

DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

3

Does My Life Really Matter to God?





LATE ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON, the deadliest tornado to hit the United States in this century tore into Joplin, Missouri. It killed 158 people, injured more than 1,100, and caused \$2.8 billion in property damage. In November 2015, in a series of simultaneous, coordinated attacks, terrorists in Paris struck a concert venue, restaurants, and cafes, leaving 130 dead, 368 injured—and the city and the world reeling.

During the Boston Marathon in 2013, two pressure cooker bombs exploded near the finish line, killing three people and injuring an estimated 264 others.

Some mornings, the world seems to be filled with sunshine, security, and joy. But other mornings, the world feels like a dark place of pain and unending misery. How can life be so beautiful at times and so hopeless at others? What does it all mean? What can you do when life appears to have no purpose and nothing seems fair? Does your life really matter to God? Does He have a plan?

1 | God Created a Perfect World

Let's start with the fact that God is the Creator—the Architect and Designer of everything from supernovas to butterfly wings. How long did it take God to perform His mighty miracle of creation?

“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth. . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Psalm 33:6-9).

God has only to speak, and the electrons, protons, and neutrons hurry off to obey His will. He is all-powerful and does not need long ages of time to accomplish His purposes. We limit His power if we say that God requires millions of years to bring about the evolution of the world or its creatures. He can take time if He chooses, or He can dispense with it altogether.

2 | Six Days to Make Our World

How long did God decide He would take to make our world?

“In six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).

The eternal, all-powerful Creator could have formed the world in a moment “by the breath of His mouth.” But He chose to take six days to do it. He didn't *need* six days—six minutes would have been sufficient, or even six seconds. The first chapter in the Bible, Genesis 1, describes what God created on each day of creation week:



Creation Week

DAY 1

Light;
sequence
of day &
night

DAY 2

Earth's
atmosphere

DAY 3

Dry land,
vegetation

DAY 4

Sun &
moon

DAY 5

Birds &
fish

DAY 6

Land
animals,
man

DAY 7

The
Sabbath

What crowning masterpiece of creation did God bring into existence on the sixth day?

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over . . . all the earth’ . . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26, 27).

God decided to create individuals like Himself who could reason and feel and love. We are made in God’s “image.” This assurance from the Bible helps us understand ourselves and our worth in God’s eyes.

“The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (Genesis 2:7).

On the sixth day, the world was filled with plants and animals, and then God was ready to introduce His masterpiece of creation. The Almighty formed Adam’s body from the dust of the ground. So when God breathed “the breath of life” into his nostrils, man became “a living being”—that is, he came to life.

God named the first man *Adam*, a word that simply means “man” (Genesis 2:19, 20). And to complete His act of creating people in His image, God made the first woman, called *Eve*, which means “living” (Genesis 2:18-25; 3:20). A loving Creator saw the need for human companionship.

Fresh from God’s hand, Adam and Eve both reflected His image. God could have programmed them to love and praise Him on cue. But God wanted a real relationship. Animals make nice house pets, but they can’t carry on a meaningful conversation. Robots can perform useful tasks, but they can’t love.

That’s why God made people. He made us in His image with the capacity to think and choose and love. Adam and Eve were the crown of God’s creation. They were His children, and therefore inexpressibly dear to Him.

3 | Evil Comes to a Perfect World

When God created Adam and Eve, they had everything to make them happy. They enjoyed perfect physical and mental health, living in a beautiful garden home in a flawless world (Genesis 1:28-31). God promised them children, the ability to creatively think, and satisfaction in the work of their hands (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). They experienced face-to-face friendship with their Maker (Genesis 3:8). No trace of worry, fear, or sickness marred their perfect days.

We can still, on occasion, catch an echo of that original Eden during moments when life seems indescribably precious. But what about the other side of life? How did the world change so drastically into a place of suffering and tragedy? The second and third chapters of Genesis tell the entire story of how sin entered our world. Read them at your leisure. Here is a brief summary of their contents:



God limited the devil's influence to one tree in the garden

Some time after God established a perfect world, the devil came to the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve into disobeying their Creator. God limited the devil's sphere of influence to one tree in the garden, the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." And He warned the first human couple to stay clear of this tree—that they should never eat its fruit, because that action would result in death.

