



Have we found the meaning of life?

5

Discover the Missing Dimension

“I have Immortal longings In me.” — Shakespeare,
Antony and Cleopatra, Act v., sc. 2, 1.282.

Many people turn to religion in their search for spiritual meaning. This is nothing new. In the past, the European continent was dominated by Christianity. If you lived somewhere in Europe, it didn't matter if you were a peasant or a king. Through the Church, you could reach beyond yourself and touch the infinite. The Church was there at every important occasion of your life. It baptized you, married you, and buried you. It replied to your questions and explained your dilemmas. Though in private you may have disagreed with the answers it gave, at least you knew what they were.

But what about today? The world has changed dramatically since then. Man has walked on the moon. He has probed the edges of the universe. He has dissected the atom. He has harnessed the forces of electricity and unravelled the genetic code. In every field of inquiry, his knowledge has exploded. Powerful computers now thrust him forward, shattering the barriers of ignorance and superstition that imprisoned earlier generations.

So, where are we? Has all our technology brought us any closer to the infinite? Have we found the meaning of life? Not

really. We've just become more efficient at analyzing it, quantifying it, and computerizing it. In the meantime, religion has faded into the background — or has it? For most of us, it has,

little to offer. Men with their collars on backward mumbling pious words. Stained glass windows, plaster saints, altars candles, and incense. Ceremonial robes and rituals. We've almost decided that no one really has the answer to the void we still feel.

But in the middle of all this, there *is* an answer to the missing dimension. Curiously enough, it isn't a "religion" at all. This calls for a bit of investigation—an open mind, if you will. What is this answer? Does it really satisfy? Could it work for us?

TOPICS

Religious Burn-Out
The Void that Remains
A Sensible Choice
A Lasting Solution

FOCUS

This chapter will help you to . . .

- State why many regard religion as irrelevant or harmful.
- Understand why you feel a sense of incompleteness.
- Evaluate the ways people try to find a deeper meaning in life.
- Find the solution that meets your need.

RELIGIOUS BURNOUT

Focal Point 1. Describe your personal reaction to religion.

In today's world, two opposite things seem to be happening in religion, both at the same time. For some people, religion is taking on a more important role. For others, the reverse is true. What's going on?

More Important

In some ways, religion seems more prominent than ever. Islamic missionaries are making converts in Europe. Yogis and gurus from India are gaining followers — and amassing huge fortunes — in the United States. North American sects like the Jehovah's Witnesses are penetrating the Roman Catholic strongholds of Latin America. And spiritism is increasing worldwide, with occult practices becoming more popular in Europe, Britain, and the United States.

But not all the activity is peaceful. Serious conflicts that have a religious element are in the news almost every day. Some of the rivalries are centuries old; others have a more recent origin. In Sri Lanka Buddhist and Hindu factions have had serious confrontations. In Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants continue to fight each other. In the Middle East, hostilities between Israeli Jews and Arab Muslims keep the area in a constant turmoil. These struggles aren't polite exchanges of opinion; they are pitched battles and reprisals that bring bloodshed and death.

Religion seldom appears to stand on its own as a force for peace in the world today. Instead, it often adds fuel to the fire. Religious persecution has always existed, of course. Yet there are signs that it is growing more intense. In many places around the globe, intolerant zealots and militant fundamentalists of all kinds are becoming more violent than ever toward those who disagree with them.



1 WHAT IS YOUR RELIGIOUS CLIMATE?

Choose the sentence that best describes the role of religion in your society.

