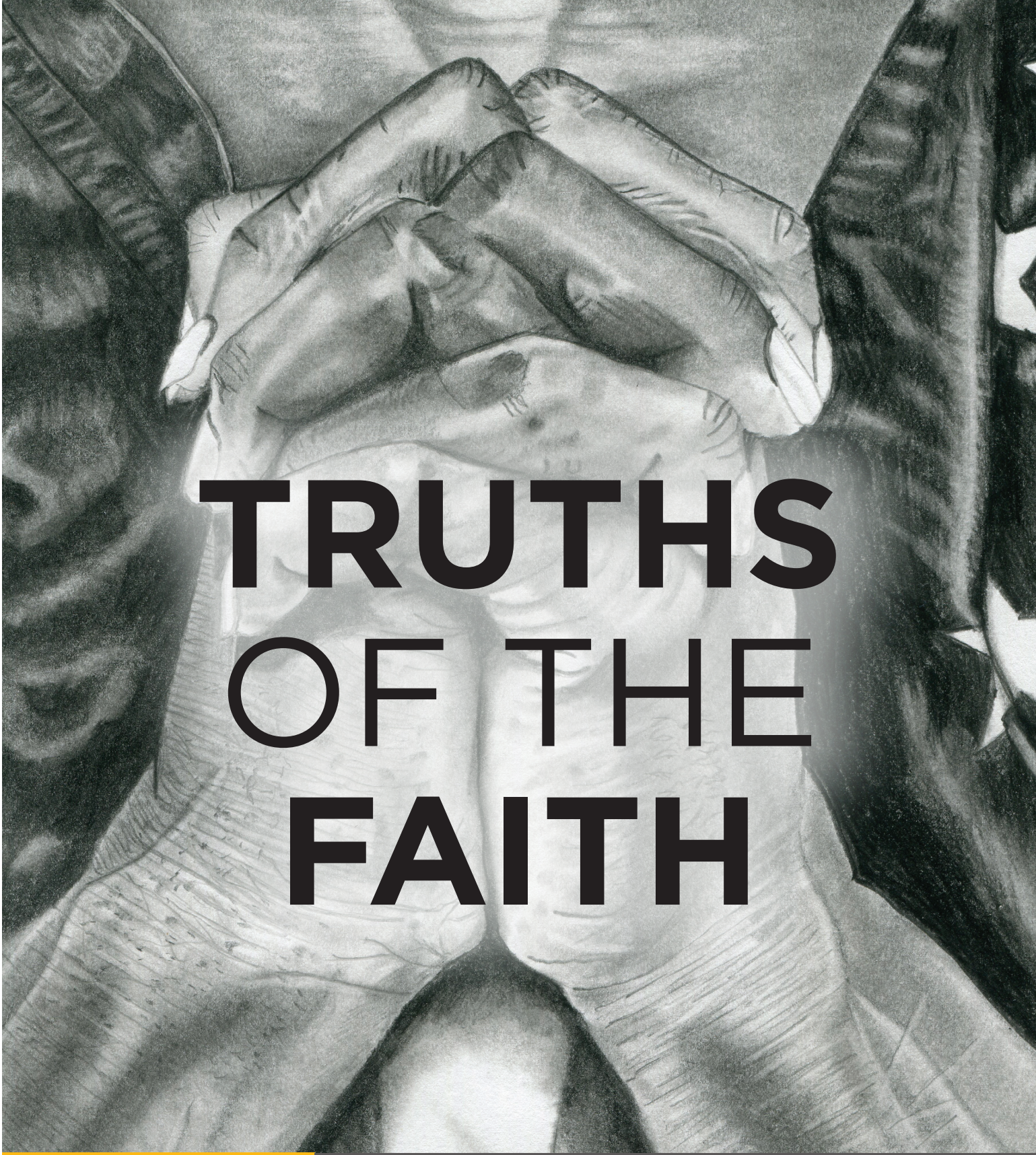




# TRUTHS OF THE FAITH



**CROSSROADS**  
PRISON MINISTRIES

## ANSWER KEY

Cover artwork by Carmine C., Crossroads student



**CROSSROADS**  
PRISON MINISTRIES

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                         |    |
|-------------------------|----|
| Introduction .....      | 4  |
| Glossary of Terms ..... | 5  |
| Lesson 1 .....          | 7  |
| Lesson 2 .....          | 13 |
| Lesson 3 .....          | 19 |
| Lesson 4 .....          | 24 |
| Lesson 5 .....          | 30 |
| Lesson 6 .....          | 37 |
| Lesson 7 .....          | 44 |
| Lesson 8 .....          | 52 |

# INTRODUCTION

This course introduces students to thirty foundational truths of the Christian faith. The course is designed to give students a basic grasp of the most important teachings of the Bible and how to apply them to their lives.

## STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided with the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with your students.



**CONVERSATION BOXES:** We have included some spaces throughout the print versions of lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can share questions or thoughts about the lesson or life. Students completing digital lessons can use the comment box at the end of the lesson for the same purpose. You may respond in any open space.



**ACTION STEPS:** At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.

# Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (\*) the first time each term appears.

**Abundant** — Something that is plentiful, overflowing, or more than enough.

**Advocate** — Someone who speaks or acts in favor of someone else.

**Born Again** — Having received new life from the Holy Spirit through belief in Jesus.

**Compassionate** — Having or showing care and concern for others.

**Conscience** — A feeling or sense of what is right and what is wrong.

**Crucifixion** — Death on a cross.

**Discrimination** — The act of treating others differently because of their beliefs, often in a negative way.

**Eternal** — Without beginning or end.

**Fellowship** — Close, meaningful companionship.

**Forbearance** — Patience and tolerance toward other people.

**Forbidden** — Not permitted or allowed.

**General Revelation** — Knowledge about God discovered through natural means. All people, whether believers or nonbelievers, can learn about God this way.

**Great Commission** — The responsibility given to followers of Jesus after His resurrection to make disciples of people from all nations.

**Hades** — The place of the dead. Often associated with hell and Satan in the New Testament.

**Holy** — When referring to humans: set apart for God; spiritually and morally excellent. When referring to God: perfect; above all others; worthy of praise.

**Image Bearer** — Something or someone that reflects the likeness of something or someone else.

**Immortal** — Living forever; never dying.

**Inner Being** — A phrase used to describe the spiritual aspect of our lives; also called the soul or the spirit.

**Intercede** — To act as a go-between for two people or to pray to God on someone's behalf.

**Invisible** — Not able to be seen by the human eye.

**Justified** — Declared or made righteous in the eyes of God.

**Law** — Rules that define required behavior. Biblically, the first five books of the Old Testament, especially God's commandments given through Moses.

**Legalism** — Strict, literal, or excessive following of the law or of religious or moral code.

**Original Sin** — The condition or state of sin that all humanity has because of Adam and Eve's sin.

**Paradise** — A perfect place.

**Persecute** — To mistreat, punish, and harm others because of their beliefs.

**Perseverance** — Continued effort to do something despite difficulties, failure, or opposition.

**Pharisee** — A member of an ancient Jewish group known for strict observance of tradition and religious law.

**Reap** — To cut down and gather what was planted.

**Reconciliation** — The act of restoring peace between two or more people who are in conflict.

**Revelation** — An act of God in which He reveals or makes known something about Himself.

**Righteous** — Doing what God's law commands; being in a right relationship with God.

**Sinless** — Free from sin.

**Sow** — To plant or scatter seeds over the ground.

**Special Revelation** — Knowledge about God discovered through supernatural means, such as miracles or God's words in the Bible.

**Supernatural** — Relating to something beyond or outside of nature or the visible universe.

**Tempt** — To encourage someone to do something wrong, bad, or unwise, promising them something good in return.

**Trinity** — The one true God, existing in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Universal Law** — A law or moral code that is generally accepted by all people and societies.

# LESSON 1: Our Great God Makes Himself Known

## Lesson Focus:

**Through creation, the Bible, and Jesus, God has made Himself known and invites you to know Him.**

In your first Crossroads course, *Who Are You?*, you answered big questions about yourself. You learned about King Solomon, who had incredible power and riches, yet he felt empty. That led him to realize that everything in life was meaningless without knowing God. In this course, we will follow Solomon's example. We will take a closer look at what it means to know God and to be known by God. We will learn that we build and strengthen our relationship with God through faith, prayer, and our daily Christian walk.

In *Who Are You?*, you also learned that the most important thing about you is that **you were made to know God**. Once we discover that we were made to know God, we can never look at ourselves the same way again.

1. Who is your closest friend? What makes that person your closest friend?

***This question encourages students to consider what it takes to form a close friendship. This is intended to help them realize that getting to know God also takes time and effort.***

Getting to know God is a lot like getting to know anyone. To get to know people well, you must spend time with them and ask them questions about themselves.

## General and Special Revelation

Before you can start getting to know someone, the person must want to be known by you. They must tell you something about themselves. Thankfully, God has done just that. He has revealed Himself to everyone and everything that He has made. He has done that in a general or natural way called general revelation.\* He has also revealed Himself in a special or supernatural\* way called special revelation.\* (This use of the term "revelation"\* does not refer to the book of Revelation in the Bible but to God's action of making Himself known and revealing Himself to us.)

General revelation is God making Himself known through our conscience,\* history, nature, and creation in a general way to all people. This is God's everyday communication with everyone.

Special revelation is God revealing something about Himself to us personally through His Holy Spirit. This includes God revealing Himself in the Bible and through Jesus' ministry on earth. It also includes God making His will for our individual lives known to us, and God inviting us to have salvation and fellowship\* with Him.

2. In your own words, what does “general revelation” mean?

***General revelation is knowledge about God discovered through natural means. All people, whether believers or nonbelievers, can learn something about God this way. The student’s response should reflect this in their own words. If the student has given examples of general revelation, affirm their response.***

3. In your own words, what does “special revelation” mean?

***Special revelation is knowledge about God discovered through reading the Bible, hearing the Word preached, or supernatural means such as miracles. The student’s response should reflect this in their own words.***

## **TRUTH 1: God makes Himself known to our conscience.**

One way God uses general revelation is through our conscience. Our conscience is an inner voice that accuses us of doing something wrong or is offended when others do something wrong to us. Our conscience also points out the good things we should do.

This concept of “right or wrong” that we all have comes from God in the form of a universal law\* stamped on our conscience. This universal law says something about God, the giver of the law: He loves justice and hates abuse and all forms of evil.

4. Read Romans 2:15 and fill in the blanks:

***“They show that the requirements of the LAW are written on their HEARTS, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes ACCUSING them and at other times even defending them.”***

***Please note that this verse is quoted from the NIV Bible. If your student is using a different version, their words may vary slightly. If the words they wrote do not make sense in context, please provide the correct words for them.***

This verse refers to the people who only know God through general revelation, not people who are saved and have experienced fellowship with Him. Even so, these people know something about God through their conscience. They are aware of His existence even if they do not know Him directly as their Lord and Savior.

## **TRUTH 2: God makes Himself known in creation.**

The Bible says God can be known through the things He has created. God spoke all things into existence (see Genesis 1). And all the things He made tell us about His glory and greatness.

