

# THE BUDDHA AND THE CHRIST

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**A LOVING CALL FOR BUDDHISTS AND ZEN BUDDHISTS TO  
DEEPEN THEIR SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING BY EXPLORING THE  
SIMPLE, YET PROFOUND, TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.**

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**by Bart Larson**

## **INTRODUCTION**

In college, many years ago, I developed a very close friendship with a graduate student from Japan named Kazu. He was a practicing Buddhist, and I was a practicing Christian. We met weekly for an entire school year to discuss the differences and similarities between our two faiths. It was a great learning experience for both of us.

Kazu had heard about Jesus, but he had never taken the time to investigate the person and claims of Christ.—Like Kazu, I invite you to join me as I discuss the life and teachings of Jesus. [If you don’t have a Bible in your own language, I encourage you to get one. Most Christian bookstores can order Bibles in other languages. The best way to learn about Jesus is to actually read the words He spoke, not merely read what I or anyone else have to say about Him. Then you can form your own conclusions.]

## **WHY SHOULD YOU INVESTIGATE CHRISTIANITY?**

While philosophies may vary, and some may be better than others, Jesus claimed to speak the very words of God. In fact, He claimed to be *God* become *man*! [In the Bible, read: John 1:1, 14; 8:58; 14:6-9—cf. Philippians 2:6,7, etc.]. Such claims should not be taken lightly. With all that is good about Buddhism, why should you investigate Christianity?—Because of *truth*. If Christianity is true and God did visit this planet in human form, then such a truth should be embraced. If it isn’t true, Christianity should be rejected as a false religion. It is that simple. Unlike most religions, Christianity is based upon the fact that people can have a relationship with the living God. If God really did come to this earth in the form of a man, and God is truly knowable, wouldn’t you like to know Him?

Am I saying Buddha was an evil man and that all that he taught was wrong? Of course not. But for the sake of *truth*, and the possibility of discovering that you can actually *know* God, you owe it to yourself to at least investigate the evidence for yourself. But please, do not remain neutral. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father [God], but through me.” [John 14:6]. If He is indeed God-become-man, and ultimate truth is found in Him, then only a fool would reject Him. If He were found to be a liar or crazy, then only a fool would worship Him. Too much is at stake to casually dismiss the radical claims of Christ. Even if you never embrace Christianity, reading this booklet will help you better understand and relate to Christians.

## **ALOOK AT THE FOUNDERS**

[In each section of this booklet I will list in brackets the references in the Bible where certain concepts are taught. I encourage you to acquire a Bible in your own language, and look up these verses. This will greatly aid in your understanding

the teachings of Jesus and His followers.]

Over the centuries, both Buddhism and Christianity have evolved a lot from their humble beginnings. Because of all the changes with different sects and denominations, it is sometimes hard to clearly define what is pure Buddhism or pure Christianity. I will not attempt to define Buddhism, except in the most basic of terms. I am sure you know far better than I the subtleties within your own faith [*Hinayan, Mahayana, Zen, etc.*]. What I do feel comfortable defining is basic, foundational Christianity; that which most Christians of all denominations would agree upon [except for a few cult groups which deny the historic faith of the church].

However, before I try to define Christianity, allow me to compare and contrast the lives of Buddha and Jesus. This may help you better understand some of the similarities and differences between these two world religious leaders.

### **1. Their Births And Early Years:**

Buddha was born in 563 B.C., in what is now modern day Nepal. His full name was *Siddhartha* (his given name), *Gautama* (his family name) and *Sakyamuni* (sage of the Sakya). He preceded Jesus by approximately 559 years. Jesus was probably born in 4 B.C. The fifth century Christian monk who calculated the dating for our modern calendars, starting with the birth of Christ, miscalculated the birth of the Roman emperor Octavian-Augustus by at least four years, thus he probably dated the birth of Jesus four year later that it really was.

Buddha was born into Hindu royalty, and married a beautiful princess named *Yasodhara* when he was nineteen. They had a son named *Rahula*.

Jesus, on the other hand, was born in Palestine (modern day Israel) in the small town of Bethlehem. He never married. The Bible teaches that Jesus' birth was miraculous. To authenticate it as being from God, God hundreds of years before gave specific prophecies to the Jewish prophets foretelling that someday God was going to send a deliverer known as the *Messiah*, or *Christ*.

At the time of her conception, Jesus' mother, Mary, was a virgin, and engaged to be married, when an angel appeared to her, and told her that she would become pregnant; not through any man, but through a miracle from God. The Bible says she never had sex until after Jesus was born. Joseph, her fiancée, naturally thought she had committed adultery with another man, but an angel appeared to Joseph reassuring him that his wife was still a virgin, and that she had miraculously become pregnant through God's Holy Spirit.

While Mary was still pregnant, she, along with her husband Joseph, had to travel to Bethlehem in order to register for a census the Roman government was conducting. It was in Bethlehem that Jesus was born. [See Matthew chapters 1-3.] This was in fulfillment of the Jewish prophecy which stated that Israel's messiah would be born in Bethlehem [Micah 10:2]. Jesus was born in a lowly stable (a barn or cave for animals), as there was no room for them in the inn. Jesus worked as a carpenter in his father, Joseph's, carpenter shop until He was thirty, at which time He began His public ministry.

### **2. Their Religious Upbringings:**

Buddha was born and raised a Hindu. He later abandoned many of his Hindu beliefs. He continued to believe in reincarnation and that the goal of life was to reach a state of Nirvana, similar to the Hindu belief of being reunited with the world soul (Brahma). It is uncertain whether Buddha believed in the existence of an Almighty God. Supposedly, he believed in many gods, and considered them a higher grade of living being. Because all of Buddha's teachings were passed on orally for at least 200 years, it is uncertain how much of what he really taught was accurately passed on to his followers. It is possible that Buddha may have even been an agnostic, or an atheist. In any event, it seems apparent that belief in a God, or gods, was not of major importance to him.

