



FOLLOWING JESUS TOGETHER

# Next Steps

## Starting Point

Everything that exists had a starting point . . . including you. You may have started on purpose. You may have started by accident. Whatever the circumstances, you had a starting point and it began before you were aware of it. Faith has a starting point as well. We invite you to follow Jesus with us and take your next steps.

# Mark out a straight path for your feet; stay on the safe path.

*Proverbs 4:26*

## *Introduction*

### **You are on the journey of a lifetime.**

No matter where you are on this journey—just starting out or getting close to the finish line, this study is designed to strengthen your understanding of biblical truth and deepen your faith in our Creator. Its purpose is to help you gain a clearer understanding of God's plan for your life and to grow in confidence in His saving grace through Jesus Christ.

Each of our journeys is unique, starting from different places, yet we all share a common pursuit—seeking purpose and meaning. This study will equip us with the wisdom and tools we need to run our race well and to support and encourage others along the way.

We invite you to engage deeply with these studies, ask questions, and join the conversation as we seek truth together as followers of Christ.



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Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

## Next Steps

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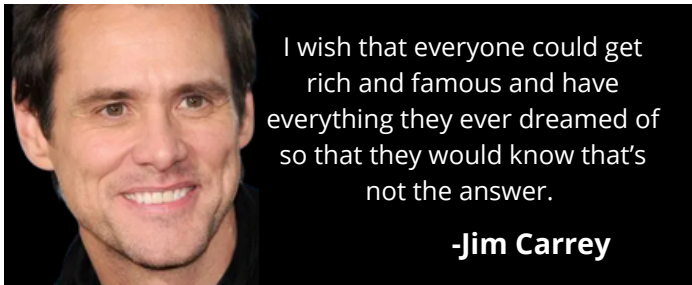


# 1

## Start Here

**What, has been your experience of Religion, Church, or Christianity?**

- Boring?
- Untrue?
- Irrelevant?



Many people believe that the most important question we can ask in this life is, "Who is Jesus"?

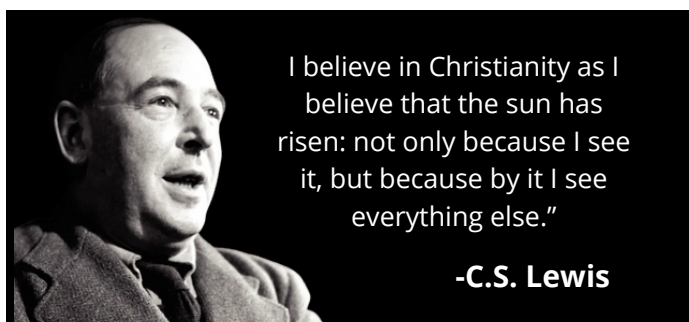
**Do you agree that this is a crucial question to ask? Why or why not?**

### 1. JESUS SAID, 'I AM THE WAY.'

**Life's fundamental questions:**

- Is there more to life than this?
- What am I doing on earth?
- What is the point of life?
- What is the purpose of my life?
- Where am I heading?

**Jesus claims to be the lens through which we see God, even to be the way to God. What are your thoughts?**



What if Jesus is the lens that allows us to see the world with a completely new depth and clarity?

**What has been the lens that you have viewed the world through?**

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### 2. JESUS SAID, 'I AM THE TRUTH.'

**C.S. Lewis:** "Christianity, if false, is of no importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important."

**Where do people go to find truth? How important is truth in the way we live our lives today?**

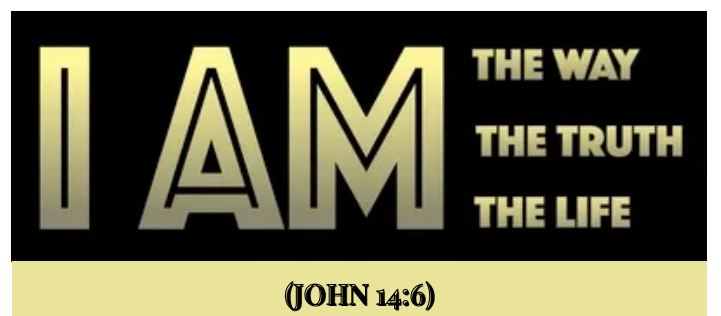
### 3. JESUS SAID, 'I AM THE LIFE.'

**John 10:10**

*"I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full".*

**What do you think Jesus means by "life to the full" ?**

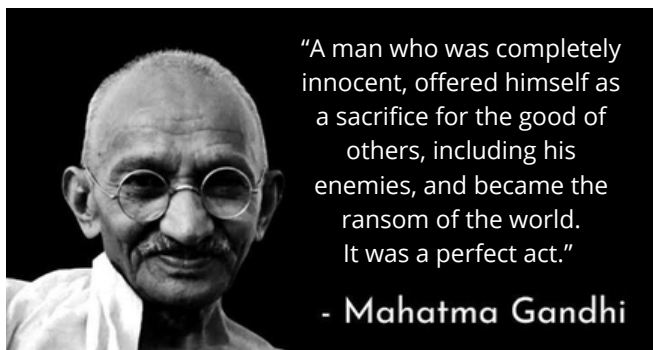
Jesus claims that God loves you and He came, in the person of His Son, Jesus, to set you free to enjoy life to the full.



**Some say** Jesus was a good teacher. Some say He was a prophet. Others say He was God. There is no doubt that He is the center of much discussion, even 2000 years after He came into the world.

Jesus was the most extraordinary man to walk the face of the earth. In this study, we will look at what history says about Him, His fulfillment of prophecy, what eyewitnesses said about Him and the bold claims He made regarding Himself. He didn't leave us with an option of claiming *"He was just a good man."*

Even non-Christians that study His life stand in awe of Him...



## Who is Jesus?

For 2000 years people have been asking this question. Jesus Himself even posed it to His followers.

### Matthew 16:15

*"Who do you say that I am?"*

Take a few minutes to write down your answer to this question.

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## Who does the bible say Jesus is?

The bible tells us that Jesus was a man (1 Timothy 2:5) and it gives us the details of His birth (Luke 2:7), His life (Luke 2:52) and His death (2 Corinthians 5:14). But the bible also tells us that Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:18), even God Himself (John 1:1). In fact the name 'Jesus' means 'Jehovah The Savior' (Matthew 1:21).

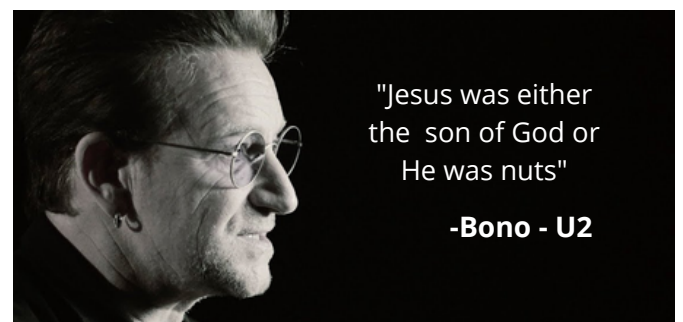
He is also called the Everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6), the Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6) and Emanuel (Matthew 1:23) meaning *'God with us'*.

## So, is Jesus a man, or is Jesus God?

The short answer is... He is both! The bible tells us that Jesus is both the true God and at the same time He is a real man.

Jesus made statements about Himself that caused so much hostility among the people of that day, they accused Him of blasphemy, a sin punishable by death. We will look at some of those bold statements and discuss what they mean to us today.

**The Bible** is not the only book that tells us about Jesus. Many other secular writers in history who were not 'Jesus followers' tell us about this man and the incredible things He did. There is more written about Jesus than any other major character in history. Let's first consider some sources other than the bible that prove there was a man named Jesus.



## Who is Jesus?



Flavius Josephus

**Josephus** was a Jewish historian who was hired by the Roman government to write the history of his people, the Nation of Israel. He wrote seven books between 60 and 80 AD, about a generation after the life of Jesus. Of Jesus Josephus said, "*He is a doer of wonderful works*" (Josephus, 18.3.3). He also said that Jesus was condemned to the cross by Pilate and appeared to them alive again the third day as the divine Prophets had foretold (Josephus, 18.3.3). It is significant that Josephus was a non-believer. He was not a disciple of Jesus, yet he put Jesus in the same place and time that the Bible does. He makes Jesus' life part of the historical record within a generation of Jesus' death and establishes that these facts were widely known. This is evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible and what it says about Jesus.



Thallus

**Thallus** was a Gentile historian and non-believer who wrote in 52 AD about the darkness that occurred at the crucifixion of Jesus. He tried to credit it to an eclipse of the sun that fell upon the land of Israel. This explanation is not valid because Jesus died during the Passover, at the season of the Paschal full moon, which makes it impossible for a solar eclipse to take place at mid day. It is interesting that Thallus tried to attribute the event to natural causes, while at the same time giving us evidence that by 52 AD the crucifixion of Jesus was common knowledge.

**The Encyclopedia Britannica** takes over 20,000 words to describe Jesus as a man of history. Here is a quote pertaining to Jesus, "*Historical accounts prove that in ancient times even opponents of Christianity never doubted the historicity of Jesus.*"

The Encyclopedia Britannica describes more about Jesus than it does about Aristotle, Socrates, Julius Caesar, or Napoleon. Nobody should question the existence of the man called Jesus.

**Jesus** did more to change the course of human history than any man who ever lived. Yet many doubt His existence because they do not take the time to research the historical record.



## *Who is Jesus?*

**Fulfillment of Prophecy** - Jesus is more than a historical figure. He is a fulfillment of prophecy. Webster describes the term 'prophecy' in this way.

*"Prophecy is a process in which one or more messages that have been communicated to a prophet are then communicated to others.*

*Such messages typically involve divine inspiration, interpretation, or revelation of conditioned events to come."*

The coming of the Messiah was predicted in great detail. In fact, His coming was planned before the world was created. Jesus said of Himself that He was a fulfillment of prophecy and the law.

### **Luke 4:16-21**

*He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Isaiah 61:1-2). Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He said to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."*

### **Luke 24:27, 44-45**

*And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He (Jesus) explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. He said to them, "This is what I told*

*you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*

**Jesus** said the Law of Moses, Isaiah, the Prophets in general, and many of the Psalms are speaking of Him.

Let's look at a few more passages where Jesus speaks of Himself.

### **Matthew 5:17**

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."*

### **John 5:39-40**

*"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life."*

### **John 5:46-47**

*"If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"*



## Who is Jesus?



**Jesus** fulfilled prophecies and predictions made hundreds of years in advance. He fulfilled 60 major prophecies in the Old Testament and 270 details of those prophecies.

### Examples:

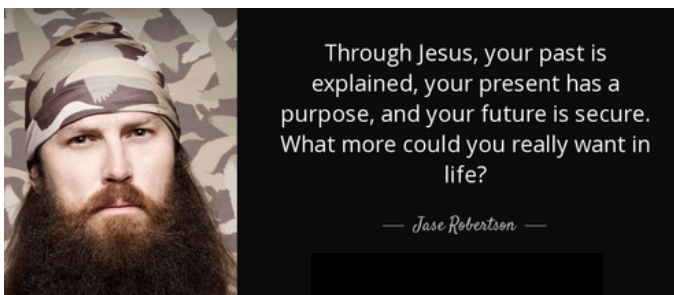
Prophecies state that Jesus would be betrayed · (Psalm 41:9; Matthew 26:20-23)

He would be betrayed by a friend  
· (Psalm 41:9)

Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver  
· (Matthew 27:9-10; Zechariah 11:12)

30 pieces of silver would be cast onto the temple floor · (Zechariah 11:13)

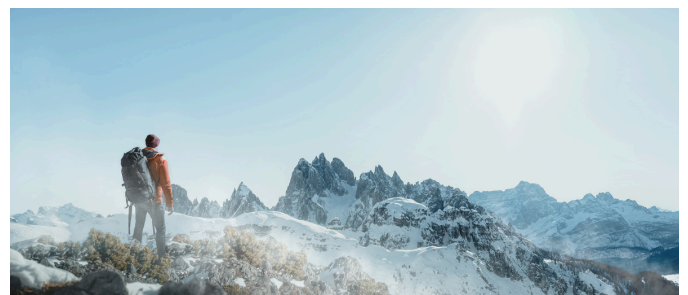
The 30 silver pieces would be used to buy a potter's field · (Matthew 27:10)



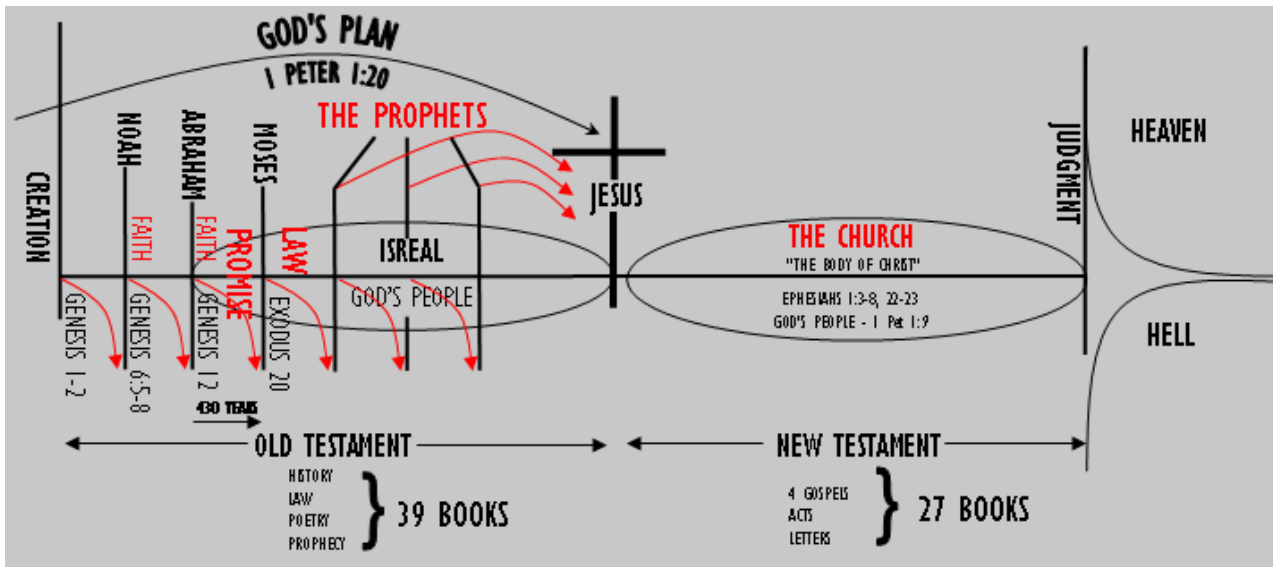
## Using the science of probability...

