

*Spiritual
Journey*

INTRODUCTION

1. We Are on A Mission

Paul said, “knowing the fear of God, we persuade men... Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... Therefore, we are AMBASSADORS for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:11,18,20)

There is no greater privilege than to be an Ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ on assignment in the world. God is the agent that changes a heart, but we are able to participate with Him as we invite and urge men and women to trust in Christ alone for salvation.

Philip told Nathaniel, “We have found the Messiah. Come and see.” (John 1:45-46) Our lives and our words should invite others to investigate Christ’s claims and to urge a response to the gospel.

2. The Importance of Investigation

C. S. Lewis, the great English author, scholar, and professor was an agnostic for many years. As an agnostic, he investigated the person of Christ from an intellectual perspective - after which he professed Christ to be God Himself. He felt that everyone, like Himself, should have the opportunity to investigate the claims of Jesus Christ. Lewis said that, as one considers Christ, he must come to one of three conclusions: either He was a liar because He claimed to be God and knew He wasn’t, He was a lunatic - that is, He was merely a man who claimed to be God and really thought He was, or He was exactly who He claimed to be, the Lord of the universe. (Lewis states: “I’m trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him. ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. You must make a choice. Either this man was and is the Son of God or else a madman or something worse.”)

3. Investigative Bible Study

A Bible Study like this gives a “Cliff Notes” overview to the critical issues of following Christ. The theme of these studies is what Jesus claimed about God, Himself, and people; and the implications to all men if these claims are true. It is reasonable to conclude that because of the magnitude of Christ’s claims and the place history gives to Jesus, that any reasonable person should investigate His claims first hand.

This study is a tool to help you in the overall evangelism process. Several things need to be kept in mind as you engage others with the gospel.

1. God changes lives. This brings optimism and freedom in our approach. This also puts an emphasis on praying for the lost. (Acts 2:47b)
2. The Word of God (Isaiah 55:10) and the Body of Christ (Matthew 5:16) are God’s tools for change. We must utilize His means for maximum impact.
3. We are called to initiate relationships and conversations with non-believers. (Lk.19:10, Col. 4:2-6)
4. Evangelism is a process that leads to an event. (Acts 17:2-3) Though we cannot create interest, we must engage those showing spiritual interest with Christ’s claims and the implications of the gospel.
5. Spiritual fruit is given by God in His time; therefore, faith is required to minister. We may never see the visible fruit of our labors. We are called to be faithful every day and abide in Him. (John 15:5)

Leader's Guide for an Investigative Bible Study

I. Planning

(Note: The pattern and principles in the evangelism process are the same for leading a group or an individual. You could take an individual through this material and use the same approach as is laid out for a group.)

1. Choose your target (dorm, fraternity, football team, etc.).
2. Pick a meeting place that:
 - a. Will be non-threatening to those attending
 - b. Will be centrally located
 - c. Will be removed from distractions
3. Pick a night that will conflict with the least activities in your target group.
4. Your meeting should not last over an hour (30-40 minutes is preferable).
5. Pick a tool that fits the needs and background of the group (refer to resources, John Bible Study).
6. Begin to pray and trust God to do His part in others' lives.

II. Recruiting

1. Begin building relationships and sharing the gospel with those in your target.
2. A major factor with attendance is the amount of time you spend with them outside the Bible study, not whether the Bible study is done perfectly.
3. Personally invite each person several times before the group actually begins. Try to remind each person the day of the study.
4. Tell each person the place, time, who else is coming and that it will only last for 4-5 weeks for 45 minutes a meeting.

III. Tips

(Remember: This is a minimum guide, be creative and flexible.)

1. Leave the group open ended. They can come one week to investigate.
2. Allow for discussion, but watch the time; don't let it go over 1 hour.
3. Allow for wrong answers, the discussion will bring each person into the group.
4. Watch for Christians who dominate the discussion. Explain the purpose of the study individually to them.
5. End the group by praying briefly.
6. Refreshments are a great way to get people to stay and interact.
7. Record who comes each week, and contact each person before the next week.

Week One

“A Spiritual Journey”

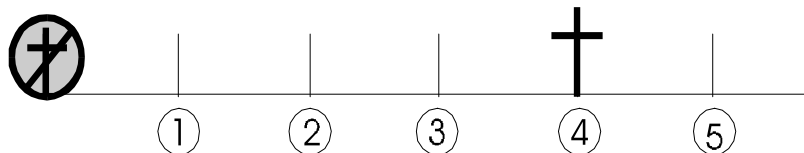
I. If the group is not already acquainted, begin by having everyone introduce themselves. This will loosen the tensions and bring each person into the group as a participant. (Suggestions: set the pace by sharing your background, where you are from, interests, M & M game etc.)

II. Explain the reasons for the Bible study.

A. Everyone is on a spiritual journey, and on that journey, everyone must confront the person and claims of Christ

Options:

- 1- Uninformed about the claims
- 2- Interested in the claims
- 3- Ready for the claims
- 4- Committed to the claims
- 5- Growing with the claims



B. To help each person evaluate where they are on their spiritual journey.

C. To help you make an **informed decision about accepting or rejecting Jesus and his claims.**

III. Explain the structure of the group.

A. Jesus Christ made radical claims about God, Himself, and people. Each week one of these topics will be discussed and verses from the Bible will be read that relate to that topic. Those that want to can give their opinions. Point out that it is optional to verbally participate.

B. The leader will sum up the discussions and illustrate the points.

C. Additional questions that individuals in the group have will be dealt with each week.

IV. Explain that the information you will discuss comes from the Bible. Read this quote: “Jesus’ own testimony is that the Bible is God’s Word. There are many other compelling facts to consider about the Bible: It was written over a period of 1500 years by more than 40 different authors in three different languages on three different continents. It tells of the beginning and end of the world. It claims to be God’s Word—a claim made by very few other writings, and substantiated by none but the Bible. It has survived innumerable attempts to destroy it. The Bible is also amazingly unified. Although it speaks on hundreds of controversial topics, it never contradicts itself. The Bible has one unfolding story from beginning to end: God’s plan of salvation. This salvation is in Jesus Christ. The Bible has enormous power to change the lives of people. The Bible is more than a human product; it is the very Word of God. (You are working from the framework that the Bible is authoritative and is absolute truth as God’s Word. If there is anyone in the group with strong questions about this try and meet one-on-one with them outside the group. Suggestion: Use the article “Is the Bible God’s Word?” from the resource page.)

