

# WHO IS A CHRISTIAN?

A Christian Guidebook 2



T. M. Moore

A *ReVision* Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Waxed Tablet Publications

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## Welcome to *Who Is a Christian?*

Certainly the answer to this question cannot be as obscure and merely personal as “Whoever claims to be one.” But, in many ways, this is precisely where we stand today. Many people identify as Christians, but a close look at what the Scriptures teach about this question makes it clear that not everyone claiming to be a Christian is a Christian.

What do the Scriptures teach? That’s what we intend to discover in this next installment of *A Christian Guidebook*.

This *Guidebook* is designed to help us be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within us by reviewing essential Christian doctrines and shoring-up the Biblical foundations of each. Our goal is to lead you into the Word of God so that you can gain a clearer and more lively understanding of what we as Christians believe.

We’re happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you’ll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Why This Question?

*Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. Acts 19.13-16*

### *Confusion around the Name of Jesus*

Early on in the Christian era it was clear that confusion about the Name of Jesus would follow the pure Gospel wherever it went.

No sooner had the Gospel begun to spread than certain Jewish theologians, claiming to be Christians, insisted that it wasn't enough to believe in Jesus. To be a true Christian, you had to be circumcised—a requirement that Gentile converts would have found particularly off-putting.

A little later, some others began insisting that to be a Christian meant you revered Jesus so much that you did not consider Him to have suffered the indignity of becoming a human being. He merely *appeared* to do so, but all the while His phantom was the beautiful, glorious, spotless Savior true Christians knew and loved.

Then there were the copycat Christians, like the sons of Sceva. They saw something in the Name of Jesus that appealed to them, and so they thought they would adopt His Name for their own religious work. But while some may have been impressed, the devil saw through that charade, with comic consequences for copycat Christians.

Even a casual reading of Revelation 2 and 3 reveals that the problems in those seven churches meant that many who were calling themselves Christians were in danger of coming under the wrath of Him they claimed to believe. They were sexually compromised, politically tainted, and comfortable in their do-nothing approach to the faith. And yet their neighbors knew them as Christians. Just as the neighbors and friends of the legalists, docetists, and copycat moralists thought of their neighbors as Christians.

### *Will the real Christians please stand up?*

The climactic scene of the 1960 epic, "Spartacus", occurs after the slave revolt has been put down. The survivors have all been taken prisoner and are seated, a hundred or so of them, under the watchful eye of Roman guards. The general's emissary arrives, promising life to all survivors, on the condition that they reveal the slave called Spartacus, the leader of the revolt. As Kirk Douglas rises to own up, Tony Curtis jumps to his feet and cries out, "I'm Spartacus!" Then another stands and does the same. Then more and more, until all the captured rebels are standing and shouting continuously, "I'm Spartacus!"

The general's inability to identify the one he sought meant the whole throng would be crucified.

It can be confusing today, for those who may be seeking a more spiritual or transcendent life, to identify who the true Christians are. So many churches, so many different denominations, so many different "styles" of Christianity. And for people all claiming to be Christians, they don't seem to do much together. I can imagine those who are considering faith thinking to themselves, "Will the real Christians please stand up?"

Even worse, so many Christians have assimilated their ways of living, working, enjoying themselves, and indulging their desires to the materialistic and narcissistic winds of the day that their claims to be Christians seem a little empty. If they're Christians, one might reasonably assume, then 'most everyone else must be too?

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And now we have the phenomenon of copycat Christians, famous or well-known figures in business and the professional world who describe themselves as “cultural Christians”, insisting that they find much of good in the Christian approach to culture and society. So, does being a “cultural Christian” fill the bill for someone who wants to be a true Christian?

And what about those “lapsed” Christians who never go to church, hold on to their baptism, live as they please, but still think of themselves as Christians?

“I’m Christian!” “I’m Christian!” “I’m Christian!” For many in the world, it’s just too hard to tell and not worth the trouble to find out. Hang ‘em all.

But for people experiencing a growing sense of disillusionment with the secular status quo and in whom a stirring re-enchantment is rising, it is most important that we show and tell them what a true Christian truly is.

*Hence the question*

This is why *A Christian Guidebook* needs to examine this question in a purely Biblical light, from the very beginning of the Christian movement. What we will find may look all too familiar, at least on the surface:

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ.  
Christians spend time with Jesus.  
Christians walk the path Jesus walked.  
Christians practice another King.  
Christians have a Kingdom mission.  
Christians examine themselves.

