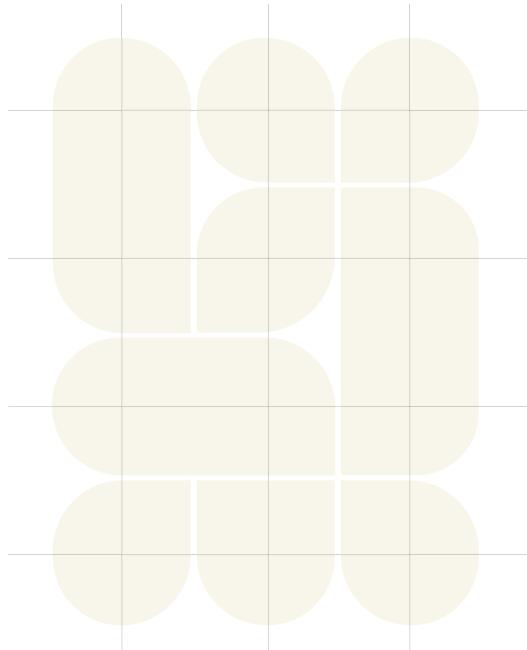




Foundations of Discipleship





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CHICAGO CHURCH OF CHRIST



FOUNDATIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP

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ISBN 978-1-971098-01-2 (premium paperback)

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Published by Chicago Church of Christ

8745 W. Higgins Rd. Suite 110

Chicago, IL 60631

United States

info@chicagochurch.org

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Cover and layout design: Josie Ziegler

Editors: Curt Simmons and Tanner Versage

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To the Jews
who had believed
Him, Jesus said,
“If you hold to
my teaching,
you are really
my disciples.
Then you will
know the truth,
and the truth
will set you free.”

John 8:31-32



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Laying a Foundation

From the very first pages of Scripture, God makes His intention unmistakably clear: He desires to be known.

Creation is a display of His power, His goodness, and His plan. In the opening chapter of Genesis, each act of creation crescendos with the same refrain: "And God saw that it was good." The repetition amplifies and reveals the beauty, order, and joy of a Creator preparing a home for His image bearers. Creation is His invitation to a relationship.

Then, with divine deliberation, God speaks: "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..." (Genesis 1:26–27). Humanity becomes the reflection of His character and the recipient of His purpose. God's relational heart continues to explode as He gives mankind the task of co-working with Him. He could have remained distant the way most gods and rulers are described, but He wanted to be close. He blessed them and entrusted them with the tasks of creation and order – just like Him. He commanded them to "be fruitful and multiply...fill the Earth and subdue it. Rule over..." (Genesis 1:28). Man was not only a gardener, but a missionary. God's image bearers were to fill the Earth with His likeness.

Unfortunately, this beautiful story unravels just a few pages later. Sin enters the story in the form of a rebellion that distorts the relationships He created. The narrative from Genesis 3 onward becomes the story of God's relentless pursuit of restoration: A holy God stealing back an unworthy, unholly, but deeply loved people. Through covenants and kings, prophets and promises, God accelerates toward the fulfillment of His redemptive plan in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the answer.

He bridges the gap between Creator and creation. He redeems what sin corrupted and restores humanity to a right relationship with God. Through His death and resurrection, He invites us not merely to believe, but to follow – to live under His Lordship and share in His mission of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17–20).

This series was created to help seekers, disciples, and teachers walk in the Way of Jesus with clarity and conviction. This series is not a tract, a new revelation, or a perfect roadmap. Instead, it offers a framework for understanding what Scripture teaches about becoming and remaining a follower of Jesus. This series has limits that we trust will be guided and supplemented by the Spirit. It is a faithful and responsible approach at thoroughly equipping someone to make a lasting decision, all while maintaining the urgency to be made right with God.



These studies progress through seven foundational topics that mirror the rhythm of the gospel itself: Hearing the Word, responding to the call, embracing community, confronting sin, being compelled by the Cross, turning through repentance and baptism, and counting the cost of lifelong discipleship. The purpose is not information but transformation. In fact, someone cannot place membership within a biblical community by only acknowledging the principles – they must be made new. Each study challenges the heart to grow in love and response.

The studies include clear biblical foundations, guided questions for conversation, and practical challenges that lead to obedience. In a follow-up publication, you will receive materials that help new believers mature in their faith, fulfilling Jesus' final command: "Go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19–20).

The heartbeat of this series is discipleship, not as a program or a class, but as a way of life. We were never meant to walk with God alone. True discipleship happens through community, conversation, and conviction formed by the Word and confirmed in practice.

As you journey through these studies, remember that the goal is not perfect adherence to a process, but participation in a story – the story of God redeeming the world through His Son. God's invitation at Creation is extended to everyone who wants to follow Him: Reflect His image, multiply His likeness, and live as evidence of His kingdom.

In Genesis, God blessed His creation with purpose. In the Gospels, the resurrected Christ renews that same call with authority:

"All authority in heaven and on Earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples..."

The mission hasn't changed. God's desire for connection and fullness remains, and He desires to redeem us so we can continue that mission with Him. May these studies help you learn with clarity, lead with faith, and live with the conviction that you are part of His divine vision.

In Christ's love and service,

—The Elders, Evangelists, and Teachers of the Chicago Church of Christ



The Word of God: The Bible

Our relationship with God begins with trust. Before anyone can follow Jesus, they must decide whether they trust His Word. The Bible doesn't just offer advice or inspiration. It claims to be the living voice of God. If that's true, then it deserves not only our attention, but our admiration and obedience. This study helps us to see what Scripture says about itself, what authority it carries, and how our response to it impacts our relationship with God.

2 Timothy 3:16–17

Q: What does it mean that Scripture is "God-breathed"? How does that make it different from every other source of truth or opinion?

Q: Paul lists four ways that Scripture is useful for us: Teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Which of these have you experienced in your relationship with Scripture?

Q: Are you open to the confrontation and correction that comes with reading God's Word? What are some ways you may be tempted to bypass God's teachings?

Q: Scripture thoroughly equips us for "every good work." What good works might God be preparing you to do? In what ways do you need His help to be more "thorough" in your preparation?

1 Timothy 4:16

Q: What do the terms "life" and "doctrine" mean in this setting?

Q: Which one – life or doctrine – do you prioritize or view as more necessary? What would it look like for you to pursue them equally?

