

THE WAY OF JESUS THE NAZARENE

(over 1 million copies of this material [originally in booklet form] have been printed)

Welcome to "The Way of Jesus the Nazarene"! You may have already realized it, this way is different, very different from all other ways you have trod. Why so? Because Jesus is very different from anybody else that has lived on this planet.

"The Story of Jesus the Nazarene" has shown you a man "like no other man", as his contemporaries said. Jesus the Nazarene, however, is more than an interesting historical figure, more than a great philosopher or moral hero. He is indeed a very disturbing person. So much so that people who know him become either his ardent followers or his fierce enemies.

One of his famous statements summarizes the reason, "**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**" These pages will explain to you why Jesus is not just one way among others, but *the* Way, and what this may mean for your personal life.

Often in life there are times when the road seems uncertain and you cannot look around the corner, but Jesus wants to lead and protect you all the way.

CONTENTS

1. **Can I really be sure?**
2. **Is there any solid foundation?**
3. **Is there any benefit in praying?**
4. **Is there anybody to help me?**
5. **Is there anybody I can help?**
6. **How to be a non-conformist**
7. **How to be an achiever**
8. **How to love your family**
9. **How to be an example**
10. **And who will be my friend?**

1. Can I Really Be Sure?

If you have followed the instructions at the end of "The Story of Jesus the Nazarene," you have entered into a friendship with Jesus. This has probably been a totally new experience for you. And you may have problems accepting it. Up until now your life has been governed by mistrust. You have never been sure whether you could really trust other people or even your

neighbours and family. So why should you trust God and the Bible? Because of Jesus the Nazarene!

He is absolutely fascinating, and his life has been a constant challenge to his contemporaries. And it still is for us today. While reading his story you may have wondered whether he isn't demanding too much and whether his ideas are really realistic. Yes, it is true, Jesus actually demands too much and his ideas aren't realistic. And he knew that. But this is precisely the reason why he came. He knew you and I couldn't do it. We just can't love others like ourselves. We can't guarantee peace in our families and our society. And we can't forgive and forget the past and live free of inner bondage, free of guilt, resentment, and revenge.

In his 1986 story, "The Blind Fisher", Victor As-tafjev laments, *"Who has switched off the light of good from our soul? Who has extinguished the lamp of conscience? Why have they stolen all of that and offered nothing in return, why did they create unbelief, a universal unbelief? To whom should we pray? Whom should we ask to forgive us?"*

Does the way of Jesus the Nazarene offer an answer? Yes, it does, and it is much more than just visiting a church, attending a service, honoring the rites of a denomination or even being baptized. This way leads into the opposite direction of all our ways, because it doesn't depend on what we do, but on what God has done in Jesus Christ.

It may surprise you, but God is not interested in what you have done or how decent you are. As you can see in Jesus' life and teaching, his ideas of life are way beyond what we will ever be able to accomplish. This is why Jesus came to save the lost, not just to reform, educate, develop, and improve people and their life. Hardly anybody likes that.

C. S. Lewis, an English professor, has summarized the reason well, *"It is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity - it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man but enmity to God. Pride can often be used to beat down the simpler vices. Teachers often appeal to a boy's pride, or, as they call it, his self-respect, to make him behave decently: many a man has overcome cowardice, or lust, or ill temper by learning to think that they are beneath his dignity - that is, by pride. The devil laughs. For pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."*

Faith actually is the very opposite of pride. It means no longer trusting in our own strength, but trusting in God's strength. The earlier we realize we can't make it on our own, the better.

The wonderful fact is that Jesus Christ came to give us life in all its fullness - free! But how can you receive this life? By simply telling God in prayer that you want to put your trust in him. If you haven't done that already you may do it with the following words, "God, I realize that I have run my life on my own and failed. Pride has been a major reason why I didn't trust you. Forgive me, please, for I have neglected you. I trust in you and accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. I dedicate my life to you and thank you for your love."

Millions before you have talked to God in a similar way. It has changed their lives forever and God will do the same for you. Some people feel a tremendous joy and peace after this decision. Others don't feel too much. It doesn't really matter. For the fact remains, "*those that come to me I will never, never reject.*" You can fully trust these words of Jesus.

It is important to know that your emotions are just a response to your perception of reality. Some people are more emotional, others less. Some know how to control their emotions, others don't. But everybody responds to what he thinks has happened. And as you have experienced time and again, different people see things quite differently. This doesn't change what has happened, but it makes all the difference in how we respond. Your decision to walk the way of Jesus the Nazarene, for example, will be seen differently by many people. You may feel that life has really begun, but others may say, "You are crazy. You are disowning our national identity. You will calm down sooner or later. You are destroying true Christianity. You are no longer fun to live with." And in times of troubles or when you lose "the feeling" you may wonder, was it real? Then you should remember, being a Christian doesn't depend on the response of your neighbors or friends and even not on your own emotions. It is a God-given fact after you have made this first step.

The Bible uses the picture of being born into God's family. You don't lose this kinship, because of other people's words or your own feelings. You can trust God's reality more than anything else, because he is more real than anything you can see, hear, or feel. This is why faith in God is more real than even the world around you.

The following chapters will explain in greater detail why this is the case and what it means for everyday life. Before you continue, we suggest you reread the text portion in "The Story of Jesus the Nazarene" and answer the following questions. It will help you to better grasp God's love for you.

Suggested text to study:

Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3:1-36)

Some questions for growth:

1. What could be an obstacle for me to fully trust God's love in Jesus Christ?
2. How can I overcome pressures from society, my friends or even myself to "stay realistic"?
3. What does God's love mean to me?

