and those who belong to him are called to grow in obedience through the Holy Spirit.

We do not disciple people so they can earn Christ's acceptance. Instead, we teach them how to live according to the grace they have received in him.

Jesus Promises His Continuing Presence

The Great Commission concludes with one of Jesus' most encouraging promises. After commanding his disciples to make disciples among all nations, he assures them that he will remain with them.

In Matthew 28:20 (WEBU), Jesus says:

> Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

This promise is just as important in Step Twelve as it was in Step One.

Jesus does not commission his people and then abandon them. Through the Holy Spirit, the risen Christ remains present with those who belong to him. They can pray to him, receive his teaching through Scripture, trust his promises, and depend upon his grace as they seek to obey.

This does not mean disciple-making will always be easy. People may reject the gospel, misunderstand our intentions, struggle with difficult questions, or require years of patient encouragement. We may also discover areas in which we need to grow before we can help others wisely.

Christ's promise is not that every conversation will lead to conversion or that every discipleship relationship will produce visible success. He promises his continuing presence with his people.

We therefore approach disciple-making with faithfulness rather than anxiety. The mission belongs to Christ, and the results remain in God's hands.

Every Christian Is Called to Be a Missionary

When we hear the word *missionary*, we often imagine someone who leaves home, travels to a distant country, learns another language, and dedicates their life to sharing the gospel. This is a wonderful and necessary calling, and Christians should faithfully support those whom God

sends into such work. **But the mission of Jesus Christ does not belong only to those who travel overseas. Every Christian is called to participate in it.**

In Acts 1:8, Jesus tells his disciples that they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The gospel was to spread both locally and across the world. **Not every Christian is called to be a foreign missionary, but every Christian is called to be a witness for Christ wherever God has placed them.**

Your mission field may be your neighborhood, workplace, school, community, or even your own household. The people you encounter in ordinary life need the same Savior as those living thousands of miles away. You do not need a missionary title, formal theological education, or a plane ticket to begin sharing the gospel and demonstrating the love of Christ.

This does not mean every believer must become a pastor or immediately undertake a formal discipleship relationship. Christians have different gifts, responsibilities, and opportunities. Yet none of us should assume that sharing the good news of Jesus is someone else's responsibility. We can pray for others, build meaningful relationships, explain the gospel, invite people to study Scripture, serve our neighbors, and help fellow believers grow in faith.

You may never be called to travel across the world as a missionary, but you are called to live as a witness for Jesus Christ in the world immediately around you. Do not overlook the opportunities God has already placed before you while imagining that meaningful Christian mission must happen somewhere else.

Share the Gospel Clearly and Faithfully

1 Corinthians 15:1–4; John 3:1–21

Before you can help someone follow Jesus, you must understand the message you are sharing.

The Christian gospel is not simply an invitation to become a better person, attend church, or adopt religious practices. It is the good news of what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ to save sinners and reconcile them to himself.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul reminds believers of the message he originally proclaimed. He explains that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures. The resurrection belongs to the heart of the gospel, not as an optional addition to Christian teaching.

John 3 adds another essential truth. Jesus teaches Nicodemus that people must be born anew through the work of the Spirit. Religious knowledge, moral effort, and outward respectability cannot give someone eternal life. We need God's saving mercy and must respond to his Son in faith.

A clear explanation of the gospel should communicate several connected truths:

- **Who God is:** There is one holy, just, merciful, and loving God, eternally existing as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

- **Our need:** All people have sinned and fall short of God's righteousness. We cannot reconcile ourselves to him through personal goodness or religious effort.
- **Who Jesus is:** Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God who became truly human without ceasing to be truly God.
- **What Jesus accomplished:** He lived in righteousness, died for sinners, and rose bodily from the dead. Through him, God provides forgiveness, reconciliation, and eternal life.
- **How we respond:** Jesus calls sinners to repent and believe the gospel. Salvation is received by grace through faith in Christ, not earned by works or produced through a particular religious formula.
- **What follows:** Those who belong to Christ receive the Holy Spirit and begin a new life of worship, repentance, obedience, fellowship, and love.

These truths should shape any explanation you give. However, you do not need to turn every conversation into a lengthy theological presentation.

You might explain the gospel to a friend in ordinary language:

> God created us to know him, but our sin separates us from him, and we cannot make ourselves righteous. Jesus Christ, God's Son, became truly human, lived without sin, died for our sins, and rose again. Through him, God offers forgiveness and eternal life to those who repent and trust in Jesus. We do not earn salvation by becoming good enough. We receive it through faith in Christ, and he gives us the Holy Spirit to begin a new life of following him.

This example is a starting point, not a script that must be memorized word for word. Learn to explain the same truth naturally and answer questions from Scripture.

If someone asks why Jesus had to die, return to the biblical teaching about sin, God's justice, Christ's sacrifice, and reconciliation. If they ask why the resurrection matters, explain that Jesus truly conquered death and that the apostles proclaimed him as the living Lord.

