SHORT STUDIES FOR THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Starting Out with Christ



Short Studies for New Believers
Eleven studies in one volume

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity
Enterprises

Starting Out with Christ

Short Studies for New Believers

Short Studies for the Christian Life

Andrew Dominguez



Trinfinity Enterprises

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Is There Really a God

Looking honestly at the evidence

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

Maybe you picked up this book because you are not sure God is there at all. That is a fair place to start. The Bible never asks you to turn off your mind. It invites you to look at what God has made, what He has said, and what He has done in history, and then decide.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember. Even so, I drifted from Him more than once through my own bad choices. When people ask whether God exists, they are rarely looking for a lecture. They want to know whether faith holds up in real life. This book lays out the plain reasons I believe God is real.

I am not going to pretend every question has a neat answer. I am going to show you why I believe, and why I think the evidence points to a God who wants to be found.

1 Something rather than nothing

The Bible starts with the simplest and biggest claim it makes.

> *In **the** beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*
>
> **Genesis 1:1 (SLB)**

Everything that begins to exist has a cause. A house points to a builder. A painting points to a painter. The universe had a beginning, and something outside of it had to bring it into being. The Bible says that Someone is God.

At my bench, I fit necks, wire circuits and set up instruments from raw wood and hardware. A guitar body does not carve itself, and pickups do not wire themselves. Every piece shows design and a builder behind it. When I look at the world around me, I see the same kind of order on a far larger scale. It points to a Creator.

Paul wrote that God's "invisible things, from the creation of the world, being understood by the things made, are clearly seen, both His eternal power and divinity" (Romans 1:20, SLB). You do not need a seminary degree to see it. Look at a night sky away from city lights.

> *The heavens are recounting the glory of God, and the expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*
>
> **Psalm 19:1 (SLB)**

2 The longing inside us

There is another kind of evidence, and you carry it around with you. People in every culture and every century have looked for meaning beyond this life. We know that some things are right and some are wrong, even when we wish they were not.

> *He has made everything beautiful in its time; also He has put eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from beginning to end.*
>
> **Ecclesiastes 3:11 (SLB)**

God set eternity in our hearts. That restless feeling that there has to be more is not a defect. It is a homing signal. Paul told the philosophers in Athens

that God made every nation "to seek the Lord, if perhaps they might feel for Him and find Him; and yet He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26-27, SLB).

For years I looked successful on the outside while hiding a drinking problem. I worked hard and told myself I had it under control, but I was empty and drifting from God. Success at work could not fill that gap. It took my wife catching me and taking me to my first 12-step meeting on May 29, 2020, to face what was missing. That restlessness inside us is a longing only God can satisfy.

3 A God who speaks

If God made us, it makes sense that He would tell us about Himself. Christians believe He has done that through the Bible, written over about fifteen hundred years by many authors, yet telling one story. The prophets named places and events long before they happened. The New Testament also survives in more ancient handwritten copies than any other book from the ancient world.

God has also spoken in a Person. Hebrews 1:1-2 (SLB) says that "God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us in a Son." If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus.

I have found that the God of the Bible forgives me when I feel most unforgivable and listens to me when I do not deserve to be heard. That is not the God of a textbook. That is the God who speaks and listens.

When I was a boy in Victorville, a neighbor down the street paid me to mow his lawn. Pastor Jimmy Carter took me to church and led me to Christ. Years later, translating the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) only deepened my conviction that God speaks clearly through His Word. God has not left us guessing about who He is.

4 The evidence of the empty tomb

Christianity stands or falls on one event in history. Paul said so himself.

> *And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching **is** empty, and your faith also **is** empty.*
> **1 Corinthians 15:14 (SLB)**

Paul did not ask people to take it on blind faith. He listed the witnesses. Jesus appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve, and then "to more than five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the greater part remain until now" (1 Corinthians 15:5-6, SLB). In other words, go ask them.

Those first followers had nothing to gain by lying. They were beaten, jailed, and many were killed for saying Jesus was alive. People do not die for something they know they made up. Something happened that Sunday morning that turned frightened men into bold witnesses.

After drifting more than once and making choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me, I did not need a good philosophy. I needed a Savior who actually conquered sin and death. Everything

rests on one fact: Jesus rose from the dead. If the tomb is still full, my faith is useless (1 Corinthians 15:14). Because it is empty, forgiveness and a new start are real.

5 Why not every religion can be right

Ray Comfort, in Why Christianity?, asks his readers to imagine being offered four gifts: a famous painting, a new sports car, a million dollars, or a parachute. Then he adds one detail. You have to jump out of an airplane at 10,000 feet. Suddenly only one gift matters.

His point is that each of us is going to face death and then God. The question is not which belief makes us feel best. It is which one can actually carry us through. The world's religions do not all say the same thing. They disagree about who God is, who Jesus is, and how a person is made right with God. They cannot all be true.

Jesus did not leave room for confusion. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, SLB). That is a bold claim, and it is either true or false. The empty tomb tells me it is true.

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young, but faith did not become personal for me until a neighbor, Pastor Jimmy Carter, showed me who Jesus is in Scripture. Over about 40 years of work, I have met many sincere people with different beliefs. Sincerity alone does not make a bridge hold weight.

Jesus made a clear claim to be the only way to the Father (John 14:6).

6 What your salvation depends on

God does not hide from people who honestly look for Him. He told Israel, "you will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13, SLB).

> *And without faith **it is** impossible to please **Him**; for the one who draws near to God must believe that He is, and **that** He becomes a rewarder to those who earnestly seek Him.*
>
> **Hebrews 11:6 (SLB)**

Knowing God exists is a start, but it is not salvation. The Bible says "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23, SLB). What saves us is not our searching. It is what God did when He came looking for us. "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, SLB).

Salvation depends on trusting Jesus, who died for your sins and rose again. "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Romans 10:13, SLB). If you are ready, call on Him. Tell Him you want to know Him, that you know you have sinned, and that you trust Jesus to save you. Then keep reading His Word. You will find He was looking for you long before you started looking for Him.

In a 12-step program you learn fast that willpower alone cannot fix you. Writing New Beginnings, I saw how many people still try to earn their way to God by cleaning up first. Religious effort always comes up short. Salvation rests on what Christ finished on the cross (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Looking for the Truth

Why it matters which door you open

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

Everyone is looking for something to believe. Many people sincerely search for truth but never stop to check whether what they were told is actually true. They accept it because they heard it often enough.

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young, but faith did not become personal for me there. It took a neighbor down our street in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter, to show me the truth of Scripture. I wrote this book for anyone standing in front of different spiritual doors and wondering which one leads to God. Eternity hangs on what is behind the door you open.

This book is for anyone who is honestly searching. It looks at how easily we accept what we are told, why the idea that all religions are the same does not hold up, the evidence that points to Jesus, and the invitation to look for yourself.

1 The cheese behind the door

Put a mouse in a box with three holes and place cheese behind the third one. He will check all three, but he will find it. Do this enough times and he will run straight to the third hole. Move the cheese, and he will go to the third hole first, but before long he will start searching the others.

Now put a man in a box with three doors. You do not have to train him. Just tell him the cheese is behind door three, even though it is really behind door one. Put phony cheese behind door three, and he will say

there must have been real cheese here, because this was made from it. Put crackers there, and he will say cheese must be close, because cheese and crackers go together. Put nothing there, and he will insist the cheese is there and we just have not found it yet.

The cheese represents truth. People will believe almost anything if they are told it enough, and they will rarely investigate it, even when the evidence does not add up. So the question is a fair one. Will I check for myself?

At 16 I passed the California High School Proficiency Exam early and aced the Air Force tests. They promised me a computer job, the future I wanted. When it came time to sign, they would not give me that job, so I walked away. What looks like a great prize can turn out to be an empty promise once you get close.

> *There is a way right before a man, and its end **is** ways of death.*
> **Proverbs 14:12 (SLB)**

2 Tolerance and truth

Today the word tolerance is often used to mean that every belief must be accepted as equally true. But that is not what the word means. To tolerate your belief means I respect your right to hold it. It does not mean I have to agree with it. I am not intolerant because I disagree with you.

This matters, because if every belief is equally true, then nothing is really true. And if we are only the

product of chance, there is no solid foundation for right and wrong. Society's standards just drift with the times.

Christians should be the most respectful people in any conversation. First Peter 3:15 (SLB) tells us to be "ready always for a defense to everyone who asks you an account concerning the hope in you, with gentleness and fear." Respecting people and believing that truth exists go together.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter lived down our street. I mowed his lawn, and he took me to church. He never put down where I came from, and he held firmly to what the Bible says. That mix of patience and clear truth is what led me to Christ.

