Introduction

These lessons are based on the book “What Mennonites Believe” written by John C. Wenger. It was first adapted for use in T.E.E. (Theological Education by Extension) by Victor Dorsch for use by the Mennonite churches in East Africa, especially by Tanzania Mennonite Church and Kenya Mennonite Church.

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The lessons were adapted further and arranged in 10 lessons by Joseph Bontrager.

We believe these lessons will benefit our churches by explaining the foundation of the Mennonite denomination and to encourage believers to look to the word of God as the foundation for our faith.

“For other foundation can no one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

1 Corinthians 3:11
Who was Menno Simons?

Menno Simons was born in 1496. He was ordained a priest at 28, in 1524. He says he lived in careless ease, but he did not live in easy times.

The monk Martin Luther had caused a real stir in the church. And, unknown to Menno, in the year after he was ordained, a group committed to practice baptism only on confession of faith began in Zurich, Switzerland.

There was a struggle in religious life in the Netherlands, and there was a struggle within Menno. Some people taught that the bread and wine were only symbols of the Lord’s death, not his literal body and blood. Menno’s own early doubts as a priest dismayed him. In desperation he read the New Testament and found that the Lord’s Supper focused not on the elements but on the Christ who died. Peace came to him for a while.

Then, in a nearby town, a tailor, Sicke Freerks, was beheaded in punishment for being rebaptized. Menno turned again to the Scriptures to see who should be baptized. He searched and saw not infants but believers baptized.

Menno was promoted to the position of priest in his hometown of Witmarsum. His reputation rose as an evangelical preacher and a good man. Then, influenced by some violent radicals, 300 people took over a monastery near Witmarsum. They were defeated, many of them killed or captured and executed. One man who died was Peter Simons, perhaps Menno’s brother. The tragedy shocked Menno in many ways; in his eyes they risked their lives for error, while he sat in comfort with the truth.

On January 30, 1536, Menno gained the courage to tell his congregation how his beliefs had changed; then he went into hiding. He gathered with some Christians, led by Obbe Philips, and studied the Scriptures privately for some time. When Menno was approached by a group of men who asked him to take on leadership, he asked them to pray with him about it. When they approached him again, he agreed, almost reluctantly, and was ordained.

For the next quarter-century Menno worked to pull together a balanced church from the many fringe groups in those difficult and dangerous times. He married Gertrude. He was a homeless man, chased from pillar to post with his family. A reward of amnesty and 100 guilders was offered to anyone who turned him in.

Menno wrote books and engaged in many disputes. He was an imperfect man. His last years were spent in relative safety and poverty in Wustenfelde, Germany. When his health broke, possibly from a stroke, he used a crutch and called himself lame. He died on January 31, 1561, at 65, preceded by his wife, a son, and a daughter. One or possibly two daughters outlived him.

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Chapter 1: Beginnings

Switzerland, 1525
Saturday evening, 21 January 1525 in Zurich Switzerland, a group of about 15 young people gathered in a home for Bible study, prayer and discussion of faith. Three of them, Felix Manz, Conrad Grebel, and George Blaurock, later became important leaders in a new movement that hoped to reform the church. Suddenly, George stood up and walked over to Conrad and said, “Baptize me. Baptize me in the name of God with true Christian baptism.” His request was a surprise to the others. Why should he ask for baptism, even though he had been baptized as an infant many years ago. Conrad had no authority from the church to baptize, and it was against the law to rebaptize anyone. The government authorities could fine them, expel them from the city, or even kill them for breaking the law.

George had kneeled down in front of Conrad, waiting. Conrad reached for a cup from the kitchen, filled it with water, and baptized George in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The others in the room also asked for baptism and George then baptized each of them. An early historian wrote, “And so, in great fear of God, together they surrendered themselves to the Lord. They confirmed one another for the service of the gospel and began to teach the faith and to keep it.”

Later, people who insisted on being rebaptized were called “Anabaptists,” a Latin word that means “to baptize again.” They referred to themselves as Swiss Brethren.