Q: This scripture says that your salvation, and the salvation of others, is dependent upon whether or not you practice what you preach. Why does God put such a premium on our actions instead of just our intellectual belief?

Q: Are you willing to make the Bible your standard for how you live and what you believe?

John 8:31–32

Q: What does it mean to "hold" to Jesus' teaching? What is the difference between holding to His teaching and simply agreeing with it?

Q: Why does "being set free" come after "hold to my teaching"? Have you ever committed to a journey but had to "stick with it" a while before seeing any positive results?

Q: What forms of "freedom" do people chase that actually pull them away from God's truth? What fears or desires make it difficult to trust that obedience leads to freedom?

Q: How does this passage describe the audience Jesus is speaking to? Considering that they were religious and "believed in Him," why is it significant that Jesus needed to give them even more instruction? How does this scripture dispel the idea that belief is enough?

“
...so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:17

Hebrews 4:12–13

Q: God's Word is described as living, active, and sharp. How does that contradict the dominant view that the Bible is dusty, old, and irrelevant?

Q: God's Word also has the power to penetrate and judge the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. What emotional or spiritual defenses may rise up as God's Word challenges your heart?

Q: We will all have to give an account to God, not only for our outward actions, but for our inner-life as well. What does this scripture communicate about God's reign in our lives?

Q: What is the difference between a program that modifies our behavior and a truth that transforms us from the inside out?

James 1:22–25

Q: What are some unwanted things that a mirror might reveal about us? Is a reflection bad because it reveals flaws, or is it good because it clarifies awareness and truth?

Q: What true reflections might God's Word accentuate when you look at it intently? What real changes might someone notice in you if you became a doer of the Word instead of just a hearer?

Q: How can "merely listening" to Scripture create a false sense of spiritual progress and self-deceit?

Q: How will "intently looking" at the Word of God bless your life?

Acts 17:10–11

Q: The Jews living in Berea were described as having noble character. How does our response to the authority of God's Word speak about our character?

Q: Do you think others will notice a difference in you if you respond to God's Word? What difference might others notice about you?

Q: The Berean Jews approached God's word with eagerness, examination, and an everyday mindset. Do those traits describe you? Which of those traits is more natural for you? Which will require the most intentional effort?

Q: The Berean Jews examined the Scriptures because they were unwilling to blindly accept Paul's teaching. They were well aware of the important truth that spiritual leaders do not carry the same authority as God's Word. Are there any religious teachings or traditions that you have accepted without confirming them in God's Word? What feeling might arise if you discover a contradiction between a tradition and the Word of God? How would you approach that discrepancy?

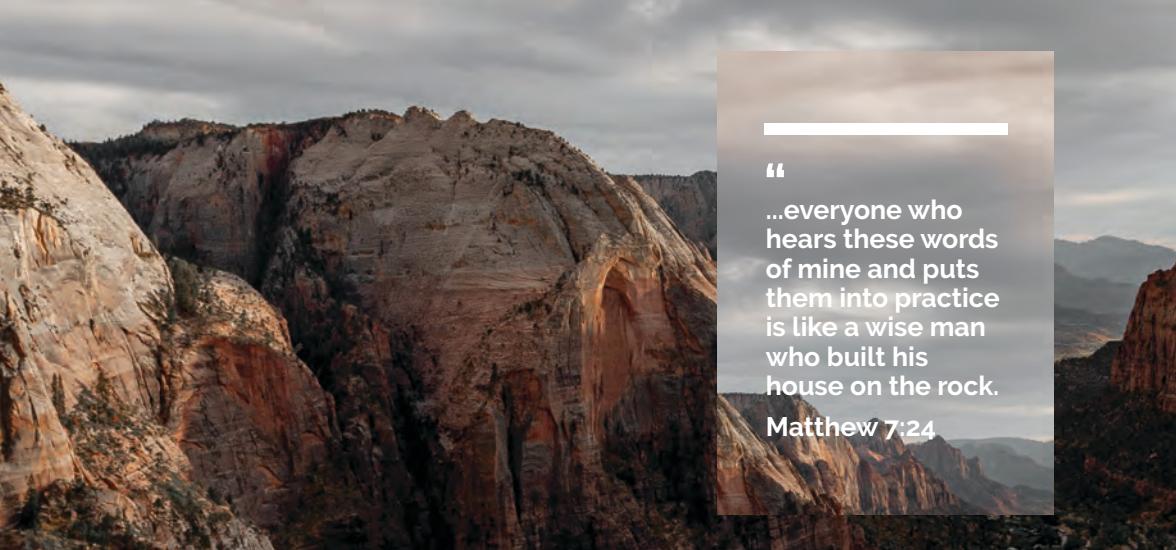
Matthew 7:24–27

Q: This story compares the outcomes of two builders – a wise builder and a foolish one. What decisions and circumstances do the two builders share? What distinguishes them?

Q: Jesus says that a lasting foundation is based upon hearing His words "and putting them into practice." How can you begin to apply the teachings of Jesus to your life? What would be some initial steps you could take this week to do that?

Q: What storms or pressures in life do you anticipate might test the strength of your foundation in God's Word?

Q: Being rooted in God doesn't guarantee a "stormless" life. How does knowing that storms will eventually come change the way you build your foundation now?



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...everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

Matthew 7:24

Preparing for What's Next

Jesus ended this teaching by saying that the wise person is the one who hears His words and puts them into practice. Discipleship begins right there – with a choice to act in accordance with the Word of God. In the next study, The Call of Discipleship, we'll explore what it means to follow Jesus with that same obedience and imitation. Discipleship isn't a religious synonym for "belief" – disciple means apprentice. The term disciple is loaded with meaning of proximity, imitation, and mentorship. Jesus promises that life, and eternal life, is better for all who apprentice and follow Him.

Between this Bible study and the next gathering, take some time to review some scriptures about knowing Jesus. This will serve as a great transition between the Word of God and His embodiment in the life of Jesus.

Matthew 16:13–16: Jesus' identity was debated in His day, and it still is today

Q: Who has Jesus been to you? What more are you beginning to see in His life and teachings?

John 1:1–14: Jesus was both human and divine

Q: How does understanding Jesus as both fully human and fully divine deepen your view of His authority and compassion?