3 Phony cheese and crackers

One common idea is that all religions are inspired by God and the differences are just human error. It sounds generous, but the major religions contradict each other on the most basic questions: who God is, what is wrong with us, and how it is made right. They cannot all be true at once.

That approach also lets a person pick and choose. Keep the parts you like and throw out the parts you do not, especially sin and accountability.

Another idea is that God set the universe in motion and then stepped back, never involving Himself in our lives. That allows a person to admit there is a God without needing to listen to Him. Still another is the idea of karma and endless rebirth, where you never

know whether you are ahead or behind, and the suffering of others is just a debt being paid. None of these offer forgiveness. None of them offer a Savior.

For a long time I tried to fill the emptiness with my own success and with doing the things I wanted to do, and I kept my distance from God. Those substitutes kept me busy but never gave me peace. Only the real truth of Christ satisfies.

4 Evidence that points to Jesus

The Bible invites us to check the evidence. The people of Berea were called "more noble" because they were "examining the Scriptures every day to see if these things might be so" (Acts 17:11, SLB).

One searcher's account tells of a man who was raised between two faiths and had learned to argue against Christianity. Someone challenged him to read Isaiah 53, Daniel 9, and Psalm 22 and explain them any way other than Christ. He could not. Those passages, written centuries before Jesus was born, describe a suffering servant pierced for our sins, "an anointed one" who "will be cut off" (Daniel 9:26, SLB), and a man surrounded by enemies whose garments are divided by casting lots (Psalm 22:16-18, SLB).

> *And He **was** pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; the chastening of our peace **was** on Him, and by His wound **there** was healing for us.*
> **Isaiah 53:5 (SLB)**

The sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed forward to this. Hebrews says, "apart from shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22, SLB). The blood of unblemished animals was a temporary picture of the sinless blood Christ would shed once for all people.

Translating the Steadfast Literal Bible word for word, I saw how tightly the history and the prophecy fit together. You do not have to check your brain at the door to follow Christ. The evidence holds up under close inspection and points to Jesus.

5 The cheese was behind door one

Jesus did not claim to be one of many ways. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6, SLB). Either that claim is true or it is not. It deserves an honest look.

The good news is that God is not hiding. He says, "you will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13, SLB).

> *and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*
> **John 8:32 (SLB)**

If you are searching, I pray you will look at the evidence with an open mind. Read the Gospels for yourself. Read Isaiah 53. Ask God to show you the truth. If you have questions or want to challenge what you have read here, that is all right. Honest questions are where honest faith often begins.

For five straight years I helped lead youth mission trips to Baja, Mexico. We met believers who had very little, yet had deep joy in Christ. We went to serve, and we came home having learned what real life is. It is found in Jesus, not in what the world offers.

When Faith Has Questions

Honest doubt and the God who answers

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

Some people think a real Christian never has doubts. That is not what the Bible shows. Its pages are full of people who asked God hard questions, some of them angry, some of them afraid. God did not throw them away. He met them.

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young. I always believed in God, but faith became personal later, when a neighbor, Pastor Jimmy Carter, took me to his church and showed me from the Bible what it means to trust Christ. Even after that, I had seasons when I drifted. I wrote this book because honest questions do not disqualify you from following Jesus.

If you are struggling to believe, or you believed once and now you are not sure, this book is for you. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. It is often the place where faith learns to stand on its own feet.

1 Help my unbelief

A father brought his son to Jesus. The boy had suffered since childhood, and the disciples had not been able to help. Jesus told the father, "all things are possible to the one believing" (Mark 9:23, SLB).

> *I believe, Lord; help my unbelief.*
> **Mark 9:24 (SLB)**

That is one of the most honest prayers in the Bible. The father had some faith and a lot of doubt, and he told Jesus both. Jesus did not tell him to come back when he was sure. He healed the boy.

You can pray that prayer too. God already knows what is in your heart. Telling Him the truth about your doubts is not a lack of faith. It is talking to Him, and that is where faith starts.

When I finally faced my drinking on May 29, 2020, I knew I could not fix myself. My wife waited in the truck while I went into my first 12-step meeting. I was drunk, and I sat there weeping as I listened to everyone, full of shame and brokenness. I believed God could save me, even though my faith felt shaky. I prayed like the father in Mark 9:24: help my unbelief. Jesus does not wait until our faith is strong before He helps us.

2 Doubters in the Bible

David wrote, "How long, LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1, SLB). Asaph admitted his feet had almost turned aside when he saw the wicked doing well (Psalm 73:2-3, SLB). He said, "it was trouble in my eyes, until I went into the sanctuaries of God" (Psalm 73:16-17, SLB).

John the Baptist, who had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God, sat in prison and sent a message asking, "Are You the One who is coming, or are we to look for another?" (Matthew 11:3, SLB). Jesus did not scold him. He sent back the evidence: "the blind receive sight, and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Matthew 11:5, SLB).

Jude told the church, "on some have mercy, making a distinction" (Jude 1:22, SLB). The Greek word behind "making a distinction" can also mean wavering or doubting, and many read Jude as speaking of mercy for those who doubt. If the Bible tells us to show mercy to people who are struggling, God is merciful to them too.

3 Thomas and the scars

Thomas was not in the room the first time the risen Jesus appeared. When the others told him, he said he would not believe unless he saw the nail marks for himself. A week later Jesus came back, and He went straight to Thomas.

> *Bring your finger here, and see My hands; and bring your hand, and put **it** into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.*
>
> **John 20:27 (SLB)**

Jesus did not wait for Thomas to fix his doubt on his own. He came to him and gave him what he needed. Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28, SLB). The man known for doubting made one of the clearest statements of faith in the Gospels.

Then Jesus said something for us: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed" (John 20:29, SLB). We do not get to touch the scars. We do have the testimony of the people who did, written down so that we may believe.

When I translated the Steadfast Literal Bible, I noticed how patiently Jesus dealt with Thomas. He

did not scold him for wanting proof. He invited him to look at His hands and side (John 20:27). God is not threatened by someone who sincerely wants to know what is true.

4 When people tell you it did not happen

Some doubts come from inside. Others come from people who sound very sure of themselves. John Shelby Spong, an Episcopal bishop who died in 2021, wrote a book titled Resurrection: Myth or Reality? (1994). He argued that Easter's power does not depend on a body walking out of a tomb, and that modern people should let go of the literal story.

Tom Bethell answered him in print. He pointed out that the first disciples, including Peter and the women who visited the tomb, were skeptical too. They did not expect a resurrection. He also pointed to Paul, who put it bluntly.

> *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith **is** futile; you are still in your sins.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 15:17 (SLB)**

Paul did not think the resurrection was a nice idea. He thought it was the whole thing. Then he gave the good news: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead" (1 Corinthians 15:20, SLB).

5 What to do with your doubts

Bring them to God. James wrote, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask from God, who gives to all

generously and does not reproach" (James 1:5, SLB). "Does not reproach" means He will not make you feel stupid for asking.

Bring them to the Word. Read the Gospels. Many doubts shrink when you see what He actually said and did.

Bring them to people. Find a mature believer you trust and be honest.

Keep doing what you know is right while you wait for answers. When the psalmist was in despair, he talked to his own soul: "Wait for God, for I will yet give thanks to Him" (Psalm 42:5, SLB).

6 What your salvation depends on

Here is something that may take a weight off your shoulders. Your salvation does not depend on how strong your faith feels today. It depends on how strong the One you trust is.

> *And this is the testimony, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life, and so that you may believe in the name of the Son of God.*
>
> **1 John 5:11-13 (SLB)**

Weak faith in a strong Savior saves. Strong faith in the wrong thing does not. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures," and "He has been raised

on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, SLB), and He holds on to His people. "He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6, SLB).

If you have never trusted Him, start with a prayer like the father's: I want to believe. Help my unbelief. Then tell Him you know you have sinned and ask Jesus to save you. He will not turn you away. Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37, SLB).

For a long time I measured how I was doing with God by how well I performed. When my bad choices caught up with me, I saw that if salvation depended on my record, I had no hope. Our security rests on what Jesus finished (Ephesians 2:8-9). Knowing salvation depends on Christ alone is what brings real peace.

Who Jesus Really Is

The Son of God who came to save us

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

Almost everyone has an opinion about Jesus. Some say He was a good teacher. Some say He was a prophet. Some say He was a legend that grew over time. Jesus Himself asked His disciples the question that matters most: "But you, who do you say Me to be?" (Matthew 16:15, SLB).

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, and I was baptized on October 19, 1995. I have led many Bible study groups, served as a lay pastor and preached, and I translated the Steadfast Literal Bible. Again and again, I met people who knew religious phrases about Jesus but were not sure who He really is. I wrote this book for anyone who wants a clear, Scripture-based look at the Son of God.

