



*How to Have a Friendship With
Jesus That Really Works*

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1. The Scriptures

Opening Story

When I was a kid, the TV show *To Tell the Truth* ranked right up there in my estimation with ice cream, football, and firecrackers. I loved it because picking the genuine from the fakes came easy for me because lots of pranksters practiced on me. That meant lots of time trying to guess whom I could trust.

As one of the youngest kids on the block, I was the target for tricks of all types. I got to guess whether the brown stuff in Judy's gift to me was really chocolate pudding, or whether Fred would *really* give me a dollar for spending the whole day in a tree, or who had filled my bathtub with slugs.

To Tell the Truth tested my skills of perception. The game featured three contestants. Each told stories about themselves, answered questions, and gave away secrets. In the end, though, only one of them was telling the truth—and the object was to figure out who. Did the man with glasses and a greasy mustache really escape killer sharks and survive for weeks on a deserted island? Did the quiet woman really live a secret life as a world-famous spy? With practice, I developed the following tools to help me determine who was telling the truth.

- Tool 1—Was there reasonable evidence for the claims the contestants made?
- Tool 2—Did the person seem believable?
- Tool 3—Over the course of the game, did a contestant's answer ever contradict information that he or she had given before?

These tips helped me ace the game “to tell the truth,” both on TV and in the real-life chocolate pudding version.

But life is not always a game. Many years ago I was sitting in the church lobby daydreaming out the window. Suddenly a flash of red ended my daydream. A man in a red shirt and torn blue jeans hurtled over the fence and bolted toward the back door of the church. Bursting through the doors, he shouted, “Get me a pastor. I need a pastor, right now!”

After the secretary coaxed him to have a seat and catch his breath, he told his story. “I was a key player in a mob family,” he began. He then described his conversion to Christianity and his resolve to abandon his gangster connections. Killing, selling drugs, gambling, and prostitution didn't really fit with following Jesus, he decided. The man explained how his decision had made the mobsters suspicious that he was an informant. “My life is in danger,” he sighed. “I came to the first church that I saw for help.”

I had heard many stories before, and this one was perfect—perfect for the game “to tell the truth.” But this was no game. If the story was true and the man was a real mobster, I could be in serious danger. I began to test my skills at “to tell the truth.” Was his story too outrageous? Was it simple, real, and possible? One thing that I had learned was that some of the most outrageous stories often turn out to be true—but so did the simple ones. I, the biggest fan of “to tell the truth,” was stumped.

As it turned out, the man disappeared on a Greyhound headed to Dayton. To this day I wonder whether or not he was an impostor.

Imagine when Jesus marched into a church one Sabbath, read the Scriptures, and then calmly announced to the congregation that He was, in fact, the Messiah that Isaiah had promised would save them from their sins. He had always been a nice kid, but the Messiah? Please. How could they believe such a wild claim?

Let's review the tools for discovering the truth:

- Tool 1—Was reasonable evidence given for the claims the contestants made?
- Tool 2—Did the person seem believable?
- Tool 3—Over the course of the game, did a contestant's answer ever contradict information that he or she had given before?

Look at the story from the beginning of Jesus' ministry and see for yourself. Think about how you would have felt if it had been your church in which He made such a startling announcement. How would you know if this bold young man was telling the truth? What tools would *you* use?

Life of Christ

Luke 4:14–21. “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery

of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.’ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ ”

What is this book called the Bible? Why do we have it? How do we know it's true? Can I really trust this book to be God's word?

Look up the Old Testament passages and the corresponding New Testament passages and write what was prophesied about the Messiah and fulfilled in the life of Christ.

Old Testament Prophecy

1. Micah 5:2
2. Isaiah 7:14
3. Genesis 49:8–10
4. Numbers 24:17
5. Isaiah 61:1–3
6. Psalm 55:12, 13
7. Zechariah 11:12, 13
8. Isaiah 53:4–7
9. Psalm 22:16
10. Psalm 22:18
11. Psalm 22:1
12. Psalm 34:20
13. Isaiah 53:9
14. Psalm 16:10

New Testament Fulfillment

- Luke 2:1–7
- Matthew 1:23
- Luke 1:30–32
- Matthew 2:1, 2
- Luke 4:16–21
- Matthew 26:47–50
- Matthew 27:3–9
- John 1:29; Acts 8:32
- Luke 23:33; 24:39
- Matthew 27:35
- Matthew 27:46
- John 19:36
- Matthew 27:57–60
- Matthew 28:2–7

The Scriptures

We Believe

Read the following verses and rewrite them in your own words, then chain-reference them in your Bible:

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| a. 2 Peter 1:20, 21 | f. Psalm 119:105 |
| b. 2 Timothy 3:16 | g. Proverbs 30:5 |
| c. Hebrews 1:1, 2 | h. 1 Thessalonians 2:13 |
| d. Hebrews 4:12 | i. James 1:22–25 |
| e. John 5:39 | |

The Holy Scriptures. “The Holy Scriptures . . . are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”¹ Everything we need for salvation is available in the Bible. The Bible is really about God revealing to us who He is and who we are in relation to Him. It reveals a trustworthy picture of God and becomes the authoritative guide for people as they follow Him.

Way to Pray

Write a letter to God about a verse or story in the Bible that helps you to know Jesus better. Discuss how the story helps you believe in Him. Thank Him for what the story says about God and how it makes you feel.

Powerful Parable. Read the parable in Matthew 7:24–27.

What do you think is the lesson Jesus was trying to teach in it? How is that lesson important to learn in your life today?

