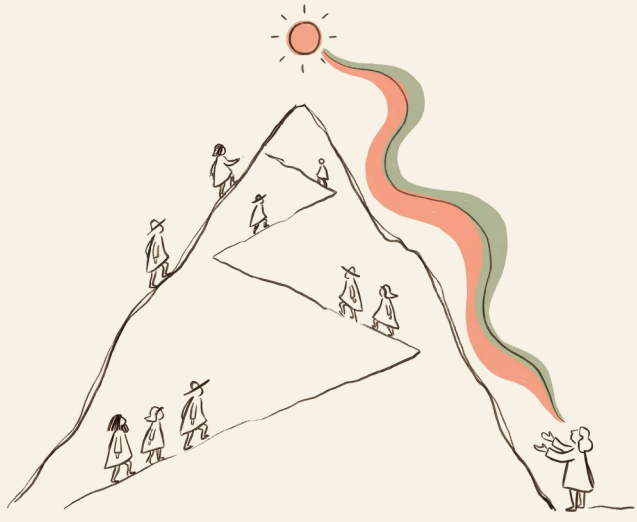
The Way

Why Christianity?

Religions that climb up, a God who came down



A comparison in pictures and charts

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Am I a good enough person?



How can my wrongs be washed away?



What lies after death?

These are questions everyone carries. Let us set the answers of the religions side by side, by the same measure, and honestly. This is not written to win an argument, but to share good news we found first.

ONE

Do all religions say the same thing?



Both could be wrong, but both cannot be right

Christianity	≠	Islam
Jesus died on the cross and rose again on the third day		Jesus did not die on the cross (Qur'an 4:157)

Who is God?

Christianity	One personal God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit)
Islam	One personal God, but not a Trinity
Hinduism	Many gods, and behind them the ultimate reality, Brahman
Buddhism	Does not posit a Creator who made the world

Who is Jesus?

Christianity	God who became a human being
Islam	A great prophet, but not God
Judaism	Not the Messiah they were waiting for
Hinduism	One among many teachers or incarnations

What comes after death?

Christianity	We die once, then resurrection and judgment
Islam	We die once, then resurrection and judgment
Hinduism	Rebirth according to karma (samsara)
Buddhism	Rebirth, which ends on entering nirvana

What is the "self"?

Christianity	A person made by God, who goes on forever
Hinduism	The true self (atman) is one with Brahman
Buddhism	There is no unchanging self (anatta)
Islam	A creature made by God, raised to life at the resurrection

On the most important questions, the religions answer differently, and sometimes in exactly opposite ways. So the saying "all religions are true" sounds generous, but in fact it tells every religion, **"the thing you hold most important is wrong."** If we truly respect one another, we have to begin by honestly calling different things different.

TWO

How do people try to reach God?

This is where the answers part most sharply.



① Bargaining with God



② Climbing on your own

The methods differ, but the direction is the same — upward

But honestly, we have to ask: how high is high enough? Even if I live better today than yesterday, the shame deep in my heart **will not wash away by my own strength.**

① **Bargaining with God.** "If I pray this much, fast, give and live a good life, surely God will pay me back." Yet you can never know how much is enough, or which way the scale will tip in the end.

② **Climbing on your own.** This is the path of hardship and discipline, of training yourself again and again to become enlightened and break free. In the end, it is a person trying to reach a high place.

← People do it — God does it →

Buddhism



Problem	Suffering that comes from craving and ignorance; endless rebirth
Goal	Nirvana, the end of suffering and rebirth
What to do	The Noble Eightfold Path, moral precepts, meditation. At the end the Buddha said, "Be a lamp unto yourselves."

