

ESSENTIALS

FOUNDATIONS FOR THE FAITH

...EVERYONE WHO
HEARS THESE WORDS
OF MINE AND PUTS
THEM INTO PRACTICE
IS LIKE A WISE MAN
WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE
ON THE ROCK. THE
RAIN CAME DOWN,
THE STREAMS ROSE,
AND THE WINDS BLEW
AND BEAT AGAINST
THAT HOUSE; YET
IT DID NOT FALL,
BECAUSE IT HAD ITS
FOUNDATION ON THE
ROCK.

MATTHEW 7:24-25

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 6 ALL ABOUT JESUS
- 7 WHO IS JESUS?
- 8 WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?
- 10 HOW DO I SHARE THE GOSPEL?
- 12 20 ATTRIBUTES OF GOD
- 14 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE
- 18 HOW TO READ THE BIBLE
- 20 SHORT ANSWERS TO LIFE'S BIG QUESTIONS
- 22 CONFUSING PASSAGES IN THE BIBLE
- 24 IDENTITY & PURPOSE
- 26 THE LOCAL CHURCH
- 28 THE POWER OF FRIENDS
- 30 QUESTIONS ABOUT PRAYER
- 33 TOPICS OF INTEREST
- 33 — HEAVEN & HELL
- 34 — BIBLICAL SEXUALITY
- 36 — MAJOR RELIGIONS
- 37 — MONEY
- 39 — APOLOGETIC ARGUMENTS
- 40 GLOSSARY OF CHURCH WORDS



FOR NO ONE CAN LAY
ANY FOUNDATION
OTHER THAN THE ONE
ALREADY LAID, WHICH
IS JESUS CHRIST.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:11

JESUS

There are many opinions about Jesus in our world, but a person who calls themselves a Christian and a follower of Jesus should know who Jesus is, not according to everyone else, but according to the Bible. Below are 5 common questions about Jesus and a short answer to each.

WHO IS JESUS?

Jesus is the central figure of Christianity, believed to be the Son of God and the savior of humanity. His life and ministry are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These books provide detailed accounts of Jesus' life, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection. Most people accept that Jesus was truly a man who lived in Israel 2,000 years ago, but the debate among most religions of the world begins with the discussion of Jesus' full identity. Almost every major religion teaches that Jesus was a prophet, a good teacher, or a godly man. But the Bible tells us that Jesus was infinitely more than a prophet, a good teacher, or a godly man. Jesus himself claimed that He was God in the flesh and that He and the Father were one. (John 10:30)

WHY DID JESUS COME TO EARTH?

God sent his son Jesus to earth to live as a human for two major reasons, the first to seek and save the lost. (Luke 19:10) Jesus came to earth so that people who were spiritually dead, blind, or lost could be found and come to life spiritually. Without Jesus coming to earth to live and die, there is no way for humanity to be saved or earn right-standing before God. (John 3:16) The second reason Jesus came was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8) Without the power of Jesus to free people from the hold of sin and death, Satan would have set up his rule on this earth and it would have continued forever. But through Jesus, chains of sin can be broken. Satan has been defeated, and people can experience new life and freedom in Christ. (Galatians 5:1)

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?

The first word that Jesus said and taught in his earthly ministry was for people to repent, turn from sin, and turn back to God. (Matt 3:2) Jesus also taught that He was the only way to spend eternity with God in heaven. (John 14:6) The Bible contains

many teachings attributed to Jesus that emphasize love, forgiveness, compassion, and salvation. (John 13:34) Jesus taught that there are many false religions and gospels that lead to destruction (Matthew 7:13), but the path that leads to eternal life with God is narrow, and few will find it. This "narrow path" is the Gospel. Jesus also taught his followers to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul and to love your neighbor as you love yourself. (Mark 12:30-31)

WHAT DID JESUS DO?

Jesus called twelve men to follow him for three years. During these years He performed many miracles, taught many things, and set the foundation for what would become the Christian Church. (John 20:30) At the end of those three years, Jesus was arrested and crucified on the cross. He willingly became the sacrificial lamb that took our sins, paid the penalty meant for us, and made a way for us to once again be reconnected to God. (John 1:29) On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave and came back to life, (Luke 24:6) showing his power over sin and death. Jesus then ascended back into heaven but sent the Holy Spirit as a gift to the local church so that they would be filled with power and boldness to share the gospel to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:4-8)

WHAT DOES JESUS HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

Without Jesus, there is no way to be connected with God. (Romans 3:23) Without Jesus, there is no way to achieve salvation (Romans 5:8). Humanity is deserving of the punishment for sin: separation from God and the removal of everything good that comes from God. There is no other name that can save from sin but Jesus. (Acts 4:12) When Jesus ascended into heaven, He called his followers together and gave them a mission to bring the Gospel to all parts of the world and to make disciples of all nations. (Matthew 28:18-20)

FOUNDATIONS CHALLENGE

BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?

One of the most important questions to wrestle with is this: Who is Jesus? This question will be asked of every person; it will not only determine the trajectory of one's life but their eternity too. It does not matter who your parents or friends say Jesus is, but who you personally believe He is and how that conviction shapes your life. In Matthew 16, this same question was posed to Peter:

Matthew 16:13-16 When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Peter answered correctly. He was able to see through all the lies and confusion of the times, and accurately proclaim that Jesus Christ was the son of God and the long-awaited Messiah. We too, just like Peter, need to see through the lies, distractions, and confusion about who Jesus is and also give His name as the only correct answer. People have many different answers to who they think Jesus is, but most of them are wrong. Some say that Jesus was only a man, or just a prophet, or simply an enlightened human; some even doubt that Jesus even existed. But each of these wrong answers have flaws: if Jesus were just a man and not God, He is a liar and His entire life was a fraud. One is also sadly mistaken to claim that Jesus was just a prophet or a great man, because a great man or true prophet would not lie and claim to be one with the Father if He were not. The only option we are left with is to admit that Jesus truly was who He said He was. He wasn't lying or misleading people. He wasn't making false claims. He was of sound mind and truly was who He claimed to be. The implications of this revelation are incredibly impactful for each of us living today. If Jesus is God, then whatever He said is truth and He is the only way to eternity with God. It also means that all other paths will not lead there.

Now it's your turn to think about and answer that same question: Who is Jesus to you?

THE GOSPEL

ROMANS 1:16 ... I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL, BECAUSE IT IS THE POWER OF GOD THAT BRINGS SALVATION TO EVERYONE WHO BELIEVES...



WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

If you have been involved in the church for any period of time, you've heard the word "Gospel". The Gospel of Jesus Christ is considered the central message of Christianity, found in the teachings of Jesus as recorded in the New Testament. As Christians, the Gospel is the foundation of who we are and what we have been called to do with our lives. But what exactly is the Gospel? What does this word mean and what impact does it have on my life? Below are 3 relevant definitions of exactly what the Gospel is.

1. THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS OF ETERNAL VICTORY

One illustration associated to the Gospel is an ancient idea of a messenger coming back from battle bringing the good news of a military victory back to the kingdom. The messenger would declare that they have been saved from destruction; the enemy has been defeated, and the kingdom is victorious! Soon the victorious King will return, so the kingdom must be prepared to celebrate the good news of victory and deliverance. This is exactly what we are called to do as Christians: to be messengers who bring a message of eternal victory over sin and death. We also tell people how they can prepare for the return and coming of the King.

- 1 John 5:4, 1 John 3:8, 1 Corinthians 15:57

2. THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS OF ETERNAL SALVATION

To understand and grasp the good news of the Gospel, we need to first understand the bad news that we have all sinned and have fallen short of God's perfect standard. Not only that, but there is nothing we can do to fix this, save ourselves, or get out of the pit we've fallen into. The good news is that we don't have to save ourselves, because Jesus came to die in our place. He took the punishment that we rightly deserve on himself to offer the forgiveness of sins and salvation to those who give their lives to Christ. Not only will our sins be forgiven in this life, but because we have been washed clean from the stain of sin, we can forever be in the presence of God in heaven. Jesus is our eternal salvation.

- Romans 3:23, Romans 5:8, Romans 8:38, Romans 10:9

3. THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS OF ETERNAL FREEDOM

Not only are we victorious over the enemy and forgiven of our sin, but in Christ we also have freedom from the bonds of sin in this life and the next. The only way we can experience true freedom in this life and eternity is by giving our lives to Christ. We cannot earn our freedom! The chains of sin that bound us, whether the stronghold be addiction, lust, or pride, can only be broken by the power of Jesus. In him, we can experience eternal freedom the way we were intended to live.

- Galatians 5:1, 2 Corinthians 3:17, John 8:36

**AS IT IS WRITTEN, HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THEM THAT PREACH THE GOSPEL OF PEACE, AND BRING GLAD TIDINGS OF GOOD THINGS!
ROMANS 10:15**

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The Bible tells every follower of Christ that they have been given the mission to spread the gospel and share the good news of Jesus. This means we bring Jesus into all aspects of society: education, business, politics, entertainment, and culture. Jesus is not confined to one day a week or simply to be shared within the walls of the church. The gospel is meant to be shared with the world as an everyday part of our lives. Many people can feel unworthy or not equipped to share the gospel, but below you'll find 5 keys to sharing the gospel, even for new Christians.

