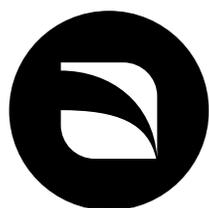


FOLLOWING
JESUS 101



INTRO

(the only page you need to read)

We're really glad you grabbed a copy of this little eBook. We think the message it contains about Jesus could help you see the world in a brand new way and discover your purpose.

At its heart, Christianity is simple: through the person and work of Jesus, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us *from* sin and death *into* relationship with him; he then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever. To follow Jesus is to believe this and make Jesus your Lord: the boss of your life. We believe that if you do this, if you choose to follow Jesus, he will make your life better and make you better at life; that you will discover meaning and purpose beyond what you had previously imagined.

Perhaps you've already made the decision to follow Jesus, but you aren't sure what to do next. Or maybe you find Jesus compelling, but you have some questions you need answered before you commit your life to him. Or perhaps you aren't even sure if Christianity is worth considering and you'd like a little more information about its basic tenets. This eBook is for you. Shorter than a book but longer than a blog post, our desire is to give you a resource for a fuller understanding of what it means to follow after Jesus. We're so thankful you downloaded it, and we're excited to see how God may change your life based on the simple message it contains. We invite you to feel free to jump around to any section that interests you.



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QUESTION

WHY JESUS?

Of all the things you could believe in all of human history, why would you believe in Jesus? Why bother with Jesus? Why study Jesus? Why does Jesus even matter?

Jesus was a first-century Jewish itinerant teacher who taught a particular way of understanding what it means to be human and what it means to engage with God. In Jesus' day, most people attempted to live meaningful lives in one of two ways: 1) by following the rules of a religious system or 2) by embracing the power structures of Roman society. While many people felt that neither of these options seemed deeply fulfilling, their desire to live a life of meaning and purpose often drove them to adopt one or the other. Two thousand years later, we are still motivated by this desire.

When asked whether they think about the meaning and purpose of life, nearly three fourths of people across the globe say that they do often or sometimes. Regional variations are small, ranging from 89 percent in sub-

Saharan Africa to 76 percent in Asia. And the question of meaning is not likely to decline in its influence.

But what are we actually asking when inquiring about the meaning of life? If people say that their lives feel meaningless, it doesn't necessarily mean that they don't have good jobs, family and friends, and the means to live in a materially comfortable way. It means that they are not sure what all the activity is being done for. Put another way, they are not sure that all their making and getting actually matters, makes a difference, or accomplishes anything beyond itself. So to have meaning in life is to have both an **overall purpose for living** and the assurance that you are **making a difference** by serving some good beyond yourself. The psychological need for this is inarguable.

01 WHY JESUS?

Enter Jesus. Jesus comes to every individual and every culture and offers to fulfill their deepest desires and best aspirations. But in the same stroke he also fundamentally challenges their beliefs and practices; he tells them they have been going about seeking the fulfillment of those desires in profoundly wrong ways. He offers them all they want—meaning, satisfaction, freedom, identity, hope, and justice—but calls them to repent and seek their all **in him**. This is his basic message, and it makes sense of the magnitude of his language. Others said, “This is the truth about the universe. This is the way you ought to go.” He says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” He said, “No man can reach absolute reality except through me. Try to retain your own life, and you will be inevitably ruined. Give yourself away, and you will be saved. Finally, do not be afraid. I have overcome the whole universe.” (John 14:6; Matthew 16:24-26; John 16:33)

Here is a man who claimed to be God yet who lived a life so great that he became the only person to convince a sizable part of humanity that he was. How do we account for that? We can't resolve the issue by saying he was only a great teacher, because his declarations don't allow that.

We can't respond that he never made such claims because of the historical evidence. We can't be content with the explanation that he was deranged or a fraud because of the evident wisdom, greatness, and impact of his life on his followers and because of the case for his Resurrection. This leaves us with the final possible explanation, namely, that he is who he said he is. As hard as it is to believe that he is God come to earth, it may be just as difficult not to. Is it really impossible for God to become human? Why, if God is really all-powerful, could he not have done it? And why, if God is really all-loving, would he not have done it?