But one day, Eve wandered near the forbidden tree. The devil quickly launched into his sales pitch. He claimed God had lied to her and that if she ate the tree's fruit, she wouldn't die but would become wise like God Himself, knowing good and evil. Until then, Adam and Eve had known only good. Tragically, Eve, and then Adam, allowed the devil to con them, and they sampled the forbidden fruit—thus breaking their bond of trust and obedience with God.

God planned for Adam and Eve to "rule" over our world as the stewards of His created works (Genesis 1:26). But because they broke faith with God and, by default, chose the devil as their new leader, the couple lost their jurisdiction. That was the first critical step that eventually led to a planet in rebellion against God.



Today, the devil claims the world as his turf and tries his best to enslave its people.

Many times we find ourselves doing something selfish or even cruel when we really want to do the opposite. Why? It's because there is an evil force at work in our world. The invisible enemy, the devil, works to make people fail morally. Many of the senseless, vicious crimes we read about with dismay are the result of individuals who have consciously or unconsciously given themselves over to the control of this evil power. They find themselves doing things they could not have imagined before.

As you read chapter 3 of Genesis, you will discover that sin caused Adam and Eve to hide from God in fear. Sin affected all of creation adversely (Romans 8:19-22). It was like throwing a wrench in a smoothly running machine. Thorns appeared along with the flowers. The soil suffered from drought, and labour became a burden. Disease began to strike at random. Jealousy, animosity, suspicion, and greed started multiplying human miseries. Most terrible of all, with sin came death!

4 | Who Is This Devil Who Infected Our World With Sin?

The New Testament mentions the devil, or Satan, nearly 100 times. The Bible clearly teaches that there is a real, personal devil. What insight does Jesus give us into the character of the devil?

“He [the devil] was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

According to Jesus, the devil is the originator of sin in the universe, the “father” of sin—and thus of murder and lying.

Thomas Carlyle, the great English philosopher, once took Ralph Waldo Emerson through some of the worst streets of London's East End. As they walked along, silently observing the wretchedness and evil around them, Carlyle finally asked, "Do you believe in the devil now?"

We might extend such a walk to the hospitals, prisons, and cities of today's world, or follow the TV cameras into battles that maim and kill innocent civilians, and then ask, "Do you believe in the devil now?"

5 | Did God Create the Devil?

According to Jesus, where did the devil come from?

"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

How does the Bible further describe the devil's fall from heaven?

"And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him" (Revelation 12:7-9).

Did God create the devil? No! Everything God makes is perfect. A good God would not create a devil. And yet the Bible states that the devil, along with the angels he had deceived, lost his place in heaven and came to our world where he carried out a successful coup, taking dominion of the world from Adam and Eve.



**You were perfect in your ways
till iniquity was found in you**

Where did the devil come from? How did he get into heaven in the first place?

“You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you. . . . You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Ezekiel 28:14, 15).

According to this passage, God did not create the devil. He created a perfect angel, and this angel gradually turned himself into a devil. Satan was one of heaven’s leading angels, standing next to God’s throne. But then he sinned—“iniquity was found” in him. Expelled from heaven and posing as Adam and Eve’s friend, he became humanity’s deadliest enemy.

When you see cartoons portraying the devil with horns, a tail, and split hooves, remember this image is not from the Bible. In Scripture, we discover that God’s great enemy was once the most beautiful and wisest of the holy angels, a leading angel, standing next to God’s throne.

6 | Why Did the Devil Sin?

If God created the devil as a perfect angel, then how did this angel become a sinner?

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

The being who became the devil was originally called *Lucifer*, meaning “day star” or “shining one.” Somehow, in this angel’s heart, vanity and ambition began to take the place of devotion. The seed of pride grew into an obsession to actually take God’s place. God had already given him a very high position in heaven as a leader of the angels. But he wanted even more. Growing more and more jealous of God, he sought to seize God’s throne.

Lucifer must have worked very hard to persuade other heavenly beings that he had a better plan. It is easy to imagine Satan arguing that God was holding something back from them—the same argument he used when tempting Eve in Genesis 3. He might have claimed that the divine law was too restrictive, and that God was an uncaring sovereign. He slandered the name of the One whose character defines what love is.

How was this conflict resolved?

“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor; I cast you to the ground” (Ezekiel 28:17).

When Lucifer’s heart became proud and lifted up, he chose to rebel. And God had to cast him out of heaven. Why? Because pride

and selfishness, which are the sins that lie at the root of all sin, cannot exist in the presence of God.

