Long Story Short

Leaders Guide

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What is Long Story Short?

The Format:

Long Story Short is a nine-episode multimedia resource that focuses on Jesus. Each video covers a particular aspect of the backstory, with each episode being essential to understanding the uniqueness of Jesus. These aspects of the story are crucial theological components, (building blocks) which help us understand who Jesus is and what he is about.

As well as these high-quality, engaging presentations, there is the extensive *Question & Answer* (Q&A) component that offers answers to questions 'seekers' frequently ask.

The Purpose:

The purpose is to provide viewers with a credible foundation for faith in Christ as personal Saviour. Christians will obviously benefit from this series as they gain a greater understanding of Jesus. But the series is primarily designed to help lead viewers to salvation in Christ.

Faith is the key. If unbelievers are to come to faith and if believers are to grow in faith, then knowledge is essential. That is because faith is built on knowledge. We cannot accept, believe and/or trust what we do not know. So, *Long Story Short* is designed to be a faith-builder by unfolding the Christ story from the pages of Scripture.

Put simply, Long Story Short is about sowing the seed, reaping a harvest and training the workers – all at the same time.

Distinctives

Exploring the Bible Chronologically

Often people are unfamiliar with the story of the Bible and, as a result, may have an incorrect understanding of both Jesus and the Christian Faith. To properly know about Christ, people need access to the story of the Bible. Long Story Short is about carefully telling 'the salvation story' as it unfolds in the Bible. It does this by starting at the beginning, in Genesis, and progressing through the Bible – all the time moving towards Christ and laying a solid foundation for believing in him. After all, Jesus does not walk onto the pages of the New Testament unannounced – he has a long and significant introduction. To overlook the Old Testament is to miss the true identity and significance of Jesus.

Understanding the Story of the Bible

There is a difference between telling stories *from* the Bible and telling the story *of* the Bible. It is entirely possible to read the stories but miss the message! Long Story Short is about unfolding the meaning of the story of the Bible so that people can discover the theological significance of the Bible for themselves in a simple, straightforward way.

As we journey through the Bible's story, some big questions emerge and are addressed very naturally:

- Is there really only one God?
- Why did God allow evil?
- What about other religions?
- What has Israel got to do with God?
- What are all the animal sacrifices about?
- What makes Jesus so special?
- What's the point of the miracles?

Values

Process

Long Story Short is about 'Process Evangelism' as distinct from 'Crisis Evangelism'.

In **'Crisis Evangelism'** people are urged to trust the Lord in response to a personal crisis. The crisis might be financial, relational or medical. It's the 'in this immediate situation, you really need to hand your life over to the Lord' approach. And for some people, like the Philippian jailer (Acts 16), salvation comes out of an 'earthquake' situation.

'Process Evangelism' is different. Process Evangelism is about joining people on an enjoyable journey of understanding where they can slowly learn and gradually grow in their understanding of the gospel. It could be called 'Discipleship Evangelism' – the kind Jesus did as people followed him, from place to place, listening to what he had to say. Whatever the label, it's about process.

'Process Evangelism' is about working evangelistically over the longer term… taking the necessary time, making the necessary commitment, and having the necessary information from the Bible ready to share. All this spells process. But it's not an endless process. It has a goal in view – it is all about seeing people come to faith in Christ.

Community

Long Story Short is about 'community'. While it can be used very successfully in one-to-one evangelism, it is best used in small groups. The Long Story Short 'small-group community' often includes enquirers, the enquirers' Christian friends and perhaps one or two other Christians. The small group has a lot to offer, especially the following:

- **'Affirmation'** – being part of a group is affirming. Sometimes, the fact that others have decided to take the journey also validates the venture for the enquirer… i.e., "I'm not the only one doing this".

- **'Protection'** – being part of a group helps the enquirer not to feel 'targeted'.

- **'Momentum'** – being part of a group has its own appeal, in the same way that travelling with others can add excitement and momentum compared to travelling alone.

- **'Encouragement'** – being part of a group provides a reason to stay with 'the itinerary' and complete the journey.

- **'Opportunity'** – being part of a group provides 'opportunity' because this new social structure can often empower the enquirer to move into a whole new way of thinking and living. The group can often become the bridge into this new dimension and help the enquirer to make some moves they might have been wanting to make but couldn't make alone.

Holy Spirit

Salvation is God's business. The Father planned our salvation. The Son obtained our salvation by dying on the cross. But, it is the Holy Spirit who brings us to salvation (Titus 3:5).

Evangelism is our business (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8). We must befriend, reach out, pray and witness. But even if we do all that, without the Holy Spirit at work no one will ever be convicted of their need for Christ, receive Christ or be born again (John 3:5; 16:8; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 2:14; 2 Corinthians 4:4–6). Only the Spirit can move someone topersonally and willingly trust Christ. This is the Holy Spirit's sovereign and gracious work! And, He is committed to it! Jesus said that, during his absence, the Holy Spirit's role would be to bring conviction to the world (John 16:8). This means we are not alone in the process of evangelism – the Holy Spirit is working too!

It is by praying that we acknowledge our dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to ask your friends and the church to pray, and to commit yourself to praying for each individual who comes to your group every week.

People

Because everyone bears the image of God, each person is incredibly significant and loved by God – more than we could ever imagine! If people are vitally important to God, they need to be important to us too. We always want to be personable, genuine, loving and respectful towards others. While salvation is the Holy Spirit's work, it's our job to love people, as we clearly communicate the message about Christ, remembering that 'people don't care how much we know until they know how much we care'.

The Possibilities:

Self-discovery:
The *Long Story Short* website is specifically designed to encourage self-discovery. People can move through *Long Story Short* at their own pace and in the privacy of their own home. A succinct *Q&A* format leads directly into the video series.

One-on-one:
Long Story Short can be used as a 'one-on-one' study and is particularly helpful as a tool for believer/seeker investigation, or for believer/believer discipleship. The video series can be tailored to suit the pace and comprehension of the inquirer. For example, each individual video can be viewed and then discussed in the same session. Or, it can be viewed privately, with discussion happening in a later, separate get-together, perhaps over coffee.

Group Evangelism:
Long Story Short offers churches the opportunity to engage in a guided, church-based approach to evangelism. It not only facilitates direct interaction with unbelievers but provides a valuable training ground – stimulating, training and equipping believers to sensitively present the gospel of Christ.

For the Church to be passionate about its primary task of mission and evangelism, it must first be confident in the salvation story of the Bible, believing with conviction that it is true. Perhaps we could say that conducting a *Long Story Short* course is a bit like walking the Emmaus Road all over again...it's about taking Christians back to the very beginning and then unwrapping the incredible story of the Messiah. And, in so doing, thrilling and inspiring them with a new-found confidence to passionately share this same story of salvation with the world.

Passion flows from confidence. Confidence is based on conviction. Conviction grows out of knowledge.

What can Long Story Short offer?

For Enquirers:

- a backstory which provides the context for who Jesus really is
- a logical foundation for believing in Jesus Christ as their Saviour
- a way to find answers to the big questions of life found in the context of the Bible's big story
- a great introductory overview of the Bible and the Christian Faith which they can build on in the future

For Believers:

- a resource that confirms believers in their faith as it unlocks the big story of the Bible
- an effective tool to help Christians naturally share the good news with their friends and family
- a learning opportunity within a friendly, motivational setting
- a chance to be involved in front-line evangelism

For Group Leaders:

- A colourful and engaging multimedia resource that unfolds the biblical story and guides group discussion and personal reflection
- An easy-to-use Q&A section that gently and engagingly addresses common objections to the Bible and Christianity
- A practical, step-by-step guide to running a Long Story Short group
- A chance to really grow in Christian belief, personal confidence and skills in small-group leadership
- An opportunity to make a real and lasting difference in the lives of others

For Church Leadership:

- A guided, church-based approach to evangelism that stimulates, trains and equips people
- A resource to help people understand and passionately own the big salvation story of the Bible
- An opportunity to grow people in their own Christian belief at the same time they are doing evangelism

How to Prepare to be a Long Story Short Leader

(Group-led format)

Preparing in Prayer

It is crucial to pray for people before, during and after the group (read about the work of the Holy Spirit on page 8). Jesus said that "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). James highlighted the importance of prayer when he wrote, "You do not have because you do not ask God" (James 4:2).

Preparing to Invite

When you invite people, it is important to be open and honest, explaining to them exactly what Long Story Short is, what will happen and who will be there. Be sure that when people are invited, they understand it is not a forum for debate – it is an opportunity for a positive learning adventure in which we discover the story of the Bible. The group is all about exploring this question: 'How does the Bible tell its own story?'

If people decide not to come, stay connected and keep praying for them because they might change their minds at some point in the future.

The ratio of 'believer' to 'enquirer' should be approximately one to one. Keep this in mind when inviting people. Too many believers in a group can make enquirers feel 'outnumbered' and it can become too easy for 'in-house' conversations, behaviour and jargon to dominate. Many Christians do not realise how alienating this can be.

Make the purpose of the group clear when you invite people. When inviting Christians to the group, make it clear that the purpose of the group is for believers and enquirers to be on an even playing field. Both are there to learn. Both are 'explorers'! It is not the place for the Christians to answer all the questions for the enquirers. Answering questions is to be respectfully facilitated by you, the group leader.

The maximum number of people in a small group is about ten. Keep this in mind when you are inviting people to your group. With more than ten people, the dynamics of a group changes – it becomes difficult to maintain good group dynamics. If you have more than ten people, you might consider running two small groups or arranging a seminar. In the seminar format, you are able to run as many small groups at the same time as your venue allows.

There are a number of resources available. These include invitation cards, posters, video clips, PowerPoint presentations, etc. to help you promote your Long Story Short programme.

Preparing a Venue

When choosing a place to meet, it's important to choose a space where conversation can flow freely without distraction from outside sources.

You could meet in:

- a living room
- a quiet and/or hired room in a restaurant, café, pub, workplace, hotel, motel, library conference room, neutral community venue, etc.
- a church venue.

You will need the following resources:

- a good internet connection
- an easily-viewable screen (TV, laptop, tablet, mobile phone)
- Explorers Guides
- Leaders Guide
- NIV Bible for each person
- Whiteboard/large sheet of paper to write down group questions
- Pens

When setting up a place to meet, it is recommended that you make the room as comfortable and inviting as possible.

Keep the following in mind:

- Every person should be able to see and hear everyone else easily.
- A screen should be of suitable size and not be affected by glare from windows, etc.
- A good-quality sound system will get the most out of the video.
- Have access to an easily viewable whiteboard or other display board to write up the group's questions.

Preparing to Use the Video

It is important to watch each episode at least once beforehand to ensure you are familiar with the content.

Preparing to Use the Q&A

Long Story Short is all about questions. Questions will surface as the members of the group reflect on their daily readings, are led by you in discussion and watch the video.

Some of the more difficult or critical questions are answered in the Q&A video section. These hard-to-answer questions are also included in the Q&A booklet along with many more. We recommend you check through both Q&A options (video & booklet) so you know where to turn when questions arise.

The Q&A sections are not designed to be read out loud. There is a comprehensive amount of information in some answers and reading the whole answer out loud could be boring. We suggest that you pre-read and highlight any key points, illustrations, examples or Bible verses that you may want to share.

As you grow in confidence, you may find you won't need to use the pre-recorded answers.

The 'feel' of the main video is different from that of the Q&A videos. The main video is designed to be a relaxed adventure of discovery and aims to have a gentle 'coming with you' rather than a 'coming at you' posture. The Q&A videos are more factual and informative, designed to answer explorers' questions from the Bible.

Don't be overwhelmed by the number of questions. You might use only a few of them – but we have included a full range in case they are asked.

For helpful and creative ways of dealing with questions, see pages 38–40.

Preparing to Use the Bible

Long Story Short is about the unfolding story of the Bible. This means that God's Word is front and centre in Long Story Short. That in turn makes the Bible the reason for and the foundation of a person's faith. Scripture teaches that faith is built on knowledge (Romans 10:14–15). This means 'enquirers' will never find faith in a vacuum, nor should they. Christianity is not about some undefined religious experience or 'taking a leap into the dark'. It is about personally and intelligently trusting the Christ of the Bible. Because of this, the Bible has a central place in the Long Story Short programme.

