



**CROSSING
THE LINE OF
FAITH**

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1. 17 IMPORTANT MINUTES

Good to have you reading this short book. It took me 17 minutes to read, and I'm no speed-reader. Without being melodramatic, it could be the most important 17 minutes of your life because Christianity is either not important **at all**, or its the most important thing **of all**. The one thing it can't be is a quite important. The claims and teachings of Christ either make Him **crazy**, or they make Him the only **true God**. The one thing they can't make Him something in between, like a good moral teacher.

Once these 17 minutes are up, you could either **reject** Jesus and retreat back from the line of faith, or **accept** Jesus and cross the line of faith, or **hang around** the line longer whilst you consider further before making a decision. To help you decide we will look at what it means to:

- Approach the line of faith
- Cross the line of faith
- Press deeper into faith territory
- Count the cost

2. APPROACHING THE LINE OF FAITH

What is the “line of faith”?

The line of faith refers to **the moment a person joins the Christian Faith**. Many Christians can point to an actual day that they stepped into believing the claims of Christ, and others just know that they came to faith somewhere “in the early months of year so-and-so”. But the important thing to realise that no one is “born a Christian”. Christianity is a choice. There is a line to cross. Jesus said:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe **stands condemned already** because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. (Jn 3:16-18)*

Did you see the word “already”? Every person is born outside the line of Christianity. Being born into a family of Christians doesn’t make you a Christian any more than being born on a farm makes you an animal. Receiving a Christian education, or being familiar with the teachings of the Bible doesn’t make you a believer. And believing *about* Jesus is not sufficient; you must believe *in* Jesus. These words from Jesus make it crystal clear: stepping into salvation means a **deliberate, conscious decision to believe** that He is the only true God.

There were two criminals on the cross on either side of Jesus. One believed in Jesus and was saved. The other didn’t and wasn’t. The saving work of Christ on the cross is sufficient but not automatic. You must actively choose to believe that Jesus is God.¹ **You don’t drift across the line of faith**, you deliberately cross it saying, “Jesus, now I truly believe that you are Lord.”

¹ Jn 5:40, Jn 8:24

No climber takes a step without first testing the strength of his next foothold. Similarly, someone considering Christianity should know something about what they would be stepping into. Crossing the line of faith means:

Stepping into forgiveness: In Mark 2, a paralysed man is brought to Jesus on a stretcher. Surprisingly, Jesus' first words to him are, "Your sins are forgiven". I expected the paralysed man to respond, "Actually, I have a more pressing problem here than sin. I need healing!" But Jesus is teaching us that our primary need is to be forgiven of our sin. The Bible teaches that we are all sinners, and that sin is deadly.² Paralysis can hinder a short life on earth but sin can destroy a life for eternity. The message of the Gospel is that Jesus, the sinless One, took the sin of countless sinners on Himself, and died on the cross as a substitute for all who would believe in Him. He became what we are, sinful, so we might become what He is, righteous. He got what we deserve, death, so that we might receive what only He can give, life. When you trust in Jesus and His work on the cross, your sins are forgiven and you are declared righteous by God, the ultimate judge.

Stepping into satisfaction: Psychologists say our deepest need is to feel a sense of identity, purpose, and significance. Simply, we long to be satisfied. To this end we pursue things we believe will satisfy us such as success, money, a career or a relationship. But we soon realise that these things can't satisfy us. Everyone knows that empty feeling that soon follows achieving that goal, that promotion, buying that car, getting that girlfriend, and so on. I expect the prophet Isaiah had this in mind when he asked, "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?"³ Into this void of discontent rides Jesus declaring, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry."⁴ And, "Drink of me and you will never thirst again".⁵ Jesus offers total personal satisfaction and fulfilment. Life satisfaction can only be found in Him because only the Creator can ultimately satisfy the Created.

² Rom 3:23 and Rom 6:23

³ Isa 55:2

⁴ Jn 6:35

⁵ Jn 4:13-14

Stepping into newness and eternal life: The Bible begins with God creating a perfect new world and ends with God renewing the world to its original perfection. The bit in-between is the era in which we live, one where our sin has messed up the world. God has kindly placed a limit on this era of “old” earth, and in due course Jesus will come again to create a perfect new world.⁶ The message of the Gospel is that each of us can step into this process of cosmic restoration *now*. Jesus called it being born again.⁷ One day all of creation will be born again, but God has begun this process by offering new birth to people right now, and those who accept this offer by faith enjoy God’s new life within starting now,⁸ and are assured a place in the perfect future age.⁹

