



I have de-cid-ed to fol-low Je-sus,
The world be-hind me, though none go with me,
Will you de-cide now to fol-low Je-sus?

READY

TO FOLLOW

no turn-ing back, no turn-ing
no turn-ing back, no turn-ing
no turn-ing back, no turn-ing
no turn-ing back, no turn-ing
no turn-ing back, no turn-ing

ARE YOU READY?

Have questions? Good! Questions are how we learn. This book is intended to give **SIMPLE ANSWERS** to questions about Jesus. Could we go deeper? Definitely. We don't want to overwhelm or overcomplicate things, however. People have spent their entire lifetimes devoted to these questions, but here in this study, we simply want to take the **FIRST STEPS** toward understanding who Jesus is and what it means to be his follower.

In this book, we hope to show you **WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** about Jesus and why it is important to know who he is. Ultimately, when it comes to the questions in this book, you must give an answer yourself. Jesus himself is asking and is waiting to hear what your answer will be.

There are many ways to talk about someone becoming a Christian. People can “convert,” they can become “believers,” they can get “born again,” and they can get “saved.” All of these ideas are found in the Bible. There isn't just one way of talking about it, but the simplest way is to use the words Jesus himself spoke: “**FOLLOW ME.**” (MATTHEW 16:24)

Christians are “followers” of Jesus Christ (another word for follower is “disciple”). Following requires movement. People who become Christians don’t just “decide” something. Instead, they begin a journey which takes time, commitment, and action.

Some followers of Jesus have understood much. Some have understood very little. What is important is to take the first steps, then keep growing. When someone goes to college, they don’t go because of how much they already know, they go because they want to learn more. A person needs fundamentals to go to college (how to read, write, and do math), but there is so much more to learn. A person needs fundamentals to follow Jesus. You don’t have to understand everything about him (which is impossible), but you do need to understand enough to make an informed decision. This book is meant to provide the important fundamentals.

The decision to follow Jesus is **YOURS ALONE**. No one else can make it for you. No one else decides when you are ready. That is solely between you and God, but don’t waste time in limbo and indecision.

Let’s get started and ask those questions!

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1. WHO IS JESUS?

Jesus himself asked this question.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.”

MATTHEW 16:13-17

“WHO IS JESUS?” It is a simple question, but it is also a difficult one.

We don’t want to be fooled. People in the days of Jesus didn’t want to be misled, either. Others had come pretending to be the Messiah, but it turned out they were not what they claimed. Is Jesus really who he says he is?

We don’t want unnecessary trouble. Many people who have believed in Jesus have been put in jail, mistreated, and even killed. It is sometimes a dangerous thing to say, “Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Is it worth the risk?

We don't want to have false hope. The promise of the Old Testament was that the Messiah was going to make things right. He would show people the way back to God. He would defeat the enemies of God's people. He would bring a kingdom of peace, justice, and mercy. It is heartbreaking to put your hope in someone and then be disappointed. Can we really put all of our hope and trust in him?

Some people believe Jesus was just a fairy tale—that he never existed. Some believe he was a good teacher who did good things, but was not the Messiah. Some people believe he lied about being the Son of God. Some believe he was just crazy. Christians believe he was who he claimed to be and that the Bible gives the truth about what he did, what he said, and who he was.

If we are to grasp what the Bible says about Jesus, we need understand these words:

MESSIAH: The word “Messiah” is a Hebrew word which means, “anointed one.” The kings of the Jews were anointed with oil by prophets which designated them as God's chosen king. (1 SAMUEL 16:13) Many prophets in the Old Testament talked about a coming “Messiah” who would be the greatest king the people of Israel ever had. The Jewish people in the New

Testament were eagerly waiting for the Messiah—the new king—to appear. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan river by John the Baptist. At that precise moment, the Holy Spirit came down from heaven and rested upon him. (MATTHEW 3:16) Jesus wasn't anointed by a prophet (spokesman for God), he was anointed by God himself. The word, "Christ" is the word in the Greek language which also means, "anointed one." The words "Messiah" and "Christ" can be used interchangeably. Both refer to Jesus being king.

