



LONG  
STORY  
SHORT

leaders guide



LONG  
STORY  
SHORT

Long Story Short Leader's Guide  
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## Table of Contents

5	What Long Story Short Is
6	Purpose
	Distinctives
7	Values
9	Options
11	What Long Story Short Can Offer
12	Enquirers
	Christians
	Group Leaders
13	Church Leadership
15	How to Prepare to be a Long Story Short Leader
16	Preparing in Prayer
	Preparing to Invite
17	Preparing a Venue
	Preparing to Use the Video
18	Preparing to Use the Q & A
	Preparing to Use the Bible
19	Preparing to Use this <i>Leader's Guide</i>
23	How Long Story Short Works
27	The Long Story Short Programme
28	Welcome
29	Explore
30	View
	Discuss
31	Conclude
33	When the Long Story Short Course Finishes
37	Some Small-Group Skills

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- 43 Optional Day Away
  - 47 The 11 Modules at a Glance
  - 53 Welcome to Long Story Short
  
  - 57 Module 1 – Mystery
  - 63 Module 2 – Best-seller
  - 77 Module 3 – The Beginning
  - 97 Module 4 – Who Am I?
  - 121 Module 5 – Something’s Wrong
  - 149 Module 6 – Confusion
  - 175 Module 7 – Billboard
  - 201 Module 8 – Life
  - 243 Module 9 – Death
  - 265 Module 10 – Empty is Good
  - 289 Module 11 – Jump
  
  - 314 Feedback Form
  - 315 Appendix – Additional Resources
-

## Introduction

In 1964 my parents built and developed a Christian camping complex. A key feature of that facility was a large mural which presented the story of the Bible. So, typically, the Christian message was understood in the context of the long story of the Bible.

In 1999 I had a shift in focus and had the privilege of leading a church plant and soon discovered that adults weren't too different from children, in that understanding the Christian message made a lot more sense when one followed the Bible's story. The problem was, we couldn't find a resource which told the story in a manageable time frame. Our conclusion? We needed to start from scratch and create something. Well that was the beginning of a long and exciting journey. Six years later, we were still researching and writing a theology manual for the big story. Understanding the stories wasn't the problem; the issue was how do they fit together to tell the whole story?

As progress was being made on the theology, we simultaneously wrote an evangelism course and started trialling it in a number of churches. It wasn't the prettiest presentation but people came to know Christ. You could see the lights come on for them as the story progressed. The leaders didn't make an argument for God's existence or for creation – they just invited their friends to explore the story. Consequently, the participants were more relaxed and open to seeing what God had to say. It was during those early trials that we discovered a number of unexpected benefits. Firstly, as we followed the long story of the Bible, pre-evangelism took place naturally as people learned the back story to the coming of Christ. Secondly, we found that when our friends became Christians their faith had deep roots, which meant follow-up was a bit easier because they already had a basic knowledge of the Bible. Another pleasant surprise was that the leaders actually grew in their knowledge and understanding of the Bible's story – their convictions grew deeper and, consequently, so did their enthusiasm for and commitment to evangelism.

Our hope and prayer is that Long Story Short will resource, equip and bless you as much as it has blessed those who have used it in the past.



Torrey Hilton  
Director of Long Story Short

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chapter

1

**what long story  
short is**

## Purpose

The purpose of Long Story Short is to provide a resource that equips the Church to understand and explain God's good news by telling his story, as recorded in the Bible.

## Distinctives

### Exploring the Bible Chronologically

Often people do not have access to the message of the Bible and, therefore, may not understand Christianity. To know about Christ, people need access to the story of the Bible. Long Story Short is about carefully telling 'the salvation story' as it is unfolded in the Bible. To do this, Long Story Short starts at the beginning – in Genesis – and moves through the Bible, all the time moving towards Christ and laying a solid foundation for believing in him. After all, Jesus Christ does not walk onto the pages of the New Testament unannounced – he has a long and significant introduction. To miss that, 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 and miss the message! Long Story Short is about unfolding the meaning of the story of the Bible so that people can discover for themselves the theological significance of the Bible in a simple, straightforward way.

As we journey through the Bible's story, some big questions are addressed quite 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 might 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 primarily designed to be used in small groups (the small group is also a basic part of the Church Seminar format). The Long Story Short 'small-group community' 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 excitement, in the same way that travelling with others can add excitement and momentum in contrast 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, unless the Holy Spirit is at work, no one would 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 to personally 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’.

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## Options

Long Story Short is an evangelistic curriculum that takes a ‘sit back, relax and enjoy’ approach. It is designed for use with people who are interested in learning what Christianity and the message of the Bible are all about. It can be used in any one of three different ways:

1. **One-on-one.** If you have a friend who is interested, you can start straight away without the need to wait for a small group to begin and easily schedule your timetables to suit. This option allows you to tailor-make each session personally, set your own pace and meet almost anywhere you have access to a TV or computer screen. This option may be less intimidating for your friend because they are meeting with you. However, it is important that your friend is introduced to Christian community (read about the value of community on pages 7 and 8).
  2. **Small group.** The small-group format is designed for up to ten people (with more than ten people, the dynamics of a group changes – it becomes more difficult to maintain good group discussion). If you have an approximately one-to-one mixture of enquirers and Christians, then a small group offers great advantages, including group discussion and the opportunity to experience genuine friendship with Christian people (remember the value of community on pages 7 and 8).
  3. **Seminar.** This is ideal if you want to develop a church-wide campaign that will build energy, enthusiasm and momentum. The seminar format requires several small groups of up to ten people per group (with more than ten people, the dynamics of a group changes – it becomes more difficult to maintain good group discussion).
-



chapter

2

**what long story  
short can offer**

## Enquirers

- A backstory that gives the context for who Jesus really is
- A logical foundation for believing in Jesus Christ as their saviour
- An opportunity to explore and understand the story of the Bible for themselves
- A great introductory overview of the Bible that can be built on in the future

## Christians

- A resource that confirms Christians in their faith as it unlocks the big story of the Bible
- A learning opportunity within a friendly, motivational setting
- A chance to be involved in front-line evangelism
- A tool to help Christians tell and explain the good news to their friends and family
- A way to find answers to the big questions of life found in the context of the big story

## Group Leaders

- A colourful and engaging multimedia resource that unfolds the biblical story and guides group discussion and personal reflection
  - An easy and ready-to-use question-and-answer section that offers suggested answers to frequently asked questions
  - A practical, easy-to-follow, step-by-step guide to running a Long Story Short group
  - A comprehensive theology manual that provides in-depth biblical and theological discussion of all subjects raised in the Long Story Short programme (to be released in 2016)
  - 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
-

## 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 Christian belief while they are involved in evangelism practically
- A means to train developing leaders in Christian belief using a comprehensive theology manual (to be released in 2016)

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

For the Church to be passionate about its primary task of mission and evangelism, it must be confident first in the salvation story of the Bible, believing with conviction that it is true. In this sense, Long Story Short is a bit like an 'Emmaus Road' journey (Luke 24:13–35). Like Jesus, we are trying to take Christians back to the very beginning and unwrap the wonderful story of the Messiah and, in so doing, thrill and inspire them with a new-found confidence to go out with passion to tell this same story of salvation to the world.

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chapter

3

**how to prepare  
to be a long story  
short leader**

## Preparing in Prayer

It is crucial to pray for people before, during and after the group (read about the value 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 communication. 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.

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See the appendix of resources at the back of this *Leader's Guide* on page 315.

## 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:

- The Long Story Short video
- A TV and disc player, or laptop/tablet (for one-on-one)
- Copies of the *Explorer's Journal*
- *Leader's 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 good viewing screen should be in a highly viewable place that won't suffer from reflection (e.g. from windows). 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 the video at least once beforehand to ensure you are familiar with the content.

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## 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 on the video (if these surface, you can simply select the question and press play). These hard-to-answer questions are also included in this *Leader's Guide* (indicated by a 'play' symbol on the left-hand-side of the question's title) along with many more. We recommend you check through the Q & A 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 slightly 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 the Bible is at the centre of Long Story Short and the message of the Bible becomes the reason for and the foundation of faith. The Bible itself 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

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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 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 leader's website ([www.lssl.co](http://www.lssl.co)). 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'.

## Preparing to Use this Leader's Guide

This guide is in two sections.

**First Section.** Pages 3–52.

This is for leaders and contains preparatory information.

This is on white paper.

**Second Section.** Pages 53 forwards.

This is for leaders to use in leading the groups. To make it easy from page 53 forwards the white pages are copies of what the group members have in their *Explorer's Journals*. This is so you always know what they have in front of them.

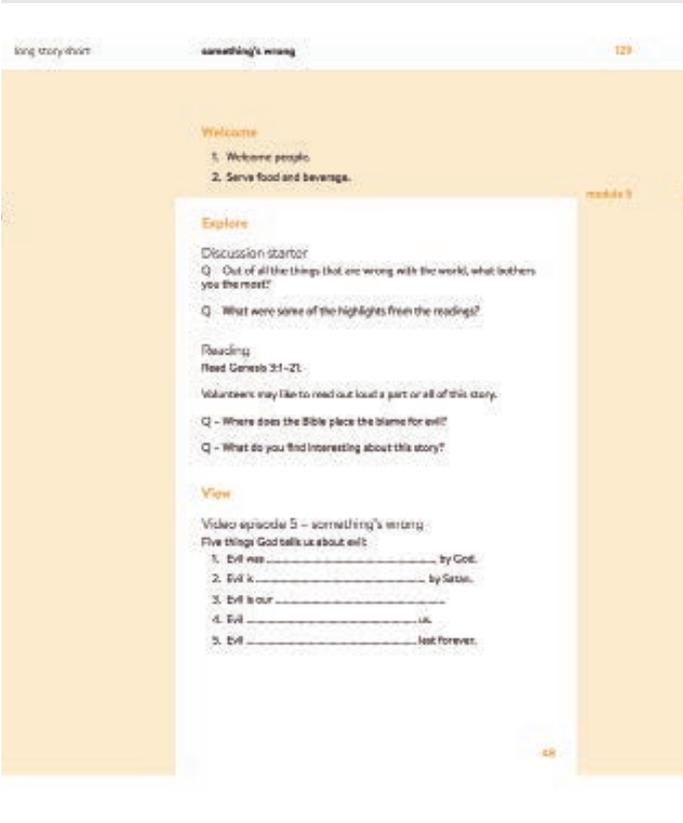
There is a diagram further explaining this on the following page.

The yellow tinted pages in this section are guides and notes for leaders, and are only in this book.

*Note: Because modules 1 and 2 are optional introductory modules and do not contain daily readings, the layout of these modules is slightly different from that used in the others.*

## Preparing to Use this *Leader's Guide*

Below is a diagram explaining how the leader's specific pages work with your group member using the *Explorer's Journal*.



**Leader's Guide page number**

**Yellow shaded sections**  
Notes and guides for leaders

**Module name**  
with easy navigation

**White sections**  
Copies of the *Explorer's Journal*.  
Showing you what your group members have.

**Explorer's Journal page number**





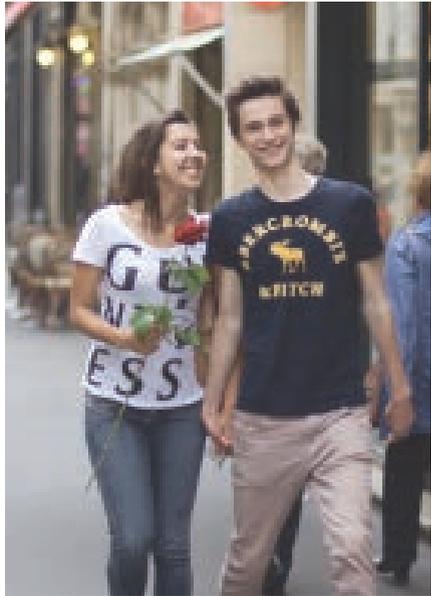
chapter

4

# how long story short works

Long Story Short is designed to teach and has a basic four-fold education structure where explorers move from personally **gathering** information, collectively **interacting** with the information and then **'banking'** the information at the end of the group time.

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 sections. Here, the leader needs to lead the 'discussion' section so that every explorer goes away from the group satisfied that they have sufficiently understood the Bible's story up to that module. The leader can choose between written and video answers. Written answers for the video questions are also in this <i>Leader's Guide</i> .	banking





chapter

5

**the long story  
short programme**

Pre-group	Consider Daily readings
0:00	Welcome Guests arrive for food and beverage 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 homely environment.

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

## 2. Serve Food and Beverage

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

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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 journals. Encourage explorers to write down any questions from the video in their journals.

The video is designed with breaks in the commentary. These breaks allow you to pause the video if you want to highlight a point.

## Discuss

### 1. 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 the frequently asked questions section of this *Leader's Guide* and summarise an answer.
  - Some questions (indicated by a 'play' symbol on the left-hand-side of the question's title) are answered on the Q & A section of the video.
  - 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 do the daily readings and Bible exploration. 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 (read about the value of people on page 8). 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.

---



chapter

6

**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 the value about 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 leader's website ([www.lssl.co](http://www.lssl.co)).

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

*Just for Starters*, produced by Matthias Media, contains seven foundational Bible studies and is ideal for new believers. A small amount of the Bible is read in context and different questions are asked. This study can be done one-on-one or in a small group. The seven topics are:

1. Saved by God
2. Trusting in God
3. Living God's way
4. Listening to God
5. Talking to God
6. Meeting with God's family
7. Meeting the world.



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<sup>1</sup> This section is taken from: Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 180–182.

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chapter

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7

# **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 truth palatable.

## 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 – at least it 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.

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## 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. They are not looking for a leader who always presents Christianity as being perfect.
  - 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, Johnny. 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 that would like to ask one?”
  - If you know that the shy person won’t feel ‘singled out’, you can ask: “Fred, 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.”
-





chapter

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8

# **optional day away**

Often people have extremely busy schedules and finding time to come to an 11-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 8, 9 and 10 on his life, death and resurrection.

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!

Usually explorers complete their daily readings each week before they come to the next group. If you use the day-away option, explorers need to complete only the readings for module 8 – 'life'. The day away includes time for the explorers to do their daily readings for modules 9 and 10.

## Day Away – Suggested Programme

10:00am	Welcome
10:15am	Module 8 – life
11:30am	Break
12:00pm	Daily readings for module 9 – death
1:00pm	Lunch
2:00pm	Module 9 – death
3:10pm	Break
3:40pm	Daily readings for module 10 – empty is good
4:40pm	Module 10 – empty is good
5:50pm	Conclude
6:00pm	Leave / Optional dinner together

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chapter

9

**the 11 modules  
at a glance**

	discovering	exploring
module 1 mystery *	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. There might be more to life than our senses can tell us.</li> <li>2. God might have set up the universe.</li> <li>3. God might be interested in humanity.</li> <li>4. God might intervene and remove evil.</li> </ol>	<p>Is there more to life than our senses can tell us?</p> <p>Is it possible that God exists?</p> <p>Is it possible that God is relevant to our lives?</p> <p>Where are we going on this journey?</p>
module 2 best-seller *	<p>The Bible...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the basis of Christianity</li> <li>2. Is a collection of 66 books</li> <li>3. Has about 37 authors</li> <li>4. Took about 1600 years to write</li> <li>5. Has two parts: Old Testament and New Testament</li> <li>6. Is unique</li> <li>7. Is the best-selling book of all time.</li> </ol>	<p>Who wrote the Bible?</p> <p>What does it mean that God wrote the Bible?</p> <p>Is the Bible accurate, trustworthy and relevant?</p>
module 3 the beginning	<p>God...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Exists as a real being</li> <li>2. Is the Creator who made everything</li> <li>3. Is eternal</li> <li>4. Is personal</li> <li>5. Is good.</li> </ol>	<p>Is the universe eternal or did it have a beginning?</p> <p>Is God eternal or did someone make God?</p> <p>Is God the Creator of everything?</p> <p>Is God real and how can we know?</p> <p>What about the Trinity?</p>

\* The first and second modules are optional introductory modules. They are ‘taste and see’ presentations, designed to create interest in the course and to motivate people to come to a Long Story Short group. The first and second modules can also be viewed online.

	discovering	exploring
module 4 who am i?	Humans... <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Were made intentionally... therefore, we are significant</li> <li>2. Were made differently... therefore, we are unique in the way we were:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Made to make things</li> <li>• Made to think about things</li> <li>• Made to love people more than things</li> <li>• Made to do the right thing</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Are loved passionately by God... so we are incredibly valuable.</li> </ol>	Why did God create humans? How does the Bible explain the origin of humanity? What does it mean to be created in God's image? What does it mean that we should rule the earth?
module 5 something's wrong	Evil... <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Was permitted by God</li> <li>2. Is promoted by Satan</li> <li>3. Is our responsibility</li> <li>4. Affects us</li> <li>5. Won't last forever.</li> </ol>	What is evil and did God create it? Who is Satan? Why did God give Adam a choice in the Garden of Eden? Why does God permit death and suffering if he is loving and all-powerful? Will God ever remove evil?
module 6 confusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At Babel humanity resisted God's purpose.</li> <li>2. At Babel God confused the language of humanity.</li> <li>3. After Babel different languages led to different locations.</li> <li>4. After Babel different locations caused different cultures and different nations.</li> <li>5. After Babel different cultures caused different religions.</li> </ol>	What is the point of all the stories from Genesis 4-10? How does the Bible explain the different languages of the world? How does the Bible explain the different nations of the world? Is there only one God? What about all the other world religions?

	discovering	exploring
module 7 billboard	<p>Israel...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is God's special people</li> <li>2. Was given a special place</li> <li>3. Was given a special purpose: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Israel's witness – one God</li> <li>• Israel's sacrifices – one way</li> <li>• Israel's Messiah – one hope.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>Why did God create and choose Israel as his special nation?</p> <p>Does this mean the other nations of the world don't matter?</p> <p>What was so unique about Israel's religion?</p> <p>What were the animal sacrifices all about?</p> <p>Why did Israel look forward to a 'Messiah' and who would this be?</p>
module 8 life	<p>Jesus...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Was a real person</li> <li>2. Made incredible claims</li> <li>3. Lived a perfect life</li> <li>4. Worked amazing miracles</li> <li>5. Was a great teacher.</li> </ol>	<p>What does it mean that Jesus is the 'Messiah'?</p> <p>Did Jesus really claim to be God?</p> <p>Why did Jesus perform miracles?</p> <p>What is significant about Jesus' perfect life?</p> <p>Are the Gospels reliable records of Jesus' life?</p>
module 9 death	<p>Jesus' death was a...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Payment for sin</li> <li>2. Payment for all people</li> <li>3. Payment for all time</li> <li>4. Payment in full</li> <li>5. Payment of love.</li> </ol>	<p>Does God really love sinful people?</p> <p>Why did Jesus speak of his death as a ransom?</p> <p>What does it mean that Jesus died a spiritual, physical and eternal death?</p> <p>Why was Jesus' death necessary?</p> <p>Did Jesus really die for every person?</p>

	discovering	exploring
module 10 empty is good	Jesus' resurrection... <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Confirms his identity</li> <li>2. Provides a receipt</li> <li>3. Is a huge promise</li> <li>4. Was a display of God's great power</li> <li>5. Means we have a living saviour and hope.</li> </ol>	Did the resurrection really happen?  Aren't there other ways to account for the empty tomb?  Why is the resurrection of Jesus so significant?  Is it important for me to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?
module 11 jump	Faith... <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the way to eternal life</li> <li>2. Is about trust</li> <li>3. Focuses on Jesus</li> <li>4. Has a moment</li> <li>5. Makes the difference.</li> </ol>	What is faith?  How much faith do I need to be a Christian?  Does being a Christian make any difference in life?  Can a person be certain they are a Christian?  Why should I think about hell?



chapter

10

**welcome to  
long story short**

## Welcome to Long Story Short!

We're so glad you've decided to join us. The Bible is a great book but it's a big one! Getting a handle on the story of the Bible is not easy but, because the story is so vital, we owe it to ourselves to investigate it. This course is designed to make the long story short and understandable. We hope your journey with us will be a thoroughly positive, enjoyable and informative one.

## What is Long Story Short?

Good question! It's about getting right to the heart of Christianity by following the truly fascinating story of the Bible. This story will eventually introduce us to Jesus, who he is and why he came into the world.

Long Story Short is a programme of personal discovery. There are readings to enjoy at your leisure, engaging videos shot on location all around the world and lots of opportunities for discussion. We want you to feel completely free to ask your questions and, hopefully, find some answers.

Most importantly, we want you to feel relaxed and comfortable! So don't worry – you won't be asked to do anything outside your comfort zone, like reading the Bible out loud, singing a song or praying a prayer. And this is definitely not about joining a church or any other organisation. It's simply a personal journey of understanding.

## How to Enjoy the Journey

### 1. Enjoy exploring.

It's not about arguing or debating, agreeing or disagreeing. It's about asking questions to enable you to understand. You might like to write your questions down at home as they come to mind, or you can jot them down as you watch the video. There will be lots of time to explore your questions.

### 2. Enjoy the Bible.

Long Story Short uses the Bible frequently because it's the Christian 'handbook'. Don't worry about finding a Bible – we are happy to provide you with one so you can check out the Bible's story for yourself.

3. Enjoy the journey.

When taking any journey, there's nothing satisfying about getting off in the middle of nowhere. To gain the most from Long Story Short, we hope you will stay the distance and join us for the whole course.

4. Enjoy meeting others on the journey.

Meeting other travellers on the same journey is part of the total adventure. We hope you find some new friends along the way.

So, welcome aboard and enjoy!



# mystery

## module

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### 1

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*Welcome to the first module of Long Story Short. In this module, we consider that there might be more to this life than our senses can tell us.*

*There is so much about this world that is beyond human understanding. So much of it is a great mystery. Sit back and enjoy the beginning of the journey!*

## leader's introduction to module 1 – mystery

Where we're going:

This optional, introductory module is a 'taste and see' presentation, designed to create interest in the Long Story Short course. It has been included specifically for people who are still wondering about the existence of God and it encourages us to think 'outside the box' and consider whether God might exist. You could, if you wish, combine 'mystery' and 'best-seller' as one module.

What we discover:

1. There might be more to life than our senses can tell us.
2. God might have set up the universe.
3. God might be interested in humanity.
4. God might intervene and remove evil.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- Is there more to life than what our senses can tell us?
- Is it possible that God exists?
- Is it possible that God is relevant to our lives?
- Where are we going on this journey?

### Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.
3. Introduce Long Story Short (use the appropriate information starting on page 54).

### Explore

Discussion starter

Q – If there were a God, how would that affect me?

*Leader's tip: Here, you will want to explain that the first video is designed to start a conversation.*

## View

Video episode 1 – mystery

1. There might be more to life than our senses can tell us.
2. God might have set up the universe.
3. God might be interested in humanity.
4. God might intervene and remove evil.

## Discuss

Questions I have

*Suggested questions:*

1. Do you think there is more to life than what our senses tell us?
2. If God did exist, what relevance would he have to our lives?
3. What questions do you have about Long Story Short?
4. What are some of the big questions you have about the Bible?

12–13

*Leader's tip: At this stage, explain that we won't answer these questions in this session but we will do so during the course.*

## Conclude

1. Organise food and beverage for the next group session (see page 31).
2. Tactfully find out who wants to commit to the course. One way of doing this is to invite the people who wish to attend the Long Story Short programme to pick up a copy of the *Explorer's Journal* as the group session finishes.
3. Close.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co](http://www.longstoryshort.co)









# best-seller

module

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2

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*Welcome to the second module of Long Story Short.  
This module is a basic introduction to the Bible,  
which is the 'handbook' from which the story  
will be told.*

## leader's introduction to module 2 – best-seller

Where we're going:

This is the second of two introductory modules. It is a basic introduction to the **Bible**, the book from which the story will be told. You could, if you wish, combine 'mystery' and 'best-seller' as one module.

What we discover:

1. The Bible is the basis of **Christianity**.
2. The Bible is a collection of **66** books.
3. The Bible has about **37** authors.
4. The Bible took about **1600** years to write.
5. The Bible has two parts: **Old** Testament and **New** Testament.
6. The Bible is **unique**.
7. The Bible is the **best-selling** book of all time.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- Who wrote the Bible?
- What does it mean that God wrote the Bible?
- Is the Bible accurate, trustworthy and relevant?

### Welcome

module 2

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.
3. If this is your first module, then introduce Long Story Short (use the appropriate information starting on page 54).
4. Give out Bibles.
5. Introduce the topic.

### Explore

Discussion Starter

Q – What do you think are common misunderstandings about the Bible?

### View

Video episode 2 – best-seller

Seven things God wants us to know about the Bible:

1. The Bible is the basis of .....
2. The Bible is a collection of ..... books.
3. The Bible has about ..... authors.
4. The Bible took about ..... years to write.
5. The Bible has two parts: ..... Testament and ..... Testament.
6. The Bible is .....
7. The Bible is the ..... book of all time.

## Discuss

Questions I have

17

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. You will need to explain that the Bible is indexed with books, chapters and verses, e.g. “Genesis 1:1” means the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 1.
3. Organise food and beverage for the next group session (see page 31).
4. If this is your first module, tactfully find out who wants to commit to the course. One way of doing this is to invite the people who wish to attend the Long Story Short programme to pick up a copy of the *Explorer’s Journal* and a Bible as the group session finishes.
5. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
6. Close.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/best-seller](http://www.longstoryshort.co/best-seller)



## frequently asked questions

### module 2

- ▶ 1. Who wrote the Bible and why is it called ‘the word of God’?
- ▶ 2. Aren’t there errors and contradictions in the Bible?
- ▶ 3. Why are modern translations of the Bible necessary? Are they accurate or has the meaning been changed by endless translations down through the ages?
- ▶ 4. Why can we trust the Bible?
- ▶ 5. What relevance does such an old book have today?

▶ Q 1. Who wrote the Bible and why is it called ‘the word of God’?

*Short answer:*

Christians refer to the Bible as ‘the word of God’ because it originates with God. About 37 different human authors wrote the Bible, each in their own distinctive style. But God guided their writing so that, what they freely wrote was exactly what God wanted them to write. That is why Jesus called the Bible “the word of God” (John 10:35).

*Discussion:*

The Bible was written by about 37 different authors with very diverse backgrounds. Some of these authors were Moses, Jeremiah, Daniel, Luke, John and Paul, to name just a few. Some of these writers were kings, some were shepherds, some priests and some prophets. One was a doctor and one was a tent maker. Most of these people lived in Israel but some had spent time living in other places like Egypt, Greece, Arabia and Babylon. Their writings spanned approximately 1600 years – so the production of the Bible was very much a process over a long period of time.

The Bible claims over 3000 times that it is the actual words of God himself. For example, phrases like “the LORD said to me” (Jeremiah 1:7), “the word of the LORD came to me” (Jeremiah 2:1) and “this is what the LORD says” (Jeremiah 2:5) are found repeatedly throughout the Bible. What this means is that, although certain people wrote the Bible, God also wrote the Bible. It claims to be “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16) – that means the words of the Bible came from God himself!

How did this happen? In 2 Peter 1:21, it says, “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”. What does this mean?

Illustration: A sailing ship is carried along as the wind blows into its sails. So, what’s driving the boat – the wind or the sailors? The answer is both. The wind is powering the boat but, unless the men raise the sails and steer the boat, it won’t be going anywhere. Both the wind and the men are necessary for the boat to sail. This is a picture of what we mean when we talk about the ‘inspiration of the Bible’ – men were “carried along” by God, meaning that God guided the writers of the Bible so they would write exactly what God wanted them to write (2 Peter 1:21). Each author used their own style of writing when they wrote their part of the Bible so that, at the same time, the words in the Bible are both the authors’ words and God’s words.

## ▶ Q 2. Aren’t there errors and contradictions in the Bible?

*Short answer:*

Because God is always true and because the Bible (in its original writings) came from him (2 Timothy 3:16), it could not contain any errors. The Bible of today is a thoroughly reliable copy of those original writings. In the process of transmission (copying), some copyist errors have been made but these are: (1) few; (2) not significant; and (3) do not affect the message of the Bible at all.

*Discussion:*

### 1. The accuracy of the original writings:

- a. **God is true.** By definition, God is perfect and this means he must be true in all that he says and does. If God were not true, he would not be perfect – and therefore he would not be ‘God’. The Bible also states that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18) – so he cannot produce untruths.
- b. **The Bible came from God.** Because the words of the Bible (i.e. the original writings) came from God (2 Timothy 3:16), we call the Bible ‘God’s word’ (John 10:35; cf. Mark 7:13; Romans 9:6; Hebrews 4:12).
- c. **If God is true, and if the Bible came from God, it must be true and free from all error.**

2. **Copyist errors.** As the originals were copied and then as those copies were re-copied, some minor textual discrepancies occurred in the copies (the copies are called ‘manuscripts’). We call these minor discrepancies ‘textual variations’. These variations are to be expected since: (1) the copyists were only human; and (2) inspiration applies only to the original writings. But these ‘copyist errors’ are:
- a. **Few in number.** The scribes who copied the original writings worked under the most exacting scrutiny – their task was so sacred and serious, they had to give great attention to detail and were kept under the strictest supervision. There were severe consequences for scribes who made errors. Therefore, mistakes were kept to an absolute minimum.
  - b. **Minor in nature.** Any textual mistakes usually involved names and/or numbers, making them minor in nature.
  - c. **Not significant in effect.** Because the copyists’ errors were few in number and minor in nature, they do not affect the total message (i.e. the teachings) of the Bible. The Christian message remains the same as it was in the original writings, despite these few copyist errors. “So, for all practical purposes, the Bible in our hand, imperfect though the manuscripts are, conveys the complete truth of the original Word of God.”<sup>2</sup> By comparing ancient manuscripts, scholars have confirmed that we can be 98.0% to 99.9% sure of every word of the original writing of the Bible.<sup>3</sup>
3. **Apparent contradictions.** Alleged ‘contradictions’ are only apparent contradictions. On closer examination, apparent contradictions are not contradictions at all. For instance, in Mark 10:46–52, it says Jesus healed a (i.e. ‘one’) blind man (Bartimaeus) outside the city of Jericho but, in the parallel passage in Matthew 20:29–34, it says Jesus healed two blind men. This appears to be a contradiction until we remember it would be a contradiction only if Mark had said there was only one blind man healed. It could be that Mark had known

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<sup>2</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Norman L. Geisler, “Updating the Manuscript Evidence for the New Testament”, *normangeisler.net*, September 2013, <<http://normangeisler.net/articles/Bible/Reliability/Norman%20Geisler%20-%20Updating%20the%20Manuscript%20Evidence%20for%20the%20New%20Testament.pdf>> (17 February 2014).

one of the blind men personally (Bartimaeus) and chose to relate only his story. But there is no contradiction... if there were two blind men, we can be sure there was one!

- ▶ Q 3. Why are modern translations of the Bible necessary? Are they accurate or has the meaning been changed by endless translations down through the ages?

*Short answer:*

Because languages are constantly changing, new translations of the Bible are always necessary. The meaning of a certain word today may be very different from the meaning that word had even 50 years ago. So we need fresh translations into our modern language.

Modern Bible translations<sup>4</sup> are translated not from previous translations but from ancient manuscripts (i.e. copies of the original writings). By comparing the many ancient manuscripts and working from them, scholars and translators are able to give us the Bible in our modern languages.

*Discussion:*

Some have tried to say that our modern Bibles are just translations – of translations – and that, consequently, the true meaning of the original text of Scripture has been lost in the process. The following points need to be kept in mind:

1. **Translations are not taken from earlier translations**, as if each translation just tweaks the language from one version to another. Each translation is made from the numerous Old Testament and New Testament manuscripts available.
2. **The Old Testament was accurately copied.** In March 1947, some Arab shepherds exploring caves in the Qumran Valley in Israel (close to the Dead Sea) made one of the most astonishing discoveries in modern archaeological history. Among the 11 caves they explored, they found about 800 ancient scrolls (manuscripts) thought by many to have been written by the Essenes (a Jewish religious group) – 200 of these manuscripts relate to the Old Testament.

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<sup>4</sup> E.g. the New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), English Standard Version (ESV), etc.

These scrolls have been dated and are said to have been written approximately 1000 years earlier than the oldest Old Testament manuscripts that scholars were using. Amazingly, these scrolls were virtually identical to the later Old Testament manuscripts – showing that nothing had been lost in the copying process. This was a huge affirmation of the accuracy of our Old Testament text.

3. **Translation accuracy is increasing.** Dr Daniel B Wallace (professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary and founder and executive director of the Centre for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, USA) reminds us that, when producing the King James Version of the New Testament (1611), translators used essentially seven manuscripts dating no earlier than the 11th century AD. Nowadays we have approximately 5800 manuscripts of the New Testament dating from as early as the second century AD. This means that we are actually moving closer to the originals – not farther away.
4. Because we do not have the original writings of the Bible **translations have always been made from manuscripts** (i.e. copies of the original writings of the Bible). As translators compare the various manuscripts and the differences between them – which are very minor – they make decisions on how to translate the variant reading by applying two tests:
  - a. **The external test.** The manuscripts themselves are assessed – the nature of each manuscript, its age and the way it was used by the early Church.
  - b. **The internal test.** Here, translators look at two things:
    - The translator asks what the original author would most likely have said, given the nature of his overall message and style and previous writings.
    - The translator asks what the copyists who copied the manuscript would most probably have recorded due to either accidental mistakes or deliberate changes made to reflect the opinion of the copyist at that time.

