

Theophilus' Quest



Finding our way home ...



Welcome to Theophilus' Quest

Theophilus' Quest is an attempt to convey the basics of Christianity in a simple and straight-forward way. Drawing upon the imagery from one of Jesus' parables (Luke 15:11-24 *Pleeease take the time to read the story*) ... I think we are all prodigals who have taken our inheritance and wandered from home in an attempt to find our own way in life. We are all co-travellers walking the same road that has its origin and its destination in God, our heavenly Father and Creator. Some of us are still journeying away from home; others are at that in-between place of turning; and still others of us are making our way back to our heavenly Father's welcoming embrace.

Wherever we are on life's journey, we need wise guides and true companions. I hope that Theo helps you on your way ...

Happy Travelling!

Stephen Wilson (2005)

steve@thepoint.org.au

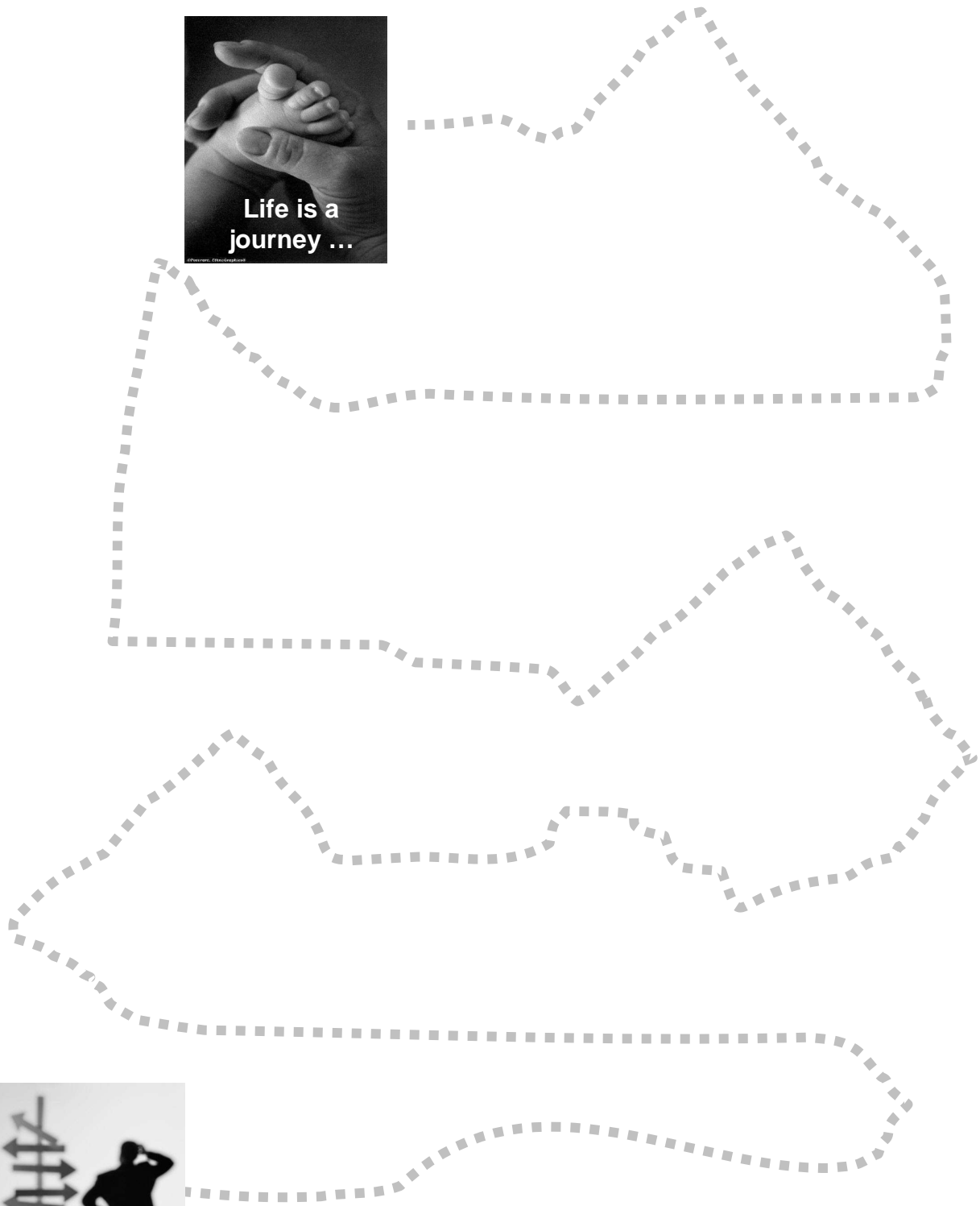
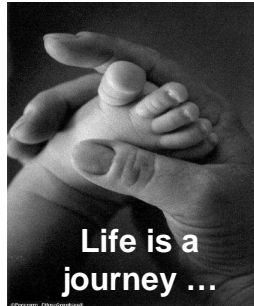


*Dedicated to my fellow prodigals at The Point Church –
thanks for sharing the journey and making a rough road a little smoother!*

Would you care to think about and describe your life-journey so far?
I wonder where you would place yourself on life's road at this point in time,
especially in relation to God? Where to next?

My life's journey so far ...

use this timeline to map the significant things and events in your journey – the good and the not-so-good



Where to
from here?





Theophilus' Quest will take us through seven stages of discovery

Stage 1

Is God For Real

Some of us have been away from home for so long that we have forgotten where we came from!

Stage 2

The Bible: Postcards from Home

Our Father has never given up on loving us and reminding us of our true identity!

Stage 3

Who Is Jesus?

We have wandered so far and for so long ... we are hopelessly lost and we need a rescuer!

Stage 4

I'm OK – Well, Not Really!

The journey away from home ... if we live an illusion long enough it begins to feel like reality!

Stage 5

We Needed Some Good News!

Learning life's hard lesson about our own powerlessness and accepting our need for grace leads us to freedom!

Stage 6

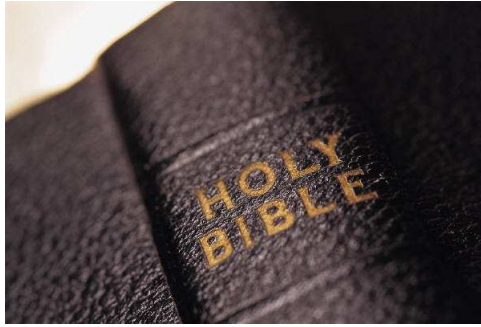
Turning and Returning

... and the prodigal came to himself and resolved to return to his Father to beg for his forgiveness.

Stage 7

The Journey Home

... while the prodigal was still a long way off, his Father saw him and felt compassion, ran to him and embraced him ... let us celebrate for my child was dead, and is alive again!



Finding our way around the Bible

Theo will sometimes refer to something said in the Bible. The Bible is regarded by Christians to be the word of God – our “street directory” for understanding and navigating life’s journey back to our Father.

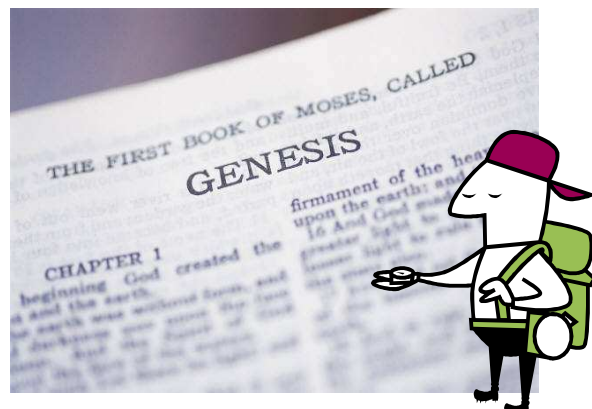
Open my eyes to see the wonderful truths in your law. I am but a foreigner here on earth, I need the guidance of your commands ... You made me; You created me. Now give me the sense to follow your word (Psalm 119:18-19, 73)

If you are not familiar with the Bible, these tips may be helpful:

The Bible is divided into books (the Bible is actually a library of 66 books sorted into two parts: the Old Testament – the first 39 books, beginning with creation and following the history of Israel to about 400 BC; and the New Testament – the next 27 books, beginning with the birth of Jesus Christ through to the development of Jesus’ church to about 100 AD). Each book is divided into chapters and verses. This arrangement makes it easier to find specific parts of the Bible.

Bible references are usually stated this way: Name of the book, followed by a chapter number, followed by the number of a verse (or verses).

For example: **Genesis 1:1-2** refers to the book called Genesis, chapter one, verses one and two. It becomes easy with a little practise.





Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage One

Much about life is puzzling – especially the most important things such as our purpose in life and our relationships with others. How did we get here? Why are we here? Why do things often seem unclear or not as they ought to be? Putting the pieces together is seldom easy. Hopefully, joining Theo on his quest to explore the basics of Christianity will help you on your own journey in life ...

Is God for real?

My thoughts about God to begin with ...



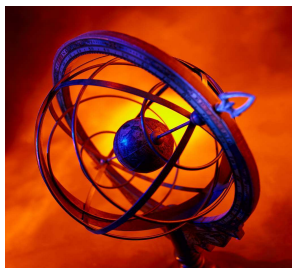


By accident or by design?

In modern times, there have been many arguments made both for and against the existence of God. Some are very technical, and some are very philosophical. Most are very confusing! The real issue, however, boils down to this one simple question:

“Is our world (including you) purely an accident, or is it the product of intelligent and purposeful design?”

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge (Psalm 19:1-2) . . . For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities – His eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Romans 1:20)



Isaac Newton believed in the existence of a Creator God and, predictably, it was a point of friction between him and some of his scientist peers. A story goes that Newton made and displayed on his desk a working model of our solar system where the planets revolved around the sun with the turn of a handle. When one of Newton’s fellow scientists spotted it for the first time, he wanted to compliment its creator. Newton said it had none. The friend became indignant, thinking he was being played for a fool. *“Of course somebody had to have made it – this sort of thing doesn’t just happen by chance!”* Newton smiled and noted that his friend would not accept that the toy model was without an intelligent maker, but had no trouble insisting that the real thing, being much more complex in design and function, had no intelligent maker – it simply *“happened by accident”!*



What sort of gambler are you?

Most of us have thrown a dice. The odds of getting a six first throw is 1 in 6. The odds of getting another six on the second throw is 1 in 36; of getting another six on the third throw is 1 in 216; in four throws it is 1 in 1,296; in five throws – well, it is so unlikely [1 in 7,776] that we would probably be accused of cheating if we pulled it off!

Jumping out of an aeroplane at 3,000 metres without a parachute would be considered extremely foolish by most of us, even though it is estimated that a person has a 1 in 6,000,000 chance of survival.



A renowned scientist named DuNouy estimated that the chance formulation of a typical protein molecule (the basic building block of life) is in the order of 1 in 2.02×10^{231} with 231 zeros after it, or practically nil. Possible? Well, yes . . . *theoretically*. Likely? *Not very!*

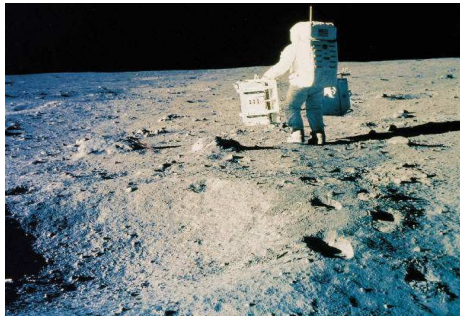


Remember, we're not getting side-tracked with discussion about "processes" here. This is not about macro evolution or any other theory attempting to explain how life may or may not have developed over time since the beginning (all of which may be interesting, but it has little to do with the issue of God's existence). Our question is much bigger than that: Where did the world (matter) and life come from in the first place? We know the world exists. We know nothing comes from nothing. How do we explain its existence?

Based upon reality and your own experiences of life, which would seem to be the more reasonable explanation for the existence of our world ... of life ... of you and me?

