

The background of the entire cover is a dramatic landscape. A stone path, partially covered in moss and small plants, leads from the bottom center towards the horizon. The path is flanked by dense, dark green foliage and trees. In the distance, a range of hills is silhouetted against a bright, glowing sunset or sunrise. Three crosses are visible on the horizon line, standing on the peaks of the hills. The overall atmosphere is one of mystery and spiritual journey.

Gary Ray

THE STORY OF

JESUS

BIBLE STUDY - LEADER'S GUIDE

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THE STORY OF JESUS

BIBLE STUDY LEADER'S GUIDE

I Am A Watchman
Publications

I Am A Watchman Publishing
A Watchmen Writers
Collective Imprint
Union City, California

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The *I Am A Watchman* ministry desires to equip and encourage believers, reach the lost, and see individuals prepared for the return of the King.

A Watchmen Writers Collective Imprint

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN# 9781642544145

www.IAmAWatchman.com

First Printing, September, 2018



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with profound gratitude that I recognize the following for making it possible for me to prepare the Story of Jesus Bible Study and share in the Kingdom's work.

I recognize that it is by the grace of God I am here today. My prayer is that this work, and the resources developed by the *I Am A Watchman* ministry, will bring honor and glory to His matchless name. The Word is true when it states that our heavenly Father is patient, loving, and kind.

Secondly, I would like to recognize my wife. Her love, support, and partnership in ministry has changed my life. I am very proud of her. She has a creative mind, a generous heart, and tirelessly serves. I am blessed.

I would also like to recognize my two children—both of whom have worked hard and sacrificed much in support of the Kingdom's work. And I would like to thank my parents; they adopted me, cared for me, and time and time again went out of their way to show their love for me. They have fostered in me a desire to learn, share, dream, and do, and for that I am forever grateful.

And finally, I would like to thank Scott and Beck Townsend, founders of the *I Am A Watchman* ministry. Their vision, sacrifice, and faith have been a blessing to me, and to many. I am proud to serve with them in *such a time as this*.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The goal in writing the STORY OF JESUS is to provide a resource that makes reading Scripture more enjoyable and understandable. The Story Of Jesus resource is not designed to replace the Bible, it is designed to be an aid in reading and understanding the Bible.

In this resource, the material in the Gospels is merged and arranged in approximate chronological order to form an easy to follow account of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Pastoral notes and cross-references (see the right column of each page) provide background information on uncommon terms and highlight sections of Scripture of particular importance.

Scripture passages are quoted from The Holy Bible, New International Version, Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, by International Bible Society, published by Zondervan Publishing House.

This five part study resource profiles the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In general, SECTION ONE profiles the birth of Jesus through the end of His first year of ministry. SECTION TWO profiles His second year of ministry. SECTION THREE profiles his third year of ministry. SECTION FOUR profiles he last months of His ministry, and SECTION FIVE profiles the week leading up to the crucifixion through His ascension into heaven.

Material for this book is drawn from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).



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SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW TO USE THIS STUDY RESOURCE

This study is designed to help individuals become more familiar with the Gospel story, better understand the chronological time line for the ministry of Christ, and gain insight into a number of challenging Scripture passages. Study resources include leader and student books, an e-book, ten PowerPoint presentations and several links to teaching videos that compliment the material in this book.

Suggestions for leading this study

- ➔ Precede launching the class with a season of prayer.
- ➔ Promote the class as a way for believers to review (and those new to the faith to learn) background information to the most important story ever told—*The Story Of Jesus*.
- ➔ Provide students with a link to the Story of Jesus e-Book.
- ➔ Ask students to read the pages in the e-Book that correspond to each lesson, prior to each lesson (this will be less than 30 pages each week).
- ➔ Ask students to journal their questions each week. Incorporate a Prayer, Question and Answer time in your weekly meeting schedule.
- ➔ During meeting times, use the material in this Leader Guide resource to aid in discussing and answering the questions in the Student Guide. The included PowerPoint files are an optional resource for lesson presentation. *Note: Each PowerPoint file provides additional research information.*
- ➔ Take advantage of (and tell a friend about) the library of discipleship resources on the *Rapture Kit USB resource*.
- ➔ **Note: The *gray italics font sections* note possible responses to the questions posed in student and leader workbooks.**

SESSION 1

1. Note several interesting facts about the Gospel writers or their writings.

The Story of Jesus book notes this information on pages 15-16. *The notes in red italics font are response helps.*

- **Matthew was** a tax collector. Formerly known as Levi, he was quick to introduce his friends to Christ, he wrote in Hebrew to Hebrews, and gave particular attention to noting how Jesus fulfilled prophecy.
- **Mark was** not one of the 12 disciples. He was related to Barnabas, accompanied Paul during the first part of his first missionary journey, and he was likely Peter's scribe in the writing of the Gospel. Mark was the first Gospel to be written.
- **Luke was** a physician by training, not one of the 12 disciples, the only Gospel writer to present information in chronological order, and the author of the book of Acts. His writings profile about 60 years—from the birth of Jesus to about 62 A.D.
- **John was** a fisherman, the last of the Gospel writers to write, the author of three epistles and the book of Revelation, and the Gospel writer who presents his information in a complex structure while using a very limited vocabulary (less than 600 words).

2. TRUE: The Messiah fulfilled more than 120 prophecies during his ministry on earth 2000 years ago.

- **The odds of less than half of Messianic prophecies coming true is approximately 1 in 10^{157} power** (a number which approximates a fraction of the number of atoms in the universe). This represents less than 5% of the total number of prophecies in the Bible—more than 900 of which have already been fulfilled as foretold. The odds of this happening by chance, or through crafty human effort, is statically zero. The fulfillment of prophecy proves that Jesus was not just a

good man, or a great speaker, or worker of miracles—Jesus is more than that. Jesus is divine (John 1:1).

3. John 1:1-5 presents the following truths:

- ➔ **Jesus has an eternal nature.** *He is without beginning or end.*
- ➔ **Jesus is one with God.** *Not just one in purpose, but one in essence. Colossians 2:9 confirms this as well. Understanding the nature of Jesus is crucial. It positions Jesus as having the right and authority to speak into and direct our lives.*
- ➔ **Review John 1:1-18 and note five titles or descriptors about Jesus:** *These include the Word, God, Creator, Light, Life, the Father's only Son, and full of grace and truth.*
 - ➔ [Lead the group in discussing what the terms they've chosen mean to them].

4. The Genealogy of Matthew Chapter 1

- ➔ **The structure of the narrative indicates** *that God is always in control. Matthew 1 shows that through the ages, through three perfect couplets of seven generations, God worked to preserve and advance His plan to fulfill prophecy and redeem humanity.*
- ➔ **The variety of individuals listed indicates** *that God delights in diversity, and that there are no bounds to what He can do, and whom He can use. The genealogy notes that God used young, old, men, women, sinners, righteous, Jew and Gentile to accomplish His purpose through the ages.*
- ➔ **The mention of Jeconiah indicates** *that God can always make a way (nothing is impossible for God). Joseph was a descendant of Jeconiah, who was cursed by God and told by the prophet Jeremiah that “none of his descendants would prosper on the throne.” It is likely that when Joseph was a young man, he dared not dream that he, a descendant of Jeconiah, would play a role in ushering in the*

promised King. However, God made this possible by sending the Holy Spirit to Mary, a virgin. Technically (and biblically) speaking, Joseph was not the father of Jesus, but was allowed the honor of being his dad.

5. Announcing the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-22)

- ➔ **Why was the birth of John a miracle?** *Zachariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child for many years. God's answer seemed to be no. At the time of John's birth, Elizabeth (and her husband) believed she was unable to conceive.*
- ➔ **How was John the Baptist the fulfillment of prophecy (see Malachi 4:5-6; Matthew 11:7-15)?** *John fulfilled prophecy by being the forerunner of the Christ—preparing the way for His ministry by preaching with power and anointing associated with the great Elijah of the Old Testament.*
- ➔ **What judgment befell John's father for his lack of faith?** *He was rendered mute.*
- ➔ **Luke 1:57-79 notes how Zechariah was restored and given a significant word of prophecy from the Lord. What does this reveal about God's grace?** *It reveals that God's grace is wonderful and abundant. Not only did Zechariah's voice return, but he was also restored to his position of leadership, and received a powerful word of prophecy from the Lord. God is good.*

6. Gabriel's announcement to Mary (Luke 1:26-38)

- ➔ **Who is Gabriel?** *Gabriel and Michael are the two Archangels named in the Bible. Apocryphal writings include additional names, but the Protestant Church does not consider Apocryphal writings to be divinely inspired. NOTE: According to Ezekiel 28:14, Satan was an angel of great authority, but is noted as being of the order of Cherubim, not as an Archangel.*
- ➔ **God chose Mary because of her heart—not her wealth, position, training, or education. What does this truth about how God**

works mean to you? *This fact communicates the truth that God can use anyone to do anything. Many wonder if their lives will have significance, or if they can be a part of something significant. Often the world says that experiencing great things is reserved for those with exceptional beauty, wealth, power, position, education, etc. However, living an extraordinary life is not dependent on who we are, but on our ability to have faith and allowing God to work in and through us.*

- ➡ **Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth. Student booklets prompt participants to note a fact about the city of Nazareth. What does this reveal about God's ability to use anyone from anywhere at any time?** *Nazareth was a small outpost village of few hundred in the days of Jesus. It was so small and insignificant that 2100 years ago, both Roman and Jewish cartographers did not list Nazareth on their maps. The Old Testament does not refer to Nazareth. The Nazareth of the Gospels was only found by archaeologists less than 60 years ago (the Arab-controlled Nazareth of today is not the same city). The Nazareth of the Gospels had a negative reputation (John 1:46). It is striking that from all the cities of the world, God chose Joseph and Mary of Nazareth to bring forth and raise the Christ child.*
- ➡ **How did Gabriel's announcement change Mary's plans and challenge her faith?** *Mary was formally engaged when the angel Gabriel visited her. According to custom, this would have been a very happy time for Mary. She would likely have spent much of her free time talking with friends and family about her wedding, the banquet, her home, and her future. A young woman's wedding was a momentous family and community event. It took great faith for Mary to set her happy plans aside, accept that she would likely be the center of shame and scandal, put her reputation and safety at risk, and respond to God's calling by saying, "I am the Lord's servant. Let it be done unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38).*

7. Joseph and the birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:18-24)

- ➡ **Joseph struggled to understand Mary's pregnancy. Though he could have pressed for harsh disciplinary measures to be carried out, he planned to "put her away quietly." What does this reveal about Joseph's heart?** *Joseph was a man of compassion. Though death by stoning, or excommunication of Mary and her family from the village, were options he could have pressed for, he knew that "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13b). Joseph's heart is evident as he extended mercy and compassion before the angel visited him in a dream to give him a greater understanding of what had happened and what he should do. God loves a heart full of mercy, grace, and compassion.*
- ➡ **Keeping in mind Joseph's choice, Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees in Matthew 15:1-20 and Paul's counsel in Romans 14, how should believers today think about the letter of the Law and the spirit of the Law?** *The goals should be to speak in truth and love, refrain from judging or debating disputable matters, be quick to forgive, lead with love, and extend grace as it has been extended to us by God.*

8. The birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-16)

- ➡ **Note an interesting fact about the census.** *Until very recently, there was no evidence that Caesar Augustus ordered non-Romans to register for a census. However, in recent years records were found verifying that Caesar Augustus gave the option for regional governors to register non-Roman residents along with Roman citizens as they thought best. Caesar ordered empire-wide census' in 28 B.C., 8 B.C., and 14 A.D. Each census took up to five years to complete. The census of 8 B.C. does sync with the biblical narrative. However, the only known census that Quirinius, governor of Syria ordered was in 6 A.D., which is nearly a decade after the death of King Herod and does not sync well with the biblical narrative. To reconcile this, scholar Nigel Turner suggests that the Luke 2:2 passage:*

“This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor...”

should read:

“This was the census taken before the census taken while Quirinius was governor.”

This is because the word for FIRST and BEFORE is the same word in Greek (Protos), and the word PROTOS is always translated ‘before’ in the Gospels when followed in the genitive case, as it is in this verse.

