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Welcome!_____

- Are you considering accepting Christ as your Lord and Savior?
- Are you considering becoming members of the faith family we call the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through confession of faith or through transferring membership from another church?
- Do you now want to re-embrace the Christian gospel after having been inactive in your faith for some time?
- Are you currently a member of a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation, but want to know more about what that means?

If so, welcome! This course of study is for you. It is based upon the five-finger exercise developed by Walter Scott, a frontier evangelist for the Disciples. Each family has “sacred stories” that help give the family its identity. The story of Walter Scott is one of our denominational family’s stories. In a biography of Water Scott, we are told that after riding into a village, Scott proceeded to address a group of children. After detailing each of the five fingers, he had them repeat and repeat, “Faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, gifts of the Holy Spirit.” We are told “he continued until they all could repeat it in concert, like a column of multiplication table... He then said: ‘Children, now run home—don’t forget what is on your fingers, and tell your parents that a man will preach the gospel tonight at the schoolhouse, as you have it on the five fingers of your hands.’” Away went the children, repeating gleefully as

they went and soon the story was rehearsed in nearly every house of the village and neighborhood..."¹

There are two basic ways to use this resource. One is to meet in a group, where a leader (usually, but not necessarily, a minister on the church staff) will work with you and others thinking about the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Another is to have a mentoring relationship with another person, such as a minister or an elder, where you will discuss the ideas on a one-to-one basis. In either case, bring your questions, your ideas, and your concerns.

Prepare the Way was put together by a group of pastors in central Kansas, in cooperation with Christian Board of Publication, the publishing house of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

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¹William Baxter, *Life of Elder Walter Scott* (Bosworth, Chase & Hall, 1874), 185.



CHAPTER 1

Let's Get Acquainted

By Jill Kaylor

"Who am I?" It is a question that we ask of ourselves and of others. Often the answers consist of name, family relationships, occupation, place of birth, place of residency, skills, talents, and hobbies. Yet, this question can be much bigger. The answer to "Who am I?" is not simply one of "What do I produce?" or "Who am I in relation to others?" but also a question of "Who am I in relationship to God and as a child of God?" Simply stated, we are asking, "Who am I as a person of faith?"

Throughout the pages of this volume, we will explore our identity as persons of faith and as members (or potential members) of a specific faith community. We will do so acknowledging that "the gospel of Jesus Christ has a personal as well as social dimension. Indeed, our lives as Christians are combinations of individual study and public witness, of individually being the body of Christ, and also being a part of Christ's body. Our faith is always personal, but never private."¹ As we journey together through this membership material and share our lives of faith with each other, we will have a chance to explore both of these dimensions.

While acknowledging that it is likely that we come as individuals from varying backgrounds, we will strive to remain true to the heritage of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in our study. In doing so, several themes will be recurring. In line with the Disciples' long-standing identity as "people of the book," scripture will be the basis for much of our exploration. Likewise, the theme of unity will arise as we discuss the long-standing commitment to strong ecumenical relationships that the Disciples of Christ hold. Thirdly, the structure of our study will follow Walter Scott's "Five Finger Exercise."



Walter Scott, an early Disciple, developed the “Five Finger Exercise” as a means to teach the five dimensions of faith to all people. The five fingers that he taught were: faith, repentance, baptism, forgiveness, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These five fingers were essential for the faith of early Disciples and are essential for us today. As we study these five fingers of faith, we will come to learn more about the ways both we and God are active in our faith journey. For now, remember the five key words. In the pages to follow we will explore in depth what each of these means for our lives.

As we continue on this journey together, it is our hope that each of us will find that we are refreshed and renewed in our faith and strengthened in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Who Am I as a Person of Faith?

- My name is:
- My occupation is:
- I have had experiences with the following congregations/denominations:
- I have chosen to be/not to be involved in church because:
- I am here today because I hope to:
- As you look over these answers, consider your life of faith, both inside and outside of organized religion. Who would you say has had the most influence (either positive or negative) on your faith?
- How has that affected who you consider yourself to be as a person of faith?

Who Are the Disciples of Christ as “People of the Book”?

