



VOLUME **1**

GROWING in **Jesus**

Becoming More Like Jesus by Studying His Life



*The greatest power in the universe
to draw people to Jesus
is an understanding of His love
as revealed in His life.*

—p. 11

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Mark and Ernestine Finley

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INTRODUCTION

Becoming More Like Jesus by Studying His Life

Volume 1 of *Growing in Jesus* contains a series of interactive, inspirational lessons on the life of Christ. The chapters cover Christ's birth, ministry, death, resurrection, high priestly intercession, and second coming. In this series, Jesus is exalted as our all-powerful Creator, loving Redeemer, interceding High Priest, and coming King.

The chapters are intentionally designed to lead each participant into a deeper relationship and closer fellowship with Jesus. While the Bible is primary throughout the lessons, the modern gift of prophecy, as manifested in the writings of Ellen White, gives added insight into each subject. These prophetic revelations provide a depth of understanding, a richness of meaning, and a broad comprehension of the life of Christ.

Studying His life, we are charmed by His love, moved to our core by His sacrifice, and motivated by His example to totally commit our lives to His service.

This may be used as a midweek Bible-study series in local congregations, as a pastor's Sabbath-morning Bible class, or a follow-up seminar to evangelistic meetings. It can also easily be used in individual Bible studies or small home groups. Many pastors will find it helpful in anchoring recently baptized converts in their newfound faith.

Jesus promised, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32).

The reason we have written these lessons is that we profoundly believe Jesus' words. The greatest power in the universe to draw people to Jesus is an understanding of His love as revealed in His life. It is our prayer that as you study these lessons, reflect on His life, and understand more completely His love, you will be amazed by a new appreciation of His character and be drawn to Him in new, remarkable ways.

May your life be forever changed as you study these pages.
Mark and Ernestine Finley



LESSON

1

Jesus: The Eternal, Everlasting God

Jesus has become quite popular these days. Country-and-western stars sing about Him. Popular news magazines feature Him. Victorious athletic teams celebrate Him. Politicians openly confess Him. Hollywood blockbuster movies acclaim Him. Thousands are seeking to discover Him. Religious leaders invite us to follow Him.

- But who is He? Who is this Jesus? Is He worthy of our allegiance?
- Can He really forgive our sins?
- Can He give us victory over undesirable habits?
- Can He change our lives for the better?
- Is His offer of eternal life real?

Throughout this book, you will discover Jesus, who loves you more than you can ever imagine and who has plans for your life beyond your wildest dreams. In following Him, you will find the secret of life's true meaning. If you are already a committed follower of Jesus, this book of lessons will lead you to a deeper experience with Him.

As you study His life, you will sense yourself drawing closer to Him. A new peace will flood your soul; a new joy will fill your life; a new sense of purpose will be yours. Knowing Him better, you will uncover the secret of really living. In this first lesson, "Jesus: The Eternal, Everlasting God," you will discover who Jesus really is.

Jesus declares Himself to be eternal

QUESTION 1 Who is Jesus? Who does He declare Himself to be?

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." . . .

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea" (Revelation 1:8, 11).

When John the revelator was an exile on the Isle of Patmos, Jesus reassured him that He is the “Beginning and the End,” “the First and the Last.” Jesus truly is from everlasting to everlasting. Although this is difficult to comprehend, the good news is, it’s true!

In verses 8 and 11, Jesus emphatically declares that He is “the *Alpha* and the *Omega*,” “the *Beginning* and the *End*,” “the *First* and the *Last*.” Jesus had no beginning and will have no end. Jesus Himself says He is the One “*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*” (emphasis added).

Jesus reveals His divinity

The author of Hebrews tells us that the clearest way that God reveals His character to a fallen planet is through His Son, Jesus. Carefully notice seven significant characteristics of Jesus in the following passage.

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they (Hebrews 1:1–4).

- Jesus is *God’s channel of communication* (verse 2).
- Jesus is the “*heir of all things*” (verse 2).
- Jesus is the *Creator* (verse 2).
- Jesus is the “*brightness of [God’s] glory*” (verse 3).

- Jesus is the “*express image*” of God (verse 3).
- Jesus is the *Sustainer of the universe* (verse 3).
- Jesus is the *great Redeemer* (verse 3).

Of the many titles that the prophet Isaiah gives to Jesus, two reveal His divinity:

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His
shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”
(Isaiah 9:6).

He is called the “Mighty God” and the “Everlasting Father.”

Jesus, the One who was with God the Father and stood in the councils of the Most High, was the greatest and most wonderful gift that Heaven could give to save humanity. He reveals what God is like, “In the Teacher sent from God, heaven gave to men its best and greatest. He who had stood in the councils of the Most High, who had dwelt in the innermost sanctuary of the Eternal, was the One chosen to reveal in person to humanity the knowledge of God.”¹

The Father addresses Jesus as God in Hebrews 1:8.