SON OF GOD: Family was very important in Biblical times. It was very rare for a child to grow up and move away from home—especially sons. Rather, a son would take over his father's business and keep the family name going. Who your father was meant a great deal. It is how people would refer to you. Many simply thought Jesus was the son of Joseph the carpenter, (MARK 6:3, LUKE 4:22) but in reality, Jesus came directly from God. This is the reason he is called "the Son of God." This phrase doesn't mean he is less than God; it indicates he is equal with God. (JOHN 5:18) Jesus is God become flesh (a person). (JOHN 1:14) When Christians talk about Jesus being

the “Son of God,” they are talking about him being the very embodiment of God’s presence. (COLOSSIANS 1:19)

SON OF MAN: This was Jesus’s favorite term he used about himself. It is a phrase that made it clear he was fully human even though he was also fully God. The term, “Son of Man,” was very important in a vision in the Jewish Scriptures. (DANIEL 7:9-14) In the vision, the “Ancient of Days” (God the Father) is sitting on his throne passing judgments on people and kingdoms. Authority is taken away from other kings, but it is given to the “Son of Man,” and “his dominion is everlasting” and “his kingdom will never be destroyed.” In using this term, Jesus was connecting himself with the fulfillment of that prophecy. He was asserting divine authority.

LORD: This is a simple term, but an important one. To call someone “lord,” is to recognize that they are worthy of honor and that they are the one in charge and the one who rightfully gets to make decisions. Jesus is above anyone else. He is “Lord of lords” and “King of kings.” (REVELATION 17:14) The simplest confession a follower of Christ can make is: “Jesus is Lord.” It is simple but profound. It means that Jesus is in charge of our lives and we submit to his ways

and trust in his promises. If we make this confession from our hearts—in honesty and commitment, we are promised salvation. (ROMANS 10:9)

Knowing Jesus is a life-long pursuit. He can never be fully understood because he is beyond our comprehension. He is so much more than what we can quantify or put into words. We can't know everything about him, but we can know him as a friend, brother, lord, and king. Jesus invites us to follow him, learning as we go. Our role is to submit ourselves to him so that he can belong to us and we can belong to him.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- LUKE 2:8-15
- MATTHEW 17:1-8
- MARK 2:23-28

QUESTIONS

1. What things have you heard others say about Jesus? What have you said about him?
2. What are some stories you know about Jesus?
3. Many people like the idea of Jesus being their savior, but Jesus is so much more. He is also king. What does the word, “savior” mean? What does the word, “king” mean? How is Jesus both?

2. WHAT DID JESUS DO?

The Bible in its entirety tells us the story of God and his people. In particular, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tell us about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. These books are called the “Four Gospels.” They all tell the same gospel (“good news”) about Jesus, but they provide different perspectives, details, and emphases.

Below is a list of the main events in the life of Jesus, but we strongly encourage you to **READ FOR YOURSELF** the inspired accounts. They are books you should read and re-read throughout your life as you endeavor to follow Christ.

Jesus **CAME FROM GOD**. (JOHN 1:14, 8:42)

Jesus was **BORN OF A VIRGIN**. (MATTHEW 1:18-25)

Jesus was **BAPTIZED** by John in the Jordan River to fulfill all righteousness. In that moment **GOD SPOKE** and the **HOLY SPIRIT CAME DOWN** and stayed on him. (MATTHEW 3:13-17)

Jesus **TAUGHT TRUTH** and showed the power of God by **PERFORMING MIRACLES** and **DRIVING OUT DEMONS**. (ACTS 2:22)

Jesus lived a **SINLESS LIFE**, always doing the things which pleased his heavenly Father. (JOHN 8:29, 2 CORINTHIANS 5:21)

