

# TASTE & SEE

Exploring the heart of the Christian message of hope over four meals.



## Meal Number 1

Week One

# It Was Good!



# Meal Number 1: It Was Good



## Leaders' introductory notes

### Week 1. Overview

We kick off with a vegetarian banquet celebrating food fresh from the earth and exploring the wonder and beauty of God's good design. We discuss: How can we know God? The mystery of being human. The basis of ethics. What about science? Is there more to life? Curiosity is welcomed.

### Week 1. People dynamics.

In week 1 people are generally quieter, checking it out and feeling their way. This means we need to work hard at warm introductions, discussion starter questions, building rapport, allaying fears and indicating that we recognise the questions they might be thinking but possibly not up to asking out loud yet. We suggest you allow a bit more time at the beginning of Week 1 to introduce each other. (see notes for suggestions).

### Week 1 Menu - Vegetarian Banquet

Focus on all things fresh, natural and green. This can be high end gourmet or really simple. Go to town with gorgeous salad combos like watermelon, mint and haloumi; pear, blue cheese and baby spinach; beetroot, feta, rocket and walnut; roasted veges with cous cous; cherry tomato and olive tart, mini quiches, rice paper wraps....

Desserts: Fruit salad; mango sorbet; lemon tarts; berries and cream....

### Week 1 Décor ideas

Presentation matters - both food and decor. It communicates love, generosity, beauty and hospitality. This can be simple and inexpensive. Employ your creative Christians to do this well.

Decorate week 1 with simple greenery, in a natural style.

Ideas: Floral tablecloth, candles, bowls of oranges or lemons.

Lemon branches or olive branches or star jasmine vines on the table.



### **Suggested formatting of the night**

- 7pm            Arrival, welcome, mingle, seating
- 7:15            Presenter welcome, introduce the format of the night, format of the course.
- 7:20            Mains served - Ice breaker discussion over dinner and introductions (see notes)
- Presenter's story - over dinner
- Session 1 Presentation - over / after dinner
- 8:00ish        Dessert break  
                  Continue Session 1 (if breaking up session)
- 8:30            Q&A
- 9pm            Wrap up

### **Presenter Script**

Though we provide presenter scripts, we also encourage you to make them into your own voice. You may want to swap in your own illustrations that fit your context. Please respect the integrity of the material and don't significantly change the content.

**Blue** is where we have provided a couple of alternative options in the [footnotes](#).  
**Orange** represents interactive elements, discussion questions and visual aids.

# Meal Number 1: It Was Good

## Presenter Script



### Welcome and Introduction

A warm welcome on behalf of (your church), to Week 1 of our Taste & See course! Thank you for joining us on this journey!

My name is \_\_\_\_ and I will be your presenter over the next four weeks. The purpose of this course is to give everyone who participates an opportunity to dive in and explore the Bible's message over a series of four shared meals. Each meal will represent a key part of the grand narrative. You could say, we're going to eat our way through the Bible!

### How this will work.

Each week will follow the same pattern.<sup>1</sup> We'll come together and share a meal. Then someone who has been invited beforehand will share the story of how they came to follow Jesus. After we've had the main meal and time for seconds, I'll present the main content for the night. Then there's time for dessert and conversation. And then home! We'll always be finished by or before 9pm.<sup>2</sup>

For some this might be familiar territory, for others maybe not so. So, a special welcome if you are a curious onlooker to the Christian faith. Perhaps you identify as a believer. Perhaps as a sceptic, an agnostic or an atheist or of another faith. Or perhaps you are not sure what you believe. Wherever you are up to, thanks for joining us and welcome to the conversation. We genuinely want this to be a safe and respectful space and invite you to share your point of view, ask questions, and explore doubts. There will be plenty of room to ask questions and make comments. But if you're the sort of person who'd prefer to sit back and observe, that's also fine.

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<sup>1</sup> **We've experimented with different formats here.**

Wendy likes to do the presentation over the meal as people are eating with the presenter sitting down to help retain a dinner party vibe. This style works best in a smaller group - up to 12 or so. Beyond Week 1, the personal faith story fits well AFTER the presentation.

