

Lesson Plan & Study Guide



Exploring Christianity:

Accepting Christ as Savior and Lord

Meeting with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

Version 1.0 - 11/4/10



About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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iFOLLOW

www.ifollowdiscipleship.org

Accepting Christ as Savior and Lord

This presentation is designed for people who have not yet come to a point in their spiritual journey where they have decided to become a follower of Jesus.

Learning Objectives

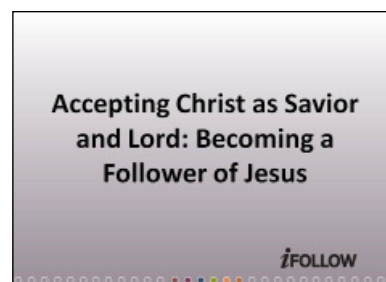
1. Understand how God feels about human beings
2. Learn how to become a follower of Jesus
3. Understand the basis of salvation
4. Make the decision to move from hopelessness to life
5. Study some key passages of the Bible

Content Outline

- A. How God Feels About Humanity
 1. What does God's judgment mean?
 2. People far from God are precious to God (John 5:16-18; 3:16-21; Acts 15:19)
 3. People close to God are precious to God (John 5:22-25; 12:31-32)
 4. Trusting God is a risk (John 5:28-29; 12:48; 1 Corinthians 2:9)
- B. How to Become a Christian
 1. Every human being has a stake in the problem of evil
 2. We cannot save ourselves
 3. The only solution is to trust in Jesus
 4. A prayer for peace with God to become a follower of Jesus

Background Material for the Presenter

This unit deals with the cross; the primary, most basic reality of Christian faith. This session is about the heart of the gospel, making a decision to follow Jesus. Two different approaches are included in these presenter notes. The first is about God's attitude toward people—people who have accepted Christ and those who have not yet done so—and how this relates to “judgment,” a word that can be off-putting to nonbelievers and/or new believers. The second is a basic Bible study on how to accept Christ and



become a follower of Jesus. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be liberated from the power of evil.” (Romans 10:9)

How God Feels About Humanity

One of the major reasons that people are skeptical about religion, put off by Christianity, is the judgment that God reportedly places on certain things. Judgment seems to get in the way of the love of God. How does God really feel about human beings? How do divine judgment and compassion relate?

There are three places judgment occurs in the Bible. They are (1) in or through the church, (2) at the cross, and (3) during the end time. Some Christians only ever focus on the end time. Some Christians only ever focus on the cross. And some people only ever focus on the church, specifically those inside it who see it as a fortress instead of an agency through which the Gospel is lived and preached. In this story (John 5:16-29) Jesus refers to them all. Open your Bible to John chapter 5, verses 16-30. This occurs right after He healed a guy who had been paralyzed for 38 years. That’s the context.

Let’s start with the concept that judgment occurs in and through the church. “Because Jesus was doing these things [healing people on the Sabbath], the Jewish leaders persecuted him.” (Verse 16) Jesus was Jewish. That was His religion while He lived on Earth. The pious did not understand why Jesus went out of His way to heal someone far from God on Sabbath. But neither the lack of clarity within the church nor the man’s distance from God prevented Jesus from healing the man. Jesus responded to the criticism, “Sorry, but I must keep pursuing my mission.” Look at verse 17: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”

We don’t realize how controversial these words were because we don’t know how rejected and lonely and far from God this guy was. People back then thought people who were paralyzed were paying for their sins; that they were far from God because they deserved to be. But that’s not how God looks at it. If it were, none of us would get near God either because Romans 3 says none of us deserve it. But when God sees people, especially broken, hurting, rejected people obviously far from God and the church, He keeps reaching. Knowing when He does so it will be controversial. Knowing it will not be understood by everyone in church. At least not right away. But Jesus heals him anyway.

This leads to major point number one: **People far from God are precious to God.**

If we really love mankind and want to follow the way of Jesus, we will never stop scheming and praying and planning to reach out to people far from God, especially the broken, hurting and rejected. Why? Because people far from God are precious to God. And what He wants is for them to come a little closer so we can love them. And you know you’re

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doing both right when how you do it messes with your church and the devoutly religious people.