Familiar, perhaps. But to make sure our understanding of such matters is not merely intellectual, we need to look more deeply at what these criteria entail. That will be the focus of this section of *A Christian Guidebook*.

*Search the Scriptures*

1. Suppose you were asked to define from the Scriptures what makes a person a Christian. Where would you turn?
2. How would you explain to an unbelieving friend what it means to be a Christian? How should you prepare for this (1 Pet. 3.15)?
3. Look at John 6.60-69. What do we learn from the disciples of Jesus about what it means to be a Christian?

*Next steps—Preparation: How did you become a Christian? Who else was involved? Under what circumstances? Write out your answers and begin to review your testimony out loud until you feel confident sharing it with someone.*

## 2 A Christian Is a Disciple

*Then Barnabas departed for Tarsus to seek Saul. And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.* Acts 11.25, 26

### *Not an option*

I imagine that among the many study and training options churches offer each year, one of those has the term “discipleship” in it. Churches are right to offer discipleship training to their members. But in all those churches that do offer such training, one thing is clear: Very few of the members sign up.

What shall we make of this situation? I can think of two explanations, neither of which is very encouraging.

First, perhaps most church members believe that they are already fulfilling the requirements of discipleship, or getting all the training they need from the preaching, and don’t need additional training. Many may believe that, but as a reality it seems unlikely. The evidence of millions of disciples of Jesus Christ loose in the neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and other venues of our society is sadly lacking.

The second explanation is probably more realistic: Most Christians regard discipleship as an option, not a necessity. Like leadership training. Or training for evangelism. Or becoming an officer in the church. Or taking a course on counseling or ministering to the elderly or establishing a Christian home. Discipleship training is an option, many seem to believe, but not essential to being a Christian. To be a Christian one simply believes in Jesus and, typically, identifies with a church community, worshiping and waiting for the Lord’s return.

But this explanation, like the first, is not encouraging. And neither explanation helps us in answering the question, “Who is a Christian?”

### *Origin of the term “Christian”*

Our text advises us that “the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.” We wonder who placed that epithet upon them. Probably not themselves, since the text does not say that the disciples “first called themselves Christians” in Antioch. No, they were *called* Christians by those who knew or encountered or observed them in Antioch. They were called Christians because “Christ” was their way of explaining the grace that spread to and through them.

Two later texts of the New Testament employ this term. By the time Herod, listening to Paul, assumed that Paul was trying to make him, like Paul, a Christian (Acts 26.28), the term had obviously begun to circulate. Paul happily owned the term as applicable to himself. Peter explained that to “suffer as a Christian” was reason to glorify God (1 Pet. 4.16). Something in the life of a Christian can provoke opposition and even persecution; but this should not surprise or dismay Christians. They should glory in it.

So we might say, in answering the question raised by this installment of *A Christian Guidebook*, that a Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ, like those in Antioch, and like Paul and all those who suffered for the Name of Jesus in one way or another. If you are a Christian, you are a disciple. The “discipleship” issue we all face, therefore, is not *whether* I wish to be a disciple but rather *what kind of disciple* am I?

But what is a disciple?

### *Disciple*

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ. The word “disciple”, in the language of the Greek New Testament, derives from a root that means “to learn.” We see this played out in the lives of the first disciples of Jesus,

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who spent some three years watching, listening to, rubbing shoulders with, and working alongside Jesus—learning Him, so to speak. And then, after His resurrection, they were instructed for forty days about the Kingdom of Christ (Acts 1.3). A disciple is a learner; therefore, a Christian is a learner. One cannot be a Christian without submitting to a regimen of learning. Disciples learn. And all Christians are disciples.

And learning is best done in community, as the disciples in Antioch did (Acts 11.25, 26). The people assembled “for a whole year” while Paul and Barnabas were among them, and we can imagine that they continued learning together after that, especially when we consider the evidence of Church history.

Early in the second century, the bishop of the churches in Antioch, Ignatius, was arrested and sent overland to Rome to be thrown to wild beasts. As he journeyed through what is now southern Turkey, the churches started by Paul’s mission from Antioch (Acts 13 and following) sent emissaries to visit, comfort, and provide for Ignatius’ needs along the way. Antioch was their “home church”, and they had not forgotten how the Christians there had helped them come to faith and begin their discipleship of Jesus.

Disciples of Jesus are who Christians are—people committed to living for Christ. But what are Christians supposed to learn?