1. SHARE THE GOSPEL AT ALL TIMES

The gospel is not just something we talk about and share with our words only, but it is reflected in how we live and the values our lives display. We cannot claim to follow Jesus and promote Christianity if our words and actions don't line up. We need to speak and show the gospel; along with Christian living, we need to always be prepared to answer basic questions about the faith and point people to Jesus.

2. SHARING YOUR LIFE IS THE BEST WAY TO SHARE THE GOSPEL

The best sharing of the gospel is not done while standing on a soapbox, or with a bullhorn yelling at people to repent. The best evangelism is through relationships. When we share our lives with people, they can see how we live and how Jesus has transformed us from the inside out. This authentic relationship allows bridges to be built with other people. When trust is built, you earn a place to speak into someone's life where they will listen to what you have to say.

3. FIND A WAY THAT WORKS FOR YOU

Over time, you will find a way that works for you to simply share the gospel. Some people like to simply start by sharing their own stories (or testimonies) of their lives before knowing Jesus and how Jesus saved them. Other people like to share a few verses that mean a lot to them. Some prefer the five key verses in Romans, known as the "Roman Road", that helps to explain the problem of sin and the solution of Christ. The key here is that there are many methods of sharing the gospel; one of those will stand out to you and be more natural than others. Find what works for you!

4. SHARE THE WHOLE GOSPEL

Sharing the gospel doesn't mean that you just tell people that with Jesus, they will be happier or all their problems will go away. Sharing the gospel means that we need to be willing to share some bad news in order to share the good news. The bad news is hard to hear: that we are sinners and cannot fix ourselves, that our good works cannot save us...etc. To accept Jesus as savior, a person needs to come to a place of humility to understand that they cannot save themselves. If a person rejects this or is offended by this, you have still done your part.

5. LEARN TO USE THE TOOLS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU

There are many helpful tools and resources available to Christians when it comes to helping you share the gospel. You can invite someone to church or send them a video, podcast, social media post, or book and then discuss it later. You can find a great Bible story like the Prodigal Son or Jesus and the Samaritan woman to help you explain the gospel. You can also take a course on evangelism or read a book that will help educate you on discipling new Christians. The key here is that we don't stop learning, growing, and becoming more effective in evangelism as we grow spiritually.



BUT IN YOUR HEARTS
REVERE CHRIST AS
LORD. ALWAYS BE 
PREPARED TO GIVE AN
ANSWER TO EVERY-
ONE WHO ASKS YOU
TO GIVE THE REASON
FOR THE HOPE THAT
YOU HAVE. BUT DO
THIS WITH GENTLE-
NESS AND RESPECT.

1 PETER 3:15

20 ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

One of the major reasons we were put on earth is to know God and to make him known. Jesus is the perfect reflection of God. In Jesus and in God's word, we gain a clearer vision of who God is. Through reading God's word and having a relationship with Jesus, we draw closer to our heavenly father. Below are twenty important attributes or characteristics of God that were perfectly modeled in Jesus to help us know Him more. There are also references to places in scripture where you can look that attribute up in the Bible.

GOD IS FAITHFUL

God is incapable of anything but faithfulness. He is loyally devoted to His plan and purpose.

2 TIM 2:13 / DEUT 7:9 / HEB 10:23

GOD IS HOLY

God is undefiled and unable to be in the presence of defilement. He is sacred and set-apart.

REV 4:8/ LEV 19:2/ HAB 1:13

GOD IS ETERNAL

God is self-existent and was not created. He has no beginning and no end. He always was, always is, and always will be.

HAB 1:12/Rev 1:8/15. 41:4 / PS. 90:1-2 / JN. 1:4 / JN. 5:26

GOD IS GOOD

God is pure; there is no defilement in him. He is unable to sin, and all He does is good.

GEN. 1:31/PS 34:8/PS. 107:1

GOD IS GRACIOUS

God is kind, giving us gifts and benefits we do not deserve.

2 KINGS 13:23/ PS 145:8 15. 30:18

GOD IS UNCHANGING

God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

1 SAM 15:29 / ROM. 11:29 JAMES 1:17

GOD IS LIMITLESS

God is without limits. He exhibits all of His attributes perfectly and boundlessly and is not contained by anything.

ROM. 11:33-36 / IS. 40:28 / PS. 147:5

GOD IS JUST

God governs in perfect justice. He acts in accordance with justice. In Him, there is no wrongdoing or dishonesty

IS. 61:8 / DEUT 32:4/ PS. 146:7-9

GOD IS LOVING

God is eternally, enduringly, steadfastly loving and affectionate. He does not forsake or betray His Covenant love.

JN. 3:16 / EPH. 2:4-5 / 1 JN. 4:16

GOD IS MERCIFUL

God is compassionate, withholding from us the wrath we deserve.

TITUS 3:5 / PS. 25:10 / LAM. 3:22-23

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

God governs over all things; He is in complete control over all of creation at all times.

COL. 1:17 / PS. 24:1-2 / 1 CHRON. 29:11-12

GOD IS JEALOUS

God desires to receive the praise and affection He rightly deserves. He will not stand for idolatry or false worship.

EX. 20:5 / DEUT. 4:23-24 / JOSH. 24:19

GOD IS WRATH

God stands in opposition to all that is evil. He enacts judgment according to His holiness, righteousness, and his justice

PS. 69:24 / JN. 3:36 / ROM. 1:18

GOD IS TRUTH

God is our measurement of what is fact and fiction. By Him We are able to discern true and false. He is the definer of all reality.

JN. 3:33 / ROM. 1:25 / JN. 14:4

GOD IS WISE

God is infinitely knowledgeable and is judicious with His knowledge.

IS. 46:9-10 / IS. 55:9 / PROV. 3:19

GOD IS OMNIPOTENT

God is all powerful.
His strength is unlimited.

MAT. 19:26 / JOB 42:1-2 / JER. 32:27

GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

God is everywhere;
His presence is near and permeating.

PROV 15:3 / PS. 139:7-10 / JER. 23:23-24

GOD IS OMNISCIENT

God is all-knowing;
There is nothing unknown to Him.

PS. 147:4 / 1 JN. 3:20 / HEB. 4:13

GOD IS SELF-SUFFICIENT

God has no needs and depends on nothing, but everything depends on God.

IS. 40:28-31 / ACTS 17:24-25 / PHIL. 4:19

GOD IS PATIENT

God is long-suffering and enduring.
He gives ample opportunity for people to turn toward Him.

ROM. 2:4 / 2 PET. 3:9 / PS. 86:15

THE BIBLE

Reading and understanding scripture is a major part of building your life on God's word. This does not happen automatically; it often takes many years to confidently read scripture, understand it, and apply it rightly to your life. Below are 5 commonly asked questions about the Bible, followed by five keys to jump into reading it correctly.

1. WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

The word Bible simply means "book". The Bible is a collection of 66 books divided into two major sections: the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament tells the story of creation and follows the bloodline of the Israelite people leading up to the birth of Jesus. The New Testament focuses on the stories of Jesus's ministry and the first thirty years of the Church. Jesus is the central character in the entire Bible—the whole book, Old & New Testament included, is really about Him.

2. WHO WROTE THE BIBLE?

The Bible was written in three different languages by forty human authors over the span of 1500 years. The authors were kings, fishermen, priests, government officials, farmers, shepherds, and doctors. They wrote in many genres: Books of Law, History, Poetry, Prophecy, Biographies, and formal letters. Many of the authors would never meet or read what the other authors wrote, yet there is incredible unity and common themes throughout all of scripture. This supernatural unity and cohesion points to the fact that, ultimately, the Bible has one Author—God Himself, who divinely inspired the words that were written down by the hands of men.

3. CAN I TRUST THE BIBLE?

The Bible can be trusted more than any book ever written because it is the true word of God. There are no errors or contradictions in the original words of God. Science and archeology are catching up to things the Bible told us thousands of years ago. Jesus himself believed the Old Testament to be true and reliable. He learned it as a young man and quoted it often. Also, Paul's letters to the churches were received by the intended audience as having come from the Lord. Most of the New Testament authors were martyred for their words. It is highly unlikely that such a wide assortment of men, all claiming a single truth, would suffer extreme persecution and eventually be murdered for words they knew to be a lie. But ultimately every person has the choice to trust in the Bible or not; even if you don't, that trust has to be placed somewhere, and the questions that scripture brings up still need to be answered. Another factor that helps us trust the Bible is the life-changing impact the Bible has had for thousands of years. The Bible has withstood the attempts that kings, dictators, and whole societies made to abolish it, yet it remains the top-selling book of all time. Its words contain a hope not found in any other religious writing and have transformed the lives of millions. Other world religions claim loyal adherence, but the glue that holds most of their faith together is fear, intimidation, or human effort. The Bible promises what no other book does: life, hope, and purpose as a gift from Almighty God. Its words have transformed murderers, tyrants, and nations because the Bible resonates as truth in the deepest part of the human soul.

