

Getting to Know God: His Book, Plan, Son & Love

(Written/Compiled by

Marcia Gillis, 1/20/21)

A study to provide you with information to build your faith
and help you grow stronger as you develop a closer
knowledge of Him through study of the Bible.

Outline of the Study

In the next eight weeks we will provide you with a foundation and tools you will use the rest of your life. They are to help you learn to feed yourself from God's Word and grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ, the only one who can save you. It is important that you are diligent in doing the weekly homework assignments. Our hope is that you do the assignments out of a deep desire to learn more about God, His Word, Plan, Son and Love. As you do this you will become more excited about Him, grow, overcome the things that hold you back and be used of Him to share His love with others. He has a wonderful destiny planned for you, as you grow in His strength.

The weekly homework assignments will include:

1. Reading assigned pages from the notebook, each week, or becoming acquainted with the Comparative Religion pages (appendix).
2. Reading through the Gospel of Mark.
3. Memorizing specific Bible verses. (Do this while you are exercising or doing mindless tasks.)
4. Memorizing and practicing a one-verse presentation of the Gospel.
5. Writing out what God is doing in your life and what He is teaching you.

YOU NEED TO BRING A HARD COPY OF THE BIBLE EACH WEEK AND YOUR PHONE OR LAPTOP.

Class 1 Introduction, Class Expectations and Beliefs Essential for Christianity

1. During this class we will go over/discuss pages 6-8 in the note book, "God's Love Letter is Amazing," which deal with Christian Basic Beliefs, and "One Verse Evangelism" and will begin to memorize: John 1:1-4
2. Before the next class, please do the homework assignments given for class 2.

Class 2 The Uniqueness of the Bible

1. Review the earlier memorized verses and memorize Romans 12:2.
2. Read the pages entitled, "More About...", "The Old Testament Books," "Amazingly Accurate Preservation," and "The Scrolls," pages 10-13.
3. Read Mark, chapters 1-2, writing down thoughts and questions.
4. Write out what God is doing in your life and what He is teaching you.

Class 3 The New Testament

1. Review the "One Verse Evangelism" page.
2. Review the earlier memorized verses and memorize Romans 8:38-39, after reading this whole amazing chapter of Romans.
3. Read Mark, chapters 3-4, writing down thoughts and questions.
4. Read the notebook pages entitled, "The New Testament...", "A Startling Comparison," and "A Matter of Survival," pages 14-17.
5. Writing out what God is doing in your life and what He is teaching you.

Class 4 Comparative Religion and the Uniqueness of Christianity

In preparation for this class, please do the following assignments:

1. Look over the One-Verse Evangelism page and read through the Comparative Religion pages (appendix).
2. Read Mark, chapters 5-6, writing down thoughts and questions.
3. Memorize John 1:1-4. (For those who feel comfortable doing so, you can practice saying it with a group member, during class.)

Class 5 Bible Study

1. Review the earlier memorized verses and Philippians 4:8-9, and plan on practicing them with a group member.
2. Read Mark, chapters 7-8, writing down thoughts and questions.
3. Read the notebook pages entitled, "Bible Study: Sound Principles...", pages 29-31.

Class 6 A Study of the Book of Mark

1. Review the earlier memorized verses and learn John 15:9-11.
2. Start to look up the prophecies on the "Messianic Prophecy" chart (appendix).
3. Read Mark, chapters 9-10, writing down thoughts and questions.

Class 7 A Study of the Book of Mark

1. Review the memorized verses.
2. Read Mark, chapters 11-12, writing down thoughts and questions.

Class 8 A Study of Mark/Sharing Our Faith

In preparation for this class, please do the following assignments:

1. Read Mark, chapters 13-14, writing down thoughts and questions.
2. Practice John 1:1-4 and memorize Romans 6:23. (It works well to memorize while you are involved in another task, like walking, vacuuming, doing dishes, etc.)
3. Study the "One-Verse Evangelism" Gospel presentation (page 15) and practice writing it yourself. (During class, you can practice presenting it, with a group member.)
4. If you haven't already, read through the "How to Share Your Testimony" (appendix), and begin to develop a 1-3 minute version of your testimony that has three brief sections: *Before, How and After*.

Class 9 A study of Mark/Sharing Our Faith

1. Review memorized verses.
2. Read Mark, chapters 15-16, writing down thoughts and questions.
3. Continue working on your testimony: ***Before, How and After*** and share it with your housemates.

Following this nine-week study, read through the following books, in a study Bible using the "Bible Overview Timeline" to gain a historical perspective, as you read:

1st, 2nd, and 3rd John

Genesis and Exodus

Ephesians and Galatians

The Gospels of John, Luke and Matthew

1st and 2nd Corinthians

Romans

Psalms and Proverbs

Study Bibles contain background information and commentary that will help you further understand the books you are read. (See recommended Study Bibles, and other helpful information, in the appendix section, of this notebook.)

Following this, you will want to read through the other books. Many people, though, get tired as they are reading through the genealogies, included to give a clear perspective on the beginnings, descendants, and how these families develop. At first, you may want to skip through some of them. Also, people can get overwhelmed as they read through the details of the Mosaic Law. These books reaffirm the nature of God's perfection and Man's inability to save himself. They affirm the depth of God's love, in sending His Son to pay the penalty for our sin, so we might have relationship with Him.

As you read through the Old Testament you will come across hundreds of prophecies concerning the Messiah-the coming of Jesus.

As you read more, you will learn more. Learning more about Him, as you study His Word, is part of the Christian adventure!

Be sure to join one of the other connect groups!!!! They are another place to learn and receive encouragement.

GOD LOVE LETTER IS AMAZING!

About the Bible and God's Solution

The Bible has been translated into various languages from ancient scrolls, thousands of years old! Those scrolls were written on parchment, papyrus or copper. There are 66,000 ancient Bible manuscripts in existence! An early and popular English Bible translation, from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek, is the King James Bible, completed in 1611 AD. Many people have a hard time understanding the old form of English used, in that translation. Today there are many great English translations that utilize more modern English, and so are easier to understand. Highly respected translations include: The New International Version (NIV), The English Standard Version (ESV), and the New American Standard Version (NASV). There are other helpful Bibles, like The Message which isn't a translation from the original Greek/Hebrew, but a version that attempts to further simplify the Bible language by paraphrasing the verses in an actual translation (like those already listed).

A STATEMENT OF CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

If you were raised Catholic, you recited a statement of Christian biblical faith called The Apostles' Creed or Nicene Creed. These Creeds state basic Biblical Christian beliefs that ALL Christian churches agree on. Religious groups that do not support all of the beliefs below, are NOT Christian groups.

