

Studies for families in Belonging, Becoming, and going Beyond

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### exploreGOD

"IS JESUS REALLY GOD?"
MATTHEW 16:13-20

#### This Week's Core Competency

**Trinity** – I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God–Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 13:13-14, May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

In the words of one author, "The doctrine of the Trinity is a uniquely Christian doctrine . . . Christianity insists that only one God exists, but it is just as emphatic in maintaining that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all are God . . . God is one as to essence and three as to persons" (John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him*, 437). And while the Scripture nowhere makes that last statement about God, Christians believe it's a logically warranted inference from what Scripture does say about him. What it says can be expressed in the following seven statements: 1) the Father is God, 2) the Son is God, 3) the Holy Spirit is God, 4) the Father is not the Son, 5) the Father is not the Holy Spirit, 6) the Son is not the Holy Spirit, 7) there is exactly one God.

The inference begins with and is based first and foremost on what Scripture says about Jesus Christ. If Jesus Christ is God, and if God the Father and Jesus Christ are distinct persons, then the Old Testament declaration, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one," must be explained. In other words, the deity of Christ makes the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity inevitable. One writer puts it this way:

The doctrine of the Trinity is inferred from things that Scripture teaches without actually being stated anywhere in Scripture.

- John S. Feinberg

"The Trinitarian doctrine simply states explicitly what is implicit already in God's revelation in Jesus Christ and basically in Jesus' historical relationship to the Father whom he proclaimed to be the one God. If Jesus' relationship to the Father could be adequately described and accounted for in other terms than those of Trinitarian doctrine, the case tor that doctrine would be lost. It can only be defended if the Trinitarian concept of God can be shown to be the only adequate and fully explicit expression of the reality of God revealed in Jesus Christ" (Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Christian View of God," cited by Feinberg, 440).

The New Testament clearly teaches that Jesus Christ is God (see Feinberg, 458-64). The evidence is overwhelming. For example, in John's Gospel Jesus, in effect, claims to be God. In John 5 after Jesus healed the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years, the Jews "persecuted him" (v. 16) for violating the Sabbath. Jesus made matters worse by saying, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I. too, am working" (v. 17), because the Jews concluded he was "making himself equal with God" by "calling God his own Father" (v. 18). Imagine what they thought when he went on to say: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (vv. 21-22). In John 10 Jesus calls himself "the good shepherd" (v. 11), and then toward the end of the chapter says: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one" (vv. 27-30). At that point recognizing

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the implication of his words, the Jews picked up stones to stone him. "We are not stoning you for any of these [miracles]," they said, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God" (v. 33). Jesus answered their accusation but not by denying it. They understood exactly his claim.

Then, of course, there are the direct affirmations of his deity. In Philippians 2:6, Paul says that Jesus existed in the form of God prior to the incarnation. The phrase "form of God" [morphe theou] refers to the divine nature; Paul is saying that Jesus is God. Then he adds that Jesus "did not consider equality with God something to be grasped" no matter what, "but made himself nothing" (v. 7). Feinberg explains, "He didn't get rid of his divine nature, but he set aside some of the privileges that come with it by taking on the form of a bondservant and by being made in the likeness of men" (459). In Colossians 1, the apostle says Jesus "is the image of the invisible God" (v. 15). The word translated image [eikon] means "representation" or "likeness" suggesting that Jesus is a "carbon copy" of God. And in Colossians 2, he says in Jesus "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (v. 9). It's hard to imagine that Paul thinks of Jesus as anything less than God. And then there's Hebrews 1:3: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." On the meaning of "exact representation" one commentator explains: "Just as the image and superscription on a coin exactly correspond to the device on the die, so the Son of God 'bears the very stamp of his nature' (RSV). The Greek word charackter, occurring here only in the New Testament, expresses this truth even more emphatically than eikon, which is used elsewhere to denote Christ as the 'image' of God (II Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15). Just as the glory is really in the effulgence, so the substance (Gk. hypostasis) of God is really in Christ, who is its impress, its exact representation and embodiment. What God essentially is, is made manifest in Christ. To see Christ is to see what the Father is like" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle* to the Hebrews, NICNT, 6). If the New Testament writers did not believe that Jesus was God, they had a strange way of expressing it, and these examples merely scratch the surface of the New Testament's testimony to the deity of Jesus Christ.