Long Story Short is based on and uses the 2011 NIV version of the Bible. Because we want people to learn mostly to use the Bible for themselves, you will need to supply an inexpensive, easy-to-read, 2011 NIV paperback version of the Bible for every member of the group. These are available through the Long Story Short website. We strongly encourage you to give a copy of the Bible as a gift to each enquirer. Having everyone in the group using an identical Bible will eliminate 'version' confusion and allow the Bible to be referenced by page numbers. In this way, newcomers are comfortable and are not made to feel like novices. Christians should not bring their own Bibles – give identical Bibles to everyone in the group. This will place everyone on an 'even playing field'.

How Long Story Short Works in the Group Format

1. Consider (Daily Readings and Bible Exploration)	The new topic is first introduced with five daily readings. These give the explorer time to consider the issues before they watch the video. Each reading concludes with a Bible passage and question.	Gathering
2. Explore (Group Discussion and Bible Reading)	Explorers come to the group and can share what they have learned. The new topic is further reinforced by a Bible passage about the topic.	
3. View (Video Viewing)	Explorers view the video, which presents the topic from various locations around the world.	Interacting
4. Discuss (Q&A)	Explorers may still have unanswered questions that have not been covered in any of the three preceding steps. So in this step, the leader's goal is to facilitate the 'discussion' so that every explorer leaves with a good understanding of the Bible's story up to that episode. The leader can choose between written and video answers, and select from discussion questions to encourage deeper engagement. Written answers for the video questions are also in this Leader's Guide.	Banking

The Long Story Short Programme

Pre-group	**Consider** Daily readings
0:00	**Welcome** Guests arrive for food and beverages Introduce topic
0:30	**Explore** Discussion starter questions Bible reading and questions
0:50	**View** Video presentation Explorers fill in outline in journal
1:10	**Discuss** Gather, discuss and answer questions
1:40	**Conclude** Review key points Organise the next group session Encourage next readings

Welcome

1. Welcome People

It is important to welcome guests warmly on their arrival. Introduce yourself to them and introduce those also taking part in the group. Be sure to show your guests where the amenities are. Use their names and remember them as this shows you care (read about the value of people on page 8). This is not the time for deep spiritual conversations but, instead, it is a good time to find common ground. Remember: the aim is to create a relaxed, natural and warm environment.

Not everyone finds conversation easy, so having a little music, etc. playing quietly in the background can help fill gaps and create a relaxed atmosphere.

2. Serve Food and Beverages

Food and beverage says 'welcome' in any language – it helps people relax and shows honour and acceptance (be mindful of people's dietary needs). As your group members get to know one another, others may offer to help provide food. Accepting their offer often helps them feel they are an integral part of the group. Remember, people like to belong – before they believe.

Explore

1. Discussion Starter

The 'explore' section has two questions. The first question is a general one, designed to stimulate discussion. The second question gives the opportunity for those who have completed their daily readings to share what they have discovered.

2. Harvest Questions

Questions are the lifeblood of a dynamic discussion. They are an integral part of the learning process and the backbone of any group discussion. Asking questions is the way we find answers to life's most important issues. So, questions need to be encouraged.

It is important to gather questions all the way through the study. You will need some way of recording these questions for the 'discuss' section (e.g. a whiteboard, paper, tablet, etc.).

Delaying answering questions until the 'discuss' section has some real advantages:

- It allows you to keep the flow of the study going.
- Some of the questions may be answered in the video before you get to the 'discuss' section.

You will need to inform the group of this and say something like, "Questions are really important. You might find they are answered in the video section; if they're not, we will try to address them in the 'discuss' section at the end of the study."

3. Read from the Bible

Each module includes a small reading from the Bible. This reading is designed to focus on the topic being addressed. This is where members of the group can make observations from the Bible. Some people may feel uncomfortable reading aloud – it is best to ask people to volunteer or read it aloud yourself.

View

1. Play the Video

Remind the group to fill in the gaps in the outlines in their Explorer Guides. Encourage explorers to write down any questions from the video in their guides.

Discuss

1. Work Through the Discussion Questions

After the video, guide the group through the provided discussion questions. Give everyone a chance to share their thoughts, and encourage different perspectives.

2. Gather Questions from the Group

After the video, ask for any questions and have someone in the group write them down on the whiteboard or large piece of paper. Seeing the questions in written form helps to address the questions and keeps the discussion on track.

2. Answer Questions from the Group

There are different ways to answer questions:

- The leader can refer to either the video Q&A or the Q&A booklet.
- If you know a Bible passage that contains the answer, invite the group to turn to it and have someone (or the whole group) read the passage and then ask the group, "What do you think that verse is saying about this?" This is a great way to let your group discover the answer for themselves.
- Invite other Christians in the group in whom you have confidence, to address the question by saying, "John, what do you think about this?" But be careful, having Christians in the group answering questions can generate a 'them and us' culture.
- If the question can't be answered, it is fine to say, "Thanks for that great question – seems like we don't have an answer for that tonight, but let me see what I can find for you this week and we will raise the question at our next session."

Conclude

1. Review

Review the teaching points, summarise and conclude (remember that this is where we intend the information to be 'banked', so the explorers are then ready to move onto the next topic – see 'How Long Story Short Works' on page 24). Point out that more information can be found on the website.

2. Organise

Set up a date and time and decide who is going to organise the food and beverage for the next group session.

3. Encourage

Introduce the next topic and encourage the group members to read the suggested Bible reading. This will help explorers gain the most from Long Story Short.

4. Close

You will need to bring the evening to a formal close. It is important that the group finishes at the planned time because this shows respect and integrity. Bringing the evening to a close allows people to leave if they wish, while others can stay to continue discussion.

Lead the group with a short, closing prayer.

When the Long Story Short Course Finishes

It is important to have realistic expectations of the people who come to a Long Story Short group. We pray that many will trust in Christ, but some may not. Even if people do not believe, do not feel as though you have failed (re-read about the work of the Holy Spirit on page 8). Some will need more time before they believe, while some may never believe (John 6:64).

What happens when you have finished running a Long Story Short course? Hopefully each explorer will have built a strong relationship with you and it is important to keep this relationship active. When people see that you care about them after the course, they will be more likely to continue exploring Christianity and recommend the course to others. Most importantly, try to connect explorers with a local Christian community.

Long Story Short explorers – both those who have believed and those who have not yet believed – can be hungry for more when they finish the course. There are many good resources that you could use when you continue to meet with an explorer. Here are two suggested tracks that you can pursue with them. These resources are available through the Long Story Short website.

Track 1: For Not-Yet Believers

One simple programme you can follow is the Seven Signs in John's Gospel. This is a seven-part study looking at the seven signs or miracles by Jesus that John recorded in his Gospel. The benefit of this study is that the Holy Spirit specifically selected these signs so "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30–31). These signs are designed to help people believe! The seven signs are:

1. The turning of water into wine (John 2:1–11)
2. The healing of the royal official's son (John 4:46–54)
3. The healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1–18)
4. The feeding of the five thousand (John 6:1–14)
5. The walking on water (John 6:16–35)

6. The healing of the man born blind (John 9:1–41)
7. The raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–46).

Ask the explorer to read the Bible passage for the first sign once every day for a week (as well as doing this yourself). Then meet together to ask the four questions below. Once completed, read the second sign in the same way once every day for a week, and continue repeating the process.

1. What does this story say to you about people?
2. What does this story say to you about Jesus?
3. What does this story have to say about you?
4. Who needs to hear this story?

Track 2: For New Believers

There is a tab on the website called 'Next Steps' which outlines some basic steps.

Some Small Group Skills

Having the Right Attitude

"But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

We all know it's possible for us to do the right thing the wrong way. That's also true when it comes to evangelism. It is vitally important that we are under the Lord's control so that we not only have the right answer but the right attitude. We want to conduct all our discussions with gentleness and respect. This not only pleases the Lord, but it also makes the people more open to receiving God's truth.

Understanding Why People Ask Questions

Not everyone asks a question for the same reason. Some questions are:

- Quizzing questions – they're asked simply to test us, to see if we know what we are talking about. Some are testing us to see what we're really like and how we handle ourselves.
- Genuine discovery questions – for the people asking these questions, the material is new and they are genuinely looking for answers to increase their understanding.
- Probing questions – the people asking these questions are looking for clarification; they genuinely don't understand or, maybe, they're trying to see if what is being said makes sense.
- Derailing questions – they're asked in order to sidetrack the group members.

Understanding Why People Don't Ask Questions

Some people are simply shy – they might prefer to write down their questions or they might just need a little more time to feel comfortable. Some people may not feel safe – they're afraid of appearing foolish. Some people simply don't have a question – or at least one isn't immediately coming to mind. If no one has anything to discuss, then feel at ease in continuing the session. Pressuring people to ask questions will not create a welcoming and friendly environment.

Creating a Safe and Question-Friendly Environment

People must feel safe to ask questions. This can be done in one or two ways:

- By making it clear at the outset (and periodically through the series) that questions are important and welcomed. Perhaps you can assure your group that there is no such thing as a silly question – apart from the one that is never asked. Unasked questions are like splinters in a finger – if they are not addressed, they will cause problems later on.
- By modelling a safe, 'question-friendly' environment, respecting every question, thanking the questioner for the question, being gracious and courteous, and avoiding put-downs (even funny ones) at all costs.

Managing Questions in the Group

Engaging the group in discussion and answering questions are important. The following can be helpful:

- If a contribution is a little 'wide of the mark', don't try to correct it immediately – open the contribution to the members of the group and ask what they think.
- Ask open-ended questions that don't have 'yes' or 'no' answers, like,
  "What effect might the confusion of language at Babel have had on humanity?" Questions that have only 'yes' or 'no' answers are conversation stoppers.
- When someone offers an answer, you might like to generate further discussion by asking the person or someone else to restate or reword the answer in a different way. Look for opportunities to build on answers offered in a group situation.
- When you do not know the answer to a question, say so! The group knows that you won't have answers to everything and this is normal. They are not looking for a leader who knows everything.
- Don't ask a question and answer it yourself – this demotivates others and makes them less eager to participate.

What do we do with Dominant and Shy Personalities?

Dominant personalities can prevent others from contributing to the group equally. There are different ways to work with a dominant personality. The suggestions below can be useful:

- You can say, “Thanks for that question, John. I wonder what others in the group think about this interesting topic”.
- To bring others into the conversation, you can ask, “We haven’t heard as much from this side of the room. I’d like to know if you have any thoughts or questions to contribute”.
- If the dominant person continues to overpower others in the group, you may need to speak to that individual privately after the group session, thank them for their interest and contribution, and ask if they would help you to encourage the rest of the group to contribute more as well.

Shy personalities can sometimes prevent the group from obtaining the most out of Long Story Short. If they remain quiet and ‘hidden’, the group can miss out on their unique contribution to group discussion. There are different ways of working with shy personalities, such as the following:

- You could ask, “Is there anyone who hasn’t asked many questions who would like to ask one?”
- If you know that the shy person won’t feel ‘singled out’, you can ask: “Sue, is there anything that you would like to add to our discussion? If there is, we would love to hear what you have to say. Your questions are very important to the group.”

Optional Day Away

Often people have extremely busy schedules and finding time to come to a 9-week Long Story Short group can be a big commitment. Because of this, you may like to provide a 'day away' option for your group so you can shorten the length of the course. The day-away option focuses solely on Jesus Christ and readily combines modules 6, 7, 8 and 9 on his life, death, resurrection, and what's next.

You will need to coordinate with your group members and ask if they would like to use the day-away option. Once explorers get into Long Story Short, you may find that they are keen to continue the course for as long as they can and would prefer not to use the day-away option!