This book looks at what the Bible says about who Jesus is, what He came to do, and why the answer to His question changes everything. If you are searching, I hope you will read the Gospel of John alongside it and meet Him for yourself.

1 The question Jesus asked

Jesus once asked His disciples what people were saying about Him. They gave Him the popular answers. Some said John the Baptist, others Elijah or one of the prophets. Then He made it personal.

> *He says to them, "But you, who do you say Me to be?" And Simon Peter, answering, said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*
> **Matthew 16:15-16 (SLB)**

The word Christ is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Messiah. It means the Anointed One, the King God promised to send. Peter was saying that Jesus was not just another prophet in a long line. He was the One the whole line had been pointing to.

You might ask, why not just call Him a good teacher and leave it there? It boils down to what He claimed. A man who says the things Jesus said is either telling the truth or He is not. A good teacher does not claim to be God unless He is.

Growing up in Victorville, I believed in God, and Pastor Jimmy Carter took me to church and led me to Christ. Even so, I drifted from Him more than once. Each time I came back, I had to answer Jesus' question for myself instead of relying on what others said about Him. Every person eventually has to answer who Jesus is.

2 God who became a man

John opens his Gospel by going back before creation.

> *In **the** beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*
> **John 1:1 (SLB)**

The Word was with God, and the Word was God. Then John tells us who the Word is: "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, SLB). Jesus did not begin in Bethlehem. "All things have been created through Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16, SLB). Jesus told the religious leaders, "before Abraham came into being, I am" (John 8:58, SLB), using the

name God gave Himself at the burning bush. They understood what He meant and picked up stones.

Paul wrote that "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Deity bodily" (Colossians 2:9, SLB). When doubting Thomas finally saw the risen Jesus, he did not call Him his teacher. He said, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28, SLB). Jesus did not correct him.

Christians believe in one God who exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus told His followers to make disciples, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, SLB). One name, three persons. It is more than our minds can hold, and I would expect nothing less from God.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter lived down our street. I mowed his lawn, and he took me to church and pointed me to Christ. He did not talk about God from a distance. He showed up in my everyday life. That is a small picture of what God did when He stepped into our world.

3 Promised long before He came

Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the prophets described Him. Micah named the town. From Bethlehem would come a ruler, and "His goings out are from of old, from the days of antiquity" (Micah 5:2, SLB).

> *For a child has been born to us, a son has been given to us; and the dominion is on His shoulder; and **one** has called His name Wonder, Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace.*
> **Isaiah 9:6 (SLB)**

Isaiah also saw that this King would suffer. "He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5, SLB). Those words were written centuries before the cross. When Jesus came, He fit both pictures: the King who reigns and the servant who suffers in our place.

Translating the Steadfast Literal Bible word for word, the Old Testament promises stood out to me in a fresh way. Read the prophets next to the Gospels, and you see specific details written centuries before Bethlehem. Jesus did not appear out of nowhere. He fulfilled promises God made long before.

4 Fully God and fully man

Jesus was not God pretending to be human. He was born, grew up, got tired, got hungry, and wept at the tomb of a friend. Hebrews says He "has been tempted in all things according to likeness, without sin" (Hebrews 4:15, SLB). That means He understands what you are going through.

> *who, existing in **the** form of God, did not consider being equal with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, having taken **the** form of a slave, having come to be in **the** likeness of men; and having been found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient as far as death, even death of a cross.*
>
> **Philippians 2:6-8 (SLB)**

Because He is God, He can show us what God is like. Jesus told Philip, "The one who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, SLB). Because He is man, He can stand in our place. There is "one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5, SLB).

5 Why He came

Jesus told us in His own words why He came.

> *For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life **as** a ransom for many.*
>
> **Mark 10:45 (SLB)**

A ransom is the price paid to set a captive free. Our sin holds us captive, and we cannot pay our own way out. Jesus paid it with His life. Hebrews says that Jesus, "having made purification of our sins through Himself, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3, SLB). The work was finished.

Then He rose. The resurrection is God's stamp on everything Jesus claimed. If He had stayed in the grave, He would be one more teacher who died. He did not stay there. He showed His disciples His hands

and His feet and said, "touch Me and see" (Luke 24:39, SLB).

On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me drinking, confronted me with the truth and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. She loved me enough to rescue me from myself. That is a small picture of why Jesus came: to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

6 What your salvation depends on

Who Jesus is matters because your salvation depends on Him. Not on your goodness, your church, or your family's faith. On Him.

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*
> **John 3:16 (SLB)**

Believing in Him is more than agreeing that He existed. It is trusting Him with your life and your eternity. When the jailer in Philippi asked what he must do to be saved, Paul and Silas answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31, SLB).

If you have never done that, you can do it today. Tell God you know you have sinned. Tell Him you believe Jesus is His Son, that He died for you and rose again. Ask Him to forgive you and to be your Lord. Jesus promised, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37, SLB).

I wrote New Beginnings, a Scripture-based 12-step course, because I know the trap of trying to clean up your life before coming to God. I tried to carry my own failures on my own strength. Salvation rests on what Jesus finished, not our track record. When a person stops trusting his own effort and trusts Christ alone, everything changes.

The Cross and the Empty Tomb

What Easter means for my past and my future

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

Easter is the center of the Christian faith. Without the cross, there is no forgiveness. Without the empty tomb, there is no hope. Paul said, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17, SLB).

After my failure came to light in 2020, and God began rebuilding my marriage and my walk with Him, the cross and the empty tomb became personal to me. I wrote this book for anyone carrying regret about the past or fear about what comes next. Easter answers both.

This book walks through the last week of Jesus' life, from the crowds on Palm Sunday to the empty tomb. Along the way I want to look at what the cross answers about my past and what the resurrection answers about my future.

1 The King who came to save

Picture the scene. Jesus rides into Jerusalem with crowds all around Him. Some had come from Galilee. Others came from Bethany, where they had seen Him raise Lazarus from the dead. The people shouted words from Psalm 118, crying "Hosanna," a word that means "save us."

They were right about who He was and wrong about how He would save them. Many expected a king who would overthrow Rome. Jesus came to deal with a far deeper problem. Within days, many of the same voices would be silent or shouting for His death.

I want to be careful not to make the same mistake. It is easy to welcome Jesus when I think He will give me what I want. The question is whether I will still follow Him when His way of saving me looks different from what I expected.

At work, authority usually means sitting at the head of the table and directing others. Jesus turned that upside down. He stepped down from heaven to serve and to die for people who had rebelled against Him (Philippians 2:6-8). In God's kingdom, real kingship looks like a towel and a cross.

2 Remember Me

On Thursday night Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples. He told them, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15, SLB). He knew exactly what was ahead.

> *And having taken bread, having given thanks, He broke **it** and gave **it** to them, saying, "This is My body, which is being given for you; do this for My remembrance."*
>
> **Luke 22:19 (SLB)**

He knew His disciples would run away. He knew Peter would deny Him three times and Judas would betray Him for thirty pieces of silver. He knew He would be beaten, mocked, crowned with thorns, and nailed to a cross. And still He said, "do this for My remembrance."

Every time believers take the Lord's Supper, we remember. We remember His body given and His blood poured out. We remember that He did not have

to go to the cross. He chose to go, "for the joy lying before Him" (Hebrews 12:2, SLB).

When my wife took me to my first 12-step meeting on May 29, 2020, she waited in the truck while I went in. I was drunk, and I sat there weeping as I listened to everyone, full of shame. I felt like my past had disqualified me. In that room I found that mercy was still within reach. The thief on the cross had nothing to offer but "Remember me" (Luke 23:42).

3 The cross answers my past

Blaming someone else is one of the oldest habits in the world. When Adam and Eve sinned, three things happened that had never happened before. They felt guilt and fear. They hid from God. And when God confronted them, Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent (Genesis 3:8-13, SLB).

People still ask the same questions. How do I deal with my guilt before God? How do I fix a broken relationship with Him? How do I face the consequences of what I have done? Jesus answered all of those questions, not only by what He taught, but by what He did.

> *For He made the One who did not know sin **to be** sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*
>
> **2 Corinthians 5:21 (SLB)**

On the cross, the one perfect person who ever lived stood in my place. He took what I had coming. My sin was the reason He came to Bethlehem, the reason He

walked the roads of Israel, and the reason He died at Calvary. At the cross I find the answer to my past.

Leading Bible studies and serving as a lay pastor, I have seen Christians carry guilt for sins God already forgave. I knew that weight myself after making choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. When you grasp that Jesus paid the whole debt, not part of it, you stop trying to pay God back (Colossians 2:13-14).