Stepping into the People of God: Genesis begins with God creating Adam and Eve as His own special people, and Revelation ends with the People of God – now a countless multitude from every tribe and tongue – dwelling with God in their midst. The bit in-between is the era in which we live where God is gathering this People. The message of the Gospel is that you can become part of God’s People. John said that those “who believe in Jesus become the children of God.”¹⁰

⁶ Mt 25:34, Acts 3:21, Col 1:20, Rev 11:15, Rev 21:3

⁷ Jn 3:3,7

⁸ 2 Cor 4:16

⁹ Jn 3:16, Jn 10:28

¹⁰ Jn 1:12

3. CROSSING THE LINE OF FAITH

Now you know something about what you would be stepping into, here are a few encouragements to help you cross the line of faith.

Remember that you already have faith. Well-known atheist Richard Dawkins said, "I cannot know for certain, but I think that God is very improbable, and I live my life on the assumption that he is not there".¹¹ He is unwittingly making the point that dis-belief in God is as much a faith position as belief in God. Atheism vs. Christianity isn't Fact vs. Faith but Faith vs. Faith. True, you need faith to accept Jesus, but you also need faith to reject Jesus. In fact, I think it takes more faith to be an atheist and believe in random, uncaused, materialistic origins. Former atheist Sheldon Vanarcon describes his conversion saying,

If I was going to stake my whole life on Christ being the Son of God, I wanted proof. I wanted letters of fire in the sky that Jesus was risen. But then I suddenly thought to myself, "My God, there was also a gap behind me as well". I couldn't prove that Jesus was God, but I certainly couldn't prove that he was not! I realized that I could not reject Jesus without a great step of faith. But I could not accept Jesus without a great step of faith.¹²

Remember that faith is more about direction than perfection. Imagine two climbers, Fred and Bill, trapped on a cliff face. To get to safety they must step onto either of two rocky ledges. They disagree on which ledge is safest so they decide to step different ways. Fred is convinced his ledge will hold, and jumps. But the ledge breaks and he dies. Bill is sceptical that his ledge will hold, but his ledge does hold and he is saved. Question: did salvation depend on the strength of their faith or choosing the correct object of faith?¹³ Faith in Jesus works the same way. You can step "onto" Jesus and be saved even if your faith in Jesus currently feels weak. In time your faith will grow but for now it is sufficient so long as it is directed to Jesus.

¹¹ In a New York Times interview about his book *The God Delusion*.

¹² From his book *Severe Mercy*.

¹³ This story from Tim Keller.

Remember that either your heart or your head can draw you across the line. Many people cross the line in response to a growing heart conviction that God is real, either through their exploration of Christianity, or on the back of some kind of encounter with God. The initial basis of their faith is along the lines of "I just know in my **heart** that Jesus is Lord". Then, once across the line of faith they gradually come to realise that Christianity is also a religion of the head, holding up to the most rigorous intellectual challenge. For others the **head** leads them across the line, and then the heart gradually warms up. Atheist and Intellectual C.S. Lewis¹⁴ was in this later group, writing this about his conversion:¹⁵

*You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted for even a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England...dragged into God's Kingdom kicking and struggling by the **sheer weight of evidence.***

Whichever the order, it is important that thinkers believe and believers think. Like C.S. Lewis you might have some questions that need answering to some degree before you feel able to cross the line of faith. At the back of this book are some common objections and some very basic responses that should point you in the right direction.

Remember that good people are as much in need of salvation as bad people. Whilst a Christian will hopefully increasingly live a "good life", doing so is not what makes him a Christian, and to be clear, the Bible is full of stories of people living good lives who are rejected by God. In the Parable of the Two Sons,¹⁶ the Good Boy stayed at home working the farm, and the Bad Boy hit the road plunging into sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. The shocking punch line is the Good Boy is rejected by God and the Bad Boy is accepted. If you rely on moral living to get right with God, rather than on His gracious mercy, the Bible says that you are cursed and

¹⁴ Former atheist, Chair of English at both Oxford and Cambridge.

¹⁵ A paraphrase.

¹⁶ Lk 15:11-32

severed from Christ.¹⁷ Good people and bad people are equally undeserving and needy of God's grace.

Remember that you cross the line by grace alone. From a young age we learn that we get what we deserve for what we do, whether it is which class or team we are in at school, or the level of our pay-grade. This causes us to think that God divides the world into *deserving* and *undeserving* based on the things that we do. And if we do more good things than bad things, or more good things than other people, then God will surely accept us. But this is not how the Gospel works. The Gospel is about grace, about getting what we don't deserve, not about getting what we do deserve. God's acceptance of us is a gift. It is *not* earned by good living. (See Ephesians 2:8-9). The Gospel is not a record of good people earning God's blessing, but bad people receiving God's blessing because Jesus earned it for them. The Gospel is not a list of things *to do*; it is a gift *to be received*.

