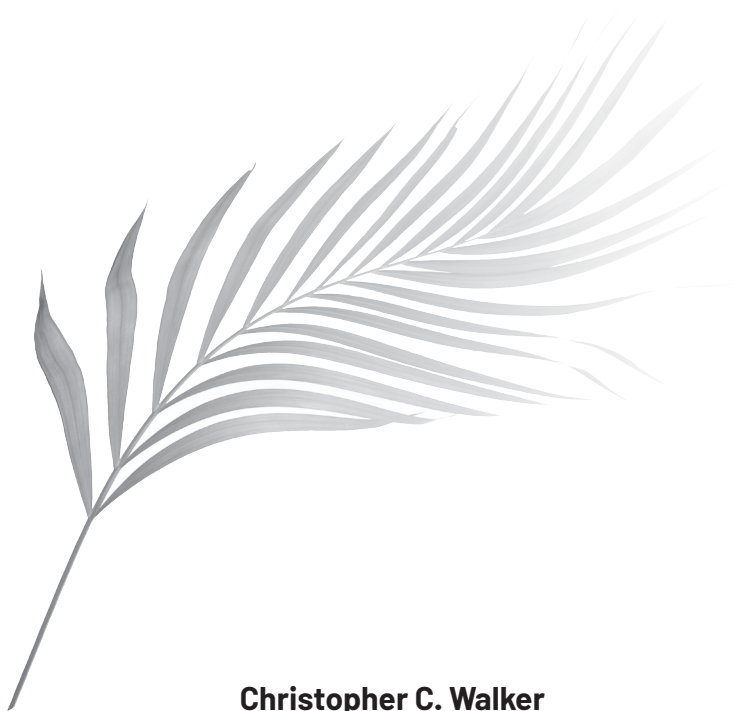


# **The Call to Discipleship**

Six Lenten  
studies on  
what it means  
to follow Jesus



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# Introduction



## The Season of Lent

Lent is the season of the Christian year that begins on Ash Wednesday and concludes at sundown on Holy Saturday. The Church remembers the life and ministry of Jesus and renews its commitment to him in Christian discipleship. While we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, the season of Lent reflects on the costly love of God for us shown in Jesus' life and death, and in confronting the powers that would crucify him. We are to take up our cross by renouncing self-interest and commit ourselves to Jesus and the kingdom of God he proclaimed.

The forty-day period was modelled on the fast of Jesus after his baptism and before he commenced his public ministry. Initially the fast did not exceed two or three days before Easter. In the early church it became a period of preparation for those who were then baptised at Easter which developed into Lent. Later, with infant baptism common, Easter was a time for confirmations after a period of instruction during Lent.

It also became a period of devotional observance for all followers of Jesus. Three elements were involved: fasting, prayer and acts of Christian compassion, such as giving. St Peter Chrysologus, a fifth century bishop, wrote in a sermon: "Prayer, compassion, fasting – these three are one, and they give each other life. For fasting is the soul of prayer, compassion is the life of fasting. Let no one tear them apart, for they cannot be separated." In recent times, fasting has often been replaced by the renunciation of something, such as coffee, chocolate or fast food over Lent.

The money saved is typically given to the poor through Christian agencies.

Lent is a time that provides opportunities for personal, spiritual growth. Participating in a personal or group study during Lent is encouraged. This, of course, should result in outward goodness and positive effects on others. Lent calls us to be better and deeper Christian people, serving God and others.

### **My approach**

I write as a person who is committed to Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God. Jesus calls us to be his disciples. That is his primary call. We respond to his call by faith and this is symbolised by baptism. We are to live out our baptism by living as Jesus' disciples in every aspect of our lives. As we continue with our Christian lives, we need to grow in our faith and understanding and serve God's purposes as is appropriate to us and our circumstances. We do so as part of the Christian community.

In preparing this Lenten Bible Study, I have focussed on two of the biblical texts given to us for each Sunday in the Lectionary (for Year B). These include the Gospel reading and one other – either Old Testament, Psalm or Epistle. Out of these readings, I have drawn some aspect of discipleship for each week. People are invited to consider what the biblical texts have to say to us in our context. The other two readings each week are mentioned as something people can read as follow up as they wish, noting how they link up with the readings considered.

In the studies I have made use of some quotes from well-respected Christians and some stories related to the theme for the particular study, inviting people to reflect on them.

### **The Studies**

The six weeks of Lent will cover the following themes.

1. Jesus' message summarised - Respond to Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God.  
We will consider Psalm 25:1-10 and Mark 1:9-15, a quote from E. Stanley Jones and an Alpha story about Andy Green.
2. What discipleship involves - Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus.  
We will examine Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 and Mark 8:31-38, a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and a story about Bobby Mallory.
3. Jesus cleansing of the temple - Be willing to take prophetic action against what is wrong.  
We will consider Psalm 19 and John 2:13-22, quotes from Martin Luther King Jr. and stories about climate change action.
4. God so loved the world - Believe in Jesus and live for God.  
We will examine Ephesians 2:1-10 and John 3:14-21, a quote from Robert Kysar and stories of two people who used their skills to help disadvantaged people.
5. The hour has come - Be ready for the time of testing.  
We will consider Hebrews 5:5-10 and John 12:20-33, a quote from David Watson and the story of Polycarp's martyrdom in the second century.
6. Into Jerusalem on a donkey - Be a person of peace like Jesus.  
We will examine Philippians 2:5-11 and Mark 11:1-11, quotes about peace and the story of Gordon Wilson.

