



Church
Of
Doug

Holy Writings
and
Guide to Faith

v 3

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Third edition

Preface

I'm a heretic¹ and proud of it. A heretic is simply someone who does not conform to the peer pressure of the masses. I have often noticed how inaccurate information becomes the guiding rule for the majority. When a false statement is said often enough, people begin to believe it, no matter how incorrect it is. People tend to prefer others who agree with them and tend to push different ideas away. This leads to people condemning anyone who thinks differently. I do not see the value gained by conforming to a false belief.

Moreover, as we learn more about something, we often end up disproving original thoughts. Since humans are creatures of habit who hate change, the resistance to newer and improved information is often squashed. The researchers are labeled heretic and are spurned. I embrace improvement.

My knowledge and understanding has changed over the years. With it, I have tried to assimilate new information into what I have been taught about theology and other areas of knowledge. In general, the newer information, when merged with what remains valid, paints a more vivid portrait of a theology which encompasses love and compassion in new and different ways.

Society, as a whole, evolves too. What was once believed to be true (and impacted people's decisions at the time) may no longer be seen as

¹ Heresy is defined as a belief or opinion contrary to what is generally or traditionally accepted religious doctrine. The word heretic comes from the Greek 'hairesis' meaning 'able to choose'.

truth. When this evolution occurs, how do we describe the past? Do we ignore the foundational beliefs of those who made decisions based on incorrect information? Do we present the incorrect information as if it was as authoritative as the ancient people believed? Do we throw away all of history, the baby with the bathwater?

This third edition of the Church Of Doug bible recognizes this evolution and tries to honor it without accepting the historical beliefs as true facts. While we applaud Aristotle and Newton for describing gravity, we no longer believe they accurately described the behavior. In a similar way, we applaud the beliefs of those who came before and accept as more accurate, that which research has revealed.

In order to know what a first century person thought and understood, we need to understand the presumptions of their understanding. At the same time, we need to distinguish fact from fiction, all the while honoring their belief in their misunderstandings we have since discovered. What they believed and trusted, even if it is later found to be in error, is worth knowing so we can better understand the course of events that led us to where we are today. We need to know the assumptions they accepted as fact so we can appreciate why they said and did what they did.

First century Jews, as a group, believed in an imminent apocalypse. If someone told you the apocalypse would happen in your lifetime, most Jews of the day would believe you. If you said the suffering under the rule of the Romans was minor compared to what the future has in store for the Jews in the coming millennia, they would ignore

you and think you were crazy. God was about to establish order to the world long before that.

We also need to know more about God and how God was understood. Let's get to know God as described in the older testament. We need to see God as first century Jews understood their faith as well as what more likely is true. I've written the first testament to look at the myths and histories of the people who came to be known as Jews.

While the Jewish story goes into more details and more descriptions, those elements are not critical to understanding the thoughts and feelings of a first century group that followed Jesus. As a result, much of their history is glossed over in an effort to make this book more readable.

With an understanding of Jewish thought, we turn next to the good news of Jesus and his teachings of the word of God. Again, the section is shortened to help us get to the real point of this book, namely, what is it God wants us to do.

What thoughts and behaviors will help us honor the divine creator? What is it God wants of us? What does it matter?

The rest of the book is a varied collection of perspectives and perceptions designed to provide a bigger picture of this universe. Since objectivity is constrained to the sum of subjective views we integrate into the whole, adding these other elements helps flesh out the overall picture.

Let's get started.

A decorative flourish consisting of a black line that starts with a knot on the left, then flows upwards and to the right, ending in a small loop. The line is adorned with several small, stylized leaves or buds.

First Testament

In the beginning, God said “Let there be light.” And there was light: from the biggest bang the universe has ever seen. God saw the shadows cast by lighted objects and called that area ‘dark’.² God linked the two separate things, light and dark, and declared the dichotomy good. Thus, God brought order out of the chaos.

When it came to dichotomy, God did not stop at light and dark. God created the heavens and the earth.³ God brought order to the waters and the land. Everything God organized had an opposite, for God was not satisfied with everything being the same.

God was not satisfied with dichotomy. Even the basic creations were created with a variety of differences. The salt waters were made with different degrees of saltiness, and the light was created in many degrees of brightness. Even the degrees of brightness were not enough diversity. So, God created a spectrum of colors for the light. Everything God made came with degrees of variation, for God loves diversity.

² Okay, technically, the text said God called it ‘day’ and ‘night’. God was not ‘creating’ the universe so much as God was organizing it by giving things names.

³ Read: ‘tangible and intangible’. This means God, existing before either were created, is outside both heaven and earth.

Around this time, God created many different plants upon the land. They grew and populated the land, spreading outward with their seeds and tendrils. Thus was the land made ready for living creatures to inhabit. God then gave the creatures awareness, each to its own kind. Some of them saw the land and knew it must be good, for it was God's. Despite the differences, some creatures ventured upon the land. With that, did creatures begin to roam the land, sea and air.

The heavens and the earth were created, and the hosts within them. God loved his creation and let it flourish by breathing life⁴ into each and every living thing. God designed the plants and creatures to evolve slowly over time and place, increasing the overall diversity and beauty.

God made People

God created people. The first were a man and woman we call Adam⁵ and Chavah.⁶ Adam and Chavah lived amongst the plants and creatures God created. From them, we are told, the whole of humanity can be traced. Like other creatures, God breathed life into Adam and Chavah, giving them souls from the intangible realm of the heavens. The relationship between the tangible and intangible remains forever connected.

⁴ The breath of life, where the intangible is added to the physical (tangible) being, occurs as the creation takes in its first breath. Science may define life differently.

⁵ The word 'Adam' is the Hebrew root word of 'Adamah' which means 'red dirt' – or clay.

⁶ The ancient Hebrew for the modern-day translation to 'Eve' was 'Chavah' (חַוָּה). The verb it derives from means 'life' or to 'make living'.

Babel

To be clear, God not only loves diversity, God encourages it. There is a story of a time when all people spoke one language and began building one city for everyone to live in. God, wanting people to be diverse and different, scattered the people throughout the world, and gave them new and different experiences.

They migrated to other areas and settled in areas with different geological features, foods, and weather. The people began to create names for the new and different things they encountered, and began to find ways to adapt to their new surroundings. Thus, people developed new languages and cultures, increasing diversity.

Abram

As the story goes, Terah, a man of Ur⁷, took his family and migrated to Haran, having originally intended to migrate to Canaan. Years later, Terah's son, Abram,⁸ completed the migration to Canaan. Conditions were not very good in Canaan. There was a drought, forcing Abram to take his family to Egypt. Years later, the drought was over, and Abram took his family back to Canaan. Abram was grateful and praised the god 'Elohim',⁹ of the Canaanite pantheon.

⁷ Ur was a city located in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers where they meet the Persian Gulf. The city was known for its trade with places as far away as India. Ur was wealthy compared to their neighbors.

⁸ Abram is a composition of two Hebrew words meaning 'Lifted Father'. Modern translations use 'Abraham'.

⁹ Interestingly, 'Elohim' is the plural for 'Eloah' which means 'god' or 'godhood' in the Canaanite language.

Many years later, Abram's great grandson, Joseph, moved back to Egypt. Joseph, helped the Egyptian Pharaoh manage a drought in Egypt.

Moses

Generations later, a story is told of a husband and wife of the tribe of Levi.¹⁰ The wife bore a child. She took her infant son, placed him in a basket, and floated him on the Nile. The Pharaoh's daughter discovered the baby and took the baby for her own, calling him Moses.¹¹ Years later, when Moses had grown up, he saw an Egyptian beating a slave. Thinking he could get away with it, Moses killed the Egyptian and buried the evidence. When he discovered he had been seen, Moses ran away to the land of Midian¹² to avoid any punishment for the murder he had committed. While there, Moses married the daughter of a priest. The priest worshiped a Midianite god named Yahweh.

Years passed, and the Pharaoh died. The story continued with Yahweh telling Moses to return to Egypt and gather a large number of slaves, bring

¹⁰ See the section on the Bronze Age Collapse. It is suggested the Levites are a group of Egyptian slaves who joined the other groups to form a confederation known as the Kingdom of Israel. The Hebrew word 'Levi' means 'joined'.

¹¹ Moses probably never existed. Instead, he is the personification of the creation story for the Kingdom of Israel. The kingdom appears to be a confederation of groups that came together around the time of the bronze age collapse and Moses personifies the gathering of those groups.

