

50 TRUTHS
THAT TAKE ON
THE WORLD



GOSPEL WAY

CATECHISM



TREVIN WAX

AND THOMAS WEST

**THE
GOSPEL WAY
CATECHISM**



**TREVIN WAX
AND THOMAS WEST**



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Introduction

Why Counter-Catechism?

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN WAS A BRITISH missionary and theologian. Born in Newcastle upon Tyne and educated for two degrees at Cambridge, he was commissioned to India as a Church of Scotland missionary and lived abroad for 40 years. Newbigin was an evangelist, community activist, church planter, and organizational strategist.

In 1974, Lesslie and his wife, Helen, retired from full-time missionary work. To celebrate this milestone, they took the long way home. Instead of flying in an airplane, they took a slower 40-day journey of rickshaws, cars, trains, and boats to travel home through Europe. Upon returning to England, the Newbigins were shocked to visit many old towns—once strongholds of Christian thought, now reduced to spiritual rubble. Lesslie recognized how a strong Christian heritage could nearly disappear.¹

Arriving in London, the Newbigins were surprised to see widespread spiritual apathy. The church's lack of missionary urgency was matched by a way of life that was overly adapted and accommodating to the surrounding society. As he considered the challenges facing the church in his time, Newbigin asked a question that still resonates today: "What if instead of trying to explain the gospel in terms of our culture, we tried to explain our culture in light of the gospel?"²

A Church Under the Influence

Today, the church is too often under the influence, drugged by worldly philosophies and practices, sluggish in our witness and evangelism, diminished in our impact as salt and light. Cultural narratives in the West are so powerful they make it hard for the people of God to see straight. We struggle to see things as they are, to understand the difference between truth and error, and to live true to our identity. The secular script of "expressive

individualism”—an outlook that describes our purpose in life as looking within to find ourselves and then express ourselves to the world—is prevalent now, to the point we’re unaware of just how pervasive this way of looking at the world has become.³

This new cultural landscape requires new tactics to contend for the gospel. Newbigin said, “It is not enough for the church to repeat the same words and phrases in different cultural situations. New ways have to be found of stating the essential Trinitarian faith.”⁴ Like Newbigin, and like countless other Christians seeking to be faithful to the Lord Jesus in their own time and place, we want to rearticulate what we believe in fresh terms. We want to expound the Christian faith in response to new challenges, fresh questions, and the perceived contradictions in this cultural moment.

A Catechism for a Secular Age

One way of meeting the challenges of our day is to take an ancient practice and employ it afresh, to help the church recover what we believe in both depth and breadth. *Catechesis* simply means “instruction.” A catechism is one way instruction takes place. Almost every denomination and tradition in church history has used some form of catechesis for the religious education of Christian children and adults: Lutherans (with *Luther’s Small Catechism*), Presbyterians (with *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*), Baptists (with *Keach’s Catechism*), Catholics (with *Catechism of the Catholic Church*), and Anglicans (with books like J.I. Packer’s *To Be a Christian* and *The Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer*).

In the Reformation era, catechisms presented Protestant beliefs over against the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church of the time. These were exercises in counter-catechesis, in that they not only provided a positive vision of Christianity but also sought to oppose the dominant religious options at the time.

Counter-catechesis is a way of presenting Christian truth *as opposed* to the dominant beliefs of a society. What outlook defines our culture today? A secularism that marginalizes and privatizes religious faith and authority; a built-in bias against transcendence and the supernatural; a radical commitment to individualism, pluralism, and skepticism; an openness to all kinds of personal spiritualities that start with the self and not with God. Counter-catechesis is a way of saying, Christianity is not *this*, but *that*. It’s saying, *Here’s what the world says, but look at what the Bible says*. It’s also

saying, *You think what you've heard is good, but let me show you how Christianity is better.* Tim Keller was right when he said, “We need a counter-catechism that explains, refutes, and re-narrates the world’s catechisms to Christians.”⁵ The Christian story told in the Bible needs to be taught alongside and even against the secular narratives of the day.

