

WHAT IF IT'S TRUE?

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If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is." That's usually good advice. But there are exceptions. Someone *does* win the sweepstakes. Some people *do* land job offers that are far better than they thought possible.

Wise people are careful. But as RBC staff writer Bill Crowder points out in the following pages, thoughtful people are not blindly cynical.

With due caution and realistic optimism, we have reason to ask questions about spiritual beliefs which, if true, lead to personal discoveries that are far better than we ever thought possible.

Martin R. De Haan II

REASONABLE DOUBT

On June 17, 1966, two men were arrested outside Paterson, New Jersey, for the murders of two men and a woman at Paterson's Lafayette Bar & Grill. One of the two men arrested was Rubin "Hurricane" Carter—a boxer who had been a serious contender at the middleweight level. Carter and his friend, John Artis, were tried. On May 27, 1967, they were found guilty of murder and sentenced to three consecutive terms of life behind bars.

Nine years later the New Jersey Supreme Court overturned the convictions of Carter and Artis. The judges unanimously ruled that the prosecution withheld evidence favorable to the defense. So they ordered a new trial. Later in

the same year the two were again found guilty and the same sentences re-imposed.

After another 9 years, on November 7, 1985, Judge H. Lee Sarokin of Federal District Court in Newark,

***What does
the evidence
really say?***

New Jersey, overturned the second trial convictions. Judge Sarokin ruled that the original convictions were based on "racism rather than reason, and concealment rather than disclosure."

The trials of Rubin Carter show the importance of questions like: "What if it's true?" "Who are you going to believe?" "What does the evidence really say?" But there are other areas, outside the courts, where even more is at stake.

WHAT IF IT'S TRUE THAT JESUS IS WHO HE CLAIMED TO BE?

For 2,000 years, much of the world has seen Jesus of Nazareth as the founder of one of the world's major religions. Many have also seen Him as a provocative teacher and good moral example.

Was Jesus merely a great teacher or good moral example?

But history doesn't give us the luxury of thinking that Jesus was merely a great teacher or good moral example. The evidence suggests that if He was not who He claimed to be, then Jesus was guilty of crimes against humanity. If He wasn't speaking on behalf

of our Creator, then He was either a very sick or evil man.

So, what were Jesus' claims?

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE MORE THAN A MAN

In chapter 8 of John's gospel, we find Jesus confronted by religious leaders of His day. In the course of the debate He claimed to know God in a way that they did not. Reflecting Jesus' claim and their resulting rage, the text quotes Jesus as saying, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.' Then they took up stones to throw at Him" (Jn. 8:58-59).

Regarding Jesus' willingness to describe Himself as more than a man, Thomas Schultz wrote:

Not one recognized religious leader—not Moses, Paul, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius

. . . ever claimed to be God; that is, with the exception of Jesus Christ. Christ is the only religious leader who has ever claimed to be deity, and the only individual ever who has convinced a great portion of the world that He is God (cited by Josh McDowell in *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, p.92).

Is that possible? What's the proof? What's the evidence that this great spiritual leader really was God?

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The four Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) provide different perspectives but a shared conclusion that the overall

pattern of Jesus' life is unexplainable if He wasn't who He claimed to be. They say that in addition to fulfilling prophecy and living a life of unparalleled wisdom and character, Jesus performed . . .

- **Miracles of physical healing:** He healed a man with a terrible skin disease (Mt. 8:2-4); reversed paralysis (Mt. 9:2-8; 12:10-13); and cured blindness and deafness (Mt. 20:30-34; Mk. 7:31-37).
- **Miracles of nature:** He turned water into wine (Jn. 2:1-11); stilled a storm on the Sea of Galilee (Mt. 8:23-27); and walked on water (Mt. 14:22-26).
- **Miracles of resurrection:** He raised the dead daughter of a religious leader (Mt. 9:18-26), a widow's dead son (Lk. 7:11-15), and a friend named Lazarus who had

died (Jn. 11:1-44).

How is such a life to be weighed 2,000 years later? One thing is clear. Jesus' life had a profound effect not only on contemporaries who were willing to die for Him, but on the whole course of history.