- ➔ **Note an interesting fact about Joseph and Mary’s journey to Bethlehem.** *Bethlehem was the ancestral hometown of both Mary and Joseph (who were both descendants of David). The distance between Bethlehem and Nazareth is about 100 miles. The journey would take more than a week as it would entail traveling over several mountain ridges, rivers, and a dangerous, desolate plain. Making the journey in the third trimester of pregnancy must have been very difficult, and making such a journey without a midwife was extremely rare. The community considered it their responsibility to provide a midwife if a family could not secure one. Making such a journey without a midwife likely speaks to the adverse feelings residents of Nazareth had toward Mary and Joseph.*
- ➔ **Note an aspect of the birth story which points to the humble nature of his birth.** *There are many aspects of the birth story which speak to Jesus’ humble beginnings. He was born in a stable, laid in a manger, wrapped in simple swaddling clothes, and visited by humble shepherds. It is likely that a person of standing could have secured a room, but Joseph, being poor, was denied accommodations even though Mary was about to deliver. When Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple on the 8th day, they offered the sacrifice of two doves (the offering of the poor). Truly Jesus, as Philippians 2:1-10 notes, “emptied” and “humbled” Himself to fulfill His mission.*

9. Infancy (Luke 2:21-38)

- ➡ **Jesus was presented and circumcised in accordance the Law. What does this, and Matthew 5:17 reveal about Jesus' commitment to be obedient to the Father's will and the Law?** *Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law (Matt. 5:17), the author of the Law (Isaiah 33:22), and had the authority to interpret the Law (Matthew 5:17-48). Isaiah 42:6 notes that the Messiah would establish a new Covenant between God and humanity. However, that would only be possible if He was the fulfillment of the Old Covenant (Law), which required that He live a sinless life and become a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 9:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5). Luke 2:21-38 shows Jesus to be obedient to the Law from birth. In death, He fulfilled the Old Covenant requirement to be an atonement for sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13; Romans 5:8-10). His resurrection, and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) made possible the establishment of a new Covenant between God and humanity. This New Covenant centers on Christ (Hebrews 8:6-13) and the grace of God (Ephesians 2:8-10). Because Jesus was obedient to the Law and fulfilled the Law, we now live under the New Covenant of grace by which we have been "rescued from the dominion of darkness..." and become "qualified....to share in His kingdom of light..." (Col. 1:12-13).*
- ➡ **Note several ways the Messiahship of Jesus was confirmed before He was two years old.** *His Messiahship was confirmed by the angel Gabriel, the virgin birth, the affirmation of John while in the womb of Elizabeth, the appearance of a notable star, and His birthplace being Bethlehem (rather than Nazareth or Jerusalem). His Messiahship was also confirmed by the announcement of the angel to the shepherds at the time of His birth, and the prophetic affirmations of Simeon and the 84-year-old prophetess Anna. And finally, His Messiahship was confirmed by the visit and gifts of the Magi, the angelic directive to flee to Egypt, and the prophecy-fulfilling decree of Herod to kill male children under two years old.*

10. Infancy and Childhood (Matt. 2:1- 23; Luke 2:40-52)

- ➡ **Note an important fact about Herod the Great.** *Herod was a despicable, ruthless leader. Though being half Jewish (on his mother's side), his family was elevated to power by the Roman government when his father provided vital support to Julius Caesar (during his campaign in Egypt). Herod ruled for 33 years, building arenas and military complexes for the Romans and the Temple for the Jews. He was politically savvy, but chronically paranoid, and put many friends, associates, and family members to death. Caesar Augustus famously said that "He would rather be a pig than Herod's son." When the Magi informed Herod that a new king had been born, Herod sought to eliminate what he viewed as a threat to his power by ordering all male children under two in the region of Bethlehem put to death. This was the fulfillment of the Jeremiah 31:15 prophecy.*
- ➡ **What do the gifts of the Magi (prophetically) represent?** *The gifts of the Magi are prophetically significant. The gift of gold pointed to His royal nature. Frankincense was used in the temple and foreshadowed His priestly role. The gift of Myrrh was a burial ointment, and though it is an odd present for an infant, it points to the Messiah's mission—to die so that we might live.*
- ➡ **Note an important fact about the "flight to Egypt."** *The "flight to Egypt" is a fulfillment of prophecy (Hosea 11:1). It notes God's ability to use friend and foe to accomplish His will. Traveling to Egypt put Joseph, Mary and Jesus outside of Herod's reach (keeping them safe until Herod's death), and it likely provided time for tensions in Nazareth to ease so that a return home could be possible.*

SESSION 2

1. The ministry of John the Baptist (John 1:6-9; Matthew 3:1-6; Luke 3:15-18)

- ➡ **Why did John refer to Jesus as the “Lamb of God?”** What did that signify? *In the Old Testament, a sacrificial Passover Lamb was the centerpiece of God’s plan to make possible the forgiveness of sins. The blood of an unblemished lamb provided a covering of protection from the plague of death in the days of Moses. That event foreshadowed how the blood of Jesus Christ (shed on the cross) would provide a covering of forgiveness and redemption for all for humanity. John’s reference to Jesus as the “Lamb of God” points to His nature and mission.*
- ➡ **Note a few characteristics of the ministry of John the Baptist:** *John was a relative of Jesus (the text notes that John’s mother Elizabeth, and Jesus’ mother Mary, were ‘cousins.’ However, the term cousin was a very general term in Hebrew culture, meaning it is possible that Elizabeth was an aunt or distant cousin to Mary. Nevertheless, John and Jesus were related and likely spent some time together growing up). The true identity of Jesus was not known to John until supernaturally revealed to him in John 1. What a surprise this must have been, and what a challenge to immediately embrace the call to point people away from your growing ministry and toward another. In this John was exceptional. His mindset is reflected in John 3:30: “He must increase and I must decrease.” John accomplished much though he had no formal training, recognition from the religious leaders of his day, wealth, or fine facilities. And though his ministry was less than 12 months long, in Matthew 11 Jesus referred to him as “the greatest man ever born of women.”*

2. The baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:13-17; John 1:29-34)

- ➡ **What is the significance of baptism, and how did the meaning of baptism change after the resurrection?** *Baptism in Old Testament times centered on bringing one into the relationship with Israel. In general, it was a way to become Hebrew and part of the Covenant promises God extended to the chosen people. The baptism of John centered on repentance and committing oneself to live according to the precepts of God. The baptism of the New Testament Church incorporated the ideas noted above (identification with God, repentance, and obedience), but centered on the truth that it is Jesus Christ who makes this possible. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) baptism of the New Testament Church centers on believing in Christ, committing to live for Christ, accepting forgiveness from Christ, and being a witness or living testimony for Christ.*
- ➡ **What happened during the baptism of Jesus that validated His calling and identity?** *Hebrew Law noted that special claims (and legal charges) required validation by the testimony of “two or three witnesses” (Deuteronomy 19:15). The sending of a dove, God’s voice of affirmation, and the testimony of John the Baptist (whom many called a Prophet) served, according to the Law, to ‘officially’ validate Jesus’ claim to be the Christ, the Messiah (John 8:17-18).*

3. The temptation of Jesus (Luke 4:1-13)

- ➡ **How did Jesus prepare for His ministry?** *Jesus prayed and fasted for forty days just prior to beginning His ministry. Entering into intense times of prayer was a common element in Jesus’ ministry. If prayer was such an essential part of Jesus’ ministry, how much more then should it be for believers today.*
- ➡ **In what three areas did Satan tempt Jesus?** *Satan tempted Jesus in the three main areas in which humanity is prone to be tempted (and fail) today: 1) The desires of the flesh (tell this stone to become bread) 2) Pride (you can have all the kingdoms of the world) and*

3) Doubt or misapply Scripture (throw yourself off the temple for God has said He will protect You). There is wisdom in knowing how the enemy operates. The areas in which Satan tempted Jesus 2000 years ago are the same areas Satan tempts God's people today.

- **How did Jesus respond each time Satan tempted him?** *Jesus overcame Satan's tempting because He knew, and was able to quote, relevant Scripture. Jesus' victory here demonstrates that there is power in the Word. It also demonstrates that Jesus had absolute confidence in the integrity of Scripture (the Scripture He quoted was more than 1400 years old at the time He quoted it).*

4. The calling of the disciples (John 1:10-12, 35-51)

- **The student workbook encourages class participants to note an observation or two regarding the choosing of the disciples. Responses could include the following:** *The disciples were 'ordinary men.' They were untrained, slow to learn, prone to failure, and for many reasons, would be classified "unfit for holy service" by the religious leaders of their day. Though Jesus did not see in them polish, He did see their potential. Amazing things can happen when we follow God's leading and allow Him to mold, shape, anoint, empower, and use us.*
- **The 12 Jesus chose would not have spent much time together were it not for Him. It is likely that most of the disciples would not have chosen to be friends—some would have been natural enemies. Why do you think Jesus chose these men?** *The choosing of the disciples reminds believers that God can choose anyone for any work. God loves diversity. God creates each human with unique qualities and attributes that, according to 1 Corinthians 12, bring value to the body as a whole. Believers in Christ do not all have to look or speak the same, or have the same background or preferences. God does not look to see if there is uniformity in the church, but He does look to see if there is unity.*

5. The first miracle (John 2:1-12)

- ➔ **Was the city of Cana a notable city?** *No. Like Nazareth, the Old Testament does not refer to Cana. It was likely more of a small village than a city.*
- ➔ **Was Jesus invited to the wedding because He was known as a worker of miracles or had some degree of notoriety at this point in His ministry?** *No. At the time of this wedding Jesus was not yet known for working miracles or powerful preaching. As Mary directs Jesus and the servants at this party, it is likely that she was somehow involved in coordinating the event (as a friend or relative of the groom or bride's family). In this case, it would have been normal for Jesus to receive an invitation (and His bringing several disciples as guests would not have seemed inappropriate).*
- ➔ **What are some of the important symbolic elements in this story?** *The backdrop of a wedding ceremony is recurring in Scripture and portends the great banquet and wedding ceremony of the Lamb that is to come (Isaiah 54:5-6; Songs of Solomon; Jer. 3:14; Rev. 22). It is notable that in this story Jesus is the facilitator of joy (John 10:10) and the provider of refreshing drink (John 4:14; Rev. 22:1-7).*

6. Jesus cleanses the temple (John 2:13-21)

- ➔ **Are John 2 and Matthew 21 contradictory Scriptures?** *No. This apparent contradiction resolves when one realizes that Jesus did not cleanse the temple once, but twice. First here in John 2, to show His authority over the religious system of His day, and later in Matthew 21, to fulfill the prophecy of Malachi 3:1-3.*
- ➔ **How does this event note the authority of Jesus?** *Many stories in the Gospels present Jesus as having great authority. He calmed the sea and showed Himself to have authority over the elements. He raised the dead and showed Himself to have authority over life and death. He healed the sick, exorcised demons, and rightfully interpreted the*

Law. This showed Jesus' authority over the religious leaders and Law—cornerstones of Jewish culture. Recognizing the authority of Jesus is a requisite to recognizing Him as Lord, submitting to His leadership in life, and receiving from Him the gift of salvation.

- ☛ **How is Jesus' cleansing the Temple is the fulfillment of prophecy?** *Prophecy foretold that the Messiah would have authority over the Temple—that children would praise Him in the Temple, and that the Messiah would be the final Passover sacrifice (a reference to the unblemished lamb sacrificed by the High Priest in the Temple). Jesus' use of phrases such as "My Father's House" reference His authority over Temple customs and leaders.*

7. Jesus meets with Nicodemus (John 3)

- ☛ **Who were the Pharisees and why were they hostile to Jesus?** *The Pharisees were the leading religious body in Jesus' day. Serving with them, but not as prestigious as them, were the Sadducees and Herodians. Their power derived mainly from self-serving interpretations of the Law, and imposing scores of regulations on the people (which they taught were of equal binding force as the Law). They coveted power and saw Jesus as a threat their office. Satan played on their pride and pettiness, and prompted the Pharisees to spearhead the move have Jesus arrested and crucified.*
- ☛ **What does it mean to be "Born Again" (V.3), and how does that tie into verse 16?** *To be born again is to die to self (living in accordance with one's own will and way), and to commit to living for God (with new priorities, focus, purpose, and hope). To be "Born again" is to be "saved." John 3:16 associates being "born again" with believing in Jesus, through Whom salvation is made possible.*

8. Jesus and the woman at the well (John 4:5-43)

- ☛ **Why was there animosity between the Samaritans and Jews in the days of Jesus?** *Approximately 800 years before the birth of Christ, a*

great apostasy swept across northern Israel. Small temples and altars to false God's were numerous. Individuals married foreign peoples who introduced or advanced pagan practices. Prophets were sent by God to speak against this. These prophets were rejected and killed. Israel did not turn so God allowed nations (such as Babylon) to invade Israel. During this time many from the northern area, known as Samaria tried to save themselves and avoid deportation by supporting invading armies. Israel fell, and many Hebrews were taken away as slaves (and lived in exile in Babylon and Persia for 70 years).