The Gospel Way

In *The Gospel Way Catechism*, we offer the old truths of Christianity in a way that identifies cultural narratives so they can be seen and considered, affirmed for the ways that they rightly embody some aspect of the biblical story, subverted and critiqued for not going far enough in delivering our deep desires of joy and fulfillment, and finally shown only to be fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ. We call this *The Gospel Way* because we trust in Jesus, who claimed to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). In a world of competing narratives and shifting values, we follow in the footsteps of the early Christians, who described their community as The Way (Acts 9:2)—men and women who walked the path of discipleship in obedience to their King.

Catechisms are tools for thought, study, and memorization. We believe the problem in the church is not that we’ve asked too much of people but too little. We are inspired by Keller’s vision of finding new ways of providing instruction for Christians. He said:

Christian education, in general, needs to be massively redone. We must not merely explain Christian doctrine to children, youth, and adults but use Christian doctrine to subvert the baseline cultural narratives to which believers are exposed in powerful ways daily. We should distribute this material widely to all, disrupting existing channels, flooding society, as it were, with the material as well as directly incorporating it into local churches.⁶

The word *disciple* simply means student, and we envision the church as a formative and holistic learning community, not merely an inspirational gathering or performance attended only a couple times a month. For the longtime Christian, a counter-catechism can provide a tune-up of sorts, a reminder of how distinct and wonderful the Christian faith is. For the new believer, a counter-catechism can introduce the basics of the Christian faith

in distinction to what we experience as common-sense beliefs and practices in the world.

Christianity is not simply something we look *at* but a lens we look *through* to understand our world. We need to recover the scriptural story as *the* story we look through to make sense of the world in which we live. We pray this resource will be an aid to that end.

How to Use This Resource

This is a short book, but it's not something to breeze through. It's packed with concentrated truth. Working your way through a catechism is a process designed for slowness and contemplation, not speed and superficiality. Here are a few suggestions on how to make the most of this resource.

- **Memorize:** Catechism questions and answers are designed to be memorized. There is a rhythm and art to the wording, intended to aid the memory. We recommend spending 5-10 minutes every day for a full week with each question, carefully considering the answer, committing it to memory so you can recite it word for word.
- **Go deeper:** The commentary for each question explains the concepts in fuller detail, showing how Christianity stands in contrast to what often passes for common sense in the world today. We recommend reading the commentary at the beginning of the week, and then again at the end of the week (once you've memorized the answer).
- **Reflect:** Reflection questions give you an opportunity to look at your life in light of Christian teaching and then look for ways to apply the truth to your life. We recommend you work through the reflection questions at the end of the week before moving on to the next question and answer. Pray through this part of the process.
- **Scripture:** Throughout the week, as you have time, look up some of the scripture references, perhaps one or two each day, so you can see how God's Word is the basis for the Christian truths expounded here.

- **Find a partner or group:** One of the best ways to work through a catechism is with brothers and sisters in your church. We recommend enlisting a partner to walk through the process at the same time, for accountability and inspiration, or joining a church group that commits to this process for 50 weeks. Discussing the Christian faith with others will solidify these truths in ways that going solo will not.





PART 1



God

This catechism begins with a section about God, not about us. Why? Because God is the center and point of everything. The world's catechism begins with us; we begin with God. The world teaches that our *self* is found by looking inward to discover our identity and destiny. The Bible teaches that we look upward to God and allow him to narrate our story for us.

God is the ultimate reality around which all creation revolves. He is not a distant deity but intimately involved with his creation, revealing himself so we can see and know him. Through Scripture, nature, and, supremely, through Jesus Christ, we understand who God is and how he desires to relate to us.

God exists as one being in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This triune nature means God is relational, loving, and eternally self-sufficient. The Trinity is a core concept for this catechism, and we'll engage with it extensively in the sections that follow.

God the Father is the Creator, Sustainer, and Sovereign over all. He is holy, just, and loving, guiding history according to his perfect will and purpose. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, is the eternal Word made flesh. He reveals God through his life, teachings, death, and resurrection. Jesus is the Savior who redeems us from sin and the mediator who reconciles us to the Father. God the Holy Spirit is the presence of God active in the world today, indwelling believers, empowering them for godly living, and guiding them into all truth. The Spirit comforts, convicts, and transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ. The world begins with *self*. We begin with God.





QUESTION 1

What Is the Center and Point of Everything?

ANSWER

God is the center and point of everything. In him, all things come to be and are held together. He has no rival.