#### 🎧 Q 4. Why can we trust the Bible?

##### *Short answer:*

The Bible has been subject always to the most intense criticism down through the centuries and, for all the criticisms, it has never been proven

false; it remains the best-seller of all time, and the most widely read and most translated book in history. It keeps proving itself to be historically, geographically, prophetically<sup>5</sup> and scientifically true. For these reasons, we can definitely trust the Bible.

*Discussion:*

We can trust the Bible because it is true. By true, we mean it corresponds to reality – that means the Bible ‘tells it like it is’.

1. **It is true historically.** While there might be some discussion about actual dates, the events recorded in the Bible fit with the history of the world. And the people of the Bible were real people in history – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, Solomon, John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, Caiaphas, Pilate, Festus and Felix; these are all well-documented persons of history and can be found in any reputable historical or encyclopaedic work.
2. **It is true geographically.** There is nothing imaginary about the places the Bible mentions – they are real places and many of those that no longer exist have been attested to by archaeology. Remarkably, these are proven places of history and can be found in any reliable encyclopaedic work.
3. **It is true prophetically.** The Bible is full of prophecies that were made and have come true. For instance, there are numerous Old Testament prophecies about Israel’s Messiah that have been precisely fulfilled by Jesus. Add to those all the other prophecies the Bible has made that came true<sup>6</sup> and there is powerful affirmation of the truthfulness of the Bible.
4. **The Bible is true scientifically.** Obviously, the Bible is not a scientific book nor does it use precise scientific language. However, the Bible has been shown to be true scientifically. For instance, the ‘flat-earth’ theory (the theory the earth was a flat disk and not a sphere) was believed by many cultures around the world including ancient Egyptian and Babylonian cultures. It was not until the fourth century BC that philosophers and scientists (e.g. Aristotle) realised that the

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<sup>5</sup> When we say the Bible is prophetically true, we mean its prophecies (predictions) have come true.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Israel’s captivity in Babylon; Israel’s return from Babylonian captivity through the intervention of the Persian king Cyrus; the destruction of Tyre; the destruction of Nineveh; etc.

earth was actually a sphere. But, four centuries earlier, in the eighth century BC, Isaiah the prophet talked about “the circle of the earth” (Isaiah 40:22) – the Bible had already stated something the science of the day disputed, though later had to admit was true after all.



Q 5. What relevance does such an old book have today?

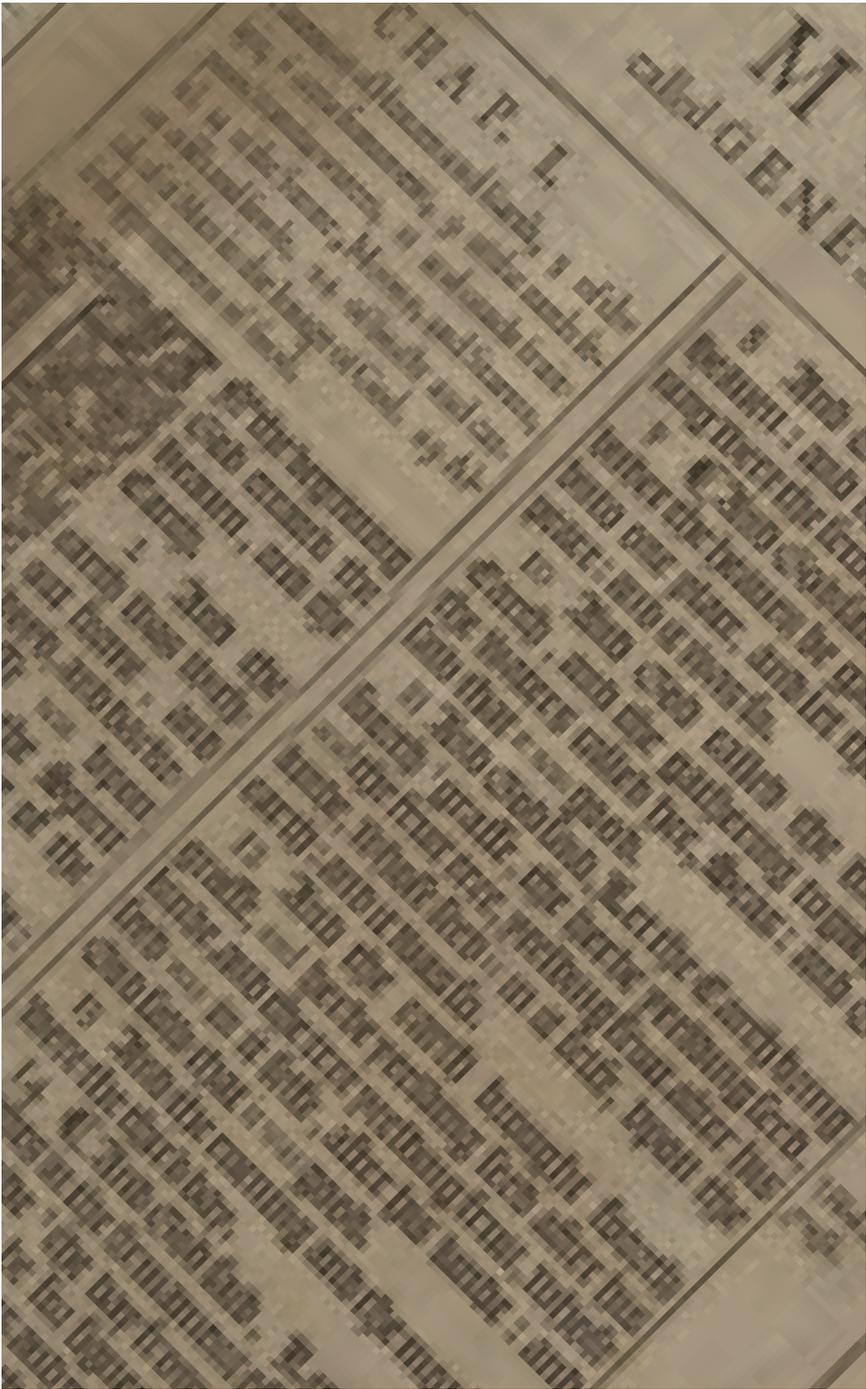
*Short answer:*

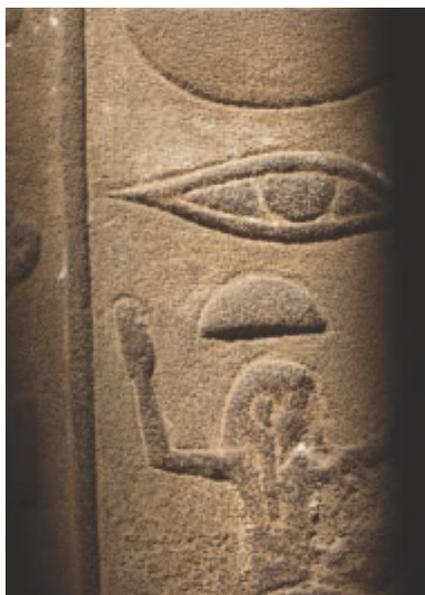
The Bible is old! Some parts are over 3500 years old. But, ‘old’ does not mean irrelevant. For instance, just because the law of gravity is old, doesn’t make it obsolete (jump out the window and see!) – some things are too important and true to be discarded.

*Discussion:*

What makes the Bible **continually** relevant is that it is true. Truth never changes. One plus one still makes two and it has been that way from the beginning of the world and it will be until the end of time. When we talk about ‘truth’ we are talking about the way things really are. When we say the Bible tells the truth, we mean it is ‘telling it like it is’! That makes the Bible as relevant as reality itself!

What makes the Bible **personally** relevant is the range of issues it addresses. It speaks about all the issues of life – God, life, faith, death, marriage, divorce, government, the environment, worry, sex, sexual abuse, love, hate, substance abuse and other habits to avoid, anger, money, poverty, friendships worth having, conflict resolution, wealth, power and family. It speaks about world history and it talks about the future history of the world. The Bible is more than relevant.







# the beginning

module

— 3 —

## Consider

### The Story so Far...

In the previous module, we saw how the Bible is one book, made up of many books, with many writers, who claimed to be directed by God.

### Continuing the Story...

If God has written everything important that he wants us to know, then it makes good sense to check it out. This week we start at the very beginning, in the book of Genesis. Take some time, enjoy the brief readings and start exploring the Bible for yourself.

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## Day One: Is God Real?

### module 3

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.

Sad, really. It was fun hearing all about Emma-Lou's globetrotting adventures and her special powers. Amazingly, Emma-Lou never needed to sleep, never needed to bathe and never needed to eat vegetables – she was on a pure candy diet! But her teeth stayed strong and she had perfect health. She lived alone up the power pole. We never did get to meet her parents – they were far too busy working for the Queen at Buckingham Palace!

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 Two: 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'? Why don't sheep shrink when it rains?

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  
Check it out.  
Read Exodus 3:2–6.

## Day Three: Is God the Creator?

### module 3

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 Four: 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 enough, 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 Five: Is God Good?

### module 3

The world around us can be an adventurous place! Have you ever climbed up to the top of a rocky peak and 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 firecrackers 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?

## leader's introduction to module 3 – the beginning

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to give explorers access to some basic biblical concepts about **God** and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means. This module uses Genesis chapter 1 as the point of reference.

What we discover:

1. God **exists** as a real being.
2. God is the **Creator** who made everything.
3. God is **eternal**.
4. God is **personal**.
5. God is **good**.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- Is the universe eternal or did it have a beginning?
- Is God eternal or did someone make God?
- Is God the Creator of everything?
- Is God real and how can we know?
- What about the Trinity?

Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.

module 3

Explore

Discussion starter

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

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

*Leader’s tip: Try not to make people feel uncomfortable if they have not done their homework.*

Reading

Read Genesis 1:1–19.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

Q – What can we learn about God from this reading?

Q – Did anything surprise you about this story?

View

Video episode 3 – the beginning

Five things God tells us about himself:

1. God ..... as a real being.
2. God is the ..... who made everything.
3. God is .....
4. God is .....
5. God is .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

27

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group session (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning](http://www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning)



## frequently asked questions

### module 3

- ▶ 1. Has the universe always existed? Or did it have a beginning?
- ▶ 2. Did the universe spontaneously come into existence by itself? If not, then what brought the universe into existence?
- ▶ 3. Who made God?
- ▶ 4. Is it possible to be a Christian and believe in evolution?
- ▶ 5. How do I become aware of God?
- ▶ 6. What about the Trinity?
  - 7. Isn't it arrogant to insist there is only one true God?
  - 8. If God is good, why is there so much death and suffering in the world?
  - 9. Is creation part of God?
  - 10. Is there any scientific proof that God exists?
  - 11. Why can't I see God?
  - 12. Is God male or female?

▶ Q 1. Has the universe always existed? Or did it have a beginning?

#### *Short answer:*

1. The Bible teaches that the universe has not always existed. The universe began when God created it (Genesis 1:1).
2. The biblical story also indicates that the universe is wearing out and, because things that wear out cannot be eternal, the universe must have had a beginning. We will discuss this point below.

#### *Discussion:*

The universe cannot be eternal but must have had a beginning because it is wearing out. The Bible uses many different images to convey the idea that the universe is wearing out. Two of these are:

1. **The picture of a leaf.** A leaf will eventually wither and fall to the ground. The Bible uses this as a picture to help us understand that stars (like our sun), and the sky, will wear out. Isaiah 34:4 records,

“All the stars in the sky will be dissolved... all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.”

2. **The picture of clothing.** A garment will become frail and eventually wear out. The longer and more frequently a garment is used, the sooner it will fall to pieces. That’s why clothing stores exist to continually replace our clothes. The Bible uses this as a picture to help us understand that the universe will not last forever but will wear out. Psalm 102:25–27 says, “... the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

Things that wear out cannot be eternal. If the universe is wearing out, it cannot be eternal. If it is not eternal, it must have had a beginning.

*For a discussion on how science confirms that the universe cannot be eternal, go to [www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning](http://www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning)*

- ▶ Q 2. Did the universe spontaneously come into existence by itself? If not, then what brought the universe into existence?

*Short answer:*

The universe did not spontaneously bring itself into existence. This idea would mean that something came from nothing but we all know that this is impossible. Maria in *The Sound of Music* was right when she sang, “Nothing comes from nothing. Nothing ever could.” The popular notion that nothing suddenly exploded and became everything is absurd! Instead, the biblical story records, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). The supernatural Creator God revealed in the Bible, who is distinct from and greater than the universe, brought the universe into existence.

*Discussion:*

We know that the universe had a beginning (see question 1 above) – so there was a ‘time’ when the universe didn’t exist.

If the universe had just erupted and spontaneously brought itself into existence, this would mean that nothing had suddenly become something – an entire universe in fact! But this could never have

happened because... something comes only from something – it can't come from nothing.

We know the idea that 'something comes from nothing' is absurd... it never does and it never has. The truth is that something that doesn't exist cannot do anything at all – much less create itself! And if that's the case, then the universe couldn't have spontaneously come from nothing. So whatever brought the universe into existence must have been:

1. **Distinct from the universe**, because it must have existed *before* the universe did
2. **Greater than the universe**, because it must have had the *intelligence* and *power* to create the universe.

The biblical story records, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). The universe didn't come from nothing. It came from someone – that someone, according to the Bible, is the supernatural Creator God, who is distinct from and greater than the universe. Because he is distinct from the universe, he is in a position to create it. And because he is greater than the universe, he has the intelligence and power to create it.

*For a discussion on how science confirms that the universe could not have spontaneously come into existence by itself, go to [www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning](http://www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning)*

### ▶ Q 3. Who made God?

*Short answer:*

No one. The Bible views God as the "eternal God" (Deuteronomy 33:27). Isaiah 57:15 says that God is forever. He has no beginning and he has no end – "For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy". God has always been the eternal God; therefore, no one made God.

*Discussion:*

Sometimes we can struggle to understand the idea that God is eternal. But since something cannot come from nothing (see question 2 above) and since something is here (e.g. the universe), there must have been something/someone that was eternal. When we 'boil it down', we have only two options:

1. **The universe is eternal** (but it can't be – see question 1 above).
2. **God is eternal**, and the universe came from him.

*For a more in-depth explanation of this question, go to [www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning](http://www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning)*

- ▶ Q 4. Is it possible to be a Christian and believe in evolution?

*Short answer:*

Yes. Some Christians believe that God used the evolutionary process as the way he brought the universe and all life into existence. To be a Christian is to be rightly related to Christ – not creation (John 1:11–13; 3:16; 8:24; 14:6). However, it appears there are some real problems trying to fit evolution with the biblical story.

Evolution is a very popular belief system that tries to explain life's origins apart from God. The implication is this: if God created us, then we are morally responsible to God but, if we simply evolved, then we are not responsible to anyone.

*For more information on the relationship between the biblical story and evolution, go to [www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning](http://www.longstoryshort.co/the-beginning)*

- ▶ Q 5. How do I become aware of God?

*Short answer:*

There are at least two ways in which we can become aware of God. The first is through God's created world; the second is through the Bible.

*Discussion:*

We will explore two ways in which we can become aware of God:

1. **Through creation.** The great thing is that God wants to be known. He is not hiding away where he cannot be found but has clearly revealed himself through creation. Romans 1:19–20 states, “what may be known about God is plain... because God has made it plain... For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made”. This verse is music to the ears of those who want to become aware of God because, through

creation, God has made his eternal power and divine nature so easy for everyone to see and understand.

2. **Through the Bible.** There is no greater way of becoming aware of God than through the Bible. This is the place where God has spoken and told us everything he has to say about himself. People who want to know God need to spend time reading the Bible, learning about him.

### module 3

#### ▶ Q 6. What about the Trinity?

##### *Short answer:*

As the biblical story unfolds, we find three distinct persons referred to as God: the Father (e.g. Romans 15:6), the Son (e.g. John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8) and the Holy Spirit (e.g. Genesis 1:2; 2 Corinthians 3:17). But the Bible is very clear that there is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4).

Christians use the word 'Trinity' to explain how God can be one and three. Christians describe God as one 'being', who exists in three 'persons'. But what does this mean?

##### *Discussion:*

Perhaps conjoined twins (sometimes known as Siamese twins) can help us understand how God is one 'being' but three 'persons'. Some conjoined twins share one body but they are two persons: two distinct personalities. One twin might like blue and the other might like red. One might favour sweet foods and the other might favour savoury. Sometimes conjoined twins share essential organs like the heart or digestive system. As a result, they cannot be separated. They are two persons in one body. In this way, conjoined twins can show us something special and unique about the triune God. What we are saying is that God is one 'being' but exists as three 'persons', just like conjoined twins have one body but are two persons.

There are small indications of the Trinity in Genesis 1. One example is Genesis 1:26 – "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness". Evangelical scholars explain the words 'us' and 'our' in different ways. Some think that when God said, "Let us make mankind", the "us" referred to angels (but mankind is not said to be made in the image of the angels, nor do angels create anything). Some think God was talking to himself as he thought about his decision to make humans (but this is doubtful because when God is reflecting on something he speaks in the singular,

not the plural, e.g. in Genesis 18:17, God said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”). Some think the plural is like ‘the royal we’ (but it is doubtful because of Hebrew language problems). If God were only a single person, we might expect the verse to read, “Let me make mankind in my image”. But it doesn’t – and, since we are made in God’s image alone, the plurals (“us”/“our”) in this verse probably represent God as a Trinity.

Q 7. Isn’t it arrogant to insist there is only one true God?

*Short answer:*

Try to defer this question to module six on Babel. This is a real issue but it must not become a point of confrontation. Remember three things:

1. **This is a ‘hot topic’.** We live in an age of globalisation, multiculturalism and religious pluralism (where there are many belief systems). ‘Ethnic spirituality’ is a given and the people in your group may sincerely believe that there are different gods for different cultures. The idea that there is only one God for the whole world might seem to them to be intolerant and prejudiced ‘Christian Colonialism’ where Christians are trying to impose ‘Western Religion’ on minority cultures.
2. **Stay with the purpose of the Long Story Short group.** We are trying only to understand the Bible’s own story as it tells it, and evidently this is part of it – we are not seeking agreement, just an understanding that this is the Bible’s position.
3. **Be quietly convinced in your own mind.** Work these Bible passages into your own mind: the Creator of heaven and earth is the God of Israel (Exodus 20:3–6; Nehemiah 9:6; Isaiah 37:16; 44:6; 45:18) and he is also God of the Gentiles (Acts 14:14–17; 17:24–31; Romans 1:18–20; 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10; 1 Timothy 2:5–6).

Q 8. If God is good, why is there so much death and suffering in the world?

*Short answer:*

Try to politely defer this question to module five on evil.

Q 9. Is creation part of God?

*Short answer:*

Pantheism (the notion that ‘God is everything and everything is God’) is a popular belief today and is found in Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age religion, Bahá’í and Scientology. Even people who do not belong to these religions embrace this idea. It says there is no absolute distinction between the Creator and creation – that the table I am sitting at is God, you are God, I am God, the cat is God, the universe is God. Why do people believe this? Because it is appealing – “If everything is God and if I am part of God, then I am accountable only to myself” – and faith in God is really faith in myself (my own potential).

If the notion that ‘God is everything and everything is God’ were true, that would make God matter. If matter is God then matter must be eternal. But it isn’t – as we have shown above (question 1).

Q 10. Is there any scientific proof that God exists?

*Short answer:*

No. Ultimately, there are no scientific proofs either for or against God’s existence but Christians believe there is very good evidence for the existence of God.

*Discussion:*

The truth is there are no scientific proofs – either for or against God’s existence. In the final analysis, both atheism and theism (belief that God exists) are faith positions (Hebrews 11:3). In the absence of scientific proof, people decide for or against God based on available evidence. So no, strictly speaking, there is no scientific proof for God’s existence.

But Christians claim that the evidence for the existence of God is greater (in both quantity and quality) than is the evidence against God’s existence. For instance, there is the evidence provided by creation: since nothing comes from nothing, creation must have come from a source older than the universe, greater than the universe (so it could bring this universe into existence) and a source with incredible intelligence sufficient to account for this universe with its amazing design and meticulous order (see Romans 1:18–23; Psalm 19:1–6). Then there is the evidence provided by Jesus of Nazareth – a man who claimed to be God and whose claim was substantiated by his amazing teaching, his incredible miracles and his sinless life.

So while we cannot scientifically prove God's existence – we have scientifically compatible evidence that provides us with sufficient reasons to believe in God without sacrificing our intellect.

Q 11. Why can't I see God?

*Short answer:*

We cannot see God because he is spirit, not matter.

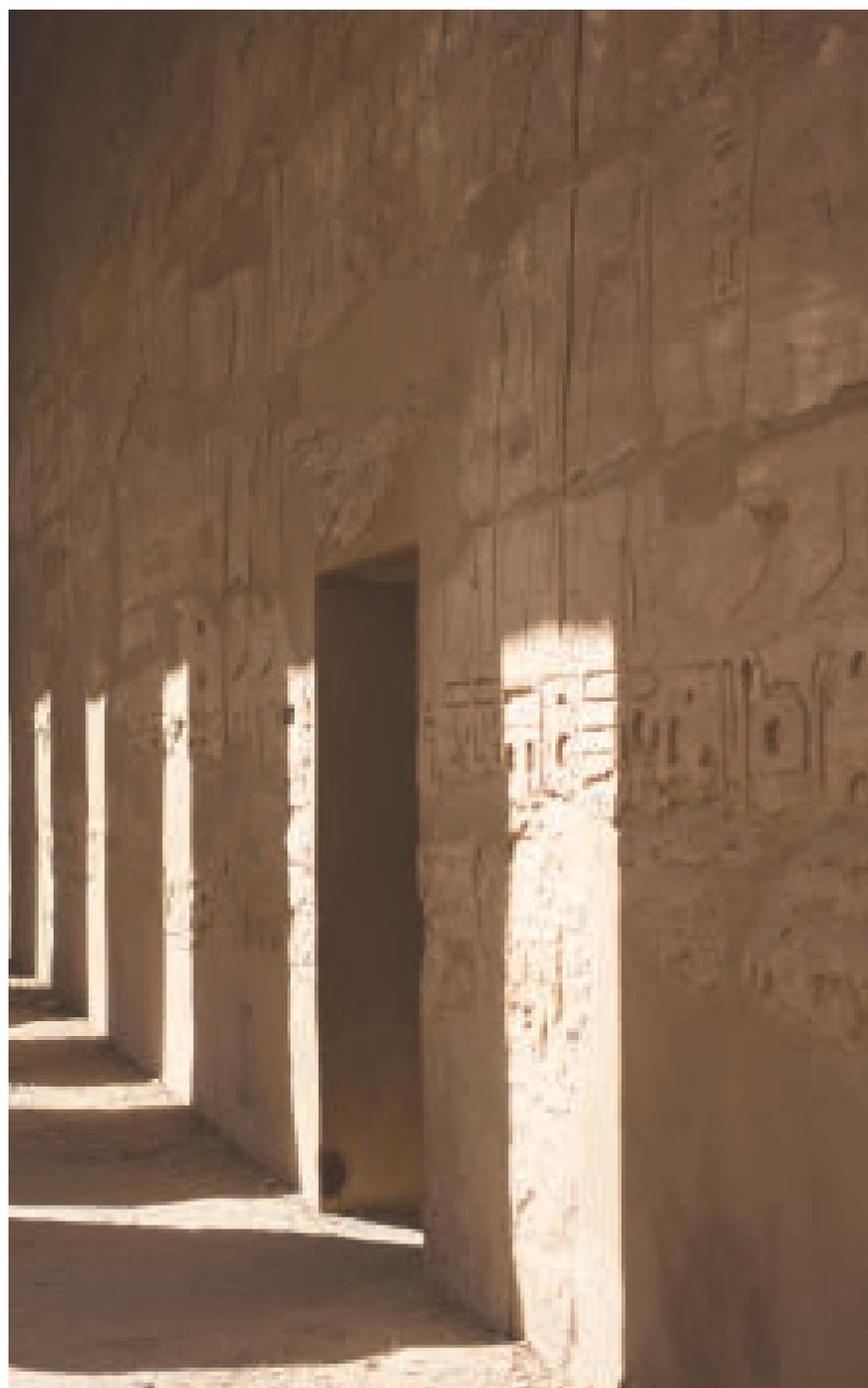
*Discussion:*

"No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18). God is spirit and not matter (John 4:24). Our physical bodies are able to interact with the physical world God created. Our senses of smell, touch, taste, hearing and sight allow us to interact with this physical world. Because God is spirit, we cannot see him as we can a waterfall, or smell him as we can a rose, or taste him as we can a freshly cooked gourmet dinner. We live with God by faith – not by any senses or feelings (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Q 12. Is God male or female?

*Short answer:*

God is neither male nor female. God is spirit (John 4:24) and not matter and so is biologically neither male nor female.





# who am i?

module

4

## 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 One: 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 and 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... only people move God to write a poem!

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 Two: 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!

Animals	Humans
CREATED ON DAY 6 Genesis 1:24–29	CREATED ON DAY 6 Genesis 1:26–27; 2:7–25
FORMED FROM DUST Genesis 2:19	FORMED FROM DUST Genesis 2:7
LIVING CREATURES Genesis 1:24; 2:19; 9:10, 16	LIVING CREATURES Genesis 2:7; 9:16
BREATH OF LIFE Genesis 1:30; 6:17	BREATH OF LIFE Genesis 2:7
MALE AND FEMALE Genesis 6:19; 7:2–3	MALE AND FEMALE Genesis 1:27
BLESSED Genesis 1:22	BLESSED Genesis 1:28
TOLD TO INCREASE Genesis 1:22; 8:17	TOLD TO INCREASE Genesis 1:28
GREEN PLANTS FOR FOOD Genesis 1:30	SEED BEARING PLANTS FOR FOOD Genesis 1:29
	IMAGE OF GOD Genesis 1:26–27

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?

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## Day Three: 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".

module 4

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 who with. We can choose friends. We can pick 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 Four: 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's 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 Five: 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 – is this happening?

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 1:26, 28; 2:15, 19–20.

What role was given to humans but not to animals?

## leader's introduction to module 4 – who am i?

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to give explorers access to some basic biblical concepts about **ourselves** and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means. This module uses Genesis 1 and 2 as the point of reference.

What we discover:

1. Humans were made *intentionally*... therefore, we are significant.
2. Humans were made *differently*... therefore, we are unique in the way we were:
  - Made to *make* things
  - Made to *think* about things
  - Made to *love* people more than things
  - Made to do the *right* thing.
3. Humans are *loved* passionately by God... so we are incredibly valuable.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- Why did God create humans?
- How does the Bible explain the origin of humanity?
- What does it mean to be created in God's image?
- What does it mean that we should rule the earth?

### Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.

module 4

### Explore

Discussion starter

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

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Genesis 2:4-24.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

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

Q – Why do you think God created human life?

### View

Video episode 4 – who am i?

Seven things God tells us about ourselves:

1. Humans were made ..... therefore, we are significant.
2. Humans were made ..... therefore, we are unique in the way we were:
  - Made to ..... things
  - Made to ..... about things
  - Made to ..... people more than things
  - Made to do the ..... thing.
3. Humans are ..... passionately by God... so we are incredibly valuable.

## Discuss

Questions I have

39

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group session (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
See [www.longstoryshort.co/who-am-i](http://www.longstoryshort.co/who-am-i)



## frequently asked questions

### module 4

- ▶ 1. Why did God make human beings?
- ▶ 2. A lot of people say we are descended from animals. Are we animals or are we unique?
- ▶ 3. Does the Bible really say that Adam and Eve were real people and that the whole human race actually came from them?
- ▶ 4. What does being 'made in the image of God' mean?
5. What does it mean when we say that humans are 'moral beings'?
6. What does the Bible mean when it says that humans should 'rule the earth'?
7. Does the Bible teach that humans gradually 'appeared' on the planet?
8. Does the Bible teach that God created humans out of nothing?
9. Why did God make Adam from dust?
10. Are Genesis 1 and 2 talking about two different creations?
11. Is God a rational, logical being?

▶ Q 1. Why did God make human beings?

*Short answer:*

The same reason for which he made everything else – to display his greatness.

*Discussion:*

Some people think that God created humans because he was lonely and needed a friend but he has never been alone or lonely! He has never needed a friend. God is a Trinity – he continually exists as three persons in one being: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Within this Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit there are 'personal relationships'. The Bible tells us that before God created the world, the Father loved the Son (John 17:24) and 'shared' life with him in perfect glory (John 17:5). The Bible indicates there was also communication between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit – "Let us make mankind" (Genesis 1:26). The Bible indicates there is constant communication between the Father and the Son (John 5:19–20). Because

God is eternal, these relationships have existed forever. Because God is perfect, his relationships are perfect – perfectly satisfying and perfectly harmonious (no tensions or problems like there are in relationships between imperfect human beings who misunderstand each other).

Because God is love, a loving relationship existed in the Trinity eternally. So God did not make humans because he was lonely or needed someone to love. The short answer is that God made humans for the same reason he made everything else – to display his greatness!

▶ Q 2. A lot of people say we are descended from animals. Are we animals or are we unique?

*Short answer:*

Taken at face value, Genesis 1 and 2 clearly argue for the uniqueness of human beings. We are not animals, nor did we come from animals – although we do have some things in common with animals.

*Discussion:*

The Genesis story indicates we have some things in common with animals: (1) humans and animals were made on the same day; (2) both were formed from the dust of the ground; (3) both were made male and female; (4) both were told to increase; (5) both were given a vegetarian diet; (6) both were blessed by God; (7) both were given the breath of life; (8) both were called ‘living creatures/beings’ (creatures and beings are the same word in Hebrew – ‘nepesh haya’); and (9) both were the work of the same Creator (see page 100).

However, these similarities admitted, the text of Genesis 1–2 clearly argues for the uniqueness of humanity, disallowing any idea that we are animals or came from animals.

1. **God made Adam from the dust of the ground** (Genesis 2:7), the same ground that produced thorns and thistles (Genesis 3:17–18), and to which Adam would return when he died (Genesis 3:19). Adam was not made from the animals (Genesis 2:7).
2. In Genesis 1 the **text gives four times as much attention to Adam** as it does to any other part of creation. This deliberate emphasis not only shows the uniqueness of Adam but that he is also more important than is the rest of creation – animals included.
3. It is clear that **Adam did not belong to the animal world because**

**Adam required the breath of life** to become a living being (Genesis 2:7) – the animals already had the breath of life (Genesis 1:21, 24, 30; 6:17). Had Adam evolved from the animals, he would have derived the breath of life from them, rather than having it directly and separately imparted by God, as is the case in Genesis 2:7.

4. **Adam found no counterpart in the animal world.** An animal could be his pet but not his partner. Nothing in the animal world corresponded to Adam (Genesis 2:19–20) – hence God intervened and made him a partner from his own body (Genesis 2:21–22; 1 Corinthians 11:8) – not from an animal.
5. **Adam and Eve were superior to animals** and were made to rule over them (Genesis 1:26, 28).
6. **The Genesis story keeps humans separate from animals.** When the text talks about them, it speaks of them as separate categories: animals (Genesis 1:24–25) are a separate creative act from humans (Genesis 1:26–28) – and this is made very clear in Genesis 2 (compare verse 7 with verse 19).
7. The fundamental difference between humans and animals is obvious. **Humans are made in God’s image** (Genesis 1:27) – animals are not. Consequently, humans are God’s designated rulers on the planet, while the animals are ruled over (Genesis 1:26, 28).

Humans are of a different kind from all other creatures. Humans did not come from a non-human, sub-human or pre-human creature – they are in a special and separate category.

▶ Q 3. Does the Bible really say that Adam and Eve were real people and that the whole human race actually came from them?

*Short answer:*

Yes. The Bible teaches that Adam and Eve were the first humans and the actual parents of the whole human race.

*Discussion:*

Some people think the Adam and Eve story could never have happened the way the Bible says it did. Therefore, they call the story a ‘myth’ – an imaginary story deliberately made up to communicate a deeper spiritual meaning (a bit like a parable).