4 The empty tomb answers my future

On Sunday morning, women came to the tomb with spices and found the stone rolled away. The angels asked them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead? He is not here, but He has been raised" (Luke 24:5-6, SLB).

The resurrection is not a nice story to make us feel better. It is the proof that Jesus is who He said He was and that His sacrifice was accepted. His disciples saw Him, were told to touch Him, and watched Him eat (Luke 24:39-43, SLB). Men who had run away in fear became bold witnesses willing to die for what they had seen.

People are searching for spiritual reality, wanting to do good, and afraid of the future. Jesus answers all three. In Him we meet God. Through Him we are made new and able to live for what is good. And because He lives, we do not have to fear death. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one believing in Me, even if he dies, will live" (John 11:25, SLB).

I have worked about 40 years now, and I think more about eternity than I did in my twenties. Life is fragile, and everyone eventually asks what happens when their time here ends. Because Jesus walked out of that tomb alive, death is no longer a locked door for anyone who belongs to Him (1 Corinthians 15:20).

5 You cannot have one without the other

The cross and the empty tomb belong together. Good Friday without Easter would leave us with a dead teacher. Easter without Good Friday would leave us with a risen Lord and our sins still unpaid. Together they give us forgiveness for the past and hope for the future.

Many people try to win at life on their own terms. They chase money, success, relationships, and experiences, and still feel empty. Jesus offers something better. He lived a perfect life, died for our sins, and rose again. In Him we can find the meaning we were made for.

Easter is also a call to respond. Romans 10:9 (SLB) says, "if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of the dead, you will be saved." If you have never trusted Him, there is no better day than today.

In guitar building, a neck without a properly set bridge will never play in tune, however good the wood looks. Both have to work together. A cross without an empty tomb leaves us forgiven but still in the grave, and an empty tomb without the cross leaves our sin unpaid (1 Corinthians 15:17). We need both.

The Good News in Romans

A walk through Paul's letter of grace

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

If someone asked me where to go in the Bible to understand the gospel, I would send them to Romans. Paul lays out the problem of sin, the gift of God's righteousness, the new life of the Spirit, God's faithfulness to His promises, and how believers are to live.

When someone asks where to start to understand the whole gospel, I point them to Romans. Translating Romans word for word for the Steadfast Literal Bible made me slow down and trace every step of Paul's argument about sin, grace and faith. I wrote this book to walk everyday readers through Romans in plain steps.

This book is a short walk through that letter. It will not answer every question Romans raises, but I hope it gives you a map so that when you read it for yourself, you can see where Paul is going.

1 Paul and the church in Rome

Romans 1:1 (SLB) identifies Paul as the writer, and Romans 16:22 (SLB) tells us a man named Tertius wrote it down for him. The letter was likely written between A.D. 56 and 58 from Corinth, just before Paul carried an offering to the poor believers in Jerusalem. Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchrea, probably carried it to Rome (Romans 16:1, SLB).

Paul had wanted to visit Rome for a long time and hoped to go on to Spain (Romans 15:24, SLB). His

plans were interrupted when he was arrested in Jerusalem, and he finally reached Rome as a prisoner.

Paul opens by calling himself "a slave of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1, SLB). He explains that the gospel was "promised beforehand through His prophets in holy Scriptures," and that Jesus "came from the seed of David according to the flesh" and "was declared Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by the resurrection of the dead" (Romans 1:2-4, SLB). Jesus is both truly human and truly God.

2 Not ashamed of the gospel

> *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is **the** power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, both to **the** Jew first and to **the** Greek.*
>
> **Romans 1:16 (SLB)**

Romans 1:16-17 (SLB) is the theme of the whole letter. The gospel is not just good advice. It is the power of God to save. In the gospel "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith," and "the righteous by faith will live."

Then Paul shows why we need it. From Romans 1:18 to 3:20 he explains that Gentiles who ignored God and Jews who had His law both fell short. His conclusion is plain: "There is not a righteous one, not even one" (Romans 3:10, SLB). Everyone stands guilty before God.

When I was a boy in Victorville, Pastor Jimmy Carter was not embarrassed to invite a neighborhood kid to

church. His example stayed with me. Living unashamed of the gospel starts with remembering it is the only message with real power to rescue people (Romans 1:16).

3 Righteousness provided

Beginning in Romans 3:21 (SLB), Paul turns to the answer. "But now apart from law the righteousness of God has been manifested" (Romans 3:21, SLB), and it comes "through faith of Jesus Christ" and "is to all and upon all who believe" (Romans 3:22, SLB). We are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24, SLB).

Paul points to Abraham as proof that this was always God's way. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3, SLB). He was declared righteous before he did anything to earn it.

> *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
> **Romans 5:8 (SLB)**

Romans 5:8 (SLB) may be the clearest picture of grace in the Bible. God did not wait for us to get our lives together. Christ died for us while we were still sinners. Because of that, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1, SLB).

Many of us grow up thinking God grades on a curve, as if our good just needs to outweigh our bad.

Romans 3:21-22 says God provides His own righteousness through faith in Jesus, because none of us could earn it. Salvation is not a wage we earn. It is a gift we receive.

4 New life in the Spirit

Romans 6 through 8 answers the question of how a forgiven person should live. If grace covers sin, should we keep sinning? Paul's answer is, "May it not be!" (Romans 6:2, SLB). In Christ, sin's power over us has been broken.

Romans 7 is honest about the struggle. Paul describes wanting to do good and still doing what he hates. Even believers wrestle with the flesh. But Romans 8 brings the victory. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1, SLB), and anyone who belongs to Christ has His Spirit (Romans 8:9, SLB).

The chapter ends with one of the greatest promises in Scripture. Paul was persuaded "that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39, SLB).

In chapters 9 through 11, Paul explains that God has not forgotten His promises to Israel. His righteousness is received by faith, by Jew and Gentile alike. Romans 10:9 (SLB) says, "if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of the dead, you will be saved."

Before May 29, 2020, I knew the war Paul describes in Romans 7: wanting to do right and falling back into the same pattern. Willpower failed me every time. When I surrendered in 2020, God broke a habit I could never break on my own (Romans 8:1-2). New life in Christ is not a cleaner set of rules. It is a new power living inside you.

5 Righteousness practiced

> *Therefore I exhort you, brothers, through the compassions of God, to present your bodies **as** a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God, your reasonable service.*
> **Romans 12:1 (SLB)**

Romans 12 through 15 shows what the gospel looks like in everyday life. Because of God's mercy, I give my whole self to Him. That means a renewed mind (Romans 12:2, SLB), humility about my gifts, real love for others, and submission to rightful authority.

It also means leaving revenge to God. Romans 12:19-21 (SLB) says, "not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath," and "overcome the evil with the good." Paul also asks strong believers to be careful not to trip up weaker ones over matters of conscience (Romans 14, SLB).

Paul's prayer for the Romans is a good prayer for us: "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you abound in the hope in the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13, SLB).

When my wife caught me in 2020, she took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. She refused to cover for me, and she stayed and did the hard work of rebuilding our marriage. She showed me truth and grace side by side (Romans 12). Real faith shows up in how we treat the people under our own roof.

Knowing Where I Stand with God

Assurance, identity, and the hope of heaven

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

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Introduction

Many people hope they will go to heaven, but few are sure. Some think it would be proud to say they know. Others are afraid that one bad day could undo everything. I want to look at what the Bible actually says, because God does not leave His children guessing about where they stand.

I believed in God as a boy and was baptized on October 19, 1995, but I went through seasons when my bad choices left me wondering where I stood with Him. Measuring myself by my own performance only left me discouraged. Going back to what Scripture actually says settled it. I wrote this book so you can know where you stand with God based on His Word, not your feelings.

Assurance does not rest on how good I have been. It rests on who Jesus is and what He has done. When I keep my eyes on Him, I can know that I belong to God, and I can learn to see myself the way He sees me.

1 Receiving Christ for who He is

John 1:12 (SLB) says, "as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God." Receiving Christ is more than raising a hand or joining a church. It means receiving Him for who He really is.

John's Gospel opens by saying "the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Then John adds, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1,

14, SLB). Jesus is not just a good teacher or one prophet among many. He is God the Son who became a man.

Receiving Christ also means receiving Him for what He did. First Timothy 1:15 (SLB) says "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He did not come only to set an example. He came to die in our place and pay for our sins. Today He is seated at the right hand of the Father, and He is the "one mediator of God and men" (1 Timothy 2:5, SLB). No priest, pastor, or saint stands in that place. Only Jesus does.

My family attended church when I was a boy, but it was a neighbor, Pastor Jimmy Carter, who showed me from the Bible who Jesus really is. Jesus was not just a figure to admire. He was the Savior who died for my sin. Once I trusted Him, my faith became my own. Knowing where you stand with God starts with receiving Jesus on His terms (John 1:12).