"I AM THE MASTER OF my fate and the captain of my soul." These words, spoken by Morgan Freeman as Nelson Mandela in the movie *Invictus*, come from the English poet William Ernest Henley.¹ This phrase resonates with us in the modern world, stirring up a sense of exhilaration at the idea of controlling our destiny or determining our own meaning of life. This is one of the controlling ideas in Western culture today. The philosopher Charles Taylor describes this outlook: "My ultimate purposes are those which arise within me; the crucial meanings of things are those defined in my responses to them."² *Master of my fate! Captain of my soul! The meaning of life is whatever I make of it. My future is in my hands.*

Exhilaration eventually slides into exhaustion. When we prioritize our individual interests and perspectives above all else, when the "I" is always in the driver's seat, we create a culture lacking in empathy and consideration for others. Loneliness arises. Friendships become shallow. We suffer under the weight and pressure of constantly having to figure out who we are, what our future should be, and what will make us happy.

When looking at life, the world starts with *us*. The Bible starts with *God*. The contrast matters. The Bible pushes back against an overly individualistic, human-centered way of thinking and living. Instead of making meaning, defining our identity, and coming to God on our own terms, we discover meaning, receive an identity, and meet the God who comes to us on *his* terms.

The Bible begins with God because God is the beginning and end. The world doesn't revolve around us, and neither does God. It is *we* who revolve around *him*. And even if we may bristle at being demoted from first place,

there's something refreshing to realize God is at the center so that everything else falls into place. The good news of God being the point of everything is that we now have someone outside ourselves who tells us who we are, who declares our worth, and who helps us see the point of our existence.

Instead of living in an inconsistent, risky, and exhausting manner of thinking life is all about us, laboring to make sense of everything independently, why not embrace God as the center and point of everything? Why not experience the sigh of relief as we move out of the center and see God take his rightful place?

The world's catechism says, "You come first." But the Bible says, *Seek God first* (Matthew 6:33). And God promises, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13). God can't be reduced to just one of the many priorities on your list; he must be *the* priority. God is not just a chapter in the story of your life; he's the author of your story, the one who makes sense of all the chapters of your life.

God is the master of our fate. God is to be the captain of our souls. "In the beginning, *God*" (Genesis 1:1). The Bible starts with God. So do we.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **How does acknowledging God as the center and point of everything challenge the contemporary notion that life is all about us?** The idea that we find meaning and purpose inside ourselves stands in contrast to the biblical teaching that meaning and purpose come from God. How does this truth shape your understanding of your identity and purpose?

2. **What risks and pressures are associated with trying to be the “master of your fate” and the “captain of your soul”? Consider how self-assertion and identity creation can lead to confusion or exhaustion. How does the biblical view of acknowledging God at the center offer a more stable and fulfilling alternative?**

3. **What practices can help remind us that God is worthy to be first in our lives? What are some practical ways our lives can show others that he is the center and point of everything?**

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Genesis 1:1
- Psalm 46:10
- Psalm 90:2
- Isaiah 43:10-11
- Isaiah 45:5-6
- Jeremiah 29:13
- Matthew 6:33
- John 1:3
- Romans 11:36
- Colossians 1:16-17
- Hebrews 1:3
- Revelation 4:11



QUESTION 2

How Do We See God and Come to Know Him?

ANSWER

We see God by the light of his revelation, not by our imagination. God reveals his character and purposes through his Word and works.

THE ANCIENT PHILOSOPHER PROTAGORAS SAID, “Man is the measure of all things.”¹ This old proverb seems like common sense to many people today. We set the standard. We determine morality. We reject the idea of a cosmic order to which we must conform, as if there could be one story of reality that must be true for all. Instead of looking to God to define the world for us, the individual constructs reality. This is an important aspect of the modern secular vision of life: we don’t find meaning *out there*; we create meaning *in here*. If people choose to believe in God, that’s fine because God is whoever we imagine God to be.

The Bible points us in a different direction—toward God’s revelation of himself. And the Bible presents us with a choice: we can either seek to interpret the world through the story told in the Scriptures or through the story of self. These two visions are rivals, offering fundamentally different ways of understanding reality and human nature. They give different answers to questions about the origins of the world, the nature of humanity, the ultimate purpose of life, the source of moral values, and what happens after death.