Jesus, on the other hand, was born and raised a Jew. Jews believe in one God who is infinitely personal, the creator of Heaven and earth. He believed in the writings of the Hebrew prophets, whose writings now comprise the Jewish Bible, and in Christianity comprise the portion of the Bible known as the New Testament. Being a conservative religious Jew, Jesus also believed in Heaven, the place where God's presence abides, and where spirits go to be with God after death. Unlike Nirvana, Heaven is viewed as a tangible place where each person's spirit retains his or her identity after death, and enjoys the blessedness of living in the presence and glory of God for all eternity. Jesus also believed in Hell, a place of eternal torment and punishment for those who reject God's salvation.

### **3. How Each Entered Their Ministries:**

Supposedly, when Buddha was in his thirties, for the first time in his life he left the sheltered environment of his palace estate. He encountered an old man, a sick man, a dead man and a *sanyassin* [one who has renounced worldly possessions]. He was so moved by these encounters that he left his family and became a traveling *sanyassin* himself.

Buddha unsuccessfully sought for peace for six years without finding it. Finally, “. . . he came to the town of Uruvela in northeastern India. There he sat under the Bodhi tree (a gigantic fig tree) and determined to stay until he received Enlightenment. Forty-nine days later he was illuminated, becoming the Buddha, which means “Enlightened One.” (Jesus, Zoraster, Buddha, Socrates, Muhammad; Inter-Varsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1972; p. 25.)

After this experience, he began teaching and gathering disciples. (His band of followers was called the *Sangha*; meaning *Fellowship* or *Brotherhood*.) Those within Hinduism, by and large, rejected his teachings. Buddhism later gained a strong following in Japan and some other Asian countries.

When Jesus turned thirty, after a 40 day fast, where He was tempted by Satan [an evil angel who is now head over all the forces of evil in the earth], Jesus began His public ministry by teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God. His teachings were clearly set within the confines of Judaism. It is apparent from the New Testament [the part of the Christian Bible which deals with Christianity] that He considered Himself to be the Christ, the Jewish *Messiah* [John 4:25,26]. As mentioned before, the term *Messiah* is synonymous with the word *Christ* which means *deliverer*; a term often used of Jesus.

#### 4. Their Main Teachings:

Succinctly stated, Buddha taught that all evil and suffering result from our desires.

Buddha had “Four Noble Truths:” (1) Suffering exists [*dukkha*]. (2) The cause of suffering is desire [*tanha*]. (3) Suffering can be eliminated by ending desire [*Nirvana*]. (4) The way to eliminate suffering is through an Eightfold Path.

He taught that everything is impermanent and that lasting happiness cannot be found in this temporal world [*samsara*] of change. The Eightfold Path for eliminating desires consists of: (1) right views (2) aspirations (3) speech (4) conduct (5) livelihood (6) effort, (7) mindfulness and (8) contemplation.

Jesus, on the other hand, taught that He was the incarnation of the one God [God become man], and that He had come to die for the sins of the world in order that mankind might be able to receive the gift of eternal life. In ancient Judaism, a lamb without spot or blemish was sacrificed annually for the sins of the nation. Jesus proclaimed that He had come to die as “the Lamb of God,” not just for the sins of Israel, but for the sins of the entire world (Isaiah 53:6,7; John 1:29; 3:16).

Jesus also taught that the one, eternal God exists as three distinct Personages: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. For example, in Matthew 28:19 Jesus taught His disciples that they were to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in “the name” (singular in Greek) of the “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Jesus used the singular noun, *name*, to modify the three [plural] Personages of God. This is one of many places where Christians derive the term *Trinity*, meaning Trinity or three in one. In the Bible, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each referred to with personal pronouns, and each is spoken of as “God” [e.g., *Father*: John 8:54; *Jesus*: John 1:1,14, Hebrews 1:8; *Holy Spirit*: Acts 5:3,4]. And yet, Jesus clearly taught there is only “one” God [not three gods].

#### 5. The Historical Records Of Each:

The main teachings of Buddha were passed down orally for almost five hundred years. Some portions of his teachings, however, were written down about 200 years after his death, at which time many of his followers deified him and began worshipping him as a god [something Buddha, himself, may have resisted].

The written records about Jesus’ life and teachings were penned by his disciples shortly after His death, burial and resurrection. I’ll say more about the reliability of these and other New Testament documents later.

#### 6. How The Followers Treat Each Founder:

Most Buddhists today consider Buddha a *Mahapurisa* [a super-human being], who is greater than the gods themselves. According to the *Lotus of the True Law*, the Buddha was an eternal being, who appeared in human form as the savior of mankind. (ibid, p.32.)

Christians [with the exception of a few cult groups] believe that Jesus was the incarnation of the one, eternal, creator God who came into the world. He is worshiped as God. Christian’s worship of Jesus is not to be confused with pantheism which treats all things as God [nature, people, etc.]. Jesus, too, is viewed as Savior of the world.

#### 7. How Jesus and Buddha Differed In Their Ministry And Their Message:

There are some fairly significant differences between Buddha’s approach to dealing with people’s problems and Jesus’ approach. Here are some of the differences I see:

a. Buddha dealt with the problems of pain, suffering and evil in our world by withdrawing from them, and trying not to feel them.—For example, when Buddha saw a dying person and a poor man, there is no indication that he tried to help them. Instead, Buddha was so moved by what he saw that he withdrew emotionally, abandoned his wife and child, and

led a monastic life and became a traveling *sanyassin*. Buddha's solution was not to feel. He believed that feelings and desires were the root of our problems.

By contrast, Jesus healed the sick. His followers were taught to care for the needy and poor. Jesus taught active compassion, "love your neighbor as you love yourself." [Read Matthew 9:19; 25:31-46 to see what Jesus had to say about love.] Jesus entered into our sufferings, felt them, died for them, and then rose again to conquer them. The Bible says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." [Hebrews 4:15,16].