How can I cross the line of faith?

There are many different biblical expressions to describe crossing the line of faith including:

- Becoming a Christian (Acts 11:26)
- Being born again (Jn 3:3-7)
- Becoming a child of God (Jn 1:12)
- Receiving eternal life (Jn 3:16, Rom 6:23)
- Being saved (Mt 19:25, Mk 16:16, Acts 2:40)
- Believing in Jesus (Jn 3:16)
- Receiving Jesus (Jn 1:12)
- Being forgiven (Acts 2:38)
- Receiving the Gospel (Rom 1:17, Col 1:6)
- Becoming a Christ follower (Mk 1:17)
- Making a confession of faith (Rom 10:9)

Paul gives us a helpful way to cross the line of faith:

¹⁷ Gal 3:10, Gal 5:4

*"If you **confess with your mouth** 'Jesus is Lord' and **believe in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom 10:9)*

It is quite possible that as you have been reading this book you have done just this. Good. Or, you may have crossed the line of faith at some point in the past. Or maybe you haven't yet believed the Gospel. If you haven't, then don't delay. Repent of your sin, believe in Jesus and begin to move deeper into faith territory.

4. PRESSING DEEPER INTO FAITH TERRITORY

Ok. What now? Now that I am over the line of faith, what's next? Now that I am believer, what's the deal? I suggest three things to get you going as a Christ-follower:

A. Join a Church

Acts 2:47 says: "And the Lord **added** to their number daily those who were being **saved**." The Bible pattern is that people who get saved (become Christians) immediately get added (join a local church). In fact, active church membership was so assumed that one of the worst things that could happen to a believer was to be expelled from a church!¹⁸

Being part of a local church is a huge gift from God to us, and one of the surest ways to grow in the Gospel and press deeper into faith territory. The love and support of the church community is something we need as new believers¹⁹ and for all of our lives. King David described believers as trees who need to be planted "**in the house of the Lord**" not alone in the desert somewhere. Believers planted in God's House will be "majestic and stable and upright and durable and useful and fruitful".²⁰ If you want to be that kind of tree, then join a local church.

It is probably best to join the church where you crossed the line of faith, or the church that your friend who helped you become Christian attends. But if that church is too far away for you, or not your "vibe" then you need to join another suitable church. Make sure the church that you join is pretty **similar to the church in the New Testament**, i.e. full of the Bible, the Holy Spirit, warm relationships, and a red-hot passion to help others cross the line of faith.

Action Step: Get along to a presentation²¹ that the church runs to help potential members decide if this is the church for them to join.

¹⁸ 1 Cor 5:1-5

¹⁹ 1 Pet 2:2

²⁰ Ps 92:13 Amplified translation

²¹ Different churches call this by different names, such as *Get Connected* or *Considering Membership*.

B. Press deeper into the Gospel

The beginning of a friendship can always be traced back to a **moment**, but thereafter it is **journey**. That's the way it is with you and Jesus. You met Him the *moment* you believed He was truly God, which happened as you stepped across the line of faith. As defining as that first step was (it gave you eternal forgiveness and peace with God), it was just the first step of a life-long *journey* of Gospel discovery and alignment.

After your moment of initial impact with the Gospel, the Gospel continues to work in you and steadily change you – it's a moment and a process. To put it another way, the Gospel is the power by which we **get saved** and the power by which we **live saved**. It's the power for both a **new life** and a **new lifestyle**. It's the power to both **get right with** God and to **live right for** God. So, pressing deeper into the Gospel is essential, and here are three ways to do that:

Firstly, as we have already said, **join a church**. You need experienced Christ-followers around you to help you get your roots down, and to teach you basics of the Faith. Secondly, start to **read the Bible and pray**. Along with our involvement with other Christians, these are the two main ways that we connect with God, learn about Him, and put our roots down. You'll also want to start reading good books that help you understand the Bible and the things the Bible teaches. Thirdly, as Peter instructed the new Christians in Acts 2:38, get **water baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit**. Water baptism is an essential moment in the life of a new Christian and a powerful way of declaring to your friends that you are now a Christ-Follower. The Holy Spirit comes to empower us supernaturally to live for God and to help our friends come to know Jesus. Being full of the Holy Spirit is vital.

