

# The Seven Commands of Jesus

## *The Seven Commands of Jesus*

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*Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*

*Matthew 28:18-20*

## Introduction

After his death and resurrection, Jesus told his followers to “make disciples of all the nations.” (See Matthew 28:18-20.) He said we should accomplish this task in two ways. First, we baptize people in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (See chapter 2 for more about being baptized.) Second, we are to teach people to obey all that Jesus commanded. This book is about obeying what Jesus commanded.

But what did Jesus command? While many people are interested in Jesus, few have studied his life and his teachings. This book is an introduction to seven of the most important commands Jesus gave his followers. We'll unpack those commands to understand what following Jesus looks like.

In the Bible, a Jesus-follower is called a "disciple." Sometimes churches talk about "discipleship." What we're really talking about is a pattern for what it means to grow in relationship with Jesus and his people. At its simplest, discipleship means loving Jesus, loving people, and teaching people to love Jesus. There is a lot more to it, of course, but these are the simplest places to start.

Gathering with others who know Jesus is a key part of this process. It is difficult, if not impossible, to follow Jesus alone. Each section of this booklet ends with questions for further discussion. Whether you are meeting with a group around these questions or simply talking about them with a family member or friend, may God bless you as you follow Jesus and grow in relationship with his people!



## The First Command: Repent and Believe

*"Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God's good news. 'The time promised by God has come at last!' he announced. 'The kingdom of God is near. Repent of your sins and believe the good news!'"*  
(Mark 1:14-15)

The paired command to "repent and believe" is the heart of Jesus' first sermon in Mark 1. It is at the heart of Jesus' last conversations with his disciples in Luke 24. "Repent and believe" is at the core of Peter's great sermon on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2). To our 21st Century ears, "repent and believe" sounds like religious language. Can't you just picture a sidewalk preacher or a televangelist throwing those words around? Maybe the picture in your mind is of someone going forward at a Billy Graham crusade, giving their heart to Jesus.

Two thousand years ago when the New Testament was written in the Greek language, these words had very specific meanings. The Greek word for 'repent' is *metanoia*, and it means to change direction. If you were driving down the highway and suddenly realized you'd missed your exit, you would need to change direction. The Greek word for 'believe' is *pisteuo*, and it means more than just intellectually agreeing that something is true. This word includes the idea of loyalty and trust. To believe something in the New Testament means you put your weight on it. Believing in something—or more to the point, *someone*—changes your life in tangible ways.

A Jewish general who lived about the same time as Jesus used the words "repent and believe" together in a way that might surprise us. Flavius Josephus records the story of his confrontation with a rebel who was stirring up trouble in Josephus' territory. Josephus ambushed the rebel and captured him. Then Josephus told the rebel in no

uncertain terms that he had to change his way of living. The words Josephus used were '*metanoiete kai pisteuete en emoi.*' They are the same Greek words Jesus spoke in his very first sermon (see Mark 1:15). Most translators render these Greek words in Mark as "repent and believe." As a military general, Josephus was certainly not telling this rebel to have a spiritual experience. Rather he was saying something like, "Stop doing things your way and start living your life my way." It is certain that Josephus had some very practical changes in mind. That is probably much closer to the way people would have heard Jesus' words when he originally spoke them. Repenting and believing are both action words that have a real impact in daily life.

Another military term is perhaps helpful here. Sometimes, especially when we have become rooted in our own ways of doing things, repenting and believing in Jesus feels like *surrender*. In a very real sense, when we live life on our own terms we are at war with God. We are opposed to his ways of doing things, and we stubbornly refuse to knuckle under. To repent and believe means laying down our weapons (pride, anger, selfishness, for example) and surrendering to Jesus. Romans 5:10 says that while we were enemies of God, he reconciled us to himself. In effect, God made us his friends through the death and resurrection of Jesus. So to repent and believe in him means that we recognize that he is in charge, choose to agree with his ways, and begin to live life on his terms.

What can you expect when you repent and believe? Jesus will begin making real changes in your life. One woman who recently surrendered to Jesus said the first change she noticed was the way she heard the name of Jesus. Previously when she heard Jesus mentioned on a radio station or television show she would change the station as quickly as possible. She didn't want to hear it. Now, though, she turned up the volume. She said she wanted to know what those people were saying about her friend.