#### *Learning Jesus*

Paul gives us the short answer: “learn Jesus” (Eph. 4.20). The goal of Christian life, of the life of every disciple, is to learn Jesus. Because God’s desire is to transform every Christian increasingly into the likeness of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.1-18); and it will be difficult for that to be realized apart from a dedicated, continuous, and lifelong effort at learning Jesus.

A Christian—a disciple—is a learner, and Christians are to learn Jesus. The goal of all Christian instruction, no matter the subject or theme, is love (1 Tim. 1.5), and loving God, one another, and our neighbors is not possible apart from knowing Jesus.

You are a Christian and a disciple if you are committed to learning Jesus.

And learning Jesus, as we shall see, begins with spending time with Him.

#### *Search the Scriptures*

1. Think about the first disciples of Jesus—Peter, John, and the others. How did they “learn” Jesus? What did they do to learn Him?
2. How does reading the Scriptures help us to learn Jesus? Can you identify one passage or book of Scripture that has been especially helpful to you in learning Jesus?
3. Read John 5.39. What does Jesus mean here? How should knowing this affect the way we read the Bible in any of its parts?

*Next steps—Preparation: Review your approach to learning Jesus. How much time do you devote to this each week? What activities or disciplines do you engage? What’s the most significant lesson about Jesus you have learned of late?*

### 3 Christians Spend Time with Jesus

“...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28.20

*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* Ephesians 2.4-7

*A Christian is a disciple*

A Christian is a disciple. Anyone who claims to be a Christian is a disciple, a *learner*, a learner of Jesus.

But the New Testament recognizes that disciples—and therefore Christians—are such in varying degrees. There are those who are babes in Christ (1 Cor. 3.1). Either they are very new Christians, or they are older Christians who have not grown in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3.18). Either way, remaining a “Christian baby” is not acceptable according to the New Testament.

Then there are those who have grown some but not enough to really fulfill their discipleship. They are not babes, exactly, but they are immature. They should be at a point of teaching Jesus to others, but they are not (Heb. 5.12-14). Being content with this is not acceptable, either.

Mature Christians can be recognized by a variety of indicators. They feast on the Word of God (Heb. 5.14), persevere in love and good works (Heb. 6.9, 10), bear the fruit of the Spirit rather than the marks of the flesh (Gal. 6.16-23), use their gifts to help build the church (1 Cor. 12.7-11; Eph. 4.12-16), teach the things of Jesus to others (Heb. 5.12; Acts 1.8), and more. This, the New Testament insists, is the condition toward which every Christian strives.

All Christians need to assess their condition as a disciple. Are we just babes? Or simply immature? Well, that should not be acceptable to us. Are we growing toward maturity? Great. Paul would say, “Press on!” Do we consider ourselves mature? Well, as J. I. Packer reminded us in his book, *Finishing Our Course with Joy*, even the most mature of us always has something more to learn.

Ken Boa once likened the Christian life to walking up the down escalator. Standing still gets you nowhere and demonstrates a lack of seriousness about the climb. But getting to the top takes some work.

And that work begins by spending time with Jesus: “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him...” (Mk. 3.14).

*Begin here—always*

The first criterion Jesus established for His disciples is that they must be with Him. Being with Jesus is how the disciples began their walk with and work for the Lord and being with Him is how each of them ended. In between, the disciples embraced being with Jesus as the *sine qua non* of a true disciple—a true Christian.

Being with Jesus has two aspects, each of which begins by meeting Jesus in His Word. We will find it difficult to be with Jesus as He intends unless we are daily communing with Him in Scripture and prayer. All Scripture is about Jesus, as He explained (Jn. 5.39); thus, in the Scriptures Jesus reveals Himself to us. *All* Scripture, over and over and ever more fully.

We respond to Jesus revealing Himself to us in prayers of wonder, admiration, praise, thanksgiving, and supplication, and through lives of obedience. Christians are resolved to meet Jesus like this every day because



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in His Presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16.11); and because unless they do, they will struggle to be with Him throughout the day.

Meeting with Jesus daily in His Word and prayer prepares and equips us for being with Jesus wherever we are and where He is.