V. Share your personal testimony. (Gospel-centered and brief)

VI. Pass out blank sheets of paper to everyone in the group and have them write down questions they would like to discuss about spiritual things. (Any questions are acceptable. Names are optional).

VII. Take up the questions. (You will deal with one of these each of the following weeks.)

VIII. Offer to provide Bibles to anyone that does not have one or needs a more readable version. (Talk with your discipleship leader or campus staff to get extra Bibles).

IX. Encourage those with Bibles to read in the gospel of John during the next four weeks to help what will be discussed make sense. Whether it is ten verses or ten chapters a day doesn’t matter, but try to read some daily. (Do not press this issue but encourage it)

X. Close with a brief prayer.

XI. If the environment allows, have refreshments available and encourage small talk as long as people will stay.

Week Two

Jesus' Claims About God

Objective: Discuss the proper ways to view God.

- I. *Review* by reminding everyone of the reason for the study. (Draw out spiritual journey chart again.)
- II. Remember that new people may be attending so don't just pick up where you left off the week before.
- III. *Discuss*: How do most people view God?
 - A. Harsh Judge - God
 - Waiting for you to mess up, so he can punish you

Questions:

 1. How would this affect your approach to God if you viewed Him this way?
 2. Why would this keep people from developing a relationship with God?
 - B. Santa Claus - God
 - Happy, jolly fellow, anxious to grant our every wish
 - He says he is making his list and checking it twice, but we can live as we want to

Questions:

 1. How would this affect your approach to God if you viewed Him this way?
 2. Why would this keep people from developing a relationship with God?
 - C. Chancellor/Governor - God
 - Involved with the big picture of your life, but not concerned with the details
 - Makes mass decisions but does not have your best interest in mind
- IV. *Look up* the following verses to examine how Jesus said we should view God. How would these views shape how we relate with him?

References

- A. Matt. 6:6-8
 - What does it mean that Jesus tells us to pray to our Father?
 - B. Matt. 6:31-33
 - What expectations does our heavenly Father place on His children?
 - What does He promise to do?
 - C. Luke 11:11-13
 - Does a good father give all that you want or all that you need?
 - Who defines needs, the parent or the child?
 - How should a good father respond to a request He knows would be harmful to His children?
 - D. John 14:21
 - How does Jesus say that we demonstrate our love for our heavenly Father?
 - What is the Father's response to those who love him?
 - What does God expect from His children?
 - How do these verses change our views of God?
- V. Conclusion: God is a Father who has the best interest of His children in mind. He guides, protects and provides for them.
1. How does a person become a child of God? (John 1:12)
 2. What does it mean to receive Him?

Deal with one question from last week and close in prayer.

Week Three

How did Jesus View Himself

Objective: Examine Jesus claims to be God and therefore the only means of salvation.

- I. *Review* the first 2 weeks (Spiritual Journey / How to View God)
- II. *Look up* the following verses that expound on what Jesus claimed about himself.
Discuss what Jesus claims and the implications of each claim.
 - A. John 14:6 - Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."
 - B. John 10:27-33 – "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one. The Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?" The Jews answered Him, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God."
 - C. John 14:9a – "He who has seen me has seen the Father."
- III. *Other evidences* (you don't need to look up each of these references)
 - A. Rose from the dead. (I Corinthians 15:1-8)
 - B. The many miracles He performed. (John 9:13-33, 20:30-31)
 - C. Approximately 300 prophecies from the OT fulfilled in Christ. (Ex: Ps. 16:10, Acts 13:34-38, I Cor. 15:1-8)
 - D. The willingness of eye witness followers of Christ to die for Him. (Who would die for a known lie? Acts 5:25-32)
- IV. *Ask and discuss the question:* "Why is Christianity different from other world religions?"
Answer: "Religions of the world are man's attempts to reach God and improve man's well being, while Christianity is God's way of reaching and saving man."
- V. *Read this quote:*
"Not one recognized religious leader, not Moses, Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, has ever claimed to be God: with the exception of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only leader who claimed He was the exclusive way to God and the only individual who has convinced a great portion of the world that He is God."
- VI. *Conclusion* - Christianity is different than other religions because it is God's way of reaching man through Jesus Christ. All other religions involve an attempt to reach up to God through good works, rituals and service. However, in Christianity, God reaches down to man as Jesus Christ.
- VII. Deal with one question from the first week and close in prayer.

Leadership Notes:

Be prepared for the emotional response participants may have to the truth that if Jesus' claims are true, that many people will be going to hell. There may also be questions about the "fairness" of God's plan and the cruelty of hell. Don't pick a fight, but also don't dodge sincere questions or concerns. If individuals have significant questions on these subjects, talk to your leader about getting them more information.

Week Four

Why Man Needs God

Objective: Determine why all people truly need Jesus.

- I. *Review* by having one person explain how we should view God and another person explain the difference between Christianity and other religions.
- II. Remind each person that progress on a journey is only made as the destination is clarified, as obstacles are removed, and as attempts for progress are made. Clarify the destination (an informed decision about the claims of Christ), and stress that how they view man (themselves) is a major hurdle to cross in understanding why they need to become a Christian.

Discussion:

