

WHY WE BELIEVE--Evidences For Christian Faith

Money and credit cards are missing. Dresser drawers appear rifled. Family heirlooms are gone. A lock is broken. Footprints remain. What happened? Did we misplace the lost items? Could a neighbor child wearing his father's shoes have been playing in our bushes? Should we call police? What if investigators accuse us of trying to collect on insurance? How do we overcome doubt in ourselves and others? What is at stake? What will we do?

Similar questions need to be answered by those who consider the converging lines of evidence summarized in the following pages. While the issues are matters of faith, the evidence is real, and the choices are our own.

Martin R. De Haan II

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE CHRIST ROSE FROM THE DEAD

1. A public execution assured His death.

During the Jewish Feast of Passover, Jesus was swept away by an angry crowd into a Roman hall of justice. As He stood before Pilate, the governor of Judea, religious leaders accused Jesus of claiming to be the king of the Jews. The crowd demanded His death. Jesus was beaten, whipped, and sentenced to a public execution. On a hill outside of Jerusalem, He was crucified between two criminals. Brokenhearted friends and mocking enemies shared in His deathwatch. As the Sabbath neared, Roman soldiers were sent to finish the execution. To quicken death, they broke the legs of the two criminals. But when they came to Jesus they did not break His legs, because from experience they knew He was already dead. As a final precaution, however, they thrust a spear into His side. It would take more than resuscitation for Him to ever trouble them again.

2. A high official secured the gravesite.

The next day, religious leaders again met with Pilate. They said Jesus had predicted He would rise in 3 days. To assure that the disciples could not conspire in a resurrection hoax, Pilate ordered the official seal of Rome to be attached to the tomb to put grave robbers on notice. To enforce the order, soldiers stood guard. Any disciple who wanted to tamper with the body would have had to get by them, which wouldn't have been easy. The Roman

guards had good reason for staying alert--the penalty for falling asleep while on watch was death.

3. In spite of guards, the grave was found empty.

On the morning after the Sabbath, some of Jesus' followers went to the grave to anoint His body. But when they arrived, they were surprised at what they found. The huge stone that had been rolled into place over the entrance to the tomb had been moved, and Jesus' body was gone. As word got out, two disciples rushed to the burial site. The tomb was empty except for Jesus' burial wrappings, which were lying neatly in place. In the meantime, some of the guards had gone into Jerusalem to tell the Jewish officials that they had fainted in the presence of a supernatural being that rolled the stone away. And when they woke up, the tomb was empty. The officials paid the guards a large sum of money to lie and say that the disciples stole the body while the soldiers slept. They assured the guards that if the report of the missing body got back to the governor they would intercede on their behalf.

4. Many people claimed to have seen Him alive.

About AD 55, the apostle Paul wrote that the resurrected Christ had been seen by Peter, the 12 apostles, more than 500 people (many of whom were still alive at the time of his writing), James, and himself (1 Cor. 15:5-8). By making such a public statement, he gave critics a chance to check out his claims for themselves. In addition, the New Testament begins its history of the followers of Christ by saying that Jesus "presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by [the apostles] during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

5. His apostles were dramatically changed.

When one of Jesus' inner circle defected and betrayed Him, the other apostles ran for their lives. Even Peter, who earlier had insisted that he was ready to die for his teacher, lost heart and denied that he knew Jesus. But the apostles went through a dramatic change. Within a few weeks, they were standing face to face with the ones who had crucified their leader. Their spirit was like iron. They became unstoppable in their determination to sacrifice everything for the one they called Savior and Lord. Even after they were imprisoned, threatened, and forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus, the apostles said to the Jewish leaders, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). After they were beaten for disobeying the orders of the

Jewish council, these once-cowardly apostles "did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42).

6. Witnesses were willing to die for their claims.

History is full of martyrs. Countless men and women have died for their beliefs. For that reason, it is not that significant to point out that the first disciples were willing to suffer and die for their faith. But it is significant that while many will die for what they believe to be the truth, few if any will die for what they know to be a lie. That psychological fact is important because the disciples of Christ did not die for deeply held beliefs about which they could have been honestly mistaken. They died for their claims to have seen Jesus alive and well after His resurrection. They died for their claim that Jesus Christ had not only died for their sins but that He had risen bodily from the dead to show that He was like no other spiritual leader who had ever lived.