Confucianism



Problem	Lacking virtue; a heart that is not upright
Goal	To become a person of noble character, a sage. Closer to becoming fully human than to salvation
What to do	Cultivate body and mind, keep the rites, keep learning

Hinduism



Problem	A life bound by karma, repeating again and again
Goal	Liberation (moksha)
What to do	The path of action (rituals and duties), the path of knowledge, ascetic practice, the path of devotion. The path of devotion also speaks of the grace of a god

Islam

Problem	Forgetting God and not following him
Goal	To pass through judgment and enter paradise
What to do	The confession of faith, prayer five times a day, almsgiving, fasting, pilgrimage (the Five Pillars). It teaches that deeds are weighed on a scale on the Day of Judgment (Qur'an 7:8–9)

Judaism

Problem	Not following God's will
Goal	To remain within the covenant made with God
What to do	Keep the Law, and turn back when it is broken (teshuvah)

Pure Land Buddhism

Problem	In this degenerate age, no one can reach enlightenment by their own strength
Goal	To be reborn in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha
What to do	Call on Amida's name and trust his vow (faith in "other-power")

Christianity

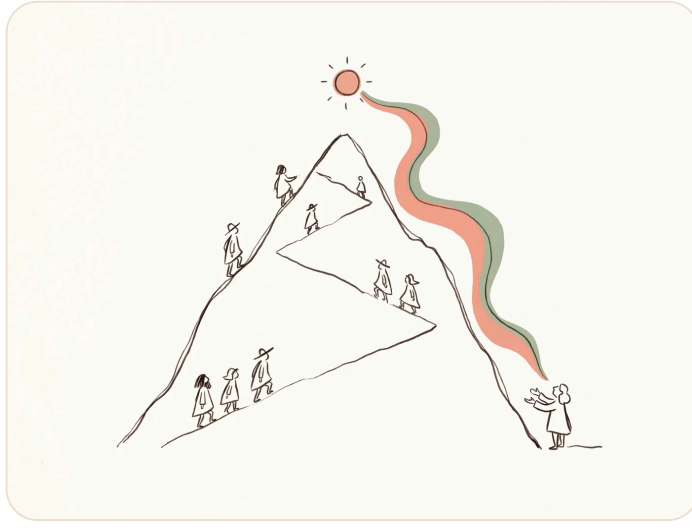
Problem	Sin; all have turned from God and stand under judgment
Goal	To be joined to God again; eternal life
What to do	**Salvation is 100% God's work.** There is nothing for us to add; we simply receive by faith what God has already done. And even that faith is not a merit, but an empty hand that receives a gift

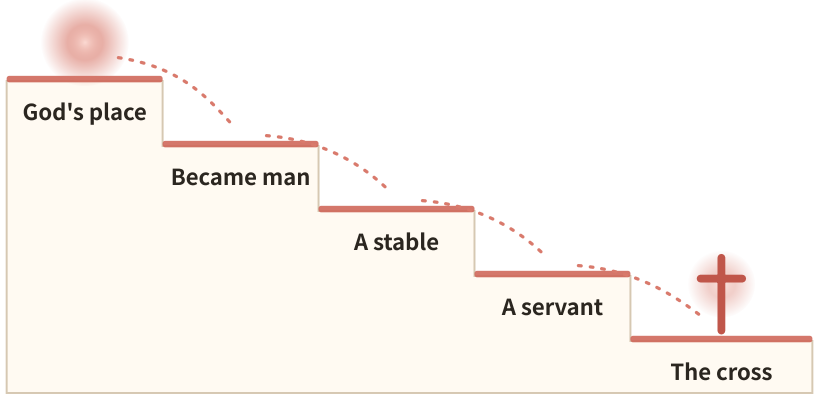
Each dot shows a rough position, based on the representative teaching of each religion. To go deeper, hear each faith from its own scriptures and believers.

THREE

But there is one story that runs the other way

Not people climbing up, but **God coming down**.





From the place of heaven, all the way down to the lowest place

It is not people climbing up; **God came down.** Not to a palace but to a stable, not as a master but as a servant, not to a throne of glory but all the way to a cross where criminals were hung.