Holland, 1536
About the same time as the baptisms in Zurich, other leaders in Germany and Holland began to search the scriptures and to question the authority of the Roman church. Menno Simons was a Catholic priest in Holland. Menno struggled to understand the teachings of the Bible in comparison to the practices of the Roman church. He read some of Luther’s writings that explained that the Scriptures should have authority above church traditions and he began to preach from the Bible. As Menno saw Anabaptists being persecuted and killed for their faith, he began to feel guilty that he continued in his comfortable life as a priest while others gave their life. In January 1536, Menno asked God to forgive his sins, create in him a clean heart, and to give him wisdom, spirit, and courage for a new life in Christ. Menno left the priesthood and began to teach the new Anabaptist believers and helped them organize their church life. Menno lived much of his life after that traveling about and in hiding to avoid being arrested by government authorities. But because of his leadership, the new churches began to be known as “followers of Menno,” or “Mennonites.”

Persecution
Trying to follow the New Testament teachings on salvation, baptism and the church brought the Anabaptists into conflict with church and government officials. The practice of baptizing adults, and refusing to baptize infants, was declared illegal. The Anabaptists were also clear that their ultimate loyalty is to God, not the state, which further displeased the authorities. As a result, the government and the state church worked together to try to destroy the new religious movement. Many were imprisoned; many were also sentenced to death by execution. Felix Manz was one of the first to die. He had been arrested and imprisoned repeatedly for preaching and baptizing. Finally, in 1526, Manz was sentenced to die by drowning. He was charged with setting up a separate church, teaching that a Christian could not use the sword, and with rebaptizing. On January 5, 1527, only 2 years after the first
baptisms, Manz was taken to the Limmat River in Zurich, his hand and feet tied, and he was pushed into the river. His last words were, “Into your hands, Lord, I commit my spirit.” Many others experienced a similar end, but in spite of the persecution, Anabaptism spread rapidly among the people. Some were drowned, others burned in fire. One of the rulers had executed 350 Anabaptists, but saw that his efforts were in vain. He said, “What shall I do? The more I kill, the greater becomes their number.”

Questions for discussion:
1. Write a list of teachings that the early Anabaptists were trying to restore in the church.
2. Where does the name “Mennonite” come from?
3. Why was the authority of the Bible over tradition so important to the early Anabaptists?
4. Why was the teaching on baptism so important to the early Anabaptists?
5. Do you think we should rebaptize people who join our churches from other denominations, even if they were baptized as infants?
Chapter 2: Beliefs Shared with Other Denominations, Part 1

Since the day of Pentecost day many denominations and churches have been started all over the world. A denomination is a Christian group of people who agree on a certain set of beliefs built on the foundation of the Bible. Sometimes we forget how much biblical truth we share with other Christians.

Mennonites try to live out the teachings of Jesus as found in the New Testament. Because of this emphasis on Christ and the Bible, Mennonites have many things in common with other Christian groups.

1. **God the Creator** (Genesis 1). God created all things, seen and unseen. God created the world and called it “good” God knows us, loves us, and guides us.

2. **We are created in God's Image**. (Genesis 1:27) Because we are created in God’s image, we can have fellowship with God, we can choose good or evil, we can love, and we live forever. God created man as male and female – Adam and Eve.

3. **Man has Sinned** (Genesis 3). Adam and Eve did not remain in the sinless state in which they were created, in fellowship with God. Sin resulted from the struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan, the serpent. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God who had created them, and to obey the serpent. The true nature of sin is broken relationships with God and each other, not just wrong acts or speech. The result of disobedience was death. As a result of this disobedience by Adam and Eve, all their descendants became sinners and involved in this conflict, and the conflict continues in the hearts and minds of all humans (Romans 5:19).

4. **God’s Plan for Redemption and Renewal** (John 3:16). Because of God’s love for the people he created, God acted to save them from death, and to renew them to fellowship with himself and with each other. This “salvation” was provided when Jesus came, as a man, and died for the sins of all and defeated the forces of sin and death and Satan, by his resurrection from the dead. The fulfillment of this plan of salvation is described in the four Gospels and the Book of Acts, of the New Testament.

5. **God’s Revelation** (Hebrews 1:1-2). The Old Testament is the story of Israel, God’s people chosen to show God’s love and power to the nations, and to prepare for the coming of the Messiah, the “One Anointed” to defeat evil and restore fellowship with God the Creator. Old Testament revelation was through the words of the prophets, through the Jewish Law, and through the story of God’s love and power to his people Israel. The Old Testament was a “shadow” of the true salvation, preparation for the coming of Jesus the Messiah.

