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WHO AM I?



WHO AM I?

**One of the most important
questions in life ...
and one of the hardest to
answer!**

When you look at yourself in the mirror, what do you see? Do you sometimes feel your family doesn't know the real you? When you are with your friends, do you worry about what they think of you?

Almost every day we are confronted with hard questions about ourselves. Probably the hardest are:

*'Who am I really?'
and
'How can I be true to myself and fit in,
at the same time?'*

Many people look in the wrong places. Some people spend their whole lives trying to be someone they are not. They try to live up to other peoples' expectations, or to fit in with whatever is trending in the moment.

Other people look in the mirror and hate what they see. They have heard people they trust tell them they are *ugly*, or *stupid*, or *weird*, or *worthless*. Sadly, they end up believing the lies.

When you don't know who you are and have no plan for your life, you end up not valuing yourself. You might try to look cool and pretend you don't care, but deep down you know you do.

When you don't value and respect yourself, you end up making bad choices. Life feels boring, so you start looking for something to fill the hole. You experiment with alcohol, or sex, or drugs, because at least *that* makes you feel good in the moment. ... And why not? Everyone else is doing it!

LIFE IN THE DIRT

When you don't know who you are and don't have a plan for your life, you look for meaning in all the wrong places. And then you justify your actions with excuses like ...

- ? Everyone *else* is doing it so it can't be *that* bad?
- ! If I just make myself look good enough, people will like me!
- ! I need a few drinks to relax and really be myself!
- ? I have no future anyway, so what do I have to lose?
- ? But it feels good in the moment, so who cares about the consequences?
- ! I *hate* myself and don't deserve to be happy anyway!
- ! If I wear the right clothes people will think I am cool!

- ! If I fall pregnant, I can just have an abortion!
- ! I'm not addicted, I can stop anytime I want!
- ! It shows you're a *real* man or woman!
- ! If I'm hurting, I'm going to hurt *them* too!
- ! I'm lost and alone; I'm better off being dead!

WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW
WHO YOU ARE, YOU DO
THINGS FOR ALL THE
WRONG REASONS!

Take a closer look at this list. None of these reasons have to do with *real* or *healthy* values; they are all a response to peer pressure and lies you tell yourself.

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IDENTITY IN **GOD**



**There is a much better way to figure out who you are:
ask the one who made you!**

You are not on your own in this quest to find out who you are, where you belong, and what your purpose is. God created you with a built-in identity and purpose! You were created in the image of God, to *love and be loved* ...

*So God created human beings in his own likeness.
He created them to be like himself.
He created them as male and female.*

Genesis 1:27

You have been created and blessed by God, and he wants more than anything to restore you to that original blessing. On top of that, he has a special plan for your life. Listen to what God says ...

"I know the plans I have for you," announces the Lord. "I want you to enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you. I will give you hope for the years to come."

Jeremiah 29:11

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CREATED IN THE
IMAGE OF **GOD**

What does it mean when the Bible says we were created in the image of God?

To start with, the Bible tells us that God is love ...

God is love. Anyone who leads a life of love is joined to God. And God is joined to them.

1 John 4:16

So we were made to live in loving relationships – relationships with God, with other people, with nature, and even with ourselves!

Jesus himself said that the whole law of God (in other words: God's will for every one of us) is summed up in the following two life rules:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Love him with all your strength and with all your mind.” And, “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.”

Luke 10:27

Over seven billion of us means that there are seven billion different stories. Yet as different as we all are, the same themes interweave all of our lives:

love, betrayal, separation, promise, sacrifice, forgiveness and reunion.

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LOVE



*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*¹

**He is real. He's alive and well, ablaze with energy.
He's large and in charge. He made it all, knows it all,
owns it all and cares about it all.**

*The LORD is tender and kind. He is gracious. He is slow to get angry. He is full of love.*²

Guess what part of creation he loves most? That's right – he loves us most, but why?