2. Is There Any Solid Foundation?

During the last 200 years a lot of people have tried to show that you cannot trust the Bible. The result is truly astonishing: Today no serious historian will deny that Jesus Christ actually lived and that the gospels report about him reliably. Men like Luke, John, and Paul have emphasized that you can verify their reports with their contemporaries.

Scientists have shown there is no other ancient manuscript that is more trustworthy than the Bible. And no other book has predicted so much about people and events that actually happened afterwards. Jesus and his life alone were announced at least 60 times by at least eight different writers over a span of 1,000 years! But there is much more to it. The Bible is really God's love letter to us. "The Story of Jesus the Nazarene" tells you about God's love for you. And it shows what he has done to prove his love for you, namely sending his son, Jesus Christ, to die for you.

Many people try to evade this claim and call Jesus "the greatest and best man that ever lived." But Jesus' words and deeds make such a statement impossible. He claimed to be God's son and the only way to God, someone who could even forgive sins! This leaves you with a choice, *either* what he said was true *or* it wasn't true. If it wasn't true, he either knew it and was the worst conman of all times and stupid, because he died for this fraud or he didn't know it and was a lunatic. But everybody agrees that his words and deeds speak a different language. **Jesus Christ claimed to be God and the only way to his heavenly Father** (Mark 14:61-64; John 14:6).

The truth is, Jesus Christ is Lord and God.

You may still doubt the Bible is a solid foundation. Then just follow Jesus' suggestion, *"If any of you really determines to do God's will, then you will certainly know whether my teaching is from God or is merely my own."* Time and again, God challenges us in the Bible, to put him to the test and see for ourselves whether we can trust his promises.

Naturally this doesn't mean you should state some nonsense or arbitrarily pick out Bible verses. But you should study a few paragraphs in the Bible daily. Somebody who chooses a new way needs guidelines and rules and the energy to reach his goal. These and others you can find in God's Word. Everybody who starts his day with it will win time, because he misses wrong roads and refuels on time.

The "Story of Jesus the Nazarene" is only part of the Bible, but you should begin with it for it is its center. Sooner or later you will want to read the whole New Testament and the entire Bible.

Here are some suggestions to make studying God's Word (the Bible) a thrilling experience:

1. The Bible isn't a piece of art that you should put on a shelf, but rather a workbook you should use daily to find new treasures.
2. Before you start reading God's Word ask God to speak to you. Then read your text with the attitude, "What does my Lord want to tell me now?"
3. While reading God's Word ask the following questions:
 - What does God promise me here?
 - Is there anything I can thank him for or I can rejoice over?
 - Does the text lead me to any changes in my life-style, something I should do or stop doing?

- What does this text tell me about Jesus, his life and death, his resurrection and coming kingdom?
- What is the central thought of this chapter, and how would I summarize it to a non-Christian?

4. Many people have found it helpful to write their thoughts and discoveries into a diary. Maybe you even know another Christian with whom you could exchange your ideas. This will help you to grow in faith.

5. When finished reading your text from God's Word, talk to God in prayer. Thank him for what you have discovered, ask his forgiveness if needed, and request his help and strength to face the new day.

Sometimes you will find parts that are difficult to understand. Don't get discouraged, just continue to study the Bible. By and by you will find that one part explains something else you have read before. In any case, we will never be able to fully understand and grasp God's message, because his reality transcends ours. Paul, one of Jesus' early followers, wrote, *"We can see and understand only a little about God now, as if we were peering at his reflection in a poor mirror; but someday we are going to see him in his completeness, face to face"*. What a day that will be!

Suggested text to study:

Jesus, the Bread of Life (John 6:1-65)

Some questions for growth:

1. Why don't I read the Bible? (too holy? - too outdated? - no time? - no interest? - too dangerous?)
2. Why should a Christian (and even a non-Christian) read the Bible?
3. What could the Bible mean for my everyday life? How do I read it the right way?

3. Is There Any Benefit in Praying?

In 1981 Vladimir Solouchin wrote in the Our Contemporary newspaper, *"In the 20th century nobody with a sound mind will doubt that in this world, in the universe, and the variety of life there exists a supreme origin ... The question isn't whether there is a supreme reason, but whether it knows about me and has any relationship to me."*

Down through the centuries people of all races, ages, and status have not only believed there is such a supreme reason, but they knew and know from experience that He knows us and wants to communicate with us. Reading prayers or singing a liturgy can prepare your heart for God and open your mind to his mystery, but he wants to do much more for you when you pray.

Prayer is personal communion with God, and it is tapping God's resources and participating in his world-rule. It is interesting to see that Jesus with all his important and highly demanding work was constantly taking time to talk with his father in heaven. Often when his followers looked for him they found him praying - early in the morning, in special situations, even during the night.

How much more do we need prayer in order to tackle life's challenges! Prayer gives strength and wisdom, it helps us plan our day, set priorities, and look for new opportunities. Jesus has promised, "*ask anything, using my name, and I will do it.*" Christians do have the legal authority to use Jesus' name. But what does that mean?

Christians can claim God's power in prayer. Where our power fails, his just begins. Jesus Christ said, "*I have been given all power and authority in heaven and on earth.*" That means that we are all-powerful through prayer, but Christians pray according to God's will. This is why studying God's word, the Bible, is so important. Using Jesus' name for something that contradicts his word or his nature would just be like forgery of a document. It cannot stand in God's eyes. God is love, and this love is for everybody. But he forces nobody to accept his love, rather he serves us. Communication with him by reading his word, listening to him, and talking with him in prayer will by and by change our whole mentality to be more like him. What does that mean?

Time with God grants wisdom.

We have to make decisions all the time. Often we don't know all the ramifications. The Bible promises that those who ask of God will receive wisdom from him which he loves to give. That doesn't mean our reason is unnecessary. But when we pray God will guide our mind to understand the situation and make the right decision.

Time with God grants authority.