But the Bible presents Adam and Eve as real people in real history and the actual parents of the human race. Consider the following:

1. **The Adam and Eve story is just one of a whole series of historical accounts** that make up the book of Genesis. This means Adam and Eve are as real as are the other people in the Genesis story (e.g. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the 12 tribes of Israel, Noah, Cain and Abel).
2. **The genealogy of Luke 3:23–38** puts Adam together with other real people of history – among them: Nathan, David, Judah, Jacob, Isaac and Abraham. And, it lists Adam as the first person God made (verse 38). The point of the genealogy is that everyone comes from Adam.
3. **Jesus believed Adam and Eve were real people** who lived at a specific point in history (i.e. at the beginning) (Matthew 19:4–5). To say Adam and Eve were not real is to disagree with what Jesus believed.
4. **Paul taught that Adam was a real person** (1 Corinthians 11:8–9; 15:45, 47; 1 Timothy 2:13–14) and also that Adam was the actual parent of the human race: “From one man he [i.e. God] made all the nations...” (Acts 17:26).

This connection to Adam is vitally important for two reasons:

1. **It explains why every human being commits sin.** When Adam sinned, he actually became a sinner (a ‘sin-bent’ creature), who reproduced, in his own image (Genesis 5:3), beings who, like himself, have this inherently ‘sinful bent’ or ‘disposition’. That’s why no one needs to teach any of us how to sin. It comes naturally and flows out of who we are. If the human race has no real connection to Adam, then we must look elsewhere for an explanation for the reason sin exists everywhere and at all times.
2. **Salvation depends on the act of one man** (Jesus). Just as everyone is doomed by their real (biological) connection to Adam so, too, are people saved by their real (spiritual) connection to Jesus.

▶ Q 4. What does being ‘made in the image of God’ mean?

*Short answer:*

It means that we are like God in ways that other creatures are not. God has made us to be like himself (in his likeness and image).

*Discussion:*

To understand what it means to be made in the ‘likeness and image of God’, note Genesis 5:3: “... Adam... had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth”. What does it mean to say that Seth was made in Adam’s likeness and image? It means:

1. Seth was definitely not Adam
2. Seth was certainly related to Adam
3. Seth was clearly like Adam in ways that no one else was.

It’s the same with human beings made in God’s image because:

1. Humans are definitely not God
2. Humans are certainly related to God
3. Humans are clearly like God in ways that nothing else is.

It is this God-image that sets us apart from the animals. So, in what ways are we like God? We are creative beings (in the way we make things), self-aware beings (in the way we think about things), relational beings (in the way we love people more than we love things) and moral beings (in the way we know we ought to do the right thing). There are more ways as well: we are spiritual beings and we are rational beings. There may be more ways in which we are like God but these are the main ones.

Q 5. What does it mean when we say that humans are ‘moral beings’?

*Short answer:*

While ‘moral’ can mean ‘good’, here it means humans were made with a moral capacity, with the ability to understand ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. We are therefore ‘ethical’ creatures. This makes us different from the members of the animal world. Mark Twain once said, “Of all God’s creatures, only humans have the ability to blush.”

*Discussion:*

The following four things should be kept in mind:

1. **Every human has a moral capacity** because they are made in the image of God. That's why God was able to give Adam and Eve commands that could be obeyed or disobeyed: e.g. "Be fruitful and increase in number" (Genesis 1:28); "Rule over... the ground" (Genesis 1:28); "you must not eat from the tree..." (Genesis 2:16–17); etc.
2. **Every human has an inborn moral code** (Romans 2:14–15). At the deepest core of every human being, there is a moral library that contains all God's moral requirements. This is true for everyone – it is part of being made in the image of God. This means we have an instinctive understanding of what's right and wrong.
3. **Every human has a conscience.** The conscience is an invisible mechanism. It might help to think of the conscience as an imaginary committee of three invisible persons who live inside us. They study the moral code implanted in our minds and their job is to evaluate everything we do against that moral code. Before we do something, our conscience will evaluate our intended action/behaviour against the information contained in the moral code. It will then categorise that action as either good or evil and advise us of its conclusion by creating a feeling (a 'conviction') either to continue with what we plan to do, or to stop. Then, after we have done something, our conscience will evaluate what we have done against the moral code and, again, it will pass a judgement on our action as being either good or evil. If the verdict is 'good' then we feel satisfied. If the verdict is 'evil', we feel guilty. Animals don't have this moral capacity. Dr John Stott puts it this way: "Our whole moral vocabulary (commands and prohibitions [bans], values and choices, obligation, conscience, freedom and will, right and wrong, guilt and shame) is meaningless to animals. True, we can train our dog to know what is allowed and forbidden. And when it disobeys, and cringes from us by a reflex action, we can describe it as looking 'guilty'. But [in reality] it has no sense of guilt; it knows only that it is going to get walloped."<sup>7</sup>
4. **Every human is morally accountable to God.** Every action will be brought into judgement: "here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear

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<sup>7</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 38.

God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14). See also Revelation 20:11–15.

#### module 4

Q 6. What does the Bible mean when it says that humans should ‘rule the earth’?

*Short answer:*

Humans are to exercise authority over the earth – developing its potential, realising its possibilities and harnessing its energies, for the good of humanity. But this needs to be done in ways that reflect the values, beauty, order and glory of the Creator, realising we ourselves are under his authority and are answerable to him for the way we develop the earth.

*Discussion:*

The God of the Bible is the Sovereign God. “The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty... and armed with strength” (Psalm 93:1). Because we are made in God’s image, there is something ‘kingly’ about us. Although we are only creatures, we too have a measure of sovereignty. God gave us that sovereignty when he said, “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). Three things should be noted:

1. **Humans should not be abusive over nature.** Power is always open to abuse and can easily be mishandled and misdirected. We can so easily cross the boundary from kingly authority into inexcusable destruction. In exercising our power, we should realise we are God’s deputies ruling on his behalf, embracing his values and concerns. Rule does not mean exploit. We exercise authority as those who are under authority.
2. **Humans should not be slaves to nature.** While humans should not be tyrants over nature, equally, we should not become slaves to it. We are not here to worship nature. We are here to worship God and act for him as his representatives. Plants and animals do not have the same value as do human beings. In the refreshing climate of environmental concern, we must be careful we don’t elevate nature above humanity.
3. **Humans should be the lords of nature.** As ‘kings of the earth’, we should exercise our rule, knowing that our authority is a

delegated authority and that it is to be exercised on behalf of, and with full accountability to, the Creator. God is pleased when humans cultivate and transform the earth into vegetable gardens, and pleasure parks and forests. He intended that humans would domesticate animals and farm them for human use. God intended that humans would explore and harness all the secrets of science and carefully use the energies of the earth to make life richer and better for everyone. When that happens, God is very pleased.

Q 7. Does the Bible teach that humans gradually ‘appeared’ on the planet?

*Short answer:*

No. The creation of humans was a sudden and deliberate event. Adam and Eve were made as human beings.

*Discussion:*

Genesis 1 and 2 uses four different Hebrew words to show that humans did not just accidentally ‘appear’:

1. **God said he would ‘make’ humans** (Genesis 1:26). The word ‘make’ (Hebrew: ‘asah’) simply indicates that humans were ‘made’ and did not spontaneously appear.
2. **God is said to have ‘created’ humans** (Genesis 1:27). The word here (Hebrew: ‘bara’) reminds us that God was very much involved in the creation of humans.
3. **God is said to have ‘formed’ humans** (Genesis 2:7). The word ‘formed’ (Hebrew: ‘yatsar’) is used to tell us that God deliberately made humans, just like pottery is deliberately made by the potter (Isaiah 29:16; 49:5).
4. **God is said to have ‘made’ humans** (Genesis 2:22). The word ‘made’ (Hebrew ‘bana’) is sometimes used of erecting a building and gives the idea of something deliberately planned and constructed.

Q 8. Does the Bible teach that God created humans out of nothing?

*Short answer:*

No. Adam was made from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7).

*Discussion:*

While the Bible teaches that God made the heavens and the earth out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3), it does not teach that God made humans out of nothing. Genesis 2 tells us that animals were formed by God from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:19) and so was Adam (Genesis 2:7). Eve was not created out of nothing – the text says she was formed out of Adam’s side (Genesis 2:21–22).

Q 9. Why did God make Adam from dust?

*Short answer:*

God made Adam from the dust because God designed humans to be ‘earthlings’ – persons who were made to live on the earth.

*Discussion:*

The New Testament also tells us that Adam was made from the dust (1 Corinthians 15:47–49). The Bible doesn’t tell us specifically why humans were made from dust but two suggestions are possible:

1. God made humanity from the dust **to give him his bearings as an ‘earthling’** – we live on the earth, work the earth, take our food from the earth and, when we die, we return to it.
2. God made humanity from dust **to remind him of his humble position as a creature** – dust is a symbol of that which is lowly and fragile. Even though humanity is made in God’s image, we must not over-reach ourselves and think of ourselves as being God. Humanity’s high honour as God’s deputy must be balanced with our lowliness. We are creatures. We are made from the dust. We are not, and never will be, God.

Q 10. Are Genesis 1 and 2 talking about two different creations?

*Short answer:*

No. There is only one account of the creation (Genesis 1). Genesis 2 focuses on part of that creation – the human species.

*Discussion:*

Genesis 1 presents a ‘wide-angled shot’ of the whole creation while Genesis 2 gives us a ‘close-up’ of the origin of humans. Both chapters show that humans are the most important part of creation: Genesis 1

does this by covering all the other parts of creation first and then mentioning humans last, showing humans to be the pinnacle of creation week, so that everything leads up to the making of the human race. By contrast, Genesis 2 shows the importance of humans by mentioning them first and making them the primary focus of the creation week. So Genesis 2 is not a different story, it is simply an expanded story.

Each chapter is making the same point from a different perspective – humanity is special!

Q 11. Is God a rational, logical being?

*Short answer:*

Yes. The Bible indicates that God is a rational being. Everything about God, the world, ourselves and Christianity is rational.

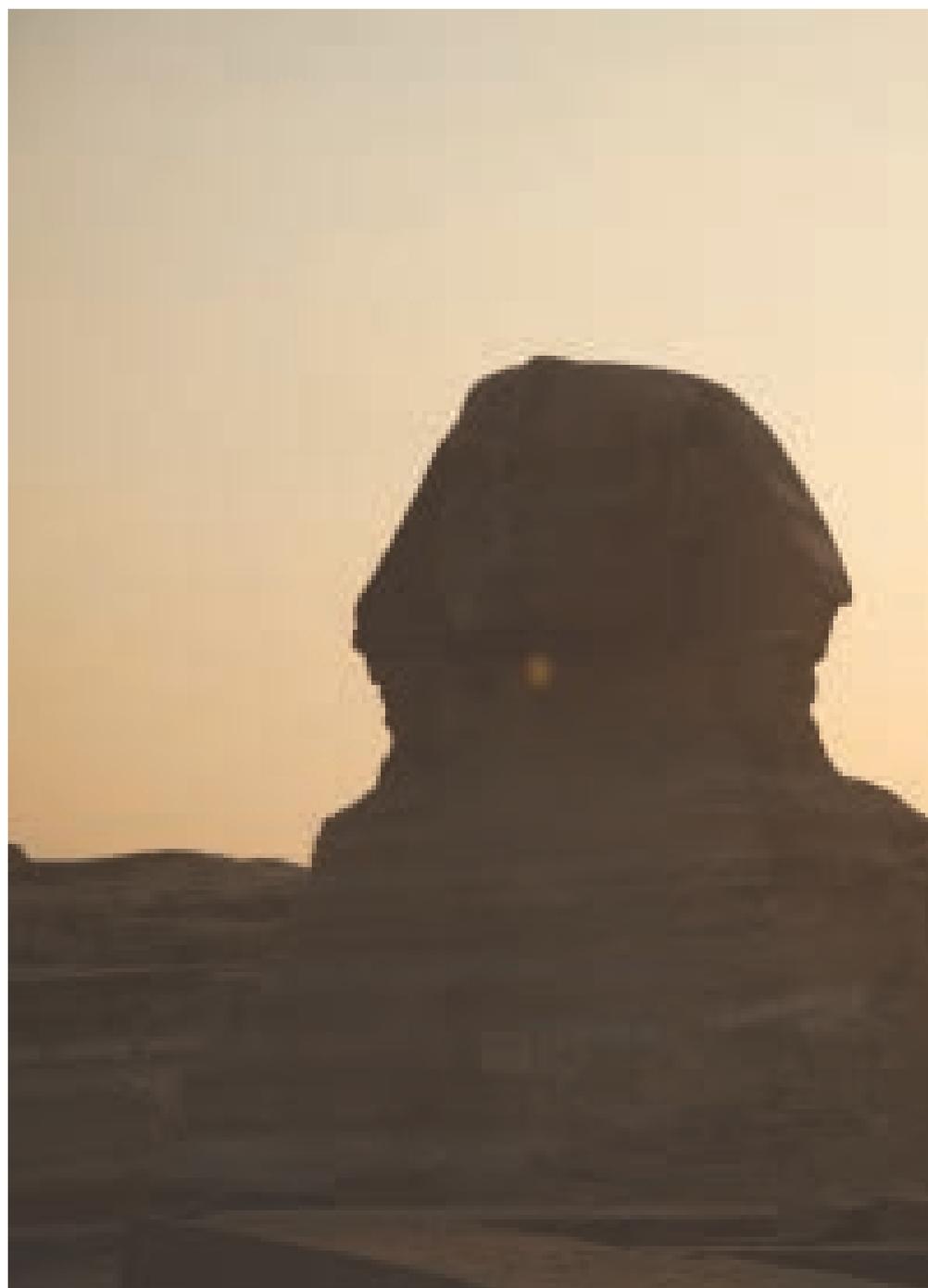
*Discussion:*

The Bible presents God as very much the intelligent One (Psalm 139:1–6) whose wisdom cannot be measured (Romans 11:33–36). His great mind has conceived and planned everything. God is never haphazard, irrational or illogical in the way he works. Everything is considered, planned and executed (Ephesians 1:11). He is the God of order (1 Corinthians 14:33), which is to say he thinks in order, works in order and creates an ordered existence. God’s intelligent, wise, rational, logical ways are clearly evident.

1. **Genesis 1 shows God’s rational thinking and logical planning.** The Bible says “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1) – and the glory of his rational intelligence and wisdom can be seen in the Genesis account of creation. For instance, God did not make ‘living creatures’ (Genesis 1:24) until he had first provided them with a place to live – the earth (Genesis 1:1–9) – and food to eat (Genesis 1:11–12). God did not make the sea creatures (Genesis 1:20–23) until he had first provided them with their habitat – the sea (Genesis 1:9–10). God did not fill the vast expanse of space with natural light-giving bodies like the sun and moon (Genesis 1:14–19) until he had first separated it out as ‘space’ (Genesis 1:3–8). God did not make woman as a helper for the man (Genesis 2:18–24) until first he had made the man (Genesis 2:7).
2. **The universe God made operates rationally and logically.** Scientists can explore the universe because it is a logical, carefully coordinated and interconnected system. Everything works in a

consistent, reasoned and cohesive way, which is exactly why it has been called a 'uni-verse'. It is why we can speak of the 'laws of nature' and why we can, in fact, do science. If everything were irrational and disconnected, there would be no science – and no school because there would be nothing to learn! Together, everything would be a disjointed, unconnected, jumbled, irrational confusion. It is precisely because there is rationality in the universe that philosophers have been able to discover and formulate (put together, not invent) systems of rational logic.

3. **God made humans rational beings.** Without rationality, we could not relate to God, to another human being or to the world in which we live – without reason, rationality and logic, everything would be meaningless and absurd. Rational laws govern human life (e.g. the law of identity and the law of non-contradiction, as explained below).
  - a. **The law of identity.** Adam would need to have known that God was in fact God, that Eve was in fact Eve, that animals were in fact animals and that Adam was in fact himself – without that certain identity, there could be no reality, let alone relationship. In philosophical terms, this is called 'the law of identity'. If A is not A, then God may not be himself (he might be someone else); Eve might not be herself (she might be someone else); etc. Such a non-rational situation would make for total absurdity.
  - b. **The law of non-contradiction.** Adam would also need to know that God was not Satan, that life was not death, that right was not wrong, that obedience was not disobedience, that work was not idleness, that goodness was not badness, etc. In philosophical terms, this is called 'the law of non-contradiction'. Because of the law of non-contradiction, God cannot be Non-God or Anti-God. Without the law of non-contradiction, God could be God and Satan at the same time, and wrong could be right at the same time. Again, this would make things absolutely absurd.







# something's wrong

module

5

## 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. If only it hadn't happened that way, but it did. Yet God was not caught by surprise – we will find out that God promised to banish evil forever!

## Day One: 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."<sup>8</sup>

*The Times* of London once 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. What's the problem?

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 3:1–7.

How did evil enter the world?

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald B. Allen, *The Majesty of Man* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1984), 98.

## Day Two: 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 one) with God?

## Day Three: Two Poisonous 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 Four: 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 frictionless 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)?

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## Day Five: 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. But the worst you can say about him is that he is an underachiever." Basically Woody Allen meant this... 'If God exists at all... he is not all-powerful. If he were, he would never have let this mess happen.'

module 5

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 erupted? 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?

## leader's introduction to module 5 – something's wrong

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to introduce explorers to some basic biblical concepts about the problem of **evil** and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means.

What we discover:

1. Evil was **permitted** by God.
2. Evil is **promoted** by Satan.
3. Evil is our **responsibility**.
4. Evil **affects** us.
5. Evil **won't** last forever.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- What is evil and did God create it?
- Who is Satan?
- Why did God give Adam a choice in the Garden of Eden?
- Why does God permit death and suffering if he is loving and all-powerful?
- Will God ever remove evil?

Welcome

- 1. Welcome people.
- 2. Serve food and beverage.

module 5

Explore

Discussion starter

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

Q - What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Genesis 3:1-21.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

Q - Where does the Bible place the blame for evil?

Q - What do you find interesting about this story?

View

Video episode 5 - something's wrong

Five things God tells us about evil:

- 1. Evil was ..... by God.
- 2. Evil is ..... by Satan.
- 3. Evil is our .....
- 4. Evil ..... us.
- 5. Evil ..... last forever.

## Discuss

Questions I have

49

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group time (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/somethings-wrong](http://www.longstoryshort.co/somethings-wrong)



## frequently asked questions

### module 5

1. a. Did God create evil?  
b. Why did God permit evil?
2. a. Who is Satan?  
b. How did a perfect angel, who lived in a perfect heaven, become evil?  
c. What was Lucifer's sin?
3. Why didn't God imprison or destroy Satan the moment he rebelled?
4. How did Satan get into the Garden of Eden?
5. Was the serpent mentioned in Genesis 3 an actual animal and did it really speak?
6. a. What is the significance of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?  
b. Was the Tree of Knowledge really necessary? Wasn't God setting up Adam and Eve to fail?
7. What was the Tree of Life?
8. If God is good, why is there so much death and suffering in the world? Will it ever end?
9. Why did Adam and Eve make loincloths out of leaves?
10. Why did God clothe Adam and Eve with animal skins?
11. Why should the whole human race suffer the consequences of Adam's sin?
12. Why is Eve cursed with "pains in childbearing" and what are those pains?
13. What is meant by "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you"?

### Website questions

14. Could Satan ever change his mind and repent?

15. Why is it dangerous to think we are not sinners but good people with pure hearts?
16. Are all sins equally sinful?
17. Why did Satan approach Eve instead of Adam?
18. Is hard work part of the curse?

▶ Q 1A. Did God create evil?

*Short answer:*

No. Firstly, God is holy and cannot create evil. Secondly, evil is not a 'thing' and therefore was never created.

*Discussion:*

There are two reasons why God did not create evil:

1. **God is holy** (Isaiah 6:3) and therefore he cannot make evil, do evil or encourage evil (Habakkuk 1:13).
2. **Evil is not a created thing.** Things are created but evil is not a thing; therefore, it is uncreated. If it is uncreated, God cannot have created it. When we say evil is not a 'thing', we mean we can't take evil and put it in a cabinet on display, any more than we can capture a thought and put that on display. But the question arises: If evil is not a thing, what is it? Evil is better understood as a bad relationship between otherwise good things. Something is evil when it stands in a wrong relationship to something else. We commit evil when we violate God's boundaries and put two good things in a bad relationship. Note these examples:
  - a. **Sexual Immorality.** God made our bodies. Our bodies are good. God made us male and female. He planned human reproduction and sexual fulfilment in the context of marriage. Reproduction and sexual fulfilment outside of marriage are wrong. The bodies are good in themselves but, if they are in a bad relationship, the act is said to be evil.
  - b. **Theft.** Money is good. The coins are well made, perfectly round and of good metal with a good imprint. They represent value accurately. We work to earn money to enable us to live. The thief's hand is good. It works well. The bones and muscles and nerves are in perfect working order. The fingers are strong and nimble. But when the thief takes our good money and puts it in his good hand, it is a bad relationship. The money does not

belong there. An act of evil (theft) has taken place.

- c. **Murder.** The gun is good. It is made of good metal, is well designed, well crafted, the barrel is perfectly straight, the trigger is perfectly balanced and the gun can fire the bullet perfectly well. The hand that holds it is good. The head it is aimed at is also good. It is well connected to the body, the blood is flowing and the brain is working; the eyes can see, the ears can hear and the mouth can talk. But when the good gun is aimed and fired at the good head, it is a bad relationship. An act of evil (murder) has taken place.
- d. **Lies.** The words are good. They are perfectly adequate means of communication. They can be well combined and show perfect grammar. Put together, they make good sense and can convey the intended meaning. But if the good words fail to match reality because they are crafted to deceive, they are a lie. Once formulated, a lie has been conceived. Once it has been communicated, a lie has been told.

▶ Q 1B. Why did God permit evil?

*Short answer:*

Because God is good, he must have permitted evil to exist so that a greater good would come from it. There are at least two ways that a greater good could come:

1. God permitted evil to display his greatness.
2. God permitted evil so he could destroy it forever.

*Discussion:*

God did not create evil because he is holy, nor could he create evil because evil is not a 'thing' (see question 1A above). God, in his wisdom, permitted evil to exist. But why would a loving, good and all-powerful God even permit evil? The reason must be that it was the best way to bring about an even greater good. But what good could possibly be 'that good' that God would permit something so awful as evil to exist? There are two possible answers:

1. **God permitted evil to show his greatness.** A diamond always looks its brightest when it is placed against the backdrop of black velvet. Sitting against this black background, the diamond sparkles like never before. This illustration is a little like God and evil. If there were no sin, we would never be able to:

- a. Experience the wonder of God's forgiveness
- b. See God's patience in the face of persistent sin
- c. See God's limitless love for the truly 'unlovely'
- d. Appreciate the light of God's holiness against the darkness of sin
- e. Know God's merciful help to those in misery
- f. Appreciate God's wisdom in face of extreme problems.

Incredibly, in God's great genius, he frustrates the purpose of evil by making it the occasion for his greater glory to shine!

2. **God permitted evil so he could destroy it forever.** By allowing evil to come into existence, God could deal with it and destroy it. And when evil is destroyed forever, God will make a new world for us... the best of all worlds... where evil can never again raise its ugly head because God has dealt with it and got rid of it. This new world will be full of people who choose only good and, because of this, evil will never again be possible! Dr Norman Geisler put it this way: "A world where evil is not defeated is nowhere near as good as a world where it is defeated."<sup>9</sup>

### Q 2A. Who is Satan?

#### *Short answer:*

Satan is a real, personal being. Once an angel of God, he is now the chief of all the fallen angels we call demons or evil spirits. Satan's consuming passion is to oppose God and destroy his purposes, which is why he is called 'The Adversary'.

#### *Discussion:*

Satan is mentioned in seven Old Testament books and in every book of the New Testament. He goes by various names: Morning Star (Isaiah 14:12), Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15), Beelzebub (Matthew 10:25), the Devil (1 Peter 5:8) and the Dragon... the Ancient Serpent (Revelation 12:9). The Bible speaks of Satan as:

1. **A real personal being.** The Bible refers to him as a person (Job 1;

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<sup>9</sup> Norman L. Geisler, "God, Evil and Dispensations", in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 111-112.

Matthew 4:1–11). He is able to exercise his will (2 Timothy 2:26). He is highly intelligent (2 Corinthians 11:3).

2. **A fallen angelic being.** He was originally known as the 'Morning Star' (Isaiah 14:12) – in Latin, this name is 'Lucifer'. He is said to have angelic followers (Matthew 25:41; Ephesians 6:11–12; Revelation 12:7, 9). He is the chief of these demonic beings (Matthew 12:24). Though scholars disagree about this interpretation, there is good reason to take Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:11–19 as speaking of Satan, the real personality behind (or possessing) the ancient Kings of Babylon (Isaiah 14) and Tyre (Ezekiel 28). Ezekiel 28:1–10 is about the historical, visible, human ruler who is King of Tyre; Ezekiel 28:12–19 describes the supernatural, invisible, spiritual personality behind the King of Tyre. This invisible personality is said to be: a created (and therefore limited) being (Ezekiel 28:13, 15); once morally blameless (Ezekiel 28:12, 15); an angelic being (Ezekiel 28:14, 16) who once held an unequalled position (Ezekiel 28:14, 16) from which he is now barred (Ezekiel 28:16–19); and once full of wisdom and beauty (Ezekiel 28:12) but now totally wicked (Ezekiel 28:15) and destructive (Ezekiel 28:16).

- ▶ Q 2B. How did a perfect angel, who lived in a perfect heaven, become evil?

*Short answer:*

We are not told. But we know:

1. Everything must have a cause;
2. God did not cause Satan's rebellion (see question 1A above); so
3. Satan himself must have simply decided to rebel out of his own free will.

*Discussion:*

Apparently this evil did not come about through external temptation – there was nothing and no one outside of Satan to do the tempting. God did not and could not have tempted Satan or caused him to sin (James 1:13). Somehow this evil spontaneously erupted inside Satan's heart. Satan simply made a choice. The choice was horrendously wrong and evil was born.

🔍 Q 2C. What was Lucifer's sin?

*Short answer:*

We are not told that he broke a specific command, but we are told he became proud (Ezekiel 28:17) and refused to worship God and wanted to take God's place.

*Discussion:*

As a creature, Satan was under obligation to worship the Creator but Isaiah 14:13–14 and Ezekiel 28:17 indicate that Lucifer refused to worship God at some point. Notice there are five 'I wills' in Isaiah 14:13–14:

1. "I will ascend to the heavens" – conclusion: Satan wants to control heaven (Isaiah 14:13).
2. "I will raise my throne" – conclusion: Satan wants a position above angelic status (Isaiah 14:13).
3. "I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly" – conclusion: Satan wants to rule the earth (Isaiah 14:13).
4. "I will ascend above the tops of the clouds" – conclusion: Satan wants all the glory (Isaiah 14:14).
5. "I will make myself like the Most High" – conclusion: Satan wants to own the heavens and the earth (Isaiah 14:14).

Q 3. Why didn't God imprison or destroy Satan the moment he rebelled?

*Short answer:*

The Bible says that God has set the day when he will lock Satan up forever and throw away the key (Revelation 20:7–10). God has appointed the right time for Satan's final judgement and, when it comes, the severity of it will be completely justified. Meanwhile, Satan's continued activity serves only to achieve God's greater purposes.

*Discussion:*

The Bible reveals an important principle: God's judgement never comes until his wisdom declares the time is right. Like all his works, God's judgement is perfect. When he judges, it is always with the right measure and at the right time. For example:

1. In Noah's day, God withheld judgement until sin reached its full measure (Genesis 6:5–6, 11–13).

2. God withheld judgement on the Amorites until their sin reached its limit (Genesis 15:16).

In the meantime, Satan and his demons (fallen angels) are under God's control (1 Kings 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12; Ephesians 1:21). When God brings Satan to his final judgement, it will be perfectly timed, perfectly executed and perfectly justified, and God will be praised.

module 5

Q 4. How did Satan get into the Garden of Eden?

*Short answer:*

We don't know how Satan got into the garden. The Bible simply says he was there.

*Discussion:*

It could be that Satan was on the earth before Adam was created, which is why (for good reasons) some English translations say that God instructed Adam to 'guard' the garden (Genesis 2:15), and then to rule over the rest of the earth and control it (Genesis 1:26–28).

Q 5. Was the serpent mentioned in Genesis 3 an actual animal and did it really speak?

*Short answer:*

Yes, the serpent was an actual animal that Satan took control of and used to approach Adam and Eve.

*Discussion:*

There are good reasons for believing the serpent was an actual animal used by Satan:

1. **The serpent is said to be one of the animals.** Genesis 3:1 and 3:14 refer to this creature as one of the animals.
2. **'Serpent' (in Hebrew) is a normal word for an actual snake in the Old Testament (Genesis 3:1).**
3. **God cursed the actual serpent** above all the wild animals (Genesis 3:14). This was separate from his curse on Satan himself (Genesis 3:15), indicating the animal itself was cursed because of its involvement.

4. **The New Testament puts the serpent and Satan together** in three texts: Revelation 12:9 – “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray”; Revelation 20:2 – “that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan...”; and in Romans 16:20 – “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet”. These clearly indicate that it was Satan that was in view in the curse of Genesis 3:15. This indicates Satan used the serpent in such a way that he became identified with the animal.
5. Throughout the Bible, Satan uses people like Judas (John 13:27) or Peter (Matthew 16:23). Certainly **demons can enter animals and control them** (Matthew 8:28–34). So it is not at all impossible that Satan, the wisest of God’s angelic beings, should (in the absence of any other available human being) choose to use the serpent, the wisest of all the creatures God had made (Genesis 3:1), to approach Adam and Eve.
6. **Genesis 3 says the serpent spoke** (Genesis 3:1). The Bible records occasions when Satan took control of people (e.g. Judas (John 13:27)) and actually spoke through them (e.g. Peter (Matthew 16:23)). If demons can enter into animals (Matthew 8:28–34) then one presumes Satan can use them to speak, especially in the absence of another available human being. The New Testament is very clear that Satan was involved in this temptation (2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Timothy 2:14). It’s not an outrageous idea. The moment the animal spoke, Adam and Eve should have ‘heard the alarm bells ringing’ and dismissed the animal immediately – after all, they had control over the animals (Genesis 1:26, 28) and could have sent the serpent away. More than that, Adam and Eve already knew animals were not their counterparts and could not have a rational conversation with them (Genesis 2:19–20). Accordingly, the alarm bells should have been ringing very loudly. We can think only that Eve kept listening in this remarkably bizarre situation because of Satan’s extreme ability to distract and deceive.

▶ Q 6A. What is the significance of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

*Short answer:*

It was one of two trees in the middle of the garden that had special significance. The tree was the symbol of God’s moral authority – his right to determine what was good and what was evil. It was not to be eaten from (Genesis 2:17).

*Discussion:*

The following is true about the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil:

1. **It was a real tree like all the others that grew out of the ground** (Genesis 2:9).
2. **It was an ordinary tree** – it wasn't full of magical powers. Neither was it poisonous. Like all the trees, it was good (Genesis 2:9). If animals ate the fruit, they would not have acquired wisdom, nor would they have died. The tree would have had no effect on animals.
3. **It was special because it was a symbol.** Even though it was a real tree, it had special meaning, like a monument. A monument is a real thing, and an ordinary thing made of concrete or stone, etc. – but it is also a special symbol. It stands for something. But what? It did not stand for the ability to understand the difference between 'right' and 'wrong' – Adam and Eve already had this ability. They could understand the difference between right and wrong before they ate from this tree. After all, as Eve explained to Satan, they already knew they shouldn't eat of this tree (Genesis 3:2–3). So it must have been something more than the ability to understand the difference between good and evil. We suggest that this tree stood for God's moral authority – the right to determine what is 'good' and what is 'evil'. How do we know this? Notice three things:
  - a. Satan realised that, if Adam and Eve ate from that tree, they would be like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:5) – in other words, they would make their own decisions about what was right or wrong.
  - b. While all trees, including this one, were “pleasing to the eye and good for food” (Genesis 2:9), Satan had convinced Eve that this tree would offer her something more – wisdom (Genesis 3:6). What wisdom? The wisdom to determine what was right and what was wrong.
  - c. After Adam and Eve had eaten from this tree, God himself said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:22). God was saying humanity had overstepped its boundaries and had become like him – the final authority on what was good and what was evil. This was humanity's attempt to displace God and elevate themselves to the place of absolute moral authority.

- ▶ Q 6B. Was the Tree of Knowledge really necessary?  
Wasn't God setting them up to fail?

*Short answer:*

God was not setting Adam and Eve up to fail but the possibility for failure was a necessary part of their development.