4. WHERE SHOULD I START READING THE BIBLE?

The key here is to simply start reading and get into a daily habit of reading God's word. Start small, starting with a single verse or book of the Bible. A good one to start with is the gospel of John followed by the book of Acts. You will get an idea of the life and ministry of Jesus as well as the story of the local church's beginning. You may also choose to follow a daily devotionals that either walks through a book of the Bible or a topic like prayer or discipleship.

5. WHAT TRANSLATION SHOULD I USE?

Match the right translation to your Bible study goals: There is a big difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible. If you only want to read, pick an easy-to-understand translation. There is a range of trans-

lations of the Bible, from formal to functional. Formal translations stay as close as possible to the structure and words of the source language. Examples of formal translations are KJV, ESV, and NASB. Functional translations try to express the meaning of the original text in a more modern language. The Message Bible, Amplified Bible, and the Good News Bible are examples of functional or paraphrased versions. The most common today is the NIV which is right in the middle of the range. The NLT, or New Living Translation, is closer to functional, but it's another great Bible just for reading.

2 TIMOTHY 3:16 "ALL SCRIPTURE IS GOD-BREATHED AND IS USEFUL FOR TEACHING, REBUKING, CORRECTING AND TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, SO THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE THOROUGHLY EQUIPPED FOR EVERY GOOD WORK."

MANUSCRIPT COMPARISON

NEW TESTAMENT VS. ANCIENT LITERATURE

Author	Ancient Title	Date of Original	Earliest Manuscript	Gap from Original	Manuscript Copies
Plato	Dialogues/Tetralogies	4th cent. BC	3rd cent. BC	ca. 150 yrs.	ca. 210-240
Homer	Iliad	9th cent. BC	415-410 BC	ca. 450 yrs.	ca. 1,800 +
Herodotus	The Histories	484-425 BC	2nd-1st cent. BC	ca. 450 yrs.	ca. 100+
Thucydides	History of the Peloponnesian Wars	460-400 BC	3rd cent. BC	ca. 200 yrs	185
Aristophanes	Assorted Works	448-385 BC	AD 900	ca. 1,300 yrs.	10
Sophocles	Assorted Works	496-406? BC	3rd cent. BC	ca. 200 yrs	ca. 220+
Julius Caesar	The Gallic Wars	58-44 BC	AD 900	ca. 950 yrs.	ca. 250
Tacitus	Annals of Imperial Rome	AD 58-120	AD 1100	ca. 1,000 yrs.	ca. 33+
Pliny the Elder	Natural History	1st cent. AD	5th&14th-15th cent. AD	ca. 400-1,500 yrs.	ca. 200
Greek New Testament Manuscripts		AD 45-100	AD 117-325	30-300 yrs.	5,860

Non-Greek New Testament manuscripts (translations) 19,000 +
Total New Testament manuscripts ca, 25,000+

THE CANON OF THE BIBLE

WHAT IS THE CANON?

In classical and biblical usage, the word canon means "rule" (cf. Galatians 6:16), "standard", or "measuring rod" (see Ezekiel 40:3; 42:16). Historically, the people of Israel never used the term to refer to the scriptures. Christians and theologians later used "cannon" to refer to the officially recognized collection of inspired books of the Bible.

THREE STEPS OF CANONIZATION

- 1. SOURCE:** The inspired books were determined by God.
- 2. DISCOVERY:** The people of God recognized which books are inspired.
- 3. COLLECTION:** The recognized books were progressively collected and preserved by the people of God into a divinely authoritative canon.

THE FORMATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT CANON

The Old Testament books, which began to be recorded in the second millennium BC, were written in Hebrew (with some in Aramaic). After the books were written, God's people immediately accepted them as Holy Scripture (Daniel 9:2; cf. Jeremiah 25:11). In some cases, they placed the books in the ark covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26; see also 1 Samuel 10:25; 2 Kings 22:8). The 39 books of the Old Testament were written over a period of 1,100 years (ca. 1500-400 BC). This long period of time is in stark contrast to the New Testament Scriptures, which were written over a span of about 60 years (ca. AD 40-100).



START TO FINISH

A time line of when the church recognized the inspired text and the principles that guided their discovery.

AD 35-95

The people of God (Christians) immediately accepted the inspired and authoritative books written in the New Testament (2 Peter 3:16; 1 Timothy 5:18). The later acceptance of a canon was for official recognition as the church grew and spread.

AD 110

Every book of the New Testament was cited (expect two) by Ignatius, Clement of Rome, and Polycarp. By AD 150, the apostolic fathers as authoritative.

AD 140

The first attempt as a canon was by the heretic Marcion, who rejected the entire Old Testament, apocrypha, and Gospels (except Luke). He accepted the Pauline epistles (except the pastoral epistles).

AD 200

L.A. Muratori discovered a canon list in the Milan library that includes the synoptic Gospels, Pauline epistles, 1 and 2 John, Jude, and Revelation. This is known as the Moratoria Canon.

EARLY 4TH CENTURY

The Apostolic Canon 85 (final Latin version) accepts all books of the Old and New Testament except Revelation.

AD 325

The church historian Eusebius lists all the Gospels, Pauline epistles (except Philemon), 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation in the canon. He does not include the general epistles, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude.

MID 4TH CENTURY

Theodore Mommsen discovers a 10th-century Latin list that contains all but New Testament books. The list probably originated in North Africa by the 4th century. This is known as Cheltenham Canon.

AD 367

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, lists all 27 books in his paschal letter. This is the earliest complete canon of the New Testament.

AD 382-397

The synod of Rome (382) gave final approval to the canon for all the Western churches. The Synod of Carthage (397) gave final acceptance to the canon to the entire church, thus completing the canon.

HOW DO I READ THE BIBLE?

If you're going to start reading and studying the Bible, you should know how to do it the right way. Think of it like lifting weights; you need to lift weights to get stronger, but you also need to know how to lift weights correctly, or else it might do more harm than good. It's the same with scripture, so read on to learn how to do it right.

PSALM 119:105 "YOUR WORD IS A LAMP FOR MY FEET, A LIGHT ON MY PATH"

FIVE KEYS TO READING THE BIBLE WELL...

1. THE BIBLE IS A VERY SPECIAL BOOK, BUT IT'S STILL A BOOK.

When you start reading the Bible, don't just jump into a random verse in a chapter, or close your eyes and point to a random passage thinking it's God's message to you. That's not how God wants us to read and study his word. A better idea is to start at the beginning of the chapter and the first verse. This will help you to get the right context, which means you'll better understand what the author of the passage meant when they wrote it. One of the major issues with biblical interpretation is taking things out of context.

2. THE BIBLE CAN NEVER MEAN WHAT IT NEVER MEANT.

The original intent of scripture is incredibly important for us to learn. If the author never meant a verse, passage, or story to mean something, then we cannot make it mean that, even if that interpretation fits better with what we wished it meant. The Bible was written for you, but also not for you. It is crucial to consider who the original audience was and what message the author intended to convey to them. A better practice is to first understand what the text meant then and there to its original audience, then after we get that right, move on to the application of what it means in our modern culture.

3. UNDERSTANDING THE MANY GENRES WITHIN THE BIBLE IS CRUCIAL.

The Bible is a collection of many books that contain different genres, such as poetry, narrative, historical, prophecy, apocalyptic literature, wisdom literature, and epistles (letters). When we first grasp what genre a particular book (or section) of the Bible is written in, it can help us to know if those parts should be taken literally or seen as symbolic. Then, we can determine how to read it and better apply what has been written. For example, Genesis was written as a historical narrative, so we should not read it as symbolic, but as true history.

4. THE BIBLE SHOULD LEAD US TO REFLECT JESUS FULLY.

If we are reading and studying scripture, but it is leading us to a place where we are full of anger and hatred, then we are reading it wrong. Likewise, if we come to a place while studying the Word where we become tolerant to sin, then we are doing it wrong. Reading the Bible should lead us to fully reflect the Grace and Truth of Jesus. This means that we don't cherry-pick verses or stories that fit with our bias, our political views, or

what we wish Jesus was more like. Instead we seek to gain a full view of God's nature and the totality of what He has written to us.

5. THERE ARE MANY TOOLS & RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO YOU.

You don't have to read and study the Bible on your own. You can ask questions, join a Bible study group, and use many other study tools available to you like concordances, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and maps. You can also seek guidance from scholars and take classes such as the Old Testament Survey or Biblical Doctrine to better help you understand and clarify difficult parts of scripture. Engaging in discussions, ongoing learning, and also studying the Bible within a community of believers can provide diverse perspectives and insights into its meaning; it will also help you enjoy and apply so much more.



SHORT ANSWERS TO BIG QUESTIONS

Youth these days have a lot of big, important questions to consider, but we also live in an age of short attention spans. We're going to attempt to answer 20 Big Questions about God, Sin, Jesus and Salvation that are not directly addressed in other parts of this resource in only a single sentence. If you are interested in learning more and reading Bible verses about this questions, you can look up the Bible references with each answer.

1. HOW CAN WE HAVE HOPE IN LIFE AND DEATH?

The only hope we have in life is that this life is not all there is and that eternal life with God can be found in Christ because we belong to Christ and were created to be with God for all of eternity.