<sup>2</sup> **Another option** Each week will follow the same pattern. Over a meal there will be a presentation. There will be opportunity to stop and discuss things along the way. And there will also be an open time for questions at the end. (You might like to write your thoughts or questions down as we go. Also, each week, at the end, someone who has been invited beforehand will share their personal faith story. Today I will kick off with my story. We will always aim to be finished by 9pm.

Each meal will be different and will in some way contribute to the theme of the night. Tonight's meal, as you can see, is vegetarian (apologies to the carnivores! Your turn next week). That's because we'll be thinking about the first part of the Bible's story – the story of creation. And that story begins in an orchard, a garden. And it was good!

### Discussion<sup>3</sup>

As you pass the food around, here's a question to discuss at your table: If you had to choose one kind of food or cuisine to eat for the rest of your life, what would it be and why?

**Pass food around, start eating and allow time for chat and introductions.**

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### Presenter's Personal Faith Story (3-4 mins)

Please feel free to keep eating as we make a start. Before we jump into the session, it might be helpful to share a bit of my own story...

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### The Bible and Meals

The Bible begins and ends with meals. The first words of God to humans in Genesis are an invitation to eat; the first conflict in the Bible is over a forbidden meal; Jesus' first miracle was in response to a catering crisis at a wedding. Jesus was famous for eating with the wrong people, for going to parties, for being (it was thought) a drunkard and a glutton.

Jesus' last act was to share a meaning-laden meal with his disciples, and the final vision of the new world God is bringing is of a massive, joyful feast.

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<sup>3</sup> **Another option here** As you pass the food around, let's start by introducing ourselves. How about we find out three things about the person next to us and then introduce them to the group in a few minutes. You could start by asking if they have a favourite fruit or veg / most unusual fruit and veg they've eaten.

**OR Set the table with a different fruit or veg in front of each person** – and observe and discuss what is good about it? Eg, here you want to bring out the nutrition and packaging of a banana, or avocado the beauty and sweetness of a strawberry, the taste of a mango.

God, throughout the Bible, invites people to eat, to drink, to come and sit at his table, to share in rich food. The whole story and message of the Bible can be told through food. And that's what this course is all about.

Over these four weeks, we'll be sharing four meals and, through them, exploring four core ideas at the heart of the Christian faith. Each meal will represent something about an aspect of the Bible's grand storyline:

(Share three header slides) Next week we want to think about what's wrong with the world. After that, we'll be focussed on Jesus—who he is and we came. And in the final week, we'll be exploring the Bible's hope for this world and for humanity.

**Optional extra. The Bible** At this point you might be wondering... <sup>4</sup>

### **So let's dive in!**

#### **Creation: "And It Was Good"**

This week we start at the beginning, with creation. Nearly the first words of God to a human in the Bible are an invitation to feast, to eat.<sup>5</sup> Hear the sense of abundance in these opening words...

*And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on*

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<sup>4</sup> **Optional extra** At this point you might be wondering... why would we read the Bible today?

A few quick stats about the Bible. Did you know?

- It is the world's most read book - over 5 billion copies printed.
- 3.9 billion sold in the last 50 years. <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-top-10-most-read-books-in-the-world-infographic-2012-12>
- The first book ever printed – the Gutenberg press 1400s.
- The most translated book of all time – over 700 languages.
- Still the best seller every year - giving deep meaning, purpose and hope to millions over the centuries and around the world.
- Is a library of 66 books, by 40 authors, over 1500 years. Yet with one storyline...

Could this be timeless wisdom from God? Has God spoken?

That is the claim we will be examining over the course of the next four weeks.

<sup>5</sup> **Optional extra** Nearly the first words of God to a human in the Bible are an invitation to feast, to eat. (I say "nearly" because the first words were an invitation to make love and have babies. Sex and gardening was apparently, how the whole thing kicked off. One can think of worse ways to start a universe.)