## Guidelines for group leaders

These studies are best done in groups, though they can be read by individuals. Opportunities are provided for group discussion. People benefit from hearing one another's comments. There is fellowship and sharing in group settings that is enriching. If practiced individually, time should be taken to reflect on the questions.

Leading a group to use these studies requires no special knowledge or skills other than facilitating a group. The material can simply be worked through in the order it appears. The leader could invite different people to read aloud the biblical passages, quotes and stories. When there are questions, adequate time needs to be provided for group discussion. Having said this, not every question needs to be responded to. Focus on what interests the group.

Those present may, if desired, be divided into groups of three or four to respond to the questions after the different Bible readings in order to allow people to contribute to the discussion. Everyone can be encouraged to participate without being required to do so. Two or three significant insights people have found particularly helpful or challenging could be shared with the group in relation to the Bible reading before moving on.

Each member of the group will need a copy of the Bible as well as a copy of this study book. The New Revised Standard Version is recommended as it is a scholarly inclusive language translation, though other standard versions of the Bible are fine also. Participants can be asked to read and reflect on the biblical passages for the week. People might like to jot down some of their thoughts.



Each study should take about 60 - 90 minutes depending on the amount of discussion. When finishing with a prayer, the group may want to add its own prayers. These studies are not just about learning but assisting us to live as followers of Jesus and members of the community of faith.

My prayer is that these studies will stimulate people's thinking and encourage you as you seek to live as disciples of Jesus in your daily lives.

### The Author

Rev Dr Christopher Walker is an ordained minister of the Uniting Church in Australia with a PhD in theology from Claremont University in California. He has served in a range of positions and places in the Uniting Church including local church ministry in NSW, as a synod consultant in Queensland, as principal of the theological college in South Australia, and for the Assembly as national consultant: Christian unity, doctrine and worship. He taught at Murdoch University and served the Western Australia synod for a semester. He is an adjunct lecturer in the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University. He lives in Sydney with his wife Dell. They have two adult children and three grandchildren.

He has written and edited more than a dozen books including: *Peace Like A Diamond, Facets of Peace* (2009), *Being and Doing Church, A Uniting Church Perspective* (2015), *Thinking the Faith, Living the Faith: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (2017), *For Times Such as These, Commending the Faith in Australia Today: Eight Studies* (2018) and *Jesus Still The One, the Christian message for a postmodern world* (2019). Most recently he wrote *The Coming of Jesus Christ - past, present and future: 4 Studies on Hope* (2020) an Advent Bible Study.



## Study 1 **Jesus' message summarised**



Respond to Jesus and his message of the kingdom of God

### **Sharing**

Take some time for introductions. People might like to say briefly who they are, one thing about themselves and why they are undertaking the study.

### **Introduction**

In this first study we will be looking at the beginning of Jesus' activity as recorded by Mark and the summary statement of Jesus' message concerning the kingdom, or reign, of God. We will consider what it means to respond to Jesus and become a disciple.

### **Opening Prayer**

Gracious God, as we commence these studies may your Holy Spirit guide our thinking and discussion. Assist us to grow in our understanding and faith. May we learn more of what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus Christ who gave his all for us. We ask that we may grasp more of the significance of what Jesus did and what it means to live under your rule. This we pray in the name and Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

*Read Psalm 25:1-10*

The psalm begins with affirming trust in God but immediately calls on God's help due to the threat of enemies. The psalmist expresses the desire that God will show him God's ways and teach him God's paths. This teaching is not just a matter of intellectual understanding but in order that the psalmist may live the right way. God's mercy is appealed to, for he is aware of the mistakes of

his youth and current sins. He knows that God is characterised by steadfast love and faithfulness.

### Questions to consider

Why is it important to affirm our trust in God?

What are some of the 'enemies' we face? The temptations to depart from God's ways?

What is the value of actually naming our sins? What does repentance involve?

The psalms often speak of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. What do these words convey to you?

*Read Mark 1:9-15*

Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordon river. The significance of this is expressed by Mark in saying that the heavens were torn open, the Spirit descended like a dove, and a voice from heaven declared Jesus as God's beloved Son. Then Jesus went into the wilderness where he was tempted and stayed forty days, a traditional number for a long time. Matthew and Luke detail the actual temptations that were meant to lead Jesus away from the difficult path God intended him to follow as a suffering servant leader.

In Mark's gospel, the signal, as it were, for Jesus to commence his public ministry, was the arrest of John. Here we are given a summary statement of Jesus' message. The whole gospel of Mark is an expansion of this. It is good news from God. The message focuses on the Kingdom of God. This is Jesus' central concept. It

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