- III. *What is a need?* A requirement, a necessity, a condition of deficiency.
- IV. *Do all people have a need for God, even if they do not sense it?* (Allow different opinions at this point).
- V. *Can a person need something but not sense they do?* (Examples: a person has cancer, but unaware of it; an alcohol or drug problem; family or individual that needs that require counseling.)
- VI. *Look up* the following verses that explain why man needs God.
 - A. *Romans 9:20* – What are the implications of God being our creator?
God created man for God’s purpose. Therefore, humans need God to understand what they were made for. (Think about a manufacturer and his product. Of course, the creator is going to know what his product is best used for.)
 - B. *I Cor. 10:31* – What does it mean to glorify God?
 - C. *Romans 3:23* – Why do we fall short of God’s glory?
Man cannot accomplish his purpose on his own. He falls short of what God expects. (Explain sin as man trying to fulfill his purpose on his own, without recognizing his need for God. Also, Matthew 5:48, says we must be perfect as God is perfect. We all know we fall far short of this standard.)
 - D. *Romans 6:23* – What is a wage? What do we earn for all our work outside of God’s plan for us?
Penalty of sin is death. (Illustrate with judge in a courtroom. If you break the law, there is a penalty. The “Back to God” article in the resource section is helpful on this point.)
 - E. *Romans 3:26* – How could God be both loving and just when dealing with our sin?
God is loving and just. Since sin’s consequence is death, someone must die for everyone’s sin. God desires to forgive us and restore relationship, but his justice demands that our sin’s penalty must be paid. * *Read II Peter 3:9-10.* (Illustrate with death-row scene. We are all in jail, guilty of sin. We all need God to save us from our guilt. You can die for your own sin or accept Christ’s death for your sin. God has provided a way out, but only one way - through Jesus Christ.)
- VII. *Conclusion:* Whether a person senses his need for God because of failures and frustrations, or if a person ignores or is unaware of his need, all men need God. Without him, we fail to fulfill our purpose, and due to our sin, remain separated from God. Jesus said he was the only way to God. The good news of the gospel is Romans 5:8 “God demonstrates his own love toward us, that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”
- VIII. Deal with another question and close in prayer.

Week Five

The Necessity of a Decision

Objective: Clarify for all participants how and why they should become a follower of Jesus.

I. *Review*

A. *Test* your group's memory by asking questions from the first four weeks of discussion and study.

What is our goal?

What is the correct view of God?

How did Jesus view himself?

Why do we need Christ?

B. *Explain* that this will be the last week unless some want to continue. (Individually get a feel for the group to possibly begin a follow-up group if the interest is there and the group is ready for an increased commitment.)

C. Each week we have discussed why Jesus Christ is the goal of our journey. (Based on Jesus' claims and life). This week explain that you will discuss how and when to become follower's of Christ.

II. *Discuss: Why become a Christian?*

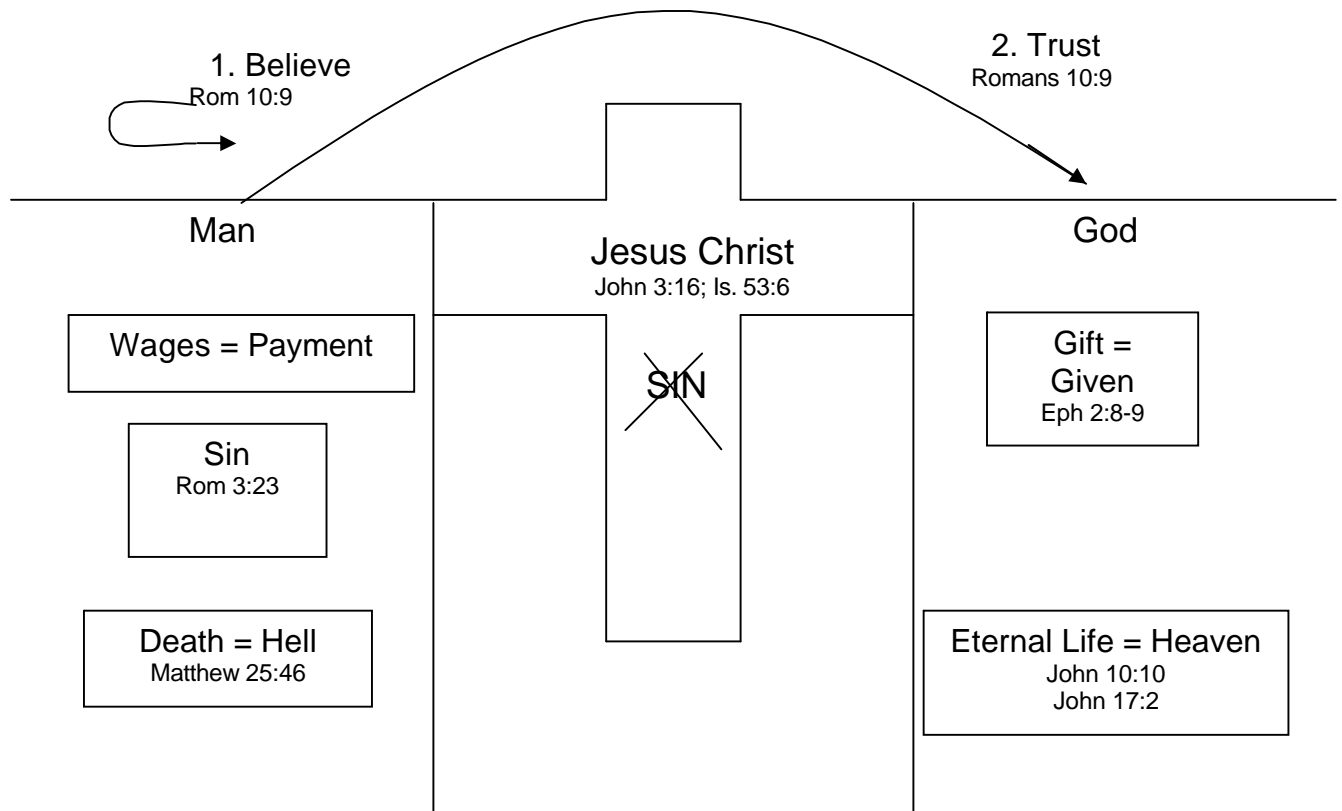
Share the Bridge Diagram with the group and explain the only way to receive the free gift of eternal life is through Jesus Christ

