

reaching

THOSE SEEKING
THE FAMILY OF GOD



MATHETIS

SOCIAL MEDIA
DISCIPLING

Using Mathetis in your Bible Class

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2. Determine what type of study group you need for your class. Standard Groups can house between 2-9 members at no cost. For more space, use our Unlimited Groups which have no size limit.

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An activation is required for any course studied in an Unlimited Group.

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A Lifetime Activation requires a one-time fee and is used on one course for one group. Subscription Activations require a recurring fee. The subscription provides you with multiple activations which can be reused after your study is completed to create a new group or to start a new course.

3. Create your Standard or Unlimited Group and select this course to study.
4. Invite the class to your group and begin the course.

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Seeking the Family of God
is the third of three quarterly Bible studies in

THE *reaching*
SERIES

devoted to
Reaching Today's Generation

Mathetis: Social Media Discipling

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SAMPLE

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Week One:

Introducing “Reaching Those Seeking the Family of God”



Discipleship is an important theme in the New Testament. In its first five books—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts—“disciple” or “disciples” occurs 268 times, as reflected in the English Standard Version. The Greek word translated “disciple” is *mathetes* (in which each e sound likes ay). Interestingly, this same term, singular or plural, does not occur in the New Testament after the Book of Acts.

Obviously, the rest of the New Testament speaks to Christ’s converts, helping them to grow as followers (disciples) of Christ. As an example, consider Paul’s mission to the Asian city of Ephesus. In Acts, the word “disciples” occurs four times in the Ephesian context (Ephesians 19:1, 9, 30; 20:1). Later, the letter to the Ephesians addresses those disciples in Ephesus and their growing group.

It assures them, as Gentiles, that the Father welcomes them into His own family, just as He planned from before creation. Then it urges them “to walk in a manner worthy” of their calling (Ephesians 4:1). That “walk” includes attitudes and behaviors that honor the Father and encourage His family’s unity and growth.

In a letter so clearly devoted to discipleship, why does Paul not use the word “disciple”? We are not told, but the explanation may be about relationships. While discipleship remains a basic and important concept, more of God’s plan is being revealed through Paul (Ephesians 3:1-5). In Ephesians, that plan emphasizes two pictures for Jesus’ followers: the family of God and the body of Christ. Yes, they are still “disciples” (as described in Acts) and they are so much more (as described in Ephesians).

Introduction

“ You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God. ”

(Ephesians 2:19)

This mystery [now revealed] is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body (Ephesians 3:6).

[Christ died to] reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross (Ephesians 2:16).

Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

To Christ's disciples in Ephesus, Paul boldly affirms, "We are members of His body" (Ephesians 5:30). Thus, discipleship evolves into much more—into intimacy, identity, belonging and privilege—which could not be conveyed by the word "disciple" alone. Now that we have the maturing letters, now that we understand the relationship more fully, we may read that more complete understanding back into earlier references—in the Gospel accounts and in Acts—to those who are true "disciples" of the Lord.

Discussion Questions

Imagine you are using the Bible as a textbook for teaching English to a foreigner. You encounter the word "disciple." In simple language, how would you help your student understand the word "disciple"?

In the scenario just described, what modern example would you use to convey the practical meaning of "disciple"?

Do you find it curious that the words "disciple" and "disciples" occur frequently in the Gospel accounts and in Acts, then never occur after that in the New Testament? Share any thoughts you have about reasons for this phenomenon.

In Paul's writings such as the book of Ephesians, what are the images he uses to depict the church, the followers of Christ?

Thinking about those images for the church, what do they convey to you about the Lord's relationship with His followers?

Jesus and Paul were directly involved in the lives of disciples. Much of their disciple-making was face to face. On the other hand, Jesus commissioned Paul to “preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God” (Ephesians 3:8-9). How did Paul “preach” (literally, “tell good news”)? How did He bring God’s truth “to light for everyone”? He did so in person and in writing, or to borrow a phrase from

2 Thessalonians 2:15, “by our spoken word or by our letter.”

When he could not be present in the flesh, he was “present in spirit” (1 Corinthians 5:3; Colossians 2:5). When he could not speak directly, he corresponded. In the case of the city of Colossae, Paul had never been there. He had never met the Colossians. He knew of them through his co-worker Epaphras (Colossians 1:7-8). Yet Paul played an effective part in discipling them.

“ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ”

(Colossians 2:1-3)



Discipling From a Distance

Paul had to communicate with the Colossian Christians remotely. Yet, despite the obvious disadvantages of distance, notice how well Paul could serve the Colossians. Through Paul's correspondence, they could "reach all the riches of *full* assurance of understanding" (Colossians 2:2). We might think of writing as conveying information alone. Yet Paul's letter did (and does) more than give "understanding." God used Paul's writing to motivate and inspire: "that their hearts may be encouraged" (Colossians 2:2). God used Paul's correspondence to unite and to mature spiritually: "being knit together in love" (Colossians 2:2). This reminds us of the Bible's "complete" effectiveness for every "man of God" and thus every disciple.

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).

What do passages like Colossians 2 and 2 Timothy 3 show us about discipleship? Indeed, what do the New Testament letters to Christians show us? That remote methods can play a vital role in making and maturing disciples. Certainly, where possible, face-to-face interaction is always preferable. As John says,

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete (2 John 1:12 cf. 3 John 3:1:14).

Personal contact was much better for John and more enjoyable. But John also valued correspondence, even finding in it a parallel pleasure: "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete" (1 John 1:4).

Discussion Questions

In what sense was Paul "present in spirit" with disciples when unable to be present physically? See 1 Corinthians 5:3; 2 Corinthians 7:3; Colossians 2:5 and Philippians 1:7.

According to Colossians 2:1-3, how effective is Paul's inspired writing for helping disciples?

According to 2 Timothy 3:16-17, what are the purposes of the Scriptures?

How effective are the New Testament writings for making and maturing disciples?

Compare 2 John 1:12 with 1 John 1:4. Explain how these passages complement each other.

We learn from apostolic experience that both forms of communication—personal and recorded—go together to build up disciples. God sent His Son in person. As John testifies,

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest,

and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:1-4).

Every time we read the Bible, we benefit from God’s inspired correspondence. It teaches us, corrects us and trains us, making us “complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:17).

The same principle is at work in the amazing tools God provides today. New Testament letters were written by hand (2 Thessalonians 3:17; Philemon 1:19; 1 Peter 5:12). Later, they were copied by hand, a time-consuming and expensive task, which remained the transmission method for many centuries. In 1439, Johannes Gutenberg became the first European to use movable type. His mass printing launched a communications revolution that changed the world. His printing of the Bible came out in 1455, paving the way for the Protestant Reformation and the spread also of New Testament Christianity.

The next communication revolutions were electronic: the telegraph and telephone (1800s), the radio (1900) and the television (1928). To these we now add modern media and devices that use the internet. Each new avenue of communication serves a wide range of activities, from children’s games to scientific discoveries. Among many digital purposes, the most important is transmitting the Bible and its life-giving lessons. Appropriately, the method that uses new tools for interactively developing disciples is called Mathetis (an anglicized form of the New Testament Greek word for “disciple”).

Meeting People Where They Are

We often describe Mathetis as “a social network for spiritual growth.” Mathetis meets people where they are. We mean that in at least three ways:

1) Where are people in their communication habits? Many of them are online and on their digital devices. In their quest for life’s meaning and purpose, many people enter their questions on search engines like Google and Bing. Mathetis meets them there and helps them find the answers they are seeking.

2) Where are people spiritually? Many of them are cautious about religion. They want to explore from a safe distance. They like to choose their subjects. They want to develop relationships at their own pace. For all these purposes, Mathetis meets them where they are. Seekers can come into Mathetis lessons at any point of interest to themselves. Mathetis uses a full range of modern media to engage learners. It provides a safe environment for finding the Bible’s answers to life’s challenges. It introduces seekers to Jesus and helps to bring them “into Christ.” It helps disciples to grow “in Christ.” It is user-friendly—indeed, you can see a sample of the content simply by going to Mathetis.org/preview.

