

Can I Believe the Bible?

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When I was a kid, I didn't care about things like the Bible, God, Jesus, or church. I was too busy fuming with hatred inside most of the time. Mostly I didn't show it, but hatred ground away at me. Everything—people, things, issues—made me mad.

One person I hated more than anyone else was my father. He was the town drunk, and my friends at school joked about him. I laughed, but I was crying on the inside. I remember one time finding my mother lying in manure behind the cows in the barn after my father had knocked her down and she couldn't get up. I wanted to kill him.

By the time I went off to college, I wanted just three things: I wanted to be happy (something my hatred had stolen from my childhood); I wanted to find meaning for my life; and I wanted freedom—the ability to do what I knew I should do but didn't have the power to do.

As I started looking for answers, it seemed that almost everyone I talked to was into religion. So I went to church. But I must have gone to the wrong one, because I felt worse there than anywhere else.

So I chucked religion.

I tried all kinds of other things, but no matter what I chose, the thrill quickly wore off. I felt like a car in a demolition derby—getting bashed from all sides and going nowhere.

Then I noticed a group of students and two professors who seemed to soar above their circumstances. They talked about happiness, purpose, and freedom in life. They seemed to have everything I was searching for, so I began to hang out with them.

One afternoon, as we sat around a table in the student union, I said, "Why are you guys so different from everybody else here?"

One of the students, a young woman, looked me straight in the eye and said, "Jesus Christ."

"Don't give me that garbage," I said. "I'm fed up with religion."

"I didn't say 'religion,'" she replied. "I said 'Jesus Christ.'"

My new friends challenged me to seriously examine the claims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that the Bible is the Word of God. I accepted their challenge, determined to prove them wrong. I was confident I would drown them in evidence and show them that the Bible was nothing more than fiction and fantasy, especially the parts about Jesus, who was supposedly the reason for their happiness, purpose, and freedom.

I'm here to tell you that I completely failed. Instead of finding evidence that would discredit their faith, I discovered that the Bible is fully accurate and reliable and that Jesus Christ is exactly who the Bible says He is. Best of all, in the process I found what I really wanted—happiness, meaning in life, and true freedom.

Where did I get that? From the God revealed in the Bible. To say that I love Him, and that He loves me, may sound like the craziest thing you've ever heard. But stay with me; I once thought so, too. If you buy even halfway into Joe Gibbs's¹ idea that you need a game plan for your life, I'm sure you'll agree that you're going to need a playbook. And what better playbook could you find than the one that God has

¹ This article originally appeared as a chapter in Joe Gibbs' book, *Game Plan for Life: Your Personal Playbook for Success* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2009). Used with permission.

provided?

But maybe you still have some questions—not the least of which may be, is the Bible a reliable source?

Can You Trust What the Bible Says about God?

What do you believe about the Bible? Do you trust what it tells you about God and His Son, Jesus Christ? Can it really be what it claims to be—God’s love letter to humanity? How can you know for sure?

In order to live in right relationship with God, you need an accurate picture of Him. I’m convinced the Bible provides that picture. However, a lot of people today have convinced themselves that the Bible can’t be trusted. So they don’t even read it. As a result, they have no idea what God is really like or how they can get to know Him. The difference with me was that, even though I initially approached the Bible with skepticism and even hostility, I really studied it. Maybe my motives and intentions were wrong, but I dug deep.

Here’s what I discovered: We *can* trust the Bible, and we *can* know God personally through its pages. This reality changed my life as a university student, and I’ve been traveling the world ever since, telling the truth about the Bible to everyone I can. In this chapter, I want to share this great news with you.

Most people dismiss the Bible because they have accepted a number of false assumptions about it. Here are six of the most popular, which I will answer with six liberating facts that will help you anchor your confidence in who God is and what He tells you in His Word, the Bible.

False assumption #1: The Bible is just another man-made book.

If you want to liven up the conversation at your next tailgate party, throw out this question: What is the Bible? The answers you get could be all over the map:

It’s a book of great literature, like the writings of Shakespeare.

It’s stories and nice thoughts about life.

It’s the rulebook for the Christian religion, as the Koran
is for Islam.

It’s the big black book passed down through our family with
great-grandma’s china.

It’s one of a number of different versions of truth.

Some people view the Bible as just another book about philosophy, ethics, and how to live a meaningful life. But calling the Bible just another book is like calling the great Vince Lombardi just another football coach. The Bible is in a class by itself.