A. Quantity of life – John 17:2: what is eternal life?

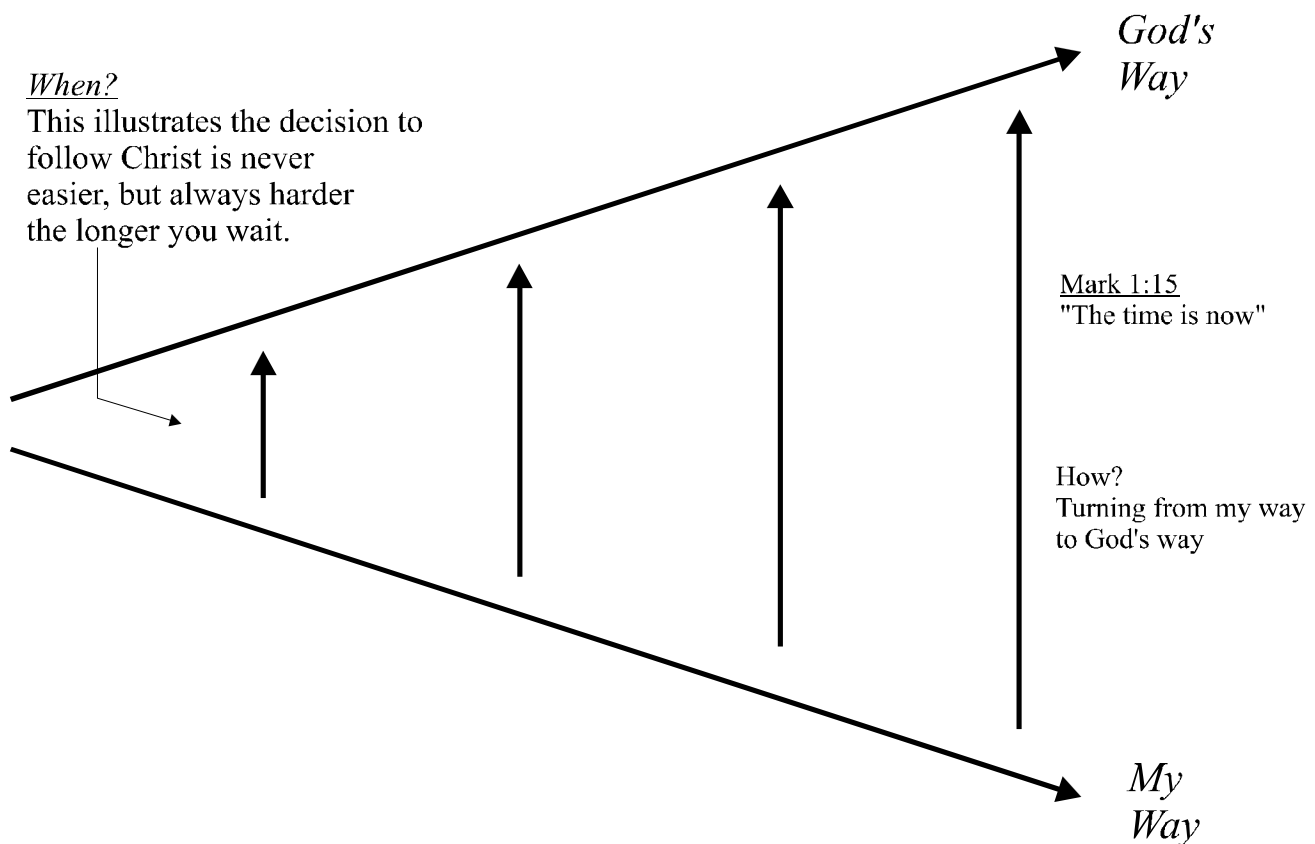
B. Quality of life – John 10:10: what is abundant life?

C. Romans 6:23 – What are the wages of sin?

What is the gift of God?



- III. *Explain* what some possible objections might be.
 (Note to the Leader: You will be dealing with barriers that individuals in the group may possess)
- A. "I'm growing into it."
 Becoming a Christian is an event, not a process.
 --John 3:1-8 - Birth; John 1:12 - Adoption; Ephesians 5 - Marriage
 - B. "I am a Christian, just not a good one."
 --Jesus demands all of your heart and life. (see Spiritual Baseball article)
 --Matthew 7:20-23
 - C. "I couldn't stick with it."
 --II Corinthians 5:17 - God gives you the power
 - D. "I'm not ready yet."
 --You will never be good enough, it is a gift.
 --Eph 2:8
 - E. "I wouldn't have any fun."
 --John 10:10 abundance is with Jesus.
- VI. When should you become a Christian?



Mark 1:15 -- The time is NOW

3 Reasons Why the Decision is Urgent

- A. Hell is real - Matthew 10:28
- B. We are not promised tomorrow - Luke 12:16-17
- C. The decision will only get harder to follow Christ, not easier - Romans 1:21-23

- VIII. How to Become a Christian. Mark 1:15
- A. Repent = Turn from going your way to go God's way / 180° turn.
 - B. Believe= Trust. Illustrate trust by using the tight rope walker illustration. (When do you really believe? When you say you believe he could carry you across a ravine on his back, or when you climb on his back?)
- IX. Close by reviewing the full study. Make sure the Gospel has been clearly presented. Give the group a chance to pray to receive Christ and then follow-up each person individually who was attending the study on any week. Decide on the direction of the study by discussing it with your discipleship leader and those attending the group.

Resources in this Leader's Guide

Back to God by Frank Barker

One Verse Bridge by Randy Raysbrook

No Mere Man by Bill Bright

Baseball Illustration by Clint Watson

Is the Bible God's Word? by Randy Pope

Other Ideas for Investigative Bible Studies

John Bible Study from Living Proof by Jim Peterson

“What it Means to Believe”

“Test of True Belief”

Bible Study Using the “4 Laws”

Tapes, Testimonies, and Articles

Books for Reference

Know Why You Believe, Paul Little

Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis

More than a Carpenter, Josh McDowell

A Ready Defense, Josh McDowell

Back to God

Christianity is the way, God's way to God -- our way of approaching Him and being accepted by Him. In simple terminology, what is the heart of Christianity and how does one become a Christian? To understand, we have to start with the nature of God.

COMMANDMENTS

God is holy. He gave certain commandments which are summed up in the Ten Commandments. Christ then summarized these into two: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:30). If we loved God with all our heart, we would never want anything wrong. If we loved Him with all our soul, we would never think anything wrong. If we loved Him with all our strength, we would never do anything wrong. If we loved God this total way all the time, we would be perfect. But, did you ever meet a perfect person? Only one man ever lived with that perfection - Jesus Christ. And when we compare our life to His, we see how far we come short. That gap between our imperfection and His perfection is our guilt -- our failure to live our life as God said to live it. No wonder the Bible says, "All have sinned and come short" (Romans 3:23). Sin is breaking God's holy law.

CONSEQUENCES

Admittedly we have sinned, but how serious is our sin? If we break human laws, that has certain consequences. What about God's law? The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). This is speaking of spiritual death. If physical death is separation of the soul from the body, spiritual death would be separation of the soul from God, a separation that carries with it fearful consequences.