Sometimes there are specific habits that we know are wrong, and Jesus may call us to make lifestyle changes very quickly. Addictions, dishonesty, sexual promiscuity, and the like will be confronted by Jesus. It may take time for these habits to change, or Jesus may simply draw a hard line in your life and make those changes right now. One key, of course, is that you work to make those changes as well. If the Spirit of God lets you know that something in your life needs to change, it's important to work along with God to make those changes as quickly as possible. Making changes like these is one reason it's so important to have others who are following Jesus helping you. It's absolutely certain you are not the first person to deal with your particular sins, and others can help you get free.

To be clear, God doesn't expect these changes because he's a spoilsport. Repentance doesn't mean we live with a constant frown. God is the source of true, overflowing joy. God wants us to turn away from things that are damaging to us. He loves us and wants what is best for us. He longs for us to experience what Jesus called "abundant life" (see John 10:10). It's the fullest, best possible life we can have. Turning away from ourselves toward Jesus and putting our trust in him is at the very core of this abundant life.

Without question welcoming Jesus into your life is a critically important step. In fact, if you've never prayed a heartfelt prayer to do that, consider doing two things right now. First, in your own heart or (better yet) with another person, pray a prayer something like this one:

*Dear Jesus, I'm sorry that I have tried to live life on my own terms. I'm sorry for those things that I have done that are wrong. Thank you for dying on the cross for me, and for rising from the dead. Please forgive my sins and send your Holy Spirit to live*

*within me right now. I give myself to you, Lord  
Jesus. Amen.*

Second, if you have prayed that prayer on your own, let someone know. Find someone who knows Jesus well and tell them you have prayed this prayer from the heart. They will certainly be excited for you. They can also help you to grow into the changes that Jesus will bring into your life in the days to come.

In one sense, this prayer sums up what it means to repent and believe. There is a deep spiritual reality to repentance and belief. But these words are more than simply religious terms. When we realize our lives are on the wrong course, we need to repent. We turn away from our own agendas and our own ways and we turn toward Jesus as Lord.

**Questions to discuss:**

1. What gut feelings are attached to the words "repent" and "believe" for you?
2. What is the difference between the way a TV preacher might use these words and the way Josephus used them?
3. Why do you suppose Jesus chose the words "repent and believe" for his first sermon and his last conversations with the disciples?
4. Have you ever surrendered your life to Jesus? If not, what is holding you back from making that move right now?
5. What things in your life do you need to turn away from? What would it look like for you this week to trust Jesus more completely?

## The Second Command: Be baptized

*Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:18-20)*

Baptism is integrally tied up with following Jesus. Historically, Jesus began his ministry being baptized by John in the Jordan River. Each of the four New Testament gospels emphasizes this event. John's baptism focused on repentance. Though Jesus was without sin, he came as the "friend of sinners" (see Matthew 9:11) and so he identified with us by being baptized.

After his resurrection, Jesus commissioned his followers. He said their grand mission was to "make disciples" (see Matthew 28, quoted above). Jesus specified two tasks that are key to this mission. First, we are to baptize. Second, we are to teach new disciples to obey all Jesus commanded. This passage is often called "The Great Commission" and it has provided simple marching orders for the church for the last two thousand years.

On the day of Pentecost, the birthday of the church, all those who heard Peter's message were "cut to the heart" (see Acts 2). When they asked what to do next, Peter's answer was "be baptized." By being baptized, these three thousand people made a public statement that they were repenting of their sins and turning to follow Jesus' way.

The Greek word *baptizo* literally means to dip or immerse something in water. Among other uses, this word was used in the Greek language to refer to a ship sinking. The action of being baptized emphasizes going down into the water. The New Testament connects baptism with drowning. But in baptism, we also come up out of the water. We are, the New Testament says, buried with Jesus in our baptism. Then just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we come up out of the water to live a new life (see Romans 6:4). This is good news!

So from baptism onward, we rise with Jesus into a new life. We are, as 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, a "new creation." If you are beginning to follow Jesus, the natural next step is to be baptized.

Different churches practice baptism in different ways. At The Open Door Christian Church, we baptize people after they confess faith in Jesus. This is the most common pattern we see in the Bible. We're not critiquing other churches, but this is what we see God leading us to practice. So even if you were baptized as an infant, we encourage you to take a public step and be baptized now that you can confess your own faith in Jesus.

Baptism is not just about an individual decision. We are baptized into a community. The church gathers to welcome the newly baptized person into the family. Welcome home! Too often people get bogged down and discouraged trying to follow Jesus on their own. We all need others to surround and support us. When you make a public statement in your baptism, we want to surround you with relationships and resources that can help you grow into this new life.