The Apostles Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.ⁱ

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

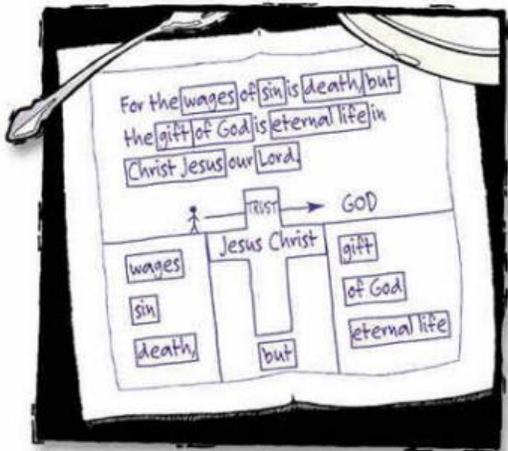
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.ⁱⁱ

ONE VERSE EVANGELISM

(The following material is used by permission of Navigators for small group use. It summarizes the Gospel and can be used when you are trying to explain the Gospel message to others.)

ONE-VERSE EVANGELISM

How to Share Christ's Love Conversationally & Visually



By Randy D. Raysbrook

Many people feel that to be effective in evangelism they must memorize a complex illustration and a multitude of verses. But the Gospel is most powerful when shared with love, clarity, and simplicity.

One-Verse Evangelism® is a simple, interactive way to share Christ's love conversationally and visually. It is based on asking questions and sharing. It's easy to learn because it uses just one verse. One-Verse Evangelism® is also sensitive to peoples' busy schedules because it can be shared in just 10 or 15 minutes.

Here's a brief look at how it works. Let's say God's leading you to share the Gospel with your neighbor, Jeff. Write out Romans 6:23 on a piece of paper or a napkin: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (NIV). Then put your Bible away. Ask Jeff if he would like to see a simple picture based on this verse that will explain God's relationship with people.

wages

Circle this word and ask, "How would you feel if your boss refused to pay you the wages that were due to you?" Deep down, we all know that it is only right that we get what we deserve. Similarly, we earn wages from God for how we have lived our lives.

sin

Draw a circle around "sin," asking your friend what he thinks when he hears this word. You might explain that sin is more an attitude than an action. It can be either actively fighting God or merely excluding Him from our lives. You can ask, "Has God ever seemed far away?" If he says "Yes," add that that's one of the things sin does—it makes God seem far away. Now draw two opposing cliffs with a gap in between.

death,

Circle this word and ask what thoughts come to mind. Explain that death in the Bible always means some kind of separation.

but

While circling this word, mention that it is important because it means that a sharp contrast in thought is coming. What we have just looked at is bad news; what follows is good news.

gift

Draw a circle around this word. Ask, "If wages are what a person earns, then what is a gift?" Remind your friend that someone must purchase every gift.

of God

Circle this and explain that the gift you are talking about is free. It is from God Himself. It's so special that no one else can give it. Ask, "How do you feel when someone gives you a special gift?"

eternal life

Circle these two words next, and then ask, "How would you define these words?" Contrast one side of the cliff, death, with the other side, eternal life. Ask, "What is the opposite of separation from God?"

Christ Jesus

Draw these words so they create a bridge between the two cliffs. Help your friend to consider that every gift has a giver, and only Jesus Christ can give the gift of eternal life.

TRUST

Write this word over the bridge you just drew.

Explain that friends trust each other, and tell your friend that Jesus wants a trusting friendship with him. All he has to do is admit that he is responsible for the "sin" of either fighting or excluding God from his life. That is what trust means—trusting that Jesus wants to forgive us for rejecting Him from our lives. At this point, you can ask him if he wants to start a relationship with God that will last forever. If he says "Yes," invite him to pray a short prayer in his own words, asking Jesus to forgive him.

Close by reminding him that this simple illustration shows what God is like: Someone who really cares about people, especially him. Invite him to read all about it in the Bible, perhaps beginning in the gospel of John.

Adapted with permission from One-Verse Evangelism, © 2000 Randy D. Raysbrook. All rights reserved. To order the booklet, contact Dawson Media at http://home.navigators.org/us/dawson/index.cfm?Entity=15&Department=267&Dept_Order=2&This_TopicOrder=2&This_SubtopicOrder=5, call (719) 594-2100, or write to Dawson Media, a ministry of The Navigators, P.O. Box 6000, Colorado Springs, CO 80934.

MORE ABOUT THE BIBLE:

A Library of Many Books

It is divided into two major sections:

THE OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1, 2 Samuel
1, 2 Kings
1, 2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

The Old Testament consists of 39 Books. In the Hebrew Bible some of those 39 books are combined into 24 books. The Hebrew Bible combines 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles and Ezra & Nehemiah into single books, and the last 12 (“Minor Prophets”) as one. The Old Testament covers thousands of years of history and was written over a very long time, at least a thousand years, from 1400-400 BC.



THE NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts of the Apostles
Romans
1, 2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1, 2 Thessalonians
1, 2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James
1, 2 Peter
1, 2 and 3 John
Jude
Revelation

There are 27 New Testament books. The New Testament was written over a much shorter time than the Old Testament. It was written over a period of about 50 years from about 45 to 95 AD.ⁱⁱⁱ



Clarification: Terminology and Format:

“Old” does not mean obsolete. It could be better called the “first” and “second” testaments, or “earlier” and “later”. Also, most Bible are not organized chronologically. For example, the prophets lived/the wisdom books were written during various time periods, described in the Historical books. (Besides the Bibles organized by “books”, there are also Bibles organized chronologically.)

The Old Testament Books.

LAW

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

HISTORY

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 and 2 Samuel
1 and 2 Kings
1 and 2
Ezra
Nehemiah
Esther

WISDOM

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon

PROPHETS

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel

MINOR (OR SHORTER) PROPHETS

Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

The first five books are called **the Law** or *Torah* or *Pentateuch*. Genesis, contains the account of Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, and the calling of Abraham to father a great people, the Israelites. Ab's descendants go to Egypt to escape famine, and are later enslaved. In Exodus through Deuteronomy we are told how God used Moses to deliver them and of their wandering in the wilderness, before going into the promised-land. Also included, is the giving of the Ten Commandments and the various ritual and communal laws.

After Moses' dies the Jews are led by Joshua, and then by various judges. The people want a king. The other **historical** books give accounts of the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon, the division of Israel into two kingdoms, and the unfaithfulness of both Israel and Judah. Finally, the two kingdoms are captured; the North by Assyria in 721 BC, the South by Babylon in 586 BC. Ezra and Nehemiah tell of the return after 400 years of captivity to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem wall. (Note—The captivity and return were prophesied, ahead of time.)

The **wisdom** books focus on worship and wisdom. "The Psalms, known in Hebrew as "the book of praises," promote worship by declaring the works and attributes of God. Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon promote wisdom, telling God's people not only how to live, but to live with God's blessing."^{iv}

The **prophet's** main duty was to speak forth God's message to His people in the historical context of what was happening. They warned against idolatry. They declared judgment on the people when they departed from God's ways, but they also spoke about the love and compassion of God to forgive, call His people back, establish a new covenant, send a promised Messiah and ultimately fulfill His purposes on earth.