**b.** Buddha taught that feelings and desires were to be repressed. We are to detach ourselves from this world and to focus on Nirvana. Nirvana is described as a state of peace. The actual root word of *Nirvana* means "extinction," the way a fire is extinguished. In one sense, as one progresses higher into the teachings of Buddha, one is to try to lose one's identity and extinguish all feelings by being totally detached from the things of this world. Nirvana becomes a place of peaceful nothingness, a state of non-being to escape the endless cycle of meaningless reincarnations and the pain and misery of this world. In psychological terms, Buddha's approach was to totally repress his feelings and emotions, and to detach himself from his environment. Buddha acknowledged suffering and evil, but, to my knowledge, he did not address, nor explain, how suffering and evil came into existence. He withdrew from suffering.

Jesus was a person of feelings. He often spoke of joy and love. Rather than withdrawing from this world, as though evil could not be conquered, He instead taught that there is a personal presence of evil in this world, Satan. Satan's kingdom is to be resisted. Christianity teaches that evil is a perversion of good. The solution is to *not* to deny it, or repress the feelings evoked by it, but to actively combat it and overcome it.—"*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good*" [Romans 12:21].

God is seen as personal and the creator of feelings. The fruit of a God-centered, God-filled, life will result in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control" [Galatians 5:22]. In Christianity, one is to worship God with passion, singing, praise, and joy in the company of other believers. "You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your mind and all of your soul." (Mark 12:30) Christianity is not a solitary religion. It is a community of believers, called the *church*, where deep feelings, passions, and godly desires are expressed in worship.

**c.** Buddha never spoke of God as being personal or knowable. There were no instructions about worshipping God. Nor did he teach about judgment. Buddha supposedly did believe in reincarnation. Again, to my knowledge, he did not indicate how, or who, determines one's fate after death, nor by what standard one's karma is judged as being good or bad. He did teach, that after possibly countless reincarnations, one's life can end in Nirvana.

Jesus on the other hand taught that God is personal, all-knowing, all-loving and a God of justice. He taught that after death, our spirits go on living, that there is a holy accounting for our lives. He believed that there were absolute moral standards of right and wrong [e.g. The Ten Commandments]. He instructed His followers that sin and suffering are real, that there is such a thing as true moral guilt. When we sin we need forgiveness. When we are sinned against, we need healing. Jesus did not believe in reincarnation. Rather His followers were taught that following death come judgment [e.g., Luke 20:34-36; Hebrews 9:27]. Instead of reincarnation, Jesus taught the resurrection of the body and judgment.

### **How Buddha And Jesus Each Died:**

Buddha, in the eighteenth year of his travels as a *sanyassin* monk, ate some bad pork, became very sick (most likely from dysentery) and died. He was cremated and his ashes taken to eight cities. Shrines all over Asia supposedly have some of his ashes.

Jesus was martyred. Jesus had predicted His death. He was crucified by Roman soldiers at the prompting of the Jewish Sanhedrin (court of 70 Jewish elders). According to Christian teaching, Jesus voluntarily submitted to death in order to die for the sins of the world [John 10:18]. It is also believed that three days later He arose from the grave [Matthew 28; I Corinthians 15].

### **Summary Of Their Lives:**

It is fair to say that both Jesus and Buddha have influenced billions of people upon the face of this earth. Both Buddhism and Christianity have high moral standards, and both emphasize peace of mind and soul. There are many commendable features in each religion. The main difference, it seems to me, is that Buddhism began as a philosophy and grew into a religion, whereas Christianity from its inception claimed to be divinely inspired by God. Buddha is worshiped

as a god, or one slightly higher than the gods. Jesus is worshiped as God-become-man.

## IS THERE A GOD, AND IF SO, WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

Before I get into the specifics of Christianity, please consider the following foundational concepts upon which all Judeo-Christian thought is based; that God is almighty [all-powerful], God is creator, and God is infinitely personal.

Let's consider each concept briefly.

**1. God is creator:** According to Christian thought, the universe did not just happen by chance. God is viewed as creator of all.

Allow me to tell a story which makes the point about God as creator.—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!”

**2. God is almighty:** Christians believe God is all-powerful [*omnipotent*]. Looking at the scope and awesomeness of our universe, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that if God created this vast universe, all the way down to the tiniest sub-atomic particles, then God must be powerful beyond belief. God must certainly be all-powerful.

**3. God is personal:** A cherished belief within Christianity is that while God is transcendent [above all things], and is omnipotent [all-powerful], God is also personal and knowable; that God has personality and is able to communicate with the spirits of people.

There are a few logic questions we can ask ourselves which make this point. For example, “Can something can come from nothing.” The answer is, “No.” If there is an absolute total void, with nothing whatsoever there (no matter, no energy—no nothing), then nothing will ever come into existence, without first being acted upon by some outside source. Most people assume this is true. Out of absolute nothingness, nothing will ever arise. True?

Following this line of reasoning, does it make sense to believe that a God without intelligence could create people with intelligence? No. (Otherwise, where would the intelligence come from?) Therefore, God must be intelligent, incredibly so to create the universe we see around us. Could a God without personality create people with personality? While that might be arguable, it stands to reason that God in all likelihood is infinitely personal since He created feelings and desires, which are components of personality. Could a God without feelings create people who can feel? Could a God who cannot communicate create people who can communicate? No.—Doesn't it stand to reason that God would possess these qualities in some fashion? Yes, it does.—Therefore, God must contain all the attributes of personality. Logically speaking, God must be infinitely personal as well as all-powerful.

If God is personal and has the ability to communicate, the next question is whether God has communicated with mankind. There are many religions making claims that He has spoken to them, usually through one of their prophets or founders. One of the first steps, it would seem to me, in discovering which of the major world religions might possibly be true is to simply ask which of the world religions believe in an all-powerful, personal, moral God as just described.