Verse 18 says, “For this reason the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.” Now, if you were to ask a random person on the street what they think of the church, any church, what do you think they would say? Do you think they would say it is a safe place that loves God and the people far from God? Do you think they would say it is a place where the Bible is studied and the presence of God is experienced? Do you think they would say it is a place where alcoholics and prostitutes and liars sit side by side with doctors and lawyers and teachers worshipping the same King of the Universe? Or do you think they would say church is a place of judgment?

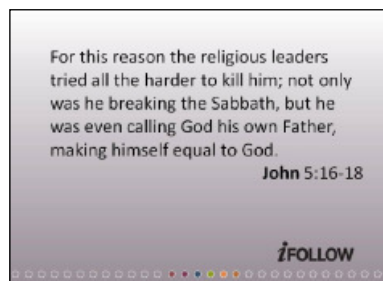
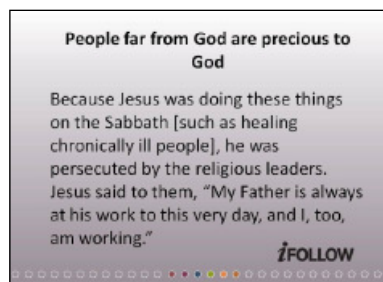
I’m not answering the question, I’m just raising it. Because it seems to me, if we are honest with ourselves, that it is too often the case in many places. And if it makes you feel any better, it has been that way for quite a while.

Listen to what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: “In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.” (1 Corinthians 11:17, NIV) Ouch! Who knew? Sometimes, the way we do church can do more harm than good. Why? Because whatever they were doing, it was not making it easier for people far from God to come a little closer. That paralytic guy in Christ’s day had been ignored by the church for 38 years! Who does the church ignore today?

If we really believe that people far from God are precious to God, that reality should confront the church. If we are really followers of Jesus, it should haunt us at night. It should be what wakes us in the morning. It should break our hearts. Because according to Jesus, it’s breaking God’s heart. Although not everyone who claims to be a Christian feels the same way, there are many followers of Jesus who’s hearts are breaking for the lost, the suffering, the dying and oppressed.

God is always at work, praying and planning and scheming for ways to bring those far from God a little closer. Those who are followers of Jesus do the same. Yes, churches can be places of judgment where feelings are hurt and motivations are misunderstood and people far from God come no closer. Churches can also be places where truth is spoken in love, where trust grows, where the suffering and oppressed are supported, and people far from God come closer and closer.

P.R.S.—Pray. Read. Share. This is how you become Christian and this is how you stay Christian. Anyone telling you anything else is selling you something false. And this, it



seems to me, is how Jesus lived His life every day. That's why Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:18-21 that when the Gospel is preached and lived and people far from God come a little closer and find they can believe in something—they are not condemned. This is just another English word for judged in Greek. When they come close and believe, they are no longer judged. By God, at least. They are no longer condemned. Same thing in Romans 8:1 and John 5:22-24 and 29. Which we will get to, but before we do, let's look at verses 19-21 to see the second place judgment occurs in the Bible.

John 5:19-21 says, "Jesus gave them this answer: 'I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.'"

So the first location of judgment is in or through the church. The second place the Bible says judgment occurred was at the cross. John 3:16 and 18 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave ... [And He gave where? At the cross.] So, whoever believes in him is not condemned, is not judged [**krisis** in Greek], because he has believed." Pointing to the cross, Jesus adds these words in John 12:31-32: "Now is the time for judgment on this world [**krino** in Greek; a form of the same word in John 5] now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."

So what's the point? The point is God loves the people far from God, going out of His way to bring them closer. And, point number two, He loves the people close to God too, going out of His way to keep them close. How? By reminding them that they are His. If you are a follower of Christ, you do not have to live your life in crisis, constantly wondering if you have done enough to be saved. Because Christianity is not about what you do, but who you know!