3) Where are people socially? We all need meaningful relationships. Mathetis benefits existing friendships and nurtures new friendships. Of course, Mathetis can help anyone with personal knowledge and growth. But Mathetis, as a “social network,” is also designed for interaction between individuals and interaction between group members. Here are some of its social dimensions:

- A group of Christians can use Mathetis for their mutual encouragement and maturing.
- A group of Christians can use Mathetis to train for effective outreach to others.
- A Christian can invite friends and acquaintances to join his or her group on Mathetis.
- Even non-Christians can form groups. They can invite you, as a “mentor” to assist them with Bible questions.

These relationships lead to the most meaningful relationship of all—with our Creator.

Purpose of This Course

First and foremost, this course is designed for Bible classes. Whether you use Mathetis or not, you will benefit from God's word.

Healthy scriptural content will nurture you and build you up in the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 1:3). This is the biblical injunction:

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying

in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life (Jude 1:20-21).

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed (1 Timothy 4:6).

Personal Growth

This, the third book in the series of Mathetis class books, relates most directly to your personal growth.

- The first in the series is entitled *Reaching Those Wondering What To Believe*. As the name suggests, it explores how to reach seekers with evidences for Jesus and the Bible.
- The second in the series is entitled *Reaching Those In Need Of A Savior*. It helps us share the Good News with seekers who feel a need for the

Bible's answers and are searching for understanding about Jesus.

- The third in the series is entitled *Reaching Those Seeking The Family of God*. As the name suggests, this current course addresses the needs of God's children.

True disciples fall into this latter category. Therefore, this third course is most relevant to those wanting to mature in Christ. Use it to enhance your own walk as a disciple of the Lord Jesus.

The Christian “walk” is never just about ourselves. It is never selfish. Rather, by its very nature, it imitates the love of the Father and the Son.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2).

“Walk” is a verb. “Walk in love” depicts purposeful, ongoing activity that cares for others. That activity follows in the footsteps of Jesus and imitates His sacrifice.

Whoever says he abides in Him [Christ] ought to walk in the same way in which He walked (1 John 2:6).

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers (1 John 3:16).

Maturing in Christ-likeness causes us to help others. It stretches us beyond our normal comfort zones. We learn to lay down our lives to meet the needs of others. Therefore, whether you use modern media or not, you will find this course orienting you toward others. It will inspire you to reach out to them, especially providing for their greatest need—to know Jesus.

For those who are willing to use modern media, this course has the added benefit of providing exciting new tools for outreach. The next lesson (Week Two) will offer more detail about Mathetis, while continuing our Bible study of discipleship. It will show how to use Mathetis. The next ten lessons after that will build on Mathetis concepts and videos, showing how to share them with fellow Christians and with seekers. In this way, spiritual growth moves from theory into practice. Mathetis provides a simple and relevant outlet for your spiritual service to others.

Compare John 1:14 with John 20:30-31 and 1 John 1:1-4. These comparisons have to do with direct, personal experience on the one hand and written reports on the other hand. What do these comparisons show about the faith that results from written reports? (Peter makes a similar point; compare 2 Peter 1:1 with 2 Peter 1:16-21.)

Do you see modern communication tools as relevant for making and maturing disciples?

What models inform our “walk in love”? (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Why must our “walk in love” involve sacrifice? (Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 John 3:16)

Week Two:

Jesus and His Disciples

Jesus Chooses Disciples

In the New Testament, the word “disciples” is used in two basic ways of Jesus’ followers. It often refers to Jesus’ closest trainees, the apostles (Matthew 8:23; 9:10; 10:1-2; 11:1). At other times, it refers to the wider group of Jesus’ followers (Matthew 27:57; 28:19; Luke 6:17; 19:37; John 4:1; 6:66; Acts 6:1, 7). We might call these the inner and outer circles.

The Gospel accounts shine a spotlight on Jesus and the glow falls also on His inner circle. What a surprise they are! And what a contrast with Jesus! They have a basic commitment to Jesus that outlasts most in the outer circle (John 6:64-68). Yet their spiritual immaturity is on full display.