Mark 1:1–8, Isaiah 40:3: Jesus was expected

Q: Isaiah 40:3 is fulfilled in these verses – God's people had waited generations for the promised Messiah. How might it have felt to hear John announce that the centuries-long wait for the Messiah was ending? In what ways is Jesus what you expected? What are you learning about Jesus that is unexpected?

Matthew 4:18–25: Jesus called people to follow Him

Q: What does Jesus' invitation reveal about what He values in His followers?

Matthew 7:24–29: Jesus was a revolutionary teacher

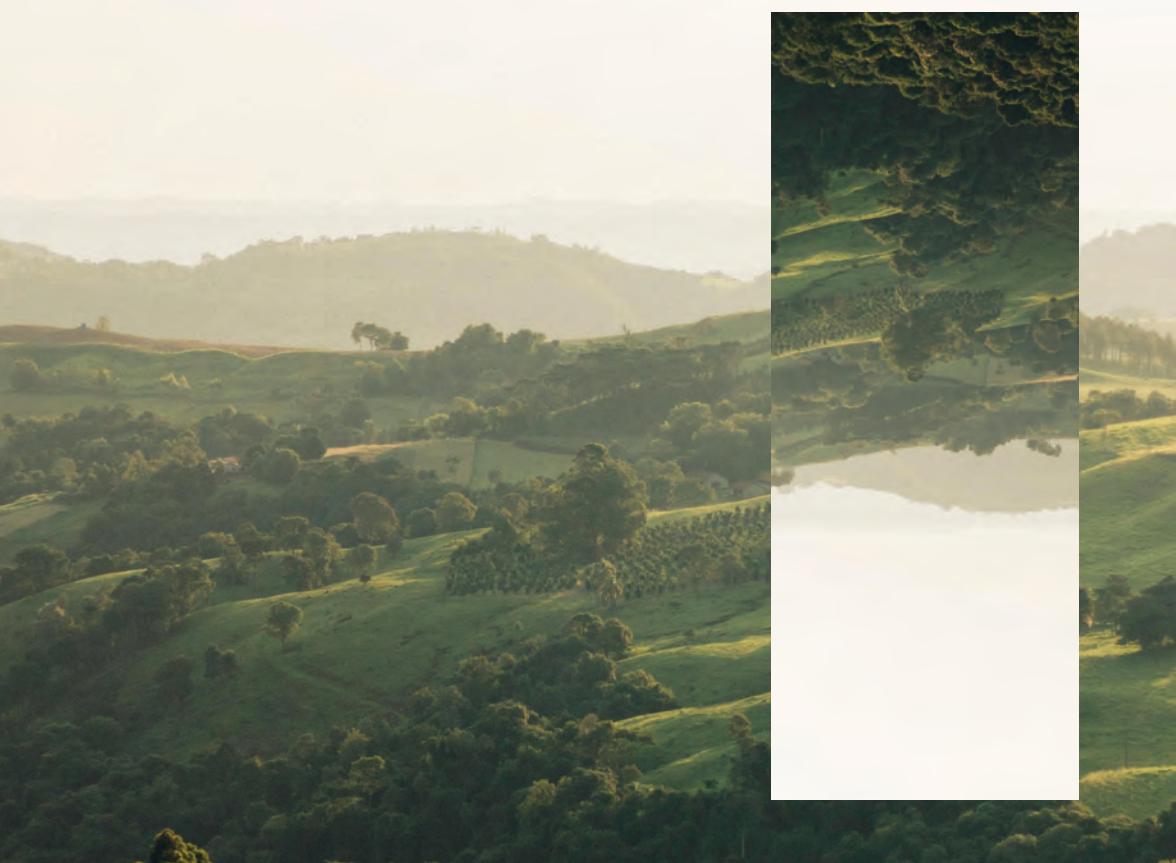
Q: How do Jesus' teachings continue to challenge the assumptions and values of our world today?

John 4:4–9: Jesus drew all kinds of people to Himself

Jesus crossed boundaries to love people whom others rejected. What should the composition of Jesus' followers look like in a church today? How can you love people who are different from you?

John 13:1–5, 34–35: Jesus loved beyond measure

Q: How does redefining love as sacrifice change the way that we live?



The Call of Discipleship

When Jesus called people to follow Him, He was calling them to an entirely new life – one centered on obedience, sacrifice, and transformation. The word disciple literally means “learner” or “apprentice,” and it’s so much more than a new self-help habit. To be a disciple is to reorient your whole life around becoming like your teacher. Jesus’ invitation to “follow me” is a call to stop following other things that falsely promise life and security. This study explores what it means to follow Jesus today – the calling, the cost, and the freedom that comes when someone chooses to walk in His steps.

Acts 11:25–26

Q: Do you think there's a difference between the terms disciple of Jesus and Christian? Does our culture emphasize one of those terms more than the other? What does the Bible say is the relationship between those terms?

Q: “Christian” wasn’t a label for self-identification – it was a term given to the disciples by outsiders. How might the disciples’ behavior have led to this new term “Christian”?

Q: In what ways has our culture redefined what it means to be a Christian, and how does this passage help correct that misunderstanding?

Q: What are some habits of disciples of Jesus that show they are following Him, not simply conforming to a self-identified title?

Mark 1:16–20

Q: What do you notice about Jesus' approach to calling His disciples? What kind of authority and confidence does He have? Is He apologetic about the all-in nature of the calling to follow Him?

Q: Why do you think they responded so quickly and completely? How do their responses challenge the way people often approach faith or obedience today?

Q: In order to follow Jesus, these men had to leave their nets – the things that made their lives familiar, comfortable, and secure. What "nets" may you need to leave in order to follow Jesus?

Q: By following Jesus, these men were signing up for a new identity – they went from fishermen to fishers of men. Following Jesus isn't just for your own benefit. In what ways will your discipleship have a direct impact on helping others to know Jesus?

Luke 9:23–26

Q: What does it mean to "deny yourself" as you follow Jesus? How is that different from simply denying bad behavior?

Q: What does Jesus' command reveal about the difference between cultural Christianity and true discipleship?

Q: How can you "take up your cross"? What are the places where following Jesus demands sacrifice and counter-cultural values? What aspects of discipleship might be met with resistance by others in your life?

Q: How can the promises of God fill us while we're being called to deny ourselves? Why are surrender and delayed gratification important traits for those following Jesus?