¹² Midian is a region east of Egypt. It is populated by nomadic tribes of people who are said to have descended from Abram's son Midian.

them to Yahweh where Yahweh would teach the slaves what Yahweh expected of them. Moses did as he was told and brought a number of slaves from Egypt to Mount Horeb,¹³. From there, Yahweh¹⁴ would help them relocate to Canaan.

With the freed slaves camped at the base of the mountain, Moses ascended it on numerous occasions to hear the word of God. God told Moses how people are to behave. God also described what God considered a decent 'home on earth' for God to reside. God wanted a house made of walls of fabric - the alter of uncut stones, for God did not want an alter profaned by man-made tools. Legend tells us God wrote the first ten of the sayings¹⁵ on stone tables. They were presented to Moses so he could take them to the freed slaves. Those sayings are:

¹³ Also called Mount Sinai. The term Sinai is believed, by some modern scholars to be derived from the name of the Babylonian moon-god Sin. It is also assumed Terah, the father of Abram, prayed to the god of the town where he grew up. That town was Ur, and the god of Ur is the Babylonian god of the moon, Sin. Of course, another theory which is more simple is that the Hebrew meaning of Sinai is 'thorny'. The mount is said to be covered in thorny bushes and brambles. Naturally, we cannot be certain, because no one can agree on which mount is the mount in question.

¹⁴ The earliest copies of the Hebrew bible still available (dated around the 9th century) that show the vowels actually read 'Yehovah'. Earlier manuscripts simply use the Tetragrammaton instead. This is reasonable, since the earliest known use of vowels in the written Hebrew language began in the 5th century.

¹⁵ Also called the decalogue, the first ten mitzvot, or in more recent terms, the ten commandments.

- ✦ The Lord God, Yehovah,¹⁶ is your God who brought you out of Egypt and bondage.
- ✦ You shall have no other gods revered or honored with or above the Lord God. You shall not make, worship, or pray to an idol or object of any image that is in heaven or earth.
- ✦ You shall not make false oaths in the name of the Lord God, but only use it with respect and honor.
- ✦ Remember how God rested after creating all the world, and you should do as well by relaxing and enjoying time away from your usual vocation on a regular basis.
- ✦ Honor your parents; and be grateful for what they have provided you.
- ✦ You shall not murder other people or kill any living creature with malice.
- ✦ You shall not have sexual intercourse with any married person other than your spouse.¹⁷
- ✦ You shall not kidnap any person.¹⁸
- ✦ You shall not bear false witness or testimony against another person in the marketplace or the court.
- ✦ You shall not act upon any craving or lusting after the possession of something which does not belong to you.

¹⁶ Another spelling of Yahweh. Yehovah, in Hebrew, translates to 'I am'.

¹⁷ Two unmarried people would not be breaking this commandment by having sex.

¹⁸ Check it out yourselves. The original message was kidnap, not steal. This command was to deal with slavery. Theft is addressed in the last of the ten commandments.

While Moses was on the mountain, the people gathered up gold and made a graven idol in the form of a calf, to which they worshiped and made sacrifices. Yahweh, seeing this, sent Moses, along with the tablets Yahweh had created, down the mountain to chastise the Hebrews.

Moses presented many more rules and variations on the above sayings, along with punishments for violators. Moses then had people make a box, covered in gold, and topped with carvings of angels, which became known as the Ark of the Covenant. Moses put a copy of the ten sayings in it and had the high priest worship before it. He then had them make sacrifices to God before the Ark of the Covenant. He then had made a tabernacle for God to live in. The tabernacle included a table of acacia wood, a golden lampstand, curtains of linen and curtains of goats' hair, plus a bronze alter.

Moses, along with the freed slaves, wandered¹⁹ in the wilderness, bringing the tabernacle with them, until Moses died. Like Terah before him, Moses did not make it to Canaan. However, the descendants of the people Moses led from Egypt made it to Canaan.²⁰

¹⁹ As mentioned earlier, there is no historical evidence to support the biblical account of Moses leading Egyptian slaves around a wilderness for 40 years. Its inclusion helps tie the earlier stories of bible to the more historically documented information included in the later books of the older testament. See the "Bronze Age Collapse" for what may help to explain why these stories about Moses exist.

²⁰ Please note: at the time Moses was supposed to have freed the slaves and delivered them to Canaan, Egypt controlled the area of Canaan.

According to tradition, Joshua took over where Moses left off and brought Yahweh and the people into Canaan by murdering the locals and distributing the possession of the land as he saw fit. They settled throughout Canaan, teaching others about their god, Yahweh. The same tradition tells the story of them setting up a home for Yahweh's tabernacle, first in Gilgal. The tabernacle was moved to either Shiloh or the top of Mount Gerizim,²¹ depending on which of two stories is to be believed. In either case, God lived there for centuries, until King David built a new tabernacle in Jerusalem, using man-made tools,²² and made God relocate there.²³

Bronze Age Collapse²⁴

Prior to the relocation of God to Jerusalem, the people of the bible who lived in the land of Canaan, like all the surrounding kingdoms, experienced a massive economic upheaval, most likely originated by ecological disasters.²⁵ These disasters laid waste to the large kingdoms, such as the Hittites, Egyptians, Mycenaean Greeks and

²¹ There is a debate as to the second location for the home of the tabernacle after entering Canaan. While both sources have different locations, the physical distance between them is fairly minor.

²² Unlike the design God requested using uncut stone.

²³ The tabernacle is the 'home of god'. The ark of the covenant represented god. King David created a new tabernacle and had the ark moved there.

²⁴ Here is where mythology ends and history begins. The stories prior to the collapse merge many story lines into one unified story to bring cohesiveness to the people. The truth is a bit more straight forward. Read on. . .

²⁵ Other reasonable explanations include a significant climate change, an increase in earthquakes in the region, and the disruption of the tin and copper trade routes. The repercussions of all this would have been pronounced.

many more. This collapsed trade routes with foreign neighbors disrupting all the other societies. At the same time, the Sea People conquered the shoreline area and created settlements there. The Canaanite region experienced an influx of many other foreign people looking for refuge. The Habiru,²⁶ or outlaws, came from the east. From Egyptian controlled lands came slaves escaping from the collapsing Egyptian kingdom.²⁷ The Shasu²⁸ moved north into Canaan from the land of Midian, bringing with them their god, Yahweh. The various groups of people merged with a collection of local Canaanite groups to form a large confederation they called the Kingdom of Israel.²⁹ Their largest urban city was Samaria.³⁰

²⁶ It is very likely that the name “Hebrew” was first used after the Habiru joined the confederation.

²⁷ The ‘collapsing Egyptian kingdom’ includes the land along the eastern Mediterranean sea. That would mean the escaping slaves would not have had to travel through the red sea. They could simply run to the hills to escape.

²⁸ If modern scholarship is to be believed, it was the Shasu who introduced the hill-dwelling Canaanites to the god Yahweh, drawing them away from the local Canaanite pantheon led by El/Elohim. It is believed that the ‘tribe of Reuben’ was likely the descendants of the Shasu.

²⁹ While there is little proof, the general consensus is that one of the tribes to join the confederation were called Israelites. They lent their name to the people who encompassed the federation of tribal groups in the new kingdom of Israel. The term ‘Israel’ is a combination of two elements: Yisra, meaning to struggle or wrestle, and El, the Canaanite word for God - ‘one who struggles with God’.

³⁰ Depending on how it is interpreted, God’s home in Samaria lasted for about 200 years (if Yahweh’s home moved from Midian to the Canaanite area with the Shasu as part of the bronze age) or about 500 years (if Yahweh left Midian with Moses and Joshua).

To the south was a smaller civilization called Judeans. The kingdom of Judah formed about the same time as the kingdom of Israel. West of the Kingdom of Judah lived the Philistines³¹ and to the immediate north of them, the tribe of Dan.³²

Invasions

God was not pleased³³ with the Israelites. The Kingdom of Israel had an on-again, off-again relationship with Assyria. During one of the lower points of their relationship, the Assyrians invaded and captured a number of Israelites to be used as slaves. Then, the Assyrians took the land for their own and pushed out the remaining Israelites, scattering them until they were no more.³⁴

Later, Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, brought a great force, capturing the people living in or near Jerusalem. Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians were simply interested in slaves. To ensure the people would not return, they torched the city, completely destroying it.

In time, the Persians conquered the Babylonians and let the enslaved people, now called Jews, return to the land once known as Canaan, now

³¹ The Philistines are very likely the newer name for some of the Sea People who invaded the coastline at the end of the bronze age. They reached their height of power about 150 years after capturing the coastline.

