



Where Do I Begin?

*A*ny number of events or circumstances may have brought you to this study. You may be exploring Christianity for the first time. Perhaps you are ready to really *know* God, not just know *about* Him. Or maybe you are a new Christian and desire a strong biblical foundation on which to build your faith. This study is for you, whatever your personal situation might be.

I encourage you to explore the claims of Christianity with me for the next 12 weeks. Questions and even skepticism are welcome. All that is necessary is a real desire to know God. Are you willing to let God show you who He is and how He wants to relate to you? The fact that you are involved in this study is proof God is at work in your life. The Bible says no one can come to God unless God draws them. (See John 6:44.)

True Christianity is knowing God in a personal way. Christianity boldly claims there is only one way to know God. Of course, so do other religions. Are they all right? Or has God established one way that is *the* way to know Him? And how can we know which is the one true way?

Let's begin our investigation of Christianity by laying a foundation we will build on over the weeks ahead. The following three concepts are a good place to start:

1. A supreme, divine being we call God does, in fact, exist.
2. God has revealed Himself to humanity through the Bible, which is God's authoritative Word to us for faith and life.
3. Christianity stands out among all other religions because of Jesus and His claims about Himself.

You don't have to believe these statements wholeheartedly or accept them without question in order to participate in this study. What is necessary is a desire to know the truth. Now let's take a closer look at these three statements.

Beginning Point for Faith: Believing in the Existence of God

Everybody puts faith in something. Every person lives his or her life based on some kind of belief system. Because I believe my car will start in the morning I put gasoline in it and plan on using it to get where I need to go tomorrow.

Q: What are some things in which people put their faith?

Q: What does it mean to "have faith" in something or someone?

Q: What are some practical ways people demonstrate this kind of faith?

Where does faith in God come from? It is not a feeling we can produce within ourselves. The Bible says that faith is a gift to an individual from God. (See Ephesians 2:8–9.) Are you receptive to this gift? Are you willing to let God convince you He is real?

Having faith in God does not mean we go through life with our fingers crossed, wondering if what we decided to believe is really true. Hebrews 11:1 says, *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”* This Bible verse tells us we can have a firm confidence in God and His promises. We may not *see* many of God’s promises right now because they are still yet to happen; or they are spiritual, not physical realities. However, we can live our lives *convinced* He will do what He says.

Additionally, faith is not illogical, blind acceptance. God can stand up under any scrutiny and investigation. One purpose of this study is to provide you with facts and information to support your faith. Living a life of faith does not mean we will never have questions about God and His ways. It does mean that when we do have questions we can trust in the One who has all the answers.

Q: Use the discussion above to write a definition for faith in your own words.

A life of faith is the way of life that pleases God. Hebrews 11:6 says, *“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”* A relationship with God starts with faith. But that is just the beginning. This verse promises that God will begin to reveal Himself to us when we believe He exists and earnestly seek after Him. We can begin the process of knowing God by acknowledging His existence and seeking to know Him more and more. As we continue in this study, we will explore the relational nature of having faith in the God that exists.

God Makes Himself Known: Trusting in the Authority of the Bible

How important is this book we call the Bible? A wide and diverse range of ideas exists about the nature of the Bible. Christians believe God inspired it to reveal Himself and His ways to mankind. But can we trust what it says? Should it make a difference in our lives?

Q: What are some of the different ways people view the Bible today? Examples: “It’s fictional.” Or, “It’s outdated.”

If God does indeed exist and desires a relationship with every individual, He must have also made a way for us to come to know Him. Christians believe individuals can come to know God through His written Word, the Bible. The Bible is also referred to as God’s Word and Scripture.

Although the actual manuscripts were written over many centuries by numerous human hands, the Bible has survived the test of time. In fact, there is more evidence for the reliability of the Bible than for any other ancient writing.

The Bible was written over a period of about 1,500 years by more than 40 different human authors in three different languages. No original manuscripts of the Bible exist today. Just like other ancient documents written on perishable materials, the Bible has been preserved over the centuries through oral transmission or copies. So how can we be certain that what God initially gave us is what we have today? There is very strong evidence to support the belief that the Bible has been wonderfully and miraculously preserved.

The Old Testament

Texts: Up until the middle of the twentieth century, the oldest known copy of the Old Testament, referred to as the Masoretic Text, was from about A.D. 900. However, this changed when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947. The oldest of these manuscripts dates back to about 150 B.C., a thousand years older than the Masoretic Text. When the Masoretic Text was compared with the Dead Sea Scrolls it was found to be 95 percent accurate. And the 5 percent discrepancy is due to spelling differences and other minor variations, according to scholars such as Gleason Archer, whose research Dan Story cites in his helpful book *Defending Your Faith*. (See “Recommended Resources,” pp. 163–66.)