Luke 14:25–33

Q: Does Jesus seem to care more about the quantity or quality of followers? How can you tell?

Q: Jesus isn't literally telling His followers to hate others – that would contradict many of His other commands. However, He is intentionally using strong comparative language to express how much it costs to follow Him. What did you think when you first read this teaching?

Q: Family is an important commitment, but if we're not careful, it can become the master of our life. How can you be a good family member but still hold Jesus as your main priority?

Q: What do you think Jesus might tell someone who wants to follow Him but is feeling pressure or persecution from their family?

John 13:34–35

Q: How is love different from general kindness or politeness? What kind of love is Jesus describing here, and how has He modeled it for us?

Q: How does this kind of love distinguish disciples from the rest of the world?

Q: This love sounds beautiful in theory, but reality teaches us that it's hard-fought. What challenges might you anticipate that make it hard to love other disciples? How can we display true love by working through those challenges?

Q: How does the love and relationships between disciples bring glory to God?



Matthew 28:18–20

Q: What connection is there between Jesus' authority and His command to make disciples? Why is He alone worth following?

Q: Those who follow Jesus take up His mission to share the gospel with the world. Why should all disciples be active participants in the mission of Jesus?

Q: What insecurities or hesitations might keep you from helping others to follow Jesus?

Q: How does Jesus' promise of "I am with you always" shape your confidence in participating in His mission?

John 15:5–8

Q: What does Jesus' image of the vine and branches communicate about dependence, connection, and fruitfulness? How does this passage highlight the ongoing nature of discipleship?

Q: What are some external factors – like work, relationships, and finances – that could distract you from remaining in Jesus?

Q: What are some internal factors – like self-reliance, shame, or laziness – that could distract you from remaining in Jesus?

Q: What daily rhythms could help you stay deeply connected to Jesus so that your life produces lasting fruit?

Preparing for What's Next

Following Jesus is a personal decision, but the journey isn't private. Since the beginning, disciples lived, prayed, and grew together as a spiritual family, the way God designed it. In the next study, we'll discuss Church and Community. We'll explore how discipleship naturally (and sometimes deliberately) draws us into connection with one another. The Church becomes both the home and the mission of every follower of Jesus.

Between this Bible study and the next gathering, take some time to review these scriptures that highlight people responding to the call to follow Jesus. Each seeker joins the larger group of disciples who follow Jesus and carry with them their own gifts and needs. As you read these stories, consider the growing diversity and composition of followers. How can all these people be unified under such a simple calling? These scriptures will serve as a great transition between the The Call of Discipleship and Church and Community.

Luke 5:1–11: Peter leaves everything to follow Jesus

Q: How does Peter's reaction to Jesus serve as an example for us?

Mark 2:13–17: Jesus calls a tax collector to follow Him

Q: What does Levi's response teach about grace and belonging?

Luke 7:36–50: A woman's overflowing gratitude is met by Jesus' forgiveness

Q: How might entitlement, pride, and self-assurance prevent us from responding to Jesus like this woman?

John 4:4–30: Jesus speaks truth and gives hope to a woman caught in shame

Q: The compassion of Jesus doesn't cancel His call for us to be transformed. In what ways are you experiencing both grace and truth in your life?

Luke 19:1–10: Zacchaeus climbs a tree to see Jesus and leaves transformed

Q: While Jesus doesn't command those deeds, Zacchaeus' actions were proof of the transformation occurring in his heart. What specific changes are evident of the transformation occurring in your life?

John 21:15–19: After denying Jesus, Peter is forgiven and recommissioned

Q: How does Jesus' restoration of Peter redefine what it means to follow Him after failure? Are there any past failures you have trouble believing Jesus can forgive?





Church & Community

When Jesus calls someone to follow Him, He calls them into a family. From the very beginning, God's plan was to build a people, or a body, not just a collection of individuals. The Church isn't a building or a Sunday event. It's the living community of believers devoted to loving God and one another. It's the natural overflow of disciples making more disciples. This study explores what that community looked like in the Bible and why belonging to it is essential to following Jesus.

Acts 2:42–47

Q: What words or phrases describe the devotion and daily rhythm of this first community? How is devotion different from something suggested or occasional?

Q: How does this picture of church life differ from the way many people experience "church" today?

Q: What do you think caused this level of unity and joy among them? Why do you think so many people wanted to be part of this community?

Q: If this same spirit existed in your life and relationships, what changes would you expect to see in your connection with others and with God?

1 Corinthians 12:12–27

Q: Paul's metaphor paints a vivid picture of the Church as one body made up of many different parts. What does this reveal about how God designed His people to function together?

Q: What attitudes or cultural messages make it difficult to see interdependence as a strength rather than a weakness? How does this passage challenge the modern ideal of self-sufficiency?

Q: Comparison and insecurity often distort the way we see our place in God's family. How might these temptations weaken the unity and mission of the Church? How can we combat a spirit of comparison?

Q: What gifts, perspectives, or experiences has God uniquely entrusted to you, and how could you use those to strengthen others rather than compete or withdraw from them? What specific gifts and strengths have you seen in other disciples?

Ephesians 4:11–16

Q: According to this passage, what is God's plan for helping His people grow and mature?

Q: Paul says the different gifts were given in order to equip God's people for works of service. What is an example of a gift that only serves the individual as opposed to a gift that encourages those in the community?

Q: What happens when people stop contributing their gifts or isolate themselves from the body?

Q: Why is it important to have a view of God that cannot be reached without spiritual one-another relationships?

“

...so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God...

Ephesians 4:12–13



Hebrews 10:23–25

Q: What are some reasons people may begin neglecting community life? What habits make it easy to drift away from consistent fellowship?

Q: How can discouragement lead to larger challenges like insecurity, isolation, and self-reliance?

Q: What are some ways you can encourage and spur others on toward love and good deeds?

Q: It's easy to read these passages and be inspired by the ideal community. We may even be quick to dismiss it as unrealistic. But it does exist! When disciples of Jesus commit to something bigger than themselves, the Church becomes a powerful force in the world. Based on all of these scriptures, what changes in mindset and schedule do you need to make to be committed to other disciples and to the body of Christ, the Church?

