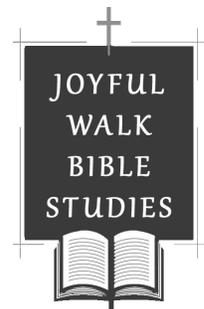


Graceful Living

*Experience a life of
freedom and joy!*

*Discover who Christ is, what he has done for us on
the cross, and your new identity and way of living in
him—a life of freedom and joy!*

MELANIE NEWTON



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Using This Study Guide

This study guide consists of 11 lessons covering foundational principles of Christianity — who Christ is, what he accomplished on the cross for us, what his resurrection means for us, and our identity in him.

As a topical study, the lessons cover a lot of different scripture passages. Because of the importance of clearly communicating the truth of our faith in Christ, each lesson contains several paragraphs of teaching interspersed between the questions.

If you cannot do the entire lesson one week, please read the teaching paragraphs so you will grasp the main idea of the lesson.

THE BASIC STUDY

This study is a topical study rather than covering one section of the Bible. That means you will be looking at multiple passages of Scripture in each lesson.

Yet, the lessons include core questions that will take you through the process of inductive Bible study—observation, interpretation, and application. The process is more easily understood in the context of answering these questions:

- What does the passage say? (Observation: what’s actually there)
- What does it mean? (Interpretation: the author’s intended meaning)
- How does this apply to me today? (Application: making it personal) **Graceful Living** questions are the application questions in this study. These questions lead you to introspection and application of specific truths to your life.

STUDY ENHANCEMENTS

To aid in proper interpretation and application of the study, five additional study aids are located where appropriate in the lesson:

- Historical Insights
- Scriptural Insights
- From the Greek/Hebrew (definitions of Greek or Hebrew words)
- Focus on the Meaning
- Think About It (thoughtful reflection)
- Dependent Living (illustrating what it means to live dependently on God)

Other useful study tools: Use online tools or apps (blueletterbible.org or “Blue Letter Bible app” is especially helpful) to find *cross references* (verses with similar content to what you are studying) and meanings of the *original Greek words or phrases* used (usually called “interlinear”). You can also look at any verse in *various Bible translations* to help with understanding what it is saying. Feel free to add your own study at the end of each lesson.

PODCASTS

Find podcasts coordinating with these lessons at melanienewton.com/podcasts and most other podcast channels. Follow along with the “Podcast Listener Guides” for each lesson.

GRACEFUL LIVING

When it comes to knowing who I am and where I stand with God, the best course I have ever taken was TEAM Training, created by Tim Stevenson as he pastored a church in the DFW area. I found that this course effectively covered the foundational principles of Christianity—who Christ is, what he accomplished on the cross for us, what the resurrection means for us, and our identity in him. It communicated clearly and succinctly to me what I needed to know to live dependently on Christ and rest in my assurance of life in him and through him. Through this course, I learned more about the purpose for the cross and the resurrection than I had ever heard before. I learned how to recognize the poison of legalism in a Christian’s life. I also became aware that my flesh is not getting better the longer I know Christ. I need to depend 100% on him now as I ever did as a young believer in the 70s. Hundreds of others also found their lives transformed as they understood God’s grace toward them and active in their lives. They, too, experienced a life of freedom and joy!

Times change; people change; circumstances change. That course is no longer being taught. Yet, these truths are essential for every believer to enjoy the life God has planned for her. So, I’ve adapted the course (given as a series of lectures) to a women’s Bible study. The outline of the study is based on what was taught in the original course. I’ve revised a lot of the wording to make it more relatable and added information where needed to make the studies flow better.

The heart of the course has remained the same—the message of God’s love and grace in Jesus Christ and the reality of “Christ alive and living in me.” Understanding God’s grace given to you is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you.

May our “Grace-giving” God completely fill your heart with his grace so that you become a “Grace-giver” in your life. “Graceful living” is a life overflowing with his grace—**a life of freedom and joy!**

Note: If you look at the cover image of this study, you will see a group of swans. Swans are a natural illustration of graceful living. They are graceful creatures, live faithfully in community with other swans, and become “new creations” as they are transformed from awkward “ugly ducklings” to beautiful mature birds.