*the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given you every green plant for food. And it was so.*

*God saw all that he had made and it was very good.*

Genesis 1:29-31, The Bible

Did you notice how food is framed as a gift here? Food is a reminder of God's provision and generosity. Notice how good it is! Just think about the wonder of an avocado, a banana, passionfruit! Today our meal focuses on things that come straight from the ground. Just think about the array of flavours we enjoy. (*your examples here... eg A Thai curry with hot, sour sweet and salty, or a rich Italian pasta sauce with tomato, feta and basil*). Notice how the account ends "God saw all that he had made and it was very good."

## **GOD 'In the beginning, God . . .**

The Bible starts with the assumption God exists.

*"In the beginning God..."*

**Option 1<sup>6</sup>** The Oxford scholar N. T. Wright, when he was serving as a College chaplain, used to meet first year students. On discovering he was a chaplain, students would sometimes mumble "Oh, you won't see me. I don't believe in God." He would reply, "Oh, right. Which god don't you believe in?" The students, looking a bit puzzled, would reply along the lines of "You know, the God in the sky who punishes people when they do wrong." To which Wright would reply, "Oh, that's okay. I don't believe in that god either."

It's worth clarifying what we mean when we say "God".

The Bible's view is that God is not part of this creation. He is not in it.

Rather, he made it.

*"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."*

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<sup>6</sup> **OPTION 2** In place of NT Wright story, you could begin with :

It is worth clarifying what we mean when we say "God".

There are many ideas about God out there! I wonder what has informed your ideas about God?

For now, let's suggest that if God is there, we can only know what (he) is like if he reveals himself to us. (Just as I can only know you or you can only know me as much as we choose to reveal ourselves.)

Otherwise, we are simply making our best guesses. AND THAT is the enormous claim the Bible is making – that God has shown up and revealed himself. That is the claim that we will be examining throughout this course.

## Harry Potter, J. K. Rowling, and God<sup>7</sup>

Think about The Harry Potter series for a moment. It contains a cast of characters who are now etched into popular memory. There's Harry, his friends Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley, his adversaries Draco and Lucius, and so on. If you know the series there are many more characters you could list. There are probably some you've forgotten. If so inclined you could geek-out with other Harry Potter fans and see who could list the most characters.

Here's a question: Would J. K. Rowling be on that list? The answer, we think, is no. J. K. Rowling is not *in* the Harry Potter universe. Rowling is not a character in the story.

Rowling is not *in* the story. She is its author. It is through her that all the characters, events, plots, and settings exist. She's not in *Harry Potter*, she made *Harry Potter*.

According to the Bible, God is like that. He is not something or someone within the creation. Rather, he is the one through whom all things live and move and have their being.

## THE CREATION

God's creative work is a process of bringing order out of chaos:

*Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.*

Genesis 1:2-4

Notice the description. The earth was 'formless and empty' with 'darkness over the surface of the deep'. Disorder, confusion, even perhaps a hint of terror? God's work over the six days is to bring order out of the disorder, by bringing clear lines and crisp boundaries.

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<sup>7</sup> **Alternative** Depending on your context, this illustration could be replaced with another example. Eg, the relationship between Shakespeare and his play Hamlet, with characters Claudius, Polinius, Hamlet, Horatio, Gertrude, Ophelia...



There's a pattern here. On days one to three he separates light from darkness, day from night, earth from sky, land from sea. Then, on days four to six, he populates those spaces, filling the sky with stars, the oceans with fish, and the land with animals. Repeated six times in the account **"And God saw that it was good."** Our world is ordered and it is good. It is not an accident. And neither are we. It is made with purpose.

**Discuss:** Where do you see order and design in the universe? (brief pairs or table discussion)<sup>8</sup>

### Power point slides

Briefly talk through visual imagery here of wonder beauty order.

