

# Q + A

In-depth Answers  
to Life's Bigger Questions

GodSpeaks<sup>®</sup>

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# Who is God?



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# Can I even know there is a God?

God's existence can't be proven.

Guess all those churches, synagogues, and mosques might as well close up shop and go home, right?

Well, wait a minute. It can't be "scientifically" proven that Julius Caesar ever existed either. But there are marble busts of Caesar, coins with his name and image on them, and untold numbers of ancient documents and inscriptions that refer to him. In fact, books about him could fill an entire library. But all these are evidence, not proof. Evidence points to a fact. Proof asserts a fact undeniably. For example, you can prove that  $2+2=4$ . You can add two oranges and two oranges, and you will always end up with four oranges. That's proof, what scientists call empirical proof. Whether or not Julius Caesar lived cannot be proven empirically. However, the weight of historical evidence indicates that he actually did.

The same is true of God. His existence can't be proven. Yet, as in Caesar's case, the preponderance of evidence makes it not only possible to believe that God existed; some would say it makes this conclusion inescapable.

The questions that follow are commonly asked by people just like you who are searching to know the truth about God. Maybe you yourself have asked these questions. Take a little time. Go through them in your quest to determine for yourself whether or not God exists.

## Hasn't science disproved God?

Many think that science, especially Darwinism, or evolution theory, has largely disproved the idea of a God who created everything around us. Despite this brand of thinking, the existence of God remains what scientists call a “highly convenient hypothesis.” In other words, it “fits,” as if our minds have a built-in “feel” for God (so much so, in fact, that when people reject the idea of God, they will always replace it with something else, like nature or even materialism).

Even with the wide acceptance of Darwinism in our world today, Darwin's extensive theorizing has done little to adequately explain the ultimate cause and origin of life. Where did this world come from? The sea that teems with fish, the sun that flames with energy, the invisible particles of dust that swirl in the air—what caused them? If they “evolved,” what caused the things from which they came?

Faith is faith friends—whether you have faith that “In the beginning, God created” (Genesis 1:1) or you have faith that once there was nothing that over eons of time developed into something with no mind to trigger its occurrence. It's still your faith and what you choose to place it in.

After careful investigation, it is next to impossible to believe that our universe evolved accidentally into its vast, beautiful, complex precision that we see all around us. The universe contains roughly one hundred billion (that's a one followed by eleven zeros!) galaxies. Each galaxy holds approximately one hundred billion stars and perhaps as many planets. The astronomer who charts the expansive intricacies of the universe must assume that such things happened by chance or say, like the Bible says, “The heavens tell of the glory of God. The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship” (Psalm 19:1, NLT).

Consider our planet, the only place in the solar system where life is found. If the earth's orbit around the sun moved just a little faster, centrifugal force would hurl it away like a stone from a sling, and all life would cease. If it traveled only slightly more slowly, the sun's massive gravity would draw the earth closer, causing all life to end. If the earth's placement in the solar system were slightly closer to the sun, the average temperature on earth would rise significantly, and the effect on the ratio of land and water would be disastrous to the balance required for the maintenance of life. Likewise, if the earth were slightly farther away from the sun, lowering the average temperature, constant winter would set in, making our planet uninhabitable. If the moon were not in its present, perfect distance from the earth, tides would overflow coastal areas and erode continents, creating a desolate water-world that could not sustain life. The scientist who understands the miracle of the earth's placement in the solar system must either attribute it to some cosmic form of luck or resolve in his mind, as the Bible says, that “God...made the world to be lived in, not to be a place of empty chaos” (Isaiah 45:18, NLT).

One molecule of human DNA, far too tiny to be seen by the naked eye, is a complex ladder of a hundred million or so twists and about a hundred billion atoms. The biologist who probes DNA must imagine that this astoundingly complicated building block of life developed on its own, like a jigsaw puzzle of a hundred billion pieces that assembles itself in a box, or say, like the Bible says, “Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it” (Psalm 139:14, NLT).

A single organ in the human body—the eye—is incredibly complex. Forty different mechanisms—a lens, a pupil, a retina made up of 130,000,000 cells, nerve fibers, and so on—function in mind-boggling harmony to produce the most sophisticated imaging device known to science. The surgeon who studies the human eye must believe that its development happened randomly or conclude, like the Bible says, that “Ears to hear and eyes to see—both are gifts from the LORD” (Proverbs 20:12, NLT).

Such obvious and breathtaking design points compellingly to a Designer. In fact, Anthony Flew, one of the world’s leading proponents of atheism, has recently made a dramatic turnaround, admitting that recent biological research “has shown, by the almost unbelievable complexity of the arrangements which are needed to produce (life), that intelligence must have been involved.” Far from discrediting the notion of a Creator, science continues to expose the astounding intricacy and irreducible complexity of the universe, adding faster to our wonder than to our understanding. The honest seeker should at the very least consider the possibility that behind such wonder is an infinite Mind rather than the mindless march of chance.

## Isn't it a little unsophisticated or unintellectual to believe in God?

Certainly, some people cherish the opinion that those who believe in God are reality challenged. But facts do not support that belief. Reliable, sophisticated, intellectual men and women through the ages have testified to their belief in the reality of God. A former Egyptian official named Moses encountered God in a burning bush and wrote an affidavit that has become part of our Bible. The head of state of a major world power, Israel's King David, gave credit to God for his own throne. A renowned political prisoner, the Apostle John, recorded his encounter with God in a lengthy revelation that now concludes the Bible.

Throughout European and American history, some very high-powered thinkers have believed wholeheartedly and whole-mindedly in God: scientists like Galileo and Sir Isaac Newton; Noah Webster, the creator of *Webster's Dictionary*; George Washington and Abraham Lincoln; Samuel F.B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph; philosopher Soren Kierkegaard; and Nobel Prize-winning physicist Arthur Compton, to name a few.

To believe in God requires no less intellect than not to believe in God because each is a function of faith, not intellect. The Bible says, "By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God's command" (Hebrews 11:3, NLT). You can refuse to believe without having a Ph.D. in microbiology. And you can likewise choose to believe without having all of your questions answered. Whatever you decide, you need to dispel the myth that intelligent, sophisticated people do not believe in God because the evidence from history firmly indicates otherwise.

## What if I only believe in things I can see and experience?

Fair enough, for starters. But that must mean you've rejected evolution theory as well; unless, of course, you've actually witnessed that whole fish-to-mammal-to-ape-to-man transformation. Not to mention evaporation. Photosynthesis. Wind. Of course, you may argue, that even though you cannot physically touch or see these things, you can certainly observe their effects and thus believe they exist.

As it is with the wind, so it is with God. Take, for example, the case of prisoners on the Malay Peninsula during World War II. Professor and author Paul Little tells of these men in a Japanese POW camp who "had been reduced almost to animals, stealing food from their buddies, who were also starving." These unbelieving men, however, began reading the New Testament. As a result, "this group of scrounging, clawing humans was transformed into a community of love...a touching and powerful story that demonstrates clearly the reality of God in Christ Jesus" (from *Know Why You Believe*, by Paul E. Little, Victor Books).

An alcoholic, who has not had a sober moment for three years, suddenly after one night, announces that his life has been changed and he has stopped drinking. A woman crippled by multiple sclerosis is totally healed in an instant, and her doctor can only shake his head in wonder at her sudden and complete turnaround. A teenager who has often contemplated suicide because of loneliness finds hope—even happiness—in prayer, Bible reading, and selfless devotion to her church.

The bottom line is, you *can* experience God and His effects, but God has designed such an experience to come about not via proof but through faith. The anonymous writer of the book of Hebrews in the Bible makes it clear that we must have faith to please God because "anyone who wants to come to Him must believe that there is a God and that he rewards those who sincerely seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6, NLT).

People can see some of God's greatest beauty and most complex creations, and they will still look from here to eternity for *proof* of God's existence. But we cannot nail down God with proofs; He is infinitely greater than our efforts to understand Him. We can only take hold of Him with the grasp of faith; in other words, we must "believe that He exists." When we believe in Him and earnestly seek Him in His Word, in the world, and among His people, He will reward us and reveal Himself to us, and to others through us.

## If I decide to believe in God, don't I have to decide WHICH God to believe in?

If you can believe there is a God, then you face a new decision: Which god is the true and living God? Can you progress from believing in a god of your own understanding to believing in the God of the Bible?

The Bible declares that there is only one God, whom Jesus called “the only true God” (John 17:3, NLT). The Apostle Paul, the great church planter of the first-century church, patently stated, “But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything” (1 Corinthians 8:6, NLT). Isaiah the prophet recorded the words that God spoke to him: “I am the First and the Last; there is no other God” (Isaiah 44:6, NLT).

The testimony of Jesus is that the only true God is the God of the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who spoke to Moses in a burning bush and to Elijah in a still, small voice, and most vividly through his Son, Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-2). But none of this matters if you don't find a way to connect personally with God. According to the Bible, if you can believe that God exists, then you must ask yourself whether you can go so far as to believe that he will reward you if you “sincerely seek him” (Hebrews 11:6, NLT). In other words, if you earnestly try to connect with God, do you believe that he will show up in some way in your life? Can you go that far in your faith? If so, then you're on the path.

You don't need to know right away all there is to know about God in order to open the lines of communication with him. You don't even need to have all of your questions answered before you ask him to reveal himself to you. You just need enough faith to start, and you might be amazed at what happens next.



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# Isn't every religion a path to God?

“If one believes in the idea of God and in salvation, there should be different ways of reaching a level of salvation, enlightenment, whatever you believe in. I find it rather difficult to comprehend the common belief that one religion, one path is the way to salvation. A religious leader shouldn't preach the exact same 'path' or 'way to salvation' for all his listeners any more than a doctor should prescribe the exact same medication to all of his patients.” (Grace Li, an Internet essayist)

These words reflect the thoughts and opinions of many. After all, why shouldn't there be different paths to God, just like there are different paths to your grandma's house?

Of course, a lot depends on our starting point. If we're going to start with our own opinions, likes, and dislikes, we could probably fashion a number of alternative “paths to God.” But, what if the starting point isn't up to us? What if God actually blazed the trail and set up the signposts for us to follow to find our way? What if he were actually to say to us, “*This is the way, walk in it*”?

That would decidedly change things, wouldn't it?

“Let's look at some commonly asked questions people have when it comes to this concept of “all paths lead to God” and see what we discover.

## Don't all religions teach the same basic truths?

Most religions (although not all) teach that there is at least one god. Most religions (although not all) teach love for others. Most religions (although not all) teach that there is a way to “salvation” (although few agree on what that means).

Beyond these very broad similarities, the religions of the world differ enormously. For example, Judaism teaches that the way of “salvation,” (the way to know God and live forever) is to turn to God and live a moral life, keeping the 613 laws of God. Christianity teaches that the way of “salvation” is to come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6, NLT). In Islam, salvation comes by faithfully observing the five pillars (belief in Allah and Muhammad, daily prayers, alms-giving, fasting, and pilgrimage). Hinduism believes you can be reincarnated as a higher life form by improving your karma with the way you live. And Buddhism claims you can escape the endless cycle of reincarnation by following the four noble truths and the eight-fold path. On the central issue of “Can I know God and live forever?” these five religions offer widely divergent paths, and that’s just the beginning. Even those religions that say all religions teach the same basic truths (like Bahai and Vedanta, to cite just two examples) go on, in the very next breath, to assert beliefs that boldly contradict virtually all other religions on earth.

In short, you could say that all religions teach the same basic truths, except when talking about the nature of God. And the path to God. And the way of salvation, the nature of humanity, sin, creation, heaven, and hell. Other than that, they’re very similar.

## Isn't it totally narrow minded to believe in one God?

Sure, it is, unless there happens to be one God.

If there are many gods, then, of course, it is totally narrowminded to believe in just one. But, if there is only one God, it would be foolish to insist on more.

So, which is it: one God or many? That is the heart of the matter. And mankind has held differing opinions on the matter throughout time. For the sake of argument, let's suppose either option is possible. Then, it is no more narrow-minded to assert a belief in one God than it is to assert a belief in many. The issue, however, isn't whether one or the other is narrow-minded; the real issue is which one is true and worthy of your belief.

## Isn't the God of the Bible the same as the gods of other religions, just called by another name?

God is definitely called by many names in the Bible. He told Moses to call him Yahweh, which means "I Am." He is called Adonai (Lord), El Shaddai (God Almighty), El Elyon (Most High God), and by many other names. That's not the same, however, as saying that the gods of other religions are the same as God, just called by different names.