Lucifer twisted love for God into an unhealthy love of self. Jealousy changed the chief of angels into the devil, or Satan. And in order to preserve the peace and harmony of heaven, he and one-third of heaven's angels, those who joined him in rebellion, had to be expelled (Revelation 12:4, 7-9).

7 | Who Is Responsible for Sin?

Why didn't God create beings incapable of sinning? If He had, there would be no problem of evil in our world.

To answer that question, we must go back to why God created us in the first place. He wanted people who could have meaningful relationships. So God did something that only He would think of: "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). This means we are free and responsible. We can decide to love God or to turn our backs on Him.

What special ability did God give to people and angels that distinguishes them from animals?

**"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve"
(Joshua 24:15).**

God gave the people of Joshua's day, as well as the angels and human beings of every generation, the capacity to make real choices.

He challenges the beings He created in His image to choose to do right because their reasoning powers tell them that God's way is best, and to turn from wrong because their reasoning powers warn against the results of disobedience and sin.

The Lord didn't have to make us free moral agents. But only beings with the power to reason and choose can experience real

love. God longed to create individuals who could comprehend and appreciate His character, freely respond to Him in love, and be filled with love for others.

God wanted to share His love so much that He was willing to take the enormous risk of creating angels and people with the power of choice. He knew it was possible that at some point, one of His created beings might choose not to serve Him. The devil was the first being in the universe to make that terrible choice. The tragedy of sin began with him (John 8:44; 1 John 3:8).

8 | The Cross Makes the Destruction of Sin Possible

But why didn't the tragedy of sin stop with Lucifer? Why didn't God destroy him before his "sin disease" could spread? It's important to remember that Lucifer had challenged the fairness of God's government. He had told lies about God. The idea of telling a lie had never entered the minds of the angels. Naturally, they didn't grasp all that lay behind Lucifer's deceptions.

If God had destroyed Lucifer immediately, the angels would have begun to serve Him from fear rather than from love. This would have defeated His very purpose in creating beings with the power of choice in the first place.

How did anyone really know God's way was best? No one had dared to try an alternative. God gave Satan a chance to demonstrate his alternative system. That's why he was given an opportunity to tempt Adam and Eve.

This planet has become a testing ground where the character of Satan and the nature of his kingdom are contrasted with the character of God and the nature of His kingdom. Who is right? Whom can we ultimately trust? These are the issues that the great controversy between Christ and Satan must resolve.

So deceptive was Lucifer that before all the universe could be fully convinced, the nature of his alternative system had to be fully exposed. It has taken time for everyone to really grasp how disastrous Satan's alternative actually is. But eventually, everyone will see that "the wages of sin is death" and that "the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

Every being in the universe will then agree with the declaration:

"Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, for Your judgments have been manifested" (Revelation 15:3, 4).

After everyone understands the deadly nature of sin and the destructive nature of Satan's philosophy, God can destroy Satan and sin. He will also have to destroy those who stubbornly resist His grace and cling to Satan's alternative. (More about this in Guides 22 and 23.)

God is just as anxious to resolve the problem of sin and suffering as we are to have Him do so. It was never God's desire to see us suffer in the first place. He is waiting until He can do it on a permanent basis, and until He can both preserve our free will and permanently prevent evil from reappearing.

How can we be certain that God will destroy sin forever? When sin first entered our world in the Garden of Eden, God had a plan to eliminate sin (Genesis 3:15). This act of the permanent removal of sin is described in these words:



“The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. . . . Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:10, 13).

When God does finally say of sin, “It is done!” (Revelation 16:17), sin will truly be finished for all time (Nahum 1:9). It will never again infect the universe. Sin’s tragic results will stand out so clearly that disobedience to God will seem repugnant for all eternity.

What makes the final destruction of the devil and sin possible?

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself [Jesus Christ] likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:14, 15).

At the cross, the angels and the unfallen worlds saw Satan for what he is—a deceiver, a liar, and a murderer. There he revealed his true character by compelling men to murder the innocent Son of God. The inhabitants of the entire universe saw how senseless and cruel sin really is. The cross fully unmasked Satan’s motives, and when God destroys the devil and those who persist in sin, all will acknowledge that God is just (Revelation 15:3).