Jesus was **ARRESTED, TORTURED, AND EXECUTED** by crucifixion. When this happened, he took away the sin of the world. (1 CORINTHIANS 15:3, HEBREWS 9:23)

Jesus was **BURIED**, but then **CAME BACK TO LIFE** in order to conquer death for everyone who trusts in him. (1 CORINTHIANS 15:4, ROMANS 6:5-10)

Jesus **ASCENDED** 40 days after his resurrection and went back up into heaven to be with God the Father. He is there now, but one day will **COME BACK** and all his followers, both alive and dead, will live with him forever. (JOHN 14:1-3, ACTS 1:9-11, 1 THESSALONIANS 4:16-17)

The story of Jesus is the story of **VICTORY**. He overcame sin by living a perfect life. He overcame the broken kingdoms of the world by establishing his good, spirit-filled, eternal kingdom. He overcame death by letting himself be killed and rising from the grave, breaking the power of death. One day, when he returns, he will win the ultimate victory, and his followers will share in it. The passage below is a poem about how Jesus was both humble and victorious.

[Jesus], Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-11
- HEBREWS 9:24-28
- ISAIAH 53:1-12

QUESTIONS

1. The word, “gospel,” means “good news.” How is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus good news?
2. A priest intercedes for people in the presence of God—they “stand in the gap” and offer sacrifices on behalf of people’s sins. How is Jesus the greatest priest who offers the greatest sacrifice?

3. DO YOU WANT WHAT JESUS OFFERS?

When people talk about becoming a Christian, the idea of salvation is first and foremost. This is appropriate because Jesus is our savior. Salvation, however, is not just a “ticket to heaven.”

JESUS OFFERS SALVATION: You are going to die. It is the fate of every person. (HEBREWS 9:27) God did not “make” death when he created the world and put the first people in the Garden of Eden. **DEATH CAME BECAUSE OF SIN.** (ROMANS 6:23) Sin is disobedience and rebellion, and it makes us enemies of our perfect and holy God. (COLOSSIANS 1:21) Because of sin, the relationship between God and us was severed and so was access to the unending life he provides.

We are in desperate need of someone to bring us back into the life and love of God. Good news! We have such a savior. **JESUS SAVES US** from the fate of death and offers us eternal life. He opens for us the way back to the Father. (JOHN 14:6) He overcomes the power of sin and death and brings us back into a right relationship with God. In biblical terms, he “justified” us, “making us righteous.” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:11)

JESUS OFFERS TRANSFORMATION: Not only does Jesus save us *from* the consequences of sin and death, he saves us *for* **A NEW AND BETTER LIFE**. In his book, Just Like Jesus, Max Lucado writes, “God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you there. He wants you to be just like Jesus.” God does his work of transformation in us.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

This passage is drawing a comparison between how God changes us and how he changed Moses in the Old Testament. When Moses went into God’s presence, he would come back out and his face would glow. This frightened the people of Israel so he wore a veil over his face. (EXODUS 34:29-35) Our faces don’t literally glow, but we are supposed to shine God’s love and goodness in our lives. We “are being transformed” (it is an ongoing process) and we are becoming more and more like Jesus as we continue to walk in faith. Being saved by Jesus isn’t just a one-and-done moment, **SALVATION IS A JOURNEY**—a life-long transformation.

JESUS OFFERS LIFE: Jesus offers us eternal life. It doesn't simply begin after we die however, it begins when we believe.

“Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself.

JOHN 5:24-26

The life Jesus offers is rich and beautiful. It is not an easy life, but it is good life and spiritually rewarding. It is a life lived in the presence of God—basking in his love and mercy. In Christ, we are promised to one day live forever surrounded by the glory of God, Right now we hope and wait, enjoying his very real blessings, experiencing a taste of the glory to come.