As we will see, the story told in the Scriptures begins with creation. The Bible tells us about God’s relationship with humanity, our fall into sin, redemption through Jesus Christ, and the ultimate restoration of all things. In contrast, the story of the self relies on natural causes to explain our origins. It emphasizes human autonomy and the notion that we can solve most or all of our problems through science and technology. The story of the self begins and ends with human reason. The story of the Scriptures begins and ends with divine revelation.

In the previous question, we saw that God is the center and point of

everything. Now, we ask: How do we see this God? How do we know him? The answer is twofold: through general revelation and through special revelation. General revelation refers to the work of God in creation. Look around at the world and you see something of God's character and attributes. Creation bears his fingerprints. General revelation is wonderful, but it only takes us so far.

Special revelation refers to God's Word (the Bible). We see God most clearly in how he reveals himself through his Word. It's ultimately in Scripture where we come to understand who God is and what he has revealed about himself.

Over the centuries, pastors and theologians have leaned on the metaphor of spectacles or lenses to explain how the Bible functions.² The Bible provides a framework or perspective through which we can understand reality, just as glasses or lenses help us see clearly. Only through the lens of Scripture can we truly understand and interpret the world and our experiences. We don't merely look *at* the Bible but *through* it to understand our lives and the world we inhabit. The story of the Scriptures is the lens we use to see God and the world.

In the end, we know God because God has made himself known. We do not conjure up God as we'd like to imagine; we encounter God as he has revealed himself.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **How does seeing life through the story told in the Scriptures differ from seeing life through the story of self?** Reflect on Protagoras's statement, "Man is the measure of all things," and how this contrasts with the biblical perspective of God's revelation as the ultimate truth. How does each perspective shape one's understanding of reality and morality?

2. **In what ways has the Bible provided you with a clearer understanding of God's character and his purpose for your life?** Consider specific instances in which Scripture has illuminated aspects of God's nature or guided your decisions and actions. How has God's Word helped you see beyond your perceptions and experiences?
3. **How can you apply the metaphor of the Bible as spectacles to your daily life and decision-making?** Consider how regular engagement with Scripture can influence how you interpret events, make choices, and interact with others. How does the study of God's Word help you align your life closely with God's will and purpose?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Psalm 19:1-2
- Psalm 119:18, 105
- Isaiah 40:8
- John 1:18
- Romans 1:20
- Colossians 1:15-16
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- Hebrews 1:1-2
- 2 Peter 1:20-21



QUESTION 3

Who Does God Reveal Himself to Be?

ANSWER

He is the Lord, the great I AM, one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. He is the Creator and Ruler of all that is, seen and unseen.

MORE THAN A CENTURY AGO, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche painted a picture of the world as having no inherent meaning or purpose. The idea of God was a great deception, and traditional morality and religion were not just irrelevant, but an obstacle to power and progress. The future would belong to those courageous enough to create their own meaning. The winners would be known not for submission to a fanciful understanding of God, but through their becoming godlike in the quest for power.

The Nietzschean outlook on life is often called *nihilism*: the belief that life is meaningless, and religious and moral principles are unfounded. Christianity stands in direct contradiction. According to the Bible, life is purposeful, not meaningless. And it is not belief in God but the denial of his existence that is the great deception in our world today.

In the Scriptures, we see that this God (who is the ultimate reality—not simply the greatest of all beings but *Being* itself) is personal and relational. God is the maker and sustainer of all things. He is the Lord. God's creation and kingship extend not only to the visible things of this world but also to the invisible realm, including spiritual powers and authorities.

In a world that often lives as if there is no God, or as if God is whatever we imagine him to be, or as if God is just one of many potential deities, Christianity, like a comet streaking across the sky, declares the identity of the God who made us. The God we see revealed in Scripture is unique, the Great I AM. God gives us his name in a famous story near the beginning of the Bible, when God appears to Moses in a burning bush (Exodus 3). The name I AM implies that God is always present, active and involved, fully

independent, self-sufficient, sovereign, inexhaustible and all-encompassing, eternal, all-powerful. Like a flame that never dies. A bush that never stops burning.

As you move through the Bible, the revelation of God grows brighter and clearer. The one true God, the Great I AM, is the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Christians call this the Trinity—one God in three persons. It is the central tenet of all Christian theology, and we will return to it often in this catechism.