Notice it does not say "the wages of great sin is death" -- but just "sin"! That's shattering! Actually, since we have broken the very first and great commandment about loving God with all our heart, we are great sinners!

You have sinned and I have sinned, and the wages of our sin is death. That "death" means our condition before God is terminal, a dreadful, final separation. Is there any escape from

such condemnation? Is there any way we can get God to forgive us for our sin?

CHRIST

Frequently, people will say all we have to do is ask forgiveness and try to be better. Is that enough? Will such a remedy work? Let's use a comparison. Suppose you robbed a bank and got caught in the act. You're taken before a judge. The judge asks, "Did you rob the bank?" You answer, "Yes, Your Honor. I was caught in the act, but I've learned my lesson and I'm not going to rob any more banks, so I ask you to forgive me." The judge would say, "Forgive you? Why, you robbed a bank! If I forgave you, the law would lose its meaning. Everyone would rob banks."

If God forgave us for breaking His law on the simple basis that we were sorry and that we promised to try to do better, His law would also lose its meaning. Were this the case He could not have said, "The wages of sin is death." It would be mercy to forgive, but not justice. What we need then, is to find some way for God to forgive us and still be just!

Going back to the court scene, suppose the judge said, "I believe you are sincere in asking for the court's forgiveness. However, if the law is to have any meaning, I will have to impose at least the minimum fine as your penalty. The minimum fine for armed bank robbery is \$5,000 or five years in jail." You answer, "Your Honor, I don't have \$5,000." "Then you'll have to go to jail."

Although you don't have \$5,000 there is a way you could go free that very day with no strings attached. I'm your friend and I pay the \$5,000 for you. Since I paid the penalty the judge could set you free and still uphold the law. Could it be that something similar has taken place in God's holy courtroom?

No, I could not pay your fine in God's court because I am also a guilty sinner. I am in the same predicament you are in. I have to find someone who was not guilty to bail me out. Only one person has ever lived who was not guilty before God and that was Christ, God's Son. But we all know He died 2,000 years ago! So how can Christ possibly help us today?

The Bible says, "Christ died for our sin" (I Corinthians 15:3). When He died, He didn't just die physically. Remember when He cried out on the cross, "My God, my God, why has Thou forsaken me?" In His death He was undergoing some kind of agonizing separation from His Father; as I understand it, He was experiencing the wages of sin. In His death, Christ was paying our fine in God's court. This is the way God worked it out so He could be just when He forgives us. When God forgives a sinner He is not overlooking the sin, because full payment has been made. It's as if the Judge himself paid the fine by punishing His Son, Jesus Christ.

Further, Christ, as it were, did not pay just \$5,000 and leave you or me \$500 to pay. No, Christ paid every cent of the penalty for all our sins, even the sins we will commit in the future.

CONDITIONS

Does that mean everyone in the world is forgiven and does not have to worry about sin anymore? Not at all! When Christ paid the penalty in full, He paid it conditionally. The

Bible tells us that there are certain conditions we have to meet before we are actually forgiven.

Let's return to the judge and the courtroom to understand these conditions. Suppose--when I paid your fine for robbing the bank--that I paid it in full, but I attached a condition: the judge was not to set you free until he felt that you meant business about not robbing any more banks. You, as the guilty law breaker, would have to meet that condition before you received the benefit of the payment.

When Christ died for us He did something similar. He has attached two conditions for all sinners to meet: repentance and faith.

REPENTANCE

Repentance means that I recognize that I really am guilty before God because of my sin, that my desires have been contrary to His desires, and that I want to readjust my way of living in order to please Him. Thus, repentance is honestly meaning business about God's will being done in my life. It is a surrender of my will to His. Suppose I said to you, "How about turning over your life to me for me to do with as I see fit for the next three years?"

"Me be your slave and you become my master?"

"Yes."

"Never!"

Believe it or not, that is the kind of surrender that is involved in real repentance. Christ becomes my master. I become His slave. Not just for three years, but from now on. Remember, we are talking about the alternative to "death," eternal separation from God.

Have you ever made that kind of surrender to Christ? That is an essential condition to becoming a Christian. Jesus said, "Except ye repent ye shall perish" (Luke 13:13).

FAITH

The second condition is faith, or "believing in" Jesus Christ. Believing in Christ first involves believing His claims; that He is God the Son, that He died for our sins, and that He literally rose from the dead. However, we can believe these facts about Him without actually believing in Christ. Believing in Him involves one more step: a step of personal trust.

A surgeon could examine you and tell you that you had a brain tumor. He could even add that he could operate and cure you. You could believe all that information, but the information would not cure you. You would have to take one more step and trust him to operate on you. It is the same with Christ. On the basis of what we believe about Him, we must put our trust in Him to do what He offers to do for us; that is, to clear us from the guilt of our sins and to bring us into a relationship with God and ultimately take us to heaven.

To illustrate such trust in Him, let us suppose three men approach the Gate of Heaven. God says to each: "Why should I accept you into my heaven?"

The first man answers, "I have tried to live a moral life." (That is another way of saying, "I'll stand on my record.") God would have to say, "I'm sorry, your record isn't good

enough. No man's is. Had your record been good enough, I would not have had to send my Son to die for your record."

Now the second man approaches Heaven's gate and says, "I believed in your Son as my Savior, and I was pretty good. For these two reasons you ought to accept me." God would say, "I'm sorry, but you've contradicted yourself: You say you believed in my Son and trusted Him to save you, a sinner, but then added that you were fairly good. That is getting back to your record. You stand with one foot on my Son and another on your record. That's like having one foot on a rock and the other on quicksand. You simply can't come into my Heaven by trusting your record -- that's what you need saving from."

The third man approaches the gate of Heaven. God says. "Why should I accept you into my heaven?" "There's no reason why You should let me in," he replies. "I'm a sinner. My record is horrible. But I understand that's why You sent your Son. He died for me. If I trust In Him instead of trust in my record, You promised I'd be forgiven. So I have!" And God says to him, "That's faith in my Son! Come on in!"

The Bible explains that salvation comes only "by grace through faith." Grace means it is *Gratis*: something I can't buy, beg or steal-something given to me that I didn't deserve. "For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Once I receive God's great gift, I must try to do God's will, or I am not repentant; however, I must not trust in how well I have done His will, because that is unacceptable self righteousness.

