

THE LAST STEP AFTER THE 12-STEPS

AS GOOD AS 12-STEPS ARE, THERE IS ONE LAST STEP YOU
NEED TO TAKE IN ORDER TO REALLY BE FREE.

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by **Timothy Cross**

INTRODUCTION

Some people talk about a Step 13 [which is when two people in the 12-Steps Program fall in love and get married, or have a relationship].—Just for the record, that’s not the “next step” I’m referring to in this booklet.—For all of you love-bugs, sorry!

Having worked in psychiatric and alcohol/substance abuse hospitals for several years, I hold the 12-Steps, as I believe they were originally intended, in very high regard. I have also seen the 12-Steps misused, where they are nothing more than a mind-game and a way of avoiding real spirituality. Choose a door knob for a Higher Power and you are home free.

If you are in A.A., N.A. or any other 12-Step Program, you had to choose a *Higher Power*. Who, or what, did you choose? Is it working? Are you tapped into a real Higher Power, or do the words, Higher Power, have an empty ring?

Let me shoot straight with you. I believe the 12-Steps become nothing more than silly **superstition** when people choose things like trees, door knobs, nature, or their pet cat as their *Higher Power*. [Since when is a door knob, a tree or a cat “higher” than a human being?—I could put a poached egg on my head and call that my Higher Power, but who would I be fooling? All that would do is lower who I am.

For others, the 12-Steps can be a form of **codependency**.—Whenever other people, or an organization, become one’s Higher Power, isn’t that codependency?—Step 3 speaks of committing one’s will and one’s life to God, as one understands God. To substitute people in place of *God* is like saying, “*I’ll commit my will and my life to people so they can run my life.*” That’s codependency.—Why do the 12-Steps at all if you don’t deal with the issue of God?

I’ll be the first to admit that there is a bunch of junk being done in the name of God, but that is a statement about those people and their practices, not about God. Let them take accountability for their own garbage, but don’t let them rob you of the One reality behind this universe Who can help you out of your problems.

There was a man in a mental institution, named George, so the story goes, who believed he was dead. No matter what anyone would say or do they could not convince him he was alive. One day a young mental caseworker had an idea. He said, “Tell me, George, do dead men bleed?” George thought for a minute and said, “No, dead men don’t bleed.” The caseworker took a needle, pricked George’s finger, and squeezed. A small drop of blood appeared. George’s eyes grew big as he saw the blood and he said, “Well, what do you know. Dead men do bleed!”

Like George, no matter how much evidence I present, I cannot convince you of anything against your will—nor will I try. I only want to share what works for me, things which I can honestly say are true. You don’t need to be a rocket scientist to read this booklet. The hardest things I will ask of you is to have an open mind, and be willing to get real with God.

And, yes, I know that asking you to deal honestly with God may take you out of your comfort zone, but so can being honest about your addiction. Have you ever done Step 1? Talk about taking a person out of his/her comfort zone. Ultimately, however, you and I both know that truth frees. (Whatever we don’t share, we keep.) For most of us, getting real with God comes down to an issue of control. It scares the daylights out of us to think about giving up control—maybe because everyone we’ve given control to in the past has hurt us.—Well, I have good news for you. God is not an abusive God.—Will you let me tell you about this God?

CHOOSING A HIGHER POWER

One of the first things, it seems to me, is to figure out who the real Higher Power is. How can you make an intelligent *commitment* to some Higher Power you don't know?

Some say it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are *sincere*. To me, that's crazy thinking. If a doctor told you, "It doesn't matter what medicine you take as long as you are sincere," would you keep going to that doctor?—No!—Then how can people say it doesn't matter which God you believe in as long as you are sincere? Isn't God more important than medicine?

For example, what if I told you that I had *sincerely* chosen Bugs Bunny as my Higher Power? Even if I was passionate in my beliefs about good ole' Bugs, would it work? When I'm on my death bed and I cry out, "Oh Bugs, save me! Save me!", is Bugs going to be there for me? No.—All kinds of people can be sincere, but be sincerely wrong.—I've know alcoholics who sincerely thought they could take "just one little drink" at a Christmas or New Year's party only to end up spending the next two years in and out of rehab centers or prison because they were *sincerely wrong*.

Who or what you place your faith in is important. Faith is only as good as the thing you believe in. [Sorry, Bugs.] For example, if I said, "I believe the chair you're sitting in is going to fly around the room."—Will it fly? No. Why not? Because chairs don't fly [unless someone is throwing one at you]. On the other hand, if I said, "I'm afraid that if I sit in your chair, it is going to collapse and hurt me," and yet you talk me into sitting in the chair, will it likely hold me? Yes.—My point? I could have all the faith in the world, but if that faith is based on a lie [e.g., that chairs fly], it won't amount to a hill of beans. On the other hand, if I have even a tiny bit of faith in something which is true [e.g., that chairs are made to sit in safely], it is going to work.—Faith, grounded in truth, works.

If you want to have a faith in God that really works, it has to be based on truth. A little bit of faith in the true God will work. All the faith in the world, if it is based on a lie, will only break your heart.

As you probably know, Step 3 says, ". . . I make a decision to commit my will and my life to God as I understand God."—If you really take Step 3 seriously, it means two things: (1) at some point you have to get real with God, and (2) you will have to get beyond a head belief and *commit* yourself to God from the heart.—This is no small decision. It is not like choosing between soup or salad, or like committing yourself to putting in a couple of hours in community service. It is more like deciding whether to get in a life boat or stay on the Titanic. When it comes to God, eternal issues are at stake. Choices matter.

