

**WARM UP**

1. Describe a time when you named someone (child) or something (pet, car, toy) and share why you chose that name.
2. What was/is one of your nicknames, and how did you get it?
3. Can you explain how you were before and after a change that took place in your life? Please include what provoked the change.

**WORD – Learning to Love Our Names in Jesus**

2 Corinthians 5:17

NLT: "... anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!"

ESV: "... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

In the Apostle Paul's letter to the first century church from the town of Ephesus, he used the phrase "in Christ," "in him," or an equivalent phrase 27 times. This phrase refers to the intimate vital union through faith between Jesus and his people.<sup>1</sup> His people are described by many words—or names—in the New Testament, all of which still stand true for His people today. As we learn about these descriptors, we can hold great hope while we grow closer to God through union with Christ.

In today's lesson, we will briefly explore seven of the words used to describe followers of Jesus: Christian, disciples, believers, saints, servants, sons (heirs) of God, and witnesses.

**1) Christian (Greek: *christianos*)**

"It was at Antioch that the believers were first called **Christians**." - Acts 11:26 (NLT)

While today this is a wide spread term referring to the largest world religion, when it was first used, it was used as a derogatory nickname—a put-down. But, the Christians turned it positive and wore it as a badge of honour. Christian means "little Christ", and Christ comes from the Greek word for Messiah or anointed one. We are 'little' carriers and couriers of Jesus's anointing to the people and places around us because of the Holy Spirit who lives within us (John 14:15-17; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

**2) Disciples (Greek: *mathetes*)**

"On the first day of the week, the **disciples** came together to break bread..." Acts 20:7

A disciple is a pupil—someone who learns from their teacher. In Hebrew culture a disciple of a Rabbi wanted to do everything their teacher did and know all that they could teach them. While both little girls and boys were taught the scriptures through the daily Jewish family life and gatherings at the synagogue or temple, only boys were selected to become a 'disciple.' Jesus was revolutionary when he allowed women to travel with him as he taught and ministered (Luke 8:1-3); he spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well

<sup>1</sup> Paraphrased from *The Pulpit Commentary* quote from <http://www.bibletruths.net/Archives/BTARO90.htm>

teaching her about the Messiah and revealing himself to be the awaited Messiah. Just like in the first century, today both men and women can learn from Jesus—be his disciple.

### 3) Believers (Greek: *pisteuo*)

“More than ever **believers** were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women.” – Acts 5:14 (NIV)

The Greek word used for “believer” comes from the word faith (*pistis*). Christians are a people who have faith in the person and power of their God and seek to exercise it. There is a distinction between those who believe something to be true and others who live out their faith. Jesus’s half-brother James wrote: “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder” (James 2:19). While demons believe in God, they do not obey God. Us as believers, exercise the faith we possess; it impacts the way we live and interact with others, being living examples of Jesus today.

### 4) Saints or Holy (Greek: *hagios*)

Colossians 1:2

(ESV) To the **saints** and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

(NLT) We are writing to **God’s holy people** in the city of Colosse, who are faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. May God our Father give you grace and peace.

The English words “saints” and “holy” both come from the same Greek word meaning sacred, consecrated, and ceremonially pure. Because we are in Christ, we have been made holy and called saints based on what Jesus has done. As a result of being given this new, undeserved holy status by God, we can draw closer and closer to Him—being with Him and having his Holy Spirit fill every part of our being and life. Such holiness leads us to willingly be God’s:

### 5) Servants (Greek: *doulos*)

“But now you are free from the power of sin and have become **slaves (servants)** of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life.” - Romans 6:22

Because Jesus frees us from the power of sin we give ourselves wholly to God’s service, choosing to bond ourselves to and be dependent on Him to see His plans and purposes prevail. Simultaneously, we are children of God who are reconciled to Him through Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

### 6) Sons (legal heirs) of God (Greek: *teknon* → *uihos*)

“Dear friends, we are already God’s **children [teknon]**, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.” 1 John 3:2

So you are no longer a slave [*doulos*], but a **son [uihos]**, and if a **son [uihos]**, then an heir through God.” Galatians 4:7

In God’s timing, we mature in our relationship with Him and grow from thinking of ourselves like “little children” who have rights similar to that of bondservants, into full heirs who can receive our portion of inheritance. Whether we are literally a son or daughter, all God’s children can mature into son-ship—ownership; being a legal heir—ready to be the next steward of what God entrusts to our care on His behalf.

The final word we will explore is:

### 7) Witnesses (Greek: *martus*)

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my **witnesses**, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” – Acts 1:8

The original Greek word *martus* means: “One who has information or knowledge of something, and hence, one who can give information, bring light, or confirm something.”<sup>2</sup> We have and can share what we know and believe about Jesus, confirming we’ve been with Him.

In Ancient Hebrew culture, to know the name of something or someone was to know the nature of that thing or person. If we are “in Christ” today, these seven ‘names’ speak to the nature God bestows on us: little anointed ones, who learn from Jesus, have faith in God, are holy, voluntary servants with a son-ship level of inheritance, all fuelled by the Holy Spirit who emboldens us to be truthful witnesses of what Jesus has done.

### APPLICATION

1. What’s something you learned from today’s lesson?
2. Which of the seven words that describe followers of Jesus do you relate to the most, and why?
3. Considering the Hebrew thought: “If you know the name of something, then you know it’s nature,” which of the seven names (words) describe the nature you hear God whispering to you that He wants to grow in you? *(Note to leader: feel free to lead the group into a few silent moments to give God space to speak to everyone.)*

### PRAYER

1. Jesus, confirm and affirm our identity in You. Grow our faith to become a more solid believer, letting what we believe impact how we live.
2. Stir us to hope afresh, Lord. Holy Spirit, bring a greater awareness of your activity in our lives. Make us more sensitive to where you are moving and what you are saying, so we can readily follow your lead.
3. Father, we invite you to still our inner world. Enable each of us to enjoy being with You without the need to fill our time together with constant activity or sound. Grow our ability to “be still and know that you are God,”<sup>3</sup> trusting in all you’ve done, will do, and the truth of what you say about us as followers of Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> “G3144 *martus*,” *The Complete Word Study Dictionary*, 1992. AMG International Inc: Chattanooga.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 46:10