*Discussion:*

When Adam and Eve were created, they still had to undergo personal development:

1. **Adam and Eve needed to develop morally.** Adam and Eve were not created holy in the absolute sense; otherwise, like God, they could never have sinned. Neither were Adam and Eve created evil. Rather, they were created in the state of innocence – but an unconfirmed and untested innocence. This does not mean that Adam and Eve were not morally responsible at the moment of creation, because we know that they were created with a conscience (Romans 2:14–15). However, it seems that the good they did (i.e. naming the animals, caring for the garden, etc.), they did naturally and innocently rather than having to make a conscious judgement to do good instead of doing evil. God's command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge meant that Adam and Eve had to make a clear, conscious and deliberate choice of good. It was part of their moral development. If Adam and Eve had made the correct choice, they would have moved up into confirmed holiness (from which point on they would have been sinless). In making the wrong choice, they moved down into confirmed corruption (from which point on, they became sinful people).
2. **Adam and Eve needed to develop relationally.** Love is bound up with choice – if it's forced, it is not love. A robot programmed to say "I love you" does not, of course, love anything. Love is a freely chosen action and robots cannot choose. Humanity's greatest duty is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart... soul... mind" (Matthew 22:36–38). Loving a superior is different from loving an equal. Children show love by being obedient to their parents. Humans show love for God by being obedient. Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). This choice would enable Adam and Eve to show their love for God.
3. **Adam and Eve needed to develop volitionally (personally).** Because humanity was made in the image of God, this included a measure of sovereignty and self-determination. Adam and Eve needed to

be free to choose who they would be. They could not be other than human, less than human or more than human, but they could choose what kind of human they would be. So this choice between becoming holy and becoming sinful was a necessary one.

4. **Adam and Eve needed to develop spiritually.** This choice enabled Adam and Eve to make a decision about their spiritual allegiance – would they go with God or would they go with Satan?

module 5

Because the choice presented by the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was a necessary one, God was not laying a trap or teasing his creatures. It was an essential part of Adam and Eve's development.

### Q 7. What was the Tree of Life?

#### *Short answer:*

The Tree of Life was one of two trees in the middle of the Garden of Eden that had special significance. It represented God's gift of immortal/eternal life.

#### *Discussion:*

There are four good reasons to believe the Tree of Life offered eternal and immortal life:

1. **A textual reason.** The words "live forever" (Genesis 3:22) mean to have continual existence and are often used in the Old Testament to refer to earthly existence. God put in extreme safeguards after Adam and Eve sinned to stop them from eating from the Tree of Life. God did that because they had already rebelled and were under the penalty of death. Consequently, they were not permitted to eat from the Tree of Life.
2. **A logical reason.** The two trees are set in contrast to each other (Genesis 2:9). If eating from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge would result in certain death (Genesis 2:17) – in all its dimensions: spiritual, physical and eternal – then, by contrast, to eat from the Tree of Life would result in abundant life – in all its dimensions: spiritual, physical and eternal.
3. **A biblical reason.** The 'Tree of Life' appears again in Revelation 22:2, 14 and 19. Genesis 3 and Revelation 22 are connected in this way: Genesis chapters 1–3 are the 'introduction' to the biblical story and Revelation 22 is the 'conclusion' to the biblical story. Both passages speak of an earthly paradise. Since the Tree of Life in Revelation 22

clearly represents eternal and immortal life, it must also be true of the Tree of Life in Genesis 3.

4. **A theological reason.** This tree offered physical immortality. God did not create Adam and Eve as immortal beings. Had God made them that way, then they would never have been able to die. But while God didn't make them immortal, neither did he make them mortal, that is, beings who would naturally die. Death came only through sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12). Had Adam and Eve not sinned by taking from the forbidden tree, they would have taken from the Tree of Life and lived forever, because this tree provides endless life.

Had Adam eaten from the Tree of Life, he would have shared the fullness of God's blessings in his physical body forever.

- ▶ Q 8. If God is good, why is there so much death and suffering in the world? Will it ever end?

*Short answer:*

God created a "very good" (Genesis 1:31) world where suffering and death did not exist. When Adam sinned against God, he and the planet suffered the consequences. Suffering and death came to the entire creation. But God promised to defeat evil (including suffering and death) and remove it forever!

*Discussion:*

The Bible presents the story of suffering and death in the following way:

1. **Suffering and death were not a part of the world that God created.** The Bible begins its story with a good God creating a "very good" (Genesis 1:31) world. The whole of creation was in perfect harmony. Humans were created to be vegetarian (Genesis 1:29) and were to rule over all the earth (Genesis 1:28). Even animals lived in perfect harmony, as they ate only plants and not each other (Genesis 1:30).
2. **Adam disobeyed God (sinned).** The Bible continues its story with God giving the first human couple, Adam and Eve, free choice either to obey him by not eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil or to disobey him by eating from this tree. Tragically, they chose to take the evil option by eating from the forbidden tree (Romans 5:12).

3. **Adam's sin brought moral evil, suffering and death to every person.** When Adam disobeyed, he introduced sin into the world. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned". Everyone descended from Adam is now born a sinner (Ephesians 2:1–3).
4. **Adam's sin brought natural evil – the earth is cursed.** While the world is a wonderfully beautiful place (Psalm 19:1–6), the ugliness of disease, suffering and death is also evident. There are floods, devastating earthquakes and famines that destroy the places where we live ('natural' evil). When Adam sinned, the whole of creation was cursed by God (Genesis 3:17–19) and subjected to frustration and groaning (Romans 8:20–22). All the natural evil we see in the world is a result of Adam's sin. That means the world is not always a good place; sometimes, it is very evil.
5. **God promised to defeat evil, suffering and death.** Genesis 3:15 says that while there will be "enmity" between Eve and Satan, one of Eve's descendants (the Messiah) would crush the head of Satan, as a person stomps on the head of a snake, and Satan will be eliminated. Revelation 20:2–3 and 10 say that Satan will one day be removed from the world. And, when evil is removed, God will create a new universe that will never again contain evil, suffering and death. Evil, suffering and death will be gone forever!

Q 9. Why did Adam and Eve make loincloths out of leaves?

*Short answer:*

They felt ashamed and needed to cover their wrongdoing.

*Discussion:*

Genesis chapter 2 closes with these words: "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Genesis 2:25). That means Adam and Eve were completely innocent – just like naked children who, in their innocence, feel no shame. Only after Adam and Eve sinned were they aware of their nakedness (Genesis 3:7) and their shame (Genesis 3:10) and their need to cover their wrongdoing.

🔍 Q 10. Why did God clothe Adam and Eve with animal skins?

*Short answer:*

When Adam and Eve sinned, they made coverings for themselves out of fig leaves (Genesis 3:7). They made those coverings because they felt guilt and shame at having sinned against God. God replaced those garments with garments of animal skin (Genesis 3:21), a provision based on the death of an animal.

*Discussion:*

1. **The garments of leaves** (Genesis 3:7). The context certainly suggests that Adam and Eve are trying to cover their wrongdoing and make themselves acceptable to God. But it wasn't working. Even though they had made aprons of leaves, Adam and Eve knew they were not acceptable to God and felt afraid of him (Genesis 3:7–10).
2. **The garments of skin** (Genesis 3:21).
  - a. **Where the skins came from.** While it's true that animals were also cursed because of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:14) and began to die as a result (Romans 8:19–21), these particular animals must have been deliberately killed – since insufficient time had passed for them to have died of natural causes.
  - b. **Why the skins were provided.** God judged Adam and Eve's disobedience with death (Genesis 3:19). That's why the leaves could never cover the guilt of sin – it required the payment of death. So God took the life of an animal and graciously used the skin of the animal as a covering to clothe Adam and Eve. It is important to understand that the provision of skins indicates that Adam and Eve were restored not to innocence and not to paradise, but to fellowship with God. They no longer needed to hide from God (cf. Genesis 3:7–10). But the return to paradise must await the new heaven and earth.

Q 11. Why should the whole human race suffer the consequences of Adam's sin?

*Short answer:*

Put simply, it's all about 'representation'. Adam was the 'official representative' for the human race. When he acted in the Garden of Eden, he acted for the whole human race. The Bible addresses this subject in Romans 5:12–21 (see the discussion below).

*Discussion:*

Adam was the 'official representative' for the human race. When he acted in the Garden of Eden, he acted for the whole human race. It's called 'representation'. This principle is still at work today – here are two examples:

1. **Representation works in national politics.** Most nations are led by legislative bodies; each of these is called something like the 'House of Representatives'. The 'representatives' might be democratically elected or they might be appointed but they are representatives who make decisions for their whole country – and the decisions they make affect each one of us very much. If they make a decision to raise taxes, we have to pay more tax. If they make a decision that the nation is at war, then everyone in that nation is regarded as being 'at war'.
2. **Representation works in sports, too.** If one member of the team scores, the whole team gets the point. If one member of the team disobeys a rule, the whole team is penalised – not just the offending player. Each 'represents' the whole team. And what each player does (good or bad) applies to the whole team.

When Adam sinned, he sinned 'for us', 'on our behalf', and his sin was counted against the whole human race. That's why Paul said, "... the many died by the trespass of the one man" (Romans 5:15). "The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation" on the whole human family (Romans 5:16). Why? Because Adam was our representative.

At first glance, that might not seem fair. Why should everyone suffer because of the act of one man? Romans 5:12–21 explains God's wisdom in arranging things this way. You see, in the same way God made Adam the representative of everyone connected to him (by nature), so too did God make Jesus to be the representative of everyone connected to him (by faith). Adam's one act in the Garden of Eden brought everyone connected to him (by nature) into judgement. Jesus' one act on the cross brings everyone connected to him (by faith) back to God. In other words, we 'get saved' the same way we 'got lost' – by the act of one man. Was it our act that got us in trouble with God? No. Was it our act that makes us right with God? No. Adam's one act in the Garden of Eden brought death to everyone connected to him. Jesus' one act on the cross brings life to everyone connected to him (how a person is rightly connected to Jesus will be discussed in module 11 below).

Q 12. Why is Eve cursed with “pains in childbearing” and what are those pains?

*Short answer:*

The pain is both physical (in childbirth) and emotional (in child-rearing). We are not told why Eve was subjected to physical pain in childbirth. Could it be possible that the pain Eve experiences as she brings a child into the world is a reminder that she helped bring sin into the world which is now a world of pain?

*Discussion:*

In the curse, Eve is affected in her two most crucial roles: those of mother and wife. The physical pain in childbirth probably includes everything from the anxieties a woman has about becoming pregnant, to the physical discomforts of carrying the child, to the concerns over the health of the child in the womb, to the dangers of the birth process for both mother and child. Why physical pain in childbirth? Maybe, as suggested in the short answer above, the pain is to remind Eve that the world she brings her child into is itself a painful one – and she and her husband made it that way. Motherhood’s happiness is interrupted by times of sadness. This pain will overwhelm Eve all too quickly. Her sons’ bickering and jealousy will turn to resentment and hatred and then murder (Genesis 4).

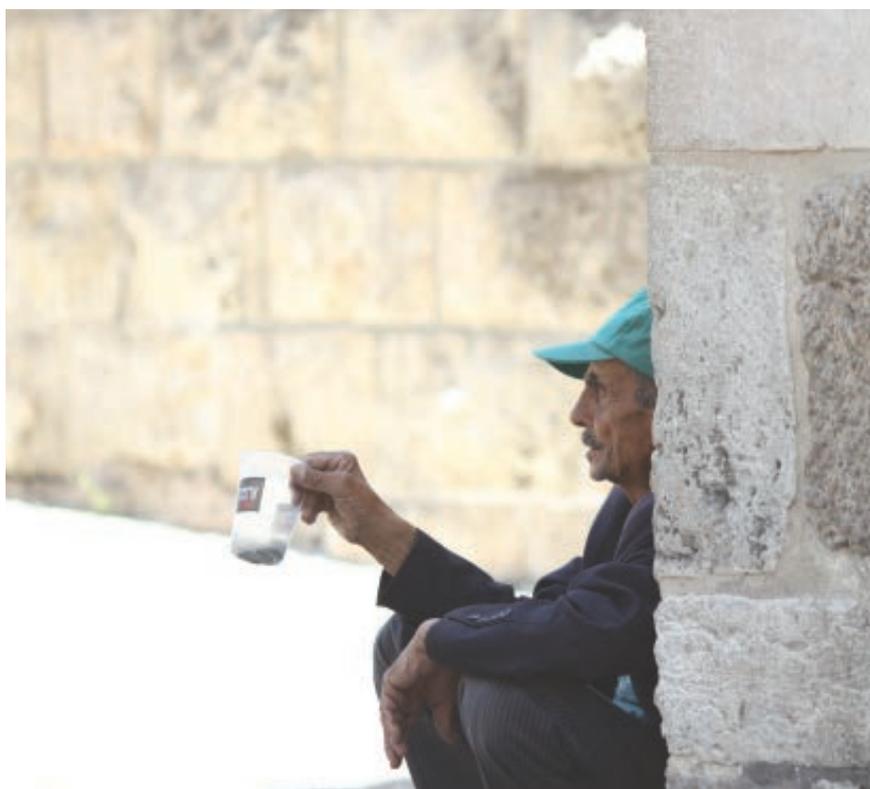
Q 13. What is meant by: “your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you”?

*Short answer:*

It means that there will be continual tension in the relationship between man and woman. The woman will try and dominate the man and the man will try to overpower the woman. Companionship is spoiled by the desire to control.

*Discussion:*

It seems best to understand that Eve’s ‘desire’ for her husband is the desire to dominate and control her husband, just as sin desires to master (dominate, control) Cain (see Genesis 4:7 where the same word is used). And, just as Cain must gain the ‘upper hand’ over sin, so the husband will try to have the ‘upper hand’ over his wife sometimes in an oppressive and dictatorial way. The meaning is this: “you will have a tendency to dominate your husband and he will have a tendency to become a dictator over you”. Here begins the ‘battle of the sexes’.





# confusion

module

6

## 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 One: 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...*

module 6

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 Two: 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*. Yet, as Creator, he 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 Three: Some Words about Words...

In her book *The First Word*,<sup>10</sup> 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 and 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?

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<sup>10</sup> Christine Kenneally, *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2007).

## Day Four: 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?

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## Day Five: 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?

module 6

## leader's introduction to module 6 – confusion

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to introduce explorers to some basic biblical concepts about the significance of **Babel** – looking especially at how different nations and different religions developed – and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means.

What we discover:

1. At Babel humanity **resisted** God's purpose.
2. At Babel God confused the **language** of humanity.
3. After Babel different languages led to different **locations**.
4. After Babel different locations caused different **cultures** and different **nations**.
5. After Babel different cultures caused different **religions**.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- What is the point of all the stories from Genesis 4 to 10?
- How does the Bible explain the different languages of the world?
- How does the Bible explain the different nations of the world?
- Is there only one God?
- What about all the other world religions?

### Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.

### Explore

Discussion starter

- Q – What excites you the most about different cultures?
- Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Genesis 11:1–9.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

- Q – What do you think it would be like to have all people united, in one world, under one God?
- Q – What do you think is the most significant thing about this story?

### View

Video episode 6 – confusion

Five things that God wants us to know about Babel:

1. At Babel humanity ..... God’s purpose.
2. At Babel God confused the ..... of humanity.
3. After Babel different languages led to different .....
4. After Babel different locations caused different ..... and different .....
5. After Babel different cultures caused different .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

61

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group time (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/confusion](http://www.longstoryshort.co/confusion)



## frequently asked questions

### Questions Leading up to Babel

1. What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice?
2. Where did Cain find his wife?
3. Who are the 'sons of God' in Genesis 6:1–4 and what is their great sin?
4. Why did God judge the earth so drastically at the time of the flood?
5. Why did God allow things to become so bad before he sent the flood?
6. Why did innocent animals have to die in the flood?
7. Was the flood worldwide?

module 6

### Questions about Babel

8. Why is Babel important?
9. Why did God want people to live all across the earth?
10. Why did God impose different languages on the human family at Babel?
- ▶ 11. How did the different languages develop after Babel?
- ▶ 12. Where did our cultural and physical diversity come from?
- ▶ 13. a. Does Genesis teach that there is only one God?  
b. When and how did alternative religions (the worship of 'other gods') begin?
- ▶ 14. Did God actually create the different nations and determine the exact places they would live? Or did he just let it happen?

### Website questions

15. What was Cain's mark?
16. If God is holy, why wasn't Cain immediately given the death penalty?

17. What is the point of mentioning Noah's drunkenness and Ham's sin?
18. What exactly was Ham's sin?
19. If Ham sinned, why was Canaan cursed?
20. What was the curse on Canaan?

## questions leading up to babel

Q 1. What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice?

*Short answer:*

The problem with Cain's sacrifice is that it was not a blood sacrifice.

*Discussion:*

Some people think Cain's offering was rejected because it was not the best of his produce. However, there are good reasons for thinking that God rejected Cain and his offering because Cain had an attitude that led him to ignore the principle and practice of blood sacrifice as the only valid means of approaching God. Though, of course, the immediate text is not very detailed, there are good reasons for thinking that the problem with Cain's sacrifice was that it was bloodless:

1. The story of Cain (Genesis 4:1–16) cannot be separated from **the preceding context in Genesis 3** where we find that sinners can approach God only on the basis of animal sacrifice (Genesis 3:21).
2. **Hebrews 12:23–24 contrasts Christ's sprinkled blood** (of self-sacrifice) **with Abel's sprinkled blood** (of animal sacrifice): "You have come to... Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel". This suggests that Abel had practised blood sacrifice that was required by God.

Q 2. Where did Cain find his wife?

*Short answer:*

From all the other people that existed at that time.

*Discussion:*

Finding a wife for Cain appears to be a problem because people think Adam and Eve had only three sons: Cain, Abel and Seth. So the question

is posed: “If we are all descended from Adam and Eve, where could Cain have found a wife?” But consider the following:

1. **The Bible never says Adam and Eve had only three sons.**
2. **The Bible says Adam had other sons and daughters.** Genesis 5:4 says: “after Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.”
3. **There were many others alive at the time Cain was ready to marry:**
  - a. Notice in the genealogy of Genesis 5 how every male descendant of Adam “had other sons and daughters”.
  - b. Notice that by the time Cain’s son Enoch was born there were enough people to build and populate a city.
  - c. The population at the time of Cain would have been quite sizeable given the lifespan and fertility of the men mentioned in Genesis 5.
  - d. By the time Adam died at the age of 930 years (Genesis 5:5), the population might have even been a few billion.
4. **Cain would have married one of his sisters or a close relative.** Genesis does not condemn marrying one’s sister or niece. It condemns only sex between parents and children. Even Abraham married his half-sister. The prohibition on marrying a sister or niece did not come into force until Leviticus (the time of Moses). Around the time of Cain, genetic defects would not have been an issue.

module 6

Q 3. Who are the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1–4 and what is their great sin?

*Short answer:*

We can’t be sure who the sons of God were. All we know is that what happened was something particularly evil that earned it a place among the many tragic evil stories of Genesis 4–10.

*Discussion:*

Scholars tell us that this is easily the most difficult passage to understand in all the Old Testament and caution us that no one can be absolutely certain about what sin is actually involved. There are three main opinions:

1. **Fallen angels.** The ‘sons of God’ were fallen angels who engaged in sexual activity with human females.

2. **Men of the godly line of Seth.** The ‘sons of God’ were the men of the godly line of Seth who intermarried with the daughters of the ungodly descendants of Cain.
3. **Demonised rulers.** The ‘sons of God’ were demonised rulers who sexually exploited the women of the lower classes.

All we know is that what happened was something particularly evil, which earned it a place among the many tragic, evil stories of Genesis 4–10.

Taken together, these several stories:

1. Show the continual moral and spiritual decline of humankind
2. Prepare us to understand God’s grief and regret over making humanity (Genesis 6:6)
3. Explain the reason for God’s awful judgement resulting in the flood (Genesis 6:7).

Q 4. Why did God judge the earth so drastically at the time of the flood?

*Short answer:*

Because humankind’s sin was so extreme and had spread across the whole world.

*Discussion:*

Scripture tells us that, at the time of the flood, evil was:

1. **Unrestrained.** Humanity’s wickedness was “great” (Genesis 6:5), the earth was “full of violence” (Genesis 6:11) and had become “corrupt” (or wrecked, ruined (Genesis 6:11–12)). The world no longer served the purpose for which it was made.
2. **Universal.** The “earth” had become corrupt (Genesis 6:5, 11): i.e. “all the people” (not just some) had corrupted their ways (Genesis 6:12).
3. **Ingrained.** The problem was entrenched in the nature of humanity: “every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil...” (Genesis 6:5). The outward acts of evil were the result of inward, ingrained evil.
4. **Unstoppable.** Every “inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil, all the time” (Genesis 6:5). Evil had become a way of life.

Humanity's sin had reached huge proportions and there was no way back. The earth required a gigantic cleansing.

Q 5. Why did God allow things to become so bad before he sent the flood?

module 6

*Short answer:*

There are two reasons for God's delay in sending the flood. The first has to do with God's patience. The second has to do with God's righteousness.

*Discussion:*

1. **God is patient.** He is "the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger" (Exodus 34:6; cf. Numbers 14:18; Psalm 86:15; Psalm 103:8). The New Testament says: "God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built" (1 Peter 3:20). God was patient because he is "compassionate" (Exodus 34:6). He is "not wanting anyone to perish" (2 Peter 3:9; cf. 1 Timothy 2:4). God never gains pleasure from people perishing in their sin (Ezekiel 18:27, 32; 33:11). Had the people listened to Noah's preaching and turned to God, God would have changed his mind and held back his judgement – he always does (Exodus 32:9–10, 14; Jonah 3:10, 4:2; Jeremiah 18:7–8; Ezekiel 18:25, 27, 32). Dr Tony Evans says: "God does not come out of nowhere and lower the boom on unsuspecting people who had no chance."<sup>11</sup> God's delays are full of warnings and pleadings as he patiently contends with sinful humanity.
2. **God is righteous.** God will bring judgement for those who do not respond to his call to turn to him. "The LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished" (Nahum 1:3). But God never judges prematurely (Genesis 15:14–16). God always waits until the measure of human guilt and rebellion have become entrenched and the people have passed beyond the point of no return before he enforces his judgement (cf. Matthew 23:32, 35; 1 Thessalonians 2:16; Revelation 6:11).

Even when he judges human sin, God is always patient and always righteous.

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<sup>11</sup> Anthony T. Evans, *Our God is Awesome: Encountering the Greatness of Our God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1994), 245.

Q 6. Why did innocent animals have to die in the flood?

*Short answer:*

Because God was cleansing the whole of the corrupt earth, not just humans.

*Discussion:*

God had said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created—and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground...” (Genesis 6:7). Nothing is said about the fish in the sea (Genesis 6:7). The whole earth was “corrupt” (or wrecked, ruined (Genesis 6:11–12)) and, therefore, the whole earth needed a gigantic cleansing – even the mountains were to be covered with the waters (Genesis 7:19). It may be that humanity had used the animals in its extreme wickedness<sup>12</sup> (e.g. bestialism – sexual activity between humans and non-humans) but it also may be that the animals and birds were simply casualties of the flood.<sup>13</sup> Regardless, it should be kept in mind that, unlike humans, animals do not have an endless existence, so while the plight of animals is important, the plight of humans is even more significant. It is interesting that God’s covenant agreement never to punish the earth by a flood again was made not only with humanity, but with every living creature that was in the ark (Genesis 9:9–16).

Q 7. Was the flood worldwide?

*Short answer:*

Biblical scholars are divided in their views on this question but there is evidence to suggest the flood was a worldwide phenomenon.

*Discussion:*

Some think the flood was **worldwide**; some think it was **regional**; some think it was a **local** event; some think it covered simply the known world. “It has generally been understood... the flood covered the entire surface of the earth”<sup>14</sup> – that is to say it was an ‘earth crisis’<sup>15</sup> (see Genesis 6:7, 12–13, 17; 7:4, 19, 21, 23; 9:11). At the very least, we are to understand that

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<sup>12</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard Jr (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 276.

<sup>13</sup> G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis*, vol. 1, Bible Student’s Commentary, ed. Edward Viening, trans. by William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 158–159.

all human life and animal life was totally destroyed except any that had been protected in the ark because “the text repeatedly emphasises that the catastrophe annihilated all human and animal life on earth.”<sup>16</sup> The end result is absolute and non-negotiable – by the time God was done with his judgement, there were only eight human survivors: Noah, his wife and their three sons and their wives.

## module 6

Evangelical scholars understand the flood in one of two ways:

1. **Regional/local.** Some see the flood as a judgement on the sinful people of Noah’s time. For these people, “all the universality demanded is that which was necessary for the destruction of the human race.”<sup>17</sup> In this way, the flood could be regional or local and, at the same time, considered ‘universal’ because it destroyed all human life except for Noah and his immediate family.
2. **Worldwide.** Others understand the flood as a judgement on the entire planet, including humanity and the animal world (see the references to “the earth” in Genesis 6:13 and the references to the mountains being covered in Genesis 7:19–20, 8:4; Psalm 104:6–8).

## questions about babel

Q 8. Why is Babel important?

*Short answer:*

Babel is important because it is a major point of departure. Up until this time, humanity was moving in a single group. Everything was fairly standard. One world, one people, one God. But, at Babel, things changed. As people groups were forced to spread out across the earth, new languages diversified, ethnic features developed, nations were formed and various religions began. The world changed shape after Babel. While Babel was the beginning of new languages, new nations and new ethnic

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>15</sup> Johann P. Lange, *Genesis, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, ed. Johann P. Lange, trans. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 296.

<sup>16</sup> Aalders, *Genesis*, vol. 1, 191.

<sup>17</sup> W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 78.

groups, the major issue was that, after Babel, each group within the human family developed their own religions. For this reason, Babel has gone down in biblical history as “the mother of all harlots” (Revelation 17:5) – that is, it is the starting point of false religion.

*Discussion:*

The story of the Tower of Babel does not suddenly pop up as an unexpected and unconnected ‘stand-alone’ episode in the Genesis story. It is just one of a series of stories that are piled one on top of the other to show how badly and how thoroughly sin had affected the whole world. There is the story of Cain and Abel, a story of jealousy, hatred, anger and murder (Genesis 4:1–16). There is the story of Lamech, a story of polygamy (having more than one husband or wife at the same time) and outrageous violence (Genesis 4:17–24). Then there is the story of the ruthless rulers – abusive leaders who sexually exploited any and every woman they could (Genesis 6:1–4). And then there’s the story of the flood, a story about how violence had fully corrupted the world (Genesis 6:5, 11–13). The story of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9) is just one more story that shows how extremely corrupt the human race had become. Before (Genesis 4–9), humanity had sinned against God but now it was determined to build a tower to the heavens – a direct attempt at replacing God. And when God judged the people at Babel and confused their language, forcing them to spread out across the earth, they created their own religions and their own gods (see Romans 1:18–32).

Q 9. Why did God want people to live all across the earth?

*Short answer:*

When God made humans, he made them in his own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26). As God’s image-bearers, humanity was appointed ruler over the whole earth (Genesis 1:26, 28; 9:1–2). God wanted the human race to manage and develop his creation across the planet. To enable this to happen, humans needed to live throughout the earth.

Q 10. Why did God impose different languages on the human family at Babel?

*Short answer:*

Originally the whole world had only one language (Genesis 11:1). Then, at Babel, God “came down” and confused their language. It was God’s way of making the human race obey his original command to spread out across the earth (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

▶ Q 11. How did the different languages develop after Babel?

*Short answer:*

The greater than 6000 languages and dialects spoken in the world today slowly developed from the several original languages God created at Babel.

*Discussion:*

When the people at Babel refused to spread out and fill the earth, God intervened and gave them different languages – the ‘parent languages’ of the earth. Because of the confusion that this caused, it seems this almost immediately caused the human family to divide into different language groups. As a result, those groups were forced to part company from one another and find their own respective places on the planet. While they did this, and as further family clans developed, each parent language began a long process of modification into sub-languages – one or two at the beginning and, eventually, hundreds. And because these hundreds of languages all developed from the one original parent language, they would have had similarities between them. For example, English and German are very similar. In English we say the word ‘water’, but in German it’s ‘Wasser’. The reason ‘water’ and ‘Wasser’ are similar is because originally German and English were one language. And even languages like Greek, Spanish and Russian are related to English and German, because all these languages go back to a common one. That’s why linguists (people who study language) classify these particular languages as belonging to the same language family, called the Indo-European family.

But all languages in the Indo-European family are so completely different from Hebrew – they aren’t similar at all. That’s why linguists classify Hebrew as belonging to a different language family – the Afro-Asiatic family. So there’s no relationship between the Indo-European family and the Afro-Asiatic family.

The fact that some languages are similar while some are distinctly dissimilar fits the story of Babel well. The explanation for the examples used above is that English, German, Greek, Spanish and Russian all go back to one parent language created at Babel, but Hebrew goes back to a different parent language.

Although we don’t know how many languages God created at the time of Babel, linguistic anthropologists (scientists who study human languages)

have estimated that, had 10 to 20 actual languages been created, there would have been a sufficient source from which to develop the 10 to 20 major language families containing the more than 6000 languages and dialects we have today. So, if we accept the biblical picture, today's language families reflect the parent languages created at Babel.

▶ Q 12. Where did our cultural and physical diversity come from?

*Short answer:*

Our one human family contains great **cultural diversity**. This variety developed gradually after God confused the language of the people at Babel.

**Physical diversity** also developed after Babel. As the new people groups formed, the gene pool in each group was reduced. With a smaller gene pool, different physical characteristics developed, including skin colour. Put simply, the reduced gene pool created genetic peculiarities within each group.

*Discussion:*

1. **Cultural diversity.** Cultural diversity developed gradually after God confused the language of the people at Babel. As the different people groups spread across the earth, and even divided within themselves to form different family trees, cultural values and beliefs slowly changed, developed and were passed down from one generation to the next. While cultural diversity is a positive thing, and should be respected and celebrated, it is not sacred – that is, God did not create those cultures.
2. **Physical diversity.** Before the confusion of language at Babel, the entire population of the world lived together. This meant that there was one large gene pool. As people bred within this one population, genetic information was evenly spread. This meant that, before Babel, the population had well-mixed genetic material and, therefore, everyone would have had similar characteristics – including skin colour. As the gene pool for each group was reduced, genetic peculiarities began to develop.

Skin colour can look different and, because of this, we can think that people have different skin colours. But, actually, every person has the same dark-brown skin pigment called melanin. The only

difference is that some people have more melanin and some people have less. If someone has a small amount of melanin, their skin will look very light brown or 'white'. If someone has a large amount of melanin, their skin will look very dark brown or 'black'. Most of the world's population is somewhere in between, being middle brown in colour.

Because the people groups were separate after Babel, they could no longer 'average out' the genes for skin pigmentation by breeding within the larger, original, pre-Babel population. So some groups would have on average, more genes for a greater production of melanin. These groups would then develop darker skin pigmentation than would others. Any idea of superiority based on physical characteristics is wrong. Modern genetics shows how closely related all people are. We make up one human family. We are all made in God's image. We are all descended from Adam and Eve through Noah. This is why racism is so wrong. To judge a person's worth based on the amount of melanin in their skin is biologically foolish, historically ignorant and morally objectionable.

## module 6

### ▶ Q 13A. Does Genesis teach that there is only one God?

Before we proceed, let's remember – this is a hot topic! We live in an age of globalisation, multiculturalism and many religions. 'Ethnic spirituality' is a given and the people in your group may sincerely believe that there are different gods for different cultures. The idea that there is only one God for the whole world might seem to them to be a kind of intolerant and prejudiced 'Christian Colonialism' where Christians are trying to impose 'Western Religion' on minority cultures. While this discussion about there being only one true God is a discussion we must have, we must have it in a good spirit. Attitude is everything. So you may need to remind your group that we are trying only to understand the Bible's own message – we are not seeking agreement on the point, just an understanding that this is the Bible's point of view.

#### *Short answer:*

Yes. Genesis 1 takes us back to the time when the universe was made and it makes it clear that, back then, there was only one God.

#### *Discussion:*

The story of creation reveals the following:

1. **Genesis 1:1 credits the existence of everything we know to the Creator**, not to a number of creators (i.e. other 'gods'). The biblical story begins with the maker of "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).
2. **Genesis means to convey that God acted alone when he made everything that exists** (Genesis 1:3–31; 2:2–3). When the text speaks of God creating, it refers to God as 'he' (third person singular) – "And God said... and he [not 'they'] separated the light from the darkness... and the darkness he [not 'they'] called 'night'" (Genesis 1:3–5). No other 'gods' helped him – 'he' made everything. God has no equals and he has no competitors. He is God alone.
3. **God the Creator alone gave full authority over the earth to humanity** (Genesis 1:28). God did not give power to any other or lesser 'gods' – only to humans.
4. **Genesis 1 is really making a statement against other 'gods'**. Having come out of Egypt, where people believed in more than one god, the Israelites are now on their way to Canaan whose people also worshipped many gods. So, God gave the Israelites the story of Genesis 1 to convince Israel of three things:
  - a. **They should not be afraid of the so-called 'other gods'**.
  - b. **They should not be tempted to worship the so-called other 'gods'**.
  - c. **They should always remember that Yahweh is God alone**, the maker of everything that exists and, therefore, they should trust, obey and worship only him. While some mistakenly worshipped the sun and the moon and the stars, Israel should remember Yahweh made the sun, moon and stars! They are not 'gods', they are simply non-living parts of creation. While others mistakenly worshipped fertility gods, gods of the sea and animal gods – Israel should remember Yahweh made the sea and the animals! They are his handiwork and he is God alone.

▶ Q 13B. When and how did alternative religions (the worship of 'other gods') begin?