³² Scholars believe the tribe of Dan were actually Sea People who assimilated into the Kingdom of Israel.

³³ God's pleasure and displeasure throughout the testaments are human's interpretation of God and do not necessarily define God's true feelings.

³⁴ An interesting observation is that the city of Jerusalem, at this time, grew from a small city to a large urban center.

called Judea. They returned³⁵ and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. Over time, Judeans began to disagree on how to practice their religion. This caused different religious groups to form, each with their own interpretation of what they felt God wanted.

Pharisees

One group, the Pharisees, were a group of lower-class laymen and scribes who became religious teachers that did not feel the temple of Jerusalem was important to the religion. The Babylonian exile and temple destruction forced the Jews to develop an alternative method of maintaining their religious beliefs, and the Pharisees filled this gap. They insisted the oral teachings provided the most important aspect of Jewish daily life. Jews could celebrate in local synagogues instead of having to rely on the temple in Jerusalem. The Pharisees were fairly liberal compared to the Sadducees. When a famous Pharisee, Hillel the Elder, was asked to summarize the law, he said: “What is hateful to you do not do to another. That is the whole law and the rest is mere commentary.” In the end, Pharisees were persuaded by the spirit of the laws of Moses, not the specifics.

Sadducees

The Sadducees were upper-class priests, aristocratic families, and wealthier merchants who rejected the oral teachings of Judaism and

³⁵ Not all Jews chose to return to Judah. Some had established lives and businesses in Babylon and chose to remain there. Others may have been hesitant to leave the relative stability and prosperity they had achieved in Babylon for the uncertainties of returning to a land that had been devastated by war and exile.

focused on the original five written books of the Torah, along with the importance of the temple in Jerusalem. They were traditionalists who were involved in the purity rituals of the temple, and felt all Jews must come there to make offerings to God. While the Sadducees embraced the order and structure offered by the Greek's Hellenistic system, they remained conservative in their beliefs. Unlike the Pharisees, Sadducees denied the immortality of the soul, bodily resurrection after death, and the existence of angelic spirits. They also took the laws Moses taught verbatim along with the prescribed harsh punishments.

Essenes

The Essenes formed when Hellenized Jews, such as the Sadducees, began to modify the historical Jewish traditions. The Essenes saw themselves as the true tradition and the 'holy elect'. They held an apocalyptic worldview, expecting the imminent arrival of a messianic figure or the end of the world. Like the Pharisees, they believed in the immortality of the soul and divine punishment for the wicked. Unlike the Pharisees, they did not believe in the resurrection of the body. While it is unlikely John the Baptist was a full member of the Essenes, much of his teachings suggest he was more than familiar with them.

Samaritans

Then there were the Samaritans. When the Assyrians captured and took away most of the Hebrews from the northern regions of the Hebrews, the Hebrews who remained were renamed Samaritans after crossbreeding with Assyrians. Nonetheless, they felt they were the true Jewish religion and the southern Judeans had corrupted the faith. The Samaritans believed

God did not choose Jerusalem, but Shechem at Mount Gerizim in Samaria as his home. When the Jews destroyed the temple on Mount Gerizim about a hundred years before Jesus, the feud between the Jews and Samaritans intensified. It was made worse when the Jews returned twenty years later and completed the total destruction of Shechem and the other remaining city, Samaria.

Romans

In the short span of time between the destruction of the temple on Mount Gerizim and the birth of Jesus, the Romans invaded. Unlike the previous invasions, the Romans did not carry off large percentages of Jews, but instead simply set up local leaders to govern the land and its people. The Romans brought with them their technology, building a sea port on the Mediterranean as well as remodeling the temple of Jerusalem.

The Romans let the Jews manage their own internal affairs. The Romans simply wanted taxes from the people without any civil disobedience. They even let the Jews do the tax collection. This, of course, led to the Jewish tax collectors getting rich by adding their own fees to the taxes they collected. Consequently, tax collectors were not well loved by the general population.

On the religious side, the Romans permitted the Jews to practice their religion in Judea. This permission lasted as long as the conquered people paid their taxes and avoided conflict.³⁶

³⁶ Naturally, that didn't happen: First Jewish-Roman War (66-73 CE) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-136 CE) are examples of a failure to remain civil.

Apocalyptic Messiahs

The Jews had a history of occupation and forced relocations, from their time in Egypt to the Babylonian invasions. The Romans were simply 'yet another invasion' into their land. As a consequence, numerous apocalyptic messiahs³⁷ began preaching the end of 'the world'. By which they meant the end of the world of being occupied or suppressed. Apocalypticism was so common and widespread³⁸ in Judea, nearly every Jew believed it was a basic fact. Jews dreamed of living in peace and freedom, and the various messiahs who appeared promised such freedom. Their influence on the Romans ended similarly.

Before Jesus, there was Athronges. He was a shepherd who declared himself the messiah and led a rebellion against the Romans. The Romans crushed his rebellion.

Around the same time, Simon of Peraea was a former slave who rebelled against Roman rule. He proclaimed himself the messiah and led a revolt against the Romans. However, his movement was quickly suppressed, and he was executed.

Theudas was a Jewish rebel who led an uprising sometime in the mid-first century. He claimed to

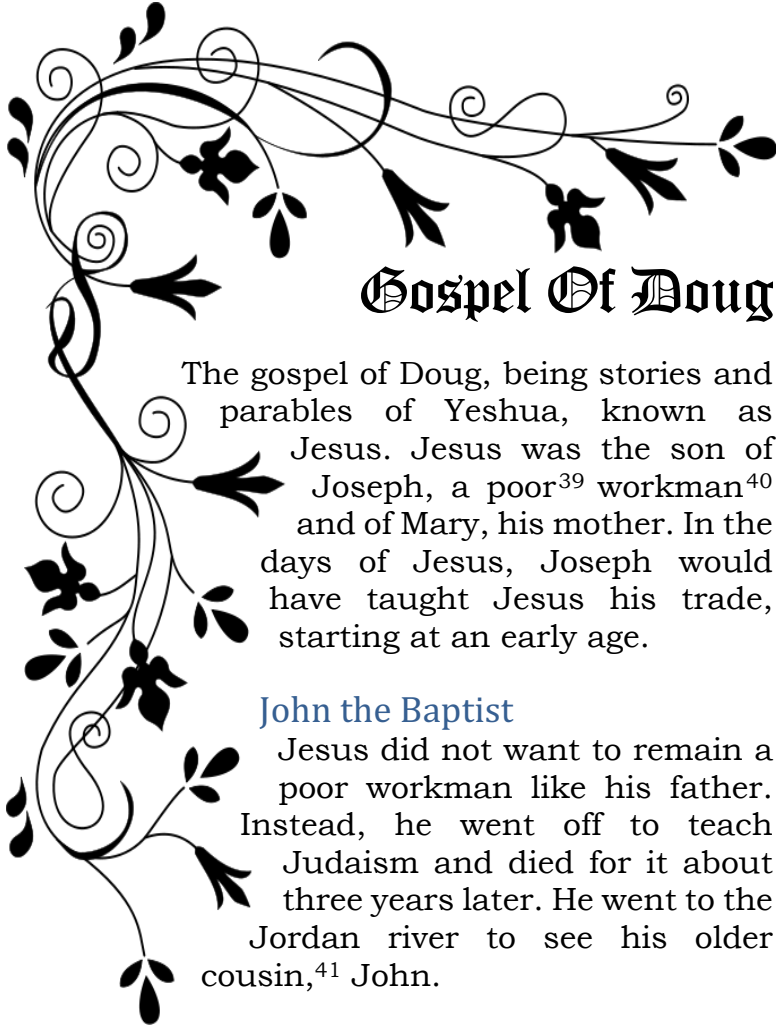
³⁷ A messiah, or Mashiach, is simply a leader, priest, or king who would free the Jews from their oppressors (Romans, in the first century) and reunite the tribes of Israel. To be a messiah, someone simply needs to be anointed with oil.

³⁸ Texts, such as the Book of Daniel, the Book of Enoch, and portions of the Dead Sea Scrolls, conveyed apocalyptic visions, prophecies, and messages of hope. They described cosmic battles between the forces of good and evil, predicted divine judgment, and anticipated the coming of a messianic figure.

be a prophet and gathered a following, but he was captured and killed by the Romans.

Menahem ben Judah was a leader of the Sicarii, a Jewish extremist group, during the First Jewish-Roman War. He was hailed by his followers as the messiah. Like the other messiahs, the Romans took care of him too.