> He shared the very nature of God, yet he did not hold on to being equal with God. Instead he poured himself out, took the form of a servant and was born as a human being. He lowered himself and obeyed to the point of death — death on a cross.
>
> Philippians 2:6–8

Other religions also have stories of a god coming down to earth, such as the avatars of Hinduism. But those gods come as princes or heroes to defeat evil. **A God who came to the lowest place to die in the place of sinners** is found only in Christianity.



Before he could finish “Make me a hired servant…”, the father ran to him first

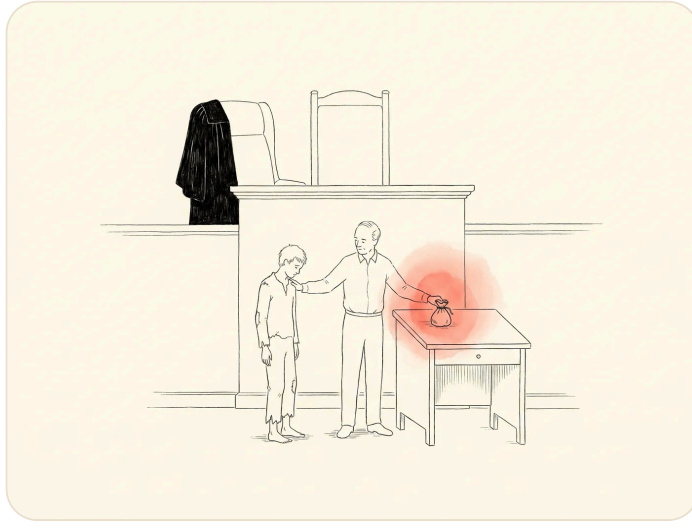
The son who has wasted everything rehearses his speech on the way home: **"Take me on as one of your hired hands."** He will work to pay it back — the climbing path. But before the father even hears those words, he recognizes his son from far away and **runs to him first** and holds him tight.

> He was still far down the road when his father saw him. His heart went out to his son; he ran to him, threw his arms around his neck and kissed him.
>
> Luke 15:20

FOUR

Couldn't God just forgive?

The prodigal's father embraced his son without asking for anything. Then couldn't God simply forgive too? **Why did it have to be the cross?**



The judge took off his robe, stepped down, and paid his son's fine himself. That is what the cross is

And Jesus, who died on the cross, **rose again** on the third day. Not a myth, but history, with a time and a place.

The Bible says that **all have sinned** (Romans 3:23) and that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin is not just a few mistakes but a heart turned away from God, and a holy God does not pretend not to see it.

If someone harmed your family and the judge said "That's all right" and let them go, it would be hard to call that love. **To simply cover it over would destroy justice; to simply punish would leave no room for love.**

1

A defendant stood before a judge. He was the judge's own son.

2

The judge passes sentence according to the law: a fine far larger than his son could ever pay.

3

Having pronounced the sentence, the judge takes off his robe, comes down, and pays the fine himself with his own money.

The law was upheld and the son went free. **Justice and love were both fulfilled.** Christianity says this is exactly what the cross is.

> Christ died for us while we were still sinners. In this God showed how great his love for us is.
>
> Romans 5:8

Where does the price of forgiven wrongs go?

Hinduism · Buddhism	Karma is **repaid by yourself**, and that takes many lifetimes.

Pure Land Buddhism	By Amida's vow you are reborn in the Pure Land. The karma that remains is worked off there through practice.
Islam	If God wills, he **forgives**. No one pays the price in your place.
Christianity	God **pays the price himself**. As the judge took off his robe and came down, God became a human being and came to us.

Not a story, but something that happened

Christianity does not tell this as a myth or a parable. It is an event with a time and a place, so it can be examined as history — and Christianity stakes everything on that event.