The Bible says that by his death and resurrection, Jesus transferred us out of darkness and into light (see Colossians 1). In baptism, we are identified with Jesus' death and resurrection. That historical event now becomes *our* death and resurrection. For the rest of our earthly lives,

we learn to live as new creations. Each day we can say, "I have been baptized. I have been crucified with Jesus. I am dead to sin and alive in Jesus Christ." That transfer from death to life is like a pro football player being transferred to another team. You are no longer on the team of Satan, but now you are on the team of Jesus. So when Satan says it's time to show up for practice, or to play on his side, you can say, "I am no longer on your team; I belong to Jesus!"

**Questions to discuss:**

1. How does baptism make a public statement? What might be wrong with "private" baptisms?
2. Have you thought of baptism being like death and resurrection? What do you think of that imagery?
3. In what ways has Satan tried to keep you on his "team"? How does it feel to be able to tell him you're on Jesus' team now?
4. Have you been baptized in a public way? If so, what was that like? If not, what is keeping you from being baptized?



## The Third Command: Love one another

*[Jesus said,] So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples. (John 13:34-35)*

It was the last meal Jesus would share with his friends before his death. He knew what was coming. He knew that though he was the Son of God, one of his closest friends would betray him and he would be arrested, railroaded through a mockery of a trial, severely beaten, and killed. What would you do in a moment like that?

Jesus could have been angry or full of self-pity. Instead, he stripped down and did the chore of the lowest slave: He washed the dusty feet of his disciples. Then he explained to them he was giving them an example. "Just as I have loved you, you should love each other." Love is the heart of Jesus' teaching and his example.

Another time, Jesus was asked what the most important command in the Jewish Law was. He said the most important thing is to love God. Then he went on to say that the second most important commandment is to love your neighbor (see Matthew 22:37-39).

Jesus says that the world will recognize his followers by the way they love each other. Almost two centuries later, the great theologian Tertullian said that pagans looked at Christians and marveled, "See how they love one another!" Throughout the centuries, those who follow Jesus have one command above all others: Love.

If you have put your trust in Jesus Christ as Lord, love is his first command to you: Love God and love other people. Note that love is

an action word, not just a feeling. That means we can learn to love. How can you learn to love well?

First, Jesus calls us to live in community. No one follows Jesus alone. If you are not rooted in a Life Group or other Jesus-focused community, you need to change that. It is simply not optional for Christians to live in community. There are many reasons why community is so important to Jesus.

For one, community breaks us down. This starts even before we enter the house or hall where we meet. If you drive up and look for a place to park, self-interest rears its head and says, "Get as close to the door as you can!" But then the Holy Spirit in your heart reminds you of the single mom who comes every time your group meets and has two small children. If you park farther away, that will leave room for her to park closer. So you start looking for a parking place far from the door. The beginning of love means being broken from our self-centered desires.

Love pays attention to the needs of others. When you learn to think in this way, there are thousands of loving actions to take each day. Our trouble is, we instinctively put ourselves first. Living in community helps us learn to love because it puts the concrete needs of others in our path. Community breaks us down by confronting our selfishness.

But second, community also builds us up. Meeting together with a Jesus-focused community means that others are looking out for our needs. This can be as simple as a caring person asking, "How has your day been?" Or it might be more tangible, like having people pray for you when you're sick or support you financially when you're facing bills you can't pay. When we are weak, the community surrounds us and loves us. When we are strong, we have resources to help others. No matter what, we learn to love each other.

Life Groups and other Jesus-focused community groups not only love those who are part of the group. As a natural extension of Jesus' love for us, we seek out ways to love beyond our group. So a Life Group may volunteer at a local food shelf, or go Christmas caroling to nursing homes, or help an elderly person with yard work, or pick up trash along a section of highway. There are countless ways to love people. Wherever there is a need, we have the opportunity to love.

Throughout the last two thousand years, Jesus' followers have tried in many ways to set themselves apart. Christians have worn special clothing, jewelry, or colors. We've had secret signs and even special haircuts. But what Jesus said is most important, what marks us to the world as his followers, is that we love each other and love the world in his Name.

What is important here is learning to love. Together we can care for one another and care for this world God loves so much.

### **Questions to discuss:**

1. Who in your life has taught you the most about what love really looks like? How did they do it?
2. What is your gut reaction to Jesus washing his disciples' feet?
3. Why do you suppose love is so important to Jesus?
4. Are you a part of a Life Group or other Jesus-focused community? If not, how can you make sure that such a community is a regular part of your life?
5. What is your community intentionally doing to learn to love?



