



7

A faith that works

The proof of the pudding is in the eating

BOOKLET 7

A faith that works

The proof of the pudding is in the eating

Why Christians believe Christianity to be true

A simple and authentic explanation of things you might not otherwise hear

A Shining Lights Trust (NZ) resource

By Dave Mann © 2023

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www.WhyChristiansBelieve.nz

DAVE MANN, AUTHOR



Introduction

In this final booklet we are going to look at the results of the Christian faith in people's lives. What difference does it actually make? Is there any evidence of something extra-ordinary going on when people reach out to connect with God? Are the results of this faith unique?

We will cover:

1. Jesus' amazing miracles
2. Miracles in Christianity today
 - a) Physical miracles
 - b) The miracle of a changed life
 - c) The miracle of a transformed community
3. How will you now live?

However, before we start, let's review where we are up to in our series.

To summarise the series

We've been looking at why Christians believe Christianity to be true.



Booklet one

GOD

We considered evidence from the universe, life, mathematical probability and more that points to the existence of a super-intelligent and powerful Creator.

... but this couldn't tell us whether God's character is good or not (because this world is clearly a mix of good and evil).



Booklet two

...REVEALED IN HISTORY AS IN THE BIBLE

We looked at the trustworthiness of the Bible's history because this is the world's primary ancient tradition, believed by Jews, Christians and Muslims to be a record of God revealing himself to us so that he can be known. Through this history God explains that he is good — and not therefore responsible for the evil, why the world is like it is, and what the solution is.

...but it would be helpful if we could also know if the Bible was more than a book of history.

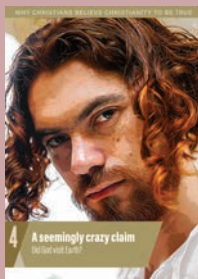


Booklet three

...WHO IS OUTSIDE OF TIME WITH A PLAN THAT COULD WORK

We next looked at Biblical predictions that were made and fulfilled within the timespan of the Bible. This revealed a series of miracles that evidence a Divine hand (from God) behind the Bible, while many of the predictions point to Jesus.

...So, who then is this Jesus who so many predictions point toward?



Booklet four

...WHO VISITED US SO HIS WAYS COULD BE KNOWN

We then looked at Jesus and the uniqueness of his claims, teachings, life, death and resurrection. We showed why he is considered by both Christian believers and non-believers alike to be without equal in human history. From whatever angle we look, he is amazing!

...but, why did he come?



Booklet five

...WHO HAS PROVIDED A PATH BACK TO GOD AND THE HOPE HE OFFERS

We looked at Jesus a second time because his claims affect everyone alive. We contrasted his claims to those of other major religions, and then logically considered our options. By making the claims he did, Jesus has forced us all to make a decision (or judgement) about him.



Booklet six

...DEALING WITH THE KEY PROBLEM WITHIN HUMANITY — OUR SINFUL NATURE AND SHAME

We assessed if what Jesus came to earth to fix is *really* our planet's greatest problem. Jesus came to deal with selfishness of our hearts (inside us), in contrast to the popular voices of our own society which often suggest the problem is in the environments around us (outside of us). They say we humans can fix our own problems, while Jesus' message is that we actually need God. We saw why the Christian faith is seen by many as an explanation of life that makes sense of things.



We now arrive at our final booklet, considering how this faith works in practice.

This is possibly the most important evidence too, because it explains more than any other, why Christians believe Christianity to be true!

What is a miracle?

When a person says a miracle happened, they claim it did not have a material (physical) cause, or it happened by itself or chance. Something happened that was caused from beyond this physical realm.

Are miracles possible?

If a spiritual realm exists, miracles are possible.

Miracles have a message

The presence of miracles tells us something. They show us there might be more to life than what we see with our eyes. They also invite us to investigate what the power behind the miracle really was.

The world's most amazing book of miracles

Whether we are talking about the Creation of life, the saving of the Israelites by giving them safe passage through the Red Sea or the life of Jesus — the Bible is a record of the miraculous interventions of God. Its events sit within history, in connection with people, places and times. But more importantly, its history tells a story that is also a message. These miracles say, “There is a loving God behind this creation who wants to be known!”



1. JESUS' AMAZING MIRACLES

There is no greater miracle-worker spoken of in history than Jesus. He sets the pattern. Here's a very brief overview.

i. Miraculous healings:

It is recorded that Jesus healed lepers and the diseased. He raised the paralysed to their feet and freed those suffering spiritual oppression. He gave sight to the blind, speech to the mute, and hearing to the deaf.¹

Of note, historians of the time who did not believe Jesus was from God, confirmed that these miracles happened — all except the resurrection. This was discussed in booklet 2, especially noting the writings of Josephus who wrote for the Romans, and the Jewish accounts in the Babylonian Talmud.

ii. Miracles over the forces of nature:

Five-thousand men — plus women and children — were fed from five loaves of bread and two fish. Jesus calmed a storm, and on one occasion walked on water.²

iii. Miracles over life:

Jesus raised a few people from death: Jairus' daughter, the son of a widow at a place called Nain, Lazarus of Bethany.³

iv. Miracles of love:

Jesus broke the patterns of human behaviour throughout history by showing love to the outcasts of society in a way that hadn't happened like that before — and it changed the lives of millions.⁴ Our society follows his values to this day.