TRUST

Closely linked to truth and faith, is trust. For those of you with trust issues, you know how scary it is to trust others. Maybe past hurts, abuse, disappointments and doubts have hardened your heart to God. Possibly you don't trust God. You may have suffered abuse at the hands of some people who claimed to be religious, and your trust in God was broken. You may even blame God for the bad things which have happened in your life. Maybe you're confusing God with your earthly father. Or worse still, you prayed to God for the abuse to stop and it didn't, and you thought to yourself, "I'll never believe in God again."

When it comes to doing Step 3, trust is everything. How can you *commit your will and your life* to Someone you don't trust?—You've probably seen a parent take a small child and stand the child on the edge of a chair or table and say, "Here, jump to daddy." It might only be two or three inches. The little kid finally gets up the nerve and jumps. The dad says, "Weeee," and catches the child. Again, the dad puts the kid on the chair and backs up another two or three inches and, again, the child jumps.

What would happen, if about the third or fourth time, the child jumped and the dad wasn't paying attention, or the dad was just plain mean, and the kid made a flying leap . . . oops, BANG! [The kid takes it, *smack*, right on the nose.] If the dad puts the child back up on the chair and says, "Here, let's try it again. Jump to daddy," is junior going to jump?—"No way."

A lot of you have landed on your nose spiritually, and you aren't about to jump until you know the Person on the other end will really catch you. I don't blame you. That's why doing an honest Step 3 is such a big deal. Don't fake your way through it. You don't like fakes, and neither does God.

Before I go much further, since I have raised the question about abuse and God not answering prayer, let me try to clear up this issue before going further. I believe there are good (not easy) reasons what God does not stop all abuse. (Please hear me out before judging me as being crazy.)

While God may sometimes rescue the one being abused, God is *not* in the practice of interfering with people's

choices, even if it involves sins of abuse. For example, God is not in the habit of striking people dead when they sin. [It's a good thing or there wouldn't be too many of us left.]

So, does God even care about abuse? Yes.—Why does God allow abuse? The answer may surprise you, but the answer is “love.”—Does God love abuse? Of course not, but you see God had a choice. The choice was this: He could make us like robots where we would have to obey Him. Or, He could make us with free will.—Have you ever tried to love a robot? The trouble with robots is they can't give real love in return, any more than a computer can.

Love—real love—involves a choice. For love to be real it must be freely given. Because the essence of God is love, He gave us free will. In other words, we can choose to love God freely, or we can spit in His face. The choice to love is ours, and so is the choice to rebel and abuse those we should love.—Is it God's will that fathers and mothers should love their children? Yes.—Is it God's will that He violate people's free will in order to make them love their children? No. God does not force parents, even bad parents, to violate the principle of free will.—[This is a hard concept to grasp, but nonetheless, true.] Sadly, it is usually the weak and defenseless who get abused the most.

I believe that people are still accountable to God for the choices they make. I also believe there will be a day of reckoning, of judgment. Free will does not take away responsibility. There may be hell to pay for those who abuse children.

COMMON OBJECTIONS TO GETTING REAL WITH GOD:

1. “I'm not sure there is a God.”

Just as no one is ever half pregnant [either they are pregnant or they are not], in like manner, either God exists or God does not exist. There is no half-God floating around in space. Either all this stuff about a Higher Power is real, or it is a bunch of crap.

How can you know there really is a Higher Power?

I won't go through a long explanation, but let me share a couple of reasons why I believe God has to exist.

One night a woman brought her husband into the psychiatric hospital where I work. The man was as drunk as drunk could be. I asked him if he went to A.A. [Alcoholics Anonymous]. He said, “No, I don't believe in all that God stuff.” His wife said, “You should!” He responded, “I don't believe there is a God.”—At that point I couldn't resist, so I said, “I think there is an easy way to prove to you there is a God.” He took the bait, so I said, “See that picture behind you? . . . Would you believe me if I said there was an explosion at a paint factory and it blew paint everywhere and just by chance made that painting?” He said, “No.” I asked, “Why not?” He said, “It couldn't happen.”—“So, whenever you see design, there is usually a designer, or when you see art, there is usually an artist, right?” He said, “Yes.” Then I said, “When you look at Cindy Crawford, the super model, or an Arabian stallion, a rose, or a New England Fall, do they look like something the universe puked out by accident, or does it look like there's design?” He said, “Design.”—I said, “Then there must be a Designer, and that is God.” He said, “###*##, you got me!”

Some have asked me, “Tell me then, who made God?”—Obviously, I can't totally answer that question, but let me share a thought which will at least give you something to think about.

It was Albert Einstein's theory of relativity which has given us a possible clue into the existence of God as an eternal God.

If you have watched some of the popular science fiction movies or television shows, you are probably familiar with the term “time warp,” where people are able to go forward or backward in time. (As far as we know, while time is relative, it is always forward. You can never go back in time.—“Sorry, Spock.”)

According to Einstein's theory, as an object approaches the speed of light, time slows down. Supposedly, if an object or being could equal or exceed the speed of light, time as we know it would cease. If there were a Being (God), who lived in the realm of light, He would not exist within time. Time would exist within Him. Scientifically, an eternal God could exist.

Let's face it. God is beyond human understanding. Much of this stuff about God makes about as much sense to us as astrophysics makes to a baby. If computers could actually think they wouldn't have to understand man in order to believe in man. The same is true with us and God. The fact that we exist should be reason enough. We don't have to understand God in order to believe in God.

2. “I’ve got all the time in the world.”