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According to William Robinson:

If one takes a historically objective approach to the question, it is found that even secular history affirms that Jesus lived on earth and was worshiped as God. He

founded a church that has worshiped Him for 1,900 years. He changed the course of the world's history (*Our Lord*, p.29).

JESUS CLAIMED TO BE A SAVIOR

According to each of the four written records of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Jesus repeatedly talked about being on a mission of rescue. Even as His popularity began to worry the religious leaders of Israel, He talked repeatedly about going to Jerusalem to die. His followers found such comments unthinkable. Yet after only 3 years in the public eye, He went to Jerusalem, was rejected by national leaders, and was sentenced to die by crucifixion for claiming to be the King and God of the Jews.

Only after His execution would followers see His willingness to die in the

light of a comment made by His forerunner. Three years earlier they heard a rugged prophet of the wilderness, known as John the baptizer, say about Jesus, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn. 1:29).

According to hundreds of eyewitnesses, Jesus did die—and 3 days later He left the tomb alive.

In retrospect, it seems reasonable to conclude that Jesus saw Himself as a sacrificial lamb. For thousands of years the religious law of Israel had been requiring the death of innocent animals on altars of sacrifice. All the while, mysterious statements of Jewish prophets referred to a Messiah who would

Himself bear the sin of fallen humanity. Yet the meaning of a suffering Messiah (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26; Zech. 12:10) would remain a mystery until after the death of Jesus.

According to hundreds of eyewitnesses, Jesus did die—and 3 days later He left the tomb alive. Also, consider the following evidence:

- Secular historians acknowledge that Jesus was a real living person who gained renown in first-century Israel as a healer and a teacher.
- Secular historians (Jewish and Roman) acknowledge that Jesus died at the hands of religious leaders.
- The biblical record tells us that Jesus was seen alive by more than 500 people after His death.
- If He was to save us from our sins, God’s plan for salvation would have to

be achieved—and in the crucifixion and resurrection, dozens of Old Testament prophecies of God’s plan for providing forgiveness were fulfilled in the space of just a few hours.

In all of these amazing events, Jesus Himself doesn’t make it easy for us. When He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6), He didn’t leave us with many options. He does

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—Jesus (Jn. 14:6)

not allow us to think that He was just “a good teacher” or “a moral model.”

C. S. Lewis, Cambridge University professor and former atheist, observed with his usual candor:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: “I am ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.” That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else He would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God—or else a 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 up with any patronizing nonsense about His

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—C. S. Lewis

being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to (*Mere Christianity*, p.41).

WHAT IF IT'S TRUE THAT THE BIBLE HAS THE ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS?

For years the game show that everyone seemed to watch was *Jeopardy*. Later it was joined by *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*?

The format of the second game show is simple: Answering increasingly difficult questions brings an increasingly larger payback. Some of the questions are basic (“Did Hannibal cross the Alps with elephants or llamas?”), but others are more intense (“Who was the first \$100,000 winner on *Star Search*?”). The lights flash, the audience tenses, and the kettledrum rolls—while contestants agonize over who invented the cheese grater or pasteurized milk. The program guests

carefully use their “three lifelines” as host Regis Philbin asks, “Is that your final answer?”

Is it possible that the Bible answers the important questions that haunt us in the darkness as we lie in bed trying to sleep?

Many of us find it entertaining to watch someone else sweat in an effort to get rich quick. Yet we also know that the questions the contestants have to ponder—no matter how intriguing—are not in themselves all that important. The really important questions are those that haunt us in the darkness as we lie in bed trying to sleep—questions

that eat at our hearts because we sense that our lives and relationships, our work and our health, our hopes and our happiness all hang in the balance.

But what if the most published book in the world has answers to our most troubling questions? What if the Bible offers us all three of our lifelines in a show called *Who Wants To Have Lasting Peace And Joy?*

Now let’s take a look at three questions that many of us wrestle with in the depths of our souls. Then we’ll take a look at the answers the Bible provides.

IS THERE HOPE FOR MY FAMILY?