- **It is purposefully and intelligently made and sustained**
- **It arose out of nothing without cause and continues to function by chance**

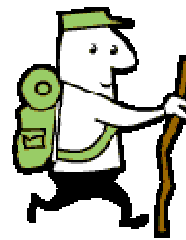
It's not "rocket science", it's just plain old common sense!



**OK. The
universe
couldn't have
just happened
... but where
did God come
from?**

That's a good question!

And the answer is simple: God always has been and always will be! This may seem to be a convenient assertion at first (if all else fails, invent a God to fill the gaps!) but you need to stay with Theo to explore that thought a little further ...



(the following concepts are adapted from Edwin A. Abbott's story, "Flatland")



Welcome to Flatland!

Imagine that we live in a two dimensional world. We know and experience width and height, but we know nothing of depth (a third dimension). We are limited to two dimensions, existing on a perfectly flat plane represented by the drawings on a piece of paper . . . use your imagination!

Welcome to Flatland.



Now imagine that a person from the “outside” three dimensional world wants to communicate with us in Flatland. After all, he made our two dimensional world and drew us in the first place. He created us for a purpose and he cares about us!



Although we couldn’t prove it empirically (i.e. with our physical senses) most of us in Flatland had suspected a “maker’s” existence because we know from our own experience that things like paper and drawings don’t just happen by chance. But we could not see or touch him because he is not part of our piece of paper. He is not “of” our flat world like we are. He is “beyond” it. If he wants to communicate with us (and if we are to know much about him other than the fact of his existence and great power) he must take the first step.

Now Imagine that the artist pictured above (having width and height *and* depth) is the three dimensional creator of Flatland.



Welcome to Flatland!

When the artist tries to explain himself to us Flatlanders, our limitations (knowing and experiencing only two dimensions) make it very difficult for us to even imagine the reality of a third dimension, much less understand a three dimensional person!

The nearest we Flatlanders can come to (very imperfectly) understanding the three dimensional artist is to conceive of a flat drawing with the appearance of depth with light and shade ... a concept which is beyond a Flatlander's experience and can only be imagined theoretically.

What if the artist were to actually touch our Flatland?

When he touched our paper, his work would appear as if materialising out of nothing: a super-natural miracle! He could actually manipulate material reality as we know it. This person would have qualities and abilities beyond anything we had ever experienced or even thought possible.





God is ...

Because of our own limitations, God will always be impossible for us to fully comprehend (for example, the mystery of the Godhead – *one God in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* – might be hard for us to get our minds around, but it shouldn't surprise us that God is mysterious to us in many ways. If He wasn't, He wouldn't be God!) **But the Flatland illustration may help us appreciate some things about Him:**

God created our world but He is not part of it, nor is He limited by it. God is Spirit, not physical. He is not floating around in “outer space” somewhere (those first Russian Cosmonauts in space who declared God didn't exist because they didn't see Him “up there” had it quite wrong) **God cares about His creation and He can “touch” and enter our world, but He “lives” outside the universe and everything in it. God exists on a different level or dimension beyond the physical universe He made!**

Even if our physical universe and everything in it were to dissolve into nothing, God would still exist – God cannot die! He is without beginning or end because these concepts are related to “time” – a physical dimension that God transcends.

God is anywhere and everywhere at once because “space” is another physical dimension that God transcends. God sees and knows everything because everything occurs in His presence – just as the artist could witness all that ever happened anywhere and everywhere on the piece of paper that is Flatland.

“Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declared the Lord. ‘Do I not fill heaven and earth?’
(Jeremiah 23:23-24)



God is ...

God is powerful. The One who created and sustains the universe and everything in it is more powerful than we could imagine – just as the capability of the artist far exceeded anything that was known, or that was naturally possible, on Flatland. God is super-natural!

“I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?”
(Jeremiah 32:27)

God is . . . He made our world and He is awesome!

We’re nearly done. Just one more point to ponder ...

In our busy everyday lives it is easy to be distracted and not think about God and those things that are spiritual and unseen. But it seems that virtually everybody has those quiet moments that sneak up on us when we ask ourselves, “Why am I here?”, “Isn’t there more to life?”, “Who am I, really?”



Why the lack of peace, sometimes to the point of despair and suicide, even among those who “have it all” – the sense that something is still missing and that life is not “real” or truly worthwhile without it?



What about *your* quiet moments?

We are all made by God, created by Him in His own image ... therefore the truth about God is known . . . instinctively. God has put this knowledge in our hearts . . . God gives all people life and breath and everything else . . . that we would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from any one of us. For in Him we live and move and exist. As one poet says, 'We are His offspring!'

(Genesis 1:26-27; Romans 1:18-32; Acts 17:23-31)

Pascal said: “There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every person”

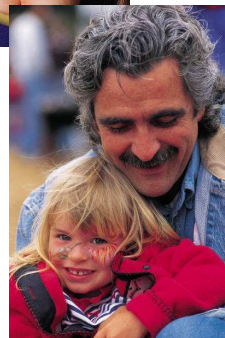
Augustine put it this way: “Our hearts are restless until they find rest in God”

Oh yes, many of us try to fill the gap and overcome the restlessness with stuff like prestige, pleasure, drugs, possessions, etc. But these can never do the job. They eventually leave us even more dissatisfied and frustrated ... often actually hurting or breaking us and others in the process!

Is there a god shaped vacuum in your heart? Are you restless and longing for peace?

Why do you think humans are concerned about morality and religion and concepts like justice and love?

Can you really make sense of life if the world and you and I are not purposefully created by an intelligent Higher Power ... a God whose image is stamped upon our very being? A “Father” from whom we have wandered and in whose “home” we truly belong?





Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Two

Our first stage of discovery with Theo looked at the reasonableness of believing in the existence of a Creator God. On this second stage of discovery, Theo will consider some important things about the Bible. If there is a God who made and sustains our world, we would expect Him to be interested in us and to communicate with us. And as Theo will discover, we do indeed have mail from heaven!
The quest continues . . .

The Bible: Postcards From Home





There is something strange about this book!

The Bible claims for itself to be the word of God, but this collection of writings did not simply “drop down from heaven”. The Spirit of God influenced the prophets (spokespersons for God) to say and write what they did (2 Peter 1:20-21). Christians call this process inspiration, which literally means “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

This is not to say that the prophets received and relayed the message of God like mechanical robots. The various personalities and educational, cultural and historical backgrounds of each prophet are clearly reflected in their writings.

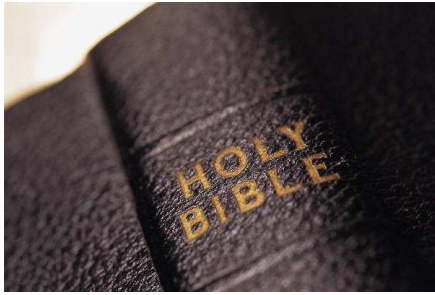
What it does mean is that God ensured that what His prophets said and wrote was what God wanted them to say and write.

It also means God ensured that everything we need to know was said, recorded, and preserved for us in the book we call the Bible.



You expect me to take your word ... or the Bible's word ... for it?!

No. There are a great many things about the Bible that make it unique among all other writings – ancient or modern. And these things can be tested. Follow Theo on the trail of clues to the Bible’s inspiration and ask yourself this question: ***“If the Bible is the word of God, what would we reasonably expect of it?”***



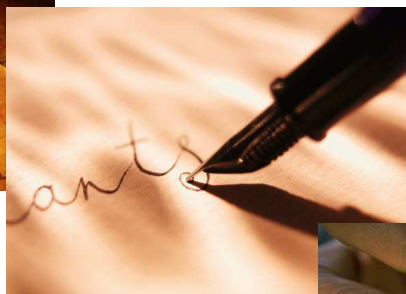
The Bible's Harmony

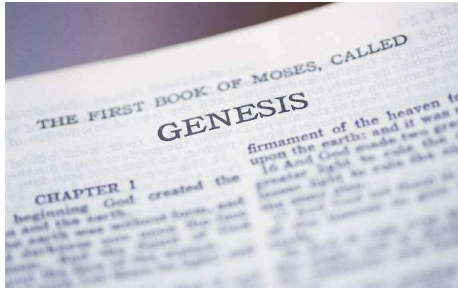
If the Bible is the Word of God, we could reasonably expect all the pieces to consistently fit together . . .

It is no surprise that a book written by a single author has a consistent theme and is without contradictions – what else would you expect? But what about a book that was written and compiled over a period of about 1,500 years by around 40 different people living in different places with very different educational and social backgrounds? That is how the Bible has come to us and yet it is without contradiction in theme or teaching.

Even the differences recorded in parallel accounts such as the New Testament Gospels written in the first century AD are characteristic of authentic eyewitness testimony and this absence of collusion among its writers only highlights the Bible's honesty and reliability.

Of course, if all these people wrote by inspiration, then the Bible does ultimately have only one author – God. If not, how do we explain the Bible's harmony?





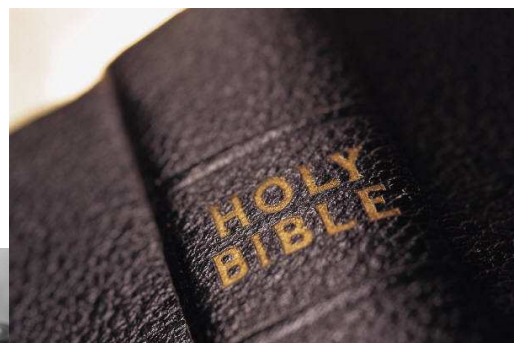
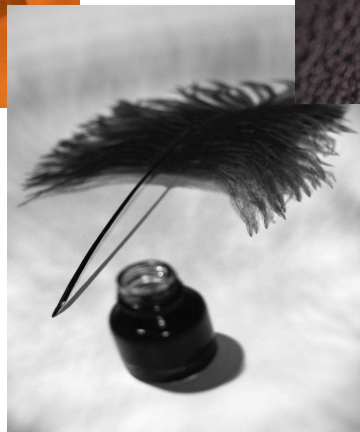
The Bible's Survival

If the Bible is the Word of God, we could reasonably expect God to ensure it was kept safe from corruption and destruction . . .

The ample textual evidence available today assures us that our modern Bible translations, both Old and New Testaments, are reliably based upon Hebrew and Greek copies that are essentially the same in content as the original writings (autographs) of the Bible.

For example, the discovery in 1947 of the Dead Sea scrolls gave us a copy of the Book of Isaiah that predated the oldest known copy of Isaiah at that time by about 1,000 years. Despite the time difference and ten centuries of copying and recopying there was no substantial variation found when the texts were compared.

No book has undergone more intense scrutiny and attack than the Bible. Emperors, scholars, religious leaders and philosophers have all tried their hand at attacking and destroying it but the Bible lives on – preserved and protected!





The Bible's Reliability

If the Bible is the Word of God, we could reasonably expect its historical and scientific references to be reliable . . .

Unlike many other sacred writings, the Bible is no mere collection of philosophical sayings and myths. The Bible message is woven into human history ... history that is testable against the discoveries of modern archaeologists and historians.

For example, before the twentieth century the ancient Hittites were known only from references to them in the Bible. For this reason, many critics of the Bible argued that they were an imaginary peoples invented by the Bible writers. When the archaeologist, Hugo Winckler, discovered the Hittite capital in 1906 the historical trustworthiness of the Bible was once again vindicated.