*Short answer:*

At Babel, the people left the one true God and, from that moment on, began creating their own religions and worshipping 'other gods'. This is why Babylon (the place where Babel was situated) is called "the mother

of all prostitutes” (Revelation 17:5). It was the beginning place of false religion.

*Discussion:*

The New Testament’s record about what happened at Babel is found in Romans 1:18–23. Note the following:

1. **There was a time when all humanity “knew God” (1:21).**
2. **God had made himself clearly known through his creation ever since the beginning of the world: so clearly known that there was no excuse for not recognising him and worshipping him (1:19–20).**
3. **Humanity turned from the one true God, refusing to worship him or give thanks to him (1:21).**
4. **This turning from God was a dark and deliberate act (1:18) that led to the increasing darkness of the worship of idols and false religion (1:21–23).**

module 6

Romans 1:18–23 appears to be talking about Babel and not about Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, they did not turn to idolatry. In fact, there is no record of idolatry anywhere from Genesis 1 through to 10. Idolatry appears only from the time of the Tower of Babel. Therefore Romans 1 seems to be talking about this point in time.

- Q 14. Did God actually create the different nations and determine the exact places they would live? Or did he just let it happen?

*Short answer:*

The Bible says that God created the nations. Firstly, God himself sent the confusion of language that caused the separation of the earth’s population into separate people groups (Genesis 11:6–7, 9). Secondly, God scattered the people groups across the earth (Genesis 11:8–9). Thirdly, the New Testament says, “From one man he [God] made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us” (Acts 17:26–27).

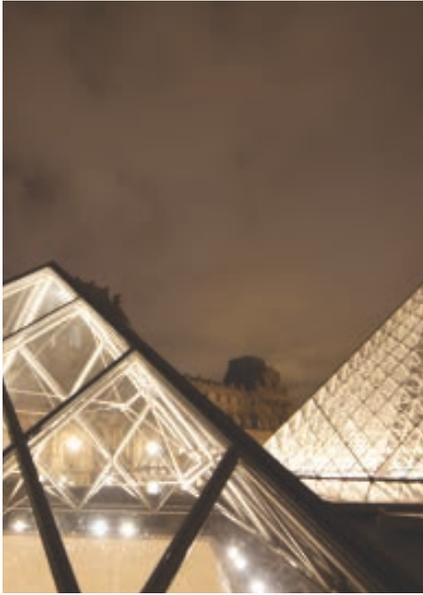
*Discussion:*

Acts 17:26 says that God not only made the nations but also marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.

1. **God “marked out their appointed times in history...”** (Acts 17:26).  
 God is God of all the nations of the earth (not just Israel) (Psalm 24:1; 83:1–18). God has determined the rise and fall of nations politically (e.g. Daniel 2:20–21; 2:36–45; 2 Chronicles 20:5–6). Because God created the nations (Acts 17:26a), he is automatically ruler over them and it is his right to intervene in the affairs of any nation, in any way, at any time, for any reason.
2. **God “marked out... the boundaries of their lands”** (Acts 17:26).  
 While each people group freely went in their own direction to find a place to live, the Bible indicates God was supervising their settlement – though they were unaware of it. The Old Testament records how God assigned specific territories to Gentile (non-Jewish) nations (Deuteronomy 2:5–9; 32:8).

Acts 17:27 also says that God marked out the boundaries of the lands where nations should live so that the nations would perhaps reach out and find him. But how would this cause the nations to seek God and perhaps reach out for him and find him? How does that work?

It seems that God allocated the nations specific places to live to the north, south and east of the land of Canaan (Ezekiel 5:5) – the land Israel would eventually occupy (Genesis 15:12–21). God specifically designed it this way. Canaan was a strategic piece of land – it was actually a natural ‘land bridge’ that connected the three great continents of the ancient world. All the camel caravan traders had to pass through Canaan. Once Israel took possession of the land of Canaan, God’s presence would dwell there (first in the tabernacle, later in the temple). As travellers and traders followed the ancient caravan routes through this land, they would be made aware of Israel’s God immediately. Acts 17:27 says God designed it this way “so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us”.





# billboard

module

7

## 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 module, we will find that God will reach out for the nations and, to do this, he will call one man, Abraham (also known as Abram)...

## Day One: 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.*

module 7

... 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? 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 start 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 the planet!

Explore the Bible

Read Genesis 12:1–3.

What happened to Abraham?

## Day Two: 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 Three: 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!

module 7



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 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 Four: 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 had found 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 Five: 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. The 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?

module 7

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?

## leader's introduction to module 7 – billboard

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to introduce explorers to some basic biblical concepts about **Israel**, showing the roots of Christianity and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means.

What we discover:

1. Israel is God's special **people**.
2. Israel was given a special **place**.
3. Israel was given a special **purpose**:
  - Israel's witness – one **God**
  - Israel's sacrifices – one **way**
  - Israel's Messiah – one **hope**.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- Why did God create and choose Israel as his special nation?
- Does this mean the other nations of the world don't matter?
- What was so unique about Israel's religion?
- What were the animal sacrifices all about?
- Why did Israel look forward to a 'Messiah' and who would this be?

### Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.

### Explore

Discussion starter

Q – What’s the ‘apple of your eye’ – the one thing that’s really important to you? Why is that important?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Genesis 12:1–9.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

Q – What did God promise Abraham (Abram)?

Q – Why is this important?

### View

Video episode 7 – billboard

Three things God tells us about Israel:

1. Israel is God’s special .....
2. Israel was given a special .....
3. Israel was given a special .....
  - Israel’s witness – one .....
  - Israel’s sacrifices – one .....
  - Israel’s Messiah – one .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

71

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group time (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/billboard](http://www.longstoryshort.co/billboard)



## frequently asked questions

1. What is the point of the stories of Genesis 4–11?
- ▶ 2. a. Why do I need to know about Israel?  
b. Why did God create the nation Israel?
- ▶ 3. a. Did Israel have a special relationship with God?  
b. Was it ‘fair’ that God gave Israel this special relationship?
4. When God chose Israel, did he abandon all the other nations?
5. Why did God choose Abraham to be the father of Israel?
- ▶ 6. What was so unique and important about Israel’s religion?
- ▶ 7. a. When did animal sacrifice begin?  
b. Why did God require animal sacrifice?  
c. Does animal sacrifice mean that God is blood-thirsty and doesn’t care about animals?
8. Why did each animal have to be perfect?
- ▶ 9. a. Did animal blood take sins away?  
b. Why did sacrifice need to be repeated continually?

module 7

Q 1. What is the point of the stories of Genesis 4–11?

*Short answer:*

The stories of Genesis 4–11 are designed to show:

1. How sin had contaminated all people and all nations.
2. How sin becomes steadily worse when unchecked.
3. The problem of sin is so severe that without God’s intervention there would be no hope.

*Discussion:*

Following the biblical story is very important at this point. The tragic stories of Genesis 4–11 are piled one on top of the other to show the tight grip sin had on the human race.

These stories show us three things about sin:

1. **Sin had contaminated the whole human race** – not just Adam and Eve. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, they not only blotted their personal records, they also became contaminated by evil. They became ‘fallen’, flawed and broken creatures. When they reproduced, they produced sinners like themselves, so that the human race itself became a fallen, broken, sinful race. These stories show that sin that had affected the first couple (Adam and Eve) had also affected the immediate family (e.g. Cain and Abel), the wider community (e.g. Lamech’s song celebrates community violence) and the whole world (the reason for the flood). Even after the flood, the ugly incident between Noah and his son Ham shows that sin lies in the hearts of even the best of us. There are no exceptions.
2. **Sin is dynamic and, left to itself, it naturally gains momentum.** In the story of Cain and Abel, rebellion leads to jealousy, jealousy to hatred, hatred to murder. In the next story, Lamech’s distrust of God leads to ruthless and excessive violence. In the story of the flood, violence had become a way of life. God’s first commandment given to Noah after the flood was designed to stop this violence (Genesis 9:6). The story of Babel shows that rebellion against God grew into a total rejection of God. In other words, sin is never ‘asleep’; it’s always ‘on the go’.
3. **There is no answer to sin apart from God’s intervention.** Shortly after these tragic stories is the story of God’s calling of Abraham to begin a new nation. In the genealogies (family trees), Noah’s son Shem is mentioned twice (Genesis 10:21–32; 11:10–26) pointing to his critical role as the progenitor (ancestor) of Abraham (Genesis 11:26) through whom God will bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1–3), rescuing them from the problem of sin.

▶ Q 2A. Why do I need to know about Israel?

*Short answer:*

We need to understand Israel’s role in the story of the Bible for two reasons:

1. Israel is the next major piece in the biblical story.
2. Israel is God’s servant nation and the special custodian of his salvation. Jesus himself said, “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22).

*Discussion:*

It might seem unusual to include learning about Israel but the subject is important because:

1. **Israel is the next major piece in the biblical story.** We have been thinking about God, creation, humanity, the problem of evil and the condition of the nations after Babel. Between the appearance of evil (Eden) and the solution to evil (Jesus), there is this massive section (Genesis 12 to Acts 2) that is all about Israel. The very size of the section indicates its importance. We can't just skip over it! If we do, the story of biblical Christianity will be distorted. So, from Genesis 12 onwards, Israel is where the greater part of the Bible story takes place and it continues to be the key focus of God's activity on earth until Acts 2. That's well over three-quarters of the Bible!
2. **Israel is God's servant nation chosen to bring God's salvation.** The story of Israel is not an interruption – it is an essential part of the story of salvation. God created and called Israel to be the means to enable him to bring a solution to the problem of evil (Genesis 12:1–3). Jesus himself said, “salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22).

▶ Q 2B. Why did God create the nation Israel?

*Short answer:*

To bless all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3). See further comments following question 2A above.

*Discussion:*

Genesis 12:3 makes it clear that God would use Israel to bring his blessing to all the families of the earth. Added to this is the fact that God called Israel to serve him as a priestly nation (Exodus 19:5–6). Priests do not exist for themselves – they have an intermediary role – their role is to be mediators between God and the people. God called Israel to this priestly role, to be an intermediary nation that would bring God to the nations and the nations to God. Having told the people of Israel that he created them for his glory (Isaiah 43:7), God then told them: “You are my witnesses... and my servant” (Isaiah 43:10; cf. 43:12; 44:8). God did not choose Israel as a replacement nation because the others had rejected him. He chose Israel as a servant nation through whom he would reach and bless all the nations of the earth. As his servant nation, Israel would bring to the world:

1. The knowledge of the living God
2. The Scriptures
3. The Messiah (Romans 9:4–5).

▶ Q 3A. Did Israel have a special relationship with God?

*Short answer:*

Yes. Israel is always spoken of as God's 'chosen' nation.

*Discussion:*

God told Israel: "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). This verse alone unmistakably singles out Israel as God's special nation. Scripture elsewhere tells us that Israel is:

1. **God's "firstborn" son** (Exodus 4:22). This itself, is a title of special privilege.
2. **God's "treasured possession"** (Exodus 19:5).
3. **God's "holy [i.e. separated] nation"** (Exodus 19:6).
4. **God's "kingdom of priests"**. Israel was a priestly nation with the unique privilege and responsibility of bringing the nations back to the one true God (Exodus 19:5–6).
5. **God's beloved nation** – "the apple of [God's] eye" (Deuteronomy 32:10; Zechariah 2:8).
6. **God's "covenant" nation** (Romans 9:4). To enter into a covenant (a legal contract) with someone was a serious and sacred act. Israel's covenants were formal, legal and binding contracts that bound Israel to God (and God to Israel) for ever in a special relationship unknown to the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:12).
7. **God's protected nation**. God had put a hedge around Israel with blessings for those who honour Israel and curses for those who treat her disrespectfully (Genesis 12:3).
8. **God's uniquely privileged nation**. No other nation had the privileges God gave Israel (Psalm 147:19–20; Romans 9:1–5). Of all the nations, Israel's relationship with God is unique: "Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire, as you have...? Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an

outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you...?” (Deuteronomy 4:33–34).

🕒 Q 3B. Was it ‘fair’ that God gave Israel this special relationship?

*Short answer:*

God’s choice of Israel is rooted in:

1. His sovereignty
2. His grace
3. His righteousness.

*Discussion:*

God’s choice of Israel is rooted in:

1. **His sovereignty.** God can do whatever he wants. Because God is the Sovereign Creator of the earth, all of it belongs to him – “The earth is the LORD’s... and all who live in it” (Psalm 24:1–2) – and he can do with it “whatever pleases him” (Psalm 115:3; cf. Jeremiah 27:5). He is the potter and the nations are the clay: “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?” (Romans 9:21). He can choose Israel because he is our Sovereign.
2. **His grace.** God chose Israel not because he thought she would be spiritually better than everyone else – she wasn’t (Deuteronomy 9:4–6). He didn’t choose Israel because she was the biggest and greatest of the nations – she wasn’t (Deuteronomy 7:7). Nor did God choose Israel because he thought she was an exceptionally clever candidate – he didn’t (Deuteronomy 8:17–18). God’s choice of Israel was wholly undeserved. His glory is most greatly seen when he takes the most unlikely and most unworthy and graciously reveals himself in and through them (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26–31).
3. **His righteousness.** Everything God does is right – because every decision comes out of his infinite knowledge, wisdom, holiness, justice and goodness. One day, we will see that God’s choice of Israel was indeed the right one, just like every other decision God has ever made.

Q 4. When God chose Israel, did he abandon all the other nations?

*Short answer:*

Yes and no. Yes, because, following the time of Babel, God allowed the nations to follow their own religions – but not without consequences (Acts 14:16; Romans 1:18–32). No, because God did not stop his love for the nations or his sovereign control over their political futures.

*Discussion:*

Remember three things:

1. **God still loves the nations** and chose Israel to bless them. God told Abraham that through him “all the peoples on earth will be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). When God called Israel to be his priestly nation (Exodus 19:5–6), it was so he could bring the nations back to himself. God is not localised, tribalised or culturised – God is the God of all the peoples (Genesis 9) and all the nations (Genesis 11).<sup>18</sup>
2. **God is still God of the nations**, even though the nations may not acknowledge him. God is related to the nations as their:
  - a. **Sovereign Creator** (Genesis 11:6–7, 9). He allocates their national boundaries and political futures (Deuteronomy 32:8; Acts 17:26–27).
  - b. **Civil legislator**. He prescribes government for the nations (Romans 13:1–7).
  - c. **Moral governor**. His moral law is in every person’s heart (Romans 2:14–15).
  - d. **Gracious provider**. He cares for them whether they worship him or not (Matthew 5:45; Acts 14:17).
  - e. **Supreme ruler**. He has authority over all the kingdoms of the earth (Daniel 2:21) and can intervene in any nation at any time.
3. **God has allowed the nations to pursue their own religions** (Acts 14:16) but not without consequences – “God gave them over” (Romans 1:24, 26, 28) to the results of their false religions. But, as we have said, this does not mean that God has abandoned the nations forever or stopped caring for, or about, them. It simply

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<sup>18</sup> George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 107–108.

means that God has given them freedom to reject him but not without consequences.

Q 5. Why did God choose Abraham to be the father of Israel?

*Short answer:*

We do not know why.

module 7

*Discussion:*

According to Genesis 15:7, Nehemiah 9:7 and Acts 7:2, Abraham lived in Ur in lower Mesopotamia, the southern part of Babylonia. According to Joshua 24:2–3, Abraham’s family worshipped “other gods” at that point. These gods would have been ‘invented’ at the time of the Tower of Babel. We don’t know if Abraham was an exception to the family’s idol-worshipping religion, or whether God sovereignly revealed himself to Abraham while he was a worshipper of idols (Acts 7:2). It seems there were others, like Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18–20), who had resisted idol worship. We are not told why God chose Abraham instead of someone else.

▶ Q 6. What was so unique and important about Israel’s religion?

*Short answer:*

Five things. Israel’s religion was:

1. Monotheistic. Israel had only one God – Yahweh.
2. Prescribed. God gave Israel her belief system; she did not think it up.
3. Sacrificial. Animal sacrifice was a dominant feature of Israel’s religion.
4. Messianic. Israel’s hope focused on one individual person – the Messiah.
5. Universal. Israel’s Messiah would be the world’s saviour (deliverer).

*Discussion:*

Israel’s religion was:

1. **Monotheistic. Israel had only one God – Yahweh.** Other religions worshipped many gods (polytheism) but Israel was called to worship

the only true God (monotheism). Deuteronomy 6:4 said, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.” Because there is only one God, the first commandment said, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image...” (Exodus 20:3–4).

2. **Prescribed. God gave Israel her belief system; she did not think it up.** While all other religions were devised and developed by people, the Bible says Israel’s religion came to them directly from God – through various divine disclosures and revelations. God first revealed his plans to Abraham (Joshua 24:2–4; Acts 7:2) and later prescribed the Law for Israel (Exodus 19–24), including all the details about her system of worship (Exodus 24–40). From Moses to Malachi, the prophets of Israel repeatedly explained how “the word of the Lord came” to them, which is why the prophets always said, “This is what the Lord says...”
3. **Sacrificial. Animal sacrifice was a dominant feature of Israel’s religion.** Blood sacrifice was not unique to Israel. The concept of blood sacrifice was so important that virtually all ancient religions included it in their systems. But those sacrifices were probably warped ‘leftovers’ from animal blood sacrifice practised ever since Adam and Eve disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:21; 8:20; Job 1:5). As soon as God created the nation of Israel, he set up the practice of blood sacrifice as an integral part of her people’s religion. These sacrifices were given to address the problem of sin. A holy God could live among a sinful people only on the basis of substitute sacrifice. Without those sacrifices, Israel could never have had God’s presence with her in the tabernacle/temple. Sin is a serious business. God cannot live with anyone unless sin is dealt with through sacrifice.
4. **Messianic. Israel’s hope focused on one individual person – the Messiah.** The moment Adam and Eve sinned, God gave a serious promise that he would provide a deliverer (Genesis 3:15), and that sin and evil would not last forever. God would put an end to the miserable cycle of suffering and death. How? The promised deliverer would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15). This means that human history is moving toward a final conquest of evil and a total transformation of the world. God will achieve this through the promised deliverer, later known as the Messiah, the Lord’s Anointed One. Who this promised deliverer would be, how and when he would come, and what he would specifically do to fix the sin problem would be revealed only gradually over hundreds of years. This

information came slowly through the prophets. By the time the Old Testament had been written, God had provided a clear and concise picture of the Messiah's personality and role (Luke 24:25–27).

**5. Universal. Israel's Messiah would be the world's saviour (deliverer).**

Long before God created Israel, he had the whole world on his heart! In fact, that's why he made Israel – so he could bless all the people of the earth (Genesis 12:1–3). This is why God called Israel a “kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:5–6). No priest exists for himself but to serve and help others. As God's priestly nation, Israel was to stand between God and the nations of the world. Israel's job was to bring the knowledge of the one true God to the nations and to bring the nations to faith in the one true God. That's why God called the Israelites his “witnesses” (Isaiah 43:9–12; 44:8). Israel's message was clear: the God of Abraham was not a localised, tribal deity but the one true God, Yahweh, the possessor of heaven and earth (Genesis 14:19). Besides him, there is no God. Unlike the ancient gods who were said to have authority over various geographical areas, Yahweh operates across the whole world – because it belongs to him. Israel was strategically placed in the middle of the nations to shine her light for Yahweh (Ezekiel 5:5; Deuteronomy 32:8).

module 7

▶ Q 7A. When did animal sacrifice begin?

*Short answer:*

It began in the Garden of Eden when God clothed Adam and Eve with animal skins (Genesis 3:20–21).

*Discussion:*

As far as the Bible is concerned, the first animal sacrifice took place immediately after Adam and Eve sinned. Before Adam and Eve sinned, they could approach God freely. They had an intimate and informal fellowship between them. But once Adam and Eve sinned, free access to God was over! Now because of humanity's sinful condition, God required an animal sacrifice and God himself provided it (Genesis 3:21). Genesis 4:1–16 indicates that sacrifice was a key part of the first family's religious faith. It is important to note that, as far as the Bible is concerned, animal sacrifice was not humanity's idea. It did not originate with the various world religions that were devised and developed after the time of the Tower of Babel. The Bible says it was God's idea and that he established it as soon as sin entered the world. When God created the nation of Israel he ensured sacrifice was a key part of Israel's religion.

▶ Q 7B. Why did God require animal sacrifice?

*Short answer:*

The penalty for sin is death (Genesis 2:17). Because God is holy and just, the penalty of sin cannot be avoided – it must be paid. Because God is loving and gracious, he diverted the penalty away from the sinner and on to the substitute animal.

*Discussion:*

The sacrificial system is an extraordinarily gracious provision from a holy God to sinful people. By means of the system of animal sacrifice, God can maintain his holiness and, at the same time, accept sinful people – the just penalty for sin having been paid by a substitute.

By offering sacrifices (national or personal), the people were:

1. **Confessing their sinfulness and their sins**
2. **Acknowledging that their sin deserved death;** when the people laid their hands on the head of the substitute animal, their sins were symbolically transferred to the animal (Leviticus 1:4; 3:2; 16:21)
3. **Expressing faith** in God's word that such a sacrifice would be an acceptable payment and bring forgiveness to the person offering it (the offerer).

▶ Q 7C. Does animal sacrifice mean that God is blood-thirsty and doesn't care about animals?

*Short answer:*

No. Animal sacrifice is an extreme measure that shows the seriousness of sin.

*Discussion:*

1. **God cares for animals.** Animals were part of God's creation that he had already called good (Genesis 1:31). It is obvious from the Law of Moses that God cares for animals. Under that Law, domesticated animals were to have the same day of rest (the Sabbath day) as humans had (Exodus 20:10); they could not be cruelly exploited (Deuteronomy 25:4) any more than humans could be cruelly exploited (Deuteronomy 23:24–25). The people had to look after animals even if they did not like their owner, did not know their owner or even if they were ownerless (Exodus 23:5; Deuteronomy

22:4). But humans have been given control over animals (Genesis 1:26). They are not made in the image of God as humans are (Genesis 1:26–27) and, therefore, they are not sacred – they can be used for food, clothing, leather goods, etc. But even in using animals for food, the Law demanded that animals be caused the least amount of pain (Leviticus 22:28; Deuteronomy 22:6–7). Even the Sabbath law could be broken if an animal was in pain or in danger of dying, as Jesus showed (Luke 14:5).

2. **God has required the use of animals for sacrifice.** As the Sovereign Creator and the offended deity, it's God's right to determine how sin will be paid for and forgiven. God's decision to use animals as sacrifices for sin is not meant to lower our opinion of animals. Instead, animal sacrifice should make us realise the seriousness of sin. God thinks of sin in such serious terms that he has imposed the penalty of death for those who sin. By its sin against God, humanity owed its very life as a payment to God, and animal sacrifice is the best way to recognise the dreadfulness of that penalty.
3. **Animals are suited to sacrifice precisely because they are innocent of wrongdoing.** Because animals are not made in the likeness of God, they are not 'moral' beings. They have no moral capacity. In fact, "our whole moral vocabulary (values and choices, obligation, conscience, freedom and will, right and wrong, guilt and shame) is meaningless to animals."<sup>19</sup> They are not capable of moral guilt. Therefore, they are guiltless and morally innocent. So if it is asked what the poor animal did wrong that it was selected to be the sacrificial offering, the answer would have to be "Nothing at all!". The animal had done nothing wrong – and certainly nothing worthy of death. But that is precisely the point! Because the animal had done nothing wrong, it was a guiltless and innocent living creature and so it was perfectly qualified to symbolically stand in the place of the guilty, living person and offer its guiltless life in substitute payment for the life of the guilty person.

Q 8. Why did each animal have to be perfect?

*Short answer:*

The animal had to be perfect, not just because God deserves the best, but to show it was in full health, and that the only possible explanation for its death was as a ritual sacrifice for sin.

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<sup>19</sup> Jay E. Adams, *More than Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 119.

*Discussion:*

An animal selected for sacrifice had to be “without defect or blemish” (Leviticus 22:21) – it couldn’t be blind, wounded, sick, malnourished or imperfect in any way. A person was not permitted to drag an already-dead animal to the altar and present it before God. After all, that dead animal might have died for any number of reasons other than as a sacrifice for sin. It might have been poisoned or starved to death, drowned or been accidentally killed (be it by a person or another animal), or it might have died of some sickness. The animal had to be in excellent health, not just because God was worthy of the very best, but because there needed to be no misunderstanding about how and why the animal had died. In ritual sacrifice, the animal had to be purposefully and deliberately killed and its fresh blood poured on the altar by a priest as an acknowledgement of that person’s sin and spiritual indebtedness to God.

▶ Q 9A. Did animal blood take sins away?

*Short answer:*

No. The book of Hebrews tells us that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). But offering the blood of animals did result in real payment and forgiveness (Leviticus 1:4), if the sacrifice was offered in faith.

*Discussion:*

1. It is clear that in the Old Testament **when animal sacrifices were offered in faith, real forgiveness was freely available** (Leviticus 1:4; 2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 32:1 and 103:12; Isaiah 38:17). That forgiveness was real – it was not fake, hesitant or ‘half-baked’. On being forgiven, the offerer had a sure word that the particular sin in question was gone (Leviticus 1:4). God had taken it away.
2. **But Hebrews 10:4 says that the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins.** So how could God forgive on the basis of animal sacrifice?
3. **Unknown to the offerer, God’s forgiveness was not granted because of the value of the animal’s blood.** Instead, God’s forgiveness was being granted because of the value of the blood of Jesus. Even though Jesus had not yet died, his death had been set in place as a sure thing before the beginning of the world (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8). In reality, God was granting true forgiveness but it was based on the value of the death of Jesus. So when the offerer

brought their animal sacrifice, God graciously credited to it (without the knowledge of the offerer) the saving value of the blood of Jesus, yet to be shed. The moment Jesus died, no more sacrifices were necessary, because his blood (unlike the blood of animals) took away the sin problem forever (Hebrews 10:16–18).

- ▶ Q 9B. Why did sacrifice need to be repeated continually?

module 7

*Short answer:*

When the offerer brought a sacrifice for a particular sin, real forgiveness was obtained for that sin. The problem was that, after the offerer had been forgiven, they would sin again, requiring the need for another sacrifice. It was an endless process – day after day, year after weary year... until the death of Christ.







**life**

module

8

## 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.

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## Day One: 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!

module 8

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? Sure! 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 (see the table below).

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.

The genealogies connect Jesus to real people	Matthew 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–38
Jesus was born during the time of Caesar Augustus	Luke 2:1
Jesus was born in Bethlehem	Luke 2:4–7
King Herod the Great ruled at the time Jesus was born	Matthew 2:1; Luke 1:5
Jesus lived when Quirinius was governor of Syria	Luke 2:2
Jesus was raised in Nazareth	Matthew 2:23
Jesus began his teaching during the time of Caesar Tiberius	Luke 3:1
Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea	Matthew 27:11–13; Luke 3:1
Herod the Great's son, Herod Archelaus, took over Judea	Matthew 2:22
Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas, took over Galilee	Luke 3:1
Herod the Great's son, Herod Philip, took over north-east Palestine	Luke 3:1
Jesus lived in the reign of Jewish High Priest Annas	Luke 3:2
Jesus lived in the reign of Jewish High Priest Caiaphas	Matthew 26:3

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?

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## Day Two: 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. Why wouldn’t he 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?

module 8

## Day Three: 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 Four: 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.

module 8

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 – that whatever God could do, he could do too (John 5:19–21) – including raising the dead!
- In authority – that he would be the judge of all human beings (John 5:22, 27)!
- In honour – Jesus 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 Five: 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 but 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?

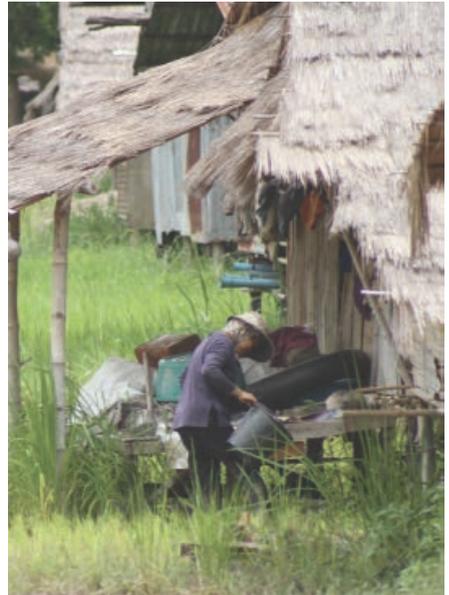
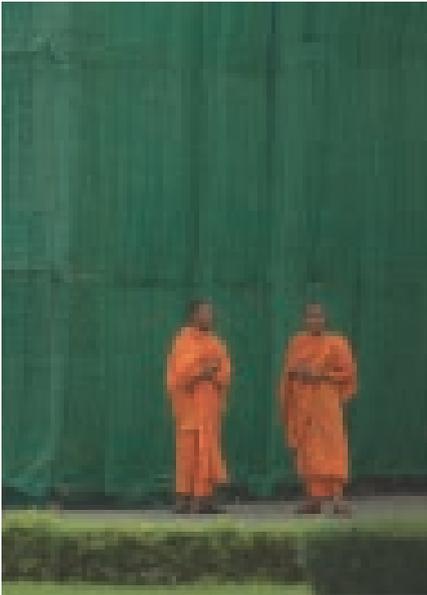
Someone once said that Jesus must have been the only human being in the world who claimed to be perfect and was taken seriously by his friends as well as his enemies. His friends found no fault in him (1 Peter 2:22). His enemies had no case against him (Matthew 27:3–4; Luke 23:4, 14). Jesus asked the 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?



## leader's introduction to module 8 – life

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to introduce explorers to some basic biblical concepts about **Jesus** – who he was, why he is central to the Christian faith – and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means.

What we discover:

1. Jesus was a *real* person.
2. Jesus made incredible *claims*.
3. Jesus lived a *perfect* life.
4. Jesus worked amazing *miracles*.
5. Jesus was a great *teacher*.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- What does it mean that Jesus is the 'Messiah'?
- Did Jesus really claim to be God?
- Why did Jesus perform miracles?
- What is significant about Jesus' perfect life?
- Are the Gospels reliable records of Jesus' life?

### Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.

### Explore

Discussion starter

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

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Mark 2:1–12.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

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

### View

Video episode 8 – life

Five things God tells us about Jesus:

1. Jesus was a ..... person.
2. Jesus made incredible .....
3. Jesus lived a ..... life.
4. Jesus worked amazing .....
5. Jesus was a great .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

85

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group time (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/life](http://www.longstoryshort.co/life)



## frequently asked questions

- ▶ 1. Is there evidence for Jesus' existence outside the Bible?
2. Aren't these secular (non-religious) references to Jesus really quite limited and insignificant?
3. Why has secular history recorded so little about the life of Jesus if he is so important?
4. Is it true that Christians rely almost totally on the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament for information about Jesus? Can the Gospels be trusted to give us reliable information about Jesus?
5. What makes Christians think the writers of the Gospels could remember the words and works of Jesus so accurately?
6. How long was it between the events of Jesus' life and the writing of the Gospels? How can we be sure there was only a short time between these events?
7. Why do critics of evangelical Christianity argue that the Gospels were written at a later date?
8. Who has the original Gospel writings? If we don't have the original Gospels, doesn't this destroy the credibility of the Jesus story?
9. Did Jesus claim to be the Messiah?
- ▶ 10. a. What does it mean that Jesus is the 'Messiah'?  
b. Where was it predicted that the Messiah would be both God and man?  
c. Why did the Messiah need to be God?
- ▶ 11. a. Did Jesus actually claim to be God?  
b. What does it mean that Jesus is the 'Son of God'?
12. If there is only one God, how could Jesus claim to be God? If Jesus were God, wouldn't this make two Gods?
- ▶ 13. a. Why did Jesus do miracles?  
b. Do people need more miracles today to enable them to believe in Jesus?

14. What do true miracles look like?
- ▶ 15. Was Jesus' mother really a virgin and why was this necessary?
16. Why is it important to think about Jesus' perfect life?
17. Could Jesus have sinned?
18. What was the point of Jesus' temptation?

## website questions

19. Can Satan do miracles?
20. Why should we consider Jesus as a teacher?
21. Does someone have to believe the Gospels are 'God's Word' to get an accurate picture of Jesus?
22. How reliable are the copies of the New Testament we have today?

- ▶ Q 1. Is there evidence for Jesus' existence outside the Bible?

### Short answer:

Yes, there are secular writings that refer to Jesus of Nazareth and his teachings, his alleged miracles, his death and his alleged resurrection.