7. Jewish believers changed their day of worship.

The Sabbath day of rest and worship was basic to the Jewish way of life. Any Jew who did not honor the Sabbath was guilty of breaking the law of Moses. Yet Jewish followers of Christ began worshiping with Gentile believers on a new day. The first day of the week, the day on which they believed Christ had risen from the dead, replaced the Sabbath. For a Jew, it reflected a major change of life. The new day, along with the Christian conversion rite of baptism, declared that those who believed Christ had risen from the dead were ready for more than a renewal of Judaism. They believed that the death and resurrection of Christ had cleared the way for a new relationship with God. The new way was based not on the law, but on the sin-bearing, life-giving help of a resurrected Savior.

8. Although it was unexpected, it was clearly predicted.

The disciples were caught off guard. They expected their Messiah to restore the kingdom to Israel. Their minds were so fixed on the coming of a messianic political kingdom that they didn't anticipate the events essential to the salvation of their souls. They must have thought Christ was speaking in symbolic language when He kept saying over and over that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem to die and be resurrected from the dead. Coming from one who spoke in parables, they missed the obvious until after it was all over. In the process, they also overlooked the prophet Isaiah's prediction of a suffering servant who would bear the sins of Israel, being led like a lamb to the slaughter, before God "prolong[ed] His days" (Isa. 53:10).

9. It was a fitting climax to a miraculous life.

While Jesus hung on a Roman cross, crowds mocked Him. He helped others, but could He help Himself? Was the miracle suddenly coming to an end? It seemed like such an unexpected ending for someone who began His public life by turning water into wine. During His 3-year ministry, He walked on water; healed the sick; opened blind eyes, deaf ears, and tongue-tied mouths; restored crippled limbs; cast out demons; stilled a violent storm; and raised the dead. He asked questions wise men couldn't answer. He taught profound truths with the simplest of comparisons. And He confronted hypocrites with words that exposed their coverup. If all this was true, should we be surprised that His enemies didn't have the last word?

10. It fits the experience of those who trust Him.

The apostle Paul wrote, "If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Rom. 8:11). This was the experience of Paul, whose heart was dramatically changed by the resurrected Christ. It is also the experience of people all over the world who have "died" to their old ways so that Christ can live His life through them. This spiritual power is not evident in those who try to add belief in Christ to their old life. It is seen only in those who are willing to "die" to their old life to make room for the rule of Christ. It is apparent only in those who respond to the overwhelming evidence for Christ's resurrection by acknowledging His lordship in their heart.

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Did Christ Really Rise From The Dead? (Q0203)

Who Is This Man Who Says He's God? (Q0205)

Is There Life After Death? (Q1205)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

1. The Credibility of its Founder.

Christ said He came from heaven to fulfill prophecy, to die for our sins, and to bring to His Father all who believe in Him. Logic says that He was either a liar, a lunatic, a legend, or the Lord of heaven. His first-century followers drew their own conclusions. They said they saw Him walk on water, still a storm, heal crippled limbs, feed 5,000 with a few pieces of bread and fish, live a blameless life, die a terrible death, and alive again. During His ministry, when some of Jesus' followers took issue with His teachings and left, He asked those closest to Him if they too wanted to leave. Peter spoke for the others when he said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Jn. 6:68-69).

2. The reliability of its book.

Written over a period of about 1,600 years by 40 different authors, the book on which the Christian faith rests tells one story that begins with creation and concludes on the threshold of eternity. The integrity of its historical and geographical record is supported by archeology. The accuracy with which it has been copied and handed down to us has been confirmed by the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran. Originating neither in the East nor the West, but in the Middle East--the cradle of civilization--the Bible continues to speak not only with spiritual power but with convincing prophetic accuracy.

3. Its explanations for life.

All religious systems attempt to give meaning to our existence. All attempt to explain our thirst for significance, the problem of pain, and the inevitability of death. All religions attempt to apply the design of the cosmos to our individual lives. It is the Christian faith, however, that reflects the caring attention to detail so evident in the species and ecosystems of the natural world. It is Christ who speaks of a Father who takes note of every sparrow that falls, a Father who numbers even the hairs of our head (Mt. 10:29-31). It is Christ who reveals a God who shows how much He cares for all that He has created. It is Christ who clothed Himself in our humanity to feel what we feel, and then to suffer and die in our place. It is Christ who reveals a God who cares as much about His creation as the design and detail of the natural world indicates (Ps. 19:1-6; Rom. 1:16-25).