A pastor jokingly told his people involved in playing ball during a Summer of Service in their city not to worry if they lost because "there is no condemnation for those in Christ." He said that to encourage the young people involved in volunteering and recreation. But he also said that because it is theologically correct! Jesus was saying the same thing in John, chapters 3, 5 and 12, as Paul has written in Romans 8:3. That, on the cross, Christ "condemned sin in sinful man." Remember, "condemned" is the same word as judged in the original language. That is why Romans 8:1 reads, "Now therefore, there is now no condemnation [**krisis**] for those who are in Christ Jesus." This means even when we lose, even when we fall short of the glory of God, we win! Because in the end, God wins! Just like He did on the cross.

So whatever else the Bible has to say about judgment in the end time, it has to be consistent with what the Gospel and the Cross reveal about judgment. Why? Because the Bible writers use the words for judgment and condemnation [and the forms of them] interchangeably for all three places judgment is described in Scripture, including the end time.

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This is where Jesus goes next in John 5.

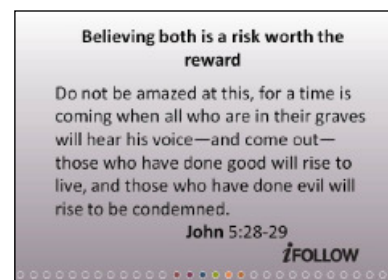
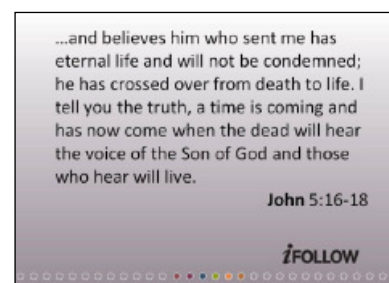
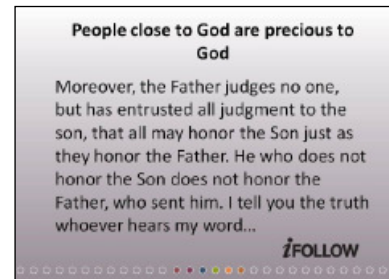
“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:22-24)

Isn't that a powerful statement? Whoever comes near to hear and believe has eternal life. Present tense. Then, Jesus adds these staggering words. “They will not be condemned.” This is another form of the word judged, krisis in Greek. You have crossed over from death to life. Point number one: People far from God are precious to God. Point number two: People near to God are precious to God too. Why? Because they've already passed over from death to everlasting life! They are in Christ, “the Son.” They have eternal life now.

“I tell you the truth [Jesus says], a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (Verses 25-29)

We don't have time to go into all the details about the end time that Jesus is referring to here. The important thing that Jesus is saying is point number three: **the risk is worth the reward.** Believing that people far and near to God are precious to God is a risk because going out of our way to love them confuses the church and messes up our lives in a good way. But so do babies and people keep having them right? Why? Because the risk is worth the reward! And it's the same way with Jesus.

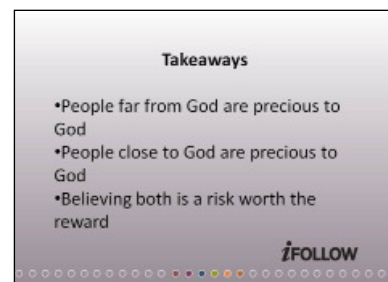
Because what Jesus has in store for those that love Him isn't some cheap parting gift on “The Price Is Right” if you don't win the Showcase Showdown. No! Because the showdown has already been won! What God has in store for those in the end time is even more of the same, love, joy and peace. Yes, patience will still be required. Especially of the saints, as Revelation reveals. But kindness, gentleness, self control—all the fruit of the



Spirit and spiritual gifts you have now—will be multiplied and made richer in the end time. And after that, we will get even more. That’s the actual context of that text about heaven: “No eye has seen nor ear heard the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

That is true of heaven and it is also true of everything we experience with Jesus before then. Even during the end time judgment, which John 12:48 describes this way: “There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.” There is an end time judgment for those who reject Jesus. But one for those who don’t reject Jesus is not necessary because they have already passed from death to life! All the end time judgment does for them is validate in heaven the decisions they have already made on earth, as Jesus guaranteed in Matthew 18:18. This is interesting: One way to define the Hebrew word “cleansed” in Daniel 8. It can simply mean “to validate.”