Action Step: Get on a course²² that will take you deeper into the Gospel and teach you how to apply the Gospel to different areas of your life, read the Bible and pray, get baptised, get full of the Holy Spirit, resist sin, and help your friends towards the line of faith.

²² I recommend the six-session *Gospel Revolution* course.

C. Begin to help your friends towards the line of faith

Look how Jesus invited a group of guys across the line of faith: “Come *follow me* and I will make you *fishers of men*”.²³ Interesting. In the same sentence that He calls them to faith, He calls them to help others to faith. We could summarise Christianity as “**follow Jesus** and **help others follow Jesus**”. Helping friends come to know Jesus is an incredible thing. And then they tell their friends, and so the Gospel spreads.

Action Step: Get on a course²⁴ that will equip you with different tools to share the Gospel with your friends.

²³ Mk 1:17

²⁴ I recommend either the short *How the Gospel moves from Friend to Friend*, or Chapter 5 of *Gospel Revolution* that deals with how to share our faith with others.

5. COUNTING THE COST

If you are not yet ready to cross the line of faith you might be encouraged to know that Jesus Himself endorsed careful consideration of such a decision. In Luke 14 Jesus said that just as a man would not start building a house without first checking he has the resources to complete it, nor king go to war without first checking he has enough troops to be victorious, so also a prospective Christ-follower should carefully consider the cost before stepping into faith.

Why? Because following Christ is no small deal. It means surrendering every part of our lives to Him. Jesus is not a **hobby** on the edge of our lives, He is the **hub** at the centre. He comes to take up presidency not just residency. I recently found out that travelling at light speed it would take you 100 000 years to cross our Galaxy, and there are a hundred billion galaxies in the universe. And Genesis 1:16 simply says, "He also made the stars." He is not a sugar daddy or a service-provider; He is the true Creator God and our appropriate response is to put God first in every area of life.

This awesome Creator God loves you, and desires to save you from your sin and from of an eternity without Him, and to make you His child. So certainly consider, but consider urgently mindful of Hebrews 3:7: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart."

FURTHER READING: SOME COMMON OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIANITY

This final section aims to help thinkers believe, and believers think. Thoughtful enquirers into Christianity sometimes have some questions that need answering to some degree before they feel able to seriously consider Christianity. Here are some common objections and some bite-sized responses. They are not complete responses or the only responses, but they should point you in the right direction.

Objection: Christianity is exclusive and intolerant. There can't be only one way to God.

Answer: Any other view is equally exclusive and intolerant.

Insisting there are multiple ways to God is exclusive and intolerant of those who believe there is just one way to God. If you claim that Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on spiritual truth then you are simultaneously claiming that you do have a monopoly on spiritual truth, because you would need to, to know that Christianity doesn't. Or to put it another way, Christianity claims that Jesus is the only path that leads to God, but others claim there are many paths to God. But, to know there are multiple paths, you would have had to see the whole map, the very thing that you are frustrated with Christians for claiming to be able to do.

Objection: Christianity is a straight jacket that will remove my freedom. It is too confining.

Answer: Freedom is not the absence of restrictions. Being free to do whatever we like sounds like freedom until you stop to think more carefully. Defining freedom as the absence of restrictions is shallow. Financial freedom is only attained through submitting oneself to the "restriction" of working hard to make money. An athlete restricts herself to training so that she might enjoy the freedom of success. A fish might look jealously at a bird in the sky and, craving that freedom, might leap out onto the beach. Now it is "free" from the restriction of water, is it

actually free? More like dead. Clearly, freedom isn't the absence of restrictions; rather it is choosing to live within the restrictions that actually free us. The restrictions of Christianity are for our true freedom and good.

Objection: I can't agree with Christianity because it is responsible for so much injustice.

Answer 1: That doesn't mean Christianity is wrong. Yes, wrong things have been done in the name of Christianity, but this doesn't mean that Christianity is wrong; it means that some people have done wrong things in the name of something that is right.

Answer 2: We don't use that logic for other issues. Violence in the name of a good cause isn't restricted to Christianity or even religion, as wars have been fought in the name of race, politics, and even human reasoning. Does that make those things wrong?

Objection: The Christian God can't be loving if he sends people to hell.

Answer: People choose hell. The Bible does teach that hell is a reality, but it teaches that in one sense, hell is for those people who have chosen it. When a person on earth rejects God, he owns that decision into eternity, which is hell. C.S. Lewis referred to hell as the "greatest monument to human freedom". He wrote, "There are only two kinds of people: those who say 'Thy will be done' to God and those to whom God in the end says 'Thy will be done'. All that are in hell chose it. No soul that seriously and constantly desires God will ever miss it."²⁵

Objection: Christianity is false because the Bible is full of errors.