“FINALLY,
DO NOT BE
AFRAID.
I HAVE
OVERCOME
THE WHOLE
UNIVERSE.”

JOHN 16:33

QUESTION

02

WHAT DID JESUS TEACH?

As God on earth, Jesus came to show us God's love, save us from sin, set up God's kingdom, and shut down religion so we can share in God's life together. If you're starting to ask questions about spirituality and faith, we think Jesus is the best place to start.

JESUS TAUGHT US WHO WE ARE

God's creation. God created us in his image and built us for a relationship with him. We belong to him, and we owe him gratitude for every breath, every moment, everything. Because humans were built to live for him (to worship), we will always try to worship something – if not God, we will choose some other object of ultimate devotion to give our lives meaning.

Sin. Jesus calls the corrosive force that separates us from God, from each other, and from our better selves, "sin." We have all made decisions at some point in our lives that have broken peace with the people and world around us.

We have all chosen (and re-affirm daily) to reject God and to make our own joy and happiness our highest priority. We do not want to worship God and surrender ourselves as master, yet we are built to worship, so we cling to idols, centering our lives on things that promise to give us meaning: success, relationships, influence, love, comfort, and so on.

In spiritual bondage. To live for anything else but God leads to breakdown and decay. When a fish leaves the water, which he was built for, he is not free, but dead. Worshiping other things besides God leads to a loss of meaning. If we achieve these things, they cannot deliver satisfaction, because they were never meant to be "gods." They

— 02 WHAT DID JESUS TEACH? —

were never meant to replace God. Worshiping other things besides God also leads to self-image problems. We end up defining ourselves in terms of our achievement in these things. We must have them or all is lost; so they drive us to work too hard, or they fill us with terror if they are jeopardized.

JESUS TAUGHT US WHO GOD IS

God is love. His active concern is for our joy and well-being. Most people love those who love them, yet God loves and seeks the good even of people who are his enemies. It is precisely because God is good and loving that he cannot tolerate evil. The opposite of love is not anger, but indifference. It is precisely because of God's commitment to the flourishing of his creation that he must actively work to overcome the sin, death, and evil in the world.

God is revealed in Jesus Christ. Jesus is God himself come to Earth. He first lived a perfect life, loving God with all his heart, soul, and mind. Then, through his death and resurrection, God inaugurates the New Covenant (a new way of being in relationship with God and one another), and offers us eternal and abundant

life now, all as a gift. In this New Covenant, God gives all believers a new heart, a new spirit, and God's own Spirit to change us from the inside out. This is pure grace, which we receive by simple faith, expressed in following Jesus.

JESUS TAUGHT US THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS HERE

Jesus is King. Throughout the New Testament we read that Jesus came to establish a kingdom. In the opening section of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus begins his ministry by proclaiming, "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15) His preaching, healing, and exorcism ministry continued throughout the Gospels as a demonstration of the power of the coming kingdom of God. Indeed, in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he asked of the Father, "Your kingdom come, your will be done..." (Matthew 6:9) Later, the kingdom also proves to be the substance of the Apostle Paul's gospel message: "He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!" (Acts 28:23).

— 02 WHAT DID JESUS TEACH? —

THIS KINGDOM CONSISTS OF AT LEAST THE FOLLOWING QUALITIES:

- 1** The kingdom of God has a king, and this king is Jesus.
- 2** The kingdom of God has a king who rules. Jesus rules by redeeming us and by governing us (followers of Jesus submit to him as Lord and seek to do his will).
- 3** The kingdom of God has a distinct people. The church, those who have chosen to follow Jesus, are the kingdom people who have been redeemed by Jesus and who follow him as their Lord. It is the mission of these kingdom people to invite everyone to experience the hope and love of God by becoming a part of the kingdom.
- 4** The kingdom of God has a moral vision. We can see the moral vision Jesus has for our lives by reading his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) or by following his commands to 1) love the Lord with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength and 2) love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matthew 22:34-40)
- 5** The kingdom of God has a land. There is no king who doesn't have a space to rule in. Jesus enters into our lives and transforms us, then calls us to go forward as Kingdom ambassadors into the whole world. In this way, the kingdom of God covers the entire world.