If Jesus had just fulfilled eight of the prophecies in the bible, the chances are 1 in 10<sup>17</sup> - That is equivalent to...  
1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.

**Suppose** we take that many loonies and lay them on the face of Alberta. They will cover all of the province two feet deep. Now mark one of those loonies and stir the whole mass thoroughly, all over the province. Now, blindfold a man and tell him that he can travel as far into Alberta he wishes, but he must pick up the one loonie that has been marked and say this is the right one. What chance would he have of picking the right one? Just the same chance that the Prophets would have had of writing eight prophecies and having them all come true in any one man, providing they wrote in their own wisdom. But they all came true in Christ! The Old Testament gives us plenty of evidence to prove that He is the Messiah.



## Who is Jesus?



### Look at this overview of the bible!

God told Abraham (about 2000 BC) that Jesus would be born into His family.

The genealogies of Jesus recorded in Matthew and Luke show that to be true (Matthew 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38).

**In Genesis 49:8-12**, God revealed that the Messiah would be born into the tribe of Judah. Revelation 5:5, refers to Jesus as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. In Micah 5:2, the Prophet says the Promised One would be born in Bethlehem, and Matthew's and Luke's historical records state that Bethlehem was his birthplace. You can read those prophecies in Matthew 2:1; Luke 2:4-7.

**We are told by Isaiah (7:14)**, 750 years before Jesus, that he would be born of a virgin, just as He was according to the New Testament writings in Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:27.

**In Daniel 9:25**, Daniel foretells that a "Prince" would come at a particular time just as Jesus did. Isaiah 53 predicts His trial, His beating and His crucifixion. Matthew 26:62-63 and Acts 8:32-35 show that Jesus is the one that Isaiah was writing about.

Every prophecy of the Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus. This provides an incredible amount of evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be.



**In light of all the prophecies and evidences surrounding Jesus, why do you think so many people reject Him?**

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## Who is Jesus?



### GOD WITH US:

**Let's look at some passages that tell us that Jesus was 'God in the flesh.'**

#### John 1:1-4, 14

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men... The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

#### John 17:3-5

*"Now this is eternal life; that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I (Jesus) have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began."*

**Jesus** makes clear that He lived with the Father before the world was made. Jesus was not a created being. He was the Creator.

Notice the plural nature of God in Genesis.

#### Genesis 1:26

*Let **us** make man in **our** image, in **our** likeness...*

**Jesus** was with God, Jesus was God, and He came to live with us. Jesus pre-existed with the Father and became flesh.

#### Matthew 1:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14

*"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Emmanuel" - which means, "God with us."*

**Have these few passages changed your perception, or understanding of Jesus? Explain?**

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## Who is Jesus?

### EYEWITNESS:

**Many who met Jesus and heard His teachings recognized that no ordinary man could perform the works He was doing.**

**Let's explore how they came to understand His true identity.**

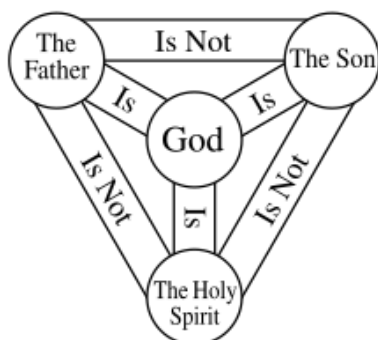
#### John 4:39-42

*Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to Him, they urged Him to stay with them, and He stayed two days. And because of His words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world."*

**Peter** was one of the apostles who spent more time with Jesus than anyone else. Notice his conclusion about Jesus being the Christ.

#### Matthew 16:13-17

*"Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."*



### Jesus' Claim

Jesus said He had given evidence of His claim, and He told them He was the Son of God. Jesus also said that He and the Father were One.

#### John 10:24-33

*"How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep... I and the Father are one." Again the Jews picked up stones to stone Him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any of these," replied the Jews, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God."*

#### John 5:17-18

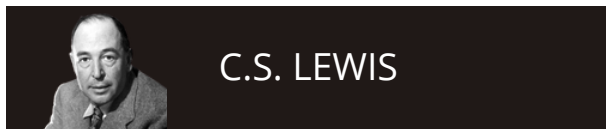
*Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God his own Father, making Himself equal with God.*



## Who is Jesus?



### BOLD CLAIMS:



#### Analyzing Jesus' claim to be God

C.S. Lewis, who was a professor at Cambridge University and once an agnostic, understood this issue clearly. He writes:

*"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the son of God; or else a mad-man or something worse."*

Then Lewis adds: *"You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."*

**Let's** take another look at some of the bold claims that Jesus made about Himself.

**Jesus** referred to Himself in a timeless way by saying He was *"I am."* In the Old Testament, that was a name God called Himself (Exodus 3:13-14).

The Jews knew that Jesus was claiming to be the divine nature of God in human flesh. Listen to what He claims...

#### John 8:58-59

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this they picked up stones to stone Him.*

**During** His trial He made it clear again...

#### Mark 14:61-64

*Again the high priest asked Him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus.*

### CONCLUSION:

There are so many other things that could be said about Jesus and His life and our challenge is to continue to seek Him and discover more about Him. Jesus said He is the only way to be with God for eternity (John 14:6). He is a living Messiah. He is a living Savior. He ascended back to heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, and has invited us to a seat at his table.

The resurrection was the most important event since the creation of the world. We don't believe this only because the bible says so, we believe it because it is history, there were eyewitnesses that wrote letters about it. He was proven to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:4).

### JESUS THROUGH EVERY BOOK OF THE BIBLE

*In Genesis, Jesus is the seed of the Woman.*  
*In Exodus, He is the Passover Lamb.*  
*In Leviticus, He is the Priest, the Altar and the Lamb of Sacrifice.*  
*In Numbers, He is the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night.*  
*In Deuteronomy, Jesus is the Prophet like Moses.*  
*In Joshua, Jesus is the Captain of our salvation.*  
*In Judges, He is our Judge and Law-Giver.*  
*In Ruth, He is our Kinsman and Redeemer.*  
*In 1 & 2 Samuel, He is our trusted Prophet.*  
*In Kings & Chronicles, He is our reigning King.*  
*In Ezra, He is the rebuilders of the broken-down walls of human life.*  
*In Nehemiah, Jesus is our Restorer.*  
*In Esther, He is our Advocate.*  
*In Job, Jesus is our Ever-Living Redeemer.*  
*In Psalms, He is our Shepherd.*  
*In Proverbs, He is our Wisdom.*  
*In Ecclesiastes, He is our hope of resurrection.*  
*In the Song of Songs, He is our loving Bridegroom.*  
*In Isaiah, Jesus is the suffering Servant.*  
*In Jeremiah, He is the righteous wronged.*  
*In Lamentations, He is our weeping prophet.*  
*In Ezekiel, He is the one with the right to rule.*  
*In Daniel, Jesus is the fourth man in the fiery furnace.*  
*In Hosea, Jesus is the faithful husband forever married to the sinner.*  
*In Joel, He is the one who baptises with the Holy Spirit, fire.*  
*In Amos, He is the restorer of Justice.*  
*In Obadiah, He is mighty to save.*  
*In Jonah, He is our great foreign missionary.*  
*In Micah, Jesus is the feet of one who brings good news.*  
*In Nahum, Jesus is our stronghold in the day of trouble.*  
*In Habakkuk, He is God my Saviour.*  
*In Zephaniah, He is the King of Israel.*  
*In Haggai, He is the signet ring.*  
*In Zechariah, He is our humble King riding on a colt.*  
*In Malachi, Jesus is the son of righteousness.*

*In Matthew, Jesus is God-with-us.*  
*In Mark, He is the Son of God.*  
*In Luke, He is the Son of Mary, feeling what you feel.*  
*In John, He is the Bread of Life.*  
*In Acts, Jesus is the Savior of the world.*  
*In Romans, Jesus is the righteousness of God.*  
*In 1 Corinthians, He is the Resurrection.*  
*In 2 Corinthians, He is the God of all comfort.*  
*In Galatians, He is your liberty, He sets you free.*  
*In Ephesians, Jesus is the Head of the Church.*  
*In Philippians, Jesus is your joy.*  
*In Colossians, He is your completeness.*  
*In 1 & 2 Thessalonians, He is your hope.*  
*In 1 Timothy, He is your faith.*  
*In 2 Timothy, Jesus is your stability.*  
*In Titus, Jesus is Truth.*  
*In Philemon, He is your benefactor.*  
*In Hebrews, He is your perfection.*  
*In James, He is the power behind your faith.*  
*In 1 Peter, He is your example.*  
*In 2 Peter, Jesus is your purity.*  
*In 1 John, Jesus is your life.*  
*In 2 John, He is your pattern.*  
*In 3 John, He is your motivation.*  
*In Jude, He is the foundation of your faith.*  
*In Revelation, Jesus is your coming King.*

He is the First and the Last  
the Beginning and the End  
He is the Keeper of Creation and the Creator of all  
He is the Architect of the Universe  
He is the Manager of all Time  
He always Was, He always Is, and He always Will Be  
Unmoved  
Unchanged  
Undefeated  
and never, ever  
Undone

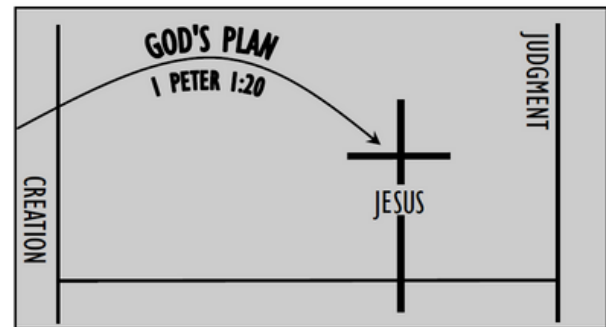


**Having** a broad look at the Bible is very important to understanding God's overall message. Throughout His Word, God continues to tell about His love and patience. Have a look at the table of contents in your Bible. You will find that the Bible is divided into two major sections, Old Testament and New Testament. **Have you ever thought about what it means to have a testament from God?**

A testament is very similar to the idea of a promise or a covenant. A covenant is a promise between two parties with conditions to be met. In the Bible we read about an old promise and a new promise. God has made a promise to us. The fulfillment of that promise is Jesus. He is what this lesson is all about. We will use an illustration in this lesson, a diagram to help us understand how all the stories of the Bible fit together to tell the story of Jesus.



## In the beginning...



Let the line on the left side of the diagram represent the beginning of time and life as we know it. The Bible refers to this as creation. The Bible also tells us time will end one day. The line on the right side of the page represents the day we will stand before God, and give an account for the lives we lived. That day in the Bible is called Judgment, the eternity of a timeless existence either in the presence of our God, or outside of God's presence.

Between creation and judgement (*as illustrated by the cross*), God sent His Son Jesus in order to rescue us and bring us back into a right relationship with the Creator of all humanity. God, in His foreknowledge knew that humans were going to fall short of his perfection so He had a plan before man began to send his one and only son, Jesus, before He even created the world.

### 1Peter 1:18-21

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from our forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

## Overview of the Bible

### **Isn't it amazing that God knew we would need to be saved from our sin even before he created the world?**

Jesus was a part of God's plan before creation. He was chosen before the world to become the sin payment for us.

### **Let's look back to Creation...**

God put Adam and Eve in the Garden and created them with the ability to make choices.