6. **The Holy Spirit** (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is God present with us today to work salvation in each person. The Holy Spirit shows us that we are sinners, invites us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and brings new life (John 3:5-6). The Holy Spirit leads the new believer to grow in his spiritual life and empowers for ministry to build up the church (Ephesians 4:11-14).

7. **The Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is the written Word of God. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to bring conviction of sin, sorrow for sin, repentance from sin, and faith in Christ. The Bible was written by human beings. It shows us how God's people believed and obeyed at different times in their history. Yet, it is the Word of God, given to men by the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the Christian’s guide for faith, obedience, love, and holiness.
Questions for discussion:
1. Read each of the teachings 1 to 7.
2. Write a short statement why each teaching is important to us.
3. Which of the teachings do you find most difficult to apply to your life?
4. Is there one or two of these teachings that should be emphasized more in our churches?
Chapter 3: Beliefs Shared with Other Denominations, Part 2

8. Salvation Through Faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is a state of spiritual wellbeing and wholeness, and peace with God. The work of salvation is already complete, for we who believe have had our sins forgiven, we are “righteous by faith,” we are “justified” before God. The result of salvation is good works, called walking “in newness of life” (Romans 6:3).

9. The Church (Matthew 18:20). The church is a group of people who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, those who respond to the good news by repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who gather for worship and mutual encouragement. The church is people who have been born again by the Holy Spirit.

10. Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). The Bible teaches the Christians to pray in the name of Christ. God hears and answers our prayers, but he may not always answer the way we would like Him to. Christians pray for greater holiness, for divine guidance, for daily cleansing from sin, for God’s blessing on the church, and for those who have not received Jesus, for daily needs, for healing from worry, anxiety, hatred, envy, grudges, and broken relationships, and for physical healing. Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God’s Kingdom will come on earth.

11. Holy Living (Ephesians 2:10). Good works do not bring salvation, but are the result of salvation. The faith that saves also brings holiness of heart and life. Jesus is our example of a holy life. In Jesus’ life, holy living expressed itself in kind words and in loving deeds of service.

12. Worship. God desires that His people worship Him “in Spirit,” both in private (John 4:23) and in groups (Hebrews 10:24-25). God, Creator and Sustainer of all things, is worthy of our worship. Christian worship strengthens faith and obedience to God’s will.

13. Christ’s Return (John14:2-3). The special hope of the church is the second coming of Christ in power and great glory. He will then raise the dead and judge the world. He will take His bride, the church, with Him to enter into the eternal glories of heaven. The New Testament teaches that everyone who has this blessed hope purifies himself, even as He is pure (1 John 3:3).

14. God Sends his People into the World (Matthew 28:19-20; John 20:21). Christians believe that all men are by nature sinners before God, they have broken God’s laws, and fall short of God’s will because of the broken relationship with God. The church has the message of salvation that all people need everywhere in the world, and is sent to proclaim the works of God to those who have not heard.

Questions for discussion:
1. Read each of the teachings 8 to 14.
2. Write a short statement why each teaching is important to us.
3. Which of the teachings do you find most difficult to apply to your life?
4. Is there one or two of these teachings that should be emphasized more in our churches?
Chapter 4: Church and Government

The Reformers and Anabaptists of the sixteenth century laid the foundation for the return to New Testament Christianity. One of the most important teachings for the Anabaptists was the nature of the church and its purpose in the world. They taught that church and government must be separate.

The Nature of Government

The government is established by God. God sets up and removes kings and kingdoms (Daniel 2:21) and gives them authority to rule (John 19:11). The Bible teaches that Christians should be subject to government authorities (Romans 13:1-7; I Peter 2:13-14). The kingdom of God is different from the kingdoms (governments) of this world. It is possible these two kingdoms come into conflict with each other. We are commanded to respect and be submissive to the state, but when the state asks us to do something opposed to the Word of God, then it is our responsibility to obey God first (Acts 5:29). The work of the government is to preserve law and order in a nation that is made up of both Christians and non-Christians. Christian believers live as citizens of the nation, but primary loyalty is to Jesus Christ.

The Nature of the Church.