JESUS TAUGHT THAT WHAT WE DO NOW MATTERS

Our lives echo. Because God is renewing all things, what we do in this life either contributes to this renewal or detracts from it. Our lives, then, echo into eternity; what we do in this lifetime carries with

it eternal significance. The new life of the Spirit, in obedience to the lordship of Jesus Christ, should produce radical transformation of behavior in the present life, anticipating the life to come even though we know we shall never be complete and whole until then. Jesus invites us to live our lives in such a way that we proclaim his

— 02 WHAT DID JESUS TEACH? —

Gospel (evangelism), that we seek to set the world right (justice), and that we reflect the love of God into the world (beauty).

Eternity. This echoing into eternity means there are eternal outcomes that result from how we live our lives now. After the return of Jesus, there will be life *with* God (heaven) and life *without* God (hell). God will allow into heaven anybody who in his considered opinion can stand it. The realm of heaven touches the realm of earth and through the Spirit of Christ we can learn to live from the Kingdom of the Heavens today. If you want to go to heaven, you don't have to wait until you die: Jesus invites us to get heaven into us and into others; heaven in eternity will then take care of itself.

Hell is the absence of God. If on earth one tries to avoid God, why would they want to be with God for eternity? In heaven God will be unavoidable. Truly, God doesn't want anyone to perish; he wants everyone to be saved. But there are people who want nothing to do with God so he lets them have their way.

The emphasis of New Testament Gospel preaching is not the threat of hell as much as the promise of life with God. Christianity is primarily about a person to run to

(Jesus), and not something to run from (hell). In matters of salvation, God is the final judge and we are not. It is not the Church's job to guarantee hell to non-believers, but based on the good news of Jesus, we can and do announce the guarantee of heaven to those who do believe and are in a genuine relationship with Jesus as Lord of their life.

03

QUESTION

HOW DO I FOLLOW JESUS?

Christianity is knowing God. A person who becomes a Christian moves from knowing about God *distantly* to knowing about him *directly* and *intimately* through *Jesus*. Possessing a mere fascination with Jesus isn't enough to fulfill you, nor will it enact his life-altering work. To "follow Jesus" is to put your trust in what he taught and to live your life accordingly. (1 John 2:5-6)

So how do we do this?

Repent. Repentance is not beating your head on the floor or feeling bad about your sins — it's to *re-think* your thinking so as to change the way you've been thinking and acting. We repent in light of the message of Jesus. There first must be an admission that you have been living as your own master, worshipping the wrong things, and that you desire to begin moving in a new direction. "Repentance" means you ask for forgiveness and turn from that stance with a willingness to live for and center on him. Because of His kindness, God calls us to repent. He knows the destructive nature

of sin and the restoring power of the message of Jesus. Will you repent?

Believe. Faith is transferring your trust from your own efforts to the efforts of Christ. Faith is not a wild, desperate "leap" — it is confidence grounded in reality. To have faith in God is to trust him and to have confidence in him. You were relying on other things to make you acceptable or give your life meaning, but now you consciously begin relying on what Jesus did to defeat sin and death. Jesus calls us to follow him, through death, into new life. To believe what Jesus said leads us to pledge our allegiance to him as our Lord, Savior, and Teacher. We

– 03 HOW DO I FOLLOW JESUS? –

are not just believers, but followers (disciples) of Jesus, learning together how to obey everything he commands. A disciple spends time with Jesus, learning from Jesus, how to be like Jesus.

Pray in this way: “Father, I see I am flawed and sinful, but that I am even more loved and accepted than I ever dared to hope. I turn from my old life of living for myself. I rest in what Jesus did through his life, death, and resurrection; I ask to be accepted into God’s family for his sake. Help me to live the life Jesus called me to: loving You and loving others with my whole heart.”