Jesus’ death on the cross made the removal of sin from the universe a certainty, because it exposed Satan’s real intent before all created beings (John 12:31, 32). The cross also revealed Christ for what He is—the Saviour of the world. At Golgotha, the power of love stood out in stark contrast against the love of power. It established beyond any question that it is self-sacrificing love that

Continued on page 16

WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What was Jesus willing to do to show how much He loves you, and how much your life means to Him? (Matthew 1:21-23; John 10:11, 17)

2. (a) How does Peter describe your great adversary, the devil? (1 Peter 5:8, 9)

- (b) Can you successfully resist Satan's temptations? (James 4:7)

3. How did Jesus overcome Satan's fierce temptations when He was on earth? (Matthew 4:1-4, 10)

4. What will be the devil's final fate? (Revelation 20:7-10)

5. (a) When sin and sinners are completely destroyed, will sin ever rise again? (Nahum 1:9)

- (b) What will every created being in the universe realise about God? (Revelation 15:2-4)



motivates God in all His dealings with Satan, sin, and sinful men and women.

At the cross, Christ's eloquent demonstration of God's unconditional love overpowered the worst that men and Satan could do. The devil was decisively defeated. The battle had been about who should rule the world—Christ or Satan. But the cross settled it for all time. It must be Christ above all!

Have you discovered a relationship with the Saviour who died to reveal His matchless, unchanging love? How do you feel about the One who came to our world as a human being and died in your place to save you from the results of sin? Will you bow your head right now and thank Jesus for His sacrifice, and then ask Him to lead in your life?

My Decision

- I thank God for having a plan to destroy evil forever.
- I choose to respond to God's love by inviting Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to live in my life and guide me each day.

My Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, I thank You for Jesus' victory over Satan in this world. Thank You for offering forgiveness so graciously from the cross. Please come into my life right now and fight for me against the evil in my own nature. Please take possession of my entire being. Help me to stay close to Jesus each day. I thank You for hearing my prayer. In Jesus' name, Amen.



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DISCOVER

BIBLE STUDY GUIDE

4



God's Plan
for My Life



AFTER A MINISTER HAD SPOKEN on the subject, “Why I Believe in Jesus,” a well-dressed young man paid him a visit in his study and remarked, “Your talk tonight was interesting, but everything you said about Jesus Christ came out of your Bible. Tell me, if Jesus ever lived on this earth, why doesn’t history tell us about Him?”

“That’s a fair question,” the minister answered as he turned and selected several books from his shelves. “But as a matter of fact, history does tell us about Jesus Christ.”

“That I’d like to see for myself,” the young man responded.

“Well, here is Letter 97 in Book 10 of *Letters of Pliny the Younger*, written by a Roman proconsul in Bithynia, a province in old Asia Minor. Pliny wrote to the Roman Emperor Trajan, telling him about events in his province. See, here he is requesting counsel on how he should handle a new sect, the Christians. He tells of their rapid growth and of how they sing hymns composed to their leader, Christ. Pliny sent his letter around AD 110. This letter by Pliny offers historical evidence of Christ, and of the spread of His faith in the days of His apostles.”

Surprised, the young man said, “Tell me more!”

As the minister thumbed through another book, he added, “Another historian, a contemporary of Pliny, was Tacitus. In his *Annals* (Book 15 in chapter 44) he tells of Nero’s hatred for, and persecution of, the Christians at the time of the burning of Rome. Tacitus explains that the term, “Christian,” comes from the name, “Christ.” He mentions that Jesus Christ, the founder of the Christian religion, had been put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. The details that Tacitus provides are an exact match for the events, names, and places given in the Bible.”

“Pastor, I never knew things like that were in secular history!” the visitor exclaimed.

“And while we’re talking,” the minister added, “I want you to notice that around AD 180, Celsus wrote a book attacking Christians, indicating that Christianity by that time had become a force to be reckoned with.

“If you are still in doubt, remember that the four Gospels provide just as much history as these secular books.”

This young man went away convinced that Jesus Christ was a real, historical figure.

Both sacred and secular history agree that Jesus did live as a man on earth. But there’s much more we can know about Him.

Sources for the above historical materials and a more detailed history appear in the following books: *Documents of the Christian Church*, selected and edited by Henry Bettenson (Oxford University Press, 2011); *A Source Book for Ancient Church History*, by Joseph Cullen Ayer (Palala Press, 2015); *Origen: Contra Celsum*, translated by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge University Press, 1980); *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6th edition, revised, by F. F. Bruce (InterVarsity Press, 2002); and *The Evidence for Jesus*, by R. T. French (Hodder and Stoughton General Division, 2001). These books should be available through most religious bookstores, local libraries, or online.