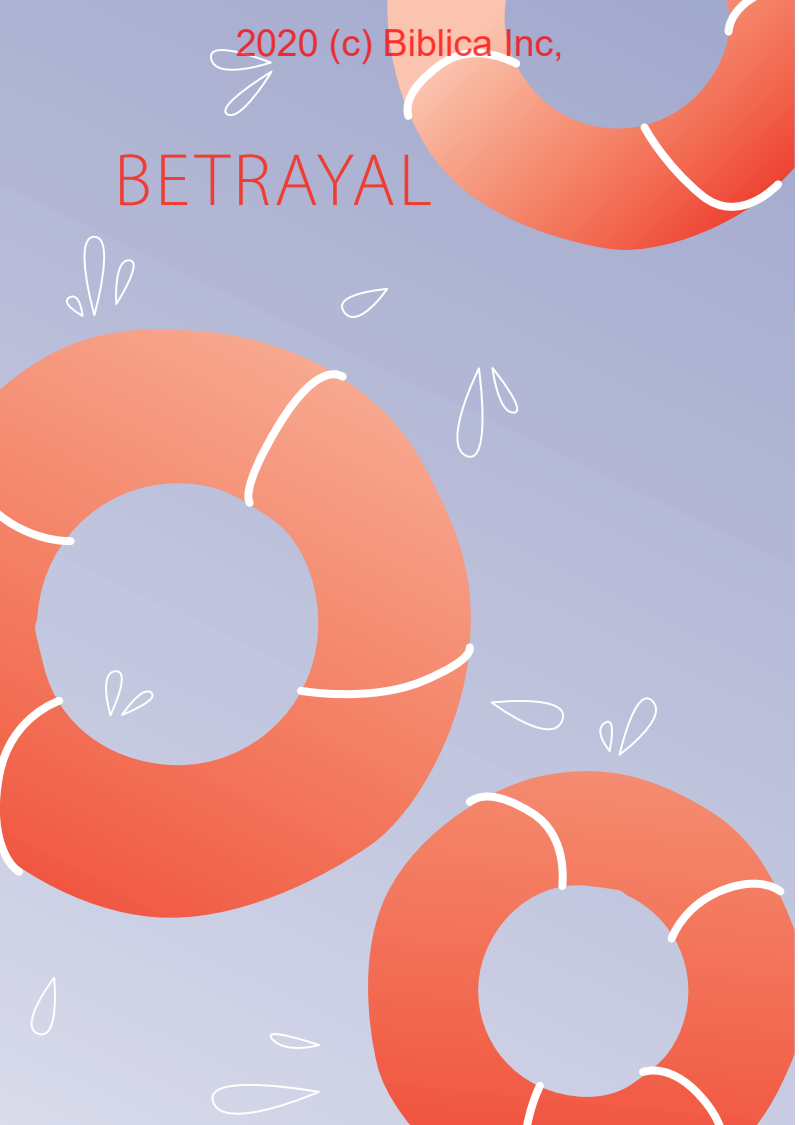
It's because God created us *in his own likeness*.³

As humans, we're unique works of art designed to reflect the image of our Creator: we think, we choose, we create, and we were made to love and be loved – by God and by each other.

We need God in the same way that the earth needs the sun. God created us to find our meaning and happiness in him. He made us for himself.

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BETRAYAL



Instead of looking to God to complete and rescue us, each of us has betrayed him by looking to things such as money, approval, comfort, romance, thrills and success instead. We've chosen a lie instead of the truth about God.

*They worshipped and served created things.
They didn't worship the Creator.*

Rom 1:25

Betraying God, we break his heart. One Scripture says:

The LORD saw how bad the sins of everyone on earth had become. They only thought about evil things. The LORD was very sad that he had made human beings on the earth. His heart was filled with pain.

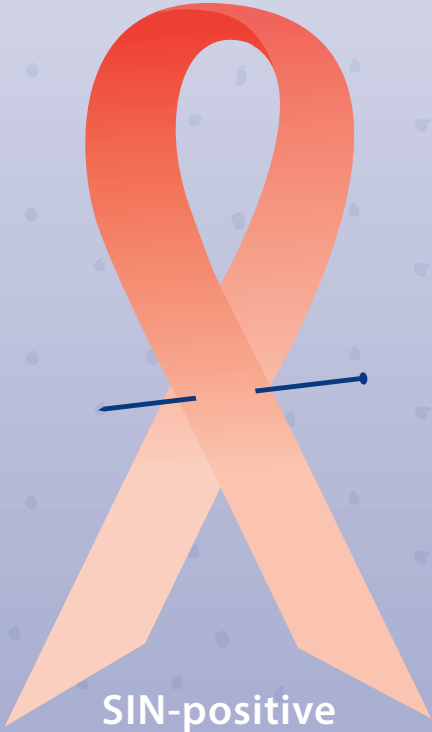
Genesis 6:5-6

In addition, our broken relationship with God has led us to the breakdown of all relationships: people with people (selfishness, racism and violence), people with nature (waste and pollution) and people with themselves (shame, fear and emptiness).