Christians can speak with authority, an authority given to them by God. This will be especially valuable in difficulties at home, at the job or in society. Every part of private and public life will be influenced positively.

Time with God grants calmness and sensitivity.

A Christian takes time with God, because he trusts him and his promise, "*I will never leave you. I will guide you with my eyes.*" This helps us to go ahead calmly even in total chaos. We are not run by the state of affairs nor by emotions, but our Lord leads us anyway. Time with God is thus time gained, not lost! Someone may ask, but how does that happen? Quite frankly, I don't know. But that is none of our business. God never told us we should be concerned how he would fulfill his promises, how he would answer prayer, and how he governs the world with our prayers. But he said, he would do it. Thus our responsibility is to pray, his is to act.

Prayer is meeting with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. As his children, all his wealth is ours. As somebody put it, "prayer is not like a sightseeing tour with a nice bus. But it's more to be compared with a truck driven to the storeroom and packing all that is needed." It is true that God knows what we need, but he wants us to talk with him as parents want to talk with their children although they know their needs. In a good family kids and parents love

and trust one another. They talk about everything that is important to them, and they love this communication. This is also true for our relationship with God. If we love him we want to share everything with him, our joys and fears, our sorrows and successes, our victories and defeats, our work and our spare time - just everything. If we don't talk with him regularly something is wrong with our relationship to him. We may even miss his best for us as we assume his love and riches are somewhat restricted!

But praying isn't just asking for myself or others. It also means thanking and praising God. There are so many things to thank him for, all he has done for us and constantly helps us with. At the same time we can praise him for his love and goodness. Thus we thank God for his deeds and praise him for his qualities. A whole book in the Bible, the Psalms in the Old Testament, are a book of songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. They and the hymns of the church can encourage and help us along.

Here are some practical helps for your praying,

- You don't need a special language or style when you pray. God listens to your heart's voice.
- Don't make long and flowery speeches. Tell God in detail what you need. And he will answer you in concrete terms.
- Pray out loud or write your prayer requests on a sheet of paper. That will help you concentrate on what is important and you can check the results.
- Set certain times when you pray. You should at least start and end your day with prayer. Remember, praying is communicating with God.
- Fixed times shouldn't keep you from talking with God at any time. His line is never busy. He will always listen to you and help you.

As a Christian you have one great advantage, you have a friend in Jesus Christ who is master of all circumstances and who is always at your service.

Suggested text to study:

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15)

Some questions for growth:

1. When did I pray the last time? Why? Why don't I pray?
2. How much space do I give God to talk to me? How can I better hear his voice?
3. Do I really believe in the power of prayer? Where does God want me to use it for his glory?

4. Is There Anybody to Help Me?

More than 1,500 years ago Bishop Athanasius wrote that God became man in Jesus Christ "*to recreate as the image of the Father his image in man.*" This is a very bold statement, but it is exactly what the Bible says. Why then do only a few Christians portray the perfect love of Jesus? Why are many so far removed from the image of God in their lives?

Some people believe there are two classes in Christianity, the normal, everyday Christian with all his or her failures and shortcomings, and a special sort who are allowed to experience the joy, peace, and victory the Bible so often talks about. Others are just frightened. They have heard of persecutions and think, who knows what will happen when I dedicate my life totally to God? Another group has given up. They "know from experience" that God demands too much, and are content with an average, status quo Christian life-style. And yet Jesus has promised to send his Spirit to help us, and to fill our lives in such a way that his image becomes a reality in us. How can that happen?

It is important to realize that the Holy Spirit is a person, not just an impersonal power. He is not something to be used, but someone who is our Lord and Helper. His work is closely connected with Jesus' work, he actually represents Jesus to us, wants to guide, support, console us, and even speaks for us and defends us. His major goal is to make the image of Jesus ever more visible in our life, and thus bring joy and glory to God.

Every person who transfers his life to Jesus is being born again by His Spirit. He or she belongs to God, and His Spirit lives in him or her. But that doesn't necessarily imply that this person is filled by His Spirit. Let's take an example. If you have an apartment or house with several rooms and you offer one to Jesus Christ he will live there. But that doesn't mean he is the owner or has the right to enter all rooms. Being a Christian, living a spirit-filled life, means opening all rooms to God, even the tiny storeroom which you open to nobody else. Jesus wants to be master of all your life. Then and only then can his image grow in you.

Why is that so important? This world is a battlefield. All sorts of ideas, groups, and ideologies are fighting for our attention, support, and dedication. Without God's help we will not be able to overcome the enemy. For the real battle is behind the scenes. The Bible tells very clearly that we do not fight with men, but with spiritual powers that cannot be seen, with the devil and his subjects.

This may sound strange or even awkward to you. But Jesus has warned us time and again to beware of the devil and his tricks. One of his best plans ever has been to teach people for the last 200 years that there is no devil. When you look into the world today and see all the terrible things happening it may, however, be easier to believe in the devil than in God!

But do not be discouraged, God is still on the throne. He loves us so much that he gives us freedom of choice, even to choose something wrong. At the same time His Spirit offers a wealth of good.

1. God's Spirit grants gifts that enable us to serve others. Among them are joy, peace, patience, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. They are more helpful to heal endangered or broken families, lives, and societies than anything else.

2. God's greatest gift is love, a love that conquers hatred, discrimination, emotional wounds, and even death. Despite all the nice things he or she does, man without God is inherently evil. But somebody who is born again and filled by God's Spirit has a new source of life within him. God himself will love others through such a person. Isn't all of that too good to be true? Now the roots of evil can be erased from your life and you can receive God's

Spirit and love in all its fullness. You can't work for it. It is God's gift, just as new life in him is a gift. If you want the holy God to make your life whole and clothed with his holiness we suggest you speak with him in prayer.