There were other messiahs during the first centuries of the common era. One of the other ones is called Jesus today.



Gospel Of Doug

The gospel of Doug, being stories and parables of Yeshua, known as Jesus. Jesus was the son of Joseph, a poor³⁹ workman⁴⁰ and of Mary, his mother. In the days of Jesus, Joseph would have taught Jesus his trade, starting at an early age.

John the Baptist

Jesus did not want to remain a poor workman like his father. Instead, he went off to teach Judaism and died for it about three years later. He went to the Jordan river to see his older cousin,⁴¹ John.

³⁹ A reference to a birth story says Jesus' parents could not afford the normal sacrifice for the birth of a son and could only afford the 'poor person' sacrifice of two birds.

⁴⁰ The Greek for Joseph's job description is 'τέκτων', meaning 'craftsman'. When used with iron, wood, or stone, the type of craftsman is normally identified. No material is mentioned in any document, implying he was either a day laborer or general workman.

⁴¹ Jesus' mother's (Mary) mother's (Anna) sister's daughter's (Elizabeth) son was John the Baptist.

John preached near the southern end of the Jordan river and dressed in a camel hair⁴² tunic with a leather band around his waist. He lived on locusts and simple bread very similar to manna, a coriander bread made with honey and baked in olive oil. John's teachings insisted people help one another. When his followers asked John how they should behave, he told them "Anyone with two coats,⁴³ share one of them with someone who has none; and anyone with food, share it as well. Do not take more than is right and fair, and be satisfied with what you receive for your actions." John would baptize his followers in the river as a sign they had washed away their old ways and would now follow John's teachings.

John the Baptist told his followers that a holier man would come to be baptized, and this man would teach a better understanding of God's message. Around this time, Jesus came to the river, and asked John to baptize him.⁴⁴ When John finished, the clouds parted and the sky opened, signifying Jesus was the person John had referred to as holier than himself. Alas, the days of John the Baptist were cut short; for the local Roman ruler had him imprisoned and then decapitated.

⁴² Camel hair clothing is a rough, uncomfortable fabric often worn to show poverty and asceticism.

⁴³ First century Jewish men typically wore a tunic, an outer tunic, and on cooler days a cloak, making three layers – or 'coats'. The message here refers to living with the bare minimum when others have nothing.

⁴⁴ There is strong evidence to believe Jesus was a disciple of John the Baptist, and some of Jesus' initial disciples began as John's followers.

Jesus Tempted

The next thing Jesus did was to wander off by himself to think and prepare himself to teach God's message. He thought long and hard. He realized we are all children of God. However, if he was the child of God, he should be able to turn stones into bread. Of course, this would be absurd, realizing mankind does not live by bread alone. Besides, even stones have their value. He could be ruler of vast areas. However, the land belongs to God who made it. Perhaps, if he fell from a great height, God would command his angels to keep him safe from injury. But willfully doing so would force God to serve the will of Jesus, and it would be inappropriate to make God to do his commands. Jesus thought of these and many other ideas. In the end, he felt better prepared to teach the message God wanted people to hear.

Crowds Gather

Jesus went home. Later, when he heard his cousin, John the Baptist had been arrested, he left home again, but this time to the Sea of Galilee. On his way, Jesus spoke of God's message to those he met. Many of them stopped what they were doing, wanting to learn more. They were intrigued at the teachings, for Jesus spoke in a persuasive manner, and not like someone simply reading complex laws from a book. Some of these people put down what they were doing and followed.

Disciples Gather

Andrew, a fishermen and disciple of John the Baptist, convinced his brother Simon to join him and follow Jesus. They then went to their fishing partners, James and John, and the four


men joined Jesus as the first disciples of Jesus. Thus, the gathering of the disciples began.

Simon's Mother-in-Law

Jesus and his four companions went to Simon and Andrew's house. Unfortunately, Simon's mother-in-law had a fever and was resting. Simon told Jesus about her condition, and Jesus went to see her. Taking her by the hand, Jesus had her stand up, and with it, the fever was gone. That evening, she waited on the five of them.

In the dark early hours of the next morning, Jesus got up went out to a secluded place to pray. Later that morning, Simon and the three other companions searched for him. When they found him, Jesus said "Let's go to the towns nearby, so I may teach there also." They went from town to town where Jesus taught God's message.

Healing a Leper

 One day while Jesus was teaching in the neighboring towns, a leper⁴⁵ came to Jesus. The leper dropped to his knees at Jesus' feet, saying, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus, moved by his compassion, reached out and touched the leper. Jesus said to him, "I am willing. You are cleansed." The leprosy left him, and he was no longer unclean. Jesus sent him away, saying, "Go now, and present yourself to the priest. Pay for your cleansing what Moses

⁴⁵ Leprosy, in biblical times, was any skin disease or skin-related symptom, and was usually curable. Regardless, they were considered unclean and the lowest member of society. Rabbis were forbidden to touch them. A leper was usually reduced to begging.

commanded⁴⁶, and speak no more of this.” Instead, he told everyone he met what had happened and that Jesus had cleansed him.

Healing the Paralytic

Jews of Jesus spread. Crowds of people came to see him. Sometimes, the crowds were so large that people clogged the streets trying to see or hear him. On one such occasion, four men carrying a paralytic man on a pallet tried to bring him to Jesus, but the crowd was so dense they could not get close. They decided to climb up on the roof, remove a section of the roof so they could lower the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. Jesus, seeing their desire to help another person, said to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven. Get up. Pick up your pallet and go home.” With that, he got up, picked up the pallet he had been lowered down on, and went out in the sight of everyone.

Dining with Tax Collectors

Levi, a tax collector⁴⁷ was sitting in the tax booth. When Levi saw Jesus, he got up and followed Jesus. Later, Jesus and his disciples were lying down⁴⁸ to dine lavishly at the table in Levi’s house, along with many tax collectors and sinners. A passing Pharisees’ scholar saw Jesus and questioned his disciples why they would eat with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus overheard

⁴⁶ Leviticus 14 describes a long and complex process involving extensive donations of time and money.

⁴⁷ Tax collectors were well known for being very corrupt. Consequently, Jews had complete contempt for them.

⁴⁸ A Greek and Roman tradition adopted by Phoenician and Aramaic princes as well as others around the Mediterranean. It was thought to aid in digestion.

the comments and replied, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor.”

Wedding Guests

Another time, Jesus was questioned about his disciple’s eating habits: “Both the disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees observe fasting, but your disciples do not.” Jesus replied, “Can the wedding guests fast while the groom is with them?”

Picking Grain on the Sabbath

Jesus and his disciples were walking through a grain field on the Sabbath, and the disciples began picking grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Why are they breaking the Sabbath law?” Jesus replied, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

Healing the Crippled Hand

In another Sabbath, Jesus met a man whose hand did not function.⁴⁹ Once again, the Pharisees watched Jesus and his followers to find opportunities to chastise him. But Jesus asked them, “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath, to save a life?” The Pharisees had no answer. Jesus lost his temper for their hardness of heart. Jesus took the man’s hand, stretched it out, and the man’s hand was restored. Feeling once again humiliated, the Pharisees began collaborate with the Romans against him.

⁴⁹ Early text references to the man’s condition describe saturnine palsy, a fairly common complication of lead poisoning. It has the same symptoms as radial nerve compression, commonly caused by sleeping on the arm.

Appointing the Twelve Apostles

Later, Jesus summoned a select few of his followers to meet. They came to him, and he appointed twelve of them to be apostles. As an apostle, the twelve would be a witness to the message Jesus taught and could teach it as well.

Beatitudes

Turning his attention toward his followers, he began saying, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.⁵⁰ Blessed are you who hunger, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep, for you shall laugh.”

Love Unconditionally

Jesus taught God’s message to anyone who would listen: Love your enemies. Don’t respond violently towards an evil person. If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not deny them your shirt either. If someone makes you to go one mile, go two. Give to everyone who asks of you, and if someone takes what is yours, do not demand it back.

What value is there in loving those who love you? Even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, how does that make you better than a sinner? Sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, how does that make you different from a sinner? Do not sinners expect return on their investments and lending.

⁵⁰ To Jesus, the ‘kingdom of God’ was located here on earth, and that it was something that doesn’t cost money.