### Discussion:

There are a number of ancient secular documents from Rome and regions within the Roman Empire that make reference to the real historical person known as Jesus of Nazareth:

1. **Caius Suetonius Tranquillus** (Roman historian who lived during the reign of Roman Emperors Trajan and Hadrian, and was secretary to Hadrian). In *Claudius* 25.4, a section in "The Twelve Caesars", Suetonius referred to Jewish Christians who followed "Chrestus their leader" and who, in AD 49, were expelled from Rome (cf. Acts 18:2).
2. **Cornelius Tacitus** (Roman historian who lived from AD 55 to AD 120, Governor of Asia/Turkey around AD 112, famous for his writings, *Annals* and *Histories*, which, together, span the period from the death of Caesar Augustus in AD 14 to the death of Domitian in AD 96). Tacitus referred to Christians as followers of "Christus,

who, in the reign of Tiberius, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator [governor] Pontius Pilate” (*Annals* 15.44). Tacitus confirms many historical details referred to in the Gospels.

3. **Pliny the Younger** (Roman historian, who also served some time as a governor of the Roman provinces of Pontus and Bithynia during the reign of Emperor Trajan). In his *Epistles* 10.96–97, Pliny referred to Christians who refused to worship Trajan and also refused to curse their leader “Christ”. He also refers to how Christians worshipped Christ as ‘a god’.
4. **Flavius Josephus** (Jewish historian who lived from AD 37 to AD 97, emigrated to Rome after AD 70, and served as historian to Emperor Vespasian). In his *Antiquities* 20.9.1, he refers to James, “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ”. In *Antiquities* 18.3.3, Josephus makes reference to Jesus, his miraculous works, his identity as the Messiah and his resurrection.
5. **Lucian of Samosata** (a Greek satirist living in the Roman Empire and former government official in Alexandria, Egypt, during the reign of Hadrian). Lucian referred indirectly to Jesus in *The Passing of Peregrinus*, but the reference to Jesus of Nazareth as a real person is clear: “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day... who... was crucified... from the moment they are converted, [they] deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws...”<sup>20</sup>
6. **Thallus** (a historian, who wrote even earlier than when the Gospels were written and recorded a history of the eastern Mediterranean from the Trojan Wars until his own day). Apparently his work is lost, apart from a few fragments, but his work is referred to by Sextus Julius Africanus (historian of third century AD, born in Libya but emigrated to Jerusalem – wrote the five-volume *History of the World* in about AD 220). Africanus takes issue with Thallus over the uncanny darkness observed by all at the time of the execution of Christ. Thallus had tried to explain the darkness as an eclipse of the sun – Africanus argued against him, saying it was impossible at full moon (Passover) for there to be an eclipse of the moon because, at that time, the moon is situated opposite the sun.

module 8

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<sup>20</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *The Death of Peregrine*, vol. 4, *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, trans. by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1905), 82–83.

7. **Roman Emperor Trajan** responded to Pliny (*Letters* 10.97) and discussed how Christians (i.e. followers of Christ) should be treated as a result of their refusal to worship Caesar.
8. **Roman Emperor Hadrian**, like Trajan before him, discussed the way to deal with Christians (i.e. followers of Christ) who refused to worship Caesar (Hadrian's letter to Minucius Fundanus appears in the writings of the Church Father, Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 10).
9. **Mara bar Sarapion** (a Syrian philosopher). In a letter to his son, he made reference to the Jews and the execution of their "wise King" (*Syriac Manuscript Additional* 14.658).
10. **Jewish Talmud** (a collection of Jewish spoken traditions and notes about them by Rabbis). In a section of the Babylonian Talmud known as "Sanhedrin 43a", there is a quote from the Jewish Talmud which acknowledges that a real person called Jesus was hanged on the eve of Passover.

Q 2. Aren't these secular (non-religious) references to Jesus really quite limited and insignificant?

*Short answer:*

It is true that there are not many secular sources that refer to Jesus of Nazareth. But the secular information that is available is quite significant.

*Discussion:*

For reasons why there are not many ancient sources that mention Jesus, see question 3 below. But, what is available is significant. When summarised, the secular sources listed under question 1 give us enough information to form a reasonably broad outline of Jesus' life:

1. Jesus existed in Israel.
2. Jesus taught in Judea.
3. Jesus was called 'Christ'.
4. Jesus' followers were called 'Christians'.
5. Jesus' followers worshipped him as a deity.
6. Jesus' followers were devoted to him and refused to worship Caesar.

7. Jesus had a brother called James.
8. Jesus was known to be wise.
9. Jesus was known as the Jews' King.
10. Jesus was called 'Messiah'.
11. There were superstitious miracles or magic about Jesus.
12. Jesus was crucified by Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius.
13. Jesus' tomb was empty.
14. Jesus' followers claim that he rose again.

## module 8

"Overall, at least seventeen non-Christian writings record more than fifty details concerning the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus..."<sup>21</sup>

Q 3. Why has secular history recorded so little about the life of Jesus if he is so important?

*Short answer:*

There is no short answer to this question – see the discussion below.

*Discussion:*

There are many possible reasons why there are not more secular references to Jesus of Nazareth:

1. **Not many documents from the ancient Greeks and Romans survived.** There does not appear to be much ancient documentation (AD 30s to 60s) available on any subject. Philo, the Alexandria-based Jewish philosopher (20 BC to AD 50), was a prolific writer but his interest was in exploring how Jewish religion influenced Greek culture/philosophy – so he would have had no specific interest in a controversial countryside preacher called Jesus. Other than Philo, from the AD 30s (Jesus' lifetime) there are only fragments from the inexperienced historian Paterculus; from the AD 40s, some fables of one writer, Phaedrus; from AD 50s and 60s, works remain from only a few writers including Seneca (a Roman governor/politician).

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<sup>21</sup> Gary R. Habermas, "Why I believe the New Testament is Historically Reliable", in *Why I am a Christian*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 164.

2. **Jesus didn't register on the Roman 'Richter scale'.** John P Meier, a modern-day 'Jesus scholar', reminds us that we need to see Jesus in perspective. While Jesus had a significant impact in Galilee and Jerusalem, on the big scale of things, Jesus was never thought of as being significant to the Roman authorities. Meier says: "Jesus was a marginal Jew leading a marginal movement in a marginal province of a vast Roman Empire."<sup>22</sup> This marginalism relates not only to Jesus, but to others in Israel at that time. For instance, even Pontius Pilate is not mentioned in any Roman histories, except when Tacitus refers to him in connection with Jesus. In fact, there is nothing mentioned about any Roman governor of Judea.<sup>23</sup>
3. **People claiming to be the Messiah were 'a dime a dozen' in Jesus' time** and many think that Jesus was only one voice among them – so he was not singled out for special attention. Even the miraculous nature of Jesus' ministry was labelled as 'superstition' and not believed to be true at all (Matthew 12:24).
4. **Religion did not figure prominently in ancient Greek and Roman histories.** The Romans were more interested in the politics of the empire (cf. remarks made by Festus regarding Paul (Acts 25:19)) and this is shown in Greek and Roman histories.
5. **Tactical omission.** Some historians showed their disapproval of those with whom they did not agree by completely ignoring them. This could also explain why Jesus is not mentioned more often in secular sources.

Q 4. Is it true that Christians rely almost totally on the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament for information about Jesus? Can the Gospels be trusted to give us reliable information about Jesus?

*Short answer:*

Yes. Christians take the four Gospels and the rest of the New Testament as their primary and sufficient authority for their belief that Jesus of Nazareth actually existed and was the Christ, the Son of God.

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<sup>22</sup> John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *Origins of the Problem and the Person* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 56.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 27.

Christians believe the Gospels provide a reliable history of Jesus because:

1. They were written by men determined to record the truth
2. The information in them does not conflict with what we know of history at that time.

*Discussion:*

There are seven points that support the truthfulness of the Gospel writers:

module 8

1. **They wrote honestly.** That is, they were committed to reporting the facts (Luke 1:1–4). Matthew and John were ‘direct’ eyewitnesses of all that happened, having been with Jesus from the beginning (Matthew 10:1–4; Luke 6:12–16; Acts 1:12–13, 21–22). Mark and Luke were not apostles but were ‘indirect’ witnesses: Luke was a ‘no-nonsense’ historian who went to great efforts to collect eyewitness accounts (Luke 1:1–4) and was a travelling companion of the apostle Paul; and Mark was the apostle Peter’s personal writing assistant.<sup>24</sup> As witnesses, they were certainly ‘in the know’. Critics have supposed that, because the Gospel writers had a theological agenda (i.e. to favourably present Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah), their histories cannot be trusted. But, in response, three things must be said:
  - a. **Having a theological agenda probably made them even more careful and precise in their reporting.** They would not want anyone to criticise their historical reports and therefore question their theology/research.
  - b. **The love and respect they had for Jesus was so deep they recorded nothing but the truth about him.**
  - c. **People with ideological agendas can still write the truth** – as did the Jews who recorded the history of the holocaust. Of course,

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<sup>24</sup> Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15) quotes Papias, a disciple of the apostle John: “This also the presbyter said: Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, though not in order, whatsoever he remembered of the things done or said by Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but afterward, as I said, he followed Peter, who adapted his teaching to the needs of his hearers, but with no intention of giving a connected account of the Lord’s discourses, so that Mark committed no error while he thus wrote some things as he remembered them. For he was careful of one thing, not to omit any of the things which he had heard, and not to state any of them falsely.” Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1) and Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 106.3) agree.

they were passionate (perhaps even fanatical) about their cause but that does not mean they weren't accurate. Just because someone is French and is passionate about French history does not mean they cannot write an accurate history of France! In fact, someone who is passionate about French history is likely to be very exact in their presentation.

2. **They wrote with integrity.** They included the Jesus story 'warts and all'. There are things in their Gospels that, had the authors been even slightly biased, they might well have left out. For example, embarrassing things (like Peter's denial, or like James and John's crass jostling for power and position in the coming kingdom, or like the disciples falling asleep during their watch in the crucial hours of Gethsemane), difficult things (like Jesus saying he did not know the day or the hour of his return, or his cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46)), or demanding things (like "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48) or "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children... such a person cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26)).
3. **They wrote freely and independently.** None of them was forced into producing a contrived or concocted story. That's why there are differences between all four Gospels. Scholars report a 10% to 40% variable range of material between the Gospels. But those differences are important and we should be glad for them. They show the writers were not being controlled to produce a piece of religious propaganda. The writers were free to present their own perspectives. Despite the variations between the Gospels, there are no contradictions.
4. **They wrote plainly.** The record they present is clear and plain. There is no attempt to hide anything to avoid criticism or objection. The Gospel records were open to the most intense scrutiny – they were able to be read by the eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus (friends and enemies) who were still alive when the Gospels were written (Acts 2:22). Had the Gospel records contained false information, the eyewitnesses would have no doubt exposed any errors.
5. **They wrote bravely.** They wrote knowing they may well pay the ultimate price for their efforts. As it turns out, 11 of the 12 New Testament apostles were killed because of their religious beliefs. The question is: Would such men die for what they knew to be a story full of lies?

6. **They wrote accurately.** Luke's writings (Luke and Acts) have proved to be extremely accurate. Luke mentions the names of many people, 32 countries, 54 cities, nine islands<sup>25</sup> and, so far, archaeologists and historians have found no discrepancies between what Luke says and actual history. Also, archaeologists have been finding proof of places in John's Gospel including the pavement stone (John 19:13), the existence of the pools of Bethesda (John 5:2) and Siloam (John 9:7), and Jacob's well (John 4:6). Recent archaeological and historical discoveries have only confirmed the truthfulness and reliability of the Gospels. Serious scholars are also prepared to say that, to date, neither archaeology nor history has disproved anything in the Gospels and Acts. Of course, geo-historical accuracy does not prove Jesus was who he claimed to be but it certainly adds to the reliability and credibility of the Gospels as a whole – including the truthfulness of their message. So archaeology 'tips the scales' and helps us trust the Gospel record that says Jesus actually claimed to be the Messiah.
7. **They wrote reasonably quickly.** While critics of evangelical Christianity have always insisted the Gospels were written a long time after Jesus lived – perhaps even 100 years or more after he lived – there is very good reason to believe that Matthew, Mark and Luke were all written by AD 61 at the latest. This certainly supports the historical reliability of the Gospel records (see question 6 below).

Q 5. What makes Christians think the writers of the Gospels could remember the words and works of Jesus so accurately?

*Short answer:*

The Gospel writers could remember the words and works of Jesus accurately because:

1. Events recorded within 30 years do not require extreme recall
2. They lived in a world that practised the discipline of 'oral tradition'
3. Jesus said and did things more than once (John 21:25)

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<sup>25</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Thomas A. Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1992), 385.

4. Jesus was a memorable teacher who taught and acted in 'unforgettable' ways
5. Written records of Jesus' life and teachings were available long before the Gospels were written
6. The Holy Spirit gave special help in the recall process.

*Discussion:*

The Gospel writers could remember the words and works of Jesus accurately because:

1. **Events recorded within 30 years do not require extreme recall.**  
A gap of 30 years, between the event and the recording of it, is close enough to guarantee a very accurate recall. As we age, we can still easily remember events and conversations going back 40 to 50 years (weddings, funerals, births, engagements, reunions, career events, friendships, school experiences, childhood holidays, etc.). Sometimes when relating such events or conversations we say, "I remember it like it was yesterday". In fact, many reliable histories (books, TV documentaries) use this kind of 'eyewitness recall' as they retell the events of the past. If we have that recall, surely the writers of the Gospels had that recall over a much shorter period of time.
2. **They lived in a world that practised the discipline of 'oral tradition'.**  
The Gospels were not written on the spur of the moment. They were written after years of telling the story over and over again in an ancient (pre-technical) society skilled in the discipline of 'oral transmission'. Each time the story was told, it was subject to exacting criticism and correction – from both supporters and non-believers. 'Oral transmission' was the key method of preserving important information and the process was subject to serious scrutiny. The Gospel writers wrote within this exacting tradition.
3. **Jesus said and did things more than once (John 21:25).** What has been recorded would have been the substance of his repeated sermons over a three-and-a-half-year period. John tells us Jesus did so many miracles that, had they all been recorded, the world would not have been big enough to contain the books that would have had to be written (John 20:30–31; 21:25).
4. **Jesus was a memorable teacher who taught and acted in unforgettable ways** – both in what he said and the way he said it. His teaching was calculated so it would never be forgotten (Matthew 7:28–29; John 7:46). What Jesus said and did, he said and did

repeatedly in the most unforgettable ways over a three-and-a-half-year period. His words and works would have been firmly fixed in the minds of the eyewitnesses.

5. **Written records of Jesus' life and teachings were available long before the Gospels were written.** Luke specifically mentions the existence of these eyewitness records – and the fact that there were many of them, and that he used them in writing about the life of Jesus (Luke 1:1–4).
6. **The Holy Spirit gave special help in the recall process.** This ensured that they had a perfect recall of all he said and did (John 14:26).

## module 8

Q 6. How long was it between the events of Jesus' life and the writing of the Gospels? How can we be sure there was only a short time between these events?

### *Short answer:*

There's not really a long time between the events of Jesus' life and the writing of the Gospels. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke were written by AD 61–62 at the latest and many scholars think John's Gospel could have been written anywhere between AD 55 and AD 95.

### *Discussion:*

An early date for the writing of the Gospel records makes the Gospels very believable because:

1. They were written close enough to the time of the actual events of Jesus to ensure accurate recall
2. Eyewitnesses were still alive and would have corrected any errors in the Gospel records
3. This closeness of time means there was not enough time for myth to develop and change the real history of Jesus.

Evangelical scholars have always argued that the evidence actually points to the Gospels being written very soon after Jesus lived. Here's the basis of their argument:

1. **The Book of Acts had to be written before AD 70** because it doesn't record the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70). Something so momentous as the destruction of Jerusalem could not have been missed.

2. **The Book of Acts had to be written before the mid-60s AD** because there is no mention of the Jewish war with Rome (AD 66).
3. **The Book of Acts had to be written before AD 62** because, while Acts mentions a good deal about James, Peter and Paul, it doesn't include any of their deaths (James died AD 62, Paul and Peter mid-to-late 60s).
4. **Luke's Gospel had to have been written before AD 62.** Luke's Gospel, being volume 1 (see Acts 1:1–2), had to be written before the book of Acts, being volume 2. If Acts (volume 2) was written in AD 62, then the Gospel of Luke (volume 1) must have been written earlier than AD 62.
5. **If the Gospel of Luke was written around AD 61–62 then, in all probability, Matthew and Mark's Gospels must have been written even earlier.** Even liberal (non-evangelical) critics agree on a very early date for the Gospels, e.g. William Foxwell Albright (probably the most famous of all American archaeologists), Colin Hemer (contemporary English classics scholar) and Dr John A T Robinson (former Bishop of Woolwich and leader of the 1960s' 'Death of God' movement).<sup>26</sup> This means that the Gospels were written within 30 years of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Q 7. Why do critics of evangelical Christianity argue that the Gospels were written at a later date?

*Short answer:*

By putting the writing of the Gospels at a later date, the critics then feel comfortable, arguing that too much time had passed for there to be any accurate record of the words and works of Jesus – and the issues about the difficult teachings and miraculous works of Jesus can be avoided.

*Discussion:*

Critics of evangelical Christianity have always been keen to put the writing of the Gospels somewhere between the late first century and well into the second century AD. By doing this, they put considerable distance between the events of Jesus and the recording of them – at least 100

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<sup>26</sup> William F. Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955), 136; Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990); John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1996).

years. Then they argue that, because the records were written much later than the original events happened, they cannot be reliable records of those events. Who could possibly remember what was actually said and done that long ago? Who could tell what had been exaggerated, added to or distorted over such a long period of time? Then they suggest that the Church of the second century made up these documents to show what they wanted to believe about Jesus and what they wanted others to believe as well. In other words, for liberals, the Gospels were dressed up as if they were actual history – but, in reality, they do not in any way represent a true picture of the life of the real Jesus.

This late dating system conveniently solves some of the problems critics have about Jesus. For instance, it allows them to suggest that the stories about his miraculous powers and predictions were, in fact, distortions and exaggerations (if not plainly untrue additions). For the critics then, the records are ‘spiritual myths’ – manufactured stories that contain spiritual principles. By arguing for a late date of the writing of the Gospels, they then say we have no way of knowing the real Jesus or his gospel.

But this late dating of the Gospels by the critics seems to have been a groundless and deliberate attempt to undermine the Gospel records.

Q 8. Who has the original Gospel writings? If we don’t have the original Gospels, doesn’t this destroy the credibility of the Jesus story?

*Short answer:*

No one has the originals. They have not been preserved and therefore do not exist. However, we have reliable copies of the originals.

*Discussion:*

Not having ‘originals’ is not just a ‘Bible’ problem! When we start to think about the writings of the ancient past (like the 16 well-known classical works of other writers, e.g. Homer, Plutarch, Suetonius, etc.), we have to openly admit we do not have the originals. But no one doubts that originals of these classical works existed. If we have copies, we know there must have been an original (in the same way 15 photocopies of a paper mean there must have been an original document or, in the same way, 135 art prints mean there must have been an original painting).

Because reliable copies of the original classical works exist (and, in some cases, there are about ten manuscript copies of these classical works

in existence), historians accept these ancient works as real history. No one doubts that the originals existed and no one doubts the manuscript copies are reliable records of ancient history. As we read ancient history, we are reading copies of copies of copies – but we also know we are reading real history. In contrast, the credibility and reliability of the New Testament text is in much better shape than that of the well-established classical works of history, in two ways:

1. **There are a huge number of New Testament manuscripts in existence.** The best-supported classical work is Homer's *Iliad* (643 copies). Most of the classical works are based on only 10 to 20 copies. But the New Testament is supported by more than 24,000 manuscripts – in round figures, there are 5700 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9300 other early versions (e.g. Syrian, Coptic, Gothic, Armenian, etc.). In addition to the New Testament manuscripts, we have over 100,000 letters written by the early Christians and the Church Fathers and, in those 100,000 letters, reference is made to 99% of the New Testament's 8000 verses – which gives even greater confirmation of what had been written! The great meticulous New Testament scholar and textual critic Bruce Metzger has claimed that, even if we had lost all the Greek manuscripts and all early translations, “we could still reproduce the contents of the New Testament from the multiplicity of quotations in commentaries, sermons, letters... of the early Church Fathers.”<sup>27</sup>
2. **The New Testament manuscripts were written very much closer to the originals.** As for the classical works, there is a big gap of time between the originals and the manuscript copies. For instance, the history of Thucydides (written from 460 BC to 400 BC) is based on eight manuscripts dated about AD 900 – that is 1300 years after the original. Aristotle's *Poetics* was written around 343 BC but the earliest copies we have are dated around AD 1100 – that is 1400 years after the original. Plato lived from 427 BC to 347 BC but our copies of his writings are dated about 1300 years later. The smallest gap is for Homer's *Iliad* (400 years) but, for most, there's a gap of 750 to 1600 years. As for the New Testament, we have copies of some parts of the New Testament books dated approximately AD 95,<sup>28</sup> copies of whole New Testament books from AD 200, “and

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<sup>27</sup> As recorded by Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 76.

<sup>28</sup> John 18:31–43, 37–38 is the oldest manuscript available, thought to have been written anywhere between AD 95 and AD 125. It is classified as P52 and is housed in the John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester, UK.

most of the New Testament, including all the Gospels are available in the Chester Beatty Papyrus from 150 years after the New Testament was finished”.<sup>29</sup>

### Q 9. Did Jesus claim to be the Messiah?

*Short answer:*

Yes. Three of Jesus’ recorded claims to be the Messiah are found in Matthew 16:16–17, Matthew 26:63–64 and John 4:25–26.

module 8

1. **Matthew 16:16–17.** When Jesus asked his disciples who they thought he was: “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.’” Jesus didn’t object to Peter’s answer but highly approved of it! Jesus even said that God had revealed his Messiahship to Peter and then he blessed Peter for giving the correct answer.
2. **Matthew 26:63–64.** At Jesus’ trial before he was crucified, he claimed to be the Messiah even though this would land him in big trouble: “The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ ‘You have said so,’ Jesus replied.”
3. **John 4:25–26.** When a Samaritan woman told Jesus that she was expecting the coming Messiah, “Jesus declared, ‘I, the one speaking to you—I am he.’”

### Q 10A. What does it mean that Jesus is the ‘Messiah’?

*Short answer:*

The word ‘Messiah’ means ‘anointed one’. When the Bible says that Jesus is the Messiah, it means that Jesus is God’s specially anointed servant. God had other servants who were referred to as his anointed servants (e.g. Israel, Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus) but God predicted the coming of one special anointed servant, Jesus the Messiah.

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<sup>29</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2002), 462.

- ▶ Q 10B. Where was it predicted that the Messiah would be both God and man?

*Short answer:*

Some Old Testament predictions that the Messiah would be God and man are found in Psalm 110:1, Isaiah 9:6–7, Jeremiah 23:5–6 and Micah 5:2.

*Discussion:*

The Old Testament predicted that the Messiah would be both God and man. The following four prophecies show this:

1. **Psalm 110:1.** “The LORD says to my lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” Psalm 110 was a psalm of David. The first person referred to in the psalm is Yahweh, translated as “LORD”. The second person referred to is “my lord”, meaning David’s Lord. So who was David’s Lord? When David wrote this psalm, he was the King of Israel. No one was greater in position than King David. The only person greater than David would be the Messiah (his descendant).

Yahweh says to the Messiah to sit at his right hand. We learn from 1 Kings 2:19–20 that someone who sits at a king’s right hand is given equal authority to the king. When one king made a formal visit to another king, he would sit at his host’s right hand because they were both equals. Since the Messiah is invited to sit at God’s right hand, it follows that the Messiah must be equal with God.

2. **Isaiah 9:6–7.** “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.”

In this prophecy, Isaiah calls the Messiah, who will rule over David’s kingdom on David’s throne, a “child”, “son” and “Mighty God”. The two names, “child” and “son”, show that the Messiah will be a human male and will begin as a baby “born” “to us”. The phrase “Mighty God” has been taken by some to mean ‘mighty hero’, but, since it is used in the very next chapter (Isaiah 10:21) of Yahweh (God), it should be taken in the same way here in Isaiah 9:6.

3. **Jeremiah 23:5–6.** “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior.’” Jeremiah teaches that the LORD (Yahweh) will raise up for David a king. This refers to the Davidic king, the Messiah, who would be descended from David (see also Jeremiah 33:15) – this means the Messiah is a man.

The name of the Messiah is revealed in this prophecy. The Messiah will be called, “The LORD [Yahweh] Our Righteous Savior”. Both “Yahweh” and “Righteous Savior” express the Messiah’s nature and character. Since God calls the Messiah “Yahweh”, the Messiah is of course Yahweh (God).

4. **Micah 5:2.** “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” This prophecy in Micah teaches that the Messiah will come from one of the clans of the tribe of Judah and will be born in Bethlehem. This means the Messiah will be a man. The prophecy further describes the origin of the Messiah as being “from old, ancient times”. These words used in this specific phrase are the strongest Hebrew words that could be used for an endless past and mean that the Messiah is eternal. Since God is the only person who is eternal, this verse teaches that the Messiah is the eternal God.

▶ Q 10C. Why did the Messiah need to be God?

*Short answer:*

There are two reasons why the Messiah had to be God: (1) he needed to be God to restore the world into a place of peace; and (2) he needed to be God to restore the people to himself.

*Discussion:*

The Messiah needed to be God because:

1. **He would restore the world.** In the future, the Messiah will change the world into a place of perfect peace (Isaiah 9:7). No human being could change the world into a place of perfect peace. Isaiah 9:6 tells us that the human Messiah will bring universal peace because he is also the “Mighty God”.

2. **He would restore people to God.** To do this, the Messiah needed to pay the penalty for sin. The penalty for sin was eternal separation from God (Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:14; 21:8). The Messiah needed to be eternal so he was able to pay the penalty of eternal separation. Because Jesus was an eternal person (God), the separation Jesus would suffer on the cross had an eternal dimension to it (see question 5 below in the study of Jesus' death).

In short, only God can fix the consequences of sin and the cause of sin.

▶ Q 11A. Did Jesus actually claim to be God?

*Short answer:*

Yes. The Gospels tell us Jesus claimed to be God in three ways:

1. Jesus said he was equal with God.
2. Jesus used God's actual names for himself.
3. Jesus exercised God's exclusive rights as his own.

*Discussion:*

1. **Jesus said he was equal with God:**
  - a. **Mark 14:36.** When Jesus prayed, he called God "Abba, Father". The Jews called God 'Father', but never 'Abba, Father'. That was a term used only by Christ. By saying "Abba, Father", Jesus was claiming to be of the same substance as the Father – just as any son is of the same substance as his father.
  - b. **John 5:16–18.** When the Jews persecuted Jesus for healing people on the Sabbath, Jesus defended his actions by saying, "My Father is always at his work to this very [Sabbath] day, and I, too, am working". Jesus is saying that what he did on the Sabbath was actually the work of God himself. The Jews understood precisely what Jesus was saying and tried to execute him because, "he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God".
  - c. **John 10:30–39.** Jesus said: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). While some (e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses) argue Jesus is not claiming equality with the Father, the Jews' decision to execute Jesus for 'blasphemy' (John 10:31–33, 39) and Jesus' lengthy

response (John 10:32, 34–38) show that Jesus fully intended his words to be taken as a claim to be God. Jesus has clearly said that he is God’s Son (John 10:36). If a man has a son, the son will automatically be of the same substance (i.e. the man’s son will, like his father, be a human being).<sup>30</sup> If an ape has a son, the son will be an ape of the same substance as its father. If a dog has a son, it too will be of the same substance as its father (i.e. a dog). And if God has a Son, the Son will be of the same substance as his Father (i.e. he too will be God). Jesus is clearly claiming to be equal with God because he is of the same substance as God – he is God’s Son. Other verses where Jesus speaks of himself as God’s Son include Matthew 11:25–30, Matthew 24:36 and John 3:16–18. Other verses where God speaks of Jesus as his Son include Matthew 3:17 and Matthew 17:5.

module 8

- d. **John 14:9–11.** Jesus said: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

2. **Jesus used God’s actual names for himself:**

- a. **Matthew 22:41–46.** Jesus is going ‘head-to-head’ with the Pharisees about his claim to be Messiah. Jesus quotes a Psalm about Messiah – Psalm 110:1. In that Psalm (v. 1), David says his Messianic son (descendant) was also his ‘Eternal Lord’ (Hebrew: ‘Adonai’): “The LORD [Yahweh] says to my Lord [Adonai]: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” By claiming to be David’s Messianic son, Jesus is also claiming to be David’s Eternal Lord, as shown in Psalm 110:1! That means Jesus is taking to himself the name ‘Adonai’, the common Old Testament name for God used in place of Yahweh. In taking this name, Jesus is making himself equal with God.
- b. **John 8:12.** Jesus said: “I am the light of the world.” In describing himself this way, Jesus was equating himself with Yahweh – “The LORD is my light and my salvation” (Psalm 27:1).

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<sup>30</sup> In this illustration, we are following Peter Kreeft, “Why I believe Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God”, in *Why I Am a Christian*, ed. Norman L. Geisler and Paul K. Hoffman (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 240.

- c. **John 8:58–59.** Jesus said: “before Abraham was born, I am!” Jesus was taking the divine name of Yahweh to himself (cf. Exodus 3:14).
  - d. **John 10:11.** Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd.” Jesus was taking the divine name to himself – “The LORD is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1).
3. **Jesus exercised God’s exclusive rights as his own:**
- a. **Jesus exercised God’s right to forgive sins** (Matthew 9:1–8; Luke 5:20–21). We can forgive those who sin against us (Matthew 6:12, 18:35; Ephesians 4:32) but we cannot forgive anyone’s sin against God or other people. In forgiving sins, Jesus was making himself equal with God.
  - b. **Jesus exercised God’s right to give eternal life** (John 4:13–14; 5:39–40; 6:27, 33, 40, 47–51, 58; 10:28–29; 11:25–26).
  - c. **Jesus exercised God’s right to raise the dead.** In the Old Testament, only Yahweh could raise the dead (John 5:21) but Jesus exercises that right (John 11:43–44) and claims he will raise from the dead all who believe in him at the last day (John 6:39–40).
  - d. **Jesus said that his words, like God’s words, would last forever.** Isaiah the prophet said, “the word of our God endures forever” (Isaiah 40:8). Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Matthew 24:35). Jesus was claiming his words were as eternal as were God’s words.
  - e. **Jesus said he would exercise God’s right to judge every human being:** “the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father” (John 5:22–23). Jesus claimed to have the authority to judge because he is the Son of Man (John 5:27). See also Matthew 25:31–34, 41 and 46 where Jesus claims to be the one who sends people to eternal punishment or to eternal life.

▶ Q 11B. What does it mean that Jesus is the ‘Son of God’?

*Short answer:*

The term ‘Son of God’ means two things: (1) that Jesus is God’s appointed King; and (2) that Jesus is God’s unique Son.

*Discussion:*

1. **In the Old Testament, 'son of God' was used in a royal sense** (2 Samuel 7:11–16; 1 Chronicles 17:10–14; Psalm 2:7). The kings of Israel were referred to as 'God's sons'. Therefore, 'Son of God' is a title indicating that Jesus is God's appointed King (Messiah).
2. **In the New Testament, 'Son of God' was used in a relational sense.** In John 5:17, Jesus called God "his Father", meaning that Jesus was calling himself God's 'Son' in a relational sense. The Jewish leaders who heard Jesus call God his 'Father' "tried all the more to kill him". Why? They reacted this way because, by calling God his own 'Father', "he was... making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). When Jesus called God his 'Father', he was claiming to be God's unique 'Son' (i.e. fully equal with God).

Q 12. If there is only one God, how could Jesus claim to be God? If Jesus were God, wouldn't this make two Gods?

*Short answer:*

There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 44:6, 8; 1 Timothy 2:5) but there are three persons in the God-being – we call this the Trinity.

*Discussion:*

From the beginning of the Old Testament, we know there is only one God – he is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. But we also know there is some kind of plurality in God: "Let us make..." (Genesis 1:26), "Let us go down..." (Genesis 11:7). By the time we are halfway through the Old Testament, Isaiah clearly predicts a man would come (Isaiah 7:14) who would also be God (Isaiah 9:6–7). When we get to the New Testament, we have three persons spoken of as God: God the Father (Matthew 6:1, 4, 6, 8–9; Ephesians 1:3), God the Son (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:8) and God the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 13:14; Acts 5:3–4). The New Testament clearly presents all three persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) as fully God. But the New Testament still teaches there is only one God – not three (1 Timothy 2:5)! Because the Bible teaches a Trinity, Jesus could claim to be God. He is the second person of that Trinity.

▶ Q 13A. Why did Jesus do miracles?

*Short answer:*

The miracles of Jesus show God approved of Jesus and his teaching.

*Discussion:*

The miracles of Jesus show God approved of Jesus and his teaching. Nicodemus said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2; cf. Acts 2:22).