#### *Where we are, where He is*

Jesus has promised to be with us always (Matt. 28.20). Like the disciples, when we are thus with Jesus in our temporal endeavors—working, being with others, eating and drinking, listening, helping, and so forth—we will strive to imitate Him, just like Paul did (1 Cor. 11.1). So we need to pay close attention, in our reading and study of Scripture, to how Jesus spoke, related to others, observed the people around Him, took initiatives, and more. Jesus with us—and even more, by His Spirit *in* us—will do those good works that take shape out of our seeing Him in the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, the Gospels, and the entire New Testament. We must “walk circumspectly” (Eph. 5.15-17) to be like Jesus in all our words and deeds, looking to and communing with Him—if only in silence—so that He will direct, empower, and bless our being, speaking, and acting like Him.

Christians spend their time with Jesus, and He shows Himself to the world through them.

But Christians also enjoy the privilege of being with Jesus where He is, seated at the right hand of God in heavenly places (Col. 3.1-3). The Scriptures—in both the Old and New Testaments—provide ample descriptions of Jesus, exalted in glory, upholding the cosmos, ruling His Kingdom, advancing the Gospel, gathering and perfecting His disciples, building His Church, and preparing a place for us. We must spend time with Jesus in these Scriptures. Christians have a ring-side seat with Jesus, to look out on themselves and their world with the mind of the Lord (1 Cor. 2.16), and thus to take all our thoughts captive to obey Him (2 Cor. 10.3-5).

This is the work of meditation, deep prayer and silence, singing with rejoicing, and encouraging one another in the Lord. John Owen, that great Puritan theologian and pastor, wrote that all believers have some image of Jesus in their mind (*Christologia*). But we must seek to improve and perfect that vision of Jesus, as much as possible in this life, because, after all, this is what God is working to do in us (2 Cor. 3.12-18) and it’s where we are headed at the end of our days (1 Jn. 3.1-3).

Christians spend time with Jesus where He is, gazing upon His beauty, wondering at His majesty, marveling at His excellence, basking in His power, and looking into His face for the glory that transforms them into His image (2 Cor. 4.6; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Learning Jesus begins by being with Him. A Christian is a disciple who spends time with Jesus. Not like a babe or some frivolous youth. But like a mature saint. Daily. In every situation. With an abundance of peace and joy. If you are a Christian, become a mature disciple. Spend time with Jesus.

#### *Search the Scriptures*

1. What are some things the disciples observed in Jesus’ life and conduct while He was among them?
2. How would you explain what it means to practice Colossians 3.1-3?
3. What can keep you from spending time with Jesus? How should you deal with that?

*Next steps—Restoration: God is working to restore us to the image of Jesus. Are you spending enough time with Jesus for that to happen? How can you improve the time you spend with Jesus?*

## 4 Christians Walk the Path Jesus Walked

*Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." John 8.31*

*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. 6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked. 1 John 2.3-6*

### *Time with Jesus*

We need to be clear about a point we raised in the previous installment. There we said that Christians, who are disciples of Jesus, spend time with Jesus. We wrote, "[Christians] must 'walk circumspectly' (Eph. 5.15-17) to be like Jesus in all our words and deeds, looking to and communing with Him—if only in silence—so that He will direct, empower, and bless our being, speaking, and acting like Him."

We "walk circumspectly" as we abide—that is, as we *continue*—with Jesus in all the time of our lives. John, as we see in our text for today, picked up on Jesus' use of the verb "abide" or "continue" and explained that all who "continue" with Jesus are "to walk as He walked." We want to continue with Jesus and walk with Him in *all* the time of our lives.

Time, as Jonathan Edwards explained, is God's most precious temporal gift, a "precious talent" to be invested in loving God and our neighbors (*The Preciousness of Time*). We must strive each day to continue in our time with Jesus. We are accountable to God for how we use our time, Edwards reminded us; and we have already wasted far more time than ever we should have. We must improve our time by using our time more in line with the way Jesus used His. We want to continue in our time walking with Jesus as He walked when He was among us.

### *Improving our time with Jesus*

Edwards exhorted us in three ways to improve our time and therefore our walk with Jesus. First, get busy at it *right now*. Today. This moment. Resolve to abide and continue in Jesus and to walk every step of your life with Him Who is with you always, even to the end of the age. Edwards quoted Psalm 119.60, "I made haste, and did not delay to keep Your commandments." Right now is the time to begin improving our use of the time God gives us.

Second, Edwards urged us to improve those "most precious" moments of our time which are spent in prayer and in reading and meditating on God's Word. We can all do better here. Edwards called this "holy time" and insisted that it "is more precious than common time" so we should always be seeking to improve it.