But to the Son He says:
“Your throne, O God, is forever and
ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the
scepter of Your kingdom.”

Throughout the New Testament, multiple sources reveal that Jesus is the divine Son of God.

The Bible gives evidence of the divinity of Christ:

- The *Father* declares Him to be God—Hebrews 1:8.
- *Jesus* declares Himself to be God—John 8:58.
- The *angels* declare Him to be God—Luke 2:9–14.
- The *prophets* declare Him to be God—Matthew 1:22, 23; 8:17.
- The *disciples* declare Him to be God—John 20:28; Matthew 16:16.
- The *Jews* declare Him to be God—John 10:33; Luke 5:20, 21.
- The *Roman centurion* declares Him to be God—Matthew 27:54.
- The *demons* declare Him to be God—Mark 5:2–7.

Jesus always existed

Jesus existed from everlasting to everlasting. Throughout all eternity, Jesus was one with the Father. Jesus declared it in His prayer to the Father (John 17:11). And earlier in His ministry, when some Jews challenged Jesus' identity, Jesus declared it in no uncertain terms (John 8:58). John also says that Jesus was with the Father from everlasting to everlasting before the world was created (John 1:1–5). The fact that Jesus always existed is abundantly plain. Whether one believes that Jesus always existed or not, it is still true. All the evidence points to the fact that Jesus is eternal!

Micah, the prophet, recorded God saying that Jesus, the One born in Bethlehem, existed from eternity:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands
of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth are from old,
From everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Jesus existed with the Father before the world was created. John records Jesus' prayer: "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). Ellen G. White declares, "The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father."²

She adds, "The Son of God shared the Father's throne, and the glory of the eternal, *self-existent One* encircled both."³ "Self-existent" describes a nature that is not dependent on anything other than itself for its own existence. Christ is eternal and not dependent on any other being in the universe as the source of His life. "Christ was the Son of God; He had been one with Him before the angels were called into existence. He had *ever* stood at the right hand of the Father."⁴ Furthermore, "in speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there *never was a time*

when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He . . . had been with God as one brought up with Him."⁵

The Father establishes the eternal nature of Christ by describing Their cooperation in the creation of this world. The author of Hebrews testifies,

"You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
They will perish, but You remain;
And they will all grow old like a garment;
Like a cloak You will fold them up,
And they will be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will not fail" (Hebrews 1:10–12).

Also, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

Jesus is God with us

QUESTION 2 What name is given to Jesus in Matthew's Gospel? What does it mean?

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23).

The amazing fact is that Jesus, the everlasting Creator, loves us so much. He cares for us. He longs for us to be with Him where He is. He knows what we face every day and is there to help and guide us. What a God. What a Savior. What a Friend!

Writing about Christ's title Immanuel,

Ellen G. White states, "From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was 'the image of God,' the image of His greatness and majesty, 'the outshining of His glory.' It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God's

love,—to be ‘God with us.’ Therefore it was prophesied of Him, ‘His name shall be called Immanuel.’ ”⁶

There is nothing that parallels this love. His love is shown to us through every doctrine of Scripture. Jesus is love and the Center of every doctrine! The teachings of the Bible are not arbitrary legalistic requirements—they are at the center of God’s great unending love.

In truth, “since Jesus came to dwell with us, we know that God is acquainted with our trials, and sympathizes with our griefs. Every son and daughter of Adam may understand that our Creator is the friend of sinners. For in every doctrine of grace, every promise of joy, every deed of love, every divine attraction presented in the Saviour’s life on earth, we see ‘God with us.’ ”⁷

Jesus, the Firstborn of all creation

QUESTION 3 How is Jesus described in Colossians 1:15–17?

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Colossians 1:15–17).

What does it mean that Jesus was the “firstborn” of all creation? “Firstborn” refers to one who has the privileges and prerogatives of God. Jesus is firstborn in the sense of privilege, *not* in the sense of time. All the privileges of the firstborn are His.

David was the eighth son of Jesse, yet called the firstborn (Psalm 89:27). Jesus declared that He was the “I AM,” meaning the self-existent One: “before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). The name “I AM” is the name God used to identify Himself to Moses (Exodus 3:14). Commenting on John 8, *The Desire of Ages* states, “The name of God, given to Moses to express the idea of the eternal presence, had been claimed as His own by this Galilean Rabbi. He had announced Himself to be the self-existent One, He who had been

promised to Israel, ‘whose goings forth have been from of old, from the days of eternity’ Micah 5:2.”⁸

Isaiah the prophet calls Him the “everlasting Father” (see Isaiah 9:6). In calling Jesus the “Everlasting Father,” Isaiah ties Jesus to the name *Jehovah*. Ellen White further explains the significance of this name: “Jehovah, the eternal, self-existent, *uncreated One*, Himself the Source and Sustainer of all, is alone entitled to supreme reverence and worship.”⁹ She also writes, “Jehovah is the name given to Christ. ‘Behold, God is my salvation,’ writes the prophet Isaiah; ‘I will trust, and not be afraid; for the Lord JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; He also is become my salvation.’ . . . ‘Trust ye in the Lord forever; for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.’ ”¹⁰



Jesus truly is from everlasting to everlasting.