2 God wants me to know

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

First John 5:13 (SLB) tells us why John wrote his letter. He wanted believers to know, not merely hope, that they have eternal life. Just before that, he wrote "that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11-12, SLB).

That is why assurance is not pride. If I were trusting my own good works, it would be foolish to say I was sure of heaven. But I am trusting Jesus and His promise. Jesus said, "the one coming to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37, SLB).

People who depend on their church, their good deeds, or their religious rituals often live with doubt, because they can never be sure they have done enough. The answer is to stop looking at myself and look at Christ. My feelings change from day to day. His Word does not.

3 Who I am in Christ

When I trust Christ, God gives me a new identity. The world will hand me plenty of labels, some fair and some not. Some come from my achievements and some come from my failures. None of them get the final word about who I am. God does.

Scripture tells me I am accepted. I am God's child (John 1:12, SLB). I have been justified (Romans 5:1, SLB). I have been bought with a price, and I belong to God (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, SLB). I am a member of Christ's body (1 Corinthians 12:27, SLB).

> ***There is*** *therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to* ***the*** *flesh but according to* ***the*** *Spirit.*
> **Romans 8:1 (SLB)**

Scripture also tells me I am secure. Romans 8:1 (SLB) says there is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus. Paul wrote that "to those who love God all

things work together for good" (Romans 8:28, SLB). Nothing in all creation can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39, SLB). And I can be confident that He who began a good work in me will complete it (Philippians 1:6, SLB).

After May 29, 2020, shame tried to tell me that my past defined me. Even after years of preaching and leading Bible studies, I had to relearn what Scripture says about who I am. In Christ I am not defined by my worst choices (2 Corinthians 5:17). Some people may not have forgiven me, and I have had to give that to God instead of dwelling on what they think. Living free starts when you believe what God says about you instead of your past.

4 Heaven is a real place

Jesus told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2, SLB). Heaven is not a vague idea or a cloud where we float forever. It is a real place prepared by a real Savior. After His resurrection, Jesus had a real body. His disciples touched Him and watched Him eat (Luke 24:39-43, SLB).

Salvation is not something I receive after I die. It is received here and now, while I am alive. Jesus said, "the one believing in Me has eternal life" (John 6:47, SLB). When the criminal on the cross next to Jesus put his faith in Him, Jesus told him, "today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43, SLB).

Believers will stand before Christ and give an account of how they lived, and rewards will differ (2 Corinthians 5:10, SLB). But the question of where I

will spend eternity is settled when I trust Christ. That truth does not make me careless. It makes me grateful, and gratitude makes me want to live for Him.

I was born in Germany while my father served in the Air Force, and I grew up in Victorville, California. This world was never meant to be our final home. Heaven is not a symbol. It is a real place Jesus is preparing for His people (John 14:2-3). Knowing our true home is real changes how we hold onto things here.

5 Living from assurance

Some believers worry that they can lose their salvation. Others argue that once saved means always saved. Sincere Christians have studied this question for centuries and landed in different places. What I can say plainly is that Jesus said His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, and no one will snatch them out of His hand (John 10:27-28, SLB).

The best evidence that I belong to Christ is not a past moment I can point to. It is a present trust in Him that shows up in how I live. John wrote, "by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3, SLB). Obedience does not earn my place in God's family. It shows that I am already in it.

If you are not sure where you stand with God, do not wait. Turn to Jesus with a repentant heart and trust Him to save you now. Then find a Bible-teaching church, be baptized, and start reading God's Word

every day. The First Letter of John and the Gospel of John are good places to begin.

My wife stayed with me through my lowest season, when I had made choices that hurt my marriage and the people closest to me. She did not give up on me. When you know you are secure in Christ, you can live with that same steadiness and grace toward others.

New Life in Christ

Understanding the gift of salvation

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

A person can know the language of church and still need to understand what Jesus means by new life. That is where I want to begin. My hope is that we will look carefully at what Jesus said, understand the gift He offers, and respond to Him with faith. I will keep it simple. The good news is clear enough to stand on its own.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, and Pastor Jimmy Carter led me to Christ when I was a boy in Victorville. Still, I drifted from God more than once through my own bad choices. When I finally gave Him every area of my life, new life in Christ stopped being church words and became real. I wrote this book to show what that new life looks like in plain steps.

1 A conversation worth hearing

> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless someone is born from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God."*
>
> **John 3:3 (SLB)**

John 3 (SLB) introduces Nicodemus as a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. He comes to Jesus at night and recognizes that the signs Jesus performs point to God's presence. The encounter gives us enough to see that religious knowledge and a respected position do not remove our need for what Jesus offers.

Jesus goes directly to the issue of new birth. Nicodemus has religious knowledge and a place in his

community, but Jesus tells him he must be born from above (John 3:3, 7, SLB). Many Bibles say "born again." The Greek word can carry both ideas. His position cannot do that for him. Neither can ours. Familiarity with religious things should lead us toward Christ, rather than give us a reason to avoid examining our own response to Him.

Nicodemus struggles to understand. Jesus is speaking about the work of the Spirit, while Nicodemus initially thinks about physical birth. Reading the conversation as a whole keeps us from treating one familiar verse as an isolated slogan. The subject is God's work of bringing life where we cannot produce it for ourselves.

I want to approach this conversation with that same willingness to listen. Being able to ask religious questions is useful. Being willing to receive Jesus' answer is essential. Our confidence belongs in Him, rather than in how much we already know.

When I was growing up in Victorville, I mowed Pastor Jimmy Carter's lawn. That job led to him taking me to church and to me meeting Christ. One neighbor taking time with a kid changed the direction of my life. A real conversation about Christ does not need fancy words, just honesty and care.

2 The gift God gives

> *For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.*
>
> **John 3:16 (SLB)**

John 3:16 (SLB) puts God's love and God's gift before us. The Son is given so that the one who believes in Him will have eternal life. The center of the passage is Jesus Himself. Our hope rests in who He is and what He has done, rather than in our ability to make ourselves acceptable to God.

I believe Jesus is the only way to the Father. That conviction should make me grateful and willing to speak clearly about Him. It should also keep me humble. I am pointing people toward a gift I need myself. I have no grounds to act as though salvation proves I am better than someone else.

Believing in Christ is personal. A family background, a church membership, or somebody else's faith cannot stand in for my own response to Him. At the same time, I should be careful not to turn salvation into a complicated procedure that the passage does not give. The call is to believe in the Son.

The surrounding verses also take unbelief seriously. God's love does not make our response unimportant. The gift is offered in a world that needs rescue. I want to speak about both the love and the need honestly, without exaggerating and without promising what Jesus did not promise.

On May 29, 2020, my wife caught me drinking and took me to my first 12-step meeting that same day. She had every reason to walk away, and she stayed and pointed me toward help. Grace I did not deserve, in my own home, helped me understand the free gift God offers (Ephesians 2:8-9).

3 Faith and the life that follows

James 2:14-26 (SLB) challenges a profession of faith that produces no response to another person's need. Romans 4:13-16 (SLB) directs our attention to God's promise received through faith. I want to hear both passages in context. Good works cannot purchase God's gift, and living faith should show itself in the way we live.

There is an order here worth keeping clear. Faith in Christ comes first. Obedience follows as the response of a person learning to trust Him. When I reverse that order, I begin treating my performance as the basis of my relationship with God. When I ignore obedience altogether, I avoid what Scripture says about the fruit of faith.

This affects ordinary decisions. I may need to tell the truth when a lie would protect my reputation. I may need to make time for somebody who has a real need. I may need to stop defending conduct I already know is wrong. These actions do not buy salvation. They reveal where I am learning to place my trust.

Growth does not mean I will never fail. It does mean I should stop making peace with failure. When God exposes sin, the right response is to turn toward Him. He is the One I need in the beginning, and He remains the One I need as I grow.

Going through a 12-step program showed me how much people need recovery rooted in Scripture. That is why I wrote New Beginnings, a Christ-centered 12-step course. Real faith always produces a changed

life. Saving faith is never dead, because God's Spirit goes to work inside us.

4 Coming into the light

> *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
>
> **1 John 1:9 (SLB)**

First John 1:5-10 (SLB) speaks about walking in the light and being honest about sin. Confession is not a way of informing God about something He missed. It is agreeing with Him instead of hiding behind excuses. I can come to Him because He is faithful, not because I have found a way to make my sin sound small.

A prayer can express a person's faith and repentance. I should never present a particular set of words as a formula that saves apart from Christ. The Savior is Jesus. Prayer is our response to Him. When I help someone understand the gospel, I want that person's confidence to rest in the Lord, rather than in having repeated my words correctly.