Day Away – Suggested Programme

10:00am Welcome & refreshments

10:15am Module 6 – Messiah

11:30am Break

12:00pm Module 7 – Salvation

1:00pm Lunch

2:00pm Personal testimony of salvation & module 8 – Resurrection

3:10pm Break

3:40pm Module 9 – Jump

5:00pm Conclude

5:30pm Leave / Optional dinner together

The 9 Modules at a Glance

Bonus Episode **Best-Seller**	
Module 1 **Beginnings**	• God exists • God is creator • God is eternal • God is personal • God is good, generous and kind
Module 2 **Identity**	We were made by God: • Intentionally • Differently • Made to make things • Made to think • Made with a conscience • Made to love • Humans are loved passionately by God
Module 3 **Catastrophe**	• Evil is permitted by God • Evil is promoted by Satan • Evil is our problem • Evil has contaminated us • Evil won't last forever

Module 4 Confusion	• Babel: Where humanity replaced God • Babel: Where different languages began and humanity was dispersed • Babel: Where different nations developed • Babel: Where different religions were devised
Module 5 Strategy	• Israel: Made a special people • Israel: Given a special place • Israel: Assigned a special purpose - Purpose #1: One world: One God - Purpose #2: One way: Blood sacrifice - Purpose #3: One book: The Bible - Purpose #4 One hope: The Messiah
Module 6 Messiah	• Jesus: [is a] real person • Jesus: [made] incredible claims • Jesus: [lived a] sinless life • Jesus: [did] amazing miracles • Jesus: [was a] great teacher
Module 7 Salvation	Jesus' death: • A rescue mission • A separation from his Father • A brutal execution • Completely intentional A holy God is: • Absolutely righteous • Must punish sin Jesus' death: • Punishment for our sin • Perfect payment of the penalty • Provides pardon forever • Requires a faith response

Module 8 **Resurrection**	Jesus' Resurrection: • Historical fact • Confirms his identity • Is a receipt: paid in full • Is a huge promise to believers • Displays astonishing power • Gives us a living Saviour and hope
Module 9 **Jump**	Faith in Jesus: • Is about trust • Focuses on Jesus alone • Is the way to eternal life • Has a moment • Makes all the difference

BEGINNINGS

where did everything come from?

Day 1: Is God Real?

I remember my cousin used to have an imaginary friend. Apparently, they're quite common among kids. Of 4000 adults recently surveyed, 44.96% said they had an imaginary friend in childhood – and another 8.90% wished they'd had one! But child psychologists say it's all fairly normal and healthy. My cousin's imaginary friend was called Emma-Lou. She seemed to be of no fixed abode. But I know when we holidayed at my grandmother's home, Emma-Lou always stayed close by. Believe it or not, Emma-Lou lived up a nearby power pole. We visited her often – it was fun! Then one day, without warning and without any fuss, somehow Emma-Lou just stopped existing.

Some rationalists once put up a road sign. It read, "God is an imaginary friend: choose reality – it's better for all of us!" But is God made up? Is he just an 'adult version' of the imaginary friends we create as children? What if God is just real – if believing in God doesn't make him more real and disbelieving in him doesn't make him less real? What if he *is* real, regardless?

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 1**.
Count how many times 'God' is referred to. What is significant about that?

Day 2: Is God Eternal?

Life is full of tricky questions. Here's a few to make you smile. If flying is so safe, why do they call the airport the 'terminal'? Why is the man who invests all your money called a 'broker'? Why don't we ever see the headline, 'Psychic Wins the Lottery Again'?

Here's another tricky question: Who made God? The Bible says that God is eternal – he had no beginning and has no end. He has always existed. If that's true, then no one made him. Moses described God as "the eternal God" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

And here's another one: If God endlessly exists, where does he get his life from? As humans, we are dependent on other things for our life – the food we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe. But what about God? According to the Bible, God is different. He endlessly 'self-exists'. He is not dependent on anyone or anything! His life doesn't come from anywhere. He has life in himself.

God made his self-existence very obvious to Moses one day when he appeared to Moses in the burning bush. The bush was burning but the leaves and the branches were as green and fresh as they were before the fire appeared. Normally, you can't have a fire without the branches or the leaves. The fire feeds off those things. It's simple. No leaves? No branches? No wood? No matches? No fire! But here, Moses is looking at a fire that existed purely on its own. That self-existent fire was a symbol of God who endlessly self-exists.

Explore the Bible

Read **Exodus 3:2–6**

Day 3: Is God the Creator?

Accidental art. It sounds crazy but apparently accidental art is just that– art that happened by accident. I read a story about a truck loaded with paint tins. The driver failed to take a corner, the truck tipped over and the paint tins all cracked open, leaving multi-coloured rainbows all over the road. I guess the road looked beautiful until it wore off!

King David once wrote a poem about creation (Psalm 19:1–4). In this poem, he likened creation to art, art that could even 'speak' and give a message about the artist to all people:

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

According to King David, creation is a magnificent piece of art. But it was no accident. The beauty all around us is deliberate. It is here to tell us all about the artist.

If God wanted to remain a big secret, then why in the world did he leave his fingerprints all over the planet?

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 1:3–26**.
What does creation tell us about God?

Day 4: Was God Lonely?

Because we are personal and relational beings, we need relationships with others to be truly fulfilled. Like John Donne said, “No man is an island” – we all need somebody.

But here’s a fascinating question: Do you think God was lonely before he created everything? That could have been one lonely, miserable existence! Interestingly, the Bible pulls the curtain aside and gives us a peek into a time when there was no one and nothing but God (if, in fact, we can call that a ‘time’). And apparently he wasn’t lonely.

Although there is only one God, he exists in three different persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus (the Son) once said that the Father had loved him even before the creation of the world (John 17:24). It seems that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit enjoyed perfectly satisfying and fulfilling relationships with one another before the world began.

As the Bible introduces us to God, it introduces us to a personal spiritual being – one who talks, thinks, sees and works. In other words, God is a ‘he’... not an ‘it’. Now that’s good news... because he is personal, we can connect with him.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 1:1–2, 4–5, 10, 16, 26–27, 31**
What indications are there that God is a personal being?

Day 5: Is God Good?

The world around us can be an adventurous place! Have you ever climbed up to the top of a rocky peak and then taken a gasping breath of mountain-fresh air? And while up there at dusk, watched the crimson and golden shades of the sunlight disappear over the horizon, to be left filled with awe by the breathtaking beauty that offers itself to us?

Or perhaps you enjoy the exploding sound of firecrackes erupting and the vivid colour, brightness and sparkling of the sky-show display? But then there's an even greater sky show that screens every night. The night sky, against a pitch-black background, displays hundreds of glittering stars and can leave any viewer in awestruck silence.

Is anything as soothing as hearing the ocean waves tumble gently onto a beach: a continuous background of tranquil sound? Or maybe you prefer the audio pleasure that our favourite musicians can produce. Stringed instruments, percussion, voice... all working together to make our ears almost 'dance'.

And when we feel the life-giving warmth of the sun and watch the earth absorb the rain that waters our crops – we can know that God is good. Each time our taste buds explode with the tingling taste of a strawberry, we know God is extraordinarily generous. After all, though food is essential for us to survive, 'taste' is a special extra. It seems that God wants us to enjoy food – and to have pleasure living in this world. And if all this power, beauty and grandeur is just "the work of [his] fingers" (Psalm 8), we can only imagine what God must really be like.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31**
What do you enjoy most about creation?

EXPLORE

- If God existed and you could talk to him, what would you say to him? What would you like him to say to you?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Genesis 1:1-19

- What can we learn about God from this reading?

- Did anything surprise you about this story?

VIEW

Video Episode 1 - Beginnings: Where did everything come from?

Five things God tells us about himself:

1. God **exists**
2. God is **creator**
3. God is **eternal**
4. God is **personal**
5. God is **good**, **generous** and **kind**

DISCUSS

- What difference might the idea that everything was created with care and purpose make to how we view the world and ourselves?
  - Consider the contrast to if things were somehow all just accidental.

- For which created being does it seem that everything was made, and how does that make you feel?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

IDENTITY

who am I?

CONSIDER

The Story so Far...

In the previous module, we saw that it all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise.

Continuing the Story...

What does it mean to be human? Do we matter? Are we significant? In this module, we explore these questions from the Bible's perspective in Genesis 1 and 2.

Day 1: Made?

In a piece of Hebrew poetry, King David asked God this question: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:4). Three thousand years later, that ancient question is still the BIG one – only, these days, everyone is asking it in a more personal, and possibly more urgent, way...

Who am I? What does it mean to be a human being? Why am I here? Does God even care?

Everyone asks these questions... because they are the ultimate questions of life. The Bible's answers to these questions surface as it tells us the story of Adam and Eve. The Genesis story says that we humans are unique. Special, in fact. Special enough:

- For God to give us this magnificent planet as our home!
- For Genesis 1 and 2 to spend more time talking about us than about any other part of creation – no exceptions!
- For God to talk differently about us – not the usual "let there be" but, instead, "let us make mankind..." See how the language changes and the mood alters? The air is electric. The words are charged! It's just so deliberate and intentional and different.
- To celebrate with a poem! Did you see it? Probably not, because it's kind of hidden. Hebrew poetry doesn't rhyme like ours. But tucked away in Genesis chapter 1, verse 27, there's a short poem celebrating the creation of humans. As fantastic as this planet is, it's not planet earth that's the subject of the very first poem. It's people!

What if God's trying to tell us that we're more special than we ever suspected we were – and more loved than we ever dreamed we could be?

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 1:26–28**
How special are humans?

Day 2: Spitting Image?

The English language has some funny phrases. For instance, when a child looks and acts just like their father or mother, we say that they're "the spitting image" of them. Doesn't sound too pleasant, does it? But "spitting image" is a short version of the original saying which was "spit and image" – which means that you are both the stuff that your parents are made of (the spit) and you look like them, too (the image). Some think the saying originally just had the spit without the image: "You are the very spit of your father", meaning... he might just have spat you out.

And here's the Bible telling us we're made in God's image! True, we have a lot in common with the animal world. In fact, Genesis indicates that there are at least seven direct comparisons that can be made between humans and animals. But there's one big difference: we humans are made so much like God, that we are said to be 'in his image'. In any language, that spells S-I-G-N-I-F-I-C-A-N-T. So walk tall today – you are an image-bearer!

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 1:27; 2:7, 19–23**
How were animals and humans created in the same way? How were they created differently?

Day 3: Personally Speaking…

I love those beautiful clear summer days… blue skies… birds singing… the sea sparkling as though it's made of sequins – all nature seems to be laughing in the sunshine. And we whisper to ourselves, "It's so good to be alive".

It's fantastic to know we exist, to know how we feel, to know our own thoughts. As far as we know, animals are not running around saying, "It's so good to be alive". They're conscious… but not self-conscious. I don't think a pig is conscious that it's a pig – as distinct from, say, a field mouse. The pig is not aware of its 'pigness', nor can it explain it. It doesn't have a clue what it's here for. Thankfully it doesn't understand 'bacon' and 'pork chop'! It has no ambition to be anything because it has no sense of 'self'. But we do. We can say "I'm so disappointed in myself" or "I've made good progress today". Unlike the pig, we can evaluate ourselves – and that makes us different.

Typically, we're free, too – we can decide where we live and with whom. We can choose friends. We can cook what foods we feel like eating. Animals don't have that freedom. Basically they're creatures of habit, bound by instinct. They roam but they don't plan holidays. So… we can have animals as pets but we can't have them as partners – because they're not persons (Genesis 2:20).

Did you notice how Genesis refers to God as a personal spiritual being? All the way through, it uses personal pronouns like 'he', 'him' and 'his'. And, because God is a personal being, we can connect with him.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 2:15–18, 22–23**
What do you notice about the relationships between Adam, Eve and God?

Day 4: More Differences...

Dr Robert Sapolsky is a brilliant primatologist who studied baboons in Africa for more than 30 years! He's no Christian – in fact, he calls himself a "strident atheist". He was Professor of Biological Sciences at Stanford University, California. In 2009 he gave a talk on 'The Uniqueness of Humans'. He drew some very real comparisons between animals and humans, showing just how close they are. However, he then went on to show the very real differences. His point? There's a thick line to be drawn between animals and humans. Genesis says the difference lies in the fact that we humans have been made in the image of God.

We know animals aren't stupid – humans just think in a different way to that of animals. We love to investigate and compare things – to think about how things relate and connect. And we have an 'ache to create'. Animals create, too: beavers build dams; moles and meerkats dig burrows; birds and gorillas make nests – but always to the same old specifications. Why? These animals function out of instinct. But we love to think, reason, invent, improve and develop things.

And we love to talk! Dr Sapolsky says it's our use of language that really sets us apart. We use words to express our thoughts, share our opinions, plans, dreams and feelings. Animals communicate too but in a much less sophisticated way. Their sounds and noises aren't speech... just like a baby's whimper or squeal isn't speech. Eventually the baby will talk... but animals won't. We use complex language because our brains are wired to think about so many more things than animals do. And that's because we're in a different category. We're 'image-bearers'.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 2:15–20, 23**
What difference in language and communication do you notice between God, humans and animals?