When the Hebrews returned from exile, they found that the Samaritans (who had escaped capture--many by aiding the enemy) were still involved in pagan practices, but wanted to share in the work of rebuilding the Temple and wall about Jerusalem. The Hebrews rejected the Samaritan's offer to help rebuild. It was clear the Samaritans did not want to fully commit to God, and the returning Hebrews did not want to relapse into apostasy. This created a great rift between the "pure" Jews of the south and the Samaritans of the northeast. By the time of the birth of Jesus, the Samaritans who considered themselves Jews had established their own Temple (which they considered the rightful Jewish Temple).

So great was the animosity between southern Kingdom Jews and Samaritans that it was said, to walk on Samaritan ground was to defile oneself (leading most Jews to take a long detour around the region of Samaria when traveling north to south through the land of Israel). That Jesus was in Samaria, and that He talked with a woman well known to have a questionable past, would have been considered very unusual by first century orthodox Jews. But in doing this the Messiah showed that He came for all and cares for all.

- ➡ **What can one infer about the woman from the notation that she was gathering water in the afternoon?** *It was common for women to gather water in the early morning or the cool of the early evening.*

That this woman was drawing water in the heat of the day implies that not only was she considered an outcast by the pious Jews of the south, she was also likely considered an outcast among her people (unfit to draw water with others). She represents the unworthy—the lowest of the low. Keeping these cultural dynamics in mind makes the story particularly tender and meaningful.

- **The woman becomes a powerful witness for Jesus. Why might this be considered unusual?** *1) She was a Samaritan. 2) She was an outcast among the Samaritans. 3) She ministered to her village in Samaria 4) She had no training and 5) She shared in the work of a missionary before the 12 disciples of Jesus did.*
- **What is the result of the woman's witness?** *1) Her village was made aware of the ministry of Jesus 2) Her village was invited to listen to Jesus 3) Many in her village believed in Jesus and 4) Many Samaritans proclaimed that Jesus was the "Savior of the world," something the religious elite of the south never did.*

9. Opposition in Nazareth (Luke 4:16-36; Mark 3:8-12)

- **What was the prophesied mission of Jesus? (Luke 4:16-21).** *In Luke 4:43 Jesus noted that His mission was to "...preach the good news of the kingdom of God to [man]..." The prophet Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would minister to the hurting, seek the lost, heal the broken-hearted, bring freedom to those in bondage, and proclaim that debts were about to be forgiven in what he called, "the year of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61).*
- **From Luke 4, and from your observations, note a few examples of how God works in mysterious ways:** *In Luke 4 we see that Jesus ministered in Galilee (considered a lesser region by the religious elite). He ministered when "praised by the people" and when He knew there would be opposition from Synagogue leaders. He was from Nazareth (a remote undistinguished village), He spent time with "sinners," traveled to "unclean places" (the graveyard, Samaria), and ministered to "cursed" people (lepers, the demoniac, the blind man in John 9, the Samaritan woman in John 4). Jesus went where*

religious leaders would not go, loved those the religious leaders would not love, and forgave the unforgivable. In doing these things He showed that yes, God does work in mysterious ways.

- ➡ **Demonic activity was common during Jesus' ministry. How did this manifest itself and do you think demonic activity has changed today?** *2000 years ago demons oppressed and possessed individuals. The same is true today. Exactly how and when that can happen is debated, but most agree that the victim often (knowingly or unknowingly), invites or allows the demonic presence in through engagement in pagan or sinful practices. Demonic activity is designed to keep humans from accomplishing God's will, and is generally marked by confusion, discouragement and destruction.*

10. The healing of Peter's Mother-in-Law (Luke 4:38-44)

- ➡ **How was Peter's Mother-in-law a supporter of Jesus' ministry?** *She was a believer, she opened her home to be a place of rest and refuge for Jesus, she was a financial supporter, and she likely provided special care for Peter's wife when he "left his nets" and became a follower of Jesus.*
- ➡ **How did she respond after being healed - what did she do?** *She immediately began to "wait on Jesus." The term "wait" means to serve. It is the root word for deacon, which means, servant. Here she provides a fine model of what believers today are to do—once saved by Jesus, believers are to serve others in the name of Jesus.*

SESSION 3

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) *The fill-in-the-blank terms for the student booklets are noted in gray font.*

- The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five *discourses* in the Gospel of Matthew and is the longest recorded *sermon* of Jesus.
- There are *eight* Beatitudes—each intended to comfort and align the hearer’s perspective to that of Christ (Rom. 12:1-2).
- How is the authority of Jesus affirmed in this sermon? *Jesus shows Himself as able to interpret and define the Law (Matt. 5:21-48).*
- The Lord’s Prayer is not a presentation on *what* to pray, but rather, *how* to pray.
- What does Jesus say about worry? *Do not worry. Do not worry about future issues beyond your control. Trust in God.*
- According to Philippians 4:6-7, what are we to do when worried? *Pray, trust, and believe.*

2. The compassion of Jesus (Mark 1:40-45)

- According to the Pharisees, a person with leprosy was physically and *spiritually* unclean.
- Why did Jesus order the healed man not to tell anyone? *Crowds were beginning to seek Jesus more for healing than for guidance. Jesus asked some individuals to not broadcast their healing because he desired to focus on teaching and preaching.*

3. Affirming the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 11:2-19)

- Do the questions regarding Jesus express the doubts of John the Baptist or his disciples? *Though the phrasing in the English text can*

be difficult to follow, the questions are from the disciples of John, who are struggling with the current plight of their teacher. John's faith is not in doubt, and Jesus affirms his character and faith in verses 7-9.

- ➞ **How does Jesus describe John the Baptist (Matt. 11:2-15)?** *Jesus refers to John as the “greatest man born of women.” This is an amazing statement considering he was poor, untrained, scorned by the religious and political leadership, he preached in a somewhat remote area, and his ministry was less than 12 months long.*

4. A dinner teaching on grace and forgiveness (Luke 7:36-50)

- ➞ **This story presents a model for finding grace and forgiveness.**
 - » **Step one:** Draw close to Jesus. How did the woman in this story “draw close?” *She took the initiative. Hearing that Jesus was at a particular home, she appeared at the dinner party uninvited; brought an expensive gift (perfume), and knelt before Jesus.*
 - » **Step two:** Acknowledge your sins and show remorse. How did the woman in this story do this? *She humbled herself before Jesus, knelt before Him, and used her tears and hair to wash His feet.*

5. A discussion regarding the source of Jesus' power (Matthew 12:22-45)

- ➞ **Is it possible for a demon to render someone blind or mute?** *Yes*
- ➞ **Did the Pharisees deny the power of Jesus, or seek to bring into question the source of His power?** *The Pharisees and enemies of Jesus could not explain away His many miracles or His power—their only recourse was to try to lead individuals to question the source of His power.*
- ➞ **Many signs and wonders marked the ministry of Jesus—often**

miracles were extended at the request of those in need. Why did Jesus deny the Pharisees when they requested a sign? *Jesus did not manifest miracles to prove He could, to satisfy the curiosity of those who doubted, or to pass a test of the Pharisees. It is also important to note that the Pharisees' lack of faith was likely an impediment to their witnessing (or receiving) miracles (Mark 6:4-5).*

6. Jesus teaches in parables (Matthew 13:1-52)

- ➔ **Why did Jesus teach in parables?** *Parables were a popular teaching form and tool in Jesus' day. Speaking in parables made teachings interesting and memorable, which was especially important when many did not read or write. Speaking in parables also fulfilled the prophecies of (Isa. 6:9; Deut. 29:4; Jer. 5:21), and allowed Jesus to communicate in a way that seekers of truth would understand, but His enemies would not.*
- ➔ **What is the general meaning of the parable of the sower?** *The central truths of this parable are 1) faith should be cultivated and guarded and 2) blessings come to those who have deep roots and strive to do the right things, in the right place, in the right way, at the right time, and with the right heart.*
- ➔ **What is the general meaning of the parable of the wheat and tares?** *The central truths in this parable are 1) it is not enough to look good (talk the talk), we must be good (walk the walk) and 2) a time of accounting and judgment are coming.*
- ➔ **What is the general meaning of the parable of the mustard seed?** *The parable of the mustard seed is simple and clear—Faith is powerful. A small measure of pure faith can accomplish much.*

7. Supporting the ministry of Jesus (Luke 8:1-3)

The student booklets encourages class participants to note something about the following individuals. Response options are noted in gray italics font.

- **Peter's Mother-in-Law:** *A strong supporter of Jesus' ministry. She often opened her home to Jesus for rest and refuge.*
- **Mary Magdalene:** *A follower of Jesus after He cast out seven demons that oppressed her. She was evidently from the city of Magdalene, a city infamous for its vices.*
- **Susanna:** *Luke 8:1-3 notes that after Jesus healed her, she was an active supporter of Jesus' ministry.*
- **Joanna:** *Luke 8:1-3 notes that she was one of the women who supported the ministry of Jesus after being healed. Tradition holds that she was a manager in Herod's house (a dangerous place for a follower of Christ).*

8. Authority over the elements (Mark 4:35-41)

What do the elements of this story reveal about how we should face fears?

- **The setting (evening on the sea of Galilee):** *We should know that the enemy is aware of our fears and weaknesses and will seek to exploit them. In this story, the fears come in the middle of the night, in the middle of the sea, in the midst of a storm.*
- **Who brings peace in the midst of the storm?** *Jesus!*
- **Did Jesus have sufficient power to deal with the problem?** *Yes (see Ephesians 3:20).*
- **Did Jesus rebuke the disciples in this story and if so, why?** *Yes, for their lack of faith. Believers must remember that times of testing will come, but God's promises are sure.*

9. Authority over the demonic realm (Mark 5:1-20)

- **What is the location of this story?** *The region of the Gerasenes—an area of ten cities (called the Decapolis) in the northern (heavily Greek) area of Israel.*

- ➔ **What does the reader learn about the demonic world from this story?** *The demons tormented their human host, knew who Jesus was, were subject to His authority, and preferred to live in pigs rather than return to hell.*
- ➔ **Why were the herdsmen angry?** *The herdsmen were angry because of the loss of the herd. They knew the owners would be angry, and that their jobs and reputations were in jeopardy.*
- ➔ **Why was the loss of their livestock considered a just reward according to Jewish tradition?** *The owners of the pigs were Jews, and according to the Law, swine were considered unclean and were not to be sources of livelihood. These Jews wrongfully made their living caring for and selling swine to Gentiles in the region.*
- ➔ **What did the formerly demon-possessed man ask of Jesus, and what did Jesus ask him to do?** *The man asked Jesus if he could leave with Him, which was understandable given the mood of the angry crowd. Jesus asked the man to stay and tell others what God had done for him.*
- ➔ **What was the result of this man's witness (see Mark 6:53-56)?** *The entire region (the ten cities of the Decapolis) was told about Jesus and were prepared to respond well to the Lord's teaching when He returned to the area one year later.*

SESSION 4

1. Affirming the authority of Jesus

Suggested responses are noted in gray italics font.

- ➡ **Why is Jesus confronted in Matthew 12 for doing good on the Sabbath?** *Satan is angered when individuals pray, give, or serve God by serving others. He can mobilize resources and will attempt to discourage, divide, and destroy. Believers today should expect this, and prepare accordingly (pray, worship, connect with believers).*
- ➡ **In Matthew 12 Jesus is accused of breaking the Law. Did Jesus break the Law or the traditions of man? (Matt. 12:9-14).** *Jesus did not break the Law—He is the Lawgiver (James 4:12). The Pharisees had wrongly interpreted the Law and placed burdensome restrictions on top of the Law (such as limiting the number of steps one could take on the Sabbath). It was their regulations and wrongful interpretations that Jesus breached.*
- ➡ **Review Mark 7:13, Matthew 15:3, and Acts 15:10 then note the relationship between man's traditions (even valued traditions in the church), the Law/Word of God, and Jesus Who is the Lawgiver (James 4:12).** *Traditions of man, (even if made by leaders in the church), no matter how well-meaning, are never to be deemed as equal to, or as binding as, Scripture. Scripture (the whole of Scripture and the spirit of the Word) serves as our final authority.*

2. The ministry of healing

- ➡ **The healing of Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22-43):** *Jairus was a Synagogue Official. What was the relationship between Jesus and most Synagogue Officials at this time?* *At this time in Jesus'*

ministry there was a growing tension between religious leaders and the Messiah (including Synagogue Officials). At the very least, Synagogue Officials would have been pressured by the Pharisees to support their efforts to marginalize or discredit the ministry of Jesus. This background adds a fascinating dynamic to the story.