#### **Genesis 2:15-17**

*"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the Garden; but you must not eat from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*

At this point Adam and Eve lived in perfect fellowship with God. God gave Adam and Eve everything they needed while they were in this perfect fellowship with Him. God also gave them an ability to choose.

### **What is the significance of God creating us with the ability to choose?**

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The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in the Garden. Adam and Eve were instructed not to eat of it, but God gave them the choice whether to obey Him or not. But with the choice came consequences. If they did eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would sin and the consequence would be '*separation from God*.'

Later in Genesis 3-5, we are told that Adam and Eve made this choice and were removed from God's presence.

### **Are there choices you have made in your life that have resulted in negative consequences? Explain.**

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## Overview of the Bible



### Genesis 6:5-8

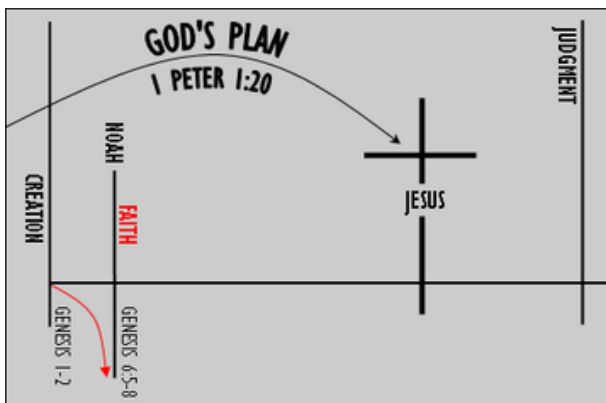
*"The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth--men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air--for I am grieved that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord"*

### God loves us

God loves us and desires a relationship with us. That is why our bad choices break his heart. Hebrews gives us more insight as to why Noah found favor in God's eyes.

### Hebrews 11:7

*It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before. By his faith Noah condemned the rest of the world, and he received the righteousness that comes by faith.*



### Take a look at the diagram above

The horizontal line through the middle of the drawing represents God's will for all mankind. While the small red arrow going downward from creation to Noah represents the fall in Genesis 3 and the direction humans decided to go.

Scripture tells us **Noah** found favor in the eyes of the Lord

**What are some areas in your everyday life that require you to live by faith? (think practical)**

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## Overview of the Bible

**Faith** is more than just believing, faith is trusting God in an active way. Faith trusts what God says enough to do what He asks.

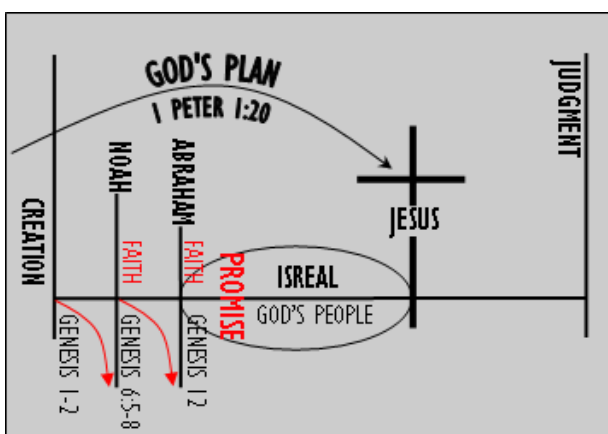
*"Faith without action is dead"* **James 2:26**

It is not a saving faith when there is no action. Noah's response of obedience to God brought back the quality level of mankind to what God desired.

God could have fellowship with Noah because he had faith.



**But**, its not long before history repeats itself and Noah's descendants were disobedient to God.



Several hundred years after Noah, another man with great faith was obedient to God - his name is **Abraham**. Abraham had such faith that God made a special covenant, or PROMISE to him.

**This PROMISE comes in three parts:**

**1)** God promised that Abraham would become a nation through his descendants who would be too numerous to count - **Genesis 12:1-3**

**2)** God promised that Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Canaan and receive God's protection (*Conditioned upon their faithfulness*) - **Genesis 13:15-16**

**3)** God promised that through Abraham, all nations would be blessed because Abraham was a direct ancestor of Jesus - **Genesis 18:17-19**

**Facts about Abraham and Sarah:**

- Abrahams wife Sarah was too old (90 years) to have children, yet God's promise came true in her old age.
- Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Isaac grew up and had twin sons, Jacob and Esau.
- Jacob had twelve Sons. Ten of his sons, along with two grandsons, became the twelve tribes of Israel.
- Abraham's family continued to multiply just as God had promised.
- Just as God promised, God gave them a land to live in and He protected them from their enemies, as long as they remained faithful to Him.



## A hiker with a red backpack stands on a large rock peak, looking out over a vast, hazy mountain range under a clear blue sky. The hiker is wearing a green jacket and black pants. The landscape is rugged with large, dark rocks in the foreground and a hazy, mountainous background. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

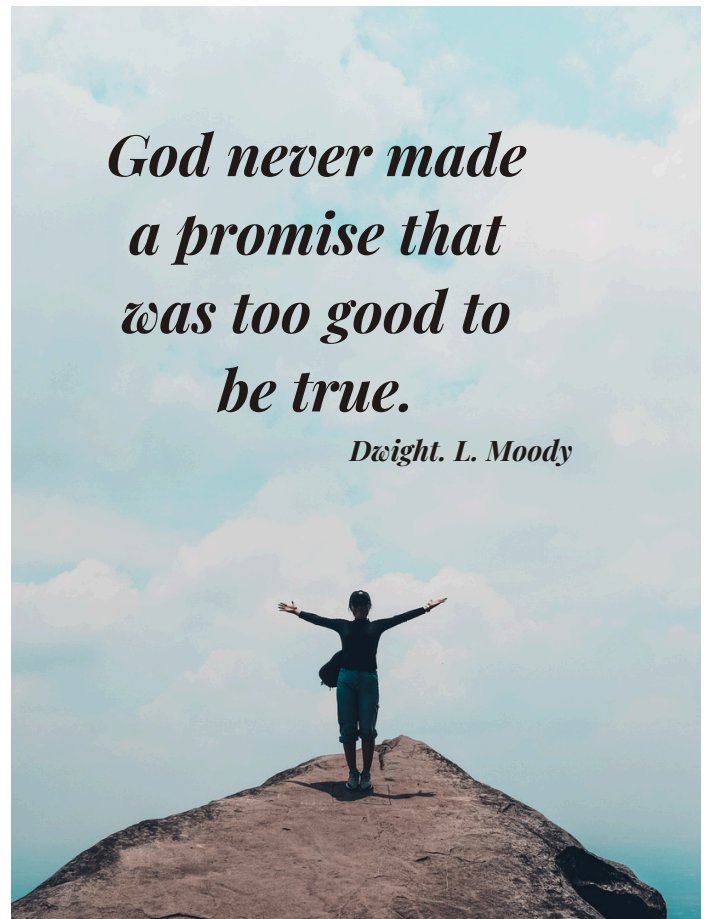
God promised that all nations would be blessed through Israel.

*"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ."*

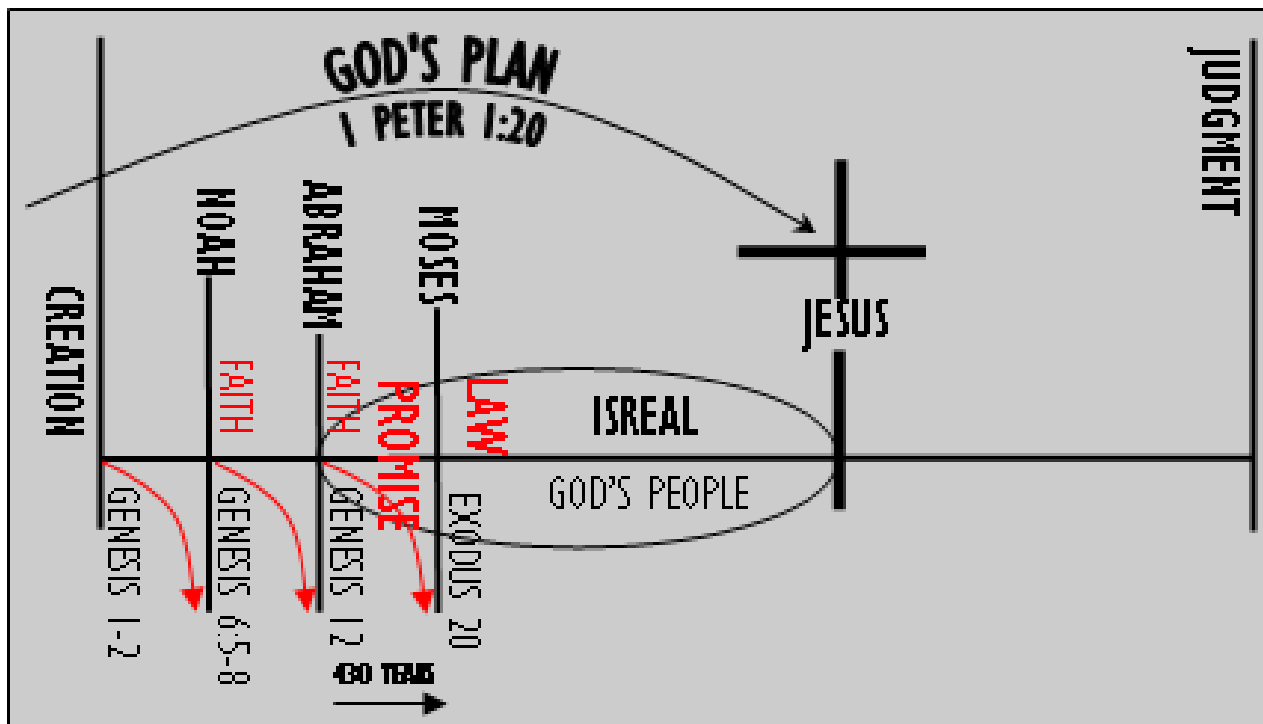
*"If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

## What is the significance of the word 'heir' for those who belong to Christ?

*Dwight. L. Moody*



## Overview of the Bible



**History repeats itself, and the nation of Israel choose to fall away from God's perfect plan.**

### Israel is separated from God:

430 years after the promise was made to Abraham Israel find themselves separated from God and from their land.

They are in bondage (*slavery*) in Egypt under Pharaoh's reign. They had become a nation of slaves to the Egyptians.

**Moses** was called by God to lead the people out of bondage. Moses was chosen because of his faith in God.

### Hebrews 11:24-27

*"By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He*

*regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw Him who is invisible."*

Moses trusted God and showed his **faith with action**. Moses was willing to give up the pleasures of sin and be mistreated along with his people for the greater reward that was awaiting him.

**Are there certain aspects of your life that are holding you back from fully embracing the life God has called you to?**

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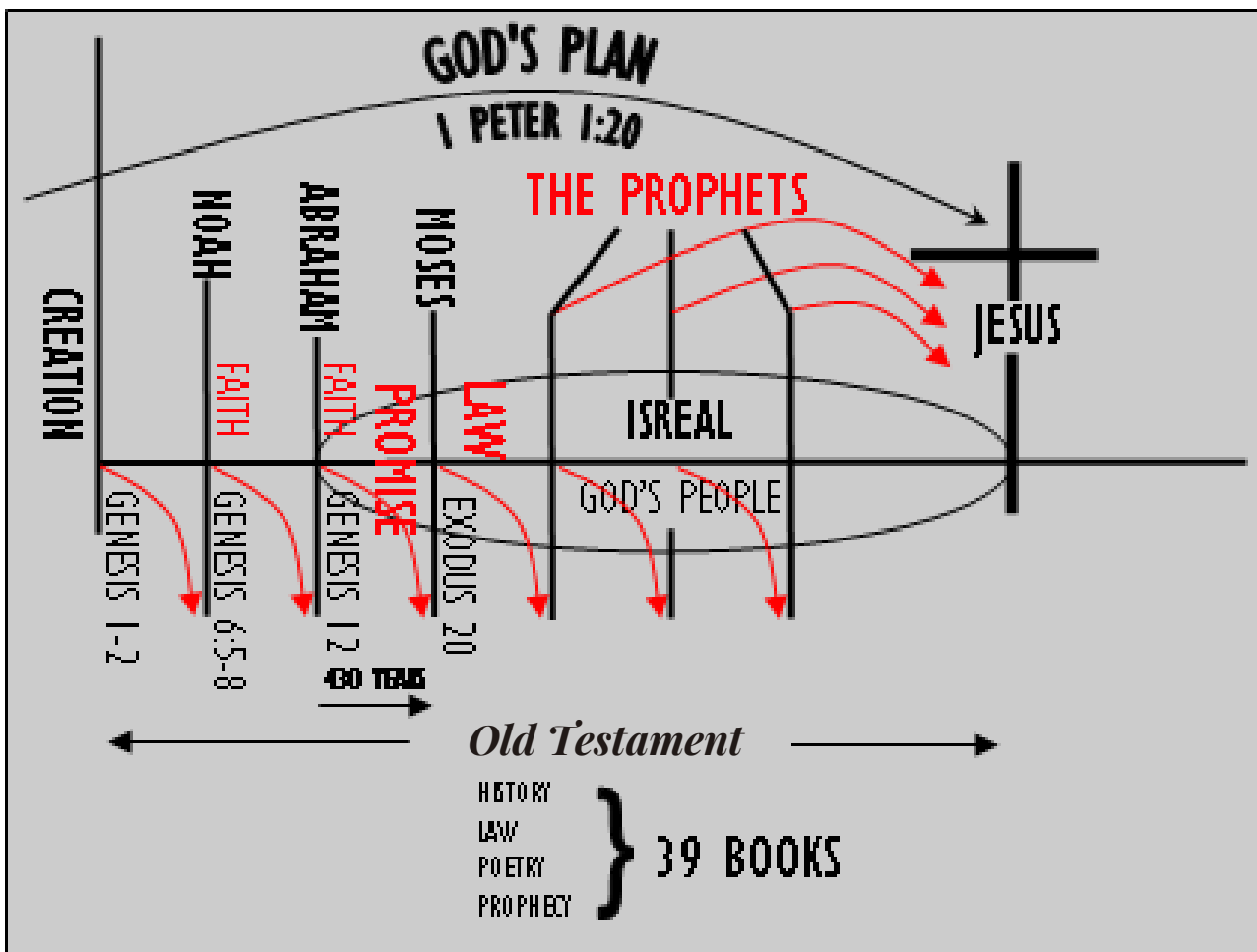
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## Overview of the Bible



## Jesus is the center of God's plan

## Prophets sent by God.

Since God's promise of the land was conditional upon their faithfulness, every time they disobeyed, God would use various forms of discipline. (*captivity, death, sickness, plagues etc.*)

Then God sent the Prophets to remind them of the Law that they were to obey. Also to remind them that a Messiah was coming. Prophets were good men, not perfect men, but men who trusted God. They were given a message from God to *"tell forth"* to the people. This is the literal meaning of the word Prophet.