The church is a fellowship of love, where men and women love the Lord and one another. The Christians obey laws and live righteously because their inner desire is to please Christ, not out of fear of punishment. The early believers taught that “Christ is Lord,” using the same word that the Roman emperor used for himself, and that led to persecution. The Anabaptists saw that to be followers of the Prince of Peace they needed to be willing to suffer for Jesus. They needed to forgive people as Jesus taught; and that they needed to love as Jesus loved. They believed that they could not be police or soldiers to prevent crime as the government wanted them to do. They also believed that to follow the teachings of Romans 13 they needed the love of God poured out in their hearts, as described in Romans 5:5.

Contrast Between Church and State.

According to Anabaptist-Mennonite beliefs, here are some differences between church and government.

- We are born under the government of our country. We enter the church by the new birth.
- The government includes all people good and bad. In the church are those who are "walking in the resurrection", as Michael Sattler said it. Sattler was one of the early Anabaptists.
- The purpose of the government includes the maintenance of law and order. The purpose of the church is evangelism and Christian nurture.
- The government rules by laws and the sword or guns. The church is built upon the Word of God, the spiritual "sword," and the Spirit of God to change and guide its members.
- The government may use fines and imprisonment, and in some cases, even death, as a means of community control. The only discipline the church uses is to separate one from the group (Matthew 18:1517; 1 Corinthians 5:13).
- The head of the government is a human being. The head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ.
The government comes to an end at the return of Christ. The church, the "bride" of Christ, will live on eternally with Christ in heaven. The Anabaptists of Switzerland and the Netherlands, now known as Mennonites, were the first peace church of modern times. They believed they were called to be peacemakers and therefore they could not do the work of a policeman or go to war for the government, because it involved the use of force and sometimes taking life. A few other denominations have also taken the position of a peace church, including the Society of Friends (Quakers).

Questions for discussion:
1. How is the Kingdom of God different from the kingdoms of this world?
2. How should Christian believers relate to the kingdoms of this world?
3. Do you believe Christians need to suffer today when they follow Jesus Christ as Lord?
4. Do you believe Christians can serve as police or soldiers? Explain your answer.
5. Are there any issues today that we as Christian leaders should challenge our government, even if it means persecution?
Chapter 5: Church Life

Church Leadership
As the Anabaptists looked at the Word of God, they saw that the Lord directed each congregation to have pastors, known as overseers, or elders in the New Testament (Acts 14:23; 20:28). These pastors were not people above the other brothers and sisters of the congregations. Rather, after much prayer the church selected them, laid hands on them, and charged them to be faithful shepherds of the Lord’s “sheep.” These persons were often mentioned as pastors, preachers, or servants of the Lord. They were to care for the congregation and to feed the members with the rich food of the Word of God.

The New Testament also mentions deacons (Philippians 1:1). The spiritual gifts required of overseers and deacons are given in 1 Timothy 3. Some Bibles avoid the translation “bishop” because of the prestige and power which has been attached to the word bishop in church history. The overseers have two main responsibilities. They are to oversee the work of the pastors, and to carry out a teaching ministry.

In many Mennonite churches, the deacons served to meet the physical and financial needs in the congregations (based on Acts 6:1-7). They helped to maintain a state of happiness and peace in the congregation and looked after any financial needs, especially among orphans and widows.

Church Organization
The New Testament does not give a clear picture of church organization. It appears the believers were organized into local congregations with persons designated as leaders. But in this early time, much of the work of the church was in response to needs, and was empowered by the spiritual life of the believers, not by organization.

Mennonite churches do not have a world-wide organization that controls their life. Mennonite World Conference is a fellowship of Mennonite-Anabaptist churches that includes more than 1.7 million baptized believers in 243 national conferences in 83 countries.

Mennonite churches usually organize themselves into local conferences, that are basically fellowships where the leaders come together to encourage one another, to help each other in their problems, and to consider how best to build up the congregations in the faith. The conferences may form boards and committees to conduct various service and mission programs. The pattern of boards and committees varies from one group of Mennonites to another and from one country to another. The purpose of conferences and boards is to help congregations serve people and their needs. But the foundation of the church is always faith and life in Christ, and not its organization. The boards and committees help the church fulfill its responsibilities, not control the church. The Anabaptists tried to avoid offices in the church that are for ruling others, but for serving. They did not want to return to the kind of ruling church from which they had just come.