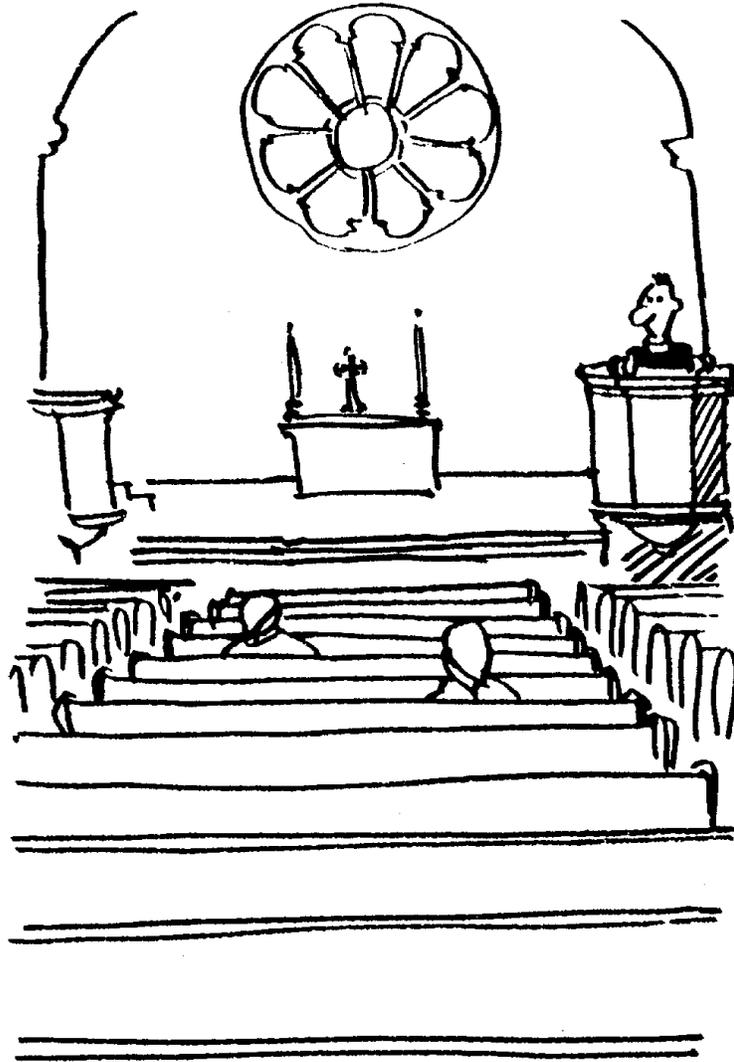
- a There are very few religious differences; most people either follow the same religion or have no strong religious ties.
 - b Some religious differences exist, but there is a general mood of tolerance among the various groups.
 - c From time to time there are conflicts involving religion—either among the different religious groups or between them and the government.
 - d Serious problems frequently arise in which religion is a major factor.
 - e Religious differences have fuelled violent confrontations in which people have been imprisoned and killed.
-
-

We've looked at some evidence that people are becoming more religious, and that religion is having a greater impact on world affairs. Now let's look at the other side of the picture.

Less Important

In much of Europe and the West, the traditional religion of Christianity has declined sharply in the past century. Many city cathedrals and village chapels have become hollow, empty shells. Once they were important community centres. Now they echo with the footsteps of tourists and the whispers of old ladies. The faith that inspired thousands to build them has vanished. Today, people no longer look to the Church for answers. They feel that it has no realistic solutions for problems like unemployment, overpopulation, racism, violence, immigration, global pollution, and war. What has happened?

For one thing, the Church seems to have lost its nerve. In an age when people need certainty more than ever, its leaders have fled in all directions at once. They seem unable to guide people through the complex difficulties of modern life. Who sounded the retreat? Not the worshipers in the pews, but some of the



For many men and women today in Western society, traditional religion is a thing of the past.

Church's most respected spokesmen. Beginning in the mid-1800s, they started to abandon the historic teachings of Christianity. By the late 1960s, the downhill slide was complete. They had left the altar, turned off the lights, and walked out the door. "God is dead," they announced. Today, well-known bishops openly discuss their unbelief on TV talk shows and in the newspapers. Listening to all this, what is the average person to think? If the leaders of the Church themselves don't really believe in God, what's left? In a word, *nothing*. Man must solve his problems strictly on his own. He must decide what is right or wrong the best he can. God is unnecessary.

Efforts to stem the tide of famine in Africa in the 1980s weren't spearheaded by churchmen, but by pop musicians and athletes. And there are more things that just don't add up. Consider the Church's stand on birth control, for example. Why should a celibate priest presume to tell husbands and wives what methods they can and can't use? Besides that, how can he understand the daily problems of family living?

For many men and women today in Western society, traditional religion is a thing of the past. The familiar rituals may offer a certain kind of comfort to some, just because they are familiar. But for the majority, they have little value. It seems clear that religion, *per se*, is not the answer people are looking for.