Preparing for What's Next

God's community is beautiful, but it's full of real people who often fall short. Every community experiences tension, not because God has failed, but because sin separates us from Him and from one another. The next Bible study will focus on the topic of sin. We'll explore why brokenness exists in the world and how it distorts our relationship with God and others. Once we take responsibility for the role we've played in that separation, we can approach Jesus with brokenness, gratitude, and vision for a reconciled life in Him.



Between this Bible study and the next gathering, take some time to review these scriptures that illustrate different aspects of the one-another relationships we see throughout the Church.

Mark 2:1-12: A paralyzed man was carried by his friends

Q: What does this story teach about the kind of faith and friendship God desires within His community? How have others helped you to reach Jesus?

2 Corinthians 8:1-5: The Macedonian churches gave generously despite poverty

Q: How does Paul describe their attitude toward giving? What does it reveal about generosity as an overflow of devotion, not abundance?

Q: What might it look like for generosity to become a reflex of joy and gratitude rather than a reaction to pressure or guilt?

Acts 11:27-30: The disciples sent relief to believers in need

Q: How does this example show the Church's readiness to meet the practical needs of others?

Q: What might it look like for today's disciples to share resources with believers in different regions or seasons of hardship?

Galatians 6:1-2: Paul commanded believers to carry each other's burdens

Q: Why do you think "carrying each other's burdens" is central to the life of faith?

Q: What kinds of burdens – spiritual, emotional, or financial – might you be able to help shoulder for others right now?

Colossians 3:12-15: Paul described how believers should treat one another

Q: Which of these traits (kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness) comes most naturally to you, and which requires the Spirit's transformation?

Philippians 2:1-4: Paul called believers to reject selfish ambition and live in humility

Q: How do humility and service protect the community from pride and division? What practical ways can you elevate the needs of others this week?

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Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

Isaiah 59:1-2



The Problem of Sin

Sin separates us from God. Some sins seem insignificant, but every sin is a rebellion that infects our lives, our choices, our relationships, and even our heart's motives. Sin is a universal problem, but it requires a personal response. It twists good things into idols and blinds us to our need for grace. The good news is that our sin can be forgiven and we can be reconciled to God. The bad news is that many people fail to feel convicted about their sin and, as a result, their pledge to Christ becomes shallow and short-lived. This study explores what sin is, where it comes from, and God's gracious call for us to respond because He's already done the heavy lifting.

Romans 3:21–24

Q: What does this passage reveal about who needs grace? How does it level the playing field between the "moral" and the "immoral"?

Q: What do you think it means to "fall short of God's glory"? How does this go deeper than simply breaking a rule?

Q: Many people compare themselves to others and feel "good enough." Why do you think God measures us by His glory instead of our relative goodness?

Romans 6:20–23

Q: What is the difference between a wage and a gift? How does that help you understand the fairness of God's judgment and the generosity of His grace?

Q: What are some examples of the "wages" of your own choices? How have those choices produced spiritual death or distance from God?

Q: How does this verse confront the popular notion that sin is simply inherited or "just part of being human"? What does it reveal about personal responsibility?

Isaiah 59:1–2

Q: What assumptions does this passage correct about why people feel distant from God? How does Isaiah redirect the blame for that separation?

Q: This text describes sin as creating distance and hiddenness. What does that imagery communicate about the relational – not just moral – nature of sin?

Q: How do people today try to bridge that distance without addressing sin? What substitutes or distractions might we rely on instead of repentance?

Mark 7:20–23

Q: Jesus teaches that we are to blame for our own sin because it comes out from within. How does that truth challenge the view that people are naturally good but occasionally make mistakes?

Q: Is it easy for people to take responsibility for their sin, or is it common to shift the blame on to other people or circumstances? Does Jesus' teaching bring you any sobriety about your own sin?

Q: What stands out to you from this list Jesus gives? Which of these attitudes or behaviors are revealed in your own heart?

Q: Why do you think Jesus focuses on the heart rather than the external behaviors that are easier to emphasize?



Galatians 5:16–21

Q: As you read through this list, are there any terms you don't understand?

Q: Of the sins listed, which ones resonate most deeply with you?

Q: How does this list expose the selfish or relational nature of sin? What kinds of damage do these choices cause in families, friendships, or churches?

Q: Paul includes the phrase "and the like." What does that phrase teach us about how our heart should be toward avoiding all sin instead of meeting the technical requirements of righteousness?

James 4:17

Q: How does this verse expand your definition of sin beyond simply doing wrong?

Q: What kinds of "good" do people often delay or avoid doing altogether, and how does that mirror the same heart behind sins we willingly commit?

Q: Why do you think God holds us accountable for the good we omit, not just the sin we commit? How does this scripture help us to hit the mark – that is, the Glory of God?

Q: What decisions or changes in your life might reflect obedience to what you already know is good but haven't yet acted on?

Luke 7:36–50

Q: What differences do you notice between the woman's actions and Simon the Pharisee's response? What do their attitudes reveal about how each person views their own sin?



Q: Why is brokenness the right response to sin rather than defensiveness or denial? How does the woman's humility amplify Jesus' grace?

Q: How might religious pride or moral comparison prevent someone from truly experiencing forgiveness like this woman did?

Q: How would your relationship with God change if you saw your sin as she did – and then responded with gratitude, not shame?

Preparing for What's Next

When we come to grips with our sin, we become desperate for a Savior. The next Bible study will focus on The Cross, where God's love and justice meet. We'll see how Jesus' sacrifice paid the debt our sin deserves and offers freedom, forgiveness, and an opportunity for new life.

Between this Bible study and the next, read **Galatians 5:19–21** and **Mark 7:20–23**.

Reflect on which of these sins you've committed and how they've separated you from God and from others. Take time to note how you feel as you reflect. Sulking and shame are not healthy responses, but sobriety from the weight of sin moves us toward gratitude and the opportunity for a new life.

As you reflect on this, write out a list of sins in preparation for a time of confession.

Ask God to help you see sin the way He sees it – not to crush you with guilt, but to lead you to true brokenness and awaken your gratitude for His grace.

Scriptures about Confession: **Proverbs 28:13**, **Psalm 32:3–5**, **1 John 1:8–9**, **James 5:16**

The Cross

Jesus' death on the Cross is the greatest act of love in human history. The Cross is where sin's cost was paid, justice was satisfied, and mercy was made available to all. The horror of sin was overwhelmed by the heart of God.