Instead, love your enemies. Do good, and lend expecting nothing in return. God is equally kind to ungrateful and evil people in the same manner as God is to the good and kind. Be merciful, just as God is merciful. How you forgive is how you will be forgiven. How you judge others is how you will be judged. Remember, when you give charity, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.⁵¹

About Anxiety

Continuing, Jesus said, "Therefore, do not be worried.⁵² Do not worry about what you will eat or drink. Do not worry about your body or what you will wear. Life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Think of the birds. They do not sow, reap, nor gather into barns, and yet God feeds them. Are you not worth at least the same as birds? And who of you, by being worried, can add a single hour to their life? Why are you worried about clothes? Look, instead, how the lilies of the field grow. They do not toil, nor weave. Not even Solomon, in all his glory, clothed himself so well. If God dresses the grass of the field, which is alive today, and thrown into the fire tomorrow, will God not clothe you at least as well?"

⁵¹ Give quietly without making a show or production of your charity. Expect nothing in return. If a person offers to return value for your gift, suggest they return that value by giving it to someone else. 'Paying it forward' helps spread love and kindness better than simply keeping it between the original two people.

⁵² Worry is caused by caring for something we have no control over. It is a fear that the thing you care about will be unsafe or unable to care for itself. Let go of the fear and the worry will go away on its own.

Lord's Prayer

Regarding prayer, Jesus said “When you pray, pray in private, always praising God. Follow the pattern of: Abba,⁵³ hallowed is your name. May your kingdom come, your will be done both here and everywhere. Provide me with the understanding and assistance for my daily needs and detach the guilt that binds me as I let go of the guilt of others. I will not be lost in materialism or common temptations but will free myself from that which keeps me from my true purpose of honoring you. Amen.”

Blind Leading the Blind

Jesus told many parables. One example is: “A blind man cannot safely guide a blind man. Who will watch for pits? Why do you focus on a speck in your friend’s eye, but do not see the log in your own? First take the log out of your own eye, and then your vision will be clear enough to take out your friend’s speck.”

A Tree and Its Fruit

He used other parables: “Grapes do not grow on thorn bushes, nor are figs gathered from thistle briars. Good fruit come from good trees, while bad trees does not produce good fruit. A good person, out of the goodness of their heart, gives what is good; and the evil person brings forth what is evil.”⁵⁴

⁵³ “Abba” is Aramaic and means more than simply “father”. It combines an intimate relationship with an acceptance of obedience. See comments in the ‘Foundation for our Faith’.

⁵⁴ What needs to be considered here is what is defined as good versus evil. Is it on a ‘per instance’ criteria or on a more overall value system? A single act does not define us.

Friend at Midnight

There was times Jesus wanted to make a point and simply spoke. “Suppose you have a friend who comes to you at midnight asking you for help. ‘Friend, lend me some bread. A friend of mine has come from a long journey, and I have nothing to offer him.’ And you respond, ‘Do not bother me; my door is already shut. My family and I are in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything.’ Even though you will not get up and give him anything out of friendship, yet out of embarrassment and shame, you will get up and give whatever is needed.”

Ministering Women

Several women supported Jesus and his apostles. The women were more than adoring outsiders looking on. They contributed to the support of the group, and were seen as equal to the men. Among the women was Miriam, also known as Mary or Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Herod's chief steward, and Susanna. They listened and learned what Jesus taught along with the other disciples, and spread the teachings of Jesus.


Good Samaritan

Once, a legal expert asked Jesus, “How should we behave?” Jesus replied, “Treat your neighbor as they⁵⁵ want to be treated.” He then asked Jesus, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was attacked by robbers, who

⁵⁵ Different translations of this teaching use different words to point the focus. While some scholars debate the best translation, this one seems most in line with the teachings of Jesus.

stripped him and beat him until he was half dead. A short time later, a priest was going down that road. When the priest saw the beaten man, the priest crossed over to the other side of the road to pass him. A short time later, a Levite,⁵⁶ walked by and saw him. Like the priest, he passed by on the other side as well. But a Samaritan,⁵⁷ who was on a journey, came upon him. When he saw the beaten man, he felt compassion, came to him, and bandaged up his wounds. The Samaritan put the man on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, he took out two coins and gave them to the innkeeper and told the innkeeper to: Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.”

Lost Sheep

 One evening, Jesus was eating and talking with tax collectors and sinners when some pharisees questioned him about it. Jesus asked, “What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, but one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains to go and search for the one that has strayed? If it turns out that he finds the stray, will he rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray?”

⁵⁶ A Levite performs services associated with Jewish public worship. They were also the temple guards.

⁵⁷ The hatred between Jews and Samaritans dates back to the Jewish patriarchs, made worse after the resettlement following the Babylonian invasion. In general, the hatred is intense between them. See the section on Samaritans.

Prodigal Son

Sometimes Jesus would tell longer stories to get his point across. One such example is the story of the prodigal son: A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of this.' So, the father divided his estate between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered his possessions and went on a journey to a distant land. There he squandered his estate with loose living.

Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine took place in that country, and he began to be impoverished. He went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and the citizen sent him into his fields to feed swine. The younger son would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, yet no one was giving anything to him. When he realized this, he said to himself, how many of my father's hired men have more than enough to eat, but I am starving here! I will go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I am not worthy to be called your son. Make me one of your hired men.'

So, he picked himself up and returned to his father. His father, seeing him approaching, felt compassion for him and ran to greet him. The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I am not worthy to be called your son.' But the father turned to his slaves and ordered them to 'bring out the best garments and clothe him with fine rings and sandals. He then ordered a fattened calf be kill so they could all eat and celebrate. The father was overjoyed to see his younger son, who was lost to him, had returned.

The older son had been in the field, and when he approached the house, he heard music and celebration. He asked one of the servants for the reason, and the servant said, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' The older son became angry and was not willing to join the celebration. When the father tried pleading with the older son, the older son replied, 'For all my life I have served you, and I have never neglected anything you asked. You have never celebrated me and given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when he came, who squandered your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' The father listened and replied, 'My son, you have always been here for me, and all that is mine is yours. But we need to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and gone, and now is beginning to live. He was lost and now has been found.' With that, the father and son went inside."

Sowing Seeds

Parables about food were common for Jesus. He realized most people would relate to stories about food. When a crowd of people found him near the shore, he relayed God's message in the form of a parable about seeds. "Listen to this!" he said. "As a farmer was sowing⁵⁸ seeds, some seeds fell beside the road. These were easy for birds to find, so they were eaten. Some seeds fell on the rocky ground which did not have much soil. They quickly grew because they had no depth of soil. Just as quickly they died for the sun

⁵⁸ Sowing is a way of planting seeds by tossing them widely so as to scatter them about.

scorched them and they didn't have deep roots to protect themselves. Other seeds fell among thorny bushes, and the thorns choked the seeds so they produced no crop. But some seeds fell into the good soil. These seeds grew into large plants producing of thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold."

Sending the Twelve

Jesus summoned the twelve apostles and sent them out in six groups of two, telling the twelve to teach God's message of love to anyone who will listen. He instructed the twelve that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff: no bread, no bag, no money. He added, "Wear sandals and do not put on two tunics."⁵⁹ He also said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town, eating and drinking what they put before you."⁶⁰ The twelve apostles went and preached that people should repent. They anointed with oil many sick people, healing them. After this, Jesus appointed seventy others, men and women, sending them in pairs ahead of him to every city and place where he was going to visit.

Remembering John the Baptist

Herod⁶¹ heard the stories circulating among the people. They suggested Jesus was John the Baptist, having risen from the dead. Maybe, Jesus was Elijah or other prophet to save the

⁵⁹ Wear ordinary clothes as opposed to what the rich or well-off would wear.

⁶⁰ Do not find new lodging just because something better came along.

⁶¹ One of the local Roman rulers, Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great. He was charged with keeping the peace in his region of Judea by putting down any uprising.

Jews from the Romans. Herod was concerned, for not only did Jesus represent a threat to the peace and stability of his rule, if Jesus was John the Baptist reincarnated, Herod feared for his own life. It turns out Herod had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias,⁶² the wife of his brother Philip. For John the Baptist had been reminding Herod that it was not lawful to be sleeping with Herodias. Herodias had a grudge against John and wanted him put to death. Unfortunately for Herodias, Herod would not order the death of John because Herod thought John was a holy man. Besides, he enjoyed listening to what John taught.

Herodias found an opportunity to deal with John the Baptist. On Herod's birthday, a large banquet was held for his lords, military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias presented herself and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests immensely. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I will give it to you." She asked her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And her mother said, 'The head of John the Baptist.' Herodias' daughter returned to Herod saying, "I want you to give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter right away." This made Herod was very sorry, yet because of his promise made before his dinner guests, he could not refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. John was beheaded in the prison, his head placed upon a platter, and given to the girl, who gave it to her mother. When

⁶² It seems it was common knowledge that Herod was having sex with his brother's wife.