So, how long is that? What is all the time in the world? The reason Step 3 is such an important step is that it has meaning, not only for this life but for eternity.—Think of a piece of chalk the size of a large telephone pole (50-60 feet tall) and a chalkboard hundreds of miles long. Now, pretend you take that chalk and draw a thin line which goes and goes until the chalk runs out. Think of this as a time line that represents eternity. Now, imagine that you put a tiny dot at the front end of that line and let it represent your whole life here on earth, compared to eternity. Does it matter whether God exists? —You bet.

If there is no God you might as well erase the time line, because when you die the party is over—forever. In which case you should eat, drink and be merry for this tiny speck of time on earth is all you will ever get.

On the other hand, if God is real, and there is an afterlife, then nothing on earth could be more important. You are literally at the beginning of forever, be it good, bad, or otherwise. Things such as war, AIDS, making money, national freedom, getting an education, dealing with an addictive personality, even sex, would not begin to compare in importance to that which will affect you throughout eternity.

Why should you take Step 3 seriously? Because, right now, this minute, you are one breath and one heartbeat away from eternity. [Latest statistics say that 100% of every generation dies.] You face either eternal nothingness or never-ending life of some sort. Unless you know something I don’t, I have no guarantees that I will be here tomorrow. I could get run over by a Mack truck or some idiot could push the button and we could all get nuked.

Don’t leave it to fate. You do have choices. Don’t gamble with your soul. Take God seriously. He takes you seriously.

3. Maybe God is this impersonal Blob.

Using only our minds, what can we know about God? Is God an impersonal blob? It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that God must be intelligent and powerful beyond belief in order to create a universe such as ours. True?

Reason with me. Could a God without feelings create people with feelings? Could a God without personality create people with personality? No, that doesn’t make sense. I think it only stands to reason that God is personal and has feelings since God created love, happiness and all that go into making up personality.

Therefore, common sense tells us that God has to be more than some impersonal *Force* or cosmic Blob. God is infinitely personal.—Can you see why people who choose to worship a door knob or nature as their Higher Power are insulting the true and living God?

If God is personal and has the ability to communicate, the next question is whether God wants to communicate with us; with *you*. I think the answer is, “Yes.”—God has strong feelings for you and He wants you to know Him.

[By the way, I refer to God as “He” because that is culturally acceptable. I don’t like calling God an “it.” Obviously, if God is Spirit, then God transcends all the male-female stuff. God contains both male and female characteristics.]

HAS GOD SPOKEN?

Here is where the rubber meets the road.

Let me share my conclusions after much reading and questioning. There are a lot of religions and people saying what God is or is not like, and whether or not He even exists. The *only* one who can say for sure whether God exists and what He is like is God Himself. As simple as this is, it is an important point to grasp. Only God can give the final word on Himself.

Suppose one day a Man walked this earth claiming to be God, saying that He was “THE way. . . THE truth. . . THE life” This is something we could test.—Any person claiming to be God would be one of three things: psychotic with delusions of grandeur (crazy). Or, He might be a deceiver out to pull off one of the greatest scams of all time.—“If I can only convince one-tenth of one percent of the people that I am God, I am set for life; money, women, respect, etc.”—Or, He might be God.

Most people who go around claiming to be God are locked up in psych units, and yet one world religious leader did—Jesus. Honesty demands that we check out the facts. We must dismiss His claims and call Him nuts [or a fraud], or else be prepared to fall at His feet and worship Him. It is that simple. If Christ is who He claims to be, then He, as no other, answers once for all the questions about God, because He is God [in the flesh].

I personally believe that God has revealed Himself to us through the *Bible*, and in the person of Jesus Christ. [Before you possibly say, “Oh no! Here is another one of those #### Christians!”, hear me out.]—If Christianity is true, then nothing in all of life could be more important. If it is not true, then it is one big fat lie and you should utterly reject it.

But, before you decide, hear the *facts*. Don’t judge Jesus by the religion some people have made through the use or misuse of His name. Just as there are scientists who can give science a bad name, and 12-Step people who sometimes give 12-Step groups a bad name, so there are Christians who can give Christianity a bad name.—You and I both know people who fall into these categories. There are so-called Christians I know who make my skin crawl. Thankfully, this is not how we judge truth. Christianity stands or falls on the person of Jesus Christ and Him alone. It is easy to dismiss some Christians. It is quite difficult to study the life of Jesus and dismiss Him as some sort of quack.

THE FACTS

In the *New Testament* Jesus is called almost every major name and attribute used to describe God in the Old Testament? For example:

“*God*” [Romans 9:5; John 1:1,14],

“*Yahweh*” [John 8:58],

“*Lord*” [Acts 10:38],

“*Creator*” [Colossians 1:15-18, Hebrews 1:1],

“*Savior*” [Titus 2:13],

“*King of kings*” [Revelation 19:16],”

“*the Alpha and the Omega*” [Revelation 1:17-18; 22:13],”

“*Holy One*” [Acts 3:14] . . . and many more.

Even though the Bible says God is the only one worthy of worship [Matthew 4:10] Jesus accepted worship [Matthew 28:9,17]. Even the angels of God are told to worship Him [Hebrews 1:6]. If Jesus were not God, He had no right being called God or allowing others to treat Him as God.

To say that Jesus was *just* a good teacher (assuming He really claimed to be God) would be out of the question. He would either be much more than a “good teacher” (i.e., God), or much less (i.e., a liar or lunatic). Think of the hundreds of thousands who have died because of their belief in Him.