According to Genesis, the first book in the Bible, God created the family. The rest of the Scriptures assume that the One who made marriage and parent relationships is the One who knows how to make

them work. Consider chapters 5 and 6 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Here the God of the Bible gives clear principles for a healthy family:

- **Husbands (5:25-28).** They draw on the spiritual strength of God to faithfully show self-sacrificing leadership that displays character and integrity.
- **Wives (5:22-24).** They find security in their relationship to Christ so they can complement the strengths of their husbands.
- **Parents (6:4).** They learn from their own Father in heaven how to provide loving instruction and wise correction that equips children for life.
- **Children (6:1-3).** They honor the loving, though imperfect, example of their parents who are accountable to God

for their care and development.

Such biblical principles are not rocket science. They are more important than that. If the Bible can be trusted, disregarding its principles will diminish our chance for true peace and

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joy. Why? Because if God created the family, He is the One best equipped to tell us how to make it work!

We expect computer users who never follow the instruction manual to have lots of problems. What should we expect if the Bible really has God's answers for healthy relationships?

Husbands, do you want to alienate your wife and drive a wedge in your marriage? Then don't give yourself for her, don't give her the dignity and respect she deserves. Don't pay any attention to the biblical instruction to love her as Jesus loves His church.

Wives, do you want to drive your husband away? Then don't give him the loving, supportive partnership that God's Word, the Bible, describes.

Parents, do you want your children to despise you and everything you stand for? Then be inconsistent, unfair, and unrealistic in your expectations. Try to dominate them without genuinely loving them. Ignore the biblical direction about giving them loving, consistent discipline that does not provoke them to anger.

Children, do you want

your home to be a place of anger, frustration, and constant turmoil? Then disregard and disobey your parents. Totally forget the debt of gratitude you owe them for giving you life and caring for your needs.

CAN I FIND PURPOSE FOR MY LIFE?

We live in a society that in the post-Vietnam, post-impeachment scandal era has become increasingly cynical and jaded. What have we become—and does it even matter?

Read these moving words that have been attributed to a Columbine High School student shortly after the mass murders there:

The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints; we spend more, but have less; we

buy more, but enjoy it less.

We have bigger houses, but smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness.

We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.

We have learned how to make a living, but not a life; we've added years to our life, but not life to our years.

We've been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor. We've conquered outer space, but not inner

space; we've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we've split the atom, but not our prejudice.

We have higher incomes, but lower morals; we've become long on quantity, but short on quality.

These are times of tall men, and short character; steep profits, and shallow relationships. These are times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition. These are days of two incomes, but more divorce; fancier houses, but broken homes.

It is a time when there is much in the show window, but nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose to either make a

difference . . . or just hit delete.

Those words are as insightful as they are scary, but is that all there is? A song from the 60s by Peggy Lee says, “If that’s all there is, then let’s keep dancing—let’s break out the booze and have a ball—if that’s all there is.”

***“I have come
that they may
have life, and
that they may
have it more
abundantly.”***
—Jesus (Jn. 10:10)

Is there no hope? If the Bible can be believed, there is hope! Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10). Jesus offers us more than answers. He offers us Himself.

CAN I KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER I DIE?

This question can produce the anxiety John Lennon expressed in his song “I’m So Tired”:

You’d say I’m putting
you on. But it’s no joke,
it’s doing me harm. You
know I can’t sleep,
I can’t stop my brain.
You know it’s 3 weeks,
I’m going insane.

You know I’d give you
everything I’ve got for
a little peace of mind.

It is for this kind of
anxiety that the apostle
John wrote:

*These things I have
written to you who
believe in the name of
the Son of God, that you
may know that you have
eternal life (1 Jn. 5:13).*

John said that he knew
Jesus before His death on
the cross—and after He
rose from the dead. If

John is telling us the truth, he heard Jesus say that all those who place their trust in Him will one day live with Him forever (1 Jn. 1:1-3).

Jesus said that all who place their trust in Him will live with Him forever.

This is the discovery that John embraced—that Jesus came into the world to save those who had wandered away from their Creator, and that all who believe in Him can find:

- The certainty of forgiveness of sins.
- The certainty of a life with purpose now.
- The certainty of life forever with God.

With all the uncertainty in this life, how amazing it would be if the Bible has the answers we need.

WHAT IF IT'S TRUE THAT THE CHURCH IS MORE THAN JUST HYPOCRITES?

