

## **I BELIEVE IN GOD, BUT: I trust in science, not the supernatural**

**April 17, 2022**

**READ plan Author: David Miles**

DAY 1 - Faith and science are friends, not enemies!

**Scripture:** [1 Corinthians 15: 13-14](#), [Proverbs 2:1-7](#), [Hebrews 11:1-6](#)

**Reflection:** Let's be honest- The Christian faith calls us to believe in a God we can't see! The Bible claims that magnificent miracles really did happen! In fact, the claim that a dead Jewish man came back to life is the whole foundation of the Christian faith! This is certifiably crazy in a rational, naturalistic worldview. You've likely heard the message that science and faith are in conflict. This conflict narrative has flowed from a generation of leading atheists like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens.

Richard Dawkins said, "Faith is like a mental illness. A great copout. The excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence."

But maybe the worlds of pure secularism and naturalism that resort to name-calling and bullying are outdated. Amazingly, such life and death certainty is placed on scientific theories, which are constantly changing. What if faith and science are friends and not enemies? A few years ago, a major national study showed that over half of all scientists believe in God, and 36% said they do not doubt God's existence. Only a small minority of scientists are true atheists. So, what if there are questions that science can't answer? Questions like, "What is the meaning of life?" or "Why do I have a sense of right and wrong?" What if we didn't believe the sound bites that say there is a good guy and a bad guy in this story? What if pure science and faith are friends, not enemies?

**Ask Yourself:** What could be the consequences of Science without faith?

**Pause to Pray:** Oh God, please use these next five days to increase my faith. Open my eyes, ears, and heart like never before. Amen

**Take a Next Step:** Start a discussion with a friend (or your family) by asking, "Do you think faith and science are friends or enemies?"

[Consider using the "I Believe in God, but..." YouVersion reading plans every week of this series. Just search "whoisgrace" on the YouVersion Bible app or website.]

DAY 2 - Science points us to God

**Scripture:** [Psalm 19:1-6](#), [Romans 1:18-23](#)

**Reflection:** Johannes Kepler is considered one of the founders of modern science. He is best known for his laws on planetary motion. Like many scientists, Kepler was not anti-faith. His faith influenced his scientific approach. Kepler once said, "The world of nature, the world of man, the world of God—all three fit together." He believed that a world created by an intelligent creator would follow order and patterns. Kepler sought to discover these patterns, and he did. Don't miss this! Kepler was not simply a scientist who happened to be a believer. Kepler's Christian beliefs were foundational to his discoveries.

Kepler said, "We see how God, like a human architect, approached the founding of the world according to order and rule and measured everything in such a manner."

Kepler is an excellent example of the truth of Romans 1:20,

*"For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse."*

Notice, God has revealed Himself through the created universe. This is called God's general revelation. And God can be so "clearly perceived" by the observation of "the things that have been made" that humankind is "without excuse." Science points us to God! And so, in a perfect world, our scientific discoveries lead us to worship and not divisiveness. More science books would be like Kepler's book, Harmony of the Worlds. In this book, Kepler established his third law of planetary motion. But he also praised God, saying, "Great is God our Lord, great is His power, and there is no end to His wisdom."

**Ask Yourself:** What examples can I think of that show that observation of this world points to God?

**Pause to Pray:** My God, my Creator, every movement of every part of this world and its creatures speaks to your knowledge, power, and wisdom. I give you all the glory! I give you all the praise!...

**Take a Next Step:** Go outside, take a walk or sit on a bench and spend a few moments in stillness, prayer, and worship.

### DAY 3 - Are you sure there's a lack of evidence?

**Scripture:** [Romans 1:18-23](#), [Psalm 19: 1-11](#)

**Reflection:** In a documentary called "Expelled," Ben Stein interviewed atheist Richard Dawkins. When questioned, Dawkins acknowledged the possibility of intelligent design. He even expressed that if you investigate molecular biology, "You might find the signature of some sort of designer." He proposed that there could be a civilization of higher intelligence somewhere in the universe that designed a form of life that they sent onto our planet. Dawkins called this an "intriguing possibility." However, Dawkins was adamant that the designer could not be God. But why not? If one can acknowledge that there could be evidence of a designer, then why can't this designer be God? If one can acknowledge that there might be a "higher intelligence" that designed us, then why is the belief in God invalid?

Romans 1: 18-23 sounds like a commentary on this interview. Paul tells us that the issue is not lack of evidence but suppression of the truth. So, what about you? Have you considered that lack of surrender to God might not be about lack of evidence? Are you willing to consider that your heart might be suppressing, or overlooking, the truth because you'd rather believe something else? If that's you, please be willing to consider that God hasn't given up trying to get your attention. When the sun comes up tomorrow morning, it isn't only because of the earth's rotation, but because God is love, and behind all the incredible beauty of scientific study of this world, He wants you to discover the one who made it all.

**Ask Yourself:** How could you, even if you are a Christian, be suppressing the truth?

**Pause to Pray:** Oh God, please help me see where you are trying to get my attention, but my heart has suppressed it...

**Take a Next Step:** Make a list of ways our culture has “*exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*”

DAY 4 - If there is a God, there are miracles!