4. Its continuity with the past.

The Christian faith offers continuity with our deepest ancestral roots. Those who trust Christ are accepting the same Creator and Lord worshiped by Adam, Abraham, Sarah, and Solomon. Jesus didn't reject the past. He's the

God of the past (Jn. 1:1-14). When He lived among us, He showed us how to live according to the original plan. When He died, He fulfilled the whole Old Testament sacrificial system. And when He rose from the dead, the salvation He offered fulfilled God's promise to Abraham that through his descendant He would bring blessing to the whole world. The Christian faith is not new with Christ. From Genesis to Revelation it is one story. It is His story--and ours (Acts 2:22-39; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

5. Its foundational claim.

The first Christians were not driven by political or religious dissent. Their primary issues were not moral or social. They were not well-credentialed theologians or social philosophers. They were witnesses. They risked their lives to tell the world that with their own eyes they had seen an innocent man die and then miraculously walk among them 3 days later (Acts 5:17-42). Their argument was very concrete. Jesus was crucified under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. His body was buried and sealed in a borrowed tomb. Guards were posted to prevent grave tampering. Yet after 3 days the tomb was empty and witnesses were risking their lives to declare that He was alive.

6. Its power to change lives.

Not only were the first disciples dramatically changed, but so was one of their worst enemies. Paul was transformed from a Christian killer into one of their chief advocates (Gal. 1:11-24). Later he reflected the changes that had occurred in others as well when he wrote to the church in Corinth, "Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 6:9-11 NIV).

7. Its analysis of human nature.

The Bible says that society's real problems are problems of the heart. In an age of information and technology, failures of character have scandalized institutions of family, government, science, industry, religion, education, and the arts. In the most sophisticated society the world has ever known, our national reputation is marred by problems of racial prejudice, addiction, abuse, divorce, and sexually transmitted disease. Many want to believe that our problems are rooted in ignorance, diet, and government. But to our

generation and all others, Jesus said, "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man" (Mt. 15:19-20).

8. Its view of human achievement.

Generation after generation has hoped for the best. We fought wars that would end all wars. We developed educational theories that would produce enlightened, nonviolent children. We conceived technologies that would deliver us from the oppressive slavery of work. Yet we are as close as ever to what the New Testament describes as an endtime marked by wars and rumors of war, earthquakes, disease, loss of affection, and spiritual deception (Mt. 24:5-31; 2 Tim. 3:1-5).

9. Its impact on society.

A carpenter rabbi from Nazareth changed the world. Calendars and dated documents bear silent witness to His birth. From rooftops, necklaces, and earrings, the sign of the cross bears visual witness to His death. The Western world-view, which provided a basis for social morality, scientific methodology, and a work ethic that fueled industry, had roots in basic Christian values. Social relief agencies, whether in the West or East, are not fueled by the values of Hinduism, Buddhism, atheism, or secular agnosticism, but by the direct or residual values of the Bible.

10. Its offer of salvation.

Alternative religious views have saviors who remain in the grave. No other system offers everlasting life as a gift to those who trust One who has overcome death for them. No other system offers assurance of forgiveness, eternal life, and adoption into the family of God by calling on and trusting Someone in the same way a drowning person calls for and relies on the rescue of a lifeguard (Rom. 10:9-13). The salvation Christ offers does not depend on what we have done for Him, but on our acceptance of what He has done for us. Instead of moral and religious effort, this salvation requires a helpless admission of our sins. Instead of personal accomplishments of faith, it requires confession of failure. Unlike all other options of faith, Christ asks us to follow Him--not to merit salvation but as an expression of gratitude, love, and confidence in the One who has saved us (Eph. 2:8-10).

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Who Is This Man Who Says He's God? (Q0205)

What Is A Personal Relationship With God? (Q0103)

Do I Have The Right Kind Of Faith? (Q0603)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN THE BIBLE

1. Its honesty.

The Bible is painfully honest. It shows Jacob, the father of its "chosen people," to be a deceiver. It describes Moses, the lawgiver, as an insecure, reluctant leader, who, in his first attempt to come to the aid of his own people, killed a man, and then ran for his life to the desert. It portrays David not only as Israel's most loved king, general, and spiritual leader, but as one who took another man's wife and then, to cover his own sin, conspired to have her husband killed. At one point, the Scriptures accuse the people of God, the nation of Israel, as being so bad that they made Sodom and Gomorrah look good by comparison (Ezek. 16:46-52). The Bible represents human nature as hostile to God. It predicts a future full of trouble. It teaches that the road to heaven is narrow and the way to hell is wide. Scripture was clearly not written for those who want simple answers or an easy, optimistic view of religion and human nature.