5. Read Psalm 19:1–3. What is the most beautiful thing you have seen in creation? What does the beauty of it say to you about God?

***This question is intended to help the student make a connection between the beauty they have seen in creation and the majesty of God. Affirm your student's reflections and share your own.***

When humans design and build an impressive building, they often attach their name to it to show that it is their work. Similarly, God's name is all over creation. We see Him wherever we go. From gravity to light waves, His works proclaim to us that He exists and that He is powerful and creative beyond description.

In Romans 1:19–20, Paul wrote that God's "eternal power and divine nature" are so clearly seen in creation that people who do not believe in God have no excuse. Before believing in God, many people need proof that He exists. Paul's words in Romans 1:20 tell us that this proof has been there all along. God's marvelous hand is everywhere in creation.

6. Describe a time when something in nature struck you as especially beautiful and made you consider the God who created it. If you would like to respond creatively, you may draw a picture or write a poem about a beautiful place that reflects God's glory.

***This exercise is intended to help the student further connect with their own experience of general revelation. The student may respond through words or images. If they drew a picture or wrote a poem, celebrate their creativity.***

7. Read Psalm 139:13–14. What did the writer of this psalm say about how God created him?

***The writer said that he was "knit together in [his] mother's womb" and that he was "fearfully and wonderfully made." Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

### **TRUTH 3: God makes Himself known in the Bible.**

The Bible contains God's words to His people. God appointed many people to create written records of His words and actions. Each writer wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. God helped them write exactly what He wanted us to know (see 2 Peter 1:20–21). We can believe what the Bible teaches and trust what it promises because we know that it comes to us from God.

Through the special revelation of the Bible, we have a record of God's actions to save His people. The Bible also reveals God's will for our daily lives. We can learn much more about God from knowing what He has done and what He wants us to do than we can learn from general revelation, such as creation.

8. Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17. How is the Bible a guide for your daily life?

***The Bible is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. It equips followers of God for every good work. Your student may answer with words from the passage or describe how the Bible guides them personally.***

9. According to Deuteronomy 29:29, why does God reveal things to us?

***“That we may follow all the words of this law.” Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

When you read the Bible, read it as though God is speaking the words, because He is! He is speaking directly to you, by His Spirit, through His Word. The Bible is a big book, and some of it is hard to understand. But it is the most important book in a Christian’s life. Read it carefully and prayerfully.

## **TRUTH 4: God makes Himself known most clearly and fully in Jesus Christ, His Son.**

Hebrews 1:1–2 tells us, “In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.”

Just as God shares His words with us through the Bible, He also shares His words through Jesus and the life He lived on earth. In his Gospel, John called Jesus “the Word” and explained the relationship between God and Jesus:

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

*No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known. (John 1:18)*

For more references to this relationship, see John 3:13, 6:46, and 14:10.

Jesus Christ is the fullest revelation of God because He is God in the flesh. To know what God is like, simply look to Jesus.

10. Colossians 1:15 and 1:19 also discuss how God is revealed through Jesus. Write the two verses below.

***Verse 15: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”***

***Verse 19: “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”***

***Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

11. Based on the verses from John and Colossians that you just read, what do you believe to be true about Jesus?

***The student may answer that they believe Jesus is God or that He is the fullest revelation of God.***

Life can be confusing. Uncertainty seems to be around every corner. But we can be certain that God loves us and wants us to know Him. He did not just make Himself known in one way but in many ways! He did this for us so that we can truly know Him as He is. Think about or meditate on that great truth. He uses His creation, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit to tell us about Himself. And, most clearly, He uses His Son to tell us about Himself (see Hebrews 1:1–4). In every way possible, He calls us into His presence and His embrace. Are we listening?

12. Circle the things that are forms of God's general revelation.

|                |                      |
|----------------|----------------------|
| Our conscience | A beautiful mountain |
| Trees          | The Bible            |
| Jesus          | Lakes                |

***The student should have circled "Our conscience," "A beautiful mountain," "Trees," and "Lakes."***

13. Circle the things that are forms of God's special revelation.

|           |           |
|-----------|-----------|
| The Bible | Jesus     |
| Flowers   | Lakes     |
| Sunsets   | Mountains |

***The student should have circled "The Bible" and "Jesus."***

### **Questions for Deeper Thinking**

1. List two things about God that you find most interesting. Why are those things of personal interest to you?

***Answers will vary. Affirm the student's response and share your answer to the question.***

2. How have you seen God reveal Himself in your life? What did you learn about God from that experience?

***Students will answer from personal experience. The question is intended to help the student identify ways God reveals Himself.***

3. What benefits do you personally receive from studying the Bible? Has it produced changes in your life? If so, what are they?

***This question is intended to help the student consider the value of spending time in God's Word. Changes in their life may include increased faith, peace, assurance of***

***God's love for them, etc. Encourage your student to remain faithful and receptive as they continue studying the Bible.***

***In this lesson, you learned:***

- God makes Himself known to our conscience.
- God makes Himself known in creation.
- God makes Himself known in the Bible.
- God makes Himself known most clearly and fully in Jesus Christ, His Son.

**Action Step**

Think of a specific passage of Scripture that God used to teach you something about Himself. Reread that passage and write down two ways it has impacted your life.

## LESSON 2: Who Is Our Great God?

### Lesson Focus:

**Our God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is greater than we could ever imagine.**

In Lesson 1, we looked at the various ways God reveals Himself to us. God is the Creator of everything, and He shows Himself to us in the beauty of His creation. Most importantly, God shows Himself to us through the Bible and His Son, Jesus Christ. In this lesson, we will look at what the Bible says about who God is.

### TRUTH 5: God, our Creator, is an awesome God.

Through the various ways God has shown Himself to us, we can see that our God is awesome. Something that is awesome is breathtaking, amazing, or stunning. It inspires wonder.

1. What words would you use to describe God, who knows all things, can do all things, and rules over the entire universe?

***Some students may respond with words like “omniscient” (all-knowing), “omnipotent” (all-powerful), and “sovereign” (rules over all things). Others may use words like “great,” “amazing,” and “awesome.”***

We learn about God’s awesomeness in every book of the Bible. In his letter to Timothy, referring to God, the apostle Paul wrote:

*Now to the King eternal,\* immortal,\* invisible,\* the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17, asterisks added)*

2. Match the words below to their definitions by writing A, B, or C in each blank (refer to the Glossary of Terms if you need help):

|                                            |                               |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>A. God is without beginning or end</b>  | <b><u>  B  </u> Invisible</b> |
| <b>B. God cannot be seen with our eyes</b> | <b><u>  C  </u> Immortal</b>  |
| <b>C. God will never die</b>               | <b><u>  A  </u> Eternal</b>   |

3. Read Psalm 103:1–8. Write a check mark next to the phrases below that David used in these verses to describe God:

✓ **God heals**

**God is disappointed in us**

**God will forgive us when we deserve it**

✓ **God is abounding in love**

- ✓ **God is slow to anger**  
**We can earn God's love**  
**God helps those who help themselves**
- ✓ **God is compassionate**
- ✓ **God forgives our sins**  
**God is angry**
- ✓ **God satisfies our desires with good things**  
**God calls our desires evil**

The Bible teaches us that God is holy.\* When we talk about God's holiness, we are talking about spiritual and moral perfection or purity. The holiness of God is far beyond what we can achieve, imagine, or understand. Isaiah 6 provides a very clear picture of God's holiness.

Read **Isaiah 6:1–9**.

4. What were the seraphim (a type of angel) calling to one another (verse 3)?

***"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

5. Why do you think Isaiah said, "Woe to me! I am ruined!" when God appeared to him in the temple in a vision (verse 5)?

***Isaiah recognized that he was unclean and sinful in the presence of God, who was perfectly holy.***

God's holiness can best be seen in His perfect love.

*How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
(Psalm 36:7)*

In one of his letters in the New Testament, the apostle John simply stated:

*God is love. (1 John 4:8)*

The fact that God's very nature is love is especially awesome.

Read **1 John 4:7–12**.

6. What did John say about people who do not love others (verse 8)?

***"Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

7. How did God show His love (verse 9)?

***“He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.” Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

8. Fill in the blanks (verse 12):

***“No one has ever seen God; but if WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.” Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

We are called to love each other the way God loves us, even to the point of loving our enemies. God’s love is different from human love. It is easy to love someone when we see something lovable in the other person. But God loved us when we were not lovable. He poured out His love on us not because of what we have done but because of who He is. His love and kindness are perfect.

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

9. What would it be like to live in a world in which everyone loved each other the way God loves us? How would life be different if everyone treated each other with perfect love, kindness, and respect?

***This question is intended to help the student to see that many of our problems stem from a lack of love. Encourage your student to find ways to treat those around them with love, kindness, and respect.***

## **TRUTH 6: The only true God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.**

What made the Jewish faith in the Old Testament and Christianity in the New Testament so different from other religions of their time was the belief that there was only one God. While some religions believe in many gods—some friendly, some unkind—the Bible tells us that our God is the only God over the entire universe. From the first verse of the Bible, we learn that there is one true God who created everything that exists.

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)*

If there is one God who created everything, what did Paul mean when he wrote the following verse about Jesus?

*For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:16)*

The doctrine of the Trinity\* helps us to answer this and many other questions.

The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the most important teachings in Christianity. It is also very difficult to understand. The doctrine says: **There is one God who exists in three persons: the**

## Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Although the word “Trinity” cannot be found in the Bible, we can see the idea of God as three persons when we look at the Bible as a whole.

When Jesus gave His disciples final instructions before returning to heaven, He 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.” (Matthew 28:18–19, emphasis added)*

As Christians, we are not baptized in the name of three gods; we are baptized in the name of the one true God. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the three persons of the one Trinity.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three separate gods, each with their own personal view on how to run the universe. They work together as one.

*Jesus gave them this answer: “Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.” (John 5:19)*

Like Jesus, the Holy Spirit also does not act on His own. John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus said:

*“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.” (John 16:13)*

10. The following statements about the Trinity are true. Match each statement with the Bible verse that teaches that truth.

**a. God the Father is God**

**b. The Son, Jesus, is God**

**c. The Holy Spirit is God**

**d. The Son, Jesus, is not the Father**

**e. The Spirit is not the Son**

**f. The Father is not the Son**

**b John 1:18**

**e John 14:26**

**a John 3:16**

**d John 6:38–40**

**c Luke 1:35**

**f 1 Corinthians 8:6**

You might be wondering how the doctrine of the Trinity impacts your life. We are studying some of the most important teachings of the Bible in this course, and many of these teachings clearly relate to our daily lives. However, it may seem a bit more difficult to see the practical value of the doctrine of the Trinity. Here are a few ways that this very important doctrine impacts our daily lives as Christians.

First, it can help us determine whether something we hear about God is true or false. From the earliest days of the Church, understanding that God exists in three persons has helped believers recognize false teachings about God. Most false teachings about God developed from misunderstandings about the nature and roles of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 1:7)*

Second, it can guide our prayers. Some Christians wonder, “Am I supposed to pray to the Father, to the Son, or to the Holy Spirit?” This is an excellent question. Let’s look at some verses to see what the Bible says.