- ➡ **What was Jesus response to Jairus' request for help (vv. 22-24)?**
Despite the growing tension noted above, Jesus quickly agreed to help Jarius, which probably surprised the Synagogue Official and his associates.
- ➡ **The interruption (Mark 5:25): On the way to heal Jairus' daughter, a woman with a severe medical condition, hoping for a blessing, lunged toward Jesus and touched His robe. How did Jesus respond to this interruption?** *Jesus paused to minister to the woman though there were several breaches of propriety on her part. According to custom, she should not have approached Jesus as she was considered ceremonially unclean, and she should not have lunged toward Jesus nor touched His garment. Nevertheless, Jesus responds to her with grace, and though for a moment it seemed that this delay cost Jarius his blessing, we see that the grace and kindness of God have no limits.*
- ➡ **The challenge (Mark 5:35): There is often a setback before the blessing. The 'setback' in v.35 seems insurmountable—but note what happens, and what that means for believers today?** *Jairus is told that his daughter is dead. How difficult it must have been for Jairus to have hope after receiving the news. How difficult it must have been to believe that his need was not too great for Jesus to address. But Jesus did (and does) have the power and authority to address every need. Praise the Lord!*
- ➡ **What was the requisite to healing for the two blind men in v.29?** *They both requested healing, and received it conditionally: Jesus said, "May it be done to you according to your faith." God's grace prevails, but many times, receiving a blessing is linked to our*

demonstrating faith (which is contrary to the logic of the world which tends to be: “Show me the miracle and then I will believe”).

- ➊ **How did the Pharisees respond when Jesus cast-out a demon responsible for rendering a man mute? (Matt. 9:32-34):** *Rather than praising God for the miracle and recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, the Pharisees sought again to disparage His reputation by telling the crowds that Jesus accomplished signs and wonders by the power of Satan.*
- ➋ **The lame man at the pool (John 5:1-17). What is the textual issue in verses 3b-4, 14)?** *Some verses in the King James Bible translation are put in brackets or added at the bottom of the page as a footnote and not included in the regular body of the text in newer translations (such as the NIV, CEV, TEB, RSV, NASB, etc.). The reason for this is that 20th Century (and newer) scholarly Bible translations are based on older families of manuscripts than were available when the King James Bible was written (in the early 17th century). These older manuscripts do not include verses such as John 5:3b-4. This type of textual issue is rare and does not impact the integrity of the text. Such verses can be read as parenthetical comments by a Scribe, added for clarity, or to note local customs not specified in the text. These comments do not address any matter of doctrine and do not alter the meaning of a story or teaching. Such verses provide accurate commentary, but as they were evidently not included in the earliest families of manuscripts, their inspired nature is in question, and consequently, they are included with an asterisk or footnote in most contemporary Bible translations.*
- ➌ **What is the theological issue with this story?** *Verses 3b-4, as noted above, were not included in the earliest families of manuscripts. That passage notes that the people were “waiting for the moving of the waters; for an angel of the Lord went at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water, whoever then first, after the stirring of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.”*

The theological issue is: While it is true that God can extend blessings any way He chooses, it is also true that receiving God's blessings does not seem to require humans passing some kind of physical challenge (such as being first in a race to get to the water). This story seems to present God working in a way that is contrary to His nature. However, the theological issue is resolved when one realizes that the John 5:3b-4 passage notes what the people at the pool in Bethsaida believed—which is not what Jesus taught or said was true.

In a sense, the lame man's pitiful situation (never being strong or fast enough to receive a blessing even though he was in what many considered to be a holy setting) is emphasized to contrast the freely-given grace of God. That is, humanity's best efforts are not enough to merit God's blessing or favor. Grace, mercy, and true blessing are found only in the Messiah.

3. Review Matthew 9:35-38, and note the prayer, the need and the opportunity.

- ➞ **The prayer:** *"Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."*
- ➞ **The need:** *"When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."*
- ➞ **The opportunity:** *"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.'"*

4. Jesus sends out the Twelve (Mark 6:7-13; Matthew 10:14-42)

- ➞ **Why do you think Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs (Mark 6:7)?**
God designed it so that humanity would be at their best when they are in relationship or partnership with others. The Bible notes

that “two are better than one...” (Ecc. 4:9). Two working together accomplish more than two working independently. Further, being in partnership with others emphasizes unity, the call to be in partnership with others in the body of Christ, and the importance of being in a relationship with Jesus.

- ➔ **How does the directive in Matthew 10:9-10 compare with the order in Luke 22:35-36? What can believers today infer about there being only one right approach or way to accomplish a task?** *When Jesus sent the disciples out in Matthew 10, He told them NOT to bring any supplies. This assignment was to help them grow in their witness, and in their ability to trust God and believe that He would provide for their needs. When the disciples departed on a similar mission in Luke 22, Jesus told them to bring ample provisions. This is not to rectify a previous error, but does note a slightly different directive regarding preparations and provisions. This is to remind believers that it is important to constantly rely on God for leading and counsel—knowing that the best way and approach for tomorrow may not be what was successful or effective yesterday.*
- ➔ **In Jesus’ teaching on the cost of discipleship, did Jesus say that persecution was probable or promised?** *Persecution for the true disciple of Christ is not a possibility or probability, but a promise.*
- ➔ **In light of Matthew 10:16-25 and Philipians 3:8, is the cost of being a disciple worth it?** *Absolutely. Whatever is given-up or lost in this life for the cause of Christ will be recognized and rewarded in the age to come.*

5. The death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12)

- ➔ **What prompted John’s murder by the weak King Herod?** *John preached against the immoral relationship Herod was having with his brother’s wife. Herod had John arrested to silence him. His brother’s wife, Herodias, was offended by John’s exhortations, and cleverly tricked Herod into ordering his beheading.*

- ➔ **In Matthew 11 Jesus referred to John as ‘great,’ yet he died in prison, had few possessions, acquired no wealth, wrote no books, led no army and held no political office. What does this tell us about how God measures true greatness?** *God’s matrix for success is very different from that of the world. God values piety more than position, faithfulness more than training, doing what is right more than knowing what is right, giving more than getting, helping others more than helping self, and a life dedicated to worshiping God rather than accumulating wealth. It is important to measure success the way God does lest we grow weary or discouraged.*

6. Jesus feeds the 5000 (John 6)

- ➔ **Was the need for food a surprise to Jesus or a test for the disciples?** *No situation we face takes God by surprise. The disciples may have thought that the food supply crisis was an administrative or planning error, but in reality, it was a tool God intended to use to test faith and bring glory to Himself (through the miracle of multiplying a few pieces of bread and fish to feed thousands). There are no planning errors or miscalculations in this story.*
- ➔ **How was the disciples’ faith further tested that night (VV:16-21)?** *The disciples are told to cross the lake, without Jesus, at night. Against this rather foreboding backdrop, a storm arises, and the disciples see what they believe is an apparition walking across the water; they become frightened. From this story we learn 1) Jesus is never far from His people 2) we are to “fear not” 3) the enemy loves to attack in the middle of the night and the midst of the storms of life and 4) we can accomplish much if we have faith and maintain our focus on Jesus.*
- ➔ **The world today values technology, research, information, and education. According to John 6:26-28, why is it best to look for**

the insight and truth in the right place and with the right motive?

There are many voices that portray themselves as presenters of truth. Some notable academics today argue that truth is relative and that what is true for you may not be true for another. However, truth is not relative—it is unchanging and absolute. According to John 6:26-28, truth will be found by individuals who seek for it in the right place, from the right source, and with the right motive.

7. Jesus speaks of Commitment (John 6:22-69)

- ➊ **It is often difficult for individuals to listen well when Jesus speaks of commitment and sacrifice. How is that truth illustrated in this story? What did Jesus say that was difficult to understand or hear, and how did the crowds respond?** *Jesus spoke of great commitment, sacrifice, eating His body (v.51), and drinking His blood (v.53). These phrases were unfamiliar and unexpected. Most chose not to give them prayerful consideration and immediately rejected them. The disciples did not fully understand the words but trusted Jesus, and believed their meaning would become clear in time (which they did). Later they came to realize that Jesus was referring to the coming Passover, the crucifixion, and the New Testament Church Ordinance of Communion.*
- ➋ **How do Peter's words in v.68 apply to the Church today?** *Believers today must remember that Jesus is the source of help, hope, and answers. Believers may not always understand His leading or instructions, but can trust that His words are true and His leading is part of God's perfect plan (Jeremiah 29:11).*

SESSION 5

THE THIRD YEAR OF JESUS' MINISTRY QUESTIONS

1. Mark 7:1-5. Why Jesus did not observe the traditions of the Pharisees (which they considered law).

- ➔ **How does the Mishna (the Oral Law) and the Laws of the Pharisees differ from the Law of Moses?** *The Mishna is a commentary on Old Testament Law. It was comprised about 200 BC, and is an important guiding document, presenting thoughtful interpretations and analysis of God's Law. The regulations of the Pharisees primarily detailed how to live-out the Law. For example, the Law of Moses noted that the Sabbath Day is a day of rest. The regulations of the Pharisees stipulated that that meant one could not walk more than 1500 steps, or tie a sandal with two hands, on the Sabbath. The Law of Moses is different in that it does not express the wisdom or directives of man, but rather, the wisdom and will of God.*
- ➔ **What is the difference between God's Law as revealed in Scripture (2 Pet. 1:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:16) and the various civil and religious laws of man? (Acts 5:29). Does one have more binding force than the other?** *Writings expressing the wisdom and law of man are subject to error; the wisdom and Law of God are not. The Law of God supersedes the religious and civil laws of this world.*

2. An encounter with a Syrophoenician woman (Mark 7:24-30)

- ➔ **Note several facts about the location of this story, Tyre, the land and of the Philistines (Isa. 23; Jer. 47:4; Ezek. 26):** *This story takes place*

in the north—in a region of Israel heavily influenced by Gentiles. It was a region that came under the judgment of God in centuries past and was overrun by Greek, Syrian, and Roman armies. The Jewish religious leaders of the south looked down on the Jews in this region (claiming their less-Gentile influenced region made them superior), and avoided contact with Gentiles from this area. The fact that Jesus ministered in this region is the fulfillment of prophecy, and stands in stark contrast to the practices of first-century AD Jewish religious leaders.