2. Its preservation.

Just as the modern state of Israel was emerging from thousands of years of dispersion, a bedouin shepherd discovered one of the most important archeological treasures of our time. In a cave of the northwest rim of the Dead Sea, a broken jar yielded documents that had been hidden for two millennia. Additional finds produced manuscripts that predated previous oldest copies by 1,000 years. One of the most important was a copy of Isaiah. It revealed a document that is essentially the same as the book of Isaiah that appears in our own Bibles. The Dead Sea scrolls emerged from the dust like a symbolic handshake to a nation coming home. They discredited the claims of those who believed that the original Bible had been lost to time and tampering.

3. Its claims for itself.

It's important to know what the Bible says about itself. If the authors of Scripture had not claimed to speak for God, it would be presumptuous for us to make that claim for them. We would also have a different kind of problem. We would have a collection of unsolved mysteries, embodied in historical and ethical literature. But we would not have a book that has inspired the building of countless churches and synagogues all over the world. A Bible that did not claim to speak in behalf of God would not have become foundational to the faith of hundreds of millions of Christians and Jews (2 Pet. 1:16-21). But with much supporting evidence and argument, the Bible's authors did claim to be inspired by God. Because millions have staked their present and eternal well-being on those claims, the Bible cannot be a good book if its authors consistently lied about their source of information.

4. Its miracles.

Israel's exodus from Egypt provided a historical basis for believing that God revealed Himself to Israel. If the Red Sea did not part as Moses said it did, the Old Testament loses its authority to speak in behalf of God. The New Testament is just as dependent upon miracles. If Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead, the apostle Paul admits that the Christian faith is built on a lie (1 Cor. 15:14-17). To show its credibility, the New Testament named its witnesses, and did so within a time-frame that enabled those claims to be tested (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Many of the witnesses ended up as martyrs, not for abstract moral or spiritual convictions but for their claim that Jesus had risen from the dead. While martyrdom is not unusual, the basis on which these people gave their lives is what's important. Many have died for what they believed to be the truth. But people do not die for what they know to be a lie.

5. Its unity.

Forty different authors writing over a period of 1,600 years penned the 66 books of the Bible. Four hundred silent years separated the 39 books of the Old Testament from the 27 of the New Testament. Yet, from Genesis to Revelation, they tell one unfolding story. Together they give consistent answers to the most important questions we can ask: Why are we here? How can we come to terms with our fears? How can we get along? How can we rise above our circumstances and keep hope alive? How can we make peace with our Maker? The Bible's consistent answers to these questions show that the Scriptures are not many books but one.

6. Its historical and geographical accuracy.

Down through the ages, many have doubted the historical and geographical accuracy of the Bible. Yet modern archeologists have repeatedly unearthed evidence of the people, places, and cultures described in the Scriptures. Time after time, the descriptions in the biblical record have been shown to be more reliable than the speculations of scholars. The modern visitor to the museums and lands of the Bible cannot help but come away impressed with the real geographical and historical backdrop of the biblical text.

7. Its endorsement by Christ.

Many have spoken well of the Bible, but no endorsement is as compelling as that of Jesus of Nazareth. He recommended the Bible not only by His words but by His life. In times of personal temptation, public teaching, and personal suffering, He made it clear that He believed the Old Testament Scriptures were more than a national tradition (Mt. 4:1-11; 5:17-19). He believed the Bible was a book about Himself. To His countrymen He said, "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (Jn. 5:39-40).

8. Its prophetic accuracy.

From the days of Moses, the Bible predicted events no one wanted to believe. Before Israel went into the Promised Land, Moses predicted that Israel would be unfaithful, that she would lose the land God was giving her, and that she would be dispersed throughout all the world, regathered, and then re-established (Dt. 28-31). Central to Old Testament prophecy was the promise of a Messiah who would save God's people from their sins and eventually bring judgment and peace to the whole world.

9. Its survival.

The books of Moses were written 500 years before the earliest Hindu Scriptures. Moses wrote Genesis 2,000 years before Muhammad penned the Koran. During that long history, no other book has been as loved or as hated as the Bible. No other book has been so consistently bought, studied, and quoted as this book. While millions of other titles come and go, the Bible is still the book by which all other books are measured. While often ignored by those who are uncomfortable with its teachings, it is still the central book of Western civilization.

10. Its power to change lives.

Unbelievers often point to those who claim to believe in the Bible without being changed by it. But history is also marked by those who have been bettered by this book. The Ten Commandments have been a source of moral direction to countless numbers of people. The Psalms of David have offered comfort in times of trouble and loss. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount has given millions an antidote for stubborn pride and proud legalism. Paul's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 has softened angry hearts. The changed lives of people like the apostle Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Newton, Leo Tolstoy, and C. S. Lewis illustrate the difference the Bible can make. Even entire nations or tribes, like the Celts of Ireland, the wild Vikings of Norway, or the Auca Indians of Ecuador, have been transformed by the Word of God and the unprecedented life and significance of Jesus Christ.

