

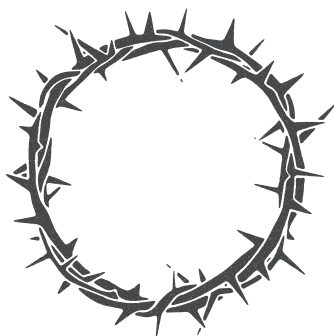
Discover



**DISCOVER TRUTH
DISCOVER HOPE
DISCOVER LIFE**

DAVE JENSEN

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 **matthiasmedia**
SYDNEY • YOUNGSTOWN

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For Sam

Introduction

Who is Jesus Christ?

On one level, that might seem like a simple question.

Jesus was a real person who lived 2000 years ago. For most of his life he was entirely anonymous, working as a carpenter in a small town in what is now rural Israel. In his early thirties he entered the society around him as a religious teacher and gained moderate popularity. Many people began to listen to him, and some even began to follow him as their leader. But it didn't last; three years after he began teaching, he was betrayed by a close friend, abandoned by many of his followers, arrested, tortured and executed.

For most people, their death signals the end of their story. In the case of Jesus, however, his death signalled the start of something remarkable. Despite his humble beginnings and horrible ending, most historians agree that Jesus has emerged over the past 2000 years as the single most influential human being who has ever lived.

In the early part of the 20th century, a man called James Francis put it this way:

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together have not affected the life of man on earth as much as that one solitary life.¹

Despite what you might have heard, this influence shows no sign of slowing down. As the name suggests, Jesus Christ's life, death and teaching form the core of what we now call 'Christianity'. Christianity is the world's biggest religion, with over two billion people on the planet claiming to have allegiance to it.² It's likely that you've had some kind of exposure to the Christian faith at some point in your life, even if that's just driving past a church, or picking up a Bible in a bookstore.

Given all this, you'd think it would be easy to find out exactly what Jesus taught. Yet it's exactly because of this influence and popularity that many people find discovering the truth about Jesus more difficult than they first considered. After all, there is such a wide variety of ways

1 JA Francis, *The Real Jesus and Other Sermons*, Judson Press, 1926, p 123.

2 Pew Research Center, *The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010–2050*, Pew Research Center website, 2 April 2015, viewed 7 April 2025 (pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/).

that Christianity is represented in the world: in entertainment, the media and wider culture, but also within the different types of Christian denominations. Add to that the influence of individual Christians that we all know, and the truth about Jesus can seem ... murky. Complex. Impossible to discover.

So, is it possible to work out the truth about Jesus?

The good news is that it *is* possible. The truth about Jesus and Christianity, at its core, isn't murky and complex; it's actually very simple. But how do we find this truth?

We need to go to the source.

Nearly everything we know about Jesus comes through eyewitness testimony recorded for us in the Bible.³ This is great news, because it means we don't have to guess who Jesus is: all we need to do is listen to what he says about himself and what those who knew him have observed.

The aim of *Discover* is to help you strip away the noise, the confusion, and the controversy, and get the essential truths about Jesus from the most reliable source we have: Jesus himself. My hope is to help you understand for yourself who Jesus is, what he says, and what he does.

Why do I think this is worth doing?

3 There is credible historical evidence for the life and influence of Jesus found outside the New Testament. Notable references include Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3; Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44; and Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.96. For discussion and analysis of these sources, see GR Habermas, *The Historical Jesus*, College Press, 1996, pp 187–190.

It's because I'm convinced of the same thing that billions of people across the world have discovered for the past 2000 years: the truth about Jesus is not only simple and understandable; it's also the most important truth you can ever discover.

How to make the most of this course

Here are several things you can do to make the most of this course.

Be open minded

You may already have had an encounter with the Christian faith. That experience may have been positive or negative. You may even be coming to this course having already dismissed Christianity. I want to encourage you to encounter Jesus for yourself, and not through the filter of your experience. Give this course the chance to present its case before coming to a decision on the truth of Jesus. It might even be helpful to approach each session by asking the question “What if this is actually true?”

Keep learning and thinking

This book is designed to help you keep thinking, whether you are reading it as part of a course or on your own.

If you are taking part in a *Discover* course that meets weekly, it can be easy to hear the talk and yet within a week be unable to remember much about it. Reading and thinking through the questions raised in this book should help you remember the important points and engage better each week. It also allows you to work things through at your own pace.

Ask questions!

