

101 Week One: Embracing *Jesus*

Welcome

We're glad you taken the step to check out this series of lessons we call Roots. Roots are the part of a plant that attaches it to the ground, where it can receive what it needs to grow. We hope these lessons will ground your faith in Christ, and help you grow closer to Him. Our aim is to point regular people in the right direction, enabling you to find Jesus and follow Him fully. Before we dig in, take a look at the continuum below based off of a spiritual development tool created by Gary Rohrmayer, and mark where you honestly think you are at with God at this moment.



Having marked where on this continuum you are today, put a mark where you'd like to be in six months to a year.

What are some of the barriers between where you are now, and where you'd like to be?

Are you willing to work toward removing those barriers that stand between you and your spiritual goals?

If you are willing to work find Jesus and follow him fully, this series of lessons should be very rewarding. First things first, lets look at the "defining moment of Christianity."

The Defining Moment

There are some fairly predictable stages in a couple's relationship prior to marriage. First the two have to meet. Following the meeting there is often a time of dating, where the couple spends time together, talks about life, and learns about each other. Following this, many men will have that conversation with the father of the soon-to-be bride. If all goes well, he will soon propose, and marriage plans will begin. All of these experiences are wonderful, and contribute to the relationship as a whole, but the fundamental, defining moment of the relationship is the moment they say, "I do" to each other at their wedding.

We've all had experiences and events that shaped us into who we are today. What are some of the defining moments you can recall that have played a significant role in who you are (try to share at least one spiritual and one non-spiritual defining moment)?

Christians have a defining moment with God. That moment is not the day they got their first Bible, or filled their Sunday school chart with gold stars. It is not the first day you went to church, or maybe even the first day you said a prayer. Those moments are all special, and important, but they all pale in comparison to **the** defining moment every Christian must experience to enter into a saving relationship with God. That moment is the instant you choose to place complete trust in Jesus Christ.

From that moment on everything changes; God sees you differently, your eternal destiny is changed, and you will have a new joy, freedom, and peace that you never thought possible. That moment is the defining moment of a person's existence.

In this lesson, we will dive into what that moment looks like. Just as every marriage has three essential parts; the two individuals and the commitment they make, so this defining moment also involves two parties and a commitment. Let's look at what each member brings to the table, and what saying "I do," to God looks like.

1

Your side: You are more lost than you think.

Do you think most people think they are good people? On what do you think they base this assumption?

Many people feel they are good people, especially if we compare ourselves to some really nasty person like Hitler. But how good is good enough? What many people seem to forget is that we are not ultimately (eternally) accountable to other humans, but to God. Therefore it is His standard that should concerned us.

Jesus shows us what keeping only the 10 commandments actually entails. God said, “Thou shalt not to murder,” but Jesus explained that if you are angry with another person you have broken the commandment. The 10 Commandments say not to commit adultery, but Jesus says,

Everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has committed adultery with her in his heart.

Matthew 5:28

Have you ever been angry with somebody, or looked at another person with lustful intent? Read James 2:10 below.

For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. James 2:10

According to this verse, what does breaking **one** command of God make a person? What does that imply about you?

When we measure our lives according to God’s standard we realize we are not a good person, and our sin has separated us from God (Isaiah 59:2). Sin is choosing our way instead of God’s way. Sin is what we call rebellion against God’s moral law.

While it may be a hit to our pride, the Bible tells us plainly that we are lost. God's word tells us:

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – everyone – to his own way. Isaiah 53:6

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Romans 3:23

God has laid out the eternal consequences of sin.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23

When a person works, the pay check he/she earns are his/her wages. What does Romans 6:23 (above) say we “earn” as a result of sin? What do you think this means?

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done... And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:11-12, 15

When a person places faith in Jesus their name is recorded in the book of life. What happens to those whose names are not written in the book of life?

What this ultimately means is that we are not in “basically” in good shape with God. We are a disaster, and without God's help, we are destined for destruction.

Do you think you have sinned against God?
Describe what God says are the consequences of sin.