In the tortured vision of Nietzsche, the best life is found when we become a “superman”—not the caped hero of comic book fame but the ideal individual who succeeds at transcending conventional morality and societal norms to create our own values and purpose in life. In contrast, Christianity teaches that God is the source of the transcendence we long for. He is Life itself.

Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, yet it is Nietzsche who died, while God still lives. In contrast to a nihilistic vision of the world that reduces all conflict to power and leads only to despair, Christianity claims the majestic, awe-inspiring, holy God of love exists as Father, Son, and Spirit, that self-giving love is the key to the mystery of life, and that all the goodness and happiness in the world can be traced back to the fountain of all joy, the divine dance of God at the center of all things.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **How does the Christian understanding of God as Father, Son, and Spirit provide a meaningful alternative to the perspective that life has no inherent purpose?** Reflect on how the relational nature of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) offers a framework for understanding purpose, meaning, and community in contrast to Nietzsche’s view that God is a deception. How does this relational aspect of God shape your sense of purpose and identity?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Scriptures on God as "I AM"

- Exodus 3:14
- Isaiah 41:4
Isaiah 43:10
- John 8:58

Scriptures on God as Trinity

- Matthew 28:19
- John 1:1-3
John 14:26
- 2 Corinthians 13:14

Scriptures on God as Creator and King

- Genesis 1:1
- Psalm 19:1
Psalm 95:3
- Isaiah 40:28
- Colossians 1:16-17
- Revelation 4:11



QUESTION 4

Who Is God the Father?

ANSWER

God the Father is the Almighty One, infinitely great and good, whose name is hallowed in heaven and on earth. He is not a distant authority, but a holy God filled with fatherly love.

THE IDEA OF GOD AS *Father* stirs up unpleasant thoughts for many people in our day. Some may remember the overbearing authority of their fathers, perhaps exerted in abusive ways. Others remember the absence of their fathers, or their fathers' indifference to what was good for the family. It's no wonder that some recommend we dispense with fatherly descriptors of God altogether.

But the Bible betrays no hint of embarrassment or reticence in describing God as Father. Even if we know God is spirit, thus transcending physical categories of male and female, and even if we can point to occasional motherly descriptors assigned to God in the biblical text, the overwhelming witness of Scripture is that God is our Father. Which means, rather than projecting all our experiences of earthly fathers onto God, as if he were merely a bigger and better version of whatever dad you had growing up (or the dad who was absent), we should see God as setting the standard for what fathering looks like. Some dads reflect him well. Others fail miserably. But *he* is the lens through which we assess what fatherhood should be, not the other way around.

The Bible describes the all-powerful nature of God as Father. "I believe in God the Father Almighty," says the ancient Apostles' Creed, "creator of heaven and earth." In calling God Father, the authors of the Bible reveal a God who is life-giving. Ancient theologians described the Trinity—the one God in three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit—in creative ways, sometimes speaking of the Father's eternal love for the Son through the Spirit. For our present purposes, it's sufficient to note how we benefit from the life-giving love of the Father, who for all eternity has never known a moment he didn't enjoy loving another or delighting in having another beside him.¹

Many imagine God as a grumpy grandfather, a distant authority figure just waiting to catch us making a mistake. But the picture we see in Scripture is of a holy and happy God. He is infinitely great and good, yes. Majestic. Fiery. Set apart. We are to pray for his name to be hallowed—that's a beautiful older English word that means *honored* and *sanctified*—in all the earth. Yet, this same holy God sings over his children in love (Zephaniah 3:17). He delights in welcoming us into his love for his Son, so much that we too can call him *our* Father. In his attributes and his work, he reveals unfathomable kindness and grace.

The Old Testament describes the Father as gentle and compassionate toward those who fear him (Psalm 103:13). He gives wisdom and instruction that lead to life (Proverbs 4:1-2). He reproves those he loves like an earthly father should (Proverbs 3:12). The Bible tells us the Father knows what we need (Matthew 6:8), plans out our future (Psalm 139:16), and is ready to provide comfort for every pain (2 Corinthians 1:3). The love and devotion of earthly fathers, even the best, will be inconsistent. But God is perfect in his fatherly love. He is infinitely great and good.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **How does seeing God as holy and filled with fatherly love reshape your view of authority and power?** Reflect on how your past experiences with your father might influence your perception of God, both positively and negatively. How does the biblical portrayal of God the Father as infinitely great and good help you reconcile these views and trust his guidance and discipline?
2. **In what ways does acknowledging God the Father as both infinitely powerful and deeply personal shape your relationship**

with him? Consider how the combination of God's power and his closeness influences your approach to prayer, decision-making, and dealing with life's challenges. How does this understanding provide comfort and confidence in his plans for you?