Even a casual reading of the Bible will make this clear. The god Baal, who was worshiped by the Canaanites, was clearly not the same as the God the Israelites worshiped (for example, Baal was far from a loving god). Molech, the god of the Ammonites, was supposedly a god who delighted in child sacrifice (which Yahweh abhorred).

Similarly, there are striking and irreconcilable differences between the God of the Bible and the gods of other contemporary religions. For example, though Muslims claim he is the God of Moses, Allah is (according to the Koran) fickle and distant, a god who will love only those who obey him (Surah 3:31); the God of the Bible is unchanging, "righteous in all his ways and loving towards all he has made" (Psalm 145:17, NIV).

Saying that the God of the Bible is the same as the gods of other religions is like claiming that your redheaded, cheerful, couch potato friend Elmer is the same person (just called by a different name) as your dark-haired, serious, athletic friend Angela. You would never say that, of course, because those two people unquestionably have different characters and personality traits. So it is with God. The God of the Bible and the perceived gods of other religions are vastly distinct from each other.



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# Is the Bible really God's Word?

If you were God, and you wanted people to know you personally, what would you do? Would you physically appear to each person? Would you host a weekly open house on some tall mountain somewhere? Would you start a website: [www.hereiamitsmegod.com](http://www.hereiamitsmegod.com)? Or would you select people you knew you could trust and tell them what you wanted humankind to know? Would you inspire some of those people to carefully write down what you told them? Would you give each generation as much truth as it could handle until the whole story was told? Would you then urge men and women who already knew you well to take that written word to the people all over the world who don't yet know you?

According to the Bible, that's what God did. He "spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways" (Hebrews 1:1, NIV). He then protected his Word throughout ensuing generations so that it was neither destroyed nor changed. Is the Bible really God's Word? Well, that's for you to decide.

Go through the presentations we have prepared for you below and examine the evidence. Only then can you make a reasoned decision whether or not the Bible is God's Word.

## Why should I even care about the Bible?

All the information on this website, or all the websites in the world, for that matter, cannot prove the truth of the Bible and what it teaches. Nor can research and investigation and evidence prove the Bible is God's Word. No amount of information can eliminate the need for faith. Information and evidence can open a door to faith, however. They can pave the way for faith.

They can remove objections or obstacles to faith. That's the reason John, one of Jesus' earliest followers, gave for writing the fourth Gospel, the fourth book of the New Testament. He wrote, "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life" (John 20:31, NLT).

The Bible is an ancient document; there's no question about that. The Bible is a textually accurate work, more so than any other book in history. The Bible is a historically reliable record, though we can only just scratch the surface in explaining why that's so. But, ultimately, none of that matters if it doesn't open a door to faith for you.

If you're hearing or reading these words and you have rejected the Bible without actually reading it, we urge you to read just two percent of it before you dismiss it. If you can read the Gospel of John, 22 chapters in all, without hearing the ring of truth in it, then at least you won't have made the mistake of reaching your conclusion without prior investigation.

Now, if you're hearing or reading these words and you already believe in the Bible, and even call it the Word of God, but you're not reading it and letting it change your life, you're missing the whole point. The Bible is not a mere storybook. Nor is it the *New York Times*. It wasn't handed down through the ages as a pipeline for information. It was written "that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31, NIV).

If you haven't yet taken that step of faith, if you haven't called out to the one true God who, though his language is heavenly and his every word is eternal, has written in human language so that YOU could know him and his forgiveness, his love, and his bright purpose for your life, you can do that right now.

## Why do I need the Bible when I can commune with God through nature?

No doubt about it, one of the ways God speaks to us is through creation. A forest can be a cathedral, and a windswept beach can become a holy place. The Apostle Paul once wrote, “From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God” (Romans 1:20, NLT).

In other words, nature provides crucial information about God, particularly about his power and majesty. David, the poet king of Israel, wrote:

*The heavens tell of the glory of God.  
The skies display his marvelous craftsmanship.  
Day after day they continue to speak;  
night after night they make him known.  
They speak without a sound or a word;  
their voice is silent in the skies;  
yet their message has gone out to all the earth,  
and their words to all the world. (Psalm 19:1-3, NLT)*

But there is a limit to what you can know of God through nature (what theologians call “general revelation”). You can learn from nature that God is creative, powerful, awesome, and orderly. But from nature alone you cannot learn that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). From nature alone you cannot discover that “he is a God who is passionate about his relationship with you” (Exodus 34:14, NLT). From nature alone you cannot know that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NLT). That is why “God spoke many times and in many ways to our ancestors through the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1, NLT), because there are truths (what theologians refer to as “special revelation”) that God wants you to know that nature alone cannot tell you.

## Isn't the Bible just a bunch of myths and legends?

Whether you've read the Bible or not, you're probably aware that it contains some very incredible stories. If it were a newspaper, some parts might sound more like a supermarket tabloid than the *Wall Street Journal*. The headlines would read:

- *Fish Swallows Man; Survivor Seen in City*
- *God Parts Red Sea; Hebrews Escape Egypt*
- *World's Population Destroyed by Flood; Survivors Ride It Out in Big Boat*
- *Galilean Teacher Returns from the Dead*

"That's incredible!" you might say, and you'd be right. But there's a difference between that which is hard to believe, at least without some measure of faith, and a myth or a legend.

Many who believe that Bible stories are mere myth or legend have never encountered a miracle (or if they have, they didn't recognize it or acknowledge it). And, since the Bible matter-of-factly relates many such reports, then, of course, the Bible is full of myths and legends.

No matter how unbelievable some Bible stories may seem, the people who reported them fully intended their accounts to be read and believed, not as myths or fables but as factual accounts, the way you believe a fire alarm, a wedding announcement, or your Aunt May's apple pie recipe. Certainly, the writers knew that telling stories about a rabbi raising himself from the dead or five thousand people being fed from five loaves and two fishes was a sure ticket to the Desert of Zin Loony Bin, unless they could cite witnesses and invite investigation, which is exactly what they did.

For example, consider the following words of three of the Bible's authors:

**John, one of Jesus' first followers:** "The one who existed from the beginning is the one we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is Jesus Christ, the Word of life." (1 John 1:1, NLT)

**Peter, one of Jesus' first followers:** "For we were not making up clever stories when we told you about the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and his coming again. We have seen his majestic splendor with our own eyes." (2 Peter 1:16, NLT)

**Luke, a physician and traveling companion of Paul:** “Many people have written accounts about the events that took place among us. They used as their source material the reports circulating among us from the early disciples and other eyewitnesses of what God has done in fulfillment of his promises. Having carefully investigated all of these accounts from the beginning, I have decided to write a careful summary for you...” (Luke 1:1-3, NLT)

The Apostle Paul, the great first-century church planter told a high Roman official, “I am speaking the sober truth. And [you know] about these things. I speak frankly, for I am sure these events are all familiar to him, for they were not done in a corner!” (Acts 26:25b-26, NLT). These are not the language of fable; they represent the way a person writes when he has the facts on his side.

Hundreds witnessed these biblical events as they happened. Reliable people testified, many of them in writing, to their authenticity. Some of them virtually signed their testimony in blood, choosing death rather than recanting their testimony. How many people do you know who would let themselves be persecuted, imprisoned, even executed, for refusing to renounce a *myth*? And their writings, far from being effectively refuted or discredited, passed the test and were recognized as authoritative in their time and beyond.

Of course, if you can go so far as to believe in a God who “created the earth and everything in it” (Isaiah 42:5, NLT), then it is a small leap of faith to believe in a God who can part the Red Sea or raise his Son from the dead, if he chooses.

## How can I believe the Bible when it's so full of contradictions and inaccuracies?

It's true that many people believe the Bible is filled with errors and contradictions. For example, a recent issue of *Time* magazine reported alleged “contradictions” in the two Bible accounts of Jesus' birth: Matthew reports that wise men visited the child, and Luke mentions shepherds coming to call. He says the wise men found Jesus and his parents in a “house,” while Luke's shepherds found them in a stable, and “the baby, lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12, NLT).

To label the two accounts contradictory is premature. Any reasonable person must acknowledge that the accounts could be parallel without any contradiction at all! Shepherds could have visited Jesus in a stable because, as Luke reports, “There was no room for them in the village inn” (Luke 2:6, NLT)). And wise men traveling from afar could have arrived later, after the family had found more permanent quarters. The two accounts would not be contradictory in the least.

Of course, there are those who see contradictions everywhere they look. For example, the *Skeptics' Annotated Bible* identifies Revelation 5:5 as a contradiction of John 1:36 because in John 1:36, John the Baptist calls Jesus “the Lamb of God” and Revelation 5:5 refers to him as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah.” The note on that supposed contradiction reads, “Is Jesus a lamb or a lion?” However, it should be obvious to the discerning reader that the Bible is using the language of metaphor in each case; the title, “Lamb of God,” refers to his mission to sacrifice himself for the sins of the world, and the title, “Lion of Judah,” refers to his victory over sin and death.

Now, that's not to say that there aren't still some passages in the Bible that make a person scratch his or her head. There do occur in the Bible different perspectives of the same event, different emphases in retelling incidents, and other *apparent* discrepancies. There are certain parallel accounts that are difficult to reconcile. And, of course, there have been a host of misinterpretations of biblical passages that create “contradictions” where a closer read would reveal there are none.

Nonetheless, the fact that the writings of forty vastly different individuals—shepherds, soldiers, prophets, poets, kings, scholars, statesmen, musicians, masters, servants, tax collectors, and tentmakers—have been assembled into one book and still retain such unity and scarcity of apparent contradictions should inspire far more confidence than doubt.

For example, suppose you had asked ten contemporary authors to write a book on the same controversial subject, after which you compiled those books into one collection. Would you expect them all to agree? Would they all take identical positions on their central topic? Of course not. Yet, in the Bible you have a collection of writings by forty men from every walk of life, written on three different continents, over a span of more than fifteen hundred years, in enormously different circumstances (prison, palace, field, cave, desert, city, etc.) and still they agree with each other to an astounding degree. That should lead any reasonable person to marvel at the Bible's unity rather than disparage its "apparent" contradictions.

## Hasn't the Bible been copied so many times it's impossible to know what it said originally?

Many presume that since the Bible was written such a long time ago (thousands of years, in fact), that its integrity has been compromised over the centuries. It's like that old party game people used to play before video games came out. It goes like this: A group of people sits in a circle. One person whispers something in the ear to the person sitting next to him. He whispers what he heard to the girl sitting next to him, and so on until it goes full circle. The fun in the game is that sometimes the message gets so garbled along the way that what started out as "A stitch in time saves nine" ends up as "His kitchen knives ate mine."

If this can happen so easily, then it must be impossible to know what the Bible originally said, right? After all, what we read in the Bible today are printed copies based on ancient handwritten copies of originals that no longer exist. Who's to say that a copier didn't omit something? What if things were changed? Is there reason to believe that the manuscripts available to us today are an accurate transmission of the originals?

The answer is yes. The Bible's accuracy has actually been proven by *several amazing discoveries!* Take the Hebrew Scriptures, for example. The scribes who hand-copied the Old Testament writings of Moses, David, Isaiah, and the rest were unbelievably meticulous. For example, one group of scribes, called the Masoretes, followed a requirement that every copy had to be written a letter at a time. In other words, the scribe could not write a single letter from memory. Each word had to be written and verified one letter at a time. And when an entire scroll had been copied, if a single error was discovered, it would be destroyed.

This care produced such accuracy that when an 1,800-year-old scroll of the book of Isaiah was discovered in the famous *Dead Sea Scrolls* in 1948, the text "proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text," according to Dr. Gleason Archer, an Old Testament scholar and expert in Semitic languages.

Beyond that, when you consider the New Testament, you're dealing with what scholars agree is the most reliable document of the ancient world. In terms of manuscript evidence, its text is over eight times more reliable than its closest competitor (Homer's *Iliad*). After Homer, the writings of Plato, Demosthenes, and Sophocles boast the largest number of surviving manuscripts. But the New Testament alone boasts over *five thousand* fragments and manuscripts. And if you add ancient translations from Latin, Ethiopian, Syrian, Arabic, and other languages to the mix, the total exceeds *twenty-four thousand*.

For this reason, renowned scholar F. F. Bruce said, "There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament," adding, "if the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt."