C.S. Lewis, who was once an atheist and converted to Christianity while trying to disprove Christianity, wrote,

“A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

There can be no middle ground. Jesus is either God or he isn’t. He stands alone in the claims He made. Christ produced anger, hatred, or worship from the people of His day. To take a middle-of-the-road position concerning Christ is to totally fail to grasp the claims He made.

You could take Buddha out of Buddhism and it would remain basically unchanged. You could take Muhammad out of Islam and it would continue to exist. But, if you took Jesus Christ out of Christianity, it would collapse because Christianity is not merely a religion or philosophy of life, but an encounter with a Person: Jesus Christ. Christianity is not an *it*, but a *Who*.—Liar? Lunatic? or Lord?—You must choose.—Christianity is not a matter of likes or dislikes, but coming to grips with the claims of Christ.

Let me be very clear. If Jesus is God then He can state the truth about God (i.e., Himself), and the *only* way to have a right relationship with God. What He says goes. What He says is right, is right; and what He says is wrong, is wrong. Like it or not, if He was/is God, then He could make such statements. That is why Christianity is such an exclusive religion, and why Christians sometimes seem so narrowminded. If Christ’s claims are true, Christians have no other choice but to proclaim Him as God, and to honor His teachings as the very words of God.

In our society, with political correctness and all that stuff, no one wants to appear narrowminded or rejecting of what others believe. Yet, what Jesus said is very narrow indeed. He said, “*I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father [God] except through me.*” [John 14:6]. In John 8:24 Jesus said, “. . . if you do not believe that I am the one

I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins.” The apostle Peter went so far as to say, “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*” [Acts 4:12].

It means that while some religions may be closer to the truth than others, salvation is only through Jesus and Him alone. It means Christians have an obligation to take His message of salvation to the ends of the earth, just as Jesus taught: “. . . go and make disciples [followers] of all nations.” [Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8]

Does that mean Christians are to tell people of other religions about Jesus dying for their sins, and their need to commit their lives to Him?—This is precisely what it means. If Jesus is God, and He was telling the truth, Christians must obey His command to preach the gospel throughout the whole world. If that angers or offends people, then so be it. Jesus said His followers could expect persecution [Luke 6:22,23]. Nevertheless, it is the love of Christ which compels Christians to tell others of His salvation [John 3:16; II Corinthians 5:14-21]. It is not a matter of bigotry, but a matter of love.—“For God so loved the world . . .”[John 3:16-18]. If there is only one cure for sin, then love will proclaim that cure, no matter the cost.

What about those who have never heard about Christ, you say?—Don’t get hung up on whether some sincere worshipper in some other religion will go to hell for something he/she never heard. Rest assured, God is fair and will do what is right [See Romans 1: 16-2:16]. The Bible is clear, however, that those, like yourself, who have heard about Christ will be held accountable for the truth they have been shown [Hebrews 10:26-31].

Rather than questioning the hardness and harshness of God in dealing with sin, maybe we should look at the harshness of sin. Look in the eyes of a child who has been raped. See what man’s selfishness has done to our earth. Gaze at what drugs and alcoholism have done. Sin is a lot like AIDS. You could put 230 million AIDS virus on the period at the end of this sentence, and yet all it takes is one to eventually kill you. Sin, in like manner, leads to spiritual death.

God hates sin, but He still loves the sinner. That is why God felt it necessary to become a man and die on the cross for our sins. To reject this message of the cross, and proclaim another way of salvation, is to tell God He made a mistake; that Jesus didn’t have to die, that there were other ways to reach Heaven.—Sorry. If Jesus is telling the truth, you must come to grips with the fact that there is only one way to God, and that is through Jesus. As good as the 12-Steps are, if they ignore Jesus, they will, in the end, do you no good.

EVIDENCE FOR JESUS’ CLAIMS [If this is not a concern to you, skip this section.]

Let me summarize some of the major reasons, as I see them, that Jesus was telling the truth. Again, you be the judge.

1. The first is Jesus’ character. No single human being who has ever lived from the beginning of time has so powerfully affected life upon this earth as Jesus of Nazareth. His teachings are profound. (If you have never read the New Testament account for yourself, a good place to begin would be with the *Gospel of John* or the *Gospel of Luke*). It is hard to read the account of Jesus’ life and teachings and maintain that He was either a liar or a lunatic (the only other two alternatives).

2. The second is the historical evidence for His rising from the dead. If anyone could disprove the resurrection they could disprove Christianity. However, to do so, they would have to explain what happened to His mutilated body; how the tomb, which was guarded by Roman soldiers, got empty; why over 500 people claimed to have seen Him physically alive; and several other equally difficult questions. Unlike other religious leaders, Christ’s grave is empty. For further reading I highly recommend Josh McDowell’s book *The Resurrection Factor*.

3. The third major piece of evidence is the documented accounts of Jesus’ miracles from both Christian and non-Christian sources (such as the writings of *Josephus*). If Jesus is God, then for Him to heal someone, or calm a stormy sea, would be no big deal, but merely a small repeat of what He did when He created the world. The New Testament clearly teaches that Christ, as God, is creator [John 1:3,10; Colossians 1:15-18; Hebrews 1:1,2].

4. Fourth is the trustworthiness of the eyewitnesses themselves. If you can’t trust them, you might as well throw out the first three pieces of evidence. Of the original twelve disciples, not counting Judas, tradition tells us that all but John were killed for their belief and bold profession that Jesus had conquered death, that they had seen Him alive after the crucifixion, and that He was the one hope for mankind.