When I come to God in repentance and with faith- meeting His two conditions-something happens. Something happens in heaven: I receive legal clearance, and I am legally adopted into God's family. God becomes my heavenly Father, and I become His spiritual child. Something has already happened in me! Christ has come into my life, and He produces a new quality of life. For this reason the Bible says that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:14). That does not mean my faith plus my works saves me. No, that would contradict the Bible's statement that salvation is given to us by grace and not by works. What happens to me is that when I really trust Christ and surrender to Him, Christ really lives within me and produces His kind of works in my life as I walk in obedience to Him. A so-called "faith" that does not produce that new lifestyle is a dead, non-saving faith.

COMMITMENT

This all adds up to a second very important question: Have you placed your faith in Christ, trusting in Him alone? Think of the three different men who approached Heaven's gate. Which of the three best illustrates your thinking?

We can miss becoming a Christian either by failing to truly surrender our wills to Christ, or by failing to place our trust in Him. Have you met both of these conditions? Have you made that kind of commitment to Christ? Does your lifestyle evidence it? If you have not, but would like to be a real Christian, are you prepared to meet these conditions? Why not do it right now? Pray like this: "Lord Jesus, I am willing to surrender my life to You and accept You as my Lord. I want Your will to be done in my life. I trust you to forgive me, and I accept your forgiveness as Your gift to me."

If you prayed that prayer and committed your life to Christ, don't expect to feel different immediately. Rather, count on the fact that Christ has come into your life. If your

commitment was genuine, the change will come.

Now set out to grow spiritually by "food" and "exercise". The "food" is the Bible and books that will help you understand the Bible. Start reading in the Gospel of John. You will get your "exercise" by keeping a daily "quiet time" with the Lord, a time you set aside for Bible study and prayer. Then you "exercise" further by finding a good Bible-teaching church and getting involved in its program and with the people who worship God with you.

That, in simple terminology, is the heart of Christianity and the only way a person can become a Christian.

by Rev. Frank Barker

Discussion:

1. Is it enough to just ask for forgiveness and try to do better? Why or why not?
2. Why did Jesus have to die? If God is loving, why couldn't He forgive us without Jesus having to die?
3. How does one receive the gift of eternal life?
4. If God asked you, "why should I let you enter heaven?", what would you say?
5. On a scale of 1 to 100, how certain are you that you would go to heaven when you die. Why?

No
More
Men

Why did Jesus of Nazareth have to die at the peak of His career?

Was He just another great teacher or religious leader? Presenting the uniqueness of Jesus...

BY
BILL
BRIGHT

If you removed Jesus of Nazareth from history, history would be a completely different story. One writer described His influence in this way: "Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned put together have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life, Jesus of Nazareth."

Wherever Christ has gone, the sacredness of marriage and of women's rights has been acknowledged; institutions of higher learning have been established; child labor laws, abolition of slavery and other changes have been made for the good of mankind.

I have talked to many thousands of men and women about Jesus of Nazareth. And naturally, I have met those who are militantly antagonistic toward Christ. Another skeptic was C.S. Lewis, a professor at Oxford University. For years as an agnostic he denied the deity of Christ. Then he became a devout follower of Christ and wrote many books advocating his belief in Him as Savior.

In his famous book *Mere Christianity*, he makes this statement: "A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic-on a level with a man who says he is a poached egg-or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool... or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us." There are men who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God, among them some of the world's greatest scholars. But I am appalled to discover that almost always they are ignorant of the basic truths of the gospel. Have you ever read any of the writings of Ingersoll, Thomas Paine or other well-known skeptics? You would be amazed to discover that these men are taking issue with something they do not fully understand. They have created straw men and have proceeded to destroy their own creations.

I have yet to meet a man who has honestly considered the evidence for the deity of Jesus of Nazareth, who does not admit that He is the Son of God. I meet some who say they do not believe, but as we talk and reason together they honestly confess, "I have not taken the time to read the Bible or consider the historical facts concerning Jesus."

There is indeed no one quite like Jesus Christ. In fact, I want to emphasize here four specific things Jesus can do for us that no one else can do.

1. PARDONED FOR LIFE

Jesus is the only one who can pardon man from his sin. Sin is not necessarily a matter of lying, stealing or immorality. Basically sin is an attitude. Sin is going one's own independent way. It is a lack of relationship or fellowship with God. If you are saying, "I am the master of my life; I will do as I please," then you qualify as a sinner.

Jesus Christ paid the penalty (eternal separation from God) for your sin and can bring you back into a relationship with Himself. As you study the 11 popular religions of the world, you will see that no provision for pardon from sin is made apart from the cross of Jesus Christ.

After I finished speaking at a Midwestern university, a group of students asked how they could become Christians. Among those who remained to talk with me was an angry young Hindu professor from India. He said, "I resent the arrogance with which you say that you have the only way to God. I believe that Christianity is one way, but only one way. Hinduism is another. Buddhism, Shintoism and others are all ways to God."

As we talked he learned how Christ had made the provision for man's basic need, which is forgiveness of sin. I explained to him, "You can take Buddha out of Buddhism, Mohammed out of Islam, and the founders of the other religions out of their religion, and little would be changed. But take Christ out of Christianity, and there is nothing left"

Finally this young Hindu understood the great truth of pardon for sin through our Savior's sacrifice on the cross. He prayed that Jesus of Nazareth would come into his heart. You see, there is salvation in no one else. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one

comes to the Father, but through Me."¹

2. PURPOSE TO LIFE

Jesus gives a purpose for living to men and women who know and obey Him. Men who do not know Him are like ships upon a rough sea without rudder and without sail, drifting with the tide. No matter how brilliant you might be or how successful as a professional person, mother or student, unless you know Jesus Christ, you will never know real purpose in life. Ralph Barton, one of the nation's top cartoonists, left this note pinned to his pillow before he took his life: "I have had few difficulties, many friends, great successes; I have gone from wife to wife, and from house to house, visited great countries of the world, but I am fed up with inventing devices to fill up 24 hours of the day." Blaise Pascal, the French physicist and philosopher, put it this way, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, which only God can fill through His Son, Jesus Christ."

You see, God made us for Himself, and we can never be fulfilled or complete until Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives.