And on the third day he rose again. The tomb was empty, and more than five hundred people saw the risen Jesus at one time. Paul wrote this about twenty years after the event and added, "most of them are still alive" (1 Corinthians 15:6), as if to say: go and ask them. Disciples who had hidden in fear gave their lives telling this news. People may die for what others told them, but **no one dies for what they claim to have seen with their own eyes while knowing it is a lie.**



About AD 30 · Outside the walls of Jerusalem

Under the Roman governor Pontius Pilate

> If Christ was not raised, your faith is hollow and you are still carrying your sins.
>
> 1 Corinthians 15:17

FIVE

Is Christianity exclusive?

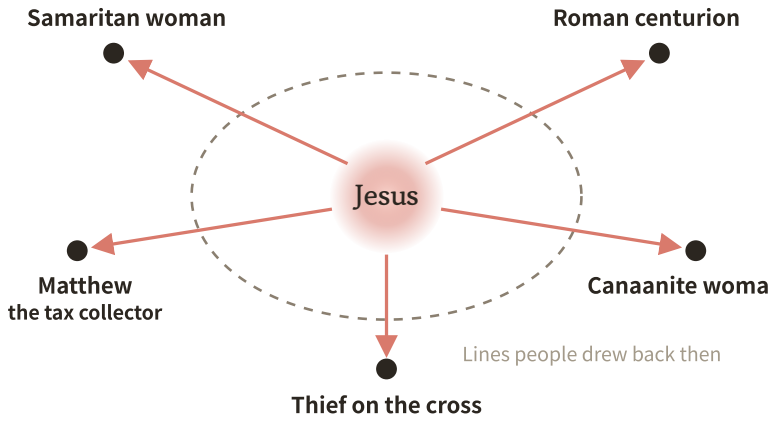
If God himself paid the price, then there is only one way.



Only one way, yet the widest door

First, let us honestly admit it: if Christianity has felt exclusive, **the cold words and actions of Christians** have played their part. That was not what Jesus is like. We are sorry.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Saying there is only one way sounds narrow. But look at **what it takes to enter**, and it looks different. At the door of good works or hard discipline, those with the strength and time to spare go first. The door of grace asks for no qualifications at all. A criminal, someone who came late, someone facing death — all enter by the same door. So did the thief beside Jesus on the cross (Luke 23:43).



He crossed the lines and went to them first

People of another nation, another faith; an officer of the occupying army; a tax collector scorned as a traitor to his people; a man condemned to death. Jesus crossed the lines people had drawn in his day and **went to them first.**

> Jew or Greek, slave or free, man or woman — none of that divides you any more. In Christ Jesus you are all one.
>
> Galatians 3:28



If there is only one exit, telling others is love

If someone who knows where the emergency exit is shouts, "This way!", we do not call that person arrogant. When Christians share Jesus, it should come from the same heart: **not a wish to win, but a wish for everyone to live.**



He does not break the door down; he knocks

Jesus does not break the door down. He calls **by his word**, not by the sword or by fear. And it is the Lord who opens closed hearts. Of Lydia, listening to Paul, the Bible says, "The Lord opened her heart" (Acts 16:14). So Christians do not try to force anyone to believe, and should treat neighbors of other faiths **with gentleness and respect** (1 Peter 3:15–16).

> Look — I stand outside the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens it, I will come in to them, and we will sit down and eat together.
>
> Revelation 3:20

Questions that remain

If God is love, why is there suffering in the world?