- **What was the woman's request? (vv.25-26):** *She desired spiritual deliverance for her daughter. It was a God-honoring spiritual request shared from a pure heart.*
- **Explain Jesus' use of the cultural reference, 'dog' (v. 27):** *The term 'dog' was common and representative of how first-century Jews considered the spiritual condition of Greek-Gentiles (dogs were considered spiritually unclean). Though strong, it was a cultural, not a pejorative term, expressed as a test to see if her faith was strong enough to lead her to persevere and push-through cultural stigmas and misconceptions in order to receive a blessing.*
- **How do you think the woman's perseverance factored into Jesus' response (vv. 27-30)?** *The story is about the testing of faith, and how perseverance and belief in the power and goodness of Jesus lead to blessing. Her story reminds believers today to not be content to pray once—believers are to ask and keep on asking; persevere.*

3. The healing of a deaf and mute man (Mark 7:31-37)

- **Why did Jesus touch the man's tongue and ears?** *The Gospels note Jesus' amazing ability to communicate. To those who tended sheep, He spoke of being a "good shepherd." To the fishermen, He spoke of becoming a "fisher of men." To those in the desert, he spoke of "living water." Here, to the man deaf and mute, he communicated via touch in a way both tender and understandable.*

- ➔ **What is the meaning of the word, “Ephphatha” (v.34)? How does the use of this word, and Jesus’ touch, show compassion?** *Ephphatha means, ‘be opened.’ It is one of the few words in the New Testament in Aramaic; likely the primary language of the man Jesus healed. The use of this word is another way to illustrate the exceptional care, tenderness, and grace of Jesus.*

4. The story of the feeding of the 4000 (Matthew 15:32-39)

- ➔ **What are some of the similarities between this story, and the story of Jesus feeding the 5000 in John 6?** *The similarities are many. They include: thousands were listening to Jesus, there is no food, the disciples approach Jesus for help, the disciples suggest that Jesus send the crowd home, Jesus multiplies a few pieces of bread and fish, all eat their fill, and there is food left over.*
- ➔ **What are some of the marked differences in the two stories?** *The differences include: the number fed, the number of baskets of remaining food, the seating arrangement for the crowd during the meal, the amount of bread and fish presented at the beginning of the story, the location, the demographic profile (largely Gentile versus largely Hebrew), and what directly follows the miracle. These are definitely two distinct miracles—not one miracle inaccurately recorded in the Gospels (as some suggest).*

5. The Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign (Matthew 16:1-12)

- ➔ **Do verses such as Isaiah 35:4-6 and Isaiah 43:7-9 indicate that signs or miracles would accompany the Messiah?** *Yes. Prophecy from the days of Moses (Cir. 1450 BC), and later, from the days of Isaiah (Cir. 700 BC) note that the Messiah would be a worker of miracles.*
- ➔ **Review Matthew 16:1 and note the Pharisees’ intent:** *The Pharisees were testing Jesus and attempting to trap Him.*

- **Why did Jesus reference Jonah in His response to the Pharisees (v.4)?** *The meaning of the reference is two-fold: 1) Jesus uses the familiar story to emphasize the need for faith and repentance. The pagan Ninevites in Jonah's day responded to the prophet's call to believe and repent. This is a reproof because Jesus presents the faith of the Ninivites as superior to that of the Pharisees and 2) the reference to Jonah points to the His upcoming crucifixion, burial in the tomb, and resurrection of Jesus on the third day.*

6. The healing of the blind man in Bethsaida (Mark 8:22-26)

- **Was the blind man in Mark 8 healed immediately, or did the healing unfold as a process?** *The healing of the blind man in Mark 8 took place in stages.*
- **Does the miracle happening as a process indicate a lapse in Jesus' power or ability?** *No. In this story, we do not see any limitation in Jesus' power, but rather, the importance of always trusting God, particularly when God's way or timing is unexpected.*
- **How does the fact that the miracle in Mark 8 happened as a process apply to believers today?** *God's ways are wondrous and creative. We are to trust that the process God chooses to help, lead, bless, teach, and guide us is best.*

7. Who is Jesus (Matt. 16:13-20)?

- **Why did some believe Jesus to be John the Baptist?** *Some thought Jesus might somehow be a resurrected John because King Herod had recently ordered John put to death.*
- **Why did some think Jesus was Elijah (Mal. 4:4-5)?** *Some believed Jesus might be Elijah (though he lived hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus) because Elijah's ministry was associated with great miracles, and because the prophet Malachi prophesied that Elijah would return and be associated with the ministry of the Messiah.*

- ➔ **Why did some think Jesus was Jeremiah?** *Some thought Jesus might somehow be Jeremiah because the circumstances of Jeremiah's death are mysterious (no one knows where or when he died), and many first-century Jews believed that Jeremiah would return in support of the Messiah's ministry.*
- ➔ **What are the most important questions (v.15)?** *Who do you say that Jesus is, and how does your answer impact how you live your life?*
- ➔ **How is Peter commended (vv.18-19)?** *Jesus said that Peter was "blessed," and noted that he had spoken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus also noted that the truth he spoke (that Jesus is the Christ) would serve as the Rock upon which the New Testament Church would be established.*
 - ➔ *Note that Jesus used wordplay in His response to Peter: The word 'Peter' in the original text indicates a small rock or pebble. Peter is noted as the small rock, but the truth he spoke (that Jesus is the Christ), is the massive, strong, unmovable Rock (a different but related word in the original text) that would serve as the foundation for the coming New Covenant and New Testament Church.*

8. The Transfiguration (Luke 9:28-36)

- ➔ **What is the Transfiguration of Jesus?** *It was a time when several of Jesus' disciples witnessed Jesus enter into a glorified state. The Transfiguration provided a glimpse of Jesus' divine nature.*
- ➔ **How was Jesus' true nature affirmed?** *The Father affirmed His deity, Moses (representing the Law) affirmed His deity, and Elijah (representing the Prophets) affirmed His deity.*
- ➔ **Why did Moses and Elijah appear?** *The appearance of Elijah and Moses affirmed the nature of Jesus, as well as provide some encouragement and solace at this critical time in His ministry (soon Jesus would be crucified).*

- ➔ **Was Peter's suggestion wrong? (v.33):** *Yes. Communing with God and having a "mountaintop experience" is wonderful, but never are believers to "stay on the mountain." Believers are to share the blessings and good news they have received. Believers are commissioned to take the hope and joy of the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:7-8).*

9. Confronting a demonic presence (Matthew 17)

- ➔ **Why could the disciples expel demons in Mark 6 but not in Matthew 17?** *Either the demon had greater power than the demons the disciples previously encountered, or the disciples were not spiritually prepared to do what was needed, or both.*
- ➔ **What can believers infer about the enemy from this story? (1 Cor. 10:12; Eph. 4:27; 1 Peter 5:8)?** *The enemy is powerful and active. He seeks to divide, discourage and destroy. Standing against the enemy can only be successful when believers 1) are sufficiently spiritually prepared to face him and 2) when believers act in the will of God and access divine power to accomplish the task.*

10. Paying the Temple tax (Matt. 17:24-27)

- ➔ **Was Jesus obligated to pay the Temple tax?** *Technically, no. Religious leaders were exempt from paying the Temple Tax.*
- ➔ **What was unusual about Jesus' directive to go fishing?** *It seemed that 1) their situation was dire and that it was not the time for fishing 2) a carpenter (Jesus) should not be advising a fisherman (Peter) how to fish (with a pole rather than a net) 3) it was not the right time of day to go fishing, and 4) the kind of bait is not specified.*
- ➔ **What should believers learn from this story?** *1) God can provide 2) God always has a plan 3) God's plan and directives often seem strange, and 4) following God's plan and directives lead to blessings.*

SESSION 6

UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFICULT SAYINGS OF JESUS



HARD SAYINGS FROM THE THIRD YEAR OF MINISTRY

Jesus spoke often of the cost of discipleship during His last months of ministry. He called (and calls) His followers to walk a different path and lead a different kind of life than those who do not believe. The New Testament notes that the Lord calls His followers to be sanctified (1 Cor. 1:2). Sanctification is a theological term meaning, *to be set apart*. Jesus communicated this truth in many ways in the months leading up to the cross (through talks, sermons, parables, rebukes, by washing the disciple's feet during the Last Supper, through His sacrifice on the cross, etc.). This session examines some of the difficult but key statements of Jesus which note the high expectations He has for His followers.

1. What is the practical application of the verse noted below?

“If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.” Matt. 18:8-9

- ☞ *To make His teachings memorable and impactful, Jesus often used language that was strong and rich in imagery. The language in this passage is hyperbole. It notes the importance of making the short-term sacrifices the Spirit leads believers to make, even when these sacrifices are difficult. The degree of sacrifice believers are called to make must be weighed against the eternal benefit and reward the faithful will receive.*

2. What is the practical application of the verse noted below?

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy [times] seven.” Matt. 18:21-22

- ➔ *According to custom, a righteous Jew need only: 1) forgive a Jew (not a Gentile) 2) forgive individuals that apologized and sought forgiveness, and 3) forgive someone three times. These cultural traditions make Peter’s suggestion of forgiving someone seven times rather remarkable—but Jesus’ response is more so. Jesus’ reference to “seventy [times] seven” does not indicate 490 times, but rather, a God-honoring and a perfect number of times (the number 7 is linked to God in Hebrew culture).*

3. How does the following passage note the divinity of Jesus?

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they picked up stones to stone Him.”

John 8:58-59

- ➔ *The phrase, “I Am” is linked to God (see Exodus 3:13-15). The religious leaders recognized that this was a deity statement and immediately became hostile, similar to what is noted in the John 10 passage below:*
 - ➔ *“‘The Father and I **are one**.’ Again the Jews picked up stones to stone Him...Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone Me?’ ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, **claim to be God**.’” John 10:31-33*

4. In John 9, a man who was born blind is healed by Jesus. When asked about the reason for this man's blindness, Jesus said that the man was blind so that "the work of God might be displayed in his life" (a reference to his encounter with the Messiah). This invites the question: *Why was the man born blind?* Would it not have been more merciful if the man went blind a week or two before he met Jesus? What does this story reveal about God's timing versus our expectations?

"His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'" John 9:2-3

- ☞ *This story illustrates how the timing and plan of God are very different from ours. From God's point of view, a few decades of blindness did not compare to the blessing of having the face of the Messiah be the man's very first sight—not to mention the blessings associated with having his story recounted through the centuries (and fondly told in heaven for eternity) as a testimony to the grace of God.*

5. The many Old Testament admonitions to honor parents makes Jesus' response to the man's question particularly difficult to understand. What do the commentary notes in the STORY OF JESUS book reveal about the motive and merit of the man's excuse?

"He said to another man, 'Follow Me.' But the man replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.' Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'" Luke 9:59-60

- ➔ *The man's excuse was not valid because his father was still alive. He did not wish to honor his father, but to defer serving Jesus Christ.*

6. What does the following verse reveal about the expectation Jesus has of His followers?

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.'" Matt. 16:24

- ☉ *It is said that grace is free, but isn't cheap. In fact, the cost of discipleship is very high. It is not enough to believe, or know the Word, or go to church—God expects courage, faithfulness, and active participation in the Great Commission work.*

7. What do the following verses reveal about individuals being accountable to respond to the truth revealed to them? What does this say about nations such as America where there is freedom, and study resources are readily available?

"Then Jesus began to denounce the towns where He had done so many of His miracles, because they hadn't repented of their sins and turned to God. 'What sorrow awaits you, Korazin and Bethsaida! For if the miracles I did in you had been done in wicked Tyre and Sidon, their people would have repented of their sins long ago, clothing themselves in burlap and throwing ashes on their heads to show their remorse. I tell you, Tyre and Sidon will be better off on judgment day than you.'"

Matt. 11:20-22

- ➔ *God holds individuals and nations accountable for the amount of spiritual insight He, in His sovereign plan, makes available. The ancient pagan cities Tyre and Sidon were judged by God in centuries past, but will be judged less harshly at the final judgment than the cities of Korazin and Bethsaida; Jesus had ministered there and imparted spiritual truth, but the residents rejected Him. Nations such as America will also be judged harshly at the final judgment as there is freedom to worship, the opportunity to learn and witness, and ample exposure to the Gospel message. “To whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48)*

8. Satan has dominion over this world (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Pet. 3:9) until the return of Christ at the end of the Tribulation. What do the following verses note about what believers can expect, and the importance of being spiritually strong and ready?

“Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, ‘Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.’” Luke 13:1-3

- ➔ *The verses referenced above note that Satan has authority over this world. He knows his time is short and rages toward all that God loves. Persecution and danger are promised. Believers are not exempt from toil and trials, but are forgiven and promised an eternal reward in the age to come.*

SESSION 7

Additional research notes and teacher helps are available in the PowerPoint presentation.



THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY

Matt. 21:1 “As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples,

Matt. 21:2 saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to Me.

Matt. 21:3 If anyone says anything to you, tell him that ‘the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.’

Matt. 21:4-5 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

Matt. 21:6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them.

Matt. 21:7 They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them.

Matt. 21:8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

Matt. 21:9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!”

Matt. 21:10-11 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Matt. 21:12 Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves.

Matt. 21:13 “It is written,” He said to them, “My house will be called a house of prayer; but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’”

Matt. 21:14-15 The blind and the lame came to Him at the temple, and He healed them. But when the chief priests...saw the wonderful things He did and the children shouting in the temple area, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.

Matt. 21:16 “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked Him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, “From the lips of children...you have ordained praise’?”

WHAT THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY REVEALS

1. The **PRESENTATION** of Jesus (John 12:12-15)

- ➊ Why is it that Peter and John being sent ahead to secure animals (Matt. 21:1-5) requires a step of faith? *This action required faith as the probable punishment for taking the animal (during the Festival period when Roman troops were outnumbered and maintained order through a kind of martial law) was death.*
- ➋ How does the Triumphal Entry and purification of the Temple the fulfillment of the Zechariah 9 and Malachi 3 prophecies.

