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FOLLOW

WHAT EVERY TEENAGER NEEDS TO DECIDE ABOUT JESUS

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INTRODUCTION

RETHINK?

Curiosity has earned a bad reputation ever since it apparently killed a cat. So well done for being interested enough to pick up this book and read it past the first sentence. Let's start with the basics: Yes, this is a book about Jesus Christ. It would be easy to stop here, dismissing this as some sort of religious waffle that won't have any significant impact on your life.

But think about this for a second.

Nearly a third of the world's population believes Jesus has changed the world. That's over 2.2

billion people! His significance is not limited to people of a certain country, race, or background. Jesus is followed by those of all nationalities and ethnicities; by the rich, poor, young, and old. This crosses borders and boundaries like nothing else. Interest in him is not just limited to those who follow Christianity either. Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and many other religions all believe something about him, even if they don't always agree on who Jesus is. In fact, he's easily the most famous person in history.

So, before you write Jesus off, wouldn't it at least be worth considering why so many people follow him? You don't have to be from a religious background to learn about Jesus. And even if you are, it's good to explore more about what you really think for yourself.

You may have noticed that some people like to buy fake designer items online to show off to their friends. They are often such good copies that it can be hard to tell them apart from the real thing – for a while. The fake stuff may not cost very much, but it never lasts long. When it comes to deciding what you really think about

Jesus, you may find it easy to fake belief because you feel a bit of pressure from someone else. Maybe you want to please your parents, or you know a group of people who are keen for you to believe what they do. But if you want this journey to last longer than five minutes, then you have to decide you will not fake it for others, but do it for real for yourself.

I have no idea where the British rapper Stormzy is on his spiritual journey, but he once explained how we've each got to think for ourselves:

*'We grew up in church. I've had faith all my life. I've loved God all my life. But I feel like you've got to come to your own realisation.'*¹

Hopefully, this book will help you come to your own conclusion.

Before we jump in, let me tell you a little about how the book is structured. We will look at six big themes together:

1 Stormzy, Louis Theroux Interviews, BBC, 2022

1. Jesus is relevant: Christ provides us with what we're really looking for.
2. Jesus is real: History proves that Christ was a real person who made a real difference.
3. Jesus is God's reflection: Christ shows us exactly what God is like and reminds us who we really are.
4. Jesus is a rescuer: Christ saves us by dying for us.
5. Jesus is a revolutionary: We are invited to join Christ's purpose to bring hope.
6. Jesus offers you a relationship: When you put your trust in Christ, he will be with you forever.

At the end of each section, there are questions to reflect on, either by yourself or with someone you trust. You can also watch a video to hear a recap of the topic.

As you read you may come across a short quote from the Bible like this one:

*‘For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.’ **John 3:16***

The section in bold refers to the part of the Bible the quote is taken from. Need to know how to find a Bible verse? **John 3:16** = the Bible book ‘John’, chapter 3 (the big numbers in each Bible book) and verse 16 (the small numbers in each chapter).

As you finish the book, you will be given a series of choices regarding what to do next. Avoid spoilers and don’t skip to the end just yet!

You can kick start your own journey of discovery right now. Everyone is welcome.

LET’S GO.



1

RELEVANT?

OVERCOME A BAD FIRST IMPRESSION OF JESUS BY BECOMING CURIOUS

There are some awkward ways someone on a first date could make a bad impression. They'd crash and burn if they only talked about themselves; or even worse, if they hardly spoke at all because they were too consumed by live streaming updates to their mates! They're unlikely to get a second date – first impressions matter too much.

This is not just true for the dating game.

I heard a story about a young person who went for his first job interview at a large superstore. Midway through, the interviewer was called outside for five minutes to deal with a customer service issue. When he returned, the teenager was fast asleep, sprawled out across the desk of the boss! He didn't land the job. Here's a top tip for if you ever go for a job interview... have a nap before you go!

First impressions can last a long time.

Have you ever felt judged by someone who didn't actually know the real you? It sucks, right? Nobody enjoys being misunderstood or stereotyped based on scraps of information rather than the whole picture. Yet, we do this to other people all the time. We often form opinions on others based on information that isn't valid at all. We so easily judge a book by its cover.

Here's another thing to consider about first impressions: Can we really trust outward appearances? Experts say that the reason con men are so successful is that they know how to give people a false impression. They might show

you warmth, trust, and attention on the outside, but secretly they're out to trick you. People fall for their schemes because they make judgments in a split second based on initial feelings, rather than concrete facts.

It's so important we don't just look at life with a shallow perspective.

First impressions can hold us back in getting to know a person for who they really are. Ask yourself how many times you've had an opinion about someone that has turned out not to be true? Most people have at least one friend who they didn't think much of, or even disliked at the start, but later turned out to be one of their besties!

It's only when you get curious enough to take that second look that you're reminded there's so much more going on beneath the surface.

THREE TYPES OF JESUS

Jesus may be a well-known figure from history, yet, when you hear his name, you might not have a burning desire to follow in his footsteps.

He might seem pretty irrelevant to your life right now. But what if that's just because you've had a bad first impression of him?

Maybe you only recognise 'Jesus Christ' as a phrase thrown around as a swear word. Perhaps when you think about that name, you immediately associate it with ideas of a dry, boring religion. Or you've googled 'Jesus' and discovered millions of ancient images that aren't exactly on point with the latest trend.

There seem to be three types of Christ we come across when we scroll through social media or search online. There's Jesus the joke, Jesus the Jedi, and Jesus the judge.

First up is Jokey Jesus.

The vast majority of pictures we see online make Christ the butt of everyone's jokes. We see countless memes of him giving us a winking smile and a jolly thumbs up. Elsewhere, we find Jesus dressed in various types of sports gear, chatting to celebrities and cartoon characters, or even riding on the back of a dinosaur! It's interesting that 2,000 years before a single

image was shared on a group chat, Jesus was already being mocked by people that completely misunderstood him. Because he hung out with individuals most people considered corrupt, he was labelled a greedy drunk. When he was arrested and crucified, many made fun of him for claiming to be from God. Dismissing Jesus as a joke is clearly not a new idea.

Next up is Jedi Jesus.

If you have ever visited an art gallery, you may have seen religious images of Jesus with a long, flowing mysterious robe that makes him look just like Obi-Wan Kenobi. If you gave this Jesus a lightsaber, then he may as well be a member of the Rebel Alliance! Why would anyone be interested in a guy who walks around wearing sandals and sporting a white dressing gown and long flowing hair?

The funny thing is that even this artistic impression of Jesus is completely made up. Clearly, they didn't have cameras back then, but even without the benefit of photographic evidence, we know Jesus was a brown-skinned,

Middle-Eastern man, not a blond, white-skinned, all-American hero. So, if the pictures we see of Jesus from the past are not even accurate, no wonder they're not making you rush to fit him into the picture of your future.

Finally, there is Judgey Jesus.

This is the version of Christ that looks like he's on the warpath and out to spoil everyone's fun. He's often associated with harsh quotes and comes across as full of anger and prejudice. Sadly, there are many that see Christ's followers in exactly the same way. The idea of a judgemental community that serves a judgemental God is not very appealing to anyone.

If we default to thinking he's just a happy joke, a hippy Jedi, or a harsh judge, then we will always underestimate the real Jesus.

A MAN WORTH KNOWING

Here's the thing: 2,000 years ago, if you tried to say that Jesus was irrelevant to his friends, or even to his enemies, they would have dismissed