Famed scholar Sir Frederick Kenyon, director and head librarian of the British Museum concluded, "The interval...between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established."

## Wasn't the New Testament written hundreds of years after Jesus?

More than a century ago, it became fashionable among some scholars to claim that there was no way Peter, Paul, James, and John, among others, were the authors of the books of the Bible, which bear their names and signatures and are collecting dust all over America, because their documents were all written long after they would have died.

Not true. Dr. John A. T. Robinson, lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge, and one of England's most distinguished scholars, accepted that view. But, as "little more than a theological joke," he says, he decided to investigate the arguments on the dating of biblical texts, a field largely dormant since the turn of the twentieth century. The results stunned him and caused him to conclude that the New Testament is the work of the apostles themselves or of contemporaries who worked with them (such as Luke). He dates every book of the New Testament before 70 A.D., even the Gospel of John, considered by some to be the latest New Testament book.

In fact, at one time, John's Gospel was said by scholars to have been written no earlier than 150 years or so after Jesus' lifetime. But less than a hundred years ago, a fragment of papyrus was discovered in Egypt and acquired by the John Rylands Library in England. It was eventually discovered that Fragment 52 of the John Rylands papyrus, dated to 135 A.D. or earlier, contained portions of John 18. In other words, what is thought to be the latest New Testament book can now be conclusively dated to within *at least* fifty years of John's estimated lifetime.

William Foxwell Albright, one of the world's foremost biblical archaeologists, wrote, "We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about A.D. 80."

In other words, the most current discoveries and research indicate that all the books of the New Testament were written within fifty years after the events they report, which would have been during the lifetimes of some eyewitnesses, and far too soon for legends and myths to have taken hold and found an audience.

## Isn't the New Testament just propaganda, written to promote a new religion?

The New Testament writers did have an agenda. John, one of Jesus' first followers, said matter of factly, "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life" (John 20:31, NLT). Far from hiding his agenda, he and the other New Testament writers stated it conclusively.

But having an agenda doesn't mean that what they wrote was untrue. In fact, the first Christians frequently reminded their listeners or readers how easy it would be to confirm, or discredit, the things they said, boldly inviting further investigation. This was done within a few years of the events themselves, when their opponents could have effectively debunked the new religion if their claims were false.

Peter said, "God raised [Jesus] from the dead, and we all are witnesses of this" (Acts 2:32, NLT) and, on another occasion, "God raised [Jesus] to life. And we are witnesses of this fact!" (Acts 3:15, NLT).

Paul told a synagogue full of fellow Jews that after his resurrection, Jesus "appeared over a period of many days to those who had gone with him from Galilee to Jerusalem—these are his witnesses to the people of Israel" (Acts 13:31).

William Lillie, Chair of the Department of Biblical Study at the University of Aberdeen, said of Paul's citation (in 1 Corinthians 15) of the resurrected Christ appearing to more than 500 people, "What gives a special authority to the list [of witnesses] as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. St. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.'"

Moreover, the men making these assertions—Paul, Peter, and others—knew that their controversial claims would almost certainly result in persecution, imprisonment, exile, even execution. And yet they stuck to their story, despite the consequences.

As Lee Strobel has written, "People will die for their religious beliefs if they sincerely believe they're true, but people won't die for their religious beliefs if they know their beliefs are false...While most people can only have faith that their beliefs are true, the disciples were in a position to know without a doubt...If they weren't absolutely certain, they wouldn't have allowed themselves to be tortured to death [for a lie]."

## Hasn't modern archaeology pretty much disproved the Bible?

Just the opposite: over and over again through the centuries, presumptive conclusions about inaccuracies and contradictions in the Bible have been discredited through archaeology. For example:

- At one time scholars argued that Moses could not have written the first five books of the Bible because writing didn't exist in his lifetime. Then, archaeologists unearthed the Kingdom of Ebla Tablets, which showed that not only did writing exist in Moses' day, but that a thousand years *before* Moses, law, customs, and events were extensively recorded in writing in at least two languages.
- Some scholars put forth the view that David, the shepherd-king of Israel, was a mythical figure until a 1993 excavation produced a ninth-century B.C. tablet referring to the "House of David."
- Daniel's mention of the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar (Daniel 5), was once thought to be an embarrassing mistake, since everyone "knew" Nabonidus, not Belshazzar, was the last king of Babylon. However, recent discoveries have confirmed that Belshazzar, the son of Nabonidus, ruled as the last king of Babylon during his father's "retirement."
- Some skeptics once questioned whether there had ever been a person named Pontius Pilate, the governor who tried Jesus, since there was no mention of him except in the Bible. Then, in 1961, two Italian archaeologists uncovered a Latin inscription referring to the Roman governor.
- Luke's use of the title "politarch" (Acts 17:6) was once thought to be an embarrassing mistake since the word was not found in classical literature. In recent years, more than a dozen inscriptions have been found that use the term.
- In 2 Kings 15:29, there is reference to a king of Assyria named Tiglath-Pileser. He is said to have conquered the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom and to have taken many of them into captivity. A generation ago, some scholars claimed that this king never existed and that the account of the fall of Israel to Assyria was mythology. However, archaeologists eventually excavated Tiglath-Pileser's capital city and found his name pressed into bricks that read: "I, Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria...am a conqueror (of the regions) from the Great Sea which is in the country of Amurru as far as the Great Sea which is in the Nairi country."

Archaeologists have also found testimony to the fact that this king had pushed his kingdom westward as far as the Mediterranean (the “Great Sea which is in the Nairi country”) and had therefore conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel, just as the Bible stated he did.

Far from disproving the Bible, Nelson Glueck, the renowned Jewish archaeologist and former president of Hebrew University in Cincinnati, wrote:

“It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever [disproved] a biblical reference.”

## How can I be sure the Bible is God's Word?

One answer to the question of how can I be sure the Bible is God's Word is: prophecy.

Both the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) record many predictions about things that would happen in the future that were later fulfilled in amazing detail. The following are just a few prophecies recorded in the Bible that were later fulfilled in the events of history:

- The fall of the powerful city of Tyre (Ezekiel 26:3-12, OT), fulfilled in 573 B.C. (and its utter desolation, fulfilled in 332 B.C.)
- Babylon would rule Judah for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11-2, OT), fulfilled from 609 B.C. to 539 B.C.
- The Jewish nation would be taken into captivity, and later restored to their own land (Jeremiah 32:30-41, OT), fulfilled in 538 B.C.
- A king named Cyrus would conquer Babylon and restore exiled Jews to their homeland (Isaiah 44:28, 45:1, and 45:13, OT), fulfilled in (and after) 539 B.C.
- The nation of Israel, though exiled and scattered "among the nations," would be reestablished in the Holy Land (Ezekiel 37:21-22, OT), fulfilled in 1948.

These are just a few examples of the Bible's mind-boggling detail and accuracy, not only in recording and explaining history, but also in predicting it! But those amazing prophecies above merely scratch the surface.

The most numerous and astounding prophecies of the Bible refer to the coming of Jesus, the Messiah of the Jews and Savior of the world. Scholars have catalogued more than sixty major messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that were fulfilled in Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection (with 270 parts or details that also had to be fulfilled).

Micah predicted that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2, OT; Matthew 2:1, NT). Zechariah predicted he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9, OT; Luke 19:35-37, NT). The psalmist David predicted that his hands and feet would be pierced, centuries before crucifixion was even invented as a form of execution (Psalm 22:16, OT; Luke 23:33, NT).

In fact, in just one day twenty-nine specific prophecies, each of them predicted at least five hundred years earlier and documented in the Old Testament, were fulfilled in Jesus and recorded in the New Testament:

- That he would be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9, OT; Matthew 26:49, NT).
- That the price of his betrayal would be thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12, OT; Matthew 26:15, NT).
- That his betrayal money would be cast to the floor of God's temple (Zechariah 11:13, OT; Matthew 27:5, NT).
- That his betrayal money would be used to buy the potter's field (Zechariah 11:13, OT; Matthew 27:7, NT).
- That he would be forsaken and deserted by his disciples (Zechariah 13:7, OT; Mark 14:50, NT).
- That he would be accused by false witnesses (Psalm 35:11, OT; Matthew 26:59-60, NT).
- That he would be silent before his accusers (Isaiah 53:7, OT; Matthew 27:12, NT).
- That he would be wounded and bruised (Isaiah 53:5, OT; Matthew 27:26, NT).
- That he would be hated without a cause (Psalm 69:4, OT; John 15:25, NT).
- That he would be struck and spit on (Isaiah 50:6, OT; Matthew 26:67, NT).
- That he would be mocked, ridiculed, and rejected (Isaiah 53:3, OT; Matthew 27:27-31 and John 7:5, 48, NT).
- That he would collapse from weakness (Psalm 109:24-25, OT; Luke 23:26, NT).
- That he would be taunted with specific words (Psalm 22:6-8, OT; Matthew 27:39-43, NT).
- That they would shake their heads at him (Psalm 109:25, OT; Matthew 27:39, NT).
- That they would stare at him (Psalm 22:17, OT; Luke 23:35, NT).
- That he would be executed among 'sinners' (Isaiah 53:12, OT; Matthew 27:38, NT).
- That his hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16, OT; Luke 23:33, NT).
- That he would pray for his persecutors (Isaiah 53:12, OT; Luke 23:34, NT).
- That his friends and family would stand afar off and watch (Psalm 38:11, OT; Luke 23:49, NT).
- That his garments would be divided and won by the casting of lots (Psalm 22:18, OT; John 19:23-24, NT).
- That he would thirst (Psalm 69:21, OT; John 19:28, NT).
- That he would be given gall and vinegar (Psalm 69:21, OT; Matthew 27:34, NT).
- That he would commit himself to God (Psalm 31:5, OT; Luke 23:46, NT).

- That his bones would be left unbroken (Psalm 34:20, OT; John 19:33, NT).
- That his heart would rupture (Psalm 22:14, OT; John 19:34, NT).
- That his side would be pierced (Zechariah 12:10, OT; John 19:34, NT).
- That darkness would come over the land at midday (Amos 8:9, OT; Matthew 27:45, NT).
- That he would be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9, OT; Matthew 27:57-60, NT).
- That he would die 483 years after the declaration of Artaxerxes to rebuild the temple in 444 B.C. (Daniel 9:24, OT).

But wait, there's more! The Bible also prophesied that on the third day after his death, the Messiah would be raised from the dead (Psalm 16:10, OT; Acts 2:31, NT), ascend to heaven (Psalm 68:18, OT; Acts 1:9, NT), and be seated at the right hand of God in full majesty and authority (Psalm 110:1, OT; Hebrews 1:3, NT).

The odds of just eight of these prophecies being accidentally fulfilled in one person have been calculated at 1 in 10 to the 17th power (1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000)! An outrageous probability! Dr. Peter Stoner, former chairman of the departments of mathematics, astronomy, and engineering at Pasadena College, California, illustrated the odds this way: Imagine 100,000,000,000,000,000 silver dollars, an amount that would cover the face of the entire state of Texas to a depth of two feet. Then imagine that one of those coins is marked. What are the chances that you could walk blindfolded into that Texas-sized pile of coins, stop only once somewhere between El Paso and Galveston, somewhere between Amarillo and Brownsville, and on your first try reach into that pile and pick out the single marked coin? Your chances would be one in 100,000,000,000,000,000, the same as supposing that only eight messianic prophecies could have been accidentally fulfilled in one person.

Now consider all two thousand (out of about 2,500) Bible prophecies that have so far been fulfilled. The likelihood of that occurring by accident has been calculated at less than 1 in 10 to the power of 2,000—that's 1 with two thousand zeros after it! Compare those odds to your odds of being struck by lightning (1 in 600,000).

So the question to ask is: Is it easier to believe that the Bible is the true and infallible Word of God or that all those prophecies have been fulfilled by a mind-boggling chain of coincidences and statistical impossibilities?



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# What prevents me from getting to know God on my own terms?

God will not force you to accept his plan for receiving eternal life. But, the truth remains; he has done all the heavy lifting himself. He sent his only Son to earth, gave him up to a horrific death to take the punishment for every wrong thing you've ever done or could ever do, then raised him from the dead, and inspired the witnesses to record His Word to you so YOU would know His plan. And all you have to do is say yes or no to His plan.

