

THE TRUTH

ENGAGING THE FOUNDATIONS
OF THE FAITH

DISCIPLES PATH

Disciples Path is a series of studies founded on Jesus' model of discipleship. Created by experienced disciple makers across the nation, it offers an intentional pathway for transformational discipleship and a way to help followers of Christ move from new disciples to mature disciple makers. Each study in the series is built on the principles of modeling, practicing, and multiplying:

- Leaders model the life of a biblical disciple.
- Disciples follow and practice from the leader.
- Disciples become disciple makers and multiply through the *Disciples Path*.

Each study in the series has been written and approved by disciple-makers for small groups and one-on-one settings.

Contributors:

Dr. Craig Etheredge, First Baptist Church, Colleyville, TX
Josh Howerton, The Bridge Church, Spring Hill, TN



For helps on how to use *Disciples Path*, tips on how to better lead groups, or additional ideas for leading this study, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/disciplespath

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Eric Geiger

Vice President, LifeWay Resources

Rick Howerton

Discipleship Specialist

Sam O'Neal, Joel Polk

Content Editors

Brian Daniel

Manager, Discipleship Publishing

Michael Kelley

Director, Groups Ministry

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

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A NOTE FOR DISCIPLE MAKERS

Several years ago I was part of a massive research study that sought to discover how the Lord often brings about transformation in the hearts of His people. The study became a book called *Transformational Discipleship*. Basically, we wanted to learn how disciples are made. Based on the study of Scripture and lots of interactions with people, we concluded that transformation is likely to occur when a godly **leader** applies **truth** to the heart of a person while that person is in a teachable **posture**.

- **LEADER:** You are the leader. As you invest in the people you're discipling, they will learn much about the Christian faith by watching you, by sensing your heart for the Lord, and by seeing you pursue Him. I encourage you to seek to be the type of leader who can say, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ."
- **TRUTH:** All six studies in the *Disciples Path* series were developed in deep collaboration with ministry leaders who regularly and effectively disciple people. The studies are designed to take the people you disciple into the Word of God—because we're confident that Jesus and His Word sanctify us and transform us. Our community of disciple-makers mapped out a path of the truths we believe are essential for each believer to know and understand.
- **POSTURE:** Hopefully the people you will be investing in adopt a teachable posture—one that is open and hungry for the Lord. Encourage them to take the study seriously and to view your invitation to study together as a sacred opportunity to experience the grace of God and the truth of God.

We hope and pray the Lord will use this study in your life and the lives of those you disciple. As you apply the truth of God to teachable hearts, transformation will occur. Thank you for being a disciple-maker!



In Christ,

A stylized handwritten signature in dark ink.

Eric Geiger

Vice President at LifeWay Christian Resources

Co-author of *Transformational Discipleship*

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Congratulations! If you've chosen to live as a disciple of Jesus, you've made the most important decision imaginable. But you may be wondering, *What does it mean to be a disciple?*

To put it simply, a disciple of Jesus is someone who has chosen to follow Jesus. That's the command Jesus gave to those He recruited as His first disciples: "Follow Me." In Jesus' culture, religious leaders called rabbis would gather a group of followers called disciples to follow in their footsteps and learn their teachings. In the same way, you will become more and more like Jesus as you purposefully follow Him in the weeks to come. Jesus once said, "Everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40).

On a deeper level, disciples of Jesus are those learning to base their identities on Jesus Himself. All of us use different labels to describe who we are at the core levels of our hearts. Some think of themselves as athletes or intellectuals. Others think of themselves as professionals, parents, leaders, class clowns, and so on.

Disciples of Jesus set aside those labels and base their identities on Him. For example:

- **A disciple of Jesus is a child of God.** In the Bible we find these words: "Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are!" (1 John 3:1). We are God's children. He loves us as our perfect Father.
- **A disciple of Jesus is an alien in this world.** Disciples of Jesus are aliens, or outsiders, in their own cultures. Because of this identity, Jesus' disciples abstain from actions and activities that are contrary to Him. Peter, one of Jesus' original disciples, wrote these words: "Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and temporary residents to abstain from fleshly desires that war against you" (1 Pet. 2:11).
- **A disciple of Jesus is an ambassador for Christ.** Another of Jesus' disciples recorded these words in the Bible: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come. ... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, certain that God is appealing through us. We plead on Christ's behalf, 'Be reconciled to God'" (2 Cor. 5:17,20). Ambassadors represent their king and country in a different culture for a specified period of time. Because we have been transformed by Jesus and are now His disciples and ambassadors, we represent Him to the world through our actions and by telling others about Him.