In each of us is a God-shaped hole that only God can fill. This is why we feel so empty sometimes, craving something more. We can try all we like to fill our lives with money, power or thrills, but we will never be truly satisfied. We were made for so much more than this world has to offer.

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SEPARATION



SIN-positive

Most of us are not HIV-positive, but we all have a condition with far worse consequences: **we're SIN-positive!**

We've all sinned against God in thought, word and deed. When someone commits a crime, a penalty must be paid, so what's the penalty for violating God's standards?

*When you sin, the pay you get is death.*⁴ The penalty is spiritual death – being separated from God.

Judgment day is real, and it's coming. Choosing a life of sin means *you are stubborn. In your heart you are not sorry for your sins. You are storing up anger against yourself. The day of God's anger is coming. Then his way of judging fairly will be shown.*⁵ Your entire life – every thought, word and deed – will be exposed and judged by God. Everything will be brought into the light. You will get away with nothing.

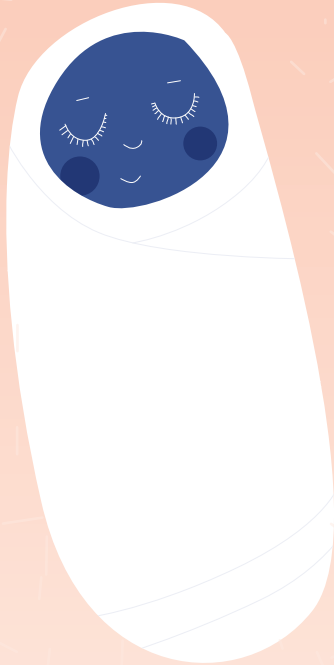
Because God is perfectly holy. *He will punish those who don't know God. He will punish those who don't obey the good news about our Lord Jesus. They will be destroyed forever. They will be shut out of heaven. They will never see the glory of the Lord's strength.*⁶

Separated from God and all that is good. Forever. That is hell.

⁴Rom 6:23, ⁵Rom 2:5, ⁶2 Thes 1:8-9

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PROMISE



Is there any hope for our broken lives and world?

Only one – the grace of God.

We betrayed God, but he did not abandon us. Long before Jesus came, God promised again and again that he would one day win us back by sending a rescuer.

Here is one such promise:

The LORD himself will give you a sign. The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel.

Isaiah 7:14

God has kept his promise! 2,000 years ago, God sent Jesus to this planet to rescue us. God's one and only Son became one of us. As the God-Man, he lived perfectly, showing us what God looks like up close and personal, with skin on. He stared down those who thought they were better than everyone else. He stooped down to pick up broken people and little kids. Words of wisdom and life-changing power flowed from him in every situation. He came to offer life in all of its fullness – though it cost him his life ...

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SACRIFICE

On the cross, Christ sacrificed everything.

For you.

He loves you so much he would rather die than live without you – and that's exactly what he did! He proved his undying love for you by dying on your behalf.

Christ also suffered once for sins. The one who did what is right suffered for those who don't do right. He suffered to bring you to God. His body was put to death. But the Holy Spirit brought him back to life.

1 Pet 3:18

God took your sin as well as the whole world's sin, placed it on his blood-soaked Son, and punished him for it.

Then the great exchange happened – he was shut out from the Father's presence – now you can enter in.

He was broken – *now you can be made whole*

He was nailed down – *now you can go free*

He was cursed – *now you can be blessed*

He died – *now you can live forever*

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FORGIVENESS



Do you know what Jesus cried out moments before he died?

"It is finished."⁷

What had he finished?

Our forgiveness and acceptance by God. We could not save ourselves, so he saved us.

God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift.

Eph 2:8

Religions wrongly teach that we can earn our salvation through our good deeds. None of us can ever be good enough. It isn't good people who find God – its forgiven people.