Answer: Please show me some, and I will get back to you. This is a serious answer to the objection because many people just assume the

²⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*. Pg. 116, MacMillan, 1961, and *The Great Divorce*, Pg. 69, Macmillan, 1963.

Bible is full of errors, but haven't ever actually looked into it. If they can point out some apparent errors, ask your church leaders for help and then get back to your friend, or to give them Tim Keller's book *The Reason for God*, which deals with this objection and many others.

Objection: God can't exist because if he did he would stop evil and suffering.

Answer 1: The issue is actually us. Ask the person what kind of suffering they mean. If they say something like a fatal car crash due to a drunk driver, point out that they are actually asking why God allows people to make evil choices. Then you could ask if they have ever made any choice that has caused suffering to another person. Yes. So, someone else is saying, "God, why did you allow that person to do that to me?" You are part of the problem. To remove the problem would be to remove you. Is that preferable to a world without evil? Are you willing to own such a "solution"?

Answer 2: Definition of evil points to God. Although reconciling the presence of evil and suffering to the existence of God is a challenge, it is a bigger challenge to reconcile it to there not being a God. Think about it: evolution tells us that disease and death are just part of natural selection, and so we should accept these "evils" as a natural part of life. But this is no answer at all, because everything inside us screams that these things are not natural. From where do we get our sense of natural and unnatural, right and wrong, good and evil, if not from God? Reflecting back on his atheist days, C.S. Lewis said, "My argument *against* God was that the universe seemed cruel and unjust. But how then had I got this idea of just and unjust? What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" He's saying that our very definition of evil and suffering is more of an indication *for* God than *against* God.

Answer 3: Our minds are finite. Within this objection lies the assertion that if evil and suffering seem pointless to *me* then they must be pointless. This is a fair boast in one's cognitive abilities! Remember, if you have a God powerful enough to be angry with for allowing evil and

suffering, then at the same time you have a God wise enough to have good reasons for allowing evil and suffering.

Answer 4: Why the cross? If God is a bad God, then why did He come earth to die on the cross, one day to bring about an end to all evil and suffering? One thing that we can't say after seeing the cross is, "God doesn't care about evil and suffering."

Answer 5: A blessing in disguise. The "blessing" of evil and suffering and death is that it forces us to face the reality of death, and causes us to think about God in a way that we otherwise probably wouldn't. What if God allowed earthly calamity to come our way to save us from the greater calamity of an eternity without him? Would that not be the action of a loving God?

Objection: I believe in science, which disproves Christianity.

Answer 1: Science is limited. Science cannot measure the supernatural world. By definition it can only measure or record the natural world. Trying to prove God through science is like trying to measure wind speed with a thermometer. And even then, science cannot measure much of the natural world. To say, "something is only true if you can measure it scientifically" is not true. For example, science can't measure love. "My girlfriend loves me" cannot be scientifically proven. Rather, we believe things because they make the most sense of the world as we see it. We conclude our girlfriend loves us because that makes most sense of her behaviour. So the real question is "does belief or non-belief in God make *most sense* of the world around us?" This leads us into the second part of the answer:

Answer 2: A world without God takes more scientific explanation than a world with God. The intricate nature of creation, our awareness of good and evil, our conscience, the occurrence of miracles, the fact that God-awareness (in some form) is present in all cultures, all take more explaining (or are impossible to explain) if there is no God. Denying the existence of God causes science more problems

than it solves, which is why through the centuries many famous scientists have been Christians.

Objection: I am already a Christian because I try to live a good life.

Answer: Christianity is fundamentally not about moral living.

Whilst a Christian will hopefully live a “good life”, it is not what makes him a Christian, and to be clear, the Bible is full of stories of people living good lives who are rejected by God. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the Good Boy stayed at home working the farm, and the Bad Boy hit the road plunging into sex, drugs and rock ‘n roll. The shocking punch line of the story is the Good Boy being rejected by God and the Bad Boy being accepted. If you rely on moral living to get right with God, rather than on His gracious mercy, the Bible says that you are cursed and severed from Christ.²⁶ Good people and bad people are equally undeserving of God’s grace. The Gospel is not a list of *things to do*; it is a *gift to be received*.

Objection: I am already a Christian because I was brought up in a Christian home.

Answer: Being born and raised on a farm doesn’t make you an

animal. Being born and raised in a garage doesn’t make you a car. Being born and raised in Christian home doesn’t make you a Christian. God doesn’t have grandchildren. Just children. You must respond to the Gospel for yourself.

²⁶ Gal 3:10, Gal 5:4