It is especially noteworthy that Jesus' miracles were highly practical as expressions of love and help. If comparisons were to be considered, miracles elsewhere are sometimes like a 'show' or performance, and nearly always for money. With Jesus, it was always about people — not power, popularity or money.

Are these claims of miracles unique?

Some sceptics of miracles have suggested miracle workers were ‘a dime a dozen’ back then — but when investigated, this claim simply isn’t true.⁵

Ronald Nash, a philosophy professor, said,

“efforts to undermine the uniqueness of the Christian revelation [meaning the stories and their miracles] via claims of a pagan religious influence collapse quickly once a full account of the information is available...” and those who make this point “...exhibit astoundingly bad scholarship. Indeed, this conclusion may be too generous.”



Regarding the nature of Jesus’ miracles, theologian Dr Gregory A. Boyd wrote of this uniqueness saying,

“it didn’t just rain when he prayed for it; we’re talking about blindness, deafness, leprosy, and scoliosis being healed, storms being stopped, bread and fish being multiplied, sons and daughters being raised from the dead. This is beyond any parallels.”



Most significantly, Dr Boyd suggests, Jesus did all of these miracles in his own authority, and this was the main message.⁶ The miracles begged the question, “If Jesus can do this in his own authority, then who is he?”

What about the religious sceptics?

Others, of course, deny miracles can happen at all.

For those who deny the existence of God or of any kind of spiritual realm, it is only logical to then believe that miracles are not possible.

Richard Dawkins illustrated this belief in an entertaining way, saying:

“even if we were to see a statue of the Virgin Mary wave to us, we should not assume that we have witnessed a miracle but rather that the atoms somehow all moved in one direction at the same time.”⁷



This explains why sceptics of miracles will continue in their view irrespective of any evidence presented. As noted throughout this series, the difference isn't a rational argument as much as it is in the 'presuppositions' — these being the things people believe before looking at evidence. Because they believe miracles cannot happen, the evidence is irrelevant because they feel they 'know' that miracles can't happen!

The significance of Jesus' miracles to Christianity

Philosophy professor Peter Kreeft⁸ explained it this way.



“Subtract miracles from Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, or Taoism, and you have essentially the same religion left. Subtract miracles from Christianity, and you have nothing but ... clichés and platitudes ... Nothing distinctive, no reason to be a Christian rather than something else.”⁹

At the core of the Christian faith is a belief that God, who is loving, exists, has a plan, and is making himself known to us — to help us. Christianity is, therefore, unavoidably a religion of miracles because anything at all that God does to intervene or reveal himself to us is technically a miracle (something that did not happen as the result of a physical cause, by itself or by chance).

Looking at miracles therefore gives us another way to test the truth of this faith.

However, because Jesus' miracles happened a long time ago, it's easier to look at miracles in our own times, like when a person prays in Jesus' name. To 'pray in Jesus' name' simply means to pray with a recognition of and trust in his authority and ability to hear and answer that prayer.

2. MIRACLES IN CHRISTIANITY TODAY

There are many types of miracles. Physical healings are exciting. A miraculous release of hurt, or freedom from an addiction, can also be a miracle and profoundly meaningful.

Consider a miraculous release from depression, a miraculous ability to walk away from a life of crime, to forgive where there was hurt, to be humble where there was pride, selfless where we were selfish, to give where we were once greedy, or to show love where we previously wanted vengeance.

These are the kinds of miracles that Christianity has in abundance right across the globe, counted in the hundreds of millions — and that would be an understatement.



A. Physical miracles

I will be quite blunt on this topic — positively and negatively. I ask that readers choose not to be offended.

Physical miracles are hard to prove because, even when they are otherwise provable, an onlooker will still say, ‘There must be another explanation.’

What a person believes before looking at the evidence makes a big difference!

For example, I’ve seen someone with asthma healed. I was even the one praying for her — and I was amazed because it wasn’t me who healed her! (I believe God did it.) Her asthma was a long-term challenge, and bad enough that she routinely wouldn’t join friends for sports. A week later she was complaining about her sore legs while playing soccer. But how do I prove it? We could each tell you what we saw or experienced — but it’s 20 years later now, and I understand that she has asthma again! How am I to explain that?

In Indonesia I saw a disabled man, who had been in bed for 9 years, walking. He walked slowly down the hallway — and with tears. As we prayed again for him in the lounge he explained that he felt a great love in his heart. Our host then arranged for him and his wife to get a ride to a church that weekend on the back of someone’s motorcycle. I can’t prove this miracle to you though. I can only tell you what I saw — and even if we had the doctor’s report, if you didn’t want to believe it you still wouldn’t. (It’s also 15 years later now — and he was already quite old, so he’s probably passed away from a sickness of some kind by now!)