The **Minor Prophets** are called minor because they are shorter books. These prophetic writers also speak of judgment and comfort. Through prophets, the Jews are constantly warned of the punishments for unfaithfulness to God's ways and God's faithfulness to restore his people, in spite of their sins. The prophetic books, themselves, often describe the high price these faithful mouthpieces paid for their unpopular and courageous declarations. Then, as now, people did not want to hear truth.

Amazingly Accurate Preservation

“Are the copies of the Old Testament writings we have today anything like the originals of so long ago? Amazingly, the answer is yes. We can be confident that what we have today is nearly identical to the ancient copies, for the reasons given below.”^v

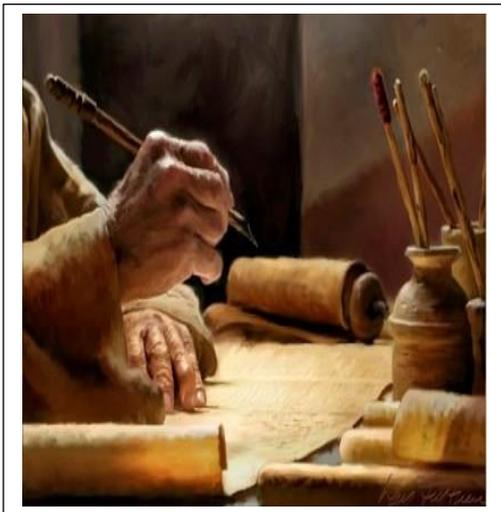
“The Scribes

“The copies of the scrolls of Hebrew scripture were made by a special group known as scribes. Israelite scribes learned their craft as a kind of holy profession in family-like guilds as is attested in the Bible that mentions “*Clans of Scribes* who inhabit Jabez” I Chronicles 2:55.

Scribe is from the Hebrew word *sofer*. Its root meaning is “to count.” Indeed, scribes were careful counters making sure every word and letter were accounted for. The conditions and regulations under which they worked were very strict. Today, their standards would be considered fanatical.”^{vi}

They worked under rules designed to insure utmost accuracy.

- No word or letter could be written from memory (the scribe had to say the word aloud).
- Before writing the sacred name of God, the scribe had to pause and wipe his pen.
- A scroll was discarded if spelling errors were found.
- Perhaps most important—after copying, every single word and every letter was counted to verify accuracy and to be sure they matched the original.
- Before beginning, a scribe would cleanse himself in a ritual bath—vivid evidence of the seriousness and sacredness of the task of writing a scroll. He was going to write the names of God and must do so with proper devotion and ritual purity.”^{vii}

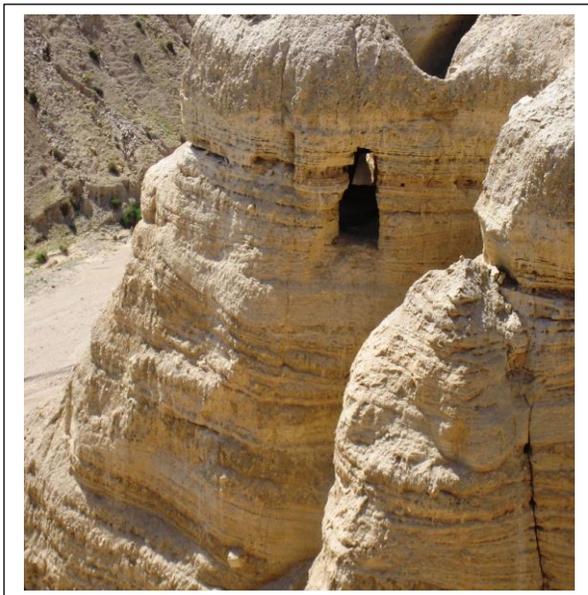


Artist's depiction of scribe copying manuscript



The Scrolls

The Dead Sea Scrolls



You may have heard the amazing story of how, in 1947, a Bedouin shepherd boy was out with his flock along the cliffs on the northwest side of the Dead Sea, when he thoughtlessly threw a rock into one of the caves.

When he heard something break, he investigated and found ancient scrolls stored in large pottery jars.

By mistake, this young shepherd had found the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. Many of these scrolls date back to before the time of Jesus, and they include copies of sections of every Old Testament book except Esther. There is an almost complete copy of the book of Isaiah. Until this discovery, the oldest available copies of the Hebrew Scriptures were from around 900 AD.

“These Dead Sea scrolls provided Hebrew text that was one thousand years earlier and would show if the text had been corrupted over ten centuries.” So it was a priceless opportunity to see if copies done so much later in any way resembled much earlier copies, which were closer to the originals.

So, just how well had the scribes done their job over so many generations? Scholars analyzed and discovered very few differences, primarily on small matters such as minor spelling variations. This is amazing and nearly impossible.^{viii} “The first ancient Qumran texts led to just thirteen minor yet clarifying alterations in the modern Revised Standard Version of the Bible.”^{ix}



Section of scroll of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls

The New Testament: The Central Focus on Jesus

*...the life, character, and teaching of Christ
...constitute the most fascinating feature in the
history of Western man.*

Historian Will Durant



Jesus is seen as fulfillment of the promises

There are at least fifty predictions in the Old Testament about a coming Messiah, or Savior-Deliverer, that the New Testament writers saw fulfilled in Jesus. Here are just a few.

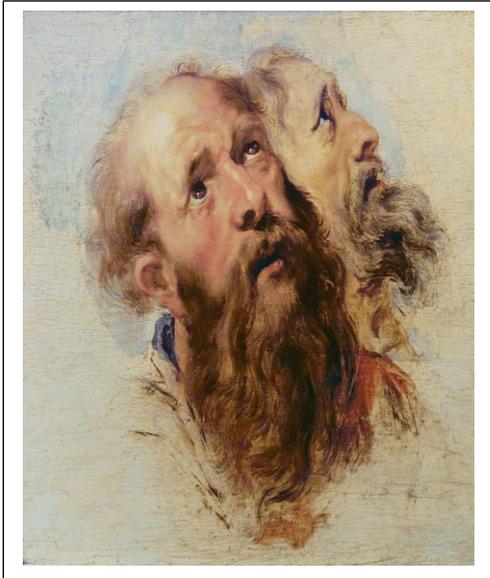
Old Testament Prediction	New Testament Fulfillment	Subject
Micah 5:2 Isaiah 7:14 Isaiah 35:5-6 Zech 11:12	Matthew 2:1 Matthew 1:23 Matthew 9:35 Matt 26:14-15	Born in Bethlehem Born of a virgin Cure deaf and blind Sold for 30 pieces of silver
Psalms 41:9 Psalm 2:16	Mark 14:17-21 Luke 23:33	Betrayed by a friend Killed amidst criminals

Jesus' life, ministry, and words, were written down and passed on by His main followers. They spread this message throughout the world, in spite of terrible persecution. "The Gospel of Christ was boldly proclaimed as God's ultimate word, God manifested in human flesh. Christ, they said, came to show us what God was like, how He would save us, and how we should live." For many it seemed crazy. For the thousands who believed,—this message completely changed their lives, just as it does today.