JESUS OFFERS THE HOLY SPIRIT: When we follow Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit who comes and lives inside us. The Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the God-head (the Trinity). His presence in our lives isn't just a feeling, it is **A PROMISE**.

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

promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

ACTS 2:38-39

As we grow in Christ, we become more “in tune” with the Holy Spirit within us. We walk/live by the Holy Spirit, (GALATIANS 5:16) bear his fruit, (GALATIANS 5:22-23) and boldly fan into flame the gifts he bestows. (2 TIMOTHY 1:6-7) The good news is that we don’t need to know *how* the Holy Spirit works, we simply need to be willing to **LET HIM USE US** for the glory of God’s kingdom.

JESUS OFFERS RECONCILIATION: When something is separated, it requires effort to bring it back together. Mankind’s relationship with God was severed by sin, but now through the saving work of Christ, we have been reconciled back to God. (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18) Not only have we been reconciled back to a right relationship with our heavenly Father, but we are also being reconciled back to a **RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH EACH OTHER**. The church (the family of believers in Jesus) is supposed to be a community full of love, grace, and compassion for one another. (EPHESIANS 2:14) It is important to understand that Jesus **OPENED UP THE WAY FOR EVERYONE** into the promises of God. We are all now one family regardless of we were before we came to Christ. (EPHESIANS 2:19)

Jesus offers us so much, it is difficult to even wrap our minds around it all, but we need to remember that he offers it on **HIS TERMS**. We don't determine how we get salvation, transformation, eternal life, the Holy Spirit, or reconciliation. These are found in Jesus alone and are his gifts to us. We must trust (have faith) in his methods and generosity—not attempt to take hold of salvation based on our own endeavors and assumptions.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- MATTHEW 5:3-12
- JOHN 10:7-15
- JOHN 14:1-7
- JOHN 14:25-27

QUESTIONS

1. We have such blessings when we follow Jesus, but they are often “upside down” blessings. How are the blessings of Jesus different than the blessings of the world?
2. Jesus promises “life abundant” or “life to the full” in JOHN 10:10. In what ways does Jesus give us a more complete life?

4. WILL YOU GIVE WHAT JESUS REQUIRES?

We cannot do anything to earn the gift of God. His salvation is far too valuable. The only reason we can receive it is because it has already been paid for by the precious blood of Christ. It is important to understand however, that while **GRACE IS FREE**, it is **NOT CHEAP**. Grace is freely given, but in order to receive it, we have to be willing to turn loose of everything else we would hold on to. Jesus cannot be one thing among many. He must be first and foremost. He must be everything.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in, The Cost of Discipleship, wrote, “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance...” whereas “costly grace is the treasure hidden in a field; for the sake of it a man will go and sell all he has.” (MATTHEW 13:45-46) We cannot hope to receive the blessings of Jesus without turning to **FOLLOW THE WAY** of Jesus.

THEN JESUS SAID TO HIS DISCIPLES, “WHOEVER WANTS TO BE MY DISCIPLE MUST DENY THEMSELVES AND TAKE UP THEIR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.

MATTHEW 16:24

We *must* “deny ourselves.” We *must* say, “no” to the ungodly things we desire. We *must* say “no” to the ways of the world. We *must* be willing to make sacrifices and take up our cross. Grace is free, but it demands that we conform our lives to continually look more like Jesus. This is evident in Jesus’s teaching on forgiveness. If we hope to be forgiven, we are required to forgive others. (MATTHEW 6:15) By forgiving, we don’t “earn” forgiveness, but we let forgiveness do its work to produce love and compassion in our own hearts. The apostle Paul warns against the presumptuous thinking that grace doesn’t require life change.

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

ROMANS 6:1-3

To follow Jesus and receive the grace he offers, we must be willing to “die to sin.” This doesn’t mean we have to be perfect. **NO ONE CAN BE PERFECT** except Jesus alone, but we must be willing every day to commit our lives to the teachings of Jesus and reject the ways of sin. In another place, the apostle Paul

shows us what that looks like: we don't live by the flesh, but rather by the Spirit.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

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

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Galatians 5:16-25

A person wanting to follow Christ must understand both what Jesus offers and what he requires. He requires obedience. This does not mean perfection, but it does mean an honest attitude of submission to follow and live according to his ways.