2. How the events of the Triumphal Entry show Jesus to be a different kind of **KING** (John 12:13b)

- ➊ What is the significance of Jesus riding a donkey, rather than a stallion? *Roman and Greek traditions included having their generals riding stallions in a procession after a great victory, whereas Jesus rode a donkey in advance of a great victory.*
- ➋ What is the significance of the Palm branches? *The waving of Palm*

branches showed Jesus to be a different kind of leader as the branches were a symbol of praise and worship, and a festival remembrance of how God was with them during their time of wandering (Lev. 23:40 Ex. 23:16; Lev. 23:33; Deut. 16:13-15). The throwing of Palm branches, while singing the Hallel's links the Jesus of the Triumphal Entry with Emmanuel (God with us), who came to "dwell among us" (John 1:14) in the time of wandering in the days of Moses.

3. The events of the Triumphal Entry fulfilled *PROPHECY*

- ➔ The fact that there was a donkey and a **COLT** (Matt. 21:2) is the fulfillment of prophecy (see verses below): *The student workbook encourages participants to share their thoughts on the wondrous, specific nature of Bible prophecy.*
 - » "Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you! He comes triumphant and victorious, but humble and riding on a donkey—on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Isa. 62:11)
 - » "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9)

Prophecy notes that the Messiah would be:

- » *Rejected in Jerusalem (Zech. 9-11)*
- » *Enthroned in Jerusalem (Zech. 12-14)*
- » *Presented and then "cut-off" (killed) exactly 69 weeks of years (69 x 7 years = 483 years) after a proclamation is made regarding the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple (Daniel 9:25-27).*

4. The Triumphal Entry notes Jesus is **WORTHY to be praised**

Note the response of the multitude (Matt 21:7-9).

- ➔ The multitude sang/shouted phrases from Psalm 113-118, a passage

known as the 'Great Hallel'...a passage directly linked to the mission and ministry of the promised Messiah.

- » The people shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David." What does *Hosanna* mean? **GOD SAVE NOW.**
- » What is the significance of this phrase the people shouted, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord"? *This phrase is from Psalm 118; it was a priestly blessing for the king who led the people in procession to the sanctuary to worship the Lord.*
- » The people shouted, "In the highest." *This associates the **one who saves** with the **highest power** and the **highest blessing**. It echoes back to Luke 2:14 when the angels proclaimed, at the birth of Jesus, "Glory to God **in the highest**."*
- » "Even the stones will cry out..." (Luke 19:40). The crowd was right to praise the Lord. *The statement is an acknowledgment of the amazing occasion, the fulfillment of prophecy, the profound moving of God, and how all of creation must recognize the majesty of the Master.*
 - » "Every knee will bow" (Phil. 2:10-11) and join all of creation in praising the Messiah.
 - » "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands." (Psalm 19:1).

5. The Triumphal Entry notes that the Messiah came to open doors for **THE UNWORTHY**

Note what these references mean to you:

- ➡ Isaiah 56:7 notes that the sanctuary should be a house of prayer. *Question: How can you make prayer more of a priority in your life, or help make the ministry of prayer be more emphasized in your church?*
- ➡ Jeremiah 7:11 notes that some would make the Temple court a *den of robbers*. Is this a reference having a bake sale or car wash on church

property? *No, it is a reference to extortion, selling forgiveness, and keeping individuals from entering into a right relationship with God.*

- ➡ Malachi 3:1 notes that the Messiah would come to His Temple and exercise authority over it. Was this prophecy fulfilled by Jesus on the day of the Triumphal Entry? *Yes. Jesus drove out the money-changers, invited children and the lame into the courtyard, and reprimanded the religious leaders overseeing Temple activity.*
- ➡ Matthew 21:14 notes that Jesus allowed the infirmed to enter the Temple court. Why is this significant? *The Pharisees taught that most who were lame were cursed of God and unworthy to enter the Temple area. By inviting the lame into the Temple court, and then healing them, Jesus showed that He had authority over the Temple, the religious leaders and the traditions, He also demonstrated the power to heal, and the ability to make the unworthy, 'worthy' before God.*
- ➡ Matthew 21:15-16 notes that Jesus allowed children to enter the Temple court. Why is this significant? *This indicates that Jesus values those whom society deems to have little value. Also, this happening is the fulfillment of the Psalm 8:2 prophecy, and notes Jesus' desire to grant individuals (even the small, unworthy and unlikely) access to God.*

SESSION 8

THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

MATTHEW 25-25



UNDERSTANDING MATTHEW 24-25 (Luke 21; Mark 13)

- Matthew 24-25/Luke 21 is a response to the discussion concerning the destruction of the temple in Matthew chapter **23**.
- Matthew chapters 24-25 address the questions: ‘Tell us,’ they said, *‘**When** will this happen, and **what** will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’*” (Matt. 24:3). ***The focus is that He is coming, not when He is coming. The focus is not on the specifics of what will happen, but that He knows what will happen and will use all for His glory.***

THE INFORMATION IN MATTHEW 24-25...

- Is **NOT** strictly presented in chronological order. ***For example, Luke 21:20 follows Luke 21:6.***
- Has a layered meaning, with primary and secondary focus points (***just as Isa. 14:5-15 and Ezek. 28:1-17 reference both nations and Satan.***)

IMPORTANT SCRIPTURE PROMISES

- 2 Tim 3:16-17 (***All Scripture is inspired and useful***)
- Prov. 25:2 (***Blessings come to those who search the Scriptures***)

MATTHEW 24:4-8

- ➔ From Matthew 24:4-8 (and the verses noted below), one can discern:
 - » Satan is the “**Ruler** of this age” (1 Cor. 4:4) and will continue to facilitate unrest until the *end of time*.
 - » Jesus said: “In the world, you *will* have *tribulation*” (John 16:33). *This is not a possibility, or a probability, but a promise.*

MATTHEW 24:4-13

- ➔ **Prophesied happenings: The decades following the resurrection would be marked by...**
 - » **False Messiahs:** Acts 5:36,37 notes that *Theudas and Judas* (and Acts 21:38 references “The Egyptian”) helped to fulfill this prophecy.
 - » **War: Three** Roman Emperors threatened war against Jerusalem in the 40 years following the cross. These were *Caligula, Claudius, and Nero*.
 - » **Famine: Agabus** predicted a great famine in Acts 11:28 (in about 44 AD). *Historians note that famines took place in the years 46, 51, 60, and 62 AD.*
 - » **The destruction of the Temple:** Emperor Nero ordered General Cestius to attack Jerusalem in 66 AD. Matthew 24 records that about 30 years before Jerusalem was sacked and the Temple destroyed, Jesus prophesied that the attack would come, but also noted that there would be an opportunity for Hebrews to escape the Roman onslaught. *Historians note that just as General Cestius was about to attack, Emperor Nero died and the General, not knowing what to do, halted the offensive. This allowed many Jews to escape (just as Jesus promised). The attack resumed under Roman Emperor Caligula and General Titus in 70 AD.*
 - » The “**This generation will not pass away...**” phrase (V.34) could be a reference to the destruction of the **second Temple** (an event that

took place in 70 AD), or the generation that saw Israel reborn as a nation (an event that took place in 1948). *The term generation could be 70 or 80 years (Psalm 90:10), 100 years (Genesis 15:12-16), the biblical norm of 40 years, or an unspecified length of time not exceeding 120 years.*

» *All these are the beginning of birth pains.* (Matt. 24:8)

MATTHEW 24:4-15

➔ **The Church-Age application:** Jesus prophesied that the following events would be associated with the last days.

- » **False Messiahs:** There were more than **1200** such claims in the 20th century.
- » **Wars:** There were more than **one hundred million** war-related deaths in the 20th century.
- » **Famines:** **one billion** will go to bed hungry today.
- » **Persecution:** Several international humanitarian agencies list **Christians as the #1 persecuted people group this century.**
- » **Signs in the heavens:** Luke 21:25 notes that there will be unusual **signs** in the heavens. ***Some have suggested this prophecy is being fulfilled by unusual solar activity, blood moons, and a celestial alignment associated with Revelation 12.***
- » **The entire world will be exposed to the Gospel:** Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:6

MATTHEW 24:21-27: HAPPENINGS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TRIBULATION PERIOD

- ➔ The Lord will come, without notice, and “Rapture” his people away from the toils and pain of this world (1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Cor. 15:51-52). ***Note: The I Am A Watchman ministry team believes that this event will precede the commencement of the Tribulation period. Some, however,***

suggest that the Rapture event will take place in the middle or end of the Tribulation period.

- ➔ There will be **great** distress, without **equal** (V.21-22).
- ➔ False Christs will deceive with **signs and wonders** (2 Thess. 2:9-10).
- ➔ The ‘*abomination that causes desolation*’ spoken of by Jesus. Paul and Daniel (Daniel 9:26-27; Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4) is a reference to the **Antichrist**. *He will proclaim himself to be God, demand worship, stand (and have a statue/idol set-up) in the rebuilt Temple. The False Prophet will require individuals to show their allegiance by receiving a mark—which both acknowledges allegiance to the Antichrist and allows individuals to buy and sell.*
- ➔ **The call is to stand firm to the end: Revelation 3:12, 21**

MATTHEW 24:44-46 [THE CHALLENGE]

- ➔ Be **watchful**, wise and **ready**
 - ➔ Matthew 25:1-13
 - ➔ Matthew 25:14-30
- ➔ **Remember:**

Believers are to expect and be ready for the return of the Lord. Verses 39-41 note the sudden nature of His promised return: “Two will be in the field, and one will be left...” (VV.39-41)

MATTHEW 25:31-46

- ➔ At the end of the Tribulation period comes the **final judgment**
- ➔ **Jesus** will serve as judge (Revelation 21).
- ➔ There will be a final separation of **sheep** and **goats** (V.46).



“Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might...” (Eph. 6:10)

SESSION 9

THE CRUCIFIXION

When Jesus died on the cross, the Temple veil was ‘rent in two’ (Matt. 27:51). *This indicates that Jesus removed the barrier (the power of sin) that separated a holy God from sinful humanity.*



Many have suggested that the crucifixion was some kind of miscalculation on Jesus’ part. Nothing can be farther from the truth. The willing sacrifice of Jesus was part of God’s perfect plan, referenced in Genesis 3:15, spoken-of by Moses, foreshadowed in the stories of Hosea and Jonah, alluded-to in the Old Testament Festivals of Passover and First Fruits, and specifically detailed by the prophets hundreds of years before Jesus was born. This section profiles Jesus’ awareness of the cross, and the meaning of the cross.

IMPORTANT FACTS

1. Jesus knew what was coming

- ➔ **What does John 16:16 and Luke 22:15 reveal about Jesus’ foreknowledge of His upcoming arrest, crucifixion and resurrection?**
 - » “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.” (John 16:16)
 - » “And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” (Luke 22:15)
 - ➔ *Jesus had been purposely traveling toward Jerusalem for almost 6 months (since Luke 9:51-53). He was aware that in Jerusalem he would suffer, be crucified, and rise again.*

2. God is always in control

- ➔ **What does the arrest of Jesus reveal? (See the verses below)**
 - » Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied.

‘I am he,’ Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them). When Jesus said, ‘I am he,’ they drew back and fell to the ground.” (John 18:4-6)

- » “While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived. With him was a large crowd armed with swords and clubs...” (Matt. 26:47)
- » “Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus).” (John 18:10)
- » “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” (Matthew 26:53-54)
 - ➔ *Jesus knew what was going to happen (John 18:4).*
 - ➔ *Jesus had power to escape if he wished (John 18:6)*
 - ➔ *The scene was chaotic, but Jesus was at peace.*
 - ➔ *What happened was not a mistake, but the fulfillment of Scripture (Matthew 26:54)*

3. Jesus knew who He was

➔ What does the trial reveal about Jesus’ knowledge of who He was and God’s plan?

- » **Jesus before the religious leaders:** “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, ‘You are right in saying I am.’” (Luke 22:70)
- » **Jesus before Pilate:** “Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ ‘You have said so,” Jesus replied...” (Matthew 27:11)
 - ➔ *Jesus knew who He was (Luke 22:70), and that His mission was to die so that we might live. (John 3:16)*

4. Note the malice and hatred

➔ The following verses note how Satan prompts people to accomplish

his will. What do these verse reveal about how Satan feels about Jesus and all who love God.