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Can I Really Trust The Bible? (Q0402)

Studies In Contrasts (Q0403)

How Can I Understand The Bible? (Q0401)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1. The inevitability of faith.

Everyone believes in something. No one can endure the stress and cares of life without faith in something that cannot ultimately be proven. Atheists cannot prove there is no God. Pantheists cannot prove that everything is God. Pragmatists cannot prove that what will count for them in the future is what works for them now. Nor can agnostics prove that it is impossible to know one way or the other. Faith is unavoidable, even if we choose to believe only in ourselves. What is to be decided is what evidence we think is pertinent, how we are going to interpret that evidence, and who or what we are willing to believe in (Lk. 16:16).

2. The limitations of science.

Scientific method is limited to a process defined by that which is measurable and repeatable. By definition, it cannot speak to issues of ultimate origin, meaning, or morality. For such answers, science is dependent on the values and personal beliefs of those who use it. Science, therefore, has great potential for both good and evil. It can be used to make vaccines or poisons, nuclear power plants or nuclear weapons. It can be used to clean up the environment or to pollute it. It can be used to argue for God or against Him. Science by itself offers no moral guidance or values to govern our lives. All science can do is show us how natural law works, while telling us nothing about its origins.

3. The problems of evolution.

Some have assumed that an evolutionary explanation of life would make God unnecessary. This overlooks some problems. Even if we assume that scientists will someday find enough "missing links" to confirm that life appeared and developed gradually over great periods of time, laws of probability would still show the need for a Creator. As a result, many scientists who believe in evolution believe also that the universe in all of its immensity and complexity did not "just happen." Many feel compelled to acknowledge the possibility or even likelihood of an intelligent designer who provided the ingredients for life and set in motion the laws by which it developed.

4. The habits of the heart.

Mankind has been described as incurably religious. In unguarded moments of trouble or surprise, in prayer or in profanity, references to deity persist. Those who would dismiss such thoughts as bad habits or social vices are left with unanswerable questions. Denying the existence of God does not dispel the mysteries of life. Attempts to exclude God from the language of civil life does not eliminate the persistent longing for more than this life has to offer (Eccl. 3:11). There is something about truth, beauty, and love that makes our hearts ache. Even in our anger with a God who would permit injustice and pain, we draw upon a moral conscience to argue that life is not as it ought to be (Rom. 2:14-15). Even unwillingly, we are drawn to something that is more, rather than less, than ourselves.

5. The background of Genesis.

On first reading, the opening words of the Bible seem to assume the existence of God. Genesis, however, was written at a point of time in

history. Moses wrote, "In the beginning God" after Israel's exodus from Egypt. He wrote after miraculous events that were said to have been witnessed by millions of Jews and Egyptians. From the Exodus to the coming of Messiah, the God of the Bible rests His case on events witnessed in real time and locations. Anyone who doubted the claims could visit real places and people to check out the evidence for themselves.

6. The nation of Israel.

Israel is often used as an argument against God. Many find it difficult to believe in a God who would be partial to a "chosen people." Others find it even harder to believe in a God who would not protect His "chosen nation" from the boxcars, gas chambers, and ovens of Auschwitz and Dachau. Yet from the beginning of Old Testament history, Israel's future was prewritten. Together with other prophets, Moses predicted not only Israel's possession of the land but also her unparalleled suffering and dispersion throughout the whole earth, her eventual repentance, and then finally her last-days restoration (Dt. 28-34; Isa. 2:1-5; Ezek. 37-38).

7. The claims of Christ.

Many who doubt the existence of God have tried to reassure themselves with the thought, "If God wanted us to believe in Him, He would appear to us." According to the Bible, that is what God has done. Writing in the 7th century bc, the prophet Isaiah said that God would give His people a sign. A virgin would bear a son who would be called "God with us" (Isa. 7:14; Mt. 1:23). Isaiah said this Son would be called, "Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). The prophet also said that this child would die for His people's sins before seeing His life prolonged and honored by God (Isa. 53). According to the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be that Messiah. Under the oversight of a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate, He was crucified on charges that He claimed to be the king of Israel and that He had represented Himself as being equal with God (Jn. 5:18).