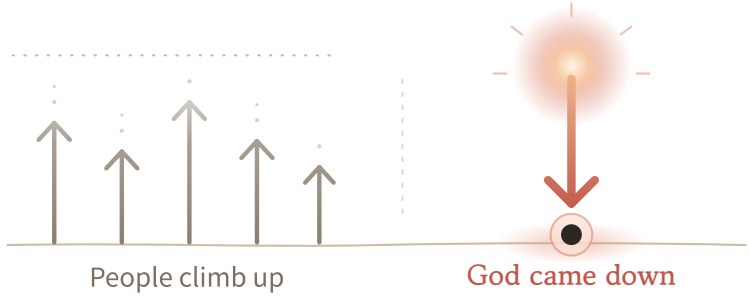
We cannot claim to know every answer to this question. But the God of Christianity is not one who only looks down on suffering from far away. **He came into it himself**: he was betrayed, beaten, and died on a cross. And he rose again, showing that suffering and death do not have the last word. The Bible promises a day when God will wipe away every tear, and there will be no more death or sorrow (Revelation 21:4).

What happens to those who have never heard the gospel?

We leave them to **God, the most just of all judges** (Genesis 18:25). The Bible says God has spoken to everyone through the world he made and through the conscience (Romans 1:20; 2:15). And one thing is certain: you who are reading this **have now heard.**

IN SHORT

In one sentence



Other paths say

"Do this, and you can reach God."

Christianity says

"God has already come to you."

The three questions we began with

Am I good enough?

No, I am not. Yet I am **loved enough that someone gave his life for me**.

How can my wrongs be washed away?

I do not have to repay them. **They were paid for on the cross.**

What lies beyond death?

The one who conquered death and rose again **is waiting on the other side.**

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

We will not press you to believe. Walk slowly along the road he walked. On that road you will meet **the one who came looking for you first**.

Things you only know by trusting

"I'll believe once I know" sounds reasonable. But in real life, much works the other way around. **There are things you only come to know once you trust and take a step.**

Know → believe	⇄	Believe → know
knowing only in your head		knowing by walking it



Swimming

Only when you trust the water to hold you and relax do you learn that you float. Thrash about, and you sink.



Cycling

You learn it by trusting that moving keeps you up, and pushing the pedals. Stand still, and you fall.



Flying

Few people board knowing exactly how a plane works. You know the sky by getting on.



Marriage

No one marries knowing everything. You trust, live together and come to know each other.



Medicine

You know it heals once you trust the doctor and take it. Reading the label alone heals no one.



Food

No description can tell you how it tastes. You have to eat it to know.



Science

Scientists, too, begin an experiment trusting their hypothesis may be right. The result comes after.



A baby

A baby does not learn all about its mother before being held. It knows her by being held.

Someone learning to swim does not throw themselves into just any water. They trust themselves to the water because an instructor is beside them and they have seen others float. **It is faith with good reasons.**

Christian faith is the same. Events in history with a time and a place, people who bore witness at the cost of their lives, and the stories we have compared above — these are the reasons. Take a step on that ground, and what follows you will come to know not with your head but with your life. And the more you know, the deeper your faith grows.

> Taste it for yourself, and you will know how good the Lord is.
>
> Psalm 34:8

> Anyone who truly wants to do God's will shall come to know whether this teaching is from God, or whether I speak only from myself.
>
> John 7:17

So you don't need to know everything first. **One step today** is enough.

What is that one step?

The Bible puts that step this way: **"Repent and believe the gospel"** (Mark 1:15).

1

Turn Admit that I have left God and lived my own way, and turn from that way back to God.

2

Believe Trust that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again, and entrust myself to him.

3

Confess Call on Jesus as my Savior and Lord in prayer.

Even this is not a merit I earn. **The heart that turns and the heart that believes are both God's gift.** If your heart is stirring now, that is God calling you.

> If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.
>
> Romans 10:9

WHAT COMES NEXT

The God who came down gathered people into one family

Believing in Jesus is not a road you walk alone. On that road there is the church.

How did the church begin?



At Pentecost, the day the Spirit came, the church was born

The call

In Galilee he called twelve disciples to be with him (Mark 3:14)

The promise

"On this rock I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18)

The price

On the cross he gave himself up for the church, and he rose again (Ephesians 5:25)

The waiting

As he went up to heaven he said, "Wait for the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4–8)

The birth

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit came, and that day three thousand people were baptized. The first church (Acts 2:1–41)

The spread

From Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). That church has come all the way to our own neighborhood today

The word the New Testament uses for "church" (ekklesia) means **"people called out and gathered together."** So the church is first of all not a building but **people**. The church building is simply the house where those people meet.

