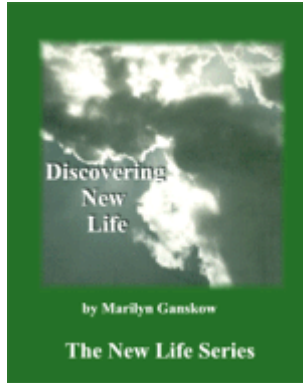


## Discovering New Life



## SAMPLE CHAPTER...Lesson 1

### Who Is Jesus Christ?

### What is Christianity?

*"There are two principal reasons why our inquiry into Christianity should begin with the person of Christ. The first is that essentially Christianity is Christ. The person and work of Christ are the rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If he is not who he said he was, and if he did not do what he said he had come to do, the foundation is undermined and the whole superstructure will collapse. Take Christ from Christianity, and you disembowel it; there is practically nothing left. Christ is the center of Christianity; all else is circumference. We are not concerned primarily to discuss the nature of his philosophy, the value of his system, or the quality of his ethic. Our concern is fundamentally with the character of his person. Who was he?" John R. Stott<sup>1</sup>[1]*

Faith in Jesus Christ is the beginning of a new relationship -- a wonderful relationship between us and God. The relationship of faith is the same as in all personal relationships -- we are free to choose how much we will invest ourselves. We can be distant and superficial with God, or we can enjoy close fellowship. But as in all our relationships, so it is in our relationship with God: if it does not deepen, it will gradually die.

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<sup>1</sup>[1] *Basic Christianity*, Inter-Varsity Press, London. Used by permission.

We may start our search for God with skepticism and doubt, with false impressions of who He is and what He thinks of us. But if we are faithful, our search will gradually bring us to a clearer and truer understanding of Him. And He will help us to understand some of the mysteries of this life and our life after death. We need to remember, however, that we cannot simply reason our way to faith, for we are dealing with infinite things with finite minds. We need all of our minds to grasp God's revelation, but faith goes beyond reason. It is a step into the unknown and it becomes real to us only through experience.

Many of us have studied about God before, memorized answers in Sunday school or taken classes in religion, and from all this we may feel our lives have no more meaning than when we started our study. It was a sterile process. What we really need is the type of encounter that will penetrate and involve every part of our lives.

In this lesson we are going to consider who is Jesus Christ and what is Christianity. We are not going to be concerned so much with Christ's teachings. Our concern will be with His person -- for He is the center of Christianity. The apostle John wrote, ". . . this is the testimony, God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; He who does not have the Son of God does not have life."<sup>2</sup>[<sup>2</sup>]

What is this life . . . who is this man? We are not told very much about Jesus until He reached the age of thirty when He began a public ministry. Though it lasted for only three years, it changed the course of history. He was a quiet person, but He began making shocking and startling statements, identifying Himself as far more than a teacher or a prophet. He said clearly to the woman at the well that He was divine. His *identity* was the main point of His teaching. He would ask His followers, "Who do you say I am?"<sup>3</sup>[<sup>3</sup>] At another time Jesus said, "I and the Father are one."<sup>4</sup>[<sup>4</sup>] This was so outrageous to the Jews that they cried out to stone Him. When His life was at stake, Jesus would not deny His deity. The high priest asked Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" and Jesus answered, "I am; and you will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."<sup>5</sup>[<sup>5</sup>]

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<sup>2</sup>[<sup>2</sup>] I John 5:11

<sup>3</sup>[<sup>3</sup>] Matthew 16:15

<sup>4</sup>[<sup>4</sup>] John 10:30

<sup>5</sup>[<sup>5</sup>] Mark 14:62

Paul Little, in his book, *Know Why You Believe*,<sup>6[6]</sup> wrote that there are only four explanations of these claims of Christ. He was either a lunatic, a liar, a legend, or who He said He was. If He is not the Son of God, then He is one of the other three: a lunatic, a liar, or a legend. We would call anyone a lunatic if he made claims of deity. But the records of the life of Christ show no evidence of a sick personality. Those who say that Jesus lied will also admit that Jesus was a great moral teacher. But this is a contradiction, isn't it? Jesus could not be a great moral teacher if He lied about His identity.

Some say that a legend was built up about Christ after His death -- that many years later His followers added the story that He had claimed to be the Son of God. History and archaeology have proven, however, that the four biographies of Christ (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) were written within the lifetime of Christ's contemporaries. If these men had written a strange legend about Jesus, it could not have gained wide acceptance so soon after His death, because too many people who knew Jesus were still alive. It would be the same as if someone in our lifetime would write about President John Kennedy and say he claimed to be God and was raised from the dead. It would be so unbelievable, no one would accept it. There are still too many people alive who knew Kennedy. The final alternative is that Jesus was who He said He was.

Let us go back to the day the Samaritan woman met Jesus at Jacob's well outside of Sychar and see how she responded to Him. The Samaritans and the Jews had been feuding for hundreds of years. They disagreed about religion. The Samaritans believed it was on Mount Gerizim that Abraham had been willing to sacrifice Isaac and where Moses had first erected an altar. The Jews believed it was on Mount Ebal. The Samaritans had also intermarried with foreigners, which was an unforgivable act in the eyes of the Jews. One hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Jews led an attack on Mount Gerizim and destroyed the Samaritans' temple.

As further background, it was a strict Jewish tradition that a rabbi was forbidden to greet a woman in public, even if she was a relative. Jesus was a Jewish rabbi. The place where He met the Samaritan woman was at Jacob's well about one-half mile from Sychar in Samaria. The well is there today near the base of Mt. Gerizim and it is a popular place to visit. From the book of Genesis we learn that Jacob purchased property there and, on his deathbed, he bequeathed it to Joseph.<sup>7[7]</sup> Jacob's well was more than 100 feet deep, too deep for anyone to use unless he had his own container to draw the water.