But for those who don’t reject Jesus, the prizes are awarded now. And last forever. And I think that’s what Jesus is telling us through the words of John today. **Number one:** People far from God are precious to God. This is why He goes out of his way to draw them close. **Number two:** People close to God are precious to God too. This is why He goes out of his way to keep them close and not in crisis. **Number three:** Believing both of these affirmations is a risk because it confuses the church and messes with your life and your spouse and your church and your children and everything else in a good way. But the risk is so worth the reward. This is a joyful meaningful life worth living with Jesus now and throughout all eternity. This is what Jesus was talking about. This is what he offered that paralytic. And this is what He is offering to you again today.



How to Become a Follower of Jesus

To be an authentic follower of the way of Jesus, a person must understand four basic spiritual realities. He or she must be willing to acknowledge his or her individual, personal need for God’s grace and affirm to God this need. Let’s review those realities.

1. Every human being has a personal stake in the problem of evil. We all fail to live up to our own moral standards. This is what the Bible calls “sin” and, as a result, we are cut off from the divine, condemned to live in a world dominated by death. It is easier to see the problem of evil in the world at large, especially among our enemies or oppressors, than it is to see it in ourselves, but that does not mean it is not there.

No human being can honestly say he or she is above the problem of evil. “We all once

conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.” (Ephesians 2:3, NKJV) All human beings, including the most devout religious people, are sinners, susceptible to the reality of evil in their own lives.

“There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Scriptures, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:10-12, 20-24)

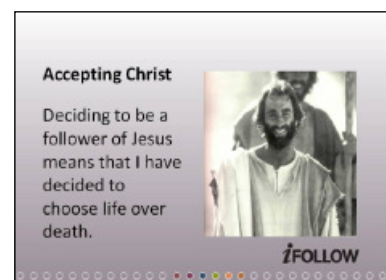
To put it another way, we are lawbreakers. We have broken God’s moral law and are worthy of be destroyed. Even one violation is worthy of destruction. We are utterly lost, condemned to die a sinner’s death. That is the problem with sin.

2. This is a fundamental spiritual problem. We cannot save ourselves. We have no means to pay the price. Human beings cannot, on their own, solve the foundational problem of evil. It is a spiritual problem for which only God has the solution. “I know that nothing good lives in men, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” (Romans 7:18, NIV) “We know that the law is spiritual, but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” (Verse 12) “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord God hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6, KJV)

Can a leopard change its spots? Can we save ourselves? No, of course not. If we could, someone would have done so by this point in human history; we’ve been at it for thousands of years. We must be honest with ourselves and realize that we are lost, condemned to death for breaking the fundamental spiritual law of the universe, and that we are powerless to save ourselves.

“It is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith, not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not by human activity. So no one can boast, for we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to live good lives.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

3. The only solution is to trust in Jesus. He is the one who has overcome the power of evil and death. He is our only righteousness. He alone can save us. “Christ died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18) “Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father, except by me.” (John 14:6) “I am found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is



through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God.” (Philippians 3:7-9)

Jesus lived a perfect life for you. He fulfilled the law, and when you accept Him as your Savior, you receive His perfect righteousness. The Bible says that if you confess your sinful reality to Jesus, He is faithful and just to cleanse you of all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9) You need only to

accept the gift of God’s grace through Christ by making a decision to center your life on Jesus.