## If God loves me, why doesn't he just make it easy for me to get to know him on my own terms?

The question itself reveals the answer. As a people group, humans generally want to do things on their own terms. They want to know they have control over their lives—and their destiny.

We can order a hamburger at Burger King and have it our way. We can choose dial-up or broadband Internet connections. We can watch broadcast, cable, or satellite TV. We can pump regular unleaded, premium, or ultra-premium gas into our car. We can even buy a car that runs on both fossil fuel and electricity!

With so much control and so many choices, it's natural, at least according to some, to want to exercise that sense of control in our relationship with God. Unfortunately, this leads to a buffet-style faith where one picks and chooses only the things—the TRUTHS—they like and reject those truths they don't. And why shouldn't we be able to come to God on our terms?

The answer of course is that you are not God. God is God. And it is HE who dictates how things are to work. Like a child who thinks he knows better than his dad, many of us think we know better than God to this God responds, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (Job 38:4)

The irony of it all is that the plan God has prepared is so incredibly simple even a child can understand it. In fact, its simplicity is what makes it difficult for many to understand! Coming to God and receiving eternal life all happen through Jesus Christ. This was God's plan and neither you nor I have any say in it. We can spend the rest of our lives wishing it weren't so and insisting that God should have done it some other way, but that won't alter God's plan. In fact, God is a lot more generous to us and respectful of us than we have given him credit for because ultimately the choice still remains ours—yours and mine—to accept or reject His plan.

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That may not be the terms you would have chosen, but it's still the best deal in the world.

## If God is all-powerful, why doesn't he just forgive us all and make us good?

“We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed...On the face of it, that is a very silly theory. If God was prepared to let us off, why on earth did He not do so?” (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*)

The short answer to C.S. Lewis' question is justice.

The slightly longer answer is because God is holy and cannot therefore tolerate sin; the Bible says, “[His] eyes are too pure to look on evil; [He] cannot tolerate wrong” (Habakkuk 1:13, NIV). Because God is just, he cannot excuse sin; the Bible says, “[H]e never lets the guilty go unpunished” (Nahum 1:3, NLT). And because God is love, he cares what happens to us; the Bible says, “The Lord...does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent” (2 Peter 3:9, NLT).

If God were to let all humanity's sin slide, that would contradict his holiness. He would be like the parent who watches his kid slowly destroy himself with drugs and never says a word. Think about it, who would want that guy to be God?

If God were to just shrug at our sin and say, “Ah, it's okay; I'm sure you didn't mean it,” that would contradict his justice. He would be like the judge who lets criminals off the hook and sets them free to victimize someone else.

But, if God were to do nothing to rescue us, that would contradict his love and mercy. He would be like the uncaring driver who sees a poor soul broken down on the side of the road in the pouring rain and keeps driving. Worse, he would be like a parent who let his child die rather than lift a finger to help. God loves each of us too much to respond to our needs that way, which is why “he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NLT).

Jesus is the only means by which our loving Father God could provide a cure for our sin in a way that didn't compromise his holiness, justice, love, or mercy.

## Why in the world do I need a Savior?

Aaron was a child of five when he saw his first television commercial for a 900-number. The announcer informed Aaron that if he called that number, he could talk directly to Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, or Goofy. That sounded like fun, so Aaron called the number. Several times a day, every day, for several weeks. Aaron didn't know that every call cost money. He didn't know that he wasn't supposed to make those calls without his parents' permission. He didn't know that someone would have to pay the bill. And he didn't know that there were consequences to his newfound addiction.

That's a bit like our situation as human beings. We have all done wrong things. The Bible says, "All have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard" (Romans 3:23, NLT). Are you as bad as you could possibly be? Of course not. But that's not the point. The point is, even the best among us has done enough wrong things that we would shudder to have them broadcast in living color on the Times Square JumboTron. And the point is, whether we know it or not, our behaviors have consequences. Yet we are no more able to pay the bill when it comes due than five-year-old Aaron could pay hundreds of dollars in telephone charges. That's why we need a Savior.

Another consequence of our wrong actions is bondage. The Bible says that those who have not experienced new life through Jesus Christ are "full of sin, obeying Satan, the mighty prince of the power of the air. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God" (Ephesians 2:2, NLT). You may choose what to wear each day, what to eat, what color your hair is going to be this week, but as hard as you try, you cannot be the kind of person you long to be. Your actions and attitudes reflect the words of Paul who once said, "I am sold into slavery, with sin as my master. I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong...But I can't help myself" (Romans 7:14b-17a, NLT). That's another reason why we need a Savior.

A third consequence of our sins is death. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23, NLT). That means not only that physical death originally entered this world because of sin, but it also includes what the Bible calls the "second death,"—eternal separation from the life that is in God for all eternity. It even refers to the daily death your spirit feels from being separated from God. "Your sins have cut you off from God" (Isaiah 59:2, NLT) and therefore, spiritually speaking, "you [are] dead, doomed forever because of your many sins" (Ephesians 2:1, NLT). This is serious stuff. That's also why we need a Savior.

## I'm very spiritual; won't I go to heaven?

Back in the days when Jesus walked on earth, he and his closest followers saw a rest stop by the road through Samaria. His followers left him there by a well while they went into town to buy lunch. As Jesus waited there, a woman came to the well to draw water. Jesus engaged her in conversation, which surprised her because he was obviously a Jew, and most Jews refused to acknowledge Samaritans. But the woman talked to him, and when she learned that he was something special (a “prophet,” she thought at first), she said, “You Jews insist that Jerusalem is the only place of worship, while we Samaritans claim it is here at Mount Gerizim, where our ancestors worshiped” (John 4:20, NLT). In other words, “We’re just as spiritual as you Jews, so what’s the big deal?”

Jesus told her, basically, that spirituality alone doesn’t cut it. “Those who worship God,” he said, “must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24, NLT). He made it clear to her that the way to heaven isn’t *by being spiritual*; it’s *through faith* in Jesus Christ, the one who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6, NLT).

The woman at the well found truth that day, which gave new height to her spirituality. The Bible says, “The woman left her water jar beside the well and went back to the village and told everyone, ‘Come and meet a man who told me everything I ever did! Can this be the Messiah?’ So the people came streaming from the village to see him...And many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus” (John 4:28-30, 39, NLT).

Trusting Jesus Christ will take you to new heights of spirituality, too, if, like that woman, you open your mind and heart to “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6, NLT).

## Won't I go to heaven as long as I do more good than bad?

Many people figure that coming to God and getting to heaven are a lot like a presidential election—that 50.00001% is good enough to win. As long as your good deeds outweigh your bad, you're home free.

The main problem with this notion is that it makes Jesus a liar. Jesus, talking to God the Father, said, "And this is the way to have eternal life—to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the one you sent to earth" (John 17:3, NLT). He also said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NLT). The Apostle Peter wrote, "There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them" (Acts 4:12, NLT). No one said anything about more good than bad.

That's good news, though, because most of us haven't kept really good records of our good and evil deeds since birth. And for some of us, our junior high years alone were enough to sentence us to eternal torture and suffering. But faith in Jesus allows us to wipe the slate clean and accept eternal life not because of how good we've been, but based on the righteousness of Jesus, which is a rock-solid foundation.

The Bible says this about those who have found eternal life by entering into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ: "It is only by God's special favor that you have been saved!...And so God can always point to us as examples of the incredible wealth of his favor and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us through Christ Jesus. God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:4,7-10, NLT).

You can try to earn your ticket to heaven by doing good deeds, but that's not how it happens. Salvation is a gift. Free. And forever.



( 5 )

# Is Jesus really God's Son?

If you ask the question, “Who is Jesus?” to a dozen people, you most likely will get twenty different answers! Answers like:

“He’s the greatest man who ever lived.”

“He was a prophet.”

“He was a great teacher.”

“Jesus? I’m not sure; I think he was a wise man, but...who can really say?”

“He was the Son of God.”

“Personally, I don’t think he ever existed.”

“A philosopher.”

“A poet...”

“The Savior of the world.”

“A simple man.”

“A complex man.”

Different people, different answers.

Does that mean we can never really know who Jesus is?

Does every person need to decide individually?

Yes and no. Every individual will be faced with the same decision the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate faced when he asked, "What shall I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?" (Matthew 27:22, GW). Whatever conclusions we arrive at as individuals, it would be nice to know whether our conclusions are supported by the facts, right?

You now have the opportunity to dig deeper into the question, "Is Jesus the Son of God?" by going through the questions below. And like Pilate, you just might find yourself asking, "what shall I do with Jesus, the one called the Christ?"

## How do I know Jesus of Nazareth ever really existed?

The overwhelming majority of reputable scholars consider the historical existence of Jesus an irrefutable fact. There is virtually no doubt that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived in the first century and gained a large following in his lifetime and especially after his death. In fact, a Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, writing in the late first century in Rome, mentioned Jesus of Nazareth in a brief paragraph of his work, *Antiquities* (Ant. 18:63-64). While many scholars believe there were later insertions to Josephus's words, virtually no one disputes that Josephus, writing a mere half century after Jesus' lifetime, referred in his history to "Jesus, a wise man...who wrought surprising feats and...won over many Jews and many of the Greeks...condemned [by Pilate] to be crucified...And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared."

References to the historical existence of Jesus are also found in the writings of the first-century Roman historian Tacitus (considered one of the most accurate historians of antiquity), Suetonius (chief secretary to the Roman Emperor Hadrian), and Lucian of Samosata (a second-century Greek writer and critic of Christianity), among others. Numerous other sources, both Gentile and Jewish, contain so many references to Jesus and the early Christians that no reasonable seeker after truth can resolutely say that Jesus never existed.

Dr. Luke Timothy Johnson, a New Testament scholar at Emory University, wrote, "Even the most critical historian can confidently assert that a Jew named Jesus worked as a teacher and wonder-worker in Palestine during the reign of Tiberius, was executed by crucifixion under the prefect Pontius Pilate and continued to have followers after his death."

## Wasn't Jesus of Nazareth really just a man whose followers later made up the whole "Son of God" thing?

More than a century ago, the efforts of skeptical scholars were enthusiastically directed at disproving the fact that Jesus existed or, failing that, to prove that the written accounts of his life were recorded at least a century after the fact. In the past fifty years, however, these pursuits have been largely derailed by the weight of evidence, both textual and archaeological. Hence, skeptical scholarship has had to move on to new theories.

One of those efforts is the suggestion that, while Jesus existed, he never really claimed to be the Son of God himself; instead his followers invented those claims. There are multiple problems with this hypothesis.

First, the culture of first-century Galilee and Judea placed a high value on the oral tradition, the ability to memorize and accurately repeat large pieces of information. For Jesus' first disciples to knowingly revise his teachings and claims would have been not unlike a generation of Hindus suddenly developing a taste for beef; it would go against everything they had learned and practiced their entire lives.

Second, the time between the events of Jesus' lifetime and the recording of the historical accounts was far too short for legends to replace the facts. Few historians dispute that the disciples of Jesus began preaching and writing the story of Jesus soon after the events themselves; in fact, Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2 in the Bible) occurred within fifty days of the resurrection. Research indicates that the written accounts of the resurrection are astoundingly early in origin, possibly within *just a few years* of the events, especially the creedal statement "that Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve apostles. After that, he was seen by more than five hundred of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died by now. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles" (1 Corinthians 15:3-7, NLT). Dr. Rudolf Pesch, a New Testament authority and professor of the University of Frankfurt in Germany, maintains that the probable source for Mark's Gospel account of Jesus' death should be dated to at least 37 A.D., just seven years after the event itself! Professor A.N. Sherwin-White, a professional historian who knows his way around both legend and history, states categorically that such early origins argue against any notion that the resurrection accounts are legendary.

Third, the theory that Jesus' followers wove legends around the historical facts requires us to ignore the track record of the New Testament writers in matters that have since become verifiable. For instance, Jesus' first biographers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) reported that the Roman governor's name during Jesus' trial was Pilate, which early scholars doubted because there was no reference to Pilate outside these early Christian writings—until the discovery in 1961 of a Latin inscription referring to the Roman governor by name. Similarly, the New Testament's references to geographical locations, Roman and Jewish customs, and political terminology (among other things) have been proven accurate time and again. To presume that scholars and writers with an exemplary track record for accuracy would be involved in legends and fabrications is illogical.