## The Fourth Command: Give of yourself

*Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back. (Luke 6:38)*

Jesus has been described as “the man for others.” Jesus gave of himself in countless ways. Though the saying isn’t recorded in the gospels, the Apostle Paul reports that Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (See Acts 20:35.) As we begin to follow Jesus, *giving* becomes part of our nature.

Our very first surrender to Jesus has often been described as giving Jesus our hearts. There is a deep truth in this phrase. The Bible uses the term “heart” to describe our will, our decision-making capability, more than simply our emotions. Giving Jesus our will is perhaps the most important gift we can give him. Such a surrender is at the core of what it means to call Jesus “Lord.” Calling Jesus “Lord” goes right along with the idea of living in obedience to him. So it is important to realize that the New Testament names Jesus as Lord far more than it names him as Savior.

Calling Jesus “Lord” means we surrender our will to his. We learn to live life by his agenda. Such a life that recognizes Jesus as Lord is at the heart of what Jesus meant when he talked about “the kingdom of God.” This kingdom is at the core of most of Jesus’ parables and provides a continuous theme through his whole ministry. Healings, casting out demons, miraculous feedings of thousands of people... all these things demonstrate the loving, giving nature of God.

That's why learning to give of ourselves is so important for Jesus' followers. Just as we give our heart to Jesus, we give ourselves in other ways to people. This giving is a concrete way to show God's love, because love by nature gives to the beloved.

How do Jesus' followers give themselves away? Here are a few examples.

Giving your time is a great place to start. How can you show love by giving your time? Over the last generation or two, our culture has gone through a remarkable transition. Experts agree that our most valuable commodity is no longer our money; it is our time. We value our time far more than we value money. So giving time might be a challenging task, especially when we think about how busy our schedules already are.

What happens when someone you deeply love is in crisis? When you get the phone call that there's been an accident, or a beloved friend has received a cancer diagnosis, aren't you quick to drop everything? Our schedules are not as inflexible as we usually think. It's just that we haven't run into a need that moves us to change our schedules.

Jesus' followers find ways to use their time to invest in others. They may visit the sick, care for prisoners, or teach children about God's love. Jesus talked specifically about these and many other examples of what it means to love each other. The key is to give our time away in a way that either demonstrates love to Jesus, or helps others come to know him, or both.

How else do Jesus' followers give themselves away?

Money is a topic that sometimes makes people uncomfortable, especially when we talk about giving. It might surprise you to learn that Jesus talked about money far more than he talked about prayer or faith. Jesus knew very well that where our money goes, our hearts follow. (See Matthew 6:21.) Jesus didn't say money is a bad thing. The Bible never says that money is evil. Rather, it says the *love* of money is the root of all kinds of evil. (See 1 Timothy 6:10.) Part of the reason why Jesus openly challenges us to give generously of our money is that he wants our hearts to be free from the love of money.

How does Jesus want you to give your money away?

The Bible's basic starting place is giving one tenth. The Bible sometimes calls this a "tithe." The tithe—one tenth given back to God—was a clear standard in the Old Testament, and Jesus clearly endorses that same standard. (See Matthew 23:23.) Why would the Bible set a standard of ten percent?

Giving ten percent of your income back to God is a big enough commitment that it goes head to head with our deep-seated love of money. For those who are just beginning to tithe, ten percent can seem like a frightening standard. Yet God encourages us to use the 90% remaining to meet our own needs in a responsible way. When people begin this practice of giving a tithe—10%—they quickly realize that 90% with God's blessing is far better than 100% without God's blessing!

Where should you give your tithe? Sometimes people look for a special cause: a missionary they can support, or a program that digs water wells in poor countries. These are worthy causes. But the Bible's most obvious practice is that your tithe goes to your local congregation. Why? Simply put, your local church is where you should have the strongest relationships. You live with these people and

share life and worship and mission with them. When you give your tithe locally, it increases your investment in every way. Those who have grown accustomed to tithing to their local congregation can tell you about the blessings God gives back to them through this practice. It's not that God promises to multiply your money back like some late-night infomercial. Rather, God pours peace and every other kind of blessing into your life as you live in obedience to his clear command.

There are other kinds of financial giving, as well. Tithing is one kind of giving, and it's the Bible's basic standard as we said. At times Jesus' followers run into other opportunities to give, so we sometimes talk about special gifts or offerings. These are over and above our regular tithes.