Day 5: The Biggest Difference...

Perhaps the biggest difference between animals and human beings is that we are here to make a difference – a big difference! That's the way we've been made... and, according to Genesis, that's our agenda. Here it is:

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful... fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground". (Genesis 1:28)

These words must have 'struck a chord' with King David, one of Israel's greatest kings. Compared to the vastness of the universe, humans look so insignificant. The truth is, we have a significance out of all proportion to our size! The Genesis story had left David dumbfounded:

You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. (Psalm 8:5)

How had God crowned humans with glory and honour?

You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet. (Psalm 8:6)

It sounds a bit outrageous but we're here to be 'movers and shakers'. Seriously! We are the Creator's managers! This planet has been placed in our hands! There's not one part of it that doesn't belong to us. But that doesn't mean it's open slather to rape and pillage the earth for our own selfish ends. We're accountable to the Creator – to care for the world, develop it and shape it, in keeping with his values. As 'image-bearers', we're here to make a difference – But are we doing that?

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:15, 19–20**
What role was given to humans but not to animals?

EXPLORE

- If you were to hold a party to celebrate being human, what two things would you celebrate?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Genesis 2:4-24

- What can you find in this story that makes humans special?

- Why do you think God created human life?

VIEW

Video Episode 2 - Identity: Who am I?

We were made by God:

1. **Intentionally**
2. **Differently**
3. Made to **make things**
4. Made to **think**
5. Made with a **conscience**
6. Made to **love**
7. Humans are **loved passionately** by **God**

DISCUSS

- The Bible indicates that humans were not only intentionally created but are the pinnacle of creation. How does that perspective inform our view of human dignity and value? (Can you think of any alternate views that are popular?)

- What difference might the idea that the creator is good, generous and kind – having made us with love and to be loved – have on how we feel about life and the future?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

CATASTROPHE

how did this world get so broken?

CONSIDER

The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image... and loves us passionately.

Continuing the Story...

The great Creator God made a picture-perfect world. He made humankind in his own 'likeness and image', placed them in a perfect paradise, signed them up as his deputies and appointed them rulers of the whole planet! It doesn't get any better or brighter than that.

If only we could have put the story on hold and stopped right there! If only everything had stayed that way! We will find that the biblical story records the introduction of evil and how the world turns sour very quickly. Yet God was not caught by surprise – we will find out that God promised to banish evil forever!

Day 1: The Dark Side

Ever read the daily news or watched the news programme on TV and become discouraged by the state of the world? Violence, murders, wars… our news bulletins are full of it! In fact, we all brush up against evil in one form or another every day. It's too real to deny, too ugly to call by any other name. Ron Allen wrote, "Unfortunately, something has gone radically wrong! We cannot pretend it hasn't. There is simply too much nastiness, pettiness, and selfishness among the descendants of Adam for us to see man's majesty very often – in others or, for that matter, in ourselves."

The Times of London supposedly asked several prominent authors to write a column on the theme: 'What's Wrong with the World?'
G K Chesterton answered with the shortest of letters…

Dear Sirs,
I am.
Sincerely,
G K Chesterton.

Do you think Ron Allen's and G K Chesterton's quotes ring true with the world around us? Check it out – listen to the news tonight.

So, what's the problem?

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 3:1–7**
How did evil enter the world?

Day 2: If God Didn't Create Evil, then Who Did?

At some point, we all ask: Where did evil come from? How could a God who is totally good create evil? The Bible tells us that God didn't create evil: not only didn't, but couldn't. He is good and absolutely hates evil. But this still leaves us with the question: If God didn't create evil, who did?

What if no one did? What if evil is not a 'thing'?

Let's think about this. Take, for example, a gun. It's incredibly well designed, precision engineered and beautifully crafted! Top-quality metal and the barrel is 'as straight as a die'. The gun is 'good'! And the bullet is also good – well designed and perfectly shaped. And the hand that holds the gun is also good – it has five good fingers that all work perfectly well. The body standing nearby is working just fine. It's good too. But to take a good gun, load it with a good bullet, put it in a good hand and point it at an innocent person and pull the trigger – that's evil.

Evil occurs when good things are wrongly related to each other. And that's how evil began. A good angel (Lucifer) in a good place (heaven) decided to rebel against God (an improper relationship). And, when creatures rebel against their Creator, it's an improper relationship and all kinds of evil things occur as a result.

So evil is not a created thing. We can't take a slice of evil and put it on display in a cabinet. And here's the point: if evil's not a thing, God cannot have created it.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 3:6–10**
What changes did Adam and Eve's rebellion make to their relationship (now an improper and damaged one) with God?

Day 3: Two Poisinous Tablets

The Bible describes Satan as a very real, very evil and very powerful personality. But he hasn't always been bad. Once he was known as Lucifer, the highest, wisest and greatest of all God's angels... the closest to God – until the day pride filled his mind. Believing he was good enough to be God, Lucifer fantasised about taking God's throne for himself. He wanted to put himself in the place of God! But he had completely overestimated himself and underestimated God. Totally disgraced, he was instantly relieved of all his duties and thrown out of heaven. Once called 'Lucifer' (the Light Bearer), he is now called 'Satan' (the enemy). His passion is to loathe God and oppose him... and establish a counterfeit kingdom of his own.

First in Satan's sights was the human race. But how could Satan break Adam and Eve's allegiance to God? God had been extremely generous to Adam and Eve in giving free access to eat from all the trees in the garden except one. And God had specifically told them the consequences if they disobeyed. To break their allegiance to God, Satan went into pharmaceuticals and he concocted two poisonous tablets... two lies... as deadly as they were clever. If Satan could convince Adam and Eve to swallow these two lies, he would have them in his grip. The first poisonous pill – God is not good – he is cruel and stingy (Genesis 3:1). The second poisonous pill – sin is not bad – so there will be no consequences (Genesis 3:4).

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 3:1–7**
Why do you think Satan chose these particular 'pills'?

Day 4: The Pain and the Promise

There's an old proverb that says: "Sooner or later we all sit down to the banquet of consequences". Adam and Eve had bought the two lies from Satan that God is not good (instead of the truth that God is extremely generous) and that sin is not bad (instead of the truth that disobeying commands has consequences). They must have been reeling with shock as the consequences of their decision to defy God's commandment came 'thick and fast'... just as God had warned they would. For example, for the first time they experienced:

Personal shame. That's why they felt naked and sewed fig leaves to cover up themselves and their sense of shame (Genesis 3:7).

Alienation from God. That's why Adam and Eve hid themselves from God (Genesis 3:8–10).

Distrust of each other. It's amazing how quickly the relationship deteriorated. Adam quickly blamed Eve for the situation... presumably to save his own skin! (Genesis 3:12).

Tension in marriage. The harmony and happiness Adam and Eve had known disappeared. Their relationship would now be full of tension... Eve would try and rule her husband and, in turn, he would tend to dominate his wife (Genesis 3:16).

Pain in childbearing. Having become sinners themselves, Adam and Eve passed on their spiritual DNA. They produced children in their own likeness and image. Instead of producing little kings, they produced little sinners. There would be the continual pain of seeing their children hurt and be hurt as they struggled through life as broken, sinful people in a broken, sinful world (Genesis 3:16; 4:8).

Explore the Bible

What were some other consequences of sin in **Genesis 3:17–19** (find as many as you can)?

Day 5: Did God Let this Happen?

Famous American actor Woody Allen said, “If it turns out that there is a God, I don’t think that he is evil; the worst you can say about him is that he is an underachiever.” Basically Woody Allen meant this… ‘If God exists at all… he cannot be all-powerful. If he were, he would never have let this mess happen.’

But the Bible insists God *is* all-powerful.

Christians believe that, in his wisdom, an all-powerful God permitted evil to exist. God didn’t create evil… he is holy. But why would God even permit evil? Unless… it was the best way to bring about an even greater good. But what good could possibly be ‘that good’ that God would allow something so awful as evil to exist?

What if God permitted evil so he could get his hands on it and dispose of it forever? Had God not allowed evil to come into existence, it would have always been a lurking possibility. But God permitted evil to erupt so it could be banished forever. When that day comes, God will make a new world for us and evil will never, ever, raise its ugly head again.

But why didn’t God just ‘zap’ evil and destroy it the moment it emerged? Maybe there is no clear answer to that question. What we do know is that if there were no sin, we would never be able to experience the wonder of his forgiveness, the extent of his patience or his amazing mercy. Only the problems show up his brilliant solutions. It’s God’s great genius that he can frustrate the purpose of evil by making it the occasion for his greater glory to shine!

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 3:14–15**
What has God promised?

EXPLORE

- Out of all the things that are wrong with this world, what bothers you the most?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Genesis 3:1-21

- Where does the Bible place blame for evil?

- What do you find interesting about this story?

VIEW

Video Episode 3 - Catastrophe: How did the world get so broken?

1. Evil is **permitted** by God
2. Evil is **promoted** by Satan
3. Evil is **our problem**
4. Evil has **contaminated** us
5. Evil won't **last forever**

DISCUSS

- Which of the five points in the video (see previous page) jumps out at you and why? In what unique ways does the Bible's explanation of evil make sense of the problem?

- At an emotional level, why might this explanation still feel deficient to some people?

- Given the continuing problem of evil and suffering in the world, does denying God exists provide any better options?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

CONFUSION

why are we all so different?

CONSIDER

The Story So Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image, and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality.

Continuing the Story...

The evil that began in the Garden of Eden intensifies and accelerates on a downward spiral, until the world rejects God completely. Babel is the place where new languages, cultures, nations and religions began, and it sets the scene for the many religions of the modern world.

Day 1: The Axle's Broken

Some songs are just silly. Here's an old one. Each crazy verse is meant to be sung louder, and faster, than the one before:

You can't play with my little red wagon
The axle's broken and the wheels are saggin'.
Second verse, same as the first
A little bit louder and a little bit worse
You can't play with my little red wagon
The axle's broken and the wheels are saggin'. ...
Tenth verse, same as the first...

The Genesis story runs a bit like that. From chapter 3 to chapter 11, as one story is piled on top of another, each one becomes a little bit worse. Not good reading... but important reading.

'First verse': Adam and Eve disobey God and bring sin into the world.

'Second verse' (a little bit louder... a little bit worse): the first family on earth is shattered by jealousy, anger, hatred and murder.

'Third verse' (even louder and worse): Lamech's blood-curdling song (Genesis 4:23–24) shows that while society is advancing technologically (Genesis 4:19–22), it's falling apart spiritually and socially! Lamech swears to kill an innocent boy for accidentally wounding him... and he threatens to pay back anyone who crosses him 77 times!

'Fourth verse' (much louder and much worse): society is overflowing with violence and unprecedented evil. So God sends the flood (Genesis 6:5, 11–17).

'Fifth verse' (worse still): after the flood, God told Noah to go and "fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1). But, when the people arrived at Shinar, they refused to budge and decided to make gods of their own (Genesis 11:4). The wheels had well and truly fallen off.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 4:8, 23–24; 6:5–7; 9:1; 11:4**
What do these verses tell you about the human race?

Day 2: God of Nations?

National anthems are interesting things. In Britain they sing, “God save the Queen”. In Canada, “God keep our land glorious and free.” In Botswana, “Blessed be this noble land, gift to us from God’s strong hand.” In Fiji and New Zealand they sing to the “God of nations”. But is he?

There was a time when there were no nations (before Babel) – just one large mass of humanity. Rejecting God’s instruction to spread out across the earth (Genesis 9:1, 7), the human race decided to stay put. So, they built a city and a tower designed to frustrate God’s will. They would stay together, living in one place, having one government, easily managing one economy and maintaining one religion. Smart idea – right? No political divisions, no ethnic distinctions, no economic difficulties, no religious differences and no conflicts! What could be wrong with that?

Well, in a perfect world with perfect people, there would be nothing wrong with that. But the world is not a perfect place. Ever since Adam sinned, it’s been a very broken place, with very broken people. And, when broken, sinful people take total control of the world, things go horribly wrong.

So God caused the human family to scatter and separate into distinct people groups… groups that would develop different languages, values, cultures and ways of thinking. And, as people settled and claimed their respective land areas, each group became a distinct nation.

But God remained God… the same God… and still the only God. As Creator, he still retained ownership of the whole planet (Psalm 24:1).