More Than Words

Luke 1:1–4 (John 20:19, 20). Write your own Bible. The purpose of Scripture is to speak to people about what God is like, who He is, and why we should follow Him. Here are the instructions:

Interview at least three people and ask them:

- What story would you tell from the Bible if you could tell only one? Why?
- What verse in the Bible would you say has changed your life the most? Why?

Ask yourself the same questions and compile a list of powerful verses and stories that help you understand God. Arrange them in a way that seems logical to you. Give it a title (other than the Bible).

In the Mirror

Think about your interview and share a few insights you gained.

Think also about what you love most about the Bible. Also write about what is difficult about studying the Bible.

2. The Trinity

Opening Story

Dr. Mr. God, I wish you would not make it so easy for people to come apart. I had to get three stitches and a shot. —Janet.”

I’m sure that when little Janet penned her letter to God she had no idea it would be published in a book titled *Children’s Letters to God*. Nor did the others. Take a look at some more:

“Dear God, How come you did all those miracles in the old days and don’t do any now? —Seymour.”

“Dear God, I bet it is very hard for you to love all of everybody in the world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it. —Nan.”

“Dear God, I didn’t think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool. —Eugene.”

“Dear God, Are you really invisible or is that just a trick? —Lucy.”

“Dear God, My brother is a rat. You should have given him a tail. Ha ha. —Danny.”

“Dear God, I do not think anyone could be a better God. Well, I just want you to know, but I’m not just saying that because you are God. —Charles.”

“Dear God, It rained for [our] whole vacation and is my father mad! He said some things about you that people are not supposed to say, but I hope you will not hurt him anyway. —Your friend—but I’m not going to tell you who I am.”²

Little kids are funny, aren’t they? So innocent. They have so much to learn and are so limited in their understanding of God. Right? Actually, when you look at the letters above,

some sound as if they could have come from someone older, though maybe with different words. What strikes me about these letters is the fact that there is a lot we don’t know about God. The question for you and me is, Do we know enough about God to love Him and serve Him?

Willie loved his father. He was funny, playful, smart, helpful, and a war hero. War hero? That’s right. The last one, however, was kind of a surprise to the boy. One day as Willie sat in the fourth row of his classroom the teacher announced a special guest who would share a few thoughts about the upcoming Veterans Day holiday. Willie’s heart jumped as he saw his father come through the door in full uniform. His father smiled at him as the teacher introduced Willie’s dad as a decorated war hero. The teacher continued to describe the deeds of bravery Willie’s father had shown under fire. For the first time the boy heard about a side of his father that he had never known before. Pride boiled over at recess when everyone mentioned to Willie how cool it must be to have a father like his. One thing is true: We don’t always know everything there is to know about our parents.

The same is true with God. After Jesus had risen from the dead in victory the disciples wanted to know what His next move was going to be. When would things really happen for them? Jesus told them something new about Him—He was going to leave and go to heaven. It was something the Father had been planning all along. And Jesus added something new about the Holy Spirit—“He’s on His way, and things are going to get a little crazy down here, so pay attention and be ready!”

As you look at this section of Scripture, imagine how the

The Trinity

disciples must have felt with the news. How would you feel?

c. 2 Corinthians 13:14

Life of Christ

Acts 1:4–9. “On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”

We Believe

Read the statements below and share with each other some of the explanations you have heard about the Trinity (God being both three and one).

As you look up each verse, be sure to mark and chain-reference your Bible as you go through the study. Also, write what you think the verse says, but try not to use the exact same words the Bible does.

The Trinity. “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of co-eternal Persons. God is immortal, all-powerful, all-knowing, above all, and ever present. He is infinite and beyond human comprehension, yet known through His self-revelation. He is forever worthy of worship, adoration, and service by the whole creation.”³

- a. Deuteronomy 6:4
- b. Matthew 28:19, 20

The Father. “God the Eternal Father is the Creator, Source, Sustainer, and Sovereign of all creation. He is just and holy, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. The qualities and powers exhibited in the Son and the Holy Spirit are also revelations of the Father.”⁴

As you look up each verse, be sure to mark and chain-reference your Bible as you go through the study. How does God’s Word describe the Father?

- a. Genesis 1:1
- b. John 3:16
- c. John 14:8–11

The Son. “God the Eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God’s power and was attested as God’s promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place, was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.”⁵

- a. John 1:1–3, 14
- b. Luke 1:35
- c. Colossians 1:13–20
- d. John 10:30

As you have read these verses and marked them in your Bible, what three characteristics of God the Son are most meaningful to you? Which passages describe those qualities?

The Holy Spirit. “God the eternal Spirit was active with the Father and the Son in Creation, incarnation, and redemption. He inspired the writers of Scripture. He filled Christ’s life with power. He draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God. Sent by the Father and the Son to be always with His children, He extends spiritual gifts to the church, empowers it to bear witness to Christ, and in harmony with the Scriptures leads it into all truth.”⁶

- a. Genesis 1:1, 2
- b. John 14:16–18, 26
- c. Acts 1:8
- d. Ephesians 4:11, 12

As you have read these verses and marked them in your Bible, what three characteristics of God the Holy Spirit are most meaningful to you? Which passages describe those qualities?

Way to Pray

Make a top 10 list of what you know is true about God. As you pray this week, tell Him what you believe about Him and ask Him to show you something new.

More Than Words

Interview someone who you think would answer these questions for you:

- When did you first realize that you knew enough about God to love Him and serve Him?
- What do you think the job descriptions are for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?
- What do you love most about each member of the Godhead? Why?

In the Mirror

Think about your interview and share a few insights you gained.

Take a few minutes and journal about the people you know who remind you of a loving God.