**Scripture:** [1 Corinthians 15:1-19](#)

**Reflection:** To recap, science points us to God. Belief in God is not anti-intellectual or anti-science. But what about belief in miracles? That must be anti-science, right? Take, for example, the claim on which Christianity rises or falls. Can someone who is intelligent and who believes in science also believe in the supernatural, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ?

Consider the words of Christian Apologist Norman Geisler, “In point of fact, if there is a God who can act (viz., a theistic God), then acts of God (i.e., .miracles) are automatically possible.”

In the case of Jesus’ resurrection, we must consider the historical evidence, and the historical evidence for the resurrection is as good as for almost any event of ancient history. For one example of many, think about the claim of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:6. Concerning this claim, Josh McDowell, co-author of [Evidence that Demands a Verdict](#), said, “Paul the apostle recounted that Jesus appeared to more than 500 of His followers at one time, most of whom were still alive and who could confirm what Paul wrote.” Anyone telling a lie would not appeal to almost five hundred witnesses!

Reading further in 1 Corinthians 15 also causes us to consider the consequences of the resurrection not being true. According to Paul, without the resurrection, faith is futile, there is no forgiveness of sins (Verse 17), and there’s no hope for life after death (Verse 18). In other words, if there’s no such thing as miracles, if there’s no such thing as the resurrection of Jesus (or us), then there’s no hope past this life. So much is riding on the resurrection, it would be wise to examine the evidence before giving up hope.

**Ask Yourself:** Have I rejected the resurrection of Jesus without taking time to consider the evidence?

**Pause to Pray:** Use Psalm 77:1 to lead you into a prayer of praise- “*You are the God who performs miracles; you display your power among the peoples.*”

**Take a Next Step:** Take time to investigate the resurrection by searching “Why should I believe in Christ’s resurrection?” and examining the evidence.

DAY 5 - Jesus answers the questions science can’t reach

**Scripture:** [1 Corinthians 15:20-24](#), [John 14:1-6](#), [Romans 10:8-13](#)

**Reflection:** While science is positioned to answer “how” questions, Christianity is positioned to answer “why,” “where,” and “who.” And therefore, science needs faith. Because even if you completely understand “how,” you will always be left wondering “why,” “where,” and “who”?

1. “Why do I exist?” Why do I feel like there’s something more? Why do I long for meaning and purpose if this is all there is? These are the questions that science can’t answer, but Jesus can.
2. “Where did I come from, and where am I going?” Science can only lead us so far, but the big questions like “Where did I come from?”, “Where am I going?”, “Where do I seek the source of ultimate truth?” “Where will I go when I die?” Science can’t answer that, but Jesus can.

3. "Who will I trust?" So, when it comes to you, "who?" That's the question- atheist, agnostic, Christian – who? Who will you trust? Who will you believe? Who will provide you with the ultimate answers? Science isn't a who, so science can't answer that, but Jesus can.

Are you satisfied only knowing the "how"? Would you be confident that you are headed in the right direction without having any answers to "why," "where," and "who"? Jesus says, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life.*" (John 14:6) Will you confess now that Jesus has what science can't offer? Will you confess Jesus as the "who" that you will trust?

**Ask Yourself:** Is there anything holding me back from putting my trust in Jesus?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, I confess you now as the "who" that I trust. I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose again on the third day. Jesus, I confess you now as my Lord and Savior. Thank you for saving me. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Whether you put your trust in Jesus today or a long time ago, tell someone about it this week!

## **I BELIEVE IN GOD, BUT: I'm not so sure about the bible**

**April 24, 2022**

**READ plan Author: Sandell Snyder**

### DAY 1 Building a Trust Relationship

**Scripture:** [2 Timothy 3:14-17](#); [Proverbs 2:1-8](#); [Psalm 119:9-16](#)

**Reflection:** So, you believe in God, but you're not so sure about the Bible. It's old, long, and confusing, and maybe you have bumped into a few things that don't seem to add up. You are not alone. Over the next few days, we'll look at several common ideas that cause believers to doubt the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

As we get started, ask yourself; Who is the person you trust the most? The one you go to when you are hurting or confused when you need advice; the one who tells you the truth - even when it hurts - and you actually consider it. Chances are you have a history with that person. You have invested time and energy into getting to know each other. You have built that trust by taking chances, sharing and listening, asking questions, and seeking understanding.

A believer's relationship with the Word of God is developed in much the same way. Trust is established and deepened over time as we get to know it and understand its layers. The truth and reliability of the Scriptures are revealed through consistently engaging with God and His word.

Take a close look at [Psalm 119:9-16](#) and [Proverbs 2:1-8](#). How do these passages encourage us to approach God's Word? What does God promise to those who follow this instruction?

#### **Ask Yourself:**

How would you describe your current relationship with the Bible? Is it more like a close personal friend, a coffee break acquaintance, or a stranger you have just met? How do you think this type of relationship impacts your ability to trust what it says? What steps can you take to develop and deepen that relationship?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, thank you for giving us the Scriptures to teach and guide us. I want to know and trust your truth. Please open my heart and mind to a deeper relationship with you through your Word...