NEW TESTAMENT SUMMARY

The New Testament opens with the births of John and Jesus. About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance as well as when a Gentile converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Jesus, God’s incarnate Son, publicly showed the world what God is like and taught his perfect ways for 3 – 3½ years. After preparing 12 disciples to continue Christ’s earthly work, he died voluntarily on a cross for mankind’s sin, rose from the dead, and returned to heaven. The account of his earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels (the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account).

After Jesus’ return to heaven, the followers of Christ were then empowered by the Holy Spirit and spread God’s salvation message among the Jews, a number of whom believed in Christ. The apostle Paul and others carried the good news to the Gentiles during 3 missionary journeys (much of this recorded in the book of Acts). Paul wrote 13 New Testament letters to churches & individuals (Romans through Philemon). The section in our Bible from Hebrews to Jude contains 8 additional letters penned by five men, including two apostles (Peter and John) and two of Jesus’ half-brothers (James and Jude). The author of Hebrews is unknown. The apostle John also recorded Revelation, which summarizes God’s final program for the world. The Bible ends as it began—with a new, sinless creation.

DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Attend consistently** whether your lesson is done or not. You'll learn from the other women, and they want to get to know you.
2. **Set aside time** to work through the study questions. The goal of Bible study is to get to know Jesus. He will change your life.
3. **Share your insights** from your personal study time. As you spend time in the Bible, Jesus will teach you truth through his Spirit inside you.
4. **Respect each other's insights.** Listen thoughtfully. Encourage each other as you interact. Refrain from dominating the discussion if you have a tendency to be talkative. ☺
5. **Celebrate our unity** in Christ. Avoid bringing up controversial subjects such as politics, divisive issues, and denominational differences.
6. **Maintain confidentiality.** Remember that anything shared during the group time is not to leave the **group** (unless permission is granted by the one sharing).
7. **Pray for one another** as sisters in Christ.
8. **Get to know the women** in your group. Please do not use your small group members for solicitation purposes for home businesses, though.

Enjoy your Joyful Walk Bible Study!

Recommended: Listen to the podcast “The Promise of Graceful Living” at melanienewton.com/podcasts as an introduction to the whole study.

The Promise of Graceful Living

WHAT IS GRACE?

- Biblical grace is God giving favor to someone, not because they are good enough to deserve it but because His love chooses to do so. God’s grace springs from God’s love.
- The Bible says that God’s grace is so abundant it’s like a cup overflowing. *1 Timothy 1:13-14*
- God’s invitation to you and your acceptance of it is wrapped up in one phrase—by grace you are saved through faith.

BY GRACE YOU ARE SAVED THROUGH FAITH

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

By grace you are saved through faith. Three important words in that phrase explain the basis of your salvation and why you can be confident in it—grace, saved, and faith.

God gives His GRACE.

- Biblical grace is God giving favor to someone, not because they are good enough to deserve it but because His love chooses to do so. Grace is a free gift from God that you accepted when you received Christ through faith.
- Our faith begins with receiving the love of God and understanding it in the Gospel. We start with how much God loves us. Then, we see His love in His grace to us. *1 John 4:19*
- God’s grace is His undeserved favor abundantly poured out on those who desperately need Him and respond to Him by faith.

By God’s grace, you are SAVED.

- To be saved means “to be rescued, spared from disaster.” When you receive Christ, you are rescued from spiritual death and eternal separation from God.
- You can know that you have a secure and personal relationship with God because you are saved through faith in Jesus Christ.

You are saved, through FAITH in Jesus Christ.

- Faith is placing your trust in God and His Word. It is a full commitment to Christ.
- It is by faith alone that you are saved. *Ephesians 2:9*
- If you were standing before God and He asked you, “Why should I let you into my heaven?” Now, you can say, “I know I am saved by your grace through my faith in your Son Jesus Christ.” You are in!

When you trust in Christ for your salvation, God’s grace is abundantly poured on you. And, with that grace comes so many blessings and benefits.

THE PROMISE OF GRACEFUL LIVING

Graceful living is for everyone who has accepted God’s gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Your salvation is an undeserved gift from God. You cannot earn it. You can’t win it. You only receive it by faith.