11. Read Matthew 6:9–13. To whom did Jesus instruct us to pray?

***Our Father in heaven.***

12. Read Acts 7:59. To whom did Stephen pray?

***He prayed to Jesus.***

13. Romans 8:26 says that we often do not know what to pray for, so we are helped by the **HOLY SPIRIT**, who intercedes for us.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the church in the city of Ephesus, provided a good summary of the unity of the Trinity and how the three persons of the Trinity work together as one through us.

Read **Ephesians 5:18–20** and fill in the blanks:

14. We are to be **FILLED** with the **SPIRIT** (verse 18).

15. We are to give thanks to God the **FATHER** (verse 20).

16. We are to give thanks in the name of our Lord **JESUS CHRIST** (verse 20).

It is fair to say that the doctrine of the Trinity is beyond our ability to fully understand. Our God is greater than our human minds can grasp. But this doctrine also comforts us, guides us, and helps us as we pray and worship. Praise God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!

### **Questions for Deeper Thinking**

1. If someone asked you about the Trinity, how would you explain it in your own words?

***This question asks the student to summarize what they have learned about the Trinity in the lesson. If your student is still struggling to understand the concept, remind them that some things are beyond human understanding and encourage them to continue studying the subject and praying for wisdom.***

2. When you pray, do you usually speak to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Why?

***This question is intended to make the student aware of who they normally address in***

***prayer and encourage them to pray to each member of the Trinity. Feel free to share your own answer to the question.***

***In this lesson, you learned:***

- God, our Creator, is an awesome God.
- The only true God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Action Step**

In your prayer time this week, spend time talking to each of the three persons of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If this is new to you, did you find it helpful?

# LESSON 3: God's Image Bearers

## Lesson Focus:

**God created humans to reflect His image.**

In Lesson 2, we learned about our great God, who exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this lesson, we will discuss what it means that we have been created in the image of God and what that means for our daily lives.

Humans are imperfect beings. When we think about our sins and weaknesses, it can be hard to understand or believe that we are made in God's image. But the Bible tells us that God specifically created humans to reflect Himself.

Read **Genesis 1:26–31**. These verses tell us about God's creation of humans. In verse 31, we see God's opinion about His creation.

1. What did God think about everything He had made?

***Genesis 1:31 says, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Whether the student copied the verse verbatim or responded in their own words, their answer should indicate that they understand the inherent goodness in God's original creation.***

## TRUTH 7: God created humans in His image.

In Genesis 1:26, we read, "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness.'" Everything God made reflected His glory, but only humans were created in His own image and likeness. When creating the world, God chose to finish it with an image of Himself. You are that image. All humans are.

2. What do you think it means to be made in the image of God?

***This question asks the student to write their thoughts before they have studied the related material in the lesson. The question is asked again at the end of the lesson.***

Everything God made was special because God was its Creator. However, of all the things God created, only Adam and Eve had a personal relationship with Him. God walked with them in the Garden of Eden. They had a perfect relationship with God and with each other. There was no hiding, no lying, no sinning—nothing stood between God and His special image bearers.\*

The first thing we should understand about being made in the image of God is that it means we have a built-in ability to relate to God personally. He created us to experience a close, trusting friendship with Him. This means that our hearts are restless until we come to know Him.

That is pretty amazing, isn't it? God created us to have a relationship with Himself for His glory (see Isaiah 43:6–7). God made us, loves us, and wants to bless us by bringing us to Himself. He wants us to know Him because knowing Him is the biggest blessing He can give anyone.

After creating Adam and Eve, God commanded them to fill the earth and rule over everything He had created (see Genesis 1:28). They were called to manage and take care of God's creation. Based on this command, we can see that being made in the image of God comes with great responsibilities.

3. How does it feel to know you are made in the image of God? Does it change the way you look at yourself?

***This question asks the student to engage their emotions as they think about being made in God's image. The student may say that it gives them a sense of worth or a feeling of purpose and meaning. Feel free to add your own reflections in response.***

## **TRUTH 8: The image of God became twisted and broken, separating humanity from God.**

Read **Genesis 3:1–7**. In this passage, we are introduced to Satan, a fallen angel who was jealous of God and wanted His power and glory, appearing as a serpent (snake). The serpent convinced Adam and Eve to do the one thing God had told them not to do: eat fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

4. What happened to Adam and Eve as soon as they ate from the tree (Genesis 3:7)?

***Their eyes were opened, and they became ashamed of their nakedness, so they sewed clothes for themselves out of leaves. Some students may also mention that this action brought spiritual death onto themselves and their offspring.***

This terrible event is known as the fall of humanity. God had created the Garden of Eden to be a paradise\* for Adam and Eve. They were close to God, and they were doing what they were created to do: to care for each other and God's creation. They experienced the pleasures of working in God's incredible creation. They were given every tree in the garden to eat from and enjoy other than the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God warned them that if they ate the fruit from that tree, they would die. Their close relationship with God would be destroyed.

When Satan appeared in the form of a serpent to tempt\* Eve to disobey God, he challenged Eve's knowledge of God and His commandments by asking, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1). When Eve repeated what God had told them, Satan changed his plan. He convinced Eve that God lied to them and did not want what was best for them.

5. What is one way you have experienced Satan trying to tempt you to sin?

***The student should provide an example from their life. Encourage your student to be alert to the enemy's devices.***

By doing what God said they should not do, Adam and Eve committed the first sin in God's perfect creation. For the first time, they felt shame and guilt. The image of God in His creation was now damaged by sin. Because of this one act, humanity's relationship with God was broken. Every person born since then suffers the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience. We call this original sin.\*

Thousands of years after the Fall, Jesus came to free us from this original sin and every other sin we have committed.

Read **Genesis 3:14–19**. This passage tells us God's response to Adam and Eve's disobedience. The language in this section of Genesis can be difficult to understand. We encourage you to study these verses further on your own.

6. What do you think about God's reaction to Adam and Eve's disobedience?

***A variety of responses are possible here. Your student might say that the punishment made sense because God, being holy, cannot tolerate sin. They may highlight God's grace in not killing Adam and Eve immediately. Feel free to respond with your thoughts as well.***

Genesis 2:17 tells us that God said, "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die." But Adam and Eve didn't immediately die after eating from the forbidden\* tree. Or did they?

**Physical death:** Adam and Eve's bodies did not die right away, but God told them they would die someday and return to the dust. Before they ate the forbidden fruit, death had not entered the world. Adam and Eve could have lived forever in the paradise God had created for them. Instead, they suffered sickness and, eventually, physical death.

**Spiritual death:** Although they did not physically die right away, they experienced spiritual death immediately. Before they sinned, they lived in total peace, satisfaction, and joy with God. After they sinned, they felt shame and guilt. They tried to hide from God. God cast them out of the paradise they had enjoyed. This separated them from God and damaged their relationship with Him.

On our own, we are unable to repair our relationship with God. However, God sent His Son, Jesus, to redeem us from sin, give us new life, and restore our relationship with Him.

7. In your own words, what is spiritual death?

***The student may say that spiritual death is being separated from God, feeling shame because of sin, or lacking the peace and joy God provides. It is distinct from physical death and entered the world through sin.***

## **TRUTH 9: God provides restoration and hope through Jesus Christ.**

God decided not to leave humanity in a broken and hopeless state. Our situation may seem impossible to fix, but with God, it is never hopeless.

Worldly wisdom or self-help books might make us feel better about ourselves and our sinful nature. They may offer practical ideas to improve ourselves. But there's an even better way to achieve deep personal satisfaction and peace. Through Jesus Christ, God invites us into a relationship with Him and offers us spiritual life.

In his letter to the Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul wrote:

*For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19, words in parentheses added)*

8. The word "Gospel" means good news and refers to the message of salvation through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Romans 5:19 offers a one-sentence explanation of the Gospel. In one to three sentences, using your own words, how would you explain the Gospel of Jesus?

***The student may paraphrase Romans 5:19 and say that the obedience of Jesus makes us righteous. Or they may mention the historical facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and what that means to them. Feel free to share your own brief summary of the Gospel.***

9. In what ways has your life changed since becoming a follower of Jesus? If you have not decided to follow Jesus, what positive changes in your life are you still hoping for?

***If they are following Jesus, the student may mention how they were delivered from harmful behaviors or difficult circumstances or how they were given peace and joy instead of guilt and shame. Celebrate these changes with them. If they are not following Jesus, take this opportunity to gently engage with them. What is keeping them from following Him?***

Read **1 Corinthians 15:3–8**. These verses further explain the Gospel of Jesus and how Jesus' death and resurrection saved us from our sins.

10. What information did Paul say was of first importance (verses 3–4)?

***1 Corinthians 15:3–4 says, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." The student may quote the passage or simply list Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection.***

11. Some people say Jesus was just a great man and a great teacher, but nothing more. What would you say to them about their misunderstanding of the Gospel?

***The student's answer should reflect the fact that Jesus is the Son of God and God Himself and that He came to earth to save us from our sins through His death and resurrection.***

## **Questions for Deeper Thinking**

1. Now that you have finished this lesson, how would you explain to a friend what it means to be made in the image of God?

***After having gone through the lesson, the student should have a better idea of what it means to be made in God's image. The student might mention our ability to have a relationship with God or our calling to reflect God's glory. The student may also write about how the image of God became twisted and broken by sin but is restored by Jesus.***

2. All humans are made in the image of God. How does knowing that affect how you view and treat others?

***It is our hope that, in learning about the image of God in all humanity, the student is growing in their compassion toward others. Knowing that their neighbor is made in God's image should lead them to see the value and inherent worth in their neighbor and treat them accordingly.***

### ***In this lesson, you learned:***

- God created humans in His image.
- The image of God became twisted and broken, separating humanity from God.
- God provides restoration and hope through Jesus Christ.

## **Action Step**

Read **Genesis 3:8–9**. God called out to Adam and Eve after they had sinned. Think of a time you were hiding from or avoiding God and He called out to you. How did He get your attention? How did you respond? Write your reflections here.

# LESSON 4: Jesus, the Perfect Savior

## Lesson Focus:

**Jesus is both God and man, and He is the hope of the world.**

Throughout history, many people have claimed to be sent from God. Some of them have even claimed to be God in the flesh. Some of these people attracted large numbers of followers and established religions. But none of these would-be saviors can save us. There is only one Savior: Jesus Christ. We know we can trust Him because He proved that He was who He said He was and He changed the world forever.

In a previous course, *Who Is Jesus?*, you learned about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. In this lesson, we will take a closer look at who Jesus is and what that means for us today.

One of the most helpful sections of the Bible for understanding Jesus is the first chapter of the Gospel of John. John chapter 1 should take away any doubt that Jesus is God, who came to earth in the flesh of a fully human man. It shows that it is a mistake to think that Jesus was just a good teacher or a good person but not God.

Read **John 1** and answer the following questions:

1. John described the Word, or Jesus, as containing life that was the "light of all mankind" (verse 4). How did John describe this light and its effect on the earth (verse 5)?

***John said, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."***

2. List at least four things that verses 10–14 teach us about Jesus.

***Answers may include the following: Jesus made the world; He was rejected by the world; He was rejected by His own people; He gave those who believed in Him the right to become children of God; He became flesh and lived on earth; He showed the Father's glory.***

The first chapter of John is packed with truths about Jesus. John clearly stated at the beginning of his Gospel that Jesus is God, not an angel or a type of godly being. Jesus is not a god with a small "g." Jesus is not a superior god among other smaller or lesser gods. Jesus is the very Word of God who became flesh—a real human person living on earth (John 1:14).