This study traces the story of Jesus' sacrifice – foretold by the prophets, fulfilled in His obedience, and explained through the apostles. The goal isn't simply to understand what happened, but to wrestle with the role we played in His crucifixion. He died for all of us, but He also died for each of us. He died, specifically, for you. That kind of love compels us to seize the opportunity for a new life.

Isaiah 52:13–53:12

Q: What phrases describe the Servant's suffering and His purpose in enduring it? What does this prophecy reveal about the kind of Savior God promised?

Q: How often do we consider the gruesome reality of Jesus' sacrifice? How would our lives change if we spent more time humbled by the way His innocence had to suffer for our guilt?

Q: Isaiah says "we all, like sheep, have gone astray." What does it look like for someone to finally stop wandering and turn back to the Shepherd?

Q: What does this passage reveal about God's heart and long-term plan to win us back?

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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.

Isaiah 53:5

The Passion of Jesus

The next few sections of Scripture will be readings from Matthew's Gospel account of Jesus' crucifixion, often called His Passion. In each of these stories, reflect upon the different types of suffering Jesus withstood on our behalf – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. How did His trust in God and love for us propel Him to endure such intense suffering? Many others also witnessed the crucifixion. How did Jesus interact with them? How were their lives transformed?

Matthew 26:36–46: Gethsemane

Q: What does Jesus' prayer in the garden reveal about His humanity?
Q: What can we learn about surrender and trust from Jesus' words, "Not my will, but yours be done"?

Matthew 26:47–56: Jesus arrested

Q: What might Jesus have felt as He was betrayed by one of His closest friends?
Q: Not only did Judas betray Jesus, but all the other disciples deserted Him and fled. What level of strength and conviction did Jesus need in order to maintain righteousness, with God as His only support?

Matthew 26:57–68: Jesus falsely accused

Q: Jesus' life was so righteous that the only accusations that could be leveraged against Him were false. Ultimately, Jesus was convicted because He spoke the truth – He is the King of the Jews. How might Jesus have felt as He sat silently through those accusations? Why didn't He defend Himself?

Matthew 26:69–75: Peter denies Jesus

Q: Peter promised loyalty but failed under pressure, denying Jesus to a lowly servant girl. How does the level of fear Peter felt illustrate the severity of the crucifixion and suffering Jesus was about to undergo.
Q: How can Peter's story give hope to those who have failed God in moments of fear or weakness? What do you think Jesus would have told Peter as he felt the weight of his failure?

Matthew 27:1–10: Judas overcome by guilt

Q: Both Judas and Peter betrayed Jesus and wept bitterly, yet their responses were very different. What is lacking in Judas' response?
Q: How can Jesus' sacrifice move us toward transformation instead of shame?
Q: What might Jesus have told Judas as he felt the weight of his failure?

Matthew 27:11–26: Jesus before Pilate

Q: In what ways do people today still "wash their hands" of responsibility when faced with the truth about Jesus?
Q: What does this passage show about the tension between public approval and spiritual conviction?

Matthew 27:27–56: The Crucifixion

Q: As you read this scene, what images or emotions strike you most deeply?
Q: Which bystanders can you relate to the most? How does the experience of Barabbas personalize Jesus' death for your life?
Q: When Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He was quoting Psalm 2, claiming that He was the expected messiah. How does that deepen your understanding of His suffering and awareness of God's plan?
Q: The centurion declared, "Surely He was the Son of God." What do you think moved him from disbelief to recognition? How should the same realization change your life?

1 Peter 2:21–25

Q: This passage says Jesus “bore our sins in His body on the Cross.” How does that phrase help you visualize what He carried for you personally?

Q: What’s the difference between knowing Jesus died for sins and realizing He died for your sins specifically?

Q: Peter ended by saying we were like sheep who have returned to our Shepherd. How does the message of 1 Peter 2 redeem the wandering sheep mentioned in Isaiah 53? How is the Cross calling you to return to God?

Romans 5:6–8

Q: Why does Paul emphasize that Jesus died for the “ungodly”? How does that word challenge the notion of being a “good person,” or the idea that people can earn God’s love or forgiveness?

Q: Jesus’ death gives us the opportunity to turn back, but there’s still a chance that many will not be sufficiently stirred by His love. In fact, most will reject it. What does God’s sacrifice say about how much He desires to have even a few people turn back to Him?

Q: How might your view of yourself and others change if you truly believed God loved you while you were still powerless and undeserving?

2 Corinthians 5:14–15, 21

Q: Paul says “Christ’s love compels us.” What does the word “compel” suggest about the kind of response God desires from us? How is “compel” a more lasting word than the short-lived emotional responses that have become a staple of modern Christianity?

Q: According to this passage, how does Jesus’ death redefine the purpose of your life?

Q: If we are now called to “live for Him who died for us,” how should your life look different because of the Cross?





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For Christ's love
compels us,
because we are
convinced that
one died for all,
and therefore
all died.

2 Corinthians 5:14

Preparing for What's Next

The Cross shows us what sin costs and how far God was willing to go for the chance to bring us home. Jesus' death is an invitation, and it demands our response. The debt has been paid, but we must decide to journey toward new life. The next study, Repentance and Baptism, will explore how we participate in Jesus' death and resurrection – dying to sin, being buried with Him, and rising to walk in a new life.

Read **Matthew 26–27** in one sitting this week. As you read, write down every moment when Jesus displayed courage, obedience, or love in suffering.

It's not uncommon to connect to the Cross rationally but still have trouble feeling stirred in your heart. Many of us have become saturated and familiar with the language surrounding Jesus' death, and many of the physical and tortuous elements are foreign to our world. A medical account of crucifixion is a great tool to better understand the severity of the Cross, and the film *The Passion of the Christ* is an accurate and stirring visual display of Jesus' death.



Repentance & Baptism

At the conclusion of the last study, we read that "Christ's love compels us" (2 Corinthians 5:14).

The word "compels" means to be gripped, controlled, and carried forward by something greater than ourselves. The love displayed on the Cross is so powerful that it demands a response. We can't truly grasp what Jesus endured without asking, "What now? What should I do?"

Repentance and baptism are God's answers to that question. They are not small, symbolic gestures or spiritual milestones. They are deep, necessary, urgent, and transformative decisions that initiate new life. Repentance changes your direction and baptism changes your condition. Together, they represent Jesus as both Lord and Messiah in our lives.