John's disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.

A House Divided

The crowds around Jesus were so large, Jesus and his disciples had difficulties moving around. Jesus tried to go home but was unable to move through the crowded streets. When his mother and siblings heard of this; they went out to bring him home, because they felt he had gone out of his mind.

The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Ba'al-zebub."⁶³ and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." Jesus called for them and began teaching them using parables, "A house divided against itself, cannot stand. If Satan is divided against himself, how will his domain survive? No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder it unless he first restrains the strong man. Only then he can plunder the strong man's house."

Brothers and Sisters

When his mother and his brothers finally made it through the crowd, they were standing outside and had to send word to him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Look outside. Your mother and your brothers are looking for you." Answering them, he said, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Looking around at those who were sitting around him, he said, "Behold my mother and my

⁶³ Ba'al-zebub was the god of the Philistines and thought by the Jews to be the prince of demons.

brothers! For whoever lives in accordance to God's message, they are my brothers and sisters."

Feeding the Five Thousand

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus all that they had taught and done. Hearing of all they had accomplished Jesus said, "Let us retire to a secluded place so we can rest for a bit away from the crowds." Jesus and the apostles went away in a boat to a secluded place to eat, rest and refresh themselves.

However, the people saw them going. Many recognized them and ran ahead on foot from all the cities and got there before Jesus and the apostles. As Jesus went ashore, he saw a large crowd assembled, and he felt compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He began to teach them what God wanted of us. Jesus taught the people to love one another and to be a humble servant to those around you.

Jesus taught until it was late in the day. His disciples came to him and said, "This place is desolate, and it is already late. Send the people away so that they can go to the nearby villages to buy themselves something to eat." But Jesus answered them, "Give them something to eat yourselves." To which they replied, "Shall we go and spend two hundred coins on bread so we can give them something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do you have?" They checked their possessions and reported, "Five loaves, and two fish." Jesus commanded them all to sit. They sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Jesus took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, blessed the food and broke the loaves. He gave them to the disciples to set before

the groups. Likewise, he divided up the two fish. They all ate and were satisfied, and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces of bread and fish. There were five thousand people who ate the loaves and fish.⁶⁴

Outside does not Defile

Jesus began saying to them, “Listen and learn. Nobody can be defiled by anything outside a person which enters into them. However, that which we let out⁶⁵ defiles us.” With this said, he declared all foods clean.

Be a Humble Servant

The apostles talked among themselves one day as they were walking between towns. They were debating who was the greatest among them. When they got to their destination, Jesus replied, “If you want to be first and greatest of all, you must be last and a servant of all.”

In Your Name

John said to Jesus, “Teacher, on our journey, we saw someone exorcizing demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he was one of your followers.” But Jesus said, “There is no need to stop him. No one who performs a miracle in my name will then speak evil of me. For he who is not against us is for us. Besides, their doing good deserves reward.”

⁶⁴ No mention is made of Jesus’ persuasive request to the listeners to share what they may have brought. Like a potluck, if people share what they bring, it often has more leftovers than expected.

⁶⁵ What we give to the world determines if we are defiled, not what is given to us.

The Rich Young Man

As Jesus was about to go to a nearby town, a man ran up to Jesus and asked, “Good Teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?” Jesus turned to him saying, “Why do you call me good? God, alone, is the definition of good. You learned the sayings attributed to Moses: ‘Do not murder. Do not have sex with a married person other than your spouse. Do not kidnap. Do not bear false witness. Honor your parents.’” And he said to Jesus, “Teacher, I have followed all these laws since I was a child. How can I have greatness throughout eternity?” Jesus felt compassion for him and answered, “There is just one more thing: go, sell all your possessions and give everything to the poor.”⁶⁶ Hearing these words, he went away grieving, for he owned a great deal of property.

Great Feast

Ⓜone day, Jesus was dining when he heard someone say, “Blessed is everyone who eat in the Kingdom of God.” To which Jesus replied, “A man was hosting a great dinner, and he invited many people. When it was time, he had his servant go to tell the guests that the banquet was ready and that it was time to come. But each and every guest had an excuse for why they could not attend the banquet. One had to tend to a newly purchased land. Another chose to tend to some recently purchased cattle. A third said he had just married and asked to be excused. When the host heard about the excuses, he became angry and told the servant to go out into the streets and back alleys of the city and return with any person,

⁶⁶ “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

be they poor, crippled, blind, or otherwise disfigured. The servant did as he was told. He returned with many people, and the host noticed there were still some empty seats at the table. So, the host had the servant go out again and search the highways and slums for others in order to fill the house with guests. The servant did, and every seat at the table was filled, yet none of the people who made an excuse for not coming was able to partake in the banquet.

Blessing the Children

People brought children to Jesus so that he might bless them by his touch, but the disciples reprimanded them. When Jesus saw this, he was offended and scolded his disciples saying, “Allow the children to come to me. Do not stop them. The kingdom of God belongs people like these children. We must be childlike to enter the kingdom of God.” He took them in his arms and began blessing them.

Prophet at Home

Jesus returned to the area of his home with the twelve apostles. On the Sabbath, he tried to teach in the synagogue, but the local people questioned him, saying, “When and where did this man get all this wisdom? Isn’t he just one of the local workmen, the son of our neighbors Mary and Joseph?” They were offended by Jesus and his teaching. Jesus responded, “A prophet is honored, except in his own neighborhood, and among his own relatives.” Since no one listened, Jesus could not teach the word of God to his neighbors and left home to resume teaching in other villages.

Mustard seed/Leaven

The disciples asked, “What is the kingdom of God?” and Jesus replied: “It is like a single grain of mustard seed⁶⁷ which a man took and tossed in his garden. In time, it grew and became a tree which the birds made nests in its branches. It is also like leaven⁶⁸ which a woman concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened.”

Manager and Debtors

Parables help people understand complex concepts. Jesus taught one about a manager. “A person told a rich man that the rich man’s manager was squandering the rich man’s possessions. The rich man called the manager and asked, ‘I hear you are not managing my possessions well. Tell me what you have done or you will not manage for me ever again. The manager thought to himself. “What will I do if I am not his manager? I’m too weak to perform menial labor and too ashamed to be seen begging. I know what to do that will make people want to welcome me in their homes when I am no longer his manager.” He summoned each and every one of his master’s debtors and asked them what they owe. He significantly reduced the amount owed, sometimes as much as a half. He rewrote each bill the debtors owed to reflect the reduced debt they owed the rich man. When the rich man heard what his manager did, he praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly.”

⁶⁷ Thought to be the smallest seed in the world. Biblical writers didn’t know about orchids, whose seeds are smaller.

⁶⁸ In Jewish tradition, leaven represents sin and corruption. See: Leviticus

Jesus continued. “A slave cannot serve two masters.⁶⁹ Either they will honor one and offend the other or they will devote themselves to one and ignore the other. Nobody drinks well aged wine and immediately wants to drink young wine. No one puts new wine in old wineskins⁷⁰ or aged wines into new wineskins.⁷¹

Hiring Labor

Jesus described the kingdom of God like a landowner who went to hire laborers for his vineyard at sunrise. He offered a coin for a day’s labor. Several workers agreed to the offer and went to work in the fields. A couple hours later, he repeated the process and found more workers who agreed to a coin in exchange for working in his field for the rest of the day. The landowner repeated the process every couple hours until late in the afternoon. Each time, he offered the workers a coin for their labor that day.

At the end of the day, all the workers assembled for their pay. The landowner gave each of them a coin for their efforts. Those who were hired at sunrise complained to the landowner. They felt it was unfair that they had to work all day in the hot sun and received nothing more than someone who only worked an hour. The landowner replied saying, ‘Friend, am I doing you wrong? Did I not pay you what we agreed? Take what we agreed and do not worry about what I do with my money.’

⁶⁹ This goes for God and this material world as well.

⁷⁰ It was well known at the time that old wineskins were more brittle and susceptible to breaking as the wine ages.

⁷¹ New wineskins will change the quality and flavor of a well-aged wine.

Unmerciful Servant

Jesus described the kingdom of God in many ways. It can be compared to a nobleman who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. As it happened, one of his slaves⁷² owed him ten thousand coins. But since the slave did not have the means to repay, the nobleman ordered the slave be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, so repayment would be made. The slave prostrated himself before the nobleman and pleaded for compassion and ask the nobleman to be patient. To the slave's good fortune, the nobleman reversed his order and forgave the debt.