When you initiate this relationship with God, two things happen at once: 1) your sins are wiped out permanently as you are adopted into God’s family and 2) the Holy Spirit enters your heart and begins to change your character into that of Jesus.

“FATHER, I SEE I AM FLAWED AND SINFUL, BUT THAT I AM EVEN MORE LOVED AND ACCEPTED THAN I EVER DARED TO HOPE.”

QUESTION 4

WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

You're probably at one of two places: either you've chosen to follow Jesus, or you aren't sure you're ready to do that just yet.

IF YOU STILL NEED TO PROCESS

If you're not ready to call Jesus Lord of your life just yet, we want to encourage you to keep exploring Christianity. Make a list of the issues that you perceive to be barriers to your crossing the line into faith. Most ongoing questions fall into one of the following categories:

Content issues. Do you understand the basics of the Christian message—sin, Jesus as God, forgiveness, faith, etc.?

Coherence issues. Are there intellectual problems you have with Christianity? Are there objections to the Christian faith that you cannot resolve in your own mind?

Cost issues. Do you perceive that a move into full Christian faith will cost you dearly? What fears do you have about commitment?

Once you understand the core issues behind your hesitancy, you can explore those questions until you can determine with clarity whether following Jesus is compelling to you or not.

IF YOU'VE DECIDED TO FOLLOW JESUS

If you've decided that Jesus is worth following and you've made him Lord, Savior, and Teacher of your life, we would encourage you to consider taking your next step.

Share it. Tell a Christian friend or an Inland Hills pastor about your commitment.

— 04 WHAT DO I DO NEXT? —

Be baptized. Jesus instructed his followers to be baptized as a public declaration of their faith. Christian baptism involves being plunged into water in the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We go through the water and enter into God's new covenant. The baptism of believers is a public witness that they have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and are becoming part of the community of faith. Baptism symbolizes the believer's submission to Jesus and identification with His death and resurrection.

CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

If being a follower (disciple) of Jesus is to learn and live what he taught, we should continue training in the basic disciplines of prayer, worship, Bible study, and fellowship with other Christians. While there are many ways you can do this, we've found the following framework to be helpful for many people:

Know God. Salvation is not a one-time event — it is a life. It is not just forgiveness and a “ticket to heaven” — it is an interactive life of knowing God, participating now in what Jesus is doing on earth. Every weekend our church gathers to worship God

together and wrestle with the teachings of Jesus. This ongoing fellowship, worship, and learning is a central part of the week for our congregation and committing to participate often in these weekend services helps each of us to know God better.

Find freedom. We believe life change happens in the context of relationships, so we invite everyone to participate in Small Groups. Small Groups have one simple purpose: to bring people together. God created us to live in community with others, and it is only then that we can experience the full life He intends for us.

Discover your purpose. You were created on purpose for a purpose, and we've created a 4-week experience called **Activate** to help you learn more about what that is. We offer **Activate** on a regular basis throughout the year and it is a great next step as you are determining what it looks like to live the full life God created for you.

— 04 WHAT DO I DO NEXT? —

Make a difference. All of us were created by God to make a difference in the world around us. God has a place for you where your unique abilities and passions can impact the lives of others. We believe your life will never make sense until you find, develop, and fulfill your purpose by pouring into the lives of others. One way to consider doing that is by joining our Dream Team: a group of incredible people who have discovered their gifts and passions

and are actively serving in them. From creating a comfortable environment by serving on a Host Team, to leading the next generation to Jesus by serving on a Student Ministries Team, to tearing down barriers across our city by leading a Small Group—we are a group that forcefully advances the Kingdom of God.

“ALL OF
US WERE
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IN THE WORLD
AROUND US.”



APPENDIX

APPENDIX

- I Glossary of Christian Words**
- IV Additional Resources**
- VI Inland Hills Faith Expressions**
- VIII Inland Hills Lived Implications**

GLOSSARY OF CHRISTIAN WORDS

When reading Christian literature, there are often terms or “jargon” that can be confusing for those who are new to exploring the faith. The following are a few words unpacked to be helpful as you continue to consider the prospect of putting your faith in Jesus.