There are two blank pages at the end of each chapter that are just for you. Use them to write notes about the ideas that you find interesting or maybe haven't thought about before. Pay attention and write down anything that applies directly to you. You will probably have lots of questions, so write them down too. If you are attending a course, there will be an opportunity to ask them. If not, ask a trusted Christian friend or the person who gave you this book. It's a cliché, but there really are no dumb questions. Write down your questions each week and don't be afraid to ask them.

Read the Gospel of Luke at least once

Most of what we know about Jesus comes from four biographies (or 'gospels') that are found in the New Testament of the Bible. We're going to be focusing most of our attention on the life of Jesus as explained in the

Gospel of Luke.⁴ But don't just rely on what I tell you. Read the story of Jesus for yourself. If you're not a reader, then there are several good free apps which make the Bible available in audio format. I recommend the NIV translation, as it uses contemporary English.

Watch the *Discover* talks

In each chapter of the book there is a QR code that you can use to watch the relevant talk. Watch the talks as many times as you want. They are completely free and will help you grow in your understanding of each topic. If you are reading this book on your own, make sure that you watch the talk before reading each chapter.

Attend each session

For those attending a weekly *Discover* course, committing to coming to something over a five-week period can feel like a big ask. In a busy world it's often hard to find time to do *anything* in addition to our normal routine. But I think the subject matter we're speaking about over the next five sessions is the most important thing in the

4 I have quoted from the Gospel of Luke as it appears in *The Essential Jesus* (2nd edition, Matthias Media, 2021), which you may be using in addition to this book. You will notice that while most translations of Luke's Gospel include verse numbers, the text in *The Essential Jesus* does not—so I have also included page references to help you find the right section. If you don't have access to *The Essential Jesus*, any copy of the Gospel of Luke will do the trick. You can read it online if you don't have a copy (biblica.com/bible/niv/luke/1/).

world, and worthy of a good investigation at some point in your life. Each week leads directly to the next, so, if you're able to, committing to attending for all five sessions is the best way to get the most out of the course. If you do miss a session, the talks are available online using the QR code at the beginning of each chapter, and you can easily catch up.

1. What is life all about?

Talk 1: What is life all about?

Go to matthiasmedia.com/discovervideos or scan the QR code to watch talk 1 at this point. Use the space below to write notes and questions as you listen.)



Think

1. What do you think life is all about? Why are you alive?
2. Let's run a thought experiment. Imagine you have a time machine that you can use to travel back and forth through time, but you can only visit parts of your own life. What are some of the times in your life that you would like to visit?

During talk 1, we imagined what it would be like to end up at our own funeral. We don't like thinking about this, but it's where we are all heading (although of course we won't be alive to see it!).

3. What would you want people to say about you at your funeral? How do you want to be remembered?

4. Are there things you would rather they didn't say? How would you *not* want to be remembered?

What is the meaning of life?

Let's consider how some well-known people have described the meaning of life:

Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life,
the whole aim and end of human existence.

Aristotle (384–322 BC)

Philosopher⁵

Your work is going to fill a large part of your life,
and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what
you believe is great work. And the only way to do
great work is to love what you do.

Steve Jobs (1955–2011)

Co-founder of Apple Inc.⁶

The biggest adventure you can take is to live the
life of your dreams.

Oprah Winfrey (b. 1954)

Talk show host⁷

5 This is a frequently quoted modern paraphrase of Aristotle's teaching in Book I of *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he argues that *eudaimonia* (commonly translated as 'happiness' or 'flourishing') is the highest good.

6 S Jobs, "'You've got to find what you love'", Jobs says', commencement address given at Stanford University, Stanford University website, 12 June 2005, viewed 16 April 2025 (news.stanford.edu/stories/2005/06/youve-got-find-love-jobs-says).

7 Quoted in *O: The Oprah Magazine*, May 2004. Though frequently cited, no single definitive primary source has been identified; it appears across multiple interviews and promotional materials.

We do not need magic to transform our world;
we carry all the power we need inside ourselves
already: we have the power to imagine better.

JK Rowling (b. 1965)

Author⁸

The meaning of life is not simply to exist, to survive,
but to move ahead, to go up, to achieve, to conquer.

Arnold Schwarzenegger (b. 1947)

Actor and former politician⁹

Follow your passion. Stay true to yourself. Never
follow someone else's path unless you're in the
woods and you're lost and you see a path, then by
all means, you should follow that.