Explore the Bible

Read **Acts 17:24–29**
Does the God of nations want to be found by every person?

Day 3: Some Words about Words...

In her book *The First Word*, Christine Kenneally reminds us that words are strange things. She's right!

They're little more than bursts of air. They come out of our mouths as a series of puffs and then disappear into thin air. We can't see them or touch them. But it's impossible to imagine life without them. No friendly chats. No songs. No poems. No explanations. No advice. No warnings. No invitations. We live and breathe words... that's part of being human. And words are such powerful things. The smallest words can hurt or they can heal. Words can make people love us more but one careless word can make them love us less.

It's hard to imagine something more important than language. But where did it all start? The Bible begins with God, Adam and Eve talking together. Community is about culture, and the core of culture is common language. And that's the way the human family hung together – they had a common language. But when the human family refused to follow God's instruction to "fill the earth", God intervened and brought confusion into their language. Whenever someone tried to communicate with their neighbour, it created great confusion. People misunderstood each other... so much and so often... that they ended up in continual conflict. Confusion turned to chaos and chaos turned to conflict! There was no option. They would have to separate from each other in order to live apart in peace.

Isn't it interesting? The human family could resist God's will (to spread out and fill the earth) but they couldn't resist his purpose (God made them spread out). Perhaps that's the way it always is.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 11:1–7**
How did different languages come about?

Day 4: Different Races?

Remember the Beatles? Their hit song Eleanor Rigby had this line: "All the lonely people, where do they all come from?" Good question. And what about all the *different* people? Where do they all come from? Asians, Latins, Eskimoes, Caucasians, Arabs, Polynesians – how did it all happen?

We frequently talk about different 'races'. But the Bible actually talks about only one race... the human race (Acts 17:26). Sure, there are different 'people groups' – but, there is only one race. Despite the so-called 'racial' differences, we can fall in love, intermarry and create bicultural families. Why? Because we all belong to the one big human family.

But how did these differences come about? Imagine humanity all together – one very big gene pool! As the human race split up, the gene pool reduced for each group. It's a bit like dealing a deck of cards. Each hand has a completely different mix. And when humanity split up, each group ended up with a slightly different genetic mix. And hey presto – ethnicity begins – all the physical characteristics that make our world such a diverse and interesting place! And different climates and other local factors all made impacts as well.

But these ethnic differences are really quite minor – compared to the unity of the human race. Basically, we're one people. And that's why racism is so wrong! Every person is 'sacred' simply because they're human! The image of God is embedded in our humanity – not in our ethnicity! It's a serious mistake for us to maximise the differences within the human race. There is, after all, only one world, one human family – and one God.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 11:8–9 and Acts 17:26**
How could understanding that we are one human family help overcome racism?

Day 5: Different Religions?

Babel is a very significant story in one more way. It's the place of some fairly big beginnings. It's where languages began, nations began, ethnic people groups began, and it's where different religions began.

Up until the time of Babel, the biblical picture seems fairly simple. There was one world, one human family, one language – and one God. The God who made the world, ruled the world. Sure, people increasingly 'thumbed their noses' at him, but he was still mankind's only supreme being. It really was a case of one world, one people and one God… until Babel.

When the human family stood against God and built a tower reaching to the heavens, they were actually taking authority into their own hands. It was their way of saying God would no longer have authority over them. They would raise themselves to the heavens, be their own authority and set their own rules.

Then, when at Babel, the human race separated off into their various people groups, each of these began to create their own religions. It's interesting that they didn't declare themselves atheists. Maybe that's because they knew that, at the core of each of their beings, they were incurably religious. It certainly seems that way.

Explore the Bible

Read **Romans 1:20–23, 25**
With what did the people in these verses replace God?

EXPLORE

- What excites you the most about different cultures?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Genesis 11:1-9

- What do you think it would be like to have all people united, in one world, under one God?

- What do you think is the most significant thing about this story?

VIEW

Video Episode 4 - Confusion: Why are we all so different?

1. Babel: Where **humanity replaced** God
2. Babel: Where **different languages** began and **humanity** was **dispersed**
3. Babel: Where **different nations** developed
4. Babel: Where **different religions** were devised

DISCUSS

- Do human beings need God, or are we capable of creating a genuinely good world on Earth through our own ideas and efforts, apart from God?

- If we deny the existence of a Creator, how might this affect the way we think and live? For example: how we value or devalue human life, how we define good and evil, and how we view the use of human power? How much do people's foundational beliefs impact what the world is like?

- If God created everything perfect as the Bible says, what went wrong to create so much confusion in our world? What prevents humanity from becoming truly good?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

STRATEGY

why Israel?

CONSIDER

The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image, and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions.

Continuing the Story...

What will God do now that the nations have turned their backs on him? Will God wash his hands and have nothing more to do with them? In this episode, we find that God will reach out for the nations and, to do this, he will specially call one man, Abraham (also known as Abram)...

Day 1: Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Moe

Back in the early 1820s they invented a rhyme to help children decide who would be on their team (and who would be left out!). Lining themselves up, the captain of the team would begin the process of random selection. With each word, he counted off one child...

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe, catch a tiger by the toe.
If he squeals let him go. Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.

... and the child on whom the last word of the rhyme fell was selected. Surprisingly, the rhyme has come back as a song! Justin Bieber hit the charts worldwide in 2010 with Eenie Meenie. And yes... it's all about an indecisive lover!

Eenie, meenie, miney mo, catch a bad chick by the toe.
If she holla (if, if, if she holla) let her go!
She's indecisive, she can't decide.
She keeps on looking from left to right...

Ever wondered why and how God chose the Jews? Did he line up every nation and go "*eeny, meeny, miny, moe*" and end up with Israel? But Israel wasn't even around then to be chosen. It simply didn't exist. It was only after every nation had rejected God at Babel that God intervened and specially created Israel. He reached down into ancient Mesopotamia and called Abraham to leave his idol-worshipping family and his homeland to birth a completely new nation – Israel (Genesis 12:1–3; Acts 7:2).

Does this mean that God would now forget the nations and focus only on his chosen people? No! The very reason God created Israel was to have a nation through whom he would bless "all the peoples on earth" (Genesis 12:3). So, from this point on, Israel would be God's headquarters on earth in order to bless the whole planet!

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 12:1-3**
What happened to Abraham?

Day 2: The Apple of His....

What's the answer? "I spoil my grandson because he is the apple of my..."

(a) Orchard; (b) Heart; (c) Tree; (d) Eye.

It's (d) – "he is the apple of my *eye*". It's a very old saying. Shakespeare used it and so did King Alfred the Great! But the saying is much older still. In fact, it's from the Bible. Not once, but twice, God uses it of his relationship with Israel! It says God "guarded [Israel] as the apple of his eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10) and, then, "whoever touches [Israel] touches the apple of his eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

But what do apples have to do with eyes? Because the pupil of the eye was round and looked like an apple, it came to be called 'the apple' of the eye.

We all know how important our sight is. That's why our Creator protected the eye with seven very strong bones! There's an eyelid to protect the eye, eyelashes to keep out the dust and tear-ducts to flush out any irritants. So when God said Israel is "the apple" of his eye, he meant Israel is very important to him. Touch Israel and it is like poking God in the eye with a stick!

God takes Israel very seriously because Israel was created to be God's 'specialist' in matters of religion. Ever since the time of Babel, the ancient world was bursting with gods. They had fertility, war, moon, sun and agricultural gods – gods for every aspect of life. But not for Israel. God told her: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3–6).

Why? Because God called Israel to be a light in religious darkness.

Explore the Bible

Read **Isaiah 43:10–12**

What was Israel to tell all the other nations?

Day 3: Location, Location, Location!

"Location! Location! Location!" It's the number one rule in real estate. Location makes all the difference between a good and a bad investment. That's true whether we are buying a house or starting up a business. There's no point opening a shop if customers can't find it.

When God told Abraham, "go... to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1–3), that land was Canaan. From then on, Canaan became central in the life of the nation. Why this particular land? Well, it's all about location! Canaan was the best piece of real estate in the ancient world because it was strategically placed. Take a look!

This little stretch of land was like a corridor. When traders wanted to go from the northern regions of Euro-Asia down to Africa (and vice versa), they had to go through Canaan. The rest of the Middle East area was an unwelcoming, barren desert. So Canaan became the main route of the ancient world. God gave Israel this influential piece of land because she was to be his billboard.

The Old Testament story shows how God displayed himself to the world through Israel: every miracle God worked for Israel showed his power; every blessing showed his goodness; every prayer God answered in Israel showed his supreme authority; every judgement showed his justice; every promise kept showed his faithfulness. Everything God did in Israel showed he is generous in love, huge in mercy, uncompromising in holiness and wonderfully gracious. When God gave Israel the promised land, he 'opened up shop' in Canaan, where every nation could find him.

Explore the Bible

Read **Genesis 12:1–3; 13:12, 14–17**
Why could Abraham be certain that God would give him the land of Canaan?

Day 4: Let's Go to the Show!

As ancient travellers passed through Canaan, they couldn't help but get an eyeful of a very different culture… with a very distinctive religion. Their home countries had developed their own gods and religious rituals. But entering Canaan, they found a very different religion with a very different God.

Israel's God appeared in a different form. Back home, these traders worshipped the sun, moon, stars, animals, fellow human beings or even gods that were half animal and half human – represented by idols carved from wood or stone. But Israel's God made his presence obvious in a bright, burning, self-existing light – the same light Moses saw in the burning bush. No one lit this light or fed it fuel. It had a presence and personality all of its own. It could come and go at will. This light was Yahweh, the Creator. The God of heaven was to become the God of Israel!

Israel had only one God. The traders were used to multiple gods and multiple altars. But Israel had only one God… and only one official residence – the temple motto was: "Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Israel's God was holy. God's 'official residences' (a tent-like structure called the tabernacle and, later, the temple) had special rooms, furniture and equipment. There was the Most Holy Place, where God lived, the Holy Place, where the priests offered prayers and worship, and the great bronze altar where animal sacrifices were offered. Without those blood sacrifices, God could not live with the Israelites. The Israelites, like the rest of us, were broken, flawed and sinful. But God made a way to be with them because he loves them (and the nations of the world)!

Explore the Bible

Read **Exodus 40:33–35, 38**
What is significant here?

Day 5: Even Crazy Dreams Come True…

There's an old Beatles' song made famous by John Lennon…

You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one.

Everyone dreams and hopes that someday, somehow, the world will be a better place. But the world gets steadily worse. Our dreams and the hopes become more urgent. Hope is still the pressing issue of our time. Is there hope for the planet – or is it just a crazy dream?

The religion of Israel was one bursting with hope. It was a radical, expectant faith. Israel looked forward to a time when God would drastically intervene and change things – right here on planet earth! A promised Messiah would come – an anointed deliverer from God. He would break the tight grip evil has over the human race and give us a whole new world. There would be no more wrongs, heartaches or tears… a world where goodness and gladness would be present forever. A world so fabulous, it makes John Lennon's dream look shabby.

Remember what God promised? The moment Adam and Eve sinned, God promised the brokenness would not last forever. One day, someone would come from the human race and crush Satan's head and destroy evil completely (Genesis 3:15). The Old Testament says that this deliverer would come from Israel – through Abraham's offspring (Genesis 12:3), through the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10). The world's deliverer would be Jewish!

Israel was a nation standing on tiptoes, eagerly looking for the promised deliverer and telling the world that a far better world was on its way!

Explore the Bible

Read **Isaiah 9:6–7**

How will the Messiah make the world a better place?

EXPLORE

- What's the apple of *your* eye? - The one thing that is really important to you? Why is that important?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Genesis 12:1-9

- What did God promise Abraham (Abram)?

- Why is this important?

VIEW

Video Episode 5 - Strategy: Why Israel?

1. Israel: Made a **special people**
2. Israel: Given a **special place**
3. Israel: Assigned a **special purpose**
    - Purpose #1: One world: **One God**
    - Purpose #2: One way: **Blood sacrifice**
    - Purpose #3: One book: **The Bible**
    - Purpose #4: One hope: **The Messiah**

DISCUSS

- To summarise: Why did God choose one nation? What was his purpose? Who was this to bless? What is the big idea here?

- How does the idea that God was willing to interact with human beings like this, despite their obvious flaws, make you feel?

- What kind of things can we learn about God from the history of Israel?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

MESSIAH

what's so special about Jesus anyway?