The message often told how God saw their disobedience and warned of judgement. The message sometimes also foretold future events, including the coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom.

## The Old Testament

All we have looked at to this point, makes up the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

***The First Five Books Are:***

History and Law from creation through to Moses. The Hebrew word is '*Torah*'.

***The Next Twelve Books Are:***

History of the nation of Israel from the time after Moses.

## Overview of the Bible

### The Next Five Books Are:

Poetry, songs, and wisdom literature, all of which were used in the Israelites' worship to God.

### The Next Seventeen Books Are:

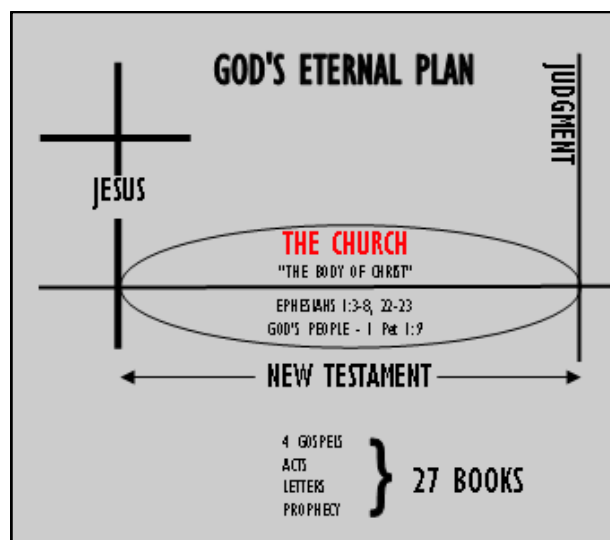
Writings of the Prophets. Through the entire Old Testament we see that God had a plan that He made known to His people one step at a time.

Notice how everything is pointing forward to the fulfillment of God's plan in the coming of Jesus Christ. That is because the bible is one unified story that leads its readers to Jesus.

### The New Testament

Reveals the fulfillment of God's eternal plan. The Messiah did come to earth. He was born in the nation that God told Abraham He would be. God foretold what tribe (*Judah*) and what family (*David*) in that tribe the Christ would be born. The prophets even foretold that He would be born in the city of David (*Bethlehem*), and born of a virgin (*Mary*).

Jesus fulfilled **60 major prophecies** in the Old Testament and 270 details of those prophecies. The Old Testament gives us plenty of evidence to prove that He is the Messiah.



### The Gospels

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels, this is where we find the history of Jesus' life. Jesus did not come to be a messenger of God like the Prophets were. He came to **'BE'** God's message; Literally, God became flesh and lived among us.

### John 1:1-18

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. "He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him.*



## Overview of the Bible

*Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God-- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning Him. He cries out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.'" From the fullness of His grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known."*

**Jesus** offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins according to God's perfect eternal plan. He was crucified, a painful humiliating death, just like the Prophet foretold in Isaiah 53.

Jesus went willingly to the cross to pay a price for our sin that we could not pay. He did this so we could spend eternity with Him by putting our faith and trust in Him.

**Three** days after His crucifixion, God raised Jesus from the dead. He appeared to the apostles for a period of forty days speaking about the kingdom of God.

### Acts 1:1-3

*"In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day He was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles He had chosen. After His suffering, He showed Himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that He was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."*

The disciples witnessed Jesus ascend into heaven and He left them with a promise that belongs to us as well.

### John 14:1-3

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."*

**In your own words describe what the kingdom of God is like:**

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## Overview of the Bible



### The Holy Spirit

About ten days after Jesus ascension into heaven, Jesus sent the promised Holy Spirit from God to empower the apostles and inspire them to preach the message of salvation to the whole world. This brought about the birth of the church, a people within the kingdom of God.

### The Book Of Acts

The book of Acts is the next book of the New Testament. It also is a history book like the Gospels. It tells about the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the church throughout the Roman Empire.



### A Collection Of Letters

The next major division of the New Testament, from the book of Romans through to the book of Jude, is a collection of letters that were written to churches and individuals that we read about in the book of Acts. They were all part of the community of believers that Jesus came to establish called his church.

The purpose of the letters were written for correction and encouragement so the people of God would know how to live the Christian life. God's purpose and plan for the church was that He might be glorified through the lives of these people.

### Ephesians 1:12

*"...in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory."*

In these letters (*Romans through Jude*) we learn how to live abundantly. We learn how to love one another. We learn how to be good neighbors, spouses, parents and employees. We learn how to build healthy relationships with each other as well as with God through faith in Christ Jesus.

### Revelation

The final book in the New Testament is revelation. This book can be confusing because it was written figuratively. Here Jesus tells the first century church what will soon take place and reassures them of their eternal home with God.

**From beginning to end**, the Bible tells the unfolding story of redemption—God revealing Himself and His will for us. When we step back and see the bigger picture, we gain a clearer understanding of our role as followers of Jesus.



## Overview of the Bible

### What comes to mind when you hear the word church?

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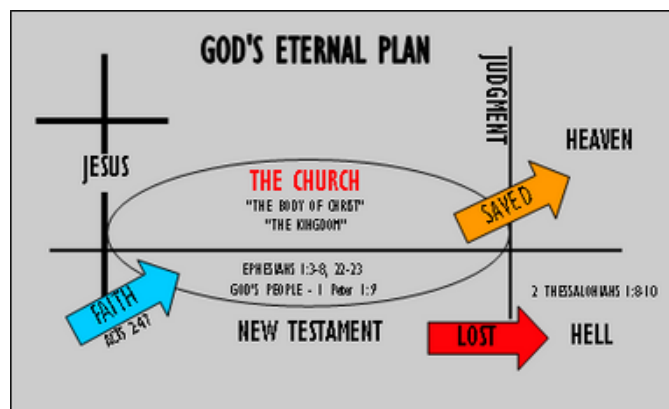
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**The church** that we read about doesn't have a name. The word church means *"The Assembled Together"* or *"The Called Out"*. It is often referred to as *"The Body Of Christ"*, *"The Saved"*, *"The Redeemed"*, *"The Reconciled"*.

These are all phrases describing the people and their relationship with God.

**The Bible** contains the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Its doctrines are holy, its precepts are binding, its histories are true, and its decisions are immutable. Christ is its grand subject, our good its design, and the glory of God its end. It should fill the memory, rule the heart and guide the feet. It is a mine of wealth, a paradise of glory, and a river of pleasure. Read it continually.



**Whether** we are Christians or not, whenever we think of judgment, especially with regards to Christianity, we have this idea of judgment as being that of a wrathful, vengeful God (*this is the idea of penal substitution*).

But to people who are suffering and consistently persecuted, the idea of God coming back to bring judgment and justice is actually good news. They see it as what it is – the setting right of all things.

The justice of God is primarily a restorative justice rather than a retributive justice. That is why the Psalmists often cried out *'how long O Lord!'*. When that day comes, these people will cry out *'finally!'*

Finally there will be justice, finally all things will be set right.

*"In a world of systematic injustice, bullying, violence, arrogance and oppression, the thought that there might be a coming day when the wicked are firmly put in their place and the poor and weak are given their due is the best news there can be. Faced with a world in rebellion, a world full of exploitation and wickedness, a good God must be a God of judgment."* - **N.T. Wright**



**The Word of God** is the foundation of Christianity. In it we learn about the human condition, our need for salvation, God's plan through Christ, the everlasting joy that awaits those who trust in Jesus, and much more.

## Misconceptions:

There are so many misconceptions about the bible and how it was put together. Some people think the Bible was all written down about the same time, copied and distributed. But the Bible is not *'instant'* Scripture and it wasn't all written down around the same time. Instead, the books of the Bible were written over a lengthy period of time by different people inspired by God.

Another misconception about the Bible is that it was merely created by a select few in order to consolidate, gain or maintain power and prestige. Given the adversity faced by the Hebrew people and, later, the persecution suffered by Christians, this explanation is far from plausible. For instance, rather than gaining power or prestige, the early Christians were severely oppressed, while many others were killed – martyred for believing the message of the gospel.



- Greatest selling book in history
- 66 books (39 in Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament)
- Written over period of about 1500 years
- Written by 40+ authors with various backgrounds (*shepherd, fisherman, king, doctor, theologian, tax collector, etc.*)
- Contains dozens of prophecies that have been fulfilled
- Historically accurate

## CRITERIA?

### What criteria were used to determine the canon of Scripture?

The concept of canonicity is the church's assertion that the 66 books of the Bible are the sole inspired texts. Due to their inspiration, they possess a distinct divine authority that guides our beliefs and lives based on their teachings.

You might be curious about the process of determining which books were included as the standard for faith and practice. Scholars have identified 6 criteria that were crucial in making this decision.

## *The Word of God*

### **1. Written by a recognized prophet or apostle**

This did not cover every book of the Bible; in fact there are some books for which we simply do not know who the author is. Hebrews is one book that took a long time for the church to recognize; now, don't have in mind that the church just decrees that now this is authoritative. But it did take longer on some books than others for the church to come to recognize as authoritative. The book of Hebrews took longer because who is the author? By a number of other criteria (which we will come to), it is clear that Hebrews is inspired; it belongs in the canon, but authorship caused it to be accepted late. But many of the books of the Bible are able to be accepted by the fact that they are written by a recognized prophet, by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Moses, Paul or Peter. So there are a lot of books that are pretty clear cut because of the author.

### **2. Written by those associated with recognized prophet or apostle**

These are books written by those associated with a recognized prophet or apostle who obviously learned from the apostle or prophet, and therefore the book is recognized really as under his supervision or teaching or instruction. The clearest case of this would be Luke and Acts. They comprise a lot of the New Testament in terms of total pages. That is a big volume of our New Testament that is not written by an apostle, but Luke traveled with Paul and learned from Paul. As he explains in Luke 1, he worked very hard to represent accurately from sources which he gathered what was true

about Christ, his life, ministry, teaching, death and resurrection. So close proximity to an apostle or prophet was an important aspect.

### **3. Truthfulness (Deut. 18:20-22)**

Truthfulness of the writing. If anything were found in a writing that was not true, it would be dismissed as not from God. God himself said in Deuteronomy 18:20-22 that if a prophet claims to be speaking from me, and what he said is not true, then he has not spoken from me. It is not from the Lord if that is the case. You can see why inerrantists are so insistent on the accuracy of the Bible. God himself goes on record. If it is from God, it has to be accurate.

### **4. Faithfulness to previously accepted canonical writings**

This is where Hebrews shines, in terms of the Church's acceptance of it. Hebrews not only agrees with, but helps explain and bring to greater clarity, what has been taught in the Old Covenant (*Old Testament*); it is now seen anew in Christ and the New Covenant and is so beautifully displayed.