Gifts are generous donations toward a special need. Maybe you send money to a missionary or support a program to dig water wells. There are so many good causes! We give because God places a special need in front of us. Because he has blessed us, we give generously.

Offerings are a grateful response to God's blessing. When you receive a raise, for example, you may decide to give a generous gift over and above a regular tithe to express your gratitude to God. Or maybe at some point you're just overwhelmed by a sense of how generously God has provided for you, and you are eager to express your gratitude in a specific way. You offer him a gift out of what he has given you.

The Bible says that the Lord loves it when we give openly and generously, with glad hearts. (See 2 Corinthians 9:6-7.) Our giving is never to be stingy or grudging. Rather, we give with cheerful hearts because we recognize that God has first given so generously to us. In this way, as we give we grow more like Jesus.

### **Questions to discuss:**

1. What is one way you've shared yourself with others that you feel really good about?
2. What is one of the most generous gifts you've ever received? How did it feel for you to accept that gift?
3. How many ways can you think of that God has been generous to you? How does it feel to make such a list?
4. What examples can you think of from Jesus' life that show how he gave himself to others?
5. How does it make you feel to think about giving one tenth of your income to God? Have you ever tried tithing? If so, how did that work out for you?
6. What do you think about tithing to your local church? Is that an exciting idea, or does it make you hesitate? Why?
7. Have you ever given an offering out of gratitude? What moved you to generosity, and what happened as a result?



## The Fifth Command: Live in God's Word

*Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)*

The Bible can be an intimidating book. Most people recognize that it's an important book, but few have read it. The effect that the Bible has had on our Western civilization is beyond calculation. Every area of our lives has been shaped by the words of the Bible, from politics to economics to education. The Bible's influence goes far, far beyond religion.

Trouble is, the Bible is a hard book to get to know. We start out with the best of intentions and read the first few pages; then we run up against a list of genealogies filled with names we can't pronounce. Or we press on through that, but soon come up against a bewildering set of instructions for building a tabernacle (whatever that is) or a confusing list of laws that put us to sleep.

And yet, here and there we hear a bit of the Bible that seems to cut us right to the heart. We know deep down that we need to know this book, but we don't have a clue how to dig into it.

Here are a few facts about the Bible that might be interesting to you:

- The Bible is not one book; it's a library of 66 books. What we call the "Old Testament" has 39 books that were mostly written in the Hebrew language. What we call the "New Testament" contains 27 books that were written in Greek.

- The Bible was written by at least 40 different human authors. They were shepherds, kings, government officials, priests, musicians, tax collectors, fishermen, doctors, prophets, and preachers.
- Those human authors lived and wrote over a period of about 1500 years. That means if the Bible was completed today, its earliest writings would date back to the time of King Arthur.
- The human authors of the Bible wrote in what today would be ten different countries, from Iran in the east to Italy in the west.
- The Bible has been translated into more languages than any other book, by far.
- The Bible is excluded from the New York Times bestseller list of books sold, because if it wasn't it would consistently fill the list. One bookseller noted that "all versions of the Bible sell well all the time."
- For all that incredible diversity, the Bible is incredibly consistent in its theme and priorities. Its focus is absolutely consistent from start to finish.

So the Bible is an incredibly intriguing, important book. But how can a beginner learn to read it? Here are a few tips.

- Start with one of the four gospels. These are the first four books in the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. If you're brand new to the Bible, reading John first might be best. John's gospel is pretty simple in its language and content. Then read through the other three gospels. This will help you get to know Jesus. He is the focus of the entire Bible, and knowing him a little helps make sense of the rest of the Bible.
- Don't try to read more difficult books until you've gotten familiar with the gospels and the rest of the New Testament.

The Old Testament is very important and worth reading, but it is more challenging.

- Read a little bit each day. The Bible is divided into chapters (the large numbers on each page) and verses (the small numbers). Reading a chapter a day is a good start for most people.
- Try to read at the same time each day. Many people set aside a few minutes when they first wake up in the morning to focus on reading the Bible. That helps create a good habit.
- Pray before you read. Ask God to open your heart and your mind to understand his Word.
- Try memorizing a few verses. John 3:16 is a great summary of the Bible's whole message, and many people have memorized it. Another key verse is Matthew 28:19-20, often called the Great Commission.
- Find a group of people who are reading the Bible together and discussing what they've read. Reading and learning in community is a powerful way to engage with the Bible.
- After you've read a passage, ask yourself a key question: How will I obey what I've just read? The Bible is designed to help us shape our lives according to God's will. Asking this obedience question helps us grow more like Jesus.
- Another good question to ask is, "Who can I tell about what I'm learning?" Maybe you can share what you've read with another believer. You can discuss how you're each growing as you read God's Word. Or maybe you can think of someone who doesn't yet know Jesus, and you could share with them how you are growing in relationship with him as you read his Word.