The message must remain centered upon Jesus rather than our ability to deliver an impressive explanation.

Speak About What Christ Has Done in Your Life

Personal testimony can be a helpful part of sharing the gospel. When appropriate, you may explain how you came to understand Christianity, why you trust Jesus, and how following him has changed your life.

However, your testimony should never replace the biblical message. The gospel is true because of who Jesus is and what he accomplished, not because someone has experienced an extraordinary conversion story.

Some Christians can identify a particular moment when they first believed. Others came to faith gradually or were raised in Christian homes and cannot identify an exact date. You do not need to manufacture a dramatic account to make your faith meaningful.

An honest testimony may include three simple elements:

1. **Your understanding before or while coming to faith:** What questions, beliefs, or experiences helped you recognize your need for Christ?
2. **What you learned about Jesus:** How did you come to understand his identity, saving work, and the grace he offers?
3. **How you are learning to follow him:** In what ways are Scripture, prayer, repentance, Christian fellowship, and trust in Jesus shaping your life today?

Keep the focus upon Christ. There is no need to describe private sins in unnecessary detail, exaggerate spiritual experiences, or imply that every Christian must have a similar story.

A testimony is most useful when it helps another person understand the Savior rather than become impressed with the speaker.

Learn to Listen Before You Speak

Christian witness is not merely the ability to deliver information. It also involves loving and respecting the person with whom we are speaking.

In Colossians 4:2–6, Paul connects steadfast prayer with wise conduct toward those outside the Christian community. He instructs believers to speak graciously and respond appropriately to each person.

First Peter 3:15 likewise calls Christians to be prepared to explain their hope with gentleness and respect. These passages remind us that our manner matters. Speaking truthfully about Jesus does not require becoming argumentative, forceful, or dismissive.

Before beginning a conversation, consider what the other person actually believes and what questions they may have. Someone grieving a loss may need patient listening before discussing a difficult theological issue. Another person may have honest objections to Christianity or painful memories of religious misconduct.

We should not assume that every question hides rebellion or that every hesitation means someone has rejected Christ.

A thoughtful gospel conversation often follows a natural progression:

1. **Listen carefully.** Learn what the person believes, what concerns them, and whether they are interested in discussing Christianity.
2. **Speak about Jesus.** Explain the gospel clearly and connect your answers to Scripture.
3. **Welcome questions.** Admit when you do not know something. Return to the biblical text or seek help rather than inventing an answer.
4. **Offer a suitable next step.** If the person is interested, invite them to read a Gospel passage, attend a church gathering, or continue the conversation.
5. **Remain patient.** Respect their freedom to respond honestly. Do not pressure them into a profession of faith simply to complete a conversation.

Prayer belongs throughout this process. Ask God for wisdom, courage, love, and opportunities to speak faithfully. The Holy Spirit works in ways that our persuasive ability cannot accomplish.

Remember that conversion is God's work. We proclaim the gospel, explain its meaning, and invite people to respond, but we cannot manufacture genuine faith in another person's heart.

From One Conversation to Lifelong Discipleship

In 2 Timothy 2:1–2, Paul urges Timothy to remain strong in the grace of Jesus Christ and entrust faithful Christian teaching to others who will be able to teach still more people. This reveals an essential pattern of discipleship: **we receive the truth of Christ, grow in understanding and obedience, and help others do the same.**

Disciple-making therefore extends beyond a single gospel conversation. It includes patient instruction, encouragement, prayer, and helping believers become established in Christ's church. Our responsibility is not to create followers of ourselves, but to faithfully pass along the apostolic teaching entrusted to the church. As we do so, we must continue growing in humility, holiness, and dependence upon Jesus.

Helping Someone Who Is Still Exploring Christianity

Not everyone who agrees to study Scripture with you is already a Christian. Some people are genuinely interested in Jesus but remain uncertain about his identity, the reliability of Scripture, or their own response to the gospel.

Welcome these questions. You should not require someone to claim that they have been converted before they can begin learning.

The early lessons of The Good Way Discipleship Course are especially useful for exploring the gospel, new birth, salvation by grace, and the identity of Jesus Christ. However, genuine conversion must never be assumed merely because a person has read the lessons or learned Christian terminology.

If someone remains uncertain, continue opening Scripture together. Pray for understanding, discuss their questions honestly, and encourage appropriate conversations with a trustworthy pastor.

The goal is not to persuade someone to say words they do not believe. It is to communicate the truth about Jesus faithfully and allow them to consider his call to repentance and faith.

Recognizing Readiness to Disciple Someone Else

Reaching Step Twelve does not automatically qualify someone to become a discipler.

A person may complete the course while still having important questions about the gospel, struggling with significant spiritual immaturity, or needing more time to develop healthy Christian relationships.