Church Discipline (Matthew 18:15-20)
From the beginning Mennonites have believed that Christians should help each other to do what pleases God, and to avoid what dishonors Him. This is called church discipline. Church discipline has to do with helping people become more faithful, useful witnesses and disciples of Jesus. Jesus taught that discipline is a task of the Christian community and is for the purpose of restoration.
Witnessing

Jesus said to His disciples shortly before His ascension “You will be witnesses” (Acts 1:8). When the early church was scattered by persecution, they witnessed to the acts of God in Jesus Christ wherever they went and the gospel spread throughout the world. The apostles, including Paul, traveled to Europe, Asia, and Africa to proclaim the good news. In the 16th century, the Anabaptists took Jesus’ words seriously, to “Go and teach all nations.” Their success in evangelism was one reason they were persecuted severely.

Questions for discussion:

1. What are the different kinds of church leaders mention in the New Testament?
2. The New Testament includes a leadership office sometimes translated “bishop” and sometimes translated “overseer”. Which word do you think we should use? Why do you think that?
3. Do you agree that church leadership is not to rule others, but to serve? Why do believe that?
4. Describe the process for church discipline that Jesus gave in Matthew 18:15-20. Will this process maintain holiness in the church?
5. What should our church be doing to be faithful witnesses in our world?
Chapter 6: Church Ceremonies

Several ceremonies are practiced by the Mennonite Church as visible symbols for believers of their faith and life in Jesus Christ. These include water baptism of believers, the Lord’s Supper, and foot washing.

Water Baptism

The Anabaptists understood the Bible to teach that baptism does not bring salvation, but it is a response to one’s personal faith, a physical act that symbolizes spiritual reality. They insisted on rebaptizing those who had been baptized as infants but now declared their faith in Jesus Christ as the means of salvation. Their belief that adult believers should be rebaptized brought them the name “anabaptist,” meaning “re-baptizer.” The symbolism of baptism includes the following:

1. Baptism is a symbol of spiritual cleansing from sin.
2. Baptism is a symbol of repentance (Acts 2:38).
3. Baptism is a symbol of our death to sin and resurrection to new life in Christ (Romans 6:3-4).
4. Baptism is a vow or a covenant with God to walk in Christ, so it requires a personal decision.
5. Baptism is a symbol of our baptism by the Holy Spirit, who enables us to witness to Christ and His good news of the gospel.

The Anabaptists were accused of choosing eternal punishment for infants by refusing to baptize them. But they believed that small children are included in salvation until they become aware of their sin and are able to choose good or evil.

The Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:7-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-33)

The Lord’s Supper began with Jesus celebrating the Jewish Passover with his disciples, remembering Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and the Passover lamb sacrificed for them. Jesus was ready to become the fulfillment of the Passover lamb, to be slain “once for all.” As Jesus was eating the Passover meal, He took bread and said, “This is my body which is broken for you, Do this in remembrance of me.” Then He took the cup and said, “This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood.” The bread was ordinary bread, and the cup was ordinary wine, but Jesus presented them as symbols of his body and blood. Since then the Lord’s Supper is an important celebration and reminder of Jesus’ death.

Foot Washing (John 13:1-17)

During the Passover meal, Jesus rose up from supper, laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself, and began to wash the feet of the twelve disciples. Then he told them they should follow his example of washing each other’s feet. Many Mennonites today follow Jesus’ words and practice foot washing as a symbol of Christ's continuing cleansing of the believer and of the Christian respect we have for our fellow saints and our willingness to serve each other.

Questions for discussion:

1. Write a short description of your understanding of water baptism. Why do we baptize? How does it help the one who is baptized?
2. Write a short description of the Lord’s Supper. Why do we do it? How does it help those who take it?
3. Do you think we should practice footwashing in our churches? How would it help us?
Chapter 7: Christian Living

The Anabaptists believed that salvation can be applied in daily Christian living, as the work of grace. By faith, every Christian can experience the victory of Jesus at Calvary and in the resurrection.

The Victory of Jesus at Calvary (Hebrews 2:14-15)

The Hebrews passage says that Jesus became human so that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, and deliver us from the slavery of sin. The cross means more than making peace between man and God. It means overcoming and defeating Satan and his hosts! Christ’s death on the cross makes it possible for believers to be spiritually healed, and to walk in victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

Divine Love “Poured In” (Romans 5:5)

We cannot live in the teachings of the New Testament in our own strength. It is not natural for human nature to forgive wrong doing, to forgive those who hate us, and to continue loving when someone betrays us. Because it is not easy for the Christian to do this, God the Holy Spirit pours His love into our hearts. This divine love enables Christians to forgive, to show love even to our enemies, to continue to hope for the best when disappointed, to return good for evil. Divine help and grace will always be needed in order for a person to walk in love and holiness. All of God’s grace must be received if one is to “walk in the resurrection.”