The journey you are about to take is one that will transform you more and more to be like Jesus. Enjoy! No one ever loved and cared for people more passionately than Jesus. No one was ever more sincere in His concern for others than Jesus. And no one ever gave more so that we could experience His love than Jesus did on the cross.

As you grow to be more like Jesus, you'll find that your relationships are stronger, you have more inner peace than ever before, and you look forward to the future as never before.

That's the blessing of living as a disciple of Jesus.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Welcome to *The Truth*. By exploring the journey of Jesus' earliest disciples, both new and established Christians will gain a better understanding of what it means to follow Christ. As you get started, consider the following guides and suggestions for making the most of this experience.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Because the process of discipleship always involves at least two people—the leader and the disciple—each session of *The Truth* includes a practical plan for group engagement and discussion.

This plan includes the following steps:

- **GET STARTED.** The first section of the group material helps you ease into the discussion by starting on common ground. You'll begin by reflecting on the previous session and your recent experiences as a disciple. After spending time in prayer, you'll find a practical illustration to help you launch into the main topic of the current session.
- **THE STORY.** While using *Disciples Path*, you'll find opportunities to engage the Bible through both story and teaching. That's why the group time for each session features two main sections: **Know the Story** and **Unpack the Story**. **Know the Story** introduces a biblical text and includes follow-up questions for brief discussion. It's recommended that your group encounter the biblical text by reading it out loud. **Unpack the Story** includes practical teaching material and discussion questions—both designed to help you engage the truths contained in the biblical text. To make the most of your experience, use the provided material as a launching point for deeper conversation. As you read through the teaching material and engage the questions as a group, be thinking of how the truths you're exploring will impact your everyday life.
- **ENGAGE.** The group portion of each session ends with an activity designed to help you practice the biblical principles introduced in **Know the Story** and more fully explored in **Unpack the Story**. This part of the group time often appeals to different learning styles and will push you to engage the text at a personal level.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Each session of *The Truth* also includes content for individual use during the time between group gatherings. This content is divided into three categories:

- ↑ **Worship:** features content for worship and devotion. These activities provide opportunities for you to connect with God in meaningful ways and deepen your relationship with Him.
- ⇒ ◀ **Personal study:** features content for personal study. These pages help you gain a deeper understanding of the truths and principles explored during the group discussion.
- ◀ ⇒ **Application:** features content for practical application. These suggestions help you take action based on the information you've learned and your encounters with God.

Note: Aside from the **Reading Plan**, the content provided in the Individual Discovery portion of each session should be considered optional. You'll get the most out of your personal study by working with your group leader to create a personalized discipleship plan using the **Weekly Activities** checklist included in each session.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

- You'll be best prepared for each group discussion or mentoring conversation if you read the session material beforehand. A serious read will serve you most effectively, but skimming the **Get Started** and **The Story** sections will also be helpful if time is limited.
- The deeper you're willing to engage in the group discussions and individual discovery each session, the more you'll benefit from those experiences. Don't hold back, and don't be afraid to ask questions whenever necessary.
- As you explore the **Engage** portion of each session, you'll have the chance to practice different activities and spiritual disciplines. Take advantage of the chance to observe others during the group time—and to ask questions—so that you'll be prepared to incorporate these activities into your private spiritual life as well.
- Visit lifeway.com/disciplespath for a free PDF download that includes leader helps for *The Truth* and additional resources for disciple-makers.



SESSION 1

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

God is the Triune Creator on
mission to redeem the world.

REFLECT

Welcome to *The Truth*. The goal of this resource is to help you engage and understand the basic doctrines—the core beliefs and principles—of the Christian faith. Throughout the following sessions, we'll examine what the Bible teaches on key issues such as God, humanity, the Person and work of Jesus, the kingdom of God, the Holy Spirit, and the church.

Use the following questions to begin the session with discussion.

How confident do you feel in your knowledge of Christian doctrine?

What are you hoping to learn or experience during this study?

When did you begin to think seriously about God and His role in the universe?

PRAY

Begin the session by connecting with God through prayer. Use the following guidelines as you speak with Him:

- Thank God for the opportunity to join with other disciples of Jesus in order to explore the critical doctrines expressed in His Word.
- Praise God for the wisdom and truth expressed in every page of the Bible.
- Ask for wisdom and understanding as you seek to gain a deeper understanding of God's character and role in the world.