The next step is to begin learning from Him. Read His Word. Pray honestly. Become part of a church where Scripture is taught and believers help one another grow. Ask questions when something is unclear. A new believer needs patient encouragement, not the impression that every difficulty should disappear immediately.

My desire is that we would receive God's gift with gratitude and live in a way that points back to the Giver. Eternal life is too important to reduce to a religious label. Jesus calls us to Himself. The response I want to make, and the response I want to encourage in others, is a life of faith in Him.

For years I was a functioning alcoholic. I did well at work and hid my drinking. I denied I had a problem until my wife caught me on May 29, 2020. She waited in the truck while I went into my first 12-step meeting, drunk, and I wept the whole time. Bringing it into the open was painful, and it was the moment healing began. Hiding in the dark is what keeps us sick.

Starting Out with Christ

First steps into a new life with God

Andrew Dominguez



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Introduction

Sooner or later most people ask why they are here and whether life has any real purpose. Some have an answer early. Others search for years. I want to start with that question, because the Bible answers it, and the answer leads straight to Jesus Christ.

I came to Christ as a boy, but I drifted from God more than once through my own bad choices. I wish I had understood early that following Christ is a daily walk built on grace, not on looking like I had it together. I wrote this book for anyone taking first steps with Jesus, or coming back after wandering off. Getting the basics right keeps you grounded when life hits hard.

This book is for someone who is just beginning, or who has been close to the door for a long time without walking through it. I want to keep it simple and honest. God made us, sin separated us from Him, Christ made a way back, and He invites us to come and follow Him.

1 Why I am here

> *everyone who is called by My name, and whom I created for My glory; I formed him; indeed, I made him.*
> **Isaiah 43:7 (SLB)**

Isaiah 43:7 (SLB) says God created His people for His glory. That means my life is not an accident. I was made by Someone, and I was made for Someone. Life

on this earth is far too detailed and well ordered to be the product of chance.

God made me so that He could love me. First John 4:19 (SLB) says, "We love Him because He first loved us." God also made me so that I could love Him in return. When Jesus was asked for the greatest commandment, He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:36-38, SLB).

Jesus also said, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10, SLB). That is not a promise of an easy life or a rich one. It is a promise of a full life, one lived with God instead of apart from Him. Real happiness starts when I find the purpose I was made for.

At 16 I aced the Air Force tests and passed my high school exam early so I could get a computer job. When they would not give me that job, I walked away and had to rethink my direction. I spent decades building a career after that. Hard seasons taught me that my real purpose was never a job title. We are here to know God and walk with Him.

2 The problem of sin

If God made us for Himself, why does He feel so far away? The Bible's answer is sin. Sin is anything that goes against who God is and what He has said. It can be as small as a white lie or as large as taking a life, but it always puts me at the center instead of God.

Romans 3:23 (SLB) says, "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That includes me, and it includes you. Adam and Eve sinned first, and every person since has followed the same pattern. Sin has broken the relationship between God and people.

> *For the wages of sin **is** death, but the gift of God **is** eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
> **Romans 6:23 (SLB)**

Romans 6:23 (SLB) is honest about where sin leads. The payment is death, which includes being separated from God forever. I cannot fix that by trying harder or doing enough good things to balance the scale. That is the bad news, and it is important to hear it plainly, because it makes the good news make sense.

For years I was a fully functioning alcoholic with a successful career. I told myself that because I still went to work and provided for my family, I was not hurting anyone. That illusion broke on May 29, 2020, when my wife caught me. I had lied to myself to protect a habit that was destroying my life. Sin always promises it is under control until it brings you to a dead end.

3 What God has done

The same verse that tells me the wages of sin also tells me about a gift. God did not wait for me to clean up my life. Romans 5:8 (SLB) says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus Christ is God's eternal Son. He became a man, lived without sin, and died on the cross in my place. Paul says "that He was buried, and that He has been raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, SLB). He took what I had coming so that I could be brought back to God.

> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this **is** not from yourselves; the gift **is** of God, not from works, so that no one may boast.*
>
> **Ephesians 2:8-9 (SLB)**

Grace is God's undeserved kindness. It is His favor reaching toward people who could never earn it. Ephesians 2:8-9 (SLB) makes it clear that salvation is a gift received by faith. No church, no good deed, and no amount of effort can buy it. God does the saving.

I have led Bible studies, served as a lay pastor and preached. Many people think they have to clean up their lives before God will accept them. Romans 5:8 says Christ died for us while we were still sinners. I learned that in my own life when I stopped trying to fix myself. God does not wait for us to get right before He rescues us.

4 Saying yes to Christ

So what do I do with this? First, I admit that I am a sinner and that I cannot save myself. Second, I believe that Jesus died for my sins and that God raised Him from the dead. Third, I turn from my sin and receive Him as my Savior and Lord. Receiving Him as Savior means trusting that He paid for my

sins. Receiving Him as Lord means letting Him direct my life.

> *that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of **the** dead, you will be saved.*
> **Romans 10:9 (SLB)**

It helps to tell God plainly what is in your heart. A simple prayer might sound like this: Lord, I know I have sinned, and I am sorry. I believe Jesus died for me and rose again. I receive Him now as my Savior and my Lord. Thank You for forgiving me and making me Your child.

If you have prayed that and meant it, you can take God at His word. John 1:12 (SLB) says, "as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God."

When I was a boy in Victorville, I mowed the lawn for Pastor Jimmy Carter, who lived down our street. He took time with me and brought me to church, and that is where I heard the gospel and said yes to Christ. Years later, on October 19, 1995, I was baptized to make that faith public, and I baptized my wife the same day. Saying yes to Jesus often starts with one person taking time to show you the door.

5 The first steps after

Second Corinthians 5:17 (SLB) says, "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." That does not mean every habit disappears overnight. It means a new life has started, and it needs to be fed.

A few things help that new life grow. Talk to God every day in prayer. Read the Bible every day and let it shape what you believe. Find a Bible-believing church where you can learn and worship with other believers. Be baptized as a public way of saying that you belong to Jesus. And tell someone what Christ has done for you.

New believers also need people who will walk with them. Accountability means giving an honest account of my life to a mature believer I trust. Proverbs 27:17 (SLB) says, "Iron grows sharp by iron, and a man sharpens the face of his neighbor."

You do not have to turn your back on old friends. They may be the very people who need to see what Jesus can do in a life. Jesus said that "everyone who does sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34, SLB), and He also said, "if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36, SLB). God is not trying to take the joy out of life. He is setting you free to find it.

When I entered a 12-step program in 2020, I had to learn to walk out my faith one day at a time instead of relying on willpower. That showed me how much new believers need simple, Scripture-based habits right after they decide to follow Christ. It is part of why I wrote a Christ-centered 12-step course. Small, steady steps in God's Word keep a new faith from stalling.

Understanding Baptism

What it means to go down into the water

Andrew Dominguez



Trinfinity Enterprises

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Introduction

Few subjects have caused more debate in church history than baptism. Christians have argued over how it should be done, who should receive it, and what it actually accomplishes. Some see it as a sacrament that saves. Others see it as an ordinance that pictures what God has already done.

Pastor Jimmy Carter led me to Christ when I was a boy in Victorville. I was baptized years later, on October 19, 1995, and that same day I had the greatest honor of my life: I baptized my wife. Years later I baptized our youngest daughter in our backyard pool in Las Vegas.

My goal in this book is not to add to the arguments. I want to look at what Scripture says, explain why I believe baptism follows salvation rather than producing it, and show why it still matters so much. If you are thinking about being baptized, I hope this helps you take that step with understanding.

1 What the word means

The Greek verb behind our word baptize means to dip, to plunge, or to immerse. A closely related Greek word was used in everyday life for cloth being dipped into dye. The cloth went in one color and came out another. It took on the nature of what it was immersed in.

That is a helpful picture. When a believer is baptized, he is saying that his life has been immersed in Jesus Christ. He has taken on a new identity. The water

itself is ordinary. The Jordan River was used for washing clothes, for drinking, and for play. What made baptism different was the name in which people were baptized and the commitment they were making.

> *Therefore, having gone, make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, as many as I commanded you; and look, I am with you all the days, until the consummation of the age.*
>
> **Matthew 28:19-20 (SLB)**

Jesus' last command to His followers tied baptism to discipleship. That is why a baptism is never done in the name of a pastor or a church. It is done in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young, so I grew up thinking of baptism as water poured on a baby. Translating the New Testament for the SLB, I saw that the Greek word means to dip or immerse. Philip and the Ethiopian official went down into the water (Acts 8:38). Knowing what the word means clears up a lot of confusion.