1 | Christ Is Eternal

What does the Apostle John say about Jesus' divinity?

"In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-3, 14).

According to the Bible, Jesus was not merely a good man, He is also fully God. Jesus, the Word, was with God in the beginning, and spoke all things into existence. What claim did Jesus Himself make concerning His divinity?

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. . . . He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:7, 9).

"I and My Father are one" (John 10:30).

If you want to know what God is like, just look at Jesus. The Father shares the same love and care for each person that Jesus demonstrated during His human life on earth. Jesus, the Word, is fully God, as is the Father. Jesus was with God "in the beginning." God the Father and Jesus the Son have existed together from eternity. There was never a time when Jesus was not with the Father.

"But to the Son He [God] says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom'" (Hebrews 1:8).

2 | Christ, the Heart of History and Prophecy

Jesus is unique in that His biography was written before He was born! Old Testament prophecies present a clear outline of Christ's life in advance. The New Testament is His life story told in fulfillment.

We know the Old Testament was completed, at the very latest, 250 years before Christ's birth, because the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, began around that time. No wonder that in writing the Gospels of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), Christ's disciples were amazed at how accurately details in their Master's life fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

Anyone who carefully reads the Old Testament discovers that it continually mentions the coming Messiah. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God immediately promised them that He would send someone to our world to defeat the devil (Genesis 3:15). That person, Scripture further reveals, would be the Messiah. The Hebrew word "Messiah" in the Old Testament, literally means "Anointed One," and it corresponds to the Greek word "Christ" in the New Testament (John 1:41; 4:25). Jesus Christ is the Messiah. That's a central promise of the New Testament.

Living from 500 to 1,500 years before Christ's birth, the Old Testament prophets made scores of very specific predictions about the life of the Messiah. Their prophecies identify the city of Christ's birth, His name, and His lifework. They disclose details of



His trial and the events connected with His death. The prophecies show that when brought into court, He would offer no personal defense, and they actually predict some of the very words He would speak in His dying hours. Even the year, the day, and the hour of His death are foretold. Messianic prophecies also reveal that He would come to life again on the third day.

At the very beginning of Christ's earthly ministry, as people compared His life with Old Testament prophecies, what did they conclude?

“We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

At His first public appearance, our Saviour appealed to prophecy to establish His identity. After quoting from an Old Testament passage, He declared:

“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

Shortly after His resurrection, which words did Jesus use to remind two of His followers about the fulfillment of the prophecies that pointed forward to Him?

“He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the [Old Testament] Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Fulfilled prophecies give convincing evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

3 | Christ's Life Is a Fulfillment of Prophecy

Let's look at a few of these prophetic passages from the Old Testament—and their fulfillment in the New Testament record of Christ's life.

OLD TESTAMENT PROPHECY

NEW TESTAMENT FULFILLMENT

His Place of Birth

"But you, *Bethlehem Ephrathah* . . . out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2).

"Jesus was born in *Bethlehem of Judea*" (Matthew 2:1).



His Virgin Birth

"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the *virgin* shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for *that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit*. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20, 21).

OLD TESTAMENT
PROPHECY

NEW TESTAMENT
FULFILLMENT

His Lineage From the Tribe of Judah

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes" (Genesis 49:10).

"For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah" (Hebrews 7:14).

His Rejection

"He is despised and rejected by men" (Isaiah 53:3).

"He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11).

His Betrayal

"Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9).

"Jesus answered, 'It is he [the betrayer of Jesus; see also John 13:21] to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.' And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot" (John 13:26).



His Betrayal Price

"I said to them, 'If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.' So they weighed out for my wages *thirty pieces of silver*" (Zechariah 11:12).

"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him *thirty pieces of silver*" (Matthew 26:14, 15).

His Death on a Cross

"*They pierced My hands and My feet*" (Psalm 22:16).

"When they had come to the place called Calvary, there *they crucified Him*" (Luke 23:33).

Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53 contain a graphic depiction of the Messiah's persecution and death at the hands of those whom He came to save.

His Resurrection From the Tomb

"*For you will not leave my soul in Sheol [the grave], nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption*" (Psalm 16:10).