Acts 2:36-41

Q: What does it mean to be "cut to the heart"? What caused the people's conviction to move from guilt to action? Why is this question – and desperation – a necessary attitude for salvation?

Q: What does it mean that Jesus is "Lord and Messiah (Savior/Christ)"? How do each of those titles change the course of our lives?

Q: What does it mean that repentance and baptism are "for the forgiveness of sins"? What does this mean for someone who has not repented or been baptized?

Q: How did the people process this command? What do you think about the command to "repent and be baptized"?

2 Corinthians 7:8-11

Q: Our world often rejects the notion of sorrow and remorse and paints a picture of God where He only wants our happiness. But this is not true! Why did God "intend" for them to become sorrowful? What are some examples in Scripture where righteous sorrow and brokenness lead to transformation?

Q: How do you see the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow in your own life? What does each produce?

Q: Paul describes repentance as something that produces earnestness, eagerness, indignation, longing, concern, and readiness. Have you experienced any of these traits in response to understanding your sin and reading about the Cross?

Q: How does this passage show that repentance is more than emotion or asking for forgiveness? Do you think a repentant person should look the same to those around them?

Acts 26:19-21

Q: What does this teach us about the relationship between faith and repentance? Why didn't Paul simply preach about belief or acceptance?

Q: Why do you think God expects visible change – not just private belief – as proof of repentance?

Q: By using the word "prove," Paul introduces accountability about our righteousness. Why are things like mentoring and feedback helpful when encountering the need for repentance? How do you feel about helping others – and being helped by others – on a journey toward repentance?

Q: How can repentance be visible in your life this week? What are some changes that can happen quickly? What are examples of changes you've been making already?

Romans 6:1–6

Q: Paul compares baptism to death, burial, and resurrection. What does that imagery reveal about what happens spiritually in baptism?

Q: How does this passage show that baptism isn't just a symbol, but a participation in Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection?

Q: What does "new life" mean to you personally? What within you needs to die in order for new life to be raised?

Q: Can a Christian simultaneously live out their old life and their new life? What would you say to someone who was baptized but never repented and died to their old life?

Acts 22:6–16

Q: As Paul retells his conversion story, he references many spiritual occurrences, like an audible voice and a blinding light. Despite these miraculous occurrences, upon which action does Paul link salvation? How do we balance the previous ways we may have experienced God, while still upholding the command to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins?

Q: How does Ananias' question "What are you waiting for?" speak to the urgency of baptism?

Q: What does it mean that baptism "washes away" sin? How does that connect to the forgiveness promised in Acts 2? Were Paul's previous actions enough without baptism?

Titus 3:3–7

Q: How does Paul describe his old life? Why is it important that, even after many years, someone is able to recognize a clear difference between their old life and the baptized life?

Q: The word that Paul used for washing is literal – it's never used figuratively

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

Acts 2:38

like "a feeling washed over me." How does "the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit" connect to baptism's role in transformation?

Q: Many people will argue against the necessity of baptism by saying it's a work. How does Paul communicate that baptism is necessary for salvation, but that baptism is not a work that we do?

Q: How does the Holy Spirit play an ongoing role in helping us to be more like Jesus? Why is the gift of the Holy Spirit an important part of our new life?

1 Peter 3:18–22

Q: What is Peter referring to when he says "pledge of a clear conscience"? Why is a clear conscience necessary for someone who wants to be born again?

Q: Peter compares baptism to Noah's flood – a moment of both judgment and salvation. How does that image deepen your understanding of baptism's seriousness and hope?

Q: If baptism is the moment we make a "pledge" to God, what does it look like to honor that commitment after you rise from the water?

Q: How do you feel about repentance and baptism? Is it something you're excited about, or do you have any reservations? If you took an honest self-assessment, what repentance and heart-work need to occur before you can, with a clear conscience, make Jesus the Lord of your life and be baptized?

Preparing for What's Next

Repentance and baptism are not the finish line, but they are essential decisions for everyone who wants to be a life-long disciple of Jesus. The prospect of committing to Jesus, being forgiven of your sin, and having a new life is exciting, and you may even want to run to the water right now. That urgency is a proper response. Life-altering decisions, however, should be made with conviction and not just emotion. Jesus tells the crowds that anyone who wants to follow Him (be a disciple) should first count the cost. The next study, Counting the Cost, will help you consider the joy, devotion, faithfulness, and endurance that's required for lifelong discipleship.

The following scriptures highlight the urgency and necessity of baptism:

Mark 16:15–16, Matthew 28:18–20, John 3:3–5, Acts 8:26–39, Acts 9:17–19, Acts 16:29–34, Hebrews 10:22

Take time to pray and reflect on what repentance means in your life right now.

Q: What attitudes, behaviors, or desires are you turning from?

Q: What will it look like to walk in newness of life, fully united with Jesus through baptism?

Q: Consider the first few Bible studies – The Word of God, The Call of Discipleship, and Church and Community. How can the principles from those studies help someone repent and surrender in baptism?

Q: Do you want to be baptized? Is there anything holding you back from committing to following Jesus and being reconciled to Him?



Counting the Cost

During His time on Earth, Jesus invited many people to follow Him. That invitation is still open to all of us today. Following Jesus means being willing to trade comfort for conviction and false security with true surrender. Anyone who proclaims "Jesus is Lord" is forfeiting self-rule and the priority of anything above God. The decision to follow Jesus is not about checking boxes or attending worship services, but about reorienting every aspect of life around His kingdom. However, part of the cost you are counting is that you should be attending worship services, devoted to the Church, spending consistent time with Him, and having fruits of repentance. A new heart and a new life are both part of the transformation that comes from following Jesus.

Jesus never tricked people into following Him. He spoke plainly about discipleship, and many times the crowd thinned out as He taught. Following Jesus will cost you everything. Yet He promised that everything surrendered would be replaced by something far greater – life to the full, an abundant spiritual family, joy that lasts, and treasure that never fades.

This study helps you weigh the cost honestly and appreciate the immeasurable worth of what you gain in return.