Finally, as Dr. William Lane Craig has written, “It is inexplicable how monotheistic Jews could have attributed divinity to a man they had known, if he never claimed any such things himself. Monotheism (the belief in only one God) is the heart of the Jewish religion, and it would have been blasphemous to say that a human being was God. Yet this is precisely what the earliest Christians did proclaim and believe about Jesus. Such a claim must have been rooted in Jesus' own teaching.”

## Why can't I just believe Jesus was a good teacher and leave it at that?

The preponderance of available evidence indicates that Jesus did claim to be the unique Son of God, which meant that he was God himself and that this claim was central to everything else he said and did.

In fact, one of the few unprompted questions Jesus asked his disciples was “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Matthew 16:13, NLT), referring to himself. He didn't ask, “What are people saying about my teachings?” He asked, “Who do people say I am?” According to the historical records of his words and actions reported by eyewitnesses and contemporary historians, Jesus repeatedly asserted or implied that he was the unique Son of God, an assertion that claimed his own deity, which did not go unnoticed by the religious leaders of his day. In fact, that was the very reason they sought to discredit and eventually put him to death: “So the Jewish leaders tried all the more to kill him. In addition to disobeying the Sabbath rules by healing and teaching, he had spoken of God as his Father, thereby making himself equal with God” (John 5:18, NLT).

Once, when he told the Jewish leaders, “Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced as he looked forward to my coming. He saw it and was glad” (John 8:56 NLT), his listeners became indignant: “You aren't even fifty years old, How can you say you have seen Abraham?” (John 8:57, NLT)

Jesus answered, “The truth is, I existed before Abraham was even born!” At that point they picked up stones to kill him. But Jesus hid himself from them and left the Temple (John 8:58, NLT).

On another occasion, when Jesus said that he was “one with the Father,” the Jewish leaders again picked up stones to kill him. When Jesus asked why they wanted to kill him, they retorted, “for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, *have made yourself God*” (John 10:33, NLT, italics added).

The central issue of Christianity is not, and never has been, the teachings of a man called Jesus, but rather Jesus Christ *himself*. Throughout the Gospel record, Jesus urged his listeners and followers to believe in *him*, not just in his teachings (John 3:15, 16; 8:24; 11:25; 12:46; 20:29).

If we accept the evidence that so strongly suggests that Jesus claimed to be God while he lived here on earth, we are faced with two alternative conclusions: either his claims were true or they were false. Either he KNEW his claims were false or he DID NOT KNOW his claims were false.

But if Jesus KNEW his claims were false, and he made them anyway, he would be A LIAR. In that case, you can no longer call Jesus a “good moral teacher” because it is neither good nor moral to lie. Worse than that, if he KNEW his claims to be God were false, and he made them anyway, he would be an unspeakably evil man because he deliberately told others their sins were forgiven when they were not—*AND he told them they could trust him for their eternal destiny when they could not.*

It's also possible that if Jesus' claims were false, he DID NOT KNOW his claims were false. If this was the case, then he would be A LUNATIC, deluded, and not mildly so. Philosopher Peter Kreeft (professor of philosophy at Boston College) wrote, “A measure of your insanity is the size of the gap between what you think you are and what you really are. If I think I am the greatest philosopher in America, I am only an arrogant fool; if I think I am Napoleon, I am probably over the edge; if I think I am a butterfly, I am fully embarked from the sunny shores of sanity. But if I think I am God, I am even more insane, because the gap between anything finite and the infinite God is even greater than the gap between any two finite beings, even a man and a butterfly.”

Could Jesus have been this crazy? He would have to have been if he falsely claimed to be God and DID NOT KNOW that his claims were false.

Such a conclusion however, explodes the boundaries of credibility. If you have read the historical record, you cannot read the calm authority of his commands, the lofty consistency of his character, the wise and practical nature of his teachings, the canny, savvy, clever quality of his dialogues with the religious authorities, the simple yet poetic phrases he used, the insight into human nature he demonstrated, the persuasion he exercised, the grace he exhibited, the *presence of mind* he retained even in the last moments of his life to say to his close friend, “Take care of my mother” and seriously regard him as demented.

Fortunately, that is not your last option. The other possibility is to believe that Jesus' claims were true. And if they were true, Jesus was exactly who he said he was. And that would make him LORD! The Bible says he is “the Word [made] human...full of unfailing love and faithfulness” (John 1:14, NLT), “the visible image of the invisible God [who] existed before God made anything at all and is supreme over all creation” (Colossians 1:15, NLT), the light of men (John 1:4), the Lamb of God (John 1:29), the Alpha and Omega (Rev. 1:8), the Lord of Lords (1 Timothy 6:5), the Messiah (John 1:41), the only God our Savior (Jude 25).

C.S. Lewis put it well, in his classic book, *Mere Christianity*:

*"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about [Jesus]: '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. 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."*

*Once our minds confront the data, our hearts are faced with a dilemma, the same dilemma posed by Pilate: "What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" (Matthew 27:22, NLT)*

Who do YOU say that he is? God leaves the choice up to you. You can weigh the facts and consider the alternatives and decide, "Nah...I mean, even if I don't argue with the evidence...I don't really wanna give in to it, either." You can do that. That's your choice to make.

Or you can make a different choice. You can choose to call out to him in prayer and surrender to him and let him change your life as he has so many others.

## Why did Jesus have to be born as a human and die on a cross?

It does seem odd to many that Jesus had to die on a cross for the sins of the world. In order to understand it, however, we must first understand the nature of God, the law of God, and the sinfulness of humanity. Then, our need for a Savior who would die for us will become more apparent.

**1. The Nature of God.** God is holy; he said repeatedly, “I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2, NLT). God is just; the Bible says, “Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is!” (Deuteronomy 32:4, NLT). God is loving; as the Apostle John wrote, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, NLT). God is merciful; the Bible says, “God is...rich in mercy” (Ephesians 2:4, NLT). When we grasp these things about God’s nature, we are on our way to understanding God’s law:

**2. The Law of God.** From the very first days of human history, God has made clear what he requires. In the Garden of Eden, he told Adam, “You may freely eat any fruit in the garden except fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of its fruit, you will surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17, NLT). Adam did not obey, and ever since then, man has been reaping the negative consequences of that choice. Generations later, God gave his law to the nation of Israel in careful detail, including the Ten Commandments. Man has not been successful in obeying these standards either.

**3. The Sinfulness of Humanity.** From the first orchard thieves in the Garden of Eden down through the ages to you and me, the Bible says that, “No one is good, not even one” (Romans 3:10, NLT) and that “all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23, NLT). All of us have failed to meet God’s standard of holiness, justice, love, and mercy. Which leads, both logically and theologically, to the consequences, or wages, of sin.

**4. The Wages of Sin.** The result of sin is separation from God, removal from the source of life. As Isaiah the prophet wrote, “Your sins have cut you off from God” (Isaiah 59:2, NLT), both in this life and for all eternity. God is our only hope of eternal life. Our sin not only condemns us, it also creates a dilemma for God.

**5. The Dilemma of God.** The Bible says, “[God] remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13, NLT). In other words, he cannot be other than he is. Unlike humans, who are sometimes honest and sometimes dishonest, sometimes polite and sometimes rude, sometimes a 34 waist and sometimes a 38, “[God] never changes or casts shifting shadows” (James 1:17, NASB).

- Because God is holy, he cannot tolerate sin. “[His] eyes are too pure to look on evil; [He] cannot tolerate wrong” (Habakkuk 1:13, NIV).
- Because God is just, he cannot excuse sin. “He never lets the guilty go unpunished” (Nahum 1:3, NLT).
- Because God is love, he cares what happens to us. “The Lord...does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent” (2 Peter 3:9, NLT).
- Because God is merciful, he longs to forgive. “The Lord still waits for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion” (Isaiah 30:18, NLT).

**6. The Need for Atonement.** Because God is holy and cannot tolerate sin; because God is just and can't just “let us off the hook”; and because God is loving and merciful and longs to forgive us, he arranged for a substitute so that we could avoid the punishment our sins deserve. It was necessary for that substitute to be sinless because only a sinless sacrifice would satisfy God's holiness. “Christ...died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God” (1 Peter 3:18, NLT). It was also necessary for that sacrifice to be human or it wouldn't have satisfied God's justice. If I owe you \$100, and a man comes along and says he's going to pay off my debt, and gives you \$5, you wouldn't accept that, would you? No, of course not, because it's not the same as what was owed. “Therefore, it was necessary for Jesus to be in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters, so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. He then could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people” (Hebrews 2:17, NLT). It was likewise necessary for that sacrifice to be divine so as to reflect God's love and mercy, because “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, NIV). God didn't SEND a substitute; he BECAME one, which also may help to explain how Jesus' sacrifice could atone for the whole world, because an infinite, holy God giving up infinity and suffering death, even for an instant, is an infinitely incalculable sacrifice. And an infinite sacrifice is more than enough to pay for the sins of the whole world.

As the Bible says,

“We are made right in God’s sight when we trust in Jesus Christ to take away our sins. And we all can be saved in this same way, no matter who we are or what we have done. For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet now God in his gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins. For God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins and to satisfy God’s anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed his blood, sacrificing his life for us. God was being entirely fair and just when he did not punish those who sinned in former times. And he is entirely fair and just in this present time when he declares sinners to be right in his sight because they believe in Jesus.” (Romans 3:22-26, NLT)

“Christ...loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins” (Ephesians 5:2, NLT). That’s why Jesus had to die. It was the only way.

## What if I don't want someone to die for my sins?

You may be among those who read the Bible's accounts of Jesus' suffering or hear the church's teachings that "Jesus died for your sins" and say, "But I don't want anyone to die for my sins. I never asked for that."

That's actually part of the mystery and wonder of the Gospel, the story of Jesus and his love for us all. No one asked for him to come to earth and sacrifice himself for our sins. No one could have dreamed that God could love us that much. But that's what happened. God didn't require us to ask for such a thing; He just calls on us to accept it.

If you're still adamant, however, about not wanting someone to die for your sins, God has thought of that, too. He will not force you to accept his offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. He simply says, "Let the thirsty ones come—*anyone who wants to*. Let them come and drink the water of life without charge" (Revelation 22:17, NLT, italics added). Though Jesus died with you in mind, God grants you the freedom to put his great love for you entirely out of your mind.

## Can I really believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

The resurrection is central to Christianity. Dr. Michael Green, Senior Research Fellow at Wycliffe Hall, said, “Christianity does not hold the Resurrection to be one among many tenets of belief. Without faith in the Resurrection, there would be no Christianity at all.”

Can we really believe in the resurrection? We can't prove it, of course, but it is possible to weigh the evidence, which abounds:

**The early publication and spread of the resurrection accounts.** Few historians dispute the fact that Jesus' disciples began preaching the news of his resurrection soon after the event itself; in fact, Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2) occurred within fifty days of the resurrection. Written accounts of the resurrection are astoundingly early in origin, possibly within *just a few years* of the event.

**The close proximity of the claims to the site of the actual event.** Dr. William Lane Craig wrote, “One of the most amazing facts about the early Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection was that it originated in the very city where Jesus was crucified. The Christian faith did not come to exist in some distant city, far from eyewitnesses who knew of Jesus' death and burial. No, it came into being in the very city where Jesus had been publicly crucified, under the very eyes of its enemies.” In other words, it would have been crazy for the first followers of Jesus to propagate a lie literally around the corner from the location of the empty tomb.

**The citation of witnesses who could easily have been checked.** At least sixteen individuals are mentioned *by name* as witnesses in the various resurrection accounts. This would have been terribly risky if the accounts had been falsified because the witnesses could have been verified. The mention of Joseph of Arimathea as the man who buried Jesus would have been exceedingly dangerous if the accounts had been fraudulent because, as a member of the Sanhedrin (a Jewish “supreme court”), he would have been well known. J. P. Moreland (professor of philosophy at Talbot School of Theology) wrote, “No one could have invented such a person who did not exist and say he was on the Sanhedrin if such were not the case.”

**The citation of women as witnesses.** The record of Jesus' first post-resurrection appearances to women is tremendously significant, since in that culture women were considered invalid witnesses in a court of law. Fabricated accounts would have never named women as the first witnesses.

**The obvious lack of cooperation between authors.** Many critics have pointed out that the historical accounts of Jesus' resurrection have a number of baffling differences that, on the surface, are hard to reconcile. But these are actually convincing evidence of their authenticity; they display an ingenuous lack of cooperation, much like eyewitness accounts of any event would display. If the accounts were made up, the authors would have attempted to match their accounts more closely.