The New Testament also clearly teaches that God the Father and Jesus Christ are distinct persons. One way to resolve the apparent inconsistency of God being one and yet three is to claim that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but just three names that bespeak of three roles God plays in the world. But the evidence to the contrary is, again, overwhelming. Take the evidence from Jesus' baptism, for example. Matthew 3:16-17 says, "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Sprit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." If the Father, Son, and Spirit are not distinct persons, this is, in Feinberg's words, "quite a feat of ventriloquism and optical illusion! And it isn't clear, then, whether it is the voice from heaven, the dove, or Jesus performing these feats. The most sensible way to understand this incident is that the three are distinct persons" (Feinberg, 466). What's more, consider what Jesus tells his disciples in John 14 and 15 after telling them, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer" (13:33): "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor to be with your forever (14:16) . . . the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name (v. 26) . . . When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me" (15:26). It makes no sense for Jesus to promise another Counselor unless Jesus, the Father, and the Spirit are distinct persons.

If Jesus Christ is God and he is, and if God the Father and Jesus Christ are distinct persons and they are, then the Old Testament declaration, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one," must be explained. Since the same can be said regarding the Holy Spirit, it must be explained in trinitarian terms.



# **ENCOUNTER** – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

#### Matthew 16:13-20

13 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

14 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

15 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. 18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." 20 Then he warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ.

### **EXAMINE** – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Underline "Son of Man" in v. 13.
- \* Highlight the questions Jesus asked in vv. 13, 15.
- \* Circle the "they" in v. 14 and "you" in v. 15.
- \* Bracket key OT figures mentioned in v. 14.
- \* Box the word "but" indicating contrast in vv. 15, 17.
- \* Highlight Peter's answer in v. 16 in a different color.
- \* Underline "blessed" in v. 17.
- \* Box the word "for" indicating reason in v. 17.
- \* Underline "gates of Hades" in v. 18.
- \* Underline "keys of the kingdom" in v. 19.



# **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the ne	notes to follow if v	<i>r</i> ou need help.
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- 1. Why do you think Jesus asked the question in verse 13? Did he not know who people thought he was?
- 2. What do you infer about Jesus from what people said about him?
- 3. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 15.
- 4. "Christ" wasn't Jesus' last name, i.e., Jesus Christ. So when Peter answered "You are the Christ," what did he mean?
- 5. And when he added, "the Son of the living God," what did he mean?
- 6. In what sense was Peter blessed?
- 7. If Peter is "this rock," in what way did Christ build his church on Peter? (See Eph 2:20; cf. Ac 2-5; 10-12).
- 8. Read Acts 10:1-11:18. Use this passage to explain Peter's use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.
- 9. What in the world might "binding" and "loosing" refer to?
- 10. **Discussion:** Talk about why Jesus wouldn't want his disciples to tell everyone that he was the Christ.



# **EXAMINE** – an explanation of its message to clarify your understanding of the passage.

This week's passage is about two things: it's about who Jesus is and it's about who Peter is. One writer puts it this way: "Once Peter makes his grand confession about Jesus, Jesus in turn makes a grand pronouncement about Peter" (Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*, 560).

The passage opens with a question. Jesus asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" He wasn't asking for information; he was well aware of what people said about him. He was setting the stage for a more important question. "But what about you? Who do you say I am?" People speculated that Jesus was a prophet-John the Baptist or Elijah, maybe Jeremiah or some other prophet. Clearly they had a high regard for Jesus. You see, people were on the lookout for a prophet to arise before messiah appeared. This expectation is based on a number of Old Testament passages. Moses taught that God would raise up a prophet like himself. "You must listen to him," Moses said (Dt 18:15-18). Malachi prophesied that Elijah would appear before the day of the LORD. "He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their child, and the hearts of the children to their fathers," Malachi said. And this expectation lingered after the close of the Old Testament. The writer of the apocryphal book 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) predicted that God would send Isaiah and Jeremiah to help his people (2:18). Did the disciples' understanding of who Jesus was rise above such everyday speculation? That was the question.

Peter's confession proved that it did. He spoke for them all when he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." On the significance of "Son of the living God," one commentator writes: "This is a more definite identification of Jesus as deity than 'God's Son or 'a son of God' (14:33). Those title forms leave a question open about the sense in which Jesus was God's Son. The Jews often described their God as the living God, the contrast being with dead idols. By referring to God in this way, Peter left no doubt about

which 'God' was the Father of Jesus. He was the one true God. Since Jesus was the Son of God, He was the Messiah, the King over the long anticipated earthly kingdom (cf. 2 Sam. 7:14; Isa. 9:6; Jer. 23:5-6; Mic. 5:2). Peter expressed belief that Jesus was both Messiah and God. Jesus had just referred to Himself as the 'Son of Man' (v. 13), but Peter viewed Him as the 'Son of God'" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Matthew," 2015 ed., 265, www.soniclight.com). How did Peter know that? Did he simply figure it out? No, he didn't come to that conclusion on his own. Jesus said he was "blessed" in that the Father in heaven had "revealed" it to him. In other words, Peter was "someone whom God had singularly favored and who, therefore, enjoyed happiness (cf. 5:3-11)" (266).