Would these men have willingly died for something they knew to be a lie?—Would you die for a lie, especially if it involved saying that some man had risen from the dead, when you really knew his body was rotting somewhere? I don’t think so.

Further, they passed on to the world its highest moral and ethical teachings. Would these teachings have knowingly been founded on a lie?—No.

Plus, in the gospel accounts the disciples don’t paint themselves as goody-two-shoe saints, as one would expect if they

were making up the story. Instead, they recorded their spats, Peter's denial, their cowardice, etc. Yet, these Jews, who only believe in one God [the one religion in all the world least likely to entertain such beliefs about God becoming man], spoke of the glory and sinlessness of Jesus, and called Him "Lord" and "God" [e.g., John 1:1,14; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Romans 9:5, etc.]. They even worshiped Him [Matthew 28:9,17], an act reserved only for God in Jewish teaching [Exodus 20:3; Matthew 4:10].

And remember, these followers of Christ had lived with him day in and day out for three years, and yet after knowing Him so intimately they were still willing to die for their belief that He was sinless, God-become-man. Can you think of one person you've known for three months, let alone three years, who you'd say is without sin? Do you have any friends who would say that about you? [Me neither.]

5. Fifth is the reliability of the Bible as a historical document. Do you know that there are over 24,600 partial or complete manuscripts of the New Testament in either Greek or Latin? The second best documented manuscript of antiquity is *The Iliad and The Odyssey* by Homer. It has around 600 manuscripts. Most ancient documents have fewer than 10 original copies still in existence, yet they are still considered "A-1" historical documents by historians. For example, there are only 7 existing copies of the works of Plato, and 5 of Aristotle's works.

Even if all of the New Testament manuscripts were destroyed, we could still reconstruct all of the New Testament, with the exception of about eleven verses, from the writings of the early church fathers before the year 325 A.D.. Even non-Christian historians have to admit that by all scientific, archaeological, and historical standards applied to any ancient manuscript, the New Testament we have today is over 99.9 percent reliable. Not one word in a 1,000 is in question, and no major doctrine is in doubt.

6. Sixth is the testimony of believers. There are many people of every age, nationality, social class, or century, like myself, who say they have *experienced* the living Christ. The accounts of restored lives, answers to prayer, healed bodies and other evidences are hard, if not impossible, to explain unless Christ is alive.

7. The last major piece of evidence is prophecy. There were many prophecies in the Bible foretelling Christ's coming, including where He was to be born [Micah 5:2], that He would die having his hands and feet pierced [Psalm 22:16; cf., Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10], and it also pinpointed the exact week and year He would die [Daniel 9:25,26—read *Daniel's Prophecy Of The Seventy Weeks* by McClain to better understand this prophecy]. The Bible also predicted that Jesus would conquer death by being resurrected [Psalm 16:10; cf., Acts 2:22-27].

How could the Bible predict such astounding things hundreds of years in advance if the Bible weren't true and Christ weren't who He claimed to be? The odds are astronomical, approaching infinity, that any one man could fulfill these exact prophecies made by many prophets over a span of several hundred years.—It was God's way to be sure we wouldn't mistake His coming.

Would you care to make a prediction that 600 years from now a great religious world leader will be born in a certain small town with a population of less than 500 people? And, could you predict 600 years in advance the exact year and week this person would die? The Bible did.

Some scholars used to say that the Bible writers had taken events from the past and written about them in such a way as to make it sound like they were yet to happen. However, with the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*, we can now prove that the prophecies were written before the actual events, especially the prophecies about Jesus as recorded in the books of Isaiah and Daniel.

In a booklet of this size I cannot go into detail but I recommend you read Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Volume 1*, for more on this subject.

The Bible also predicts future events still to come. According to the Bible, God will not let sin and evil go on forever. There is a day coming when Christ is going to return and set up His kingdom here on this earth. Jesus said that no one would know the exact day or hour of His return, but He did say that we would know it was getting close when we began to see certain signs [Matthew 24:33].

There are far more prophecies about Christ's second return than there were concerning His first coming. The Bible is very clear concerning the props that must be in place before Christ returns. As I read my Bible and the morning newspaper, it is getting close . . . very close!

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY ALL ABOUT?

Love!

Let me explain, as best I can, what I believe are the basic teachings of Christianity. Most who call themselves Christians will agree with what I am about to share. The main differences between most Christian denominations are over minor doctrines (e.g., modes of baptism, styles of worship, etc.), not these major truths.

I will list Bible references in case you want to read where these ideas are found.

STEPS TO KNOWING GOD

Principle #1: God is a God of love [I John 4:16]. He loves you [John 3:16], and has a wonderful plan for your life [John 10:10, Ephesians 2:10]. What God wants for you is awesome beyond belief [Ephesians 3:14-21].

Principle #2: So, what went wrong? Why aren't more people experiencing what God intended? It is because our sin separates us from a holy God [Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23]. Sin is active or passive rebellion against God. It is missing God's mark of perfection. Because God is "holy" [pure and blameless], totally without sin [Isaiah 6:1-5, I John 1:5], we cannot just bop into God's presence. Just as you would not be allowed to walk on someone's expensive white carpet if you had oily, muddy shoes, neither will God tolerate sin in Heaven. If we went to Heaven without a change in our sin nature, we would corrupt and pollute Heaven as we have the earth.

We all fall short of God's standard of perfection. If we lined up in front of the Grand Canyon, and tried to jump across it, some might jump further than others; but the point is, we would all fall short. [Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; Romans 1:18]. Because Adam and Eve chose to sin, the Bible teaches that this sin nature got passed on to all subsequent generations; the same way a leopard inherits its spots from its parents [Genesis 3; Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-21].