**The religions of the world say do, do, do.
Only Jesus says done!**

The only place we sinners can reunite with God is on our knees, at the foot of the cross. There we find that:

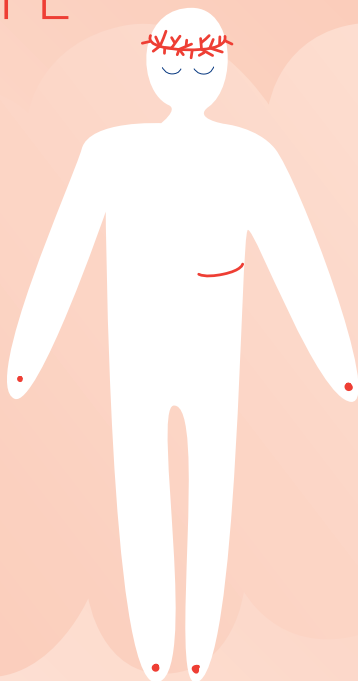
He has removed our sins from us. He has removed them as far as the east is from the west.

Ps 103:12

⁷ John 19:30

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LIFE



The Son died on Friday afternoon, but on Sunday morning he rose from the dead. Death was defeated. Shafts of unstoppable hope shone upon our dark planet.

Ever since then ...

In his great mercy he has given us a new birth and a living hope. This hope is living because Jesus Christ rose from the dead.⁸ Jesus could set people free who were afraid of death. All their lives they were held as slaves by that fear.⁹

When we turn to the Risen One, we come alive to the Living God. His Spirit comes to live inside of us. The winds of heaven begin blowing through the deepest chambers of our heart.

Most wonderfully, we're given a forever-relationship with our Creator. The door into his throne room swings open. We can be up close and personal with the invisible God anytime we want.

*Even though you have not seen him, you love him.
Though you do not see him now, you believe in him.
You are filled with a glorious joy that can't be put
into words.*

1 Pet 1:8

Wow!

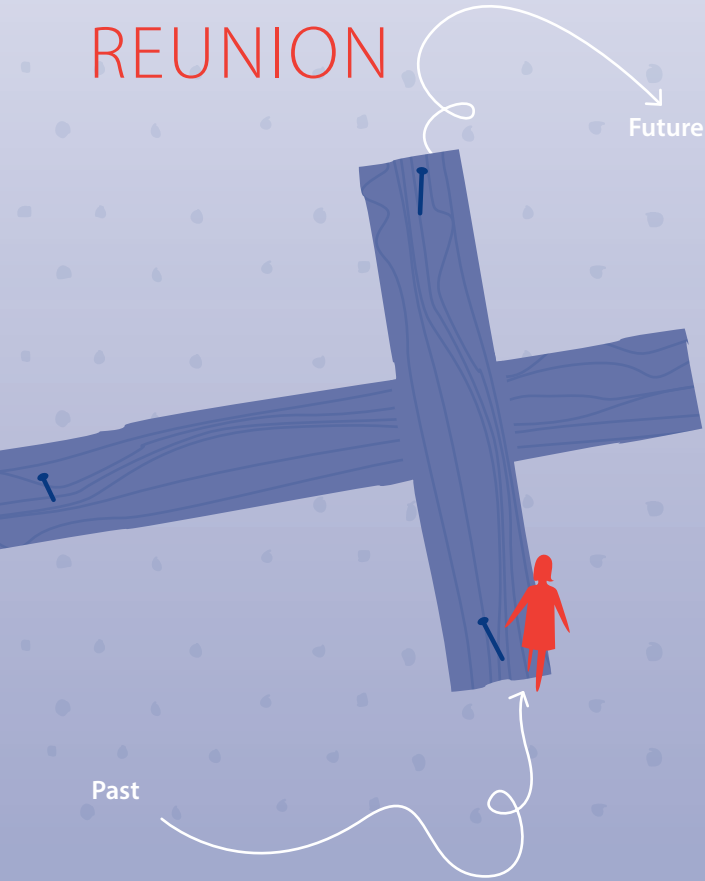
⁸ 1 Pet 1:3, ⁹ Heb 2:15

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REUNION

Future

Past



In Christ, our past is forgiven and our present has purpose. Best of all, our future is heaven.

*“Look! God now makes his home with the people.
He will live with them. They will be his people.
And God himself will be with them and be their God.
‘He will wipe away every tear from their eyes.
There will be no more death.’¹⁰ And there will be no
more sadness. There will be no more crying or pain.
Things are no longer the way they used to be.”*

Rev 21:3-4

God’s story will reach its high point when Jesus returns to remove all that is evil and heal all that is broken. He will bring with him a whole new world. In it, we will enjoy God and each other forever. All this world was meant to be but couldn’t be because of our sin. That world will be ...