The prominent twentieth century archaeologist, Nelson Glueck, summed up the Bible's case when he wrote that ***"It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference . . . (I assert) the almost incredible accurate memory of the Bible, and particularly so when it is fortified by archaeological fact"*** (*Rivers in the Desert: History of the Negev*, 1969)

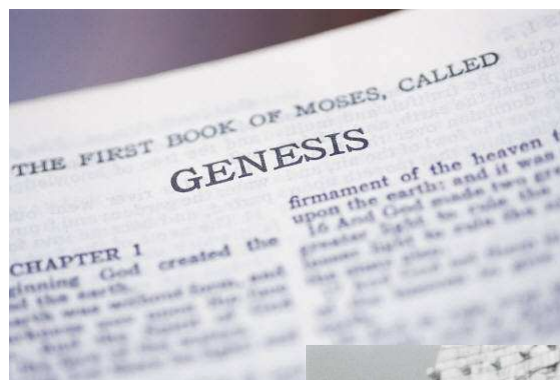
The Bible is not a "Science Textbook", so you won't find scientific jargon in it like DNA and proteins (the Bible was written for a much wider audience than an elite educated few of the 21st century!) But the Bible often does touch on issues relating to the physical sciences and social sciences, and when it does, it is invariably correct.

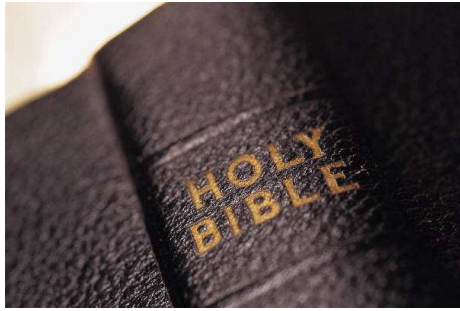
For example, Moses is the man who wrote the first five books of the Bible – you might recognise him from stories like the ten plagues in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. The Egyptians in Moses' time (then the world's super power) treated people's infections with worm's blood and donkey manure. This is typical of the primitive medical science of the culture in which

Moses was raised and educated. But such anti-scientific views are totally absent from Moses' writing. Instead, Moses teaches things like quarantine and purification laws (e.g. Numbers 19:1-22) that modern medical science failed to fully understand and practise until the mid nineteenth century – more than 3,000 years after Moses died!

The Bible's moral principles have had more widespread and profound influence for good on the world than any other (Western civilisation was built upon them). And the Bible's wisdom and insight into human life and relationships is unsurpassed. Modern psychology, ranging in its applications from business leadership strategies to personal well-being, is largely re-inventing the wheel when considered from a biblical perspective.

Were the writers of the Bible really that smart ... "centuries ahead of their time" ... all on their own?





The Bible's Reliability

If the Bible is the Word of God, we could reasonably expect it to be reliable in its own “special” claims too . . .

Predictive prophecy (foretelling things before they happen) is a special characteristic of the Bible. This is not the hit and miss stuff of many modern (or ancient) clairvoyants and mediums. Nor is it the vague and ambiguous generalisations of newspaper horoscopes. Bible prophecies were clear and exact, and were fulfilled down to the last detail!

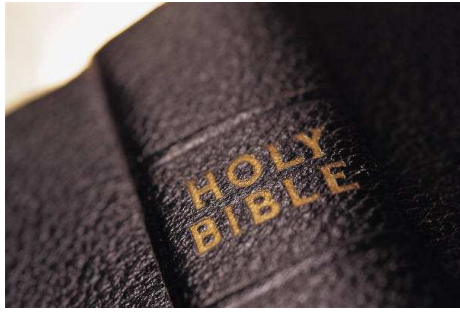


Many prophecies foretold Jesus Christ's coming – the circumstances of His birth, characteristics of His life's work, and His death and resurrection from the grave – and all this was predicted hundreds of years before He was born (e.g. Micah 5:2; Isaiah 7:14; Isaiah 40:3-5; Zechariah 9:9; Isaiah 53:1-12; Psalm 16:10)

Many prophecies foretold the fate of cities and nations. Perhaps the most astonishing example is the prophecy about Tyre (Ezekiel 26:1-21). This prediction was fulfilled through a Babylonian king named Nebuchadnezzar and later, through Alexander the Great, even down to the detail of the city being thrown into the sea.

Isaiah wrote between 740 and 680 BC and identified Cyrus by name as the one who would liberate Israel from Babylonian captivity (a captivity that didn't start until about 100 years after Isaiah prophesied). Cyrus conquered the Babylonians in 539 BC, and shortly afterward allowed the Israelites to return from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem (Isaiah 45:1-13). This is too precise to be dismissed as a lucky guess or a coincidence!

How do we explain the many fulfilled prophecies of the Bible if these guys were not speaking by the inspiration of God?



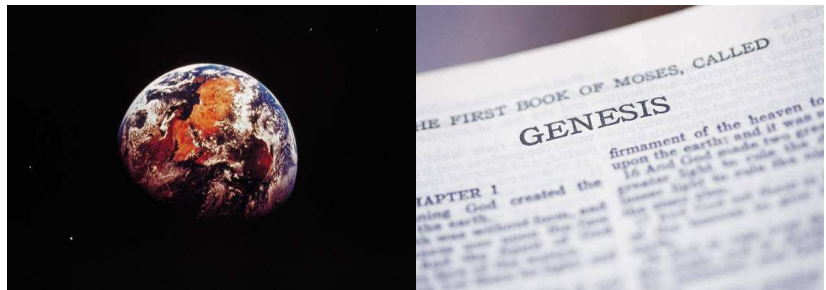
The Bible is the word of God!

We can read the Bible with confidence knowing that what it says is true and reliable because of its unique “track record”. As is the case with any literature (especially that of antiquity where we are distanced by time and culture from the original writers) there will be difficulties and differences in our interpretation and understanding of some parts of the Bible. And we all need to be humble and careful when it comes to the fallible human process of interpretation (2 Peter 3:14-18) – for example, many so-called conflicts between the Bible and Science are actually differences of opinions and theories held by some scientists and some Bible students, not conflicts between biblical and scientific “facts” at all. **But the basic message and teaching of the Bible is unmistakable and the path God would have us travel is clear.**

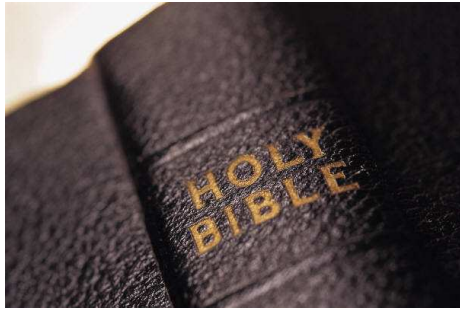
All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Why do you think God had His message written and preserved in “a book”?

God’s ‘fingerprints’ are all over the universe and the Bible (Psalm 19:1-14). God created our world and us for a purpose. He knows and wants what is best for us.



The story of how He has been active throughout human history and made known His love and His desire for us is recorded in the Bible. A very simple and brief overview of the Bible story follows ...



Overview of the Bible Story ...

Genesis (the first book of the Old Testament), **chapters 1-2**. **God created everything**. Humans, who are uniquely made in God's image, were the crowning glory of His creation. Everything was good and harmonious. **Paradise!**



Genesis, chapter 3. **The first human pair rebelled against God**, seeking to dethrone God and to rule their own lives in His place. The Bible calls this attitude and behaviour towards God **sin**, which alienates people from God and from one another. **Paradise was lost**. Sin spoiled everything, and things went from bad to worse (Genesis 4-11). **Genesis, chapter 12 and the rest of the Old Testament** tells of how God promised to restore all people to Himself through a special person and how God prepared the way to accomplish His promise through the nation of Israel.



Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (the Gospels – the first books of the New Testament). **That special person turns out to be God's own Son, Jesus** (Saviour, Immanuel – God with us). Jesus lived and taught how God wants us all to live. Then Jesus allowed Himself to be killed on a cross to accomplish God's plan to reconcile people to God by dying in our place, paying the penalty for our sin. God then raised Jesus from the grave to prove He was God's Son and to receive Him back to heaven.

Acts, chapter 1 through the rest of the New Testament. Jesus' followers teach about the things God had done through His Son, and how people can now be reconciled to God through following Jesus. The story will reach its climax when Jesus returns to gather God's family and **Paradise will be regained for those who love and follow God and His Son, Jesus** (Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 9:27-28; Revelation 20:11-22:21).



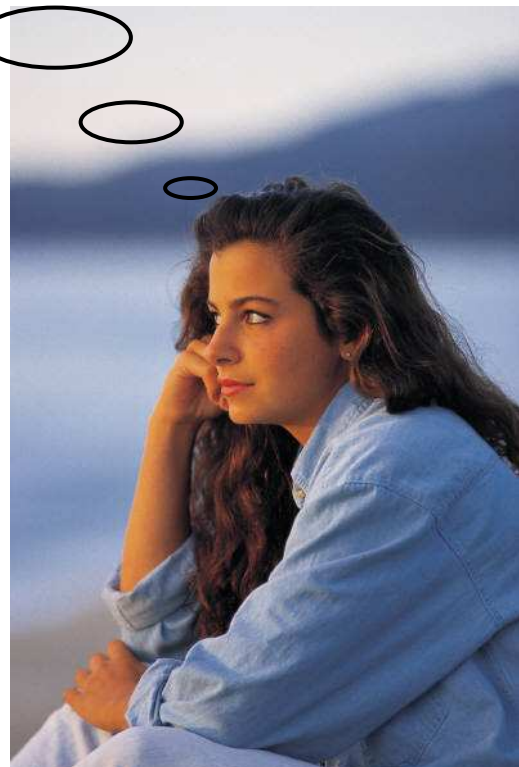
Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Three

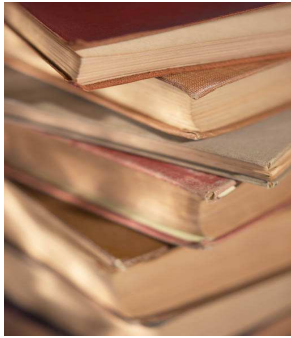
Our second stage of discovery with Theo looked at the Bible and its claim to be the word of God. On this third stage of discovery, Theo will investigate Jesus. Who is Jesus? And why has His impact on human history been so great?

The quest continues ...

Who is Jesus?

My thoughts about Jesus to begin with ...





Was Jesus a real person?

No doubt about it. As well as the Bible, there are other reliable historical references to Jesus. For example:

The Roman Historian, Tacitus wrote in his ***Annals*** (ca 115 AD) concerning the great fire in Rome: “To get rid of the report (that Nero started the fires) Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on . . . Christians. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty (crucifixion) during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our Procurators, Pontius Pilatus”.

The Jewish Historian, Josephus, wrote in his ***Antiquities*** (ca 90-95 AD) two references to Jesus. In the first Josephus mentions James, “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ”. In the second Josephus says, “At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good and he was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive”.

What sort of person was Jesus?

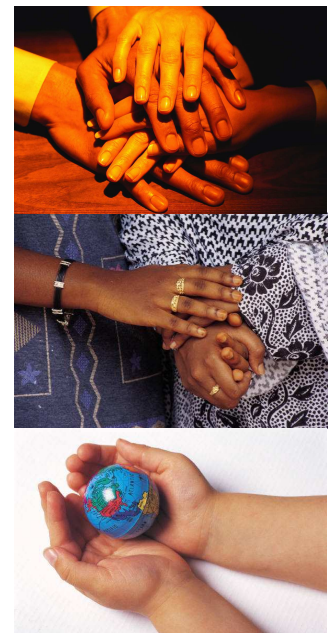


The New Testament is our primary source of reliable information about the life and teachings of Jesus – especially the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John (If you haven’t read one of the gospels before, why not plan to read through the Gospel of Mark or Luke over the next week to get better acquainted with Jesus).

And what a life it was! Born into humble circumstances and living in relative obscurity until about thirty years of age in a remote corner of the Roman Empire, Jesus’ short three year

public work of teaching and healing nearly two thousand years ago continues to have a greater influence and impact on the world than any other person's life and teaching – ancient or modern. Nobody has come even close to Jesus in inspiring more music, more art, more literature, more moral and social progress (ranging from law reform to humanitarian benevolence), more dignity and peace . . . More of almost everything that is good and beneficial to humankind (yes, a lot of bad stuff has been done “in the name of Jesus”, but those things clearly violate Jesus' teaching, dishonouring Him and His way. The One who said “love your enemies” and “turn the other cheek” would hardly condone or promote murder and greed!)