Fact #1: The Bible is God’s unique message about who He is and how you can know Him.

Consider what I discovered about the Bible’s unique qualifications:

It was written over a span of 1,500 years—forty generations.

It was penned by more than forty authors from different walks of life, including kings, peasants,
philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, scholars, military leaders, a doctor, a tax collector, and
a rabbi.

The authors wrote from three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe.

The authors wrote in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

Its prophecies have proven 100-percent accurate.

Key evidence for the accuracy of the Bible is in the scores of specific prophecies about nations and events that were fulfilled hundreds of years later. The Bible takes the accuracy of these prophecies very seriously. The prophet's very life was on the line! One single prophecy that did not come true would be disastrous for a prophet: He was to be stoned to death on the spot.² During the days of the Old Testament, people were not recklessly jumping onto the prophetic bandwagon. They knew they had to be right 100 percent of the time.

So let's take a look at just some of the hundreds of biblical prophecies that have been fulfilled.

The most amazing and convincing prophecy fulfilled about the nation Israel is her very survival and ultimate return to the Promised Land in the modern state of Israel, founded in 1948. Although there has always been a Jewish presence in the land of Israel, God promised unconditionally that the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would return from the four corners of the earth to the land of Israel, never to be taken into exile ever again.³

Normally when a nation is conquered, overrun, and scattered, it takes only three or four generations (120 to 160 years) for the people to lose their national identity. Not so with Israel. They were overrun by the Roman legions in AD 70 and scattered throughout the Roman Empire. In accordance with biblical prophecy, for generations (nearly two thousand years) Israel languished in exile yet never lost her national identity and purpose.

Then, in accordance with biblical prophecy, the people of Israel returned to their ancient land. No other nation in the history of mankind has ever accomplished such a feat.

It is said that Napoleon was once asked why he believed the Bible. He answered, "Because of the Jews!" Think about it: When was the last time you saw a Hittite in New York City? or an Amorite? When those ancient civilizations were conquered, they disappeared from the face of the earth. Not so with the Jews—just as the Bible predicted. So one of the most powerful proofs from prophecy is the survival of God's ancient people, the Jews.

The Bible contains even more specific predictions about who would be the Messiah. Scholars have demonstrated that some three hundred Old Testament predictions were literally fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ. Dr. Peter Stoner, in his book *Science Speaks*, says that by applying the science of probability to just eight of those prophecies, "we find that the chance that any man might have lived down to the present time and fulfilled all eight prophecies is 1 in 10¹⁷."⁴ That's one chance in 100,000,000,000,000,000.

Here is an example of eight (out of more than three hundred) messianic prophecies and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ:

If you agree that these fulfilled messianic prophecies bear the stamp of the divine, you should seriously consider the Bible as the Word of God—a book worthy of your investigation, especially as it makes claims about your eternal destiny.

The Bible treats hundreds of controversial subjects with harmony and continuity from Genesis to Revelation and focuses on one consistent theme: God's love and plan for His human creation.

One of the New Testament writers, known as the apostle Paul, writes, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."⁵ God is not trying to restrict you or bully you with His

² See Deuteronomy 13:1-18; 18:20-22.

³ See Genesis 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:8; Deuteronomy 30:1-10; Isaiah 11:11-12:6; 43:5-7; Jeremiah 30:7-31:40; Ezekiel 20:33-44; 36:16-37:28; Amos 9:11-15; Romans 11:25-27.

⁴ Peter Stoner, *Science Speaks* (Chicago: Moody, 1963), 107.

⁵ 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

instructions. He always has your best interests at heart, and His Word is intended to protect you and provide for you.

If the Bible is really God's written message to the human race, it *must* be accurate and reliable. If it were just a collection of nice thoughts, it wouldn't matter if parts of it had been left out or changed over the centuries. If it's only one of many versions of truth, who cares whether it's accurate? But if the Bible is really what God wants to tell you about Himself and your relationship with Him, it is extremely important for you to know that it was recorded exactly as God gave it and has been accurately passed down to you today.

False assumption #2: The Bible is full of myths and legends.

When people claim that the Bible is full of myths and legends, they are usually referring to the New Testament—especially the accounts of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The arguments typically sound something like this:

The virgin birth of Jesus is just an invention to explain away Mary's getting pregnant before the wedding.

The miracles of Jesus, such as walking on water, are explainable natural events that got exaggerated over time.