The church is not a club that people started with good intentions. Jesus called it "**my** church" and built it himself, and the Holy Spirit came and breathed life into it.

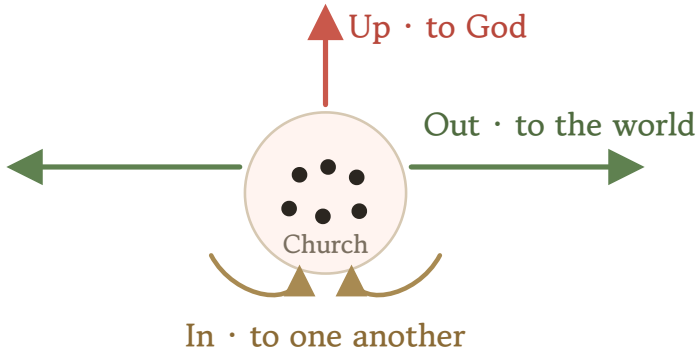
> Where two or three come together in my name, I am right there with them.
>
> Matthew 18:20

CHURCH · TWO

What does the church do?



The church is not a building but people — the body of Jesus



Worship Up

Together we honor God, and receive his grace in baptism and communion

Prayer Up

We ask God for one another and for the world

The Word In

We learn the Bible together and grow to be like Jesus

Fellowship In

We eat together like a family and share each other's burdens

Service Out

We care for neighbors who are poor or sick

Sharing the news Out

We pass on the good news we received to our neighbors

> They kept on learning from the apostles, sharing life with one another, breaking bread together and praying. ... All the believers stayed close together and shared everything they had.
>
> Acts 2:42–44

The church is **the body of Jesus** (1 Corinthians 12:27). Following the will of Jesus, its head, it becomes his hands and feet and carries on his work on earth. Baptism is the sign that we belong to Christ and have become part of this family, and communion is the table where we remember the cross and by faith receive the grace of Christ.

Isn't it enough to believe on my own?



A coal taken from the fire grows cold on its own

Those words grieve Jesus

The church is the body of Jesus. To Saul, who was persecuting the church, Jesus did not say, "Why are you persecuting **the church**?" but "Saul, why are you persecuting **me**?" (Acts 9:4). When the church hurts, Jesus hurts.

Jesus gave his life for the church (Ephesians 5:25). If we look at the family he loved enough to die for and say, "I don't need them," how that must grieve him.

On the night before the cross, Jesus prayed for this: "Father, may they all be one" (John 17:21).

A finger cut off from the body cannot live long, however healthy it is. Faith is the same. Faith kept alone cools easily and loses its way easily. God made us to grow **through one another**.

> Let us keep an eye out for one another and spur each other on to love and good deeds. Don't stop meeting together, as some have, but keep giving each other strength.
>
> Hebrews 10:24–25

If that has happened to you, we are truly sorry. The church is a gathering of people too, so it makes mistakes, and sometimes it wounds deeply.

But the church is **not a showroom for perfect people; it is a hospital for people being healed**. Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick" (Mark 2:17). A place where sick people gather and are healed by the same doctor — that is the church.

Please don't leave Jesus because of the people who hurt you. You can look again for a healthy church. We have written how below.

> The eye can't tell the hand, "I have no need of you," and the head can't tell the feet, "I can do without you."
>
> 1 Corinthians 12:21

CHURCH · FOUR

How can you tell the real thing?



A real pearl is a jewel that grows out of a wound

Alongside the church there are also imitations of it. The ‘fake’ here does not mean other religions, but **teachings that borrow the name of Christianity and present Jesus differently**. Precious things always attract imitations: no one counterfeits a pebble, but counterfeit money copies only real money. So when you know the real thing well, the fake shows itself.