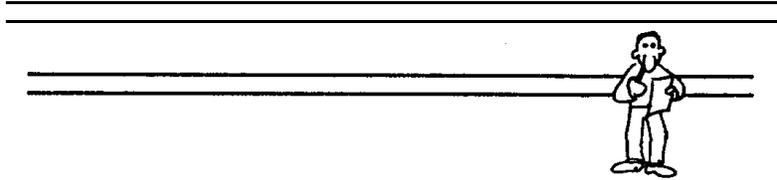
2 SKETCH YOUR PERSONAL RELIGIOUS PROFILE

First, answer the following.

- a Were you raised to follow a particular religion?
.....
- b If so, what was it?
- c Do you personally follow it today?.....

d If your answer to item **c** is “No,” what would you give as your main reason why you don’t follow the religion you were taught?

.....



3 Now, complete this survey by circling the number that best describes your reaction to religion. (If you don’t follow any particular religion, give your opinion of the one you know the best.) Use this key.

- 4** = strongly agree, **3** = agree, **2** = disagree,
- 1** = strongly Disagree, **0** = no opinion.

Then add your responses for a total score.

I would say that the religion I follow or know the best offers people . . .

- a** guidelines for solving everyday problems. **4 3 2 1 0**
- b** leadership in showing compassion to the needy. **4 3 2 1 0**
- c** a vital, caring community to belong to. **4 3 2 1 0**
- d** positive spiritual experiences. **4 3 2 1 0**
- e** effective ways of dealing with guilt. **4 3 2 1 0**
- f** comfort in times of bereavement and loss. **4 3 2 1 0**
- g** a philosophy of life that makes sense. **4 3 2 1 0**

The religious scene certainly is a study in contrasts. There are aggressive, new forces at work. At the same time, the influence of the traditional church has disappeared almost completely. In the midst of all this, people continue to look for some kind of spiritual dimension or meaning in their lives, even those who don’t consider themselves to be religious. What is this search all about?

THE VOID THAT REMAINS

Focal Point 2. *Evaluate the ways in which you have tried to find a deeper meaning in life.*

It is an odd fact that we humans never seem to be satisfied with what we have, no matter how much it is. Even when we reach our goals and have every reason to be content, we still have feelings of boredom, unhappiness, depression, anxiety, dread, meaninglessness, and despair. Sometimes life looks like an endless treadmill. We go to work to earn the money to buy the bread to give us the strength to go to work to earn the money to . . . *is that all there is?*

Exactly what *do* we want? What's missing? It's not very easy to describe, is it? Yet a voice deep inside us keeps insisting that there has to be more to this business of living than what's on the surface. Perhaps one way to get at it is to say that what we want is the opposite of what we feel. Instead of boredom and frustration, we want excitement and fulfilment. Instead of depression and fear, we want satisfaction, peace, wholeness, purpose, and hope. We want our lives to have meaning. We want to know that we're not just insignificant specks on an unimportant planet in a heartless universe.



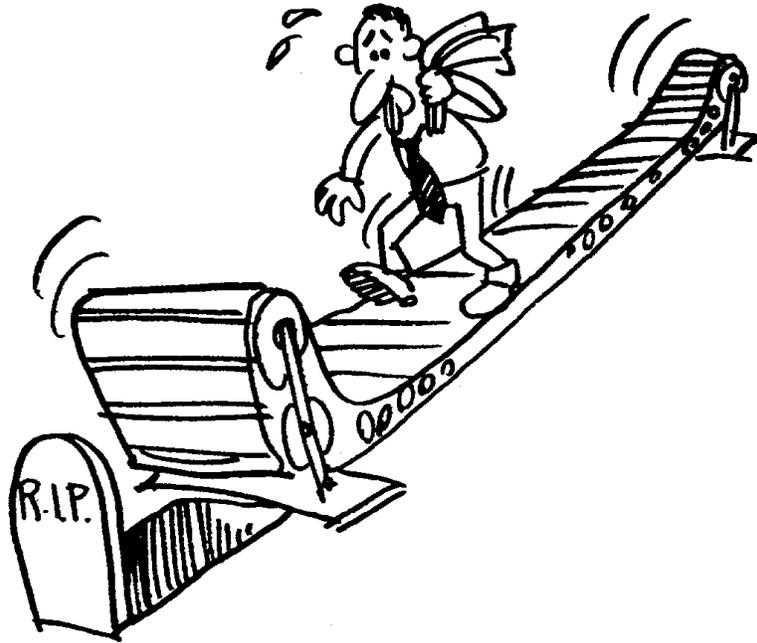
4 Here are some words that may describe what seems to be missing in your life. Mark those that come closest to what you feel, or write in your own description:

- FULFILMENT PEACE MEANING
 WHOLENESS PURPOSE

Or?