2***God's Side: God is more gracious than you could imagine.***

The good news is that God is a gracious God who loves you too much to let you remain separated from Him. Of course, if you choose to continue to reject Him, and do not respond to His loving invitation to enter into a relationship with Him, He will not force you to spend eternity with Him. We'll talk more about how to cross that line of faith in a moment, but first, let's discuss how God has acted in Jesus to save you.

Many people feel that the way back to God is to stop doing bad stuff. That is, if they just fixed their morals, God would accept them. The truth is, outside of Christ, we are powerless to be rightly related to God.

Read Ephesians 2:5. How does that verse describe people who have sinned? What do you think that means?

The fact is, we are not just a bit off course and need to “get back on track.” God has not said that **good** people go to heaven (like we saw above, there would be nobody there but God). God has graciously said that **forgiven** people go to heaven to be with Him for eternity.

Imagine a group of children walking on a frozen over pond. As they venture out on the ice, one child wanders over to a dangerously thin part of the ice, and falls into the icy water. The child cannot escape on his own, but one of the others quickly finds a branch, and extends it out to the drowning child, who grabs ahold and is pulled out before any real harm is done. Many people see salvation like this. They see themselves as drowning, and they just need a savior to reach out so they can grab ahold of the stick and get pulled out. While this illustration may warm the heart, it actually misses the point to some degree. The Bible does not say we are drowning in a lake, it says we are dead on the bottom. You see, we are not sniveling with a cold in our sin, we are dead in our sin. Jesus does not reach out a stick, He dives in and gives His life to save ours. He gives us life, but only at the cost of his own. Christians trust Jesus to save, but that salvation has nothing to do

with what we do, and everything to do with what Jesus did for us on the cross.

Romans 5:6 also says that, while we were powerless, God is not. That is the good news; God has acted on your behalf. What does Romans 5:6 say Christ did? For whom did Christ die?

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Romans 5:6

Though Jesus lived a sinless life (Hebrews 4:15), he was crucified. Even though the Romans officially killed him, Jesus says his life was not taken, but given (John 10:17-18). What do you think that means?

Jesus' death was not for any sin he had committed, but for all the sins **you** have committed. God, in His perfect justice cannot allow sin to go unpunished. In His grace, Jesus assumed the full penalty of our sin, and thus enables us to be seen as holy and perfect in God's sight. In other words, Jesus lived the life you should have lived, and died the death you should have died. He is more than an example, he is your substitute, dying on the cross for your sins.

Read, Colossians 1:21-22. How does God see those who have trusted in Jesus?

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, Colossians 1:21-22

What do you think it means to be holy in God's sight?

While we were powerless to reach out to him, God, because of his love for us, reached down to us. His son was forsaken so we could be accepted (Matthew 27:46). Jesus was lost so we could be saved. Though we are accountable to God who created us, God has acted on our behalf sending His son Jesus to die for us on the cross! The Bible also teaches us that three days

after he was crucified, Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus' victory over sin and death is a victory he wins for us. The gospel (good news) is that our sins can be forgiven, and we can have eternal peace with God. This is a gift for us to receive (100% God's doing).

Is it easy or hard for you to turn to God and accept his forgiveness? Why?

3

We turn to God by putting our trust in Jesus.

Some people believe that because of Jesus' death, everybody is automatically forgiven of their sins and made right with God. However, this is not what Christianity teaches. It is certainly true that when we are saved from our sins we will spend eternity with God, and that gift is based 100% on what God has done. But that gift must be **received**.

Read Revelation 3:20. To what does God liken receiving Christ into ones life?

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me. Revelation 3:20

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.
Ephesians 2:8-10

Is being saved from our sins of grace or works? Why do these verses say no one can boast? How does this verse state we receive the gift of eternal life?

Look at the two equations below. How would you describe the difference, and which one do you think best represents what Ephesians 2:8-10?

1. Salvation = Works + Grace
2. Grace = Salvation + Works

In some circles "faith" gets a bad rap. Faith is not believing against all odds, or believing even when all signs point in the opposite direction. Faith really means trust. To have faith in a chair is to believe/trust that when you sit in it, it will support your weight. Having faith in Christ means you believe/

trust that when you place your life in His care and control, your sins are forgiven and you stand Holy and blameless in God's sight, just as He said you will. Faith is putting all your confidence and hope in Him.