Growth Through Grace

Peter encouraged the believers “to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18). The following are words of advice to help us mature in Christ and “grow in grace.”

a) Give yourself completely to God daily. (Romans 12:1)

b) Read and study the Word of God daily. (Psalms 1:2; 2 Timothy 2:15)

c) Pray at all times, with adoration, petition, intercession, and thanksgiving. (Ephesians 6:18)

d) Look to the Lord for ways to share His goodness and His salvation with others in order to fulfill the great commission. (Mark 16:15-16)

e) Fellowship with other believers. (Colossians 3:16-17)

f) Join in the public worship service of the saints. (Hebrews 10:25)

g) Resist temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil, which tempt us to think or do that which we know is contrary to the will of God. (James 4:7)

h) Daily thank God for calling us into His kingdom, for giving us many blessings, and for continuing to forgive our sins. (Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

i) Give your tithes and offerings faithfully to the Lord. Be a good steward of all that you have and are. (2 Corinthians 9:6-8)

j) Do good in every way possible; show kindness to those in need; forgive those who are difficult to be with; and witness to those who can do something about the injustices of our community. (Matthew 22:34-40)

k) Have a good plan for your life, for work, and rest, and play. Eat good food and use as little medicine as possible. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

l) Trust God to continue to keep you and to lead you in His service. (1 Peter 5:6-7)
Questions for discussion:

1. Explain how salvation makes a difference in daily living.
2. Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to become human to bring us salvation?
3. What are some things that could hinder God’s love from being “poured out into our hearts?”
4. Make a list of things that show that a person is “growing in grace.”
5. Read the list under “Growth in Grace”. Write three things you can do to help you grow in grace.
Chapter 8: The “Hard Sayings” of Jesus

The Anabaptists believed the so-called “hard sayings” of Jesus. They are hard sayings because Jesus is asking the disciples to break with tradition to follow Him. Also they are very hard things to obey.

- Jesus told His followers to avoid going to court, but to settle disagreements out of court. (Matthew 5:26-27; I Corinthians 6:1-8)
- Jesus told His disciples, “swear not at all” (Matthew 5:33-36), because all swearing, or oaths, in the end is arrogance before God. Jesus says that there is no need to strengthen or defend our witness by swearing.
- Jesus said to “resist not evil” (Matthew 5:38-42). Jesus was opposed to taking revenge on someone who does us wrong. He taught that it was wrong to use the law to retaliate or to get even with the wrong doer. Through the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, our love for others should be so great that we do not want to retaliate at all.
- Jesus warned against demanding titles of honor, like Rabbi (teacher) and Father (Matthew 23:8-12). Jesus is referring to titles that people demand to be called because of their high position. Some people feel you are despising them and are angry with them if you do not use their titles. Jesus tells us to avoid such titles. Be satisfied to be addressed simply by your name. Mennonites have tried to obey this hard saying of Jesus by using New Testament words such as brother or sister, even for persons called to serve as pastors, deacons, and overseers. We try to make the church a loving family of brothers and sisters, rather than a place of status and honor.
- Jesus warned against storing up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19). Jesus wants us to put our treasures in heaven with Him. Jesus is warning against the danger that our material possessions take control of our lives so that we forget God. To trust in our treasures here on earth will lead to ruin. But, if we put our treasures in Heaven and our interests in the Kingdom of God, that will lead to spiritual health and blessing. One way to put our treasure in heaven is to help those who are in need (Luke 18:18-30). The early Christians were so filled with God’s love that they shared their material possessions (Acts 2:44-45).

Questions for discussion:
1. Which of the “hard sayings” are not practical for us to follow literally today?
2. Is it possible to follow the principle of the teaching even if we do not do it exactly as Jesus said? Give an example.
Chapter 9: Christian Discipleship

One of the requirements for Christian faith is faithfulness to God in daily living. This is sometimes called discipleship, or learning to be a disciple. A disciple is one who receives instruction from another, as the disciples of were followers of Jesus.