"He [David] . . . spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that *His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses*" (Acts 2:31, 32).

Christ's life story is a continuous fulfillment of Bible prophecy. Peter Stoner, in the book *Science Speaks*, examined these predictions in the light of probability theory. Of the 60 major Messianic prophecies, he selected just eight and calculated this: "The chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10^{17} ." (That's 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.) The evidence is strong that Jesus didn't just happen to fit a few predictions. His biography was indeed written beforehand by supernatural means. Truly, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

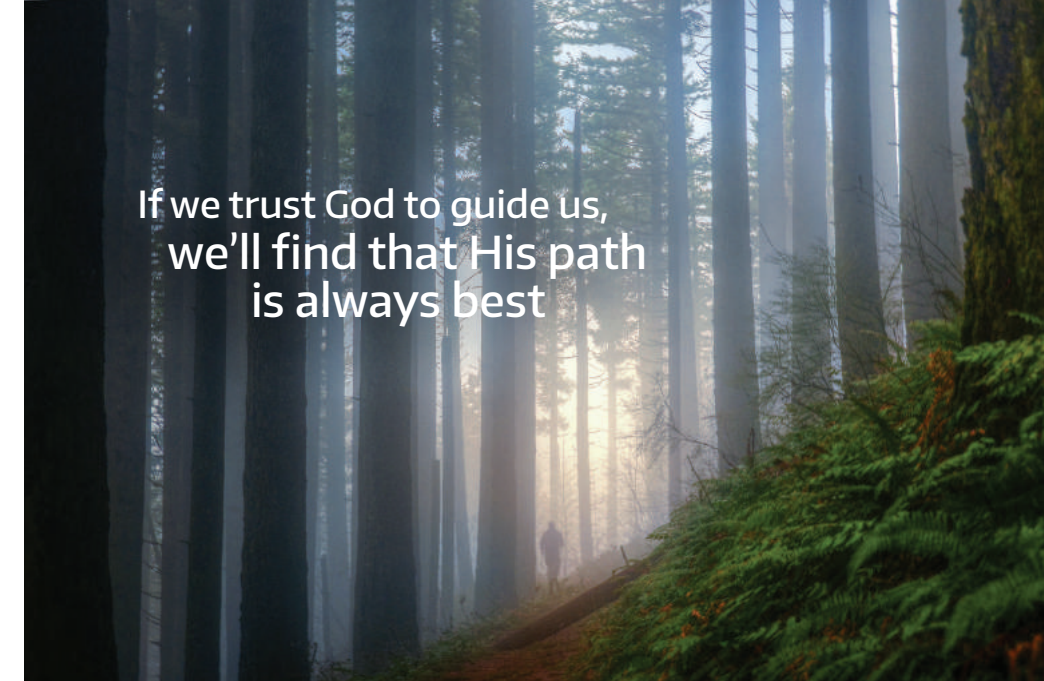
One of the main reasons the followers of Jesus, many of whom were at first skeptical of His claims, came to believe so passionately was because they saw Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in every detail of His life. A disciple named Apollos, for example, "vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 18:28).

The eyewitness testimonies of Peter, John, and Luke compel us to take Christ's claim seriously when He says that He is God's Son (2 Peter 1:16; John 20:30, 31; Luke 1:1-4). After looking at the evidence, we need to make a prayerful decision about who is going to be Lord in our lives. If you have not already done so, will you place your life in Jesus' hands?

4 | A God-Planned Life

Jesus lived a God-planned life—one outlined hundreds of years before His birth. That's why He said:

"I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. . . . I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:28, 29).



If we trust God to guide us,
we'll find that His path
is always best

Just as God planned the human life of Jesus before His birth, even so He has a plan for every one of us. He has a plan for you. He knows how you can fulfill your deepest desires and find an abundant life.

Sometimes we are reluctant to submit to God's plan, because we are afraid He will lead us in ways we don't want to follow. But if we will trust Him—letting Him guide in each decision we make—we'll find that God's plan is always the best plan. Looking back, we'll be amazed at how God has always tried to guide us down the correct path, even if we didn't see it at the time.

But how can you know God's plan for your life? Here are four steps that will help you as you learn to follow God's leading:

- ▶ **Ask.** According to James 1:5, if you ask God for wisdom, He will give it to you. In every situation, instead of trying to figure out things on your own, ask God for guidance.
- ▶ **Live up to what you know is right.** God can't lead you further if you aren't following the light you already have.