## The Word of God

### 5. Confirmed by Christ, prophet, or an apostle (e.g. Luke 24:44; 2 Pet. 3:16)

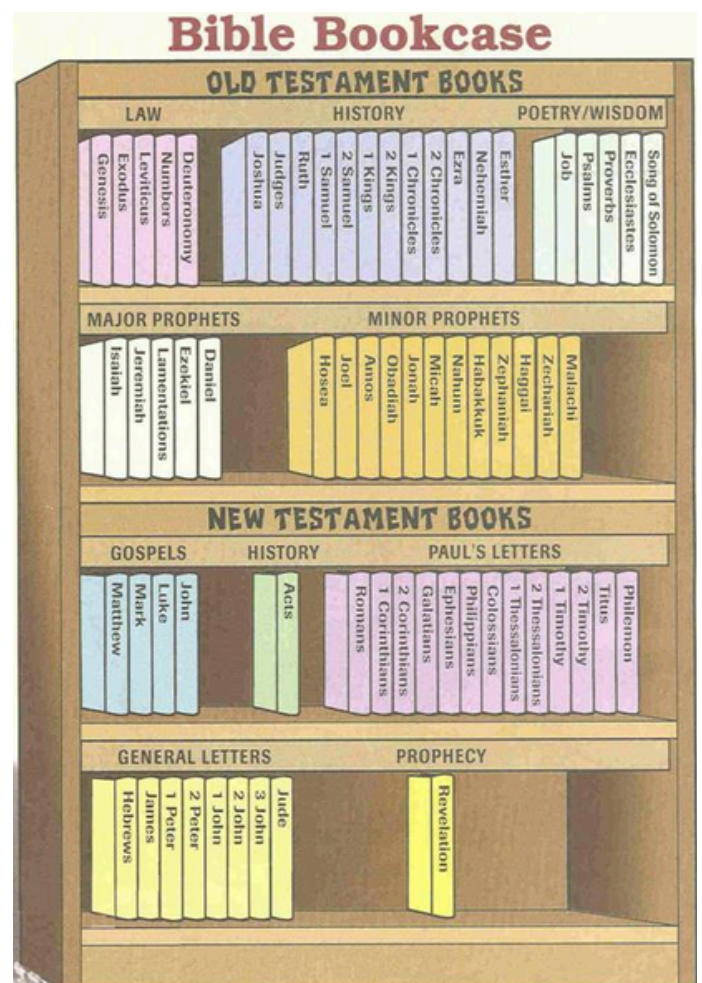
The whole Old Testament, although this was not convincing to Jewish scholars (*to Judaism in the first century*); the Christian Church has had no difficulty accepting the 39 books of the Old Testament because of what Jesus said in **Luke 24:24-27,44**. You will recall when Jesus met the two on the road to Emmaus and was talking with them. That is clearly a reference to the Old Testament that was used and accepted in the days of Jesus.

Now the New Testament becomes, as we have alluded to, a more difficult matter in some books. **2Peter 3:16** is interesting. There is obviously an awareness in the first century, an apostolic awareness, that more Scripture was being written. Paul himself understands what he wrote was the Word of God. Peter, in **2Peter 3:16**, understands what Paul wrote as Scripture. Paul himself refers to his own writings with language like that. **1Thessalonians 2:13** *For this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.*

### 6. Church Usage and Recognition

Ultimately, what happened was that these letters circulated and more and more groups of Christian people were edified by these writings and came to witness together that these writings were from God. The Church used these writings and was deeply edified by them; they were believed over time that they were from God, and so the final acceptance of the

recognition of the 66 books of the Bible as Scripture took place at the Senate of Carthage in A.D. 397. That is not to say that prior to that there was not wide recognition of most of the Bible (we are talking here mostly about the New Testament; the Old Testament Books were never in question because of the dominical approval in Luke 24 when Christ says the Law, the Prophets and the Writings). Some of the New Testament books took longer for them to accept, but most of them were accepted by the first century. There were some that took longer: 2Peter, 2John, 3John, Jude, Hebrews. Those took longer. But by 397, at the council of Carthage, they were accepted by the Church and have been ever since as canonical. - Bruce Ware



## *The Word of God*



### **2 Timothy 3:14-17**

*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

This scripture is full of information on how important God's Word is for our lives. It is through the scripture (*The Word Of God*) where we learn about faith and salvation. It also tells us that the bible is God-breathed - from God Himself; communicated through the personalities of chosen men such as Moses, Paul, John and Luke.

### **What does it mean for scripture to be God-breathed?**

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**Paul** is also sharing with Timothy how the scriptures are useful to our everyday lives. They teach us, correct us, we use them to rebuke and train us in righteousness so that we may be fully equipped for every good work.

The Words of God equip us - they can be used in every aspect of our lives: areas such as marriage, parenting, work, finances, decision-making, relationships etc.

### **How has the Word of God been transformational to you in your life?**

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### **James 1:21-25**

*Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does.*

## *The Word of God*

**James** who is believed to be a brother of Jesus Christ is calling us to humility. A calling that his brother Jesus demonstrated to us so vividly as He walked this earth.

- We are to humbly let the word of God expose our imperfections.
- James is also calling us to action - God expects us to look intently into His word and obey it, and he blesses those who do this.
- We are called to examine our lives. The bible, like a mirror, exposes who we really are.

**How does the function of a mirror apply to us and our spiritual lives?**

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### **Matthew 15:1-9**

*Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."*

**Have you ever encountered people who honored God with their lips but didn't reflect it in their hearts? How did that make you feel?**

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## THE BOREAN CHALLENGE:

## Acts 17:10-11

*As soon as it was night, the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Bereans' were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

**The Bereans'** had 3 qualities that indicate they were noble.

1. **Eagerness** - they were eager to hear God's word.
2. **Digging deep daily** - they examined the scriptures every day. There is nothing more important to your walk with God than to be into His word every day.
3. **Personal pursuit of truth** - they did not just accept what the religious leaders were saying; they checked the scriptures themselves.

**Here** are some great questions to ask as you read the word of God.

- *What did the author mean when they wrote it?*
- *What did the audience understand when they heard it?*
- *What is the inspired conversation (in the Text) trying to communicate to us?*

## CONCLUSION:

## 1 Timothy 4:16

*Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*



**When** you consider an airplane in flight. Which of the two wings is most important?

Truth is they are equally important and vital to the safety of it's passengers. So it is with our life and doctrine, if it doesn't match up it becomes fake and brings reproach upon ourselves. Being followers of Jesus requires us to persist in knowing and living out the truths of the scriptures in our daily lives.

**NOTES:**



**Fashion trends** come and go and many we thought were 'in style' and a 'must have' only look silly now as you leaf through old photographs or magazines. But one thing that seems to always be fashionable is wearing a cross on a necklace.

Funny question, but would you ever see anyone wearing an electric chair on a necklace? Most likely not, because of what it represents. Yet the cross was an ancient form of execution used by the Romans in the first century.

If you were found guilty of certain crimes you would be crucified with your hands and feet nailed to a cross. It was the most humiliating and painful type of death known to man. The apostle Paul even reminds the Galatians of the verse in Deuteronomy where it says '*cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree*' (Galatians 3:13).

And yet there are many reasons people wear crosses, most just don't understand the powerful significance of the symbol they've chosen.

There's an extraordinary, life-changing message that the cross represents for followers of Christ and it would be sad for us to miss it. The cross is central to our life as Christians, and we must embrace this incredible display of love and sacrifice and all it represents.

## 1Peter 1:18-21

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver and gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from our forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

**The cross** was not an afterthought as if God was somehow surprised that we would choose life on our own terms. The fall of man did not destroy God's purpose in creating mankind. God is omniscient (*all knowing*) and nothing takes Him unaware nor is He unprepared for any event. God does not go running after Satan trying to sort out the mess he started. Rather, the blood of Jesus had already been pre-arranged for our redemption. Again, the cross was not an afterthought, but was all part of the master plan of God revealed to us in His word from Genesis to Revelation.

**How would you describe the cross and what it means to you?**

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## *The Power of the Cross*

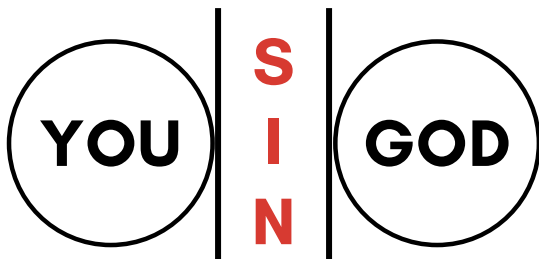
### **What would drive Jesus, the Son of God, to do all of this for us?**

**If we are to fully understand the why,** we must first realize where sin puts us in regards to our relationship with God. The problem of sin is that it has broken our relationship with God since the very beginning. The word of God says that He is light and in Him is no darkness.

#### **1 John 1:5-6**

*This is the message we have heard from Him and declare to you: God is light; **in Him there is no darkness at all**. If we claim to have fellowship with Him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.*

**We** need to understand that God loves us regardless of our sin. However, our sin prevents us from having a relationship with Him.



**The circle** on the left represents you, the circle on the right represents God. But in the middle we see a wall that separates you from God. Sin creates a barrier between humans and God.

### **How would you define sin?**

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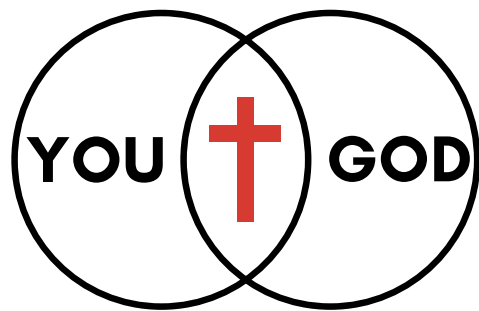
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#### **Isaiah 59:1-2**

*Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear. But **YOUR INIQUITIES** have separated you from your God; **YOUR SINS** have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.*

The message of the cross is so important to us because it's the way that God brings us back into a relationship with Him.



**The cross** of Jesus Christ is seen as a powerful symbol that connects believers back to God. Through the cross, believers are reconciled to God, justified through Christ's sacrificial death, and restored in their relationship with the Father.

It means redemption, freedom, debt paid-in-full, restoration, victory, forgiveness, purification, a sacrificial demonstration of the love that God has for us.

Sin no longer has to hold claim on you. He has provided a way!



## *The Power of the Cross*

### **Isaiah 53:4-6**

*Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

### **Considering everything Christ has done for us, how should we respond?**

#### **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**

*For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.*

### **When responding to Jesus, what are some things you would need to consider?**

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## **CONCLUSION:**

### **Mark 8:34**

*"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."*

**This** may be the most important description of what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the entire gospel, yet most are not clear on what it means. We understand the imagery, but we don't know how to live it out.

### ***What exactly does it mean to take up your cross?***

**First**, it means self-denial. I've never met anyone who doesn't want to experience self-fulfillment, but the only path to self-fulfillment is self-denial. There is no other way. We must refuse to settle for anything less than the best which is God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. Not ours!

**Second**, taking up your cross means sacrifice. And we wince at the thought, but stop and think about it. Any great achievement requires sacrifice. Just as athletes sacrifice their bodies - *'no pain, no gain'*. Are you willing to give up what is keeping you from experiencing a life to the full in Jesus?

**Finally**, it means death. You have to die to self everyday. How? By allowing God to transform you into someone new. Anytime your tempted to live from your old self it's an opportunity to die to pride, die to ego, die to sin, die to self. And if you keep dying to self, you'll come alive in ways you never imagined. In fact, you'll live forever.

**What Is Sin? - The Big Question:**

Today we live in a culture where the concept of sin has become entangled in legalistic arguments over right and wrong. When many of us consider *"What is sin?"* we think of violations of the Ten Commandments. Even then, we tend to think of murder and adultery as *"major"* sins compared with lying, cursing, or idolatry.

The truth is that sin, as defined in the original translations of the Bible, means *"to miss the mark."*



The mark, in this case, is the standard of perfection established by God and lived out by Jesus. Viewing sin in that light, it is clear that we are all sinners.

The Apostle Paul says...

**Romans 3:23**

*"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"*

In light of this, it does no good to compare ourselves to others. We cannot escape our failure to be righteous in our own strength. This is by God's design, because only when we understand our weakness will we consider relying on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Paul, however, puts this in perspective...

**Romans 3:20**

*"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."*

**God** wanted us to recognize our sins. Even those who have not murdered or committed adultery will find themselves convicted of lying, or of worshipping false idols like wealth or power ahead of God. Tragically, sin in any amount will separate us from God.

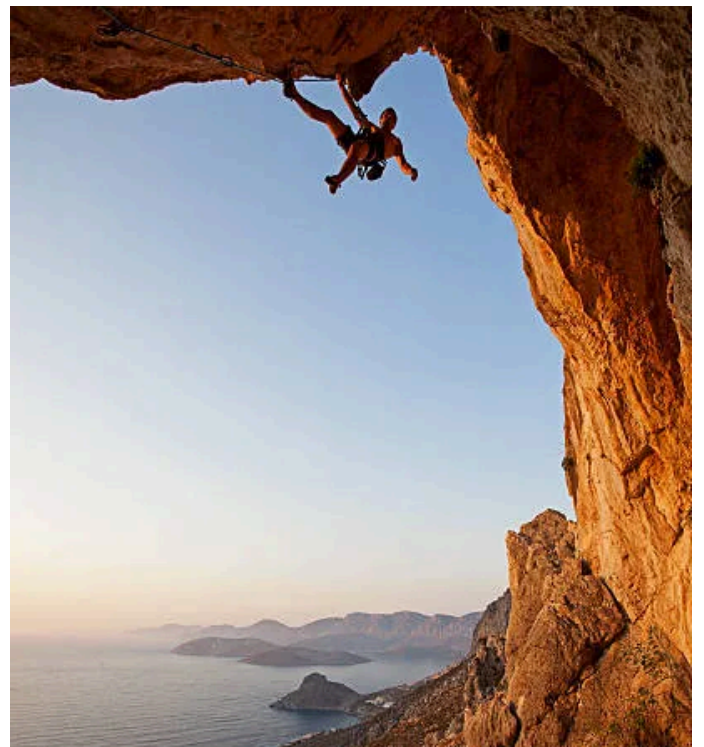
**Isaiah 59:1-2**

*"Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear, but your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."*

We must resist the temptation to act as if we are righteous, especially by leaning on our good works.