The Word, when speaking about Jesus, cannot be anything other than God (John 1:1–4, 10, 14). John wrote that "the Word was God." In Lesson 2 of this course, you learned that Jesus, the Son of God, is not the Father, but they are both God (John 1:14).

The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is God. He is not God the Father or God the Holy Spirit, but He is equal to and united with the Father and the Holy Spirit as part of the Trinity.

3. Why do you think some people believe Jesus was a good man and a good teacher but not the Son of God or God Himself?

***The student may say that some people know a little about Jesus but do not have faith in Him. Another possible answer is that they may have a negative opinion about Christianity or Christians. If the student has attempted to evangelize, they have most likely encountered this objection or even voiced something similar themselves. This is a common objection in Islam, which is prevalent in some prisons.***

Jesus Himself told the disciples, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). The apostle Paul, in several of his letters to the churches, highlighted the reality and importance of the truth that Jesus was God. Here are a few examples:

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:15–16)*

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ 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. (Philippians 2:5–7)*

Paul suffered greatly because of his teachings about Jesus. He was beaten, tortured, and imprisoned multiple times. While reflecting on his experience and the importance of the truths he taught, Paul made an interesting comment: “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:19).

4. What do you think Paul meant by this?

***The purpose of this question is to help the student consider the importance of the resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus has not been physically raised from the dead, we have no hope for the future, and everything we have based our lives on is worthless.***

We can take great comfort in knowing that Jesus is God and not just a good teacher. As Paul said, if Jesus were not God, there would be no hope of life after death. Because Jesus is God, we can place our trust in Him.

## **TRUTH 11: Jesus was fully human.**

John 1 also teaches us the importance of Jesus having lived on earth as a man. He was a real human who needed to sleep and eat. He was even tempted by Satan, just as we all are, but He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15).

When Jesus lived on earth, He was not just a spirit that appeared to be a human. It is important to understand that Jesus needed to be fully human in order to die on the cross for our sins. Sometimes we tend to think about Jesus as some sort of superhero or magician. He is neither. Jesus took upon Himself a human nature just like our own. He was as much a man as He was God.

5. Does it comfort you to know that Jesus was human? Why or why not?

***This question encourages the student to see how approachable Jesus is. He knows what it is like to be human. He can fully understand our weaknesses because He spent time on earth in a physical body, enduring temptations and trials that are common to humanity.***

Read **Colossians 1:15–20**.

6. The Son (Jesus) is the image of whom (verse 15)?

***Jesus is “the image of the invisible God.”***

7. Who created all things (verse 16)?

***Jesus, who is also God.***

8. How do we have peace with God (verse 20)?

***We have peace through Jesus’ blood, which was shed on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, reconciling us to God.***

## **TRUTH 12: Jesus’ obedience in life and in death is our only hope.**

In John 1, we learn a lot about why Jesus, the eternal Word, became flesh. He did it to show us who God is and what God is like (John 1:18) and to allow us to become children of God (John 1:12). Jesus did these things by living a righteous\* life and dying a sinless\* death in our place.

In Jesus’ day, the Romans killed thousands of people by crucifixion.\* As Christians, we believe that the death of Jesus was different from the deaths of the others who died in the same awful way. What made His crucifixion different? Jesus’ crucifixion had a deliberate, eternal purpose. It was a necessary part of God’s plan to bring humans back into a relationship with God the way He created them to be. This purpose could only be achieved because of two unique characteristics of Jesus.

First, Jesus was *sinless*. Although He was a human, He never disobeyed God. He did not do anything against God’s law. Because He was the Lamb of God without spot or stain (1 Peter 1:19), He could be crucified for our wrongdoing.

Second, Jesus was *righteous*. He always did what was perfect. Not only did He keep from sinning throughout His life on earth, but He also obeyed God perfectly. He did everything God's law required.

9. Jesus was both sinless and righteous. What is the difference between sinless and righteous?

***Jesus was sinless because He was born without sin and never disobeyed God's law. Not only did He not sin, but He is perfectly righteous in His nature, and He perfectly obeyed God's law.***

Jesus lived His life on earth as the perfect man. Most importantly, He died on the cross in our place as the sinless Lamb of God. This truth about Jesus brings us to the heart of the Gospel. If we believe and place our trust in Jesus, God sees us as sinless and righteous because of what Jesus did for us. Jesus' obedience to dying on the cross made it possible for us to become children of God. As 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

John 1:12 states that all who have faith in Jesus receive "the right to become children of God." There is no other way for us to become children of God than to believe in Jesus. As God's children, we will spend eternity with Jesus as part of God's family.

10. As God's children, we can refer to Him directly as "Father," as Jesus taught us (Matthew 6:9). How does it make you feel to refer to God as your Father? Is it easy or difficult? Please explain your answer.

***Some students have had horrible experiences at the hands of their fathers. It may be difficult for them to relate to God as their Father. If this is difficult for your student, encourage them to see God as a loving Father who cares deeply for them.***

## **TRUTH 13: Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven, where He continues His work to this day.**

Jesus' death on the cross is not the end of the Gospel story. After being buried in a tomb for three days, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus is alive and well right now, seated at the right hand of God (Ephesians 1:19–20).

Just before Jesus died, He said, "It is finished" (John 19:30). The death of Jesus was the full payment for our sins. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is proof that Jesus is who He said He was and that reconciliation\* with God is available to us. It is proof that the debt for our sins has been paid in full.

Jesus rose from the dead so that we may have new life (Romans 6:3; Colossians 3:1–4). We were spiritually dead before we met Jesus. Now, Jesus is the source of our new life.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He began the next stage in His work as our faithful priest in heaven. Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus lives to intercede\* for us. Jesus lives for you! Think about that truth. Christians often talk about Jesus dying for us, but we don't often talk about Jesus living for us right now. This truth should bring us great peace. Whatever you are going through, Jesus knows. He is with you, and He cares about your needs.

11. Why did Jesus rise from the dead? List at least two reasons.

***The student should have listed at least two of the following: Jesus rose from the dead to fully pay for our sins. He rose from the dead to prove that He was who He said He was and that reconciliation with God was possible for humanity. He rose from the dead to give us new life in place of spiritual death. He rose from the dead so He could begin His ministry in heaven and send the Holy Spirit to His followers.***

12. If you believe Jesus is who He says He is, how does that impact your willingness to follow and obey Him?

***This question asks the student to consider the authority that Jesus claims over their lives. If Jesus is who He says He is, we would be foolish not to follow Him. If your student does not believe this, take a moment to encourage them to dig deeper. What is keeping them from believing?***

## **Questions for Deeper Thinking**

1. Choose one of the truths of the faith you learned in this lesson. How does that truth give you hope and peace?

***This question encourages the student to understand the practical value of one of the following truths covered in this lesson: Jesus is truly God; Jesus was fully human; Jesus' obedience in life and in death is our only hope; Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven, where He continues His work to this day. Consider sharing your own answer to the question.***

2. Read Hebrews 2:5–18. In what ways was Jesus like us when He became human? Why was it important for Jesus to be fully human like us?

***He shared in our common humanity. He understood our weaknesses and frailties. He had to go to the cross and suffer for us in accordance with the will of the Father. He had to be made like us, but without sin, so He could serve as our high priest—our representative before God the Father.***

### ***In this lesson, you learned:***

- Jesus is truly God.
- Jesus was fully human.
- Jesus' obedience in life and in death is our only hope.

- Jesus rose from the dead and went to heaven, where He continues His work to this day.

## **Action Step**

Most false teachings about Jesus center around misunderstandings about who Jesus was. Some religions teach that Jesus was a good teacher, a great man, a prophet from God, a son of God but not God, or a spirit. Review this lesson and make a list of truths about Jesus. If possible, connect with another Christian, review your list together, and see if they have any other truths to add to the list.

# LESSON 5: Who Can Be Saved?

## Lesson Focus:

**Salvation is for everyone who responds humbly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Luke 18:9–14 records Jesus' parable about a Pharisee\* and a tax collector. The Pharisees were religious leaders of Jesus' day. Outwardly, they seemed righteous and holy, but they were also very controlling and took advantage of people. Because of their religious positions, many of them looked down on common people.

Tax collectors were Jews who collected tax money for the Roman government. They often collected more than was due and then pocketed the extra money. Tax collectors were not well-liked by others. In Jesus' parable, both men spoke to God in prayer at the temple in Jerusalem.

Read **Luke 18:9–14**.

1. Jesus said the tax collector was justified before God. Justified, in a religious sense, means "declared righteous." Why do you think Jesus considered the tax collector justified?

***This question highlights the irony in Jesus' parable: the one who appears the most sinful is the one who is right with God. The student may mention that the tax collector's humble and repentant heart pleased God.***

2. God was pleased with the tax collector's heart but not with the Pharisee's. Why was the Pharisee not justified?

***The Pharisee was proud of his good deeds, looked down on the tax collector, and exalted himself instead of God. He thought he was good enough on his own merits and did not need to be saved.***

Jesus explained that the tax collector came to God humbly, without any confidence in his own goodness or righteousness. He understood that he was sinful and needed forgiveness and grace. But the Pharisee thought that he was righteous. He believed he did not need to repent or be saved.

What does it mean to be saved? In general, to be saved means to be rescued from danger or disaster. In the Christian faith, it means being rescued from sin and its consequences.

Without Jesus, we stand before God—the highest authority of all—guilty and convicted of sin. Being saved, or receiving salvation, means we will not be judged guilty, and we will spend eternity with God. We are found not guilty because Jesus took our place by accepting the

punishment we deserved. That is the good news of the Gospel. But it doesn't end there. God also gives us new life through His Holy Spirit. He allows us to live as His true sons and daughters. This might seem too good to be true, but it is true!

In the book of Ephesians, the apostle Paul provided a very clear summary of the Gospel on which all Christians can agree.

Read **Ephesians 2:1–10** and complete the following statements:

3. When we followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Satan), we were **DEAD** in our transgressions and sins (verses 1–2).
4. Because of God's great love for us, He made us **ALIVE** with Christ (verses 4–5).
5. It is by **GRACE** that we are saved (verse 5).
6. God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the **HEAVENLY** realms (verse 6).
7. We have been spiritually raised with Christ in order that God might show the incomparable **RICHES** of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us through Christ Jesus (verse 7).
8. It is by **GRACE** we have been saved, through **FAITH** (verse 8).
9. We are not saved by our works (good deeds), which means no one can **BOAST** about their salvation (verse 9).
10. We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do **GOOD WORKS**, which God prepared in advance for us to do (verse 10).

This summary provides a good outline for us to use when we share the Gospel with others.

11. Based on your own studies and experience, how would you respond to someone who asked you, "What is the Gospel?"

***The student may summarize Ephesians 2:1–10 or give an answer based on their personal experience of receiving the Gospel.***

**TRUTH 14: Through salvation, we receive forgiveness from our sins and new life as God's children.**

In Lesson 3, we learned that all have sinned and were separated from God because of sin. God gave commandments, also called the Law,\* to Moses, and God's people are required to obey them. If we are honest, we know that we frequently fail to obey God's commandments. But God, in His perfect love, sent His own Son to take our punishment and give us new life.