- ▶ **Listen.** Study God’s Word, pray, and watch for the leading of the Holy Spirit. God will never lead you to go against the principles of His character or His Word.
- ▶ **Wait.** Sometimes God gives you more than one good choice. Waiting on God before you act allows Him to lead you more fully and give you more of the wisdom He has promised.

In addition to these four steps, there are three main avenues by which God speaks to us. If we pay close attention, He will show us His will:

STEP 1: The Bible

How does the psalmist describe the Bible, life’s Guidebook?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”
(Psalm 119:105).

What does Paul tell us we should learn from the life experiences of Bible characters?

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11).

God’s Word renews our minds and gives us insight (Romans 12:2; Psalm 119:99). Instead of just putting your finger on a random text, hoping for some guidance, try to absorb the mind of God by studying and meditating on many texts—the whole of God’s Word. A regular time for prayerful Bible study is best.

STEP 2: Providential Circumstances

God also guides us by divinely-directed circumstances. Psalm 23 depicts Him as the Good Shepherd. A shepherd leads his sheep



through lush valleys as well as through rocky ravines. With Him by our side, we can benefit and learn from every experience.

STEP 3: Direct Communication From God to Our Hearts

God also guides us by speaking to our conscience through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10). Paul declares that the Spirit can enlighten “the eyes of your understanding” (Ephesians 1:18). Prayer enables us to talk directly with God. The more consistently we practice communicating with God, the more He is able to guide us. He molds both our inner impressions and our reasoning and judgment so we can see clearly the next step we need to take.

5 | Understanding God's Will

How can you be sure that you are living a God-directed life and not just following your own inclinations and impulses? The Bible cautions us about just such a trap:

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 16:25).

It's easy to rationalise the problem areas of our lives. We make excuses for our behavior even when we know it is not in harmony with God's will. Some people tell themselves things like, "God understands my situation," "God wants me to be happy," or "What I'm doing isn't really hurting anyone."

Our actions and feelings must harmonise with Bible teaching. God has a plan for each of us, but that plan will never involve disobedience to His Word. It's never safe to conclude that God is leading us if our actions are out of harmony with any of the three points discussed above—the Bible, providential circumstances, and God speaking to us through the Holy Spirit.

What is the final test for determining a right course of action?

"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

6 | Submitting to God's Plan



When the devil came to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, he attacked Jesus on the issue of submission. The devil suggested, "If you will only forgo the painful sacrifices your Father has planned for you, I'll give you the world in the palm of your hand—with fame, fortune, and a comfortable lifestyle." Satan even quoted Scripture in an attempt to lead Jesus astray. But each time, Jesus fought him off with the words, "It is written" (Matthew 4:1-11).

Continued on page 16

WordSearch

If you want to go deeper into this study topic, complete this section.

1. What claim did Jesus make regarding His eternal nature? (John 4:23-26; 8:57, 58; 17:21)

2. How does God describe His plan for your life? What does He have in store for you? (Jeremiah 29:11)

3. How carefully does God promise to guide you so that you can follow His plan for your life?

(a) Isaiah 30:21 _____

(b) Through whom does this guidance come? (John 16:13, 14)

4. What good advice does the psalmist give about how to use God's Word to know and follow His will? (Psalm 119:11-16)

5. How faithfully does God promise to protect and guide you through all the dangers and difficulties of life? (Isaiah 43:1-3)

One powerful lesson we can learn from the life of Jesus is submission to the Father's will. Even amid the terrible agony of



Gethsemane, He cried out, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). After three years of His ministry, living each day in harmony with the Father's plan, Christ's dying words were: “It is finished” (John 19:30). Jesus was really saying, “My God-planned life is now complete and fulfilled.”

As you begin to hear God's voice speaking clearly through His Word, providential circumstances, and through His direct leading in your life, you can learn to accept His guidance wholeheartedly. You too can discover the joy of a well-planned existence—a God-guided life.

My Decision

- I want to follow God's plan for my life. I choose to let Jesus lead me and show me His will.

My Prayer

Dear Father: Thank You for sending Jesus to this world to live and die for me. I want You to guide my life just as You guided Jesus' life while He was here on earth. I invite You to be the Lord of my heart and mind. In Jesus' name, Amen.



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