"Lord Jesus Christ, I have run my life on my own. I have had my reservations in trusting you fully. (If you can name any specific sins, tell them to God right now.) I thank you for carrying my sin. I want you to be the master of all my life. I open everything up to you. Fill me with your Spirit. He shall be my guide now and evermore. I trust you to do according to your promise. Thank you for actually filling me with your Spirit and transforming me into your image. Amen."

If you have honestly spoken this prayer, God has done what he has promised. He has actually filled you with His Spirit. You may or may not feel anything, but God will keep his word.

Again this doesn't mean you own the Holy Spirit. He has promised to be with you always. Your life will be a battle, but with his help it will be an uphill battle! This is why the apostle Paul reminds us, *"be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit."* Yes, there will be times when the going gets rough. Times when you make mistakes, when you lose your temper, when your love reservoir will run low. What to do then? Does it mean you are no longer God's child, you have lost his favour and help? Not at all!

You don't need to wallow in your sin, punish or accuse yourself constantly, or wait for days to show your honesty. You can come back to God right away. He waits for you. Just tell him your troubles and failures. He wants to cleanse you, renew your strength, and fill you again with His Spirit.

You may call this "spiritual breathing." If you tell God your sin or the pollution from life's stress, you exhale the dirty, used air. When you let him fill you with His Spirit, you inhale fresh, life-giving air. When you regularly breath spiritually, your union with God will grow, and his image will be seen in you more clearly. Sections 6-9 will explain in greater detail what this means in practical terms.

Suggested text to study:

God's Spirit (John 16, Acts 2)

Some questions for growth:

1. Where do I see a deficit in my Christian life?
2. What would happen if I give all to God?
3. Where does God want me to use his gifts?

5. Is There Anybody I Can Help?

There are two general ways people have misunderstood Jesus' message. One is taking it purely individually, being grateful that "God saved me", but never considering others and their needs. The other is taking it just as a model to change society, forcing people into a

Christian mold, but never considering them as individuals with eternal value and the right to make their own decisions.

God values the individual so much that he sent his son to die on a cross. *"He wants everybody to be saved,"* as Paul put it. Yet because he loves us and respects us as people, he never forces us to do his will. At the same time, he wants people to live in harmony and peace, enjoying all his goodness.

For many centuries Christians have struggled with this concept and some have erroneously tried to erect God's rule by force. Others have understood that without an inward change, a new heart and mindset, God's kingdom cannot be truly built. The former not only contradicts the principles of the Bible, but has also no lasting results. A society, community or family can only be truly helped if you tackle the fundamental problem, the distorted relationship with God. This is so important that Jesus Christ has used most of his last days on earth to call his followers to *"testify about me to the people in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, about my death and resurrection."* He has promised the help of His Spirit in that task (see section 4).

Since that time, nearly 2,000 years have gone by, and still millions have never heard the message of God's love, forgiveness, and new life. This is a crime, as it deprives men of personal salvation and society of its only major root for improvement, welfare, and peaceful coexistence.

If you have experienced God's love personally, you should share it with others, your family, your neighbours and coworkers. Otherwise your joy will die like a flame without oxygen. Not everyone will like what you say. Some will not understand what you tell them or feel embarrassed. Others may even discriminate or mistreat you because you are a Christian. Keep in mind, there is nothing better you can tell somebody than the good news of Jesus and his love. The other person may not see it at the moment, but you know what Christ can do in his personal life and through him in others. A famous Christian leader summarized it this way, *"As Jesus Christ is God and died for me, how could any sacrifice be too big for me to bring him!"*

When you talk about Christ these ideas should help you along:

- Pray for the person you want or have contacted with the message of Christ.
- Don't preach, just tell the other person in a few short sentences what Christ has done for you.
- Use the opportunities God gives you, e.g. an article in a newspaper, a book, a film or event, a common interest or experience. Try to explain how your faith in God relates to it or helps you to action.
- If you don't know how to talk about Jesus, you may print out "The Story of Jesus the Nazarene" or other literature you can give others while you pray for them.
- Try to develop a personal strategy of how you can convey the love of God to others. Remember, talking is just part of it. People want to see your love in action.

We have seen as someone put it, *"the major task of the church of Jesus Christ is the evangelization of the world in our generation."* But why is that so? There are three simple

reasons: (1) God told us to tell the good news to everyone. (2) Without Christ no one can be saved but is eternally lost. (3) If we don't tell it to our generation no one else will.

We cannot preach to the people that have already died or to those who will be born after our death. Of course that's obvious, but many people forget the logical result, we have to tell our generation for no one else will and can do it. Every man, woman, and child is born separated from God and his love. We are not only unable to earn our way to God, most of us are even not interested in God, but rather in ourselves. This is why Jesus came and opened a new way to God for us.

Most people have difficulties with this concept. How can a nice, helpful person be lost? We tend to forget that not our birth, behavior, or outward appearance makes us acceptable before God, but only what he has accomplished for us in Jesus Christ. He is the *only* way to God. This is why neglecting or rejecting Jesus is worse than anything else. It actually decides our eternal destiny!

If you see a child stand close to a gorge and the next step means their certain death, wouldn't you do everything you could to keep them back and save them? How much more should Christians do everything they can to save people from eternal death! Your life is part of communicating God's love to others. A non-Christian once told a Christian who was just good in words, "your deeds speak louder than your words." The Bible not only teaches that faith without works is worth nothing; it also emphasizes that our lifestyle should be so clear and full of love that others come and ask us why we live the way we do.

Jesus explained in a story about the final judgement that what we do to the people around us will be counted as if we would have done it unto him. What a challenge! Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, opening our homes for foreigners, visiting the sick and the prisoners will be charged to our heavenly account as a service to God himself.