The Bible makes some powerful promises about what happens for those who spend time in its pages. Below are a few key passages from the Bible itself that talk about its importance.

Writing to his young protégé Timothy, Paul said:

*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

The book of Hebrews says that the Bible cuts right to our heart motivations:

*For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12)*

Jesus said that the entire Bible points toward him:

*“You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life.” (John 5:39-40)*

Even more, Jesus said that he came to fulfill the Old Testament, which he refers to here as “the law of Moses” and “the writings of the prophets”:

*“Don’t misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth*

*disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved.”*  
(Matthew 5:17-18)

Three final thoughts.

First, reading the Bible and praying on your own is important. It is also incredibly important to be part of a community that is reading the Bible together. Bible study groups, Life Groups, even just a couple friends who share what they're reading—such groups will open up richness and blessing for those who make time to participate. God blesses those who seek him in his Word.

Second, what to do when you run up against difficult questions? You don't have to read the Bible very long before you start asking hard questions. Please understand, this is a good thing. God will use those questions to grow you deeper in relationship with himself.

When you hit difficult questions, keep studying. Keep reading. Keep talking with others about those difficult things. More often than not, the Bible itself will eventually answer your questions as you continue to read. And God will almost always use those questions and your search for answers to grow and deepen your faith in him.

Finally, even if you're just getting started, don't be intimidated. Don't become discouraged because others seem to know so much more than you do. Yes, other people have spent more time studying the Bible than you have. Remember, this is not a trivia contest. The important thing is to know Jesus and to be growing in relationship with him. Wherever you find yourself on that journey, don't let discouragement keep you from taking the next steps. There are many helpful tools for growing deeper into the Bible. But ultimately, reading the Bible itself is far

more helpful and important than reading other resources about the Bible.

The Bible is a treasure. It is infinitely precious. God has given it to you as a way for you to know him better. Open it up and begin to read.

**Questions to discuss:**

1. What, if any, has been your experience of reading the Bible?
2. What is one difficult thing for you about reading the Bible?
3. What did you learn about the Bible in this chapter?
4. Have you ever been part of a group Bible study? If so, what was that like?
5. What is one way God has spoken to you through the Bible?
6. What is one question you have about God, Jesus, or the Bible?

## The Sixth Command: Receive communion

*[Jesus] took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” After supper he took another cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you. (Luke 22:19-20)*

Have you noticed how relationships grow over food? Whether it’s an intimate date at a nice restaurant, a picnic at a family reunion, or a group of guys tailgating before a game, we instinctively gather around food. It’s part of how God wired us.

When he faced his own betrayal, arrest, and execution, Jesus gave his followers a meal. He said it was a way to remember him.

After he rose from the dead, Jesus reconnected with his disciples. Then he sent his Holy Spirit (see Acts 2) so that his presence and power could live within his followers. But even with Jesus’ Spirit living within them, Jesus’ followers have consistently celebrated this simple meal of bread and wine. We do this because Jesus commanded us to do it. We also see that it benefits us.

Most of us live scattered lives. We are pulled in so many different directions. Sometimes we feel like we’re being pulled apart.

In a way, you can think of the word “dismember” as the opposite of “remember.” To be re-membered is to be reconnected. In this basic meal, Jesus reconnects us to himself and to each other. There are many forces in this world trying to “dismember” you. Crazy

schedules, mixed-up priorities, money troubles, relationship troubles, and much more. It seems like there are lots of forces trying to tear you limb from limb. Jesus invites us to reconnect to himself at the center, to be re-membered to him.

Not only does Jesus connect us to himself in the present, but he connects us to everything he plans for us in the future. The Apostle Paul said that as often as we share this meal, we proclaim Jesus' death until he comes again. (See 1 Corinthians 11:26.) In other words, this meal has both a *past* focus (remembering Jesus' death and resurrection) and also a *future* focus (looking ahead to Jesus' return).