According to the Bible, sin is more than murder, stealing or adultery [Exodus 20]. It is such things as boasting in our own achievements and not giving God credit [James 4:16]. Sex outside of marriage is sin [Romans 1-2]. Lying, gossip, slander, cheating, cowardice, yielding to fear and not trusting God, coveting what others possess, not acting in faith, being disrespectful to parents, putting worldly success or money before God, unforgiveness, lack of prayer, failure to keep our promises, looking lustfully at someone, swearing, not acting in love, and a whole host of other things, are sin [Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; Romans 14:23; Matthew 5,6; etc.].

According to the Bible, we all stand guilty before God, no matter whether we have sinned a little or a lot [James 2:10].—It is like the man who said, "*But, judge, look at all the people I didn't kill.*"—The point? None of us deserves to go to Heaven. Scripture teaches that we have all sinned against an eternal God and committed eternal crimes.—Stating it bluntly, unless God forgives us, we're doomed and deserving of hell. As a good and righteous judge, God cannot just sweep our sins under the carpet.

Principle #3: Christ is the only way to God. He died to pay the penalty for our sin [II Thessalonians 1:8-9; John 3:16; Romans 5:8, Acts 20:28]. He is the bridge that connects a holy God with sinful man. Either we go to God through him, or we do not get to God [I Timothy 2:5].

The story is told of a young woman who received a phone call stating her dad was ill, and that he only had a matter of hours to live. Because she lived a couple hundred miles away, she got in her car and began frantically driving to see her father. As she was going through a small southern town, she looked in her rear view mirror, and there was a cop car chasing her. Because she was going so fast, the officer didn't merely give her a ticket, he arrested her. The next day she appeared before the local county judge who told her that for going 50 miles per hour above the speed limit, her fine would be \$300 or three days in jail. She pleaded with the judge. "Your honor, you don't understand, I don't have \$300 with me, and I can't spend three days in jail. I must go see my father who is dying." The judge said, "I'm sorry, young lady, but the law says you must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail."

As she began to weep, the judge was moved with compassion. To the surprise of everyone in the court, he stood up, stepped down from the bench, walked over, took off his robe, put on his sport coat, walked around in front of the bench, pulled out his checkbook, wrote a check for \$300, and laid it on the bench. Then he walked back around, took off his sport coat, put back on his robe, and resumed his seat. He said, "Young lady, the law is very clear. You must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail! But, I see someone has paid the fine for you. Case dismissed!"

In essence, that is what God did for us. The Bible says that the penalty for sin is death [Romans 6:23]. When we stood condemned, without hope, deserving death and hell, God took off his robe of deity, put on a robe of humanity, became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, and died for us. God did for us what we could never do for ourselves [Romans 5:6]. According to scripture, Jesus is both God and man. He has two natures: one human, the other one divine [Philippians 2:6,7 and Romans 1:3,4]. As man he bridged the gap between us and God. If we have received forgiveness, when we

stand before God as Judge, we will be standing before the very One who loved us and paid the fine for us.—Case dismissed!

Principle #4: Knowing the first three principles is not enough. It takes a response on our part. While we cannot earn salvation [Isaiah 64:6; Ephesians 2:8-9], it is nonetheless a *gift* which must be received. John 1:12 says, “*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*”—How do you receive the gift of salvation?

First, you must *believe* that Jesus really did die for your sins: past, present and future, and that he arose from the dead [I Corinthians 15:3-5, Romans 10:9].

Since it is your sin which has been keeping you from God, you must acknowledge your sin and be willing to turn away from it [Mark 1:14,15]. The Bible calls this *repentance*, which simply means to *turn around*.—If you are headed down a one way street the wrong direction, away from God, turn around. As you turn back to God, ask God to forgive you and receive you back. The Bible says that if you will confess [admit] your sins, no matter how great or small they are, God will forgive you [Isaiah 1:18; I John 1:9]. The moment you do this you are totally, 100%, forgiven. Your sins will *never* be held against you [Romans 4:7,8].

The tale is told of a man who tightrope walked across Niagara Falls with a 200 pound sack of sand on his back. Upon successfully completing his feat he turned to a spectator and asked, “Do you believe I could do that again?” The person said “Sure!” The tightrope walker tossed down the sand and said, “Then climb on my back.”—Real believing is more than giving mental assent to the claims of Christ. God asks you to “climb on board,” and commit yourself to him. It is more than believing something to be true in your head. It is a commitment of the heart.

As an act of faith, in order to become a Christian, you must invite Jesus to come into your life to be your Savior and Lord. [*Savior* refers to the fact that he *saves* us from our sin, and *Lord* simply means boss, the One in charge.] It means getting out of the driver’s seat, and letting him be in the driver’s seat of your life.

Once you do this, not only are you forgiven, but God places his Holy Spirit within you. [Ephesians 1:7-14, Galatians 2:20]. You become a child of God.

Let me share a simple illustration. Would you go to a stranger’s funeral and ask the family of the deceased for a share of the inheritance? You could tell them, “I’m a *good person*, and I do nice things for others.”—Would that impress them? No. They’d say, “I’m sorry, but the inheritance is for family members’ only. We don’t even know you.”