- “Graceful living” begins and continues through Jesus Christ. He gave His life for you by grace, so He could give His life to you by grace, so He could live His life through you by grace.
- “Graceful living” is life overflowing with His grace giving you rest from trying to earn God’s favor. *Matthew 11:28-30*
- “Graceful living” is knowing Christ’s love for you and letting that love motivate you to live for Him in obedience.
- “Graceful living” leads you to serve Christ through serving others. That’s letting His life in you overflow to others around you, especially those who need to know Him.
- “Graceful living” is seeing your transformation from being a selfish, sinful being into having the likeness of Jesus Christ Himself. God’s Holy Spirit does this to us from the inside out. We grow up into mature Christians who are beautiful in God’s sight and bring His glory to everyone around us.

This *Graceful Living Bible Study* will help you build a foundation for successful, enjoyable Christian living based on God’s **grace** to you and for you. Understanding God’s grace given to you is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you. That’s the promise of “Graceful Living.”

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His grace so that your life overflows with His grace every day. You will experience a life of freedom and joy!

1: Christ, the Grace-Gift

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:16-17)

DAY ONE STUDY

Jesus Christ presented himself as the answer to every need of the human heart. The New Testament writers unanimously taught the same. Multitudes of people throughout the centuries since have witnessed that he does indeed do what he promised for those who trust and follow him.

I have been a Jesus follower for more than 40 years now. Not once have I regretted that decision. I am a lifelong learner, a student of God's Word and my Lord's life. He teaches me in many ways.

Recently, someone asked me, "How has Jesus disciplined you? What has made the most impact on your life?"

When it comes to knowing who I am and where I stand with God, the best teaching I have had was a course at my church that effectively covered the foundational principles of Christianity—who Christ is, what he accomplished on the cross for us, what the resurrection means for us, and our identity in him. It communicated clearly and succinctly to me what I needed to know to live dependently on Christ and rest in my assurance of life **in** him and **through** him. I learned more about the purpose for the cross and the resurrection than I had ever known before. I learned how to recognize the poison of legalism in a Christian's life. It was through this teaching that I became aware that my flesh is not getting better the longer I know Christ. I need to depend 100% on him now as I ever did as a young believer in the 1970s. These timeless truths are essential for every believer to enjoy the life God has planned for them. So, I've adapted the original teaching I received (given as a series of lectures) into this Bible study called *Graceful Living*.

The heart of *Graceful Living* is the message of God's love and grace in Jesus Christ and the reality of "Christ alive and living in me." This study will help you build a foundation for successful, enjoyable Christian living based on God's "**grace**" to you and for you. Understanding God's grace given to you is essential to enjoying the life that God has planned for you. As you apply these truths in your life, you will experience a life of freedom and joy.

God's invitation to a life of freedom and joy

1. Read John 10:10 and Matthew 11:28-30. What does Jesus promise to his followers?

Focus on the Meaning: Full is not empty. Full means to have purpose and meaning. Full does not mean easy, though. Fullness means that even when we are weary and burdened (Matthew 28:28-30), we can go to him with open hands and receive the rest and guidance that he readily gives. Jesus's invitation says, "Come to me. Connect to me. Learn from me. Rest with me." That sounds pretty wonderful. Jesus Christ invites you to a life of fullness, freedom and joy. Are you interested?

2. Read John 8:31-32. What does Jesus promise to his followers?

Truth. It is critically important for anyone who knows Christ to have sound theology (rational, systematic understanding of God). Theology is inescapable. Any thoughts you have about God or information you receive about God is theology. You may not realize it, but you live according to your theology.

Anyone's theology can be based on truth or error. Truth and error lead to dramatically different results. If truth sets you free, then the opposite is also true. Error binds you. When you know the truth that is revealed to you in the Bible, you will experience freedom. With freedom comes a life of joy. Do you want a life of joy? Stand firmly on God's truth revealed to you in his Word, the Bible.

3. Read John 1:16-17. What do Jesus' followers receive?

What Jesus offers to you, as one of his followers, is a life **full of grace**. What is grace? In particular, what is God's grace?

Focus on the Meaning: Grace is commonly defined as unmerited favor, an undeserved gift. It is God's gift to an undeserving humanity. God gives his grace because of his great love and mercy (Ephesians 2:4-7).

Would you like a life full of God's grace? You are in the right place!

Christianity is Christ

The New Testament opens with the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance. It was also used when a non-Jew (usually called Gentile) converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Shortly after that, Jesus presented himself to the public. The account of his earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels, the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account. Each Gospel presents Jesus as "the Christ."