Jesus' resurrection was made up by His grieving followers after His brutal death.

Because Christians base their faith on these so-called incredible and unbelievable stories, skeptics assume that nothing in the Bible can be accepted as truth.

Fact #2: The Bible can be trusted because Jesus' disciples staked their lives on its truth.

If Jesus' followers made up the "legend" of His resurrection, they paid for that lie with their lives. History tells us that ten of Jesus' original twelve disciples suffered violent deaths as a result of boldly proclaiming that He was the risen Son of God.

Would these men have died for a lie? Though it's true that thousands of people throughout history have died for a lie, they did so *only* if they thought it was the truth. If the resurrection of Jesus was a lie and the disciples knew it, certainly one or two at least—and probably several—would have cracked under the pressure and confessed the conspiracy to save their lives.

But it wasn't a conspiracy based on a lie. The disciples saw Jesus alive after His death and burial. Luke writes, "After his suffering, he [Jesus] showed himself to these men [the disciples] and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive."⁶

Why did the followers of Jesus need "many convincing proofs"? Because when Jesus died, they thought it was all over—the movement, the cause, the kingdom. When Jesus was arrested, they ran and hid.⁷ And when they were told that His tomb was empty, at first they didn't believe it.⁸ They needed serious convincing, especially a guy by the name of Thomas.⁹ Can you identify with him? I sure can.

What was the result of their seeing Jesus alive? The disciples were transformed from cowardly to courageous—overnight! They could not have faced torture and death unless they were totally convinced of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection form the central theme of the Bible. The

⁶ Acts 1:3.

⁷ See Mark 14:50.

⁸ See Luke 24:11.

⁹ See John 20:24-27.

boldness and courage of His once cowardly followers is powerful evidence for the reliability of the Bible as a whole.

False assumption #3: The Bible was written by people who had little firsthand knowledge of the events.

In 2003, Jayson Blair, a reporter for the *New York Times*, was fired for inventing sources, making up facts, and stealing material he used to write nearly seven hundred stories. Some highly regarded authors from the ancient world were in the same boat as Blair. A survey of ancient nonbiblical writings shows that many writers reported events that took place many years before they were born, in countries they never visited. Though their information may have been close to factual, wouldn't you have greater trust in writers who wrote with firsthand knowledge?

A lot of people mistakenly assume that the authors of the Bible are among the ancients whose sources were distant and doubtful. They rightfully argue, "How can you place confidence in documents where the facts may not be accurate?"

Fact #3: Most of the Bible was written by eyewitnesses or from eyewitness sources.

When we examine the sources of the New Testament, for example, overwhelming evidence confirms that the accounts of Jesus' life, the history of the early church, and the letters that form the bulk of the New Testament were all written either by eyewitnesses to the events or by people who knew eyewitnesses. Here's what some of them wrote:

Luke: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by *those who from the first were eyewitnesses* and servants of the word."¹⁰

Mark: We know that Mark relied largely on the account of the apostle Peter, a direct eyewitness.

John: "We proclaim to you what *we have seen and heard*."¹¹

Peter: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but *we were eyewitnesses* of his majesty."¹²

Peter and John: "We cannot help speaking about what *we have seen and heard*."¹³

These primary sources are evidence of the credibility of the New Testament record. And they are all the more convincing because these men appealed to the knowledge of their readers—even their most critical opponents—who could easily have contradicted any false accounts or claims. These authors *invited* correction by other eyewitnesses:

Peter: "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, *as you yourselves know*."¹⁴

Paul: "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that *none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done*

¹⁰ Luke 1:1-2, emphasis added.

¹¹ 1 John 1:3, emphasis added.

¹² 2 Peter 1:16, emphasis added.

¹³ Acts 4:20, emphasis added.

¹⁴ Acts 2:22, emphasis added.

*in a corner.*¹⁵

These disciples were saying, in effect, “Check it out”; “Ask around”; “You know as well as I do that this is true!” Such challenges demonstrate supreme confidence that what they spoke and recorded was absolutely factual.

“Come on, Josh,” you may say, “that’s only what the writers *claimed*. Someone writing a century or more after the fact can claim *anything*.”

Yes, if the accounts recorded in the Gospels were dreamed up long after the disciples themselves were dead and gone, then the credibility of the New Testament record could be called into question. But the fact is, the books of the New Testament were written during the lifetimes of the people whose lives they record, not a century or more after the events they describe.