God is love. He is the happiest, most joyful being in the universe. God is not mean, but he is dangerous because he is committed to vanquishing the evil that threatens the humans he loves so much. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and eternal. He is holy. He is the creator of life, the savior of sinners, and the judge of all.

The Trinity is God’s self-revelation to us as ONE God existing in three persons. God is a sweet society of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The cosmos environing us actually is, beyond all else, a self-sufficing community of unspeakably magnificent personal beings of boundless love, knowledge, and power. Everything God does is an expression of who God is, which is eternal infinite love. God does not love us because

we are good; God loves us because he is good.

Jesus is Lord. He is also the Smartest Person ever to live. Everything about us starts and ends with Jesus, the key to understanding who God is and what God is like. Jesus showed us the heart of God by willingly laying down his life for the very people who nailed him to the cross. He taught us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, and to live our lives with purpose. Jesus is both fully God and fully human; he is our doorway to knowing, understanding, and experiencing God and our true humanity, and the model and means for our reunion with God. Jesus is the authoritative living God to us, and we submit to him as his lifelong apprentices, Kingdom citizens, commissioned ambassadors, and beloved friends. Through Jesus, we get to know the Father and the Spirit.

The Gospel is the announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again according to the Scriptures, has been enthroned as the true Lord of the world. It’s

— GLOSSARY OF CHRISTIAN WORDS —

the announcement that God is restoring and renewing all things and wants to start with us. When this Resurrection is preached, God calls people to salvation, out of His grace, leading them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as the risen Lord. The first people to hear this message called it “good news.”

The Word of God is a real substance that nourishes our body and soul. The Bible is the Word of God in its unique written form. But the Bible is not Jesus Christ, who is the living Word. Neither is the Bible the word (small “w”) that Jesus spoke of as being sown by the active speaking of the ministry. All of these are God’s “word.”

The Bible is the unique written Word of God. It is authoritative for the purpose of guiding us into a life-saving relationship with God in His kingdom. The Bible contains a body of knowledge without which human beings cannot survive. It reliably fixes the boundaries of everything God will ever say to humankind.

Glory is the magnificent outpouring of the radiant splendor of God’s power, strength, beauty, and goodness.

Salvation is not an event — it

is a life. It is not just forgiveness and a “ticket to heaven” — it is an interactive life with God, participating now in what Jesus is doing on earth. The Biblical word for salvation is deliverance.

Doctrine and Salvation: You don’t need correct doctrine to be saved — you need to believe that Jesus is really it. Salvation begins in the attitude of the children’s song: “Jesus loves me this I know...” Your doctrine will come along.

Redemption involves, in seamless unity, both the remission of guilt for sins and the deliverance of our lives from domination by sin. Though these are distinct, they were not, in our past, generally thought of as separable, and of course they aren’t separable — ever.

Repentance is not beating your head on the floor or feeling bad about your sins — it’s to re-think your thinking so as to change the way you’ve been thinking and acting. We repent in light of the gospel of Jesus.

Grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action. Grace is not just about forgiveness — if we had never sinned we would still need grace. Grace is God acting in our life to do what we cannot do on

— GLOSSARY OF CHRISTIAN WORDS —

our own. Grace is what we live by and the human system won't work without it.

Regeneration is the entrance of God's nature and life into our real existence and identity. Regeneration is to be "born from above" and it is what enables us to see the Kingdom of God (John 3:3). It is what kicks off and enables sanctification.

Sanctification is not defined simply by external obedience, but by the kind of person one has become. It is living in a right relationship to Jesus Christ, the Master, that brings and sustains right thoughts, feelings, choices, and habits, enabling one to do what is right.

Life is self-initiating, self-directing, self-sustaining activity.

Eternal Life is not just unending life in heaven; it is interactive relationship with God and Jesus, now and forever (John 17:3). Life in general is self-initiating, self-sustaining, self-directing activity and power.

Death is the cessation of the body. Those who trust in Jesus will never experience death. Some time after they "die" they will figure out that something is different.