Many young boys growing up in the 50s had two heroes: Davy Crockett and Zorro (both courtesy of the *Wonderful World Of Disney*). If you remember the story of Zorro, part of his mystery was that he wore a mask and created a false persona to cover his activities for the good of others. Most of the time Zorro was the somewhat delicate, timid Don Diego—a front to cover his identity as the swashbuckling hero of the victims of wicked villains. In order not to blow his cover, he wore a mask when he was Zorro.

In the Bible there is a

Greek word that means “to hide behind a mask,” but it is not a word that has noble connotations. It is the word *hypokrites*, from which we get our English word *hypocrite*. In ancient times it spoke of actors who displayed changes of emotion by changing the masks they held in front of their faces. What they portrayed was ultimately unrelated to who they were—for their real self was hidden by a mask.

**“Christianity
might be a good
thing if anyone
ever tried it.”**

—George Bernard Shaw

The issue of masked men (and women) lies behind one of the most common reasons for rejecting Christ and the church. We’ve all heard the criticism, “Church people

are hypocrites. They pretend that they’re wonderful, kind, and loving people, but they really aren’t.” Those who claim to be followers of Christ are accused of saying one thing and living another. Their religious declarations are thought by many to be merely a false face, a mask to hide behind so others don’t see them as they *really* are: bigoted, narrow, mean, and self-centered.

Here are a few classic statements about this supposed hypocrisy:

- “Every Stoic was a Stoic, but in Christendom where is the Christian?” (Ralph Waldo Emerson).
- “In truth there was only *one* Christian, and he died on a cross” (Friedrich Nietzsche).
- “Christianity might be a good thing if anyone ever tried it” (George Bernard Shaw).
- An American T-shirt

says, “Jesus, save me from Your followers.”

Are the charges true? Far too often the answer is yes. The people of Christ all fall short of their ideals. Their walk doesn't consistently match their talk. And this does have a profoundly damaging impact on those who are watching and wondering if Jesus has anything genuinely good to offer.

It's important, therefore, to look honestly at some misconceptions about the church—and try to set the record straight.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT

No one in the church is perfect. Notice the words of one of the most influential leaders of the early church. It was the apostle Paul who wrote:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on,

that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me (Phil. 3:12).

Paul's words remind us that followers of Christ are not attainers; they are comers. No one achieves perfection in this life. At best, people of the church seek to keep growing spiritually while, as Paul wrote, “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

Not everyone in the church is a believer. Observers of the church need to understand the difference between the church as a social institution and the church as the true “body of Christ.” People have all sorts of different motives for attaching themselves to the church without personally accepting the truth about

Jesus Christ for themselves. Some do so for family or business reasons. Some use the church as a cover for their sin, with no intention of embracing the forgiveness and life-changing love of Christ.

This was true even among Christ's disciples:

Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (Jn. 6:70).

No one in the church is as good as Christ. The best examples of the church still fall far short of the goodness demonstrated by Jesus. Once again we find such honest disclosure in the apostle who wrote so much of the New Testament. In his letter to the church at Rome, the apostle Paul admitted:

For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice (Rom. 7:19).

The implication is clear.

On the inside at least, followers of Christ still battle with selfish desires, temptation, and their own failure to be what they want to be.

The church needs to honestly say to the watching world, "You are right. The followers of Christ all fall far short of the example of their Lord."

The church needs to honestly say to the watching world, "You are right. The followers of Christ all fall far short of the example of their Lord." Yet, as we've seen, these patterns of inconsistency are what the Bible teaches us to expect.

WHAT THE CHURCH IS

A common bumper sticker says, “Christians aren’t perfect—just forgiven.” The true church is made up of people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ—those who are “believers.” John 1:12 says:

As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

True followers of Christ are marked by what they believe about themselves and their Savior. Throughout their lives, they entrust themselves to One who has done for them what they could never do for themselves. While having every reason to want to live with the attitudes of Christ, they depend on His willingness to qualify them for acceptance with God.

Those who believe in Christ are on a journey of

personal growth that is meant to last a lifetime. At best they live out their years learning from the Bible, from the Spirit of God who lives within them, and from other spiritually mature people who have discovered for themselves what it means to rely on Christ.