William F. Albright (1891–1971), an archaeologist and professor of Semitic languages at Johns Hopkins University, writes, “We can already say emphatically that there is no longer any solid basis for dating any book of the New Testament after about AD 80, two full generations before the date between 130 and 150 given by the more radical New Testament critics of today.”¹⁶

Ample evidence exists to show that, for the most part, the men who wrote the Bible had firsthand knowledge of the events they recorded or had access to people who had witnessed those events. We have no reason to deny that the words of the Bible are true.

False assumption #4: The Bible was written and copied by hand, so it is full of mistakes.

Imagine this: Writing longhand, you copy word-for-word an article from the Internet about your favorite football player or race car driver. Then you ask a friend to copy your version by hand. She in turn gives her copy to someone else to copy by hand, and so on, until there are fifty handwritten copies in the chain.

Now, how far down the chain could you go before you would find a copying mistake, such as someone writing *this* instead of *the*? Or before you noticed something missing, such as a phrase or sentence left out by mistake? Or what if one of the copiers purposely changed the content because he liked another athlete better than yours?

What are the chances that you and your forty-nine friends could copy the article without any mistakes? I’d say zero! Many people assume that the Bible we have today can’t be trusted for the same reason: copying mistakes.

The documents included in the Bible were originally written with pen and ink on papyrus, many centuries before the printing press was invented. As the ink faded and the papyrus deteriorated, copies were made of the original manuscripts, and copies were made of the copies.

None of the original manuscripts of the Bible has been found. What we have are copies of copies ranging in size from scrolls to scraps of papyrus. The Bible today is a translation of the most reliable existing manuscript copies, but how can we be sure that the words in our modern-day Bibles are the same as what God originally said?

Fact #4: Overwhelming evidence proves that the Bible has been accurately preserved.

To determine the reliability of the Bible manuscript copies we have today, we can ask two questions that historians ask to test the reliability of any ancient literature:

¹⁵ Acts 26:25-26, emphasis added.

¹⁶ W. F. Albright, *Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1955), 136).

1. *How many manuscript copies still exist?*

Like the Bible, other ancient writings have been passed down through the centuries as manuscript copies. Checking multiple copies against each other allows scholars to find copying mistakes and determine the author's original words. Obviously, the more copies you have of a manuscript, the closer you will get to the original.

Modern editions of classic ancient books are often based on just a handful of existing copies. Yet scholars are confident that the present versions accurately reflect the authors' originals.

By comparison, trusting that the Bible has been preserved and passed down to us accurately is a slam dunk. Take the New Testament, for example. We're not talking about mere hundreds or even a few thousand handwritten manuscript copies still in existence. Libraries and museums around the world today hold close to twenty-five thousand copies of portions of the New Testament.

2. *How much time passed between the original writing and the earliest copies we have?*

Obviously, the closer the copies are to the originals, the more reliable the copies will be. The earliest copies of most classic ancient writings are 400 to 1,400 years removed from the originals. The earliest copies we have of New Testament documents, however, are only 50 to 225 years removed from the original documents.

The following chart illustrates the stark contrast in reliability between several volumes of ancient literature and the New Testament.¹⁷

The evidence is overwhelming. "In the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests, the New Testament stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings,"¹⁸ writes New Testament scholar F. J. A. Hort. Theologian Norman Geisler adds, "The abundance of manuscript copies makes it possible to reconstruct the original with virtually complete accuracy."¹⁹ Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias (see his chapter in this book²⁰) writes, "In real terms, the New Testament is easily the best attested ancient writing in terms of the sheer number of documents, the time span between the events and the document, and the variety of documents available to sustain or contradict it. There is nothing in ancient manuscript evidence to match such textual availability and integrity."²¹

Caretakers of the Old Testament

The reliability of the Old Testament is strongly supported by what we know about the methods used by the Jewish scholars, called scribes, who were the caretakers of the manuscripts from generation to generation.

From around 500 BC to AD 900, the scribes were in charge of preserving the ancient manuscripts and producing new copies when necessary. They considered these responsibilities sacred and performed them reverently.

Talk about meticulous! The scribes followed so many rules for how copies were to be made that it would make the most particular neat freak you know seem like a slob. Here are just a few examples:

Not even the shortest word could be copied from memory; everything had to be copied letter by

¹⁷ Adapted from Josh McDowell and Thomas Williams, *The Relational Word* (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006), 219.