With all that is good within Buddhism, the god(s) of Buddhism are not presented as all-powerful.

The reason I would like you to consider seriously the claims of Jesus, is because He not only taught people to believe in such a God, but He actually claimed to *be* God. He told His followers that seeing Him was the same as seeing God [John 14:6-10]. Is it true? Did the transcendent, all-powerful, personal God of this universe choose to become a man in the person of Jesus Christ. There can only be two answers: yes or no.

Please consider with me the following points:

Any person claiming to be God [as Jesus did] would either be mentally ill [psychotic with delusions of grandeur], a deceiver out to pull off one of the greatest scams of all time, or, this Person might actually be the incarnation of God. This is exactly what the Bible teaches concerning Jesus [e.g., John 1:1,14]. In the New Testament, Jesus is called almost every major name used to describe God in the Old Testament: “God,” “Yahweh,” “Lord,” “Creator,” “Savior,” “King

of kings,” “the Alpha and the Omega,” “Holy One,” etc. Even though Jesus taught that God is the only one worthy of worship [Matthew 4:10] He, received worship [Matthew 28:9,17]. It even says the angels of God are 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. It would be the ultimate in blasphemy and arrogance. Jesus, a Jew, would have known that.

To believe 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).

C.S. Lewis—author, professor, and Christian intellectual, 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.—Liar, lunatic, or Lord. If you are to be honest, you must decide. Worship Him or reject Him, but please don't treat Jesus with indifference!

If you really want to know the truth about God, it is not intellectually wise to ignore the life and teachings of the one major religious leader in all of history who actually claimed to be God: Jesus. He is too important of a figure to pass over lightly. 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 Him is to totally fail to grasp the claims He made. The enemies of Jesus clearly understood His claim to divinity. They tried to kill Him for blasphemy because He claimed *equality* and *oneness* with God [e.g., John 5:18; 8:58-59; 10:33, Mark 14:6'1-64, etc.]. All of the main writers of the New Testament, such as Paul and the apostle John, clearly taught the deity of Jesus [e.g., Colossians 2:9; Philippians 2:6,7; Romans 9:5; John 1:1,14; Hebrews 1:1, etc.].

This is even more staggering when we realize that those who were claiming Him to be God, were Jews. Jews, as you know, are monotheistic (believing in one God). When Jesus' disciples called Him *God*, they were not talking about Jesus being a *god*, in some polytheistic (many gods), Hindu sort of way. No, they worshiped Jesus as the incarnation of God Almighty [e.g., Matthew 28:9, John 20:28, Hebrews 1:6, Revelation 5:8-14, Philippians 2:10,11], Creator of the universe [Colossians 1:16-18, Hebrews 1:1].

If Jesus is God, then He could state the truth about God (i.e., Himself) and about the only way to have a right relationship with God, because He is God. Correct?—Whatever 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. If He wasn't God, He'd be crazy, Christianity would be false, and you should avoid it like the plague.

That is why Christianity is such an exclusive religion, and why Christians sometimes seem so narrow-minded. If Christ's claims are true, Christians have no other choice but to proclaim Him as God incarnate, who shed His blood for mankind's sins and evil acts [Acts 10:28, Romans 5:8].—This is one of the main reasons why I am writing you.

Jesus taught that He was the *only* way to God [e.g., John 8:24, 14:6; see also, Acts 4:12]. Christianity is not a matter of likes or dislikes, but an issue of whether Jesus was telling the truth.. Because Christ claims to be God, His teachings are to be regarded more highly than any other religion in the world. It does not mean we are to be disrespectful of other religions, or that 100% of what they teach is wrong, but Christians have an obligation to tell the world about Jesus and His claims [Matthew 28:19-20].

Rather than questioning the severity and harshness of God in making the way to Himself so seemingly narrow, maybe we should look at the severity of sin and the harshness of the human condition which would make it necessary for a holy God to go to such extremes to win mankind back to Himself. According to scripture, God entered this world for the express purpose of dying for the sins of the world [Isaiah 53; John 3:16; Acts 2:23, Romans 5:8].

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

**1.** The first is Jesus' character. From the beginning of time, no other person 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]. Either we believe His seemingly unbelievable claims [to be God] or we disbelieve His believable character.

**2.** The second is the historical evidence for His rising from the dead. This is crucial. Disprove the resurrection and

you disprove Christianity. However, to do so, you would have to explain what happened to Jesus's mutilated body. For example, why didn't the enemies of Jesus just produce the body if He never arose? How did the tomb, which was guarded by Roman soldiers, get empty? Does it make sense that Jesus' disciples would steal the body of Jesus, when every Roman soldier knew that if a prisoner [in this case a corpse] escaped while under his watch it would be his life for the prisoners? Why wasn't there a fight, and why weren't there killed disciples around the tomb? If the soldiers were asleep [which was also a crime], how could the disciples have rolled away a stone weighing over one ton without waking the soldiers?

Another theory says that Jesus, having been crucified by the Romans, swooned in a state of near death, suddenly revived, rolled away a stone weighing 1-2 tons, scared away the Roman soldiers, and told His disciples, "Hey guys. Look, it's me. I've conquered death!" [No way. It takes more faith to believe some of the theories which try to explain away the resurrection, than to believe that Jesus did arise from the dead as He foretold.] And what about the disciples, and over 500 other people who claimed to have seen Him physically alive following His crucifixion? What about Thomas who was told to put his finger into the nail prints in Jesus's hands? What made the disciples, who were cowards before His death, suddenly change and begin preaching a message under the threat of death which eventually turned the whole Roman world upside down?— 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's miracles from both Christian and non-Christian sources. 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]. One reason Christianity spread so rapidly was because of the miracles Jesus and His followers performed. If you were born blind, and you could suddenly see because Jesus touched you, you would probably believe too. [Read the Gospel of John, chapter 9.]

