



*Taking Your Relationship  
With God Into Your Own Hands*

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# 1. The Scriptures

## Opening Story

I stood at the back of the crowd, watching the magic show in the mall. Even more intriguing than the magician, however, was the girl beside me. She bawled like a burst pipe as the magician sliced a woman in half.

“It’s OK, honey,” her father said. “That woman didn’t really get cut in half. It’s just a trick. Let’s go meet the magician, and he’ll show you the woman is OK.”

After the show the father escorted his girl to the stage. “Excuse me, sir, but your sawing trick greatly disturbed my daughter, Chelsea. Surely you will tell her that cutting a person in two is a trick, won’t you?”

“Well—uh—of course the woman is OK and now in one piece . . .”

“But please show Chelsea that the woman is safe.”

After fifteen minutes of haggling, the magician surrendered his secret like a monkey giving up his last banana. “Of course she’s OK. She is right there.”

Because his assistant had changed out of her costume, however, the girl didn’t recognize the woman. Even after the magician walked the girl through a step-by-step drill of the trick, the kid wouldn’t buy it. Seeing the real thing did not equate to believing it.

Isn’t it amazing how we can refuse to believe what is so clearly real? For example, science keeps documenting the deadly effects of tobacco, yet people still smoke. In a world swarming with sexually transmitted diseases young people remain as promiscuous as ever. The Bible has been around for centuries and has proved itself to be the most trustworthy guideline for

living. Nevertheless, many people ignore its counsel.

Why? Because we tend to believe the magic trick rather than the evidence. Consider the story Jesus told about the rich man and Lazarus.

## Life of Christ

**Luke 16:19–31.** “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If

they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

## Opening Questions

Do you think it is easier to believe your eyes or what was written years ago in the Bible? Why?

Jesus spoke to the religious leaders so pointedly because they knew the Scriptures but didn't "live them."

Read the statement below and mark or chain-reference the verses in your Bible.

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

Which verses help you understand the purpose of the Bible the most? Write a brief statement of your belief about the Bible.

## We Believe

**The Holy Scriptures.** “The Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, 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. In this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation.

The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God's acts in history.”<sup>1</sup>

## Way to Pray

Scan through Psalm 119 and notice what David says in prayer to God about Scripture. Write a short prayer to God about what you want to say to Him about His Word.

## More Than Words

Interview someone you know about his or her faith in the Bible. Here are a few questions to ask:

- When in your life did you come to trust the Bible as God's word for you?
- When has the Bible been a real source of strength to you? Have you had times when you had doubts about God's Word?
- If you could tell only one story from Scripture, which one would you choose to help a friend know God? Why?

## In the Mirror

Think about how important the Bible is to your life now. Does it point out some things in your life that you would you like to change?

## 2. The Trinity

### Opening Story

*TransWorld Skateboarding* asked some famous skateboarders the question “Do you believe in God?” Here are some of the responses:

“Not in the traditional sense of a supreme being. I believe in more of a unified force in the world.”—Tony Hawk.

“I believe in my brain: God’s in there, and it’s really small. . . . We’re just here, man. We don’t know what’s going on. . . . All we know is that we don’t know.”—Tim O’Connor.

“I don’t know if there is one physical man, but I do [believe in God] in one form or another.”—Rick Howard.

“Yes, I do. I believe in God, and I think everyone has their own interpretation of what God is and who they know to be their God. I’m not really close with my God right now, but I do believe in God, for sure.”—Reese Forbes.

“I believe there is something. I don’t know if it’s a someone, a female, or a male. I couldn’t tell you what it is. But there’s definitely something that is greater than ourselves. I do feel we were created somehow, but do I believe in God? I don’t think I believe in God because God is just a word that was given to it. Like I could call my skateboard my god, you know?”—Ricky Oyola.

“No, I don’t. I just can’t see it. It’s not real to me. It just feels like something so that people won’t be so scared of dying—something to look forward to. I’m just meat and bones, and then it’s done.”—Rick McCrank.

“I believe in something, you know? I don’t know enough about God, you know? I know that I want to believe. . . . I feel some spirit. Maybe if you just feel good about yourself and

what you’re doing . . . maybe that’s what exists.”—Brad Staba.

“Absolutely. I’m sure because something has to come from something. It can’t just come from nothing. And we all know that there’s a force that separates good from evil.”—Rob Dyrdek.

“No. I don’t believe in God. I think that when I die I’m gonna rot in the ground just like every other animal.”—Moses Itkonen.

“Of course I believe in God. If you don’t believe in God, then you think you’re God.”—Jamie Thomas.<sup>2</sup>

What do you think of their impressions of God? A couple of thoughts popped into my mind as I thought about their answers:

- The God I know not only wants us to know Him personally, but also goes out of His way to make it happen.
- The God I know is a person, or has person-like qualities, for He created us “in His image.”
- The only way to really know God is through the ways He reveals Himself to us—primarily through Scripture.

As you study the Trinity, notice this supernatural encounter with Christ and think about what it really means both to believe in God and to know Him.