From the Greek: This title "the Christ" is from the Greek word *christos*, a translation of the Hebrew term "Messiah" meaning "anointed one." The Old Testament prophets promised that the Messiah, as the anointed one of God, would come and do many wonderful things for God's people, including restoring God's Kingdom on earth. Christians are followers of Jesus, who is the Christ.

If you have heard the good news of the gospel and believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who gave himself for your sins, you have eternal life just by believing in him as your Savior. But more than salvation, Jesus Christ calls you into a relationship with himself.

Christianity is Christ! It is not a lifestyle, rules of conduct, or a society whose members were initiated by the sprinkling or covering of water. Christ calls all humans into a close relationship with him as brothers, sisters, and friends.

Yet, he is also our Lord, the one who sits at the right hand of his Father God as head over everything else in heaven and on earth. As Lord, Jesus Christ is our *master*—the one to whom we should willingly give our obedience. He is our *model* of how to live as humans in a dependent relationship with God, and he is our *mentor* in walking with us in that dependent relationship.

Jesus' disciples 2000 years ago were no different than we are except they physically beheld the risen Christ. We must see him through eyes of faith and allow the Gospels to leap off the page revealing our Lord. This is so that we may know this God-man who changed our lives as we received the Good News. We need to frequently read the Gospels, watch movies based on them, and tell the stories about Jesus as often as needed to know his life well because Christianity is Christ!

Through this study, you will get to know this Christ who is the ultimate grace gift to us.

4. **Graceful Living:** What questions do you have about Jesus or Christianity? Feel free to be honest here. God is faithful and has revealed so much that you can know for sure. Trust him to show you.

Respond to God in prayer about what he has shown you today.

DAY TWO STUDY—WHO IS JESUS?

According to the Bible, God chose to reveal himself to the nation of Israel and, through Israel to the world. Many truths about God ("attributes") are taught in the Old Testament. Our God is self-existent, all-powerful, all-knowing, present everywhere, holy, just, good, loving, and merciful.

But, there is one thing clearly and relentlessly asserted about God in the Old Testament.

*"Hear, O Israel! The LORD our God, **the LORD is one!** Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)*

Then, God himself spoke these words through Isaiah:

"You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior." (Isaiah 43:10-11)

Jesus of Nazareth presented himself to the people living in a very religious culture who held strongly to the belief that there is only one God. When Jesus came on the scene, he called people to a spiritual relationship with himself as well as with God the Father. It is no wonder that many of the Jewish leaders were appalled at what Jesus said. But, Jesus demonstrated that what he claimed was indeed the truth.

Of all the world's religions, Jesus is the only "founder" who claimed to be equal with God. For the next few days, we will see what the scripture says about who Jesus Christ is.

What does the Bible say that Jesus claimed about himself? (Observation)

Let's look at what the Bible text says. Read the following verses from John 5. Mark the specific things that Jesus declares about himself. Then answer the question that follows.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. (John 5:16-18)

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. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (John 5:19-23)

"Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. (John 5:24-27)

"I have testimony weightier than that of John [the Baptist]. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5:36-40)

"But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me." (John 5:45-46)

DAY THREE STUDY***What does the Bible say that Jesus claimed about himself?***

Let's look again at what the Bible text says. Read the following verses from John 8. Mark the specific things that Jesus declares about himself. Then answer the question that follows.

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." (John 8:28-29)

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. (John 8:42)

Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God." (John 8:43-47)

Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. (John 8:54-59)

9. What does Jesus claim about himself in each of the following sections of John 8:28-59?

- Vv. 28-29—

- V. 42—

- Vv. 43-47—

- Vv. 54-59—

Jesus claims to speak what Father God has taught him and to always do what pleases God. And, no man can prove him guilty of any sin. These are fantastic claims to make by anyone who was not absolutely certain that they are true. Jesus knew who he was. He knew his purpose.

Scriptural Insight: When Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am,” that “I am” was the name by which the Jews knew their God—in Hebrew, *Yahweh*. The listeners knew immediately that Jesus was claiming to be God himself. That infuriated them. But, Jesus claimed it without hesitation regardless of the danger to himself.

Regarding his innocence: Though Jesus was executed by Rome as a state criminal (the meaning of crucifixion), his innocence was repeatedly confirmed by others: Pontius Pilate (Luke 23:4,13-15,22), King Herod Antipas (Luke 23:8-12,15), a crucified criminal (Luke 23:41), and a Roman centurion (Luke 23:47).