- Little faith (Matthew 8:26; 14:31; 16:6; 17:20)
- Fearful (Matthew 8:26; 14:26, 41; John 11:8, 16; 20:19)
- Forgetful (Matthew 8:26; 16:9)
- Slow to learn (Matthew 16:9, 11; Acts 1:6)

- Prejudiced (Luke 9:54; 18:15; John 4:27)
- Hardhearted (Mark 6:52; 8:17) even when Jesus gives them the Great Commission, (Mark 16:14)
- Unreliable (Matthew 26:31, 34, 40, 43, 56, 75)

Jesus Himself chooses the inner circle, the apostles. One of these is Simon the Zealot (Matthew 10:4). In the first century, the Zealots militantly resist Roman occupation. They incite fellow Jews to violence, eventually igniting the brutal First Jewish-Roman War (A.D. 66-70). Yet Jesus teams this partisan Simon with a person that most Zealots would hate: Matthew, also called Levi the tax collector (Matthew 9:9; 10:3; Luke 5:27). Tax collectors are viewed as betraying and oppressing the Jewish nation to support Roman authorities. Grouped as “tax collectors and sinners,” they are among the most despised people in Jewish society (Matthew 9:10-11; 11:19; 18:17). Add to the innermost circle James and John. Jesus calls them “Sons of Thunder” (Mark 3:17). Like Peter, they favor violence at times (Luke 9:54;

22:38, 50). Their selfish ambition threatens to rupture the team (Mark 10:35-41). Peter admits to being “a sinful man” and is known for his outspoken brashness (Luke 5:8; 9:28-35; Mark 8:32-33).

What are we to make of this volatile mix? Jesus is indeed the friend of sinners (Luke 7:34; John 15:15). When Jesus brings this band of brothers together, their selection is no accident. He says to them, “You did not choose Me, but I

chose you” (John 15:16). Jesus chooses and works with earthen vessels, even cracked pots. He works with all types of people, across the human spectrum. This means He can work with us. He sees our faults, but He also sees our potential. He knows we come from different backgrounds. Yet He calls us together into one body (Ephesians 2:13-16). He molds us into the winning team. He has the power and patience to overcome our ignorance and foolishness—if we let Him.

Discussion Questions

The New Testament speaks of Jesus’ disciples in two ways, which we call the inner and outer circles. Why was the inner circle (the apostles) necessary?

Did the distinction mean that those in the outer circle (non-apostles) were less committed as disciples?

Simon the Zealot and Matthew (Levi) the tax collector seemed, politically, to begin as polar opposites. How do you think they managed to work together as apostles?

Can you identify with the list on page 12 that begins with “little faith” and ends with “unreliable”?

What do the failings of the apostles suggest to you about your failings?



A person who wants to become a disciple of Jesus must comply with one basic condition: *willingness*. Jesus expresses that basic condition in various ways.

[Jesus] said to all, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it (Luke 9:23-24 cf. Matthew 16:24-25).

If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and

wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.... So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be My disciple (Luke 14:26-27, 33).

Jesus requires willingness that is serious, stubborn and sacrificial. We may not foresee all a future in discipleship holds. But we start with the firm resolve to follow Jesus, whatever that brings, whatever the challenges and sacrifices, whatever the cost. There is no room for divided loyalties.

“ No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. ”

(Luke 9:62)

The commitment is so far reaching, so all-encompassing that Jesus tells prospective disciples to “count the cost” (Luke 14:28). Is the aspiring disciple willing and able to complete what he begins? (We will address the word “able” later.)

The concept of willingness—commitment to learn and follow—helps us understand how “disciple” is used in different ways. Most often “disciple” in Acts is the equivalent

of “Christian” (Acts 11:26; 26:28). These are willing students who have learned enough to become Christians. But some who are willing may not know enough yet. We recall “Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38). His early willingness needed further development. We read of “some disciples” in Ephesus who had not yet received the Holy Spirit. They were willing but uninformed. That same willingness led them

immediately, after hearing Paul, to be baptized into Christ (Acts 19:1-7). The basic meaning of disciple is pupil, learner or trainee. (The verb form of *mathetes* is translated "trained" in Matthew 13:52.) As a willing student, every true disciple who learns the Gospel will obey it (Mark 16:15-16; Matthew 28:19-20). Thus, true disciples are set free from sin (John

8:31-32) and enter the family of God (John 3:3-5; Galatians 3:26-27). Some may claim to follow Jesus, but if they resist His commands, they prove themselves unwilling and not true disciples (Matthew 7:21-23; 25:11; Luke 6:46; John 6:66; 8:31; 12:4).