INTRODUCTION

A. W. Tozer once wrote, “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”¹ That is certainly true. God is the Creator and Sustainer of all things; therefore, we cannot be anything or accomplish anything that transcends our connection with Him.

Still, it’s important in a study like this one to remember that *thinking* about God is only the beginning. Believing information about God with our heads is only one part of forming a relationship with Him. We must also develop that relationship through our hearts—through our emotions and affections.

In this way, our relationship with God should resemble the sun, which produces both *light* and *heat*. Take a moment to think about our solar system. If the sun produced nothing but light, our planet would be an illuminated wasteland of solid ice. If the sun produced nothing but heat, the lovely diversity of our world would be shrouded in darkness. Only the combination of light and heat produces life.

Those who embrace an intellectual understanding of God may have proper doctrine. However, beliefs won’t do us any good if they fail to push us toward an actual love and appreciation of our Creator. Similarly, today’s culture is filled with people who demonstrate a genuine passion for spiritual principles and ideas, yet direct that passion toward false idols or false ideas about God. Both approaches are ultimately unfulfilling.

What are the practical consequences of focusing too much on the intellectual side of following God?

What are the practical consequences of focusing too much on our emotions and passion?

As we’ll see in this session, God has revealed Himself as the Triune Creator—three separate Persons who make up one Being—who is on a mission to redeem the world. That’s a critical doctrine that all disciples of Jesus need to understand. Yet even as you engage the light of the Scriptures throughout this study, don’t forget to allow the warmth of God’s love to penetrate your own heart. Both are necessary.

KNOW THE STORY

The first words in the Bible are, “In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1). Looking at verse 1 in the Scripture below, it’s clear that John wanted to make a bold statement at the beginning of his Gospel. In many ways, John 1 serves as a restatement of Genesis 1.

Not surprisingly, these verses can teach us a great deal about the character of God.

¹ In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
² He was with God in the beginning.
³ All things were created through Him,
and apart from Him not one thing was created
that has been created.
⁴ Life was in Him,
and that life was the light of men. ...
¹¹ He came to His own,
and His own people did not receive Him.
¹² But to all who did receive Him,
He gave them the right to be children of God,
to those who believe in His name,
¹³ who were born,
not of blood,
or of the will of the flesh,
or of the will of man,
but of God.
¹⁴ The Word became flesh
and took up residence among us.
We observed His glory,
the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:1-4,11-14



What do these verses teach us about God?

UNPACK THE STORY

GOD IS THE TRIUNE CREATOR

In the very first verse of his Gospel, the apostle John made a crucial declaration that's easy to miss if you're not looking for it. Here it is:

In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

JOHN 1:1

When John wrote about "the Word," he was actually talking about Jesus. That's why verse 14 says "the Word became flesh and took up residence among us." So, the crucial declaration John made in verse 1 is that Jesus is God. According to this Gospel, Jesus and God are the same Being.


All of this points to a foundational aspect of God's nature: He is the Trinity. The Father, the Son (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit are all one God. Together they form the Deity who created everything out of nothing. Put another way, you can describe God as one "what" and three "who's." He is one Essence, one Being, who exists in three Persons. So, if someone asks you whether God is one or three, the best response is, "Yes."

What, if anything, have you been taught about the nature of the Trinity?

What questions would you like to ask about the Trinity?

The doctrine of the Trinity is something theologians have historically called an incommunicable aspect of God. Meaning, it's something that human beings cannot grasp. This shouldn't surprise us or even insult us. After all, if we believe God to be infinite and all-powerful, we should never expect to condense Him into a formula we can understand.

How do you respond to the concept of an "incommunicable aspect of God"?



If we believe God to be infinite and all-powerful, we should never expect to condense Him into a formula we can understand.

GOD HAS A MISSION TO REDEEM THE WORLD

While it's a challenge to contemplate God's nature as three Persons interconnected within a single Being, we have an easier time identifying God's motives when it comes to us and our world. All we have to do is follow the verbs. For example, when we look at the verbs in Genesis 1, it's clear that God was focused on creating the different elements of our world:

- "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (v. 3).
- "So God created the large sea-creatures and every living creature that moves and swarms in the water, according to their kinds" (v. 21).
- "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'" (v. 26).

What about John 1? If this chapter was constructed as a restatement of Genesis 1, what did the apostle John want to communicate about God's mission and motives?