Then Jesus went on to say that he would build his church, and it would prevail over "the gates of Hades." "As Jesus looks down the long corridor of history and even at the corridor that leads him to the cross, he gives an absolute promise that his church will endure to the end of the age" (Wilkins, 565). Whether he means that Hades cannot conquer the church or that it cannot resist the church's advances is a debated one, but in the end it matters little. In either case the church prevails over death and Satan. What's more, Jesus said that Peter had a special role to play in the building of the church. Jesus would build it on the foundation laid by Peter. "Jesus will build his church, but it will come about through the foundational activity of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). Peter will be the leader among the apostles, but once he has fulfilled that role, he will pass off the scene" (565), which is exactly what we see happen in Acts 1-12. Peter is prominent in the opening chapters of the book; Paul is prominent in the closing chapters. And in the process Peter opens the door of the kingdom to the Jews on Pentecost (Acts 2), to the Samaritans (Acts 8), and finally to the Gentiles (Acts 10), announcing that the sins of those who believe in Jesus are forgiven.

### The Message of the Passage

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, who promised to build his church and vowed it would prevail over the gates of Hades.



## **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you through his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on the first two "living questions" below to apply what you have learned this week.

• Journal your answers to the following living questions:	
-How is God making himself known to you?	
-How does God want to change you?	
How is Cod calling you to shape your would?	
-How is God calling you to change your world?	

"Is Jesus Really God?" (Use the space below for Sunday's message notes)

# **STUDY** – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 13 Caesarea Philippi A predominately Gentile area, 25 miles north-northeast of the Sea of Galilee. "Caesarea Philippi was an important Greco-Roman city, whose population was primarily pagan Syrian and Greek. This region, long a bastion of pagan worship to Baal, then to the Greek god Pan, and then to Caesar, becomes the site where Jesus calls for a decision about his own identity. It is here that the Father reveals to Peter that Jesus is truly the prophesied Messiah" (Wilkins, 557).
- v. 13 Son of Man The expression is used more than ninety times in Ezekiel to refer to the prophet to connote his humanity. But it is also used in Daniel to refer to the apocalyptic messianic figure who rules forever with the Ancient of Days to connote his Sovereignty (7:13, 14). It was used with the second connotation in Jesus' day but not widely (see 1 Enoch 62:5-7). "With such an ambiguity, it was for Jesus a convenient vehicle to convey his messianic identity. It did not have popular associations attached to it, such as were attached to titles like 'Messiah,' 'Son of David,' or even 'Son of God.' Instead he could teach the true meaning of his identity by referring to himself as 'the Son of Man,' which is indeed Jesus' favorite self-designation" (348).
- v. 14 **John . . .** The opinions reflect Jesus' popularity. "The crowds view him as some kind of spokesman for God. The equation with John the Baptist recalls Herod's fears in 14:2 and suggests that others shared these sentiments. Elijah represents the messianic forerunner of Old Testament prophecy. Many had obviously not made the link between Elijah and John the Baptist. It would be natural to think of Jesus also as a kind of Jeremiah, a preacher of judgment and repentance who was widely rejected by the leaders of his nation. Some may have even speculated that Jesus was a literally resurrected Jeremiah, in light of certain Jewish expectation to that effect (cf. 2 Esdr 2:16-18 and 2 Macc 15:12-16)" (Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, NAC, 250).
- "Prior to this, the expression 'Christ' has occurred only in Matthew's narrative; now it is used for the first time by a person to address Jesus directly. 'Christ' is a title, the transliteration of the Greek term Christos, which is the translation of the Hebrew term for 'anointed.' 'Anointed one' came to be linked in the Jewish mind to David as the anointed king of Israel, with the promise of an 'anointed one' who would be the light of hope for the people of Israel . . . . By the time of the first century, the term Messiah or Christ denoted a kingly figure who, like David, would triumph in the last days over Israel's enemies" (Wilkins, 559).
- v. 16 Son of God "Peter immediately adds the title 'Son of God' as in 14:33, where all the disciples had acclaimed Jesus with this form of address. Apparently, Peter now has a deeper appreciation for Jesus' unique relationship with the Father" (Blomberg, 251).
- v. 17 blessed To be blessed is to be on the receiving end of God's favor—to be benefited by him. v. 18 this rock The meaning of verse 18 is much debated-primarily among Protestants in reaction to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. Three interpretations are possible: 1) "this rock" refers to Peter, 2) "this rock" refers to Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," 3) "this rock" refers to Christ. Even if "this rock" refers to Peter, this warrants neither the conclusion that he was the first pope nor the elaborate ecclesiology the Catholic Church has built on it. "Jesus never treated Peter as though he occupied a favored position in the church because he made this confession" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Matthew," 2015 ed., 267, www.soniclight.com). The fact that two different Greek words [petros and petra] are used is inconclusive. "Grammar requires this variation because the ending of petra ('rock') is feminine and could not be used for a man's name. The underlying Aramaic would have used kepha in both instances" (Blomberg, 252).
- v. 18 gates of Hades Hades may connote the grave (cf. Heb. Sheol) or Satan's domain; in the first case it refers to the power of death and in the second the power of Satan. What's more, "gates are naturally seen as defensive protection, while 'overcome' suggests an army on the offense. Is Jesus saying that Hades cannot conquer the church or that it cannot resist the church's advances? Is Satan on the defense or offense here? The latter seems more likely" (Blomberg, 253).
- v. 19 keys "One should pursue the imagery of keys that close and open, lock and unlock (based on Isa 22:22) and take the binding and loosing as referring to Christians' making entrance to God's kingdom available or unavailable to people through their witness, preaching, and ministry . . . . Illustrations of Peter's privilege may then be found throughout Acts 1-12, in which Peter remains at the forefront of leadership in the early Christian proclamation of the gospel" (255).
- v. 19 kingdom of heaven "Church" is neither synonymous with "kingdom of heaven" nor unrelated to it. The church is present; the kingdom is future-certainly in its consummation. Yet the kingdom is also present in some sense (cf., Mt 13:1-53). (For a survey of views on the kingdom of God in Dispensationalism, see Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, Progressive Dispensationalism, 39-56; on the presence of the kingdom see, 251-62).