Discussion Questions

Jesus tells people to "count the cost" of discipleship (Luke 14:28). In that context, what is the cost, the price the disciple must pay?

What do you think is meant by Jesus' phrase, "take up his cross daily"? (Luke 9:23-24)

Have you experienced the promise "Whoever loses his life for My sake will save it"? (Luke 9:23-24)

Do you have the basic willingness to be a disciple of Jesus? Have you counted the cost?



Jesus told His apostles, “Make disciples” (Matthew 28:19). He gave this order only after He had given them models to follow. He and John the Baptizer had cast a wide net. They had attracted vast crowds (Mark 1:5, 28, 33, 45). John and Jesus had proclaimed,

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17 cf. Mark 1:3, 14-15). The many who heard these messages were the broad field from which emerged the relatively few who became committed disciples, first of John, then of Jesus. (For an example, see John 1:35-42.)

To You It Has Been Given

“ To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ”

(Matthew 13:11-12)

The same principle applies today.

- Those who ask receive... and receiving, receive more.
- Those who seek find... and finding, find more.
- To those who knock... the door opens, and leads to more openings.

We should also emphasize knocking at the right door and asking the right person. There are wrong doors.

- For example, the Pharisees had their disciples (Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; John 9:28; Acts 15:5).
- False teachers had (and have) their disciples (Acts 20:30 cf. 2 Timothy 4:3-4; Ephesians 2:2).

One Leader

In truth, there is only one Door (John 10:9), only one Teacher.

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Christ (Matthew 23:8-10).

John the Baptizer had disciples, but he pointed them to Jesus (John 1:35-37; 3:25-30). Paul had disciples (Acts 9:25), but only to model Jesus for them. “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1 cf. 2 Timothy 3:10). The Great Commission’s command to “make disciples” means disciples of Jesus, those who acknowledge His complete authority, who are baptized into Him, and who learn to obey all His commands (Matthew 28:18-20). To such disciples He promises, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). “Behold!” means “look!” Are we looking by faith? Do we see that Jesus—Immanuel, the risen and living Lord—is “with us” even today? In making that promise, Jesus anticipated the future, all the way “to the end of the age.” We who are nearer to the end, are we still looking?

- Are we like those in John 12:21, seeking to see Jesus more clearly, to get closer to Him?

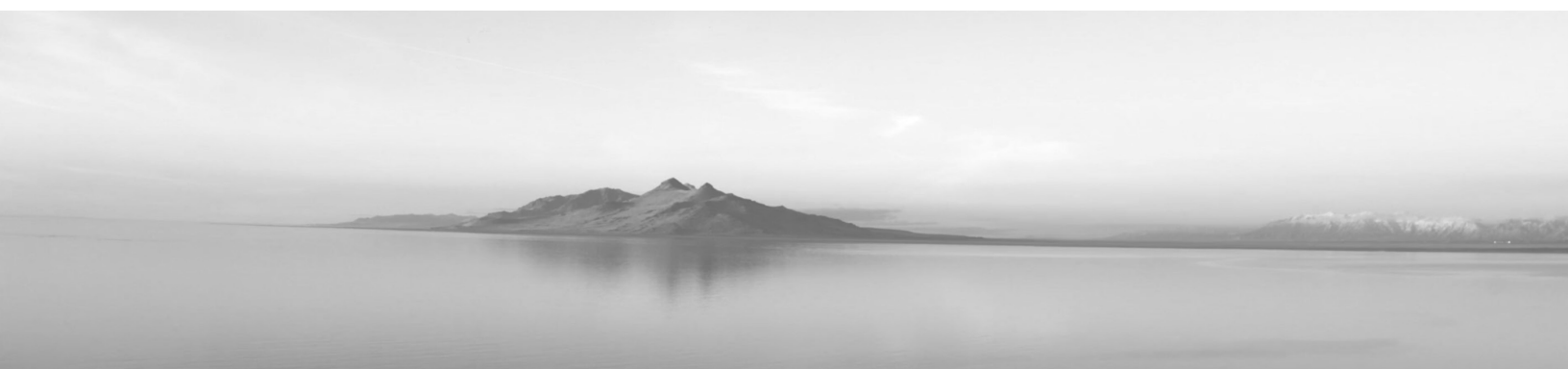
- Are we, by watching Him, becoming like Him? “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40 cf. Matthew 10:24-25; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

- Are we prioritizing His primary virtue? “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

- Does His word fill our lives? “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples” (John 8:31 cf. John 15:7-8).