Hell is the absence of God. If on earth one tries to avoid God, why would they want to be with God for eternity? In heaven God will be unavoidable. Truly, God doesn't want anyone to perish; he wants everyone to be saved. But there are people who want nothing to do with God so he lets them have their way.

Heaven: God will allow into heaven anybody who in his considered opinion can stand it. The heavens touch earth and through the Spirit of Christ we can learn to live from the Kingdom of the Heavens today. If you want to go to heaven, why wait? Get heaven into yourself and others and heaven in eternity will take care of itself.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following are a few recommended books for additional reading. If you're considering Jesus or want to go deeper in your faith, these volumes will give you a good overview of Christian beliefs. The tones and styles of the books differ widely and we suggest that if you pick one up and find it slow, feel free to choose another from the list that engages you more. What you learn from that first book can then be supplemented by the others from this list.

Mere Christianity, by C.S. Lewis.

A wonderfully complete single volume: short and easy to read. Gives both explanations of the beliefs of Christianity along with arguments for their validity. While popular in style, Lewis demands that the reader follow long sequences of logical argument. (227 pages)

Unapologetic: Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense, by Francis Spufford.

Funny, ironic, and very informal. A British writer explains why the basic beliefs of Christianity “work” emotionally and culturally

to address many of the main problems and to solve many of the main puzzles of contemporary life. Good for those who live in a social context where Christian faith is almost unthinkable. (240 pages)

The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism, by Timothy Keller.

Wildly helpful and logical. The first half deals with common objections to Christianity. The middle seeks to make a positive case for the rationality of belief. Finally there's a basic treatment of the main Christian beliefs. (336 pages)

Letters from a Skeptic, by Gregory Boyd.

A truly helpful book that allows you to skip around to the questions that are most interesting to you. These letters between a Christian scholar and his atheist father tackle some of today's toughest challenges facing Christianity, including:

- Do all non-Christians go to hell?
- How can we believe a man rose from the dead?
- Why is the world so full of suffering?
- How do we know the Bible was divinely inspired? (258 pages)

— ADDITIONAL RESOURCES —

***Gunning for God: Why the New Atheists are Missing the Target*, by John C. Lennox.**

An Oxford professor answers a series of objections to the Christian faith. The material was crafted in debates and so has the

sometimes feisty tone of someone engaging in a public disputation. Special attention given to faith and science, though he also deals with question of moral beliefs and the resurrection of Jesus. (248 pages)

RESOURCE CREDIT

We hope that this short ebook has been a helpful starting place for you as you consider the possibility of following after Jesus. This resource is more of a curation than an original work and contains excerpts and ideas from the following publications:

The Divine Conspiracy by Dallas Willard

Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church by Scot McKnight

Making Sense of God by Timothy Keller

Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis

Reunion by Bruxy Cavey

Simply Christian by N.T. Wright

Simply Jesus by N.T. Wright

INLAND HILLS FAITH EXPRESSIONS

1. Jesus is Lord. Everything about us starts and ends with Jesus, the key to understanding who God is and what God is like. Jesus showed us the heart of God by willingly laying down his life for the very people who nailed him to the cross. He taught us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, and to live our lives with purpose. Jesus is both fully God and fully human; he is our doorway to knowing, understanding, and experiencing God and our true humanity, and the model and means for our reunion with God. Jesus is the authoritative living God to us, and we submit to him as his lifelong apprentices, Kingdom citizens, commissioned ambassadors, and beloved friends. Through Jesus, we get to know the Father and the Spirit.

2. God is Love. The essence of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe is unconditional, selfless love. Because God is triune, three-in-one, he has existed as a perfect loving community, Father – Son – Holy Spirit, for all eternity. Everything God does is an expression of who God is, which is eternal infinite love. God does not love us because we are good; God loves us because he is good.

3. The Spirit Empowers. The Holy

Spirit guides us toward Jesus, grows the fruit of love in our hearts, empowers us for ministry, and distributes spiritual gifts and talents among the Church to help build up the Body of Christ. Through the Spirit, we have the mind of Christ, and continue to experience the presence of God at all times for conviction, confirmation, and comfort.