That same slave then went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred coins. He seized the other slave and began to choke him, demanding to be paid back every coin. His fellow slave dropped to the ground and pleaded with him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' But the first slave was unmoved and had the other slave thrown in prison until the debt was fully paid. When people saw what had happened, they were deeply upset and reported what they knew to the nobleman. The nobleman summoned the slave to discover the truth. To which, the nobleman said, 'You wicked slave. I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?' And the nobleman, moved with anger, handed the slave over to the prison guards until he repaid all that was owed him.

⁷² Despite the laws against kidnapping and slavery, some Jews kept slaves.

Unjust Judge

Another parable Jesus taught regarded a widow and a judge. The judge did not respect his people nor did he care about God. The widow came before the judge every day and asked for legal protection from her opponents. Every day, the judge would deny her, and every day she would beg for protection. After a while, he relented knowing that she would not give up until he gave her the protection she requested.

Lamp and Basket

When Jesus was away from the crowds, those who were close to him asked him about his parables. Jesus explained, “To you has been given the secret of understanding. For those outside, everything is simply parables. Is a lamp placed under a basket or under a bed? Is it instead placed on a table or stand? Nothing is hidden, for it is placed in plain sight to those who look.” He said to them, “Think carefully about all you see and hear. How you understand it, so will you believe. And by your standards will you, in turn, be measured. Whoever understands, more will be available. And whoever does not understand, even more will be denied him.

On the Road to Jerusalem

They were passing through from one city and village to another on their way to Jerusalem. As they proceeded, Jesus taught and answered questions. Someone asked, “Will your leadership save all of us?” And Jesus replied, “It is a narrow, but open doorway. Many will try to enter and will be too burdened to pass through.”

On Praying

As they were passing by the temple in Jerusalem, Jesus taught humility using another parable: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a great Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood in the center and was praying loudly: ‘God, thanks to you I am not like these other people: thieves, swindlers, and adulterers, or even like this tax collector. Instead, I fast twice a week; I pay a generous tithe on all that I get.’ In the meantime, the tax collector, in a quiet corner some distance away, was also praying. The tax collector bent his head down, unwilling to lift up his eyes. Quietly the tax collector prayed, ‘God, please be merciful to me, a sinner! While I try and will continue to try, I fail to be what you want for me.’ I tell you; this tax collector went home more justified in the sight of God than the Pharisee.”

Forgiveness

When evening came, Jesus and the disciples went out of Jerusalem to sleep. As they were entering the city in the morning, Jesus said “Whenever you pray, forgive. If you have anything against anyone, forgive so that God will also forgive you for your transgressions. God will forgive you as you forgive others.”

Jesus continued “Resolve issues early. Make friends with adversary at law while you are with him on the way to court, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the warden, and you be thrown into prison. If you end up in prison, you will not come out until you have paid every cent.”

Caesar or God

Then some of the Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus wanting to trap him. They asked him, “We know you are always truthful and defer to nobody. For your teachings is exclusively the message of God. Is it the law to pay taxes to Caesar?” Jesus, recognizing their hypocrisy and the trap they were trying to create, asked them to bring forth the coin that would be used to pay the tax. When they did, Jesus asked them, “Whose likeness and inscription is on this coin?” They answered it was Caesar’s. Then Jesus said to them, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.”

Later, Jesus told his disciples “Beware of scholars who like to walk around in long robes, and like respectful greetings, and seats of honor.”

Last Supper

While they were eating the evening meal, Jesus took his cup, and after blessing it by saying “We give thanks to you, Holy Father.” drank from the cup and passed it to each disciple. Afterwards, he took a loaf of bread, broke it, and blessed it saying: “As this broken bread was scattered over the hills and was brought together becoming one, so gather your people from the ends of the earth into your kingdom, for you have all glory forever.” After which, Jesus shared the bread with his disciples, and they drank and ate. Afterwards, they sang a hymn and went to the base of the Mount of Olives. That night, Jesus was arrested, and by the morning, tried and crucified.



Acts of the Apostles

The apostles and close disciples, like Matthias, Mary Magdalene and others, returned to Jerusalem after Jesus died. In the upper room they were using, they prayed. In the days and weeks that followed, Mary, the mother of Jesus and her other sons joined them.

Those who were gathered were afraid and wondered how it is that God would let Jesus die, particularly by crucifixion. Their hearts were weakened, and they could not make sense of it. They prayed for enlightenment on what Jesus taught and what they were to do with the learning. For weeks, they prayed and talked to each other about the lessons and parables Jesus taught.

Miriam's Vision

Mary Magdalene arose and greeted them all. She said to her brothers and sisters, "Don't weep and grieve or let your hearts be divided, because his grace is with you all and will protect you."

Peter said to Mary Magdalene, "Sister, we know the teacher loved you more than all other women. Tell us the words of the teacher that you remember – the things which you know we don't, and which we haven't heard." Mary replied, "I'll tell you what is hidden from you." She started by saying: "I saw him in a vision, and I said to him, 'Teacher, I saw you in a vision today.' In response he said to me, 'You're blessed because you did not

waver at the sight of me. For where the mind is, there is the treasure.’ I said to him, ‘Does the one who sees the vision see it in the soul or in the body?’ In response he said, ‘They do not see in the soul or in the body, but the mind. The mind exists between the two and is what sees the vision.’ The vision ended, and I prayed on its meaning.”

Baptism of Faith

After fifty days of prayer and supporting each other, those present were overcome with a sense of awe. They understood God’s message and, as one, began to celebrate. Peter said to them, “Confess your sins,⁷³ and be baptized⁷⁴ as a symbol of your faith in the teachings of Jesus.”

The followers of Jesus began to go out to help and care for others. They sold all of their possessions, and gave what they had to the poor and needy. They went out and taught the message of God.

Trial of Peter and John

Peter and the other apostles preached to the multitude who had gathered in Jerusalem. Their teaching upset the established religious hierarchy because they did not teach traditional Judaism. Moreover, they were not Sadducees or Pharisees. Peter and John were taken and put in jail until the next day, for it was already evening.

⁷³ Sin, in this context, means thoughts, words, or deeds which fall short of the teachings of Jesus.

⁷⁴ Tevilah, or the full immersion of the body, is more of a second temple tradition. Simple washing was more common in early Judaism. Since the Apostles saw themselves as Jews, baptism was assumed. However, Jesus never preached the need for it. Nor did he discourage it.

On the next day, the Jewish elders questioned Peter and John. In the end, they commanded Peter and John to not speak or teach any longer in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” When the elders had threatened them further, they let them go (finding no basis on which to punish them).

Diversity

The apostles and disciples began spreading God’s message far and wide, teaching anyone who would listen to what Jesus had taught. The message of God spread to Jews and gentiles⁷⁵ alike, touching the heart and soul of the people who heard the lessons. As more and more gentiles began following the teachings of Jesus, questions arose about how the laws of Moses applied to the teachings of Jesus.

Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the believers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” This confused some of the gentile believers, for they did not know the Jewish laws. They decided to send a couple believers from the congregation to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders to get clarification on the issue.

⁷⁵ Gentile comes from *gentes*, the Latin translation of the Jewish word ‘goyim’ meaning ‘nations’. Specifically, it is used to mean any person or nation that is not Jewish.

When the gentile believers arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who had joined the church in Jerusalem stood up, saying, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.”

The apostles and the elders came together to investigate this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days Jesus made a choice among you, that by his mouth the Gentiles would hear the word and believe. And Jesus testified to them giving them the holy word of God, just as he also did to us; and he made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts with God’s holy message. Why do you put God to the test by placing conditions on who God loves?”

Spreading the Word

The apostles and disciples who were close to Jesus traveled to Damascus and Antioch to spread the teachings of Jesus. After that, they traveled throughout the Roman controlled lands: to Asia Minor, Egypt, and Rome. Wherever they went, they spread the teachings of Jesus to everyone⁷⁶ they met. As they found people who converted to the faith, they established small churches in the various communities. These small congregations celebrated the faith in each other’s homes and other secluded places.

⁷⁶ The teachings were first taught to Jews living throughout the Roman empire, then later to gentiles.

The Written Word

The apostles felt a need to help the distributed groups of disciples understand how to celebrate the teachings of Jesus. The apostles had copies of their teachings created and distributed.⁷⁷ This led others to put to written words what they remembered of the stories and teachings of Jesus. Later, people would evolve the teachings and write other perspectives of what was said and taught.