**Take a Next Step:** Commit to spending time reading the Bible every day this week. Find a place and a time of day that you can focus your attention. Say a brief prayer before beginning, asking God for wisdom and understanding. Consider journaling your thoughts and any questions that you have.

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### DAY 2 You Can Trust the Bible Historically

**Scripture:** [Luke 1:1-4](#); [2 Peter 1:16-21](#)

**Reflection:** Some Bible readers doubt its reliability as a historical account, thinking that it should be read as a collection of myths and fables instead. For this brief study, let's focus on the New Testament in

particular. Given the uncommon life and teachings of Jesus, perhaps this skepticism is not surprising. However, the timing of the writing, the amount of detail, and the inclusion of undesirable and counter-productive elements all support the historical reliability of these texts.

Most New Testament books were either written by eye-witnesses to the events recorded or by someone who consulted closely with eye-witnesses. Either way, the writing of these books and letters so soon after the events took place makes it extremely unlikely that facts were significantly distorted or fabricated. It would have been too easy to confirm or refute them.

Scholars have noted that the Biblical accounts include more detailed information than myths and legends composed around the same time. Luke intentionally explains that he wrote his account of events to confirm what Theophilus had been taught. The specific details were necessary to build confidence and certainty in the truth of the events.

The gospels also include many undesirable and counter-productive elements that ultimately contribute to the credibility of the accounts. The disciple Peter who wrote about his experience witnessing Jesus' transfiguration in 2 Peter, is the same disciple recorded as disowning Jesus in Luke 22. If the early church was looking to inspire faith through a hero-like legend, there would have been no need for this story of human failure.

As you read [2 Peter 1:16-21](#), what do you notice about Peter's perspective on the validity of Old Testament scripture (the prophets)? How do the things that he has witnessed relate to that scripture?

**Ask Yourself:**

How can trusting the Bible historically impact your reading and understanding of Scripture? In what ways can it make following scripture easier? How can it make it more challenging?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, I am so thankful for the opportunity to read your Word and learn about your presence and purpose throughout history. I sometimes find it hard to believe \_\_\_\_\_. Help me to dig deeper into all that you want to teach me...

**Take a Next Step:**

Read [Luke 24:1-12](#). Note two or three details that you have not noticed before. Take a little time to look up a commentary or read study notes related to this passage to gain more insight into the historical context or significance of those details.

DAY 3 Differences are not the same as contradictions

**Scripture:** [Luke 24:1-45](#); [Matthew 28:1-10](#)

**Reflection:** One of the most common claims that critics make against the trustworthiness of the Scriptures is that they contain contradictions, particularly within the Gospel accounts. As you read through the Gospels, you too will notice that there are variations in the order and details of the events recorded. Before that gets confusing, consider; differences are not the same as contradictions. The Gospels were written by four different authors, each addressing a specific audience and each with a theme that they intended to emphasize. Their individual perspectives would naturally cause them to organize and include details differently.

Think about the common example of four people observing the same vehicle accident at an intersection, but each seeing it from a different street corner. Although they all witness the same event, their perspective from their specific vantage points undoubtedly impacts how they describe it. None of the descriptions is wrong, and they don't necessarily contradict each other, but the details will not completely align. These variations increase the credibility of the reports and give a more comprehensive final account.

The Resurrection accounts in Luke and Matthew have apparent differences. By comparing the differences, what can you tell about their individual points of view and thematic emphases? Do any of the differences change the overall meaning or message of the event?

**Ask Yourself:**

Where else in the gospels have you noticed differences between the accounts? How might the differences be helpful to your understanding? How might those differences be challenging? How can you approach investigating challenging differences?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord Jesus, help me approach the Scriptures from a curious perspective instead of a critical one. Teach me to delight in your Word as I meditate on all you want me to learn from it...

**Take a Next Step:**

Find a good study Bible and read the introductions to all four gospels. Or watch The Bible Project introductory videos for Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Make a note of the differences between their intended recipients, purposes, and themes/emphases. Why do you think God would intentionally include gospel accounts from those different viewpoints?

DAY 4 Does it really say *that*?

**Scripture:** [Genesis 3:1-7](#), [Luke 24:18-27](#)

**Reflection:** Sometimes we begin to doubt the integrity of scripture when we think it says something that it actually does not.

In this passage from Luke, a disciple named Cleopas is disillusioned by the death of Jesus. We can see from his response that his *expectation* of what the Messiah would do was not in line with what the scriptures prophesied. He had applied his own idea of what redemption of Israel would look like. When Jesus was crucified, Cleopas' belief in Jesus as the Messiah was shaken, and he revealed that he didn't really understand the scriptures after all.

Sometimes this doubt is born out of a personal or culturally based misunderstanding; sometimes, the enemy sows it into our thinking. Remember that old serpent in Genesis 3? His crafty questioning led Eve astray, and before she realized it, she was distorting the actual word of God through her interpretation. Nothing good came from that!

It is so very important to know God and His Word intimately. If we read or hear something that doesn't line up with our understanding, we need to first return to the Scriptures and investigate what it really says. When we make assumptions or jump to conclusions based on partial understanding, doubt and confusion are sure to follow.