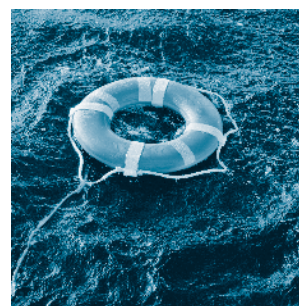
Read through John 1:11-14 again. What do these verses teach us about God's mission and motives?

One of the main messages of the Bible is that God's creative work in Genesis 1 was eventually corrupted by the presence of human sinfulness. What God created as "good" and "very good" became broken and stained. It makes sense, then, that John's Gospel begins with God's heart to redeem and repair the damage of our sin.

The verbs are fascinating: "He *came* to His own" (v. 11). "He *gave* them the right to be children of God" (v. 12). "The Word *became* flesh" (v. 14). Each of these terms shines a spotlight on God's mission to redeem the world and offer salvation to all people. The verbs reveal an active mission, as well. God didn't remain distant and arrange for our salvation from heaven. He jumped into our world to rescue it and us.

How would you describe your first encounters with God?

As you work through this study, remember that mission and salvation are not simply things God does; they are a part of who He is. God delighted in saving you because He loves you, that's true. But also God is a Savior at His core—so much that He willingly sacrificed Himself for us.



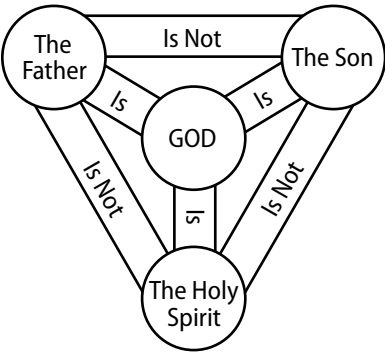
God didn't remain distant and arrange for our salvation from heaven. He jumped into our world to rescue it and us.

ENGAGE

As disciples of Jesus, evangelism is one of the duties to which we’ve been called. We have a responsibility to proclaim the message of the gospel within our spheres of influence—to help people understand who God is and what He has done.

Unfortunately, we can’t “explain” God in the same way we can explain a math problem or the best way to bake an apple pie. He is God! What we can do, however, is help people understand the basic elements of God’s nature and character—and then work to help them experience Him for themselves.

With that in mind, the image below offers a starting point for helping others to begin thinking through the doctrine of the Trinity. Work as a group to practice drawing out the image. Also practice explaining the basic idea of the Trinity to one another so that you’ll be ready to help others who want to gain a better understanding of who God is and what He has done.



PRAYER REQUESTS

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1. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1961), 1.

In addition to studying God's Word, work with your group leader to create a plan for personal study, worship, and application between now and the next session. Select from the following optional activities to match your personal preferences and available time.

↑ **Worship**

- ☒ Read your Bible. Complete the reading plan on page 16.
- ☐ Spend time with God by engaging the devotional experience on page 17.
- ☐ Connect with God each day through prayer.

➡ ⬅ **Personal Study**

- ☐ Read and interact with "God Is the Triune Creator" on page 18.
- ☐ Read and interact with "God Has a Mission to Redeem the World" on page 20.

⬅ ➡ **Application**

- ☐ Take some time to study God's Word and worship Him in a natural setting. Consider what you can learn about God from the world He created.
- ☐ Memorize Isaiah 40:28: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Yahweh is the everlasting God, the Creator of the whole earth. He never grows faint or weary; there is no limit to His understanding."
- ☐ Make an intentional effort to draw and explain the Trinity chart (see p. 14) for someone before the next session.
- ☐ Start a journal to record your reflections on the different doctrines you'll explore throughout this study. Commit to thinking about what you learn from each session, and then record your questions and insights for later discussion.
- ☐ Other:



WORSHIP

READING PLAN

Read through the following Scripture passages this week. Use the space provided to record your thoughts and responses.

Day 1

Genesis 1:1-31

Day 2

Exodus 33:12-34:9

Day 3

Jeremiah 10:1-16

Day 4

John 16:12-33

Day 5

Romans 1:18-32

Day 6

Hebrews 8:1-13

Day 7

Revelation 4:1-11

DIVINE TESTIMONY

There's no greater authority on who God is than God Himself. That's why God's Word is the best place to find information about God's nature and character. In the following passage, for example, God takes the incredible step of revealing a piece of Himself to Moses after the exodus from Egypt:

⁵ The LORD came down in a cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed His name Yahweh. ⁶ Then the LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed: Yahweh—Yahweh is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth, ⁷ maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving wrongdoing, rebellion, and sin. But He will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' wrongdoing on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

EXODUS 34:5-7

Use the following questions to help you reflect on this passage.