Isn't it wonderful to know that everyday we can show Jesus Christ how much we love him by the way we serve the people around us! Certainly this will not always be easy, but God is with us and helps us. In his strength we can make a difference!

Suggested text to study:

Jesus' final farewell (Acts 1)

Some questions for growth:

1. Who are the people that God wants me to show and explain his love?
2. What can I do to fulfill Jesus' last command?
3. Why is it necessary to reach everyone *now*?

6. How To Be a Non-Conformist

In Jesus' time there lived an interesting group of people. All their life they had listened to the Bible and tried to live honorably. The people of Israel respected them as their leaders. When Jesus started preaching and performing miracles they knew he had to be the Messiah, God's appointed and longed for messenger. The Bible says "they believed in Jesus." But their belief didn't show any results. Actually they were not much different from those who persecuted Jesus. Why? *"They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God!"* And the gospel adds, they were frightened they would be kicked out of the church if they would side with Jesus.

Down through the centuries, in all societies and groups, whether religious or not, people have been tempted to stick with the status quo, to accept things just as they are. "Our fathers have done it this way, so why should we change? Our leaders know what they do, so why should I ask questions? Everyone does it, so why should I be different?" This don't-rock-the-boat mentality has brought a lot of stability, and some of the greatest disasters in history!

Some people have even claimed that being quiet, accepting everything humbly, and suffering patiently is a Christian virtue. Nothing could be further from the truth! Sure enough, Christianity is not a political program, but neither is it a program of conformity, accommodation, and non-interference. Jesus spoke up for and served the neglected, the deprived, those that had no one to intervene for them.

Above all Jesus made it clear that his followers couldn't be friends with everyone. They would need to make a decision either to follow him and his radical demands or to succumb to the expectations of the crowd. Often he shocked his disciples because his teachings and his life were so different from all they expected of the Messiah.

One day he really hit the nail on the head. In an unprecedented way he made it clear that he was the Light, the Truth, the Messiah, the living God among them. And he continued, *"You are truly my disciples if you live as I tell you to, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* People were upset and angry. "We have always been free, never have we been anyone's slaves", they claimed. But Jesus answered, *"you are slaves of sin ... if the Son sets you free, you will indeed be free."* Jesus didn't want to agitate. He emphasized, however, that true freedom is much more than not being enslaved or imprisoned. Anyone who is captivated by sin, who is still bound by egotism and self-serving, is anything but free. He or she will be more concerned for his or her image, acceptance by the insiders, and personal welfare than for serving the truth and other people.

The Jewish leaders were so enraged about his freedom and uncompromising stand that they finally nailed him to a cross. They thought this would bring the whole story to an end. But only three days and seven weeks later they had to realize that Jesus had "multiplied". His followers would neither give in to threats nor accept their offers of compromise. With Jesus in their hearts, they were indeed free.

As Jesus had foreseen, so it happened, *"since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you."* But that couldn't destroy their freedom, because they were free from circumstances and public opinion through Jesus Christ who lived in them. Is this only a privilege of the first followers of Jesus or can it happen today? It can and it will, but it won't

necessarily be applauded by the crowds, even not in a so-called free society. Why is that the case? Some people will have a bad conscience, because they know they aren't free from bondages. Others will feel threatened by someone who doesn't give in to threats. And some will even hate you, because they cannot manipulate you or others the way they used to.

Jesus actually gave a clear outline how you can be free.

First. The son has to set you free, Jesus himself. As you have seen in the beginning of this material your own strength is not enough. You need Christ to forgive your sin and to begin a new life.

Second. You should live as Jesus tells you. This is why you need to read the Bible daily. Study it and make it a part of your life and thoughts. The more you read his word the more you will be changed into his image. This will not happen in one day. But suddenly you will realize like Paul, *"I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. And the real life I now have within my body is a result of my trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

Third. Jesus has sent His Spirit of freedom for you to live in his freedom. This doesn't mean that you will never be frightened. Jesus promised, *"here on earth you will have many trials and sorrow; but cheer up, for I have overcome the world."* He has therefore not promised us freedom from troubles and fear, but freedom in all circumstances. And with his Holy Spirit he guarantees this freedom.

This will have tremendous results in your everyday life. You will no longer need to support injustice or be silent when somebody suffers. You can confront evil with the love of God and offer help and friendship even to your enemies. You will be able to see through the thicket of self-protection and complacency, and follow God's principles even if you are alone. You will face opposition and contempt, but you will find friends in most unlikely places.

It is not easy to be a non-conformist. You have to be careful not to become a fanatic of justice and forget the love of God. If you depend on God's strength and protection and act according to his principles, you will be able to share his love with people you wouldn't even have dreamt of. You will conclude, the way of Jesus the Nazarene is really worth it all.

Suggested text to study:

Jesus makes free (John 8)

Some questions for growth:

1. Where am I still bound by opinions, experiences, so-called facts, or other people?
What should I do?
2. At which places should I put true Christian freedom into effect? Who could help me?
3. Where am I in danger to exchange Christian freedom with my personal idea of justice?
How can I make sure I follow the principles of Jesus lovingly?

7. How to Be an Achiever

No successful society can be built on laziness. Performance is the name of the game. Some societies are purely achievement oriented. They know that without it real progress isn't possible. Some experts even believe that without it survival is impossible.

Others go so far to call it a "Christian principle." But can that be true, when some people just accept successful performance, and when success sanctifies the means? What about the people who produce something that isn't accepted by society? What about seniors, and people with a terminable illness or a mental or physical handicap? They can't perform, often they are even an obstacle for achievements.

A Christian can neither expect nor bring performance and success at all costs. His major concern is the individual. This may mean doing something that isn't popular. For example, though he doesn't support alcoholism, he will help those that suffer from it. Though he supports giving your best, he will help those that fall behind for one reason or the other, and he will always honor and help people that are old, ill, or handicapped.