**Ask Yourself:**

How do you respond when something in your life doesn't go the way you expected? Are you tempted to doubt what God has said? What kind of impact does that have on your faith?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, forgive me for allowing unmet expectations and limited perspectives to sow doubt and confusion in my heart. Deliver me from disillusionment in \_\_\_\_\_. Teach me again what your Word truly says...

**Take a Next Step:**

Ask God to remind you of a passage of scripture that has offended you; that appears to teach or endorse a practice or behavior you disagree with. Spend some time in study and prayer, seeking fresh revelation on how you may have misunderstood or misinterpreted the passage.

DAY 5 You can trust the Bible personally

**Scripture:** [Luke 24:27-32](#); [Luke 24:44-48](#); [John 1:1-5,14-17](#)

**Reflection:** The Scriptures were written a long time ago, and since they are ancient texts, we can be tempted to doubt that they apply to us personally today. This doubt grows if we search the scriptures looking for ourselves and examples of our current situations. But everything changes when we realize that despite being written over centuries by multiple authors, the Scriptures never waiver from their focus on God's plan for the salvation of humankind. The entire Bible points to Jesus.

The story arch set in motion through the Old Testament is brought to fruition through the New Testament. The scriptures are consistent in their message and in fulfilling what they prophesy. Every prophecy is and will be fulfilled through Jesus, and our current lives are included within the context of that ongoing story arch.

In a real way, we have come back to where we started with this study. Jesus is the Word. As we come to know the Word, we come to know Jesus. As we come to know Jesus, we find personal salvation and restoration back into relationship with God - and that relationship applies to every part of us personally. Everything holy in Him satisfies everything broken within us.

**Ask Yourself:**

How does your perspective on the Bible change when you look at it through a Jesus lens?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, thank you for sending your word to save us. I give you my doubts and points of confusion and ask for your clarity and insight. Continue to open my heart and mind to your truth. Help me to seek you diligently, day by day...

**Take a Next Step:**

Identify someone in your life who is growing in their relationship with God and His Scriptures. Consider setting up a time to read the Bible together and talk about what you learn.



## **I BELIEVE IN GOD, BUT: Christians Are So Intolerant**

**May 1, 2022**

**READ Plan Author: Kathy Schriefer**

### DAY 1 What is Intolerance?

**Scripture:** [Matthew 7:1-7](#); [Galatians 6:1-4](#)

**Reflection:** Tolerance was once defined as recognizing and respecting other beliefs even while disagreeing. In more recent days, many feel tolerance means one must consider every belief as valid. Some even think a person is intolerant if they uphold any belief contrary to popular culture. In Matthew 7:1, Jesus tells us not to judge others. Jesus condemned those who find fault in others while pridefully maintaining their own innocence. This verse is often wrongly quoted as a caution against making any moral judgments, but the whole of Scripture supports the truth that there are moral absolutes we need to uphold. In Galatians 6:1-4, Paul tells the church members to call out and restore those caught in sin.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

-How can you hold up the Bible's absolute morality while maintaining a loving and gentle attitude toward those you disagree with?

-Do you judge others in the same way you would want to be judged?

-How does restoring a fellow believer caught in sin differ from passing judgment on those who are not yet Christ-followers?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, help me see people as you see them—with a grace that loves them as they are yet wants them to experience true freedom in You. Help me discern how to stand up for what the Bible says is true with gentleness and respect because I want to represent You well. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Today, make a conscious effort to see each person you meet or pass as a person Jesus created, loves, and died to save.

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### DAY 2 Not a Matter of Intolerance But Truth

**Scripture:** [John 14:1-7](#); [John 18:37-38](#); [Hebrews 13:7-8](#)

**Reflection:** In these verses from the book of John, Jesus affirms that He is truth, and the writer of Hebrews reminds us Jesus is the same all through time. Jesus is the definition of absolute truth. A common phrase today is "follow the science," but we know the truths of science have changed over time. There was a time when the earth was believed to be flat, and even the list of planets is not the same as it was ten years ago. Still, people have no problem placing faith in what are really the relative facts of science while discounting the unchanging truth of Jesus. If truth is relative, whoever has the most power will determine truth. Thankfully, God is truth, and He is absolute and unchanging throughout the ages.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Is it easier for you personally to believe in scientific fact or the absolute truth of Jesus? Why?
- How can reading God's word and spending more time focusing on Him help you to grasp His unchanging truth?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, I know You are unchanging truth, and You came to show the world that truth. Help me today to see You in Your amazing creation around me and in Your word so that I can more fully understand that truth. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** When you have spare moments in your day today, open up your Bible or your YouVersion app and read a few verses from the book of 1 John. You could probably read the first chapter in the space of waiting for the microwave or a commercial. What does John teach you about Jesus as truth?