The church—the body of Christ—is composed of many Christian denominations, offering different interpretations of the Bible and its significance for us today. Some believe it to be the perfectly written (inerrant) word of God. Some believe it to be the story of a people of faith struggling to be faithful and to understand God. Some believe it to be an



Let's Get Acquainted

important book of historical facts. Some believe that the Bible bears witness to theological truths without being historically factual. Yet all traditions claim scripture has some degree of authority and is important in our understanding of the faith.

■ How would you define the significance and authority of the Bible?

■ How does this affect your reading of the scriptures?

This question may provide much discussion within any group of people. Regardless of where each person in your class, family, congregation, or denomination falls on this spectrum, one thing remains for certain. As is stated in 2 Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness." Hear this text: scripture is useful in our lives of faith. The Bible is for us to use!

The members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have long identified themselves as "the people of the book." "Christ remains the 'creed' of the Disciples, yet we need our Bibles to understand that creed. Disciples must undertake Bible study in open dialogue with critical scholarship. Bible study ought not be a spectator sport. Disciples need to open their Bibles together, with spirited curiosity about what God had to say to the ancients and says now to us. Perhaps then we will repeat the experience of the psalmist, echoed by our Disciples founders, who found that scripture "rejoiced the heart and revived the soul."²

■ How much time have you spent in study and dialogue with the scriptural texts?
What kind of a commitment would you be willing to make to do that?

■ What is your favorite Bible passage or story?

Who Am I as I Interact with God through the Scriptures?

As people encouraged to use the Bible, it seems appropriate that we delve into the scripture as we seek to understand our relationship with God our Creator.



In each of the following texts, look for images of identity — how creation is perceived by the Creator and what is anticipated in our relationship with God.

- Genesis 1:26–31
- Psalm 139:1–18
- Jeremiah 1:4–10
- John 3:16–21
- Acts 2:1–4
- 1 Corinthians 12:27–31

■ What do these texts tell us about our identity and relationship with God?

Who Are the Disciples of Christ in Relation to the Ecumenical Movement?

In the 1809 *Declaration and Address*, Thomas Campbell wrote, “That the church upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ.”³ His son, Alexander Campbell, shared that commitment to unity. Indeed, as Barton Stone said, the unity of the body of Christ has been the “polar star” for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

In the last century, Disciples have been instrumental in the formation and activity of the World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches and Council on Christian Unity (COCU). As we remain active in ecumenical efforts, we remember that our quest is “a quest for a unity through common faith in Christ, a unity of humankind, a unity in freedom, a unity that comprehends a vast diversity of beliefs, and a unity that must begin within each human soul.”⁴

■ What value do you find in cooperating with other denominations?

■ Do you believe unity will ever happen? Why or why not?



Let's Get Acquainted

A Final Word

As we discover who we are in relationship to God and as people of faith, we also discover who we are as the church, the one body of Christ. Let us open ourselves to God and each other so that this time of study can be a time of discovery in our journey of faith and that we can go from this place telling the good news.

A Time of Worship

Let us share together the following litany:

Voice 1: We are witnesses and storytellers; we are part of the unfolding tale of faith.

Voice 2: Precious words and sacred memories are carried by every one of us.

Voice 1: If we "Go and tell what we have seen and heard" each one of us can recite a chapter, a verse, a paragraph.

Voice 2: When we risk spinning these yarns, when we listen and speak, when we carefully gather these fragments up,

All: We discover that there is good news all over again!⁵

Prayer

God, you have searched us and you know us. During this journey allow us to open our hearts and minds to you, so that we might see ourselves as you see us. As we seek understanding of our faith, guide us so that we might seek not only to understand but also to live our faith more fully. Help us to find excitement in this journey and unity in our diversity. We pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us how to love more fully, Amen.

¹Neil Engle, "Let's Get Acquainted," *Prepare the Way: Leader's Guide* (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1998), 10.

²Marti Steussy, "Can Disciples remain a 'People of the Book'?" (*The Disciple*), July/August 1998, 11.

³D. Duane Cummins, *A Handbook for Today's Disciples* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1991), 41.

⁴*Ibid.*, 40.

⁵Keri K. Wehlender, *Joy is our Banquet* (Ontario: The United Church Publishing House, 1996), 16.