What then are the principles that govern Christian performance?

1. God's principle is service. Many people cannot understand this. They want to rule, and have called this a religion of washouts. Others are just too idle or fear they will lose their authority if they serve. Nothing could be further from the truth. Only the person who serves can be a true leader. Someone who serves others will win their respect, their ears, and their hearts. This will create a totally new atmosphere, at home and at the workplace.

This is the principle that governed Jesus' life, *"I did not come to be served, but to serve."* He did this although he is the ruler of the universe, and by acting in such a way he changed whole societies. Paul, one of his early followers, dedicated his whole life to the fact that God has no favorites, he loves everyone the same, for *"we are no longer Jews or Greeks or slaves or free men or even merely men or women, but we are all the same - we are Christians; we are one in Christ Jesus."* Birth, race, language, education, and other things make us different, but we still carry the same worth in God's eyes.

Our different gifts will lead to different responsibilities in life. Being equal doesn't mean everyone should do the same. God respects us as individuals, and he expects us to use our individual talents creatively to serve others. If Jesus came to serve, how much more should Christians do it and feel honored to live as their master did. In this way you will not only do God's will, but win the confidence and friendship of those you serve.

2. God's principle is suffering. Paul has probably done more to enlarge the early church than anyone else. He found that God's work and suffering cannot be separated. He concluded, *"I am quite happy about my suffering, for when I am weak, then I am strong - the less I have, the more I depend on him."* He knew that in the final analysis, God was using him and working through him, and His power didn't depend on Paul's talents, but on his dedication to his Lord.

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If you investigate the major discoveries, developments, or achievements you will easily find that all of them cost a lot of "blood, sweat, and tears." Sometimes scientists have worked a

lifetime for just one major breakthrough, and not all have enjoyed the fruit of their labor and hardships.

Christians do not have a miracle drug that saves them from hard work and setbacks. Jesus Christ helps them to accept hardship, sacrifices, and suffering with joy. They know they don't work in vain, and final victory is sure. They know God's Spirit will support them and give them wisdom and love no matter what the circumstances are. This is why they look to the future with a sense of joy.

Many people, even Christians, have difficulties with God's command to be always thankful. The reason lies in a simple principle, thankfulness isn't a response to outside events, but an inner habit. (The same is true for Christian joy.) Because a Christian rests in God and builds on his provision, he can be thankful in all circumstances. The interesting result is that this will change our attitude to people and situations. When we obediently thank God for anything that happens and for the fact that he is still on the throne, it will energize our life and often result in a major breakthrough in our work or in our relationships with people. Even enemies can be turned into friends.

3. God's principle is dependability. Paul made a startling statement about Christian work, *"the most important thing about a servant is that he does just what his master tells him to, that he is faithful and reliable."* A Christian serves God, no matter who his or her human master may be. God's ultimate standard obviously isn't success, but faithfulness.

This will make Christians look differently at various issues. It will help them not to look down on people or despise them. Even a minor thing could have lasting value, and the coworker or citizen with the smallest responsibility can be full of worth, if he or she is faithful in what they do. Faithful and reliable, however, is the person who uses his or her scope of responsibility to the utmost.

It is good to know that God will not compare us with others, but with what he has entrusted to us and how we have used it. To look at people in such a way is truly human, and a society built on these principles will not only succeed, but will display an atmosphere of friendship and love.

Christians know that their whole life depends on God's grace, that is, his free love. This will not only challenge them to treat others the same way. It will protect them from wrong success pressure, and help them gratefully do their very best for the Lord. At the same time they will serve their family, their society, and mankind in general, because God has given them all they have and are.

Suggested text to study:

The final judgement (Matthew 25)

Some questions for growth:

1. Where do I need to increase serving people? What could be an obstacle for me to serve?
2. Am I prepared to follow God's principles? How and where do I want to begin?
3. Whom will I need to show his eternal value?

8. How to Love Your Family

This is hardly as simple as it sounds, and it doesn't come naturally. In our world today more and more people are mainly concerned for themselves, and will spare hardly any time on their family. Others have no idea how to instill lasting values into the lives of their children or how to empower them emotionally to tackle the challenges of a society in change.

1. Love is a decision. In each marriage, family, or other relationship, there will be times when you have problems and feel no love. If your relationship was mainly built on feelings, you are in trouble. Love is a decision: a decision to serve another person sacrificially no matter what the cost; a decision to value and honor someone else and prove that with actions.

2. Love is honoring someone. Nothing destroys relationships (whether in a family or among friends) faster and more effectively than dishonoring another person. This can be done through very simple words and actions. Accumulated through months and years, they build a wall that may be hard to penetrate.

On the other hand, you can build lasting relationships by investing honoring words and deeds into the life of your loved ones. The easiest way to start is to stop dishonoring the other by no longer

- degrading his/her ideas and suggestions,
- making jokes about his/her weaknesses,
- expecting kindnesses without a thank you,
- denying we are wrong and need forgiveness,
- ignoring their need for our support and time.

Paul once wrote, *"do not let selfishness or pride be your guide, but give more honor to others than to yourselves."* Following this principle not only deepens your family life and relationships with people, but it will also help you as they will answer with love and friendship. What to do when your reservoir runs low, when you cannot muster the strength or impetus to put others first? When they fail to respond, because they have been hurt too deeply and cannot believe that you truly love them? Then it is good to know that God's Spirit is here to help us. His strength can renew broken relationships, it can transform dry deserts into green fields! In any situation we can go to God, ask his forgiveness, and start again with a clean sheet. He can give us creativity, sensitivity, and stamina to show our loved ones and friends that we truly love them. It may take some time till they accept this change. But God is prepared to carry us through.