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 who betrayed Christ [as foretold in Psalm 41:9], 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 decomposing somewhere? I think not.

Further, they passed on to the world its highest moral and ethical teachings. Would these teachings have knowingly been founded on a lie? No. The only logical explanation is that they saw Jesus alive three days after His crucifixion, death and burial. This is the central theme of Christianity. [See I Corinthians 15:3-8.]

In the gospel accounts, the disciples didn't falsely cast themselves in a favorable light, as one would expect if they were making up the story. They recorded their own bickerings, Peter's denial, their cowardice, etc. Yet, these Jewish followers of Jesus, 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.]. And, as mentioned earlier, they even went so far as to worship Him [Matthew 28:9,17], an act reserved only for God in Jewish teaching as you know [Deuteronomy 6:13-15; Matthew 4:10].

And remember, these followers of Christ had lived with him day in and day out for three years, and yet they were willing to die for their belief that He was sinless and "God."—Could anyone live with you for even one week and think that of you?

5. Fifth is the reliability of the Bible as a historical document. 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.

Concerning the Hebrew Bible, most Jewish and Christian scholars had been using the Masoretic Hebrew text

dated around 1,000 A.D. In 1947, a young shepherd boy discovered, what we now call, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, in the caves of Qumran near the Dead Sea. They are easily dated around, or before, the time of Christ [100 B.C.-70 A.D.]. They were virtually identical to the Masoretic Text.

Add to this the reverence and painstaking methods that Jewish scribes used to copy, check, and double check their handwritten copies of the Hebrew Bible, including using a mathematical numbering system to see that things “added up.” With this said, you see why the entire Bible is the most well-preserved piece of literature from ancient times. Anyone can dispute its message, not so its historicity.

The Christian Bible as a whole is a miraculous piece of literature. Its 66 books [39 Old and 27 in the New] were written over a period of approximately 1,600 years, by 40 authors, on three different continents [Asia, Europe and Africa]. It was written in three different languages [Hebrew, Chaldean and Greek], with many literary styles (poetry, historical narrative, parables, proverbs, allegory), under all types of conditions [on the battlefield, in times of peace, in prosperity, in poverty, in captivity, at sea, in palaces, in the desert), by all sorts of people [fishermen, shepherds, kings, a physician, a rabbi, a tax collector, scribes, priests], and on about every topic imaginable [God, salvation, sex, money, marriage, family, war, politics, religion, relationships, leadership, business, etc.]. Yet, considering all this, the Bible reads, not as a fragmented mess, but as a unified whole.

The next question, of course, is whether modern translations of the Bible are accurate translations of the originals.

There are many different Bible translations on the market, which often confuses those not familiar with the Bible. Some mistakenly assume that because there are many different Bible translations, they must be saying contradictory things. Except for one or two Bible translations by cult groups where they have altered a few key verses to fit their theology, this is not true. For example, most Bible translations are translated from one of two basic New Testament Greek texts [considered to be most reliable by Biblical scholars] and one basic Old Testament Hebrew text.

Thus, while translations vary in style, they are all saying the same basic thing. To say, “You’re smart,” “Thou art smart,” or “You are erudite [smart],” are all accurate ways of saying the same thing. The content is the same, but the wording varies. The same principle is true of Bible translations.

It is my personal belief that the original writings were “inspired,” perfect in every way [II Timothy 3:16-17]. Modern translations are not inspired, but they are accurate translations of those which were inspired.

6. Sixth is the testimony of believers. Whatever one says, there are many people, like myself, of every age, nationality, social class, or century, 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. The New Testament bears witness to a living, resurrected Lord who is alive and well, and able to change lives.

7. The last major piece of evidence is prophecy. There are at least 48 specific prophecies in the Bible foretelling Messiah’s [Christ’s] coming, including where He was to be born [Bethlehem; Micah 5:2], and that He would suffer and die having his hands and feet pierced [Psalm 22:16; cf., Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10].

Did you know that Daniel the prophet prophesied the exact week in history that Christ would be killed [Daniel 9:24-27]? Put in layman’s terms, this passage says that from the command to “restore and rebuild Jerusalem,” which we can easily date in 445 B.C. by King Artaxerxes, until Messiah would “atone” for sin and be “cut off” [die], would be a total of  $62 + 7$  weeks = 69 “weeks” [= 7 years], or in other words  $69 \times 7 = 483$  years.

Using a Jewish calendar, with operated on 360 days per year, starting at the time Artaxerxes issued his decree, going forward 483 years, it comes out exactly to the week Jesus was crucified [April 6th, 32 A.D.].

Also, the Messiah had to be “cut off” [killed] before the destruction of the temple, which we know occurred in 70 A.D. when Titus and his soldiers destroyed Jerusalem, and burned the temple. [If you really want to understand this prophecy, please get a copy of the small book *Daniel’s Prophecy Of The Seventy Weeks* by McClain and read it.]

What famous Jewish religious figure, claiming to be the Messiah, was born in Bethlehem, died having his hands and feet pierced, on a Day of Atonement, exactly 483 years from when Artaxerxes gave his decree, and before Titus destroyed the sanctuary in 70 A.D.?—There was only one person.—Jesus.

Further, 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 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 probably less than 1,000 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. In Jerusalem, at a museum called the Shrine of the Book, there is a complete copy of the book of Isaiah, with the passage in chapter 53 about the Messiah [Christ] being the suffering servant and dying for the sins of the world. There are also eight copies of the book of Daniel among the *Dead Sea Scroll* parchments.

In a booklet this size I cannot go into detail, but I recommend Josh McDowell's book, *Evidence That Demands A Verdict Volume I*, 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 Messiah is going to return and set up His kingdom, headquartered in Jerusalem. What many fail to realize is that Messiah had to first come as the atoning sacrifice for sin [Isaiah 53] before He could return a second time as King and Judge.