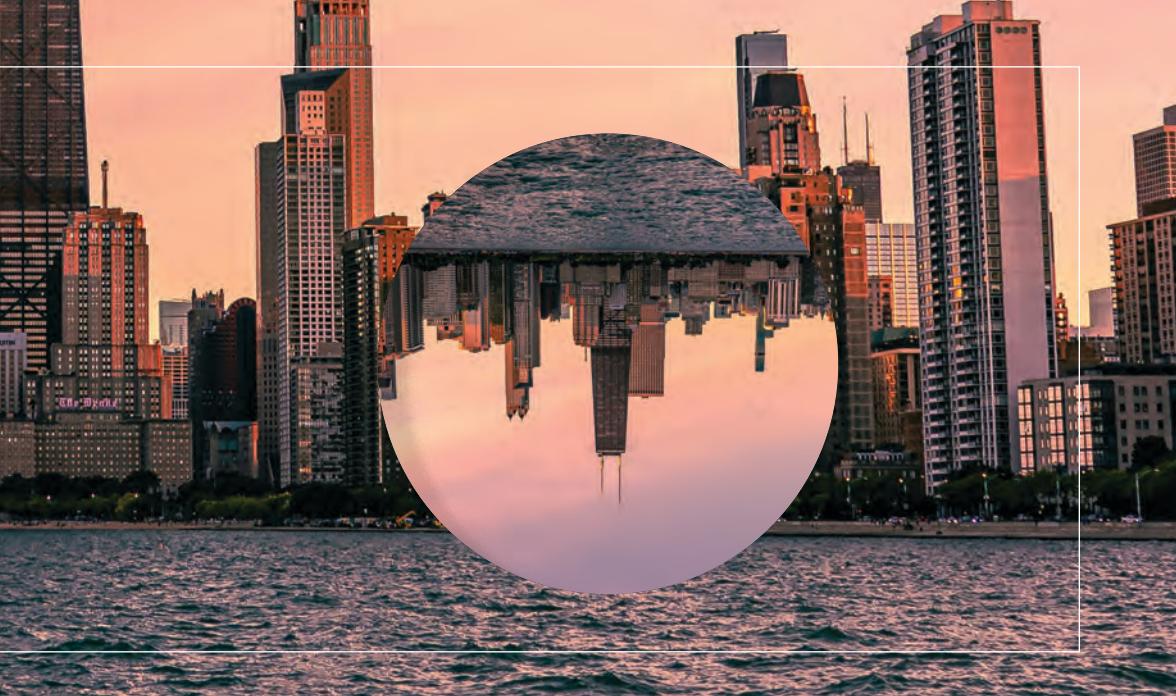
Luke 14:25-33

Q: Why do you think Jesus intentionally warned people about the cost of following Him instead of minimizing it or selling them on only the "good" parts?

Q: What does it mean to "give up everything" to follow Jesus? How does this challenge cultural ideals about comfort, autonomy, and personal freedom?

Q: Jesus compared discipleship to building a tower or fighting a battle – both of which need to be completed. Why is it important to consider the life-long commitment and not just the emotional high of right now?

Q: What priorities or attachments might be hardest for you to surrender to God's control?



Matthew 13:44–46

Q: What do these short parables teach about the joy of sacrifice? How can someone have joy despite giving up everything?

Q: No one would sell everything if the treasure was only slightly better than what they already had. How does the value of God's kingdom far outweigh the trajectory of life lived on your own terms?

Q: Are you experiencing joy in your pursuit of God? If so, how? If not, what might be preventing that from happening?

Luke 8:4–15

Q: What do the different types of soil reveal about the possible responses to God's Word? Which soil do you most identify with right now?

Q: The rocky soil represents those who begin to follow Jesus with joy but fail to develop deep roots. What can you do to develop deep roots and convictions?

Q: The soil close to thorns represents those who begin to follow Jesus but remain too intertwined with the world. What temptations and trappings of the world would be most likely to choke your faith?

Q: Jesus says the good soil represents those who "hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop." What does perseverance look like in your spiritual life?

Galatians 5:22–25

Q: The Fruit of the Spirit sits in opposition to the list of sins mentioned just a few verses earlier. Which of these "fruits" are you most eager to see develop in your life?

Q: How do these fruits and the power of the Holy Spirit help you to crucify the desires of the flesh?

Q: What practices can help you stay "in step with the Spirit"?



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...and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Matthew 13:44

Mark 10:28–31

Q: How does this passage help us view discipleship as investment rather than deprivation? How does Jesus respond to Peter's concern?

Q: Jesus promises some physical abundance, but He also promises fullness through relationships. How is God supporting you through your spiritual relationships?

Q: Eternal life will certainly be worth enduring the trials of this life, but sometimes heaven can seem so far away. Why is it important that Jesus also promises abundance in this age?

Hebrews 12:1–3

Q: Why do you think the author uses Jesus Himself as the example of perseverance? How does "the joy set before Him" help reframe the way we see our own hardships?

Q: How can fixing your eyes on Jesus – rather than on comfort, comparison, or control – give you strength to finish the race?

Preparing for What's Next

How has your faith in Jesus grown? Are you excited about repentance and making Jesus the Lord of your life? How have relationships with other disciples spurred you on? Are you ready to be baptized?

Don't be surprised if doubts or temptations seem to increase over the next few days. Satan hates when people choose to follow Jesus, and he will use every tool at his disposal to drain your faith. Keep reading God's Word. Keep praying. Consider selecting a day to fast as you make the decision to begin a new life in Him.

Jesus never promised that following Him would be easy, but He did promise it would be worth it. The following passages are about the promises He offers to those who walk faithfully with Him.

For each passage, answer these three questions:

Q: What is Jesus promising? Can you truly find this promise anywhere else?

Q: How does this promise impact you in the present?

Q: How will this promise impact you throughout a lifetime of discipleship?

Matthew 11:28–30, Matthew 19:29, John 8:12, John 10:10–11, John 14:1–3



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Very truly I tell you,
unless a kernel of
wheat falls to the
ground and dies,
it remains only a
single seed. But if
it dies, it produces
many seeds.

John 12:24



CHICAGO CHURCH OF CHRIST

8745 W. Higgins Rd. Suite 110
Chicago, IL 60631
United States

www.chicagochurch.org
info@chicagochurch.org



You might be seeking God, but did you know He's already seeking you?

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Yes, He thinks you're worth it.

Yes, He's still seeking you.

Are you ready to start following Him?



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ISBN 978-1-971098-01-2



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