Third, Edwards pleaded with readers to use more of what he called "leisure" time to improve, not our bodies, but our souls. We must not waste our time in "useless diversions or amusements" but invest even this time to help "fit the mind and body for the work of our general and particular callings."

All of which reinforces the importance of continuing with Jesus at *all* times so that we walk the path that Jesus walked in everything we do.

### *The path of God's Law*

But what path did Jesus walk? Obviously, the path of knowing, loving, and serving God and loving the people of this world enough to die for us. Put more succinctly, Jesus walked the path of loving God and His neighbors. That is, Jesus walked the path marked out by the Law of God (cf. Matt. 22.34-40).

### *Who Is a Christian?*

A Christian is someone who delights in, learns, obeys, and helps others to delight in, learn, and obey the holy and righteous and good Law of God (Matt. 5.17-19; Rom. 7.12). Such a lifestyle may not appeal to those who are babes in Christ or who consider it acceptable to remain immature in Him. But Christians who abide with Jesus will want to discover, delight in, and dedicate themselves to walking the path that Jesus walked in all the time of their lives.

This can begin, as Edwards noted, right now. Today. Today you can take the Law of God into all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities to help you love God and your neighbor as Jesus did. Begin by memorizing Matthew 22.37-40:

“Jesus said to him, *‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’* This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: *‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’* On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Until you have memorized this passage, write in on a note card and review it often throughout the day. This will begin to set your heart to know and delight in God’s Law, all the better for empowering you to love God and your neighbor, just as Jesus did.

Second, improve your time with Jesus by including something from the Law of God. Add meditating on the Law of God as part of your morning and evening time in prayer and the Word with Jesus (Ps. 1.1, 2). Stretch out in the Law by reading over and over from the book of Deuteronomy, seeking both to understand the requirements of the statutes and precepts of the Law and to see Jesus in them (Jn. 5.39).

Finally, work on your soul throughout the day, even in your “leisure” time, to fine tune it for delighting in, loving, and obeying God’s Law. Take Psalm 119 into whatever you do, just a verse or two to guide you. Every verse in this psalm teaches us how to improve our time, abide in Jesus, and walk with Him in whatever we’re doing by submitting our soul to God’s Law.

Spending time with Jesus involves all the time of our lives, whatever we’re doing, wherever our walk with Him may take us. But we want not only to walk *with* Jesus but walk *like* Him, and this requires learning and following the path Jesus did, the path of God’s Law.

#### *Search the Scriptures*

1. Some Christians think we no longer have to obey God’s Law. What does Ephesians 2.10 teach about this? And what about Romans 3.31?
2. Jesus said that learning, keeping, and sharing the Law had something to do with living in His Kingdom. What did He say about that in Matthew 5.17-19?
3. How did the apostle James refer to the Law of God? How did he counsel us concerning its use (Jms. 2.12)? We don’t keep the Law to *become* Christians, but because we *are* Christians. Explain.

*Next steps—Restoration: Will you follow the suggestions for improving your time with Jesus? If not, why not?*

## 5 Christians Practice another King

*“These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.” Acts 17.6, 7*

*Who are these people?*

It was obvious to the people of Thessalonica that there was something different about those folks whom Paul had “persuaded” (v. 4) to become disciples of Jesus Christ—Christians.

The Christians in Thessalonica were changed. They began at once to engage in works of faith and labors of love (1 Thess. 1.3). The Christians in Thessalonica were outspoken about Jesus and their commitment to Him (1 Thess. 1.8). They put aside every false idol they had previously sought to gain or appease (1 Thess. 1.9), committed themselves to the Word of God (1 Thess. 2.13), assembled as a church (1 Thess. 2.14), walked the path that Jesus and the apostles walked (1 Thess. 4.1, 2), embraced the work of sanctification (1 Thess. 4.3ff), and abounded toward one another in brotherly love (1 Thess. 4.9, 10).

And for all this, the Christians in Thessalonica were noticed, and they were persecuted (Acts 17.1-9; 1 Thess. 1.6).

We can imagine how this came to pass. Neighbors noticed them going regularly to some meeting or other. When they asked about what they were doing, they answered they were going to learn Jesus and worship Him. When they no longer showed up at the local temple or idol kiosk, their explanation, when asked, was that they were walking with Jesus now. They talked about Jesus. They refused to accept or submit to whatever “dogmas” of emperor loyalty their neighbors gave lip-service to, because they had “another King, Whose Name, they said, is Jesus.”