10. What does Jesus claim about himself in John 17:5, 24?

Twice in this beautiful prayer of John 17, Jesus spoke about the relationship he had with his Father before he was sent to earth and even before the world was ever created. Together they had existed in relationship, and it was special to Jesus, a relationship of love between the Father and the Son. From this love relationship flows the love that Jesus has for all those who follow him.

11. Read Psalm 110:1. what position of authority would the promised Messiah (my Lord) hold?

12. Read Daniel 7:13-14 and Mark 14:61-64.

- According to Daniel’s vision, how would the promised Messiah (my Lord) come to earth?
- What position of authority would the promised Messiah (son of man) hold?
- In Mark 14, what did Jesus claim about himself regarding his being the promised Messiah?

Jesus claimed these truths for himself in the gospels. He called himself the Son of Man (seen often in Luke’s gospel). During his trial, though he did not defend himself against accusations of

wrongdoing, he did answer the questions related to his identity. Jesus said that he would be seen sitting at the right hand of God (Psalm 110:1) and coming on the clouds of heaven (Daniel 7:13-14). There is absolutely no doubt that Jesus claimed to be God and to have the authority of God.

The coming of Jesus Christ into human history was not an event that suddenly burst upon an unsuspecting world. It was the fulfillment of a long line of prophecies that started with the beginning of human history (Genesis 3:15). The arrival of Jesus in human form was planned before the creation of the world as well as the mission he was sent to accomplish—reconciling the world to God (2 Timothy 1:9; 1 Peter 1:20).

Our God is a God you can know

13. Read John 14:6-10. What does Jesus say about our being able to know God?

A relationship with God must be based on a true knowledge of the God who is. The Bible teaches that man can know truth about God. Jesus declared that one must go through him to know God the Father. Jesus also demonstrated that seeing and knowing him is the same as seeing and knowing God the Father. Both Jesus' words and his works come from God living in Jesus. The New Testament asserts that the invisible God can be known through his Son. Jesus is our Savior and our ultimate grace gift from God!

14. ***Graceful Living:*** Read Matthew 16:13-17. Notice the question Jesus asked his disciples. This is the world's most important question: "Who do you say Jesus is?" Many want to tell you that he was just a great religious teacher. But, was he just that?

In his book *Mere Christianity*, the great 20th century thinker C. S. Lewis posed this solution:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse ...You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, pages 54-55)

As we have seen in this lesson, Jesus Christ claimed equality with God. Either he was God, or he was not God. If he was not God, then he was a liar (knew he wasn't God but claimed it anyway) or a lunatic (thought he was God). Either way, you must decide. Who do you say that Jesus is?

Respond to God in prayer about what he has shown you today.

The New Testament writers are consistent in their claims about Jesus. They effectively declared that Jesus was truly God and not just a great teacher. If these writers knew that Jesus was not God and yet claimed that he was, you would conclude that they were liars, promoting a myth in order to somehow profit from it. But, they did not do that. They declared what they had seen, heard, touched, and known to be absolutely true.

Historical Insight: There were, to be sure, ways of coping with the death of a teacher, or even a leader. The picture of Socrates was available, in the wider world, as a model of unjust death nobly borne. The category of 'martyr' was available, within Judaism, for someone who stood up to pagans, and compromising no-better-than-pagans, and died still loyal to YHWH (the Hebrew name for God). The category of failed but still revered Messiah, however, did not exist. A Messiah who died at the hands of the pagans, instead of winning YHWH's battle against them, was a deceiver...Why then did people go on talking about Jesus of Nazareth, except as a remarkable but tragic memory? The obvious answer is the one given by all early Christians actually known to us (as opposed to those invented by modern mythographers). **Jesus was raised from the dead.... The resurrection, however we understand it, was the only reason why his life and words possessed any relevance two weeks, let alone two millennia, after his death.** (N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, Volume 2*)

From the beginning, the church has maintained that Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, is Savior and Lord of heaven and earth. Apart from his resurrection from the dead, historians have no feasible theory for the birth and progress of the Church. Paul confirms what was being taught everywhere about Jesus: that he died for our sins, that he was buried, and that he was raised from the dead—all according to what was promised in the Scriptures. his resurrected body was seen by more than 500 people and on at least 6 occasions. There were plenty of eyewitnesses to these truths.