Jesus wants the relationship between husband and wife to portray his relationship to his church, and by our strong love for one another, people will realize we are Christ's disciples. Without the help of his Holy Spirit we would never make it. So why not start your day by

praying, "Lord, show me, please, how I can lovingly honor my family and friends today. Help me to do it!"

A family expert adds a word of caution, "*While husbands and wives can make great friends and lovers, they make lousy gods.*" That is also true for children. So many people, especially women, put all their hope for a fulfilled life into their spouses or children, and get terribly disappointed! Only when God is the source of our happiness and when his love fills us to the brim, will we be able to truly love our family and friends and not end in disappointment. People, places, and things can never bring lasting satisfaction, because man is created for God. Only when we come to him and let our empty hearts be filled by his love will we find lasting fulfillment. This will also keep us from using people for our own ends and neglecting their needs.

Despite all efforts and goodwill, times will come when the road gets rough. God has promised to renew our strength and enable love for a lifetime. Otherwise God's idea for a Christian marriage, "to be one in spirit, soul, and body till death separates us," would be impossible.

There are three important principles for lasting relationships that we want to emphasize in closing:

- (1) ***Growing love needs security.*** We are all imperfect people. Our temperaments, talents, education, experiences, and expectations are different. Love can only last and grow if we are unconditionally committed to one another, that means committed to an imperfect person. Our partner needs to know and feel such a commitment. It will help him or her to work on his/her imperfections. At the same time it gives room for us to grow. A wonderful way to grow together is to study one another's interests. It shows how much we value our spouse, and our joy and love will automatically deepen, grow, and consolidate.
- (2) ***Growing love needs conversation.*** Empty words are not enough, or else a TV-set or a tape would suffice. It has to be a meaningful conversation which is more difficult than it sounds. Often we think we understand what other persons say, but they may mean something else. This is why we need to listen very carefully and through additional questions make sure we truly understand what our partner says. This will also underline how much we value the other person and our mutual love will grow.
- (3) ***Growing love needs planning.*** All these things will take lots of time, effort, and careful planning. Hardly anyone starts a marriage with the notion, "let's see how long it will last, probably not very long." Especially young people are full of dreams and idealism. But soon things look different, and the reason is very often lack of careful planning for a lasting and growing relationship.

So why not start today? Make a list of the things your spouse really likes, discuss it with him or her, and talk about it with God in prayer. Then take time to carefully plan the steps by which you want to express your love by words and deeds. You will be astonished to see God fill your heart with love and let it grow towards him, your spouse, your family, and others.

Suggested text to study:

Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-6)

Some questions for growth:

1. How can I honor my loved ones today?
 2. What will I do to let my love grow?
 3. How can God's love saturate our family?
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9. How to Be an Example

"If all people would live according to the Sermon on the Mount, we would have peace and prosperity." This is what many people believe, but in words or thoughts they continue, "this is impossible." Isn't that true? The principles of Jesus Christ are not made for this world. They are great to listen to, but nobody can keep them! Is this really what the way of Jesus the Nazarene is, nice but impossible?

Jesus obviously didn't think so. He emphasized, *"the decisive question is whether you obey my father in heaven."* Just using religious words, even repeating Jesus' instructions isn't enough. He wants us to do what he says, to be perfect as our father in heaven is perfect. What does that mean?

1. Christian perfection is God's will. God is perfect, and all that want to be eternally united with him have to be perfect. Anything else would contradict God's nature. As we have seen earlier, God himself has made the provision for us to be perfect. This can already happen in this life, because it is God's gift, and thus depends on his grace and not on our efforts or worthiness.

2. Christian perfection is given in an instant. God wants to fill us with His Spirit now. If we open our hearts to him, he will cleanse us and fill us with His Spirit. Not because we have been nice, prayed hard enough, have given to the church or visited the services regularly, but because God has promised it. He waits for us to ask him, and as a good father he loves to give all his riches to us.

3. Christian perfection means growing. God will give us all we presently need and are able to use. Thus Christian perfection isn't stable, otherwise Jesus and the apostles wouldn't have needed to talk about the challenges of everyday life. Of course there is a difference between a person who became a Christian a year ago or thirty years ago. Both can be perfect in what God envisions for them right now, but certainly the older Christian should be much more mature.

Sadly, there are many Christians that are content with what they have reached. They are like old trees with wonderful leaves, but without fruit. How different is Paul's vision of a true Christian life, *"We must become like a mature person - we must grow until we become like Christ and have all his perfection."* If we are open to God's Spirit and his work in our lives he

will constantly change us into Christ's image. If we aren't, we will continually dim his image until we no longer represent him.

4. *Christian perfection is specific.* The Sermon on the Mount and the whole Bible explain God's principles for a perfect life to us. And God is very specific, so much so that it often contradicts what we are used to do. Let's look at a few examples.

- *Love your neighbour.* God identifies with the poor, the oppressed, and those in society that cannot speak for themselves. In the same way, Christians are called to identify with, and to enter into, solidarity with the poor and not just to offer charity. It also means our churches and our personal lifestyle should be simple and free from an emphasis on wealth and extravagance.

- *Honour the life of others.* Any decision to terminate life for personal or societal convenience or population control contradicts God's principles, finds his judgement, and harms both society and the individual. On the other hand, Christians are called to create an atmosphere of love that enables expectant mothers to welcome their child and that initiates support for mother and child. The same is true for the handicapped and seniors, especially for those who have no one to care for them.

- *God treats everyone the same.* He created men of all races, nationalities, peoples or tribes. This is why each individual should be respected regardless of race, color or creed, and should have equality before law and equal opportunity according to one's ability. Christians should promote racial understanding and harmony, and "follow peace with all men".