Ellen DeGeneres (b. 1958)

Comedian and television host¹⁰

8 JK Rowling, *Very Good Lives*, Little, Brown, 2015, p 67.

9 A Schwarzenegger and DK Hall, *Arnold: The education of a bodybuilder*, Simon & Schuster, 1977, p 112.

10 E DeGeneres, 'In case you missed my Tulane speech, watch it here!' [video], *TheEllenShow*, YouTube, 1 October 2010, viewed 25 June 2025 (youtube.com/watch?v=M6pPBqfrAnI).

5. Which of these views rings true for you? Why? Which ones don't ring true? Why? Can you detect anything in common between these views?

Option me

In talk 1, I spoke about everything boiling down to two options: 'Option me' and 'Option he'. Here are some ways to think about 'Option me':

- The meaning of life is found *in me*.
- Traditionally this has meant that your life's purpose and meaning is found in what you do.
- Meaning can be found in your achievements, accomplishments, wealth, family or even religion.
- More recently, it also means that you are 'free to be me'.
- What matters is discovering the 'real me' within yourself and then living as authentically as possible.

6. What's attractive about finding ultimate meaning within yourself? Why is it that being told to 'Follow your heart' or 'Be true to yourself' feels so good?

7. If 'Option me' is the philosophy of most of the world, is it working? Why or why not?

How happy are we?

In mid-2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) released its *World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All*, highlighting a sobering picture:

- During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of anxiety and depression rose by approximately 25%.¹¹
- Nearly 1 in 8 people worldwide—close to 1 billion individuals—live with a mental health disorder.¹²
- Suicide accounts for 1 in every 100 deaths globally and remains one of the leading causes of death among adolescents.¹³

Further WHO reports add the following:

- Around 1 in 7 adolescents worldwide experience a mental disorder.¹⁴
- Suicide is the third leading cause of death among those aged 15–29.¹⁵
- More than 280 million people worldwide live with depression.¹⁶

11 World Health Organization, *World Mental Health Report: Transforming mental health for all*, WHO, 2022, p vi ([who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240049338)).

12 WHO, *World Mental Health Report*, p 5.

13 WHO, *World Mental Health Report*, p 5

14 WHO, *Mental Health of Adolescents*, WHO website, 2024, viewed 16 April 2025 ([who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health)).

15 WHO, *Mental Health of Adolescents*.

16 WHO, *Depressive Disorder (Depression)*, WHO website, 2023, viewed 16 April 2025 ([who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression)).

- Between 2005 and 2015, the number of people living with depression increased by over 18%.¹⁷

While precise estimates vary across countries and organizations, it is widely held that as many as 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health condition at some point in their lives.¹⁸ In the United States, for example, the Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA) reports that anxiety disorders affect nearly 1 in 5 adults (19.1% of the population) every year.¹⁹

8. We have a paradox: the greatest freedom ever has led to the greatest unhappiness ever. Why, in a world of unprecedented freedom, do you think happiness is so elusive?

17 WHO, “‘Depression: let’s talk’ says WHO, as depression tops list of causes of ill health”, *WHO*, 30 March 2017, viewed 16 April 2025 ([who.int/news/item/30-03-2017-depression-let-s-talk-says-who-as-depression-tops-list-of-causes-of-ill-health](https://www.who.int/news/item/30-03-2017-depression-let-s-talk-says-who-as-depression-tops-list-of-causes-of-ill-health)).

18 E Schwartz, ‘The global mental health crisis: 10 numbers to note’, *Project Hope*, 20 May 2024, viewed 16 April 2025 (projecthope.org/news-stories/story/the-global-mental-health-crisis-10-numbers-to-note/).

19 Anxiety & Depression Association of America, *Anxiety Disorders—Facts and Statistics*, ADAA, 2022, viewed 25 June 2025 (adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/facts-statistics).

Option he

Alternatively, Jesus offers a different way of thinking: 'Option he'. He says:

- The meaning of life does not come from within yourself.
- There is a God who created all things.
- If God is the creator, then what he says matters. (Here's something to think about, which we'll address in the coming sessions: How do we know what God says?)