Archaeology: The Old Testament has been proven historically reliable time and again. For example, archeological digs around Jericho support the biblical story found in Joshua 6.

The New Testament

Texts: More than 24,000 complete and partial copies of the New Testament exist. This is far more than any other ancient document. For example, only 643 copies exist of Homer’s *Iliad*. And between these 24,000 copies of the New Testament there is only a 0.5 percent variation. Among the copies of the *Iliad* there is a 5 percent variation (a variation 10 times greater than for the New Testament). Check out Josh McDowell’s book, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, for more facts and a discussion of these variations.

Time Span: There is a gap from 30 to 60 years between the actual occurrence of the events in the New Testament and when they were written down. In comparison, there is a 500-year gap between Buddha’s death and the actual recording of his sayings. Additionally, the New Testament has the shortest time period of any ancient document between existing copies and the date of the originals—just 25 years. In comparison, there is a 500-year span between Homer’s original *Iliad* and the oldest existing copy. (See Story, *Defending Your Faith*.)

Not only is the Bible a trustworthy source of information, it is a powerful, spiritual book that can change our day-to-day lives. Find and read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 in your Bible or read it from the margin. (See also “Navigating Your Way Through the Bible,” p. 20.)

In verse 16 of the passage, the Greek word *theopneustos* is used to describe Scripture. It can be translated as “God-breathed” or “divinely inspired.” According to Dr. Spiros Zodhiates in *The Complete Word Study New Testament* the word refers to that process by which God directed the writing of the Bible through human beings.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

—2 Timothy 3:16–17

Q: What are some of the uses for Scripture mentioned in this Bible passage?

Hebrews 4:12 provides even more insight into the nature of the Bible. It says, “*For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any*


double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” God can use the Bible to change an individual and affect his or her life.

Q: Do you feel the Bible might be of benefit to your own life? If so, how?

The passage in Hebrews says that God’s Word is not static, time-bound, or general. God’s Word is living and active. It is able to penetrate the hearts of individuals and judge their thoughts and motives.

This is just a sampling of the things the Bible says about itself. The Bible claims to be the Word of God revealed to humanity through individuals God inspired to physically write the words. The Bible also claims authority and truth about how God chooses to relate to us and how we should live in response to Him.

How do you feel about these claims? How do these claims the Bible makes about itself compare with the way the world views the Bible? How can you know what is true? Begin to read the Bible. Be open to God showing you truth through His Word working in your own life.



Navigating Your Way Through the Bible

How It’s Put Together

- Two main parts—the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament covers the time period from Creation until about 400 years before Jesus. The New Testament begins with the birth of Jesus. Its focus is His life, death, and resurrection. The New Testament also covers the beginning and spread of Christianity during the first century A.D.
- Individual books—each Testament is further divided into books. Some books are historical, covering a particular time period or event. Others are poetry or

prophecy. Still others are letters written to a person or group of people for a specific purpose.

- Chapters and then verses—these divisions were not in the original writings. An editor added them later to make finding a specific passage easier.

Finding a Biblical Reference

Example: Ephesians 2:8–9

Turn to the list of Bible books or table of contents located in the front of your Bible. Find the Book of Ephesians in the list. Note whether it is in the Old or New Testament. The list will provide the page number where the book begins.

Turn to the beginning of the Book of Ephesians. The first number (2:) before the colon is the chapter number. When you open the Bible, the larger numbers mark the chapters. Find the second chapter. The numbers after the colon (8–9) represent the verses. Now looking at the smaller numbers in the text, find and read verses 8 and 9.



God's Ultimate Revelation: Jesus Christ Sets Christianity Apart

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God's ultimate revelation of Himself. In fact, it's Jesus who makes Christianity unique among all the religions of the world. Jesus said the only way a person can know God is through Him. Christians believe this to be true. If this is true, it makes all other efforts to find God futile and empty—merely religion, not a relationship with a living God. Aren't Jesus's claims worth investigating?

There came a point in Jesus's life when He knew He would soon be physically leaving His followers. He wanted to equip them for His departure, so He took an evening to reinforce some of the important truths they would need later.

If you were going away for a time and leaving the ones you love and care for, what would you say to them? Wouldn't you tell them

Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.”