4. We are Valuable. Humans are made by God for loving relationship with their Creator and with one another. The first word that the Scriptures say about us is that we are created in the image of God, crowned with glory and honor, sons and daughters of the Divine. The second word is the honest, unvarnished truth about how we all fall short, we all sin, we all disrupt the peace God intends for all things. As Jesus' parables of the lost coin, lost sheep, and lost son affirm, we have lost our way through our own sin and are unable to save ourselves. Jesus shows us a God who values us enough to pursue us, restore us to who we were made to be, and celebrate with us whenever we come home.

5. Something is Wrong. Jesus teaches, history demonstrates, and experience affirms that something is wrong with

FAITH EXPRESSIONS

everything. This world is filled with both beauty and horror, and humans amplify experiences of both. Jesus calls the corrosive force that separates us from God, from each other, and from our better selves, “sin.” Jesus came to heal our hearts, save us from sin, and show us a better way.

6. Saved by Grace. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, God inaugurated the New Covenant (a new way of being in relationship with God and one another), and offers us eternal and abundant life now, all as a gift. In this New Covenant, God gives all believers a new heart, a new spirit, and God’s own Spirit to change us from the inside out. This is pure grace, which we receive by simple faith, expressed in following Jesus.

7. Faith is Following. Biblical “faith” includes “faithfulness.” Jesus calls us to follow him, through death, into new life. Christians choose to pledge their allegiance to Jesus as Lord, Savior, and Teacher. In doing so, they repent (turn away) from sin in every area of their lives. We are not just believers, but disciples of Jesus, learning together how to obey everything he commands. A disciple spends time with Jesus, learning from Jesus, how to be like Jesus.

8. Scripture is Inspired. Like John the Baptist and the star of Bethlehem, the Bible points people to Jesus. The Bible, Old and New Testaments, is our God-given

window to see Jesus most clearly, and is useful to equip us for living as his disciples. We believe in the divine inspiration of all Scripture and we read and interpret the Bible together, with Jesus at the center. Most importantly, the Bible helps us know Jesus, and Jesus helps us interpret, understand, and apply the Bible.

9. Peace is Pursued. Because we see Jesus’ life and teaching as God’s authoritative Word to us, we take his teachings about all things – including peacemaking, reconciliation, and forgiveness – very seriously. We seek to live peaceful, reconciled lives, to encourage other believers to do the same, and to actively extend the peace of Jesus to the world.

10. Citizens and Ambassadors. Jesus came to establish his Kingdom and he invites us to live in it now. This is a Kingdom that transcends land and laws; a Kingdom of our hearts and relationships. This Kingdom defines for us a new culture and identity that stand in sweeping contrast to the kingdoms of this world. Christ-followers are ambassadors on behalf of the Kingdom of God to the people of all nations, with church communities functioning as embassies to experience a taste of what it means to live with Jesus as King. Our purpose every day is to accept God’s invitation to partner with Jesus to experience, express, and extend the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

INLAND HILLS LIVED IMPLICATIONS

These theological and ethical implications extend naturally from our core faith expressions. We invite conversations about these ideas as part of building a relationship with prospective Inland Hills members, versus wielding them legalistically to draw a hard dividing line.

1. Free Will. God's aim in creation is that humans enter into the divine flow of love that has existed within the Triune community for all eternity. Because love must be chosen and cannot by definition be coerced, human will is freed by God to trust him or to reject him. God wants all people to trust him, but does not force his will upon his own image bearers. In light of our free will, we believe that Christians are not saved because of our family of origin or religious heritage, but because we choose to trust Christ and receive his gift of salvation. Accordingly, the sacraments of communion and baptism symbolize our freely chosen faith in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf and our commitment to his Lordship.

2. New Covenant Atonement. The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ is the center of human and cosmic history. The cross and empty grave are the source of our

healing, our redemption, victory over the kingdom of darkness, the coronation of our King, the inauguration of God's kingdom on earth, and the birthing of the New Covenant, which offers forgiveness and cleansing of sin to everyone. This New Covenant opens the way for the Holy Spirit to be offered to all. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts and offers us not only justification (imputed righteousness) but rebirth and renewal (imparted righteousness).