3. A LIFE OF PEACE

Jesus of Nazareth is the only one who can give you peace. Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."² He also says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."³

Perhaps you are now experiencing the fears and frustrations of life. Perhaps you are worried about your finances, family, social life or grades. You say, "Of course. Everyone has these problems." Yes, and the Christian is not exempt. Becoming a Christian does not mean that you will suddenly be ushered into a Utopian situation, but rather that you will have with you one who said, "Peace, be still."⁴ Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.⁵ I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you."⁶

4. POWER TO LIVE

Jesus is the only one who can give you power to live a new life. Frequently men and women will say to me, "I would like to become a Christian, but if I do, I am sure I will never be able to live the life. You don't know the mistakes I have made, the resentments I have."

But as they have given their lives to Christ, they have discovered that the Christian life is a supernatural life—you and I cannot live it, no matter how good we are. But Jesus Christ literally comes to live within us, living His life in and through us. Therefore, it is no longer what we do but what He does, because He is the one who provides the power. We are merely the instruments through which He releases that power.

There is a throne in every life. If you are on that throne—if you are deciding what to do with your life—it is quite likely that you are not a Christian. Christ says, "Behold, I stand at the door (the door of your heart—your will, your intellect, your emotions) and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me."⁷

Commitment to Christ involves the surrender of the intellect, the emotions and the will—the total person. Suppose you are engaged to marry a certain young man or woman. Intellectually, you believe that he or she is the most wonderful person in all the world. Emotionally, your heart beats twice as fast when you are together. But are respect, admiration and strong emotions enough to build a marriage on? No. Something else very important must also take place

As you stand before the minister to exchange your vows, you commit your wills one to the other. The marriage is not a true marriage if there is no mutual giving of one to the other.

The same is true in becoming a Christian. One must give himself wholly—intellect, emotions and will—to Christ.

At this moment, if you have not already received Christ as your Savior and Lord, Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart. Will you surrender your will to Him? Invite Him to come into your life, to live His life in you, to pardon your sin, to give purpose to your life, to give you His

peace and power to be different.

As you receive Christ into your life, you begin the great adventure for which He created you. As you continue in obedience to His commands, you will experience the fulfillment of His promise of an abundant life.

Q and A

Is the Bible God's Word?

The Two Most Important Questions

Men and women throughout the ages have debated the two most important questions in life. The first is, "If there is a God who is knowable, how does one get to know Him?" The second is, "If there is a literal heaven, how can one be certain he will live there after death?" The Bible says that the answer to both questions is one and the same. The Bible quotes Jesus Christ who says, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). To "come to the Father" includes both knowing God and gaining qualification to enter heaven upon death.

However, to believe the credibility of this quote of Jesus presumes, among other things, that the writings of the Bible are reliable. Christians throughout history have argued that the Bible is God's Word. They most often agree that as God's Word it is both inspired (God-breathed) and infallible in its original writing.

The First Issue to Investigate

It would be easy to argue from logic that a book written with human hands could not be authored by God. Even if it were believed to be so, a strong case could be made for expecting that writing

to be significantly altered through the hundreds of years of duplicating by hand the various manuscripts.

Yet, in spite of such logic, very intelligent and scholarly giants have persistently believed in the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible. Many of those who do, boldly insist that in doing so they have not "shelved their brains," and agree that there is a solid, historical rationale for such a belief.

The Bible's Incredible Unity

The Bible was written over a period of 1500 years by over 40 human authors writing in three different languages. These men and women lived in three different continents and wrote on a variety of controversial subjects. One would expect that these authors, living in such different cultures, would contradict each other. Yet there is an amazing unity throughout the Bible without error or contradiction. This unity would suggest that the Bible was written by one author, namely God.

The Bible's Historical Accuracy

Throughout the years skeptics have claimed that many of the stories in the Bible had no historical foundation. One after another of these accusations are being abandoned. A favorite target was the Old Testament account of the city of Jericho. The Bible recounts that Joshua and the Israelites marched around the city of Jericho once each day for six days. On the seventh day they walked around the city seven times. The priests then blew their trumpets, the walls of Jericho collapsed and the city was invaded. Those who deny the existence of the supernatural have dismissed this account as fanciful. Their skepticism was strengthened by the fact that there was no city where the Bible claims Jericho to have existed-only desert.

However in the 1930's archaeologists made an incredible find. Going to the Bible location of Jericho, they began to dig and discovered an ancient city buried beneath the sand. Finding a vase with the name of the city on it, they learned that it was, in fact, Jericho. Furthermore, during the excavations, an archaeologist concluded that "the walls fell outward so completely that the attackers would be able to clamor up and over the ruins into the city." *One would expect the walls of the city to fall inward during an invasion, and yet the walls of Jericho fell outward in accordance with the biblical account.*

Commenting on the historical accuracy of the Bible, archaeologist William E. Albright states, "Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of the innumerable details and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history."

The Bible's Fulfilled Prophecies

The Bible contains countless prophecies about future events. If the Bible were not inspired, the odds of these prophecies being fulfilled would be no better than chance. Yet, we find an incredible accuracy in the Bible's foretelling of the future. *For example, over 300 prophecies in the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ, refer to the coming Messiah, Christ. All 300 came true.* The following are examples of these prophecies, their Old Testament references and their New Testament fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

- a. *Messiah to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 - Matthew 2:1-6)*
- b. *Messiah to be a descendant of David (Jeremiah 23:5 - Luke 3:31)*
- c. *Messiah to enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9 - Matthew 21:1-9)*
- d. *Messiah to be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9 - Matthew 26:47-50)*

- e. *Messiah to be sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12 - Matthew 27:9)*
- f. *Money thrown in God's house (Zechariah 11:13 - Matthew 27:5)*
- g. *Money given for potter's field (Zechariah 11:12,13 - Matthew 27:7-8)*
- h. *Messiah's side, hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16 - John 20:25)*
- i. *Messiah crucified with thieves (Isaiah 53:12 - Luke 23:32-43)*
- j. *Messiah's clothes divided and lots cast for them (Psalm 22:18 - John 19:23-24)*
- k. *Messiah's bones not broken (Psalm 22:17, Psalm 34:20 - John 19:31-33)*
- l. *Messiah to be buried in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9 - Matthew 27:57-60)*

Mathematical probability indicates that the chances of only eight of these prophecies being fulfilled in the same man are 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000. These odds are statistically impossible apart from a sovereign God who knows the future.