But the most telling charge, the real deal-sealer to all this, is what their accuser said about them: “*πράσσοσι βασιλέα ἕτερον λέγοντες εἶναι Ἰησοῦν*” (*prassousi basilea heteron, legontes einai Inson*—they practice another King, saying Him to be Jesus).

Who were these people? They were Christians, citizens, ambassadors, and practitioners of a Kingdom not of this world.

*The Kingship of Jesus*

A Christian is one who acknowledges, embraces, and submits to the Kingship of Jesus Christ. A Christian believes in Jesus not just for forgiveness and eternal life, but for life now, Kingdom life now, life in the Spirit and Word of God by which we are daily transformed into the very image of our King (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

A Christian has been transferred or conveyed by Jesus the King out of the grip of the powers of darkness and wrong belief into the realm where Jesus’ love is the defining motif and overarching aim (Col. 1.13). Christians have been called to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12). Whatever else we do, whatever callings or vocations we take up, whatever task or role or duty or relationship or responsibility falls within our remit, we are Kingdom-seekers—Kingdom *practitioners*—first and above all and in and through and by all.

Christians have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16) and foremost in the mind of Christ—as is evident in nearly every one of His public statements or messages—is realizing the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords. He rules the vast cosmos simply by speaking to it (Heb. 1.3). All the

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kingdoms of this world have become the domain of King Jesus. He dispatches angels by the myriad to carry out His all-comprehending will. He is gathering His chosen ones from out of every nation, tribe, and tongue through the faithful work of Kingdom citizens like those in Thessalonica. He is building His Church in unity and maturity to be His very own Body in communities all over the world. He is advancing the reach of His Kingdom and the promulgation of His Law through Christians in every walk of life and every culture and society.

And He is preparing a place for us to dwell with Him forever in the fullness of joy, glorifying God and rejoicing in Him forever.

#### *The Kingdom of God*

Christians are citizens of the Kingdom of God. Jesus our King encourages us to make progress in Kingdom greatness, that is, in realizing and contributing to more of the righteousness, peace, and joy of the Holy Spirit in everything we do (Rom. 14.17, 19). And there are two keys to realizing increasing Kingdom greatness: be a servant to everyone; and learn, keep, and teach the Law of God (cf. Mk. 10.43-45; Matt. 5.17-19).

Who is a Christian? In ancient Thessalonica, the Christians stood out as those who loved and served one another, loved and cared for their neighbors, rejoiced in worshiping Jesus, spoke about Him to others, and refused to conform to any of the powers of darkness or idols of wrong belief, no matter what it cost. Where are these people today?

Christians wake up every day to the sense that the Kingdom of God is calling them; and they are determined to seek it and the righteousness that accompanies it in everything they do. Which is just another way of saying that Christians *practice* the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God defines and shapes and lends power to all our daily practices, no matter what they may be.

Christians have the Kingdom mindset of Jesus working in them always and increasingly. And that comes out in all we are and do.

#### *Search the Scriptures*

1. Read Colossians 1.13. How does this happen? What does this mean? How can we know whether we have been "conveyed" into the Kingdom of God?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 4.20 and Romans 14.17, 18. What should we expect to see where the Kingdom of God is advancing?
3. According to Jesus in Matthew 5.17-19, what role does the Law of God have in His Kingdom?

*Next steps—Transformation: In how many ways do you experience the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God? In which of these do you want to improve?*

## 6 Christians Have a Kingdom Mission

*So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you."* John 20:21

### *A unique people*

Christians are a unique people. As disciples of Jesus Christ, committed to learning Him, we understand that one overarching calling directs our lives: we are called to the Kingdom and glory of God and to seek His Kingdom and righteousness first and always (2 Thess. 2:12; Matt. 6:33).

To that end, Jesus has transferred us into His Kingdom from the kingdom of darkness, self-centeredness, and wrong belief in which we formerly lived. Now our lives are to be characterized by righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17, 18). Jesus is our King. We are His people and subjects. We practice the life of Jesus unto the glory of Jesus in everything we do.

Practicing the Kingship of Jesus is not reserved for some special class of Christians who are good thinkers, excellent speakers, talented artists or musicians, or able to support Christian endeavors by their time or wealth. All who call themselves Christians heed the calling to His Kingdom and glory, seek first His Kingdom and righteousness, and practice the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit as the driving force of their lives.