It also needs pointing out that I have prayed for many friends who've been sick over the years who weren't miraculously healed — though I would hope that God did somehow encourage or strengthen them for the journey. At times I've felt more than disappointed God hasn't healed some people — because I believe he could.

Faked miracles confuse the topic

The discussion is made even more complicated by fraudsters, who falsely claim miracles. Occasionally there have even been fake preachers who employed actors to fake a sickness and healings — to get money from gullible donors!

It's wrong, and it angers every one of us!

(So it is noted, it angers Christians more than non-Christians — because it is our faith they are discrediting.)

Some who see this (or merely read about it) then decide they'll never believe any miracle story — 'because they are all frauds'.

Doctors reluctant to admit a miracle

As someone in church circles, I hear of smaller healing miracles a few times each year. But even where doctors can confirm someone is now well who was sick, they will rarely admit a miracle. This is understandable because a doctor's job is to find repeatable solutions to illnesses to make people well.

My observation is that doctors will commonly admit something happened that they don't understand — but not that a miracle happened. They then turn their attention to their next patient because they are busy.

A friend recently reminded me of a significant ankle injury he had about 25 years ago, with a literal snapping sound when he fell playing sports. His ankle was placed in a temporary cast and an x-ray revealed



that it was fractured. Shortly after this, he received prayer — and the pain unexpectedly stopped at that very moment. Returning shortly afterwards for a longer-term cast to be put around his ankle, he had another x-ray where they found no break or problem. The doctor suggested the line in the bone on the prior x-ray must have somehow come from a crack in the temporary cast. When asked about the loud crack at the time of the accident he explained that would have been a ligament snapping — which would unfortunately require even longer to heal than a broken bone. However, by that weekend my friend was playing basketball (although he admits very carefully, as there was a small amount of discomfort).

My point is that it isn't surprising that the doctor wouldn't accept any explanation other than a physical and 'natural' one. His job is to find repeatable solutions for illnesses. Meanwhile, for my friend whose ankle was healed, it is remembered to this day, and he is still amazed. He heard the crack, he knew the pain and he felt the difference from the specific time of the prayer!

So, it is hard to prove a miracle sometimes — even where one might have happened.

Also, the message of a miracle might be more important than the miracle sometimes — because we all still die here on earth.

Concurrently, if praying for the sick in the name of Jesus can sometimes achieve a unique miracle — what does that say about Jesus?

Some examples

One of the easiest ways to show some examples of physical miracles is to refer you to someone who has prayed regularly for the sick who uses a video camera.

Reinhard Bonnke was a Christian preacher (Evangelist) in Africa for many years. He spoke to ever increasing groups across about 40 years of ministry — resulting in crowds of well over one million at a time in his later years. I reference him because I view him as a man of high integrity.



He didn't chase the dollar. He didn't care for fame. He cared about people knowing Jesus more than any miracles. However, while preaching he would also then pray for the sick.

Some (not all) would be healed.



The image here is of a previously blind woman saying her blindness has just been healed. She is being asked to follow and touch a handkerchief — which she can now see.

David Attah lost his speech following a head injury. Having been mute for a

while, and desperate for any remedy possible, he went to hear Bonnke preach. When a general invite was offered to reach out to God for healing he did so — and saw a light come and hit him. This image is the moment at which he spoke into the microphone for the first time to prove his speech was returning.



Daniel Ekechukwu died shortly after a serious car accident. A few days later his wife uplifted the coffin from the mortuary and took him to a particular church because she had heard Bonnke was going to be preaching. She refused to accept his death because she knew a challenging life awaited her without him.



Taken to the basement, a group gathered to pray — at which point he miraculously started to breathe — and they had a video camera present. The account — which is told in a one-hour documentary — includes reports from the

ambulance, doctor, the mortuary and the wife who took the body from the mortuary to the church (in a coffin).¹⁰

The story of Jean Neal of the UK is well documented. After 25 years of spine troubles and 16 operations, she miraculously stood up from her wheelchair at a Christian outreach event (at which Bonnke was the speaker) — and started running around the room while screaming with joy. This



stunned public media, her husband, her children and the staff at a top Midland Orthopaedic hospital (Rugby, Warwickshire) who had cared for her for years.¹¹



A collection of these stories was compiled in a documentary called ‘Miracle Scene Investigation — 7 Miracles and a Martyr’, put together by Bonnke and his team.

If miracles like this really can happen in Jesus’ name, what does that mean?



B. The miracle of a changed life

While significant physical miracles are rare (in my opinion),¹² miracles in people's lives are plentiful in Christianity. This is a faith that 'works'! I also suggest there is something unique here.

What difference does looking with faith to Jesus make — as compared to not looking to Jesus?

i. Miracles in drug addiction rehabilitation

While it is not often published, Christian faith-based drug rehabilitation programs are consistently amongst the most effective of all programs.

Countless testimonials exist that tell the same story. A miracle somehow took place in a person's heart as they turned to God with faith — and something profound within them changed. There is an identifiable pattern. People who previously could not get off drugs then can.