A Room with No Exits

There's no easy solution, though. When we set out to find what's missing, we come up against a serious obstacle: *nothing around us seems to be the answer*. Our real need can't be met by more money, more possessions, or more experiences. As long as we think it can, we are doomed to failure. We can stay busy for years at a time trying one thing after another, perhaps even for our whole lives. But our efforts will bring no lasting results. The happiness we are looking for will fade away each time like a mirage in the desert. It simply won't be there. Of course, we're not the only ones who have this need, this feeling of emptiness.



Sometimes life looks like an endless treadmill.

Others have sensed it too. People today are exploring many different pathways in order to find a deeper sense of purpose and meaning.

Who's Finding What?

Astrology, Eastern religions and meditation, even the occult and spiritism have attracted a significant following in recent times. Where do these roads lead?

Astrology

Astrology is the belief that the stars and planets influence the character and destiny of human beings. Through astrological horoscopes, people receive advice based on their sign of the Zodiac (the time of year they were born). Daily horoscopes are found in the newspapers of almost every major city and featured in countless books and magazines. Do the stars hold the key to life?

Not exactly. The facts show that astrology can't fulfil its promises. Its broad, vague predictions are impossible to verify. Many of them do *not* come true. Coincidence can easily explain the rest. Probably the most that could be said is that astrology demonstrates the power of the mind. For example, suppose I've been trying to decide whether or not to get married and I consult my horoscope for guidance. It says that this is a good time for making alliances. Aha! I should get married right away. My marriage will be successful because my horoscope says so.

But if I do, and if things go well, should the stars take the credit? More likely it's my positive mental attitude that has helped. But wait a minute. Before I even get that far there could be a snag. What if my prospective mate's horoscope says the opposite of mine? Now what?

The most serious inadequacy of astrology, though, is that it is based on the material universe. In other words, *it is a materialistic method of solving non-materialistic problems*. Even if the planets are in perfect, harmonic alignment, will that really help me? Human problems need personal, not cosmic, solutions.

Eastern religions

Several Eastern religions have recently become more popular in the West. Beliefs like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and others offer explanations for the suffering of man, the existence of good and evil, and the purpose of life. Some have complicated

moral codes and dietary laws. Others emphasize meditation and religious experience. How satisfying are these beliefs?

Many of their founders thought deeply about the world and its contradictions. They sought a sense of balance. Do you see a crippled beggar on the street? Don't be overly concerned, the Hindu says. It's the law of *karma* at work. He is suffering for his evil deeds in some previous life. Are you constantly frustrated? Learn how to meditate, the Buddhist advises. Find unity with the origin and meaning of the world. Seek *nirvana*, the cessation of all desire. Are you upset by cruelty and violence? Understand the yin and the *yang*, the Chinese philosopher replies. Realize that darkness and light and good and bad are all part of the whole.

Certainly these religions acknowledge the fact that life has a dimension that can't be seen or measured. And they preserve the ideas of many wise men. No one could dismiss their teachings and insights as worthless babblings. But they are lacking in many serious ways.

Consider meditation, for example. Does this practice bring us closer to discovering the meaning of the world and our own lives? Not really. During meditation, no truly *personal* communication takes place. It can't lead us anywhere beyond the fact that what is, is. Examine the goal of *nirvana*. This aim is essentially a denial of all the longings that we feel. Does that really inspire us and give us hope? It seems more like a terrible kind of dead end to everything that makes us who we are. And what about *karma*? Is an attitude of resignation and acceptance the best response we can make to those who are suffering? Love and compassion would say otherwise. The *Yin-Yang* principle is equally discordant. Why do we instinctively avoid death and pain if they are a completely "normal" part of living?

To some extent, we must admit, the moral codes of these beliefs and philosophies are worth applauding. Yet they, too, are inadequate. Where is the actual power to live by them? Where is the remedy for failure? All of it still falls short of the mark .