16. **Graceful Living:** Do you believe that Jesus was raised from the dead according to the eyewitnesses who claimed this truth? How does your faith about this truth influence your life?

Scriptural Insight: The Christian church rests on the resurrection of its Founder. Without this fact, the church could never have been born, or if born, it would soon have died a natural death. The miracle of the resurrection and the existence of Christianity are so closely connected that they must stand or fall together. If Christ was raised from the dead, then all his other miracles are sure, and our faith is impregnable; if he was not raised, he died in vain, and our faith is vain. It was only his resurrection that made his death available for our atonement, justification, and salvation; without the resurrection, his death would be the grave of our hopes; we should be still unredeemed and under the power of our sins. A gospel of a dead Savior would be a contradiction and wretched delusion. (Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Volume 1, page 172*)

What does the Bible say about the “Trinity?”

While confirming that there is only one true God, believers have worshiped Jesus Christ and have spoken of him in terms appropriate only of deity from the earliest days of Christianity. The Holy Spirit is also known as deity. You may be confused how Jesus could be God and the Spirit could be God and the Father could be God. Who is the one that is really God? The answer is all of them: three-in-one.

The Bible clearly teaches three Divine Persons, each rightly called God, yet all the one and same God. The doctrine of the *Trinity* (or “Tri-unity,” a man-made label) is a summary of the teachings of the Bible regarding the nature of God.

17. Read the following verses where the three representations of the one true God are mentioned together and fill in the blanks.

Matthew 28:18-20: “...baptizing them in the name of the _____ and of the _____ and of the _____.”
2 Corinthians 13:14: “May the grace of the _____, and the love of _____, and the fellowship of the _____ be with you all.”
1 Peter 1:1-2: “...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of _____, through the sanctifying work of the _____, to be obedient to _____.”
Luke 3:21-22: “... _____ was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened and the _____ descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are _____, whom I love.”

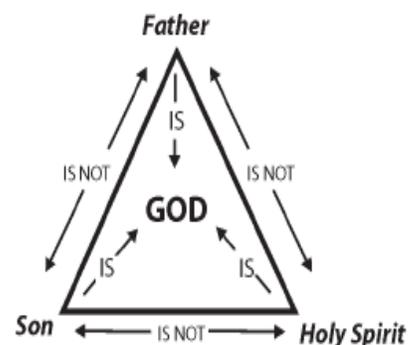
The doctrine of the Trinity (“Tri-unity”) was formulated by the church after many years of reflecting on the biblical data and after rejecting many inadequate theories. The “problem” answered by the doctrine was created by apparently contradictory assertions:

- Biblical monotheism - the insistence that there is only one true God. *Exodus 20:2-3; Isaiah 42:8; 45:5*
- That *without denying biblical monotheism*, the apostles and early church worshiped Jesus Christ, and honored three Persons as God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14*
- Therefore, outsiders accused the church of falling into either *polytheism* (belief in more than one God) or *idolatry* (improperly worshipping someone as God - in this case, Jesus).

Church leaders gathered in Nicaea (modern Turkey) to verbalize what God revealed about himself: one in essence, three in persons. They wrote what is known as the Nicene Creed.

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary...And I believe in the Holy Spirit the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified... (*Nicene Creed*, AD 325)

The doctrine of the Trinity was defined after careful Bible study and debate. Since the earliest century, it has stood as an accurate representation of the Bible's teaching: **God is one in essence, three in Person**. The diagram at right is an attempt to picture this.



18. **Graceful Living:** Read 1 Timothy 2:3-6. God invites all men into a personal relationship with himself through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. *If Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be, then knowing him is the single most important issue in all of life.*

- Are you confident that you have made the choice to put your faith in Jesus? If not, you can do so right now. Just tell God that you know you have sinned in his sight. Tell him that you are putting your trust in Jesus for your salvation. Accept God's gift of forgiveness for all of your sins. Thank him for his goodness to you and his gift of eternal life.
- If you are confident that you have already put your faith in Jesus, what choice(s) as a Christian do you need to make in order to grow in the process of knowing him?

Think About It: "Today, all sorts of subjects are eagerly pursued; but the knowledge of God is neglected...Yet to know God is man's chief end, and justifies his existence. Even if a hundred lives were ours, this one aim would be sufficient for them all." (John Calvin)

Respond to God about what he has shown you in this lesson.