John 14:6 // Isaiah 40:31

2. WHO IS GOD?

God is the creator of everyone and everything and is the source of everything good in this life.

Psalm 24:1 // James 1:17

3. WHAT IS THE TRINITY?

The trinity are three persons in one God: the father, the son, and the Holy Spirit.

Matthew 28:19 // 2 Cor. 13:14

4. WHY DID GOD CREATE MANKIND?

God created mankind to worship, glorify and be in relationship with Him.

Isaiah 43:7 // Eph. 2:10 // Rev. 4:11

5. WHAT ELSE DID GOD CREATE?

God created all things, and all his creation was very good.

Colossians 1:16 // Isaiah 44:24

6. HOW CAN WE GLORIFY GOD?

By loving him, praising him, and by obeying His commands.

Psalms 63:3 // 1 Peter 4:10

7. WHAT DOES THE LAW OF GOD REQUIRE?

That we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Matthew 22:37

8. CAN ANYONE KEEP THE LAW OF GOD PERFECTLY?

Since the fall, no one has been able to keep the law of God perfectly besides Jesus.

Galatians 3:11 // Romans 3:20

9. DID GOD CREATE US UNABLE TO KEEP HIS LAW?

No, but we are all born into sin and guilt because of the fall and we are unable to keep God's law.

Romans 3:23,

10. SINCE NO ONE CAN KEEP THE LAW, WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

That we may know the holy nature of God, the sinful nature of our hearts, and our need of a Savior.

Galatians 3:24 // Romans 7:7

11. WHAT IS SIN?

Sin is rejecting or ignoring God to the point we fall short of his perfect standard.

Romans 3:23 // James 4:17

12. WHAT IS IDOLATRY?

Idolatry is trusting in and worshipping created things rather than the creator.

Exodus 20:3-6 // Isaiah 2:8

13. WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF SIN?

Spiritual Death and eternal separation from God as well as consequences in this life.

Rom 6:23 // Gal 5:19-21

14. IS THERE ANY WAY TO ESCAPE PUNISHMENT & BE BROUGHT BACK INTO GOD'S FAVOR?

Yes, God reconciles us to himself by a redeemer...

John 3:16 // Rom 5:8

15. WHO IS THE REDEEMER?

The only Redeemer is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:7 // Hebrews 9:12

16. DOES CHRIST'S DEATH MEAN OUR SINS CAN BE FORGIVEN?

Yes, because Christ's death on the cross fully paid the penalty for our sin. God will remember our sins no more.

Psalm 103:12

17. WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE TRINITY?

God is one and God is eternal and co-equal within the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

1 John 5:7-8 // 2 Cor 13:14

18. WHAT DO WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE BIBLE?

The bible is the word of God. Written by human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

19. WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

A community of people who are saved by Jesus, united by faith, who love, follow, learn from, and worship God together.

Rom 12:4-5 // 1 Cor 3:16-17 // 1 Peter 2:9-10

20. WHAT HOPE DOES EVER-LASTING LIFE HOLD FOR US?

That we will live with and enjoy God forever in the new heaven and the new earth, where we will be forever freed from all sin in a renewed, restored creation.

1 Peter 1:3-9 // Rom 15:13

CONFUSING PASSAGES

The Bible, as a religious text with a rich history and diverse interpretations, contains several passages (or types of passages) that have been considered confusing or difficult to understand, even by scholars and theologians. These passages often require careful analysis and consideration of historical context, linguistic nuances, and theological perspectives to unravel their meaning. Below are five of the most confusing types of passages in the Bible you will run into when you start studying the Bible.

PSALM 119:130 (ESV) "THE UNFOLDING OF YOUR WORDS GIVES LIGHT; IT IMPARTS UNDERSTANDING TO THE SIMPLE."

PROPHECY AND VISIONS

Prophetic dreams and visions are when a person sees a picture of the future that may seem strange and difficult to understand. The books of Daniel, Revelation, and Ezekiel all contain examples of this, specifically Ezekiel's Vision of the Wheels in Ezekiel 1:15-21. In this passage, the prophet Ezekiel describes a complex vision involving wheels within wheels, covered in eyes. As a reader, we need to understand that the imagery described is highly symbolic and points to the nature of God as being one who sees all and is everywhere on the earth at once. Once we understand how these types of passages work and what they are used for, we can better understand what they mean to the one having the vision and also what it should mean to the reader.

STRANGE STORIES

There are some stories in the Bible that contain elements (often violent or graphic) that are difficult to understand, such as when Zipporah circumcised her son or when Elisha called bears to kill children. These passages seem strange, but the more we understand the historical context of when and to whom these books were written, the more we understand what these stories mean and how they can be applied to our lives. An Old Testament survey class is a great place to start to gain much more clarity that will also help you to enjoy digging into scripture even more.

LAWS, CUSTOMS, AND GENEALOGIES

The books of Leviticus and Numbers are especially known for describing strange ceremonial laws and Israelite customs, as well as long-drawn-out genealogies. These laws can seem strange because they don't make sense to us: such as food laws, how to sacrifice animals, what to do if someone is unclean, and how they can become ceremonially clean once again. Once again, the more we learn the context of the time and why these passages were written the more we understand how these laws point to fulfillment in Jesus, and how the genealogies were also ways to record the bloodlines that would lead to Jesus. There are also great Bible classes that can help you better understand these confusing passages.

NEW TESTAMENT EPISTLES

These letters, mostly from Paul, (but also from Peter, Jude, James, and John) can be confusing because we are essentially only seeing the letter from Paul who is describing and responding to issues, news, and problems within the Churches. We don't see the original letters that were sent to Paul, so we the reader have to play detective to figure out exactly what Paul is responding to. The good news is that we have historical context and other sources from the Early Churches that help us to piece together exactly what the problems were, how Paul's words were divinely inspired, and also how those words are relevant to our lives today.

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

Jesus often told stories to those who gathered around him. Great wisdom and truth can be found within these stories, but those points were only understood by those who 'had ears to hear'. Often, Jesus would take time later to explain the parables to His closest followers. Jesus taught in this way so that those who had the right heart and motivation would continue to seek out the truth. But those who were only mildly curious or trying to trap Jesus would not understand what he was saying. In essence, Jesus was telling people that if they wanted to mine the gold, they would have to dig and do the hard work. The same is true for us today; we can gain greater clarity and understanding of confusing passages when we care about finding the truth. And there are many great resources available to you if you want to grow in your understanding of Scripture.

HOW TO READ THESE PASSAGES

Sometimes the stories we read in the Bible can be strange, confusing, or downright horrifying. Below are three examples of some weirder ones with an explanation for why they are in Scripture and how we can glean some wisdom from them.

BALAAM AND THE TALKING DONKEY

In chapter 22 of the book of Numbers, we read a story about a spiritual prophet named Balaam who saddles his donkey and rides out one day, only for his donkey to stop and refuse to go further. Three times the donkey stops and three times Balaam beats the donkey until God then speaks to Balaam through the donkey, a very strange sight you can imagine. There are many lessons in this story: the first that God is all-powerful, even over animals. If He wants a donkey to speak, it will speak. Another lesson in this story was that the heart of Balaam was not right. His heart was greedy, his error was compromised, and his doctrine was betrayal and corruption. God needed a way to get the man's attention and found it in the mouth of the donkey.

EZEKIEL'S STRANGE VISION

In Ezekiel chapter 1, a man had a strange vision of supernatural things he could not explain. It included strange wheels within wheels, covered in eyes. It would have been a frightening sight, and as a reader, we can wonder (similarly to Ezekiel) what this vision has to do with anything. As a reader, we need to understand that the imagery described is highly symbolic and points to the nature of God. The wheels represent the Omni-Presence of God; that He can move and travel anywhere and everywhere all at once. The multitude of eyes represent the Omniscience of God in that He sees all and knows all. And the overall grandeur and majesty of the vision show the Omnipotence of God in that He is all-powerful.

ELISHA AND THE BEARS

2 Kings chapter 2 contains a story that seems to suggest a group of children make fun of Elisha for being bald, so he calls a group of bears to come and maul the children. This is not at all what happened; a better understanding of historical context and original Hebrew would help us determine that this passage was speaking about young men and not small children. Additionally, this story takes place at Bethel, which at this time had just been turned into one of two major centers of pagan worship for the northern kingdom. One aspect of pagan temple worship was that groups of young men called temple prostitutes would engage in sexual acts for money as a form of demonic worship. These young men, who were demon-possessed prostitutes, were not only mocking Elisha, but mocking God as well, and it was God who rightly caused the bears to come as a form of judgment on them.

IDENTITY & PURPOSE

WHO AM I AND WHY AM I HERE?

The questions of who we are and why we were born are two of the most important questions that we could ask and find the right answers to. So many young people embrace the wrong answers. They may wrongly believe that they are an insignificant speck floating through an endless space and their life has no purpose, or they might think that the purpose of life is just to have fun, seek out pleasure, and try to make a name for themselves. The truth is that both your identity and purpose are found in God. Below is a list of verses in the Bible that contain a truth about your identity and purpose. Take a look and be encouraged by what God's word says about who you were meant to be instead of believing lies of this world.