**The description of the tomb's location.** Any first-century "mythmaker" would have kept the location of Jesus' tomb a secret to prevent the chance that someone might discover Jesus' body. He would have reported that the angels had sealed the tomb or carried it off into heaven after the resurrection. Or he would have simply rendered this "fictional" resurrection a "spiritual" one. The Gospel accounts choose none of those routes. They describe the owner of the tomb (Joseph of Arimathea) and its location ("The place of crucifixion was near a garden, where there was a new tomb, never used before," John 19:41, NLT), and identify Jesus' resurrection as a bodily one (John 20:27).

**The frequent invitations of investigation.** According to the historical record, Jesus' disciples made frequent reference to the evidence, as if to invite investigation (Acts 2:32, 3:15, 13:31; 1 Corinthians 15:3-6). This was done within a few years of the events themselves; if the resurrection appearances were fiction, the early Christians' opponents could have conclusively debunked the new religion. William Lillie (Chair of the Department of Biblical Study at the University of Aberdeen) said of the citation (in 1 Corinthians 15) of the resurrected Christ appearing to more than 500 people, "What gives a special authority to the list [of witnesses] as historical evidence is the reference to most of the five hundred brethren being still alive. St. Paul says in effect, 'If you do not believe me, you can ask them.'"

**The martyrdom of the witnesses.** History records (and few scholars dispute) that the self-proclaimed witnesses to the resurrection endured persecution, exile, and executions rather than recant their testimony. Lee Strobel pointed out, "People will die for their religious beliefs if they sincerely believe they're true, but people won't die for their religious beliefs if they know their beliefs are false. While most people can only have faith that their beliefs are true, the disciples were in a position to know without a doubt whether or not Jesus had risen from the dead. They claimed that they saw him, talked with him, and ate with him. If they weren't absolutely certain, they wouldn't have allowed themselves to be tortured to death for proclaiming that the resurrection had happened."

**The birth of the church.** For a few hundred first-century Jews to begin a new religion (proclaiming their Nazarene companion of a few years earlier to be God Incarnate) in Jerusalem, the holy city of Judaism where their preaching would unquestionably invite violent persecution from civil and religious authorities would be the height of lunacy, unless, of course, they were doing so in response to a life-changing event that they themselves had witnessed.

**The conversion of skeptics.** There is virtually no argument among historians that the earliest Christians included Saul of Tarsus and James the brother of Jesus. Saul was a fierce opponent of the first Christians, even to the point of imprisoning and executing some (Acts 22:4); James was one of Jesus' younger brothers, none of whom believed in Jesus during his lifetime (John 7:5). Yet not only did both of these skeptics become followers of Jesus sometime after his resurrection; they also became influential proponents of Christianity. In fact, even a modern skeptic like New Testament critic Hans Grass admits that the conversion of James the brother of Jesus, who apparently became a Christian sometime *after* Jesus suffered a degrading death as a criminal on a cross, is a severe obstacle to believing that Christianity is built on a lie.

## Isn't it narrow minded to believe that Jesus is the only way to a relationship with God?

Jesus couldn't have put it any more clearly than when he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NLT). Doesn't that seem incredibly narrow and exclusive? Absolutely. *Unless*, of course, Jesus really is the only way to a relationship with God.

Jesus' sacrifice is actually the *most inclusive act in the history of the universe*. Jesus died "so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it" (John 3:16-17, NLT, italics added). He died "once for all" (Hebrews 10:10, NIV). For all. That includes everyone. That includes you.

## Do I need to stop sinning before I come to Jesus?

Expecting to stop sinning before you come to Jesus is like fixing your car before you take it to the mechanic. If we could do it ourselves, we wouldn't need a Savior. But we can't do it ourselves. We can't stop sinning. We can't make ourselves clean. We can't get rid of our own guilt.

Using thirst as a metaphor for spiritual longing, Jesus says, “Come’...Let the thirsty ones come—anyone who wants to. Let them come and drink the water of life without charge” (Revelation 22:17, NLT). He says, “Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink—even if you have no money! Come...it's all free!” (Isaiah 55:1, NLT). And he promises, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37, NIV).

Jesus wants you to come with your sin, your problems, your faults, your fears. Give him your future, and he'll take care of your past.

## Is Jesus really coming back?

Forty days after Jesus' resurrection, he took his disciples to the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. After saying goodbye to them, the Bible says, "He was taken up into the sky while they were watching, and he disappeared into a cloud. As they were straining their eyes to see him, two white-robed men suddenly stood there among them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. And someday, just as you saw him go, he will return!'" (Acts 1:9-11, NLT).

The return of Jesus Christ to the earth is a dominant theme of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died...For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. So comfort and encourage each other with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16-18, NLT).

No one knows exactly when Jesus will return, but Jesus did tell his followers to pay attention (Matthew 24:32) so they wouldn't be unprepared for his coming. "And then at last," Jesus said, "the sign of the coming of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the nations of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send forth his angels with the sound of a mighty trumpet blast, and they will gather together his chosen ones from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven" (Matthew 24:30-31, NLT).



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# How can I believe in a good God when there is so much evil in the world?

Earthquakes. Tornadoes. Hurricanes. Tsunamis.  
Embezzlement. Rape. Murder.  
Cancer. Arthritis. Diabetes. Parkinson's disease.

There's just a whole lot of bad stuff going on in this world, and it can make it awful hard to believe in a good God, a God of love and mercy.

Some of us really have to come to terms with evil before we can fully believe in a God who is good.

God is not the author of evil. God created a perfect world in which humans lived in complete harmony with him. But he also gave them freedom of choice. In exercising that freedom, Adam and Eve chose to disobey God (Genesis 3). And it was through that act of disobedience that sin entered the world.

Now, the Bible says the penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:23). So sin is like an inherited disease. We are all born with it and our bodies will ultimately die from it. But sin affects more than just our bodies. Sin affects everything around us. Plainly put, the world is in a state of decay because of it.

All sickness, pain, injustice, and death result from sin. So why doesn't God intervene? Why doesn't He just put an end to evil by eliminating sin? The fact is He has done just that! God sent Jesus Christ to take the penalty for our sin and break the cycle of death. His death in our place bought forgiveness for all who believe in him. In addition, God gives us his Spirit to live inside us and help us break free from the chains of sin.

We will all still suffer because of the presence of sin—whether it's from our own wrong choices, the choices others or the result from a living in a fallen world. But when we suffer we can remember that Jesus Christ underwent the ultimate unjust suffering when He died on the cross at Calvary. He was the only human ever to live without sin, but he took on himself all the pain and evil that has ever been known in the history of the world (1 Peter 2:19-24).

Many still choose not to believe in Jesus, but the Bible says a day is coming when those people will be punished. Wrongs will be righted and God's perfect justice will be meted out. When Jesus Christ returns, all those who have put their faith in him will go to be with him forever. But those who have persisted in sin by rejecting him will go to eternal punishment. But God is patient. He is waiting because he loves everyone—even those who deny him. He wants everyone to have a chance to receive forgiveness (2 Peter 3:3-9).

Jesus said his Father's plan is like that of a farmer who planted a wheat field but whose enemy came and planted weeds in the field. The farmer chose to let the wheat and weeds grow together until the harvest. Then it would be clear which plants were weeds and which were wheat, and they could be easily separated (Matthew 13:24-30).

Our loving and caring God actually uses hardship to serve a useful purpose. Imagine if we all went happily about our business without God—but without pain. Then, when we died, we would discover our rejection of God had earned us eternal punishment. The suffering that results from evil is like a symptom of a disease that sends us in search of a cure.

God often uses hardship to make people who are busy with their own pursuits aware of their need for him. When we realize we can't deal with our circumstances, we go in search of a God who can. The apostle Paul saw suffering as an opportunity to prove God's strength. He wrote, "I will boast all the more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me...For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

Adapted from *Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?* by Dr. Luis Palau, Doubleday, 1999.

# Why do bad things happen to good people?

## Part 1: The practical response

This is a difficult question to answer because it's quite possible that you or someone you know has suffered some type of loss or trauma in your life and you are trying to understand why it happened. The truth is no one really knows why bad things happen to good people. Only God Himself really knows the answer to that. As the Apostle Paul explains, "Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror. Later we will see him face to face. We don't know everything, but then we will, just as God completely understands us." (1 Co 13:12)

In other words, there will be a time when we will have complete understanding. We just don't have that right now. However, there are things we DO know, the most important of which is that God understands the pain we go through when tragedy strikes. The Bible tells us that two thousand years ago, when Jesus walked the earth, one of his closest friends died prematurely. The man's name was Lazarus. When Jesus saw Lazarus's sister crying, and heard the weeping of the others at the funeral, the Bible says, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

A few moments later, Jesus actually raised Lazarus from the dead, and turned their grief into joy. But he still wept. Even though he knew Lazarus would soon be restored to those who loved him, he wept. Jesus, the Son of God, wept. Why? Why did he weep?

Jesus wept because God hurts when you hurt. He shares your sorrow. He does not sit on some distant throne, uncaringly letting bad things happen to you, or to those you love.

When bad things happen to you, he shares your grief. If you're hurting right now, God is hurting with you. If you're crying, his heart is weeping with you. If you're angry about the bad things you or someone you love is suffering, he is angry too, because that's not how he designed this world to be. His original design did not include bad things happening to anyone. God DID, however, design us in such a way that we had the freewill to either follow God's original plan or do things our own way. Man chose to deviate from God's plan and do things his own way which resulted in the imperfect world we know today.

The good news is that the Bible tells us that a time will come when there will be no more tears, no more death, no mourning, no crying out, and no more pain." (Rev 21:4) That is God's promise to those who choose to enter into a relationship with Him.

## Part 2: The philosophical response

Just to put things in perspective, no one is completely good, according to the Bible. In Romans 3:23 we read, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” That means no one is “innocent.” True, some people commit more heinous offenses than others, but we have fallen far short of God’s absolute standard of conduct. Perhaps the only adequate answer to the question of human suffering is the cross. In it God enters into suffering with us, taking the worst of it upon himself—the suffering for our sins.

Scripture tells us the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23). That’s what we deserve. Anything else we receive is the gracious gift of our loving heavenly Father. In fact, he has already gone to great lengths to keep us from the greatest hardship of all—spending eternity in hell apart from him. By sending Jesus to take the penalty for our sin, God made it possible for us not only to escape punishment, but also to experience the joy of life with him.

One of the secrets to contentment here on earth is an eternal perspective. This life is temporary. But if we know Jesus Christ, our real home is in heaven, and that is where we will spend eternity. Any suffering we experience here is incredibly trivial compared to the joy that awaits us. Paul wrote to the Romans, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Jesus himself guaranteed that life would be hard—hardest, in fact, for those who follow him! Jesus said: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Later, after his resurrection, Jesus also told them, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Paul calls God “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

We can take further comfort in the knowledge that our suffering is not meaningless. In spite of the way things appear at times, God is in control, and he uses our hardships to accomplish his purposes, both in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Job didn’t know why he was suffering, but we see in Job 1-2 that God was in control of everything that was happening to him. God’s purposes were being worked out through Job’s hardship.

If we have an eternal perspective, we can rejoice when God is glorified even if it requires that we experience difficulty. Sometimes God glorifies himself through our suffering by providing a miraculous escape. Other times he gives us strength to endure in the midst of it.

If we ask God to give us his perspective on the difficulties in our lives, he will assure us of his purpose in allowing them and his presence in the midst of them. We will be able to affirm the words of Romans 8:28: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.”

It would be nice if God explained to us, specifically, why he allows this bad thing or that bad thing to happen, but he doesn't. But we can trust that He is with us through the suffering. More than that, He has plans to heal your heart, turn your grief into joy, and deliver you and those you love from this painful world we live in (Romans 8:18-21).

Adapted from *Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?* by Dr. Luis Palau, Doubleday, 1999.

## If God created everything, does that mean he created evil?

God created everything. The Bible says, God created everything in heaven and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities (Colossians 1:16).

The Bible also says that God is not the author of wrong:

No one who wants to do wrong should ever say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else either. Temptation comes from the lure of our own evil desires. These evil desires lead to evil actions, and evil actions lead to death. So don't be misled, my dear brothers and sisters. *Whatever is good and perfect* comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights (James 1:13-17 NLT, italics added).

Now, if God created everything, and evil exists, how can it possibly be said that God did not create evil?