Even many of those opposed to Christianity readily admit that Jesus' life and teaching make Him the greatest and most influential man to have ever lived. Just think about some of Jesus' teaching for a moment: Jesus said the most important things are to love God and to love others as ourself (Matthew 22:37-39). Imagine what the world would be like if everyone treated each other as they would like to be treated themselves. There would be no more war, greed and starvation; no more social injustice; no more divorce and domestic violence; no more exploitation of people and the environment. Life would be just like we all know it could and should be – if only we would put aside our selfishness (sin) to *really* follow Jesus' teaching and example.



A man named G. K. Chesterton stated the issue well: ***“it is not that Christianity has been tried and found wanting, it is that Christianity has been found to be hard and left untried”*** (sadly, that observation often applies to many of the institutional Christian Churches which sometimes seem to condone and promote what Jesus opposed more than what He taught. But don't blame Jesus for the hypocrisy of some who claim to be His followers. Anything valuable will have its counterfeits!)

With wisdom like this from Jesus, it is not surprising that even an atheist like the philosopher John Stuart Mill would still say of Christ that *“religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in picking on this man (Jesus) as the ideal representative and guide of humanity”*.



But Jesus claimed to be more than just a man!

If we accept the eyewitness testimony recorded in the Gospels about Jesus' moral excellence, the genius of His teaching and the flawless consistency with which He practised what He preached – *and there is no good reason not to* – we are faced with a dilemma. You see, the One who always told and defended the truth claimed to be more than just a man – ***Jesus claimed to be God!***
(John 10:24-33; Mark 2:5-12; Luke 22:66-71)

C. S. Lewis states the dilemma this way:

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 . . . But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.

Other great moral reformers and founders of religions say, "I can show you the right path to God". But Jesus alone says:
Follow Me: I am The Way, The Truth and The Life because the Father and I are One
(John 14:6-11)

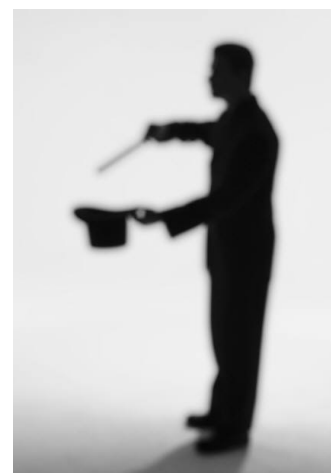




... and what about that walking on water business?

Apart from His wisdom and compassion, Jesus is perhaps best known for His miracles.

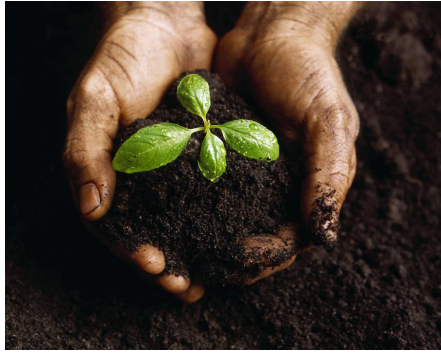
Jesus' miracles were never the stuff of magic or sensational publicity stunts (Jesus was no Houdini!) Each miracle was performed selflessly and purposefully, and most of them were done spontaneously (i.e. without "setting the stage") and publicly. For example, Jesus' feeding multitudes of people with just a few loaves and fishes pointed to His mission as "the bread of life" (John 6:1-40). In other words, **Jesus' miracles served as living illustrations and demonstrations of who He was and what He was all about.**



It is important to remember that these stories are not exaggerated legends or fantastic tales like Homer's Iliad or Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark. These gospel accounts record eyewitness testimonies to Jesus' miracles and were spoken and written during the lifetime of Jesus' contemporaries – not many years later when those people who could dispute the claims were long dead. Even Jesus' enemies (grudgingly) acknowledged His miraculous power (Mark 3:22)



If Jesus' claim to be the Son of God is true, miraculous (super-natural) power is exactly what we would expect from Him (remember Flatland and the artist's touch?) What is really amazing is that He had this power but never used it selfishly – not even to deliver Himself from an unjust and torturous death!



Jesus' death, burial and resurrection: the greatest miracle of all

Jesus' holy life, His unmatched wisdom, and His miraculous power all substantiate His claim to be the One and Only Son of God – if Jesus' claim were true, we would expect nothing less.

But it is His resurrection from the grave that clearly and indisputably distinguishes Him from all others and proves His claim to be God's Son (Romans 1:2-4)

The historical death, burial and resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of Christianity. If Jesus died and was raised back to life on the third day, the truth of Jesus' claims and Christianity is established. If Jesus was not resurrected from the grave, His claims are found wanting and Christianity may be dismissed as being just another religion among many others.

Consider the events surrounding Jesus' death and resurrection by reading at least one of these accounts: Matthew 26:47-28:20; Luke 22:47-24:53; John 18:1-20:31.





What happened to Jesus' body?

Even the strongest critics of Christianity admit that Jesus' body disappeared from the tomb. If Jesus' body was not missing, Christianity could never have gotten off the ground.

Did Jesus' disciples steal the body? This was the story first circulated by the Jewish leaders to explain the missing body of Jesus (Matthew 28:11-15). Not likely! The disciples endured lives of deprivation, suffering and even death for their belief in Jesus' resurrection. People die for causes they believe in (whether what they believe is true or not) but no sane person dies for what they know to be untrue! This sort of deceit and/or foolishness cannot be reconciled with what we know of the character and behaviour of Jesus' apostles and the other early disciples.

Did someone else steal the body?

But who? Who could get past the Roman soldiers set to guard the tomb? (Matthew 27:62-66). It certainly wasn't the Jewish or Roman authorities. They would have loved to be able to produce Jesus' corpse to silence the claims of the disciples about Jesus' rising from the grave and appearing to them alive three days after His death.



Did the disciples go to the wrong tomb? Surely Joseph knew where his own sepulchre was – besides, Jesus' enemies would certainly have checked out that possibility.





What happened to Jesus' body?

But if Jesus' body wasn't stolen, what happened to it?

Perhaps Jesus wasn't dead after all, but revived in the tomb and escaped? Jesus had been scourged and crucified (John 19:1-30). Experienced executioners pronounced Him dead and thrust a spear into His side to make doubly sure (John 19:31-37). There is no reason to doubt that Jesus was dead.

But if not dead, how did the mortally wounded Jesus move the stone and get past the guards? Even if this incredible scenario were allowed, we still have this problem raised by the sceptic D. F. Strauss:

It is impossible that a being who had stolen half dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment ... could have within a few hours of his escape given the disciples the impression that he was a Conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life, an impression that lay at the bottom of their future ministry.



None of these scenarios credibly explain the fact of the empty sepulchre, but the story doesn't end at the empty tomb ...





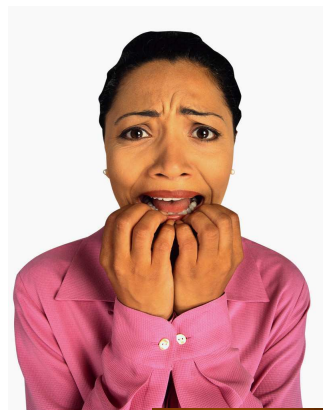
“Read all about it – Dead Man Walking?!”

And why did so many give up so much for such a belief?

The disciples of Jesus claimed that Jesus had presented Himself alive to them after His crucifixion and burial. The many appearances of Jesus with empirical proofs (touch Me, eat with Me) to different people (both individuals and groups) at different times over a forty day period following His death rule out any hallucination or vision theories (Luke 24:1-53; Acts 1:1-3; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8)

Immediately following Jesus' crucifixion, the disciples were discouraged, disillusioned and frightened. Despite what Jesus and the Old Testament prophets had predicted, His disciples were not expecting or even faintly hoping for a resurrection, and they took a lot of convincing by Jesus Himself! But now these dejected and dispirited cowards are transformed into bold witnesses whom no opposition could muzzle.

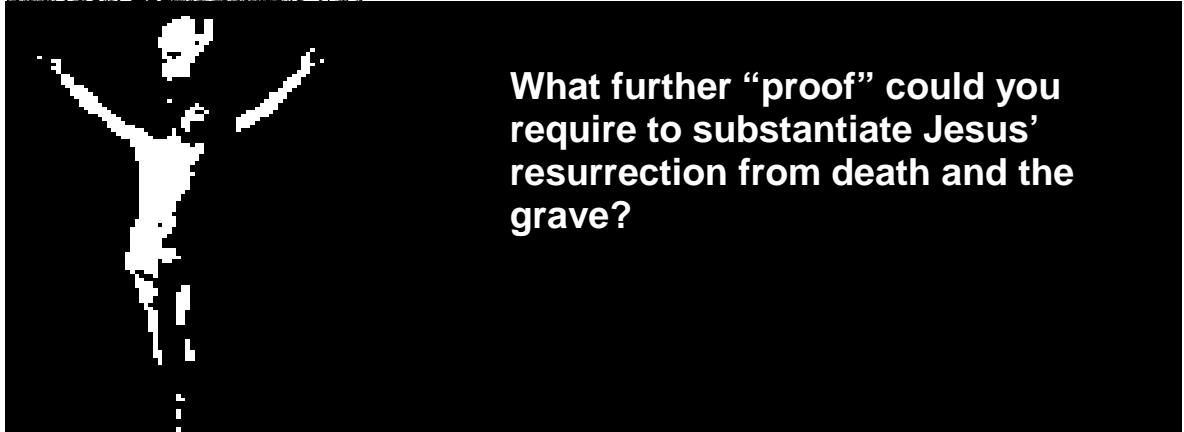
Over the next few years, many thousands of people, including former critics and enemies of Jesus – both Jews and Gentiles, convert to Christianity on the basis of their eye-witness testimony regarding Jesus' resurrection from the grave. And many of those converts were forced to give up all for that faith: career, family, prosperity, safety ... even their lives!



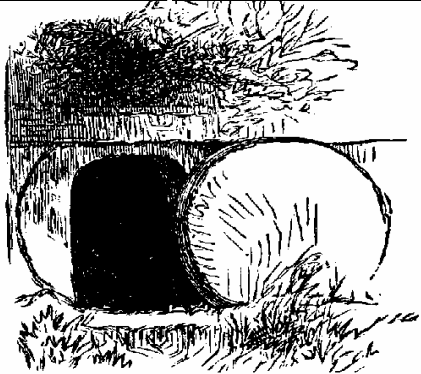
There is only one explanation that satisfactorily accounts for the mystery of the empty tomb, the alleged appearances of Jesus after His death, and the growth of the Christian church – Jesus was killed, was buried, and was resurrected to life on the third day!



- What would you expect if God were to come and live among us as a man? How would He be different to Jesus?
- When it comes to Jesus' claim to be God, there are only three options: He was a **liar**, He was a **lunatic**, or He is the **LORD!** Which option do you think fits Jesus?
- If the resurrection of Jesus was invented by Jesus' disciples . . . Why? What did they gain from such a conspiracy?



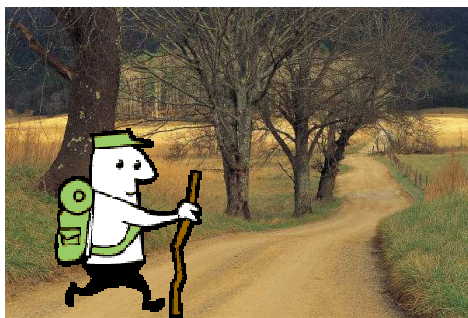
What further “proof” could you require to substantiate Jesus’ resurrection from death and the grave?



He is risen! He is truly God’s Son!

Putting the pieces together:

God has revealed Himself in **Creation** and in **the Bible**. And God has revealed Himself most fully in the person of **Jesus Christ**, God’s only Son.



Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Four

Our third stage of discovery with Theo looked at the identity of Jesus. On this fourth stage of discovery, Theo will investigate why God sent His Son to rescue us . . . even though most of us don't even realise we are in trouble and in need of help!
The quest continues ...