The good news is that when we give up worldly ways to follow Christ, we aren't losing anything of value.

Compared with Jesus, the only thing we give up is “**RUBBISH.**” (PHILIPPIANS 3:8) We are so much better off without it. Jesus calls us to relinquish everything, but in the end, all we lose are worthless burdens. In Christ we gain everything that is truly good.

We also need to understand that Jesus expects those of us who follow him to **LEAD OTHERS TO HIM.** Christians don’t just receive grace, it is our job to extend to others the same grace that was extended to us. The call to make disciples is not a secondary command—it is primary in the life of a Christian. These were the final words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew.

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:18-20

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- MATTHEW 22:36-40
- JOHN 14:15-17
- 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21
- 1 JOHN 4:7-12

QUESTIONS

1. How important is love to God? If a Christian doesn't love others, then is that person really a Christian?
2. How does being a "new creation" give us a new identity? A new way of living? A new purpose?

5. WILL YOU COMMIT TO JESUS?

To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.

REVELATION 3:21

Jesus calls us to be “victorious.” The only way a runner can win is if he finishes the race. (1 CORINTHIANS 9:24) The only way we can be victorious in Christ is if we never give up. We will have ups and downs. We will have successes and failures. Through it all, we **MUST BE COMMITTED** to continuing in our faith over the course of our entire lifetime.

The decision to follow Christ should not be made lightly. It is not unlike marriage. When people get married, they vow to be faithful to each other, “until death.” When we decide to follow Jesus, we not only vow to be faithful until we die, our hope is that we can be his faithful people throughout all eternity.

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

HEBREWS 10:35-36

Because the decision to follow Jesus is a life-long commitment, people need to be old enough to grasp what a commitment is before they devote themselves to Christ. While some groups practice infant baptism, we believe very young children don't need to get baptized because they are already accepted by Jesus in their innocence, (MATTHEW 19:14) they don't have sinful lifestyles that need to be repented of, and they don't have the capacity to make the kind of commitment necessary. There is no set age requirement, but becoming a Christian is a life-long decision everyone needs to be able to **MAKE FOR THEMSELVES.**

We are warned in Scripture that if we give our lives to Jesus, then later stop following, it would have been better had we never believed in the first place. (2 PETER 2:20-21) This is an unsettling passage, but we need to remember that **WE ARE NOT ALONE.** When you follow Jesus, you join a family of believers who also are trying to follow Jesus. We help each other and encourage each other to push through even when it gets hard. The church isn't perfect. It is made of imperfect people, but the church is a source of great comfort and help.

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we

may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

HEBREWS 10:23-25

In 2 TIMOTHY, the apostle Paul anticipates that he doesn't have much time left, so he writes,

For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

2 TIMOTHY 4:6-8

It is such a good thing to become a Christian. Our hope as followers of Christ is that everyone will come to know Jesus as their lord and savior, but our prayer is also that no one will give up and thereby throw away the future which lays in store for them. Don't be afraid to follow Jesus, but be committed to **FOLLOWING THROUGH** with what you start.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- MATTHEW 24:10-13
- HEBREWS 12:1-3
- REVELATION 21:1-7

QUESTIONS

1. Why would it be worse for people to believe then fall away as opposed to never believing at all? (2 PETER 2:20-21)
2. How can we be encouraged to persevere by the example of Jesus who didn't give up even though it meant death on the cross?

6. How Do You Follow JESUS?

How do you accept the grace Jesus offers? What things do you need to do in order to become a Christian? The things listed below are specifically commanded by Jesus and we see clear examples of people in the Bible doing them as they begin their walk with Christ.