Joseph Califano was founder and chairman of the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University.¹³ He told *U.S. News & World Report* that he had been "*stunned to discover that nearly every ex-drug addict he meets cites religion as a key to rehabilitation.*"¹⁴

Statistics bear this out. As an example, to summarise from a commentary on ‘Overcoming Addiction’ by Chuck Colson (of America), “*National recidivism rates of secular drug rehabilitation programs range from 60 to 75 percent.*” (This means, 60% to 75% go back to drugs after their treatment.)

However, the “*Hazelden Foundation... has a recidivism [fall-back] rate of 50 to 55 percent. By contrast, San Antonio’s Victory Fellowship—a Christian program—has a recidivism rate of just 20 percent. Prison Fellowship’s Transition of Prisoners Program (TOP), which includes a focus on substance abuse, has a recidivism rate of just 9 percent.*”¹⁵

Why the difference? One researcher studied various programs like these in the mid 90s — at a time when many drug rehabilitation programmes were failing. He could find no other way to describe the reasons for the remarkable success of some faith-based programmes, so simply labelled it, ‘*the Jesus Factor.*’¹⁶

Somehow this faith makes a positive difference to the success of these kinds of programmes.

However, this is also rarely discussed because it isn’t considered ‘politically correct’. Governments fear that, if they fund faith-based programmes, they’ll be accused of religious bias.

I have personally talked with people involved with prison-based rehabilitation programmes on two different continents. Despite being in entirely different cultural contexts, they have told the exact same story. The ‘Jesus factor’ makes a difference.



JARED'S STORY

Jared grew up with drugs around him. By age 12, he was a user. After a first stint in prison he became involved with a programme to help young men break free of drugs. After a second stint in prison a pastor connected with the programme took him out for a meal. They discussed faith in God — and Jared decided to invite God to help him. He explains now, from that very day, the addictions broke. He looked up from his simple prayer and the world looked different — and he was different. He still goes to the same programme — but now as a staff member, helping youth who face the same challenges he did.



View a short video of Jared telling his story at 10DayChallenge.co.nz/stories

KERENSA'S STORY

At age 11, Kerensa explains how her family fell apart — and so did she. She went on to struggle with self-abuse, drug addiction, and to suffer sexual abuse and suicidal thoughts. Twenty years later she reached a breaking point. One day she literally cried out to God, “If you’re there, and if you care, help me! Tell me what to do!” Within minutes her Dad called her — who she says was the most inspiring Christian in her life. That was, to her, the beginning point of the change — but it took a few years. The birth of her first daughter made her want to be a better person. A few years later,



they decided to visit a church — and have been going ever since. Over time she realised she had a lot of forgiving to do, but also that God had forgiven her because he loved her. She became able to forgive. She says she is a different woman because of this and could not have made these changes on her own. As she sees it, God changed her!



View a short video of Kerensa telling her story at 10DayChallenge.co.nz/stories

ii. Miracles in prisoner rehabilitation

Regarding success in turning past offenders away from future crime, the 'Jesus factor' is also observed globally. For example, one study revealed that mere regular attendance at a 'Prison Fellowship Bible study' cut reoffending by two-thirds.¹⁷ It's a truly amazing figure!

Programmes like this are, however, constantly under threat because of that same awkwardness around supporting faith-based programmes. Non faith-based programmes definitely make a difference too. However, there remains a clear pattern. Somehow, the 'Jesus factor' makes a difference!¹⁸



PETER WHAANGA'S STORY

Peter grew up with hurts, struggled through school and then became involved with gangs. He was soon involved with crime, and in prison. One day in prison he was feeling particularly low, and reached a breaking point. He tells how he challenged God, *"If you are real, prove yourself to me!"* In that moment he experienced a supernatural touch, knowing God loved him. He heard a



voice in his heart clearly saying, "I love you". The experience was so real that it made him cry, and he was changed! He suddenly wanted to read the Bible. Having been dyslexic, Peter found that he could now somehow read! He was concurrently set free of his alcoholism and drug addiction. The life of crime also ended from that day. *"If you want the evidence"*, he says, *"ask my family!"*

Peter went on to give more than two decades of his work life to drug and alcohol counselling, helping others.



View a short video of Peter telling his story at 10DayChallenge.co.nz/stories

iii. Miracles in stress and depression reduction

In the treatment of psychological disorders, the place of faith is being increasingly recognised. However, this wasn't always the case.

Two-hundred years ago Western intellectuals went on a bit of a journey, suggesting faith might be a bad thing for mental health rather than a good thing. For example, the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), defined religion as *"a universal obsessional neurosis"*¹⁹ (meaning 'a bad thing').

This generally negative view has now largely changed — with the benefits of faith clearly in the data.