The Bible's Miraculous Preservation

It would be reasonable to expect errors in the transmission of the Bible in the last 3500 years, especially since copies were duplicated by hand. How do we know the Bible we have today is same as the original?

Until 1947, the oldest known Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were dated from the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. They were copies of only the first five books of the Bible.

Then, in 1947 came the remarkable discovery of *the Dead Sea Scrolls*. These were early manuscripts from the library of the Jewish religious groups, which flourished at Qumran about the time of Jesus. These manuscripts were written about a thousand years earlier than the ninth century documents. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls are copies of every Old Testament book except Esther. Upon this discovery, the question was raised whether the ninth and tenth century manuscripts would match up to these ancient manuscripts. Would errors have been made in transmission over those 1000 years?

The impact of this discovery is vividly illustrated in the virtual duplication of the Isaiah scroll (dated 125 B.C.) in the Masoretic text of Isaiah (A.D. 916) written 1000 years later. This demonstrates the unusual accuracy of the copyists of the scripture over a thousand year period. Of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen letters have been questioned. Ten of these letters are a matter of spelling, which does not affect the sense. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as a conjunction. The remaining three letters comprise the word "light", which is added in verse 11 and does not greatly affect the meaning. Thus, in one chapter of 166 words, there is only one word (three letters) in question after a thousand years of transmission-and this word does not significantly change the meaning of the passage. Comparisons of other Bible passages show even closer duplications. *This incredible preservation of the Bible over time can best be explained by God's doing.* Desiring to keep the Scriptures in accord with His original revelation, God ensured that the Bible would be accurately copied over the centuries.

There is no better way to investigate the claims of Christianity than by reading the Bible itself. And there is no better place to begin one's reading than in the Gospel of John. This Gospel is

written by one of Jesus' closest disciples, John, who seeks to convey the historical account of the life and teaching of the one whom claimed to be the Christ.

by Randy Pope

Read John 5:18-47 from the Bible.

1. What did Jesus' enemies accuse Him of claiming?

2. What did Jesus' promise in 5:24? How does one receive these promises?

3. Jesus presents witnesses who attest to His deity (31-39). Who or what are they?

4. 5:39 states why Jesus said the Scriptures were written. What is the aim and reason for the Scriptures?

5. Other Passages about the Scriptures.
 - a. II Timothy 3:15-16

 - b. Mark 13:31 or Psalm 119:160

 - c. John 20:30-31

 - d. II Peter 1:20-21

Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Becoming a Christian means acknowledging that you have sinned by seeking pleasure, security, and fulfillment in things other than God. In order to escape eternal death, you must turn from your sin and believe that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for your sin by His death on the cross.

Only Jesus offers the real LIFE that God promises.

Spiritual Baseball

This illustration was designed to communicate Lordship salvation to a generation that has been taught that believing there is a God is the same as true Faith and Repentance.

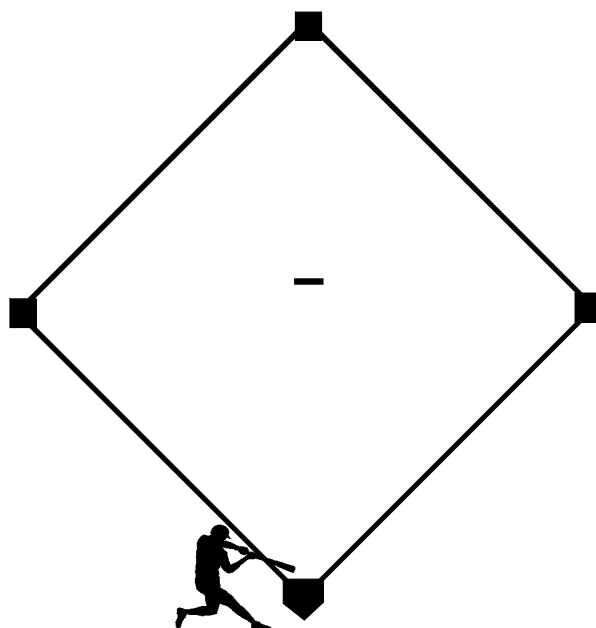
Becoming a Christian can be compared to hitting a home run in the game of Baseball. The Bible teaches that the game of life starts with the score: hell - one and heaven - zero in regards to our salvation and how we enter this world (Rom 3:23). In the Bible, this is known as man's "sin problem." If you are reading this illustration or hearing it, you have an opportunity to remedy this sin problem by hitting a spiritual home run.

In the game of baseball, we must know the rules to compete successfully and win. This is also true with our spiritual life. Suppose a batter did not know the rules of baseball, and after hitting the ball and reaching first base he began to shout "home run!" while standing on first base. Everyone would think he was a fool. This is often the case in regards to our spiritual life. For example, someone goes to church and has an emotional experience without a basic intellectual understanding of the person and work of Christ. Nor do they truly place faith in Christ and repent of their sin. This would be the same as the person who would stand on first base and scream "home run!". Though sincere, this person would not have scored a home run and would be "sincerely wrong" in regards to their relationship with God. An emotional experience without a basic intellectual understanding of the person and work of Christ and a surrendered will is insufficient to enter into saving faith.

Now, let an intellectual understanding of the person of Christ represent second base. Another might hit the ball so to speak, and cross first base, heading for second. Upon reaching second he might again begin to stand on the bag and scream "home run!". This too would be inaccurate because it takes more than emotions, or intellect to hit a home run spiritually.

Let third base represent the will. A decision for Christ is required to receive Him. Some would say or believe that to give intellectual assent to Christianity or God would be enough to experience saving faith. Mark 1:15 teaches that we must repent and believe to become children of God. Someone may reach third base with emotions and intellect satisfied but still possess reluctance to place faith in Christ to be the controller of their life. This leaves them stranded at third base without biblical grounds for true saving faith.

In Luke 18:18, we see the story of the "Rich Young Ruler." In this story, Jesus clearly teaches it is necessary to say to Christ "anything, anytime, anywhere." This is the heart indication that we have truly come to Christ with a surrendered will, and therefore have spiritually hit a "home run." Then and only then does the score actually change to Heaven - one and Hell - zero.



Score: Heaven Hell