2 Salvation comes first

In the New Testament, baptism always follows faith. When the jailer in Philippi asked what he must do to be saved, Paul and Silas answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31, SLB). That same night

he and his family were baptized (Acts 16:33, SLB). Belief came first. Baptism came right behind it.

> *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this **is** not from yourselves; the gift **is** of God, not from works, so that no one may boast.*
> **Ephesians 2:8-9 (SLB)**

I believe baptism does not bring salvation. It declares it. The church in the New Testament practiced believers' baptism as an act of obedience to Christ and a personal declaration of a person's identification and unity with Him.

Some point to Acts 2:38 (SLB), where Peter told the crowd, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins." Sincere Christians read that verse differently, and I respect that. I read it alongside the many passages that tie salvation to faith alone, and I understand baptism there as the public response that went hand in hand with repentance.

Pastor Jimmy Carter led me to put my faith in Christ first. My baptism came years later, on October 19, 1995, because of the salvation I already had. Salvation is a gift received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). Water cannot wash away sin, which is why faith in Jesus comes before baptism.

3 A picture of the gospel

Baptism preaches a sermon without words. Going down into the water pictures the death and burial of Jesus. Coming up out of the water pictures His

resurrection. It also pictures what has happened to the person being baptized. The old life has died, and a new life has begun.

> *Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised out of **the** dead through the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life.*
> **Romans 6:4 (SLB)**

This is one reason I believe immersion best fits the meaning. Jesus went up from the water after He was baptized (Matthew 3:16, SLB). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian official, "they both went down into the water," and "they came up out of the water" (Acts 8:38-39, SLB). A burial is a full covering.

Colossians 3:1-17 (SLB) shows what that new life looks like. Since we have been raised with Christ, we seek the things above. We put to death what belongs to the old nature, and we put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and love.

I was baptized on October 19, 1995, and I baptized my wife that same day. Going under the water pictures being buried with Christ. Coming up pictures walking in new life (Romans 6:4). Baptism is a living sermon that shows the gospel without a word.

4 How Christians have understood it

It helps to know that believers have held four broad views. Roman Catholic teaching holds that the act itself brings new birth. Lutheran teaching holds that baptism imparts saving grace to the one who

exercises faith. Reformed teaching sees baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant, an outward sign of an inward reality. Baptist teaching sees it as a testimony, one of the first public professions a believer makes.

My own understanding is closest to the last two. The Foursquare Church's Declaration of Faith (1923) describes water baptism as a blessed outward sign of an inward work, an emblem reminding us that just as our Lord died, was buried, and was raised, we reckon ourselves dead to sin and raised to walk in newness of life. That says it well.

People who love Jesus disagree about the details. Whatever position we hold, we should hold it with humility. Ephesians 4:4-6 (SLB) reminds us that there is "one body and one Spirit," "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all."

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young, and I came to faith later through a neighbor. So I understand why people feel strongly about the traditions they were raised in. I do not attack other believers. I open the New Testament and look at what Jesus and the apostles practiced.

5 Baptized in the Holy Spirit

John the Baptist said that he baptized with water to repentance, but the One coming after him would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11, SLB). The book of Acts records that promise being fulfilled.

In Acts the Spirit's coming was often marked by something others could see. At times believers spoke in tongues (Acts 2:4; 10:46, SLB). At other times they were "speaking the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31, SLB), Peter spoke up before the rulers (Acts 4:8, SLB), or they prophesied (Acts 19:6, SLB).

This subject has divided churches, and there are two errors to avoid. One is to avoid it altogether, even though Paul wrote, "do not forbid speaking in tongues" (1 Corinthians 14:39, SLB). The other is to treat one gift as the test of real spirituality. Paul also asked, "Do all speak in tongues?" (1 Corinthians 12:30, SLB). The Spirit gives gifts, "distributing to each individually as He wills" (1 Corinthians 12:11, SLB).

The goal is not a particular experience. The goal is a life filled with the Spirit and bearing His fruit.

6 Before you step into the water

Who should be baptized? Everyone who has trusted Christ. Children should wait until they are old enough to believe and understand what baptism means. When should you be baptized? As soon as you believe. The Ethiopian official said, "Look, water! What hinders me from being baptized?" (Acts 8:36, SLB). If you wait until you feel good enough, you will never go.

A baptism service can include three questions for each candidate. Do you hate the devil and all his works? Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the soon-coming King, and have you

accepted Him as Lord of your life? Do you desire to be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, declaring before every witness here that you are indeed His disciple?

Baptism is not only for the person in the water. It is a moment for every believer watching to ask, "Am I living today as a committed, obedient follower of Christ? Is His lordship evident in my daily decisions?"

> *I have been crucified with Christ; and I live—no longer I, but Christ lives in me; and what I now live in* ***the*** *flesh, I live in faith, that of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.*
>
> **Galatians 2:20 (SLB)**

Why Am I Here?

Christianity 101 | Lesson 1

Andrew Dominguez

Trinfinity Enterprises

Why Am I Here?

Christianity 101 | Lesson 1

Passage	Ephesians 2:4-10, with Isaiah 43:7, Matthew 22:36-38 and Romans 3:23 and 6:23
Big idea	God made you on purpose, to love you, to be loved by you and to give you real life, and the way into that life is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
Memory verse	Ephesians 2:8-9
Session length	60-75 minutes
What to bring	Bible (SLB), this handout, pen.

Before You Meet (Leader Prep)

For the leader only. Read the passage at least twice during the week and pray for the group by name.

I have believed in God as long as I can remember, yet it took me years to understand what following Him really means. Leading Bible studies and serving as a lay pastor, I saw how many adults still wrestle with the basic questions of purpose and faith. I wrote this first lesson in the Christianity 101 series for anyone who wants plain, honest answers from Scripture.

When I was 16, I wanted to join the Air Force and work with computers. I passed the California High School Proficiency Exam early and aced the testing, so I thought my path was set. When they would not give me the computer job they promised, I walked

away. Looking back, God had other plans: about 40 years in utilities, a computer repair business, building guitars and writing.

- Read Ephesians 1-2. Paul spends chapter 1 on what God has done for us before he gets to how we are saved in chapter 2.
- Think about your own story: when and how you came to know Christ. You may be asked.
- Expect some people in the room who are not sure they are Christians. Keep it welcoming. Nobody should feel put on the spot during the prayer at the end.

Opening (5-10 minutes)

At some point everybody asks the question: Why am I here? Why do I exist? For some people the answer is hard to find. For others it has been clear their whole life. People also ask a second question: How can I be truly happy? Both questions have the same answer, and it starts with God our Creator.

This first lesson in Christianity 101 covers three things: why God made you, what it means to be a Christian, and how you become one.

Icebreaker: When you were growing up, what did you want to be? How close did you get?

The Passage (10 minutes)

Have one or two people read the main passage aloud. We will look at the other verses as we go.

> **Ephesians 2:4-10 (SLB)**
>
> [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5] even us, being dead in the trespasses, He made alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), [6] and raised ***us*** up together and seated ***us*** together in the heavenly ***places*** in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that He might show in the coming ages the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. [8] For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this ***is*** not from yourselves; the gift ***is*** of God, [9] not from works, so that no one may boast. [10] For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

Setting the Scene (5 minutes)

For the main passage, Ephesians 2:4-10.

Who wrote it	The apostle Paul, who names himself in Ephesians 1:1 and 3:1. The church has always held this view; some modern scholars think a follower of Paul wrote it in his name.
To whom	Believers in Ephesus, a major city in what is now western Turkey (Ephesians 1:1). Paul had spent more than two years there (Acts 19:8-10). Some early copies leave out "in Ephesus," so the letter may also have been passed around to nearby churches.

When and where	Paul wrote while he was a prisoner (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1), most likely in Rome around A.D. 60-62.
What comes before	Ephesians 2:1-3: without Christ we were "dead in the trespasses and the sins" (Ephesians 2:1), following the world and our own desires.
What comes after	Ephesians 2:11-22: Christ brings Jews and Gentiles together into one family, with Himself as the cornerstone.

What It Means (15 minutes)

1. Why am I here? Why do I exist?

Here is the short answer: we were put on this earth to **worship** God. God says His people are those "whom I created for My glory" (Isaiah 43:7). Heaven sings the same thing: "You created all things, and because of Your will they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11).

So how do I find true happiness? I can only find it when I find my purpose in life, and that purpose comes in three parts.

At 16, walking away from the Air Force left me wondering what I was supposed to do next. Later, even when my career was going well and my family was growing, there were seasons I drifted from God and lost sight of why I was here. Each time I came back to Scripture, I remembered that my purpose was never a job title. We exist to know God and walk with Him.