That does not mean the course has failed. Christian discipleship is lifelong, and readiness for responsibility should be considered wisely.

Before undertaking an ongoing mentoring relationship, consider several important qualities.

- **Sound understanding of the gospel:** Can you explain who Jesus is, what he accomplished, and how salvation is received through grace and faith?
- **Faithfulness to Scripture:** Are you willing to study the Bible carefully, recognize context, and submit your opinions to God's Word?
- **Christian character:** Are humility, patience, honesty, teachability, and genuine concern for others becoming visible in your life?
- **Church participation:** Are you meaningfully connected to a healthy local congregation and willing to receive pastoral instruction and accountability?
- **Appropriate boundaries:** Can you respect another person's conscience, privacy, relationships, and personal responsibilities?
- **Willingness to keep learning:** Are you prepared to admit when you do not know an answer and seek responsible help?

You do not need to possess flawless character or comprehensive theological knowledge. However, you should demonstrate enough maturity to guide someone without misusing spiritual influence.

Mentoring is not ordination or an independent claim to church authority. Christians differ over the qualifications for particular teaching and leadership offices, and those distinctions should be respected. Ordinary believers can still encourage one another, share Scripture, pray, and help others grow within the oversight and fellowship of Christ's church.

If you are not yet ready to mentor someone formally, you can continue participating in Christ's mission. Pray for others, serve in your congregation, welcome visitors, help someone read Scripture, or seek further guidance from a mature Christian.

There is no need to rush into responsibility simply because the course has ended.

Invite One Person Into a Discipleship Relationship

If you are spiritually prepared and appropriately connected to a church, consider whether there is someone you could help through intentional discipleship.

This might be a newer believer, a friend who desires greater understanding of Scripture, or someone exploring Christianity. It could also be a person who has attended church for years but never received structured discipleship.

Begin with prayer. Ask God to help you recognize opportunities for faithful service and approach people with genuine concern rather than a desire to build your own ministry.

When someone comes to mind, consider offering a simple invitation.

An Invitation You Can Send

You could adapt the following message:

> I have been working through The Good Way Library's twelve-part Christian discipleship course, and it has helped me think more deeply about knowing Jesus and following his teachings. I would like to help someone else work through the same material. The course involves reading Scripture, discussing Christian beliefs, praying, and considering how to follow Christ in everyday life. Would you be interested in meeting to explore it together? We could begin with one conversation and see whether it would be helpful.

The message should sound natural for your relationship. You do not need to present yourself as an expert or make an indefinite commitment before either person understands what the relationship would involve.

If someone declines, respect their decision. They may have other responsibilities, already be receiving discipleship elsewhere, or simply not wish to participate.

Their response is not a measure of your faithfulness or worth before God.

If someone expresses interest, arrange an initial meeting and explain how the course works. Encourage their continued participation in a healthy local church, and make it clear that they are free to ask questions and disagree respectfully.

How to Begin Discipling Someone

When someone agrees to begin, return together to Step One: Begin the Journey. That lesson contains instructions for the discipler, a suggested first-meeting structure, and guidance for establishing a healthy discipleship relationship.

Begin by listening to the person's questions, explaining the purpose of the course, and agreeing on a realistic meeting schedule. Read Scripture together, establish appropriate boundaries, and encourage continued involvement in a healthy local church.

You do not need to develop your own curriculum or possess every theological answer. **Your responsibility is to help another person understand Scripture and grow in following Jesus, while continuing to learn alongside them.**

You will be amazed at how much you learn by going over this material again as a discipler instead of a disciple! It is a night and day difference. Each time you interact with God's Word and follow his command to disciple others, he will continue to grow and sanctify you in the process. Try it and see.

Keep Discipleship Healthy and Accountable

A discipleship relationship should be characterized by humility, honesty, appropriate boundaries, and mutual respect.

The discipler is a fellow follower of Jesus, not an unquestionable spiritual authority. Their responsibility is to help someone receive and understand Scripture, not control personal decisions, finances, relationships, medical treatment, or family responsibilities.

Both people should understand that private conversations deserve care and confidentiality, while serious safety concerns, suspected abuse, immediate danger, or applicable safeguarding obligations may require appropriate assistance.

The local church remains central. A healthy discipler encourages participation in biblical teaching, worship, fellowship, and accountable Christian community rather than making the learner dependent upon one individual.

The goal is to help another person become more faithful to Jesus, not more dependent upon you.

Faithful Discipleship Can Reach Beyond One Relationship

Paul's instruction in 2 Timothy 2:2 reminds us that Christian teaching can continue from one generation of believers to another. Those who receive the gospel and grow in maturity may eventually help others learn the same truth.

Consider a simple illustration.

Imagine one Christian who disciples **just two people each year** to follow Jesus. Now imagine those two people begin doing the same thing the following year, each helping two more people. Meanwhile, the Christian continues discipling two new people every year.