Later research by David Larson, president of the National Institute for Healthcare Research in America in 1991, described the change at that time, saying,



“Growing numbers of psychologists are finding religion ...in their data. What was once, at best, an unfashionable topic in psychology has been born again as a respectable focus for scientific research.”²⁰

That change has continued. Quoting Chuck Colson,

“The data is showing that religion, far from being a mental illness, is actually beneficial to mental health, physical health, family strength, and social order.”



Some current data

A 2021 study²¹ revealed mental health benefits for regular church attenders, including:

- An 84% reduced risk of suicide
- A 29% reduced risk of depression
- A 50% reduced risk of divorce (or 35% in a different study²²)

Children growing up in church-attending households were less likely to be depressed (12% less likely) or use drugs (33% less likely).

The data is wide-reaching

Data around the positive effects of Christian faith today go far beyond basic mental health to include improved marriage strength, marital satisfaction,²³ life satisfaction, sense of meaning in life, educational levels, more volunteering and also financial generosity to charitable causes, more civic engagement, improved financial stability, more stable long-term family dynamics, improved long-term physical health and increased longevity in life.

(A remarkable 7 year life-span benefit was demonstrated in one recent study.)²⁴

When it comes to dealing with crisis in life (resilience), there are benefits also.²⁵

To be clear, not all of these things are miracles — because some will be the result of living by various good and healthy values the Christian faith teaches.

However, some are miracles — like people breaking free from drugs from the moment at which they prayed to God. People make decisions to change that require a strength that they somehow find after turning to God. There are millions of these stories.



ROSALIE'S STORY

Rosalie grew up in a home with violence, and suffered several sexual assaults. She explains how inside herself psychologically, this really impaired her. She would sit looking over a dam bank near her home wondering if a loving God might exist, while feeling unworthy.

On her 14th birthday her dad violently threatened the life of a boy visiting their home. Shortly after this incident she stole some money and moved to the city.

The turning point came when she was arrested at age 15, and realised she was probably going to go to the 'big girls prison'. She said to God, *"If you can use someone like me, I will serve you"*. The judge — after what seemed like the longest time, said, *"I don't know why I'm doing this, but I'm going to give you probation."*

On being released, she went to her Auntie's place — who was a Christian, and said *"I need your Jesus."* Rosalie says that, upon praying, the immediate change she felt was a sense of peace she'd never known before, and a sense of belonging. She knew that — despite all her darkness, she had been accepted.

She asked God to help her make a new start — which happened. She ended up moving to Canada to get a complete break from the patterns of her past. A fulfilling life has unfolded since. She says that a key message she hopes people will take from her story is that God really is willing to love people right where they are — because that's what he did for her!

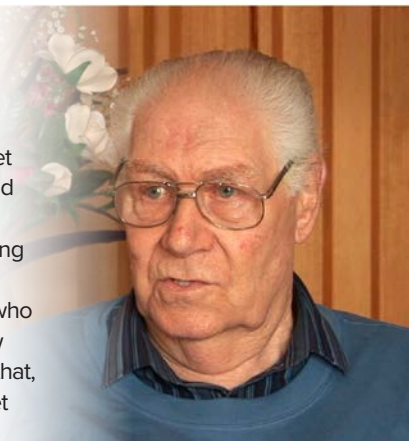


View a short video of Rosalie telling her story at 10DayChallenge.co.nz/stories



ROB'S STORY²⁶

Born in Holland, World War 2 changed Rob's world. At age 12, he was walking down a street one day when a German military truck stopped and forced him, along with others, to work for them. His first night on the job involved cleaning up debris and dead bodies from bombed houses — including the remains of a mother who had been giving birth at the time. He tells how hatred towards the Germans grew so strong that, after the war, had he had an opportunity to get revenge, he would have been worse than the Germans.



Stuck in a hospital after a motorbike accident Rob asked for something to read and was given a Bible. Opening it he read Jesus' instruction to 'love your enemies'. The words struck his heart — and he was changed. He tells how he let God in, and somehow found the power to forgive. He lived free of that bitterness and hatred from that day onwards. It was a miracle!



View a short video of Rob telling his story at 10DayChallenge.co.nz/stories

To consider the pattern that is in these (millions of) stories, people pray to God in Jesus' name — understanding that Jesus is the 'key' that opens the door to a direct connection to God — then something happens.



What is the 'Jesus factor' really?

As noted, some suggest these benefits and changes are merely psychological — because the idea of a good and loving God is such a positive idea to live with.

However, the existence of millions of stories begs a question: Might it be more?

Also of note, those who tell these stories affirm that it wasn't just an idea that changed them; it was a person! They connected with a spiritual reality who could be known — through Jesus.

While our psychologists and psychiatrists do important work in helping us to identify and overcome our various emotional and psychological triggers, the reality of the 'Jesus factor' is difficult to deny.

I have personally been to a counsellor three times in my life. In every case we met for 6 discussions, and it helped me greatly. The work of counsellors, psychologists and psychiatrists is important. This point needs affirming.

However, from my own experience I can also tell you that the 'Jesus factor' is another thing entirely!

C. The miracle of a transformed society

We will summarise this point very concisely, because it was covered earlier in the series.