It is true that there is a cost involved in turning to God. God desires to be your Savior and Lord. He is faithful to save all who turn to Him, but we must trust Him with more than our salvation, we must be willing to trust Him with our life. When we turn to God in faith, we admit that we have sinned against God, but that at the cross Jesus paid for our sins, and that we are willing to live for Him from here on out. While we will not live perfectly, our salvation is not dependent on the perfection of our repentance (turning to God), but on the perfection of the sacrifice (Jesus) for our sins.

Read Luke 9:57-62. How much of your life does Jesus ask for/expect? Is it possible to have a casual relationship with Jesus?

Read Revelation 3:14-16. What is the reason for the Lord's rebuke of the church in Laodicea? What is the result?

Jesus would rather we be honest with ourselves and be all in, or all out, at least then we would know where we stand. The problem is many people want one foot in "religion," and one foot in the world. This group is the most dangerous because they think they are saved, but they are far from the Lord (Matthew 7:21-23).

Where would you put yourself on the following scale?



Are you happy with where you are at now?

What are some steps you can take to move farther in the right direction?

Read Luke 14:27-33. Why is it important to count the cost before making any major life decision? What are some things it may cost to follow Jesus?

Based on what we have talked about so far, what do we gain by trusting Jesus to be our Savior and Lord? What is the cost of not following Jesus?

Are you willing to turn away from (repent of) all the ways you have rebelled against God, and all the ways you've attempted to live without Him, and entrust yourself to Him. The Bible says that when we do this, we are saved from the eternal consequences of our sin, and our relationship with God changes. We have eternity with God to look forward to, and a growing relationship with Him here on Earth. The rest of this discipleship program is designed to help you grow in your relationship with God, and experience the power of God in your life.

Are you ready to say "I do" to God?

If you have not yet entrusted yourself to Jesus, know that He is standing at the door knocking. He is asking you to trust Him for eternity. Are you willing to put your faith in Him? If you have not already turned to Christ and received him as your Lord and Savior, there is a simple prayer below that will help mark this "defining moment" in your eternity.

How would you like to respond to this lesson?

- I've already trusted Jesus for salvation.
- I'd like to place my faith in Jesus for my salvation today.
- I'm not ready to place my faith in Jesus for salvation today.

"Jesus, I recognize that I am a sinner. I know You died for me so I could have eternal life. I turn from my sinful past, and want You to be my Savior and Lord. I trust you completely for this free gift. Amen." (Amen is a fancy way of saying, "let it be so." It's the way Jesus ended his prayers, so we follow His example.)

Before Next Meeting:

1. If you have either responded in faith to this message before, or made a first time commitment to Jesus, we encourage you set up future meetings with someone who can guide you through the rest of the course. If you have read over this lesson and are not ready to make a commitment, we encourage you to go through our “Reason for Faith” workbook available at The Bridge Community. Those lessons help build confidence in the God of the Bible, and can help you work through many intellectual doubts.
2. Complete the “Who is Jesus” worksheet (pages 11-14) on your own, and we will review it the next time we meet.

For Further Reading:

Andy Stanley, *How Good is Good Enough*, 2003.

John Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 2nd ed., 1971.

Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God*, 2008.

In Mark 8:29, Jesus asks perhaps the most profound questions in human history. He asks Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” That is a question with which each of us must wrestle. If you asked 10 people that are close to you the question Jesus asked Peter, what do you think the top two or three answers you would hear from them would be?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Hopefully this little worksheet can help you formulate/solidify your understanding of who Jesus is. In what follows, you will examine three lines of evidence for discerning who Jesus is. First, you will look at what Jesus claimed about Himself. Next, you will look at what the Bible claims about Jesus. Finally, you will see what others who lived with Jesus declared him to be.

1 Who did Jesus claim to be?

Jesus, in his ministry, made some startling claims. He claimed to be older than Abraham (John 8:58), and around when Satan fell from grace (Luke 10:18). These are certainly startling claims, but what got Him in the most trouble is that He claimed to be God, made flesh. At one point in Jesus’ ministry, Jesus, having just given sight to a man born blind man, declared that He is the “good shepherd,” (John 10:11). Jesus was telling those around Him that in His presence, the prophecy of Ezekiel 34:11 was fulfilled. God, the true “good shepherd,” had come to bind the broken, and shepherd His flock personally. Read John 10:33, how did those hearing Jesus’ claim to be the good shepherd react to that claim? Why do you think they reacted this way?