A story from Israel's history is helpful here. When God rescued the Israelites from Egypt, he led them out into the desert. At one point he told Moses to send spies up into the Promised Land to check it out. When they came back, the spies brought back some of the fruit of the land, including a huge cluster of grapes. It was so big two men had to carry it on a pole between them. The Israelites got to taste the Promised Land. It was a way to fire up their hopes. They literally got to taste how God was going to keep his promises to them. It was a foretaste of God's goodness.

In some ways, communion is a similar foretaste. God has promised us many things. Near the end of the Bible, we read these words:

*Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:3-4)*

In our present lives, our tears have not yet been wiped away. Mourning, crying, and pain are a very present reality for many of us. But God has promised us this future. In communion we share a foretaste of what God has promised. One benefit we experience in sharing this simple meal together is that God gives us power to endure. We endure grief, temptation, and difficulties of all kinds. We need strength to face these troubles, and Jesus gives himself to us in this tangible meal of bread and wine. Communion points us forward to the beautiful completion of God's good plans in our lives.

Many tiny country churches across the prairies were built with a rail around the altar area where believers came to share communion. They would solemnly kneel at that half-circle shaped rail, hearing the words, "The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you." That half-circle shaped rail made a powerful statement about the future God has promised. You see, the way those churches were usually set up, if you completed that circle, the other half would go outside the walls into the cemetery. So as those believers knelt to receive communion, the invisible completion of their circle was with their loved ones who were already with Jesus. By faith in Jesus, those believers experienced the tiniest taste of a time when death and grief would be no more.

In a very simple sense, one of the most powerful messages of the bread and wine in communion is that Jesus is present in the details of daily life. In Jesus' earthly life, bread and wine was the most simple meal, the kind of thing people ate every day. Jesus wants to be present in every moment of our lives. He's not just for the spiritual highs or the mountaintop experiences. Jesus commanded us to share this meal in his name as a way to reconnect with him in everyday ways.

Jesus knew that following him would be challenging. He knew we would need a way to stay connected. It's a powerful thing to look back

months, years, or even decades to the time when you first came to know Jesus. But all of us need something to strengthen us here and now. That's one reason Jesus commanded us to share communion.

Perhaps the most important lesson about communion comes down to two words: “For you.” Jesus said this bread is his body broken for you. The wine or juice is his blood, poured out for you. Jesus himself is for you. When we come to receive communion, we may have a limited understanding of what it means. The bottom line, the most basic level of understanding, is simply this: Trust that this meal is *for you*. Trust that as you come, Jesus reconnects you to himself and to his people. Trust that he has a beautiful future planned for you. Trust that he loves you and gave himself for you. Trust that when you are weary and beaten down, Jesus loves you. Trust that even though you can never be good enough to deserve his love and acceptance, he welcomes you freely. He is *for you*.

### **Questions to discuss:**

1. What is one favorite memory of a special meal you've shared with others? What made it so special?
2. What did you learn about communion in this chapter?
3. What factors in your life threaten to pull you apart or scatter you? How might communion help you remain connected to what is most important?
4. How does it feel for you to think of a time when God will wipe away all our tears, when death and grief will be gone?
5. How often do you receive communion? What is that experience like for you?

## The Seventh Command: Invite others to follow Jesus

*Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)*

Jesus’ parting instructions to his followers were clear. In each of the gospels, and in the book of Acts, Jesus tells them to share the good news about him with others. Each of these narratives shares Jesus’ words in slightly different ways, so it seems that Jesus repeated these instructions over and over. It’s important.

Think about the best restaurant you’ve ever been to. What did you like about it? Was it the quality of the food? The atmosphere? The portions? The prices? Then ask yourself: Did you ever recommend that restaurant to a friend, or maybe even take someone special to that restaurant?

Yet many people are uncomfortable telling others about Jesus. We get nervous and clam up. At times (often at funerals) people talk about some saintly person (let’s call him “Uncle Norman”) who lived a Christian life, but never talked about his faith. This sounds great, and without a doubt Uncle Norman was a good man. But if he was truly a Christian, *someone first had to tell Uncle Norman about Jesus.*

Why is it easier to share our excitement about a restaurant than to talk about Jesus?

First, many of us have never let Jesus have freedom to make changes in our lives. When we have sincerely experienced the love and power of Jesus for ourselves, it's exciting—and we're much more likely to talk about him.

Second, our culture has built high walls around certain topics. We've been told it's not polite to talk about religion, money, or politics. Each of these three areas is a potential minefield, it's true. But each one is also incredibly important.