CONSIDER

The Story So Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image, and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions. In his love for the peoples of the world, God decided to reach out for them. To do this, he chose Israel as his special people and put them in a special place for the special purpose of representing him to the nations.

Continuing the Story...

God had set up his special nation, Israel. Through that nation, God would reveal himself and send the promised deliverer, who would fix all the problems that sin had created.

Day 1: Believe It or Not...

In the 1920s Robert Ripley began writing a fun daily 'Believe It or Not' column for the New York Globe. After that, 'Ripley's Believe It or Not' went viral. It's now a huge global franchise – radio programmes, television series, websites, books, comic books, and even an international chain of museums and aquariums. Ever since he began, Ripley has been putting everything odd, weird and plain unbelievable right under our noses! – things so bizarre, fascinating, strange and unusual, we always find ourselves questioning the claims. But, as Ripley puts his stories together, the unbelievable becomes undeniable... right in front of our eyes!

At first glance, the story of Jesus can sound quite unbelievable too. A virgin birth with angels in attendance! Miracles galore. Demons by the dozen. Graphic predictions of the end of the world. Promises of a heavenly utopia for those who follow him. A crucifixion followed by a physical resurrection. The promise of a 'Second Coming'. All a bit unusual to say the least! So, is Jesus real? Did he really live? Did he really say and do what the Bible says? Or does he belong to the imaginary world?

Ever noticed how the Bible repeatedly connects Jesus to real history? By constantly connecting Jesus to real people and real places in history, the Gospel writers showed that Jesus was not a legend – he was a real person.

In fact, the Bible has connected Jesus to history so well that, despite various opinions about him, historians have no doubt he existed. Reputable encyclopaedias all have articles about Jesus and treat him as they do any other real person of history. Actually, our whole civilisation is dated in relation to Jesus Christ – check the coins in your pocket.

What does all this mean for us? Just this: whatever we might think of Jesus, we can't call him Mr Imaginary.

Explore the Bible

Read **Luke 3:1–3**
How many historical and geographical references can you find?

Day 2: Everyone Talks About the Weather...

Mark Twain, the witty American author, once said: “Everybody talks about the weather but nobody does anything about it”. We smile – because it’s true! It’s either too hot, too cold, too wet, too dry or too windy. In their song, Weather With You, the band Crowded House put it so well...

Julius Caesar and the Roman Empire couldn’t conquer the blue sky.

Even powerful political rulers can’t conquer the weather! Sometimes the weather goes out of its way just to prove we can’t do anything about it. Massive storms lash huge cities around the world, leaving them in tatters.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus is the one person in all history who could literally do something about everything – including the weather! He made the deaf hear, the dumb speak and cripples walk. The hungry were fed to their fill. Empty nets were suddenly bursting with fish. Empty water jars overflowed with the best wine. Dead people were raised to life. The demon-possessed were set free. The blind were given sight. He calmed life-threatening storms with just one word. For everything that was a problem, he had an answer.

How could he do it? The Bible says that he was the Messiah, the promised deliverer. Of course he would have an answer for everything!

Explore the Bible

Read **Luke 8:22–25**

What does this miracle tell us about Jesus’ ability to change the world?

Day 3: Jesus Who?

It seems the Chinese were the first to use surnames around 2852 BC when Emperor Fushi decreed everyone had to have three names: a surname, a generation name and then (lastly!) a first name. The Romans eventually 'followed suit'. Then, it seems, surnames went out of fashion and disappeared – until around the 11th or 12th century AD.

This time, people were known more by their occupation… the Bakers, Smiths, Knights, Archers, Farmers, etc. Some were known by where they lived… the Hills, Woods, Fields, Lakes and the Stones. Even the most curious of names had a logical explanation – Mr Sidebottom (some prefer to pronounce it 'Sid-e-bot-tom') came from the bottom side of the valley!

The Jews didn't have surnames, either. So, looking for Jesus in the local Nazareth telephone directory would have been a bit of a mission. First, no telephones. Then, no directories. And then, no surnames! Jesus was known simply as 'son of Joseph', 'son of Mary' or just plain 'Jesus of Nazareth'. Some people mistakenly think 'Christ' was Jesus' surname – because the Bible refers to him a lot as "Jesus Christ".

But the Greek word 'Christ' (or 'Messiah' in Hebrew) is actually a title that means 'anointed one'. So really, Jesus is "*the* Christ" – the anointed deliverer predicted all through the Old Testament.

Jesus once put his disciples right on the spot and asked them who he was: "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah [Christ], the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:15–16). Jesus wasn't shocked at his answer, nor did he correct him. In fact, he congratulated him! Peter had never got anything more right in his life!

If he asked you, would you have an answer?

Explore the Bible

Read **Matthew 26:63–68**

What is so significant about this encounter?

Day 4: Could We Have a Fair Religion Act?

Every day, businesses are fighting for our attention so we will buy their products. We all know some of that advertising stuff is just a plain con – supposedly cheap deals spiked with hidden fees… endless 'Hurry… Last Days… going out of business' sales that are still there two years later! Thank goodness for 'truth tests' like the Fair Trading Act that make it illegal for traders to mislead consumers through unfair trading practices. I can hear you thinking… "We could almost do with that in religion!" And you'd be right – A Fair Religion Act – something to protect us from all the 'shonky' religious claims out there.

But didn't Jesus make some outrageous claims of his own? Yes he did. He claimed that he was the Messiah – which the Old Testament taught would be fully human and… fully God (Isaiah 9:6)! So, while Jesus never exactly waved a banner that said "I am God", he claimed to be equal with God:

- **In person** – he called God his Father (John 5:17–18), which is why the Jews accused Jesus of blasphemy and sought to have him killed!
- **In power** – he said whatever God could do, he could do too (John 5:19–21) – including raising the dead!
- **In authority** – he claimed he would be the judge of all human beings (John 5:22, 27)!
- **In honour** – he said that he should be honoured in exactly the same way God the Father is honoured (John 5:22–23)!

If these outrageous claims were not true, God would have distanced himself from Jesus… but he didn't! Instead, he called Jesus his beloved Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5) and then confirmed his claims through countless miracles (John 3:2; 20:30–31; 21:25). These really were outrageous claims - but shonky? What do you think?

Explore the Bible

What is **John 5:17–21** all about?

Day 5: Nobody's Perfect...

Someone once said: "Nobody's perfect. We're all just one step up from the beasts and one step down from the angels." The singer Miley Cyrus put it this way:

Everybody makes mistakes...
everybody has those days...
everybody knows what, what I'm talkin' 'bout...
everybody gets that way
Nobody's perfect! I gotta work it!
Again and again 'til I get it right!
Nobody's perfect! Ya live and ya learn it!
And if I mess it up sometimes...
Nobody's perfect!

The Bible would almost agree. You see, there's one exception – Jesus.

People tend to look at Jesus' life in one of two ways. Some say, "It's too good to be true" and they write Jesus off. But others say, "It's so good, it has to be true!" Who could (or even would) invent a life that good when it makes the rest of us look so bad?

Someone once said that Jesus must have been the only human being in the world who claimed to be perfect and was taken seriously by his friends *and* his enemies. His friends found no fault in him (1 Peter 2:22). His enemies had no case against him (Matthew 27:3–4; Luke 23:4, 14). Jesus asked the one question a flawed person would never ask... "Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?" (John 8:46).

It's quite amazing. He taught about wrong but never did it. He taught about repentance but never needed it. He taught about forgiveness but never experienced it. He never had to apologise. When he reached the end of the day, he had no regrets.

Explore the Bible

Read **Luke 23:39–43**
What did the second criminal think?

EXPLORE

- What do your family, friends and work colleagues think about Jesus?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Mark 2:1-12

- The teachers of the Law knew that only God could forgive sins (verse 7). What was Jesus claiming by forgiving sins?

VIEW

Video Episode 6 - Messiah: What's so special about Jesus anyway?

1. Jesus: is a **real person**
2. Jesus: made **incredible claims**
3. Jesus: lived a **sinless life**
4. Jesus: did **amazing miracles**
5. Jesus: was a **great teacher**

DISCUSS

- What amazes you most about Jesus?

- If Jesus is who he claimed to be, what does this tell us about what God is like?

- Story: If God can be known as Christianity claims, does anyone have a personal story of how that came to be real for you?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

SALVATION

how can one man save the world?

CONSIDER

The Story So Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image, and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions. In his love for the peoples of the world, God decided to reach out for them. To do this, he chose Israel as his special people and put them in a special place for the special purpose of representing him to the nations. Jesus came to the nation of Israel and lived an incredible, perfect life; he made incredible claims and backed them up with incredible miracles.

Continuing the Story...

Jesus is famous for his teachings, perfect life, miracles and claims. Yet his mission did not stop at living a good life...

Day 1: The Last Goodbye...

"On a long enough time line," wrote Chuck Palahniuk in the *Fight Club*, "the survival rate for everyone drops to zero." Memorable words! We live with the fact we're mortal. Best-selling author Brandon Mull 'hit the nail on the head': "You spend the first portion of your life learning, growing stronger, more capable. And then, through no fault of your own, your body begins to fail. You regress. Strong limbs become feeble, keen senses grow dull, hardy constitutions deteriorate. Beauty withers. Organs quit. You remember yourself in your prime, and wonder where that person went. As your wisdom and experience are peaking, your traitorous body becomes a prison."

All of us know that the 'seeds of death' are growing deep inside each of us, and have been from the day we took our first breath. An old song puts it this way: "They say the moment that you're born is when you start to die, and the first time that we said hello began our last goodbye." Truer words have never been spoken – almost!

Jesus claims to be the one exception: no 'seeds of death' growing inside him. Paul, an early Christian author, described Jesus' death by writing that Jesus became "obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8). Strange words. I couldn't be disobedient to death if I tried. I have a sneaking suspicion you couldn't either. Imagine – had Jesus not deliberately laid down his life as a sacrifice for sin, he wouldn't have died. And at his next birthday, someone would be trying to fit more than 2000 candles on his cake!

Explore the Bible

Read **John 19:30**

What did Jesus give up? What does this mean?

Day 2: Please, Don't Feel Sorry for Jesus...

Life can just randomly 'dish up' some mean and miserable experiences and we become the innocent victims. You might be one of them. The elderly are mugged in their own homes; innocent little children are abused; good people contract serious and incurable diseases they don't deserve. It happens all the time. Only the most fortunate get through unscathed. As genuine victims, we deserve much love and support.

Sometimes, though, people choose to play 'the victim card'. Why? Maybe it's easier than taking responsibility for ourselves and growing through the hard times. Let's face it, many of us get our 'tea, cakes and cuddles' – by crying 'poor me'.

Some people wrongly think Jesus was a 'victim'. But the Bible will have none of it. Jesus didn't cry 'poor me'. In fact, he said of himself: "I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord" (John 10:17–18). Hardly the words of someone 'playing victim'. Innocent? Yes! Victim? No! Jesus had come to die deliberately as a sacrifice for sin – fulfilling exactly what the detailed Old Testament prophecies had foretold about his death. Here's just a few. Jesus would be:

- Sold for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12–13)
- Tried and condemned (Isaiah 53:8)
- Silent before his accusers (Isaiah 53:7)
- Tortured and spat upon (Isaiah 50:6)
- Mocked and insulted (Psalm 22:7–8)
- Put to death (Daniel 9:26)
- Pierced in his hands and feet (Psalm 22:16; Zechariah 12:10)
- Crucified with sinners (Isaiah 53:12).

None of that speaks accident or victim. Sounds more like 'intention'.

Explore the Bible

Read **Isaiah 53:3–9**
What prophecies of God's Messiah can you find in this passage?

Day 3: What Will I Do with My Debt?

Debt. None of us likes it. Student loans. Mortgages. Credit card debt. There isn't one of us who hasn't dreamed of being free from debt.

I remember my first job. I went to work as a 'junior' for a large bank earning a huge 11 dollars a week! Eventually I found another job – but I would need my own transport. After a lot of discussion, my mother agreed to lend me $800 to buy my first car. But the repayments were definitely a struggle. My grandma always said, "No one ever drowned in sweat!" – but I thought I might be the first. There were 'board' payments, running expenses for the car and personal items. All out of 11 dollars! After a few months, my mother took pity on me. She lovingly cancelled my debt. No more payments. No more struggling. The cloud lifted.

But what if there's an even worse kind of debt than a financial one?