1. **Miracles were signs of God’s approval of the message and the messenger** in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God gave his messengers public approval by including miracles in their ministries (e.g. Moses (Exodus 4:17); Elijah (1 Kings 18:1–46); Elisha (2 Kings 4:8–37), etc.). In the New Testament, God gave his messengers public approval by including miracles (e.g. the 12 apostles (Matthew 10:1) and Paul (2 Corinthians 12:11–12)).
2. **The miracles of Jesus are no different in quality from the other miracles** recorded in the Old and New Testaments. They simply provide God’s seal of approval on Jesus and his message. Jesus’ message was unique: he was the Messiah, the Son of God. The miracles show that God agreed with his claim.
  - a. **The miracles of Jesus proved that he was the Messiah.** When John the Baptist was in prison, he sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he was the true Messiah or whether they should be looking for another (Matthew 11:2–3). Jesus answered John by reminding him of the miracles that he was doing (Matthew 11:4–6). By doing these miracles, Jesus was showing he was the Messiah and he could bring about the utopian Kingdom promised in the Old Testament (Isaiah 29:17–19; 35:5–6; 42:1–7). Nothing was beyond Jesus’ ability to control – disease, death, climate, productivity, demons – he controlled everything and this was a sign that he was the true Messiah and could establish the long-anticipated Kingdom.
  - b. **The miracles of Jesus proved that he was God** (Mark 2:1–12). While miracles on their own do not prove anyone is God (otherwise Moses, Elijah, Elisha, the 12 apostles and Paul could all claim to be God because they all did miracles just like the miracles of Jesus), Jesus’ miracles did show that God was agreeing with his claim to be God. Under any other circumstances, anyone claiming to be God would be guilty of blasphemy and executed under Jewish law. But the case of Jesus of Nazareth was unique – God was actually confirming Jesus’ claim through miracles. When Jesus told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven (Mark 2:5), the Pharisees predictably accused Jesus of blasphemy – since giving forgiveness was strictly God’s

business (Mark 2:6–7). Understanding their way of thinking, Jesus asked, “Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Get up, take your mat and walk?’” In other words, the miracle Jesus did showed that God completely agreed with Jesus’ claim to be God, and that he also completely approved of Jesus handing out forgiveness. Forgiving sins was a very appropriate thing to do, because Jesus was God.

## module 8

▶ Q 13B. Do people need more miracles today to enable them to believe in Jesus?

*Short answer:*

No.

*Discussion:*

1. **The Gospel of John**, a gospel written to create belief (John 20:30–31), **says ‘no’**. The Holy Spirit so inspired and crafted John’s Gospel that it would serve for all time as the Gospel that creates belief: “these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [what is written] you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).
2. **Jesus says ‘no’** (Luke 16:27–31). Jesus told the story of Abraham and the rich man who was in Hades. The rich man begged for a special, miraculous communication from the world of the dead (Luke 16:30) so his five living brothers would realise the warning and escape the coming judgement in hell. Jesus said Abraham refused the request: “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them... If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets [the written Old Testament], they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:29–31). The conclusion is clear: the written record is sufficient for belief in Jesus.

Q 14. What do true miracles look like?

*Short answer:*

The Bible points out an obvious difference in quality between supposed ‘miracles’ and the true miracles that characterised Jesus and God’s other messengers in both the Old and New Testaments.

*Discussion:*

It is clear that Jesus' miracles were unique. Witnesses of Jesus' miracles said, "Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel" (Matthew 9:33)

1. **Jesus' miracles happened instantly, not gradually.** Notice the word 'immediately' and the idea of 'immediacy' in connection with Jesus' miracles (Matthew 8:3, 13, 15, 26, 31–32; 9:6–7, 22, 25, 30). Even when Jesus touched the blind man twice before the man's sight was fully restored, that would have taken no more than two minutes. Jesus' miracles were 'immediate' not 'gradual' in their effect.
2. **Jesus' miracles were comprehensive, not selective.** He healed every disease and sickness (Matthew 4:23–24; 9:35) and this was true of his apostles – Jesus "gave them authority... to heal every disease and sickness" (Matthew 10:1). Nothing was 'off limits' or beyond their scope.
3. **Jesus' miracles were complete, not partial.** If a blind man was healed, it seems the sight in both eyes was fully restored. If a paralytic was healed, it appears both legs were healed – enough for the man to take up his bed and walk!
4. **Jesus' miracles were long-lasting, not momentary.** There is no indication that things were worse in a day or two or even a week or two. There is no mention of people having to come to Jesus for follow-up healings. It's possible that those who were healed of blindness may have eventually suffered from more eye problems in later life – and one supposes Lazarus (John 11:1–44) would have eventually died again since there is no record that he was translated to heaven. But each miracle was so substantial that it appeared to have lasted a lifetime, not two weeks or two months or two years.
5. **Jesus' miracles were meaningful, not random.** They were not random acts of power performed just for the sake of it. In other words, Jesus was not about turning donkeys into Ferraris, or blowflies into Boeing 'Dreamliners'. They were 'signs' pointing to a whole new quality of life in the coming Kingdom (Matthew 11:2–6); in other cases, they were showing God's approval of Jesus' claim to be God (Mark 2:1–12). But they were never showy displays of power just for the sake of it (see question 13A above).

- ▶ Q 15. Was Jesus really born of the Virgin Mary and why was this necessary?

*Short answer:*

Two Gospels definitely say that Jesus' mother was a virgin and the other two (along with the rest of the New Testament) assume it.

The person we now know as Jesus actually existed before his birth as God the Son – the second person of the Trinity. Therefore, he did not need a beginning – he already existed. What he needed was a human-body and this was specially arranged by the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

module 8

*Discussion:*

Two Gospels definitely say that Jesus' mother was a virgin:

1. **Matthew 1:18–25 makes it clear that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.** These verses teach that Jesus was conceived not by Joseph but by the Holy Spirit (in fulfilment of Isaiah 7:14). Joseph did not have a sexual relationship with Mary until after Jesus was born. Notice Matthew 1:16 said, “Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah”. This clearly shows Jesus was born of Mary.
2. **Luke 1:26–28, 34–35 makes it clear that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.** These verses teach that Mary was a virgin while she was engaged to Joseph and that her pregnancy was created by the Holy Spirit.

Strange as it may seem, the man we know as Jesus did not need a personal beginning. He already existed as God the Son. When a couple come together and procreate, a whole new person is conceived. In Jesus' case, this was absolutely impossible because he already existed as the second person of the Trinity. He 'came down' from heaven to earth (John 6:41–42). Therefore, he did not need a beginning – he simply needed a human body for his birth on earth. So there was no need for a reproductive act on Joseph's part. The moment Mary conceived, God the Son left heaven and took up residence in the womb of the virgin. He was brought into the world by a woman.

Q 16. Why is it important to think about Jesus' perfect life?

*Short answer:*

There are two reasons why we should think about Jesus' perfect life:

1. To show that Jesus is perfectly 'sane' even when claiming to be God
2. To show Jesus was sinless and therefore a suitable saviour.

*Discussion:*

There are two reasons we mention Jesus' perfect life:

1. **To show Jesus was perfectly sane.** While the Gospels present Jesus as a real human being (human birth, human body, human DNA, gender, racial identity, normal human development), obviously we can't say Jesus was 'normal' in the sense that he was like everyone else – he just wasn't. For one thing, he wasn't sinful – for another thing, he wasn't naturally mortal. Because he was without sin, death was not 'ticking away' inside him like it is inside every other human being. This is probably the reason we never read of Jesus being sick. Jesus died only because he became [deliberately] "obedient to death" (Philippians 2:8). Also, he is said to have worked some extraordinary miracles. So, he wasn't the normal, 'run-of-the-mill' human being like the rest of us. Yet we can say that the Gospels present him as being perfectly 'sane'. There is no sign of psychological or emotional or irrational behaviour in Jesus. He had enemies but there are no signs of paranoia in him; in fact, his enemies were so real they eventually crucified him. There were times when Jesus was deeply sad and troubled – but there's no sign of depression. His claims were quietly and deliberately stated and carefully thought out. His works of power were obvious for all to see – his enemies could not deny them, they could claim only that an evil source caused these powers (Matthew 12:24). The reason for highlighting Jesus' perfect life is to emphasise that Jesus was perfectly sane, even though he claimed to be God.
2. **To show Jesus was sinless and therefore a suitable saviour.** If someone cannot swim, they cannot hope to save someone drowning in a fast-flowing river. Why? Because they have the same problem – neither can swim. If someone is blind, they cannot act as a guide for another blind person. Why? Because they have the same problem. If Jesus has come to save us from sin, he cannot have the same sin problem we have. The fact of Jesus' sinlessness means that there is no doubt about his ability to save us from sin.

Q 17. Could Jesus have sinned?

*Short answer:*

Jesus could not have sinned, because he was God and God cannot sin.

*Discussion:*

We answer ‘no’ because, while the New Testament teaches that Jesus was man, it also teaches he was God (see question 11A above). But, and this is a fine but important point, the New Testament does NOT teach that Jesus was ‘God and man’ – as if the humanity of Jesus and the deity (God-ness) of Jesus could be separated. Instead, it teaches that Jesus was ‘the God-man’ – in whom deity and humanity were perfectly and inseparably united. Because of this, Jesus could not sin.

Two important verses teach this:

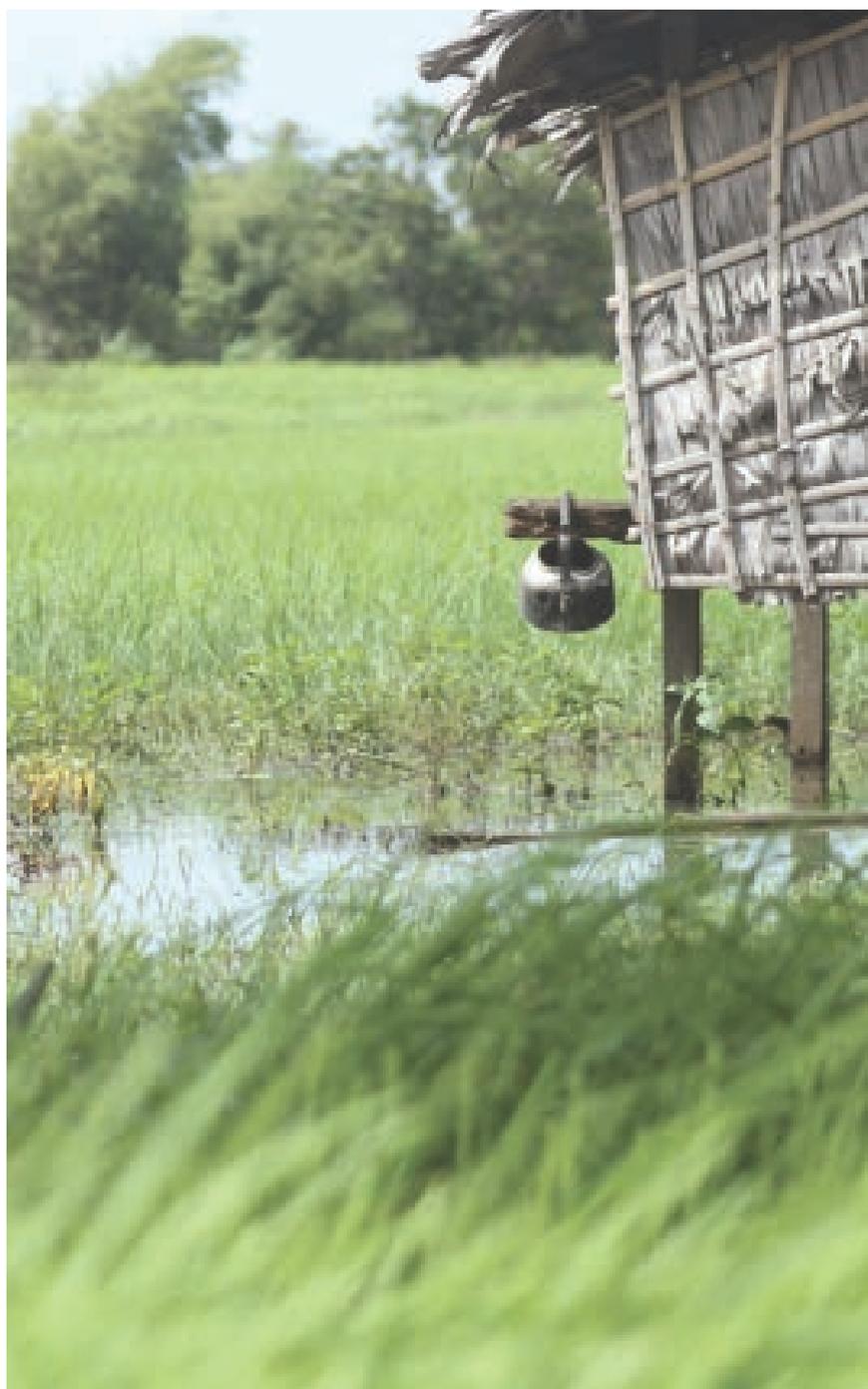
1. “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).
2. “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone” (James 1:13).

Q 18. What was the point of Jesus’ temptation?

Sometimes question 17 leads to this question about Jesus’ temptation (Matthew 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). Note two things:

1. **The temptation was not to see if Jesus could sin but to show that Jesus could not sin** because he was the Son of God. This is why the Holy Spirit deliberately led Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by Satan (Matthew 4:1).
2. **Even though Jesus could not sin, the temptation was still real.** A row boat can attack a battleship and, while the attack might look quite ridiculous, it would still be a real attack. Even though Jesus could not sin, Satan still tempted him. Jesus would have felt the evil strength in Satan’s attack, the power of Satanic persuasion, the hunger pains of a 40-day fast and the need to consciously resist this attack. The temptation was not a trivial experience for Jesus because we are told he needed angelic help, both during the temptation (Mark 1:13) and after it (Matthew 4:11).







# death

module

9

## 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 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...

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## Day One: 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.”

module 9

All of us know that the ‘seeds of death’ are ticking away 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’ ticking away 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 Two: 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?

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## Day Three: 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 Four: 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 tennis.” “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, who 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 Five: 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. Pronounced 'ik-skroo-SHe-atiNG'. 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?

## leader's introduction to module 9 – death

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to introduce explorers to some basic biblical concepts about **Jesus' death**, the nature of his death and why his death is foundational to Christianity, and to give explorers the opportunity to explore and discuss what this means.

What we discover:

1. Jesus' death was a payment for *sin*.
2. Jesus' death was a payment for all *people*.
3. Jesus' death was a payment for all *time*.
4. Jesus' death was a payment in *full*.
5. Jesus' death was a payment of *love*.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- Does God really love sinful people?
- Why did Jesus speak of his death as a ransom?
- What does it mean that Jesus died a spiritual, physical and eternal death?
- Why was Jesus' death necessary?
- Did Jesus really die for every person?

### Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.

### Explore

Discussion starter

Q – Why do think wearing a cross can be seen as trendy, even though it’s a symbol of death?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Mark 10:45 and 15:24–37.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this section.

Q – What did Jesus claim was his mission?

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

### View

Video episode 9 – death

Five things God wants us to know about Jesus’ death:

1. Jesus’ death was a payment for .....
2. Jesus’ death was a payment for all .....
3. Jesus’ death was a payment for all .....
4. Jesus’ death was a payment in .....
5. Jesus’ death was a payment of .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

95

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group time (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/death](http://www.longstoryshort.co/death)



## frequently asked questions

1. Why is there a whole module on the death of Jesus?
2. Why did God plan Jesus' death before the world began?
3. Does God really love sinful people?
- ▶ 4. How could a loving God plan to punish his innocent Son with crucifixion?
- ▶ 5. What was the ransom price that Jesus paid?
- ▶ 6. Did Jesus really pay the ransom price for all sin, for all people, for all time?
7. Can we genuinely tell someone Jesus really did die in their place?
8. Why did Jesus speak of his death as a ransom payment?
9. To whom did Jesus pay the ransom?
10. What has God done with our sins?

module 9

### Website questions

11. If Jesus died for all our sins, why does God still 'judge' Christians for their sins?
12. If Jesus died for all our sins, why do Christians have to appear at the Judgment Seat of Christ?

Q 1. Why is there a whole module on the death of Jesus?

*Short answer:*

Because the death of Jesus is the single most important feature of the Christian faith.

*Discussion:*

1. **Jesus' death is central to the story of the Bible** – everything moves towards it and proceeds from it.
2. **Jesus' death is central to the Christian life** – it is the basis of all our blessings and the benchmark for our love.
3. **Jesus' death is central to the life of the Church** – it is continually celebrated in communion.

4. **Jesus' death is central to the worship of heaven** – the slain, but resurrected Lamb holds centre stage there (Revelation 5).
5. **Jesus' death is central to the Christian gospel** – it is at the core of the good news (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). We cannot forget this! “A lot of people are calling on Jesus Christ’s name for a lot of things these days: peace, happiness, healing, power, better relationships, and freedom from debt or addictions. But none of these are what the Bible focuses on when we are told we need Christ. We need Christ because we have sin that needs to be paid for. These other things are side benefits... if God chooses to grant them.”<sup>31</sup> That’s why Paul told the Corinthians: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Q 2. Why did God plan Jesus' death before the world began?

*Short answer:*

God's plan of Jesus' death before the world began shows two things:

1. **Jesus' death was no accident**; it was central to God's eternal plan. It was not an afterthought (as if it were God's 'fix-up-quick' idea).
2. **God loves sinners so much**, he planned their salvation before they even sinned (see question 3 below).

Q 3. Does God really love sinful people?

*Short answer:*

Yes – and not reluctantly or hesitatingly! God is an enthusiastic, generous lover of sinners!

*Discussion:*

While this question grows out of question 2 above, it is so important we have given it space on its own. The mood of this truth must permeate Long Story Short studies. We can see God's love for sinners because before they had ever sinned (before they had even thought of sinning!),

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<sup>31</sup> Anthony T. Evans, *Who Is This King of Glory? Experiencing the Fullness of Christ's Work in our Lives* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 74.

God knew they would sin and loved them so much he planned their rescue before he ever created the world! If this is too unclear, John 3:16 will make it obvious: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...” and not in a ‘spur-of-the-moment’ way – he deliberately calculated the gift of his Son before the world began. God’s love for sinners is the subject of Jesus’ three famous parables in Luke 15. Note Luke 15:1: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.” Jesus’ attitude to sinners was so positive and welcoming and accepting, that the Pharisees noted it and counted it against Jesus (Luke 15:2) because they despised sinners and tax collectors. Then Jesus tells three parables that show God’s attitude to sinners. He loves them and pursues them: like a shepherd looking for his lost sheep (Luke 15:3–7); like a woman looking for a lost coin (Luke 15:8–10); and like a father looking for his lost son (Luke 15:11–32). God’s love for sinners is real. The reason God loves everyone is because everyone is made in the image of God.

module 9

▶ Q 4. How could a loving God plan to punish his innocent Son with crucifixion?

*Short answer:*

The question assumes that the Bible story of salvation involves three separate entities: a Holy God, a world of rebellious sinners and an innocent Jesus. The answer to the question is found in the mystery of the Trinity.

*Discussion:*

It’s an important question. To be brutally honest, because of the way the Christian story is told sometimes, people could easily get the idea that God the Father is a bit like a ‘heavenly bully’ who exploited his Son Jesus (the innocent bystander), forcing him into an agonising, torturous execution for the crimes of a no-good, rebellious world to enable the Father to achieve his secret agenda. But this seriously misrepresents the biblical story in three ways:

1. **It is not a drama of three separate entities** – only two are involved: God and sinful humans. The Father is God and Jesus is God – two persons but one entity. God is not grabbing a ‘third party’ outside himself to suffer the penalty. In fact, God is actually inflicting the penalty on himself! 2 Corinthians 5:19 says: “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ...”

2. **God did not exploit Jesus** – “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). This means God is perfect and sinless and he is incapable of exploiting but, apart from that, Jesus himself never indicates he was exploited.
3. **Jesus was not a disinterested bystander** – Jesus was (and had always been) a wholehearted and willing participant in the crucifixion (Hebrews 10:5–9). Jesus ‘joyfully’ fulfilled his Father’s plans (see John 15:10–11) and laid down his life voluntarily, not under any sense of pressure (John 10:17–18). As the Second Person of the Godhead, Jesus not only perfectly understood the plan of salvation – he was perfectly committed to it.

▶ Q 5. What was the ransom price that Jesus paid?

*Short answer:*

The Bible talks about three kinds of death that come as a result of sin: spiritual, physical and eternal death. Jesus suffered all three kinds of death on the cross when he paid the ransom price for sin.

*Discussion:*

1. **The penalty for sin includes spiritual, physical and eternal death.**
  - a. **Spiritual death.** When Adam and Eve sinned they experienced ‘spiritual separation’ from God – that’s why they were afraid of God (Genesis 3:10) and why they hid from God (Genesis 3:8). God highlighted that spiritual separation by asking (for the very first time), “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9).
  - b. **Physical death.** Adam and Eve would return to dust (Genesis 3:19; 5:5).
  - c. **Eternal death.** Our sin against an infinitely holy God means that he is infinitely offended. Because he is infinitely offended, we incur an infinite punishment. We are finite creatures (we are not God) so the only way we can pay an infinite penalty is to pay the penalty for an infinite amount of time. To experience physical death without first fixing the problem of ‘spiritual death’, results in separation from God forever, i.e. eternal death (Matthew 25:41, 46; Revelation 20:14; 21:8). There is no recovery from eternal death.

2. **Jesus suffered spiritual, physical and eternal death when he paid the ransom price for sin.**
- a. **Jesus suffered ‘spiritual death’ (separation from God) on the cross.** He cried out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus’ question reveals two things:
    - i. **Jesus was experiencing separation from God.** He uses the word ‘forsaken’, which means ‘abandoned’. Any other time in his life, he addressed God as “Father”, or “My Father” or “Abba Father” (such terms are used 191 times in the Gospels). At the beginning of his suffering on the cross, Jesus says, “Father, forgive them...” (Luke 23:34) and, at the end of his suffering on the cross, Jesus says, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46). But here, at the most intense moment, Jesus (fully conscious) cries out to God because he cannot sense the Father’s loving presence – only the harsh justice of God.
    - ii. **Jesus did not deserve that separation.** That’s why Jesus asked, “Why have you forsaken me?” He is personally innocent of any sin that would rightfully incur such a judgement (John 8:46). He knew he was the Father’s well-beloved Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). He knew God would not reject a good man – so he asks the question ‘Why?’
  - b. **Jesus suffered ‘physical death’ (separation of body and spirit) on the cross** as a result of his spiritual death (see above). Jesus died physically – they certified death (John 19:33) and buried his body (Matthew 27:57–66; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). Physical death occurs when the human spirit is separated from the human body (James 2:26). In a deliberate act of dying, Jesus committed his spirit into his Father’s hands (Luke 23:46) and then “breathed his last”. Jesus’ physical death was the result of his spirit leaving his body.
  - c. **Jesus suffered ‘eternal death’ (eternal separation from God) on the cross.** An infinite being can experience an infinite punishment even though the suffering occurs in a finite amount of time (the time on the cross). Jesus was an infinite being (he was God) and so he suffered this infinite punishment (eternal death) on the cross.

- ▶ Q 6. Did Jesus really pay the ransom price for all sin, for all people, for all time?

*Short answer:*

Yes!

*Discussion:*

1. **Jesus paid the ransom price for all sin.**
  - a. **Jesus paid the penalty for sin in full.** After Jesus experienced the agonising separation from the Father that made him cry out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, he then said, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). The term was used in the Greek business world for officially cancelling a debt that had been paid in full (i.e. for the whole amount). Upon full payment, the Greek word ‘tetelestai’ (meaning ‘it is finished’) was written across the invoice.
  - b. **All our sins are forgiven.** If “all our sins” are forgiven (Colossians 2:13), it can be so only because Jesus paid for “all our sins”.
  - c. **Christians “have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all”** (Hebrews 10:10).
2. **Jesus paid the ransom price for all people.** Had Jesus died for only one person, he would not have had to suffer one bit less than he did. However, in dying for the sins of every single person in the world, Jesus did not have to suffer one bit more than he did. Jesus’ sacrifice for sin was the perfect payment for every person.
  - a. **Precise statements in the Bible.** There are many precise statements in the Bible that say Jesus’ one-time death was sufficient to remove all the sins of all people for all time. These include:
    - i. **Hebrews 2:9.** “... [Jesus] suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone [i.e. for all people]”.
    - ii. **Hebrews 9:26.** Jesus “has appeared once for all [i.e. once for all sin, for all time and once for all people] at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself”.
    - iii. **1 John 2:2.** Writing to those who were already Christians, John said... “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not

only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world [i.e. once for all sin, for all time and for all people]”.

iv. **Other statements in the Bible.** John 1:29, 1 Timothy 4:10 and 1 Peter 3:18.

- b. **Insight from the Day of Atonement.** On the tenth day of the seventh month, Israel celebrated the great Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29–30), arguably the most significant day in Israel’s religious calendar. On this day, God provided a way for all the sins of all the people of Israel to be wiped clean. Two goats were used in this ritual. One was sacrificed and its blood sprinkled about the Most Holy Place, the Holy Place and the bronze altar (Leviticus 16:15–19). The other was taken live to the High Priest, who would put his hands on the head of this live goat and then “confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat’s head... The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:21–22). The day was to be regarded as a special day, “a day of sabbath rest” (Leviticus 16:31). The Israelites were called on to “deny themselves” (Leviticus 16:29, 31) – that meant they had to personally observe the rituals of the day, showing genuine remorse for their sins by fasting. Individuals who refused to show remorse by fasting were expelled from the community (Leviticus 23:29) and those who did not respect the day were executed (Leviticus 23:30).

Now, the Day of Atonement clearly shows one sacrifice was ‘sufficient’ for all the sins of all the people of Israel for a whole year – but that sacrifice was efficient only for those who personally embraced it (i.e. observed it). In the same way, the Book of Hebrews says Jesus’ one sacrifice is sufficient to cover all the sins of all the people of the whole world for all time (Hebrews 2:9; 9:26), but it is only efficient (takes effect) for those who personally embrace that sacrifice and rely completely on it. Those who disregard this sacrifice and disbelieve (i.e. ‘non-believers’) will come into the judgement of the second death in the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8).

3. **Jesus paid the ransom price for all time.** Jesus died for all people in the past, present and future. No sin has been left out. That’s why Christians can never come into condemnation (Romans 8:1) –

even though Christians will commit many more sins in the future. According to Romans 8:38–39, nothing in the present and nothing in the future (including the sins of the present and the sins of the future) can ever condemn us or separate us from God’s love. Every single sin, even the future ones we haven’t yet thought of, have been paid for by the death of Jesus.

Q 7. Can we genuinely tell someone Jesus really did die in their place?

*Short answer:*

Yes.

*Discussion:*

Because the death of Jesus was ‘sufficient’ for all (see question 6 above), we can genuinely and confidently tell someone Jesus did actually die for them. His death was for them – all they have to do is embrace him as the one who made the acceptable sacrifice to God for sin. Jesus “came to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10). Question: Who was lost? Answer: Everyone. That means Jesus came to seek and to save every lost person. But God saves only those who receive him. This is what Paul meant (1 Timothy 4:10) when he said “God... is the Savior of all people [because Jesus’ death is sufficient], and especially of those who believe [for whom his death is efficient]”.

Q 8. Why did Jesus speak of his death as a ransom payment?

*Short answer:*

Because Jesus came to fix the problem of sin, and sin had a price tag attached to it – ‘death’.

*Discussion:*

God had been ‘straight up’ with Adam and Eve – sin was a serious crime that carried the death penalty (Genesis 2:17). Nothing but the payment of that penalty would fix the sin problem. No amount of reasoning, regretting, repenting, reforming or ‘turning over new leaves’... would ever remove the sin problem. It could be paid for only in death. God is infinitely holy and always just. There are no compromises. When Jesus said he came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45), he was saying he had come to fix the sin problem by paying the price God had set on sin. He had come to die in the place of sinful mankind.

Q 9. To whom did Jesus pay the ransom?

*Short answer:*  
To God.

*Discussion:*  
Some have suggested that Jesus paid the ransom to Satan. But Satan never set the price of sin, God did (Genesis 2:17). It was God's holiness and justice that had to be satisfied. Therefore, Jesus offered himself to God in death as a payment for human sin.

module 9

Q 10. What has God done with our sins?

*Short answer:*  
He has given them all to Christ! They are gone! The Bible has lots of different ways of saying the same thing. Our sins have been: taken away (John 1:29); forgiven (Romans 4:7; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 2:13); not counted (or remembered) against us (Romans 4:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17); and paid for (Mark 10:45).







# empty is good

module

10

## 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 and lived an incredible, perfect life; he made incredible claims and backed them up with incredible miracles. Jesus' mission was to pay the perfect ransom price 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 One: 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 is faced with death
5. The members of the entire Christian community are 'Losers' (with a capital 'L!') – victims of a gigantic hoax and should be pitied.

module 10

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?

## Day Two: A Cross-examination...

Of course, some people don't believe in Jesus' resurrection and have suggested the 'swoon' theory – that Jesus never actually died – 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. 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 Three: 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...”*

module 10

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?

The desperate disciples? Did they steal the body to save face and prop up their Jesus-Messiah-Son-of-God story? Couldn’t be! 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 Four: 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 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 – were 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? All having exactly the same hallucination?

Explore the Bible

Read Luke 24:36–43.

What convinced the disciples that Jesus had been physically resurrected?

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## Day Five: 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.

module 10

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?

## leader's introduction to module 10 – empty is good

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to introduce explorers to some basic biblical concepts about **Jesus' resurrection** and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means.

What we discover:

1. Jesus' resurrection confirms his **identity**.
2. Jesus' resurrection provides a **receipt**.
3. Jesus' resurrection is a huge **promise**.
4. Jesus' resurrection was a display of God's great **power**.
5. Jesus' resurrection means we have a living **saviour** and **hope**.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- Did the resurrection really happen?
- Aren't there other ways to account for the empty tomb?
- Why is the resurrection of Jesus so significant?
- Is it important for me to believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

### Welcome

1. Welcome people.
2. Serve food and beverage.

### Explore

Discussion starter

Q – What do you think about the resurrection of Jesus? Do you think there is good evidence for it?

Q – What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read Mark 16:2–8.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this section.

Q – Was anyone expecting the resurrection?

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

### View

Video episode 10 – empty is good

Five things God wants us to know about Jesus’ resurrection:

1. Jesus’ resurrection confirms his .....
2. Jesus’ resurrection provides a .....
3. Jesus’ resurrection is a huge .....
4. Jesus’ resurrection was a display of God’s great .....
5. Jesus’ resurrection means we have a living .....  
..... and .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

107

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Organise food and beverage for the next group time (see page 31).
3. Encourage the group to explore the daily readings in the next module (see page 31).
4. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
see [www.longstoryshort.co/empty-is-good](http://www.longstoryshort.co/empty-is-good)



## frequently asked questions

- ▶ 1. Why is the resurrection so important?
- ▶ 2. Does someone have to believe in the resurrection to be a Christian?
- ▶ 3. Did the resurrection really happen?
- ▶ 4. What is the basic case for the resurrection?
- ▶ 5. Is it unscientific to believe in the resurrection of Jesus?
- ▶ 6. Could there be an alternative, more ordinary explanation for the resurrection?
- ▶ 7. Can the resurrection be explained by saying the disciples went to the wrong tomb?
- ▶ 8. Could the disciples simply have been hallucinating and actually never have seen a physically resurrected Jesus?
- ▶ 9. Can the resurrection be explained by saying the disciples actually had seen a ghost?
- ▶ 10. Can the resurrection be explained by saying Jesus wasn't actually dead?
- ▶ 11. Can the resurrection be explained by arguing the disciples stole Jesus' body to 'stage' the resurrection?
- ▶ 12. Could the Jewish/Roman authorities have worked together and removed Jesus' body and buried it somewhere else?
- ▶ 13. Why are there so many theories which attempt to disprove the resurrection?

module 10

- ▶ Q 1. Why is the resurrection so important?

*Short answer:*

The resurrection is important because it proves:

- 1. Jesus is God
- 2. Jesus is the Messiah
- 3. Everything Jesus said is true

4. Jesus has defeated Satan and will eventually destroy him
5. Jesus has defeated death and will eventually destroy it
6. Those connected to Jesus by faith will be resurrected
7. Jesus has completely paid for sin
8. Jesus will judge the world.