**1 John 1:8-10**

*"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives."*



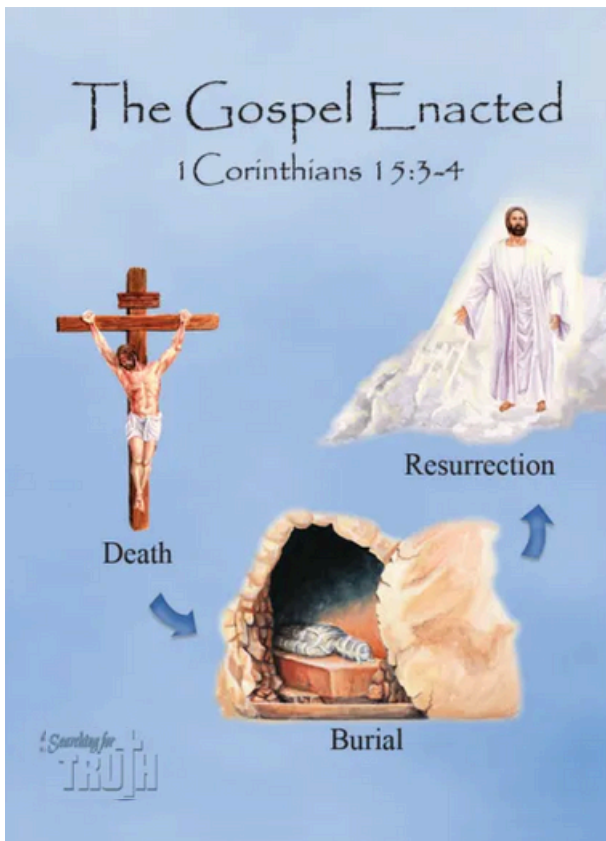
## Sin - What Now?



**The great news** is that the ever cleansing blood of Jesus Christ is washed over us when we obey the gospel and put on Christ in baptism.

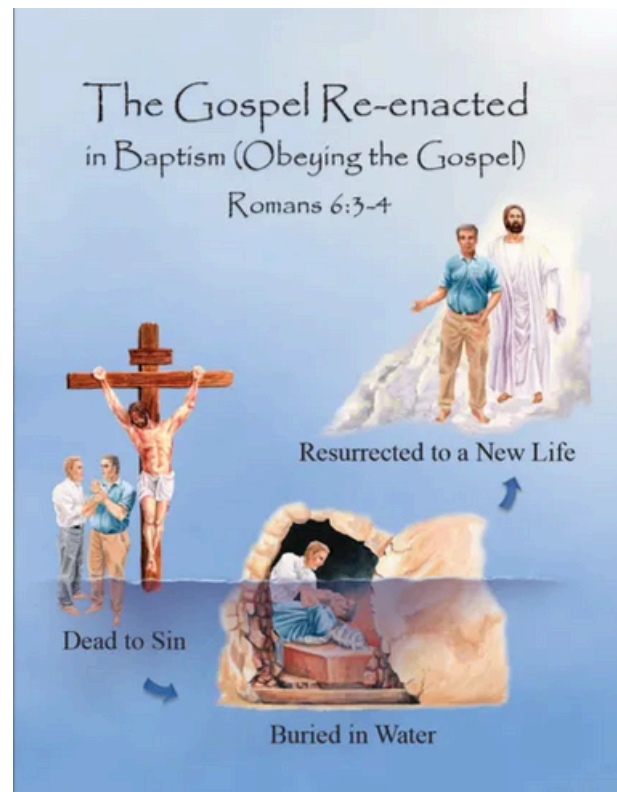
Because of this we can receive full forgiveness continually.

When we recognize ourselves as sinners, our response is to repent, confess our sins and claim Jesus as our King. Jesus will forgive us. He died and rose again three days later claiming victory over death, and through the power of the gospel we also died, were buried, and raised to new life.



### Romans 6:3-4

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*



### What Sin Does

Sin does negative things to us and others. If sin was a positive or even neutral thing in our lives a loving God wouldn't be so concerned about it. There would be no need to repent and turn from it if it was harmless. And yet God commands us to overcome it and avoid it at all costs.

Satan's purpose is to control us with it.

Satan's name means "Adversary," which literally means he is against God and anything godly. In Revelation 9:11, he is called "Abaddon" and "Apollyon." Both of these names, one Hebrew, the other Greek, mean "Destroyer."



## *Sin – What Now?*

**The** more we come to understand that it is the blood of Jesus Christ that purifies us from all our sin, the more fully we will come to appreciate the significance of the price that was paid for us.

**How has your sin hurt your own life?**

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**How has your sin hurt others?**

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**How has your sin hurt God?**

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**How has other people's sin hurt you?**

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Charles H. Spurgeon who was well known for his gifted preaching abilities says...

*"Your conscience is not the rule of your duty, but God's Word is; and if God's Word*

*commands it, what ever your conscience may say about it, you are sinning if you refuse to obey."*

### **James 4:17**

*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

Our consciences often let us know when we are not living as we should.

Sinning is not just acting out in bad ways, it is also failing to do what we ought to do.

Our conscience was given to us by God, and that gift is the key to bringing you joy and freedom from our sins.

As a Christian, you have the capacity to walk before God with a clear conscience. In fact, that is your daily privilege and joy.

Paul says it this way...

### **Acts 24:16**

*"I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men".*

## *Sin - What Now?*



**Guardrails** - In his series 'Guardrails', Andy Stanley describes a guardrail as a system designed to keep vehicles from straying into dangerous or off-limit areas. And just as we need physical guardrails on a road to direct and protect us, we need also to set up guardrails in areas of our spiritual lives as well.

Our conscience works very similar to that of a guardrail and there is something very important about the placement of guardrails.

- They are not placed in the actual areas of danger.
- They are placed just inside the danger zones.
- The actual danger zones are just beyond.

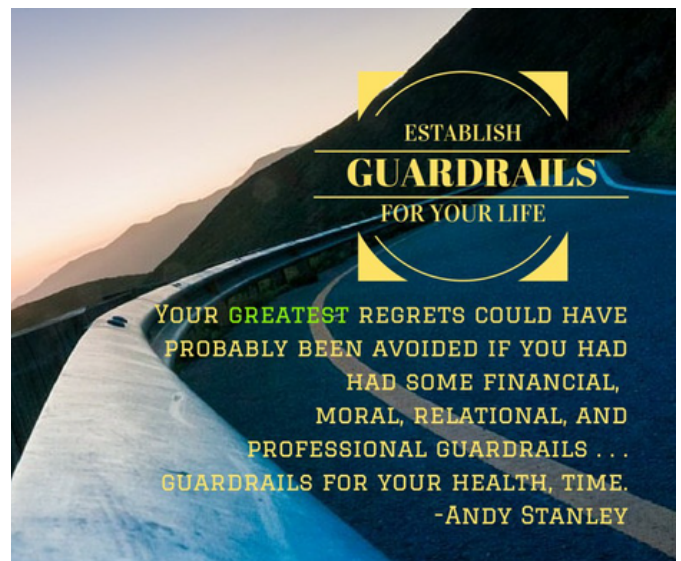
If there were no guardrails on bridges, you could choose to drive closer to the edge of the bridge and you maybe be just fine. No one argues with that logic. To do otherwise would be foolish. It would defeat the purpose.

The assumption with guardrails is that the damage done by hitting a guardrail is minor when compared to what you would have hit had it not been there.

We all need guardrails to keep us from getting to the place where we hand control over to someone or something.

**Who or what** will you allow to influence your behavior or decisions? God wants to play that role. So as you reach for the remote, head to the fridge, text her back, order that second drink, we bump into a guardrail. It is then our conscience whispers "Uh, uh, uh."

We don't plan to mess up our lives any more than we plan to wreck our cars. We just don't plan not to.



**The challenge** for all of us is that culture doesn't promote guardrails.

Here are some examples of the world's attempt at a guardrail.

- Alcohol: Drink responsibly
- Sex: Wait until you are ready.
- Parents: Talk to your children about drugs.
- Money: Consolidate your debts.

None of those things alert your conscience. For us to be intentional about not falling into sin and letting it rule over us we must set guardrails or boundaries that alert our conscience and be sure to heed the warning when our conscience lights up.



# SIN DEFINITIONS

From Galatians 5:19-21

**SEXUAL IMMORALITY** – To commit sexual intercourse or any sexual sin outside of marriage.

**IMPURITY** – Uncleanliness or filth in a natural or physical sense; moral uncleanliness, lewdness, any unnatural pollution, whether acted out by oneself (masturbation), or with another (petting, oral sex).

**DEBAUCHERY** – Lack of self-control which involves one's behaviour (over-indulgence; food, sleep, etc.)

**IDOLATRY** – Worshipping anything other than God (career, school, pleasure, sports).

**WITCHCRAFT** – The occult, sorcery, witchcraft, illicit pharmaceuticals, trance, magical incantation with drugs.

**HATRED** – Being hostile. Animosity towards others.

**DISCORD** – Rivalry or a lack of harmony between people.

**JEALOUSY** – Grief and desire because you do not have what someone else has.

**FITS OF RAGE** – A state of intense displeasure, anger, wrath, rage, indignation.

**SELFISH AMBITION** – Strife and rivalry because of selfish motives.

**DISSENSION** – A separate faction; division between people.

**FACTIONS** – Creating a separation between people because of a different opinion.

**ENVY** – Pain and bitterness felt at the sight of another's excellence or happiness.

**DRUNKENNESS** – Excess intake of alcohol.

**ORGIES** – Living without restraint. Partying.

Additional sins in Colossians 3:5-10

**GREED** – Excessive desire for what one does not have, especially wealth or possessions.

**MALICE** – The desire to inflict injury, harm, or suffering on another.

**SLANDER** – Verbal abuse against someone. Wounding someone's reputation.

**FILTHY LANGUAGE** – Speech of a kind that is generally considered in poor taste or swearing.

**LYING** – To speak falsely or deceitfully.

Additional sins from Mark 7:20-22

**THEFT** – The act of stealing.

**MURDER** – Killing a human being

**ADULTERY** – Sex where at least one person is married.

**DECEIT** – Concealment or distortion of the truth for the purpose of misleading others; fraud.

**LEWDNESS** – Absence of restraint; obscene or indecent.

**ARROGANCE** – An offensive display of self-importance.

**FOLLY** – Lack of prudence or good judgment; foolishness; lack of sense.

Additional sins from Ephesians 5:1-7

**OBSCENITY** – Behavior that is socially or morally inappropriate or indecent.

**COARSE JOKING** – Offensive or distasteful joking.

Additional sins from 2 Timothy 3:1-5

**LOVERS OF YOURSELF** – Loving oneself, selfish.

**LOVERS OF MONEY** – Fond of money, covetous.

**BOASTFUL** – Bragging.

**PRIDE** – See arrogance above in Mark 7:20-22. Same Greek word.

**ABUSIVE** – Harsh or insulting language; mistreating, especially physically.

**DISOBEDIENT TO PARENTS** – Unwillingness to follow your parents' instruction.

**UNGRATEFUL** – Unthankful. Unappreciative. Not acknowledging or demonstrating gratitude.

**UNHOLY** – Being in opposition to God or what is sacred.

**WITHOUT LOVE** – Hard-hearted; unfeeling; without regard for others.

**UNFORGIVING** – Unwilling to show mercy; irreconcilable.

**WITHOUT SELF-CONTROL** – Unable to govern one's desires, lacking in moderation.

**BRUTAL** – Savage.

**NOT LOVERS OF THE GOOD** – Unfriendly, hostile. Showing no compassion.

**TREACHEROUS** – Traitor, betrayer.

**RASH** – Reckless, thoughtless. Acting before thinking or getting advice and perspective.

**CONCEITED** – To swell or inflate with pride. Puffed up.

**LOVERS OF PLEASURE** – Loving pleasure.

Additional sin from 1 Corinthians 6:7-10

**CHEATING** – To defraud, swindle; to take from others in a dishonest way.

**HOMOSEXUALITY** – Intimate or sexual relation with the same gender.

**STEALING** – To take something that does not belong to you.

**SWINDLING** – To cheat a person or business out of money or other assets; to obtain by fraud or deceit.

**What is Grace?**

Even after we have become a disciple and follower of Christ we wrestle with the question:

***How do I know if I am right with God?***

Good people ask that question, and people who don't think they are good ask that question. As long as we continue to look at our behavior and try to figure out where we stand with God we will never have assurance, because we could have always been better. As long as I am looking at my goodness I will not have assurance. But, the moment I look at what Jesus did on my behalf there is assurance in where I stand with God.