### DAY 3 Not a Matter of Intolerance, But Sin

**Scripture:** [1 John 1:5-10](#); [Romans 3:23](#); [Romans 6:23](#)

**Reflection:** These verses tell us that sin is the normal human condition. As Romans 3:23 says, "*All have sinned.*" If we refuse to acknowledge our sin problem, the result is spiritual death. Rather than covering up our sin with tolerance and refusing to admit we have a problem, we need to take the cure in 1 John 1:9. We need to confess our sins and ask for God's forgiveness. Our tolerance for sin is actually dangerous because it keeps us from recognizing our root problem and asking for the forgiveness we need. Our present culture still agrees some things are evil but has a hard time agreeing fully with biblical morality in all things. Thankfully, it's still considered evil to kill your neighbor, yet it's not so bad to sleep with your neighbor's husband or wife, especially if you're not happy with your own. Moral relativism can often masquerade as tolerance and keep us from admitting or revealing sin.

**Ask Yourself:**

- Is tolerating sin an act of love?
- How do we love people as they are while still pointing them to Jesus?
- What sins have you come to tolerate in your own life, and how can confessing them to Jesus be the cure?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, I confess that I often tolerate sin in my own life. Search my heart and show me what I need to ask You to change in me. Help me know how to stand firm in the Bible's truth while still loving those around me. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** Use a concordance (a word index in the back of many Bibles) or Google "Bible verses about sin" to study what the Bible says about the effect of sin in our lives.

### DAY 4 Jesus Showed Us a Better Way

**Scripture:** [1 Corinthians 13:1-7](#); [1 Peter 3:15-16](#)

**Reflection:** The Bible teaches that our words and actions should be rooted in love. As Peter tells us, we need to be ready to defend our faith and give a reason for the hope we have in Jesus, but gentleness and respect should be the hallmark of these conversations. The key is to know how to disagree well and show humility. Prayerfully ask God to show you the best way to share truth in love and approach difficult conversations with grace. Above all, ask God to search your heart and reveal the intolerance you have for others that can be a barrier to true love for them, and ask Him to give you His love for those with whom you disagree.

**Ask Yourself:**

-Think back on your conversations of the past week. How could you have been more bold to share the hope you have in Jesus?

-When you stand up for truth, how can remembering the qualities of love spelled out in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 help you speak that truth in love?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, I am helpless to love people the way You call me to love. Will you do what only You can do in my heart and help me see people the way you see them. Help me understand that speaking the truth is a loving thing to do and that I can do it with love because of Your power that works in me. Amen.

**Take a Next Step:** The next time you need to stand up for truth, be sure to take as much time as you can to pray before speaking a word and ask Jesus to help you speak the truth with gentleness and respect.

DAY 5 Jesus' Vision For His Kingdom

**Scripture:** [James 5:19-20](#); [Jude 1:17-23](#)

**Reflection:** Make no mistake. Jesus loves sinners but does not tolerate sin; instead, He paid the sentence for it. For example, Jesus was (and is) intolerant of hypocrisy and selfishness. Christians are imperfect, and in His mercy, Jesus shows us our sin and moves us toward change. Jesus loves us as we are but loves us too much to leave us as we are. As a community of believers, the Church is like a hospital that brings healing change. We can't have the healing without the diagnosis. As believers, we can overcome divisions with love and prayerfully turn people (and ourselves) away from sin. The danger of spiraling downward into sin is real, and we can't shy away from crucial conversations even if they are uncomfortable. Having those difficult conversations with love and humility is how we grow.

**Ask Yourself:**

-How have you seen a Christian lovingly turn back someone who is sinning?

-James 5:20 says bringing a sinner back from wandering "will cover a multitude of sins." And 1 Peter 4:8 says, "love covers a multitude of sins." How do both truth and love cover sins?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, help me recognize the difference between love and tolerance and teach me how to love people honestly. Teach me to pray for Your strength to get involved in hard conversations when You call me and give me the discernment to know when I need to wait patiently and love.

**Take a Next Step:** As you go through your week, ask Jesus to show you areas of your life where you need to have a change of heart, and as He shows you those, ask Him to fill you with love.

## **I BELIEVE IN GOD, BUT: I just want to have FUN**

**May 8, 2022**

**READ plan Author: Matt Woodruff**

### DAY 1 WHERE THE FUN BEGAN

**Scripture:** [Genesis 1:31](#); [Ecclesiastes 2:10](#); [1 John 2:15-17](#)

**Reflection:** There was once a garden. Its Maker created it as a place of beauty and stillness, peace and wholeness. A place of pleasure and purpose. All living things were fully satisfied, complete, and fulfilled. I was perfect.

But an enemy came to the garden. And he hated its Maker, and he hated that it was perfect. And so he whispered lies- is this really enough? Are you truly satisfied? Don't you want more? And the ones whose hearts were created to be filled up with their Maker and His perfect garden suddenly doubted the truth and turned toward the lies.

And every single person born since that time has been created for the garden but has been born into the brokenness and consequences of lies and sin. We are creatures longing for beauty and peace. We have a place deep inside us that needs to be filled up, that wants to be satisfied. We will look for pleasure and purpose everywhere we go. It is what we were made for.