- *Estimates are 100 Billion Stars in our Galaxy alone. 100 Billion Galaxies in the universe*
- *Planet earth just the right distance from the sun, tilt, combination of gases, water, gravity to sustain life.*<sup>9</sup>
- *Comment on other slides. Complexity, order<sup>10</sup> and beauty....*

According to the Bible, whatever else the world is, and whatever else we are, neither it nor we are an accident. We are part of an amazing design! The Bible says we were made on purpose, and for a purpose.

### WHAT ABOUT SCIENCE?

A common (and fair) question when reading Genesis is 'what about science?' At this point you might be wondering, how does this account of origins of the world fit with what science seems to have discovered?

Broadly speaking, there are three ways Christians have thought about this issue. Here's a quick summary:

### Option 1: Science and Genesis are saying different things about the same thing

The first approach says that Genesis and science are saying different things about the same thing. They are both about how the world came to be and the biological origins of humanity. But what they say is different. Genesis says the world was made in six days, science says

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<sup>8</sup> **Visual Aid moment.** If you can, use real life examples of natural beauty and design to pass around the table during discussion and viewing slides. Eg, a nautilus shell, sea urchins.

<sup>9</sup> Known as "Fine tuning" or "the Goldilocks theory" [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fine-tuned\\_universe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fine-tuned_universe)

<sup>10</sup> Eg the Fibonacci Sequence.

millions of years. And so on. One must be wrong and one must be right. That's the first option.

### **Option 2: They are saying the same thing about the same thing**

The second option agrees with the first option: Genesis and science *are* talking about the same thing. However, the second option says that, when you look a little more closely, they are both saying the same thing. Perhaps the 'six days', it is suggested, are vast aeons of time that together make up the six billion years that science tells us is the age of the universe? Perhaps the creation of the man and the woman on the sixth day points to what evolutionary science also points to—that humans have arrived relatively late in the process? That's the second option

### **Option 3: They are talking about different things**

The third option is that science and Genesis are talking about different things, answering different questions.

Imagine two people both answering the question: What is food for? One is a nutrition scientist and the other a family cook. The nutritionist could tell you that food is for fueling the body. They could explain how food is digested, turned into energy, and the ways it mobilises the body, right down to the cellular level. The family cook, on the other hand, could tell you how food is for bringing people together. They could explain how food is for celebration, and community, and forgoing a life together. Is one of them wrong and the other one right? Of course not! They talking about different things, and answering different questions.<sup>11</sup>

We reckon that's a pretty good way to approach the science question. Science is brilliant at answering a particular set of questions. When it comes to the material world, the **'what'** and **'how'** questions, science is fantastic. And the creation account in Genesis is brilliant for understanding God and his purposes—the **'who'** and the **'why'** questions.

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<sup>11</sup> **ALTERNATIVE ILLUSTRATION** Imagine two people describing Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. One is an art critic and the other a chemist. The chemist could tell you all about the properties of the paint on the canvas. She could tell you what it is made from, how old it is. The art critic, on the other hand, would help you understand what it means and why it affects you as it does. The art critic is interested in a different set of questions. Who was Mona Lisa? What was Da Vinci trying to communicate? What makes this painting so arresting, so beautiful?

Which one is telling the truth?

The answer of course is, they both are! They're just answering different questions.

(There's more to say here than we have time for, but if you are interested we can point you in the direction of some helpful resources.)<sup>12</sup>

### Option Prof Brian Cox interview clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-eG-xDPXS8> (Clip 0:00-1:44)

*Professor Brian Cox particle physicist University of Manchester. A non-Christian scientist discusses how science can't answer everything. Science needs theology and philosophy to answer questions about meaning. Discuss video - noting Brian's point.*

(Optional extra slides with other scientist's quotes.)

Slide - Wonder and meaning

### OPTION: PAUSE FOR DESSERT <sup>13</sup>

#### DISCUSS OVER DESSERT:

Where have your ideas about God come from?

.....

### WHAT IS A HUMAN?

What is a human? Where are we from? And what are we for? The Bible's answer to that question is really interesting.

#### Made of 'dust'

Have a listen to what it says in our story. Genesis chapter 2 and verse 7

*Then the Lord God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Genesis 2:7*

The first humans are 'made of the dust of the earth.' What does that mean?