Spiritism and the Occult

In a number of Western societies, spiritist and occult practices have increased recently. These include seances for consulting the dead, psychic “channeling” of messages from the spirit world, black and white magic, fortune-telling, witchcraft, sorcery, divination, and Satanism. Through these practices, people try to contact the supernatural and wield power over others. Many date back to primal religions of pre-Christian Europe.

Today, spiritist and occult activities have resurfaced and are spreading throughout society. Devotees gather at ancient holy sites, such as Stonehenge in England. Covens of witches regularly meet in some European towns. Seances are held by mediums. Psychics offer guidance. Books on sorcery and magic are sold in stores. Computer games featuring occult themes are available. Movies about demon possession and supernatural experiences are shown in cinemas and on television. Rock stars sing twisted, obscene lyrics; some even proclaim themselves to be Satanists.

What happens when a person becomes involved in these practices? At first glance, they seem harmless enough. Many who dabble in them discover that most of the so-called “manifestations” are complete fakes. But there’s another side to the story. Those who seriously and persistently search for contact with the supernatural through these methods place themselves in a very dangerous position. Some of them end up by touching something real. But what they find is sinister and malevolent.

They may experience a sense of power and excitement at the beginning. But fear, darkness, and confusion follow. Even those who think they are strong enough to keep the upper hand are eventually overcome. For some, the pathway that begins with an innocent experiment leads to insanity, murder, and death. Teenagers who have taken part in role-playing video games based on the occult, such as “Dungeons and Dragons,” have actually murdered others and committed suicide. In some spiritist and Satanist cults, human sacrifices have been made. These are high prices to pay.

Clearly, the evidence shows that there are unseen forces in this world that can’t be totally explained away. People are capable of contacting them. But they are not capable of completely controlling

what happens as a result. Instead of being the masters, they become the victims. Excitement and thrills? Yes, but destruction in the end.



5 SOME PROBING QUESTIONS

a If you have been searching for a deeper meaning in your life, mark the words that name the things you have tried, or write in your descriptions.

- Traditional religion
- Philosophy
- Astrology
- Meditation
- Drugs
- Spiritism
- Psychic guidance

Or?

b What results have you had?

.....

6 WHAT'S YOUR CHANGE POTENTIAL?

Mark the phrase that best describes where you are right now.

- 1-Not aware of a need
 - 2-Dissatisfied with life but not looking
 - 3-Trying various solutions
 - 4-Disillusioned or seeking to escape
 - 5-Ready to examine a new approach
-
-

Now let's take a look at a positive answer to the missing dimension in life. This answer is not a religious organization or a philosophy. But it completely fits the needs that men and women have for meaning and purpose in life. In fact, it is the only one that does.

A SENSIBLE CHOICE

Focal Point 3. *Discover the positive, authentic answer to the missing dimension in life.*

If none of the pathways we have explored so far is the solution to our need, what is? Philosophies, moral codes, and formal religions are all inadequate. They have no life or personality in them. The people around you are inadequate too. The void in your life is much greater than they can fill. You need complete acceptance, total love, genuine fulfilment, and lasting hope. These are not material needs. They can't be satisfied by anything you can buy. They are spiritual needs, and they need a spiritual solution.

If you have found genuine peace and fulfilment in the life you lead now, then you have no reason to search for something else. But if you haven't, this is your opportunity to examine an answer. This answer will meet your spiritual needs. You will find it by having a personal relationship with a personal God. Such a God exists, and He wants you to know Him.

The God Who Is There

We are not talking about the *word* "God," or the *idea* God. We are not talking about some sort of vague, mindless energy. We do not mean the notion that god-is-everything-that-is. Absolutely not. When we use the name, "God," we point to a specific Person. We mean God Himself. This God speaks, moves, and acts. He is alive today. He is the source of everything that is, yet He is not confined by it. On the contrary, He stands apart from what He has made in majestic, awesome glory. Everything that is good comes from Him. *He created you and designed you to know Him.* He is aware of you at this instant, wherever you are. He knows everything about you.