8. The evidence of miracles.

The reports of the first followers of Jesus agree that He did more than just claim to be the long-awaited Messiah. These witnesses said He won their trust by healing paralytics, walking on water, and then voluntarily dying a painful, undeserved death, before rising from the dead (1 Cor. 15:1-8). Most compelling was their claim that many witnesses had seen and talked to Christ after finding His tomb empty and before watching Him ascend visibly into the clouds. These witnesses didn't have anything on earth to gain by

their claims. They had no hopes of material wealth or power. Many became martyrs, claiming to the end that the long-awaited Messiah of Israel had lived among them, that He had become a sacrifice for sin, and that He had risen from the dead to assure them of His ability to bring them to God.

9. The details of nature.

Some who believe in God do not take His existence seriously. They reason that a God great enough to create the universe would be too big to be concerned about us. Jesus, however, confirmed what the design and detail of the natural world suggest. He showed that God is great enough to care about the smallest details of our lives. He spoke of one who not only knows every move we make but also the motives and thoughts of our heart. Jesus taught that God knows the number of hairs on our head, the concerns of our heart, and even the condition of a fallen sparrow (Ps. 139; Mt. 6).

10. The voice of experience.

The Bible says that God designs the circumstances of our lives in a way that will prompt us to look for Him (Acts 17:26). For those who do reach out for Him, the Scriptures also say that He is close enough to be found (v.27). According to the apostle Paul, it is God in whom "we live and move and have our being" (v.28). The Bible makes it just as clear, however, that we must reach out for God on His terms rather than our own. He promises to be found, not by just anyone but by those who admit their own need and are willing to trust Him rather than themselves.

RBC booklets available on this topic:

How Can I Know There Is A God? (Q0101)

Do Christians Believe In Three Gods? (Q0107)

Who Is This Man Who Says He's God? (Q0205)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN A GOD WHO ALLOWS SUFFERING

1. Suffering comes with the freedom to choose.

Loving parents long to protect their children from unnecessary pain. But wise parents know the danger of over-protection. They know that the freedom to choose is at the heart of what it means to be human, and that a world without choice would be worse than a world without pain. Worse yet would be a world populated by people who could make wrong choices without feeling any pain. No one is more dangerous than the liar, thief, or killer who doesn't feel the harm he is doing to himself and to others (Gen. 2:15-17).

2. Pain can warn us of danger.

We hate pain, especially in those we love. Yet without discomfort, the sick wouldn't go to a doctor. Worn-out bodies would get no rest. Criminals wouldn't fear the law. Children would laugh at correction. Without pangs of conscience, the daily dissatisfaction of boredom, or the empty longing for significance, people who are made to find satisfaction in an eternal Father would settle for far less. The example of Solomon, lured by pleasure and taught by his pain, shows us that even the wisest among us tend to drift from good and from God until arrested by the resulting pain of our own shortsighted choices (Eccl. 1-12; Ps. 78:34-35; Rom. 3:10-18).

3. Suffering reveals what is in our hearts.

Suffering often occurs at the hand of others. But it has a way of revealing what is in our own hearts. Capacities for love, mercy, anger, envy, and pride can lie dormant until awakened by circumstances. Strength and weakness of heart is found not when everything is going our way but when flames of suffering and temptation test the mettle of our character. As gold and silver are refined by fire, and as coal needs time and pressure to become a diamond, the human heart is revealed and developed by enduring the pressure and heat of time and circumstance. Strength of character is shown not when all is well with our world but in the presence of human pain and suffering (Job 42:1-17; Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:2-5; 1 Pet. 1:6-8).

4. Suffering takes us to the edge of eternity.

If death is the end of everything, then a life filled with suffering isn't fair. But if the end of this life brings us to the threshold of eternity, then the most fortunate people in the universe are those who discover, through suffering, that this life is not all we have to live for. Those who find themselves and their eternal God through suffering have not wasted their pain. They have let their poverty, grief, and hunger drive them to the Lord of eternity. They are the ones who will discover to their own unending joy why Jesus said,

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:1-12; Rom. 8:18-19).

5. Pain loosens our grip on this life.

In time, our work and our opinions are sought less and less. Our bodies become increasingly worse for the wear. Gradually they succumb to inevitable obsolescence. Joints stiffen and ache. Eyes grow dim. Digestion slows. Sleep becomes difficult. Problems loom larger and larger while options narrow. Yet, if death is not the end but the threshold of a new day, then the curse of old age is also a blessing. Each new pain makes this world less inviting and the next life more appealing. In its own way, pain paves the way for a graceful departure (Eccl. 12:1-14).