12. Write a short prayer or poem of thanksgiving to God for freely offering us the gift of salvation and forgiveness of sins.

***This question encourages the student to engage their emotions and creatively express their thankfulness to God. Celebrate their creativity.***

Each of us has a different story about how we came to believe and trust in Jesus to receive this new life. But we all share some common experiences with other Christian believers:

*We admit to God and ourselves that we are sinners.*

*We believe the good news of the Gospel: that, through Jesus, we have forgiveness of sins and new life as children of God.*

*We declare that Jesus is now the Lord of our lives.*

### **Faith, Repentance, and Assurance**

There are three important things to know about salvation through Jesus. First, we cannot come to God unless He draws us to Himself. Faith is a gift that comes from God's grace. When Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was, Peter said, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus said to Peter, "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 16:16–17). Peter's faith in Jesus came directly from God. Therefore, Peter was able to place his complete confidence and trust in Jesus. Faith is having confidence that all of God's promises in the Gospel apply to us.

Faith comes from God, but God wants us to continue to grow in our faith. Faith is like a muscle; it must be exercised and strengthened. We do this by praying, reading the Bible, and surrounding ourselves with other believers who can encourage us through the seasons of our lives when our faith may be weak. Our faith is also strengthened as God shows His trustworthiness in our lives.

13. How has someone encouraged you when your faith needed to be strengthened?

***This is an opportunity for the student to reflect on a time they have been comforted and consider how they "can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God" (2 Corinthians 1:4). Feel free to share a similar experience of your own and challenge your student to seek ways to encourage others.***

14. Give an example from your life of how God has proven to you that you can trust Him.

***An important part of the Christian life is trusting that God will keep His promises to us. This question provides an opportunity for the student to consider how God has been faithful in their life.***

Second, along with faith, repentance is a key part of our salvation. Jesus died for the sins of the entire world. But not everyone who hears the good news of the Gospel is willing to turn from a life of selfishness and sin toward a life of walking with God and following His commands. In the story about the Pharisee and the tax collector, we saw that the tax collector understood his sinfulness and his need for God. He had come to God in humility, understanding his desperate need for grace. He was repentant. The Pharisee, on the other hand, thought he was already a good person. He didn't think he needed to change anything about himself. He was not repentant.

Many verses in the Bible talk about the importance of repentance in the lives of God's people.

Complete the following verses by filling in the blank spaces.

15. 2 Chronicles 7:14 – “If my people, who are called by my name, will **HUMBLE** themselves and pray and **SEEK** my face and turn from their **WICKED WAYS**, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”
16. 1 John 1:9 – “If we **CONFESS** our sins, he is faithful and just and will **FORGIVE** us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

God doesn't just forgive us and then leave us to figure things out on our own. The third important thing to know about our salvation is that God wants us to have assurance, or certainty, that we are forgiven and saved. The root of the word “assurance” is “sure.” When we become Christians, we can enjoy the peace of knowing for sure that we belong to God. Jesus said the following:

*“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.” (John 5:24)*

When Jesus began a sentence with the words “very truly,” He wanted to emphasize the importance of what He was saying. Our lives are changed when we have peace and certainty that we belong to God, no longer fearing that we will spend eternity separated from Him. Salvation brings assurance that God loves us and calls us His children.

## **TRUTH 15: Everyone who responds to Jesus in faith will be given new life.**

The apostle Paul illustrated the concept of new life through Jesus when he wrote:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

Paul didn't say that only some people in Christ are new creations; he said that anyone in Christ is a new creation. As new creations, we have been born again, and we are shaped and molded according to God's plan for our lives. It may not always look or seem like we are changing, but by faith, we can believe that God is making us into something new even when we don't yet see the results.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us that faith is believing in something we cannot see with our eyes.

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.  
(Hebrews 11:1)*

Faith is more than believing that something might be true. If we have faith, our actions will reflect what we say we believe. If we believe in Jesus, we will respond in faith by following Him. James, in his letter in the New Testament, said that even the demons believe in God and shudder (James 2:19). The difference is that demons believe in God but do not place their trust in God.

When we have faith, we are willing to trust God with our lives and with our eternal souls. Even when things are not going well in our lives, as believers, we continue to seek and follow God because we have confidence that God will do the things He says He will do. For example, if we believe God rewards those who seek Him, we will be seekers of God. We will continue to seek and follow God even when we experience difficult times.

*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)*

Not everyone who claims to have faith in Jesus lives a life that demonstrates what they say they believe. Gallup is an organization that conducts polls on many topics to see what people think and believe. In 2017, Gallup asked random people throughout the United States, “Do you believe in God?” Eighty-seven percent of the people polled said yes. That is almost nine out of ten people. When you look at society, do you think nine out of ten people are truly trusting and following God?

17. What is the difference between believing there is a God and placing your trust in God?

***Believing there is a God involves only the mind; putting our trust in God involves our whole selves. When we put our trust in God, we surrender to His will. This impacts every aspect of our lives.***

18. Why do you think so many people say they believe in God but don’t trust Him enough to follow Him in their daily lives?

***Some people may not be willing to surrender their own will to the will of God. They may have grown up in an environment where their own caregivers could not be trusted. They may have head knowledge about God but have not experienced His love. Others may be angry at God due to life circumstances.***

God has not called us to simply say we believe in Him and leave it at that. He has called us to actively participate with Him in the world that He created. We have been born again for a purpose. In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote:

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)*

Having faith in God means we trust that He is working for the good of all who love Him. However, God's thoughts and ways are far above what we can understand. During difficult times, it may not be clear what God is doing. But we can find peace when we trust that God uses all things, including our mistakes, for His purposes. When life isn't going the way we expect or want, trusting that God knows what He is doing will help us stay close to Him even in the storms of life. This is the kind of faith that following God requires.

## **TRUTH 16: No one is too sinful or bad to be saved.**

It might be easier for you to believe that God loves others than to believe that God loves you. We live with ourselves every day, and we know that our thoughts and actions do not always match up with what God expects of us. On top of that, we have an enemy, Satan, who tells us that we are not good enough to be Christians. Satan works nonstop, trying to convince followers of Jesus that they are unworthy of God's love.

Salvation is not offered based on how good or bad we are. No one is good enough to earn salvation. In Romans 3:10, Paul wrote, "As it is written: 'There is none righteous, not even one.'"

19. Write a check mark by the statement below that you think most closely reflects Romans 3:10:

***Some people are better than others and more deserving of God's forgiveness and love. No one can be saved.***

***✓ Every single person who has ever lived was not righteous enough on their own to deserve God's grace and forgiveness.***

This truth—that no one is too sinful or bad to be saved—may be the most important truth about God to understand.

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)*

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)*

Based on the verses you just read, are the following statements true or false?

20. **FALSE** Christ died for us when we were finally good enough to deserve it.
21. **FALSE** Some people have no sin in their life.
22. **FALSE** People are basically good.
23. **FALSE** Some people's lives match up to God's glory.

It is so important to understand that no matter what we have done in the past, we can receive forgiveness of sins and new life in Jesus Christ. We may have done things that friends, family, or society are unwilling to forgive us for doing. But we can know for certain that God offers forgiveness for every sin.

This is why the Gospel is “good news.” What a relief to know that, even though we may have been an enemy of God in the past, God loves us and desires to have a relationship with us. This may not seem fair. That’s because it’s not! To be fair, God could punish us for every one of our sins. But instead, because of God’s mercy, Jesus “himself bore our sins in his body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24). He took the penalty we deserved so that we could spend eternity with Him. “Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:25).

### **Question for Deeper Thinking**

1. As you reflect on your faith journey, which of these three things have you found the most difficult: being sure that God loves you, being confident that God has forgiven all your sins, or doing the good works God has created you to do? Please explain your answer.

***This question is designed to get the student thinking about the overall direction of their Christian life. All of us, in one way or another, struggle with these three things. This may be a good opportunity to share your own struggles to encourage your student that they are not alone.***

### ***In this lesson, you learned:***

- Through salvation, we receive forgiveness from our sins and new life as God’s children.
- Everyone who responds to Jesus in faith will be given new life.
- No one is too sinful or bad to be saved.

### **Action Step**

Look back at your answer to question 13. Think of someone you know who needs encouragement in their faith. How can you bless or encourage them? Send that person a note or spend some time praying for them.

# LESSON 6: The Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life

## Lesson Focus:

**Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach us and give us new life.**

In Lesson 2, you learned that the Holy Spirit is God, just as the Father and the Son are. In this lesson, you will learn more about the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives as Christians.

Before Jesus went to the cross, He told His disciples that He was leaving them. He prepared them for the sadness they would experience when He went back to His Father in heaven. Jesus told them:

*"It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate\* will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7, asterisk added)*

This was not the first time that Jesus had spoken to the disciples about sending the Advocate, or the Holy Spirit. He had previously told them that the Father would send the Advocate in Jesus' name.

Read **John 14:26**.

1. What did Jesus tell His disciples that the Holy Spirit would do for them?

***Jesus said the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and remind them of everything Jesus said to them.***

2. Describe a time when you believe that the Holy Spirit helped you understand something you read in the Bible or determine how to best deal with a specific situation in your life.

***This question encourages the student to actively look for the presence of the Holy Spirit. Their answer should relate to a specific time when they received insight from the Holy Spirit that helped them better understand God, themselves, or how to respond to a challenging circumstance.***

Having spent three years traveling and ministering with Jesus, His disciples were frightened, sad, and confused upon learning that Jesus would be taken away from them.

3. Describe the emotions you had, or still have, due to being separated from a loved one.

***This may be a difficult question for many of our students to answer due to the pain of being separated from their families. It is a challenging question, but our students live every day with the awareness of loss and may be grateful for the opportunity to express***

***their emotions. Gently encourage your student and remind them that the Lord is with them.***

As you learned in Lesson 2, we are in the presence of God when any of the three persons of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) are with us. Even though we cannot physically be with Jesus right now, Jesus promised to be with His followers “always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Jesus kept His promise and sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples shortly after He returned to heaven. When the disciples were all together in one place, the Holy Spirit came to them in an amazing and powerful way. Immediately, Jesus’ disciples began preaching the Gospel in a way that changed the world.

Read **Acts 2**.

4. If you had been in the crowd listening to Peter preach, how do you think you would have felt? How would you have reacted to the disciples’ actions?

***This question invites the student to imagine the story of Pentecost through the eyes of the original audience to highlight the importance of this event. The student may say they would have been skeptical or that they would have been amazed and filled with faith. Feel free to share your own answer in response.***

## **TRUTH 17: The Holy Spirit gives new life to all who trust in Jesus.**

Before we believed in Jesus, sin brought death and decay to our souls (Ephesians 2:1). But the moment we believed, the Holy Spirit breathed new life into us. We became a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

*He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. (Titus 3:5)*

This is what Christians call being born again.\* When we are born again, our old self, which is spiritually dead, is replaced with a new self, made alive by the Holy Spirit.