The New Testament writers present Jesus as more than a great religious leader. He is presented as the personal fulfillment of centuries of promise, prophecy, waiting, and hope that is woven throughout the Old Testament, whose last book was written some 400 years before Jesus' birth. "And the New Testament also clearly and repeatedly speaks of Jesus coming again, a second time, to establish a kingdom of justice, love, truth and righteousness."

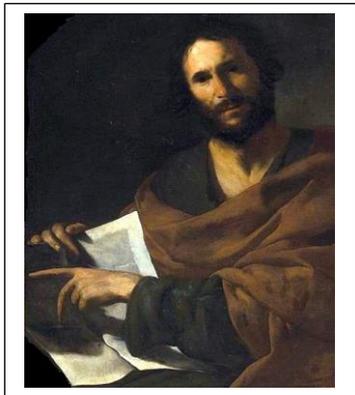
"The Jesus of the New Testament is seen offering an invitation to every human being on the face of the earth. The invitation is to repent of our sins, turn to God, accept Christ's death on the cross in our place for our sins, turn to Him in love and faith, make Him central in our lives, and seek His strength to live our lives in a way that will please God."^x

Other New Testament Figures



Peter was a fisherman and one of the first disciples Jesus called. He is a major figure in the four Gospels and key in the Acts expansion of the early church. He is also credited as writing two New Testament books and is likely the eye witness source for Mark's gospel. Christians identify with Peter because of his obvious flaws, impulsiveness and outright failures. Instead of being forgotten as a "loser," he found forgiveness, renewed faith and anointing to provide critical leadership for the early church.

Paul began as a persecutor of the church. He was a Roman citizen and Pharisee, trained by Gamaliel. His dramatic conversion led him to become perhaps the greatest missionary in the history (read it in Acts 9:1-12) of the church. He is credited as the author of almost half of all the New Testament, far more than anyone else. Paul's role was critical in interpreting how the Gospel was a universally available for all people, in all places and all times.



John is credited as the author of five of the New Testament books. When on the cross, Jesus asked John to take care of his mother. John appears to be the only apostle who did not die a martyr's death. Historical documents indicate that he wrote most of his books near the end of his life, and became the last man/Apostle standing. He lived into the AD 90's to provide important leadership for the churches in Asia Minor and other regions. John refers to himself as the *Apostle whom Jesus loved*. Certainly, his Gospel gives us the most personal account of Jesus.

To Fully Understand the New Testament You Need to Read the Old Testament

The New Testament is deeply rooted in the Old Testament, even though it was written 400 years later. There are over 220 quotes of the Old in the New. In addition, there are 180 Old Testament allusions or references. 22 of the 27 New Testament books quote or refer to the Old Testament. These references include 58 of the 66 Old Testament books.

GOSPELS

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

HISTORY

Acts of the Apostles

PAUL'S LETTERS

Romans
1 and 2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 and 2
1 and 2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon

GENERAL LETTERS

Hebrews
James
1 and 2 Peter
1, 2 and 3 John
Jude

APOCALYPSE

Revelation

The four Gospels are narrative accounts of Jesus' life. Though they cover much overlapping material, they are written from different perspectives. Matthew targets a Jewish audience; Mark is a briefer, fast-action gospel; Luke, a Gentile doctor, writes more for the Greek mind; John goes into more personal and theological reflection than the others.

The Acts of the Apostles is introduced by its author, Luke, as being a continuation of the Gospel of Luke. It is the history of the early Christian church from the time that Jesus ascended into heaven, and the Day of Pentecost, until the time of Paul's imprisonment in Rome, around the year 60 AD.

Paul's Letters were written to various churches and individuals, generally in response to a crises. Some were written to address problems in churches he had founded (e.g. I & II Corinthians), or to encourage his close co-laborers (e.g. I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon). Some of were written while he was a prisoner (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon). Paul's passionate writings generally include doctrinal material, apocalyptic themes and Christian teachings with practical applications for everyday life. A repetitive underlying theme in Paul's writings is to know Christ and make Him known.

The General Letters are those written by others besides Paul. They were usually written to churches or groups of Christians to deal with needs, problems or questions that had arisen. In these letter, believers are encouraged to stand strong in the faith, even though they were dealing with many difficulties. They also warn against false teachings that were threatening the churches' sound Gospel foundation.

Revelation was written by John, while a prisoner on the Island of Patmos, approximately 85-95 A.D. Its purpose is to give encouragement and hope for all Christians to continue watching for the return and triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ. It also is to warn of the Final Judgment that nonbelievers will endure at the end. Revelation is full of wonderful God-given visions.

A Startling Comparison

The original New Testament writings were all completed before the year 100 AD, some within just a few years of Christ's resurrection. None of the original writings is known to exist today. What we have are copies of copies. Can we be confident that these copies are accurate copies of what was originally written?

Scholars have found a wealth of manuscripts, copies and fragments that substantiates the reliability of the New Testament writings far beyond that available for any other writings from the ancient world. The wealth of evidence is simply staggering.^{xi}

In the chart below you will see how the New Testament compares to other ancient famous literature, in regard to when the originals were written, the age and number of the copies. It's a staggering comparison!

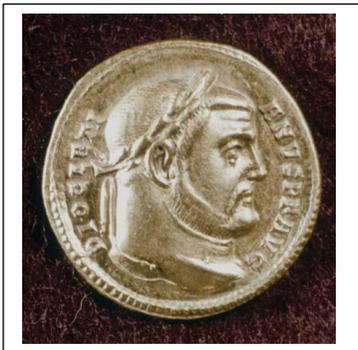


Author	Title	Date Written	Earliest copy available	Interval	# of copies for comparison
Herodotus	History	450 BC	900 AD	1,350	8
Caesar	Gallic Wars	50 BC	900 AD	years 950	10
Tacitus	Annals	100 AD	1100 AD	yrs. 1,000	20
Piny	Natural History	100 AD	850 AD	years 750	7
(Various)	New Testament	50-100 AD	250 AD	years 200	5,000+

The Bible is a very ancient book. Its antiquity is a wonder. It is a marvel that the Bible has remained until the present time. I am quite sure it would not have, had it not been that God had purposed that it should never be destroyed. Relatively few books survive the decade in which they are printed. Very, very few survive for a century. Their make-up is such that the elements tend to destroy them. Age and water rot them, insects eat them, careless handling destroys them, ink fades, and covers pull loose. But the Word of God remains.

AMAZINGLY PRESERVED

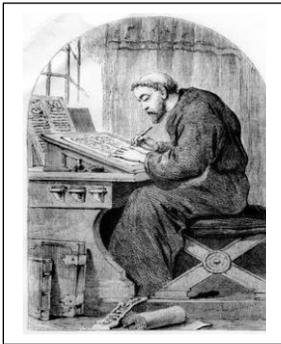
The Bible is so readily available to us now in every conceivable format and in so many versions that we can easily overlook the marvel of how the Bible survived the centuries and the many attempts to destroy it from as early as 167 BC to our current time period.