Well, the same is true with God. You must be born into God’s family if you expect to *inherit* what is God’s. His inheritance is for his children, for those who *know* him. That is why Jesus said unless a person is *born again*, he or she will never see the Kingdom of Heaven [John 3:3-18]. The moment you receive Christ into your life, you are spiritually reborn into God’s family. You become a joint heir with Christ [Romans 8:32]. You inherit eternal life, and glory beyond your wildest imagination awaits you [I Corinthians 2:9; 3:21-23; Ephesians 1:3; Romans 8:31,32].

If you meet God’s conditions for salvation, which I have just outlined, you can *know* and rest assured you are a child of God; that when you die you will go to Heaven, where you will live with God forever [John 14:1,2; Revelation 21:1-4]. I John 5:11-13 says, “*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may KNOW you have eternal life.*” [emphasis mine]—How can you *know* for sure that you will go to Heaven? Does it depend on how you feel, or upon circumstances? No. If you do what God says, believe in Christ, God will hold up his end of the bargain. God does not lie.

The Bible says that if you pray and ask for *anything* according to God’s will, He will answer you [I John 5:14].—So, is it God’s will that you *believe* in and *receive* Jesus? Yes. [See: II Peter 3:9.] Therefore, when you ask God to forgive you and come into your life, you can count on it [Romans 10:9, Ephesians 3:17].

Speaking for myself, I entered into a relationship with Jesus when I was 14 years old. I prayed and asked Jesus Christ to come into my life and forgive me of my sins.—And he did. It was that simple. To my amazement, it worked. God’s peace flooded through me. Old feelings of guilt were gone [II Corinthians 5:17]. As I read the Bible, it finally began to make sense. I also began seeing God answer specific prayers, which utterly surprised me. God became real to me. While being a Christian has not always been easy, I wouldn’t trade the joy of knowing Christ for anything in the world.

Christianity isn’t simply a religion; it is a relationship with the living God. God doesn’t want you to merely believe he exists. He wants you to know him, and for you to love him. As a lover of your soul, God has proposed to you. The question is, will you say, “I do”?

ATIME OF DECISION

If you feel the Spirit of God speaking to you, and you become convinced in your heart, and in your mind, that what

I have written is true, then you face a decision.

No matter how much evidence I give, the final step is one of faith, even though there is solid evidence upon which to base that faith. For example, I can't *prove* that George Washington lived, but I can show overwhelming evidence that he did. By *faith*, I believe George Washington lived, and by *faith*, I believe Christianity is true, based on evidence, the fact that it works, and that I know Jesus has changed my life.

A simple way for you to test the truthfulness of what I've said is for you to actively, honestly, seek God on His terms [as best you understand], with a willingness to follow the truth, whatever that is. Not to honestly seek God with all of your heart, is to gamble with your soul. Choosing not to decide is a decision. To do nothing is the same as saying "No."

You may want to pray something like this, "*Dear Lord God, if You're there, and what this booklet says is true about Jesus, then I want to know. Please show me the truth.*"—Praying this prayer will not make you a Christian, but it is an honest start.

Secondly, read.—Read the Bible. Don't just rely on what you have heard. Study it for yourself. Look up the verses in this booklet. Think with your mind; listen with your heart. If you are still struggling with doubt, read some of the books I mention in this booklet. There are well thought-out answers to virtually any question you can ask.

Some day you will stand before God, either forgiven or unforgiven. Hell is one of those horrible doctrines most Christians, myself included, don't like to discuss. However, Jesus talked about it more than all the other Bible writers put together. Not to choose God, and accept his offer of forgiveness, is to choose a life of eternal separation from Him [Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:11-15; II Thessalonians 1:8-9; Matthew 13:40-43]. God is serious when it comes to sin. God judges sin. If you refuse his forgiveness, and you hang on to your sin, you will die with your sin, like a person refusing to get off the Titanic. If there were any other way, Jesus would not have had to die. There is no other sacrifice acceptable to God than the death of Jesus on the cross. Scripture says, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" [Acts 4:12].

There is no sin too great for God to forgive. He loves you. He died for you. Whatever you have done, whatever guilt you are carrying, God is willing to forgive. God does not lie. He promises to forgive you *if* you will but ask [Isaiah 1:18; I John 1:9]. He will give you the strength to overcome any sin [I Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13]. With God's Spirit living in and through you, you can begin to experience God's peace and joy [John 14:27; Galatians 2:20, 5:22; Romans 7:14-8:11].

This may be a hard decision for you. Much is at stake. If you receive Jesus as Lord, it will cost you. You may be misunderstood. Friends and family members may reject you.—Welcome to the club. Jesus was also misunderstood and rejected.—He was willing to die for you. Are you willing to live for him?

No one has a deciding vote in this decision but you. God votes for you. Satan, who is also very real, votes against you. I pray that you will cast your deciding vote before it is too late. According to scripture, there are no second chances in another life [Hebrews 9:27].—The question is whether you are willing to receive him and give your life to him. Jesus said, "*Here I am! I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone [you] hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in . . .*" Revelation 3:20.

If you become convinced that what I have said is true, then find a quiet place and make your peace with God by confessing your sins to him, and inviting Jesus into your life. What greater joy could you have than to know your sins are forgiven, that you have been given eternal life, and that you are ready to meet Jesus when he returns [Zechariah 14:1-9; I John 3:1-3].

When you are ready to make your peace with God, I suggest you pray something like this: "*Dear Jesus, I thank you for loving me. I am sorry for the ways that I have sinned against you. I believe you died on the cross for my sin. As best as I know how, right now, I invite you to come into my life. Please forgive me, and cleanse me, from all my sin. Make me the person you want me to be. I need you. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.*"

These words are not magical. The important thing is that you mean them [I John 5:11-15]. Once you have invited Jesus Christ to be a part of your life, I encourage you to find a loving church where the Bible is both honored and taught. Make public your commitment to Christ by getting baptized [Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 10:47, 48a]. Visit several churches before you pick a church. Pray about it, and listen to your heart. God can lead you. It is sort of like trying on a new pair of shoes. You don't necessarily want to buy the first pair you try on.