The positive influence of the Christian faith in history upon societies, families, nations and wider cultural groups has been miraculous. Consider slavery ending, or the women's rights movement starting. Consider the cultural view of charity we have — with 27,000 charities in New Zealand, where some historians have noted that they are yet to find an example of any organisation existing purely for charitable purposes like this prior to the time of Christ.

Or consider crime-ridden communities 'locked' in patterns of corruption, alcoholism and fear that are then miraculously transformed as people turn to God with faith. Pubs and prisons close while churches grow. Husbands apologise for treating their families badly — and families are restored. Everyone then starts working hard and wisely, bringing increased prosperity and well-being for all.

There are many stories in history like this that could be told,²⁷ but in view of length, we will leave this point to stand without further comment.

3. HOW WILL YOU NOW LIVE?

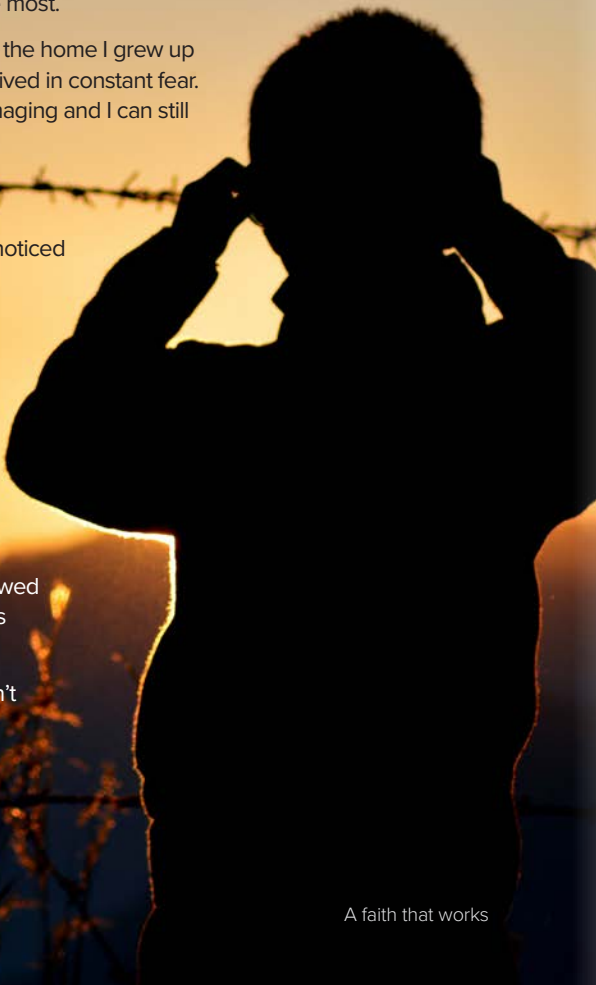
Before the closing words to this series, I would like to tell you part of my story, which explains why I believe this faith to be true.

While I understand various reasons for faith, it is my experience of this faith that has convinced me the most.

There was quite a mess in the home I grew up in. The hurt ran deep. We lived in constant fear. It was psychologically damaging and I can still remember how I felt.

When I was 11 years old, I noticed Mum had sunshine in her eyes (hope), despite the circumstances. She had become a Christian. I knew I needed whatever it was that she had. So, I reached out to this God I couldn't see, knowing Jesus was part of it — and hope somehow entered the core of my being, followed by an awareness that I was loved by God.

What happened next wasn't just psychological.



It wasn't the mere idea of a loving God that changed me — because I'd heard that story before. Instead, as I reached out to God for myself, recognising Jesus in that picture, I had a spiritual experience. I knew that I knew I was loved by God. This led to a profound change in the way I saw the world, and myself.

Because of my early experiences I didn't like men. I didn't trust them. It took me twenty more years to fully resolve that. However, I somehow knew as a young teenager that God — although he came as a man, was perfect, loving and trustworthy. I was enabled to break free of debilitating insecurity, one day at a time. I began to feel joy on the inside as a pattern. As a teenager, I lived with a remarkable sense of peace and hope. How I felt made no rational sense. My circumstances didn't change — but I did, and I remember the difference.

In the decades since, I've studied and travelled. I have had opportunity to investigate questions I've had about this faith. I've lived overseas and have had opportunity to investigate other religions. I would have left this faith if I had found it not to be true — though I'd also have been very disappointed if that had happened. For me, the rationality of this faith has been affirmed again and again as each matter has been considered.

For two other brief reflections, had I not 'found God', I think I'd have been rich and successful by this world's measure (because I know how to work hard). However, I think I'd have filled my life with various 'successes', believing this would have given me importance. (My identity would be in my achievements.) I also suspect I'd have remained quite bitter. I don't know if I'd have managed to forgive in the way I have — if not for God's help.



For a second reflection, being a Christian didn't protect me from the experience of suffering (and there might be more to come in life still too). I had six years of fairly intense anxiety — and God didn't 'fix' it! My mind and emotions had to process things that had happened earlier in life. It was a terrible journey! At my worst, I had anxiety so intense I was conscious of every breath some days, and seemingly random panic attacks were a constant reality — all while I continued (outwardly) in my daily work and life. At that time I felt like God had abandoned me — and I had to decide again whether or not I'd choose to trust him.