The mad tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 BC decreed that "The books of the law (i.e. Jewish scripture) that they found they tore to pieces and burned with fire. Anyone found possessing the book of the covenant, or anyone who adhered to the law, was condemned to death."

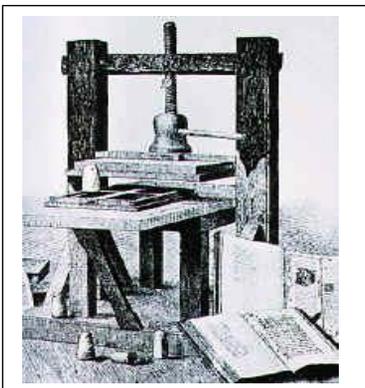
Of Diocletian (284-316), the ruler immediately preceding Constantine, Eusebius, the historian said, "royal edicts were published everywhere, (Truth Magazine XIX: 31, pp. 483-485, June 12, 1975)

But God's Word prevailed!



Other obstacles also kept the Bible from the people, including illiteracy, language, cultural barriers and difficulty in making copies. The church in the middle Ages spread to diverse peoples who spoke different languages.

The monasteries carefully attended to the copying of the Bible, but it was a slow process, every copy was done by hand. A single copy of the Bible could take up to a whole year for a scribe to write.



But even if the Bible had been available, most of the population would not have been able to read it. For example in fourteenth and fifteenth century Europe, only ten percent of the population could read and only two percent could read effectively.

The invention of the printing press (1440) and the translation of the Bible into everyday language, by John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and re-formers like Martin Luther (1483-1546) brought about a reformation!

BIBLE STUDY

SOUND PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY/INTERPRETATION (HERMENEUTICS)

Doctrine and teaching must follow sound principles of biblical interpretation to avoid error.

The Bible itself is the primary source of study to learn about God and what the Bible teaches. To get to know God, we must study the Bible, His revealed Word.

It is very important that Christians learn to properly study the Bible. There are sound principles that must be followed to avoid bizarre interpretations, based upon inadequate foundations. Faulty interpretations are most likely to take place when verses are taken out of context of the whole, symbolic meaning is read into verses meant to be taken literally, historical context is not considered, Scripture is not used to interpret Scripture and original language is not considered for difficult passages and concepts.

Below are some basic principles which must be followed:

CONTEXT RULES

1. You must consider the historical, geographical, political, literary genre and cultural context, in relation to the passage/chapter/book.
2. Develop a personal habit of reading the Bible through regularly each year, so that you have a context in which to base your understanding on what a particular passage means. (Download the spoken Word on to your Phone and listen to it while you work or drive, to continue build/refresh your knowledge of the whole of Scripture. Invest in a respected study Bible.)
3. As you study, ask: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
4. Consider the relationship of various chapters and verses to each other to determine meaning.
5. Don't base your interpretation/doctrine on a single verse, but on the whole of Scripture.

SCRIPTURE INTERPRETS SCRIPTURE

1. Obscure passages must be understood in the light of clearer ones.
2. Remember that no part of the Bible can contradict any other part. If one passage seems to contradict another, one of the passages is being misinterpreted, or even both.
3. As God's Word, the Bible must be consistent with itself.
4. Don't base your convictions on an obscure passage of Scripture.

INTERPRET SCRIPTURE LITERALLY

1. Scripture is to be read in its literal sense.
2. Understand God's words just as you would interpret the language of normal discourse.
3. Look first for the literal meaning, not some mystical, deeper, hidden, secret or spiritualized interpretation.
4. If there is symbolic meaning, use Scripture to interpret Scripture..

CONSIDER GRAMMER/ORIGINAL LANGUAGE TO DETERMINE MEANING

1. Be aware of the sequences of the words and phrases, tenses, and part of speech (verb or noun), to determine meaning.
2. Often it is necessary to consider the original language to fully understand the passage. (Today, there are Greek/Hebrew lexicons, Bible study software, or free sites like www.blueletterbible.org , www.biblegateway.com, etc. that can help you understand.)

CONSIDER THE "TYPE" OF LITERATURE (GENRE)

Historical Narratives: (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, and Joshua through to Esther. Parts of the Gospels, and the book of Acts.) These describe specific actual historical events from God's perspective. They tell us what God is like (His character and nature), what God likes/dislikes, how He deals with people who obey and honor Him, and those who disobey and hate Him, and give principles and lessons. The Gospels take excerpts from the life of Jesus.

Poetry and Songs: (Primary Psalms and Song of Solomon, although Job and some other books contain poetic portions) These are expressions of emotion to God: happiness, joy, love, worship, trust, hope, security, discouragement, guilt, repentance, suffering, fear, anger, despair and repentance. When it comes to exposition of biblical poetry it is important to understand figures of speech, types of parallelism in Hebrew poetry and the different types of Psalms. (1. *Simile* – comparison using "like" or "as"; 2. *Metaphor* – Comparison where one thing represents another; 3. *Allegory* – Extended metaphor around a specific theme; 4. *Metonymy* – Substitutes one object or concept for that of another; 5. *Synecdoche* – a part is made to represent the whole or visa versa; 6. *Hyperbole* – Exaggeration for dramatic effect; 7. *Apostrophe* – Addresses absent/imaginary person as if there, Personification, "Lift up your heads, O gates," Psalms 24:7; 8 *Antropomorphism* – Speaks of God as having human body.)

Legal Writings: (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Wisdom/Wise Sayings) These writings indicate God's high moral standard, His idea of justice, principles of commonsense government, health and safety, and His pattern and order for acceptable worship. They are not meant to be legalistic instructions and commands to Christians. They indicate God's view of wisdom as opposed to man's view of wisdom. They contain wise sayings, and practical advice on how to live life and avoid trouble and hardship.

Wisdom literature: can be found primarily in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. (Note: Proverbs teach probable truth, not absolute truth.)

Prophecy: (Old Testament, from Isaiah to Malachi) It is God's message to a particular person/group and sometimes to all humanity. Sometimes, but not necessarily foretelling the future. The vast majority speaks of the present (at the time of the prophet).

Teachings of Jesus: (Gospels) These are direct statements of truth from Jesus concerning the nature and character of God, the kingdom of God, heaven, what God expects of us, principles of righteous living, and the ways in which Jesus fulfills the OT prophecies.

Parables: Stories with a punch line. Most parables have only one message or central idea, and even if multiple messages are present, one of them will be the chief idea. Note also that they are not perfect analogies. They are found in parts of the Gospels.

Epistles: (Romans to Jude) Letters written with a clear purpose to an identified audience. The epistle writer presents arguments to correct, rebuke, defend, instruct, praise and encourage the readers.

Apocalypse: (Revelation, and large parts of Ezekiel and Daniel) These describe prophecies in which God "reveals" His hidden future plans and is a view of God's relationship to human history. Rather than work within it, God radically intervenes from outside it. The book Revelation is a vision of warning and encouragement to the early church as it was going through immense persecution.