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<sup>12</sup> Resources [Professor John Lennox | God DOES exist \(youtube.com\)](#) see more below

<sup>13</sup> **Dessert Break** As the introduction in Week 1 adds to the length of this session, it might be helpful to have a dessert break here. This breakup could also be the pattern for the following weeks if you think it would be helpful.

Interestingly in Hebrew, the word 'Adam' is not so much a name as a title. *Adama* means dust and 'the Adam' is made from the dust. We might translate it as 'the earthling', the one formed from the soil of the earth.

The Bible never loses track of our status as earthlings. Later on, the Bible says:

*For God knows how we were formed;  
he remembers that we are but dust.*

Psalm 103:14

One of the liberating truths of the Bible is this frank and joyful recognition that we are creatures, made of dust, 'earthlings'. It's not a bug, it's a feature. We can't be in two places at once. We can't be good at everything. We need to stop and eat. We don't remember everything we're told. We need to rest. We need to sleep for seven or eight hours a day. And that's okay.

The song says, 'I believe I can fly.' But we can't. And that's okay. We are creatures of God. We are finite. We are part of this creation. We are invested in the health of the soil, for it is the soil from which we eat and are sustained. One of the key differences between God and us is that we need to eat and God doesn't. Only God is self-sustaining. The rest of us need food to keep us alive. That's fine! That's what it means to be a creature. We're from around here. We need other things (such as food) to keep going. This is our home.

### **God's image bearers**

What makes humans different is not what we're made *from*, but what we're made *for*. Have a listen to these words in Genesis chapter 1:

*Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Genesis 1:26-27

(Take out a coin) In countries such as Britain or Australia, on one side of the coin is a picture of Queen Elizabeth (and, soon, King Charles).

Why? Having an image of the monarch on a coin is a very ancient tradition. It reminds you that there is a queen or king who rules over you. You can't see them, but you can see their image.

Like that coin, we bear God's image. We are a reminder to the world of his good rule over it. We are God's argument for the existence of God.

That, according to the Bible, is what humans are *for*. We are made to bear God's image. This makes a huge difference. It secures the value and dignity of every human life, because every human life bears the image of its creator. It is a basis for human rights (there are certain things we should *never* do to each other), and it is the basis for human responsibility (there are certain things we *should* do for each other because we owe certain duties to each other).

Here's a question as we finish: <sup>14</sup> If bearing the image of God to the creation and to each other is our role, how do you think we're doing?

We humans are like fallen monarchs with amnesia.

At one level, we stagger around the world. We do damage to our world and to each other. We ignore God and his call on our lives. We do bad things—to ourselves, to each other, and to our world. And we ignore the God who made us.

But like a monarch with amnesia, we occasionally show evidence of our former glory. It is as if one of your friends were to suddenly break out into perfectly fluent Latin—a language that neither he nor you recall him ever learning. Humans are like that. We are often disappointing. Occasionally we are evil. But sometimes, just sometimes, we will create something of such beauty, or act with such kindness, or intervene with such wisdom that you can't help but think, 'Wow! That is remarkable.' Our response is so overwhelming, it even feels a little bit like worship.<sup>15</sup>

## THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Jesus was once asked whether or not the inhabitants of Roman-occupied Judea should pay their taxes to Caesar. It was a trick

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<sup>14</sup> **Optional discussion moment.** Or leave it hanging as a rhetorical question.

<sup>15</sup> **Your version of an illustration here.** Concrete examples that fit your context – Eg, Mozart Beethoven, symphony at the Opera House, Football stadium full of fans State of Origin; Marvels of medicine, Space travel...

question. If he says 'yes' he's in trouble with the deeply religious Jewish community who feel their money shouldn't be going to pagan rulers. But if he says 'no' he's in trouble with the Romans and their collaborators for rebellion.

What did Jesus do? (Show slide of Roman denarius)  
He held up a coin and asked the crowd,  
*'Whose image is on this?'*

The answer, of course, was 'Caesar'.