- *Your body is God's temple.* A Christian is no longer his own master, his body and mind belong to Jesus Christ who died for him. This is why he cannot destroy his body (or family) with excessive use of tobacco or alcohol, the reading or viewing of pornography or anything that is contrary to God's principles of love, truth, and purity. Our standard should rather be, "Whatever weakens our reason, impairs the tenderness of our conscience, obscures our sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of our body over mind, those things for us are sin."

- *God is Lord of all your life.* Whenever a Christian has to make a decision, he will ask "what would Jesus do?" For he is the lord of his time, his money, his possessions, his family, his past, his present, and his future. This means a Christian is an administrator of all that God has entrusted to him. One day he will have to report to God what he has done with his trust, and whether he has invested God's time, money, etc., wisely. Jesus has summarized our fears and his wonderful promise in this way, "*Your heavenly Father already knows perfectly well what you need, and he will give that to you if you give him first place in your life and live as he wants you to.*"

5. *Christian perfection will be final.* There will be one day when God's plan with this world will be finished and his new world will be visible to everyone. All that have loved and served him will see him as he is and be glad in his presence. The others will tremble and finally be separated from any love, peace, and joy. On that day nothing will be left that can hinder us from being all God wanted us to be. Our fellowship with God will be unrestricted,

our life without stain or wrinkle, and our mutual love will grow forever and ever and each moment will be better than the one before.

This is the way of Jesus the Nazarene. It is called his way, because he has made all the provisions for it. We just need to use them while we tread the way of Jesus the Nazarene.

Suggested text to study:

Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)

Some questions to grow:

1. Where do I follow unbiblical principles, and how could I express Christ in a clearer way?
2. How can I help others to follow Christ?
4. Where can I portray Jesus to others today?

10. Who Will Be My Friend?

"This is a world where you can trust no one! If you would have endured what I have, you would be cautious too! All my life I have been exploited by others. I am just not prepared for another disappointment! The church is the worst of all, don't you know ... !" - Have you heard statements like that before? Do you feel the same way? It could well be!

At the same time you look for a real friend, someone you can trust unreservedly, someone who will not disappoint you. There is good news, Jesus Christ wants to be your friend. When you have taken the steps described on the previous pages, you are his friend. He says, *"I will never, no never leave you alone!"* And Paul concluded, *"Nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ when he died for us."*

Since you have opened your life to God's love and are his child, he is your friend. At the same time, you are brother or sister to all his children around the world, the moment a new relationship began that is closer than the ties to your family and former friends. Everywhere in society there are people that have opened up to God's love, and want to have fellowship. Be friends with those that have experienced the same love of God.

You don't need to be afraid of them. Sure enough there may be some that are not "your type", some may even make you nervous. Some are true saints, and others are strange saints. Try to meet them anyway, and see with whom you can have fellowship. Why is that so important?

1. Christian fellowship is more than having a nice time. That's important too. However Christians are "members of one body" as Paul called it. They share their joys and sorrows. They help one another, especially when they are in difficulties. They are truly happy when their friends prosper. This is something you will not want to miss!

2. Christian fellowship means serving others with the gifts God has entrusted to me. When you meet, you'll exchange how you are and what the next days may bring. You will

pray with and for another. You will find ways to support one another in everyday activities. God will open your eyes to what you can do - for other Christians, and for those who do not yet know God's love in a personal way.

3. Christian fellowship means serving God. In many ways you will be able to glorify God and make him happy. Not just by bringing his love to others, but also by worshipping him in prayer and song. A person whose heart is full of God's love cannot be quiet. He or she will sing praises to God. Such a person will thank God, at home and together with other Christians. This will also deepen your relationship to God, and at the same time give you new strength for the challenges of each day.

4. Christian fellowship will serve you. In all these ways you will learn more of God's love, better understand his principles, and grow in wisdom to apply them. Other Christians will encourage and correct you. They have been through a lot of the problems and challenges you will face. Generally your confidence in Jesus and your love for him and others will grow. One special way of Christian fellowship is the *Lord's Supper*. One of the last things Jesus did before he went to the cross was sharing this supper with his followers. He told them to remember him and what he did for them by taking this supper. This is why the church has always invited God's people to come to the Lord's table.

This meal does much more than remind us of Jesus and what he has done for us. It unites us with all Christians around the world, and points forward to the day when we will all be at his table in his heavenly kingdom. Through it Jesus tells his family and us - just as real as you taste these elements signifying my broken body and shed blood, so real is my love for you and my Spirit to help and strengthen you.

Christian fellowship - what a wonderful offer of God's love. No, you are not alone. You are part of a worldwide family. Some family members you will never meet on earth, but they pray for you. They wait for the day when they can shake hands with you. What a day will that be when you meet these people that have been a part in your coming to know Jesus and his love! Together you will kneel before God's throne and joyfully thank him for all he has done for you.

Of this wonderful day the last book of the Bible says, *"God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain. All of that has gone forever. And he said, 'See, I am making all things new!'"*

This is not the end, just the beginning of the way of Jesus the Nazarene. Thus you may wonder, „how can I learn more about him? How can I find other Christians that will share this new faith and joy in Jesus with me?“

We will try to help you. In a third section of material, we will explain to you *The Life with Jesus the Nazarene*. We suggest you read again *The Story of Jesus the Nazarene*. Read a couple of pages every day, and don't forget to answer the questions explained on the last page. This will help you to grow in your relationship with Jesus and develop a friendship with him that lasts for time and eternity.

We pray for you, and hope to meet you someday soon. Your friends from JESUS Film Harvest Partners.

Suggested text to study:

God's new fellowship (Acts 2)

Some questions for growth:

1. Which help could other Christians give me?
2. Which Christians do I know? How could I contact them and have fellowship with them?
3. How can I overcome my fears and learn to trust other members of God's family?

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