What do these verses teach you about God?

How have you recently experienced one of God's characteristics described in these verses?

What aspect of God's character would you like to experience more fully in your life?

Of course, the best way to learn about God is to experience Him through real and personal encounters. Spend several minutes in prayer. Proclaim your desire to know more about Him and to experience Him in a meaningful way. Then be silent. Allow yourself to listen for the voice of His Spirit and feel the reality of His presence with you.

GOD IS THE TRIUNE CREATOR

One of the interesting aspects of studying the Trinity in Scripture is that you'll never find the word *Trinity* in Scripture—not even in the original Hebrew or Greek languages. Indeed, *Trinity* is a term that Bible scholars created in order to discuss God's existence as three distinct Persons united in a single Being.

However, that doesn't mean the concept of the Trinity is foreign or the Scriptures are outside the boundaries of biblical doctrine. In fact, the presence of the Trinity can be felt throughout the entirety of God's Word—starting with the beginning:

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

GENESIS 1:1-3

The very first verses of the Bible make direct references to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. But Jesus is there, too, if you know where to look. Remember what John wrote in the first verses of his Gospel:

¹ In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
² He was with God in the beginning.
³ All things were created through Him,
and apart from Him not one thing was created
that has been created.

JOHN 1:1-3

How do these verses influence your understanding of Genesis 1:1-3?

Because we are created in God's image (see Gen. 1:26-27), what does the nature of the Trinity say about us?

Perhaps the clearest representation of the Trinity occurred during Jesus' baptism at the very beginning of His public ministry:

¹⁶ After Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water. The heavens suddenly opened for Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming down on Him. ¹⁷ And there came a voice from heaven:

This is My beloved Son.
I take delight in Him!

MATTHEW 3:16-17

Again, it's difficult for us to fully process what is happening in these verses. On the one hand, we can see three distinct persons acting in different ways—Jesus was baptized as a human being, the Holy Spirit descended from above in the form of a dove, and God the Father spoke an audible pronouncement of His pleasure with Jesus. At the same time, we know that all three of those Persons exist as one Being. All three are God at the same time.

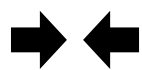
That's the mystery of the Trinity.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record how they contribute to your understanding of the Trinity.

Matthew 28:18-20

John 14:23-26

2 Corinthians 13:11-13



GOD HAS A MISSION TO REDEEM THE WORLD

When we think about the doctrine of God, we are really attempting to address two major questions: What is God like? What does God do?

How would you answer these questions right now?

The short answer to the first question is: “the Trinity.” As we’ve seen, it’s understandably difficult for human beings to process the nature and character of God. The best way we can describe what He is like is three distinct Persons living in perfect community as a single Being. That’s the Trinity.

The short answer to the second question is: “everything.” God created everything in the universe, and He is solely responsible for sustaining everything He created. God is both the source of all things and the ultimate purpose for all things. And that’s only a part of what He does. It’s also true that, since God exists as a perfect community, another part of what He does is enjoy a relationship with Himself—and with everything He has created.

The Bible helps us understand these big-picture concepts, but that’s not its primary focus. Instead, the Scriptures are mainly focused on one specific aspect of what God does. Namely, they help us see God’s long-term mission to redeem His creation—including both the world He created and the people He loves.

As you discussed earlier in this session, God’s original creation was corrupted by human sin. In response, God initiated a long-term plan designed to re-establish a connection between Himself and humanity—a plan that culminated in Jesus Christ. John offered a helpful summary of that moment:

The Word became flesh
and took up residence among us.
We observed His glory,
the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father,
full of grace and truth.

JOHN 1:14

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about God's mission to redeem the world:

Genesis 12:1-3

Leviticus 26:3-17

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Matthew 28:16-20

Revelation 21:1-8

The total message of the Bible makes it clear that God has personally involved Himself in the mission to restore His creation. He's not a "divine Watchmaker" who created the universe only to remain distant from whatever happens within it. He's not an angry Creator waiting on the edge of His seat to destroy us for our disobedience.

Instead, God has lovingly and patiently worked with us and extended Himself toward us in order to redeem us and restore our relationship with Him.

What are some ways God's mission is evident today?