YOU ARE ACCEPTED // Romans 15:7
YOU ARE CHOSEN // John 15:16
YOU ARE KNOWN // Jeremiah 1:5
YOU ARE FREE // Galatians 4:7
YOU ARE FORGIVEN // 1 John 1:9
YOU ARE A NEW PERSON // 2 Corinthians 5:17
YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD // John 1:12
YOU ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE // Genesis 1:27
YOU BELONG TO JESUS // 1 Corinthians 3:23
JESUS OFFERS YOU A NEW LIFE // Romans 6:4
YOU ARE A CITIZEN OF HEAVEN // Philippians 3:20
YOU ARE PROTECTED BY GOD // 1 Peter 1:5
YOU ARE PART OF SOMETHING IMPORTANT // 1 Corinthians 12:27
GOD LOVES YOU NO MATTER WHAT // Romans 8:38-39
GOD IS WITH YOU // Zephaniah 3:17
YOU ARE GOD'S SPECIAL CREATION // Psalm 139:13-16
YOU ARE PRECIOUS TO GOD // Isaiah 43:4
YOU ARE RESCUED // Galatians 3:13
GOD HAS A PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE // Jeremiah 29:11
GOD LISTENS TO YOU // 1 John 5:14-15
GOD GIVES YOU STRENGTH // Philippians 4:13
YOU ARE AN HEIR OF GOD // Romans 8:17
YOU ARE PART OF GOD'S FAMILY // Ephesians 2:19
YOU ARE SAVED IN CHRIST // Romans 10:13
THE HOLY SPIRIT LIVES IN YOU // 1 Corinthians 6:19
GOD IS TAKING CARE OF YOU // Psalm 23:1-3
JESUS GIVES YOU TRUE JOY // John 15:11
YOU ARE BLESSED // Ephesians 1:3
JESUS GAVE HIMSELF FOR YOU // Galatians 2:20
GOD UNDERSTANDS YOU // Psalm 139:1
YOU ARE TREASURED BY GOD // Exodus 19:5
YOU ARE COMPLETE IN CHRIST // Colossians 2:10

THE LOCAL CHURCH

The local church is the hope of the world. Jesus Christ came and established the local church to be a place where people could come and meet Jesus, hear the gospel, be healed, be equipped, and be sent out to continue to build the kingdom of God. The church is not a building, but a group of like-minded people who come together in unity under the name of Jesus. Jesus loved the church so much that He often referred to the local church as His bride and declared that one day He would return to His church. If Jesus loved the local church so much, shouldn't we as well? Below is a collection of verses that refer to the local church and give us a little insight into what the church should look like.

JESUS HAS BUILT HIS CHURCH AND EVEN HELL ITSELF CANNOT PREVAIL AGAINST IT!

Matthew 16:18 "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

JESUS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH SO MUCH HE LAID DOWN HIS LIFE FOR IT.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

THE LOCAL CHURCH IS A PLACE OF DEVOTION, TEACHING, FELLOWSHIP, PRAYER, GRATITUDE, SHARING, PRAISE, AND SALVATION.

Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

WE SHOULD NOT GIVE UP MEETING TOGETHER AND ENCOURAGING EACH OTHER NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENS.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

THE LOCAL CHURCH IS GOD'S HOUSEHOLD AND THE PILLAR AND FOUNDATION OF TRUTH.

1 Timothy 3:14-15 Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, 15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

THE CHURCH IS MADE UP OF MANY DIFFERENT GIFTS WHICH ALL COME TOGETHER TO MAKE UP THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Romans 12:4-5 For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE CHURCH HE IS BUILDING AND WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY IN THAT

Ephesians 2:19-22 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

WE AS CHRISTIANS ARE A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD AND LIVING STONES WHICH ARE PART OF THE BUILDING OF GOD'S HOUSE.

1 Peter 2:4-5 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

WE CAN FLOURISH IN LIFE WHEN WE ARE RIGHTLY PLANTED IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

Psalm 92:13 planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God.



THE POWER OF FRIENDS

We are better together. A Christ-follower of any age needs to have people in their life (friends, family & community) who can encourage them, teach them, correct them, challenge them, and do life together. Not just any relationship will do; our friendships must be moving towards Christ and not pulling us away from him. The truth is that your five closest friends will determine the direction of your life and what next steps you take. The Bible provides numerous insights and teachings on friendship and community. Friendship is regarded as a valuable and essential aspect of life; companionship, loyalty, support, and love are all necessary. The Bible encourages believers to cultivate genuine friendships that are based on mutual respect, trust, and encouragement. Below are 5 passages of scripture that tell us what type of friends we should be inviting into our lives.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:33 DO NOT BE MISLED: "BAD COMPANY CORRUPTS GOOD CHARACTER."

If you surround yourself with friends who are a bad influence, they will influence you, and lead you away from Jesus even if you don't want them to. Generally speaking, a group of influential friends has far more influence over one person than that one person has over the group.

PROVERBS 18:24 ONE WHO HAS UNRELIABLE FRIENDS SOON COMES TO RUIN, BUT THERE IS A FRIEND WHO STICKS CLOSER THAN A BROTHER.

A true friend takes on the characteristics of Christ of genuine love, compassion, kindness, truth, and loyalty. An unreliable, flaky friend is no friend at all and shouldn't be someone you depend on.

PROVERBS 17:17 A FRIEND LOVES AT ALL TIMES, AND A BROTHER IS BORN FOR A TIME OF ADVERSITY.

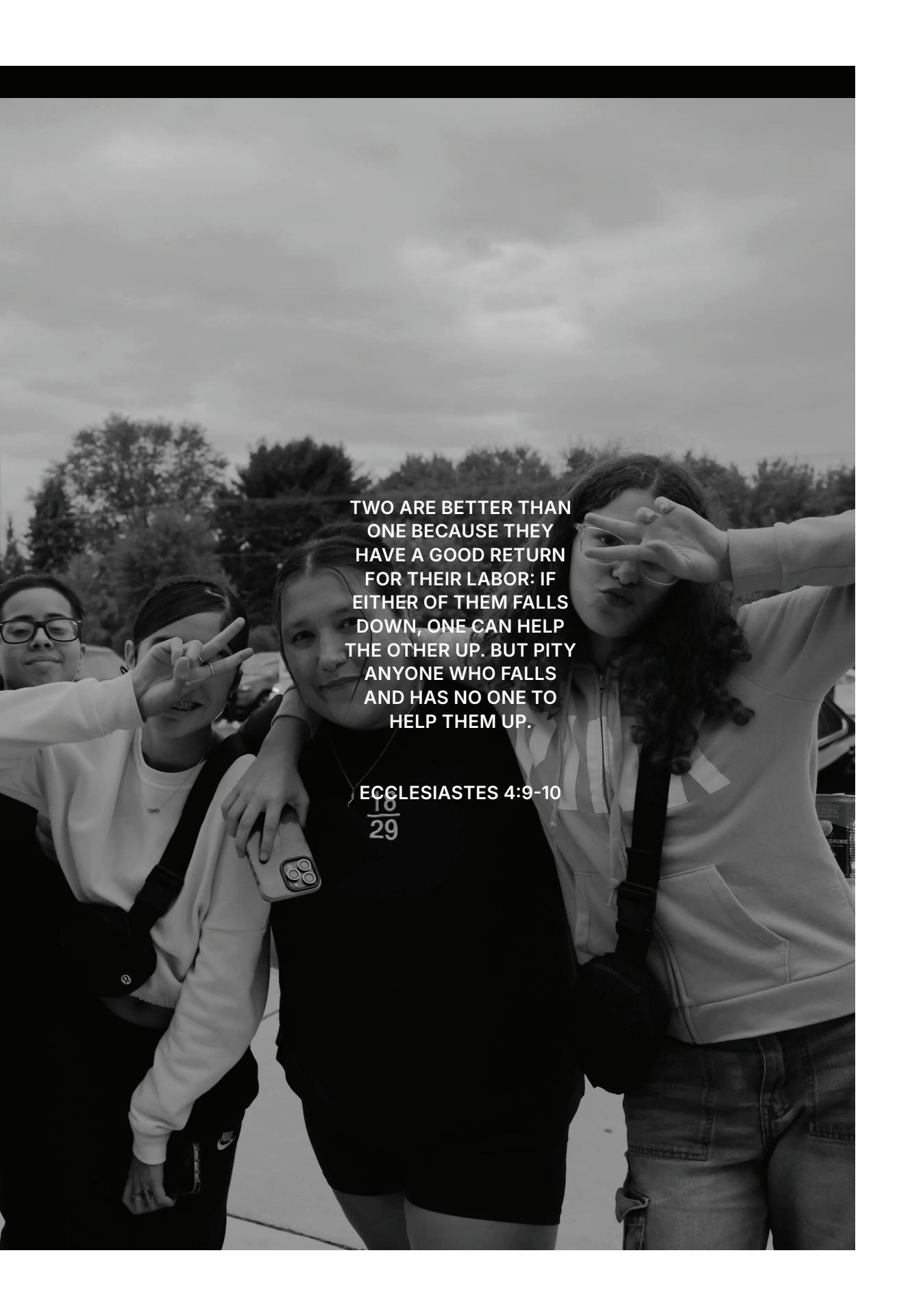
True friends will point you to Christ and will be there for you in times of adversity, encouraging you and praying with you and for you.