How can we have conversations about something as personal as faith without being offensive or pushy?

That brings us to the third obstacle. Many of us have experienced ways of talking about Jesus that are insensitive, judgmental, and rude. We get fearful because we don't want to be that kind of person.

When Jesus told his followers to invite others to know him, he often talked about them being “witnesses.” (See Acts 1:8, for example.) What is a witness? A witness is someone who tells what they have seen and heard. A witness is called into court to share their own firsthand experience. As an old man writing about how Jesus had changed his life, the Apostle John put this in vivid terms:

*We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that*

*you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy. (1 John 1:1-4)*

Have you experienced Jesus firsthand? That experience of meeting Jesus and having him change your life is the most important thing you have to share. Your experience is the key to you being a witness of Jesus.

This is good news, because most people are not offended when you tell them about your own experience. They may not want to hear your story, but it is in fact your story. Back to the idea of telling a friend about your favorite restaurant: Your friend may not care for Italian food, but she won't likely be offended by you saying how much you enjoyed it.

Of course, telling people about Jesus is far more important than sharing your passion for pizza. Knowing Jesus changes a person's eternal destiny and gives power and meaning to their life here and now. There is nothing more important. Sometimes the weight of this message can make us fearful.

There is more good news. Jesus said we are not on our own. Instead, he promised that his Spirit would help us. In fact, he told his followers that even if they were called to testify before kings, they didn't need to worry about crafting their message. Instead, the Spirit would guide them. (See Luke 12:12.) This promise is for us today as well. When you have the chance to tell someone how Jesus has changed your life, you can be confident that the Holy Spirit is flowing through your words and guiding your conversation.

Who has God placed in your life? Who do you know, and how can you talk about Jesus with them? Jesus is important for everyone, but there are a couple good places to start.

Children tend to be especially open to hearing about Jesus. In fact, Jesus himself encouraged those who wanted to bring children to him. (See Matthew 19:13-15.) Statistically we know that people are much more likely to become Jesus-followers as children than at any other time in life. Adults can certainly experience Jesus for the first time, but such a conversion is harder. Investing in children is a great idea, and it's one of the easiest ways to share about Jesus. Bible story books, praying together, children's ministry programs through church, and a wealth of Jesus-centered videos and resources are available for you. If God has placed children in your life, find a creative way to share Jesus with them.

The second place to look as you wonder how to share Jesus with others is in your own household. As one old pastor used to say, who are the people who put their feet under your dinner table? Here again, there may be obstacles that make it more challenging to share with those we love most. But if we talk about what Jesus has done to change us, how he has made a difference in our own lives, that often opens the door over time for our loved ones to open their hearts to him.

Perhaps the most exciting people to share with are those God places in our path. If you really want an adventure, start praying for opportunities to share about Jesus. Then watch God create open doors. It might be a distraught person in the grocery checkout line, a friend who calls up at random, or a neighbor in need. God loves to use us to speak into the lives of others.

When we get those opportunities, it's important to ask ourselves what it looks like to love this person. We want to embody love in everything we do. If our words about Jesus are matched with a loving, serving heart, people will be much more likely to hear our message.

When you have the chance to share your story with someone, don't be afraid to invite them to a worship service, a home gathering, or a Bible study. Think ahead of time about where you might invite someone who is hungry for more of this Jesus you're talking about.

Finally, don't be discouraged if people don't accept your message right away. The gospels recount Jesus telling a story about seed being scattered on four different types of soil. (See Matthew 13:1-23, for example.) Some soil was too packed down from people walking on it. Some was crowded with thorns and thistles. Some was shallow and rocky. None of those soils allowed the seed to grow well.

Jesus seems to be saying that there are lots of reasons for people to reject him. But the seed that fell on good soil, Jesus said, took root and grew and bore fruit. There is nothing more exciting than seeing someone's life transformed in a fruitful way after you helped them come to know Jesus. And even if a person seems to reject Jesus right now, you never know when God will use that seed to break open their heart and change their life.

### **Questions to discuss:**

1. Why did Jesus put such emphasis on us being witnesses?
2. Who told you about Jesus? How did they do it?
3. How does it feel for you to think about telling someone about your relationship with Jesus?

4. Can you sum up the story of how Jesus changed your life?  
How might you share it in conversation in a minute or less?
5. Have you ever prayed aloud with another person? Has anyone ever prayed with you? If so, what was that like?