Jesus' relationship with the Father

QUESTION 4 How did Jesus describe His relationship with the Father?

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9).

From the days of eternity, the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father and was the image of God. John says,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the

beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. . . .

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and

truth (John 1:1–3, 14).

The following statements from Ellen White confirm the fact that Jesus Christ existed with the Father from all eternity. “Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father—one in nature, in character, in purpose—the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God.”¹¹

“From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and

majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world.”¹²

“From all eternity Christ was united with the Father, and when He took upon Himself human nature, He was still one with God.”¹³ “In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.”¹⁴

Jesus’ character

QUESTION 5 What does John reveal Jesus’ character is really like?

“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. . . .

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:9, 13).

Jesus, provides us a picture of the Father’s character, and the Bible declares that God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is love (1 John 4:8). The very character of God is love. His law is love. “Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, ‘Love one another, as I have loved you’ (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts.”¹⁵

Jesus came to reveal what God is like. The Savior’s life of sacrificial, unselfish ministry paints a picture of a God whose love for us can

never be exhausted. The following statement summarizes the practical ways Jesus treated people:

Jesus did not suppress one word of truth, but He uttered it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact and thoughtful, kind attention in His relationships with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. . . . In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save.

Such is the character of Christ as revealed in His life.¹⁶

Jesus was tenderhearted, loving, and kind to everyone He came in contact with—what

an example for us! To be like Jesus is the longing of my heart!

Jesus, our Creator and Friend

QUESTION 6 What does the eternal, all-powerful, loving Christ call us?

“No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

What a privilege! The Divine Son of God calls us His friends. His greatest joy will be to introduce us as His friends to His Father one day soon.

How wonderful that our Creator calls us His friends. Truly, He created us for Himself, “for by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). Through Creation, Jesus has revealed His eternal, almighty power.

- Jesus is eternal.
- Jesus is all-powerful.
- Jesus reflects the loving character of God.
- Jesus is the Creator.
- Jesus is our Friend.

Jesus is our best Friend. Being a friend of Jesus brings contentment, inner peace, and joy that the world does not know. Although we are social beings and our earthly friends provide us with much of life’s joy, Jesus, our best Friend, provides us a depth of happiness beyond comparison. We never need to feel alone. We have a wonderful friend in Jesus.

The following statement from Ellen White is so encouraging: “Your only safety and happiness are in making Christ your constant counselor. You can be happy in Him if you had not another friend in the wide world. . . . Your heavenly Father means to teach you to find in Him the friendship and love and consolation that will satisfy your most earnest hopes and desires.”¹⁷

I love the old song written in 1855 by John M. Scriven, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” Each phrase speaks of the depth of Jesus’ friendship.

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear;
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge,

Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.¹⁸

Jesus' greatest desire

QUESTION **7** What is Jesus Christ's greatest desire?

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

As we meditate upon the life of Christ, we discover what God is really like. Jesus' great longing is for us to know the Father as He knows the Father and that we love His Father as He loves His Father.

Would you like to open your heart to a new or possibly renewed relationship with Jesus? Would you like to say, “Yes, Jesus, I believe You are the eternal, everlasting Christ, and I choose to be Your friend forever”? If so, check the box below:

I choose to be Jesus' friend forever.

The next lesson will unfold the greatest drama in the universe, enabling us to more fully understand the great controversy between Christ and Satan—a titanic struggle between good and evil. The origin of sin and the reason for its existence is very perplexing to many people. In our next lesson, we will discover what is really behind the pain and suffering in the universe and what a loving God is doing about it.

Although it is not possible to explain the origin of sin and give a reason for its existence, we can still understand the justice and mercy of God in all His dealings with evil. The Scriptures plainly teach that God was in no way responsible for the entrance of sin. Sin is a mysterious intruder. But there is hope for this sinful world. Let's learn about it!

1. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press®, 1952), 73.
2. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1958), 247.
3. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005), 36; emphasis added.
4. White, 38; emphasis added.
5. Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1946), 615; emphasis added.
6. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2005), 19.
7. White, 24.
8. White, 469, 470.

9. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 305; emphasis added.
10. Ellen G. White, "The Word Made Flesh," *Signs of the Times*, May 3, 1899, 2.
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