Christians may be more or less consistent, efficient, and mature in such matters. But true Christians aim at these ends, work to improve their time and their love for Jesus, and assess their lives in terms of their progress in practicing His Kingship.

A Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ and a citizen of His Kingdom.

### *People with a mission*

We do not expect the lost and wrong-believing people of our world to rise to such a high and holy calling. After all, they are, as we were, dead in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3). They do not worship God, are ensnared in the lies of the devil, and follow a course of ultimate self-interest in everything they do.

But King Jesus has really Good News for confused, anxious, uncertain, broken, and needing-to-be-broken sinners.

That Good News was the same as what Jesus Himself proclaimed: "From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17). Jesus began His ministry proclaiming the "at handness" of the Kingdom of God. That was the dominant theme of all His teaching and good works. It was the vision that sustained Him as He hanged on the cross (cf. Heb. 12:1, 2; Ps. 22:21b-31). The Kingdom was the gift He received upon His ascension to glory (Dan. 7:13, 14). It is the gift He has bestowed upon His disciples in the Person of His Holy Spirit (Dan. 7:18; Acts 1:8).

And it is for the progress of that Kingdom that we have been saved, set apart, and sent to the world.

As God sent Jesus to the world, Jesus sends His disciples—every Christian. We are a people with a mission. Our mission is to "bring near" and announce the "at handness" of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Good News of the Gospel is that the Kingdom is at hand; that our victorious Savior and King has gained the eternal Kingdom by His life, death, and resurrection; and that He is the door to His Kingdom for all who believe in Him and desire to be set apart for His Kingdom and righteousness.

The message with which Christians have been entrusted, and which we both live and proclaim, is not merely

### *Who Is a Christian?*

that our sins can be forgiven and we will go to heaven when we die. The message is that the Kingdom of God has come, and King Jesus is calling you to enter it by believing in Him and taking up His calling to follow Him and be His disciple.

#### *But where?*

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is within or among us (Lk. 17.21)—right where we are, as we are going about our daily work, in all our conversations and all our deeds. Paul explained that, in imitation of Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1), he demarcated a “sphere” of activity for seeking the Kingdom of God (2 Cor. 10.13-18). Just as Jesus had been sent to a particular place, people, culture, and time, so too with the apostle Paul. And like each of us as disciples of Jesus.

Our “sphere” includes the places we go, the people we engage, and the responsibilities and roles we fulfill. Dallas Willard, in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, explained that we could think about this sphere in terms of the reach or extent of our active will. Wherever we can exercise our will to say or do whatever pertains to our Kingdom mission, our sphere extends there. We can pray about our sphere. Learn more about the people and culture of our sphere. Prepare to show Jesus in our sphere, talk about Him, and bring His grace to bear on the lives of the people we meet as we are going about our daily calling and mission.

Working our sphere—if you will, our Personal Mission Field—is how, like Jesus, we show and declare the reality of the Kingdom of God that is “at hand.” We encourage our fellow Christians as we pursue our mission and we bring hope, truth, and life to a dying world as we declare that the Kingdom is at hand and the King is its Door.

Christians are a people on mission for Jesus and His Kingdom.

#### *Search the Scriptures*

1. Read Matthew 28.18-20. What did Jesus mean by “as you are going”? How does this mandate instruct us in the work of the Kingdom?
2. Which of Jesus’ Kingdom parables most speaks to you about the greatness and joy of the Kingdom of God? Why?
3. Read Acts 2.36. What does it mean to say that Jesus is “both Lord and Christ”? How does that relate to your mission in the Kingdom of God?

*Next steps—Preparation: Have you identified your Personal Mission Field. Watch [this brief video](#), download the worksheet, and get started right away.*

## 7 Christians Examine Themselves

*“But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.”* Mark 4.20

### *Spiritual check-up*

I had been a Christian for around a year. I was glad to be forgiven and saved, and I would even share my faith in Jesus with others.

But my walk with the Lord was going nowhere. Worse, I was allowing the culture of college to creep into my lifestyle in noticeable ways. I had no daily time with the Lord, and prayer and I were still strangers. I was slipping back and drifting away from the Lord, but I didn’t notice it.

But the friend who led me to the Lord did. Rick Duwe asked me to meet with him at the student union between classes one day. We sat across from each other as he opened his Bible to Mark 4, turned it upside down, and pushed it toward me. Then he read the parable of the soils (upside down, no less!) and briefly explained Jesus’ teaching.