The irony is, as I clawed my way back to health over a six year period, I looked back and felt immense gratitude to God. I see times when I feel



certain God was with me and helped me. I also consciously chose to believe God would bring good out of the experience, and that has definitely happened. I'm more content, more secure in who I am (in God), and definitely have more empathy for other people.

So that is my story. I would say 'God changed my life', and that faith in God has

been the strength of my life to overcome things, and also to attempt things. I'm very grateful. But I don't want to give a wrong impression.

Following God doesn't mean we'll escape all of life's normal challenges — but also to be clear, eternity is the wrong thing to be wrong about! We don't follow this faith for convenience, mere happiness or the current benefits. What is true matters because what is true will have implications. If this faith is true, the implications are not only for now, but forever.

In summary, I suggest to you that God really isn't the 'good and bad God' we might create on the basis of our general experiences of life. Instead, I suggest God is exactly who he has told us he is through history, as recorded

in the Bible. He is a good God — and the accounts recorded in the Bible explain why this world is in such a mess! God is reaching out to us, and we each get to choose how we will respond.

A conclusion to the series

The Bible says, *“Taste and see that the Lord is good”* (Psalm 34:8).

The English writer, philosopher and theologian G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) penned these profound words.

“Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.”

The miracle of a baby is enough to convince most of us there is a Creator. How could all the ‘pieces’ make themselves and come together so perfectly? It is a marvel of engineering — and beauty. There are more than a dozen highly complex independent ‘systems’ at work in this child’s body too, like the blood system, breathing system, nervous system, muscular system, digestive system, skin system and more.

As if all that were not enough, the child has the ‘software’ to match, being mentally alive (and conscious) as a person within her body.

What engineer or computer programmer on this planet, with all their intelligence, could even imagine something so complex and amazing — let alone create it?



The Bible put it this way:

“For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse” Romans 1:20

Imagine I make a dessert that I claim is the best pudding in the world. I explain the taste and texture of it to you, read you scientific facts on the nutritional benefits, and then have a dozen people come and tell you why they also concluded this is the best dessert ever made. The fact is, you’ll never know until you taste it!

As in the sub-title of this final booklet, “The proof of the pudding is in the eating”. No matter how logical or rational something sounds, the ultimate test is whether it works.

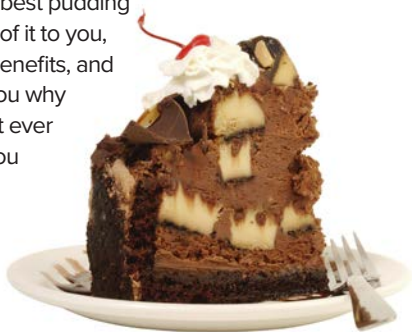
As Jesus explained it:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.” John 3:16-17

Christians believe God is calling us to turn our hearts and lives over to him. The starting point is therefore very simple; we need to choose it!

There is an optional prayer on the following page if that is useful — or freely use whatever words come naturally to you.

These are some of the reasons Christians believe Christianity to be true.



A Prayer

“Dear God my Creator, thank you for loving me in spite of the wrongs I have done.

I thank you, Jesus, for taking the punishment I deserved when you died, and for inviting me to follow and know you. From today I choose this.

Please forgive me for the selfish and wrong things I have done.

I give the rest of my life to you.

Please help me to learn about you and your ways from the Bible, to find friends for this new journey, and to love others as you have loved me. From this day onwards I am yours

Amen.”

Want to walk forward in faith?

- Read about Jesus in the Bible.
- Consider a Bible app for your phone or device like YouVersion (which includes an audio 'play' option if reading is difficult).
- Reading about Jesus in the books of 'Matthew', 'Mark', 'Luke' or 'John' is a good place to start.
- Many churches have small groups that meet regularly to study and discuss the Bible.
- Within the YouVersion Bible app, under 'Plans', there are Bible study and daily reading guides on different topics. One we created is called the '10 Day Challenge' — which gives ten introductory thoughts about the Christian faith. (Alternatively see 10DayChallenge.co.nz)

Find a Christian community (church) near you

- Hearing people's life stories can bring understanding and hope.
- Reflecting on the words of the songs and Bible teachings in weekend church services can encourage and help.
- We all need friends for the journey.
- We are stronger in teams, working together to bring hope to others.