We are talking about the possibility of a unique relationship between you and this God. This relationship is the missing dimension in your life. In it, there is real communication and understanding. He speaks to you, and you speak to Him. There is genuine friendship. And there is much more — more that will continue to unfold far into the future. This God wants to bring you into a true, satisfying relationship with Himself. How can this be

done? You can't make it happen; the distance is too great. *But He can.* He has removed all the barriers that separate you from Him. Let's examine these barriers between us and this God we are speaking about. What are they, and how did He deal with them?

The Fatal Flaw

To put it simply, the barriers between us and God are there because we have set them up. We have chosen to shut Him out of our lives. *We have decided that we wanted to be left alone.* This is the reason for the void we feel, the gnawing sense of emptiness and futility. These are only the superficial symptoms, though. In order to understand our true condition, we must see ourselves from His point of view. He knows all that we can be, and He knows what we are. His judgement is incisive and accurate.

According to His analysis, we are in a state of revolt and anarchy. We have deliberately refused to accept the proofs of His existence that are everywhere around us. We have worshipped anything and everything but Him. We have disobeyed the laws that He gave us for our welfare and protection. In fact, we have turned our backs on Him completely.

Though we want to deny it, we know He is right. Something is drastically wrong with the world, and something is drastically wrong with us. No matter what is happening around us, good or bad, we don't have internal peace or contentment. Certainly we may love our families and friends, those who love us. But what about our enemies? What about those who persistently mistreat us and cause trouble for us?

The true outlines of what we really are may *be* blurred by the manners we have learned. But fault is still there, running all the way through us. When the pressures become too great and the price is too high, we end up by saying "me first." We have an obstinate tendency to want our way no matter who suffers. There are times when, rather than face embarrassment, we reject what we know to be true and defend what is false. Because of all this, we are now going down a road that will ultimately lead us to failure, defeat, and death.

Even the natural order of the planet has been affected by our rebellion. We have misused the power He gave us. We have wasted the earth and its resources. We have caused harm to ourselves and others. We have offended Him and broken His heart. He says that we are diseased, guilty, and unfaithful, and He speaks the truth. Our condition is serious. We are full of disease; now death is inevitable. We have committed crimes against Him; now prison awaits. We have rejected His love; now a final divorce is unavoidable.



7 What have you seen around you that supports what God has said about people and society?
 War Greed Injustice
 Exploitation Crime Or?

8 God says that you need His forgiveness. What things have you done that show He is right?
 Ignored Him Led a selfish life
 Envied and hated other people Hurt other people
Or?

Guilty on all counts? Keep reading. There's an answer!

The Total Cure

In the face of all this, what can be done? God has provided the only solution that is great enough. He is against everything that is destructive. He has said that He will remake the entire universe and remove all that is evil. In fact, His work of transformation has already begun. He has chosen to start with us, for we are the ones He has created to know Him. He offers us His pardon, healing, and forgiveness. He loves us in spite of everything we have done, and He wants our separation from Him

to end. If we will let Him, He will change us and bring us into harmony with Himself and all He intends to do.

At the same time, He will exercise complete fairness and justice. He can do this because He has already taken on Himself the full effect of our rebellion and all the damage it has caused. These effects could not be simply forgotten or ignored. Why not? *Because He gave us real power to affect our environment, and real power to know Him and respond to Him.* He is the only one who could reverse the terrible process of death and decay that we started. And He has done it! He personally defeated the forces of destruction and paid for our misdeeds.

In Jesus Christ, God suffered in our place. Let's take a closer look at what happened when Jesus came. It is important for us to understand what He did because it changed everything. He made it possible for us to know God in a new way.

A LASTING SOLUTION

Focal Point 4. *Begin now to experience the true solution to your need for meaning and purpose in life.*

Jesus Christ was not a myth. The events of His life are not a matter of hearsay. They were recorded by eyewitnesses in documents that can be verified historically. These testimonies show that Jesus was a man who actually lived on earth. But they also show that He was much more than that. He was both the son of man *and* the Son of God at the same time without conflict or confusion. He is both today. No one else is like Him! *This is why He is the only one who can help us.* You can have a true, living relationship with the true, living God. But in order to have that kind of relationship, you must be bonded to Jesus Christ, God's only Son. When and how did Jesus bring us back to God?