LISTEN: The first thing we must do is let the message of Jesus inside us. He often spoke about the importance of being willing to listen. (MARK 4:9) Jesus quoted Isaiah the prophet and talked about how dangerous it is to refuse to hear God's message.

For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.'

MATTHEW 13:15

No one can come to Jesus unless they hear the message about him. (ROMANS 10:14) Even when God's message is shared, not everyone is open to receiving it, however. (LUKE 8:4-15) We have to be willing to listen with our hearts, letting the truth change us.

BELIEVE: If, after listening, we believe in Jesus and put our trust in him as our lord and king, then we are coming into the salvation he is offering. (JOHN 3:16) Jesus frequently talks about how important belief is, especially in the Gospel of John.

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."

JOHN 6:40

The apostles spoke about the importance of believing as they shared the message of Jesus with others.

"All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

ACTS 10:43

Another word for "belief" is "faith." It is impossible to follow Jesus or to be pleasing to God unless we have faith in him. (HEBREWS 11:6)

REPENT: The word, "repent," is often misunderstood. Many people associate it with "being sorry." Godly sorrow is important in that it motivates us to repentance, (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10) but sorrow and repentance are not the same thing. To repent means

to turn, to change directions, to stop going one way and start going another. Repentance is from the heart, but it needs to be visible in our behaviors and actions. (MATTHEW 3:8)

If we are guilty of doing things that go against the teachings of Jesus, we are required to stop and change our lives to more closely align with his ways. We all make mistakes. We all fail. Repentance doesn't mean perfection, but it does have to do with lifestyle. Are we habitually doing things that go against God's will? If so, we need to break those habits. Are we continually putting ourselves in situations where we are vulnerable to our temptations? If so, we need to stay away. Are we complacent in our lack of obedience? If so, we need to pray—and ask others to pray (ACTS 8:22-24) for God to soften our hearts.

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

MARK 1:15

CONFESS: Jesus doesn't want us to keep our faith to ourselves. If we believe in him, we must be willing to confess it by confidently speaking about him out loud where others can hear. If we are too ashamed to

tell others that we believe in Jesus, then we are not ready to follow him.

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.”

MATTHEW 10:32-33

Just before Jesus went back up into heaven, he told his followers that they were going to bear witness about him. (ACTS 1:8) Throughout the entire book of Acts, we see them doing just that. Confessing and believing go hand in hand. We are to confess what we believe in the hope that others can hear and believe it as well.

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

ROMANS 10:9

Before someone is baptized, they should have the opportunity to make the good confession. A good question to ask is the same one Jesus asked, “Who do you say Jesus is?” (MATTHEW 16:15) It is an important question and God himself is listening to hear what our answer will be. To become a Christian, we are called to confess Jesus, and then keep confessing him for the rest of our lives.

BE BAPTIZED: The word “baptize” is a strange word. It comes from the Greek language the New Testament was written in. It means “immerse.” Over the course of Christian history, some have used sprinkling or pouring, but in the days of Jesus and his apostles, baptism referred to being completely dipped in water. The topic of baptism can be complicated. Christians in different times and places have intensely debated it, but we encourage you to explore what the Bible says about it.

Jesus himself was baptized by “John the baptizer.” God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all were present at his baptism and that moment launched Jesus’s earthly ministry.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented. As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

MATTHEW 3:13-17

When Jesus was baptized, it was “proper” and it “pleased” God the Father. When we get baptized, it is

good and pleases God, too. Baptism was so important that it was among the last things Jesus told his followers to go and do.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:19-20

Throughout the book of Acts, when people came to believe in Jesus, they were baptized. (ACTS 2:41, 8:12, 8:38, 9:18, 10:48, 16:15, 16:33, 18:8, 19:5)