That's it. Just two. For the full year.

If everyone continues discipling just two new people annually, the total number of people involved would grow like this:

1 → 3 → 9 → 27 → 81 → 243 → 729 → 2,187 → 6,561 → 19,683 → 59,049 → 177,147 → 531,441 → 1,594,323 → 4,782,969 → 14,348,907

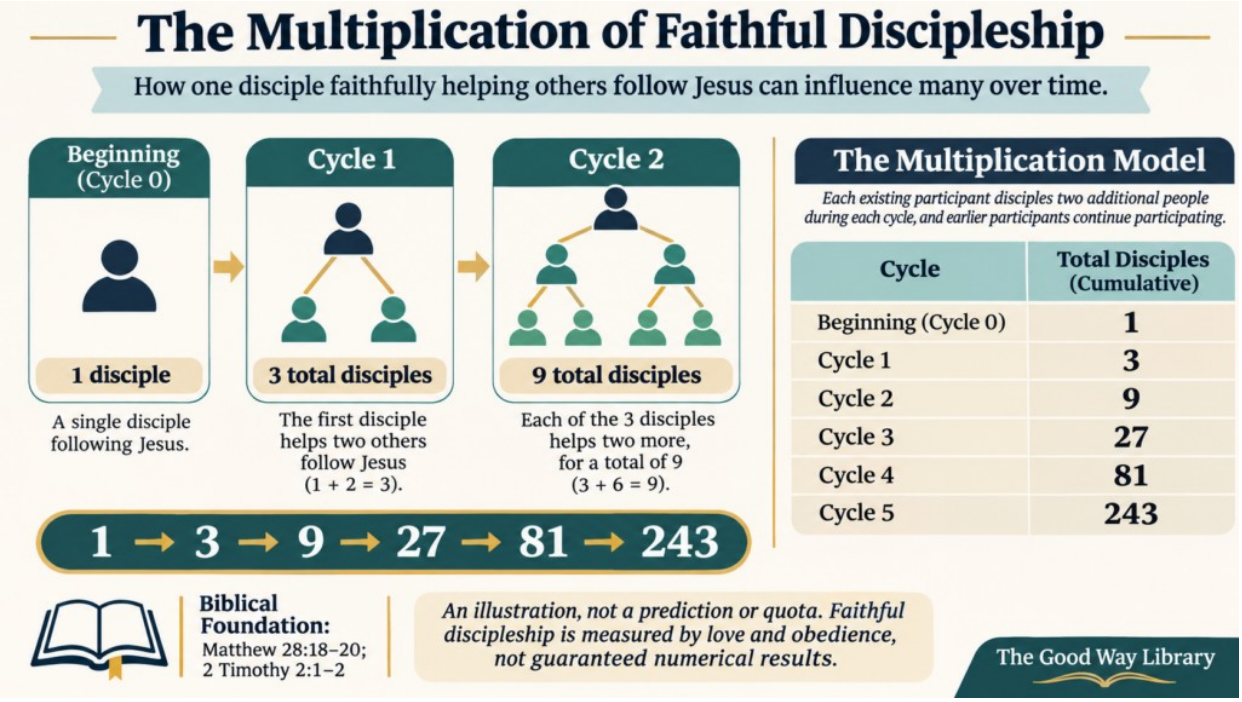
That's **more than 14 million people after just 15 years**, starting with one Christian discipling only two people a year!

Of course, this is only a mathematical illustration. Real discipleship takes time, and not everyone will be ready or able to disciple two new people every year. But by the power of God, some may do more than two a year.

The lesson is powerful: **You do not have to reach thousands of people yourself to make a lasting difference.** By faithfully helping even one or two people grow in Christ and teach them to do the same, you may influence many more lives than you will ever know.

You may never know how God uses a conversation, a prayer, a lesson, or an act of kindness in another person's life. Someone you encourage today may eventually serve people you will never meet. Christian mission is therefore not measured by impressive numbers. It is

characterized by obedience to Christ, love for people, and trust in God's work. He will take care of the rest.



Christians Before Us: The Gospel Across Generations and Nations

The history of Christianity reminds us that the Great Commission has never belonged to one nation, culture, or generation. In the fourth century, a Christian named Frumentius helped establish Christianity in the ancient kingdom of Aksum, located in what is now Ethiopia and Eritrea. According to early historical accounts, Frumentius and his brother Aedesius were taken to Aksum after surviving an attack during a voyage along the Red Sea. Frumentius eventually gained responsibility within the royal court and used his position to encourage Christian worship and strengthen the existing Christian presence in the kingdom. Later, he traveled to Alexandria, where Athanasius appointed him bishop, and returned to continue his ministry. Frumentius became an important figure in the development of Ethiopian Christianity, remembered as *Abba Salama*, meaning Father of Peace. His story reminds us that **God can use unexpected circumstances, personal relationships, and faithful service to open opportunities for the gospel.** Frumentius did not begin with an elaborate missionary organization. He served faithfully where he found himself, recognized opportunities to strengthen the Christian faith, and helped establish a church that would continue long after his lifetime.