*Discussion:*

The resurrection is important:

1. **It is a proof that Jesus is God.** The reasoning is that:
  - a. Jesus predicted he would raise his own body from the grave (John 2:19–22)
  - b. In claiming that he would raise his own body, Jesus is claiming to be able to do what only God can do – raise the dead
  - c. If Jesus did rise from the dead by his own power, he is God!
2. **It is a proof that Jesus is the Messiah.** The reasoning is that:
  - a. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah (Matthew 26:63–64; John 4:25–26)
  - b. The Messiah would establish God’s kingdom forever (Isaiah 9:6–7)
  - c. Jesus could not do this if he stayed dead (Matthew 16:13–16, 21)
  - d. Jesus rose from the dead, proving he was who he claimed to be (the Messiah who would one day establish God’s kingdom).
3. **It is a proof that everything Jesus said is true.** Jesus predicted his own resurrection many times (Matthew 16:21, 20:18–19, 26:26–29) and he even said that he would raise his own body from the grave (John 2:19–22). If Jesus was right in something this important, we can be certain he was correct in everything else he said.
4. **It is a proof that Jesus has defeated Satan and will eventually destroy him** (John 16:11; 1 Corinthians 15:21–24; Revelation 20:1–3, 10).
5. **It is a proof that Jesus has defeated death and will eventually destroy it** (1 Corinthians 15:21–26, 54–57).
6. **It is a proof that those connected to Jesus by faith will be resurrected** (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

7. **It is a proof that Jesus has completely paid for sin** (Romans 4:25). The resurrection of Jesus is proof that we have been declared righteous before God (justified). That means Jesus' death for our sin was so fully and completely acceptable to God that God has raised Jesus to life to prove the account has been settled in full! The debt has been completely paid – Jesus can live again. For instance, when a person commits a crime and is sentenced to imprisonment, they must remain imprisoned until they have completely paid the penalty for their crime. Once they have paid for their crime, they must be set free. Jesus so completely paid the penalty for our sin (death), that he was set free (resurrection).
8. **It is a proof that Jesus will judge the world** (Acts 17:31). Jesus said he was the judge of all men and that God the Father has committed all judgement into the hands of his Son (John 5:22–23, 27). The resurrection is proof that Jesus is God and the coming Judge of every human being. Paul confirmed this: "... he [God] commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:30–31). If people were confused about Jesus in his lifetime, there could be no doubt or confusion about who Jesus was after the resurrection. It is unmistakable: he is declared to be the Son of God with power (Romans 1:4) – including the power to judge.

## module 10

Q 2. Does someone have to believe in the resurrection to be a Christian?

*Short answer:*

Yes.

*Discussion:*

Yes, for two reasons:

1. **The resurrection of Jesus is the absolute foundation of the Christian faith:** "... if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14). The resurrection is key to one's personal Christian faith.
2. **The resurrection of Jesus is an integral part of the Christian confession:** "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified..." (Romans 10:9–10a).

▶ Q 3. Did the resurrection really happen?

*Short answer:*

The resurrection of Jesus was a real, historical and physical event – like any other real, historical and physical event.

*Discussion:*

The resurrection of Jesus was as real, historical and physical as were the Battle of Hastings, the Great Fire of London and the landing of man on the moon.

1. **Jesus' physical resurrection was confirmed by over 500 witnesses** (1 Corinthians 15:3–8).
2. **Jesus' resurrection body was real:** it could be seen and recognised (Matthew 28:7, 17; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:31; John 20:16); it could speak (John 20:19); it could walk; it could eat food (Luke 24:41–43; Acts 1:4); it could be touched (John 20:25–28); and it could be held on to (Matthew 28:9; John 20:17).
3. **Jesus' resurrection body was the same body that went into the tomb** – it bore the actual wounds of the crucifixion in hands, feet and side (John 20:25–28) and still does today (Revelation 5:6)!
4. **Jesus said his resurrection body had flesh and bones** (Luke 24:39).
5. **Jesus' resurrection was a historical event** that could be pinpointed in space-time history – it occurred “on the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4) after he was crucified.

Q 4. What is the basic case for the resurrection?

*Short answer:*

The evidence is simple and straightforward. There are two key points as well as an additional confirming point:

1. The empty tomb
2. The appearances of Jesus after his tomb was found empty
3. Secondary evidence (the transformation of the disciples).

*Discussion:*

The confirmation of the resurrection rests on two primary pieces of evidence as well as some confirming evidence:

1. **There is an empty tomb.** The empty tomb cannot be adequately accounted for apart from by the resurrection of Jesus (see questions 6 to 12).
2. **The resurrection appearances.** There are in excess of 500 independent witnesses to the physical resurrection of Jesus which occurred on 12 separate occasions over 40 days and included many different levels of verification – touching Christ, hearing Christ, seeing Christ, watching him eat, etc.
3. **Confirming evidence.** In addition to these two primary pieces of evidence, there is a secondary strand of evidence: the ‘transformation of the disciples’. What can possibly explain the radical transformation that took place in the disciples – one which saw the disciples change from being a fearful group of runaways (Matthew 26:56) to fearless, unstoppable preachers of the resurrection (Acts 4:5–22) – each of whom would suffer and eventually die for their faith? But this is secondary (not primary) evidence.

module 10

▶ Q 5. Is it unscientific to believe in the resurrection of Jesus?

*Short answer:*

No. Let’s remember three things:

1. **Only some scientists argue against the resurrection of Jesus.**  
There are equally capable scientists who argue for his resurrection.
2. **The resurrection is a matter for historical investigation not scientific investigation** – the resurrection cannot be proved or disproved scientifically.
3. What drives a lot of ‘scientific opposition’ to the resurrection of Jesus is that **there is so much at stake** if the resurrection of Jesus is true (see question 13 below).

*Discussion:*

The key point is that the resurrection belongs to history and not a scientific laboratory.

For instance, if we wanted to investigate on which day World War 2 began, we would undertake a historical (not scientific) investigation. We would check eyewitnesses’ accounts, historical documents written

by different world rulers, news clippings and TV footage, etc. We would not go to a scientific laboratory and try and do experiments. Why? Because World War 2 happened once, cannot be repeated and cannot be observed happening today in a laboratory. This means the question is a matter of historical investigation, not scientific investigation. Just because World War 2 happened only once does not mean it is not a reliable fact to be believed – for the same reason, just because the resurrection of Jesus happened only once does not mean it is not a reliable fact to be believed.

▶ Q 6. Could there be an alternative, more ordinary explanation for the resurrection?

Long Story Short discusses six alternative theories that deny the resurrection. Questions 7 to 9 are addressed in this video question (questions 8 and 10 to 12 are addressed in the daily readings in this module). All six theories are covered in this guide below (questions 7 to 12).

Q 7. Can the resurrection be explained by saying the disciples went to the wrong tomb?

*Short answer:*  
No.

*Discussion:*  
This is the ‘wrong tomb’ theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples were upset, confused and very worried. It was dark and they went to the wrong tomb.
2. **The response.** The ‘wrong tomb’ theory is faulty:
  - a. **All the authorities had to do was take the disciples to the correct tomb and unveil Jesus’ corpse.**
  - b. **Later, in broad daylight, John and Peter found the same tomb to be empty** and they saw the burial clothes too. There was no mistaking the tomb (John 20:6–8); they had the right place, for sure.

Q 8. Could the disciples simply have been hallucinating and actually never have seen a physically resurrected Jesus?

*Short answer:*

No.

*Discussion:*

This is called 'the hallucination' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples were so mentally distraught and sleep deprived through the time of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion that they were actually hallucinating.
2. **The response.** This theory is faulty:
  - a. **There is good evidence the disciples were in a sound state of mind** – e.g. Thomas flatly refused any belief without hard evidence (John 20:24–25).
  - b. **There were 516 separate witnesses to the physical resurrection of Jesus**, on different occasions, over 40 days. This excludes any possibility of such people all hallucinating about the same event (1 Corinthians 15:6).

module 10

Q 9. Can the resurrection be explained by saying the disciples actually had seen a ghost?

*Short answer:*

No.

*Discussion:*

This is the 'ghost' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples actually saw a 'spirit' and assumed Jesus had risen from the dead.
2. **The response.** The theory is faulty:
  - a. **Jesus demonstrated his physical status.** The Gospels report that the disciples actually thought they were seeing a spirit but Jesus invited them to examine him closely by touching (Luke 24:36–40). Then Christ ate real, physical food in front of them (Luke 24:41–43) – something a spirit could not have done.
  - b. **The actual 'physical' resurrection was verified by at least 516 people** – not all of them could have been mistaken.

Q 10. Can the resurrection be explained by saying Jesus wasn't actually dead?

*Short answer:*

No.

*Discussion:*

This is called the 'swoon' theory.

1. **The proposal.** Jesus didn't die but was in a coma when they took him down from the cross and put him in the tomb. After three days in the cool of the tomb, he recovered enough to take off the grave clothes, move the stone and overpower the guards and escape.
2. **The response.** The 'swoon' theory is faulty:
  - a. **It requires that we believe in a near-death Jesus who:**
    - Was exhausted from lack of sleep (Mark 14:32–41)
    - Had four large wounds in his hands and feet
    - Had a large spear wound in his side that had probably pierced his lungs and heart (John 19:34)
    - Had suffered the excruciating agony of the crucifixion (Mark 15:24–34)
    - Had been embalmed and buried and...

**After three days in the tomb, suddenly recovered sufficiently to:**

- Undo approximately 34 kilograms of bandages (John 19:39–40)
- Move a 1000-kilogram stone
- Overpower 16 Roman guards
- Walk kilometres to meet the disciples on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13–31) on those feet that had nails driven through them.

The truth is, this is asking us to believe too much. Given that kind of suffering, Jesus could not have made it out of the burial clothes, let alone his tomb!

- b. **It overlooks the fact that the Roman soldiers** (familiar with death by crucifixion) **knew Jesus was dead**, made doubly sure he was dead by stabbing the spear into his side (John 19:34) and gave Pilate the guarantee he was dead (Mark 15:44–45).

Q 11. Can the resurrection be explained by arguing the disciples stole Jesus' body to 'stage' the resurrection?

*Short answer:*

No.

*Discussion:*

This is called the 'stolen body' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The disciples were so desperate to secure the future of their 'Jesus movement', they stole the body to 'stage' Jesus' resurrection.
2. **The response.** This theory is faulty for seven reasons:
  - a. **It overlooks the fact the Jews and Romans had anticipated and taken precautions** against such a thing happening (Matthew 27:63–64).
  - b. **It is unlikely that 11 disciples** (if they all showed!) **would have had the ability to overpower a Roman watch** of 16 soldiers, break the Roman seal (on penalty of death) and then move the 1000-kilogram stone to steal the body of Jesus.
  - c. **It doesn't explain how and where the disciples might have successfully hidden Jesus' body** so it couldn't be found by the authorities.
  - d. **It doesn't explain why the disciples** (generally all honest and sane men) **would have suffered so greatly** for what they knew to be such an obvious lie.
  - e. **The disciples would not have had time to unwrap the body** of Jesus from the burial clothes – nor would they have had the time or the presence of mind to neatly fold "the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head" (John 20:6–7).
  - f. **It doesn't consider how unlikely it would have been for 11 men to continue the lie.**
  - g. **If the body were stolen, the soldiers would have been punished by death.** But they weren't (Matthew 28:12–15).

Q 12. Could the Jewish/Roman authorities have worked together and removed Jesus' body and buried it somewhere else?

*Short answer:*

No.

*Discussion:*

This is the 'precaution' theory.

1. **The proposal.** The Jewish and Roman authorities took precautions against the possibility of a resurrection by removing the body and taking it into custody.
2. **The response.** The 'precaution' theory is obviously faulty:
  - a. **Why put the Roman seal and guards in place if they had the body in their custody?**
  - b. **Why not stop the whole resurrection madness by presenting Jesus' corpse?** This would have immediately destroyed Christianity once and for all – something they could have done and, given half a chance, would have done.
  - c. **The authorities would not have unwrapped the body of Jesus and left the burial clothes in the tomb.**

Q 13. Why are there so many theories which attempt to disprove the resurrection?

*Short answer:*

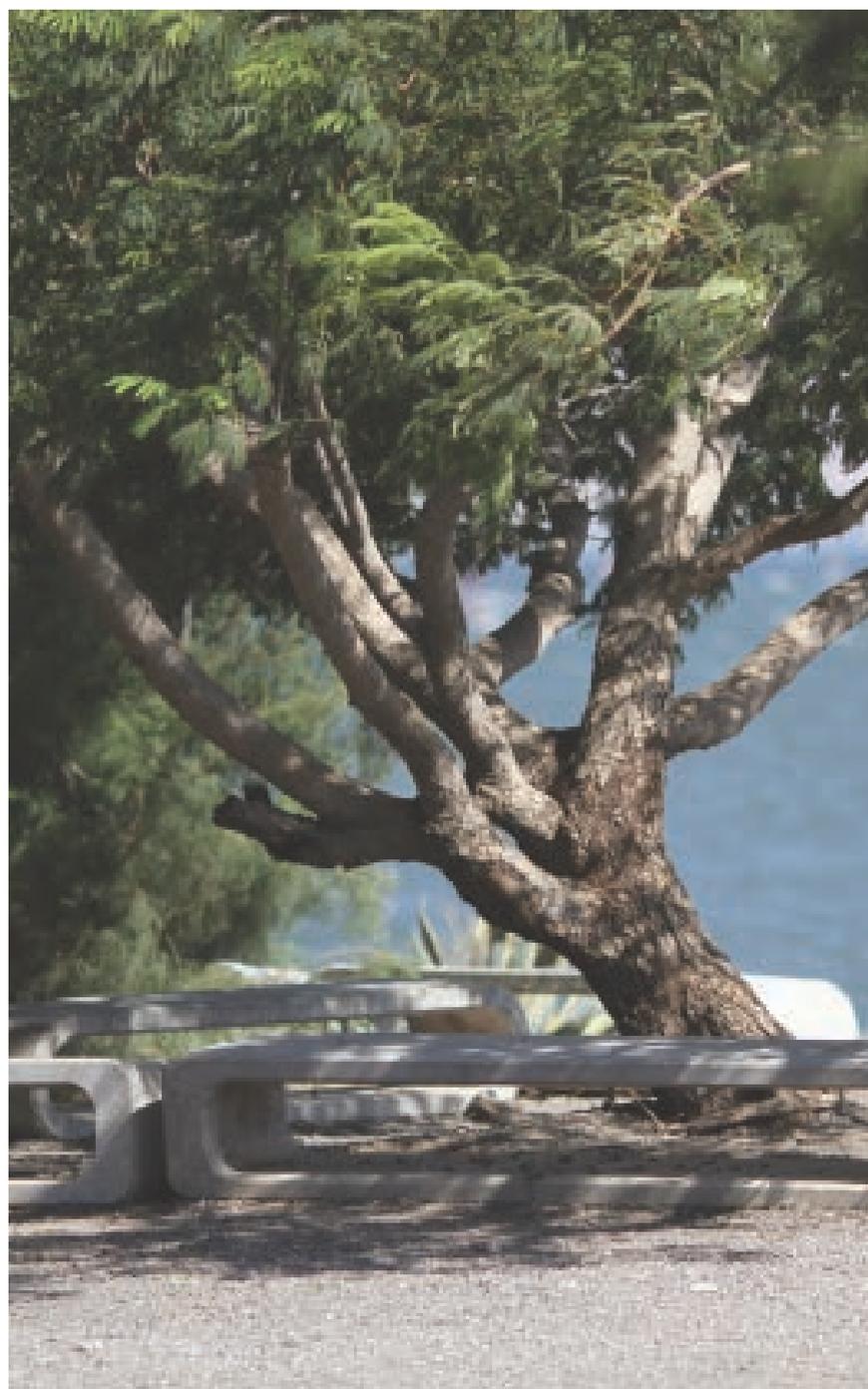
The resurrection is under constant attack because Christianity stands or falls with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*Discussion:*

Saying Christ is risen from the dead is "like a knife pointed at the throat of the irreligious man, and an irreligious man whose religion is threatened will fight... like a tigress fighting for her cubs."<sup>32</sup> Some people are desperate to disprove the resurrection, simply because so much is at stake (see question 1 above).

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<sup>32</sup> Julian V. Langmead Casserly quoted in John W. Montgomery, *History in Christianity* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1971), 77–78, cited in Erwin W. Lutzer, *Christ Among Other gods: A Defense of Christ in an Age of Tolerance* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 140.









# jump

module

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11

## 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 and lived an incredible, perfect life; he made incredible claims and backed them up with incredible miracles. Jesus' mission was to pay the perfect ransom price 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 One: 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 Two: 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 Three: 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 Four: 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 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 Five: 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.

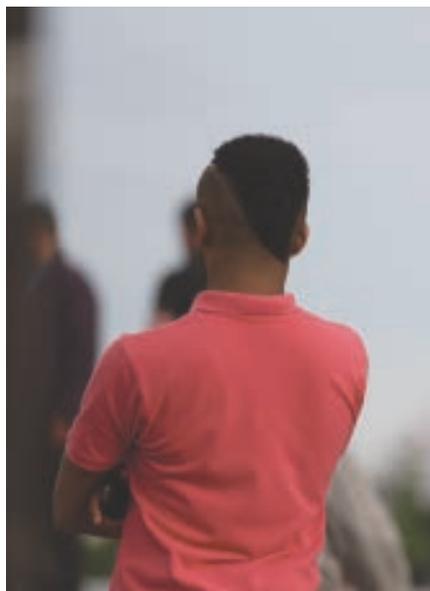
And since trusting Christ, I have become part of this huge Christian family. I have some amazing genuine and deep friendships. We are family because we have God as our father. I belong to these people and they belong to me.

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?



## leader's introduction to module 11 – jump

Where we're going:

The goal of this module is to introduce explorers to some basic biblical concepts about **personal faith** and to give them an opportunity to explore and discuss what this means.

What we discover:

1. Faith is the way to **eternal** life.
2. Faith is about **trust**.
3. Faith focuses on **Jesus**.
4. Faith has a **moment**.
5. Faith makes the **difference**.

What we explore:

This module addresses the following types of question:

- What is faith?
- How much faith do we need to be a Christian?
- Does being a Christian make any difference in life?
- Can a person be certain they are a Christian?
- Why should I think about hell?

Welcome

- 1. Welcome people.
- 2. Serve food and beverage.

Explore

Discussion starter

Q - Has the story from the Bible changed the way you think about Christianity? If so, then how?

Q - What were some of the highlights from the readings?

Reading

Read John 3:16-18.

Volunteers may like to read out loud a part or all of this story.

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

View

Video episode 11 - jump

Five things God wants us to know about faith:

- 1. Faith is the way to ..... life.
- 2. Faith is about .....
- 3. Faith focuses on .....
- 4. Faith has a .....
- 5. Faith makes the .....

## Discuss

Questions I have

121

## Conclude

1. Review the teaching points (see page 31).
2. Find out if anyone would like to continue with further material beyond this course (see pages 34–35).
3. Close with a short prayer.

**For more information...**  
**see [www.longstoryshort.co/jump](http://www.longstoryshort.co/jump)**



## frequently asked questions

- ▶ 1. What do I need to believe to become a Christian?
- ▶ 2. How much faith do I need to have to become a Christian?
- ▶ 3. How do I get faith?
- ▶ 4. Doesn't 1 Corinthians 2:14 say non-Christians cannot understand the gospel?
- ▶ 5. What changes can a person expect to see in their life after they become a Christian?
- ▶ 6. Can a new Christian be certain about their salvation? Is assurance important?
- ▶ 7. a. Why is it important to think about hell?  
b. What is hell like?
- ▶ 8. Isn't hell just the absence of God?
- ▶ 9. Isn't hell just for Satan and his angels?
- ▶ 10. Are there different levels of punishment in hell?

### module 11

- ▶ Q 1. What do I need to believe to become a Christian?

*Short answer:*

Someone becomes a Christian when they can say that they sincerely believe four things:

- 1. That Jesus of Nazareth was a real person.
- 2. That he was God in human flesh.
- 3. That he died to take God's punishment for their sins.
- 4. That he rose again on the third day and returned back to his Father.

Believing that much, that person then turns in faith to this risen, glorified Christ, abandoning any confidence in self or anyone or anything else to make themselves acceptable to God, and embracing (receiving, taking, trusting) that living glorified Christ as the only one who can make them right with God.

- ▶ Q 2. How much faith do I need to have to become a Christian?

*Short answer:*

It is not the amount of faith but the object of faith that is important.

*Discussion:*

Becoming a Christian is not about having a lot of faith – as if there were something ‘special’ about faith. Jesus said that the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds (Matthew 13:31–32) and that his disciples needed faith only the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20)! Salvation is not about the amount of someone’s faith but is a matter of where that faith is placed – is it in Christ? It is Christ who saves – not faith (John 1:11–12)!

- ▶ Q3. How do I get faith?

*Short answer:*

Faith is simply believing that Jesus died to take God’s punishment for our sins and rose again from the dead as a result, and personally receiving (owning, trusting) the Jesus who died (see question 1 above). The good news about Jesus is not hard to understand but it is very hard to accept. It is good news that anyone can understand the gospel!

*Discussion:*

1. **The gospel message is not hard to understand.** We can all understand John 3:16 and, if we gave ourselves a couple of minutes, we could put it in our own words or explain the meaning of it in simple terms to a friend. We do not have to be Christians to understand the simple gospel message. That’s why the gospel is to be taken to every person in the world (Mark 16:15) – because everyone can understand it.
2. But while the gospel message is easy to understand, **it is very hard to accept** – for at least two reasons:
  - a. **The gospel seems so absurd.** The idea that God can forgive us for all our sins and make us acceptable to him forever, because of something a man called Jesus did, when he died, way back in AD 30, on the other side of the world, in a culture completely different from our own, just doesn’t seem to make sense to us. How can something that happened way back then, way over there, make me acceptable to God now?

- b. **The gospel seems so insulting.** The idea that we are made acceptable to God – not because of who we are, or what we have done or haven't done, but solely on the merits of another (a man called Jesus) – seems very insulting. We don't like it that we are not considered to be good enough for God the way we are, and we don't find it easy to accept that our works do not and cannot count, but that his do. It feels degrading. It makes us look like spiritual beggars, totally dependent on God's charity.

So we reject the gospel idea as very foolish – not because we don't understand the concept – but because we do understand it! This is what the Bible means when it says, “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing...” (1 Corinthians 1:18). The message of “Christ crucified... [is] foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Corinthians 1:23). In other words, we think the whole idea is too ridiculous and too insulting. We can be thankful to God for the convincing work of the Holy Spirit who enables us to acknowledge the ‘wisdom’ of the gospel and to receive Christ.

module 11

Q 4. Doesn't 1 Corinthians 2:14 say non-Christians cannot understand the gospel?

*Short answer:*  
No, it doesn't.

*Discussion:*  
In 1 Corinthians 2:14 Paul says three things:

1. **“The person without the Spirit does not accept [or receive for themselves] the things that come from the Spirit of God...”** The word ‘accept’ does not mean the person without the Spirit cannot ‘understand’ but that they cannot eagerly, willingly accept with pleasure, embrace as true, the words given by the Spirit.
2. **The words of the Spirit seem foolishness** to us before we become Christians. This does not mean the words of the Spirit are unintelligible to us. Jesus expected people without the Spirit to understand the Old Testament (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4)! People who were not Christians could understand Paul's message about Jesus (see Acts 17:32; 18:4) but they mocked it as ‘foolishness’ (1 Corinthians 1:18).

3. The word translated as ‘understand’ in 1 Corinthians 2:14 actually means **the person without the Spirit cannot ‘know’ in a deeply personal, experiential way**, the things of the Spirit of God. In other words, before we are Christians we can easily understand the gospel concept but we do not personally welcome it as true or embrace it as personally relevant.

- ▶ Q 5. What changes can a person expect to see in their life after they become a Christian?

*Short answer:*

Becoming a Christian leads to some big changes. This is to be expected because when someone becomes a Christian they are born into a new family (John 1:11–12). These changes come as a result of being ‘born again’, they are not the means to being born again. We are saved by faith (Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8–9), not by making changes.

*Discussion:*

When someone becomes a Christian, they can expect to discover a whole range of new experiences:

1. **Enormous relief.** There is enormous relief in knowing the following:
  - a. The penalty for being a sinner has been paid for us by Jesus himself (Mark 10:45).
  - b. Our sins can never be counted against us (2 Corinthians 5:19).
  - c. Christians can never be condemned by God because they are seen as being ‘in Christ’ (Romans 8:1).
  - d. Christians have been freely credited with a perfect righteousness from God (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9).
2. **New confidence.** Christians are boosted with a super-confidence (or inner assurance):
  - a. Christians know they have eternal life (1 John 5:11–12).
  - b. Christians know God is their Father (Romans 8:14–17).
  - c. Christians know they can never be separated from God’s love by anything or anyone (Romans 8:31–39; John 10:28–29).
  - d. Christians know they have an ‘understanding helper’ in heaven (Hebrews 4:14–16).

- e. Christians know Jesus constantly appears in heaven as their advocate (1 John 2:1).
  - f. Christians know they will be with God forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17).
3. **Deep joyfulness.** As Christians discover all God has done for them and all God has planned for them, they are deeply joyful. This joy is not the same as happiness. Happiness comes and goes because it depends on circumstances. Joy doesn't depend on circumstances. Christians are joyful regardless of their circumstances. Joy comes from knowing we belong to God and from experiencing all the blessings of salvation (Ephesians 1:3–14).
4. **Changing values.** The moment someone receives Christ, they are 'born again' into God's family and become his child (John 1:11–12). In this spiritual rebirth, they receive God's nature (2 Peter 1:4). And this new nature starts making itself felt. Old ways of living are slowly but gradually replaced with new ways of living (Ephesians 4:17–32; Colossians 3:1–14; 2 Peter 1:3–11). Christians soon realise not only that Jesus died to take their punishment but that, in his death, he also 'bought' them for himself (1 Corinthians 6:19–20; 1 Peter 1:17–19)! And they begin to look for new ways they can serve him and bring honour and glory to him.
5. **New interests.** With the new birth come new appetites and interests. Christians want to pray, to worship God, to confess their sins, to express their gratitude and to bring their needs to him (Matthew 6:9–13). Christians develop an appetite for the Bible. They have a desire to bring glory to God by the way they live (1 Corinthians 6:20; 10:31). And Christians want to share their faith and show others the love of Christ.
6. **Vital relationships.** They realise that, in the family of God, they are not the only child... and they find they have a whole new world of relationships to discover with their Christian brothers and sisters.
7. **A fresh set of problems.** This new life creates new problems, too:
- a. **New relational problems.** Christians will sometimes experience tension in friendships and family relationships as people adjust to a 'Christian's' new thinking, priorities and lifestyle.
  - b. **New issues.** Things that once weren't important become important. As a result, there are 'growth pains' as we move from one way of living to another (Ephesians 4:17–32).

- c. **New conflicts.** The new nature comes into conflict with the old nature (Galatians 5:16–26); then we discover our new enemy, Satan (1 Peter 5:8–9; Ephesians 6:10–18).

- ▶ Q 6. Can a new Christian be certain about their salvation? Is assurance important?

*Short answer:*

Yes, a new Christian can be certain about their salvation. When the Bible talks about someone becoming a Christian, it uses the language of absolute certainty. It is vitally important that a person is reminded that they know for sure that they have salvation.

*Discussion:*

The modern mind seems to reject certainty when it comes to issues of religion. But when the Bible speaks of someone becoming a Christian, it uses the language of absolute certainty. In fact, the gospel message carries its own guarantee! Here are some of the certainties:

1. **John 1:12–13.** “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”
  - a. It is certain that those who receive Christ have the right to call themselves the children of God.
2. **John 3:36.** “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on them.”
  - a. It is certain that, the moment a person believes in the Son, that person has eternal life.
  - b. It is certain that a person who does not believe does not have life but is under God’s wrath (condemnation).
3. **John 5:24.** “Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”
  - a. It is certain that the believer has eternal life (now).
  - b. It is certain the believer will not be condemned (then).

- c. It is certain that, at the moment of believing, the Christian has passed out of death and into life.
- 4. **John 6:40.** “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”
  - a. It is certain that everyone who believes in the Son has eternal life.
  - b. It is certain that the one who believes in the Son will be raised at the last day.
- 5. **1 John 5:11–12.** “And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”
  - a. It is certain that God has provided eternal life.
  - b. It is certain that eternal life is in his Son.
  - c. It is certain that, if someone has the Son, they have eternal life.
  - d. It is certain that if someone doesn’t have the Son, they do not have eternal life.

## module 11

It is vital Christians have the assurance of eternal life:

1. **Assurance is part of the gospel.** The same verses that promise eternal life for the one who receives Christ also declare the certainty of eternal life for the one who believes! The good news of the gospel message carries its own guarantee. It is impossible to believe the gospel without believing the words of assurance. They cannot be separated from the same Bible passages.
2. **Assurance is necessary for Christian living.** No one can begin to move into the new lifestyle (Galatians 5:16–26; Ephesians 4:17–32) if they are not sure they have the new life itself!

▶ Q 7A. Why is it important to think about hell?

*Short answer:*

Because everyone will exist forever in either heaven or hell.

*Discussion:*

Jesus made it clear from the start: there are only ever two ways (the broad and the narrow (Matthew 7:13–14)) and two foundations (the sand of false teaching or the rock of Jesus' teaching (Matthew 7:24–27)), and there were only ever two destinies – eternal punishment on the one hand and eternal life on the other (Matthew 25:46; John 5:28–29). Revelation 20:11–15 clearly teaches that there will be a judgement called the Great White Throne. At that judgement, the Book of Life will be consulted and anyone “whose name was not found written in the book of life [the record book of all who have faith in Jesus] was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). We have only this life to determine our destiny... after death comes judgement (Hebrews 9:27) – not reincarnation (rebirth of a soul in another body) or another chance to get it right.

 Q 7B. What is hell like?

*Short answer:*

Hell is a place of everlasting, irreversible conscious torment.

*Discussion:*

Jesus described hell in these terms:

1. **A specific place:** the “blazing furnace” (Matthew 13:42, 50). Revelation describes hell as a place of “burning sulfur” (Revelation 14:10). It is called “the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15). For the unbeliever, “they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur” (Revelation 21:8).
2. **Inescapable torment.** More than once, Jesus said people would be thrown into the fiery furnace (Matthew 13:42, 50). Revelation says unbelievers (including the beast and false prophet) would be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 19:20; 20:14–15). The imagery suggests total immersion in inescapable torment.
3. **Conscious torment.** That people suffer consciously in hell is clear from the words Jesus used to describe hell – it is a place “where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42, 50). Revelation describes people in hell being “tormented” (Revelation 14:10).
4. **Intense torment.** The use of words like ‘blazing furnace’ (Matthew 13:42) and ‘lake of burning sulfur’ (Revelation 21:8) suggests the most excruciating pain ever known.

5. **Physical and spiritual torment.** The Bible teaches that unbelievers will have resurrection bodies suited to eternal judgement, just as believers will have resurrection bodies suited to eternal life (Daniel 12:1–2; Matthew 10:28; John 5:28–29). The Bible consistently teaches resurrection bodies for all, believers and unbelievers alike. This suggests the suffering will be mental, physical and spiritual – exactly the kind of suffering Jesus experienced for us on the cross.
6. **Everlasting torment.** Jesus referred to hell as a place where “the worms that eat them do not die [because the people are never destroyed], and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:48). This describes unending suffering. It is an “eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41) and an “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46). Revelation puts it this way: “the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night...” (Revelation 14:11); they “will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

module 11

Q 8. Isn't hell just the absence of God?

*Short answer:*

No. Hell is torment because God is there exercising his judgement (Revelation 14:10–11).

*Discussion:*

God is everywhere (Psalm 139:7–10) including hell! At the final judgement, the Bible says that “those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus... will be... shut out from the presence of the Lord...” (2 Thessalonians 1:8–9). But the Bible also says God is in hell. Those who suffer in hell suffer “in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb” (Revelation 14:10–11). Is this contradictory? No... we are best to understand that both descriptions are true: people in hell are shut out from God's loving presence and shut in to God's dreadful presence as he executes his eternal judgement.

Q 9. Isn't hell just for Satan and his angels?

*Short answer:*

No. Hell was designed for Satan and his angels (Matthew 25:41) but is shared by human beings who do not believe in Christ (Matthew 10:28; 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:8–10; Revelation 14:9–11; 20:11–15).

Q 10. Are there different levels of punishment in hell?

*Short answer:*

That's what is strongly implied in the New Testament.

*Discussion:*

God is infinitely righteous. His judgement is always perfectly measured. Jesus speaks of judgement day being more bearable for some than it will be for others (Matthew 11:20–24), suggesting that greater sin brings greater judgement (John 19:11). The picture of the final judgement (the Great White Throne) suggests the same thing – John sees people judged “according to what they had done” (Revelation 20:12–13), which indicates the judgement is according to (appropriate to) their works. It could not be any other way with an infinitely holy God. Clearly, one lie cannot be punished to the same degree as one murder.



# chapter

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## 11

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# feedback form

*There is a brief feedback form available for you to fill out on the website for Long Story Short leaders ([www.lssl.co/additional-resources](http://www.lssl.co/additional-resources)). We need your assistance to help us improve the course.*

*We want to continue to make Long Story Short as user-friendly and powerful as possible.*

## chapter

## 12

# appendix additional resources

The following resources are available for download from [www.lssl.co/additional-resources](http://www.lssl.co/additional-resources)

**Invitation Cards**

A resource to give out to people interested in coming to your Long Story Short course.

**Posters**

A resource to help promote your Long Story Short course in a public place like a church building or community centre.

**PowerPoint Presentations**

A presentation promoting Long Story Short groups, explaining what they are and why they are beneficial.

**Trailer Download**

A trailer promoting Long Story Short groups, explaining what they are and why they are beneficial.

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