¹⁸ F. J. A. Hort and Brooke Foss Westcott, *The New Testament in the Original Greek, vol. 1* (New York: Macmillan, 1881), 561.

¹⁹ Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 386.

²⁰ Joe Gibbs, *Game Plan for Life: Your Personal Playbook for Success* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2009).

²¹ Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?* (Nashville: Word, 1994), 162.

letter.

The scribes had to count the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurred in each book and make sure it matched exactly the count in the original.

If a copied manuscript was found to contain even one mistake, the whole manuscript was discarded.

In light of the overwhelming evidence, Frederic G. Kenyon, director and principal librarian of the British Museum and second to none in authority for evaluating manuscripts, concludes, “The Christian can take the whole Bible in his hand and say without fear or hesitation that he holds in it the true word of God, handed down without essential loss from generation to generation throughout the centuries.”²²

False assumption #5: The Bible’s reliability cannot be proved from outside sources.

Many people assume that the Bible’s claim to be the inspired, reliable Word of God is hollow because the only evidence for such a claim is the Bible itself. It would be kind of like claiming to be the world’s number one authority on anything. If you’re the only one saying it, who’s going to believe you?

Fact #5: The Bible’s reliability is substantially supported by external sources.

Mountains of persuasive evidence *outside* of the Bible confirm the truth of what is *inside* the Bible. I’ll give you just a few examples of the evidence, and these barely scratch the surface.

The writings of early Christians

Extensive quotations of Scripture by leaders, writers, and theologians in the early church confirm the reliability of our modern-day Bible. We can document approximately thirty-six thousand quotations from these sources, and these range from single verses to entire passages. All but eleven verses of the New Testament can be verified from these secondary quotations.

Norman Geisler writes, “Early Christian writers provide quotations so numerous and widespread that if no manuscripts of the New Testament existed today, the New Testament could be reproduced from the writings of the early Fathers alone.”²³

Clement of Rome (AD 95) quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke, Acts, 1 Corinthians, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and Titus.

Ignatius (AD 70–110) quotes from thirteen New Testament books, including Matthew, John, Acts, Romans, Galatians, James, and 1 Peter.

Clement of Alexandria (AD 150–212) quotes 2,400 times from all but three books of the New Testament.

Cyprian (died AD 258) quotes 740 times from the Old Testament and more than 1,000 times from the New Testament.

The writings of early non-Christians

Even many non-Christians from early centuries of the modern era authenticate the people, places, and events of the New Testament in their writings. Their records help substantiate that the world at large was well aware of the events of the New Testament and the claims of Scripture.

²² Frederic G. Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939), 38.

²³ Geisler and Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 430.

Tacitus, a first-century Roman historian, wrote about the death of Jesus and alluded to a “mischievous superstition” (likely a reference to Jesus’ resurrection).

The writings of Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, contain many statements that verify the historical validity of both the Old and New Testaments.

In a letter to Emperor Trajan in about AD 112, Pliny the Younger, a Roman author and administrator, describes early Christian worship practices, which confirms that Christians worshiped Jesus as God from an early date.

The evidence of archaeology

Archaeological discoveries, especially in the last half century, strongly attest to the reliability of the Bible. “Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history,” archaeologist William F. Albright has written.²⁴

For example, for centuries, no archaeological evidence existed to support that Pontius Pilate ever lived. Then in 1961, two Italian archaeologists uncovered a Latin inscription referring to Pilate by name as a Roman governor.

It would take many books to list all the archeological discoveries that confirm the historical reliability of the Bible, but here is a sampling:

Archeological discoveries have confirmed numerous historical details of Luke’s record of the birth of Jesus, including the existence of a list of taxpayers and a periodic census.²⁵

During the excavations of Jericho (1930–1936), British archaeologist John Garstang stated, “The walls of Jericho fell outwards so completely that the attackers would be able to clamber up and over their ruins into the city.”²⁶ This discovery is noteworthy because the walls of besieged cities typically fell inward, forced by the attackers.²⁷

The destruction of Sodom was long regarded as religious legend—until archaeological discoveries confirmed the existence of the city mentioned in the Old Testament and the fiery judgment that destroyed it.²⁸

Evidence from outside the Bible resoundingly supports the Bible’s historical reliability. It is the most thoroughly documented collection of writings in all of history. Thus, you have every reason to trust the Bible.