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<sup>6[6]</sup> Inter-Varsity Press, Illinois, 1971.

<sup>7[7]</sup> Genesis 33:18-19, Genesis 49-50

When the Samaritan woman saw Jesus at the well, when she dared to trust the tired stranger, she didn't know she was stepping out in faith. Let us use our imagination to picture the encounter. Think of it as a sunny, hot day. The Jewish day ran from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., so the sixth hour was midday -- the hottest time of day. The woman from Sychar was walking out from town to get water from the well. Why didn't she use the well in town? We can only guess. Perhaps her reputation was such that the other women snubbed her. We can see her coming in the distance . . . her body robed in the Eastern tradition, carrying her jar for water on her shoulder. Jesus is sitting at the well, tired and thirsty. As if He knew what was about to take place, He had sent the disciples into town.

Do you think the woman noticed anything different about this stranger? She must have been reluctant to approach, for she could see that He was dressed as a Jewish rabbi. Perhaps the fact that He had no pouch for water and was there alone raised her curiosity. Jesus humbly asked her for a drink. The Samaritan woman replied, “ ‘What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a

Samaritan woman, for a drink?’-- Jews, in fact, do not associate with Samaritans.”<sup>8</sup>[8] The woman's heart was probably bitter. She was unhappy and disappointed about her life, and she may have resented the self-righteous Jews who hated her people.

*Does this touch something in your heart? Is there a vague dissatisfaction in your life that causes you to be irritable? Do you have hurts or disappointments which you use to close your heart to others and to the love of God?*

Even though she was rude to Jesus, He remained peaceful and gentle. He spoke to her as if He understood the hurts in her life. He simply said, "If you only knew what a wonderful gift God has for you, and who I am, you would ask me for some *living* water."<sup>9</sup>[9]

What are the things that keep us closed to God? Our pride, our guilty feelings, our resentments and our insecurities blind us and keep us from receiving His blessings. The noise of our selfishness and fear make us unable to hear the soft voice of the Lord asking us to join Him in drinking the living water.

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<sup>8</sup>[8] John 4:9 Living Bible

<sup>9</sup>[9] John 4:10 Living Bible

The woman quickly left when the disciples arrived. When she returned to Sychar, she knew she could not convince the people of what she had just experienced, so she said to them, "Come and see." She let them come to their own conclusions. But by her excitement and witness, she raised their curiosity so they would come to see and experience the touch of Jesus.

And this is my appeal to you. Come and see. If I am to be a messenger of our Lord Jesus Christ, I am not going to trust my own power of persuasion. Just like the woman at the well, I hope you will come and see for yourselves. As you study the Scriptures, I hope you will experience the indwelling Christ and learn to live with faith and love and power. I hope you will be touched by Jesus, because Christianity is first of all a person. He is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. He reveals to us the nature of God, and God is love. He accepts you just the way you are and loves you more than you will ever be able to comprehend. He is calling you into friendship with Himself, for it is through Him we enter into fellowship with God.

Christianity is also the truth which sets us free -- free to receive and respond to the love of God; free then to love others. And finally Christianity is life -- more true and meaningful than you ever thought possible. It is life which gives us a glimpse into the kingdom of God. Come and see!

## **Questions for Personal Study and Group Discussion**

**1.** Read **John 4:1-26**. What do we learn about Jesus from His encounter with the Samaritan woman?

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2. In the Old Testament, water is frequently identified with God. Read **Isaiah 44:3**, **55:1** and **Jeremiah 2:13**. What was Jesus offering the Samaritan woman when He referred to "living water"?

**John 4:10-14** \_\_\_\_\_

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*Question for private reflection:*

*How would you like God's living water to change your life?*

3. Why do you think Jesus asked the woman to call her husband?

**John 4:16-19** \_\_\_\_\_

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What do you think were the woman's needs? How had she tried to satisfy them?

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What are some of the ways people search in vain for happiness?

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***Question for private reflection:***

*Is there any way you are trying to be happy  
that may be harmful to you?*

- 4.** Why do you think the Samaritan woman wanted to discuss worship and how did Jesus respond to her?

**John 4:20-24** \_\_\_\_\_

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***Question for private reflection:***

*If you were to meet Jesus today, what would you tell Him and/or ask Him?*

- 5.** What did Jesus claim about Himself?

**John 4:25-26** \_\_\_\_\_

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**John 6:35**

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What do you think Jesus meant when He said we shall "never thirst"?

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- 6.** Jesus stated that a response to Him was a response to God. In what ways did He declare this?

**Mark 9:37**

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**John 14:7,9**

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**7.** What was Christ's relationship to His Father?

**John 10:30** \_\_\_\_\_

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**8.** What relationship does Jesus desire for us?

**John 17:21** \_\_\_\_\_

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**9.** What do we enjoy in this relationship?

**John 17:26** \_\_\_\_\_

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***Question for private reflection:***

*How would you describe your relationship with God? How would you like it to be?*

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***A Personal Word***

*At some point in my early years, I came to the conclusion that to be a Christian meant trying to earn God's acceptance by obeying a set of rules. How discouraging that was. There was always some area of my life that would not measure up!*

*My life changed radically when I discovered that to be a Christian means to be in fellowship with God who loves and accepts me just as I am.*

*Looking back, I realize how important it was that someone showed me that Jesus was the way to God. Though I was skeptical at first, I couldn't help thinking, "What if it is true? This may be my greatest opportunity." My decision to receive Jesus into my heart was the beginning of a new life for me. Instead of an ethical philosophy, what I had been looking for all along was a person--Jesus Christ.*

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*Who is Jesus Christ? What is Christianity? Lesson 1*