Concerning Jesus' second coming, He 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]. I believe that Christ's return is near, *very near*. And once again, ask yourself, "If the New Testament weren't inspired by God, how could it give predictions 2,000 years ago that read as though they were off the front page of today's newspaper?" If you went to a theater to see a play you had already seen before, and you happened to arrive late, you could tell, just by looking at the props on stage, what was coming next. The same is true about the Lord's return. The Bible is very clear concerning the props which must be in place before Christ returns.

**a.** Virtually all prophecy centers around the nation of Israel, because God has not forgotten His promises to the Jewish people. [There are also some wonderful prophesies for non-Jews.] The Bible predicted that Israel would become a nation again [Daniel 9:27; Ezekiel 37:1-14]. After almost 2,500 years Israel did in 1948. Let me share a quote from Dr. Paul Meier concerning Israel becoming a nation:

*"In the Torah, Moses wrote [Leviticus 26:18 and elsewhere] that in the future, whenever Israel sins greatly as a nation God will allow calamity to come their way. He will however, give them time to repent. If they, as a nation, do not repent after their warning period, then the remainder of their punishment will be multiplied by seven.*

*Over 600 years before the birth of Jesus, God used Ezekiel, a contemporary of Daniel, to show Israel her sin. In Ezekiel 4:3-6, God told the prophet to lie on his side for 430 days to signify the 430 years Israel would spend in exile for her sins. Another contemporary of Daniel's and Ezekiel's, the prophet Jeremiah, predicted that the first 70 years of that 430 years would be a Babylonian exile [Jeremiah 25:11]. That was Israel's warning period.*

*Sure enough, as predicted, Nebuchadnezzar came along and transported the Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon in 606 B.C. Then 70 years later; Cyrus the Great of Persian [possibly Queen Esther's son] conquered Babylon in 536 B.C. and said he would pay for the millions of Jews to go back to Jerusalem. But the Jews refused. Only 50,000 devout Jews went back. The rest didn't want to interrupt their businesses in Babylon [now Iraq].*

*This obviously made God angry, so take 430 years of exile, subtract 70 years of warning, and multiply the remaining 360 years times 7, as Moses instructed in the Torah. You will get 2,520 prophetic years of 360 days each = 907,200 days from the day Cyrus made his decree to return to Jerusalem which comes out [are you ready for a shock?] to May 14, 1948, the day Israel became a nation."*

Has God forgotten His people? No. He was merely carrying out the prescribed judgement on them, brought about when they chose to disobey. [Do you ever get the idea that God takes our choices seriously? I do.]

According to Matthew 24:34, Jesus said *this generation* would not pass away until all these things were fulfilled. Obviously, He wasn't speaking of His own generation 2,000 years ago. So, what generation did He mean? Was it the generation alive when Israel was to become a nation? Most consider a generation 70-80 years. According to that view Christ will likely return before the year 2028, possibly much sooner. The second view is that it will be the generation when all of the major signs He predicted begin to occur. Either way, as I view things, it could be getting close, very close.

**b.** Another event the Bible predicts, is that there will be a coming together of 10 nations recreating the old Roman Empire [Daniel 7:21-25; Revelation 17:12]. Some feel the forming of the European Community in 1992 may be a partial fulfillment of this.

**c.** The Bible has a great deal to say about a 7 year period on the earth known as the Great Tribulation [Daniel 9:26-

27; Matthew 24; Revelation 4-19; Jeremiah 30:7; etc.]. It is the 70th “week” Daniel talked about in the passage we examined earlier. It is a time when *all hell will break loose* on earth. Revelation 8:7-11 describes some of what will happen during this time. It says that a third of the earth will be destroyed by fire and a third of the world’s waters will turn to *wormwood* [poisonous or bitter]. It is interesting, but the Russian word *wormwood* is translated *Chernobyl* [as in the nuclear power plant that experienced a meltdown and spread radioactivity over much of Eastern Europe and Russia].

Most consider this judgment either an asteroid hitting one of earth’s oceans, or possibly nuclear war. For example, after the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima in World War II, thousands and thousands of people died, not only from the bomb blast itself, but also from drinking water contaminated by radioactive fallout.

**d.** Another major prop is that an army out of the East will come toward Israel some day with an army of 200 million men. The Bible says the Euphrates River will dry up before them. Red China today can easily muster an army that size, and isn’t it interesting that the Euphrates River now has a dam across it with huge spillways which could hold back the water [Revelation 9:13-21]. And remember, this prophecy was written when the entire earth’s population was not much larger than 200 million and huge dams did not exist.

**e.** The Bible predicts that there will come a man, called the Anti-Christ, who will proclaim himself to be God, and he will rule the world during much of the seven years of Tribulation. In Revelation 13, it says he will make everyone take a *sign* on the hand or forehead [the number “666”] called the *Mark Of The Beast*. People who do not have it will not be able to buy or sell. With computer technology, computer chips, visible and invisible inks, and laser scanners [like you see at grocery stores] this is easily possible today.

With the instability of the world economy, it is very likely that there could be an economic collapse in the not too distant future.

**f.** During the Tribulation, there will be plagues and diseases which will wipe out a fourth of the world’s population [Revelation 6:7-8]. With AIDS, the ebola virus, germ warfare, and other diseases, this is a real possibility.

**g.** In Matthew 24:6-8, Christ spoke of an increase in *wars, famines and earthquakes*. We have already had two world wars. At the time of this writing, according to the U.S. Geological Survey in Boulder, Colorado, there has been a rapid increase in earthquakes with a magnitude of over 6.0 on the Richter Scale. To give you an idea of how rapidly things are changing look at the following statistics:

1890- 1900	1 major quake	1950-1960	9 major quakes
1900-1910	3 major quakes	1960-1970	13 major quakes
1910-1920	2 major quakes	1970-1980	51 major quakes
1920-1930	2 major quakes	1980-1990	86 major quakes
1930-1940	5 major quakes	1990-1995	over 100 quakes.
1940-1950	4 major quakes		

Besides wars and earthquakes, there have also been an increasing number of famines worldwide.