I'm OK ... Well, Not Really!





Ignorance is not so blissful!

There are many interesting war-time stories. Some of them are inspiring ... and nearly all of them are tragic. This story comes to us from the Second World War.

The Japanese armies had penetrated much of the Pacific Region before the U.S. Airforce dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The Japanese surrendered soon afterwards and the war was over. But some Japanese soldiers were isolated on small islands and continued to fight long after the war because news of Japan's surrender had not reached them; or because they refused to accept the possibility of defeat, ignoring news of Japan's surrender as an enemy trick. One such soldier was Hiroo Onada.



Onada was “discovered” on a small island in the Philippines in 1973. Onada had continued to hide and fight all this time, terrorising the people of the island and killing 30 farmers between 1945 and 1973.

Soldiering had become the normal, natural way of life for Onada. He had no idea that he was actually disobeying his government and dishonouring his country, being a peace-time criminal murdering innocent civilians. He had no idea that he could have rejoined his family and loved ones many years earlier to share in the post-war prosperity of Japan. Instead, he lived in squalor, fearfully hiding in a jungle for almost thirty years fighting a war that was already lost because he didn't know there was any alternative – he didn't understand the truth about his circumstances.

Onada's experience serves to illustrate the spiritual plight of us all in several ways.



Living in the jungle

Most of us do not *consciously* or *deliberately* rebel against God. Most people refrain from things like murder, robbery and rape. We might even highly value things like honesty and keep our lying and cheating to a minimum. Typically, we feel we are doing the right thing and are not in trouble with God at all. So we live in our jungle doing what seems natural and right to us without realising we are in fact criminals, captives of our own spiritual ignorance. When we hear talk about sin against God and our need for forgiveness ... well, they must be talking about someone else ...

But made for life in paradise ...



The thing is, we were made for peace in paradise, not war in the jungle! We were purposefully created by God in His image to enjoy, honour, and serve Him and one another. That's why Jesus said the foundation of all God's laws is to *love God and to love one another* (Matthew 22:37-40 – Love here is from the Greek word *agape*, and means to will and to do the best for the other, regardless of the other's merit or response). Sin is not *just* a matter of breaking a rule or two set down by God. **Sin is essentially an issue of the heart ... a betrayal of relationships.** It is moral rebellion against our Creator (fuelled by our ingratitude and proud self-centredness) where we fail to honour God and His purposes for us (Genesis 3:1-7). *Every time we behave in a way that is not based upon love for God and others, we fall short of the mark and become less than we are meant to be* (if you don't believe you are a sinner, try lining yourself up against the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17 for an "objective test"). We have all rejected God and alienated ourselves from Him to become fearful, insecure, wounded and defensive survivors in the jungle ... like the prodigal son, we have all taken our inheritance and left home to wander in a hostile wilderness (Genesis 3:8-24)

While most of us live our lives in the jungle thinking we are doing what is right, our view of right has become distorted because of sin (that's why we need direction from God through the Bible and His Son). Soon enough we become accustomed to sin and tend to accept it in our lives (i.e. sinning becomes "natural" or habitual for us, Ephesians 2:1-3), and then we rationalise it and excuse ourselves ("I'm only human – besides, everyone else is doing it") or we even sear our consciences towards sin, encourage it, and begin to call evil good (Romans 1:21-32). **But our guilt remains, despite our ignorance, and we stand justly condemned before our Creator because of our rebellion against Him.**

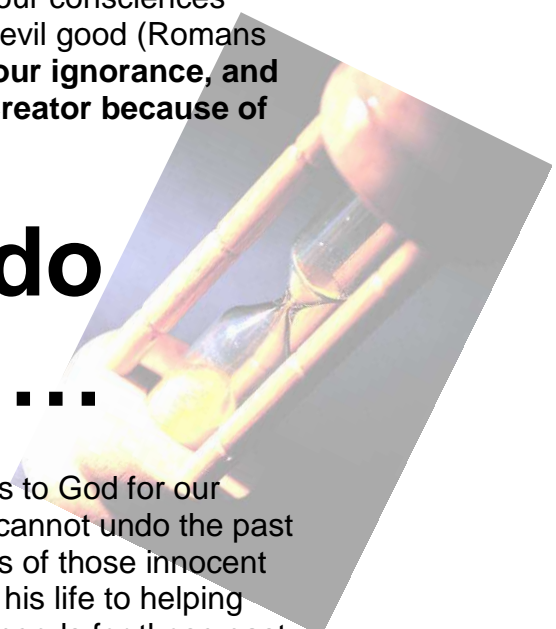
We can't undo our past ...

There is nothing we can do to make amends to God for our rebellion, no matter how sorry we are. We cannot undo the past any more than Onada could restore the lives of those innocent farmers. Even if Onada devoted the rest of his life to helping people on that Island, he could not make amends for those past murders (and no amount of doing good or religious service can cancel out our debt to God)

Even if we could begin from scratch, relying on our own performance would sooner or later see us failing to measure up and we would be right back where we started – guilty sinners. It is simply not possible to keep any standard or law perfectly. To be justified on the basis of law alone requires **flawless** obedience – *one slip and you're undone!* Far from giving us a right standing with God, law only highlights our failure to honour and obey God (Galatians 3:10-13)

We need God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness, not more rules to break and further demonstrate our failure! The Christian's trust and submission (i.e. faith) towards God and His word – *where God is the object of our trust, not ourselves* – is not "law-keeping in order to be right with God" ... It is simply trying to live life in the only way that is consistent with being God's beloved child ... following in the footsteps of Jesus and *living God's truth* – the really real – rather than playing along with and conforming to the world's *lies* of manipulation and illusion.

We cannot do it ourselves. We must rely on God to rescue us from our predicament.

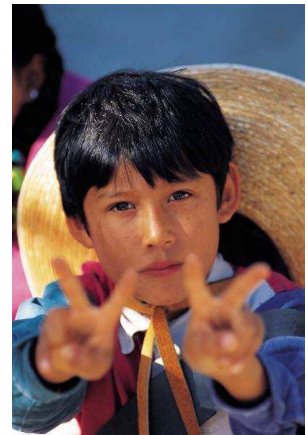


When Onada's presence in the Philippines became known to the Japanese, they negotiated terms for his pardon and arranged for a helicopter to fly over the dense jungle broadcasting this message in Japanese:

Onada, surrender without your weapons. The people in the search party will not shoot you. They will take you back to Japan and protect you. Japan has been defeated. The war is over. You must surrender now!

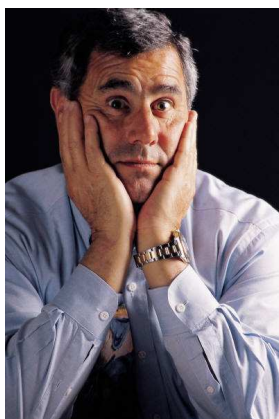
Despite his ignorance, as long as Onada refused the call to surrender (thus rejecting the gracious pardon extended to him) he remained guilty and punishable for his crimes. As it turned out, Onada did surrender and went home to a hero's welcome.

In similar fashion, God sent His Son, Jesus, to call us out of the jungle of sin and to invite us to follow Him and return to God. God promises us forgiveness and acceptance no matter what we have done in the past (wilfully or in ignorance) if we surrender ourselves to Him. Peace and reconciliation with our Father. It's an invitation to return home as a hero ... "my child was dead, and is alive again ... let's celebrate!"



In the past God overlooked [our] ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31)

But frankly, many seem to prefer living in the jungle:



It has been reported that one of the founders of the American Society for Atheism said he was an atheist, not because it is so hard to believe in God, but because he would not accept the moral consequences for his life if it were admitted that God existed – **It takes humility to admit our sinfulness and it takes courage to leave our familiar jungle behind to accept God's offer of forgiveness and to follow Jesus on the unfamiliar road back to our Father.**

Then again, some do not accept God's offer of forgiveness because they think they are good enough anyway:

"I have not sinned that much. The good stuff I've done outweighs the bad. I am generally a good moral person compared with others and God should accept me as I am". **But to be right with God on the basis of our own performance (law keeping – regardless of who makes the 'rules') requires a *perfect scorecard* – and no one has one of those!**



Others think God's offer of forgiveness is too good to be true:



"My sins are too bad and too many for God to forgive me. I'm a nobody, a failure, unworthy, unlovable". **But God promises that no matter how deep the stain of our sins, He will remove it. He can make us as clean as freshly fallen snow ... If we will only submit to Him and let Him help us (Isaiah 1:18-19)**

"I cannot become a Christian yet because I am not good enough yet". **But a person can *never* be "good enough". That's the point! God is willing to forgive us *despite the fact that we don't deserve it* (Romans 5:6-8) – it's a matter of God's grace, not our merit. *Forgiveness is a gift from God, not something we can earn!***



We really aren't OK. No one is. Everyone has chosen to rebel against God in order to run our lives 'our way'. And we are all in a mess because of it. Once we are ready to admit this, we are ready to appreciate and accept God's offer of help and forgiveness through His Son. We have faced the 'bad news' about ourselves, and now we are ready to hear the "good news"!

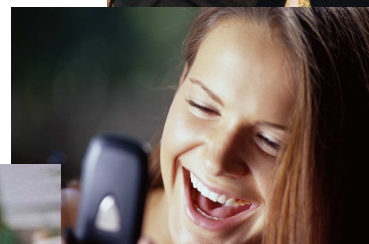
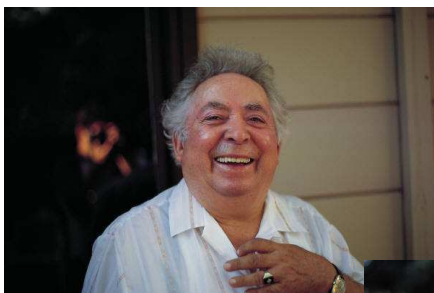


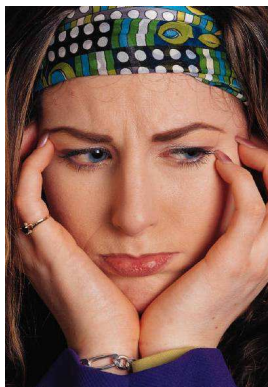
Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Five

Our fourth stage of discovery with Theo looked at the predicament we are in because of our rebellion against God and why we need rescuing. On this fifth stage of discovery, Theo will investigate how and why Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave is the greatest news in the world for us!

The quest continues . . .

Thank you God ... we needed some good news!





Our dilemma

We can do nothing to undo or make amends for our rebellion against God. Our sin created a gap between us and God that no amount of sincere effort on our part could bridge. We are totally dependent on God if we are to be reconciled to Him and made whole again.



God's dilemma

There are two aspects to God's character we need to understand:

1. God is loving, merciful and compassionate.
2. God is also righteous and just.

God's character presents Him with a dilemma when it comes to dealing with our sin:

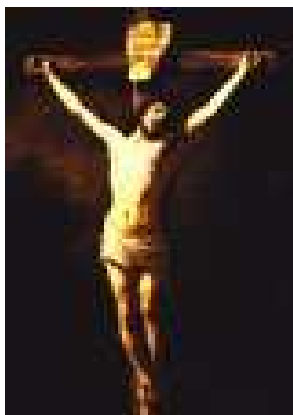
Justice alone would bring judgement against us, resulting in the death penalty (separation from God, what the Bible calls "Hell"). *But God's love and mercy seek another solution.*

Mercy alone would want to overlook our guilt. *But turning a blind eye to our sin is not an option for God because justice and righteousness demand that the penalty be paid.*

God's costly choice ...