God made me so that He could love me

"We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). God did not make us because He was lonely or needed something. He made us to pour His love on us. "But God demonstrates His own love toward

us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God made me so that I could love Him

When a lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, which commandment is great in the law?" (Matthew 22:36), Jesus answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). "This is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:38). (Here Jesus is quoting the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:5.)

God made me so that I could have a full life

God "provides us all things richly for enjoyment" (1 Timothy 6:17). Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

Abundant life does not mean an easy life or a rich one. Paul wrote some of his most joyful letters from prison. It means a life full of meaning, joy and peace with God, now and forever. "Fullness of joys is with Your presence" (Psalm 16:11).

So you are part of a masterfully designed plan. God made you for a **purpose**! You are not some cosmic accident that just happened. Life and the way this earth works are too exact to be an accident. As David put it, "in awesome ways I am distinguished" (Psalm 139:14). God created you so that He could enjoy you and love you, and so that you could praise Him.

2. What does it mean to be a Christian?

Followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26). The word means someone who belongs to Christ.

To be a Christian means to accept the absolute authority of **Jesus Christ**. It means we do everything in Him, no matter what it is: eating, drinking, buying, selling, reading, working and playing. "Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the God and Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). When we live the way He wants us to, we are recognizing Him as the Master of our lives.

It also means having a **personal** relationship with God. Not a set of rules, not just going to church, but knowing Him: "This is the eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You sent" (John 17:3). Here is how the Bible lays it out:

My family attended the Catholic church when I was young, and the routines did not become real to me. A neighbor, Pastor Jimmy Carter, led me to Christ as a boy. I was baptized on October 19, 1995, and in 2020 I had to face my own failures honestly. Being a Christian means trusting and following Christ every day, not checking a box on Sunday.

- **You were made for a relationship with God.** God made people in His own image (Genesis 1:27). In the beginning Adam and Eve walked with Him in the garden.
- **Sin broke that relationship.** Adam and Eve disobeyed, and the first thing they did was hide from God (Genesis 3:8). We all do the same. "But your iniquities have been separating between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).
- **Jesus came to bring us back.** Jesus is God's eternal Son. The Father sent Him to make peace between God and people. "Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). To be restored, you trust Him as Savior (believing He died to take away your sins) and as Lord (letting Him run your life).
- **Stay connected to Him.** Being a Christian is not a one-time event. Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one remaining in Me and I in him, this one bears much fruit; for apart from Me you are not able to do anything" (John 15:5).

3. What must I do to become a Christian?

Before we can say we are Christians, a few things have to happen.

First, admit that we are **sinners**. We are sinful by nature, not just by the things we do. As Paul wrote, "all sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Second, admit that without God's **provision** we are doomed to die forever. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). A wage is what you earn. A gift is something you could never earn.

Third, recognize that God has provided the way of **salvation** for us. We are saved by grace. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; the gift is of God, not from works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). And we are saved for a reason: "For we are His workmanship, having been created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). Good works do not save us, but saved people do good works.

How could God do that? "He made the One who did not know sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus took our sin, and we get His righteousness. Through Him "we have had access by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Romans 5:2).

That is the heart of it: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His Son, the only begotten, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. The one who believes in Him is not judged; but the one who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:16-18).

There is only one way to God, and that is through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus said it Himself: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Peter said the same: "And there is not salvation in any other; for neither is there another name under heaven which has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Without

Christ's sacrifice on the cross we would have no way to spend eternity with God in heaven.

So what do you do? You turn to Him and trust Him. Paul wrote "that if you confess with your mouth Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God raised Him out of the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). "But as many as received Him, to them He gave authority to become children of God, to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12).

When I was a boy in Victorville, I mowed the lawn for Pastor Jimmy Carter, who lived down our street. He took me to church and showed me that I needed a Savior and that Jesus had already paid for my sin. That is still the same gospel I share today.

Key Terms

Term	Plain meaning	Where it appears
Worship	Giving God the honor He deserves, with your words, your heart and the way you live.	Isaiah 43:7
Sin	Anything we think, say or do (or fail to do) that goes against God. It separates us from Him.	Romans 3:23
Grace	God's kindness that we do not deserve and cannot earn.	Ephesians 2:8
Faith	Trusting God and taking Him at His word.	Ephesians 2:8

Term	Plain meaning	Where it appears
Salvation	Being rescued by God from sin and its penalty, and brought into a right relationship with Him forever.	Acts 4:12
Righteousness	Being right with God. In Christ, God counts us as right with Him.	2 Corinthians 5:21
Lord	Master and boss. Calling Jesus Lord means He is in charge of my life.	Romans 10:9

Where Christians Read This Differently

Christians agree that salvation is God's gift through Jesus Christ. They describe how a person receives it in different ways.

- **Personal decision:** Many evangelical and Baptist churches teach that a person is saved when they personally repent and put their faith in Christ, often marked by a prayer of commitment. Baptism follows as a public sign of that faith.
- **Baptism as a means of grace:** Catholic, Orthodox and Lutheran churches teach that God gives His grace through baptism, including the baptism of infants, and that faith grows within the life of the church. They point to verses like Acts 2:38.
- **God's work first:** Reformed churches stress that God makes a person spiritually alive first, and that faith is the response. They point to Ephesians 2:4-5, where God made us alive together with Christ "even us, being dead in the trespasses" (Ephesians 2:5).

My view: There is only one way to God, through His Son Jesus Christ. We are saved by grace through faith, not by anything we do, and we must personally accept Jesus into our hearts and our lives as Savior and Lord. Baptism and church matter a great deal, but they follow that decision; they do not replace it.

Discussion Questions (20-25 minutes)

What does it say?

1. According to Isaiah 43:7 and Matthew 22:37, why did God create us?
2. In Ephesians 2:8-10, what saves us, and what are we saved for?

What does it mean?

3. What is the difference between a wage and a gift in Romans 6:23? Why does that matter?
4. Why do you think so many people find it hard to accept that salvation is free and cannot be earned?
5. What is the difference between knowing about God and knowing God (John 17:3)?

How do I live it?

6. Which of the three purposes (God loves me, I love Him, I can have a full life) is hardest for you to believe right now? Why?
7. If someone asked you this week, "What does it mean to be a Christian?", what would you tell them in two or three sentences?

Takeaway (5 minutes)

This week: God made you on purpose and for a purpose. The way into that life is not by working for it but by trusting Jesus, who already paid for it.

Memory verse: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; the gift is of God, not from works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9, SLB)

Prayer

God has told us these things so we can have real joy and peace. The first step is to ask Him. If you have never put your trust in Jesus, you can do it right now, in your own words. There are no magic words. God is looking at your heart. Here is one way to say it:

Heavenly Father, I know I am a sinner, and I ask You to forgive me. I believe Jesus is Your Son, that He died on the cross for my sins and that You raised Him from the dead. I turn from my sin and I trust Jesus as my Savior and my Lord. Come into my life and make me Yours. Thank You for Your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you prayed that today, tell someone in this group or tell your pastor. That is a big deal, and we want to celebrate it with you and help you take the next step.

Going Deeper (Optional)

- Genesis 1-3: How God made us for Himself and how sin broke the relationship.
- Romans 5:1-11: Peace with God through Jesus, and what it cost Him.
- John 3:1-21: Jesus explains to Nicodemus what it means to be born again.

- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21: In Christ we are new, and God has made peace with us.
- Galatians 2:20: Paul on living by faith in the Son of God.

Leader Notes

Question 1 (why God created us): For His glory (Isaiah 43:7), so that we would love Him with everything we have (Matthew 22:37), and so He could pour out His love on us (1 John 4:19).

Question 3 (wage and gift): A wage is earned; a gift is given. Death is what sin earns. Eternal life cannot be earned at all, only received. That is why no one can boast (Ephesians 2:9).

If someone asks "What about good people who are not Christians?": Romans 3:23 says all have sinned, so no one is good enough on their own. That is the point of grace. Jesus said no one comes to the Father but through Him (John 14:6). Answer with kindness. The goal is to point to Jesus, not to win an argument.

Fill-in version: If you teach this as a class, the key words in bold in "What It Means" make good fill-in blanks: worship, purpose, Jesus Christ, personal, sinners, provision, salvation.

Sources

Every outside fact in this study comes from one of these. Scripture is from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) throughout.

- Paul's time in Ephesus and the letter's setting: Acts 19:8-10 and Ephesians 1:1; 3:1; 4:1. Early copies without "in Ephesus," the circular letter idea, and the Rome date: "Epistle to the Ephesians," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistle_to_the_Ephesians.
- Church views on how salvation is received are summarized as each tradition states its own teaching; no outside text is quoted.

Acronym List

SLB: Steadfast Literal Bible

A.D.: Anno Domini, Latin for "in the year of our Lord"