APPLY BIBLICAL TRUTH

1. The Scripture is meant to be applied to life, not just read.
2. Ask: How does this apply today? How does this apply to me? What needs to change in the way I think and act?

We strongly recommend that all Bible students invest in one or two respected study Bibles. Be sure to make one of your study Bibles the Fire Bible (Global Study Edition) and, also, include an ESV Study Bible or an NASB Study Bible (Ryrie, Zondervan, or Inductive). The NKJV Spirit Filled Life Bible (compiled by Jack Hayford), is also a great resource. All study Bibles include Bible book background information, cross references, maps, timelines and basic commentary, which is very helpful when study time is limited. Students, who want to go deeper, may wish to invest in some respected Bible study software.

BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

<https://www.youversion.com/apps>

Bring the beauty and truth of the Bible into everyday life. With the **YouVersion Bible App**, you can read, watch, listen, and share on your smartphone or tablet, and online at Bible.com

<https://www.biblestudytools.com>

Use our free online **Bible** to grow deeper in the Word. Read verses by topic, **study** Scripture while you highlight or underline verses and use a large library of popular resources.

<https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/tools>

Bible study resources at Gospel.com. **Bible** studies and related resources will help you to grow in your knowledge and understanding of God's Word. View **Bible** studies · View Devotionals · View Daily emails · View **Bible** Reading Plans. **Bible** Gateway. Help. FAQs/Tutorials.

<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/>

Get guidance for your personal **Bible study** time. Inspirational and popular trending articles focused on making **Bible study** life-changing.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org/>

Read and **study** God's Word with **Bible study** software that has in-depth resources such as commentaries, Greek and Hebrew word **tools**, concordances, and more.

(See the APPENDIX for additional helps.)

APPENDIX

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH ON SOME BIBLICAL TOPICS

<https://aq.org/Beliefs/Position-Papers>

Some Topics include:

- Baptism in the Holy Spirit
- The Doctrine of Creation
- Church Mission and Peacemaking
- Divine Healing
- Divorce and Remarriage
- End time Revival — Spirit-Led and Spirit-Controlled
- Eternal Punishment
- A Biblical Perspective on Gambling
- Homosexuality, Marriage, and Sexual Identity
- Inspiration, Inerrancy, and Authority of Scripture
- Kingdom of God
- Positive Confession, The Believer And...
- Rapture of the Church
- Sanctity of Human Life - Abortion and Reproductive Issues
- Sanctity of Human Life - Suicide and Euthanasia
- The Security of the Believer
- The Role of Women in Ministry
- Worship in the Bible
- (Many other topics are included at this url under “topics.”)

LOCAL PLACES FROM WHICH YOU CAN RECEIVE HELP

CELEBRATE RECOVER GROUPS (Help for addictions of any type: alcohol, pornography, gambling, etc.)

To locate a Celebrate Recovery group, go to: <http://locator.crgroups.info/>

MARRIAGE SUPPORT GROUPS

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/divorce-and-infidelity/when-your-marriage-needs-help/indications-you-need-help-for-your-marriage>

<http://www.focusonthefamily.com/marriage/divorce-and-infidelity/when-your-marriage-needs-help/marriage-needs-help-booklet-overview>

To gain online help, go to: <https://relationship.supportgroups.com/>

There are many local counselors that can help you.

DIVORCE RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUPS

To locate a Divorce Recovery group, go to: <https://www.divorcecare.org/>

A Comparison of the 5 Major Religions

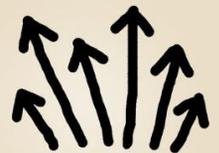
Hinduism and its beliefs

Most Hindus worship one Being of ultimate oneness (Brahman) through infinite representations of gods and goddesses. These various deities become incarnate within idols, temples, gurus, rivers, animals, etc.

Hindus believe their position in this present life was determined by their actions in a previous life. Hinduism therefore provides a possible explanation for suffering and evil in this life. If a person's behavior before was evil, they might justifiably experience tremendous hardships in this life. Pain, disease, poverty or a disaster like a flood is deserved by that person because of their own evil actions, usually from a previous lifetime.

A Hindu's goal is to become free from the law of karma...to be free from continuous reincarnations. Only the soul matters which will one day be free of the cycle of rebirths and be at rest.

Hinduism lets a person choose how to work toward spiritual perfection. There are three possible ways to end this cycle of karma: 1. Be lovingly devoted to any of the Hindu deities; 2. Grow in knowledge through meditation of Brahman (oneness)...to realize that circumstances in life are not real, that selfhood is an illusion and only Brahman is real; 3. Be dedicated to various religious ceremonies and rites.



Hinduism... infinite manifestations of God

New Age Spirituality and its beliefs

New Age Spirituality promotes the development of the person's own power or divinity. When referring to deity, a follower of this type of spirituality is not talking about a transcendent, personal God who created the universe, but is referring to a higher consciousness within themselves. A person pursuing spiritual development would see themselves as deity, the cosmos, the universe. In fact, everything that the person sees, hears, feels or imagines is to be considered divine.

Highly eclectic, New Age Spirituality is a collection of ancient spiritual traditions, taught by a vast array of speakers, books and seminars. It acknowledges many gods and goddesses, as in Hinduism. The Earth is viewed as the source of all spirituality, and has its own intelligence, emotions and deity. But superseding all is self. Self is the originator, controller and power over all. There is no reality outside of what the person determines.

New Age teaches eastern mysticism and spiritual, metaphysical and psychic techniques, such as breathing exercises, chanting, drumming, meditating...to develop an altered consciousness and one's own divinity.

Anything negative a person experiences (failures, sadness, anger...) is considered an illusion. Believing themselves to be completely sovereign over their life, nothing about their life is wrong, negative or painful. Eventually a person develops spiritually to the degree that there is no objective, external reality. A person, becoming a god, creates their own reality.



New Age... believes we ourselves are God

Buddhism and its beliefs

Buddhists do not worship any gods or God. People outside of Buddhism often think that Buddhists worship the Buddha. However, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) never claimed to be divine, but rather he is viewed by Buddhists as having attained what they are also striving to attain, which is spiritual enlightenment and, with it, freedom from the continuous cycle of life and death.

Most Buddhists believe a person has countless rebirths, which inevitably include suffering. A Buddhist seeks to end these rebirths. Buddhists believe it is a person's cravings, aversion and delusion that cause these rebirths. Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one's heart and to let go of all yearnings toward sensual desires and to oneself.

Buddhists follow a list of religious principles and adhere to personal restraint, fasting and very dedicated meditation. When a Buddhist meditates it is not the same as praying or focusing on a god, it is more of a self-discipline. Through practiced meditation a person may reach Nirvana -- "the blowing out" of the flame of desire.

Buddhism provides something that is true of most major religions: disciplines, values and directives that a person may want to live by.