If God is to rescue us, there is only one way ... **Both mercy and justice are brought together and satisfied on the cross.** In the person of Jesus, God became a human to suffer and offer up His own life in our place (God's love and mercy to our rescue!) In dying on the cross for us, Jesus paid our penalty in full (so justice and righteousness are upheld!) Because, *and only because*, of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, God can now declare us *not guilty* and reconcile us to Himself if we choose to accept His offer of forgiveness and new life through Jesus Christ, God's Son. **That's grace, God's gift to us all!**

Don't have troubled hearts ... in my Father's house are many rooms ... I go to prepare a place for you ... I am the way, the truth, and the life ... no one comes to the Father except through me ... (John 14:1-7)



God's costly choice

For God so loved the world that He gave His Son (John 3:16)



Justice + Mercy = THE CROSS (God's grace and love towards you and me)

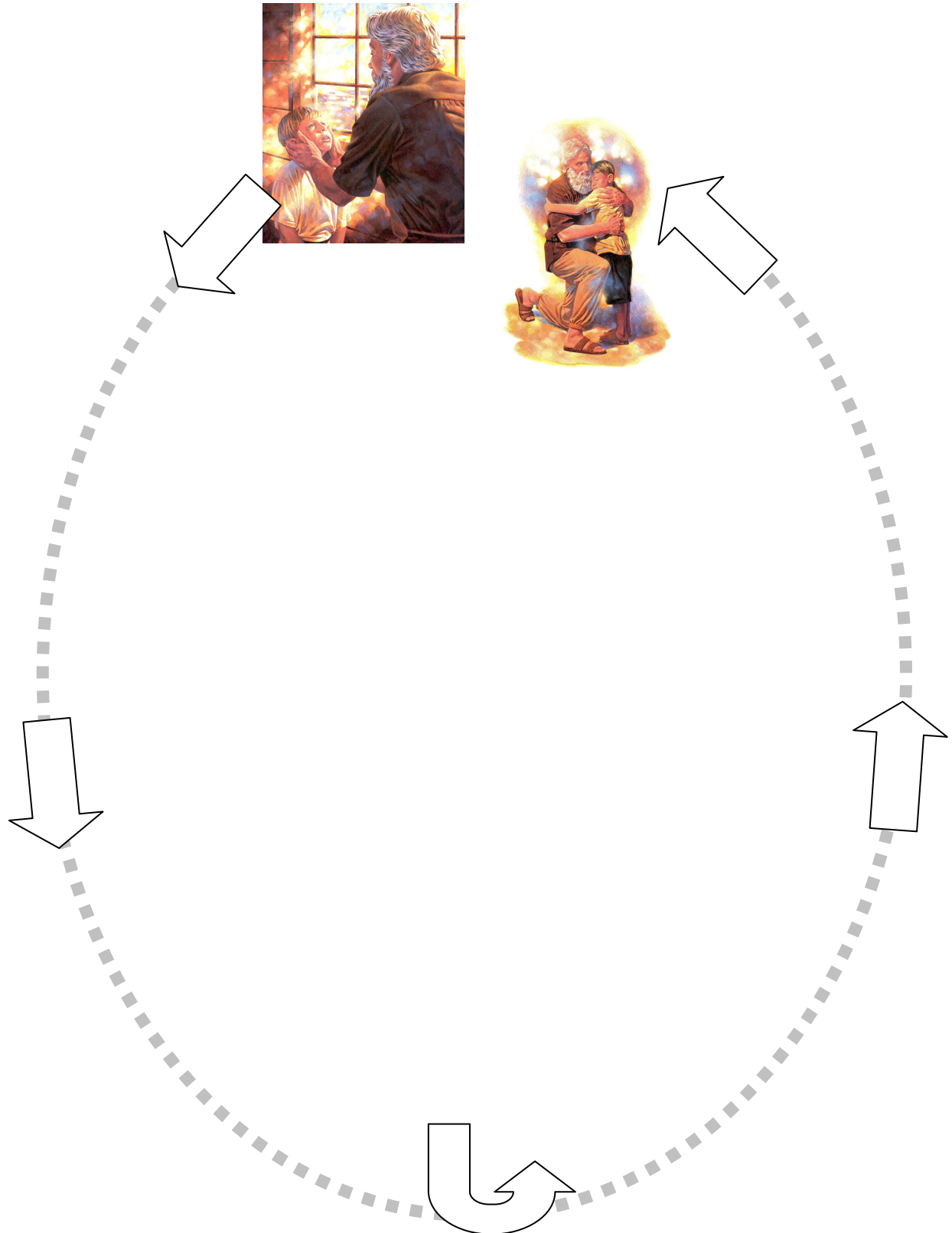
Jesus' death, burial and resurrection from the grave are our assurance that God is not only **willing** but that He is also **able** to deliver on His promises.

God sent His Son, Jesus, not only to suffer and die for us, but also to be raised to glory and to return to His Father in Heaven. Jesus has opened up the way to Heaven for us and He calls for us to follow Him, now and into eternity, on the road back to our Father – and home.

**The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
That is the heart of God's gospel.
That is God's *very good news* for everyone!**

Would you care to think about and describe your **SPIRITUAL** life-journey so far? I wonder where you would place yourself on life's **SPIRITUAL** road at this point in time? Where to next?

My life's spiritual journey so far ...





Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Six

Our fifth stage of discovery with Theo looked at the good news of forgiveness and new life that Jesus' death, burial and resurrection makes possible for all humanity. On this sixth stage of discovery, Theo will investigate how we should respond if we want to accept God's offer of forgiveness and new life in His Son.

The quest continues . . .

Turning and Returning ... what shall we do to accept God's gift of forgiveness?





Jesus' Great Commission

Jesus went about teaching, helping, and forgiving people of their sins – even down to his last moments on the cross (Luke 23:39-43)

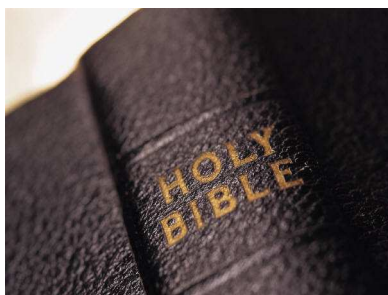
But following His death and resurrection it is now time for Him to set things in order as He prepares to return to His Father in Heaven. Matthew, Mark and Luke record Jesus' last instructions to His disciples as follows:

I have been given complete authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and **make disciples** (i.e. learners, followers of Jesus) of all the nations, **baptising them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.** Teach these new disciples to **obey all the commands** I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20)

Go into all the world and **proclaim the gospel** to the whole creation. **Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved**, but whoever does not believe will be condemned (Mark 16:15-16)

With my authority, **take this message of repentance** to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: **'There is forgiveness of sins for all who turn to Me'** (Luke 24:47)





Just following Jesus' orders ...

About ten days after Jesus gave His Great Commission, the disciples did as Jesus had instructed them – **please read Acts 2:22-42.**

Notice that the apostle Peter (one of Jesus' chosen and authorised messengers) ***taught the gospel of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection*** (verses 22-36)

Notice that many believed Peter's message and were sorrowful about their actions, and they asked Peter what they should do about it: ***Peter's words convicted them deeply, and they said to him and the other apostles, 'What should we do?'*** (verse 37)

Now notice Peter's answer to their question regarding how they should respond to the gospel: ***Each one of you must turn from your sins and turn to God (i.e. repent) and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit ... Those who believed what Peter said were baptised and were added to the church ...*** (verses 38-41)

Notice the apostles continued to teach those baptised believers so they could continue to grow (verse 42). This is Jesus' and His apostles' answer to the question: *"How do I receive God's gift of forgiveness?"*

Faith (i.e. trusting God's power and His promises), which is initially expressed through **Repentance** (changing one's mind, turning to God) and **Baptism** (immersion/burial in water to receive God's promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit), and then ***continuing to live by faith*** (keeping on trusting God and surrendering to Jesus)



Faith

A Christian's faith is not belief without evidence or belief that runs contrary to evidence – it is not 'pie in the sky' wishful thinking! Faith begins with accepting the testimony and evidence of God's word (Romans 10:17; Luke 8:1-21) and grows in proportion to our relationship with Christ as we follow Him and experience His faithfulness. Belief or faith in the biblical sense means much more than just mental assent. True faith encompasses the **assent** of the intellect, the **trust** of the emotions, and the **obedience** of the will (Hebrews 11:1-19)

At its heart, biblical faith means to trust. Anyone who truly believes or trusts God will surrender themselves to His care and to His directions (Matthew 6:19-33; 7:21-27; James 2:14-26) ... putting our lives in His hands and relying upon His power in the same way that we might be called upon to trust a surgeon's expertise and integrity when seriously ill and in need of a life-saving operation (when you think about it, 'faith' isn't just a *religious* concept – we live life on the basis of faith all the time – if we didn't, we would rarely be able to do anything at all!)

This story may help us to understand the character of biblical faith:

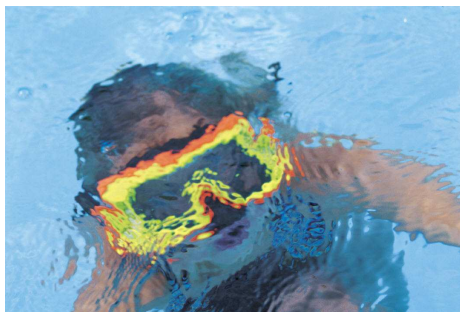
Blondin was a famous high-wire stunt performer. One of his most notorious stunts was to walk (sometimes blindfolded) across a wire stretched over Niagara Falls. When Blondin announced his plan to push a man in a wheelbarrow across the Falls, a newspaper reporter interviewed him about it. “Do you think I can do it?”, Blondin asked the reporter. “I really believe you can”, replied the reporter, “I think you’re the greatest stunt artist of all time”. Then Blondin responded to his admirer, “You really believe I can do it? Well then, get into the wheelbarrow!”

There is a big difference between simply believing in someone's ability and being willing to trust that person *with your life*. Jesus wants us to trust Him to the point of surrendering our lives to Him. Jesus wants our heart and will as well as our mind. ***Jesus wants us to get into His wheelbarrow!*** Anything less falls short of authentic biblical FAITH!



Repentance

Appreciating God's love expressed through the gospel and arriving at the point of being willing to trust and follow Jesus leads us naturally to a change of mind (repentance – 2 Corinthians 7:8-11) ... we see that we have been travelling in the wrong direction (the journey away from our Father) and have been using the wrong road map (our will over God's will) which has led us to become lost, bruised, beaten and broken (life in the prodigal pig-pen). **So we resolve to make a U-Turn in our journey!** In Jesus' story about the prodigal son, repentance is described as the son 'coming to his senses', and determining to get up and return to his Father (Luke 15:17-18)