He asked, “T. M., which of those soils best represents your life at this time?” That wasn’t hard. Suddenly I saw myself in an entirely different light, and the jig was up.

I answered, “The third one.”

“The one being choked off by worldly diversions, you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Why do you say that?” Rick asked. I just looked at him and said nothing, because I knew he knew.

He continued, “Which of these soils would you *like* to have represent your life?”

“The last,” I answered sheepishly.

“That’s great,” Rick said. “Now what do you think it’s going to take for you to get there?”

He then proceeded to review what it means to believe in Jesus and how true disciples—real Christians—want to grow in the Lord. Sometimes, Rick continued, that takes a little self-examination, “but once that’s done, we can begin to grow and become fruitful for the Lord.”

And that’s what I wanted, so Rick showed me how to make the necessary corrections that would help me to grow in learning Jesus. I’m forever grateful to him for that time of self-examination. It would take yet another serious shove from Rick to get me moving in the Lord, but that morning in the student union was the beginning of it.

### *Examine yourself!*

Christians do not fear to examine themselves. Especially when it seems something may be lacking in our walk with and work for the Lord, we need to heed the words of the apostle Paul and do some serious soul-searching and altering of our life course (2 Cor. 13.5). Examining ourselves involves carefully considering how we use our time (Eph. 5.15-17) as well as what’s going on in our soul and our life.

We must not fear to examine ourselves nor resent when others may encourage us to do so. None of us is free



from sin. All of us are susceptible to drifting from the Lord. And it's very easy to settle into a kind of Christian comfort zone where we feel assured of our salvation but little in the way of spiritual fruit is in evidence. Faith, we remember, is expressed in evidence (Heb. 11.1), the evidence of good works for which God has saved us in the first place (Eph. 2.8-10). But if we don't check-up on our walk with and work for the Lord from time to time, we can easily fall into a kind of stasis, going nowhere in the Lord and sharing little of His grace with the people around us.

But what should such a self-examination include?

*Ask the wise*

Solomon, who was wise in such matters, offers a course of self-examination that can keep us growing as disciples of the Lord, Kingdom citizens and ambassadors who are on a mission for the glory of the Lord. In Proverbs 4.20-26, Solomon outlines the crucial areas to pay attention to and to review on a regular basis:

- vv. 20-22: Make sure you are getting regular time in the Word of God, paying careful attention to God's Word, cherishing it dearly, and allowing it to bring you to increasing levels of spiritual health.

- v. 23: Check your desires. What do your calendar and expenditures say about what you really love? Are you harboring any sinful desires? Indulging any compromises of a heart that loves God supremely? Refortify your heart through meditation and prayer, to guard it against any wicked influences.

- v. 24: Are you using your words for edification? Speaking the truth in love? Not stretching the truth or practicing deceit? Does any perversity find its way into your conversations? Recommit all your speech to being gracious and always edifying.

- v. 25: Are your goals in life what they should be, and are you working toward them diligently, not allowing any distractions to interrupt your progress?

- v. 26: What about your daily walk? Is it always with the Lord, toward the Lord, and for the Lord?

- v. 27: Is there any evil lingering in your soul? Call on the Lord to search it out and remove it (Ps. 136.23, 24).

These simple steps of self-examination can keep you walking with Lord, growing in His grace, and bearing fruit for His Kingdom and glory in all you do. Christians do not fear to examine themselves. After all, such regular self-examination may yield many excellent reasons to give praise and thanks to the Lord and rejoice in His work in our lives.

*Search the Scriptures*

1. How would you describe your practice of examining yourself at this time?
2. Meditate on Psalm 90.12 and Ephesians 5.15-17. How can you improve the use you make of your time?
3. Besides those Solomon outlined, what are some other areas of your life that you should examine regularly? Can you think of some Scripture to guide you in each of those areas?

*Next steps—Transformation: Set a time to do a thorough self-examination. Give thanks to God for whatever He reveals to you. Make plans to improve as indicated.*

*Who Is a Christian?*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. A Christian is a disciple of Jesus. What does it mean to “learn” Jesus? How do Christians learn Him?
2. Christians “practice” the Kingship of Jesus. What does that require of us?
3. Christians are called to seek the Kingdom and glory of God. How would you explain the Kingdom and glory of God to a new believer?
4. What is the Christian mission in the world?
5. What’s the most important lesson you have learned from this study?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship to help us extend our ministry and resources to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, P. O. Box 8213, Essex, VT 05451.

Thank you.