It is written that “no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human mind has known.”¹¹ God has prepared these things for those who love him.

1 Cor 2:9

So much to look forward to, but there’s no need to wait ...

¹⁰ Isaiah 25:8, ¹¹ Isaiah 64:4

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COMING HOME



Some people did accept him and did believe in his name. He gave them the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

God's arms are open wide. He invites you to come home to him. Right here. Right now.

Can you feel his love drawing you like a magnet?

Why not come home? This could be the moment your story collides with his! Will you turn to him and trust in him?

Scripture says, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."¹²

Rom 10:13

If you want to put your faith in Christ as your Lord and Saviour, don't wait another minute ...

¹² Joel 2:32

Get alone.

Go down on your knees and pray the following simple words.

He's listening ...



'Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God who came to rescue me. I want to know you. You died on the cross for my sins to bring me back to God.

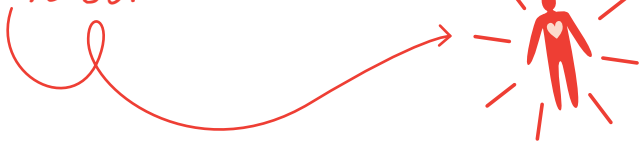
Be my Saviour. Forgive me. Make me your child, part of your family now and forever.

I want to turn from my
sin to you now.

I believe you are risen
from the dead. Alive,
large and in charge.
Come and live in me by
your Spirit.

Take control of my life,
as I learn to trust and
follow you from now on.

Reshape me to be the
person you created me
to be.



FIRST STEPS

If you prayed this prayer, welcome home.

The adventure has begun!

Like all relationships, your walk with God will grow stronger the more time you spend with him. God's Word gives some ways to begin growing closer to him. You can start right away ...

1

Daily – celebrate God's unfailing, undeserved love. It's the best thing you will ever have!

I am absolutely sure that not even death or life ... the present or the future ... or anything else in all creation ... can ever separate us from God's love.¹³

2

Find spiritual community in a church you can call home and with some Christian friends.

And let us not give up meeting together. Some are in the habit of doing this. Instead, let us encourage one another with words of hope.¹⁴

3

Start talking to God, who is now your friend and Father, about anything and everything.

At all times, pray by the power of the Spirit. Pray all kinds of prayers. Be watchful, so that you can pray. Always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.¹⁵

4

Tell your Christian friends and relatives about your decision. In fact, don't be shy to tell everyone you've decided to follow Jesus.

So we are Christ's official messengers. It is as if God were making his appeal through us. Here is what Christ wants us to beg you to do. Come back to God!¹⁶

5

Read this book daily, asking God to speak to you through it.

Your word is like a lamp that shows me the way. It is like a light that guides me.¹⁷

6

Your relationship with God is not based on your feelings, but on his Word. Feelings come and go, but God's promises are unshakable.

We live by believing, not by seeing.¹⁸

7

Although there may be some immediate changes in your life, you need to form new habits of goodness with the help of the Holy Spirit. These changes take time. When you fail, receive Christ's forgiveness and get back on your feet.

But God is faithful and fair. If we confess our sins, he will forgive our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure.¹⁹

8

Don't expect life to become easier or that everyone will support your faith.

Dear friends, don't be surprised by the terrible things happening to you. The trouble you are having has come to test you. So don't feel as if something strange were happening to you.

Instead, be joyful that you are taking part in Christ's sufferings. Then you will have even more joy when Christ returns in glory.²⁰

9

Accept your identity in Christ.

When anyone lives in Christ, the new creation has come. The old is gone! The new is here!²¹

Write down the date, so you don't forget when you turned your life over to Christ ...