Christians aren't perfect—just forgiven.

We must continually remember that no living follower of Christ has arrived. All are “on the road,” healthy or unhealthy, and with more or less of a desire to experience the difference that the Spirit of Christ wants to make in their lives.

Believers are people who have found forgiveness and hope in a sinful world. At their best, the people of the church are not super-

spiritual. They certainly are not super-deserving. They are simply rescued people. When they are healthy, they live with the attitude of the apostle Paul, who wrote:

Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:12-14).

Believers are people who have found forgiveness and hope in a sinful world.

At one time, followers of Christ had felt guilt; now they understand the joy of being forgiven. Once they felt lost; now they know

they've been found. Once they felt fear of death; now they know peace. Why? Not because of their efforts, but because they had been rescued by Jesus Christ.

Believers are people who are imperfect representatives of Christ. C. S. Lewis wrote these helpful words:

Take the case of a sour old maid, who is a Christian, but cantankerous. On the other hand, take some pleasant and popular fellow, but who has never been to church. Who knows how much more cantankerous the old maid might be if she were *not* a Christian, and how much more likeable the nice fellow might be if he *were* a Christian. You can't judge Christianity simply by comparing the *product* in these two people; you would also need to know what kind

of raw material Christ was working on in both cases (*God In The Dock*, p.59).

WHAT THE CHURCH IS OFFERING US

Those who are wondering whether there is anything for them in the teachings and offers of Christ may find bad experiences with church people a difficult obstacle to get over. They may also wonder whether they've been too bad to be

None of us can afford to let the personal failures of others or ourselves ruin our future.

forgiven. But none of us can afford to let the personal failures of others or ourselves ruin our future.

The Founder of the church does not make offers based on what others have or haven't done, but on what He Himself has done for us.

The apostle Paul explained what Jesus did for us in these words:

He [God the Father] made Him who knew no sin [Christ] to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21).

The Founder of the church does not make offers based on what we have or haven't done for ourselves, but on what He Himself has done. As the Bible says to those who have already received Christ:

By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast (Eph. 2:8-9).

The Founder of the

church doesn't just promise hope beyond the grave, He offers new life now:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

The Founder of the church doesn't just promise hope beyond the grave, He offers new life now.

Trusting the Founder of the church opens the door to an eternal life where no one will be disappointed:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (Jn. 3:16).

WHAT IF IT'S TRUE THAT THE CREATOR CARES FOR ME?

Not too long ago the American public was introduced to a television program called *Who Wants To Marry A Multimillionaire?* It turned out to be a beauty pageant with only one judge (the proposing groom who was hiding behind a screen). The prize was marriage to a multimillionaire.

There were all the normal trappings of a pageant, complete with a host and a swimsuit competition. The pack of "contestants" was whittled down from thousands to the 50 who made the show, to the 10 semifinalists, then the 5 finalists. It ended with a wedding right there on stage. (The prenuptial agreements were signed

beforehand.) It was a truly bizarre evening of television viewing. In the midst of the craziness, however, there were two comments that seemed especially significant. One of the contestants said, “It’s really not about the money.” And the alleged multimillionaire stated, “We are all here because we have been unlucky at love, and we are hoping something magical will happen.”

If we take those comments at face value, the program symbolized the risks some people are willing to take for a relationship that offers to meet their needs with money, with romance, or with notoriety.

At the very least, such cultural “indicators” remind us of what we all are looking for. We all long for meaningful relationships—to give and receive love, to experience and share

intimacy, to care and to be cared for. Yet too many go through life without ever entering into a satisfying, significant relationship. Too many find their lives marked by an emptiness that fills them with profound sadness.

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But it’s not just the need for relationship that hounds us. It’s the need for a meaningful relationship with our Creator.

French philosopher

and mathematician Blaise Pascal declared that within every human being, our Creator has placed a “God-shaped void” that only God Himself can fill.

The Bible assures us that our Creator desires a relationship with us.