PROVERBS 16:28 A DISHONEST MAN SPREADS STRIFE, AND A WHISPERER SEPARATES CLOSE FRIENDS.

Friends who gossip and talk behind their other 'friends' backs aren't friends at all. If a friend is gossiping to you about someone else, just imagine what they say about you when you're not around. It's better to surround yourself with people who speak life and positivity.

PROVERBS 17:9 WHOEVER COVERS AN OFFENSE SEEKS LOVE, BUT HE WHO REPEATS A MATTER SEPARATES CLOSE FRIENDS.

True friends are not always offended or angry with you. They overlook mistakes and they seek to maintain a sense of peace. A person who is continually stirring up drama finding reasons to be angry and bringing up past mistakes is a major red flag!



TWO ARE BETTER THAN
ONE BECAUSE THEY
HAVE A GOOD RETURN
FOR THEIR LABOR: IF
EITHER OF THEM FALLS
DOWN, ONE CAN HELP
THE OTHER UP. BUT PITY
ANYONE WHO FALLS
AND HAS NO ONE TO
HELP THEM UP.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10
18
29

PRAYER

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 (NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION): "DO NOT BE ANXIOUS ABOUT ANYTHING, BUT IN EVERY SITUATION, BY PRAYER AND PETITION, WITH THANKSGIVING, PRESENT YOUR REQUESTS TO GOD. AND THE PEACE OF GOD, WHICH TRANSCENDS ALL UNDERSTANDING, WILL GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS IN CHRIST JESUS."

Prayer is a central aspect of many religious traditions, including Christianity. In the Bible, prayer is depicted as a means of communication with God and is how we seek guidance, express gratitude, and ask for help. Below are five common questions about prayer with some helpful answers and scripture from the Bible for each.

WHAT IS PRAYER?

Prayer is communication with God. Prayer is made up of both speaking our hearts to God and also listening to how God would respond to our hearts. We tell God about our worries, fears, hopes, needs, and requests even though He already knows it all. In a sense, prayer is more about us vocalizing what is in our hearts than it is about God hearing it or learning something He wasn't aware of. In this way, our relationship with God is strengthened because all relationships need open communication. In our relationship with Christ, we come to depend on him more and more each day.

Psalm 62:8 Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.

WHO SHOULD PRAY?

Everyone should pray because everyone was created to be in a relationship with their Creator. For someone who is not a Christian, the first prayer should be one of repentance and accepting Christ as Lord and Savior, but for the Christian, prayer should continue to become a major part of your daily life.

Luke 11:9-10 "So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to You.

WHY SHOULD I PRAY?

There are many reasons for prayer. Prayer is expected of a Christ-follower so prayer is a form of serving God and obeying Him. Prayer was modeled by Jesus and the early church, and if prayer was worthwhile and necessary for Jesus, it should also be for us. Prayer is also useful to prepare our hearts, calm our emotions, clear our minds, align our motivations, overcome demonic barriers, strengthen others, heal, overcome temptation, and open doors for God's will to be done on earth. Prayer helps us discern the will of God and to make requests to God that are in alignment with His will. Scripture tells us that prayer is not a placebo and that it is very powerful, effective, and beneficial to the work of God's kingdom.

James 5:13-16 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

WHEN SHOULD I PRAY?

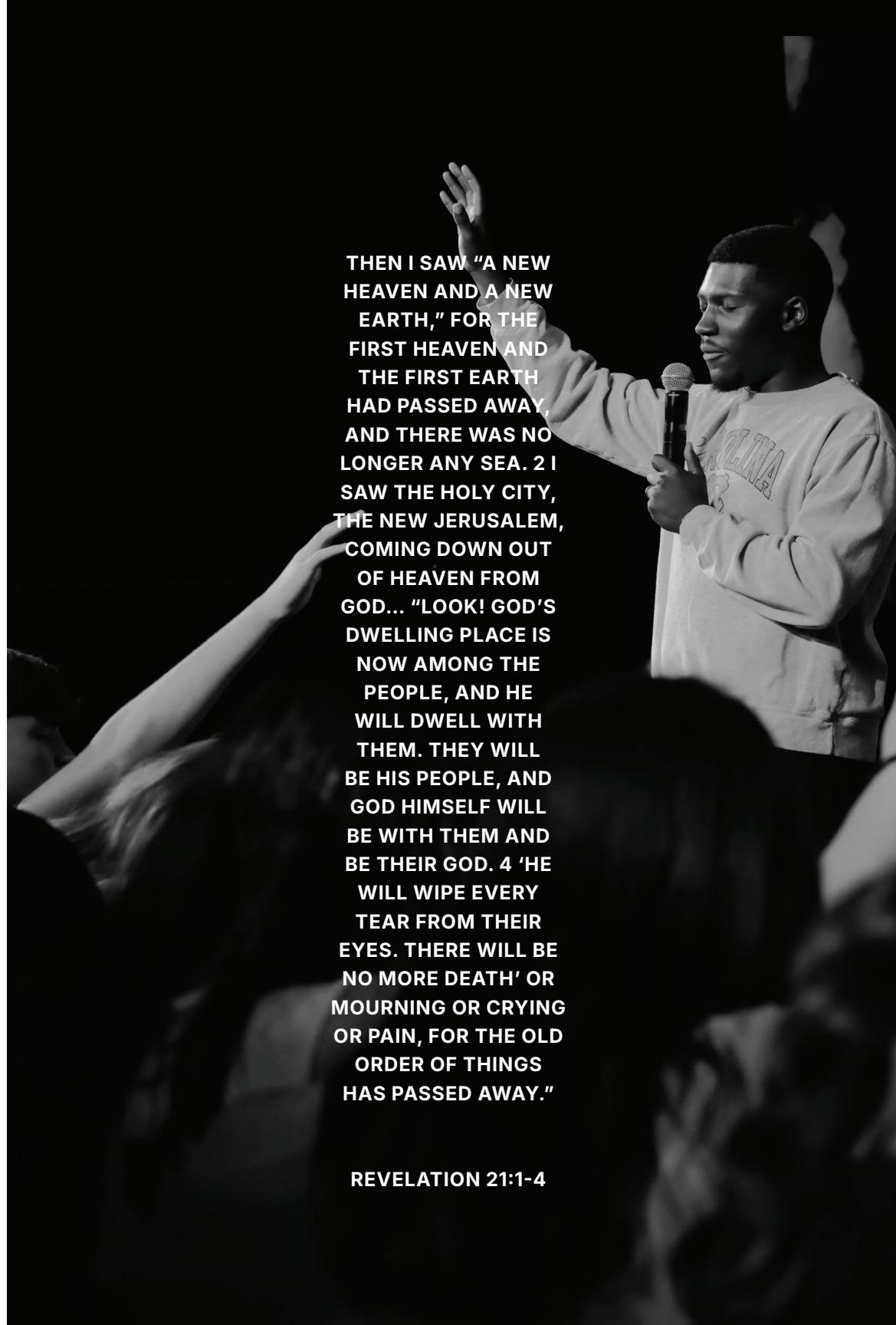
You should always pray. This doesn't mean that you close your eyes while driving or speak out loud while you're at work. What this means is that you should always be in relational connection and communication with your Father. This means that during the day, you are in prayer. In every situation, you are in prayer. In the highs and lows of life, you are already in a mindset and state of prayer. This is how a relationship remains strong, intimate, and close; this is what the Christian life should be.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

HOW DO I PRAY?

There are many ways to pray: publicly, with another person or a small group, in your mind without speaking out loud, or on your own pouring out your heart vocally. There is no right or wrong way to pray as long as you are engaging in communication with your heavenly father in an authentic way with the right motivations. Jesus corrected the religious because their method of prayer was done with the wrong motivations: so that they would be seen by men as being holy and righteous, even though they weren't. This is why Jesus makes this statement in Matthew 6 below.

Matthew 6:6 "But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."

A black and white photograph of a man speaking into a microphone on stage. He is wearing a light-colored sweatshirt with the word "CAROLINA" printed on it. His right arm is raised, and his left hand holds the microphone. In the background, a woman's arm is raised in the air. The scene is set against a dark background.

THEN I SAW "A NEW
HEAVEN AND A NEW
EARTH," FOR THE
FIRST HEAVEN AND
THE FIRST EARTH
HAD PASSED AWAY,
AND THERE WAS NO
LONGER ANY SEA. 2 I
SAW THE HOLY CITY,
THE NEW JERUSALEM,
COMING DOWN OUT
OF HEAVEN FROM
GOD... "LOOK! GOD'S
DWELLING PLACE IS
NOW AMONG THE
PEOPLE, AND HE
WILL DWELL WITH
THEM. THEY WILL
BE HIS PEOPLE, AND
GOD HIMSELF WILL
BE WITH THEM AND
BE THEIR GOD. 4 'HE
WILL WIPE EVERY
TEAR FROM THEIR
EYES. THERE WILL BE
NO MORE DEATH' OR
MOURNING OR CRYING
OR PAIN, FOR THE OLD
ORDER OF THINGS
HAS PASSED AWAY."