### Life of Christ

**Luke 24:36–49.** “While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and frightened, thinking they

saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence. He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.’”

Here is one of the many sections of Scripture that mention the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit in the same place. What can you tell about the different roles that the members of the Trinity have by looking at this story?

## We Believe

**The Trinity.** “There is one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, a unity of three 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.”<sup>3</sup>

- a. Deuteronomy 6:4
- b. Matthew 28:19, 20
- c. 2 Corinthians 13:14

**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.”<sup>4</sup>

- 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.”<sup>5</sup>

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

**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.

## The Trinity

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.”<sup>6</sup>

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

What do you believe about the Trinity—who God is—and what do you think is the best way to describe His many sides?

### Way to Pray

As you pray this week, talk openly and honestly about what you think is true about God. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you

in as many ways as possible. Prayerfully read through the Bible and discover what He might be trying to say about Himself.

### More Than Words

Interview a teacher this week with the following questions:

- When did you come to an understanding of the Trinity (God’s threefold existence)?
- How would you teach this to a fourth grader?
- What do you know for sure about the Trinity, and what do you still have questions about?

### In the Mirror

Write your thoughts on this mystery of God’s existence. Share your own thoughts and questions with your partner.

# 3. The Great Controversy

## Opening Questions

**Either/Or.** “My beliefs determine my actions” or “My actions determine my beliefs.” (Explain.)

Can you think of examples of both mind-sets in the people you see today?

## Opening Story

Art Linkletter saw a small boy scrawling wildly on a sheet of paper. “What are you drawing?” Linkletter asked.

“I’m drawing a picture of God.”

“You can’t do that, because nobody knows what God looks like.”

“They will when I’m finished,” the boy confidently replied.”

A. W. Tozer once said that the most important thing about us is what we believe about God. Perceptions—the way we see things—are powerful. The perception I had of my next-door neighbor scared me to death. Mr. Rob was tall and bony with a bushy gray mustache and an Adam’s apple the size of—well, an apple. Because he just looked weird, he made me nervous.

One night as we were eating at the dinner table Mr. Rob did something to alter my view of him entirely. I watched him nervously because I never knew when he would attack. During the middle of the meal his expression changed from scary to downright silly. I giggled at the sight. His face returned to its normal scary pose for a moment, then he repeated his silly look when no one else was watching. By now my eyes were riveted on him as I took another bite.

Like the final explosion of fireworks on the Fourth of July Mr. Rob rapidly contorted his face, repeating in a sensational

show of tremendous talent all the expressions he had made during dinner. The food in my mouth spewed out like a volcano as I laughed uncontrollably. I laughed so hard that my dinner made its way through my nose, ears, and I think through my eyelids. My mother and father stared in horror at me as Mr. Rob’s face effortlessly resumed its gaze back at his plate of food. While I was scolded for my bad manners, I changed my mind about my skinny neighbor. He wasn’t a freak—he was a riot. Mr. Rob became an endearing part of my family, and during the years following I saw what the rest of my family had already observed—a brilliant, witty, caring human whose passion in life was to create a moment of artistic surprise.

Perceptions. The fight between Christ and Satan is about perceptions and beliefs. Lucifer—tainted by pride and self-exaltation—saw God as a tyrant. As a result, he deceived the angels and now seeks to convince the world to believe a lie about God’s character. The bottom line? The targets of Satan’s fiery darts are our minds—what we think of God and what we believe God thinks of us. If Satan can reshape our perspective—our viewpoint—only a little, it is enough to taint, even destroy, our relationship with our Father in heaven. Notice the battle in the life of Jesus.

## Life of Christ

**Luke 11:14–20.** “Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, ‘By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’ Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. Jesus knew



## The Great Controversy

their thoughts and said to them: ‘Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.’ ”

- |                      |                    |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| a. Revelation 12:4–9 | e. Isaiah 14:12–14 |
| b. Ezekiel 28:12–18  | f. Genesis 3       |
| c. Genesis 6–8       | g. 2 Peter 3:6     |
| d. 1 Corinthians 4:9 |                    |

Which verse speaks to you the most about this topic? Why? What do you believe about the war between Christ and Satan? In a few sentences, describe how you would teach this to a third grader.

### We Believe

**The Great Controversy.** “All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with the freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God’s adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation

at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.”<sup>8</sup>

### Way to Pray

Take a few moments and write down all the characteristics you can think of about God. In your prayer life this week talk to Him about the character traits you love and are grateful for, and also those qualities you don’t quite understand.

### More Than Words

Interview a college student this week and ask him or her the following questions:

- How has your view of God changed in the past ten years?
- When in your life have you been most aware that the battle between good and evil involves you personally? Describe that time or the events surrounding it.
- What advice would you give a teenager who is seeking to know who God “really” is in a world that misunderstands or misrepresents Him?

### In the Mirror

Think about the war between Christ and Satan. What do you believe it was like back when it started? How do you think it will end?