Continue to pray, read scripture, and allow God to speak to you. If you're a student in high school, check out such groups as Campus Life, Young Life, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, K-Life, etc. If you are in college, there are some wonderful college ministries such as Campus Crusade For Christ, the Navigators, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, etc. Groups such as these are a great way to begin to grow and to find support throughout the week. Even if you are not

a student, call these groups to find some good churches in your area.

The story is told of a native witch doctor who had done much evil in his life, causing much needless suffering through his superstitious beliefs. As a result of the love and work of some Christian missionaries, he yielded his heart to Christ. He called a tribal meeting to share with his village the transformation that had occurred in his life. He said that before he came to know Christ it was as though there was an evil dog in him that made him do cruel, hateful things. When he repented, and asked Christ into his life, he said it was as though a powerful good dog of love and peace came to live in him.

As he spoke, a small lad sitting at his feet grew more and more absorbed with what he was saying. When the lad couldn't take the suspense any longer, he blurted out, "Did the bad dog leave?" The former witch doctor paused and said, "No, son, he still hangs around." The boy asked "How do the two dogs get along?" The old man replied, "They fight all the time!" The little boy, with great concern in his voice said, "Well, which one wins?" The old man, with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes said, "The one I feed the most."—How true.

There are spiritual battles that will go on in your life. Just as God and angels are real, Satan and his demons are also real. The New Testament has much to say about them. Beside the books I've mentioned thus far, there are three books I highly recommend to help you gain and maintain spiritual victory in your life. The first two are written by Dr. Neil Anderson; *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*. The third book is *Search For Significance* by Robert McGee. I also recommend such Christian writers as Charles Swindoll, Josh McDowell, and Max Lucado as profound, yet readable authors. If you like heavier philosophical reading, try C.S. Lewis [e.g., *Mere Christianity*, <http://cslewis.DrZeus.net>] or Peter Kreeft [e.g., *Making Sense Out Of Suffering*].

To grow as a new Christian, I suggest you contact any of the following Christian organizations for their assistance and literature. Check your local phone book, inquire at a Christian bookstore, or access them over the internet.

Billy Graham Evangelistic Assoc.: <http://www.graham-assn.org>

Campus Crusade For Christ: <http://www.ccci.org>

Fellowship Of Christian Athletes: <http://www.gospel.com.net/fca/>

Freedom In Christ Ministries [Dr. Neil Anderson]: <http://www.ficm.org>

Great Commission Ministries: <http://www.greatcommission.org>

Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship: <http://www.ivpress.com>

Josh McDowell Ministries: <http://www.ccci.org/josh/>

The Navigators: <http://www.gospel.com.net/navs/>

Youth For Christ: <http://www.gospel.com.net/yfc/>

* You can also log onto <http://www.gospel.com.net/> for addresses of other Christian organizations and resources.

Keep feeding the good side. May His grace and peace be yours.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

This booklet is one of several booklets in a series I've written defending the Christian faith. You can read or download any of my booklets off the internet at: <http://www.Crosslink.com>.

In this series there are booklets addressed to many different religious groups, including Muslims and Satanists. Due to the potential risk to my family by those violently opposed to Christianity [such as some Muslim extremists and Satanists], I have chosen to write under the pen name, Timothy Cross.

Why the name Timothy Cross?—Because it was Timothy who was told by the apostle Paul to *guard the gospel* [II Timothy 1:13,14]. What is the central message of the *gospel* [which means *good news*]? Is it not the *cross* of Jesus Christ [I Corinthians 1:18-2:2]? Our salvation before a holy God depends upon Christ's work on the cross where He laid down His life for us.

We live in a world of celebrities. By writing under a pseudo-name, it takes me out of the picture, and puts the focus where it should be, upon the truthfulness and trustworthiness of Jesus Christ and Him alone.

So you know a little about me, I am an evangelical Christian. I became a Christian through Youth For Christ in high school, and was very involved with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship as an undergraduate in college. I have always chosen church denominations which are broadly evangelical and inter-denominational in flavor [e.g. Evangelical Free Churches, Evangelical Covenant, Great Commission Ministries, etc.]. On more than one occasion, I worked closely with Josh McDowell [Campus Crusade For Christ] .

I hope this booklet helps you discover and walk in the awesome truth that you are loved by God.

With deepest respect,
Timothy Cross

SOME OF THE KEY SCRIPTURES USED IN THIS BOOKLET

- **Romans 6:23**—“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”
- **Isaiah 59:2**—“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”
- **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.”
- **Romans 5:8**—“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- **Romans 3:23**—“. . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God . . .”
- **I John 1:9**—“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”
- **John 1:12**—“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God . . .”
- **Revelation 3:20**—“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in [to him].” (bracket mine)
- **Galatians 2:20**— “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The live I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- **Ephesians 2:8-9**—“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”
- **II Corinthians 5:17**—“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”
- **Revelation 20:11-15**—“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.”
- **I Corinthians 10:13**—“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”
- **Philippians 4:13**—“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”
- **Galatians 5:22**—“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control . . .”
- **Hebrews 9:27**—“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment. . .”
- **I John 5:11-15**—“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may **know** that you have eternal life.” (emphasis mine)