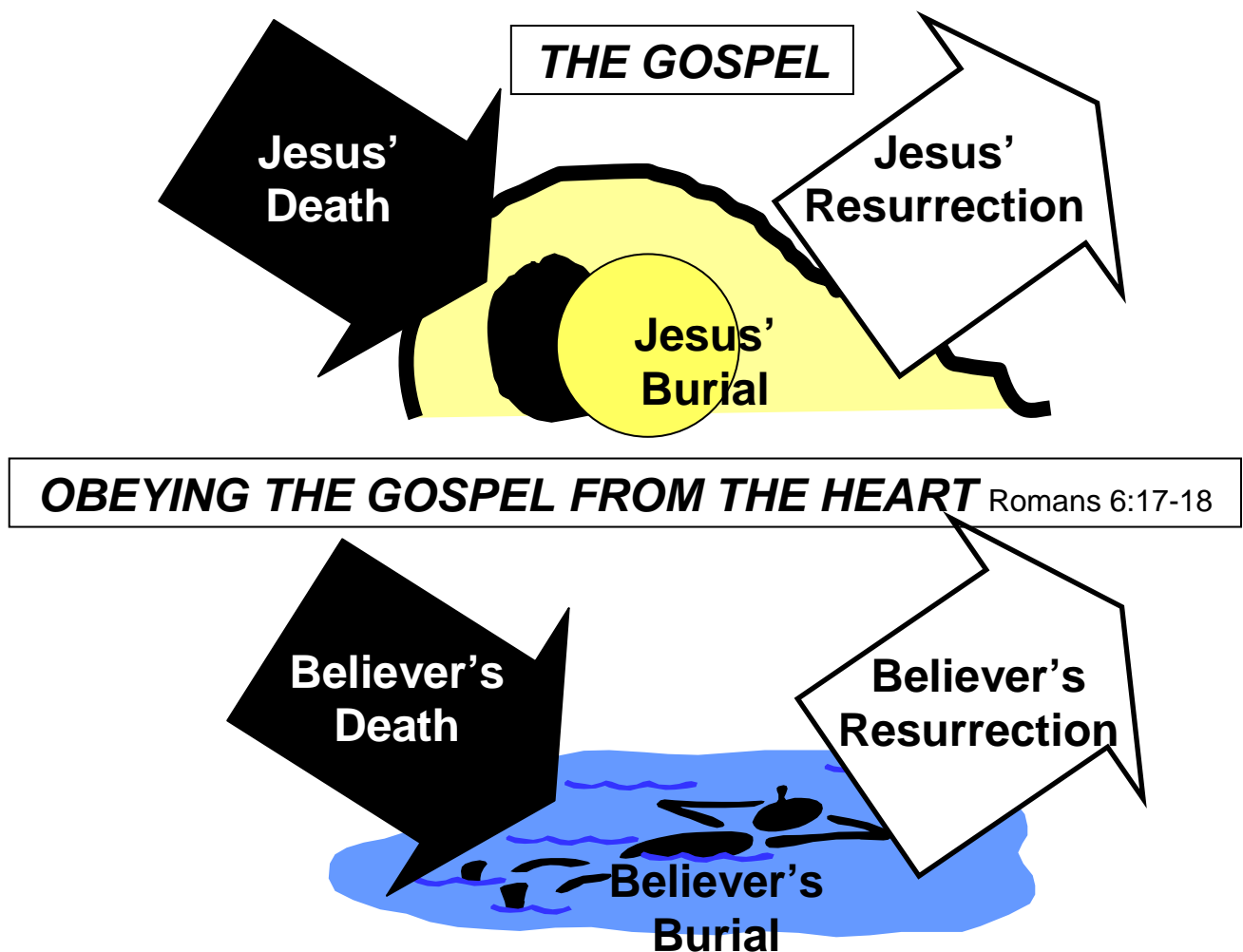


Baptism

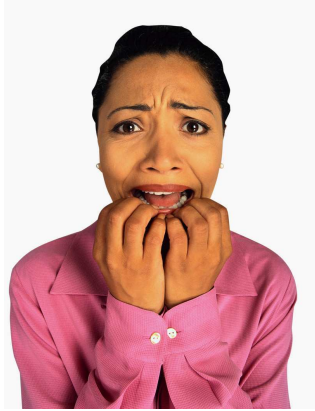
The repentant believer in Christ "obeys from the heart" the gospel (*the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus*) in water baptism (Romans 6:1-18; cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10) – baptism is the divinely appointed way in which we appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Peter 3:20-21), thus "calling upon the name of the Lord" to be forgiven (Acts 22:16; Romans 10:13). It is at the time of our baptism that we are "born again" (John 3:5) because it is then that God forgives us of our sins and gives us His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Galatians 3:26-4:7). The repentant believer is baptised into Christ and into His death (Romans 6:3). And just as Jesus was raised from

death, so God raises the believer up from the 'watery grave' of baptism to a new life in Him (Romans 6:4). *In this way, faith (expressed initially in repentance and baptism) reproduces the gospel in the life of the believer whose life is now 'shaped' by the gospel as they continue to die to self and to live for God.*

Accompanied by repentance, baptism is a powerful re-enactment of the gospel; anchoring the body, heart and mind of each believer at the time of their reconciliation with God to that which is saving him or her (the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus) as they humbly surrender in faith to the promise, will and power of God (Colossians 2:11-13; cf. 2 Kings 5:1-14 and understand that it is God who is 'working' here, not the obedient believer or 'magic water'!)



The response to His gospel that God requires from us is simple but profound. We are reconciled to God and receive His Holy Spirit through faith when we repent and are baptised into Christ: ***We are saved by the gospel when we conform to and obey the gospel – dying to our 'old (false) self' and being raised with Jesus to discover our 'new (true) self' as God's Beloved child.***

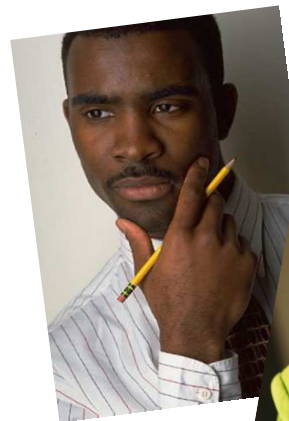


Authentic Christian discipleship is not for wimps!

Living by faith . . . beginning with repentance and baptism, the new born child of God embarks upon a new life in Christ, coming out of darkness to live in God's light – expect to stumble a bit as we adjust to the light! Baptism is not an end in itself . . . it is just the first step in the process of turning around (repentance) to begin walking by faith in the direction of home . . . and Jesus never promised that the journey back home to our Father was going to be an easy one!

The return journey will demand changes in our thinking and lifestyle – and for some of us those changes may be radical (we have all picked up a lot of harmful 'baggage' for our survival on that hostile path which led away from God). **Authentic Christianity** is not for the faint hearted. It may even bring suffering and persecution! Jesus warns:

If you want to be My follower you must love Me more than your own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters – yes, more than your own life . . . But don't begin until you count the cost . . . no one can become My disciple without giving up everything for Me
(Luke 14:25-35)



The paradox of forgiveness and new life in Christ is this:

By God's grace new life is a free gift, but if you want to accept His gift, it will cost you everything!

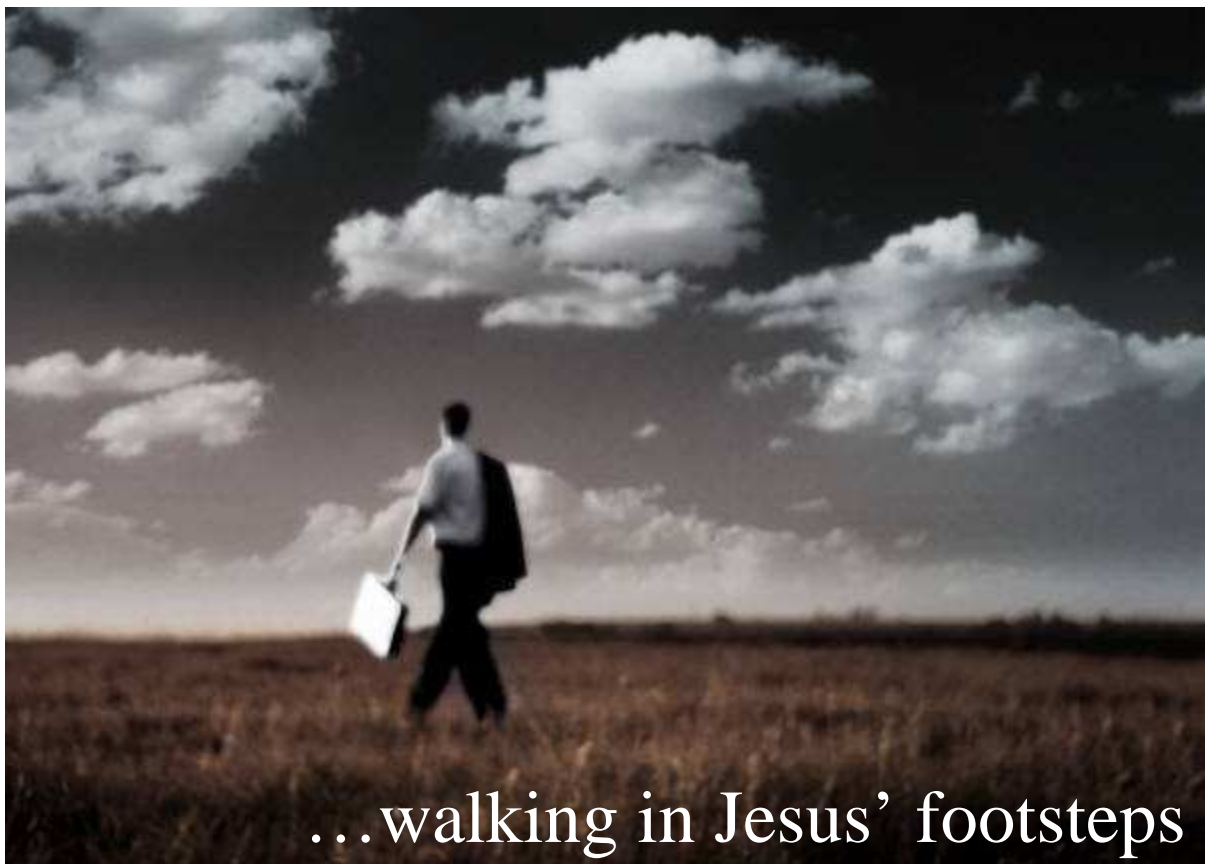


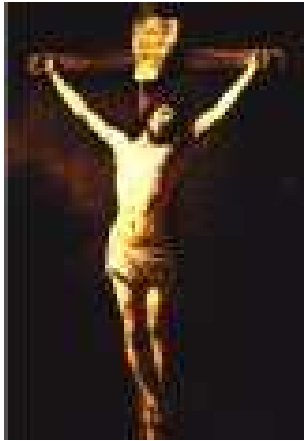
Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Seven

Our sixth stage of discovery with Theo looked at how we should respond if we want to accept God's offer of forgiveness and new life in His Son. In this seventh (and last) stage of discovery, Theo looks briefly at the Christian's new life in Christ.

The quest continues . . .

The Journey Home





The bottom line: Gospel shaped living

Having begun our journey home, our chief concern in life is now the question:

“What would Jesus do if He were living my life?”

... because He is living my life through me!

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer me in charge, but Jesus lives in and through me. So I live this life in this earthly body by trusting and obeying the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me ...
(Galatians 2:20)

*We have a leader to follow,
a mentor to imitate,
a big brother in whose footsteps we are to walk ...*
(Romans 8:29; 1 John 2:1-6)



We are rescued from sin to become holy – a temple of God's Holy Spirit!

Please take the time to read Matthew 3:13-4:11

It is no coincidence that the Christian's new life with God begins in the same way that Jesus' own ministry began: water baptism and anointing with the Holy Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove to alight upon Jesus at His water baptism, the Father affirmed that Jesus was truly His beloved Son (Matthew 3:16-17)



Trusting God's promise and His faithfulness, we know that we received the Holy Spirit from God at the time of our own water baptism too (Acts 2:38; 5:32). Thus we were sealed and anointed with the Holy Spirit, confirmed as God's special possession (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Ephesians 1:13-14) and His beloved "re-born", "adopted" child (John 3:5-8; Romans 8:15-17; Galatians 4:6)

Christians are strengthened and led by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:1-17; Ephesians 3:16) who dwells in us (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) to help us live lives set apart (i.e. holy) to God (this is called **sanctification** and it is a growing process – just as a babe matures into an adult, our sanctification and becoming holy is a life-long process). The primary means the Holy Spirit uses to lead, instruct and convict us is God's word, the "sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 10:15-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

And it is important to remember the Holy Spirit is a 'helper', not a 'maker'. Our role is to submit to Him and cooperate with Him, allowing God to work in our lives and transform our minds and hearts (Galatians 5:13-26; Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:12-16). Not to submit and cooperate is to grieve the Holy Spirit and stifle His influence in our lives (Galatians 6:7-10; 1 Thessalonians 5:19)

Jesus and temptation

Jesus' trial in the wilderness includes His confrontation with Satan – someone that Theo has alluded to, but not explained in any detail.

Satan is a powerful being – probably an angel. Though the Bible only gives hints about Satan's identity, it seems likely he is an arch angel who led a rebellion against God (cf. 1 Timothy 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Satan is actively opposed to God and all of God's purposes. Satan orchestrated the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God (Genesis 3:1ff.), and he seeks to keep us all in a state of rebellion against God.