But wait a second. Remember- we're no longer in the garden. Our ideas and perceptions of what we need and how we find it have been broken and skewed. So much so that the very thing that is the source of satisfaction and pleasure and perfection and joy and FUN is the very thing we assume is trying to prevent our fun and make life boring. And that's what this reading plan will wrestle with- I believe in God, but I just want to have fun. God is the One who made us crave fun and pleasure. And yet, we'll reject Him and look anywhere else to find it. We want the Garden without the Gardener.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

-What is your idea of FUN? Where do you find FUN? Who do you have FUN with?

-Do you believe that being a Christian is FUN? Why or why not?

**Pause to Pray:** God, you created the whole world to find peace and joy and even FUN in You! Open my eyes to see the fun that life with You brings...

**Take a Next Step:** Have some good fun today! Tell silly jokes with some kids, play on a playground with a friend, turn on your favorite song and sing it out loud, add chocolate syrup to your milk, play a board game- just pick something simple that sounds like good fun!

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### DAY 2 FUN or ESCAPE?

**Scripture:** [1 John 2:15-17](#); [Jeremiah 15:16](#)

**Reflection:** "From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord deliver us." (The Book of Common Prayer)

Yesterday we learned that we were created for the Garden, but we live in a broken world. So, instead of looking to the Gardener to satisfy our souls, we search and search, looking to creation, people, and the world around us to find meaning, purpose, and fun.

John warns the Church in his first letter that *the desires of the flesh* are not from the Father but from the world. The pleasures and fun we crave are often sin in disguise. One more drink, one more picture, one more dance, one more swipe of the credit card, one more white lie so that I can get what I want... each of these choices aims at gratifying a craving within us. The problem is that nothing this world offers will satisfy. True fun, true pleasure, is found in the love of the Father.

**Ask Yourself:**

-What are your go-to “escapes” for fun when life gets hard? Do those things encourage your heart? Heal your soul? Satisfy deeply?

-What does it look like to enjoy the presence of God?

**Pause to Pray:** Lord, for too long, I have run to this thing/person/habit to try to satisfy the craving in my heart for fun and pleasure. But, Jesus, I truly believe that I want more of You...

**Take a Next Step:** Commit to finishing this reading plan and reading through a book of the Bible in the next month. Read and hear His Word, sit in the Presence of the Father, and ask Him to lead you to true satisfaction and joy.

DAY 3 NEVER ENOUGH FUN

**Scripture:** [1 John 2:15-17](#); [Matthew 19:16-26](#); [Galatians 5:24](#)

**Reflection:** Have you ever opened a can of Pringles or a bag of Doritos and eaten just one chip? Ever? Is it possible to stop after just one? Even if chips aren’t your thing, try not eating more than one blueberry or more than one M&M. You get it!

We see. We taste. And we desire more. Our brain is wired to want more of a good thing. But our brain doesn’t necessarily discern between true good and temporary good. Addictions like drugs, alcohol, and pornography are all fed by the brain’s demand for more and more and more.

Again, we were made for more. But we live in a broken world. The more we crave is found in the Gardener, the Creator, not in the created things. We will always want another Pringle or another M&M, but those things will run out. With God, He is more than enough. He has more than enough good things to satisfy not only you but every person who ever lives.

**Ask Yourself:**

-What do you think the rich young man was looking for in Matthew 19:16-26? Why did Jesus’ answer leave him sad?

-How does Paul indicate in Galatians 5:24 that we can be set free from the addiction of “more”?

**Pause to Pray:** Oh God, I feel pulled toward more. I see. I spend. I try. I search... I want to be free from the addiction to more of this world. I want to find more in You...

**Take a Next Step:** Do you know a Christian who seems not to crave more of this world? Set up a coffee date and ask them how they have found satisfaction in the Father.

#### DAY 4 JESUS IS GREATER

**Scripture:** [1 John 2:15-17](#); [Philippians 1:19-24](#)

**Reflection:** In a 60 minutes interview years ago, quarterback Tom Brady asked, “Why do I have 3 Super Bowl rings and still think there’s something greater out there for me?”

Well, Tom, because there is something (actually a Someone) far greater out there! Paul wrote to the Church in Philippi, “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*” He knew what he was living for. Maybe it would be better to say that he knew WHO he was living for. It wasn’t for self or fun, the weekend, retirement, or the next big achievement. Paul was living for Christ. He knew that God created him for more and that more was found in Jesus.

Paul’s life was filled with purpose and meaning- he was a child of God, called to be a gospel-sharing church planter throughout the Roman Empire. And so, every day he lived, he lived not for his own desires but for the mission of Christ. And if you read Acts and all his letters, Paul’s life wasn’t easy, but it sure sounds like he was fully satisfied.

You are a child of God. You are called to be part of Jesus Christ’s mission to share the gospel with the whole world. Wherever you are, your life has purpose and meaning.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

-What makes Paul’s attitude toward living and dying hard?

-What do you live for? Who do you live for?

**Pause to Pray:** Jesus, I know the truth. You are worth far more than the temporary pleasures of this world. Teach me to have the perspective of Paul...

**Take a Next Step:** Consider your schedule for the day ahead. Consider how you can live for Christ in your work, with your family, among your friends, and as you have fun.