Buddhism... believes no god or gods exist

Islam and its beliefs

Muslims believe there is the one almighty God, named Allah, who is infinitely superior to and transcendent from humankind. Allah is viewed as the creator of the universe and the source of all good and all evil. Everything that happens is Allah's will. He is a powerful and strict judge, who will be merciful toward followers depending on the sufficiency of their life's good works and religious devotion. A follower's relationship with Allah is as a servant to Allah.

Though a Muslim honors several prophets, Muhammad is considered the last prophet and his words and lifestyle are that person's authority. To be a Muslim, one must follow five religious duties: 1. Repeat a creed about Allah and Muhammad; 2. Recite certain prayers in Arabic five times a day; 3. Give to the needy; 4. One month each year, fast from food, drink, sex and smoking from sunrise to sunset; 5. Pilgrimage once in one's lifetime to worship at a shrine in Mecca. At death -- based on one's faithfulness to these duties -- a Muslim hopes to enter Paradise. If not, they will be eternally punished in hell.

Islam teaches that there is one supreme deity, who is worshiped through good deeds and disciplined religious rituals. After death a person is rewarded or punished according to their religious devotion. Muslims believe that giving up one's life for Allah is a sure way of entering Paradise.



Islam... devoted to one transcendent God

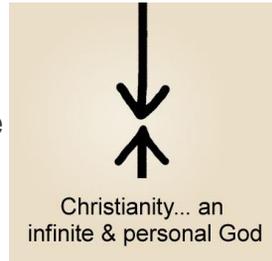
Christianity and its beliefs

Christians believe in one eternal God who is creator of all that is. He is viewed as a loving God who offers everyone a personal relationship with himself now in this life.

In his life on Earth, Jesus Christ did not identify himself as a prophet pointing to God or as a teacher of enlightenment. Rather, Jesus claimed to be God in human form. He performed miracles, forgave people of their sin and said that anyone who believed in him would have eternal life.

Followers of Jesus regard the Bible as God's written message to humankind, and a historical record of Jesus' life and miracles. The Bible reveals His personality, His love and truth, and how one can know and relate to God, as to a friend.

Christians believe that all people sin, including themselves. They see Jesus as their Savior, as the Messiah who was prophesied by all the prophets of the Old Testament, in the Bible. They believe that Jesus Christ, out of love for us, paid for the sin for all of humanity by dying on a cross. Three days later, he rose from the dead as he promised, proving his deity.



Each Major Religion is Very Different.

- Hindus acknowledge multitudes of gods and goddesses.
- Buddhists say there is no deity.
- New Age Spirituality followers believe they are God.
- Muslims believe in a powerful but unknowable God.
- Christians believe a loving God who created us to know him.

Are all worshipping the same God? New Age Spirituality teaches that everyone should come to center on a cosmic consciousness, but it would require Islam to give up their one God, Hinduism to give up their numerous gods, and Buddhism to establish that there is a God. Of these, only one affirms that there is a loving God who can be known now in this life.

Each Major Religion Requires Different Things.

Most of the world religions place an individual on their own, striving for spiritual perfection. In Hinduism a person is on their own trying to gain release from karma. In New Age a person is working at their own divinity. In Buddhism it is an individual quest at being free from desire. And in Islam, the individual follows religious laws for the sake of paradise after death. With Jesus Christ, you see God offering us a relationship with himself, not based on our efforts, but based on what he did for us.

All religions are working on the same problem.

We're all aware of personal failings and the need to be better. This is what leads to the creation of religions. We also want to feel at peace, fulfilled and having inner strength. And so we practice meditation, religious rituals, self-help books, fasting, prayer, personal sacrifice, pilgrimages, etc.

However, when it comes to connecting with God who is there and created us, our problem is not lack of personal effort. Our problem is our sin. No amount of good works is going to cover up those times we've acted contrary to God's holy ways.

It's interesting that Buddha never claimed sinlessness. Muhammad also admitted that he needed forgiveness. "No matter how wise, no matter how gifted, no matter how influential other prophets, gurus, and teachers might be, they knew they were imperfect just like the rest of us."¹

God tells us that our sin stands as a barrier between us and him. We sense that separation, that distance. That's what leads to religious practices.

God acknowledges this separation between us and him and provided a solution to it. He said the payment for sin is death...eternal spiritual separation from him. Yet out of love for us, Jesus Christ, God himself, came in human form to pay for our sin for us.

Jesus took all of our sin on himself, suffered on a cross, and willingly died in our place. The Bible says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us." (1 John 3:16)

"For the wages [payment] for sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 6:23)

God is offering us complete forgiveness because of Jesus' death for us. This means forgiveness for all our sins...past, present and future. Jesus paid for them all. God, who created the universe, loves us and wants to be in a relationship with us. "This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him." (1 John 4:9)

"For God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Christ offers us real freedom from our sin and guilt. He does not leave a person's failures on their shoulders, with a dim hope of becoming a better person tomorrow. In Jesus Christ, God reached toward humanity, providing a way for us to connect with him.

God wants us to know him.

Jesus said, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty...and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." (John 6:35) Jesus called people not only to follow his teachings, but to follow him. He said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life." (John 14:6) In claiming to be the truth, Christ goes beyond mere prophets and teachers who simply said they were speaking the truth.⁸

Jesus identified himself as equal to God, and even gave proof. Jesus said that he would be crucified on a cross and that three days after his death, he would come back to life, and he DID! He didn't say he would reincarnate someday into a future life. On that third day, Jesus' tomb was found empty and many people testified that they saw him alive again. He now offers eternal life to us.

Unlike many world religions...

This is not a commitment to a method of self-improvement like the Eightfold Path, the Five Pillars, or meditation, or good works or even the Ten Commandments. Those ways become a burdensome striving for perfection, and connection with God is still distant.

With Jesus Christ it's a two-way interaction between you and God. He welcomes us to go to him. "The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth."⁹ You can communicate with God, who will answer your prayer, give you greater peace and joy, provide direction, show you his love, and transform your life.

Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and have it more abundantly."¹⁰ It will not mean that life will become perfect and free of problems. But it means that in the midst of life, you can relate to God who is willing to be involved in your life and faithful in his love.

Our hope is not in following laws or standards, but in knowing a Savior who fully accepts us because of our faith in him and his sacrifice for us. We don't earn our place in heaven by religious efforts or good deeds. Heaven is a free gift to us, when we begin a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Would you like to be totally forgiven and personally come to know God's love for you?

Beginning a relationship with God.

In the world's religions a person has a relationship with teachings, ideas, paths, rituals. Through Jesus, a person can have a relationship with the loving and powerful God. You can talk with him and he will guide you in this life now. He doesn't just point you to a path, a philosophy, or a religion.

He welcomes you to know him, to experience joy, and to have confidence in his love in the midst of life's challenges. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God."¹¹

You can begin a relationship with God right now. It is as simple as sincerely asking him for his forgiveness of your sin and inviting him to enter your life. Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him."¹²

Would like to begin a relationship with the God who created you, who deeply loves you? You can do so right now, if it is your heart's desire: "God, I ask you to forgive me and invite you to enter my heart right now. Thank you Jesus for dying for my sins. Thank you for coming into my life as you said you would."