In the ninth century, two brothers named Cyril and Methodius demonstrated another important aspect of making disciples: helping people understand God's truth in their own language. These Byzantine Christian missionaries traveled to Moravia in Central Europe, where Christianity had already been introduced but many people lacked access to Christian teaching

in a language they could readily understand. Cyril developed the Glagolitic alphabet, an early writing system for the Slavic language, and the brothers worked to translate Scripture and materials used in Christian worship. They also trained local believers for ministry so that Christian teaching could continue through people who understood their own communities. Their work encountered political and religious opposition, yet their students carried their efforts into other regions, helping establish lasting traditions of Christian learning and worship. **Their example reminds us that disciple-making is not simply delivering religious information. It involves helping people genuinely understand Scripture and preparing them to teach others faithfully.** We should never expect people to adopt our language, culture, or personal preferences before they can follow Jesus Christ. The gospel belongs to every nation, and its truth must remain understandable to the people we hope to reach.

In the nineteenth century, **Adoniram Judson (1788–1850)** devoted much of his life to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in Burma, now known as Myanmar. Arriving with his wife Ann in 1813, Judson faced the challenge of communicating Christianity to people who spoke a different language and had little familiarity with Scripture. He spent years learning Burmese, preaching the gospel, and translating the Bible so that people could read God's Word in their own language. Despite years of difficulty and slow progress, Judson remained committed to his calling, eventually completing his translation of the entire Bible into Burmese in 1834. His ministry helped establish Christian congregations and equipped others to continue sharing the faith. Judson's example reminds us that **making disciples involves more than leading someone to an initial profession of faith.** Jesus commands us to teach others to observe everything he commanded (Matthew 28:19–20). While most Christians will never serve as foreign missionaries, every believer can participate in this calling through prayer, sharing the gospel, teaching Scripture, and helping others grow in faith. **The goal is not simply to introduce people to Jesus, but to help them become faithful disciples who will eventually help others follow him as well.**

What Is True in Christ

As we conclude this discipleship course, we should consider the extraordinary privilege and responsibility of participating in the mission of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission is not merely a task that the church must complete through human effort. Scripture reveals that **Christ entrusts his message to ordinary believers, works through many different people to advance his purposes, and is gathering worshipers from every nation.** Understanding these truths should fill us with gratitude, humility, and a deeper desire to help others know the Savior we follow.

We Are Ambassadors of Jesus Christ

In 2 Corinthians 5:18–20, Paul describes the ministry of reconciliation and identifies believers engaged in this work as ambassadors on behalf of Christ. An ambassador represents someone

greater than themselves and communicates a message that does not originate from their own authority. This is a remarkable description of Christian witness. God has reconciled believers to himself through Jesus Christ, and he now calls his people to proclaim the message of reconciliation to others. **When we share the gospel, we are not promoting our own ideas, defending our personal importance, or inviting people to become followers of us. We are representing Jesus Christ and announcing what God has accomplished through him.**

This should change how we approach conversations about Christianity. An ambassador must communicate the message faithfully rather than alter it to gain approval. Likewise, Christians must resist the temptation to soften biblical truth merely to make the gospel more appealing or to add unnecessary requirements that Christ has not commanded. Yet representing Jesus also requires humility, patience, and genuine concern for others. We must not confuse boldness with harshness or faithfulness with winning arguments. Paul explains in 2 Corinthians 4:5 that his ministry does not proclaim himself, but Jesus Christ as Lord. *The greatest privilege of Christian witness is not that people might remember our words, but that through our words they might come to know our Savior.* Every conversation should therefore be approached with reverence for Christ and sincere love for the person before us.

God Gives Growth Through Many Faithful Servants

In 1 Corinthians 3:5–9, Paul addresses divisions among believers who had become overly attached to particular Christian teachers. Some identified themselves with Paul, while others preferred Apollos. Paul corrects their thinking by explaining that both men were servants through whom people came to believe. One had planted, another had watered, but God was responsible for the growth. This image provides a beautiful understanding of Christian ministry. **We may participate meaningfully in someone's spiritual journey without being the person who first introduced them to Christ or the one who eventually witnesses their conversion.**

Consider how this might happen in ordinary life. A Christian parent may teach a child about Jesus for many years. A friend might later answer important questions about the gospel. A pastor may explain a difficult passage of Scripture, while another believer provides encouragement during a season of spiritual struggle. Each person serves in a different way, sometimes without knowing what others have contributed. Jesus expresses a similar principle in John 4:35–38, where he distinguishes between those who sow and those who reap, reminding his disciples that they are entering work in which others have already labored. *No individual Christian is responsible for accomplishing everything in another person's spiritual life.* We are called to serve faithfully with the opportunities God provides, recognizing that his work is larger than our personal involvement. This should protect us from pride when ministry appears fruitful and from discouragement when we cannot see immediate results. God is the one who gives the growth, and the glory belongs to him.