- Are we obeying Him and training others to do the same? “Make disciples... baptizing them... teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20 cf. Matthew 7:21, 24).

- Are we fruitful in His cause? “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples” (John 15:8 cf. John 15:16).



To Be With Him

Jesus appointed the apostles to be “with Him” and to send them out as

messengers (Mark 3:13-15). Such was their training that Acts 4:13 reports,

“ Now when they [the Jewish authorities] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. ”

(Acts 4:13)

We may feel that we are plain people with plenty of flaws and lacking in many ways. But Jesus makes all the difference. Being “with Jesus” spiritually transforms us and emboldens us.

Do you recall that Jesus charges us to “count the cost” of discipleship? He uses the illustration of a builder considering whether he has “enough” and is “able to finish” (Luke 14:28-30). Frankly, most of us are likely to answer, “No, I don’t feel very able.” Which brings us to Jesus’ second illustration. Two kings are about to

go to war. The weaker king realizes he has no way to win, so he wisely seeks peace (Luke 14:31-33). God is the stronger king and we the weaker. The underlying charge is, “Count the cost of war with God.” To refuse discipleship is to oppose the Almighty King, a sure formula for defeat. What a bind! We shrink from discipleship’s high price—die to yourself! Yet we dare not disobey. The solution is that, in committing to follow Jesus, He gives us His strength. With *Him*, we have more than “enough” and confidently feel “able to finish.”

“ I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. ”

(Philippians 1:6)



Discussion Questions

If discipleship is about personal relationships, why did John and Jesus spend time with large crowds? (Mark 1:5, 28, 33, 45; 4:3-8; 16:15; Matthew 9:37; 13:38; 28:19)

Who received "the secrets of the kingdom" and why? (Matthew 13:11-12)

If Jesus is our "one Teacher," how do we learn from Him? (Matthew 23:8-10)

What role does imitation play in discipleship? (Luke 6:40; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 2 Timothy 3:10)

In what sense can we be "with Jesus" today? (Matthew 28:20; Acts 4:13; Romans 6:4-8; 8:17; 1 Corinthians 9:16; 2 Corinthians 6:1; 13:4; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:10; Revelation 17:14)

Why did Jesus use two different illustrations to depict counting the cost? (Luke 14:28-33)

What is the secret to being "able" to fulfill the demands of discipleship? (Luke 14:29; Romans 14:4; 16:25; Ephesians 3:20; 6:10-13; Philippians 1:6)

Week Three:

Am I In Christ?

Mandy's Story

Mandy was driving home from work when she passed a cemetery and saw a funeral hearse and some family gathered around a gravesite. She thought, "I wonder who died. Whoever it was, I hope they were ready to go." Then the thought hit her, "Someday that will be me. Life is passing so quickly. I know that the time will come when I will breathe my last breath. But what will that mean for me?"

Her uncertainty reminded her of a childhood game. She and her girlfriends would take flowers and pull off the petals one at a time. Thinking of a boy they liked, they would rotate saying with each plucked petal, "He loves me" and "He loves me not." They would be in suspense until the last petal. If the answer was, "He loves me," they giggled with delight. If the answer was, "He loves me not," they frowned with disappointment.

Mandy's mind raced through several thoughts: "Am I ready to meet God? Will He accept me or not? How can I know?" A few blocks from Mandy's home, she saw an ambulance at a neighbor's house. Lights were flashing and a police car was arriving as medics wheeled someone out of the house. "It looks like an emergency, maybe a heart attack or a shooting." That thought moved Mandy to consider her own mortality. "What if that was me? What will happen to me after death? I may never know until I die."

What would you say to Mandy? Must we rely on guesswork as we face our eternal future? Are we depending on being good enough to live with God? Can we know for sure we are going to heaven when we die?