The Time and Place

For hundreds of years, God had spoken to men and women through the Jewish nation and its prophets. They said that one day, a Christ or Messiah would come, a person who would be authorized to do God's work. He would restore the broken relationship between God and the human race. These ancient

prophecies were fulfilled in the land of Israel during the days when the Romans ruled much of the Middle East.

The birth of Jesus Christ took place in the town of Bethlehem when Caesar Augustus was Roman emperor, Herod was king of the Jews, and Quirinius was governor of Syria. He reached adulthood and carried out His mission at the time when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. As a Jew, He lived an exemplary religious life.

Many Jews accepted Jesus. His miracles proved that He was the Christ. But others found His words and His claims to be profoundly disturbing. Some were interested in freedom from Roman oppression; but this was not what He offered. Instead, He talked about knowing God. He said that their traditional, organized religion had become useless. His indictment infuriated the religious leaders. As He continued to heal the sick and teach about His Father, they became more and more opposed to Him. They began to look seriously for some way to get rid of Him once and for all.

The Midnight Betrayal

Late one night, one of the followers of Jesus came to them, a man named Judas Iscariot. In exchange for information about where and when they might seize Jesus, they had agreed to pay him a certain sum of money. Now the moment had arrived. According to Judas, Jesus had just gone to the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem to pray. He was alone except for a few of His followers. Here was their chance! Yet they were afraid. They could not deny the unique power and authority He possessed .

Armed with swords and clubs and bringing soldiers to bolster their courage, they followed Judas. But when they actually confronted Jesus, He was curiously unresisting. He said that though He could stop them from taking Him, He would not. He told them that the episode that was about to unfold was the supreme goal of His mission. By torchlight, the band made its way from the garden of Gethsemane to the courtyard of Caiaphas, the High Priest.

In front of the assembled leaders, Caiaphas charged Jesus to reply under oath whether He was the Son of God. Jesus said, "I

am.” Caiaphas turned to the leaders. “You have heard the blasphemy,” he said. “What do you think?” With one voice, they condemned Him to die. There was a problem, though.

They had no legal authority to execute criminals. Jesus would have to be tried by Pilate, the Roman governor. They bound Him and led Him to Pilate’s hall, and there He was examined again. Pilate could find nothing wrong with Him. Then suddenly Pilate backtracked on his verdict and, without securing a conviction, sentenced Jesus to death.

Throughout His trials during that long night and the morning that followed, Jesus was repeatedly questioned, slandered, spat upon, ridiculed, insulted, beaten, and flogged. At last, after He had suffered those hours of abuse, after He had been crowned in mockery with spines and thorns, after He had been led to the place of execution on a hill called Golgotha outside of Jerusalem, the soldiers carried out the sentence: death by crucifixion — slow, torturous, horrible, and agonizing. They nailed the hands and feet of Jesus the Son of God to a cross.

The Final Moments

Outwardly, Jesus Christ was just another convict being executed. Perhaps He was a somewhat unusual one, though, because His “crimes were religious,” according to His accusers. But what really took place when He suffered and died? Our language can scarcely begin to describe it.

The One whose power gave life to all things let His own life ebb away. His hands, the ones that had touched the sick with healing and compassion, were nailed to a Roman cross. He had already laid aside His honour as the Son of God in order to become a man. Now He laid aside everything else He had. The One who made the human race allowed Himself to be rejected and despised by them. The One whose word created the universe submitted Himself to derision and scorn. He was torn, disfigured, and murdered. It is an event which is too heavy, too awesome for our shallow, petty minds.

We want gods of our own making — handsome heroes, winners, and super-stars. But in the face of Jesus Christ as He

suffered and died we see the real God. We see the One who was glad to pour out all He had for us, who went the awful, final distance to rescue us. We see the One who willingly carried the weight of all our misdeeds — for all of us who have ever lived and ever will live — until at the end He was crushed by it.

He felt many blows in those hours, but one was the most grievous of them all. It was the wrenching, tearing separation from His Father whom He loved. That was the ultimate price. But even that He paid. Throughout the whole unimaginable ordeal, He never lost sight of us. He knew that we were unable to save ourselves, and as His life ended He pleaded forgiveness for us.