In baptism, we die to our old self and bury our old way of life in the water so that we can start anew. (ROMANS 6:3-4) Because we are baptized, we share in the Holy Spirit and become part of the body of Christ—the church. (1 CORINTHIANS 12:13) When we come up out of the water, we have put on Christ like a new set of clothes. (GALATIANS 3:27) In so doing, we receive salvation and can come before God with a clean conscience. (1 PETER 3:21)

There are some things about Baptism which require clarification:

Baptism is **NOT A WORK**. It is not something we do to accomplish or earn our own salvation. Salvation is by

grace through faith—not through works. (EPHESIANS 2:8-9) Instead of a work, baptism is a **SURRENDER** to the saving power of the blood of Jesus. Baptism has very little to do with our actions, it has everything to do with what God is doing in us.

Baptism is **NOT A TRANSACTION**. When we get baptized, we aren't bartering goods and services. We aren't doing "our part" so that God does "his part." As the water rushes over us, we relinquish all of our arrogance and entitlements. God doesn't owe us anything, but he **FREELY GIVES** us salvation out of his great love in this moment of surrender and commitment.

Baptism **IS FOR SALVATION AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**. This is what ACTS 2:38 and 1 PETER 3:21 unequivocally say. In light of this, baptism is essential. It is a command of Jesus himself and needs to be obeyed by every person who desires to follow him.

Baptism **IS TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT**. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is not a bonus for the super-Christian. The Holy Spirit is promised to all those who are baptized in ACTS 2:38. We may not understand the gift of the Holy Spirit—we don't have

to. We simply need to believe and trust the promise as we open up our lives to his transforming presence.

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

EPHESIANS 1:13-14

Jesus **WELCOMES EVERYONE** who comes to him. He is not about the business of placing unnecessary burdens on anyone. Quite the contrary—he eases them. (MATTHEW 11:29-30) He didn’t require anyone to prove they were good enough or smart enough or capable enough. He accepted people as they were as long as they were ready to follow him completely.

The same invitation is open to you that Peter spoke long ago:

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

ACTS 2:38

Listening, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized are just the beginning. They should not be considered separate “steps” in and of themselves. They are interwoven in perfect harmony. Together,

they carry us through the door to a lifetime of service in the kingdom of God and an eternity of praise in his presence.

Are you ready? What is keeping you from doing what Jesus asks and becoming his follower?

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- ACTS 8:26-40
- ACTS 10:24-48
- ACTS 16:23-33

QUESTIONS

1. How important is belief? If we don't believe, does hearing, repenting, confessing, or getting baptized do anything?
2. In the Bible, the word, "confess" refers to "confessing Jesus as Lord" (ROMANS 10:9) and also "confessing our sins" (MARK 1:5, JAMES 5:16, 1 JOHN 1:9). Why are both important?
3. Why did the people in the book of Acts need to get baptized? Why do we need to be baptized today?

7. WHO IS JESUS?

Once again we ask the question. This study has sought to give the answers the Bible gives. Now it comes to you; **WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?** Who do you believe Jesus is? What are you going to do about it?

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is regarded by many to be the greatest sermon ever preached. In it, Jesus talks about the way we should live, how we should treat each other, and how important it is to have a right heart and right actions as we strive to serve God. At the end of the sermon, Jesus closed with this story:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

MATTHEW 7:24-27

What are you going to do with the words of Jesus? Are you going to put them into practice? Are you going to just listen or are you going to listen *and*

obey? If Jesus is Lord, then the only proper response to his Lordship is to do the things he has asked us to do.

We implore you—believe in Jesus, obey him, follow him, and receive the gift of salvation he offers. Be reconciled to God and be added to his kingdom.

Don't be shy. Out of all the things in this world, this is the one to be bold about—what is your answer?

WHO DO YOU BELIEVE JESUS IS?

I wanted to get baptized because: _____

I promise from here on out to: _____

Signed:

**COME TO ME,
ALL YOU WHO
ARE WEARY AND
BURDENED, AND
I WILL GIVE
YOU REST.**