Christ Is Gathering Worshipers From Every Nation

The Great Commission begins with the risen Jesus commanding his followers to make disciples of all nations. Near the end of Scripture, Revelation 7:9–10 presents an extraordinary vision of the fulfillment of God's saving purposes. John sees a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language standing before God's throne and the Lamb, celebrating the salvation that belongs to God. This scene reveals something profound about the ultimate purpose of Christian mission. **We are not merely trying to increase church attendance, expand religious organizations, or persuade people to adopt a particular way of life. We are participating in God's work of gathering people from every nation to worship Jesus Christ.**

This vision should expand our understanding of what God is accomplishing throughout history. The gospel has crossed mountains, oceans, languages, political boundaries, and generations because Jesus Christ is worthy of worship everywhere. No culture possesses exclusive ownership of Christianity, and no nation stands beyond the reach of God's saving purposes. The believers gathered before the throne in Revelation are not presented as people who have abandoned every cultural distinction. They come from every nation and language, united in their worship of God and the Lamb. This does not mean every person will ultimately be saved, nor does it guarantee that every attempt at evangelism will succeed. It reveals the glorious fulfillment of God's purpose to redeem a people through Jesus Christ.

Learning to Follow Jesus To The Finish Line

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus calls people to follow him, trust him, and obey his teaching. His commands include repentance, love for God and neighbor, prayer, forgiveness, humility, service, and faithfulness through suffering.

In Matthew 28, these teachings become part of a worldwide commission. Jesus commands his followers to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe everything he commanded.

Acts 1:8 adds Jesus' promise that the Holy Spirit will empower his witnesses. Second Timothy 2:1–2 provides apostolic instruction about faithfully entrusting Christian teaching to others. Together, these passages show that making disciples requires both a clear gospel message and continued dependence upon God's grace.

We should therefore never treat disciple-making as merely a technique for recruiting people. It is an expression of our ongoing fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Continue Abiding in Christ While Serving Others

Helping another person follow Jesus does not mean that you have finished your own discipleship.

You still need Scripture, prayer, repentance, worship, Christian fellowship, and the encouragement of others. You will continue facing difficult questions, temptation, suffering, and circumstances that reveal your need for God's wisdom.

Return often to Jesus' teaching in John 15:1–17. He describes himself as the true vine and his disciples as branches. Their fruitfulness depends upon remaining in him, not upon developing independence from him.

This truth remains important even when you begin teaching someone else.

You may encounter a question you cannot answer, a difficult conversation, or a situation that requires pastoral help. You may also discover your own weaknesses through the responsibilities of mentoring.

In such moments, return to Christ. Pray, open Scripture, seek wise counsel, and continue learning. Do not assume that serving another person requires pretending to be spiritually complete.

A faithful discipler remains a disciple of Jesus for life.

Continue Growing Within Christ's Church

The local church is not an optional addition to Christian maturity. Jesus gathers believers into a community where they receive teaching, worship together, participate in baptism and the Lord's Supper, encourage one another, and exercise their gifts in service.

If you are helping someone through this course, encourage them to participate in a healthy congregation. Speak with appropriate church leaders when questions arise concerning baptism, doctrine, pastoral care, or ministry responsibilities.

The Good Way Library can provide free biblical teaching and helpful study resources, but it does not replace the church. Our hope is that these materials will strengthen the work of faithful Christians and congregations by making sound biblical instruction more accessible.

As you continue serving Christ, remain open to correction and encouragement from other believers. Your relationship with Jesus is personal, but his mission is carried forward through the shared life of his people.

For the Discipler: Walking Through This Step Together

Before You Meet | Read Matthew 28:16–20 and 2 Timothy 2:1–2, along with Acts 1:6–11 and Colossians 1:24–29. Review the learner's understanding of the gospel, Scripture, grace, obedience, and church fellowship without treating course completion as certification. Prepare to explain how disciple-making includes evangelism, continued teaching, and healthy church participation. Pray for humility and wisdom as you consider the learner's readiness to help others.

During the Meeting | Return to the Great Commission and discuss how the learner's understanding has developed since Step One. Invite them to explain the gospel naturally, then consider how they might offer someone a thoughtful invitation to study Scripture. Discuss what an initial meeting could involve and how a discipler should remain accountable to Christ's church. Encourage the disciple to begin preparations to become a discipler. Remind them that they do not need to know everything about theology or the Bible to begin discipling, because the power rests on Jesus, not them.