*"Good people don't go to heaven, forgiven people do."* Forgiveness is made available to all people through the cross of Christ and through His death burial and resurrection. Forgiveness is available to us through what Jesus has done, NOT through what we have done.

***Does that not take the pressure off?***

Just think for a moment about the rest, peace and relief that this offers us.

It means I don't have to measure up to a certain standard. I don't have to meet a certain requirement to earn His forgiveness. It is a free gift that comes through the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That is Grace!

**Often times** we confuse law and grace and consider them polar opposites when in fact there's really not an actual tension between the two. If you look back to the sequence of events of God giving the law to Israel, God delivered the nation of Israel from Egypt before they even knew God's name and before they knew any of His requirements.



**In fact** it was months later before they received the law. The sequence of becoming God's child was followed by understanding His requirements. For some reason we get those two confused and think we have to keep requirements in order to be redeemed. When there's confusion in this we will always have a tension between law and grace.



**Grace - God's perfect idea!** It's His unique way to rescue His people back into a pure relationship with Him that was destroyed in the garden. And when grace happens, we receive a new heart.

**Ezekiel 36:26**

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you".*

Do not miss this truth. It's much easier to understand that Christ is for me, with me, ahead of me. But it's much more than that - **Christ is in you.**

## *Grace - Yes Please!*

**No other religion** or philosophy makes such a claim. No other movement implies the living presence of its founder inside his followers. Muhammad does not indwell Muslims. Buddha does not inhabit Buddhists. The Christian is a person in whom Christ is happening.

**Grace is God** aggressively moving toward us. He creates the change in us. He accepts us as we are and begins cleaning us up. Grace is God as a heart surgeon, cracking open your chest, removing your heart - poisoned as it is with pride and pain - and replacing it with His own. It is easy for us to fear failure and the result is that we become the weariest people on earth. Attempts at self-salvation bring about nothing but exhaustion. We rush and strive, seeking to earn God's approval, collecting merit badges and brownie points, and scowling at anyone who questions our performance. But God's unending affection isn't something we earn. You have it! Rest in that thought. You are His, you are His child, adopted into the family of God.

### **Why is it so hard to grasp this concept of grace?**

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### **When Mercy Met Grace**

Mercy gave the prodigal son (Luke 15:11) a second chance. Grace threw him a party. Mercy prompted the Samaritan (Luke 10:25) to bandage the wounds of the victim. Grace prompted him to leave his credit card as payment for the victim's care. Mercy forgave the thief on the cross. Grace escorted him into paradise. Mercy pardons us. Grace woos and weds us.

### **Sustaining Grace**

Saving grace saves us from our sins. Sustaining grace meets us at our point of need and equips us with courage, wisdom, and strength. It surprises us in the middle of our difficulties with ample resources of faith. Sustaining grace does not promise the absence of struggle but the presence of God. And according to Paul, God has sufficient sustaining grace to meet every single challenge of our lives. Grace is another way to describe His overflowing, unstoppable source of strength and protection. It comes at us not occasionally but constantly and aggressively, wave upon wave. We've barely re-gained our balance from one breaker, and then, bam, here comes another. God's grace dethrones your fears. Anxiety still comes, for certain. The globe still heats up; wars still flare up; the economy acts up. Disease, calamity, and trouble populate your world. But they don't control it! Grace does.



### **The Result of this Powerful Grace**

We can trust that God's love for us is unending. Which means that rather than conjure up reasons to feel good about yourself, we can trust God's verdict. If God loves you, you must be worth loving. If he wants to have you in His kingdom, then you must be worth having. God's grace invites you—no, requires you—to change your attitude about yourself and take sides with God against your feelings of rejection. To live as God's child is to know, at this very instant, that you are loved by your Maker not because you try to please Him and succeed, or fail to please Him and apologize, but because He wants to be your Father. Nothing more. All your efforts to win His affection are unnecessary. All your fears of losing His affection are needless. You can no more make Him want you than you can convince Him to abandon you. You have a place at his table.

### **Ephesians 1:7-8**

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.*

### **Ephesians 2:1-10**

*As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.*

*All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, **we were by nature objects of wrath.** But because of His great love for us, **God, who is rich in mercy,** made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - **it is by grace you have been saved.** And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God - not by works so that no one can boast.** For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

**As you read and reflect on these verses, do you find them challenging or inspiring? Why?**

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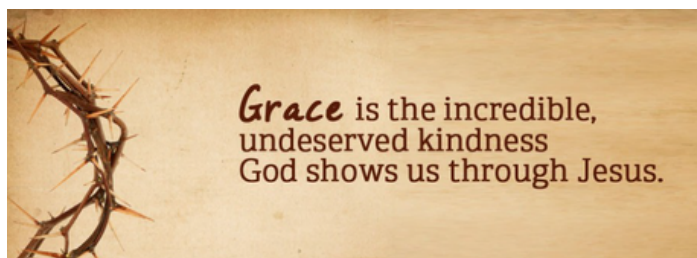
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## Grace – Yes Please!



### CONCLUSION:

#### Falling from Grace

Someone once said: *"I love to sin, God loves to forgive. What a wonderful arrangement."* If we hold to this understanding of grace we will have completely missed the point.

Take a moment and read through this next passage of scripture. It gives a clear picture of how God views deliberate sin.

#### Hebrews 10:26-31

*If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

**The concept** of God's grace is thrilling beyond words. It shines its brightest, however, against the backdrop of another aspect of our Creator's nature — that of sacred wrath.

But "wrath," as used of God, does not suggest an impulsive, emotional reaction, as the term frequently does with humans. Rather, divine wrath is the reflection of a deliberate and measured reaction of a perfectly Holy Being toward sin — a response that is entirely consistent with the righteous nature of a loving God. Standing over against the starkness of sacred wrath, is the dazzling concept of "grace."

**In the New Testament**, "grace" is mentioned 156 times, and takes on a special redemptive sense in which God makes available His favor on behalf of sinners, who actually do not deserve it. God's grace is not dispensed apart from an instruction that requires both understanding and obedience.

The Scriptures warn of certain Christians who attempted to revert to the Mosaic system for salvation. As a result, they were *"severed from Christ"* and *"fallen away from grace"* (Galatians 3:26-27; 5:4).

**Grace** is a soul-stirring truth that should be deeply cherished, never twisted or taken advantage of.



**In the minds of most people** the word "church" does not conjure up images of something grand, something glorious, something powerful or something amazing. The wife of Robert A. Taft, the American politician, once remarked:

*"I always find that statistics are hard to swallow and impossible to digest. The only one I can ever remember is that if all the people who go to sleep in church were laid end to end, they would be a lot more comfortable."* She summed up what a lot of people feel: Church is a place to sleep.



**Ralph G. Ingersoll**, the 19th century attorney, gave a different, but equally negative and equally common view when he wrote, *"The Church has always been willing to swap off treasures in heaven for cash down below."*



**Ralph Waldo Emerson** found the church most attractive when it was sitting quietly and doing nothing. *"I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching,"* he wrote in an 1841 essay.



But leave it to **H.L. Mencken**, the 20th century American journalist, to bring the strongest charge: *"A church is a place in which gentlemen who have never been to heaven brag about it to persons who will never get there."* He thought the church to be a place full of hypocrites or fools or, most likely, both.



When you mention church to many people, a host of unattractive words jump into their minds---words like boredom, irrelevancy, greed, hypocrisy and foolishness. From the towering (but now empty) cathedrals of Europe to the picturesque white church building of New England, the church has often been admired more for architecture than for attitude, more for construction than for character. It must break God's heart. Paul understood what the church could be - what God designed her to be - and that understanding comes through clearly in these words from his letter to the Ephesians.

## Ephesians 3:20-21

*"Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."*

God's glory dwells in the church, says Paul. No, not in empty edifices or cozy sanctuaries, but in the people of God who have been brought together by the blood of Jesus Christ, who have committed themselves to a life of daily cross-bearing, and who now look at life, at each other, and at their neighbors in a totally different way.

*(Thomas A. Jones -Glory in the Church)*



## *Who Needs the Church?*

### **"What is the church?"**

Many people today understand the church as a building. This is not a biblical understanding of the church. The word "church" comes from the Greek word **ekklesia** which is defined as "an assembly" or "called-out ones." The root meaning of "church" is not that of a building, but of people. It is ironic that when you ask people what church they attend, they usually identify a building.

### **Romans 16:5**

*"... greet the church that is in their house."*

Paul refers to the church in their house—not a church building, but a body of believers. The church is the body of Christ, of which He is the head.

### **Ephesians 1:22-23**

*"And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way."*

The body of Christ is made up of all believers in Jesus Christ from the day of Pentecost (Acts chapter 2) until Christ returns.

### **Why does the church exist?**

This question is one of purpose. When all the extras are set aside, when we dig right down to the core reason for our being on earth at this time, what do we find? The answer to this question should radically affect the way we think and live. We want to learn to ask the right questions. Because, like picks and shovels, good questions are the best way to uncover what's not so obvious on the surface.

### **What is the purpose of our existence as a local church?**

The array of possible answers might be: *to present the gospel to the lost...to bring hope to the hurting...to provide a place of worship and instruction...to equip the saints for the work of ministry...to comfort the grieving...to feed the hungry...to help the needy.*

While all of these are certainly worthwhile reasons and a part of the greater picture, they are not the primary reason for the church's existence.

**Answer:** *"To glorify the Lord our God."*

The Apostle Paul gives us this answer which explicitly states the reason for our existence.

### **1Corinthians 10:31**

*"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."*

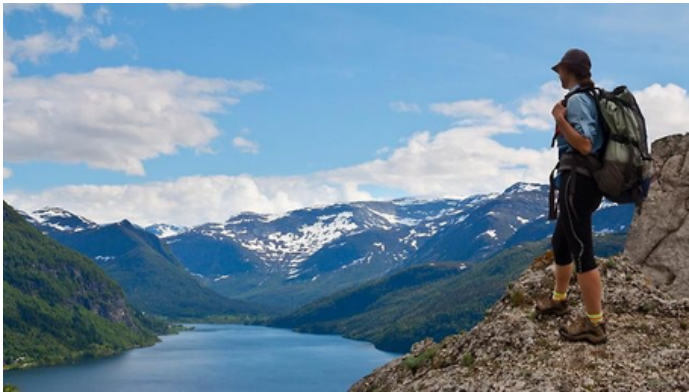
Paul also reiterates our purpose earlier.

### **1Corinthians 6:19-20**

*"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."*



## Who Needs the Church?



**If we were to look** in the letter to the Romans, Paul articulates the same purpose for the church once again.

### **Romans 15:5**

*"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Even though the New Testament throbs with the consuming purpose to glorify God, our cultures pulse grows faint on this point. Often we think the goal is growth. After all, isn't bigger better? Is our goal is to make an impression, to look good, to have stirring programs and incredible sermons? If not, why does the church exist?

The goal of the church is to glorify God by following Jesus, spreading His message, and fostering a community of believers who live out their faith in love, service, and obedience. It exists to equip and empower believers to be transformed in their relationship with God.

### **2 Thessalonians 1:11-12**

*"With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of*

*His calling, and that by His power He may fulfill every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

As you glorify God, you will be glorified in Him. And when others observe your life, they will want to glorify Him too.

### **Matthew 5:16**

*"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."*

It is abundantly clear that the soul purpose of our existence is to glorify the God of Heaven.

### **1 Corinthians 10:31**

*"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."*

*(Chuck Swindoll - The Church)*

### **Our Four Rhythms at ECC:**

If the church exists to glorify God, and share in that glory, we believe these four postures are essential: *Worship, Connect, Discover, & Hands and Feet.*



## Who Needs the Church?



**WORSHIP**  
LOVE GOD



**CONNECT**  
LOVE OTHERS

### **Worship - Love God**

Worship is the foundation of the church's existence, as it directs our hearts and minds toward God. We are called to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37). Through worship, prayer, and the study of God's Word, we honor and glorify His name.

When we look at Acts 2:42, we see a body of committed, worshipful people. The Greek term, meaning "to devote," is also used in Acts 1:14 and 6:4. It implies a steadfast, single-minded solidarity.

Verse 46, of Acts 2, suggests a unity in the worship: *"And day after day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart."*

Our goal is to create opportunities for believers to gather together and worship, through singing, teaching, discovery and radical hospitality. The goal is to cultivate relationships that seek God above all else.

### **Connect - Love Others**

Connecting with others goes beyond just the worship service on Sundays. It's about building a deeper, authentic community where believers are actively engaged in each other's lives throughout the week. Jesus commanded us to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34), and this love is most fully expressed in daily relationships and interactions. The church is not just a place to gather on Sundays but a network of individuals who are committed to walking alongside each other in every season of life.