6. Suffering gives opportunity to trust God.

The most famous sufferer of all time was a man named Job. According to the Bible, Job lost his family to "a mighty wind," his wealth to war and fire, and his health to painful boils. Through it all, God never told Job why it was happening. As Job endured the accusations of his friends, heaven remained silent. When God finally did speak, He did not reveal that His archenemy Satan had challenged Job's motives for serving God. Neither did the Lord apologize for allowing Satan to test Job's devotion to God. Instead, God talked about mountain goats giving birth, young lions on the hunt, and ravens in the nest. He cited the behavior of the ostrich, the strength of the ox, and the stride of the horse. He cited the wonders of the heavens, the marvels of the sea, and the cycle of the seasons. Job was left to conclude that if God had the power and wisdom to create this physical universe, there was reason to trust that same God in times of suffering (Job 1-42).

7. God suffers with us in our suffering.

No one has suffered more than our Father in heaven. No one has paid more dearly for the allowance of sin into the world. No one has so continuously grieved over the pain of a race gone bad. No one has suffered like the One who paid for our sin in the crucified body of His own Son. No one has suffered more than the One who, when He stretched out His arms and died, showed us how much He loved us. It is this God who, in drawing us to Himself, asks us to trust Him when we are suffering and when our own loved ones cry out in our presence (1 Pet. 2:21; 3:18; 4:1).

8. God's comfort is greater than our suffering.

The apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord to take away an unidentified source of suffering. But the Lord declined, saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." "Therefore," said Paul, "most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor. 12:9-10). Paul learned that he would rather be with Christ in suffering than without Christ in good health and pleasant circumstances.

9. In times of crisis, we find one another.

No one would choose pain and suffering. But when there is no choice, there remains some consolation. Natural disasters and times of crisis have a way of bringing us together. Hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, riots, illnesses, and accidents all have a way of bringing us to our senses. Suddenly we remember our own mortality and that people are more important than things. We remember that we do need one another and that, above all, we need God. Each time we discover God's comfort in our own suffering, our capacity to help others is increased. This is what the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

10. God can turn suffering around for our good.

This truth is best seen in the many examples of the Bible. Through Job's suffering we see a man who not only came to a deeper understanding of God but who also became a source of encouragement for people in every generation to follow. Through the rejection, betrayal, enslavement, and wrongful imprisonment of a man named Joseph, we see someone who eventually was able to say to those who had hurt him, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20). When everything in us screams at the heavens for allowing suffering, we have reason to look at the eternal outcome and joy of Jesus who in His own suffering on an executioner's cross cried, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mt. 27:46).

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Why Would A Good God Allow Suffering? (Q0106)

How Does God Keep His Promises? (Q0105)

Does God Want Me Well? (Q0104)

10 REASONS TO BELIEVE IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

1. The injustices of life.

It would be difficult to believe that life is good if we knew there was nothing beyond the grave to compensate for problems of inequality and unfairness. While some people seem destined for happiness, others are born into terrible relationships and circumstances. If we could be sure there was nothing to offset unequal distribution of suffering, many would have reason to curse the day of their birth for the way life has treated them (Job 3:1-3). We could agree with King Solomon who at a low point in his life said, "I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed--and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors--and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun" (Eccl. 4:1-3 NIV).

2. Beauty and balance.

There is much about life that doesn't seem to correspond with personal problems of unfairness and hardship. For all that is hurtful and unequal, there is beauty and balance. For moments of horror and violence, there are times of harmony and peace. As age-worn bodies succumb to pain and weakness, children and young animals play with carefree joy. Each sunset and dawn provides an answer to nature's need for rest and renewal. Dark nights and cold winters come with the awareness that "this too shall pass." If there is nothing beyond the grave, the pattern of nature is stunningly incomplete.

3. Near-death experiences.

The clinical evidence for life after death is subjective and arguable. It's often hard to assess the significance of "out of the body experiences," encounters with bright lights, long tunnels, or angelic guides. It's difficult to know how to respond to those who speak of temporary near-death visions into heaven or hell. What we do know is that there are enough of these kinds of experiences to create a sizable library on the subject. Taken as a whole, this body of evidence shows that as people approach death, many sense they are coming not to the end of existence but to the beginning of another journey.

4. A place in the heart.

The human heart hungers for more than this life offers. Each of us experiences what King Solomon called "eternity in [our] hearts" (Eccl. 3:11). While it is difficult to know what Solomon meant, it is apparent that he was referring to an inescapable longing for something this world cannot satisfy. It was an emptiness of soul that Solomon could not escape. For a while, he tried to fill this inner void with work, alcohol, and laughter. He tried to satisfy his longings with philosophy, music, and sexual relationships. But his disillusionment grew. Only when he returned to his confidence in a final judgment and afterlife could he find something large enough to satisfy his longing for significance (Eccl. 12:14).