In John 3, we read about a respected Jewish teacher named Nicodemus. Jesus told him that he needed to be born again. He explained:

*“Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.” (John 3:5–6)*

Being “born of water” means being cleansed from sin. Jesus was reminding Nicodemus of the words of the prophet Ezekiel. God, speaking through Ezekiel, said that a time was coming when He would cleanse people from all their impurities, or sins.

Read **Ezekiel 36:24–28**.

5. What are the two things God said He would give the people and the one thing He said He would take away from them (verse 26)?

***God said He would give them a new heart and a new spirit and remove their hearts of stone.***

6. After God put His Spirit in the people, what would they be moved to do (verse 27)?

***The people would be moved by the Spirit to follow God's decrees and keep His laws.***

7. What did God say about the new relationship between Him and the people (verse 28)?

***The people will live in the land He promised to their ancestors; He will be their God and they will be His people.***

Without the Holy Spirit, our Christian life would be impossible. God takes our hard hearts of stone and softens them into hearts of flesh. Think about the hardness of a stone. Before we knew Jesus, our hearts were hardened against God and unwilling to let God use us. Our new hearts of flesh can love and show mercy to others as God desires. Thanks to the new life that the Holy Spirit provides, we can follow God and have a relationship with Him.

8. What did it feel like to be given new life in Christ by the Holy Spirit when you became a Christian? If you are not a Christian, what stands in your way of becoming one?

***This question is an attempt to engage the student on an emotional level. Remembering how we felt when our eyes were first opened to Jesus can be very powerful.***

***If your student wrote that they are not a Christian, engage with them gently and tell them you are praying for them.***

9. Since being born again, how have you grown in love and mercy for others? Please provide an example.

***Love is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and growing in love for others helps us become more merciful toward others as well. The student is challenged to examine their faith and determine how the Holy Spirit is working in and through them.***

The most important thing to remember is that our Christian life is a life lived by and through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to love others as God loves us and to be merciful to others as God has shown us mercy.

**TRUTH 18: The Holy Spirit helps believers live holy and fruitful lives of service.**

As Jesus was teaching the people about the Kingdom of God, He used many examples related to farming to help them understand. People at that time depended on the cycles of planting and harvesting crops. In Galatians 6:7, Paul wrote, “A man reaps\* what he sows\*” (asterisks added). Sowing is the act of planting seeds; reaping is the final harvesting of the crops.

Before becoming Christians, many of us likely planted seeds of envy, anger, and selfishness (Galatians 5:19–21). The harvest from those seeds pushed us farther away from God and His plan for our lives.

Now, as Christians, the Holy Spirit is at work in us, producing a harvest of fruit that glorifies God. This fruit is known as the fruit of the Spirit. As we mature in our faith, these characteristics will become more and more present in our lives. Let’s take a closer look at this fruit.

*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. (Galatians 5:22–23, asterisk added)*

This list of characteristics mirrors the character of God Himself. God is supremely loving, faithful, and kind. As His children, we are growing to become more like our Father. This is possible only with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Just as a farmer needs to do specific tasks to produce a good harvest, there are things we need to do to allow the Holy Spirit to produce fruit in our lives. For example, as we follow Jesus’ teaching to pray for God’s will to be done in our lives, we are surrendering our own desires and allowing ourselves to be molded by God and His Spirit (Matthew 6:9–13).

As we learn to be obedient to God’s Word, we will find more joy and peace in our hearts. Before becoming Christians, our lives may have been out of control, but the Holy Spirit teaches us to have self-control.

Philippians 2:13 says, “It is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” Obeying God is not always easy. But as we learn to submit our lives to Him, we will see that He is changing us and helping us obey Him.

God has called us to do His work on the earth. As He makes us holy and fills us with the fruit of His Spirit, He enables us to follow Him and make a difference in the lives of others. We can thank God that we are not dependent on our own strength but on the strength of God supplied by the Holy Spirit.

10. How have you changed since becoming a follower of Jesus and receiving God’s Spirit in you? If you are not a Christian, how have you seen God changing someone you know who is following Him?

***The student should note areas of their life where they have grown as a person and acknowledge the Holy Spirit’s hand in that growth. Celebrate this growth with them!***

***If they are not a believer, they should reflect on how God seems to have worked in the life of someone they know. Encourage your student to allow the Holy Spirit to guide their thoughts and actions.***

11. How do you see the Holy Spirit using you to help others?

***An important part of the Christian life is discovering how God is calling us to serve. The student is challenged to consider how God might be calling them to serve those around them. Encourage your student to follow the Spirit's guidance as they seek to bless others.***

## **TRUTH 19: The Holy Spirit helps believers know God as they study His Word and experience His work in their lives.**

*Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? (1 Corinthians 6:19)*

To truly know someone, we need to be close to them and spend time with them. The same is true for knowing God. Having His Spirit dwell in us allows us to be close to Him. We cannot know God's thoughts without having His Spirit. As Paul wrote, "No one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11). What an amazing thing it is that we can know the mind of God because His Holy Spirit is in us.

12. Has God ever taught or shown you something that you know must have come from the Holy Spirit? Please explain.

***Another important part of the Christian life is remembering how God has led us in the past. This question asks the student to remember one of those times. The question is like question 2 but provides another opportunity for the student to consider how the Holy Spirit teaches them.***

The Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible. What might not have made sense to us when we read the Bible in the past becomes understandable when the Holy Spirit lives in us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can truly know God and His Word.

How does the Holy Spirit help us to do this? At the beginning of the lesson, you read this verse:

*"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)*

Jesus was speaking to His disciples, who had witnessed much of what He had said and done. The Holy Spirit continued to teach the disciples and remind them of everything Jesus had taught them.

The Holy Spirit also uses our experiences with God and His Word to teach us. If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you have surely experienced God working in your life. The Holy Spirit reminds us of the ways God has worked in our lives.

As you learned in Lesson 1, one of the ways we get to know God directly is through the Bible. The Holy Spirit inspired every word of the Bible, so we can be certain that every word in the Bible is true.

If we believe that the Holy Spirit is teaching us something, we must go back to the Word of God to make sure it is true. God will never contradict Himself. Relying on our experiences and interpretations can be misleading, so our experiences must always be filtered and understood through what is written in the Bible.

Every time we open the Bible, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us about who God is. Without the Holy Spirit, we cannot know God or understand spiritual things.

*The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. (1 Corinthians 2:14)*

13. Why do you think the person without the Spirit considers spiritual things foolishness?

***Paul wrote that it is because spiritual things are “discerned only through the Spirit.” Without the Holy Spirit, it is impossible to understand spiritual things. For the unbeliever, the Gospel is foolishness.***

14. Before you were a Christian, what about the Gospel of Jesus seemed like foolishness to you?

***This question asks the student to remember their former way of thinking and how that has been changed by the Holy Spirit.***

15. What do you think Paul meant when he wrote that spiritual things can only be discerned or understood through the Spirit?

***Paul meant that only those who have believed in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit can understand spiritual things or the Gospel. When we have the Holy Spirit in our lives, the Gospel makes sense, and our experience confirms this truth.***

## **TRUTH 20: The Holy Spirit helps believers pray and bring praise and thanksgiving to God.**

The Bible tells us God hears the prayers of His children. We can approach God with confidence, knowing that our requests will be heard by our loving Father (1 John 5:14). But how do we know that we are praying for the right thing?

Romans 8:26–27 says:

*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.*

Sometimes, we might feel alone when we pray, like David did when he wrote in Psalm 13, “How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?” David faced many dangers throughout his life. At times, he seemed to lack confidence that God would save him. But even in his times of doubt, he cried out to God, and God never abandoned him.

When we pray, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit is helping us. The writer of Hebrews said that Jesus is our high priest and intercedes for us through the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 4:14–16). Going to God on our behalf is one of the most important responsibilities of the Holy Spirit.

16. Have you experienced a time when you weren’t sure what to pray for and the Holy Spirit provided you with the words to say? Please explain.

***The intention of this question is to help the student consider the role of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Some students might not be able to recount a specific time, but that is okay. Encourage them to continue praying with the knowledge that the Holy Spirit is praying with them.***

17. Describe how your prayer life is strengthened by knowing that the Holy Spirit intercedes for you.

***Knowing that the Holy Spirit intercedes when we pray should be of great encouragement to your student. Share your own thoughts in response.***

### **Question for Deeper Thinking**

1. How have you seen God work in your life? Ask the Holy Spirit to remind you of the things God has done for you.

***Remembering God’s faithfulness in the past helps us trust that God will be faithful in the future. This is an opportunity for the student to consider and testify to the work of the Holy Spirit throughout their life. Celebrate this with your student and share some of the things God has done in your life.***

### ***In this lesson, you learned:***

- The Holy Spirit gives new life to all who trust in Jesus.
- The Holy Spirit helps believers live holy and fruitful lives of service.
- The Holy Spirit helps believers know God as they study His Word and experience His work in their lives.
- The Holy Spirit helps believers pray and bring praise and thanksgiving to God.

### **Action Step**

Make a list of ways God has worked in your life. Keep the list in your Bible so you can review it periodically and thank God for everything He has done for you.

# LESSON 7: Your New Life as a Follower of Jesus

## Lesson Focus:

**Following Jesus changes every aspect of our lives.**

The apostle Paul, while he was still called Saul, persecuted\* people who followed Jesus. His job was to find believers, drag them out of their homes or places of worship, and bring them to the authorities. But one day, he had a life-changing experience. While Paul was carrying out his mission, Jesus appeared to him and confronted him about his persecution of Jesus' followers. From that day on, Paul's world was turned upside down. He went from being a persecutor of the Church to a preacher of Christ (Acts 9:1–9).

Although we generally do not experience Jesus appearing to us like that today, the Holy Spirit is working in your life just like He worked in Paul's.

1 Peter 1:3–4 tells us:

*In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.*

In the previous lesson, you learned that the Holy Spirit was given to God's people to bring them new life. In this lesson, you will learn more about what it means to experience that new life.

## TRUTH 21: Following Jesus results in abundant\* life.

Before we became Christians, many of us thought we were living full and meaningful lives. We chased after the pleasures of this world, believing the lie that they would satisfy us and bring us peace and contentment. But when we met Jesus, we found the true source of peace and contentment—the only one who can truly satisfy our souls and give us abundant life.

1. According to John 10:10, why did Jesus come to earth?

***John 10:10 says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Wording may vary depending on the version of the Bible the student is using.***

What is this abundant life that is promised to all who follow Jesus? What can we expect if we follow Him? Some people believe we should expect an easy life that is free from trouble and full of health and wealth.

In this world, both Christians and non-Christians will experience hard times. The difference is that, as Christians, we can have peace and assurance that God is with us in the middle of our struggles. We can trust that God loves us and is guiding our lives even when things are difficult.

The abundant life Jesus promised does not guarantee we will gain lots of money, possessions, or approval from others or that our every wish will come true. But what we do gain by following Jesus is far better.

*My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.  
(Philippians 4:19)*

When we feel like something is missing from our lives, it can be difficult to tell if it is a *want* or a *need*. There is a difference. God never promised to supply all our wants. But when it comes to things like food, clothing, and shelter, Jesus taught His followers not to worry about them.