Connect the **FAMILY**. Kids Kindergarten thru 6th grade receive Kid Pix tokens for discipleship activities completed during the week.

#### **Family Talk**

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Your children will face those who say that Jesus never really lived or that He wasn't really God. You can help prepare them for this by making sure their faith in Him is solidly grounded. For eyewitness accounts, see passages like Acts 2:22, 24, 32, 36 and 2 Peter 1:16. The Bible is our main source for information about Jesus. Is the Bible accurate? It's been shown to tell the truth about so much else that you can be confident it tells the truth about Jesus. Extra-biblical sources: The Bible isn't the only book that mentions Jesus. Others who wrote not long after He lived show that He was a real, historical person. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian who lived around A.D. 70, mentioned Jesus, saying that He was condemned to death by Pilate and then appeared alive again on the third day. Jesus claimed He was God. As C. S. Lewis wrote, there are only three things you can believe about Jesus' claim: He was either Lord, a liar or a lunatic. His teachings on other topics and the wisdom he displayed proved he neither lied nor was He crazy. Jesus fulfilled over 60 major Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah! For instance, Micah 5:2 predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem; Genesis 49:10 foresaw that He would be from the tribe of Judah; Psalm 16:10 hinted that He would be raised from the dead. Helping your kids understand the truth about who Jesus is will be foundational to their relationship with Him.

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Mt 16:13-20

- 1. What question did Jesus ask the disciples?
- 2. What was their answer?
- 3. How did Peter describe Jesus?

#### What Do You Think

- What would you say if someone asked you who Jesus is?
- 2. How would you describe your relationship with him?

#### What R U Going To Do

The Bible describes Jesus in many ways. Look up these passages and list the ways He is described. John 8:12; 6:35; 10:11; 14:6; 11:25

#### Core Comp

Trinity - I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

#### Memory Verse

Psalm 145:3 - Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.

KIDPIX COUPON					
I memorized my verse	, completed Scrolls	, brought Bible _	, brought a friend		
Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.					
Child's name	Grade	Parent's signature			
Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.  Questions: Kids@pantego.org					

# CORE COMPETENCIES

### **10 CORE BELIEFS**

**Trinity** 2 Corinthians 13:14 I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians* 2:8-9 I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

**Authority of the Bible** 2 *Timothy* 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2 I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

**Identity in Christ** John 1:12 I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

**Church** *Ephesians* 4:15-16 I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

**Humanity** *John 3:16* I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior. Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need. Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

**Stewardship** 1 Timothy 6:17-19 I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

#### 10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7 I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

**Prayer** *Psalm* 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

**Single-mindedness** *Matthew* 6:33 I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

**Spiritual Gifts** Romans 12:4-6 I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

**Biblical Community** *Acts* 2:44-47 I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world. Giving Away My Time Colossians

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians 6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1 I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

#### 10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

**Peace** *Philippians* 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

**Faithfulness** *Proverbs* 3:3-4 I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

**Self-Control** Titus 2:11-13 I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

**Humility** Philippians 2:3, 4 I choose to esteem others above myself.

**Love** 1 John 4:10-12 I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15 I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

**Gentleness** Philippians 4:5 I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

**Hope** *Hebrews* 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

#### **About the Authors**

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.