4. We must individually receive Christ as our personal Savior. That is the single most important decision about the purpose and character of your life. Are you going to live on the side of life or the side of death, on the side of good or the side of evil? Can you recognize that you are estranged from God, living your life in a fundamentally self-centered manner, acknowledge that you are powerless to save yourself, and recognize that Jesus is your only hope? If so, then you must take the final step, accept Him as your personal Savior and commit to live your life as a follower of Jesus.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13)
“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) God says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and will have fellowship with him and he with me.” (Revelation 3:20) Jesus said, “Come unto me, all who labor with heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart and you will find rest and spiritual peace. (Matthew 11:28-29)

These are some of the most wonderful promises recorded in God’s word. Once you have surrendered your heart to Jesus Christ—centered your life on following the way of Jesus—you will find spiritual newness and life deep inside.

A Prayer for Peace with God

Would you like me to pray a prayer with you, so that you can make peace with God? Please repeat each line after me so that you can speak to God personally.

Dear Jesus, I admit that I cannot live up to my own aspirations for my life. I am a sinner and I violated God’s law by living a self-centered life because that is all I have known. Please forgive me for my sins and wash me in your grace. I open the door of my heart and invite you to come in. Please put my name among your followers. Please help me to live for you from now on. Amen.”

May God bless you in your new spiritual life. May He give you the sense of His presence in your life at all times.

Handout in this Package

1. From Death to Life: Becoming a Follower of Jesus



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Additional Resources

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Video

Interstate Batteries, "God's Love." www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zlc3wUo6arQ

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Discussion Questions

1. What are some examples of the problem of evil that you observe in the world today? In our city or local community?
2. What are some examples of the problem of evil in your own life? Do you live up to your highest moral standards?
3. At what point are you in your personal spiritual journey?
3. Have you ever thought about becoming a follower of Jesus, centering your life on His goals?
4. Has your spiritual journey come to the point of making a personal commitment to Christ or are you still on the way?
5. If your life were to end today and you met God, and if He were to say to you, "Why should you go home with me?" ... What would you say to Him?
6. What are you willing to risk to show people that God loves them like crazy?

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Group Activity

Opening: Call your group together and warmly welcome everyone.

Prayer Time: We come to you, God, to ask that you show us what You are like. Please send the Holy Spirit to bless our study and this group. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Ice Breaker: Go around the room asking participants what their view of God was as a child and what it is now. Was God more like a teddy bear? Or a grizzly bear? Does God love people like crazy? Is so, how do we know? If not, how do we know? Do Christians love people like crazy? If not, why not?

Exercise 1: As a pre-group homework assignment, invite participants to interview co-workers or random people on the street asking them the same questions. Secure their permission to video tape their responses. Show video tape before group discussion.

Suggested Video Clip: Interstate Batteries, "God's Love," YouTube Commercial; www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zlc3wUo6arQ

Exercise 2: Have groups of two or three pick up and distribute a box of emergency groceries to a family recommended by your Adventist Community Services director or the local unit of the Salvation Army. Meet back in the group to debrief.

Exercise 3: Role play the basic questions and prayer of peace with God in the final section of the Presentation Notes. You will need to make a handout for the group to follow.

Closing Prayer: Dear God in Heaven, thank you for drawing us close to you. For going out of your way to love us. And meet us. And save us. Now, would you please help us go out of our way too? Would you give us the wisdom that we lack? The strength that we need? The courage that is required? Would you open our eyes so we can see the people that are precious to you? Wherever they are? Near or far? Would you bless a congregation that is trying to figure it all out? Even if we occasionally stumble and make mistakes? Read our hearts Lord. We want to please you. By ourselves we can do nothing. But with you, we believe, all things are possible. Thank you that we don't have to live our lives in crisis. Thank you for the assurance and joy that is ours in knowing Jesus. Because it's in His name that we pray, Amen.

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Handout

From Death to Life

Becoming a Follower of Jesus

Participant Notes

1. People far from God are precious to God
2. People close to God are precious to God
3. Believing both is a risk worth the reward

Scripture: John 5:16-30

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath [such as healing chronically ill people on the Sabbath], the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.” For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. ... Jesus gave them this answer: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.” I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice—and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.”

Decision

Have you come to the place in your spiritual journey that you are ready to become a follower of Jesus Christ?