*“Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!” (Luke 12:24)*

2. If you leave prison someday, you will have needs like housing, a job, medical services, etc. If you are making a reentry plan, what concerns do you have as you get closer to your release?

***For many students, thinking about leaving prison comes with a lot of fear and anxiety about the future. Some students will not have the option to leave prison at all. In either case, encourage your student to trust in the Lord, who cares and provides even for the flowers and the birds.***

You will certainly have real needs if you leave prison, but Jesus wants you to know that He will go before you and that He already knows everything you need. If you do not expect to be released, you can be sure that Jesus is there with you as you seek to live a full and meaningful life.

Let's look at some promises that God makes to us as believers.

3. Read Ephesians 3:20. What is God able to do?

***God is able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”***

4. Read John 17:3. Jesus prayed to His Father that His followers would have eternal life. What did Jesus say is eternal life?

***Jesus said eternal life is to know the Father, the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He has sent.***

5. Read 1 Corinthians 2:9. What can no human mind conceive (understand)?

***No human mind can conceive “the things God has prepared for those who love him.”***

6. Read Deuteronomy 31:8. What promise did God give through Moses?

***God promised to go before His people, to be with them, and never to leave or forsake them.***

7. Read Ephesians 2:10. What were we created to do?

**We were created “to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”**

8. Which of these five promises gives you the most peace? Please explain.

***This is an opportunity for the student to apply one of these promises from God to their life. Feel free to share your own answer in response.***

## **TRUTH 22: Even the strongest believers will face challenges.**

What are some of the challenges we can expect as followers of Jesus? Being aware of challenges in advance can help us overcome them.

One of these challenges is our natural resistance to change. As followers of Jesus, we are no longer slaves to sin; we are free to obey God’s commandments. However, we may still wrestle with some patterns, habits, and desires from our old life. Past wounds or abuse from others might make it difficult to put our full trust in God. All these things can make living our new life challenging. We will still experience temptations to sin. It can be a struggle to put God’s will above our own. The pull of our old life can make obedience to God difficult.

The apostle Paul was one of the most mature and faithful Christians that ever lived. But even he wrestled with sin. He wrote about his struggles with his sinful nature in his letter to the Roman Christians:

*Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being\* I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:21–25, asterisk added)*

9. As you seek to follow God, do you find Paul’s struggles similar to your own? Please explain.

***This question aims to help the student feel less alone in their struggles against the temptation to sin. All Christians experience this—even Paul did. Offer encouragement and prayer.***

Taking off the old self with its sinful desires and putting on the new self is a process that takes a lifetime. As we continue to look to Jesus in faith, we will be transformed into His image (2 Corinthians 3:18). There will be times when we fail. There will be times when we face opposition. But the Bible encourages us not to run away from God when we fail. We are told to run toward Him. Our challenges and failures are not hidden from God. He knows more about our weaknesses than we do.

Another challenge we often face as Christians is conflict with the world. When we are *in* the world but not *of* the world, we will naturally seem out of place. Jesus said the world might hate

us for that (John 17:14–16). This hatred from the world can come in the form of mockery or even discrimination.\* Some Christians have been put to death because of their faith in Jesus. Even today, in some countries, Christians experience this kind of extreme hatred. While hatred from the world is hurtful, it should not surprise us. Jesus warned His disciples:

*“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.” (John 15:18–19)*

10. How does it make you feel to know that God sees and understands all your challenges, including the challenges you face from the world?

***Your student likely experiences periods of intense loneliness and/or feeling misunderstood. Encourage your student to remember that God sees them and cares about them.***

The challenges we face as Christians are common to all believers. The Bible tells us we can expect these challenges to come, and in some ways, we can prepare ourselves to face them. But it is important to understand that we also have an enemy of our souls: Satan.

*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)*

As we follow Jesus, the devil will look for ways to trap us. He may try to fill us with fear, hoping we will walk away from God. If he cannot do that, he may tempt us to act in ways that make others question the truth of the Gospel.

Satan even tempted Jesus in hopes that He would not complete the mission that He came to earth to fulfill.

Read **Matthew 4:1–11**.

11. What was the first thing Satan tempted Jesus to do?

***He tempted Him to turn stones into bread.***

12. What was the second thing Satan tempted Jesus to do?

***He tempted Him to jump down from the highest point of the temple.***

13. In his third temptation, what did Satan say Jesus had to do for Satan to give Him all the kingdoms of the world?

***Satan said Jesus had to bow down and worship him.***

Satan wants us to abandon God's purposes for our lives, just like he wanted Jesus to do. He will tempt us with the promise of an easier life if we walk away from God. As Jesus said to His disciples, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" (Mark 8:36). Anything the world has to offer does not compare to eternal life with God.

## **TRUTH 23: We will experience trials and sufferings as we follow Jesus.**

Life is difficult for everyone—Christians and non-Christians alike. Everyone experiences loss, pain, and heartbreak. Natural disasters, wars, and poverty affect believers and nonbelievers in the same way.

14. While every human is subject to the results of sin in the world, what makes the experience of suffering different for Christians?

***As Christians, we do not suffer as those who have no hope. God is with us in our suffering, and it is purposeful, not pointless.***

Read **2 Corinthians 4:16–18**.

15. Why did Paul tell the believers they should not "lose heart" or become discouraged (verse 16)?

***Because even though "outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."***

16. What do our difficulties and troubles achieve (verse 17)?

***They achieve for us "an eternal glory that far outweighs" our troubles.***

17. Why should we fix our eyes on what is unseen (verse 18)?

***Because "what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."***

We live in a world that is not as it should be. Pain, brokenness, and death are all around us. When we are saved, God does not take us out of this broken world. Instead, He calls us to bring light into it.

Think about what it was like to go through a very difficult time before you knew Jesus. In contrast, when we have faith in Jesus, we can lean on God's Holy Spirit to give us peace, wisdom, and comfort in our suffering. Whatever difficulties we face, we can rest assured that God can and will use them to draw us closer to Him.

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome:

*We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;\* perseverance, character; and character, hope. (Romans 5:3–4, asterisk added)*

18. How do you think suffering can produce perseverance, character, and hope in our lives?

***Your student may give a personal example of how God brought them through a period of suffering to hope. Or they may answer this more broadly and say that when we look to the Lord in our suffering, we persevere and are shaped into those who have a deeper hope in Jesus.***

## **TRUTH 24: Following Jesus transforms how we view our relationships.**

Healthy relationships with others can be one of the biggest blessings from God. However, relationships can be difficult. Relationships with people who are hard to get along with are especially challenging. Some people use relationships to manipulate others. Every relationship comes with its own set of challenges.

When we follow Jesus, our relationships become less about our needs and more about serving others. The Bible calls us to look to Jesus as our example.

*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ 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. (Philippians 2:5–7)*

19. Explain a time when you had to humble yourself to help build a healthy relationship with someone in your life.

***Many students have a lot of experience with destructive relationships, where showing humility is a sign of weakness instead of strength. You may want to encourage your student, sharing that you understand just how hard it can be to humble yourself and serve others.***

20. What do you think it means that Jesus, “being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage”?

***Your student may write that Jesus humbled Himself for our sake, to serve instead of being served.***

We know from God’s Word that God loves us. But more importantly, the Bible tells us that God *is* love (1 John 4:8). As we get to know God and allow His Spirit to fill us, He transforms us into His image. Romans 5:5 says, “God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.” It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can love others with the same love God has shown us.

Review the fruits of the Spirit in **Galatians 5:22–23**.

21. Review the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23. How have your relationships with others improved as you have shown these fruits in your life?

***Producing the fruits of the Spirit will lead to more harmony in our relationships. Celebrate your student's relational improvements and encourage them to continue living in step with the Spirit.***

## **TRUTH 25: God promises He will never leave us or forsake us.**

Toward the end of Jesus' ministry on earth, He gathered His disciples to prepare them for His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven. He said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

As Jesus sent the disciples into the world, He promised them, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

Hebrews 13:5–6 tells us, "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.' So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?'"

22. Have you experienced God's presence in a difficult situation? Please explain.

***If your student shares a positive experience, celebrate with them and share an experience of your own so you can encourage one another. If your student responds negatively, assure them that God is nearest to those with a broken heart and that you will be praying for their situation.***

As Jesus' disciples, we can trust His promise to be with us always. We can also find strength in relationships with other Christians who, like us, have God's Spirit within them. That is why the Bible places so much importance on meeting together with other believers.

23. Read Hebrews 10:24–25. What should we "spur one another" (encourage each other) to do?

***We should encourage one another to love others and to do good deeds.***

The Christian life can be difficult, but we are never alone. The presence of God and fellowship with His people are gifts given to us in Christ.

## **Question for Deeper Thinking**

1. As you think about the abundant life you have received in Christ, what excites you most about being a Christian?

***Your student's answer will reveal a lot about where they are on their spiritual journey. This would be a good opportunity for you to share with your student what most excites you about the new life you have in Christ.***

### ***In this lesson, you learned:***

- Following Jesus results in abundant life.
- Even the strongest believers will face challenges.
- We will experience trials and sufferings as we follow Jesus.
- Following Jesus transforms how we view our relationships.
- God promises He will never leave us or forsake us.

## **Action Step**

This week, get together with one or two other believers to pray, read God's Word, and encourage one another toward love and good deeds.

# LESSON 8: Our God Is King!

## Lesson Focus:

**God is King over His creation, the universe, and His people, the Church.**

King Nebuchadnezzar (pronounced neh-byoo-kuhd-NEH-zer) was a proud and stubborn man. Most likely, any of us would have been just as proud if we were him. He was king over the massive Babylonian Empire from 605 to 562 BC (before Christ). His empire had destroyed Jerusalem, God's holy city.

Daniel chapter 4 describes the way God mercifully broke King Nebuchadnezzar of his stubbornness and showed him who the real King was. At the height of Nebuchadnezzar's power, God took away not only his authority but also his sanity for seven years. After these seven years, Nebuchadnezzar said the following:

*At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. (Daniel 4:34)*

In this lesson, we will look at God as the King who rules over all creation. We will also discuss God's rule specifically over His people, those who follow Jesus. Jesus said that He came to establish His Church (Matthew 16:18). As followers of Jesus, we are His Church, the people of God.

1. What does it mean to you that God is the King over all creation?

***This question gauges the student's thoughts before they have gone through the material in the lesson. The student might mention that it means He has the right to rule over everything He has made.***

2. As a follower of Jesus, what does it mean to you that God is your King?

***This question is highlighting the need to have God rule in our hearts, not just over the rest of creation. Feel free to share your own reflections in response.***

## TRUTH 26: God reigns over the whole world.

When we say God is our King, what does that mean? For those who live in countries not ruled by a king, it is easy to miss the full meaning. A democracy, for example, is defined as "government by the people." Democratic countries are ruled by people chosen through election. Earthly rulers have limited power. They are flawed humans like us. If people disagree with the actions of their elected officials, they can vote them out of office and elect someone else.

In contrast, God's Kingdom is ruled by God and God alone. God has established His laws and desires for us to live our lives based on those laws. God is King forever, and His power is not limited. Unlike an earthly king or lawmaker, God is perfect and loving, so we can trust that He will rule justly and for our good.