Satan is the enemy of God and all humankind. He delights in our dishonouring of God, and because humans are special to God, Satan seeks our destruction. Christians should not treat lightly the threat Satan poses (1 Peter 5:8-9). Though we cannot 'see' it on the six-o'clock television news, there is a spiritual battle raging. This makes Jesus' response to Satan's temptations all the more important if we too are going to resist Satan.

It is no coincidence that the Christian's life includes trials and temptation from the very beginning, just like Jesus' own experience.

The apostle John said:

Do not love the world or the things of the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh (pleasures) the lust of the eyes (possessions) and the pride of life (prestige or power) – is not of the Father but is of the world (1 John 2:15-16)

The 'world' here represents the sphere of Satan's influence and purposes as opposed to God's influence and purposes. These elements (the three P's) are evident in the original temptation (Genesis 3:1-6) as well as Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

These seem to be Satan's most effective modes of attack as he seeks to undermine or deny the truth and promises of God and His word, trying to draw us away from God (James 1:13-21; 1 Peter 5:6-11) by asserting our independence of God – determining right and wrong for ourselves to usurp God's place (Genesis 3:5)

“If you are the Son of God ...”

Satan's first approach to Jesus sought to cast doubt in His mind about His relationship with God. “If you are the Son of God . . .” It is not uncommon as a new Christian to have doubts about our relationship with God. Satan will always try to convince us that God is against us rather than for us. He will point to our negative feelings, our difficult times and our failures to undermine our faith in God and His love for us (just like he got Eve's attention off the many blessings of God and on to the one restriction God had placed on her and Adam, Genesis 3:1)

Those born of water and the Spirit have a **concrete experience** (not just ‘feelings’) to look back to (*i.e. their baptism*). If a repentant believer has been baptised into Christ, they have God's assurance that they are His beloved child – they have God's promise of forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and God is faithful in keeping His promises!

Thank God that our relationship with Him is dependent on His grace and His faithfulness, not our feelings or our circumstances or our performance (Romans 8:28-39). Thank God that even when we do fail (and we all do!) we still have His forgiveness and acceptance as we confess our need for Him and continue to try and walk in His light (1 John 1:5-2:6). Thank God that He is a loving Father who cares enough to allow us to be disciplined and tested in life for our own spiritual welfare and growth (Hebrews 12:5-13)

“Turn these stones into bread ...”

Jesus had been exposed to hardship and danger in the wilderness for forty days. Jesus was hungry and the idea of turning stones into bread must have been very appealing after fasting for so long.

But Jesus knew the wilderness trial was God's way of testing Him and strengthening His faith for what lay ahead (that the similarity between Jesus' wilderness trial and that of Israel following their baptism in the Red Sea, 1 Corinthians 10:1ff., did not escape Jesus is evidenced by the context of the Scriptures He cited in rejecting Satan's temptations)

Satan was effectively proposing that Jesus take matters into His own hands rather than trusting and depending upon God. Jesus would have none of it. He responded: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:1-5). There was more at stake here than His physical comfort – Jesus would discipline Himself to depend upon God and trust in His Father rather than Himself, even in the most trying of circumstances.

“Throw yourself down ...”

Satan tries to provoke Jesus to put God to the test by appealing to Jesus' pride. Satan even quotes Scripture (albeit out of context) to seduce Jesus: “Show everyone how much God cares for you by *forcing* Him to protect you from harm – that will get the people's attention and prove you are God's special One!” Jesus' recourse is again to God's word (in proper context), “It is wrong to tempt God” (Deuteronomy 6:16, cf. Exodus 17:2-7)

Jesus' relationship with God was not conditioned upon God's measuring up to certain expectations or dealing out special favours: God is to be trusted, honoured and served, not manipulated or exploited for our own purposes!

“Fall down and worship me ...”

Jesus had come to establish God's kingdom on earth. Satan set it all out before Jesus and said, “take it!” God's way to establish His kingdom was long and hard and it included Jesus' suffering and death. Satan's way appeared easy and painless. All Jesus needed to do was worship Satan and turn His back on God (Deuteronomy 6:10-15; 10:12-22)

Sometimes a Christian will find God's way hard and be tempted to turn her or his back on God too. When those times come, our answer needs to be the same as Jesus' response: “Away with you, Satan! . . . I will worship the Lord my God, and Him only shall I serve”.

We were made for relationship with God – Abba Father!

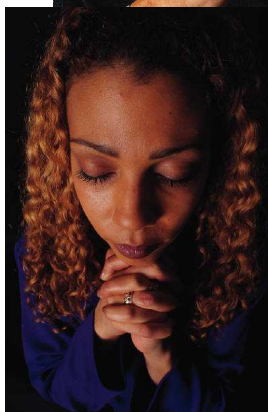
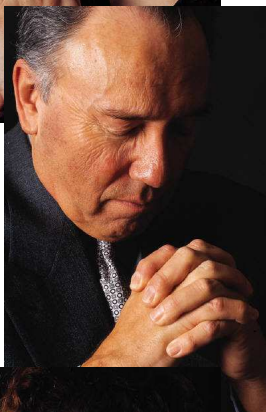
Jesus' life was dominated by His close relationship with His Father. This closeness was most apparent in His prayers. Jesus spoke to God regularly, sometimes all night long. Sometimes His prayers were fervent and very focused. Sometimes His prayers seem like casual conversations with God. Sometimes He prayed alone. At other times He shared prayers with His disciples. Regardless of His circumstances, prayer was a constant in Jesus' life. He even made a special point of teaching His disciples how to pray (Matthew 6:5-15)

While God speaks to us primarily through His word, we speak to God through prayer. If a relationship is to be vital and healthy, it must involve

both talking and listening. God delights in our communication with Him. He wants us to listen to Him through understanding and obeying His word, and He wants to listen to us as a Father who yearns to enjoy and share in a rich relationship with His children. It is important that we remember God's interest and involvement in our every day activities and speak with Him often. Dallas Willard put it nicely when he said that prayer is like a friend walking and talking with a friend. It is the sharing of our life together with God, and out of it we pray.

If it is in accordance with God's will, our prayers can change things (James 5:13-18; 1 John 5:14-15). With God, all things are possible (Matthew 17:14-21). We must trust in God's promises and power sufficiently to ask Him, not limiting our requests in proportion to our own limitations or doubts (Ephesians 3:20-21; James 1:5-8)

Sometimes God's answer may be no. God's answer may not be when or what we expected. We must be persistent (Luke 11:1-13), knowing that God hears us. And yes, God knows what we need and want before we ask Him – but God wants us to enter into a deep relationship with Him and developing an intimate relationship requires much experience shared together where trust and open communication prevail.



Based upon Jesus' model prayer, this acronym (ACTS) may be helpful as you seek to develop your own prayers.

In time, prayer will occur naturally as your relationship with God grows, but at first it may seem a little awkward.

Adoration

Express your adoration and reverence to our Creator God: Father, Saviour, Helper

Confession

Lay bare your faults and failures to God and ask for healing and forgiveness

Thanksgiving

Thank God for His provision and goodness

Supplication

Bring your concerns and requests before God

We were made for relationship with one another – brothers and sisters in God's community!



God's purpose in Jesus is to gather to Himself a people – His church – the redeemed community growing *together* to become like His Son and prepared to live with God for eternity. God's universal church on earth encompasses all those who have been born of water and the Spirit (we have sisters and brothers in Christ all over the world that we will never get to know until we get to heaven!) But it is the local church that provides the primary context for fellowship with other Christians.

Jesus' church has a simple and distinctive mission: "making followers of Jesus" (Matthew 28:18-20)

This involves teaching others about God's love and the gospel (1 Peter 3:15-16). It also involves encouraging and equipping one another for God's service (Ephesians 4:11-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)

Jesus saves people in community. Under normal circumstances, there is no such thing as a 'lone Christian'. Every Christian is a valued member of God's family and every Christian's involvement as a member of Christ's body is important to the body's functioning as a healthy, living organism (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). The church is those people brought together in and through Jesus – we exist because of who He is and what He has done for us on the cross.



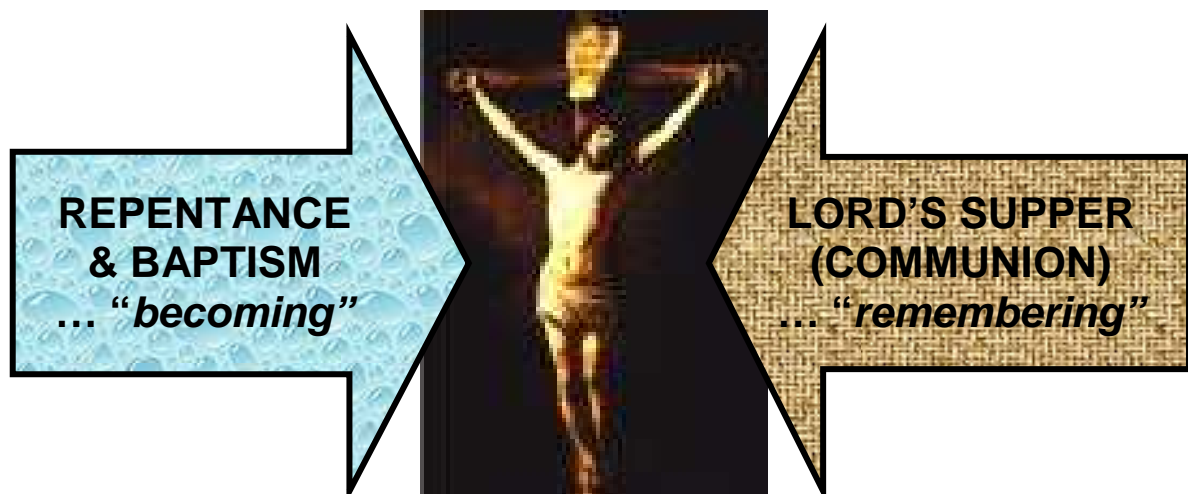
The church is God's gospel community: The gospel is what saves us and brings us together as God's family. The gospel is the model for our becoming a child of God (remember your death, burial and resurrection in repentance and baptism?) The gospel continues to shape our daily living as we die to self and live by faith in Christ (Galatians 2:20). The gospel is the message we proclaim to others (Mark 16:15-16; 1 Corinthians 11:26). And the gospel will stamp its final impression upon us with our own bodily resurrection on Judgement Day – Great Day! (John 5:19-29; 1 Corinthians 15:12-58; Revelation 20:11-22:5)

While much of our life as God's children is lived out in the context of our daily routines at work and at home, God knows we need other Christians for mutual encouragement and growth (Christians need to get together often)

As a vital part of its community life, God's church meets on the first day of the week (Sunday – the day of Jesus' resurrection and the birthday of His church) to commune with Jesus and one another in a special way: focusing upon, celebrating, and declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ through fellowship in the Lord's Supper in anticipation of His return (Matthew 26:17-30; Acts 20:6-7; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-29). The Lord's Supper is also known as the Eucharist (i.e. thanksgiving), and Communion (i.e. sharing)



It is important to appreciate that the two distinctive rites (some call them sacraments) of the Christian faith (baptism and the Lord's Supper) both have their substance and meaning rooted in the gospel:



God's church – the community of the gospel!



Farewell from Theophilus

You have a lifetime journey of growth and learning ahead of you as you make your way home to our Father. Theo just wants to finish by highlighting some helpful signposts (spiritual disciplines) to look out for along the way. These are intended to keep us safely on track towards maturity in Jesus.



Bible Study:

To listen to God's message, understanding His word and submitting to His will, thus being led by His Spirit.



Prayer:

To be mindful of God's continual presence and concern and to talk with Him often. Make time to be alone with God in prayer and contemplation!



Worship:

To be living a life of praise, thankfulness and love toward God and to be serving and loving others in His name.



Community:

To be encouraging, equipping, and serving other Christians as an active and growing member of Christ's body.



Evangelism:

To be living as God's Beloved and inviting other prodigals to join you on the homeward journey to be with our Father!