What to Watch For | Do not require the learner to recruit someone as proof of salvation or maturity. Some participants need more time to develop sound understanding, Christian character, or healthy boundaries before assuming mentoring responsibility. Avoid conversion quotas, exaggerated promises, spiritual control, and pressure to disclose private struggles.

Before Moving Forward | Help the learner identify a faithful next step: continued study, prayer for another person, church-supported service, or a suitable discipleship invitation. If they are ready to mentor, encourage a thoughtful first meeting and ongoing church accountability. Remind them that both of you remain disciples of Jesus and must continue learning long after this course ends.

Discuss Together

Read Matthew 28:16–20 and 2 Timothy 2:1–2 again before discussing these questions. If you have a discipler, work through them together. If you are studying independently, consider recording your responses.

1. **Returning to the Great Commission:** How has your understanding of Matthew 28 changed since Step One? What do Jesus' authority, commands, and promised presence mean to you now?
2. **Explaining the gospel:** If someone asked who Jesus is, why he died, and how a person can be saved, how would you explain the Christian gospel from Scripture?
3. **Making disciples:** What is the difference between sharing the gospel in one conversation and helping someone grow in faith, obedience, prayer, and Christian fellowship over time?
4. **Readiness and humility:** What qualities should characterize a Christian who begins discipling another person? Where might you need further understanding, encouragement, or guidance?
5. **Serving another person:** Is there someone in your life who might benefit from patient Christian friendship, prayer, Scripture study, or intentional discipleship? How could you approach them respectfully?
6. **Continuing your own discipleship:** How will you remain rooted in Christ, Scripture, prayer, and church fellowship while serving others? What support or accountability would be helpful?

Put It Into Practice

Completing this course should lead toward continued faithfulness, not pressure to accomplish an impressive ministry project. Consider these three practical responses as you prepare for the next season of following Christ.

Prepare to Explain the Gospel

Return to the approximately six-sentence gospel explanation you wrote in Step Two. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, John 3:1–21, and Ephesians 2:1–10 again, then review what you originally wrote. Can you now explain more clearly who Jesus is, why humanity needs salvation, what his death and bodily resurrection accomplished, and how we respond through repentance and faith? Revise your explanation as needed, making sure that salvation by God's grace remains central. Then practice explaining it naturally, as though you were speaking with someone who knows very little about Christianity.

If possible, also consider how you would describe your own relationship with Christ. Keep your testimony honest and centered upon him rather than upon extraordinary experiences or personal achievements.

You may benefit from practicing this explanation with a trusted Christian who can offer thoughtful feedback.

Pray for People You Might Encourage

Think of two people for whom you could begin praying. They might be exploring Christianity, growing in faith, struggling spiritually, or simply needing Christian friendship and encouragement.

Ask God to give you wisdom, genuine love, and opportunities to serve them appropriately. If someone appears interested in studying Scripture, consider offering an invitation to work through The Good Way Discipleship Course together.

Do not treat their response as a measure of your spiritual success. Your responsibility is to love and serve faithfully, leaving the results to God.

Prepare for a Faithful First Conversation

If you are ready to begin discipling someone, consider speaking with a pastor or trustworthy church leader about appropriate support and accountability.

Review the course's first lesson, prepare a Bible, and think through how you would welcome the learner, open Scripture, explain the purpose of discipleship, and pray together.

If you are not yet ready to mentor, choose another faithful next step. Continue learning, participate in church life, and look for ordinary opportunities to encourage others in Christ. Make a plan to get to a position where you are ready to disciple another.

The goal is not to begin immediately at any cost. It is to serve faithfully, with wisdom and humility.

If You Are Studying Alone

You can complete certain parts of this final lesson meaningfully without a personal discipler. Read the assigned passages, consider the discussion questions, and reflect prayerfully on what you have learned throughout the course.

However, beginning a significant one-to-one mentoring responsibility without any Christian fellowship or accountability may be unwise. If possible, seek connection with a healthy local church and speak with a trustworthy pastor or mature Christian about your desire to serve others.

You can begin participating in Christ's mission through prayer, hospitality, personal witness, and practical encouragement while continuing to grow in understanding and maturity.

The Good Way Library remains available to support your biblical study, but your Christian life should continue within the fellowship and care of Christ's people whenever possible.

Suggested Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to save sinners and call people into your family. Thank you for his death and resurrection, for the forgiveness and new life you give through faith, and for the Holy Spirit who dwells within those who belong to him.

Lord Jesus, thank you for your authority, your commands, and your promise to remain with your people. Help me continue abiding in you rather than relying upon my own strength or understanding. Teach me to love your Word, obey your commands, and grow in humility and faithfulness.

Holy Spirit, give me wisdom and courage to speak truthfully about Jesus. Help me recognize opportunities to encourage others, listen patiently to their questions, and serve them with genuine love. Keep me from pride, impatience, and the desire to measure spiritual success through numbers or recognition.