What is God's Kingdom? In general terms, God's Kingdom is the entire universe. God made the universe (Genesis 1). It belongs to Him. He rules over it, causing the sun to rise and rain to fall. Not only did God create everything in this world, but He also holds everything together (Colossians 1:15–17). Without God, there would be nothing.

Read **Job 38**. This chapter describes how God reminded Job of the wonders of creation to show Job that He was in control, not Job.

3. Think about a time when you saw the stars on a clear night. What does that image of the stars and the universe say to you about God?

***This question aims to help the student see the majesty of God in the wonders of creation.***

4. According to Colossians 1:16, what was Jesus' role in the creation of the universe?

***All things were created in Him, through Him, and for Him.***

## **TRUTH 27: The Kingdom of God has come to earth.**

Prior to the birth of Jesus, the people of God knew God through Scripture and through His laws. Prophets communicated more directly with God and His people. But when Jesus was on earth, He said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). During Jesus' three years of earthly ministry, His main message was about the Kingdom of God, what it was, how it operated, and how it would overcome evil. Countless books have been written and could be written on this single topic of the Kingdom of God. Even though it is not an easy idea to grasp, it is important to understand that Jesus came to establish His Kingdom on earth, made up of people (the Church) who would love and serve Him.

John the Baptist began preparing the way for Jesus to come and establish His Kingdom. Matthew wrote about the prophecy of Isaiah concerning John the Baptist:

*This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" (Matthew 3:3)*

In Jesus' day, when an important ruler was going to visit a city, workers would first prepare the way by ensuring that the pathway was straight. This included filling in potholes so the ruler's chariot could travel smoothly into the city. Preparing the roads showed respect and honor to the visiting ruler.

5. Read Mark 11:1–11. What did the crowd shout as Jesus rode into the city?

***"Hosanna!"***

***"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"***

***"Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"***

***"Hosanna in the highest heaven!"***

The Jewish people were waiting for, praying for, and expecting God to send a king to rule over them. They hoped this earthly king would defeat the Roman government and establish an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem so they would no longer have to suffer under Roman rule. But instead, Jesus said He was establishing a spiritual kingdom (John 18:36).

6. If you were a Jewish person in Jesus' day, how would you feel when you learned that Jesus was not going to set the people of Jerusalem free from Roman rule?

***This exercise aims to help students understand the story from the perspective of the people experiencing it, who expected an earthly kingdom instead of a spiritual or heavenly kingdom.***

The Bible teaches that someday, every person will bow to God as King and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord (Philippians 2:10–11). God, in His love, has given each of us time to choose to follow Him and participate in His Kingdom. It was always Jesus' plan that His followers would continue establishing His Kingdom on the earth. An important part of Jesus' ministry on earth was training His disciples to do exactly that.

Because Jesus came to establish a spiritual kingdom, He taught His disciples about spiritual warfare. As Christians, it is important for us to understand that there are spiritual forces, under the rule of Satan, that seek to destroy God's Kingdom on earth.

During His ministry, Jesus sent seventy-two of His followers ahead of Him to prepare villages and towns for His arrival.

7. Read Luke 10:17–20. What did Jesus' followers say to Him when they returned?

***"Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."***

As followers of Jesus, we will also encounter spiritual warfare. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we are praying for God's Kingdom to be established on earth (Matthew 6:10). We often think of spiritual warfare as something supernatural, but the simple act of forgiving someone who has harmed us is a powerful tool for spiritual warfare. Nothing makes Satan angrier than when we choose to forgive and love others.

8. Read 2 Corinthians 2:10–11. When we forgive others, what do we prevent Satan from doing?

***We prevent Satan from outwitting us.***

Think about the spiritual battle that is won when we share the Gospel with people who then place their trust in Jesus. This is spiritual warfare at the highest level. Each time a new believer is added to the Church, Satan's plans to defeat Jesus' Kingdom on earth are frustrated. Developing a close relationship with God will prepare us for the spiritual battles Jesus has called us to fight.

As we wait in anticipation for the day when Jesus returns, Satan wants to do all he can to keep us dead in our sins and make us reject God. Jesus said that He came so we can have abundant life, but Satan comes "only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10).

The Bible encourages us to be aware of Satan's plans and how he may tempt us (1 Peter 5:8). But the Bible never tells us to be afraid of Satan. That is because Jesus won a victory over him on the cross. Satan's power was taken away from him. And though he may try to overpower us, we know that Jesus already defeated him. Therefore, through prayer, we can fight against Satan without fear, knowing that we have everything we need in Jesus.

Jesus said to Peter, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades\* will not overcome it" (Matthew 16:18, asterisk added).

Jesus made it clear that He would establish His Kingdom and the forces of darkness would be defeated.

9. Does knowing that Jesus will succeed in establishing His Kingdom give you confidence to continue seeking and serving Him? Please explain.

***This is an opportunity to gauge where your student is on their spiritual journey. Being assured of Jesus' victory is an important part of the Christian faith. Without the confidence this brings, our Christian lives will suffer greatly.***

## **TRUTH 28: The Church is made up of all believers.**

God uses the Church to advance His Kingdom on earth. In fact, the Church is so connected to Jesus that He referred to Himself as a bridegroom and His people as the bride.

10. Read Matthew 25:1–13. What did the bridegroom (Jesus) say to those who were not ready for His arrival?

***"Truly I tell you, I don't know you."***

Jesus often taught about this special relationship between Him and His people, the Church. The apostle Paul used the same imagery in his letter to the Ephesian church to teach about godly relationships between husbands and wives.

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her*

*to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25–27)*

Who is considered to be the Church, the bride of Christ? The Bible says that the Church includes everyone who believes in Jesus, from all times and places (Hebrews 12:22–24).

The Bible also refers to believers as the body of Christ. The Church is united with Christ and with each other in Christ.

*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (1 Corinthians 12:26–27)*

11. Why do you think it is important to God that His people are united with each other?

***Your student may mention a variety of reasons. When we are united, we are stronger, and we demonstrate to the world that God's love is in us. God is love, and as we follow Him, our lives should begin to mirror God's character.***

When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we become a member of Christ's body, the Church. It is important for Christians to gather with other believers. Becoming involved in a local church will not make you a Christian; only faith in Jesus can do that. But as a Christian, gathering with other believers is a gift from God.

*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 10:24–25)*

12. How is God using you to serve the Church?

***This question asks the student to examine how God is using them to bless His people. They are being challenged to put their faith into action. If your student struggled to answer this question or said it's too hard to do in prison, offer some ideas and suggestions.***

## **TRUTH 29: A healthy church is one that preaches the Gospel and serves the broken.**

Whether you will be going home someday or not, you will want to seek out a healthy church where you can grow in your faith. But how can you tell if a church is healthy?

The Bible gives us a lot of guidance about what a church is supposed to do and teach. In fact, what might seem like a complicated question has a simple answer: a healthy church is one that preaches and teaches the Word of God as taught in the Bible and loves and serves others. A healthy church takes seriously the Great Commission\* Jesus gave to His disciples:

*"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)*

An important job of a church is to help its members become faithful followers of Jesus. But a church can do this only through Jesus, to whom "all authority in heaven and on earth" belongs. He is the head of the Church, and He rules with grace and peace by His Spirit and through His Word. He is the Good Shepherd (Ezekiel 34:15–16; John 10:11–16), and He has also appointed pastors and other leaders to care for His flock.

Jesus taught that we can identify a tree by its fruit (Matthew 12:33). Therefore, a healthy church, while not perfect, will produce healthy fruit. When looking for a healthy church, ask yourself whether the church reflects the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

In previous lessons, you learned about the religious leaders of Jesus' day, the Pharisees. They created hundreds of laws that they wanted others to follow, but they lacked the most important thing: love. When choosing a church, ask yourself, "Does this church reflect God's love?" Legalism\* can creep into and negatively impact a church when the church places a greater emphasis on following rules than on loving God and others.

A healthy church does not require its members to be perfect. A healthy church is a place where broken people can come to receive the grace and healing of Jesus Christ.

13. What are some ways you can welcome broken people into your life?

***Your student is most likely surrounded by people who may be considered broken, but finding ways to welcome them can be difficult in prison. Encourage your student as they brainstorm ways to bring Christ's love to the broken.***

## **TRUTH 30: Jesus will return one day.**

From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have been eagerly waiting for Jesus to return as He promised (Matthew 24:30–31). Many Christians disagree about the time and circumstances of Jesus' return. But there are quite a few things on which all Christians can agree.

First, the Bible teaches that we should be waiting and watching for Jesus' return. Paul wrote:

*You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. . . . But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.  
(1 Thessalonians 5:2, 4)*

Second, when Jesus returns, He will judge humanity. During Jesus' earthly ministry, He said He did not come to judge the world (John 12:47–48). But at His second coming, He will judge the living and the dead.

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:10)*

Third, when Jesus returns, He will bring comfort for our sufferings.

*He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:4)*

The day is coming when we who believe in Jesus will be changed to be like Him. We will no longer be tempted to sin or experience sorrow or physical decay (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). Beyond that, we do not know exactly what it will be like for us. The apostle John wrote:

*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure. (1 John 3:2–3)*

The return of Jesus is central to the hope of every Christian. One look at the world shows us that things are not as they should be. Even creation itself is eagerly waiting for Jesus' return (Romans 8:18–21). As we pray for God's Kingdom to come and work hard to advance the Kingdom, we know that His Kingdom will not fully come until Jesus returns. Thanks be to God that this world is not our home (Philippians 3:20). We eagerly await the day when Jesus rules in all His grace and glory.

14. As part of the Church, the bride of Christ, how are you preparing for the return of Jesus, our bridegroom?

***This question asks the student to consider how the expectation of Jesus' return leads them to action. Feel free to share your own answer in response.***

15. As you continue to grow in your faith, what does it mean to you that you are in the world but not of the world?

***Your student is probably surrounded by constant reminders that they are in the world while also feeling the pull to be of the world. Choosing to follow Jesus in prison will make the student stand out. Encourage them to continue following the Lord.***

## **Questions for Deeper Thinking**

1. When Jesus returns, He will judge the world and put an end to sin. When you think about Jesus' return to earth, what emotions do you experience? Please explain.

***The student is asked to imagine what it will be like when Jesus returns. Will they be happy that their struggles with sin are over? Will they be overjoyed to reunite with loved ones? What do they look forward to with eager expectation? Share your own thoughts with your student in response.***

2. During Jesus' earthly ministry, His disciples expected Him to destroy the Romans and give the Jews political freedom. Instead, He gave spiritual freedom to all who trust in Him. What does spiritual freedom mean to you?

***This question will likely hit close to home for our students, who have lost their physical freedom. We want to help them see that even though their bodies may be behind bars, Jesus has set them free spiritually. Encourage your student and congratulate them for finishing this course!***

***In this lesson, you learned:***

- God reigns over the whole world.
- The Kingdom of God has come to earth.
- The Church is made up of all believers.
- A healthy church is one that preaches the Gospel and serves the broken.
- Jesus will return one day.

## **Action Step**

Choose a local church to pray for this week—either a church inside your facility or one on the outside. If you don't know of a church you can pray for, ask a chaplain or another Christian how you can pray for their church's spiritual health.



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