To the teacher:

We suggest that you watch the video in your personal preparation for leading this (and every) class. Are you familiar with the biblical term “in Christ” or “in Him”? Paul makes frequent use of this term, and Peter also uses it. You may wish to use a concordance or a Bible search program to list the blessings found “in Christ” or “in Him.” The video shows several examples, but your research can expand the Bible’s list of benefits found in Christ.

Even in some Christian circles, there is discussion about baptism’s role. Please review the expression “into Christ” in Romans 6:3 and Galatians

3:27, and related passages about baptism’s purpose. Some people downplay baptism, belittling it as a human work. That idea has arisen, not from the Bible, but from struggles between denominations. In biblical baptism, the believer’s part is passive (“be baptized”) and Colossians 2:12 shows that God does the “working” in baptism. He is the source of our assurance. His Spirit is our strength and guarantee (Ephesians 1:13; 3:16; 4:30; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Corinthians 5:5). Thus, our confidence is not in ourselves but in the grace of God through Christ’s sacrifice and the Spirit’s power.

To the mentor:

You too may benefit from the notes in the previous paragraph. To lead this session in Mathetis you will need to be confident of your own salvation. Read and pray over this lesson and search your own heart and life to be assured of your relationship with God. Make sure that the confidence you have and share with others is grounded in who Jesus is, what He has done for you, and what He is doing now and

will do. Our faith is in Jesus, not in the perfection of our performance. If we emphasize the role of baptism, we do so because Jesus and the New Testament give it an essential role (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15-16; John 3:3-5; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Titus 3:5). If we emphasize remaining in Christ, we do so because the Lord makes it essential (John 15:4-7; 1 John 2:6, 28; 3:6).

View the Video

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**T**his lesson deals with troubling questions of doubt and uncertainty. In the video, can you identify with the man who has questions? Is the video's scene familiar to you in the sense that you have had similar discussions? You may have been the seeker, or you may have been the Christian sharing the Gospel. Does the video's biblical teaching resonate with you? Can you see yourself sharing biblical truths in a similar way?

Notice that the Christian who is sharing the Gospel turns to the Bible for answers. Why is that important? Even with a healthy approach, how would you handle disagreements that might arise? (See 2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 3:2; 1 Peter 3:15.) Do you have other insights for helping a person who asks similar questions about being right with God?

Watch video at:  
[www.mathetis.org/q3w3](http://www.mathetis.org/q3w3)



# 1

There is nothing wrong with asking the questions, "Am I in Christ?" and "Am I really saved?" 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, "Test everything; hold fast what is good." Why would you think it is healthy for us to ask these questions?

**T**hese questions are healthy because they have to do with the most important concern of life: our relationship with God.

He is the source of all life. He is the only judge and the only one who can forgive our sins.

**“ With His Son, He will either welcome us into eternity with Him or cast us away from His presence forever. ”**

(Matthew 25:31-46; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-10)

A positive relationship with the Father comes through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. This faith includes the willingness to accept His authority, to change (repent) in the way He requires, to obey the Gospel in baptism and to live

faithfully as His disciple. Covered by His grace, we enjoy assurance and courage to live life now and to face death eventually. Nothing else matters more in this life or after death.

# 2

Have you ever felt doubtful of your relationship with Christ? Did you feel like your doubt was due to your inability to obey God properly? Or was it more about God's inability or lack of love toward you?

It is spiritually healthy for every person to inquire about his or her standing

with God. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you

are in the faith. Test yourselves.” Our doubt can motivate us to investigate the word of God more carefully. The only way to know with certainty if we are right with God is to look into the Bible, believing and obeying what God says about receiving forgiveness and eternal life. If we discover that we are not in a right relationship with God, then we will need to accept God’s way forward, as revealed in His word. The New Testament places special emphasis on God’s saving work accomplished through Christ.

*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the*

*Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).*

Our part is to trust Him by obeying the Gospel and remaining faithful to its truth. In believing baptism, we come “into Christ,” sharing in His death, burial and resurrection (Romans 6:3-4). Our insecurities and doubts are remedied by trusting the Lord who never lies. Even as we acknowledge our sins, we trust in Christ’s blood to remove all our sins from God’s sight (1 John 1:5-7).