Jesus is the example of faithful, suffering discipleship

The Son of God became man so that He might tell us of God and His will. As a man, he was tempted in all points as we are, yet He never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was faithful to God. He was not defeated by Satan and his temptations.

Jesus’ obedience to His Father led to suffering. The prophesy in Isaiah 53 describes the Messiah as the Suffering Servant who will carry our sorrows, and die for our sins, and through his suffering he is able redeem God's people and the whole world.

Jesus’ disciples did not understand the kind of kingdom Christ was building. They thought He would build again the political kingdom of Israel. After Pentecost, they understood that Jesus came to establish a spiritual kingdom through his suffering and death.

Discipleship is Based on Love

Jesus was sent by the Father to build the church of Jesus Christ. But He could not build His kingdom by destroying the enemy with the sword. He defeated His enemies by suffering for them in love. Love is the heart of the gospel. Love brought Jesus to this world to be our Saviour (John 3:16). Love is also the heart of Christian living. Jesus told his disciples that his new commandment is love and that people will know they are his disciples by their love for each other (John 13:34-35).

Discipleship as Cross Bearing

Jesus said that anyone who wants to follow him must “take up his cross and follow” him (Luke 9:23-24). A decision to follow Jesus includes a desire to follow him, denying himself (his desires), and being willing to identify with Jesus even if it means suffering.

A New Revelation

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples (Acts 2:1-4). This gave them a new understanding of why Jesus had come to earth. Now, they did not look for political redemption from Rome. Instead, they talked about the good news of the Gospel that Jesus had brought. The Holy Spirit empowers the believer to live in victory over sin and in relationship with God.

Christ is Our Example

We, as disciples of Jesus, are called to suffer, just as Jesus suffered. However, we are also promised eternal life and an eternal home in heaven, when this life here on earth is finished (1 Peter 4:13; Philippians 3:10-11). Suffering here and our future glory go together in the life of a disciple. In fact, it is the hope of future glory that makes it possible to bear any present suffering that comes to us. We are not promised a life without trouble when we choose to be disciples.

Take Up Our Crosses

Jesus said very clearly to His disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). The teaching of cross-bearing and following Jesus is a central theme in Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching. All early Anabaptist writings emphasize this teaching. Jesus warned us that if the world hates us, we know that it first hated Him (John 15:18). Suffering was viewed as a normal part of following Jesus. Paul
and Barnabas warned believers in the new churches that they should expect suffering (Acts 14:22b). More than 5,000 Anabaptists died for their faith in the sixteenth century.

Questions for discussion:
1. Describe the meaning of “discipleship.”
2. How can we be disciples of Jesus?
3. Do you think we are true disciples of Jesus if we do not suffer as he suffered?
4. As you read this lesson and the Bible verses, did the Holy Spirit show you any areas of your life where you can be a better disciple of Jesus?
Chapter 10: Shared Convictions among Mennonites everywhere

(The following statements were adopted by Mennonite World Conference. These are statements of faith that are shared by Mennonites around the world)

Shared Convictions

By the grace of God, we seek to live and proclaim the good news of reconciliation in Jesus Christ. As part of the one body of Christ at all times and places, we hold the following to be central to our belief and practice:

1. God is known to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the Creator who seeks to restore fallen humanity by calling a people to be faithful in fellowship, worship, service and witness.

2. Jesus is the Son of God. Through his life and teachings, his cross and resurrection, he showed us how to be faithful disciples, redeemed the world, and offers eternal life.

3. As a church, we are a community of those whom God's Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life.

4. As a faith community, we accept the Bible as our authority for faith and life, interpreting it together under Holy Spirit guidance, in the light of Jesus Christ to discern God's will for our obedience.

5. The Spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice, and share our possessions with those in need.

6. We gather regularly to worship, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and to hear the Word of God in a spirit of mutual accountability.

7. As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language. We seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God’s grace by serving others, caring for creation, and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

In these convictions we draw inspiration from Anabaptist forebears of the 16th century, who modeled radical discipleship to Jesus Christ. We seek to walk in his name by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we confidently await Christ’s return and the final fulfillment of God's kingdom.

Adopted by Mennonite World Conference, General Council, March 15, 2006

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you agree with the statements of faith? Which would you like to discuss more?
2. Do you think of anything that should be included to help the church in Africa be more faithful to the gospel?
3. What are some ways you can share these convictions with your local church, to help them be more faithful Christians?