#### DAY 5 FULLNESS OF JOY

**Scripture:** [1 John 2:15-17](#); [Psalm 16](#);

**Reflection:** Every day, you will seek satisfaction, fun, and joy for your soul from someone or something. The choice is always between God’s good gifts and the world’s temporary, often deceptive, temptations.

King David had access to all the good stuff the world had to offer at that time. He was the king! And we see in his story (read 1 Kings and 1 Chronicles) that he didn’t always make the right choices. But here, in Psalm 16, we see David pursuing pleasure in God. In verse 11, he prays,

*You make known to me the path of life;*

*in your presence, there is fullness of joy;  
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

**Ask Yourself:**

- What fun and pleasure has God given you this week that has satisfied your soul?
- What fun and pleasure do you feel is not from God and needs to be given up?

**Pause to Pray:** Make Psalm 16 your prayer today. Father, *make known to me the path of life...*

**Take a Next Step:** Walk outside, close your eyes, and remind yourself that you are in the presence of the Creator, the Gardener, and in Him, your soul will find its satisfaction. Then go and enjoy some good fun with some of the good people in your life.

## I BELIEVE IN GOD, BUT: I'm Not a Fan of the Church

May 15, 2022

READ plan Author: Jess Burkell

### DAY 1 Imperfect People, Not an Imperfect Church

**Scripture:** [Genesis 3](#), [Romans 3:23-24](#)

**Reflection:** Let's face it, sometimes we can hear the word "church," and we have a slight (or maybe not so slight!) shudder. A sad reality is that the church and the people who are a part of it have caused a lot of pain and suffering throughout history. Perhaps you are intimately familiar with the hurt caused by the church, whether from people in it or by a system or structure that is hurtful. Read these words and let them sink in – the pain and suffering you have felt because of the church or religion are real and valid, but it does not come from Jesus. By reading through the story of scripture, we know that hurt inflicted on others in the name of religion greatly pains Him. It is not what He desires for His people.

God's perfect design for humanity was forever altered in Genesis 3. As you read, He has some pretty strong words for Adam and Eve because of their sin. These consequences will be felt for generations to come. If sinful, imperfect humans are involved, it's going to be messy and broken. The truly astounding thing is that it doesn't matter! God's design for the church to grow and flourish and reach the ends of the earth still stands. Despite our human failings and despite how much we have given the church a bad name over the generations, it will continue. This means as followers of Jesus; we need to **look beyond the imperfect Christians that make up the church to behold the perfect Christ**. Over the next several days, we'll dig into how we can reclaim God's original vision for His church.

#### **Ask Yourself:**

- How have imperfect people influenced your view of the church?
- What is something you need to let go of in order to behold the perfect Church within an imperfect church?
- What are some current misconceptions that you have about what the church should/shouldn't do?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, help me see that you are bigger and greater than the church's failings; help me see YOU in the midst of it all...

**Take a Next Step:** Healing often begins with forgiving the person(s) who caused the hurt in your life. It won't erase the painful experience, but it will allow you to receive God's healing and restoration in your life. Who do you need to forgive?

[Consider using the "I Believe in God, but..." YouVersion reading plan this week. Just search "whoisgrace" on the YouVersion Bible app or website.]

### DAY 2 Church and Injustice

**Scripture:** [Matthew 25:31-45](#), [Psalm 89:14](#)

**Reflection:** Throughout history, the church has been the source of many injustices. It seems as though in every century and within every generation, the church has a major misguided attempt to "spread the gospel." That last statement is in quotes because, in many cases, the pursuit of furthering religion has caused great injustice. One example seen in history occurred during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. Western



European Christians led the Crusades to stop the spread of the Muslim states and reclaim the Middle East for Christianity. Bloody battles broke out as the Christians and Muslims fought for their stake in the Holy Land. Historians estimate that it's likely more than one million people were killed during that time. This was a massive loss of life for that time period. You've likely heard countless stories throughout history and perhaps within your own circle about people hurting others in the name of religion.

Sinful people with sinful hearts cause pain and suffering. Violence and injustice are a result of our broken and sinful existence. Even if we took religion out of the equation, the problem would still remain.

In the passage in Matthew that we read for today, Jesus provides his disciples with a powerful reminder that His followers are called to walk with the sick, widowed, and marginalized. When we reject the least of these, we reject Jesus and His teaching. Jesus lived his life and conducted his ministry alongside the marginalized and broken. Inflicting pain in the name of religion was never a part of Jesus's vision for the church. His ministry highlighted the importance of mercy and justice.

**When we look beyond imperfect Christians, we behold the perfect Christ.**

**Ask Yourself:**

- Am I using religion as a way to hurt or judge people?
- How do I heal or help others heal from the pain caused by people within the church?
- What do you learn about God's heart for justice in the passage in Psalm 89?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, we have often gone astray in our attempts to be the church and spread the gospel. Please help me look beyond the hurt and pain so that I can discover you in new ways...

**Take a Next Step:** Acknowledge where you have allowed baggage from Christianity to cloud your view of Christ. If you feel comfortable, open up about this baggage with a safe person in your life and ask them to pray with you as you begin to release it.