3. **How can you reflect the traits of God the Father—his love, his joy, and his creative power—in your relationships and responsibilities?** What does a life of self-giving love, wisdom, and strength look like, as you interact with others? How can you be a source of support and guidance, modeling the character of God in your family, community, and work?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Deuteronomy 32:6
- Psalm 103:13
- Psalm 139:1-2
- Isaiah 64:8
- Matthew 6:9
- Matthew 7:11
- John 3:16
- John 13:3
- Romans 8:15
- 2 Corinthians 6:18
- Galatians 4:6-7
- James 1:17



QUESTION 5

Who Is God the Son?

ANSWER

God the Son is the eternal Word who took on humanity: Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of Israel and King of the world.

He is not a life coach or therapist who affirms all our desires, but the Great Physician whose blood heals our sin-sick hearts.

EVERYONE WANTS JESUS ON THEIR side. That's why you often hear people say things like, "My Jesus would never" or describe "my Jesus" in ways that line up with whatever they already think. The world is full of manufactured ideas about Jesus. You can find just about any version of Jesus that suits you—a Jesus who cheers you on as you pursue all your hopes and dreams, a Jesus who will never challenge your choices, a Jesus who hates all the same people you hate, or a Jesus who blesses and affirms your life as you want it to be.

The most popular version of Jesus today casts him in the role of a life coach who is there to help you achieve your goals rather than someone who might call into question your goals or offer a new direction. Another version of Jesus casts him in the role of the therapist who affirms all our desires rather than someone who might challenge our feelings or offer to replace our selfish dreams with a new set of desires. Then there are versions of Jesus that cast him as a useful advocate for whatever cause or agenda we're most passionate about.

The four biographies of Jesus contained in the Bible (the Gospels) shatter all these mythical versions of Jesus. The Bible portrays Jesus as the Son of God, the eternal Word of God who is uncreated and has always existed (John 1:1). The Son took on humanity and came into the world as a historical person who grew up in the backwater town of Nazareth in Judea in the first century. His ministry marked him as the Messiah, a title that comes from the Hebrew word "anointed one." In his life and work, he fulfilled the ancient prophecies of Israel, taught about the kingdom of God, and claimed he was the chosen one bringing the long story of Israel to its rightful climax.

Jesus is more than a good teacher, a life coach, a therapist, or an advocate. The New Testament claims Jesus is King of the world. He has supreme authority. In future questions devoted in more detail to the life and ministry of Jesus, we will consider the significance of his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

At the same time, this Jesus, named both Son of God and Son of Man, is a King marked by self-giving love, and the blood he spilled on the cross for us is for our healing. In the end, we don't need a coach; we need a Savior. We don't need an anesthetic; we need a surgeon. We don't need a heart tune-up; we need a heart transplant. The real Jesus is not a cheerleader for our feelings, but a doctor for our souls. The real Jesus isn't an advocate we get on our side. It's being on *his* side that matters.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **How do you reconcile the differing images of Jesus you encounter (cultural, personal, or religious) with the biblical portrait of Jesus as the eternal Word of God and King of the world?** Consider how the true Jesus, as described in Scripture, challenges or aligns with your previous notions or cultural representations of him. How can you ensure your understanding of Jesus is rooted in biblical truth?