The good news, according to the Bible, is this: Although we desperately and passionately desire to have a relationship with God, He has already worked out a plan to make such a relationship possible. As amazing as it may seem, the Bible assures us that our Creator desires a relationship with us as well. To understand how we can have a personal relationship with this One who has a personal interest in us,

consider the following points:

WHO THE CREATOR IS

In Colossians 1:16-17, the apostle Paul wrote:

By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Who is this that created all things? In verse 15 He is identified as the “image of the invisible God” (the God we can see). In verse 13 the writer is more specific. The Creator is “the Son of His love.” According to the Bible, Jesus Christ is not only the Son of God, He is also the Creator of the universe! Let’s consider

other Scriptures that say the same thing:

- *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made (Jn. 1:3).*
- *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him (Jn. 1:10).*

According to the Bible, Jesus Christ is not only the Son of God, He is also the Creator of the universe.

- *Yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live (1 Cor. 8:6).*
- *[God] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all*

things, through whom also He made the worlds (Heb. 1:2).

The Bible is clear in claiming that our Creator did the unthinkable. He came to us in the person we know as Jesus Christ.

WHAT THE CREATOR DID

The apostle John, in the first chapter of his gospel, wrote:

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth (v.14).

Every December the Western world celebrates the birth of God's Son into the world. Most gift-givers, however, don't realize the significance of the event behind this holiday. Many of the celebrants might not even realize that, according to the original story, Jesus was born into our world as

“the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15).

The idea that God was among us is more important than any of us can absorb. If it is true, then we can only scratch the surface of the thought that the little one bundled up in that crude stable manger was in fact our Creator. Yet this is the claim of the Bible:

- **God was in a human body.** The most astounding miracle of all history is that God became a man. This is the amazing reality of Christmas: God came in human flesh!
- **God lived among us.** Jesus did not come to be an auditor in the class of “Life 101.” He came to fully engage in life. He walked on ground He Himself had created.
- **God showed His goodness to us.** Without seeing what God is like in human

flesh, we could never realize how desperately we need Him.

*The most
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became a man.*

God didn't just come, check things out, and then return to a better place. He lived here, placing Himself under the conditions, sufferings, and temptations we all live with.

HOW THE CREATOR LOVES

In Revelation 1:5-6, the apostle John wrote:

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be the

*glory and dominion
forever and ever. Amen.*

How has the Creator displayed the depth of His care and concern for us? Recording for us the vision he had from Jesus Christ, John declared simply, "He loves us."

In another letter, the same author wrote:

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [full payment] for our sins (1 Jn. 4:9-10).

From other Scriptures we learn more of what this love means. For example, consider the following:

He released us from our sins by giving His own blood for us. This is the message of Hebrews 2:9.

We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

He removed the barrier that prevented us from a relationship with our Creator. If we believe what the Bible says, God has not abandoned us; we have abandoned Him.

If we believe what the Bible says, God has not abandoned us; we have abandoned Him.

According to the Bible, the Creator of the universe went to the cross and died for our sins so that we could be made right with God.

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him (1 Jn. 4:9).

What a powerful thought—the Creator hanging on a cross, dying for people who were living on death row under the sentence of eventual judgment and death. He gave His life so that others could live, not in their own merits but by the merits of the perfect One who died in their behalf.

He made us a kingdom of priests. In the Old Testament, there were three offices in the leadership of the kingdom of Israel: king, prophet, and priest. Interestingly, the New Testament not only calls Jesus our Creator, but our King, our Prophet, and our Priest. The implication is that we do not need any

other mediator between God and us except Jesus Christ.

- *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6).*

***We do not
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- *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Rom. 5:1-2).*
- *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the*

heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14-16).

***The Creator
gave His life
so that others
could live.***

These thoughts are not from just any book. They are from the Bible. They tell us that our Creator Himself died for our sins to bring us back into the “lost relationship” of Eden. That’s the essence of Jesus’ words, “The Son of Man

has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Lk. 19:10). And He says to each of us, “Follow Me” (Lk. 9:23).

In his book *The Call*, author Os Guinness writes: We cannot find God without God. We cannot reach God without God. We cannot satisfy God without God—which is another way of saying that our seeking will always fall short unless God’s grace initiates the search and unless God’s call draws us to Him and completes the search.