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith (Romans 3:23-25).*

### 3

**What are some of the blessings we can enjoy when we are in Christ? Do you have any personal experiences with these blessings that you can share with your group?**

Look again at Romans 3.

*[We] are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by His blood, to be received by faith (Romans 3:24-25).*

According to that passage, what do we find “in Christ”? Yes, “the

redemption”—the price paid by Christ to set us free. His death on the cross paid the punishment for our sins. The “propitiation” was the sacrifice that satisfied God’s justice and let God accept us. Christ’s redeeming sacrifice was for all people (John 1:29; 3:16; 1 John 2:2), but the people who experience its benefit are those “in Christ.”

Redemption is one example of many showing what God gives to us in Christ. If we continue to read Romans, we find similar expressions. "In Christ" there is...

- no condemnation (Romans 8:1)
- the law of the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2)
- the love of God (Romans 8:39)
- the truth (Romans 9:1 cf. Ephesians 4:21)
- one united body (Romans 12:5 cf. Galatians 3:28)

As you read through other New Testament letters, you can continue to build this sort of list. Indeed, Ephesians 1:3 assures us that all spiritual blessings are found "in Christ."

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*

*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence, by which He has granted to us His precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire (2 Peter 1:3-4).*

Our experiences have to do with faith. Look at Ephesians 1:7 as an example:

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.*

Forgiveness takes place in the mind of God. That is His experience, the objective reality. I believe His word, and that belief gives me a strong sense of relief and peace. That is my experience, which is subjective. My trust in His complete forgiveness lets me experience a clear conscience (Hebrews 9:14; 10:22; 13:18). With that in mind, if you are in Christ, share with your group what it means to you to have these blessings in your life.

- How does the Holy Spirit affect the way you live?
- How is God creating oneness in your life with other believers without regard to race, gender or economics?
- How does having the peace of God affect the way you live?
- Describe the joy of expecting to live with God forever.
- How does Jesus affect what you value, think about, and how you treat others?
- Which "precious and very great promises" of God mean the most to you?

## Social Media Exercises

- 1) As a study group, look up some of the "in Christ" statements in Scripture and make a list of God's blessings for those "in Christ." For those of you who are Christians, what are some of the blessings you have personally experienced by being in Christ?
- 2) After this lesson, if you are still left questioning whether you are in Christ or if you realize that you have not properly followed God's direction to be in Christ, we want to provide you with a few options that can help you take the next step. If you would like to speak with someone, the group leader(s) can invite a Mentor to this study group who can help answer any questions you might have. If you are not a group leader, you can create your own personal group, which

immediately invites a Mentor to join you in a one-on-one personal study. If you would like a more immediate response, you are always welcome to email us your questions directly at [help@mathetis.org](mailto:help@mathetis.org).

If you are looking for a way to continue studying on your own or as a group on this topic, check out the course, *In Need of a Savior*, which goes into further detail on what it means to be a follower of Christ and how you can enjoy the blessings that are found in Him.

For this exercise, share how you want God to transform you as you continue this study together. As a group pray for each individual's request and give encouragement to one another.

**T**he video shows a Christian sharing God's word with a seeker. The Christian draws a circle that represents Christ and a right relationship with Him. Inside the circle, he writes examples of spiritual blessings "in Christ" as stated by the Scriptures. In view of Romans 6, we may ask, "Where is a person

before they are baptized into Christ?" Picture a house with an open door. Where is a person before he goes "into" the house? Obviously, he is outside. In the same way, before one is baptized "into Christ" he obviously is outside Christ. To be outside Christ is to be without salvation, to be lost in the worst way.

**“ Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ”**

(Ephesians 2:12)

Earlier in that same chapter, Ephesians tells us more about the human condition.

*You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Ephesians 2:1-3).*

People who are so alienated from their Creator have "no hope." Yet they do not have to remain in that devastating condition. They can come into Christ and be made "alive together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:5). They can enjoy the free "gift of God" (Ephesians 2:9). But how are they to know these great truths? They will only know about Jesus if we believers share Him! That is why this Bible course and methods like Mathetis are so vital. They help seekers to know the answer to the all-important question, "Am I in Christ?"

## Conclusion



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