The answer is that evil is not a part of God's original creation; it is an indirect result of the world God created.

God certainly could have created a world in which evil was not possible. But, if he had done that, the creatures that populated that world could not have had the freedom to choose to do good, to choose to love him, or to choose to obey him. God knew that the gift of our free will could conceivably result in us not loving him, not obeying him, and not maintaining the kind of world he designed for our enjoyment, which is, of course, precisely what happened and what still happens to this very day. Real goodness, real love, and real obedience can only exist in a person who has free will to choose the opposite but determines not to; true obedience can only result if the choice to disobey is also present.

This is the choice you and I face on a daily basis: to exercise our free will to love God or to turn away from him, to gratefully submit to him or to rebelliously go our own way.

## Can there possibly be any purpose in evil or suffering?

Back in Old Testament times, there was a young man named Joseph who endured a series of injustices that, by all appearances, seemed to ruin his life: he was betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery, exiled far from home, falsely accused of rape, imprisoned, and forgotten. For years, his troubles seemed to pile up. But, in truth, every one of the awful things that happened to Joseph eventually had a redeeming purpose, not only for him, but for those he loved and cared about (Genesis 37).

When evil seems to triumph and suffering seems to go on forever, it can be nearly impossible to imagine anything good coming out of all the pain and tragedy. Yet, even our darkest days have a purpose in God's eternal plan. We can't know all the details of God's plan and purpose in this life, but we can find reason to hope that even when we suffer, he is bringing about a wise purpose through it all. Sometimes those purposes include:

- **Warning us of potential danger.** Pain can be horrible, but the absence of pain can be worse. The great danger of a disease like leprosy is not the disease itself—which involves the loss of the ability to feel physical pain—but the injury and infection that result when the sufferer loses the *benefits* of pain. What is true physically is also true of emotional and spiritual pain. Paul the Apostle once wrote to distant friends, “I am no longer sorry that I sent that letter to you, though I was sorry for a time, for I know that it was painful to you for a little while. Now I am glad I sent it, not because it hurt you, but because the pain caused you to have remorse and change your ways. It was the kind of sorrow God wants his people to have, so you were not harmed by us in any way. For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation” (2 Corinthians 7:8-10 NLT). Pain can be good when it warns us of danger. Sometimes it is “God’s megaphone,” as C. S. Lewis famously said—the means he uses to get our attention.
- **Turning us to God.** A person whose whole life is smooth sailing—no pain, no trouble, no suffering—may go through life like the people who lived in a town called Laodicea in the first century A.D., to whom Jesus said: “You say, ‘I am rich. I have everything I want. I don’t need a thing!’ And you don’t realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17 NLT). Suffering sometimes makes us aware of how much we need God, in good times as well as in bad.

- **Teaching us perseverance and strengthening our character.** Everyone wants to be strong like an oak, but no one wants to endure the storms that make the oak tree strong. Bonsais are delicate because they are pampered; oaks are strong because they are not. The Bible says, “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us” (Romans 5:3-4 NLT).
- **Preparing us for future challenges.** Sometimes pain that seems pointless while we’re suffering becomes a preparation for future effectiveness, even greatness. Joseph’s slavery positioned him to become Pharaoh’s right-hand man. Moses’ exile in Midian prepared him to become a deliverer of multitudes. Jesus’ suffering on the cross paved the way for his resurrection. As the Bible says, “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. So take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs. Mark out a straight path for your feet. Then those who follow you, though they are weak and lame, will not stumble and fall but will become strong” (Hebrews 12:11-13 NLT).

All pain has a purpose, whether we learn its purpose in this life or not. It may seem senseless, but God—and only God—can make sense of it all and weave it into a pattern that brings about our eternal good and his eternal glory (see Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 4:17).

# Is God relevant to my life?



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# I'm doing great thanks. What could God possibly do for me?

Alcoholics and drug addicts, they need God, sure.

People with terminal diseases, of course.

Folks who just can't get their act together otherwise? Absolutely!

But you? Not so much.

Below are the stories of people, in their own words and with their own voices, who felt that they too had it all together but were still willing to search for the missing ingredients that might make their “together” lives even better. If that describes you, why not take a few minutes to listen to what they have to share? You might be surprised by what you find.

## I'm doing great but sometimes I wonder, "Am I the person I really want to be?"

We all start out in life with dreams and ambitions. They may change as we grow older, but we still long to be someone. Someone good. Someone great. And every once in a while, even if we've achieved great things and gained the respect and admiration of many, we want more. We may not even be sure what that "more" is, but we're hungry for it nonetheless.

In fact, for some of us, the more successful we become, the more we struggle to stay in touch with who we really are and somehow connect that to who we long to be. As George Herbert once said, "It's never too late to be who you might have been." The problem is, we're not very well equipped to do that apart from God.

A relationship with God can have a deep and far-reaching effect on your life. Apart from God, we all struggle to one degree or another to fully comprehend and develop a sense of who we really are. But a relationship with God will strengthen and deepen your sense of who you really are, because only by his presence and work in your life can you fulfill your true identity.

Your identity was established by God's creative power; you are a priceless human being, made in God's image. You were created as a spiritual being, intended to live in relationship with God.

In addition, there is a second aspect to the identity a relationship with God will fulfill in you. By sending his Son to die for you, God revealed that you—even in your sin—were a priceless soul, who is literally worth Jesus to him. When Jesus submitted himself to death on a cross, he revealed that you—even in your sin—were worth more to him than his own life! In other words, your identity was not only established by God's creative power; it was emphasized by God's redemptive power, showing that you are a priceless human being made in God's image and a precious soul for whom Christ died.

It's true. It's never too late to be who you might have been. And you can do that right now by simply getting to know God through his Son, Jesus Christ. You have nothing to lose, and a much stronger sense of identity to gain.

## I'm doing great but sometimes I wonder, "Is this all there is?"

Time sure does fly when you're having fun. Days, weeks, months, even years, can zip right on by you when things are going great. But, no matter how much fun you're having, no matter how great life is treating you at the moment, every once in a while you probably wonder if you're missing out and just don't know it yet. Sometimes you may even ask yourself: Is this all there is?

If you have asked that question, you know the answer already. You know that as good as life may be, it's missing something, or you wouldn't ask the question. Deep down inside, you know there's more—much more—to life than your career, income, possessions, or what other people think about you. You know there's a level of satisfaction you haven't yet experienced.

Maybe it's going to sound trite, but here's what's missing: a sense of purpose, a sense that you're contributing to something important, something that is bigger than you, greater than this life, more than just living and working and achieving and having fun.

God planted within you the desire to live a meaningful, purposeful, abundant life, and he alone can satisfy that desire. He created you to live for a purpose much greater than yourself. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment. It's far greater than your own happiness. Even your own peace of mind. You were made by God, and you were made for God, and you were put here for a purpose. And until you understand that, and begin living that, life just isn't going to make a whole lot of sense.

The Bible says, "Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding" (Proverbs 9:10, TLB). You're not going to learn your purpose from some talk show. You're not going to learn it in a séance. You're not going to learn it reading tea leaves. You're not going to learn it from a seminar. The only way you're going to learn the meaning of life and your purpose in life is to get to know God.

So, what is that purpose? The Bible says, “Long before He laid down the earth’s foundation, He had us in His mind and settled on us as the focus of His love to be made whole and holy by His love”(Ephesians 1:4, The Message). He settled on us as the focus of his love. He settled on you as the focus of his love. You were created to be loved by God.

God is love, and he wanted to create something to love, so he created you. He didn’t need you. He wasn’t lonely. But he wanted you. And he made you in order to love you. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ will infuse your life with purpose, as you begin living for a calling and purpose higher—much higher—than yourself. The purpose God had in mind when he created you.

## I'm doing great but sometimes I wonder, "What's going to become of me?"

We just can't help it. Part of the human condition is a drive to live, to go on living, to live forever. Despite some people's contrary opinions—whether scientific, philosophical, or political—we all long for a destiny beyond this life. As far as we know, the human animal is unique among all other life forms on earth in that respect. Dolphins, smart and adorable as they are, probably don't spend a lot of time wondering whether they will outlive their short time here on earth. Despite animators' and poets' depictions, lions and tigers don't seem to long for the transcendent or the eternal. Even apes, which Darwin supposed to be our closest ancestors, don't seem to possess a sense of destiny.

But you're different, and you know it. When you die, your heart is going to stop, you're going to stop breathing, and your brain will stop functioning. That will be the end of your body, but that will not be the end of you. You're far more than a body. The Bible says that you are "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NLT). You were made to last forever. You were made, not for this life alone, but also for the next life.

One of the best ways to waste your life is to think that this—the here and now—is all there is. You're going to spend far more time on the other side of death than you do on this side. On this side of death, you may enjoy seventy or eighty years of life, if all goes well. But that's a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of time—actually a TIMELESS amount of "time"—you'll be spending on the OTHER side of death.

Obviously, the time to plan to plan for the next life is in this life. Sure, you can plan to wait until your final hours to pack for that trip—as long as you know exactly when you're going to die. But you don't know that, do you? Of course not; none of us do. But it's a wise man or woman who gives thought to the next life, because "no man knows when his hour will come" (Ecclesiastes 9:12, NIV).

To the person who enjoys a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, the Bible says, "When this tent we live in—our body here on earth—is torn down, God will have a house in heaven for us to live in, a home he himself has made, which will last forever" (2 Corinthians 5:1, TEV).

That's not "pie in the sky." That's not just a promise of heaven when you die. It's also a very real, very present destiny that can change how you live your life now, day by day, because a relationship with God through Jesus Christ can give you such a sense of destiny that it can color everything else you do in this life. You'll still have bills to pay and problems to work through. You'll still have setbacks and disappointments, but you'll have a different perspective through it all, knowing that "what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory [God] will give us later" (Romans 8:18).

You can gain that new perspective, that strong sense of destiny, right now. That's what a relationship with God through Jesus Christ can do for you.



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# I'm not doing so hot. Could God possibly help?

You might be just looking for some answers to some problems. Or you might be desperate. No matter what your situation is, God wants to help. We invite you to listen to how He's changed the lives of others in similar situations. In their own words and with their own voices, the people below share the hope that God can and will intervene when you turn to Him in faith.

## Can God help me feel better about myself?

When life starts to spin out of control, you start to wonder if it's you, don't you? You start to worry that there's something wrong with you. You start to entertain the thought that you're the problem, that "someone upstairs" has a grudge against you.

Wouldn't it be nice, even when things are going badly for you, to know that you're a child of God? Wouldn't it be nice, even in the midst of trouble and turmoil, to know that your Father in heaven is very fond of you? Wouldn't it be nice to know that you are a friend of God, a favorite son or daughter, a prize in God's eyes?

That is one of the deep-down and far-reaching things a relationship with God can do for you. Sure, you may have plenty of problems, and you may make plenty of mistakes, but if you've entered into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, you can know—whatever may go wrong—who you really are and how God really feels about you, because only by his presence and work in your life can you fulfill your true identity.

Your identity was established by God's creative power; you are a priceless human being, made in God's image (Genesis 1:27). You were created to be a spiritual being, intended to live in relationship with God.

In addition, because God sent his Son to die for you (John 3:16), you can know that you—even in your sin—are a priceless soul, who is literally worth Jesus to him (the Bible says that "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8, NLT)). When Jesus submitted himself to death on a cross, he revealed that you were worth more to him than his own life! In other words, your identity was not only established by God's creative power; it was emphasized by God's redemptive power, showing that you are a priceless human being made in God's image and a precious soul for whom Christ died.

George Herbert once said, "It's never too late to be who you might have been." It might not change your circumstances, but it sure can change your ability to stand strong even in the stiffest winds when you know who you are—and whose you are. And you can make that happen right now, by simply getting to know God, through his Son, Jesus Christ. You have nothing to lose, and a much stronger sense of identity to gain.

## Can God help me get my life together?

When life starts to unravel, and we feel like we're losing our grip, it's only natural—perfectly understandable—to slip into survival mode. In survival mode, we're lucky just to be able to get through each day. We do what we can. We make it through. And sometimes we don't even do that, to be honest.

Nearly everyone goes through times like that, at least for short periods. But there's a problem with survival mode. If it goes on very long, it will deepen our discouragement and depression, and even lead to despair. And with every step down that spiral staircase, it becomes harder and harder to turn things around and climb out. That's because life is no fun when we're struggling to survive. As human beings, we need much more than the will to survive. We need a reason to hope. We need a purpose, and we just long to know what that purpose is.