5. Universal beliefs.

While some believe it's impossible to know whether there is life after death, belief in immortality is a timeless phenomenon. From the pyramids of the Egyptians to the reincarnation of New Age thinking, people of all times and places in history have believed that the human soul survives death. If there is no consciousness or laughter or regret beyond the grave, then life has fooled almost everyone from the Pharaohs of Egypt to Jesus of Nazareth.

6. An eternal God.

The Bible names God as the source of immortality. It describes His nature as eternal. The same Scriptures tell us that God created us in His likeness, and that His plan is to welcome His children eventually into His eternal home. The Scriptures also teach that God introduced death into human experience when our first ancestors trespassed into the darkness of forbidden territory (Gen. 3:1-19). The implication is that if God allowed the human race to live forever in a rebellious condition, we would have unending opportunity to develop into proud, self-centered creatures. Instead, God began to unfold a

plan that would ultimately result in the eternal homecoming of all who chose to be at peace with Him (Ps. 90:1; Jn. 14:1-3).

7. Old Testament predictions.

Some have argued that immortality is a New Testament idea. But the Old Testament prophet Daniel spoke of a day when those who sleep in the dust of the earth will be resurrected, some to life and some to everlasting shame (Dan. 12:1-3). An author of the Psalms also spoke of the afterlife. In the 73rd Psalm a man named Asaph described how he almost lost his faith in God when he considered how evil people prospered and the godly suffered. But then he said he went into the sanctuary of God. From the perspective of worship, he suddenly saw evil men standing on the slippery ground of their mortality. With new insight he confessed, "You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever" (Ps. 73:24-26).

8. Quotes of Christ.

Few would accuse Jesus of being an evil man or a false teacher. Even atheists and people belonging to non-Christian religions usually refer to Jesus with deference and respect. But Jesus wasn't vague or indefinite about the reality of a continuing personal existence after death. He said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mt. 10:28). Jesus promised Paradise to the repentant thief who was dying at His side, but He also used the Valley of Hinnom--a foul garbage dump outside of Jerusalem--as a symbol of what awaits those who insist on risking the judgment of God. According to Jesus, facing the reality of life after death is the most significant issue of life. He said, for example, that if an eye keeps you from God, you have reason to get rid of that eye. "It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell" (Mk. 9:47 NIV).

9. The resurrection of Christ.

There is no greater evidence for the existence of life after death than the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament predicted a Messiah who would overcome sin and death for His people (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:26). The testimony of Jesus' followers is that He did just that. He voluntarily died at the hands of executioners, was buried in a borrowed tomb, and then 3 days

later left that tomb empty. Witnesses said that they had seen not only an empty tomb but a resurrected Christ who appeared to hundreds of people over a period of 40 days before ascending to heaven (Acts 1:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:1-8).

10. Practical effects.

Belief in life after death is a source of personal security, optimism, and spiritual betterment (1 Jn. 3:2). Nothing offers more courage than the confidence that there is a better life for those who use the present to prepare for eternity. Belief in the unlimited opportunities of eternity has enabled many to make the ultimate sacrifice of their own life in behalf of those they love. It was His belief in life after death that enabled Jesus to say, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Mt. 16:26). It is the same truth that prompted Christian martyr Jim Elliot, who was killed in 1956 by the Auca Indians, to say, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose."

RBC booklets available on this topic:

Is There Life After Death? (Q1205)

Where Do We Go From Here? (Q1202)

What Does The Bible Say About Hell? (Q1002)

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

If you still find yourself troubled by unanswered questions and lingering doubts, you're not alone. Many have considered the evidence summarized in the previous pages without seeing their way clear to accept Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.

People of every generation have found that it takes far more to believe in Christ than evidence, reason, and probability. Just as important is the factor of personal choice and autonomy.

The relationship between the mind and will, however, is not easy to understand. Being honest with ourselves is not inevitable.

So how can we sort out the relationship between facts, perceptions, and will? One answer is to be open to the possibility that God Himself can do what we cannot do. If Christ is who He claims to be, then we are not alone. If Christ really did rise from the dead, His Father stands ready to give assurance of understanding to anyone who wants to do the will of God (Jn. 7:17). It was Jesus who said to a group of skeptics in John 7:

My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority (vv.16-17).