—John 14:5–10

the things that were most important for them to know? Wouldn’t you share information they couldn’t get along without?

Read John 14:5–10. Find it in your Bible or read it in the margin.

This conversation between Jesus and His disciples took place the night before Jesus was crucified. Jesus had spent the entire evening talking with His closest followers, sharing vital information.

Q: What does Jesus say about His relationship with the Father?

Q: How can we know what the Father is like?

Q: One prominent worldview is that there are many ways to God. This view asserts that although every world religion is a different path, they eventually all lead to the same place.

Q: What does John 14:6 say about this? How do you feel about this?

If Jesus really is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, then He is “the Way” of access to God the Father. This is not a statement created by intolerant Christians but one that comes from the revealed Word

of God. According to the Bible, Jesus is the ultimate revelation or “the Truth” of God to mankind. He shows us God as He can be seen by humanity. Jesus is also “the Life” or the source of life for those who come to Him. Do you believe this is so? Ask God to help you know what is true.

Session Summary

We’ve laid a foundation for this study by looking at three important concepts of Christianity. First, anyone who desires to know God must believe He exists. Second, the Bible is God’s true and authoritative Word to us. Third, Jesus Christ is God’s ultimate revelation to mankind and is the only way to the Father.

Again, you do not have to believe these things unquestionably to continue in this study. However, please consider the truth of these three statements. When you grasp these truths this study will begin to grow in personal relevance on a daily basis.



Personal Story: *Are You There, God?*

God does not exist. There is nothing after death. Life is about what you can get for yourself.

Victor grew up hearing and believing these things.

He was two years old when his mom abandoned him, his two-month-old brother, and his dad. For the next 15 years, Victor’s military father raised the boys in “boot camp.” These years were hard and often lonely for Victor and his brother.

Victor recalls a few particularly difficult times when he wondered if maybe there really was a God. “I was open to getting any help I could. But if God was calling me, why did He allow suffering? Looking back now, it does seem that God was always whispering to me.”

Although Victor consciously shunned organized religion, God, and Jesus in particular, he remembers having an

interest in “spiritual” things. As a young adult, he investigated Taoism, Buddhism, and other Eastern religions.

Victor also became involved in the party scene and drug activity. He even dealt drugs for a while in high school. Victor indulged in any activity that might bring pleasure and fulfillment. Instead, he discovered these things brought just the opposite. “They did not satisfy. They did not make me happy,” Victor reveals.

At 21 years old, Victor was married with a baby. He and his wife, Chelsey, had both discovered what didn’t satisfy in life. Now they wanted to try something different. A house, kids, and family life felt right. They wanted to grow up and be “good people.”

Dan and Amber, their new neighbors, seemed to have life figured out. They had everything—a great home, kids, and a dog with puppies. Just one problem. Dan and Amber were *Christians*. Victor soon discovered Dan was just a regular guy—even though he was a Christ follower. The two men began to hang out together. Occasionally Dan would talk about Jesus, but there was no pressure. In fact, Dan’s faith was a novelty to Victor, a point of interest to investigate.

When Dan and Amber invited Victor and Chelsey to church they agreed. Chelsey also joined a Bible study for women. Soon after, she committed her life to Jesus. Still skeptical, Victor moved slowly. He now believed God existed, but he did not know what to do with Jesus.

Over the next year, Victor found creative reasons to miss church while Chelsey attended. However, he spent a lot of time lying awake at night wondering what would happen when he died. In addition, there were changes in Chelsey that he could not ignore. Her faith was vital and growing. She had new patience. She approached challenges with strength of character and wisdom. Victor knew it was due to Chelsey’s relationship with God.

Finally, Victor agreed to try a Bible study. The emotional reaction he had to Jesus’s teachings surprised him. Victor was drawn to them in a way he could not explain.

Victor reflects, “This was different from anything I had ‘analyzed’ before. Deep down I had a spiritual hunger. I believed Jesus could meet that need. It felt right.” Through a physicist in the Bible study group, God opened Victor’s eyes to understand that faith is not illogical or unscientific. Victor, now ready to become a Christian, gave his life to Jesus.

After that, a lot of things in Victor’s life changed. He now knows God exists because he has a personal relationship with Him. He stopped searching for fulfillment because he found it in Jesus. Victor no longer lives for himself because he lives to please Jesus. And he doesn’t wake up at night anymore and wonder what will happen when he dies—Victor knows he’ll spend eternity with Jesus. (Read about Chelsey, Victor’s wife, in session 8.)