The prophet Jeremiah asked this same question roughly 2,600 years ago: “Why was I born? Was it only to have trouble and sorrow, to end my life in disgrace?” (Jeremiah 20:18, TEV). There have probably been times in your life when you felt that way too: Was I born for THIS? You may well be feeling that way right now. You may agree with humorist Jack Handy who says, “I hope life isn't a joke, because I don't get it.”

God planted within you the desire to live a meaningful, purposeful, abundant life, and he alone can satisfy that desire. He created you to live for a purpose much greater than yourself. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment. It's far greater than your own happiness. Even your own peace of mind. You were made by God, and you were made for God, and you were put here for a purpose. And until you understand that, and begin living that, life just isn't going to make a whole lot of sense.

The Bible says, “Knowing God results in every other kind of understanding” (Proverbs 9:10, TLB). You're not going to learn your purpose from some talk show. You're not going to learn it in a séance. You're not going to learn it reading tea leaves. You're not going to learn it from a seminar. The only way you're going to learn the meaning of life and your purpose in life is to get to know God.

So what is that purpose? The Bible says, “Long before He laid down the earth’s foundation, He had us in His mind and settled on us as the focus of His love to be made whole and holy by His love” (Ephesians 1:4, The Message). He settled on us as the focus of his love. He settled on you as the focus of his love. God is love, and he wanted to create something to love, so he created you. He didn’t need you. He wasn’t lonely. But he wanted you. And he made you in order to love you.

You were created to be loved by God, to return his love, and to live to please the One who loves you. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ will infuse your life with purpose, as you begin living for a calling and purpose higher—much higher—than yourself. When you respond to Christ’s love by loving him back and agreeing to follow him, his eternal purpose becomes your mission. Have you committed yourself to fulfilling God’s purpose? Take an important first step toward a life that is lived on purpose—the purpose God had in mind when he created you.

## Can God help me feel like I'm finally getting somewhere?

No doubt about it, we live in a cruel world. Smiles at some point turn to frowns, and laughter gives way to crying. Happiness and joy are eventually replaced with pain and suffering. Maybe you haven't noticed, but even men and women who follow Jesus Christ experience anguish, sickness, disappointment, loss, and death.

Yet, as often as life serves up pain and heartache, we are rarely willing to accept it. Something inside us says, "This makes no sense," and we hope that life will be better tomorrow. But, even if tomorrow is better, it won't mean much because eventually someday, all that we have and hold will fade from our grasp, and we will die.

In the midst of any measure of suffering and sorrow, a relationship with God through Jesus Christ will make a huge difference in our lives. Paul of Tarsus once said, "Even we Christians, although we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, also groan to be released from pain and suffering" (Romans 8:23, NLT). There's no denying our present pain. Paul went on to say that "the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress...And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them" (Romans 8:26-28, NLT). A relationship with God does make a difference because the Holy Spirit (who lives inside each individual Christ-follower) causes everything—even bad things—to work together for our eventual and ultimate good.

Now, don't misunderstand: that's not saying that everything that happens on this planet is good. Sickness is not good. Pain is not good. Sorrow, sadness, and suffering are not good. But a relationship with God vaults us beyond a human perspective to an eternal perspective. That eternal perspective equipped Paul—just as it can equip you—to face life with courage and optimism, even in the most difficult of times:

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed and broken. We are perplexed, but we don't give up and quit. We are hunted down, but God never abandons us. We get knocked down, but we get up again and keep going...we know that the same God who raised our Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself along with you. All of these things are for your benefit... That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see right now; rather, we look forward to what we have not seen. For the troubles we see will soon be over, but the joys to come will last forever (2 Corinthians 4:8-9, 14-15, 16-18, NLT).

You may be enduring pain, grief, and suffering right now, but those troubles don't have to be meaningless, and they don't have to make you feel hopeless. A relationship with God through Jesus Christ can give you a sense of destiny. You can know where you are going in life and after this life. You can gain the assurance that your struggles, suffering, and death will one day be transformed into blessings, joy, and eternal life.

In just a few moments, you can gain eternal life and gain a new perspective for the rest of this life in the bargain. That's what a relationship with God through Jesus Christ can do for you.



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# How can I have a personal relationship with God?

“In Life’s Journey Some Seek Peace through the pursuit of riches, good times, or personal relationships. But those things bring temporary peace. A committed Relationship with God is a peace that will last forever.” Author - A Changed Person

## Invitation to receive Jesus as Lord

“I stand at the door and knock.” Do you know who said that? It was Jesus. What door, you might be wondering. Well, that happens to be the door to your heart. Then Jesus said, “If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in.” Jesus is such a gentleman, such a compassionate Creator, that He will not force His way into your life. You have to want Him in your life, and if you don’t want Him in your life, you’ll keep the door to your heart closed. But before you make that decision, you should really ask yourself why you would close the door of your heart to Jesus Christ?

One reason might be that you’re doing something that you don’t want Jesus to see. Did you know that He sees it anyway? In fact, the Bible tells us that not only does He see, but someday we will each have to explain to Him *why* we did every single thing that we did. A second reason might be that you’re just not interested in spiritual things. You’re curious, but you’re not serious. That’s hard to believe, actually. You’re on this Web site, after all, because you’re interested in spiritual things. Most likely, there’s something lacking in your life, and you’re hoping to find that missing piece. A third reason why you’re not ready to open your heart may be because you’re not sure what Jesus will do if you let Him in. The Bible has an answer for that, too. It tells us that God is able to do exceedingly abundantly more than we could ever think, ask, or imagine. The fact is, you have a dream in your heart that He placed there, and He wants that dream to become a reality.

But there’s a problem. See, in the Bible, Romans 3:10 to be exact, it says that none of us is without sin. All of us fall short. No one hits the bull’s-eye when it comes to leading a life that is perfect. And sin separates us from God. But once you open the door to your heart, and Jesus comes inside, His first order of business is to save your soul. He wants to wash away your sins, clearing the path to spend eternity in heaven with God. Please note, the hand He’s knocking on the door to your heart with is covered in blood because Jesus Christ bled and died for your sins. If you’ll allow that blood to cover your sins, you will be saved. The Bible says there is only one name by which we can be saved, and that name is Jesus. Salvation is from Jesus for you. It’s the gift of God. And it brings eternal life.

Are you ready to receive this free gift? If you are, here's what's you need to do: Confess with your mouth that Jesus is who He claimed to be and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and the Bible promises that you'll be saved. How do you do that exactly? In prayer. If you're ready and willing, with your heart opened wide, you can repeat this prayer or one like it: Lord God, I open my heart, and I invite You inside, to be my God, to be my Savior, and to be my Friend. Please wash away my sins. I want to be saved, and I want to be certain that I have a place in Your Kingdom that will soon come. I trust You, God, today for my salvation. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Now, if you didn't pray that prayer, you still don't know who God is, but you most certainly need to know who He is because if you know who God is, you'll trust Him enough to let Him inside. The Word of God is a truly reliable record.

What if you didn't ask Jesus Christ into your life because you're afraid He's going to make you odd for God or make you strange or weird like the guy down the block who says he's a Christian? Please do not fear that, and here's why. The Bible says that the fruit of the Spirit is love and joy and peace and goodness and kindness and gentleness and faithfulness and self control. So, if you're truly connected to the real God, you will live a real life, and that reality is wise, and it's sharp, and it's smart. You can trust that.

Maybe you didn't invite Jesus into your heart because you weren't really sure what He can do for you. To talk to someone about God [click here](#).

## New Believer Encouragement

Welcome to the family of God! You are now a new creation in Christ, and according to God's Word in 2 Corinthians 5:17, the past is past. It's a new beginning, and with that new beginning, you've got a new family. You may be thinking, "Wait a second! I already have a family. I have a mom and a dad and brothers and sisters." Your new family is not the family of flesh; it's the family of faith. It's one heavenly Father and a whole host of brothers and sisters that are here for you, waiting to love and support and accept and involve you in this thing called the Church, a great big body of believers. That's the good news.

But there's also bad news. Jesus provides a word of warning in Matthew Chapter 13 in the parable of the sower. He tells us that when a spiritual seed is sown (which is what just happened in your heart), you've got to be very careful the way you cultivate the new soil of your heart that contains this seed. According to the Bible, there are four different types of soil. Type number one is soil that's like the dirt on the side of the road next to the expressway. If God's seed was sown there, the Bible says that the enemy (the devil) will come and snatch that seed away. In this case, your experience in Christ would be just a passing fad.

Type number two is soil that is stony. When a spiritual seed is sown in a stony place, it will be uprooted at the first signs of tribulation or persecution. To be firmly planted, you will need to root yourself deeply into the Word of God and make yourself part of a Bible-teaching local church.

A third place that seed can be sown is in thorny soil. The Bible says that in this type of soil, there is no support system in place when times get tough, so the new spiritual seed will easily be choked out by the deceit of riches and the worries of this life.

Then there's the fourth type of soil. God says if you plant spiritual seed in this kind of soil, you will bear much fruit. Cultivating your new spiritual seed in good soil means that you've found a local church, you're digging into the Word of God, and you're really beginning to grow. The Bible promises that you will produce a crop thirty, sixty, and even a hundredfold as God gives you gifts to glorify Him. It also means that you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, and if you take that really seriously, you will discover what God has planned for you in your life. He has a purpose expressly for you, and you'll discover that purpose when you build your new faith on Jesus Christ's foundations.

Those foundations are four-fold: one is Bible study; two is prayer; three is fellowship; and four is sharing Christ with others. In Bible study, you will begin to uncover what God has to say about life's issues. God has principles and promises, and His Word will assist you in making wise choices.

Through prayer, you'll have the chance to talk to God and tell Him what's on your heart. Once you know God and once His Son's sacrifice has cleansed away your sins, your prayers will not be like they've ever been before.

Then there's fellowship. You will want to hang out with people that feel the same way about God that you do. That's what happens in a good church.

## Finding a church

Did you know that church is not an option for you if, in fact, you are a real believer? And here's why. It's Hebrew's Chapter 10, starting in verse 23: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." The Day approaching is the day that you meet your Maker face to face, and until that day the Bible says you are supposed to be engaged in "one-another" relationships and the assembling together with other believers.

Right about now you may be thinking, "Do I really have to go to church?" If this is your hesitation, we understand why. For some of you, the reason is hypocritical Christians—people who claimed they were believers but who didn't behave like believers. They've raised some real questions in your heart or maybe even caused a bad experience in your life. Perhaps, you showed up at a church and what you saw was not what's described in the Bible. Or quite possibly, you've been to a church that's from your family's religious background, and it was so boring, it turned you off.

What you need to look for is something very different—a place where there are fewer hypocrites, where the experience is positive, and where the body of believers is alive and serving God as Christians should. You also need to look for a place where love abounds. Jesus said that you would be able to tell who His disciples are by their love one for another. In a real church, love will be more important than tradition. In a real church, you'll find that the teaching of God's Word is more valued than your own personal experience. Everyone has experiences in God, but if you find yourself part of extra-biblical experiences—things that you can't find in the Bible—that's not the church you want to be a part of. You should also look for a church where relationship is esteemed more than membership. Membership is important to some churches, but it's your relationship with God that keeps you in right standing with Him and others, so look for a place where that is encouraged.

Now, when it comes to the actual format—whether, for example, the worship team or the choir plays three fast songs and then two slow songs or whether the sermon is a half hour long or forty-five minutes long—these variables are not as critical as having a church home where you can express yourself and grow as a Christian. You need a church that provides opportunities for you to utilize the gifts that God gave you and where you can be educated and equipped in the Word of God.

To find the right church for you, pray and ask God where you should attend. He will match you to a ministry where you can discover His will for your life—meeting needs in someone else's life. The truth is, you go to church not just for yourself but for your service to others. That's why it's called a church service. Church service is a service from God to you, but it is also an opportunity for you to serve others. That's what needs to happen.

Finally, your church should be a place you look forward to going to and where you truly do enjoy your involvement. When you do become a part of a church, you will discover this exciting thing called the body of believers. It's your family of faith, a whole host of new brothers and sisters that are waiting to accept you and support you as you involve your life in this thing we call church.

If you have more questions about God, just ask:

[chat.needhim.net](http://chat.needhim.net) or 888-NEED-HIM.