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2. In what ways does understanding Jesus as the Great Physician, rather than just a life coach or a therapist, deepen your appreciation of his role in your life? Reflect on the significance of Jesus's self-sacrifice and how it addresses not only the needs we feel, but the deeper needs we may be unaware of.
3. How can recognizing Jesus as the Messiah of Israel in fulfillment of God's ancient plan help you learn to trust in his promises? Reflect on the continuity of God's plan from the Old Testament to the New Testament and how Jesus fulfills the prophecies and expectations of the Messiah. How does this knowledge strengthen your faith and trust in God's overarching plan for your life?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

The Eternal Word

- John 1:1-3
- Colossians 1:15-17
- Hebrews 1:1-3

King of the World

- Matthew 28:18
- 1 Timothy 6:15
- Revelation 19:16

Jesus Taking on Humanity

- John 1:14
- Galatians 4:4-5
- Philippians 2:5-8

Great Physician

- Mark 2:17
- Luke 5:31-32
- John 3:17

Jesus of Nazareth

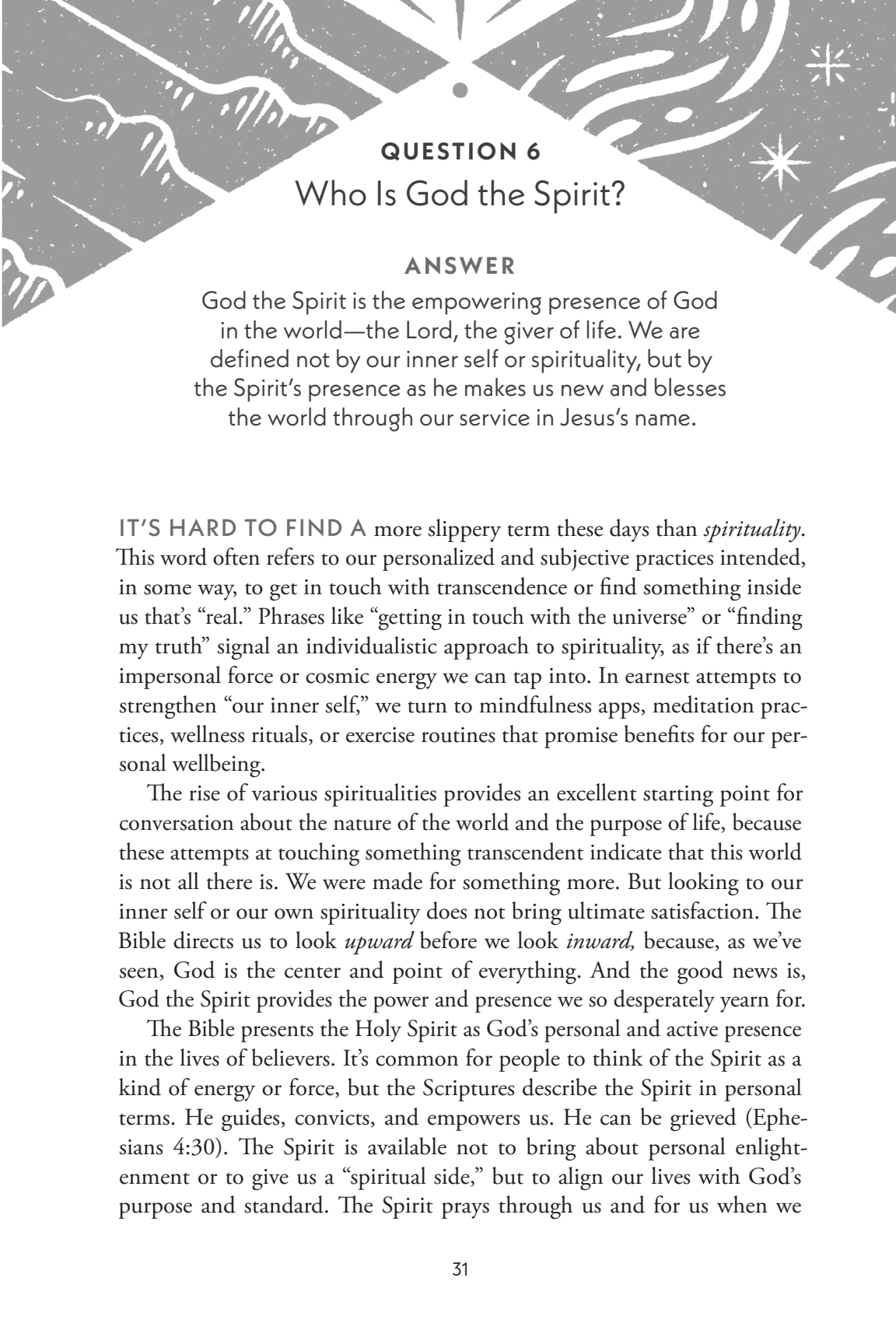
- Matthew 2:23
- Mark 1:9
- John 1:45-46

Self-Sacrificial Love

- John 10:18
- Philippians 2:5-8
- 1 John 3:16
- 1 John 4:8-10

The Messiah of Israel

- Isaiah 7:14
- Micah 5:2
- Zechariah 9:9
- John 1:41



QUESTION 6

Who Is God the Spirit?