- » “The men who were guarding Jesus began mocking and beating him. They blindfolded him and demanded, ‘Prophesy! Who hit you?’” (Luke 22:63-64)
- » “The governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and stripped [Jesus] and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again.” (Matt. 27:27-30)
- » “Now it was the governor’s custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. So, when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, ‘Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?’ ‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus Who is called Christ?’ Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify Him!’” (Matthew 27:15, 17, 22)
 - *The malice and hatred toward Jesus was clear, illogical and undeserved.*
 - *The malice and hatred toward Jesus was the fulfillment of the Isaiah 53 prophecy.*

“He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:3-6)

5. The outcome of the trials

➤ Were the charges against Jesus substantiated during the trials?

- » **The finding of the religious leaders:** “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. ***But they did not find any***, though many false witnesses came forward.” (Matt. 26:59-60)
- » **Pilate’s Assessment:** “Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “***I find no basis for a charge*** against this man.” (Lk. 23:4)
- » **Herod and Pilate’s Assessment:** “Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. Neither has Herod...” (Lk. 23:13-15a)
 - *Though many aspects of the trial were illegal (according to Jewish law and custom), no charge could be substantiated, and both Herod and Pilate could find no fault in Him, still the religious leaders pressured Pilate to move forward with the crucifixion. The trial was a sham, and served only to highlight the innocence of Jesus.*

6. The crucifixion

➤ Noted below are several prophecies that Jesus fulfilled the day He was crucified. Note: NO prophecy regarding the crucifixion or resurrection was either partially fulfilled or left unfulfilled.

- » **This was a spiritual battle:** “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He will bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel*” (Gen. 3:15).
- » Jesus Christ was forsaken by His disciples (Zechariah 13:7).
- » Jesus Christ was sacrificed as the Passover Lamb, on the day of Passover (Isaiah 53:7)
- » **Jesus was abused:** “*I gave My back to the smiters and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I did not hide My face from spitting...*” (Isaiah 50:6)

- » Jesus was crucified with sinners (Isa. 53:12)
- » The hands and feet of the Messiah were pierced (Psa. 22:16)
- » The Christ was given vinegar to drink (Psa. 69:21)
- » Soldiers cast lots for His garments (Psa. 22:18)
- » The Messiah was pierced by a spear (Zech. 12:10)
- » None of the bones of the Messiah were broken (Psalm 34:20)
- » The Messiah was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Isa. 53:8-9)

🔗 **Note how the fulfillment of prophecy can embolden one's faith and strengthen one's witness:** *The world today is spiritual, but skeptical. A strong witness will include reasons to believe. Presenting information on the accuracy and statistical probability of prophecy fulfillment strengthens one's witness. When one concedes that biblical prophecy is verifiably true, what often follows is an acknowledgment that there is a divine hand behind the writing. And when one acknowledges that past prophecies have been fulfilled, one must concede that future prophecies will likely come true, and that wise spiritual decisions should be made in order to prepare for what is to come.*

7. The reason for the sacrifice of Jesus

- **Read the following Scriptures and note what each verse reveals about the reason Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified.**

- » “For God so loved the world, He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him, might not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). *The death of Christ is not only the demonstration of God’s love, it is also the supreme expression of Christ’s own love for all.*
- » “And might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility” (Ephesians 2:16). *Through the cross Jesus reconciled sinners back to God.*
- » “By canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross...” (Colossians 2:14). *Through the death of Christ our record of debt was canceled.*
- » “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14). *Through the cross the power of death was broken.*
- » “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10). *Through the death of Christ the wrath of God (our deserved punishment) was satisfied.*

SESSION 10

EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION



Most believe that Jesus was an actual historical figure, but do not believe that Jesus died on a cross and rose again on the third day. In this section study participants are asked to draw on what they have learned thus far about Jesus the Messiah, and respond to the common questions skeptics have regarding the cross and resurrection. *Response material is provided in red font.*

- **QUOTE:** *The probability of one person fulfilling less than have of the prophecies is one in a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion...Equal to the number of atoms in a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, billion universes the size of our universe."*

- From the Case For Christ by Lee Strobel

COMMON ARGUMENTS, OBJECTIONS, AND CONCERNS REGARDING THE STORY OF THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION AS PRESENTED IN THE GOSPELS:

- **Argument #1: There is NO God or higher power.**

Many voices of influence (educators, movie stars, politicians, etc.) urge individuals to reject belief in God noting that the Gospel narrative is false, or at the very least, should be understood to be allegorical. For example, Dr. Victor J. Stenger, author of *Not By Design*, and Emeritus Professor of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Hawaii promotes the idea of *creation ex nihilo*. This model suggests there is no God, no master design or designer, and that all matter and life

sprang forth spontaneously. The idea of matter spontaneously arising from nothing, and all matter progressively evolving toward higher states of order is contrary to several fundamental laws of physics, but somehow is quickly becoming mainstream thought. ***How can one counter this teaching?***

Many try to malign faith by suggesting that Christian views are not based on science and their views are. This is not accurate. The viewpoints noted above are theories, are based on models that cannot be reproduced, and actually run contrary to fundamental laws of physics. Yes, not all matters of faith rest on empirical evidence (faith, by definition, suggests that not all points of belief will be able to be examined or verified in a lab). However, the Bible can be verified by historical evidence, archaeological evidence, manuscript testing, and prophetic fulfillment. Further, a number of brilliant scientists HAVE or DO accept the idea of intelligent design. Notables include:

- » *Nobel prize winners Albert Einstein and Donald Page*
- » *Nobel Laureate Arno Penzias*
- » *Astrophysicist Hugh Norman Ross*
- » *MIT Physicist Lisa Dyson*
- » *Stanford Physicist Leonard Susskind*

➡ **Argument #2:** Jesus, by Himself or aided by a group, lived a kind of **SCRIPTED LIFE** designed to put Him in the right place at the right time to fulfill **PROPHECY**. ***How can one respond to this charge?***

Jesus fulfilled more than 120 specific prophecies during his earthly ministry 2000 years ago—dozens of prophecies were fulfilled in the week leading up to the cross. Though a few of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled could have been ‘scripted’ and fulfilled with the assistance

of some complicit in a conspiracy, the sheer number (and type) of prophecies that were fulfilled could not have been fulfilled without divine intervention. A few examples are noted below:

- » *The Triumphal Entry (the crowd's response could not have been perfectly manipulated so as to fulfill prophecy).*
- » *The words uttered by the crowd during the Triumphal Entry were prophesied.*
- » *The Betrayal (The Sanhedrin's offer of exactly 30 pieces of silver is the fulfillment of prophecy).*
- » *Soldiers gambled for His clothing (this rather unusual detail is the fulfillment of prophecy).*
- » *Jesus was arrested and in very unusual (and illegal) fashion, sentenced to death and crucified within 24 hours, on the day of Passover, thus fulfilling prophecy.*
- » *The words and response of the crowd were prophesied.*
- » *Those in attendance (and notably absent) at the crucifixion were prophesied.*
- » *The method of execution was prophesied.*
- » *That Jesus was pierced (with a sword) was prophesied.*
- » *That none of Jesus' bones were broken was prophesied.*

➔ **Argument #3: There was no CRUCIFIXION.** Those who hold this view often note that crucifixions were usually mass or large group events (the Gospels note that only 3 were crucified on Good Friday), and that typically, Roman leaders in Israel did not schedule crucifixions on or near Hebrew Festivals (the Gospel's note that the crucifixion happened on the day of Passover). Therefore, it is argued, the Gospel narrative must be inaccurate. ***How does one respond to this argument?***

➔ Yes, the Gospel narrative profiles happenings that can be considered unusual. However, unusual, or even unprecedented, does not negate something from being true. Rare does not equate to false. Yes, some aspects of the crucifixion story are atypical, but the fact that the

crucifixion of Jesus is one of the best documented executions of antiquity (religious and secular sources) verifies the veracity of the story. A few facts that verify the Gospel account follow:

- » *The discussion that took place on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-18) notes that all in Jerusalem (more than one million at that time) were talking about the events of Good Friday.*
- » *The book of Acts notes phenomenal responses to early invitations to, at great cost, become followers of Christ.*
- » **Many non-Christian historians and statesmen record the crucifixion as a historical fact. These include:**
 - » *Tacitus*
 - » *Lucian*
 - » *Mara Bar-Serapion*
 - » *The Talmud*
 - » *Josephus the historian writes: “He was the Messiah. And when upon the accusation of the principal men among us, Pilate had condemned him to a cross...He appeared to them spending a third day restored to life, for the prophets of God had foretold these things...”*

- ➔ **Argument #4: Jesus was crucified, but did not DIE ON THE CROSS.** Within days of the cross, enemies of Christ suggested that the squad of Roman soldiers guarding the tomb of Jesus fell asleep, allowing someone to silently roll the several thousand pound stone that sealed the tomb aside and whisk away the body of Jesus, that was likely laden-down with more than 100 pounds of burial wraps and ointments. Within 150 years of the cross the Greek philosopher Celsus wrote that Jesus was put into a drug-induced coma to simulate death and that “the teachings of Scripture are absurd” (178 AD). The Gnostic Gospel of Barnabas suggests that someone was crucified, but it was

not Jesus. The Koran suggests that Jesus was crucified, but never died on the cross. In the 19th century, Karl Bahrdt and Karl Venturini suggested that the Romans crucified Jesus, but when He appeared to be dead, He was removed from the cross and then revived. ***How does one refute these claims?***

- ⇒ *To believe that the wrong man was crucified is to suggest that Roman soldiers and officials, religious leaders, and thousands who heard Jesus preach and witnessed His miracles, failed to properly recognize one of the most recognizable figures of the time. Further, it can be said with certainty that the Roman were experts at killing. They knew how to execute, and soldiers who failed in their task not only forfeited their lives, but often the lives of family members as well. It is not logical to believe that the Romans failed in their task to kill Jesus, or that an entire squad of soldiers fell asleep at their post (thus allowing the disciples to steal the body of Jesus from the sealed tomb).*

Additional evidence supporting the integrity of the Gospel record includes:

- » *Jesus was scourged (not just whipped/lashed) prior to being crucified. This alone often resulted in death.*
- » *The Gospels record that Jesus manifested signs consistent with hypovolemic shock (likely a result of being scourged. Hypovolemic shock leads to death).*
- » *The “blood and water flowed” reference in John 19:34 indicates death (this would not have happened if Jesus were still alive).*

- ⇒ **Argument #5:** Jesus died on the cross, but there was **NO RESURRECTION**. Some believe that the account of the crucifixion in the Gospels is accurate, but that the resurrection story is fabricated. The leading schools of thought are 1) Someone other than Jesus was crucified, and his body was burned immediately upon his removal

from the cross (as was common in first century Jerusalem) 2) Jesus' body was stolen from the tomb, and reports of his appearance were fabricated. ***How can one begin to refute these ideas?***

- ☉ *The tomb of Jesus was covered by a several thousand pound stone, sealed with wax, and guarded by a squad of Roman soldiers. The extreme measures taken to prevent the body of Jesus from being taken were ordered by Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate, at the behest of the Pharisees, make the prospect of secretly removing Jesus' body from the tomb not just improbable, but impossible.*

The suggestion that the squad of soldiers were paid-off by the Pharisees to say that they fell asleep is also extremely improbable. The historian Polybius notes that the punishment for a Roman soldier falling asleep at their post was death. It is important to note that the resurrection of Jesus (not just the teachings or miracles of Jesus) was the central, foundational tenant of the New Testament Church (Acts 2:22, 32, 26:26). Many hundreds of thousands would die as martyrs in the next several centuries, not because they believed Jesus was a good man, but because they believed Jesus was God and raised Himself from the dead. And finally, let me note that Christian and secular first, second and third century writers verified the resurrection story. These include every New Testament writer, Clement (59 AD), Polycarp (69-155 AD), Irenaeus (185 AD), Tertullian (200 AD), and Eusebius (285 AD). 42 authors, nine of them secular, mention Jesus, the cross and the resurrection within 125 years of the crucifixion.