Recommended: Listen to "Treasuring the Gift of Jesus Christ" at melanienewton.com/podcasts after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the listener guide on the next page.

Treasuring the Gift of Jesus Christ

CHRISTIANITY IS CHRIST

- Christianity is Christ! It is not a lifestyle. It's not rules of conduct. It's not a society of people who have joined together by the sprinkling or covering of water. Christianity is a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

WHAT JESUS CLAIMED ABOUT HIMSELF

- Not only did Jesus claim to be God, but He also claimed to be the answer to the needs of the human heart. He consistently calls God His father. He declared His right to judge and said that He deserves the honor that belongs to God.
- Even in His trials before the Jewish and Roman leaders, Jesus clearly and boldly claimed His identity as the promised anointed one of God. He claimed to be the Son of Man who was also the Son of God.

JESUS WAS FULLY HUMAN.

- Jesus was fully human. He experienced the normal process of body development from a child to an adult man. He obeyed His parents and learned to live with at least 4 brothers and 2 sisters. In His human body, Jesus felt hunger and thirst, tears and anger, distress and pain.
- Because Jesus was fully human, He understands every single one of your heartaches, physical pains, feelings of rejection, strained relationships, abuse, grief, and impatience. He gets your joy, too.
- Jesus was fully human, but He did not sin because He lived in perfect love for God the Father, His Father. Because He loved God perfectly, He lived in perfect dependence on God the Father and perfect obedience. And, He gave us a pattern to follow so that we can learn to love God and to depend upon Him by faith, too.

JESUS WAS FULLY GOD.

- Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is the exact representation of God's likeness. We're not talking about His face but His character. *Colossians 1:15; John 14:9*
- Jesus as the Son of God is the firstborn **over** all creation. This refers to Him being the one who had priority and supremacy over everything that God the Father owned. He inherited it all. *Colossians 1:15*
- Jesus was the Creator. He was not created. All things were created by Him and through Him. *Colossians 1:16; John 1:3*
- Jesus holds all things together. Christ is the controlling and unifying force in nature. *Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3*

- Jesus is also Head of the Church. The Jews and Gentiles are combined into one body of believers, and He is the Head of that body. *Colossians 1:18*
- All God's fullness dwells in Jesus. The totality of God's powers and attributes are in Jesus. There is nothing missing. There is nothing more of God that we can get apart from Jesus. *Colossians 1:19*
- Jesus Christ is fully God and is Lord over all. Jesus not only claimed Psalm 110:1 for Himself but also demonstrated that He was the Son of God who sits at God's right hand. Jesus is the Christ. He is also the Lord. Lord means master.
- As fully God and fully man, you can be confident that Jesus as human understands how you feel and is powerful enough as God to take care of your every need. When you go to Him in prayer, you can trust that He understands, that He knows how you are feeling and what your needs are at that moment. You can trust His compassion toward you to meet your needs. Are you confident of that?

JESUS DEMONSTRATED HOW MUCH HE LOVED AND VALUED WOMEN.

- The Lord Jesus also demonstrated in His life on earth how much He loved and valued women. He taught them truth about God, forgave them for their sins, accepted them in His circle of followers, and gave new life to them after His resurrection. His care for them was so countercultural to what they had previously known. Women recognized that and responded with love for Him and a desire to serve him. Jesus Christ entered into the midst of their lives, visibly representing God to them, loving them dearly, and changing their lives forever! He does the same for you and me today.
- Jesus invites you to trust in what He says about Himself—that He is the Son of God—and believe that He died on the cross for you. Have you done that?
- As soon as you trust in Christ to be your Savior, you begin a loving relationship with the God of the universe. From then on, you have a new spiritual life with God's Spirit living inside you and producing many new qualities in you as you respond to Him.
- You receive complete love and acceptance by God as your Father. You receive treasure that is yours to know and experience for the rest of your earthly life. When you trust in Christ, He is in your life forever. You will never be without him. Ever.
- The treasure that God offers you in Jesus Christ is greater than anything you could substitute for Him. Why not spend the rest of your life getting to know this Jesus who gave Himself for you so you could have a new life? That's graceful living.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart with His grace so that your life overflows with His grace every day. You will experience a life of freedom and joy!