At ECC we believe connection happens through small groups, prayer times, and discovery groups where believers can build strong, supportive relationships. These spaces allow people to share their struggles, celebrate victories, and grow together in their faith. These connections are vital for our spiritual growth and cultivate an environment of accountability, encouragement, and love.



## Who Needs the Church?



### **DISCOVER** LOVE JESUS

#### **Discover - Love Jesus**

Loving Jesus goes beyond a one-time encounter with Christ; it's about developing an ongoing, intimate relationship with Him every day. Loving Him means continually growing in our understanding of who He is, deepening our relationship with Him through prayer, devotion, and becoming students of His Word. Jesus invites us to follow Him, which draws us into a daily commitment of time spent with Him, and living out His teachings.

This is foundational to our spiritual growth. Just as Jesus spent time in prayer and solitude with the Father (Mark 1:35), we connect with Him through prayer and reflection as well. This communion with Jesus helps us hear His voice, seek His guidance, and to strengthen our faith as we walk with Him as friends.

Becoming a student of the Word is a key part of discovering who this Jesus is. Through scripture we learn about life He is inviting into. It's where we discover more about His life, His character, and His mission.

In John 5:39, Jesus tells the religious leaders, *"You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me."* On the pages of Scripture is where we find Jesus.

*"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"* (John 14:9)



### **HANDS & FEET** LOVE LIKE JESUS

#### **Hands & Feet - Love Like Jesus**

Loving like Jesus is about actively living out our faith through service and compassionate action, following the example Jesus has set for us. Jesus demonstrated what it means to love through His selfless acts of kindness, His willingness to meet the needs of others, and to ultimately lay down his life for all people. He didn't just preach love; He showed it through tangible everyday acts of service.

To be the hands and feet of Jesus means being engaged in the world around us, showing kindness, generosity, and compassion to everyone, particularly those in need. Jesus didn't reserve His love for the well-off or those who could repay Him; He reached out to the marginalized, the oppressed, and the forgotten. As followers of Christ, we are called to love in the same way—by serving those who may never be able to repay us, by showing mercy to those who have wronged us, and by advocating for justice where it is needed. We strive to be the hands and feet of Jesus by engaging in various community outreach efforts. This might take the form of serving at a food bank, visiting the sick or elderly, offering care to those facing homelessness, or coming alongside families in crisis.

*"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink..."* (Matthew 25:35)

## All the “ONE ANOTHER” COMMANDS in the New Testament

### UNITY

One third of the “one another” commands deal with the church getting along.

1. Be at peace with one another (Mk 9:50)
2. Don't grumble among one another (Jn 6:43)
3. Be of the same mind with one another (Ro 12:6, 15:5)
4. Accept one another (Ro 15:7)
5. Wait for one another before beginning the Eucharist (1 Co 11:33)
6. Don't bite, devour, and consume one another (Ga 5:15)
7. Don't challenge or envy one another (Ga 5:26)
8. Gently, patiently tolerate one another (Ep 4:2)
9. Be kind, tender-hearted, and forgiving to one another (Ep 4:32)
10. Bear with and forgive one another (Co 3:13)
11. Seek good for one another, and don't repay evil for evil (1 Th 5:15)
12. Don't complain against one another (Ja 4:11, 5:9)
13. Confess sins to one another (Ja 5:16)

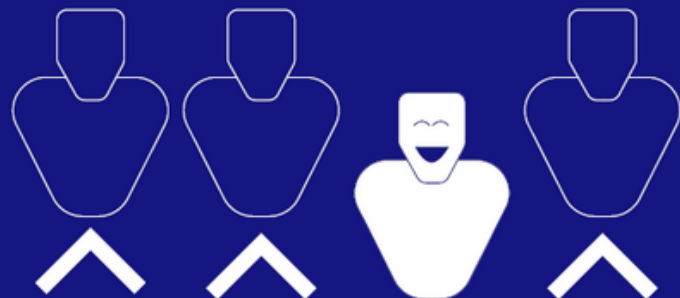
### And here's the rest:

1. Don't judge one another, and don't put a stumbling block in a brother's way (Ro 14:13)
2. Greet one another with a kiss (Ro 16:16; 1 Co 16:20; 2 Co 13:12)
3. Husbands and wives: don't deprive one another of physical intimacy (1 Co 7:5)
4. Bear one another's burdens (Ga 6:2)
5. Speak truth to one another (Ep 4:25)
6. Don't lie to one another (Co 3:9)
7. Comfort one another concerning the resurrection (1 Th 4:18)
8. Encourage and build up one another (1 Th 5:11)
9. Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (He 10:24)
10. Pray for one another (Ja 5:16)
11. Be hospitable to one another (1 Pe 4:9)



One third of these commands instruct Christians to love one another.

1. Love one another (Jn 13:34, 15:12, 17; Ro 13:8; 1 Th 3:12, 4:9; 1 Pe 1:22; 1 Jn 3:11, 4:7, 11; 2 Jn 5)
2. Through love, serve one another (Ga 5:13)
3. Tolerate one another in love (Ep 4:2)
4. Greet one another with a kiss of love (1 Pe 5:14)
5. Be devoted to one another in love (Ro 12:10)



### HUMILITY

About 15% stress an attitude of humility and deference among believers.

1. Wash one another's feet (Jn 13:14)
2. Give preference to one another in honor (Ro 12:10)
3. Don't be haughty: be of the same mind (Ro 12:16)
4. Serve one another (Ga 5:13)
5. Be subject to one another (Ep 5:21)
6. Regard one another as more important than yourselves (Php 2:3)
7. Clothe yourselves in humility toward one another (1 Pe 5:5)

## A full-body photograph of a woman from behind, walking away. She has blonde hair tied in a bun. She is wearing a white short-sleeved t-shirt and dark grey leggings. A white drawstring backpack is slung over her shoulders. In her left hand, she holds a black bag. She is wearing dark flip-flops. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.



## If I can see as God sees, I will do as God says

### Romans 12:2

*Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will.*

**The way we perceive things** shapes our reality. This principle explains so much of why we do what we do from faith to selfishness, it is perspective that drives our behavior. With this in mind, we are to do everything in our power to see as God see's. If we can gain God's perspective, we are more apt to do what He says. Simple? Yes. Easy? No.

**The good news** is that God has documented His take on all of life - in the Scriptures. It's the discipline of reading God's Word, understanding what it means, and doing what it says that we struggle with. The ability to develop consistent spiritual disciplines will have a dramatic impact on the quality of our relationship with Christ.

So what brings about this transformation or change? A renewed mind. But renewal is not instantaneous. Renewal is a process of taking off old things and putting on new things. In the context of life in Christ, renewal is the process of removing lies and replacing them with truth.

**Does that mean** God erases the lustful thoughts and insecurities that have harassed us throughout our lives? No. After committing our lives to Christ we wake up the next morning fighting the same things we battled the day before. Our identities will be in Christ, but our minds will still be full of crud.

**We will never** live transformed lives until we have transformed minds. And we will never have transformed minds until we have God's thoughts. It is His perspective, His mind that we need to gain. And we will never gain God's thoughts until we exercise the spiritual disciplines of time alone with God, scripture memory, journaling, and prayer. Paul's statement on renewal in Romans must become foremost in our minds if we want to see life change happen.

## Where are your favorite places to be alone with God?

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## *Spiritual Disciplines*



**Jesus' time alone** with the Father was His ultimate priority. It took priority over ministry, family, friends, and even sleep. In spite of all He had to do, He made time to be with His Father.

### **Luke 5:15-16**

*Yet the news about Him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.*

**As strange** as it sounds, He put His own spiritual welfare ahead of the spiritual and physical welfare of others. Jesus came to do the will of the Father. In order to do the will of the Father, He had to know the will of the Father. Jesus made it a priority to know the One who sent Him.

Time alone with God must become our priority as well, if we are serious about pursuing intimacy with God. God speaks to us through His word, to hear from Him we must be in it.

The main reason that most people don't spend time alone with God is they have come to a conclusion that it is not urgent. Instead it is easy to approach God like a vending machine with "give me, bless me, help me" attitudes. If we don't discipline ourselves into time alone with God, what began as a relationship will dissolve into routine, a ritual, a religion.

### **Make the Time**

We don't want to put God into a box, but we must learn to prioritize our lives around listening to God. A daily time alone with Him postures us to listen. Time alone with God develops a listening heart. Find a favorite place. Make it yours, unique to you, away from any distractions. It could be a guestroom, a corner of a bedroom, or a particular chair in the living room. I think you would agree, that when possible, a drive to the park or a certain rock near the water on a beautiful day changes everything. Learn to escape once in awhile. The reason most of us don't make time with God is that we fail to plan time with God. Learn to make an appointment on your schedule for just you and your heavenly Father. You'll be glad you did.

**God speaks** to the core issues of our lives through the Scriptures. Scripture is where we find out how deeply we are loved. Scripture is where we become overwhelmed with the price God paid to know us and to be known by us.

Without closeness to God comes a sense of powerlessness and anxiety. We will feel as though we are on a roller coaster ride: up one day, down the next, since there is no interior stability from intimate, daily contact with God. We will seek to live our lives relying on the faith and strength of others. This will cause us to have an unhealthy dependence upon other Christians. This is not God's intent for His children. His desire is for us to seek and depend on Him for everything.



Go under the knife daily.

For the word of God is alive and powerful.  
It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword,  
cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow.  
It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12 NLT)

## THE BIG 4

*There are four components that we must incorporate into our time alone with God*

- 1. DISCOVERY OF THE WORD OF GOD**
- 2. PRAYER TIME**
- 3. WRITE ON - JOURNALING**
- 4. SCRIPTURE MEMORY**

### DISCOVERY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Ask yourself 4 questions when reading

- 1. What does this passage say?**  
What does this mean to me in my own words?
- 2. Why is this important?**  
Why do I need to know this?
- 3. What should I do about it?**  
How can I apply this to my life today?
- 4. How can I remember this?**  
What's the best way for me to remember this verse? (write it on a card, ask for accountability)

### PRAY THROUGH THE WORD

- Lord, help me to be, or not to be like the person I just read about...
- Lord, when I face a trial, remind me that it is a test of my faith.

#### Pray through the day

- Today, I will not allow temptation...
- Today, I am meeting with...
- Today, when he or she approaches me,...

#### Pray through your relationships

- Family, friends, acquaintances.

### WRITE ON

*Keep a record of your spiritual journey*

1. Requires us to think about our goals
2. A journal serves as a permanent record of our progress
3. Writing requires us to think through the why's and the how's
4. A journal reminds us of how God has answered our prayers in the past
5. Keeping a journal naturally reminds us to articulate next steps
6. Writing reminds us to think beyond the obvious
7. Journaling provides accountability
8. Journaling allows our story to inspire others

### MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

*Write on your heart every word*

1. Jesus memorized scripture - Like Him, it will help us through temptation
2. We are called to remember - Let the word of God dwell in us richly (Colossians 3:16)
3. Memorizing scripture renews our minds and transforms our life
4. Memorizing scripture helps to guard our hearts and keep our ways pure
5. The memorizing of scripture helps us with encouraging others
6. Scripture memory is vitally useful for sharing our faith to others
7. It gives us a better understanding of God and His will for our lives
8. Memorizing scripture makes us wise



## Spiritual Disciplines



**A strong devotional life** will do more to transition us from a religious approach to God to a relational one than anything else. If there is no intimate communication, God is relegated to buildings and days of the week. He becomes a duty. This accounts for those who go to church every week but whose everyday lives are not changed. A strong devotional life is what develops a sense of accountability between us and our Father in heaven. When we develop the habit of spending personal time alone with God, we enter into the realm of accountability. All the difference in the world lies between hearing something convicting and sitting alone with God's Word and hearing from Him.

**What do you see as a challenge to developing consistent spiritual disciplines? And how do you plan to overcome those challenges?**

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### Psalm 119:9-11

*How can a young man (or woman) keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

### 2 Corinthians 10:3-5

*Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

### Deuteronomy 11:18

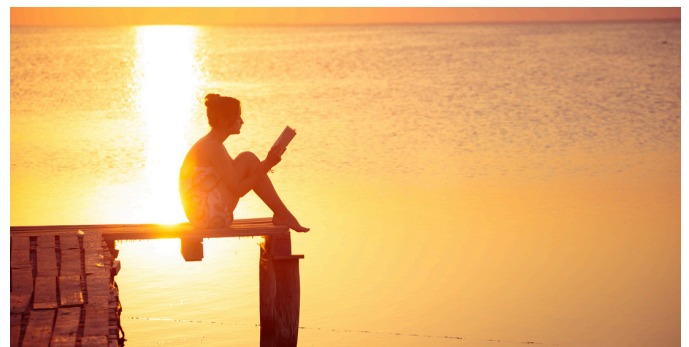
*Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.*

### Proverbs 3:3

*Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.*

### Psalm 5:3

*In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice... I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.*



*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

*Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,*

*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

*Philippians 3:12-14*



LET US RUN WITH PERSEVERANCE  
THE RACE MARKED OUT FOR US.

*Hebrews 12:1*



FINISH