I,
(name)

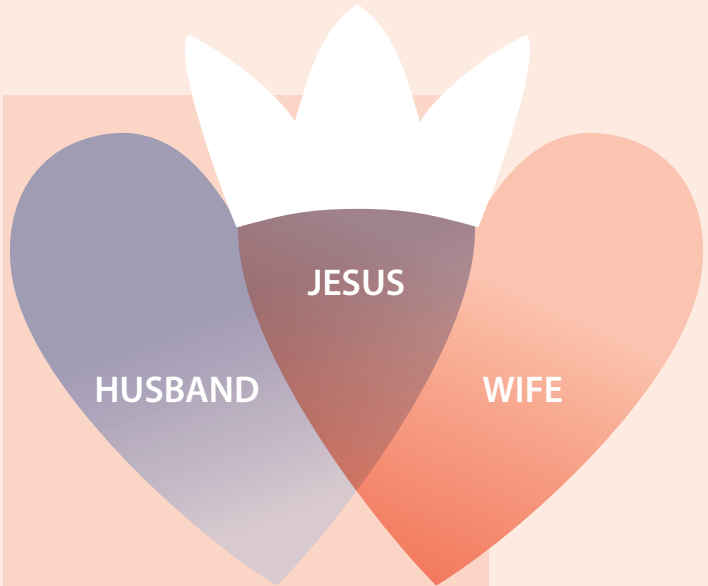
came home to God on

.....
(date)



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JESUS



AT THE CENTRE

God has created many good and beautiful things that can become *unhealthy* or *destructive* if they are used in the wrong way.

Your ego is one of them. ‘What is your *ego*,’ you may be asking. Ego is basically what you think of yourself – or you could say: it is your *relationship* with yourself.

We have already heard that Jesus said one of the two most important rules in life is to love other people as you love yourself. So loving yourself is not just *healthy*, it is a requirement! It is God’s will and plan for your life.

But to love yourself, doesn’t mean you must think you are the centre of the universe!

If you really love and value yourself, you will do everything you can to fulfil your God-given purpose. Like everything else in the universe, you can only become your true self and fulfil your purpose when *Jesus* is at the *centre*...

All things have been created by him and for him. Before anything was created, he was already there. He holds everything together.

Col 1:16-17

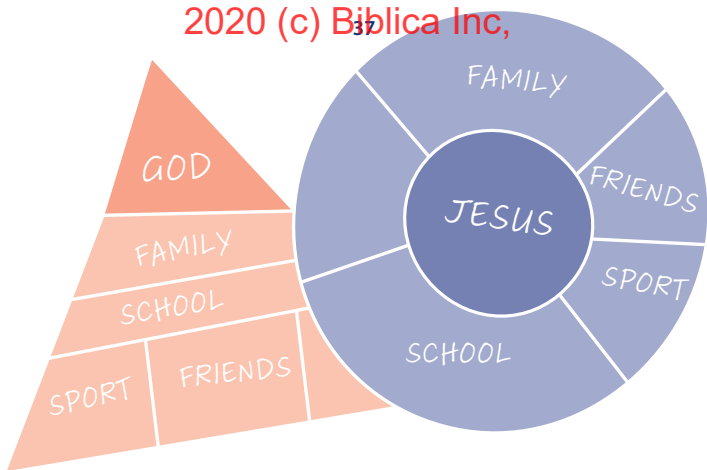
PYRAMIDS AND CIRCLES

Figuring out what's most important in life.

If you don't know what your priorities are in life – what is more important in your life – you will end up being pulled in every direction. You'll be just like one of those birds that is attracted by shiny objects, madly hopping all over the place, chasing the next sparkly thing that catches its eye.

There are a few ways to figure out what should be more important in life. One technique is to draw a pyramid with levels:

- ① First write down a list of the things you think are most important in your life.
- ② Then decide what their order of importance is.
- ③ Now fill all the levels in order in the pyramid, starting with the most important at the top. If you are a Christian, hopefully you'll put God on top!



But there is a downside to this method of sorting your priorities: maybe you feel you have to choose between things of equal importance, or maybe you feel guilty for wanting to spend more time with your friends than with God (who is supposed to be top of your list).

So here is a better way ...

- ① Draw a big circle divided into segments, like a pie, and a small circle at the centre.
- ② Now write down in the segments, all the things from your list of important things in your life and put Jesus at the centre. This way you'll be able to honour all of the things that are important in your life without having to choose one above the other – and Jesus will be at the centre of all of them!

JOHN

To really know someone, you have to be up close and personal. John knew Jesus like that. He was called *the disciple Jesus loved*. This is why John is able to give us such an under-the-skin view of Jesus. Three insights will make an impact on you as you travel with John on his journey with Jesus...