Jesus did much more than speak inspiring messages, or teach good morals. Jesus claimed and acted as though He were God in the flesh. For example, Jesus healed a man and says that He forgives him his sin (something only God can do, see Luke 5:21). Read John 5:18. How did the people hearing Jesus' claim to forgives sins interpret that claim?

Jesus claimed to be much more than a religious teacher. He was God come down to save humanity. The Bible does not present Jesus as a good man, it presents him as the God-man. Reflecting on this presentation of Jesus, C.S. Lewis said,

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. 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 a level with the 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 with any patronizing nonsense about Him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to,” (*Mere Christianity*, pg. 55-56).

C.S. Lewis saw that the claims Jesus made about Himself were either true or false. If they are true, Jesus is God made flesh, who alone can forgives us our sins, and who we ought to worship. If His claims were false, then He was either trying to deceive people on purpose, or He was crazy. In the Bible, God declares that He would save Humanity by becoming a sacrifice that would atone for its sins. This sacrifice would be by a particular person. Jesus claimed to be that person. Lets see if the Bible supports that claim.

2**The Bible's witness about Jesus**

Match the the claim the Bible makes about the coming person, who the Bible calls, "The Messiah," who would take away the sins of all who would trust him for salvation, and the corresponding verse from the New Testament that shows that Jesus fulfilled that prediction/prophecy.

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| ___ born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) | a. Matthew 27:57-60 |
| ___ born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14) | b. Acts 13:33-35 |
| ___ suffer for sins (Isaiah 53:5-6) | c. John 19:34-37 |
| ___ pierced on the cross (Psalm 22:16
Zechariah 12:10) | d. Matthew 1:18, 22-25 |
| ___ kings entry to Zion (Zechariah 9:9) | e. Luke 19:35-38 |
| ___ visit the temple (Malachi 3:1) | f. Matthew 24:1-2 |
| ___ buried in a rich mans grave (Isaiah 53:9) | g. Matthew 2:1, 4-6 |
| ___ rise from the dead (Psalm 16:8-10) | h. 1 Peter 2:24-25 |

This set of claims the Bible makes about Jesus' life and ministry are astounding. The Bible predicted that God would send The Messiah, who would be born in a specific place (Bethlehem), to a specific parent (the virgin Mary), and at a specific time (since the coming Messiah would visit the temple and the temple was destroyed in 70 AD, the Messiah would have to come before 70 AD). More than just that, the Bible predicted this person would be crucified for the sins of others, buried, and would be raised from the dead. Clearly, no other person in the history of the world could fulfill all these facts, and this is only the tip of the iceberg. There are over 60 specific prophecies about the coming Messiah, all of which are fulfilled by Jesus.

So clearly, Jesus claimed to be God in the flesh, and the Bible pointed specifically to Him in a unique way that helps verify His claim. Let's see what other people thought of him during is life and ministry.

3**Claims other people made about Jesus**

A. Read John 9:1-38 and answer the following questions.

1. What happened to the man born blind?
2. What testimony did the man bear to the Pharisees (vs. 25)?
3. What confession does the man make to Jesus (vs. 38)?
4. What action does the man take after his confession?
5. Does the fact the Jesus performed miracles like this help establish the truth of His claim to be God in the flesh? Why or why not?

B. Read John 20:28. Who did Thomas confess Jesus to be?

C. Matthew 14:33 and Matthew 28:9, 17 give more examples of people worshiping Jesus. Read Exodus 34:14 and Daniel 3:28. From those verses answer the following.

1. Who was Israel instructed to worship?
2. Who else could Israel worship?
3. Given Daniel 3:28, how serious of a rule was it for Israelites to not to worship other Gods?
4. What do you think Jesus' disciples thought of Jesus given their actions in Matthew 14 and 28?

D. Read Hebrews 1:1-13, Colossians 1:15-22, and John 1:1-14. Name as many attributes of Jesus as you can from these scriptures.

Finally: Who do you say Jesus is? _____