**h.** The Bible predicts that the Jewish temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt [implied in Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15]. I understand that Israel already has it designed. In Jerusalem, Orthodox Jewish priests are being trained on how to perform temple sacrifices, as prescribed in the Law of Moses.

**i.** In Matthew 24:22, Christ said that unless He returned to earth, there would be “no life” left on this planet. Christ spoke this when the Roman two-edged sword was about the most powerful weapon on earth. Now, think of the nuclear, germ, and chemical weaponry that could be unleashed, and ask yourself, “How much longer can our world survive?”

One multiple-warhead nuclear bomb today has more power than all the explosives and bombs used by all the nations in World War II combined. Supposedly, if you dropped a fork from your kitchen counter, at exactly the same time a major nuclear bomb exploded a few miles away, you would be vaporized before the fork hit the floor.

**j.** Revelations 11:7-9 says two prophets of God will be killed during the reign of anti-Christ, and people all around the world will view their bodies. People used to make fun of such a notion—until satellite TV.

**k.** Revelation 16:21 talks about hail balls weighing up to 100 pounds. Impossible you say? That’s what scientists thought until the first atomic bomb was exploded forcing moist air high into the atmosphere creating hail balls large enough to dent the decks of Navy test ships near the explosion site.

**l.** The Bible predicts major breakdowns in the family and in moral values prior to Christ’s return [II Timothy 3:1-5]. This is happening. Look at the rise in abortions [over 30 million in the U.S. in the last 25 years], crime, unwed mothers, abuse, violence, suicides, rapes, drugs, gangs, etc.

There are many more prophecies I could list, but I want you to see that what the Bible talks about is as real today as when it was written. In fact, the book of Revelation in the Bible is much easier to believe and understand now than when it was written almost 2,000 years ago.

I believe our days here on this earth may be rapidly drawing to a close. In I Thessalonians 4:16-17 says, “*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*”

Read Zechariah 14, and the physical coming of *Yahweh* [Hebrew name of God] to Jerusalem, and compare that with Revelation 19 and the physical return of Jesus, and suddenly it all starts to make sense. Passages which Jewish teachers for centuries have allegorized and spiritualized may actually come true literally when Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, returns to Israel.

I think the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus is who he claims to be: God.

## STEPS TO KNOWING GOD

Most who call themselves Christians, I think, will agree with what I am about to say. This section is extremely important. I don't ask that you automatically believe the facts I present. If you are serious about God, then do your homework. Take the time to look up the Bible verses I cite. Ask God to confirm in your heart whether what I say is true. Seek God as if your soul depended on it; it just might.

I intentionally list references from the Old Testament [Hebrew Bible], because I want you to see that the same New Testament truths were clearly taught or prophesied in the Old Testament. The Bible is a unified whole, with Jesus being the unifying theme which ties it all together.

The following four spiritual laws are clearly taught in the New Testament.

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

**Spiritual Law #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 not listening to God, but “*doing our own thing.*” Because God is “*holy,*” totally without sin or wrongdoing, we cannot just bop into God's presence [Isaiah 6:1-5, I John 1:5]. Just as you wouldn't 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 basic change in who we are, we would corrupt and pollute Heaven, just 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]. Because Adam and Eve chose to sin, the Bible teaches that this sin nature got passed on to all mankind; 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. From God's perspective sin is such things as boasting in our own achievements. Sex outside of marriage is sin. Lying, gossip, slander, cheating, cowardice, yielding to fear, not trusting God, coveting what others possess, not acting in faith, being disrespectful, putting worldly success or money before God, unforgiveness, lack of prayer, not keeping our promises, looking lustfully at someone, swearing, not acting in love, and a bunch of other things, are sin [Exodus 20; James 4:16; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8; Romans 1:18-32; 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. We have all sinned against an eternal God and committed eternal sins.—Stating it bluntly, unless God forgives us, by God's standard we're deserving of Hell. As a just and righteous judge, God cannot just sweep our sins under the carpet.

**Spiritual Law #3:** Christ is the only way to God. He died to pay the penalty for our sin. By his death, Jesus bridged the gap between a holy God and sinful man. Either we go to God by way of Jesus, or we do not get to God [II Thessalonians 1:8-9; John 3:16; Romans 5:8, Acts 20:28; I Timothy 2:5].

The story is told of a young woman who received a phone call from the emergency room of a hospital stating that her dad was deathly ill, that he may have only 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 police 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 to 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.*"

She began to weep, and the old 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 sports 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 sports coat, put back on his robe, and resumed his seat. He said, "*Young lady, the law says 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, 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 divine [Philippians 2:6,7 and Romans 1:3,4]. If we accept his offer of forgiveness, when we stand before God as Judge, we will be standing before the One who loved us and paid the fine for us: "Case dismissed!"

**Spiritual Law #4:** Knowing the first three laws is not enough. It takes a response on our part. While we cannot earn salvation, it is nonetheless a *gift* which must be received [Isaiah 64:6; Ephesians 2:8-9]. 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 we receive the gift of salvation?

First, we are asked to *believe* several wonderful truths: (1) that Jesus loves us, (2) that he died for our sins [past, present and future], and (3) that he arose from the dead [John 3:16; Romans 5:8; 10:9; I Corinthians 15:3-5].

Since it is our sins which have been keeping us from God, we must be willing to turn from our sin [Mark 1:14,15]. The Bible calls this *repentance*, which simply means to *turn around*.—For example, if you are on the wrong bus heading away from God, you need to change buses, and get on board with Christ. Or, putting it another way, if you have been driving your own bus, it means being willing to get out of the driver's seat, and inviting Jesus to take over as your bus driver. He can turn your life around, and get you going in the right direction.

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.