How fascinating that, when Jesus died, he cried out: "Tetelestai!" (translated "It is finished!") – a Greek word commonly used in business and accounting that meant 'paid in full'. Back then when a bill had been fully paid up, "tetelestai" would be scribbled across the invoice and the invoice became a receipt. Gasping his last breath on the cross, Jesus whispered the best of all words any of us could ever want to hear: "Tetelestai!" The debt had been cancelled. The payment for sin had been made in full. On our behalf, Jesus had experienced the full fury of God's judgement on sin. There's nothing left to pay. Nothing at all! It's finished. The penalty has been paid.

Can you feel the cloud lifting?

Explore the Bible

Read **John 19:30**
Have a go at writing this verse out in your own words.

Day 4: Love Is a Verb

Back in the 'old days' down on the farm, one or two times a year we'd amuse ourselves by greasing a pig and then spending hours trying to catch it. There were squeals of excitement all round – mud too! We hardly ever got our hands on the pig – it was just too slippery. The word 'love' is like that: we use it so many ways... "I love ice cream!" "I love the beach." "I love my job." "I love my friends."

Teenage lovers just discovering each other say, "I love you!" But that's different from what a couple who've been married for 50 years mean when each of them tell of their lifelong partner, "I love you". It was Richard Wurmbrand (a Romanian Christian minister of the mid-20th century) who reminded us that the boy who wants a girl just for the night, and a man who wants to marry a young woman and be with her forever, both say "I love you".

When the Bible talks love, it's talking about a lot more than 'feelings'. It's talking commitment and action – love that takes the initiative to do the very best for the one loved, whatever the cost! Love in the Bible is a verb, a 'doing word', which is why Jesus said: "Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27).

And Jesus knew how to 'do' love. Paul put it this way: "... the Son of God... loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Jesus loved us and proved it by paying the penalty for sin. There's nothing slippery about that.

Explore the Bible

Read **John 15:13**
What is the greatest expression of love? Does Jesus really love us that much?

Day 5: Ex-cruci-ating...

None of us likes pain. It doesn't matter what it is – stubbing our toes, blister-burning our fingers, bumping our not-so-funny 'funny-bones'. And don't forget the toothache! Worse still, its treatment! – all the drilling and filling... and the billing!

One of the most frustrating things about pain is that only the one suffering the pain really knows how bad it feels. There's no blood test to show how much we're suffering. And it's hard to say just how much pain we feel. So the doctors have come up with a 'pain scale' – they ask us to choose on a zero-to-ten scale... ten being 'excruciating'.

Now *there's* an interesting word – 'excruciating'. It comes from the 16th-century Latin word 'excruciare', which comes from 'cruciare' (to crucify) which comes from the root word 'crux' (cross). Excruciating pain is crucifixion-type pain.

The physical pain Jesus suffered must have been truly excruciating. When a person was nailed to a cross with hefty iron spikes driven through hands and feet, death was a slow, agonising process. Sometimes they hurried up the process by spearing the heart and sometimes by breaking the legs, causing severe shock.

As bad as that was, the emotional pain was even worse. In the crucifixion, experiencing intense emotional and spiritual agony, Jesus screamed out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Why? Because he was suffering the full fury of God's judgement on our sin – and that judgement was separation from God. He had never known a moment when he wasn't the Father's delight. Then, he was separated. For him – excruciating pain. For us – everlasting gain!

Explore the Bible

Read **Matthew 27:46**
How does this verse impact you?

EXPLORE

- Why do you think wearing a cross can be seen as trendy, even though it' a symbol of death?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Mark 10:45 and **15:24-37**

- What did Jesus claim was his mission?

- What would you have thought about Jesus if you were near the cross when he died?

VIEW

Video Episode 7 - Salvation: How can one man save the world?

1. Jesus' death:
   - a **rescue mission**
   - a **separation** from his **father**
   - a **brutal excecution**
   - completely **intentional**

2. A holy God is:
   -absolutely **righteous**
   -must **punish sin**

3. Jesus' death:
   - punishment for **our sins**
   -perfect **payment** of the **penalty**
   -provides **pardon forever**
   -requires a **faith response**

DISCUSS

- In your own words, what does the Bible say was the purpose of Jesus' death?

- In reviewing the series so far: Is the logical connection between a good Creator and the coming of Jesus beginning to make sense? How so?

- If Jesus is at the very centre of God's plan for a rescue mission, is anyone reaching a point where you'd say you are willing to be rescued?

- Story: Did anyone reach that point earlier in life, and what difference did that make for you?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

RESURRECTION

is conquering death even possible?

CONSIDER

The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image, and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions. In his love for the peoples of the world, God decided to reach out for them. To do this, he chose Israel as his special people and put them in a special place for the special purpose of representing him to the nations. Jesus came to the nation of Israel and lived an incredible, perfect life; he made incredible claims and backed them up with incredible miracles. Jesus' mission was to pay the perfect penalty for sin because he loves humanity with a perfect, passionate love.

Continuing the Story...

Jesus was crucified and suffered a horrible death. But this was not the end. To the disciples' amazement and disbelief, Jesus came back to life!

Day 1: It's the Linchpin

A linchpin is a very important metal clip that is inserted on the end of an axle to stop the wheel from falling off. The resurrection is the 'linchpin' of the Christian faith. Christianity stands or falls on the resurrection of Jesus. The issue is very simple: no resurrection – no Christianity! Without the resurrection of Jesus, the wheels fall off the Christian faith. Even the Bible admits this is the case. It puts it like this: If Christ *has not* been raised, then:

1. The Christian message is false and pointless
2. Having 'faith' is worse than useless
3. There is no Christian solution for sin
4. There is no Christian hope when a person faces death
5. The members of the entire Christian community are 'Losers' (with a capital 'L'!) – victims of a gigantic hoax who should be pitied.

Really! Go ahead and check it out (see 1 Corinthians 15:14–19 below).

But if Christ *is* raised, the exact opposite is true:
1. The Christian message is true
2. Jesus' claims to be Messiah-Son-of-God are proven right – and he is to be believed
3. Christ's death dealt with sin successfully
4. We have a living hope when faced with death
5. We have a living saviour and can expect him to return and straighten out our chaotic world, just as he promised.

No wonder the resurrection of Jesus is so hotly debated!

Explore the Bible

Read **1 Corinthians 15:14–19**
What happens to Christianity if the resurrection of Jesus is not true? What are the implications if the resurrection *is* historical fact?

Day 2: A Cross-Examination...

Of course, some people don't believe in Jesus' resurrection and have suggested the 'swoon' theory – that Jesus never actually died, and that the resurrection never happened. Here's the theory: after his whipping and ugly crucifixion, Jesus was taken down from the cross in an unconscious state. Then, after three days in a cold tomb (no food, medicine or treatment), he recovered, rolled away the one-ton-plus stone with his bare nail-pierced hands, and then dragged himself miles on nail-pierced feet to convince 11 disbelieving disciples he had risen from the dead. Not surprisingly, there are some big 'buts' to this theory!

Firstly, the Roman soldiers who crucified Jesus were experts in putting people to death and then disposing of the bodies. While they broke the legs of the two criminals crucified with Jesus (to speed up their deaths), they never broke Jesus' legs. They knew he was already dead. But, just to make doubly sure he'd died (their lives depended on it), they stabbed a spear into his side, piercing his heart. Out came "blood and water" (John 19:34) – a way of saying the blood had separated from its serum as Jesus experienced hypovolemic shock. Jesus was so dead, they released him for burial.

Secondly, his friends – Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus – took his body from the cross and prepared it for burial. As they turned the body of Jesus over and over, they wrapped his corpse in strips of linen, generously layering between the strips a heavy mix of gooey embalming spices (about 34 kg in full), all designed to help preserve the body. If they had noticed one faint breath or tiny twitch, wouldn't they have stopped the embalming process immediately and done all they could to nurse their friend to health and strength?

Explore the Bible

Read **John 19:31–42**

Were these people certain that Jesus was dead?

Day 3: Who Stole the Cookie?

The 'Cookie Jar' song has been around for years. All over the world, kids still have fun with the clever ice-breaker, learning one another's names as they sit in a circle reciting the chant:

(Oscar) "Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar? Isaac stole the cookie from the cookie jar."

(Isaac) "Who me?"

(Oscar) "Yes, you."

(Isaac) "Couldn't be."

(Oscar) "Then who?"

(Isaac points to Chantelle) "Chantelle stole the cookie..."

Funnily enough, whenever I read Matthew 28:11–15, I think of the Cookie Jar song... slightly modified!

Who stole the body from the empty grave?
The disciples stole the body from the empty grave!

Both Christians and their opponents believe the tomb was empty. No one disagrees. But the point is: How did it become empty? Perhaps someone stole the body! But who?

The Roman soldiers or the Pharisees? Couldn't be! If they'd stashed the body of Jesus somewhere, the moment some Christ-follower stood on his 'soapbox' to preach about the resurrection of Jesus, they could have just dumped the corpse at the preacher's feet for all to see. Christianity would've come to a standstill forever. But they didn't. They couldn't. They didn't have it. Then who did?

The desperate disciples? Did they steal the body to save face and prop up their Jesus-Messiah-Son-of-God story? No way! The Pharisees had the grave secured. The huge, one-ton-plus stone was carefully sealed. A guard was posted. No one could tamper with the grave.
So what if no one stole the cookie from the cookie jar?

Explore the Bible

Read **Matthew 27:62-66**
Is the 'stolen body' theory reasonable?

Day 4: Could the Disciples have been Hallucinating?

By itself, the empty grave doesn't prove Jesus' resurrection. It proves only that Jesus' body wasn't there. It's the actual, 'alive and well' appearances of Jesus in the 40 days following his presumed resurrection that show he rose from the dead. This list of appearances to more than 500 people is impressive:

- Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–14)
- The women returning from the tomb (Matthew 28:8–10)
- Simon Peter (Cephas) (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5)
- The Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–33)
- The apostles, without Thomas (John 20:19–24)
- The apostles, with doubting Thomas (John 20:26–29)
- The seven by Lake Tiberius (John 21:1–23)
- More than 500 believers in Galilee (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- Then James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- Then the eleven (Matthew 28:16–20; Mark 16:14–20; Luke 24:33–52; Acts 1:3–12)
- Paul (Saul) (Acts 9:3–6; 1 Corinthians 15:8).

But what if the disciples and others were simply hallucinating – what if they were just a bunch of uneducated people all imagining the same thing? If the disciples were excitable, unbalanced people then we might wonder about what they said they saw. But these were tough, hard-headed types, not mentally unstable people. Even Jesus said they were "slow to believe". The truth is, none of them expected to see Jesus again. In fairness, we might accept that perhaps one of them could have had a hallucination – but all of them? Over 500 of them? People from all sorts of backgrounds? With many different personalities? In all kinds of different locations? All having exactly the same hallucination?

Explore the Bible

Read **Luke 24:36–43**

What convinced the disciples that Jesus had been physically resurrected?

Day 5: Who's Fooling Who?

It was Abraham Lincoln who said: "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." That's especially true when it comes to the people closest to us.

It's interesting that in a passage which mentions over 500 witnesses to the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3–8), only three men are mentioned by name. Peter (Cephas) is mentioned because he will figure prominently in the first part of the early Church. Paul is mentioned because he will be the obvious 'mover and shaker' in the last part of the early Church.

The third man is James (1 Corinthians 15:7). Now that's interesting. James was to become an important leader in the Church at Jerusalem but, more than that, James was family! James was "the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19) – actually his half-brother because Joseph was not Jesus' biological father.

As a brother, James was not easily influenced. Most family aren't – they know us too well. There's no way we can hide the truth from them. And early on James was troubled by Jesus. At one stage, all the family had some real concerns about Jesus. They wondered if he might have lost his mind (Mark 3:20–21).

Now here's the question: Would the James that lived so close to Jesus and had serious concerns about him have become one of the strongest leaders of the Jesus movement, so firmly committed that he would surrender his life in martyrdom, if he had any doubt at all about his brother having risen from the dead?

Explore the Bible

Read **John 7:1–5**

What did James (Jesus' brother) initially think of Jesus?

EXPLORE

- What do you think about the resurrection of Jesus? What do you think is the best evidence for it?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

Mark 16:2-8

- Was anyone expecting the resurrection?

- Imagine you were one of the disciples. What would you have been thinking?