DAY 3 Church: a movement fueled by the Holy Spirit

**Scripture:** [Psalm 127:1](#), [Matthew 28:19-20](#), [Acts 2:1-3](#)

**Reflection:** Though the church is made up of imperfect people, Jesus makes it clear that it's through the church (this gathering of His followers) that His kingdom will grow. If we rely only on human minds and strength to build and grow the church, it's not going to go well. So, how can we, a bunch of flawed and sinful people, live out His mission while we are here on earth?

We must rely on the direction of the Holy Spirit. We'll always go astray if we try to do church and ministry without the Holy Spirit. In his great commission in Matthew 28, Jesus reminds the disciples of their job – to go and make disciples. He ends his great calling by reminding the disciples that they'll never be alone. Ministry was always intended to be done with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As the beginning of Psalm 127 says, *"Unless the Lord builds the house, the labors build in vain."*

**When we look beyond imperfect Christians, we behold the perfect Christ.**

**Ask Yourself:**

- What does it look like when a church is following the direction of the Holy Spirit?
- What does the passage of Acts teach us about God's vision for the church?

-How can we tell when we are operating out of our own strength rather than relying on the Holy Spirit to guide us?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, I pray for the local church and the global church. As we continue to grow your kingdom, I pray that we also continue to be fueled and guided by your Holy Spirit. Show us where we fall short and open us up to your will...

**Take a Next Step:** Commit to praying for your church over the next few days, asking God to reveal His plan and His power to your pastor, leaders, and congregation.

DAY 4 Church: an outpost of compassion; a community of devotion and generosity

**Scripture:** [Colossians 3:12-13](#), [Acts 3:3-10](#), [1 Corinthians 12:7](#)

**Reflection:** God's design for the church is that it would be a blessing and reach the entire world. At its best, the church should be a place where people feel safe, loved, accepted, and cared for.

Acts is the New Testament's strategy to reach the world. In today's passage from Acts, Peter sees a lame beggar and offers him healing in the name of Jesus. As a result of this incredible blessing, the man leaped up with praise and worship. It's reasonable to assume that the healing bestowed on this man changed the trajectory of his life. In his miraculous healing, he was able to encounter Christ.

God's dream for the world and His people is outlined all the way back in the Old Testament. In Genesis 1, after God created Adam and Eve, he commands them to be fruitful and multiply and to fill the earth. In Genesis 12, God enters into a covenant relationship with Abram. God promises Abram that he will be given a nation and that all people throughout the earth will be blessed through him.

*"I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

God's people and His church were always meant to be the way in which his Kingdom would expand. The kingdom will grow when the followers of Jesus act out of compassion, devotion, and generosity.

In 1945, a German pastor was executed for his role in an attempt to stop the Nazi regime and its atrocities against humanity. While he was ultimately killed, the teachings of Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer continue to guide us to the heart of the Father. During his imprisonment from 1943 to 1945, Bonhoeffer wrote down his convictions and beliefs about being a follower of Jesus. In the book, "Letters and Papers from Prison," Bonhoeffer wrote, "The church is only the church when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others."

**When we look beyond imperfect Christians, we behold the perfect Christ.**

**Ask Yourself:**

-How should followers of Jesus act according to the passage in Colossians?

-How do you see the modern church living out this call of compassion, generosity, and devotion? Where do they fail?

-How can we remain compassionate even when we disagree with others (within the church or outside)?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, thank you for the example of mercy and love that you show us throughout scripture. Help us draw closer to you by showing compassion to those around us...

**Take a Next Step:** What is one way you can show the love of Christ and compassion to someone in your life? Make time to do it this week.

### DAY 5 Repentance and Restoration

**Scripture:** [Hebrews 13:8](#)

**Reflection:** Over the last several days, we've established the fact that the church is full of imperfect people. As a result of our sinful nature, we have done many things wrong. Often, people's wrongdoings get in the way of experiencing the Church as God intends it.

God has always had a vision for His church that he would use his people to grow his kingdom despite these failings. If we get back to the original vision he set before us, we can be a Church where people encounter the perfect, blameless Christ. Life change, healing, restoration, joy, peace – it's all possible within the church. It will happen when we embrace God's vision and not the human version of what the church should be.

One place we can start is by repenting and apologizing for the things we have done wrong along the way. We can change the course and prove through our actions that we will do things differently. Doing Church the Jesus way. We can be a Church of Jesus' followers who express love, mercy, justice, and humility.

The best part about all of this remains that despite it all, Jesus is always the same. Even when people royally mess up this life, we can rely on Jesus. When we look to Jesus and follow him, we can embrace His plan for the Church. With Jesus, we can restore the Church.

**When we look beyond imperfect Christians, we behold the perfect Christ.**

**Ask Yourself:**

- How can you embrace forgiveness in how you handle your faith with others?
- What stands out to you the most about the passage from Romans?
- What is something that has changed about your impression of the Church over the last few days of study?

**Pause to Pray:** Father God, I want to behold the perfect Christ. Open my heart and mind to experience you fully. Help me to be a follower who loves your people well...

**Take a Next Step:** Take some time today to read one of the gospel accounts (Matthew-Mark-Luke-John) to get a first-hand glimpse at our perfect Christ.