Prepare me to help others follow Christ when I am ready, and surround me with faithful Christians who will continue encouraging and correcting me. May the teaching I have received bear fruit in my life and bless others through your grace. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, amen.

Scripture to Remember

2 Timothy 2:2 (WEBU):

> The things which you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit the same things to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

This verse reminds us that faithful Christian teaching is meant to be received, preserved, and entrusted to others. Paul instructed Timothy to pass along the apostolic message to people capable of continuing that same work.

The focus is not upon building personal influence or creating impressive numbers. It is upon remaining faithful to Christ and helping others receive the truth revealed in Scripture.

As you remember this verse, also return to Jesus' promise in Matthew 28:20. The risen Lord remains with his people as they carry out his mission. Our confidence rests upon his authority, his grace, and his continuing presence.

Continue Studying With The Good Way Library

The following free resources support the teaching of this final lesson. Begin with the assigned biblical passages, then use The Good Way Library's commentaries to strengthen your understanding and prepare for faithful service.

- **Matthew 28 Commentary: Resurrection and the Great Commission** - Return to the resurrection of Jesus, his universal authority, and his command to make disciples of all nations. The Walkthrough explains baptism, teaching obedience, and Christ's continuing presence. The Application and Leading sections are especially useful when preparing to help someone else study the Great Commission.
- **2 Timothy 2 Commentary: Grace, Endurance, and Truth** - Explore Paul's instruction to entrust faithful teaching to others, endure hardship, handle Scripture correctly, and correct opponents with gentleness. This commentary is particularly valuable for understanding the character and responsibilities of a Christian discipler.
- **Acts 1 Commentary: Witnesses, Ascension, and Matthias** - Study Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit, his commission to bear witness, and the beginning of the church's worldwide mission. The chapter connects Christian witness with the risen Christ's authority and the Spirit's empowering presence.
- **Colossians 4 Commentary: Prayer, Witness, and Fellow Workers** - Learn how prayer, wise conduct, gracious speech, and cooperation among believers support gospel ministry. This resource is especially useful for developing thoughtful conversations with people who are exploring Christianity.

The Good Way Library also provides free chapter-by-chapter Bible studies, book overviews, and additional Christian resources through our Commentary Library and Christian Resource Library.

These materials are available to support your continued learning and to help you study Scripture with others. However, always return to the biblical text itself. God's Word remains the authority, and our resources exist to help readers understand and follow it faithfully.

If you have not yet read the full Bible, now is the time to do so. Sign up for our Bible Challenge.

Where the Journey Continues

You have now completed the twelve lessons of The Good Way Discipleship Course. Throughout this journey, we have considered the gospel, our new life in Christ, abiding in Jesus, Scripture, prayer, the Holy Spirit, repentance, Christian love, church fellowship, perseverance, and the command to make disciples.

Yet there is no thirteenth lesson that completes your Christian growth. The next step is to continue living what you have learned, remaining in fellowship with Jesus Christ and growing in faithful obedience throughout your life.

You may be ready to begin walking alongside another person in discipleship. If so, approach that responsibility prayerfully and with the support of a healthy local church. Begin with Scripture, offer patient encouragement, and remember that your responsibility is to point people toward Christ rather than yourself.

You may also recognize that you need more time. Perhaps an important doctrine remains unclear, your relationship with a local church needs attention, or you would benefit from continued mentoring before taking responsibility for another person's spiritual instruction.

That is a faithful reason to continue learning. Christian maturity cannot be rushed, and completing a course is not a substitute for the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

Keep Following the One Who Called You

Return to the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:16–20. The same passage that began this course now sends us back into ordinary life with a deeper understanding of our calling.

The risen Jesus possesses all authority. He commands his people to make disciples, baptize them, and teach them to observe everything he has commanded. **And he promises to remain with them until the end of the age.**

That promise carries us beyond this final lesson.

Continue reading Scripture and receiving its teaching. Continue approaching God in prayer, trusting the saving work of Christ, and depending upon the Holy Spirit. **Move forward** in worshiping and serving among God's people, repenting when you sin, and remaining faithful through suffering and uncertainty.

And as God gives you opportunities, help others know the Savior who has called you.

Suggested Continuing Reading: John 15:1–17

Return to Jesus' teaching about the vine and the branches. Remember that fruitfulness comes through abiding in him. Whether you are learning, teaching, praying, serving, or helping another person begin the journey of discipleship, your life remains dependent upon Christ.

The Good Way Library hopes that these twelve lessons have helped establish a foundation for deeper fellowship with Jesus and a lifetime of faithful Christian living. Our prayer is that you will continue growing in his Word, finding encouragement in his church, and sharing what you have received with others.

The journey began with Jesus Christ, and it continues with him.

You have been called to know Christ, to follow Christ, and to make Christ known. Wherever God places you, whoever he brings into your life, remain faithful to this calling until the day you stand before your Savior.

May God bless you on this journey to life everlasting. Amen.