VIEW

Video Episode 8 - Resurrection: Is conquering death even possible?

Jesus' Resurrection:
- Historical **fact**
- Confirms **his identity**
- Is a **receipt**: **paid** in **full**
- Is a huge **promise** to **believers**
- Displays **astonishing power**
- Gives us a **living saviour** and **hope**

DISCUSS

- What stood out to you the most in this episode?

- Why is the resurrection so important – not just for Christianity but for each one of us individually?

- If God is as loving and purposeful in his dealings with humanity as the story of the Bible indicates, what are some possible implications of that for us?

- Story: Does anyone have a story of how understanding the significance of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection made a difference for them?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Reminder: Please read the daily devotionals again this coming week

JUMP

what's my next step?

CONSIDER

The Story so Far...

It all began when the eternal, personal God made everything there is as a perfect paradise. God intentionally made us as personal beings in his image, and loves us passionately. But Adam rebelled against God, paradise was lost and evil became a horrific reality. Rebellion continued at Babel, where God was rejected; the people were spread all over the world and began their own religions. In his love for the peoples of the world, God decided to reach out for them. To do this, he chose Israel as his special people and put them in a special place for the special purpose of representing him to the nations. Jesus came to the nation of Israel and lived an incredible, perfect life; he made incredible claims and backed them up with incredible miracles. Jesus' mission was to pay the perfect penalty for sin because he loves humanity with a perfect, passionate love. Jesus rose from the tomb, defeating death, because his death had successfully dealt with sin for ever.

Continuing the Story...

Although we have come to the end of the story, in a way our story does not end here. In this module, we explore how the story of Jesus affects us today.

Day 1: Delia's Story (Faith is the Way to Eternal Life)

I was born and raised in the People's Republic of China, just after the Communist revolution of 1949. I was one of five children. Times were tough and we were very poor. My parents weren't Communist or Christian since they didn't have time to think about politics or religion. They were simple people who had to work very hard to get enough food for us to even survive.

We lived near a church but I never visited one. We didn't ever think or talk about God. Anyway, the churches were all destroyed after the Cultural Revolution of 1966.

I graduated from university with degrees in Economics and English. Then I moved to teach at a university. About this time, the Cultural Revolution brought some foreign teachers to China to help with university education. I met a kind American teacher called Wendy (my colleague at university), who invited some of us to her home to talk, enjoy good food and learn English by reading the Bible. I wasn't interested in Christianity and I didn't want to join the Christian faith. All I wanted was to make friends and learn better English. Wendy gave each of us an English/ Mandarin Bible for free! I was so impressed and thankful. Because I was poor, I had to value this wonderful, hardback book. I also wanted to honour Wendy's kindness by seriously reading it to improve my English. Our small group of English learners suggested meeting weekly. The foreigners were so friendly, kind and generous to us. I enjoyed their friendship but I didn't want their religion. It was too foreign and I cared only to learn English and to try and provide some help to my family who were so poor.

The more I got to know these foreigners, the more I liked them. They were good people who really cared about us. Why were they so happy? Why was their country so successful? Why did they have such good lives? Why did they leave it all, to come to help us in China? Why were they so generous? And what made them so strong that they were not afraid of our government?

The Cultural Revolution destroyed all the Christian churches and told us they were a bad thing but I was seeing a very good thing. I was seeing really good people who were loving and kind to us.

I liked them but, more than that, I wanted to be like them. Why were they so happy and kind? I kept reading the Bible and found the answer.

Their faith in Jesus made them this way. He had changed their lives. Very slowly, I came to understand that not only was Jesus good, he was perfect! And then I found the reason he was perfect was that he was God. I came to believe that Jesus was God. I kept reading more and found that Jesus had come to die for me to pay the penalty for my sin. That was hard. I knew I was not an excellent person but it took me some time to admit I was a very imperfect person deep inside. I trusted him as my saviour. Now my life is changed. I am so glad God found me and brought me to faith in his Son, Jesus.

Explore the Bible

Read **John 6:40**

What happened to Delia when she had faith in Jesus?

Day 2: John's Story (Faith is about Trust)

In my late teens, four men came across my pathway: my school counsellor, two guys from the US who were living in New Zealand and a pastor who was trying to spend time with my Jewish girlfriend's parents. All of them were Christians and wanted me to be one too but it wasn't sitting too well with me. There were some roadblocks. What about evolution? How could God send 'good people' to hell?

These guys impressed me. I needed to think things through for myself. I started reading some of the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah, about where he was to be born, how he was to be born, how he would die (blow-by-blow graphic accounts) and how he would be raised from the dead. I had no doubt those prophecies had come true in the life of Jesus. There were also a whole lot more prophecies that were still to be fulfilled. I had the sense as I read these prophecies from the Bible that there was something really big going on in the world, something very big, and I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted my Jewish girlfriend to be part of it too. I went to the synagogue and bought her an English translation of the Hebrew Bible so I could show her what I had found.

The more I learned, the more I wanted to know. Would this God accept me? I had the idea that life was pretty much one big exam. If I tried to do enough good things, when I died and faced God, things would hopefully be okay and I'd find myself on the right side of the ledger. I started thinking that if God is holy (I mean infinitely holy), I'd need a 100% pass in the exam for every year, for the whole of my life. I couldn't achieve that for one day, let alone one year!

I learned from the Bible that the consequence of not being good enough was that I was disconnected from God now and, if I died like that, I would be separated from him forever. Then it clicked. When I was in my first year of medical school, I discovered that while I could never pass the holiness exam myself, someone had. That someone was Jesus. He lived a perfect life. He died to pay the penalty of my failure. And, because he paid the penalty for my sin, God was willing to scratch out my poor, pitiful and woefully inadequate exam mark, and instead give me his 100% pass. It wasn't about me trying to please God by myself. I couldn't. It was about me acknowledging my failure and accepting the free gift of eternal life found in Jesus Christ. By myself, one night, I prayed and made the decision to trust Christ. I can't describe the sense of relief, excitement and peace I experienced and still have! Roll on forever!

Explore the Bible

Read **Romans 4:5**

What did John have to stop doing? What did he have to trust?

Day 3: Kathryn's Story (Faith Focuses on Jesus)

I grew up in a church-attending family (not a perfect one but a church-going one). So I learned about God. When I was 13, I was 'confirmed' and became a 'youth-group girl'. Not for long, though. My parents separated when I was 15 and I slowly drifted into a 'more colourful' life. I wish I could say it was a more successful life, or a more fulfilling one. It was a wild adventure for a while but the truth is it all went really wrong. It's messy, too sad for words. Bad things happened to me. I did things I never ever thought I would do just because I was desperate. I was sad and completely broken. Inside I was falling apart. A counsellor told me I was right on the edge of losing my own soul.

I shared my desperation with a friend. She told me of a local church where I might find help. I knew there was a God and I knew I needed his help. But would I find him? Did he really care? Would it make a difference?

Let's be honest, some churches disappoint us. But this one was an exception. The people there knew God personally and they were filled with his love. I know this, because they channelled God's love to me. It blew my mind. They prayed for me and my son. They cared for us in real, practical ways by giving us food and a place to stay. They were genuinely there for us and asked nothing in return. God had heard my cry. He was showing himself to be real and that he loved and cared for me and had a better life waiting for me.

But I needed more than ‘religion’ (I’d grown up with that). I needed to know God for myself, like they knew him. I needed God to be more than an idea. I really needed to connect with him. They invited me to a Bible study where I found more mind-blowing discoveries. I had no idea of the real story of the Bible but I was hungry to learn. It was then that I discovered Jesus, the Lamb of God. He was the one who laid down his life and paid the penalty for my sin so I could be connected to the living God.

Have all my problems disappeared? No, but my life has changed and I have changed. I am in touch with the living God. I’m in his hands. Now I pass my problems on to him because he cares for me. I’m free and life is so different now. I feel like I’ve been saved.

Explore the Bible

Read **1 Corinthians 15:2–4**

What did Kathryn need to believe about Jesus?

Day 4: Faiva's Story (Faith has a Moment)

I was raised in a village in the islands of the South Pacific. My folks were good, God-fearing people. Life was simple, strict and religious. Church was compulsory. No excuses! Baptised as a baby, I grew up learning the teachings and observing the rituals of the Church. That's the way our family worked.

Going to college was an eye-opener. When some friends took me to their Scripture Union Bible studies, it was so different to what I was used to. These were warm, personal, lively discussions. Everything focused on the Bible and everyone took part. People were reading the Bible for themselves, thinking about what it was saying and sharing their thoughts. I was used to more formal instruction where we were told our beliefs. I kept my Scripture Union involvement secret from my family because I thought they might have seen it as a betrayal.

After college, I attended a one-year pre-university class. A young teacher was helping me with extra tuition. He became a friend, helped me with my studies, introduced me to volleyball and slowly began sharing his faith with me. I was interested but I was also interested in hanging out with the local guys doing the usual guy things like drinking and smoking dope. My teacher friend knew about this other side of my life but he remained a friend. We'd still hang out together, going to the beach and attending youth meetings and Christian camps. Then he introduced to me to his family who really welcomed me. They were so warm and hospitable. They talked about the Bible together so naturally and prayed together. It was so different to the colder, more-formal religion I had known.

Then one night at a youth meeting, the speaker shared with us the words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John 5:24. Suddenly it all became very clear to me. Eternal life doesn't come through religious rituals and good works but it's all about believing. All this time, I had been thinking and hoping my religious works would earn me eternal life. But Jesus said eternal life comes through believing only. That night, I committed myself to Christ as my saviour. He had died for my sins and paid the penalty for them in full. God had shown his acceptance of Christ's death for my sin by raising him from the dead. The fear of condemnation was gone!

Explore the Bible

Read **John 5:24**

How did this verse make it clear that the moment Faiva believed he would have eternal life?

Day 5: Gary's Story (Faith Makes All the Difference)

I grew up in a Christian home, so I've always had some 'inside information' about Christianity. I remember when I was about eight years old, my dad and I were watching the movie *Jesus of Nazareth*. I can still hear my dad telling me, "If that guy didn't die on the cross for you, you would never have eternal life".

But the Christian thing wasn't for me. I was anything but a good little Christian kid. I refused to believe all the Christian stuff. I chose to live my teenage years my own way. It was a very wild ride. I honestly thought religion was a load of rubbish and I lived my life saying it. The only time I mentioned God was when I cursed him and that was often! I was a sinner and proud of it.

It's hard to believe this happened but I came to a real, personal faith in Christ when I was nearly 20. I never expected to have anything to do with God!

Here's how it happened. A Christian man gave me a job, and then he told me about his journey as a Christian. He talked to me about Christ and told me how God had given Christ, his Son, to pay for all our sin. He explained that if I personally trusted in Christ, I would not have to suffer God's judgement myself forever. What he said just rang true deep inside me. I trusted Christ as my personal saviour.

The best thing about being a Christian is knowing that I have been made right with God. If God is holy, he must deal with sin, including mine. Because of Christ's death, I have been saved from eternal hell. I am free from condemnation.

And since trusting Christ, I have become part of this huge Christian family. I have some amazing genuine and deep friendships. We are family because we have God as our father. I belong to these people and they belong to me.

I wish I could describe for you the deep peace in my soul. I belong to my Creator and that belonging will last for ever. Life for me is about deep and lasting peace, real assurance and a living hope.

Explore the Bible

Read **John 3:36**

How important was it for Gary to believe in Jesus?

EXPLORE

- Has our eploration of the story of the Bible changed the way you think about Jesus? About Christianity? If so, how?

- What were some of the highlights from the readings?

READ

John 3:16-18

- According to this reading, how important is it to believe in who Jesus is and what he did on the cross?

VIEW

Video Episode 9 - Jump: What's my next step?

Faith in Jesus:
- Is **about trust**
- Focuses on **Jesus alone**
- Is the **way** to **eternal life**
- Has a **moment**
- Makes all **the difference**

What's your next step? Are you ready to make the jump?

DISCUSS

- What were some of the highlights from this final episode for you? How about highlights from the entire series?

- Now that we have completed our journey through the story of the Bible, what conclusions have you come to about who Jesus is?

- Do you think you're ready to make the jump?

- What are your next steps on this journey?

CLOSE

Close with a simple, honest prayer

Extend an invitation to all guests to participate in your regular church gatherings, or in other activities that might be of an interest to them.