If the chasm is to be bridged, God must bridge it. If we are to desire the highest good, the highest good must come down and draw us so that it may become a reality we desire. From this perspective there is no merit in either seeking or finding. All is grace. The secret of

seeking is not in our human ascent to God, but in God's descent to us. We start our searching, but we end up being discovered. We think we are looking for something; we realize we are found by Someone. As in Francis Thompson's famous picture, "the hound of heaven" has tracked us down (pp.13-14).

After his conversion from atheist to believer, C. S. Lewis looked back on his journey to faith in Christ and discovered that "God closed in on me." He wrote:

Amiable agnostics will talk cheerfully about "man's search for God." To me, as I then was, they might as well have talked about the mouse's search for the cat (*Surprised By Joy*, p.179).

Yes, the seeking is real—but who seeks whom? The

Creator of the universe is seeking you! To be sure, that's an imposing thought.

The Creator of the universe is seeking you!

The great Christian prime minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper, declared,

There is not one square inch of the entire creation about which Jesus Christ does not cry out, "This is Mine! This belongs to Me!"

Why? Because He is the Creator, and He is merely claiming that which He Himself has made.

IF IT'S TRUE, WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU?

Someone once said, “Life is like a wild goose chase—without the goose.” The search for a truly loving relationship can be like that. In the midst of the search, however, a book as trustworthy as the Bible assures us that the Creator of the universe cared so much for us that He came seeking after each of us.

*In a world of
loneliness, despair,
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In a world of loneliness, despair, and rejection, the Bible offers hope and encouragement. In the

words given to a blind beggar named Bartimaeus: “Cheer up! . . . He’s calling you” (Mk. 10:49 NIV). Yes, the Creator cares for you! With that awesome truth in mind, consider the words of astronaut Guy Gardner, who said this about what he learned when he saw the marvels of the created universe in outer space:

It’s very hard to think this must have happened by chance. . . . You realize at the same time that there had to be a Master Designer, a Creator of this planet. And to me that makes life all the more special. Because that tells me that instead of me being something that just came along in the course of time to live and die, that instead of a meaningless existence, I have Someone—who cares for me—who has made me and cares about me.

Someone I can go to with my troubles, and my cares, and my joys.

What if it's true? If Jesus is who He claimed to be, if the Bible has answers to our most important questions, if the church is more than hypocrites, and if the Creator really does care for us, then everything now depends on our willingness to trust Him. If Jesus is God in the flesh, then apart from Him we will never know real joy, real meaning, or real peace in life. He is our Creator and He seeks a personal relationship with us. Have you responded to His sacrificial love with faith and accepted His invitation to everlasting life, forgiveness, and peace?

Carefully consider what the Bible says:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but

have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 3:16-18).

If you have any questions we can answer, or if you would like additional material to help you in your walk of faith, please write to us.

The general contents of this booklet were originally prepared as a series of messages for the "What If It's True?" areawide outreach developed by Pastor Keith Dornbos, Holland, MI.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Here's a list of books and Discovery Series booklets that will supplement and enhance the concepts discussed in this booklet:

BOOKS

- *The Call* by Os Guinness (Word Publishing, 1998)
- *Following Christ* by Joseph Stowell (Zondervan, 1998)
- *Christ Among Other Gods* by Erwin W. Lutzer (Moody Press, 1997)
- *What Angels Wish They Knew* by Alistair Begg (Moody Press, 1999)
- *The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict* by Josh McDowell (Nelson, 1999)
- *Jesus: Lord And Savior* by F. F. Bruce (InterVarsity Press, 1986)
- *The Empty Cross Of Jesus* by Michael Green (InterVarsity Press, 1984)
- *How You Can Be Sure That You Will Spend Eternity With God* by Erwin Lutzer (Moody Press, 1996)
- *Unriddling Our Times* by Os Guinness (Baker Book House, 1999)
- *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis (Harper, 2001)
- *First Love* by John MacArthur, Jr. (Victor Books, 1995)
- *The Only Way To Happiness* by John MacArthur, Jr. (Moody Press, 1998)

RBC BOOKLETS

- *Who Is This Man Who Says He's God?* (Q0205)
- *Can I Really Trust The Bible?* (Q0402)
- *The Church We Need* (Q0904)
- *What Is A Personal Relationship With God?* (Q0103)
- *How Can I Know There Is A God?* (Q0101)

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