3. Evangelism + Eternity. It is our privilege and passion to prioritize learning, living, and giving the good news of Jesus to anyone who is willing to consider it. In matters of salvation, God is the final judge and we are not. The emphasis of New Testament Gospel preaching is not the threat of hell as much as the promise of life with God. It is not the Church's job to guarantee hell to non-believers, but based on the good news of Jesus, we can and do announce the guarantee of heaven to those who do believe and are in a genuine relationship with Jesus as Lord of their life.

4. Equality in Ministry. God has made all people in his image and likeness and grants us all gifts, including leadership gifts, as the Holy Spirit decides.

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Therefore, all mature and gifted believers should be considered for all expressions of service and leadership in the Church, regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic status.

5. Third Way. When people tried to force Jesus to weigh in on either-or issues, he often managed to point out a “third way” — a Kingdom of God alternative that transcended the binary options with which he’d been presented. In doing so, Jesus set an important precedent for churches to follow. We consistently strive to move beyond dualistic thinking and to avoid aligning our church with any particular nation, political party, or politician. We look for creative Kingdom solutions to theological tensions that seem to only have binary possibilities. We seek to affirm goodness in the world wherever we find it and to push back against that which conflicts with the values and teachings of Jesus.

6. Marriage. Inland Hills understands God’s intended design for marriage to be a lifelong, monogamous, loving, mutually submissive relationship between a man and a woman. We also believe that faithful Christians may arrive at a different interpretation, and that our disposition towards others both inside and outside the church is as important as the theological positions we carry on this topic. Whether someone is conservative/

traditional or liberal/progressive on this topic, we seek to embrace Christians on both sides of the divide as family from whom we have much to learn. Because we believe that spreading the transformational message of Jesus is the critical mission of the Church, we seek unity with all Christians, including those with whom we disagree.

7. Infinite Worth. Jesus ascribed infinite worth to each person and gave his life that all might have the opportunity of being saved from lives of sin and brokenness. The church, then, is to similarly ascribe infinite worth to everyone. The New Testament explicitly teaches us not to judge those outside of the church nor to hold them to the same moral standards we hold ourselves to as followers of Jesus. Rather, the only opinion we are to have of those who have not yet placed their faith in Christ is that they are infinitely loved by God. We carry the responsibility to live out the Gospel in our relationships with them, to ascribe dignity and worth to them while also bearing witness to the power of God in our own lives.

8. Everything is Spiritual. Creation was from the beginning an act of love, of affirming goodness of the other. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good; but it was not itself divine. While sin corrupted creation, Jesus continued to find truth and goodness in every

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corner of this God-bathed world. He told stories about every-day events that held deep spiritual significance. He seemed to believe that everything was spiritual — capable of pointing back to God — and refused to divide the world into arbitrary categories of secular and sacred. The church, then, should embrace the goodness of God wherever we see it in whoever we see it in. While Jesus is our ultimate authority and the lens through which we see the rest of the world, we should seek to learn from anyone who has something to teach us that aligns with a Christocentric worldview. We therefore affirm the pursuit of theology, art, science, and philosophy as highways into the center of a reality which cannot be glimpsed, let alone grasped, through any singular discipline.

9. The Church. Though it has a multitude of diverse expressions, there is only one universal Church. We believe that the Church is the body of Christ, of which Jesus Christ is the head. The members of the Church are those who have trusted by faith the finished work of Christ. The primary purpose of the Church is to use every possible means to advance the Kingdom of God by making disciples through worship, prayer, teaching of Scripture, observance of the ordinances, fellowship, the exercise of our gifts and talents, and the proclamation of the Gospel both in our community and throughout the world. The people of God are also called to be a redemptive influence in the world, seeking to overcome evil with good. They are to be a voice for righteousness, peace, and justice.



14670 RAMONA AVE, CHINO, CA 91710
INLANDHILLS.COM | 909.393.1577

@INLANDHILLS