If you sincerely asked God to come into your life, you have begun a personal relationship with him. It is like you have just met God and he wants you to know him better.

SHARE YOUR TESTIMONY

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason

for the hope that you have." —1 Peter 3:15

(Summarized from a pdf publicly displayed at http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/webfm_send/334 which was from www.navpress.com/magazines/archives/article.aspx?id=1.60.11. Used by permission of NavPress and *Discipleship Journal* . www.NavPress.com.for NW Assembly small group *Foundations 102*.)

As you write down what Christ has done/is doing in your life, daily, it should bring excitement and hope in your life. It will also help you prepare to share your testimony with others.

BEFORE, HOW, AND AFTER

Here are practical suggestions for developing the before, how, and after sections in your personal testimony.

1. Before:

a. Many people's actions spring out of their unsatisfied deep inner needs. What were one or two of your unsatisfied deep inner needs before you came to know Jesus Christ? Some examples of inner needs are: *_ lack of peace _ fear of death _ something missing _ no meaning to life _ desire to be in control _ loneliness _ lack of security _ lack of purpose _ lack of significance _ no real friends _ no motivation*

b. Non-Christians are usually trying to satisfy their deep inner needs through unsatisfactory solutions. In the past, what unsatisfactory solutions did you use to attempt to meet those deep inner needs? As you develop your testimony, list positive as well as negative solutions you may have tried. Some examples are: *_ marriage/family _ work _ drugs/alcohol _ sports/fitness _ money _ education _ hobbies/entertainment _ sex _ wrong friends*

2. How:

a. Describe the circumstances that caused you to consider Christ as the solution to your deep inner needs. Identify the events that led to your conversion. In some cases this may have taken place over a period of time.

b. State specifically the steps you took to become a Christian. If there is a particular passage of Scripture that applies here, you may want to use it. Usually you will simply paraphrase it. c. Include the gospel clearly and briefly.

The gospel includes: • All have sinned • Sin's penalty • Christ paid the penalty • Must receive Christ

3. After:

a. State how Christ filled or is filling your deep inner needs. In the before, you expressed your needs and how you tried unsuccessfully to meet them. You now want to briefly show the difference that Christ has made in your life.

b. Conclude with a statement like: "But the greatest benefit is that I know for certain that I have eternal life." The person you talk to will tend to comment on the last thing you say. Often it is natural to move from the testimony into a clear presentation of the gospel.

YOUR TESTIMONY FORMAT

Format 1: Adult Conversion You trusted Christ as an adult. You have a distinct before, how and after.

Format 2: Early Conversion, Adult Full Commitment You made a genuine decision for Christ as a child, but your life was characterized by spiritual immaturity—a lifestyle similar to that of a non-Christian—until you reached a point of crisis and recommitted your life to Christ.

WRITE OUT YOUR TESTIMONY

Believe/Accepted Trusted or relied Christ for my salvation on Christ Sin Disobedience, breaking God's laws, turned my back on God Went forward Decided to turn my life over to God Under the blood God forgave the wrongs I had done Saved/Born Again Became a real Christian

1. Share about what happened to you, don't preach about what should happen to them. Say "I" and "me," not "you." This helps keep the testimony warm and personal.
2. Generalize so more people can identify with your story. Don't name specific churches, denominations, or groups. Avoid using dates and ages.
3. Include some humor and human interest. When a person smiles or laughs, it reduces tension. Humor is disarming and increases attention.
4. Word pictures increase interest. Don't just say, "Bill shared the gospel with me." You might briefly describe the setting so a person listening can visualize it.
5. Explain how Christ met or is meeting your deep inner needs, but do not communicate that all your struggles and problems ended at conversion.
6. Avoid dogmatic and mystical statements that skeptics can question, such as, "I prayed and God gave me a job," or "God said to me."
7. Simplify—reduce "clutter." Mention a limited number of people and use only their first or last names. Combine information when you can.

PRACTICING YOUR TESTIMONY

After you have written out your testimony, you may want to have another Christian read it and make suggestions for improvement. Ask them to point out any areas that you need to explain further and to make sure the gospel is presented clearly. Then, when you have a final draft that you like, outline your

testimony on a 3" x 5" card. Practice giving your testimony to a friend in four minutes or less. Sharing your testimony with your small group would also be an excellent opportunity to practice and receive feedback.

LEADING INTO YOUR TESTIMONY

When you feel comfortable giving your testimony, you may begin to wonder, "When do I share it with a non-Christian?" "How do I direct the conversation so it will lead to presenting my testimony?" You may find the following suggestions helpful.

1. Include some "small talk" before discussing spiritual matters. Discuss family, job, interests, etc.
2. Be alert for expressed needs such as family problems or stress on the job. You can use these to show how Christ has helped you through some of the same areas.
3. Discuss past concerns and needs in your life. "We used to struggle in our marriage relationship," or, "I used to allow the pressures at work to get to me." "Then I discovered something that made a tremendous difference in my life."
4. Build relationships with them. It may take ten minutes or ten hours or ten days or ten months—but build relationships.
5. Don't condemn them for living like non-Christians, they are non-Christians. Your objective is to share how they can have a better life in Christ.
6. Avoid dogmatic "religious" statements. "Jesus is the answer to all your problems." He is, but they don't even know who He is, much less what He can do in their lives.
7. Avoid arguments on moral issues. You can expect non-Christians to have conflicts with clear biblical teaching. They do not have a valid base from which to make correct moral decisions.

THE CLOSE

When you have shared your personal testimony, you may want to conclude with a statement that causes the person to reflect on what you have just shared. What you say will depend on how this person has been responding to what you have shared. If their response seems positive you can say:

1. "Bill, has anything like this ever happened to you?"
2. Mary, do you know for certain whether you have eternal life?"
3. "Do you have any idea what eternal life is?"
4. "May I share with you some time how I know for certain that I have eternal life?"
5. "May I share an illustration that explains how a person can know for certain that he has eternal life?"

If their response seems negative or neutral you could say something like:

1. "If you are interested I would like to share more with you sometime."
2. "Do you have any questions on what I have just shared with you?"

3. "Well, that is what happened to me. If you ever want to talk about it any further, I would love to do so."

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ Apostles Creed

ⁱⁱ Episcopal Church *Book of Common Prayer* (1979), *The Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated. 2007. pp. 326–327. Retrieved 2013-02-18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Utilized the format contained in the online pdf at www.visionvideo.com/files/DTB_ColorBookLR.pdf . Content from commonly known information and study of the Bible.

^{iv} <https://www.westernseminary.edu/transformedblog/2016/09/29/the-story-of-the-bible-the-wisdom-books/>

^v Utilized format and content from www.visionvideo.com/files/DTB_ColorBookLR.pdf

^{vi} Ibid. (This information is also available in many other sources.)

^{vii} Ibid

^{viii} Ibid

^{ix} Ibid

^x Ibid

^{xi} Ibid