○ Real	✕ Counterfeit
Who saves?	
○ **God does, 100%.** By grace, as a free gift	✕ **People must earn their place.** Works, rules, devotion
Who is Jesus?	
○ **God who became human**, the one and only Savior	✕ **Jesus is not God** (his divinity denied). Or **someone else is set up** as the returned Lord, the Comforter, "the one who overcomes"
What is added?	
○ **Nothing needs adding.** We simply receive it by faith	✕ **Something is added.** A special day, a number, our group

What is it based on?	
○ **The whole Bible** and events in history	× **A new revelation given to one person**, secret interpretations

What fruit does it bear?	
○ **Freedom and love.** It brings life to families and neighbors	× **Fear and secrecy.** It cuts people off from their families

Teachings that borrow the name of Christianity almost always say **"grace alone is not enough"** and add something, turning it back into a "climbing path."

A real pearl feels gritty when you rub it against your teeth. The real gospel feels gritty at first, too, because it begins by saying, "You cannot save yourself." But inside it is **a love that was wounded in your place**.

Which church should I go to?



A healthy church is close by, and its door is open

○ Healthy church	✕ Be careful
What does it preach?	
○ **The cross and grace.** Jesus Christ at the center	✕ **Works, blessings or secret interpretations** at the center

Whom does it lift up?	
○ It lifts up **Jesus**	× It lifts up **the pastor or founder**, even calling him "the Comforter"

Is it open about who it is?	
○ It gives **its name and denomination**, and confesses the Apostles' Creed together	× It **hides its name** and approaches through surveys, personality tests or cultural events

How does it treat people?	
○ You can come and go **freely**, and family is cherished	× It tells you to **keep it secret** from family, and makes you afraid to leave

Money	
○ Its finances are **transparent**, and giving is done with joy	× It **pressures** you to give, and hides its finances

How to go for the first time

1. Look up **two or three churches near your home**. Check their name and denomination.
2. **Just go to a Sunday service.** It's fine to sit at the back. Everyone feels a little awkward the first time.
3. Ask about **the welcome for newcomers**. You can ask anything you are curious about.
4. Attend for a few weeks and look at it with **the O·X table above**.
5. Join **a small group** and walk together. That is where the church becomes family.

If someone approaches you on the street saying "Could you fill in a survey?", "We offer free personality tests" or "There's a great Bible study," but won't say clearly which church they are from, be careful. It is best to avoid any group that does not give its church name and denomination from the start.

When you are unsure, ask the pastor of a church near you, or your denomination's office. A healthy church welcomes questions like these.

Questions to talk over

1. Where do I stand now — on the road up, or before the God who came down?

2. What comes to mind when you hear "all religions are the same"?

3. Has anyone ever run to you first, like the father in the story?

4. In the judge story, how does it sound that justice and love meet?

5. Is there something you only came to know after trusting and taking a step?

6. Which church could you visit this week, and who would you like to go with?

Notes

Notes

Notes

Why Christianity?

Religions that climb up, a God who came down

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A family is waiting for you

Jesus does not leave you to walk alone. This Sunday, knock on the door of a church near you.

The Way series



Jesus
The footsteps of Jesus through the four Gospels



Moses and Joshua
From Egypt through the wilderness to Canaan



David
From shepherd of Bethlehem to king in Jerusalem



Kings
Two kingdoms, following the prophets



Paul
From the Damascus road to Rome: the gospel to the ends of the earth



Psalms
Songs and prayers, heard where they were first sung (in Korean)



Proverbs
Solomon's wisdom for today's road



GoodNews (the Gospel)
God's love and salvation in four spiritual laws



Why Christianity?
Religions that climb up, a God who came down — and the church

thewaymap.org

The Way — Bible journeys on the map