9. Who do you think Jesus is (or was)?

What others have said about Jesus

In the next session, we'll think more about who exactly Jesus is. For now, let me give you a variety of views on this question from some notable people:

[Jesus of Nazareth] is easily the dominant figure in history ... Now, it is interesting and significant—isn't it?—that a historian, setting forth in that spirit, without any theological bias whatever, should find that he simply cannot portray the progress of humanity honestly without giving a foremost place to a penniless teacher from Nazareth ... He left no impress on the historical records of his time. Yet, more than nineteen hundred years later, a historian like myself, who does not even call himself a Christian, finds the picture centering irresistibly around the life and character of this simple, lovable man.

HG Wells (1866–1946)

Novelist²⁰

I call Christianity the one great curse, the one enormous and innermost perversion, the one great instinct of revenge, for which no means are too venomous, too underhand, too underground, and too *petty*—I call it the one immortal blemish of mankind.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900)

Philosopher²¹

20 B Barton, 'H.G. Wells picks out the six greatest men in history', *The American Magazine*, 1922, 94:13–14.

21 F Nietzsche, 'The Antichrist' (AM Ludovici trans), section 62, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche* (O Levy ed), vol 16, TN Foulis, 1911.

If someone proved to me that Christ were outside the truth, and it *really* were that the truth lay outside Christ, I would prefer to remain with Christ rather than with the truth.

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821–1881)
Novelist²²

I know men, and I tell you that Jesus is not a man ... Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires; but upon what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon *force*. Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon *love*; and at this hour millions of men would die for him.

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821)
Emperor of France²³

I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene ... No-one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus.

Albert Einstein (1879–1955)
Physicist²⁴

22 F Dostoevsky, 'To Natalya Fonvizina, 1854', in *Fyodor Dostoevsky Complete Letters*, vol 1 (D Lowe and R Meyer eds and trans), Ardis, 1988, p 195.

23 Quoted in *Napoleon's Argument for the Divinity of Christ and the Scriptures, in a conversation with General Bertrand, at St. Helena* [tract], The South Carolina Tract Society, 1861, pp 7–8.

24 Quoted in GS Viereck, 'What life means to Einstein', *The Saturday Evening Post*, 26 October 1929, p 117.

Jesus ... to me is a great world teacher among others.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

Political and spiritual leader²⁵

10. Which of these quotes do you find the most interesting? Why?

From the Bible

Just then, a certain expert in the Jewish law stood up, wanting to test Jesus. “Teacher”, he said, “what must I do so that I will inherit eternal life?”

And he said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?”

The lawyer replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbour as yourself”.

Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this, and you will live.”

Luke chapter 10, verses 25–28
(*The Essential Jesus*, page 37)

25 MK Gandhi, ‘For Christian friends’, *Harijan*, 1936, 4(10).

11. What does this Bible passage say about love?
12. Think of the best person you know. What makes them so good?

I am from a loving family. I grew up in a good home, a loving home. I went to a good school ... As I got older, I had kids, supportive workmates, supportive friends, good bosses ... I had love—plenty of it, no shortage of it—but it still wasn't enough to make me happy.

From *Discover* talk 1: What is life all about?

13. How does the Bible passage from Luke 10 help us understand how love is meant to work?

If I find in myself a desire which no experience
in this world can satisfy, the most probable
explanation is that I was made for another world.

CS Lewis (1898–1963)
Academic and author²⁶

Summary

- Even though there are limitless ideas and opinions about life, in reality there are only two major ways to understand the meaning of life. In essence, there are only two ways to live: ‘Option me’ or ‘Option he’.
- ‘Option me’ is the most common way, which is to believe that the meaning of life is found *in me*—in what I do, or in who I think I am.
- ‘Option he’ is the way offered by Jesus, who teaches that the meaning of life is not something we decide or invent for ourselves. Rather, our purpose is given to us by our creator, and it is to love God and love others. God created us to find our meaning in a loving relationship with him.
- The options before us all are the same: Me or he?
- The Bible says that the truth about your life can only be discovered by understanding the truth about the life of Jesus.

26 CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book III, chapter 10, Macmillan, 1960, p 120.

14. Where does the truth lie? Where is your meaning truly found? Which of these options makes the most sense?

As you talk to people at work this week, or watch a movie, or spend time online, ask yourself: What ideas about the meaning of life are being conveyed? What evidence can you spot for what people believe about life?

From the source

Before reading more of this book, why don't you look at the claims of Jesus for yourself? Read chapters 1–5 of Luke's Gospel (*The Essential Jesus*, pages 7–22).

Questions and notes

(Use this space to write down any notes and questions, and bring them along next time.)