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Endnotes

- 1 For example, Leper — Mark 1:40-44; diseased — Mark 1:34; Paralysed — Mark 2:1-12; Spiritual oppression — Mark 5:1-20; Sight to blind — Mark 8:22 - 26; Speech to mute and hearing to deaf — Mark 7:32-37.
- 2 For example, Feeding of the 5000 — Matthew 14:13 — 21; Calming of a storm — Luke 8:22-25; Walking on water — Mark 6:45-56.
- 3 Jairus' daughter - Mark 5:21f; Son of widow - Luke 7:11-15; Lazarus - John 11:12-19.
- 4 For example, Zacchaeus, as in Luke 19:1-9.
- 5 To note, some sceptics suggest that 'miracles were a dime a dozen in this era'. Ian Wishart responded to that claim by Richard Carrier saying he either 'got their facts wrong, or can't count' [Ian Wishart, The Divinity Code, (Howling at the Moon Pub Ltd, 2007), p152.] Dr Gregory Boyd (theology professor at Bethel University, and author of Letters from a Sceptic) points out that the supernatural miracles in Jesus' life had no parallel in Jewish history (noting there were other miracle-workers — including Old Testament Prophets, but none in terms of the scale, scope and numbers of miracles). [See A Case for Christ, Lee Strobel (Zondervan, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1998), p159]. Some note that Jesus came into a period of history in which there had been a notable 200 year absence of prophets and miracle workers [See Ian Wishart, p152 and also 'Were the Miracles of Jesus Invented by the Disciple?' By Glenn Miller, 2002 - <http://www.christianthinktank.com/mqfx.html>]. Noted biblical scholar Gird Theissen calls this one of the most sceptical periods in Ancient History. While other miracles workers did exist in seasons of history (not least of which were the Old Testament prophets like Elijah and Elisha), Jesus' miracles stand out as completely unique in terms of their variety, number, and scope.
- 6 Lee Strobel, p158-159.
- 7 Richard Dawkins, The Blind Watchmaker, (London: W.W.Norton, 1986), p159.
- 8 Professor of philosophy at Boston College and King's College in New York City.
- 9 Peter Kreeft, Christianity for Modern Pagans (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p273, as quoted in The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict, by Josh McDowell (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p358.
- 10 Current YouTube link, 2023: Raised from the Dead - God performed miracle through Reinhard Bonnke <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZP5Gq7-WYM>
- 11 Current YouTube link, 2023: Jean Neil's Miraculous Healing in 1988 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S55MQLWPoEU>
- 12 I am not saying miracles don't happen, or that we should not pray for and expect miracles. I am saying there are seasons and environments within which miracles are rare.
- 13 He also held the post of United States Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.
- 14 From a Breakpoint Commentary 'Overcoming Addiction', www.breakpoint.org, also noting Colson, p31f.
- 15 From a Breakpoint Commentary 'Overcoming Addiction', www.breakpoint.org

- 16 Three studies over time are in view. This was stated by Dr. Aaron T. Bicknese after a 1994 study of the Pennsylvania Teen Challenge faith-based program whose success rates were unusually high at a time when state-funded secular programs were failing, as cited in an article about 10 Studies On Teen Challenge, dated 2010. (No longer online).The state had earlier funded a study — revealing a 87.5% success rate. The later 1994 study also revealed a very low comparative financial cost per client. With an anomaly in early data noted, a 2007-2009 study revealed a 74% success rate at 6 months after participation. A current summary is at <http://teenchallengehawaii.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Success-Rate-of-Teen-Challenge.pdf>
- 17 Charles Colson, p311, citing B.R. Johnson, D.B.Larson, and T.C.Pitts, "Religious Programs, Institutional Adjustment, and Recidivism among Former Inmates in Prison Fellowship Programs," Justice Quarterly 14, no. 1 (March 1997), p145-166.
- 18 We note there will be cases of both successful and failed faith-based programs, as of every type of program. The discussion here is on the averages and patterns they reflect.
- 19 Charles Colson, 315, citing David B. Larson, "Physician, Heal Thyself!" Guidepost (March 1993), p41-43.
- 20 Charles Colson, p 315 citing Daniel Goleman, "Theraposts See Religion As Aid, Not Illusion," New York Times, 10 September 1991.
- 21 Empty Pews Are an American Public Health Crisis, (2021) at <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2021/november/church-empty-pews-are-american-public-health-crisis.html>
- 22 <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-divorce-rate.html>
- 23 No, Christianity Is Not as Bad as You Think, by Josh Howerton. Point 2 in the article: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christianity-not-bad/>,
- 24 Religion and Health: A Synthesis, by Tyler J. VanderWeele, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. See <https://pik.fas.harvard.edu/files/pik/files/chapter.pdf>
- 25 For example, the Washington Post recorded that regular churchgoers were the only segment of the population whose mental health actually improved in the Coronavirus pandemic-full year of 2020. 'Regular churchgoers top Gallup's mental-health poll...'
<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/dec/6/regular-churchgoers-top-gallups-mental-health-poll/>
- 26 Rob passed away prior to the time of this publication. We thank his family for giving permission to include his powerful story.
- 27 A short video series called 'Transformations (A documentary)', was created in the 1990s and 2000s by Global Net Productions. It tells stories of communities and cities that have been remarkably transformed through a wide embrace of the Christian faith. Some of the stories can be found on YouTube.

Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.

— G.K. Chesterton, English writer, philosopher and theologian



“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

— Jesus

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