We are confounded by this sight. The enormity of what He has done haunts our thinking and troubles our minds. But we are not asked to completely understand it. No one really can. *What we are asked to do is to reach out and accept it.* He does not compel us. He respects our freedom of choice, a freedom He gave us when He made us. Still, our need and our guilt are such that we are faced with only two choices. We can continue to walk away from Him, proudly refusing to admit our guilt and our wretchedness. Or we can turn around, come towards Him, and embrace all that He is and offers to us. If we do, we discover that everything changes.

The Awesome Victory

His death was not the end of the story. Three days later, His Father raised Him to life again. His tomb was empty! His body had been transformed, and He was alive. More than 500 witnesses saw Him in the weeks that followed, before He went back to heaven. From that day until this, *His body has never been found.* He lives today. His resurrection is undeniable proof that He was who He said He was — God's Son and our Saviour!

Through His death and His life, our spiritual needs are met. When we accept His death for us, we are cleansed from our guilt and freed from our failure. As we experience His life in us, we are changed. We become like Him. Yet our individuality is not destroyed. Not at all! Through His power, *it is protected and raised to its full potential.* Each of us becomes a signed original,

overflowing with His life and creativity. At the same time, we are shaped to fit the grand design He is making.

He holds out His gift now, but the time for receiving it is limited. He has already announced that on a certain day, His Father will close up the history of the world like a man who shuts a book. He will gather to Himself everyone who belongs to Him, and eternity will begin. The hour when this will happen has already been set. At any moment, your chapter in that book could be ended. *None of us can guarantee that our own lives on this earth will continue even one more day.*

But while you read these words, His offer is wide open. Jesus Christ has invited you to receive His life, and He waits for your reply. You can accept His gift. By faith, you can look past the outward events of His career. You can grasp the unseen reality that He is the Son of God, as He said He was. If you believe that He is and that His Father raised Him to life again, He will answer you.

He will come into your life, and His light will fill every part of you. Through Him, you will know God. The Bible says that “He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him . *Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become the children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.*” Will you believe in Him and receive Him?



9 If your answer is “Yes,” complete the following sentences. This will help you remember the steps you have taken.

I, (write your name)
 admit that I have sinned against God. I believe that Jesus Christ is His Son, and I accept the forgiveness and life God offers me through Jesus.

(write today's date)

(your signature)

If you have accepted God's offer, a miracle has happened to you. *God says that you have actually crossed over from death to life!* You have been born into His family. *You have a relationship with Him.* You are in a position to receive everything that He intends you to have. One day, you will know the full extent of your inheritance. What happens in the meantime? Your relationship with God means that your life changes for the better right now, today. We look at these changes in our next chapter.

But what if you refuse God's offer? What if you walk away, determined to exclude Him from your life? Only a fool would do such a thing! Yet some have. We live in a world where many people act as if God did not exist. Others blame Him for their problems. Some despise Jesus Christ and ridicule Him, even using His name to curse and swear. All of them are following a dangerous course of action that leads to darkness, isolation, and death. Eventually, they will meet God as Judge, rather than Friend.

Don't let that happen to you, though. Take what God offers you, and take it now! It doesn't matter where you are at this moment or what has happened to you in the past. Because of Jesus, God stands ready to forgive anything and everything you have done. He loves you. The emptiness in your life will be gone as soon as you reach out to Him. Start to pray, right now. Speak to Him. Tell Him what you feel and how you need Him. He is God and He will hear you. Because He is God He knows it already, but He wants you to communicate with Him — and that makes all the difference!

If you did not answer "Yes" to the last question (Question 9) but you want to do so, do it **now**.

**SOME FEEDBACK TO THE INTERACTIONS . . .**

- 1** Your choice. If you chose **c**, **d**, or **e**, is there anything you personally could do to help reduce the tensions?
- 2** Your answers. Do you think the answers of most people in your age group would be similar to yours?
- 3** Your reactions. A score of 21-28 would show that your religion is working very well for you. 17-20 would indicate some problems. Scores 16 and below mean that the religions you know about are negative in their effect. Later in this book, we will refer back to this interaction as a point of comparison.
- 4** Your answer. One word might not be enough! Would you say your feelings have changed a lot in the last few years?
- 5** Your replies.
- 6** Your description.
- 7** Your observation.
- 8** Your response. The point of this interaction is to see yourself from God's viewpoint. His estimate is the one that counts.
- 9** If you have taken these steps now, your relationship with God has begun! *Through His Spirit, He will make Himself real to you.*