And Jesus said:  
*'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's.'*

See what he did there? Why does the coin belong to Caesar? Because his image is on it. What should we, therefore, give to God? That which bears his image. Us.

According to Jesus, God's image on you is God's claim on you. You are his. You are his – made for a purpose. The one who made you, as creator has rights over you, as designer knows best how you work. We need his wisdom for life. We are not made to be independent of him. We function best in relationship with him.

(Week 2 Slide) **Over the next meal** we'll explore what the Bible says when God's image-bearers go rogue. And, just as the Bible opens with an invitation from God to eat from 'every green plant'; the insurrection is triggered by an invitation from the serpent to eat a forbidden fruit. It will be a different kind of meal next week!

## **Conclusion**

Let me end with a poem. This one's from G. K. Chesterton—a poet who had a strong sense of the delight and joy that comes from being God's image bearers in God's creation. He says:

*Here dies another day  
During which I have had eyes, ears, hands  
And the great world round me;  
And with tomorrow begins another.  
Why am I allowed two?*

## **This week consider...**

I wonder what stood out to you from tonight. Take a moment....

Let me invite you to consider two things this week.

- The wonder and beauty of Creation all around us.
- And to ask what does it mean to be made in the image of God?

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## **Q&A opportunity**

### EXTRA RESOURCES

*John Lennox address to Oxford Union (15 mins)*

[Professor John Lennox | God DOES exist \(youtube.com\)](#)

*John Lennox - The Bible and the age of the earth (5 mins) The Veritas Forum)*

[The Bible and age of the earth? | John Lennox at SMU \(youtube.com\)](#)

*"God's Undertaker" - John Lennox*

*"Seven Days that Divide the World" - John Lennox*

*"Questioning Christianity" Dan Patterson*

<https://www.questioningchristianity.com/resources/blog-post-title-one-f2rx8>

*Confronting Christianity Rebecca McLachlan*

*(Chapter 7 - Hasn't Science Disproved Christianity?)*

*"The Lost World of Genesis One" Prof John H. Walton*

*Undeceptions Podcast - Library*

<https://undeceptions.com/>

*Centre for Public Christianity - Library*

<https://www.publicchristianity.org/>

## Example personal faith story

### ***A bit about me....***

*I've never struggled to believe God exists. From a young age it felt obvious that there was a designer behind the design and wonder of the universe.*

*For me the question was "How can you know the God that exists?" God always felt distant, impersonal and out of reach.*

*Like most teens I was intent on fitting in at school and trying to belong in the cool group. When I started surfing age 16, it seemed to help my status at school. But being a girl on Cronulla beach in the 80s (think "Puberty Blues") created its own set of complications.*

*As a teenager my family was going through some tumultuous times, my dad's drinking hit a crisis point and thankfully he went to rehab and got help. This probably made my crying out to God more intense but still he felt far away. At 16 I was lost, confused and bearing the weight of the world.*

*When I was 17, I can remember praying "God where are you? How can I know you?" Soon after I stumbled across a bunch of Christians who were surfers - they broke my stereotype, which helped me take a closer look at Jesus.*

*Meeting Christians whose lives were impacted by God in a wonderful ways, made me ask questions. I soon realised I had never really understood the Christian message for myself. Even though I had believed in God I hadn't had much to do with him. My previous experience of church as a kid had felt boring and irrelevant.*

*It was with them, that I first began to engage with the bible in a meaningful way for myself. And there I discovered the claim that God had actually, made himself very clear. More than that - he was personal, knowable and he loved me. I was struck by the historical person of Jesus. He was compelling. Could it be true? If the Jesus story was true then I needed (wanted) to take it seriously. Now I needed to evaluate it.*

*The journey began... what I discovered really changed the foundations of my life in wonderful life-giving ways. It is wonderful to be able to say I know God personally. Knowing God has filled my life with meaning and purpose, security and peace. He has called me into a story so much greater and more exhilarating that my own small life could ever be.*

***You might also be asking, how can we know what God is like?***