ANSWER

God the Spirit is the empowering presence of God in the world—the Lord, the giver of life. We are defined not by our inner self or spirituality, but by the Spirit’s presence as he makes us new and blesses the world through our service in Jesus’s name.

IT’S HARD TO FIND A more slippery term these days than *spirituality*. This word often refers to our personalized and subjective practices intended, in some way, to get in touch with transcendence or find something inside us that’s “real.” Phrases like “getting in touch with the universe” or “finding my truth” signal an individualistic approach to spirituality, as if there’s an impersonal force or cosmic energy we can tap into. In earnest attempts to strengthen “our inner self,” we turn to mindfulness apps, meditation practices, wellness rituals, or exercise routines that promise benefits for our personal wellbeing.

The rise of various spiritualities provides an excellent starting point for conversation about the nature of the world and the purpose of life, because these attempts at touching something transcendent indicate that this world is not all there is. We were made for something more. But looking to our inner self or our own spirituality does not bring ultimate satisfaction. The Bible directs us to look *upward* before we look *inward*, because, as we’ve seen, God is the center and point of everything. And the good news is, God the Spirit provides the power and presence we so desperately yearn for.

The Bible presents the Holy Spirit as God’s personal and active presence in the lives of believers. It’s common for people to think of the Spirit as a kind of energy or force, but the Scriptures describe the Spirit in personal terms. He guides, convicts, and empowers us. He can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30). The Spirit is available not to bring about personal enlightenment or to give us a “spiritual side,” but to align our lives with God’s purpose and standard. The Spirit prays through us and for us when we

don't know what to pray (Romans 8:26-27). The Spirit reminds us what Jesus has taught (John 14:26).

The Nicene Creed (AD 381), which lays out a clear description of the Trinity—one God in three persons—describes the Holy Spirit as “the Lord, the giver of life.” Not only was the Spirit active in the creation of the world, but he also brings about a new creation in the hearts and minds of those who follow Jesus—convicting us of wrongdoing, regenerating our hearts, and renewing our lives as we put off the old self and put on the new self (Ephesians 4:23).

In a world where people are attracted to all kinds of spiritual practices, the Bible reminds us of the importance of the Spirit in bringing about real and lasting life change. In the end, we are defined not by our futile attempts at finding ourselves or achieving some kind of super-spiritual status, but by the Spirit's presence in us. By the Spirit's power we are made new. By the Spirit's power we bring blessing to the world. By the Spirit's power we serve others in Jesus's name.

This is the glory of the Trinity, the central tenet of the Christian faith: the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.¹

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. **How does recognizing the Holy Spirit as the empowering presence of God in your life influence your daily actions and decisions?** Reflect on how acknowledging the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit can change how you approach your daily tasks, challenges, and interactions. How can you more deeply depend on the Spirit's power and leading in your everyday life?
2. **In what ways has the Holy Spirit transformed your understanding of your identity and purpose?** Consider how the Spirit's work has redefined who you are and what you are called to do. How does

the Spirit's indwelling presence shape your sense of self and your mission in the world?

- 3. How can you actively participate in blessing the world through the love and good works empowered by the Holy Spirit?** Reflect on specific ways you can be an ambassador of Jesus the King, bringing the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to those around you. How can you use the gifts and guidance of the Spirit to serve others and share God's love more effectively?

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Matthew 28:19
- Luke 1:31, 35
- John 14:16-17, 26
John 15:26
John 16:13
John 17:25-26
- Acts 1:8
Acts 2:4
Acts 10:47-48
- Romans 5:5
Romans 8:9
Romans 8:26-27
- 1 Corinthians 12:4-7
- 2 Corinthians 13:14
- Ephesians 1:13-14
- 1 Thessalonians 1:6
- Titus 3:5-6