- ☉ **Argument #6: The differing accounts of RESURRECTION DAY events proves the biblical record has errors, contradicts itself, and therefore should not be held in high regard. A proponent of this view, Dr. Michael Martin, Professor Emeritus of Boston University wrote, "In summary, the accounts of what happened at the tomb are either inconsistent or can only be made consistent with the aid of implausible interpretations."**

He points out that the number of women at the tomb is different in each Gospel. Matthew notes that there were 2, Mark mentions 3, Luke names 5, and John's Gospel lists 1. ***How can these diverse reports be reconciled?***

- ➔ *In all four Gospels, there is complete agreement on the primary aspects of the crucifixion and resurrection story. All accounts agree that: 1) Jesus was arrested on the night before Passover 2) Jesus was tried by Pilate, Herod and the religious leaders 3) Jesus was crucified 4) the body of Jesus was placed in a tomb that was subsequently covered by a great stone, sealed and guarded by soldiers 5) several women went to the tomb on Sunday morning and found that the stone had been rolled away and the body of Jesus was gone 6) a number of individuals then report seeing the risen Lord 7) In the weeks following the cross, Jesus met with the disciples, was seen by more than 500 people, and ascended into heaven.*
 - » *Emphasizing the testimony of women increases the validity of the story. Note, in the first-century women could not give testimony in court. It is improbable that a fabricated story would present women as principle witnesses.*

SUMMARY/OUR CHALLENGE

- ➔ Believe (Romans 10:9-10) * Acknowledge (Rom. 3:23)
- ➔ Confess (1 John 1:9) * Give God your heart (Matt. 22:37)
- ➔ Obey (1 John 5:3) * Live a life worthy of your calling (Eph. 4:1)

RECOMMENDED READING:

- ➔ New Evidence That Demands A Verdict by Josh McDowell
- ➔ The Case For Faith by Lee Strobel
- ➔ The Case For Christ by Lee Strobel
- ➔ The Case For The Resurrection by G. Habermas & M. Licona
- ➔ A Ready Defense by Josh McDowell
- ➔ When Skeptics Ask by Geisler Brook

EPILOGUE

The story of Jesus does not begin with the Gospels—it begins in Genesis, and is announced in the first prophecy in the Bible (Genesis 3:15). There God reveals His perfect plan to redeem humanity by sending a Savior. Jesus Christ is the expression and fulfillment of God's plan to overcome evil and offer salvation to humanity.

The Gospels note how Jesus demonstrated the love of God (John 3:16; Romans 5:8), and how He commissions (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8) all who believe to carry-on His work. The book of Acts and New Testament Epistles and Pastoral Letters profile how to live-out the 'Great Commission' challenge believers have received.

Studies show that believers in the early New Testament Church actively lived-out their faith. By the end of the second century A.D., more than 1,000,000 individuals had come to faith in Christ, and more than 80,000 died as martyrs. By the end of the fourth century A.D., more than 35,000,000 had come to faith, and approximately 1,950,000 died for it.

Jesus said that the cost of discipleship is high (Matthew 16:24-26). The calling is not for the curious, but for the truly committed. Yes, there are blessings in this life, and unimaginable rewards await the faithful in the age to come. However, believers must expect trials and tribulations and be prepared to overcome. Disciples of Christ are to be strong and brave. Disciples are to be the salt and light in a darkened world. Disciples are to have hope and share hope. Disciples are to be learners, and willing to share what they learn with others. Believing in Christ is good, but there is more. The challenge is to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

On the Rapture Kit you will find information on How To Become A Christian. Do not delay in making the most important decision a human can make—to ***become a follower of Jesus Christ.***

GOD BLESS YOU AS YOU GROW IN HIM!

HOW TO BECOME A CHRISTIAN



Noted below is a simple, four-step plan to receive Christ as your Lord and Savior.. Some refer to this process as being saved (1 John 2:2; Acts 4:12) or born again (see John 3:3 and 2 Cor. 5:17). Born-again believers are disciples and followers of Christ. The courageous identify as Watchmen (see Ezek. 33:1-9). Those who believe in Jesus Christ, are saved by Jesus Christ; they are forgiven of their sins and assured of eternal life in heaven.

Additional information on the subject of salvation follows this simple four-step outline. See Section 05 - Discipleship Study Materials for the video The Gift of Salvation. This video will further support the information below.

FOUR STEPS TO SALVATION

1. **Acknowledge that you have sinned and that God has not been first place in your life** and ask Him to forgive your sins:
 - ➔ *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from every wrong.” (John 1:9)*
2. **Believe that Jesus died to pay (atone) for your sins** and that He rose again and is alive today.
 - ➔ *“If you confess that Jesus is your Lord, and you believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)*
 - ➔ *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name [Jesus] by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)*

3. Accept God's gift of salvation

- ➔ *"For it is by **grace** you are saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."* (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- ➔ Note: Restoring our relationship with God is not facilitated by anything we do, but by what Jesus already did for us!

4. Ask Jesus Christ to come into your heart and be Lord of your life.

- ➔ *"To all who receive Him, He gives the right to become children of God."* (John 1:2)
- ➔ *[Jesus said] "Listen! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in."* (Revelation 3:20)

You can begin a new life in the faith by praying a simple prayer of commitment to God. A sample prayer is noted below:

"Dear Jesus. Thank you for making me and loving me (even when I've ignored you and went my own way). I realize I need You in my life, I'm sorry for my sins, I ask You to forgive me. Thank you for dying for me on the cross so that my sins can be forgiven. Please help me to understand Your love and Your Word. Help me to learn more about who You are and Your will for my life. As much as I know how, I want to follow You from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person. I accept Your gift of salvation, and pledge to live for You and tell others about You."

THANK YOU JESUS!

WHAT EVERY BELIEVER SHOULD DO



Many ask: “What do I do now that I have committed to be a follower and disciple of Christ? What are the best next steps?” Noted below are five suggestions.

The **next** chapter profiles what the highly committed disciple should keep in mind and pursue. You can read many articles along these topics in the Section 08 - Additional Articles folder on the Rapture Kit USB

1. **Join a good, evangelical, Bible-teaching church:** When looking for a church, do not be unduly influenced by congregation size, building design, or professional music, drama and preaching presentations. Look for heart. Look to see if the people love each other. Discern whether or not the staff are good teachers and shepherds. Ask for information about church goals, study opportunities, beliefs, and missions involvement. Determine if staff teach and preach in a way that communicates the need to be prepared for the imminent return of the Lord. *If this book is being read after the Rapture, be sure the church or small group you attend understands what has happened, and desires to be study Scripture to understand what prophecy notes will happen next.* Ask to meet with a Pastor, Elder, or Deacon to discuss the church vision, how the church can be a blessing to you, and how you can be a blessing to the church.
2. **Join a small group.** The *Bible Disciple-making* ministry notes that some of the benefits of sharing in a small group include:
 - ➡ **You will begin to feel like part of God’s family:** It is easy to get lost in a crowd—to go to church and worship but stay invisible and anonymous. Meeting with a small group of fellow believers provides an opportunity to build relationships. It also provides the opportunity to share, learn, pray with and for others, and walk with others on your spiritual journey. When you are connected to fellow believers, you are part of a family and never stand alone.

- ➔ **You will grow faster spiritually in a group than alone:** The Word notes that we have been “predestined to become conformed to the image of Christ” (Rom. 8:29). Spiritual growth involves life change. Life change is optimized in the context of a small group. 2 Timothy 2:22 teaches that we are to “run after” godly character and “run away” from the passions of youth. This verse instructs us not to do this alone but “with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart.” It’s always easier to exercise, physically or spiritually, in a group rather than alone (1 Timothy 4:7b).
- ➔ **You will not have to go through struggles alone:** It’s not only possible but probable that you could walk into and out of large group (worship) events with hurts, heartaches, and questions, but never connect with someone who will show an interest in you or identify with your difficulty. Many think their struggles are unique, but in a small group setting, it becomes clear that most struggles are universal. It’s encouraging to find that members of your group have not only struggled with common problems but have also found helpful solutions in God’s Word (1 Corinthians 10:13).
- ➔ **Pray, Pray, Pray:** Many are hesitant to pray in front of others, especially in a large group setting. In a small group of 6-12, you will learn to participate in prayer by having a conversation together with God. As you see prayer modeled by others you know, you will become more comfortable joining in prayer. It is good to pray for one another—it is even better to pray with one another.
- ➔ **You will understand the Bible better:** Have you ever listened to a message at a worship service and wanted to stop the speaker and ask, “But what about....?” If so, then a small group is for you. The message presented in a worship service is one-way communication. You listen while the speaker speaks. It’s fine for imparting knowledge, but not as effective for personal application. In a small group setting, you can ask questions, participate in a discussion of the text, and hear others share their insights. The truth in the Bible is practical, timeless, and designed to be applied to our everyday lives—participation in a small group helps individuals know how that is possible.

3. Develop your personal prayer life: Many have busy schedules and hesitate to schedule something new—particularly a new time commitment every day. However, prayer is not only important, it is essential. Jesus prayed constantly and encouraged his disciples to pray. Paul noted that believers are to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). A great evangelist once said, “I have so much to do today, it would be impossible for me not to pray.” That’s a proper mindset. A few suggestions to help you develop a meaningful daily prayer time are noted below:

- ➔ **Schedule it:** For many, if it’s not on the schedule it doesn’t get done. It may take some time to get into a routine, but the benefit of setting aside this time will become clear.
- ➔ **Seek out a prayer partner:** This needs to be a confidant who will pray for you and with you—someone who will encourage you and challenge you. Pray with and for this person about specific needs. Keep a list of your prayer needs. Follow-up with your prayer partner to let them know you are praying for their needs. Follow-up with your prayer partner to let them know how God is working in your life. Be positive, be encouraging, and be perseverant. *Ask church leadership to pair you with a prayer partner if one is not apparent.*
- ➔ **Keep a prayer journal:** Note when you began praying for the specific needs, and when/how God moves. Review your prayer journal often and rejoice in seeing how God moves to answer specific requests.

4. Plan to give: Christian stewardship is the mark of Christian maturity. When believers give, believers receive. “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor. 9:7). A few suggestions are noted below:

- ➔ Make a plan to provide regular financial support for God’s work. Note: there is a chapter on Christian Stewardship in this book, and articles on Christian finances on the iamaWatchman.com website.
- ➔ Ask for a copy of your church budget and familiarize yourself with church finances.
- ➔ Give cheerfully, regularly, and generously. Give your time, talent, resources, and finances.

- ➔ Rejoice in being able to support mission and outreach efforts through the local church. Seek God's leading regarding providing above-and-beyond support (funds, time, encouragement) to address particular needs and ministry projects.
- ➔ Remember, God expects His people to be good and faithful stewards of the resources He entrusts to them (Luke 14:13-14; Matthew 25:14-30). Ask God to help you do what He desires you to do.

5. Read and study the Word: Titus 2:15 notes that disciples are to study and “rightly handle” (understand and share) Scripture. Acts 17:11 notes that the Bereans (a small group of believers living in Berea) were commended for their diligence in studying the Word. Acts 2:42 records that the early church committed themselves to learn from the Apostles. It honors God when His people strive to learn what the Word says, how to share it, and how to incorporate it into a daily walk. A few suggestions are noted below:

- ➔ Take notes during sermon and teaching times. Write down important points and questions. Follow-up with spiritually mature individuals.
- ➔ Write down your questions as you read—share these with a staff member or Small Group/Bible Study teacher.
- ➔ Consider purchasing a STUDY BIBLE—A Bible that has study/commentary notes on each page of the text. This will aid in understanding difficult passages.
- ➔ Listen to good Bible Study Teachers online, on TV, and/or radio. Church leadership may be able to share recommendations.
- ➔ Establish a Bible reading routine. Read for a certain number of minutes at a regular time each day.



About this author: Gary Ray is a student of the Word. He has served in pastoral ministry with his wife Tina for 30 years. He currently serves as President of the *I Am A Watchman* ministry.

Gary is a lifelong learner. He has received and shares the grace of God, and enjoys speaking and writing about what God has done and what He is going to do.

God is on the move! More prophecies have been fulfilled in the last 70 years than in the 700 years leading up to 1948 (the year Israel was restored as a sovereign and independent nation). An understanding of Bible prophecy provides insight into what is happening, and what will happen in the future.

There are more than 1000 prophecies in Scripture; more than 90% have been fulfilled and verified to be true. As NO Bible prophecy has been proven to be in error, one can trust that the remaining 10% of the prophecies in the Bible will be fulfilled exactly as foretold. This writing will help seekers of truth discern and be ready for what is to come, and be ready to greet the One who promised to return. Maranatha.