If you confess your sins to God, and ask him to forgive you, the Bible promises you will be forgiven. No matter how big, or how awful, your sins are, God is more than willing to forgive you [Isaiah 1:18; I John 1:9]. And, more incredible still is the fact that these sins will *never* be held against you [Romans 4:7,8; 8:1].

Because we are weak and rather powerless when it comes to sin, God places his Holy Spirit in each person who receives Christ in order to help them keep from sinning. In other words, if you allow him, the Holy Spirit will power your bus [Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:7-14, Galatians 2:20; I Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13]. With God's Spirit living in and through you, you can also begin to experience God's peace and joy [John 14:27; Galatians 2:20, 5:22; Romans 7:14-8:11].

And last, but not least, if you receive Christ into your life, you become a child of God, part of God's family.—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 *believe* in Christ, you are legally adopted into God's family. 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; John 14:1,2; Revelation 21:1-4].

When you die, how can you be sure you will go to Heaven to be with God? The Bible 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.*" [I John 5:11-13, emphasis mine]—How can you *know* you have eternal life? Does it depend on how you feel, or upon circumstances? No. It depends on God's promise. God promises that if you *believe* in Christ, and commit your life to him, you can *know* you have eternal life.

Scripture also says that if you ask *anything* according to God's will, God will hear and answer you [I John 5:14].—So, is it God's will that you *believe* in Jesus and *receive* him? Yes [II Peter 3:9]. Therefore, if you sincerely pray to God, and invite Jesus into your heart, you can do so with confidence *knowing* that God will hear and answer your prayer. This is where *faith* comes in: believing that what God tells you is true.

I entered into a relationship with Jesus when I was 14 years old. At a youth meeting I invited Jesus Christ to come into my life and forgive me of my sins.—And he did. To my amazement, it worked. God's peace flooded through me. Old feelings of guilt were gone. As I read the Bible, it finally began to make sense. God became very real to me. I also began seeing God answer specific prayers, which surprised and delighted me no end. While being a Christian has been hard at times, I wouldn't trade the joy of knowing Christ for anything in the world.

## ATIME OF DECISION

Christianity isn't merely a religion; it is a love-relationship with God. God is the lover of your soul, and he has proposed to you. Will you say, "I do."

If you have felt the Spirit of God speaking to you, and you have become convinced in your heart and mind that what I have written is true, then you must decide what you will do with Jesus.

No matter how much evidence I give, the final step is still 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, and the fact that it works. Jesus Christ has changed my life. I am not the person I used to be.

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."

To start with, 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 first step in turning to God.

Secondly, read.—Read the Bible. Don't just rely on what you have heard. Study it for yourself. Look up the Bible verses I've shown you. *Think* with your mind; *listen* with your heart. Allow God to speak to you.—Read some of the books I have made reference to 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 Hell 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 hates and 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 payment for sin acceptable to God other 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].

This may be a hard decision for you. Much is at stake. If you receive Jesus as Lord, it will cost you. It has cost me. 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. As I understand scripture, there are no second chances in another life [Hebrews 9:27]. Jesus stands at the door of your heart knocking. Will you open the door and let him in [Revelation 3:20]?

If you become convinced that what I have said is true, and if you are ready to open the door of your heart to him, then find a quiet place and invite him in. Don't procrastinate. What greater joy could you have than to know your sins are forgiven, that you have been given eternal life, and that you are prepared to meet your Lord. I believe his return is very soon [Zechariah 14:1-9; I John 3:1-3].

When you are ready, may I suggest the following prayer, or one like it: “*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. I willingly yield my life to you. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.*”

These words are not magical. The important thing is that you mean them. 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 one of these groups and ask them to suggest 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 witchcraft. As a result of the love and work of some Christian missionaries, he yielded his heart to Christ. Later, 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 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 two books I highly recommend to help you understand, gain, and maintain spiritual victory in your walk with Christ. The two books are: *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker* by Dr. Neil Anderson.

Another book I highly recommend, which will help you learn of the awesome love God has for you, is *Search For Significance* by Robert McGee.

If possible, I urge you to read such authors as Charles Swindoll, Josh McDowell, and Max Lucado. If you like somewhat heavier philosophical reading, try C.S. Lewis [e.g., *Mere Christianity*, *The Weight Of Glory*, *The Screwtape Letters*], or Peter Kreeft [e.g., *Making Sense Out Of Suffering*, *Heaven The Heart’s Deepest Longing*, etc.].

To grow as a new believer, I suggest you contact any of the following Christian organizations for their assistance and literature. You can most likely get their addresses from a library, a Christian bookstore, or you may 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:** <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/>

Log onto <http://www.gospel.com.net/> for addresses of other Christian organizations and resources.—Keep feeding the good side.

C.S. Lewis once remarked, “*Joy is the serious business of Heaven.*” If Heaven is true, as Jesus taught it is, then no sacrifice or cost is too great to please the *One* who loves you. Set your heart and your mind on the reality of Heaven [Colossians 3:1,2; Matthew 6:19-21]. Let it motivate you all the days of your life.

May His grace and peace be yours.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

This booklet is one of several booklets in a series defending the Christian faith, written by myself. You can read or download any of the booklets off the internet at: <http://www.4seekers.com>.

So you know a little about me, I am an evangelical Christian. I work primarily as a chaplain with a hospice [terminally ill patients], and in a psychiatric hospital. I coauthored one book with Josh McDowell [Campus Crusade For Christ] on the deity of Christ. I became a Christian through Youth For Christ [Campus Life] in high school, and was very involved with Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship as a student in college. I have always attended churches which are evangelical and interdenominational in flavor [e.g. Evangelical Free Church, Evangelical Covenant Church, Great Commission Ministries, etc.].

I hope this booklet helps you discover and walk in the awesome truth that, not only does God exist, but you are awesomely loved by God.

With deepest respect,

Bart Larson

*“ . . . in love he claims all.”*—C.S. Lewis