Jesus is more than human. The first verse stuns you with the breath-taking claim that Jesus is the Word – and that he was there in the very beginning! Ride the rollercoaster of revelation as Jesus reveals that he is the *I Am* (God's personal name) – our bread, water, light. Jesus also calls himself a gate, a shepherd, the way, the truth, the life, the resurrection and the vine.

Jesus wants one-on-one time with you. As Jesus places himself in the personal space of Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, Lazarus, Peter and others, you'll realise he's talking to you as well.

Jesus wants more for you than you can imagine. Don't settle for only knowing about Jesus, dig into this book to draw closer to God and come to know him face-to-face.

ZOOM - - - - -

- God moves into the hood (1:1-18)
- Jesus gathers his gang (1:19-51)
- Jesus doing his thing (2-11)
- Famous last rap (12-17)
- He's a goner! (18-19)
- He's back! (20-21)



The Word became a human being

1 In the beginning, the Word was already there. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was with God in the beginning. ³All things were made through him. Nothing that has been made was made without him. ⁴Life was in him, and that life was the light for all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness. But the darkness has not overcome the light.

⁶There was a man sent from God. His name was John. ⁷He came to be a witness about that light. He was a witness so that all people might believe. ⁸John himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light.

⁹The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰The Word was in the world. And the world was made through him. But the world did not recognise him. ¹¹He came to what was his own. But his own people did not accept him. ¹²Some people did accept him and did believe in his name. He gave them the right to become children of God. ¹³To be a child of God has nothing to do with human parents. Children of God are not born because of human choice or because a husband wants them to be born. They are born because of what God does.

¹⁴The Word became a human being. He made his home with us. We have seen his glory. It is the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father. And the Word was full of grace and truth.

¹⁵John was a witness about the Word. John cried out and said, ‘This was the one I was talking about. I said, “He who comes after me is more important than I am. He is more important because he existed before I was born.”’ ¹⁶God is full of grace. From him we have all received grace in place of the grace already given. ¹⁷In the past, God gave us grace through the law of Moses. Now, grace and truth come to us through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No-one has ever seen God. But the One and Only is God and is at the Father's side. The one at the Father's side has shown us what God is like.

John the Baptist says that he is not the Messiah

¹⁹The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask John who he was. John spoke the truth to them. ²⁰He did not try to hide the truth. He spoke to them openly. He said, ‘I am not the Messiah.’

²¹They asked him, ‘Then who are you? Are you Elijah?’

He said, ‘I am not.’

‘Are you the Prophet we've been expecting?’ they asked.

‘No,’ he answered.

²²They asked one last time, ‘Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?’

²³John replied, using the words of Isaiah the prophet. John said, ‘I'm

the messenger who is calling out in the desert, “Make the way for the Lord straight.”’

²⁴ The Pharisees who had been sent ²⁵ asked him, ‘If you are not the Messiah, why are you baptising people? Why are you doing that if you aren't Elijah or the Prophet we've been expecting?’

²⁶ ‘I baptise people with water,’ John replied. ‘But someone is standing among you whom you do not know. ²⁷ He is the one who comes after me. I am not good enough to untie his sandals.’

²⁸ This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the River Jordan. That was where John was baptising.

What John says about Jesus

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him. John said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God! He takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I was talking about. I said, “A man who comes after me is more important than I am. That's because he existed before I was born.” ³¹ I did not know him. But God wants to make it clear to Israel who this person is. That's the reason I came baptising with water.’

³² Then John told them, ‘I saw the Holy Spirit come down from heaven like a dove. The Spirit remained on Jesus. ³³ I myself did not know him. But the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, “You will see the Spirit come down and remain on someone. He is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit.” ³⁴ I have seen it happen. I am a witness that this is God's Chosen One.’

John's disciples follow Jesus

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ He saw Jesus walking by. John said, ‘Look! The Lamb of God!’

³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this. So they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Then Jesus turned round and saw them following. He asked, ‘What do you want?’ They said, ‘Rabbi, where are you staying?’ Rabbi means Teacher.

³⁹ ‘Come,’ he replied. ‘You will see.’

So they went and saw where he was staying. They spent the rest of the day with him. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew was Simon Peter's brother. Andrew was one of the two disciples who heard what John had said. He had also followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon. He told him, ‘We have found the Messiah.’ Messiah means Christ. ⁴² And he brought Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas.’ Cephas means Peter, or Rock.