False assumption #6: The Bible doesn’t make any difference in how people live.

Sometimes it seems that people who claim to follow the Bible really aren’t any different from anybody else. We’ve all seen headlines like these:

“Pastor admits link to prostitute, resigns”

²⁴ William F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin, 1960), 127-128.

²⁵ John Elder, *Prophets, Idols, and Diggers* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1960), 159-160; Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History* (Wheaton: Scripture, 1969), 285. See also Luke 2:1-7.

²⁶ John Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History: Joshua, Judges* (New York: R. R. Smith, 1931), 146.

²⁷ See Joshua 6:20.

²⁸ Normal L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 50-51. See also Genesis 19: 23-29.

“Fundamentalist Christian sentenced in abortion clinic bombing”

“TV evangelist bilks donors of millions”

“Bible-toting athlete arrested in drug sting”

“Divorce rate same for churchgoers and non-churchgoers”

“Denomination in bitter dispute over articles of faith”

Chances are, you know some people whose behavior doesn't live up to the faith they claim to practice. This apparent hypocrisy has caused some skeptics to claim that the Bible is powerless to make a difference in a person's life.

Fact #6: God changes the lives of those who take His Word to heart.

I am walking evidence that the Bible is true and that Jesus can dramatically change a person's life. I'm not saying I'm perfect—far from it—or that I don't screw up from time to time. But thanks to the power of God's Word, I continue to enjoy the happiness, significance, and purpose that the Bible promises to those who trust in Jesus Christ.

I became a Christian during my second year of college. That means I accepted the fact that Jesus died on the cross for my sins, and I believed that God had raised Him from the dead. You've probably heard people talk about a “bolt of lightning” conversion experience. Well, nothing that dramatic happened to me. But, in time, there were some obvious changes in my life.

First, I *experienced mental peace*. My mind had always been in a whirlwind of conflicts. I couldn't concentrate to study or think. In the first few months after I decided to trust Jesus for the forgiveness of my sins and for my salvation, peace of mind began to quiet my thinking. I'm not talking about an absence of conflict—that was still there—but now I had a growing (and I would say *supernatural*) ability to cope with it.

Second, I *gained control over my temper*. I used to blow up at people for no reason. I still have painful, guilty memories of almost killing a man during my first year in college. But one day, after my decision to trust Jesus, I met a conflict head-on, only to find that my foul temper was gone!

Third, I *found freedom from resentment*. About five months after I became a Christian, a love for my father—clearly from God—flooded my life. It turned my resentment upside down. It was so strong that I was able to look my father in the eye and say, “Dad, I love you”—and really mean it!

How could this happen? I had *hated* my father. He had caused me no end of shame and embarrassment. He had abused my mother. And he was still a drunk. Yet the God whose story is told in the Bible had so deeply changed my life through the power of Jesus Christ that my hatred for my father turned to love.

Shortly after that, I was in a serious car accident and lay in bed with my neck in traction. I'll never forget my father standing over me and saying, “Son, how can you love a father like me?”

I said, “Dad, six months ago I despised you.” Then I shared with him my conclusions about Jesus Christ and how He had changed me.

My father said, “Son, if God can do in my life what I've seen Him do in yours, I want to give Him that opportunity.”

Often, a new Christian's life changes gradually over several days, weeks, or years. But my father changed right before my eyes. He touched alcohol only once more after that, but he got it as far as his lips and put it down. He didn't need it anymore.

It's overwhelming to me to realize that the God of the universe supervised the writing and passing down of His words from generation to generation so that you and I could have an accurate picture of Him.

It's amazing to hold in our hands a book that we can confidently believe is an accurate transmission of God-breathed words. And it's thrilling to know that God gives us His Word so we can know Him intimately and be changed by His power.

After more than forty years of watching God change thousands of lives—just like he changed mine and my father's, I've come to this conclusion: The Bible is true, alive, and powerful, and a relationship with Jesus Christ changes lives. If you ask Him to take control of your life, just watch how your attitudes and actions will change, because Jesus—the one who is at the center of everything in the Bible—is in the business of forgiving sin, removing guilt, changing people from the inside out, and healing relationships.

Will you give him that opportunity in your life?²⁹

²⁹ Portions of this chapter were adapted from Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993); Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1977); Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *Beyond Belief to Convictions* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2002); Josh McDowell and Thomas Williams, *The Relational Word* (Holiday, FL: Green Key, 2006).