REVELATION 21:1-4

TOPICS OF INTEREST //

HEAVEN & HELL

WHAT IS HEAVEN AND HELL?

In the Bible, heaven and hell are described as two distinct spiritual realms where individuals will spend eternity based on their beliefs and what they do with Jesus Christ. Heaven is depicted as a very real place of eternal joy, peace, reward, and communion with God. Hell is portrayed as a realm of eternal separation from God, torment, and pain.

WHY DID GOD CREATE HEAVEN AND HELL?

Heaven is described in the Bible as a place of beauty and perfection, where believers will experience the presence of God in all His glory. The book of Revelation provides a vivid description of heaven, stating that there will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:4). Additionally, it is described as a place where believers will worship God for eternity (Revelation 22:3) and be rewarded for staying faithful to God. On the other hand, hell is depicted as a place of eternal suffering and separation from God. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes hell as a place of "eternal fire", originally prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). It is portrayed as a realm of darkness and torment where unbelievers will be separated from God's presence for eternity. Keep in mind that people never intended to go to hell, and it is only by choice that people choose to spend eternity separated from God.

WHO GOES TO HEAVEN AND HELL?

Whoever wants to go to heaven can go to heaven. The Bible tells us that heaven was created for all mankind and that all people were supposed to spend eternity with God. For those who want to spend eternity in heaven, the Bible tells us how: John 14:6 reveals that the way to spend eternity with the Father in heaven is through accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The same is also true of Hell. Whoever wants to go to Hell and be eternally separated from God in His goodness will. A person only needs to reject the gift of salvation, and they have made their choice to become their own "savior". Hell is essentially a place where people go to pay the punishment for their sins, instead of letting Jesus pay for their sins. God allows people to do that if that is what they want.

DOES GOD SEND PEOPLE TO HELL OR HEAVEN?

God does not send people to hell, the same way God does not send people to heaven. God allows people to make their own choice as to where they will spend eternity and He will not override that free-will choice. God loves humanity so much that He would not force a person into heaven who has rejected and run from God their entire life. To do that would not be lovingly allowing a person to choose their final destination. The good news is that heaven is available to all who desire to spend eternity there and the Bible shows you exactly how to spend eternity with God.

TOPICS OF INTEREST //

BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

To understand God's plan for sexuality, we need to understand that God loves all people far greater than they could ever love themselves. God loves people, no matter their lifestyle, far more than any community leader, activist, or politician could ever love them. God also knows what is best for all people far more than what we think is best for ourselves or what another person would tell us is best for us. God even divinely inspired the writing of the Bible as a way to show His love and teach people the wisest, healthiest, and most fulfilling way to live.

JOHN 3:16 FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. FOR GOD DID NOT SEND HIS SON INTO THE WORLD TO CONDEMN THE WORLD, BUT TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH HIM.

When it comes to sexuality, we need to also understand that God created it, defined it, and laid out proper guidelines and practices in scripture. Going outside of those boundaries and lines of definition will always lead to pain, bondage, suffering, and the destruction of life, even when twisting sexuality to suit our desires and appetites seems like so much fun. God has our best interests in mind and wants only what will allow us to live in freedom and joy.



UNDERSTANDING BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

In Genesis 2:24, it is stated, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This verse highlights the sacred union between a man and a woman in marriage. Any type of sexual activity outside of this definition is considered immoral and sinful. Even if the people involved are committed and loving to each other, the boundary has been crossed and danger awaits.

SEXUAL PURITY

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 advises, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." This verse underscores the importance of maintaining sexual purity according to what God defines as sexual purity, not what we think it is or is not. There are far greater consequences to our pursuit of sinful desires than we may even know about at the moment. There are ripple effects that affect others and have future consequences.

BOUNDARIES IN SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

Hebrews 13:4 states, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." This verse emphasizes the need for fidelity within marriage and condemns sexual immorality as something that God detests and will one day judge. It is also important to note that all sexual activity outside of marriage is dishonoring, not only to God but also to yourself and the other person involved.

ADULTERY

Exodus 20:14 declares, "You shall not commit adultery." This commandment prohibits extramarital affairs and reinforces the sanctity of marital relationships. God was wise with this command because anytime affairs outside of marriage begin, there are always consequences for everyone involved, even those not directly involved like children and family.

HOMOSEXUALITY

Romans 1:26-27 addresses homosexuality, stating, "For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error." This passage is one of many in the New Testament that condemn homosexual activities and behaviors as unnatural, dishonorable, shameful, in error, and ultimately sinful and immoral. (also 1 Timothy 1:8-11, 1 Corinth 6:9-11) It was because people followed their feelings and sinful desires instead of God that they committed shameful acts and had consequences as a result that led to bondage, pain, suffering, and destruction.

PSALM 119:9 HOW CAN A YOUNG PERSON STAY ON THE PATH OF PURITY? BY LIVING ACCORDING TO YOUR WORD."

TOPICS OF INTEREST //

MAJOR RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

There are only two religious systems that have ever existed in history. The first is any system that says "I can save myself". I can earn my way to eternal paradise through good works, enlightenment, spiritual secrets, keeping the 5 Pillars, or attaining spiritual oneness. Christianity stands alone as the only religious belief system that says "I cannot save myself". The problem cannot fix a problem; we are fallen people and need a savior outside of ourselves. That person was Jesus Christ. Below is a short comparison of the 4 other largest or most well-known belief systems in our world.

Religion	God	Way of Salvation	Beliefs About Jesus
Islam	Allah	Muslims strive to faithfully perform the five pillars: fasting, making pilgrimage, giving alms, praying, confessing that Muhammad is the true Prophet. However, they do not believe this earns them salvation; even with perfect obedience, Muslims believe that Allah must determine whether you are saved at the end of your life.	Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet and a wise teacher but not the son of God who gives us salvation.
Hinduism	Supreme Deity: Brahman	Hindus endeavor to become pure by ridding themselves of all evil to merge with Brahman; they aim to sure up enough karma (good deeds). Reincarnation occurs until one is able to merge with Brahman.	Most view Jesus as a holy man and wise teacher; some believe Jesus is a god but one of many gods
Buddhism	None	Buddhists practice the Eightfold path to achieve Nirvana: right seeing, right intention, right speech, right action, right work, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This religion eliminates all desire and renounces self to achieve enlightenment, thus reaching Nirvana.	Buddhists believe Jesus was an enlightened man and a wise moral teacher, but not the Son of God who gives us salvation.
Judaism	God	Jews believe that they are God's chosen people and that they receive salvation through the lineage of Abraham, the Law, and the coming messiah.	Jews believe Jesus existed and was a teacher and political rebel, but He was not the Son of God. They are still awaiting the promised Messiah from the Old Testament

TOPICS OF INTEREST //

MONEY

The Bible doesn't shy away from the topic of money. In fact, Jesus spoke about money and possessions often—because they reveal where our hearts truly are. Scripture makes it clear: "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Our giving is not just about finances; it's about worship, trust, and allegiance. When we give, we declare that God—not wealth—is our Master.

BECAUSE HE GAVE, WE GIVE.

It's a simple statement, but one that rings true for every follower of Jesus. God gave His first and His best in His Son Jesus and because of that, we give with gratitude and thankfulness.

WHAT IS THE TITHE?

The tithe is returning 10% of your increase (income) back to the house of God.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it."

Malachi 3:10

IS TITHING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Yes. The biblical principle of first fruits was introduced before the law is given. Giving is a principle that precedes the law and therefore, does not end with the fulfillment of the law.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. 24 You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel."

Matthew 23:23-24

WHAT ARE OFFERINGS?

Offerings are any gifts above the tithe. While the tithe is a set percentage, offerings are given freely, reflecting generosity and gratitude. Offerings in the Bible supported the work of the ministry, so the church could continue to grow and reach the world.

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"

2 Corinthians 9:7

TOPICS OF INTEREST //

APOLOGETICS

Apologetics is not the art of saying "sorry", though it might sound like it is. Apologetics comes from a Greek word that means "to defend", and is the art of defending the Christian faith and its teachings using a variety of logical arguments. Below are 5 examples of apologetic arguments used in the defense of Christianity from a continued barrage of insults and attacks.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE

One of the primary arguments in defense of Christianity is the historical and archaeological evidence supporting the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the validity of scripture. There are thousands of preserved New Testament documents, as well as non-Christian historical sources such as the writings of Josephus and Tacitus which provide accounts of Jesus' existence and crucifixion outside of scripture. The early spread of Christianity, despite widespread persecution, also attests to the reality of Jesus' life, teachings, and influence.

FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

Another compelling argument for Christianity is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in the life of Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus fulfilled over one hundred prophecies regarding the Messiah, such as his birth in Bethlehem, His betrayal by thirty pieces of silver, and His crucifixion alongside criminals. The odds that one person could fulfill these prophecies and not be the Messiah are staggering and impossible.

TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER

Many Christians argue that their faith has a transformative and supernatural power that can change lives for the better. Testimonies of individuals who have experienced personal growth, healing, miracles, and positive changes through their faith in Christ serve as evidence of the truth and efficacy of Christianity. There are even many accounts today of Muslims having dreams and visions of Jesus and waking up to give their lives to Christ.

PHILOSOPHICAL COHERENCE

Christian theology offers a coherent worldview that addresses fundamental questions about existence, morality, purpose, and human nature. The concept of a loving God who created humanity with free will, the problem of sin, and the promise of redemption through Christ's sacrifice provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the world. Simply put, the Christian worldview is the most complete, logical, and reasonable framework for understanding creation than any other put forth.

CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Throughout history, Christianity has made significant contributions to the art, literature, music, ethics, medicine, education, and social movements. The influence of Christian values and beliefs on Western civilization is undeniable, shaping laws, institutions, and cultural norms. There is no doubt that wherever Christian values and principles are embraced, blessing follows, and wherever they are rejected, war, disease, corruption, poverty, and suffering will soon follow.

FIVE COMMON APPROACHES

CLASSICAL

This approach uses philosophical arguments as well as cosmological, intelligent design, and moral arguments to prove God's existence. It then moves on to show the validity of the Bible and the life of Christ, showing that Christianity is the only logical choice. William Lane Craig is a great representative and resource for this approach. He uses arguments such as the Kalam Cosmological argument, which is based on the idea that everything that begins to exist has a cause, and the universe began to exist. He also uses the Moral Argument, which is based on the idea that objective moral values and duties exist, and that God exists as an absolute standard for these values. The cosmological argument from contingency states that everything that exists has an explanation for its existence and that if the universe has an explanation, that explanation is God. The Teleological argument of fine-tuning states that the fine-tuning and precision of the universe point to an intelligent designer. The Ontological Argument asserts that God, being defined as most great or perfect, must exist since a God who exists is greater than a God who does not.

EVIDENTIAL

Relies primarily on physical historical evidence like archeology, ancient writings, artifacts, as well as church writings, and eyewitness accounts of the resurrection to show that Christianity is true and the Bible is reliable as a source. If that is the case, then therefore God must also exist as stated in the Bible and Christianity. Gary Habermas is a representative of this approach.

PRESUPPOSITIONAL

This approach focuses on showing what is wrong with all other non-Christian religions and worldviews, where their reasoning for the universe falls short, and how Christianity makes the most sense in understanding the universe. John Frame is a representative of this approach.

REFORMED EPISTEMOLOGY

The key idea here is that belief in the Christian God may be taken as logic and need not depend on evidence or argument to be rational. One may simply find themselves rationally believing in God and be within one's epistemological rights to do so, just as we believe in the reality of the past without being able to prove it intellectually. Kelly James Clark is a representative of this approach.

CUMULATIVE CASE

This approach uses a broad variety of evidence and arguments to establish Christianity as the best explanation for a broad range of significant phenomena. It likens all the evidence for or against the Christian worldview like a lawyer making a brief, as opposed to a series of sequential arguments of the inductive or deductive sort. In the end, the jury must find that Christianity and the Christian worldview are true and not false based on the entire collection of evidence. Paul Feinberg is a representative of this approach.

GLOSSARY OF 40 CHURCH WORDS

Sometimes there are words you read in Christian books or hear a pastor say in a message that are difficult to understand. We compiled 40 common words that preachers and teachers use that many people new to church don't fully understand. Hopefully, by reading below, you'll be able to follow along better.

FAITH - Trust and belief in what is true, even if we cannot see it

GRACE - God's unmerited and undeserved favor.

MERCY - The withholding of punishment that we do deserve.

HOLINESS - In reference to God: to be set apart: perfectly pure and without sin, In reference to holy living: to be set apart; moral goodness in actions, words, and character

IMMANENCE - God's active involvement with His creation

IMMUTABLE - The unchanging nature of God.

RIGHTEOUSNESS - Right behavior in accordance with God's moral law.

SALVATION - To be saved from sin and the punishment of sin through Christ

SANCTIFICATION - The process of growing in holiness and Christ likeness

SOVEREIGNTY - God's total control over all things and His ability to do anything at anytime.

TRANSCENDENCE - God's distinct separation from creation; His being above and before all things.

REDEEMED - A term which means bought or purchased. In the crucifixion, we were redeemed from our sin.

RECONCILIATION - A term which means being brought back. "And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled" (Col. 1:21).

PROPHECY - The act of speaking from the mind of God. Either to forth tell or foretell. "...for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet. 1:21).

THEOLOGY - The study of God (Greek, THEO).

ATONEMENT - Literally, "a covering," as in covering our sins from God's sight. The covering of our guilt and punishment of sin through Christ's sacrifice, therefore making us right with God. It is used in reference to a sinner's reconciliation with God through the sufferings of Christ. "Help us, O God of our salvation, For the glory of Your name; And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, For Your name's sake!" (Psa. 79:9).

APOLOGY - A theological term to describe a contention made in defense of the Christian faith. It is derived from the Greek, APOLOGIA, meaning "a defense in conduct or procedure." Apologetics is the study of this explanation or defense.

APOCALYPSE - From the Greek, APOKALYPSIS, meaning "revelation or unveiling," as used in Rev. 1:1. The New Testament book of Revelation is frequently referred to as the Apocalypse.

APOSTLE - A person sent by God. One of five office gifts described in Ephesians 4:11.

CANON - A Greek reference to a "reed" or measuring rule. This pertains to those writings which are considered to be sacred or divinely inspired.

CHARISMATIC - Comes from the Greek word CHARISMATA which means gifted. A Christian who believes in or practices speaking in tongues and the present-day operation of the spiritual gifts.

COVENANT - A sacred, irrevocable promise between God and man. "You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Acts 3:25).

ESCHATOLOGY - A theological term to describe the study of last events.

ESOTERIC - A term based upon customs in mysterious Greek religions to explain advanced doctrines only to the fully enlightened, as was probably inferred by this passage: "For all the Athenians and the foreigners who were there spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing" (Acts 17:21).

DENOMINATION - A cluster of individual churches, which have unified together due to their agreement on certain issues, and perhaps due to their disagreement with the viewpoints of other churches or denominations.

DOCTRINE - A teaching; That which is taught as the belief of a church. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16).

EPISTLES - Letters written under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to be read as instruction to the churches. "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren" (1 Thes. 5:27).

EVANGELICAL - A term to describe those with devotion to the Gospel of Jesus instead of the ecclesiastical or rationalistic forms of Christianity — Spiritual mindedness and zeal for Christ rather than ritualism.

GOSPEL - Literally, "good news." The story of Christ's life, His death and resurrection, as described from different perspectives by eye-witness authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Their four individual records of Christ are each called a Gospel, entitled with each authors name — which comprise the first four books of the New Testament. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

INTERCESSION - To intercede in behalf of another person or cause in prayer. "...It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34).

JEHOVAH (YAHWEH) - The English rendering of the Hebrew consonants, JHVA. This is God's sacred name, used over 7,000 times in the Old Testament. The Jews considered this name to be so sacred that when reading scripture aloud, they preferred not to utter it, but would use the word Adonai, which means

"Lord," in its place. The transliteral pronunciation, Jehovah, was formed from the Hebrew consonants JHVA and the vowels from Adonai. However, scholars of ancient Hebrew say that JHVA was originally pronounced as "Yahweh." The King James Version translated it as Jehovah, while new translations use Yahweh or Lord. "That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth." (Psalms 83:18 KJV)

JUSTIFIED - To be made just and right in God's sight which occurs through our faith in Christ. "...being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24).

SOTERIOLOGY - A theological term used to describe the doctrine of salvation. Taken from the Greek word for salvation, SOTERIA..

PENTATEUCH - A reference to the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, & Deuteronomy.

PENTECOSTAL - A believer who claims the same experience of the early disciples on the day of Pentecost — the infilling of the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in tongues (Acts 2:1-4). The Pentecostal embraces the present-day operation of the gifts of the Spirit.

OMNIPOTENT - A theological term to describe the all-powerful characteristics of God.

OMNIPRESENT - A theological term to express God's characteristic of being everywhere at once.

OMNISCIENT - A theological term to describe God's all-knowing characteristics.

ORDAINED - Chosen, authorized or endorsed. Generally used to describe God's approval. Ordination of a minister is the act of recognizing God's endorsement upon an individual for a ministry office, implemented by the laying on of hands or the issuance of ministerial credentials. "...He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

TRINITY - A theological term which describes the three persons of the Godhead, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. A church which embraces this doctrine is called "Trinitarian." "For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 5:7).

...EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE AND PUTS THEM INTO PRACTICE IS LIKE A WISE MAN WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE ROCK. THE RAIN CAME DOWN, THE STREAMS ROSE, AND THE WINDS BLEW AND BEAT AGAINST THAT HOUSE; YET IT DID NOT FALL, BECAUSE IT HAD ITS FOUNDATION ON THE ROCK.

MATTHEW 7:24-25



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