⁷⁷ The Didache is an early document, predating many books of the canonical bible, describing the basic perspective of the early Christian community and its practices. It includes descriptions on how to perform various rituals, including communion. It also discusses the assumptions and perspective of the early church. It is unlikely that the apostles personally wrote it; however, it is very reasonable that it is based on the discussions of the apostles at the Council of Jerusalem around the year 50. The standards endorsed by the apostles at the council were distributed to the remote Christian communities, and the Didache is likely to be the product of that distribution.



Epistles of Doug

1 Doug

Doug, a servant of the Creator, called by God to be a disciple, through whom we have received grace, to the church and congregation of God on the web to all God's beloved: Grace to you and peace I give you from God.

I give thanks to God always for you, because of the grace of God which was given to you that, in every way, you were enriched in God. For I long to speak to you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's kindness, both yours and mine. I have often intended to come to you (but thus far been prevented) in order that I may reap some harvest among you, as well as among the rest of the people of this great creation.

I appeal to you, friends, by the name of God, that all of you agree to the message of God and that there are no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me that there is quarreling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that there are some of you who say "My group says this." and others of you who say "My group says that." Are we not all of the same people, imbued with the divine deity which permeates all? Why, then, must you disagree with one another's understanding? Diversity flavors us as different breads provide variety to the meal.

Listen and understand one another's differences, and together celebrate as one with the Lord's divine law. The teachings of the Holy Creator focus upon that which matters, leaving open the details to add color and flavor to our lives.

The Everlasting Creator has reached out and touched each of us, over-filling our chalice of being with all great things. All good gifts around us are sent to us by God's love, blessing us, for which we ought to give praise. God, may we ever stop our busy lives to remember to praise and cherish the divine, instills us with the capacity to share God's bounteous love with one another. The charity we give is not ours, but rather God's grace, passed through us to others.

The peace and love of God's divine gift requires it be given away. It is like the mountain stream which babbles as it meanders along the countryside, refreshing all living things along the way. It gives itself to the plants and animals, without distinction, that they may take their fill, and when overfilled, the excess flows past. In this way, the cycle of the web of life is fulfilled. God's grace is circulated, bestowing upon us, and all living beings, that rejuvenating love and peace which is God within each of us.

A full cup cannot receive new water. It must be emptied first. So, too, must you empty your cup of love and charity before you can be refreshed, receiving the bounty of God's gift. Pour out the water of love you carry onto the parched and needy as well as those who appear less in need. Give it away to all who ask and to all who do not ask. Give unconditionally. Only when you have

emptied your chalice can you experience the elation of renewed love.

Dissention, or withholding God's grace, embitters us. The refreshing water of God's love in us grows stale and we tend to focus on what we have lost as opposed to what we are here to do. I understand that it is difficult to give when it seems we have so little. It seems right to withhold charity because we have not received any ourselves. Yet, God continues to pour love onto your cup, even when there is no room for it. If you feel you are not receiving much, that may be because you are only emptying small amounts of your cup. If you feel your cup is already empty, yet you do not feel God's rejuvenating grace, look to what love you are hoarding. Give first and give completely. Only then can the grace of the Divine Creator replenish and refresh you.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to the gospel and the preaching of the word of God, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations to the command of the eternal God, to the wise God be glory for evermore. Amen.

2 Doug

Doug, a servant of the Lord, through whom we have received grace, to the church and congregation of God's people on the web: The grace of the Lord I give to you. The blessings of God, which showers all of us equally, may it revive you and those who cause you suffering.

I praise our Creator for the bounty of gifts he has bestowed upon you; for you are rich in his love. His supreme gift, that all-forgiving love which transcends all bounds, washes over each of us without let or reduction. It is this love, given without thought of recompense or condition, that nourishes us, like an endless stream giving up its water to the ocean. Our shortcomings are met with understanding and forgiveness, freely given.

Have we not been taught, through sacred writings, to forgive one another in similar fashion? It has been written that you should “love one another, as they want to be loved.” I say unto you: “Love unconditionally, with all your heart and with all your soul.” Like love, our Lord spreads forgiveness openly and fully. What better role model so we have than our Lord’s own giving? I am greatly pleased to find each of you wanting to live your lives modeled on the message of God.

Why, then, do you hesitate to forgive yourselves? What dark motive have you for withholding love and forgiveness to one of our blessed Lord’s creatures? Is your denial of self-forgiveness an attempt at belittling yourself due to some low self-image or is it to show to the world that you are somehow better than everyone else because you can live with the suffering associated with the withholding of forgiveness?

While it is our Lord’s wish that we be servants to our fellow man, helping and offering aid in any manner available, crippling ourselves with self-hatred or with the shackles of suffering interferes with our ability to serve.

It is easier to love others when we feel loved. When we feel God's love, we find the love within to love ourselves. This empowers us to find the love to share with others. So, it is with forgiveness. It is easier to forgive others when we can forgive ourselves.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to the gospel and the preaching of the word of God, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed and through the prophetic writings is made known to all nations to the command of the eternal God, to the wise God be glory for evermore. Amen.

3 Doug

Doug, by the will of God, to the church of God which is on the web, with all the saints who are in the whole of the world: Grace to you and peace from God our Creator. Blessed be the God and Father of us all, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in our entire affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

Yes, there are countless variations claiming to be gospel, good news of revelation and joy. None available for purchase are more than that: a source of income to the printer and their translators. For they suffer on the trinity: Time adulterates all things, translations fail to capture the whole essence, and individuals only see what they are looking to find. Anyone who tells you the word of the Divine Father is solely in the Holy Scriptures does not see the Holy hand's impact on the creation. By limiting themselves to textual

documents alone, they encounter the vastness of the majestic opera by looking at the brochure alone. How is it that words, however inspired, can compare to the performance itself?

Yet more! Once words are stuck together, even in our gospel, they begin to wither and age. Language is alive and ever changing to stay current with the times. Ideas set down to words are taken on a path away from their author's meaning. The words take on new meanings the author did not predict or intend. How then, can I hope to be understood to our grandchildren and their grandchildren? Do we change the words to reflect the new meanings of the message more closely, or do we keep the same letters and expect our descendants to know the original usage?

We talk in a common tongue, one we both think we understand. Each word choice brings nuances and room for misinterpretation. Imagine how great the understanding changes when we look for other words with their nuances as we look to find ways to translate it into a different language? If our language has one word for a concept, and the language being translated into has dozens, who chooses the new language's word with the associated nuances being added or dropped?

Read alone, a reader can easily skim over the harder passages. Hard, because they are confusing or do not align with the reader's presumptions. Perhaps hard because the meaning is lost to them. We often break ideas apart and gravitate to that which makes us feel best, ignoring what doesn't.

What, then, can we do? I am as guilty as anyone. For I would have you know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel which was first preached by me is man's gospel. For you have heard of my former life, how I persecuted all religions violently and tried to destroy each follower's beliefs; and I advanced in knowledge beyond many of my own. When Elders came to my door, I opposed them to their face, because they were not on my path. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of their gospel, I said to you before them all, "If you, though a codling, live like a Gentile and not like a true follower, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like us?"

But when the Lord God who had set this course for me before I was born, and had called me through His grace, in order that I might preach Him among the people on the web, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Galicia to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Iran; and again, I returned to the country of my home. Then, after more than seven years in Iran, I went up to the north fields of Mount Hermon to study and remained there three years. I read the early writings and listened to the nuance of that early day. I listened to the holy teachers who, too, saw the cliffs and chasms along the path.

Along this journey, my eyes were opened. The divine scriptures became known. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation. Its very essence is of the same substance of God. In its refined form, the message is one of love: "love unconditionally".

I prayed to the Lord for forgiveness. I asked the same of myself. Only then was the burden of my early years lifted from my shoulders. I devoted myself to the love God asks of each of us.

So, then I say unto you, the path you walk is a narrow one. Follow in faith that which you have been instructed, ever watching for self-imposed contradictions. The laws we have received are but behavioral examples of the choices we make based on our faith. We do not take from others nor demand unfairly, not because of the law, but because of our generosity and our recognition that our Lord would want us to be grateful for what we already have. We do not kill or lie for the sake of avoidance of any punishment. Instead, we denounce these actions because we love that which God has created.

But more, my brothers and sisters, if a person is overtaken in any trespass; you who are spiritual should restore them in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the will of God.

Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the realm of God. Henceforth let no one trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of my past. The grace of our Lord be with your spirit, my friend. Amen.

4 Doug

Doug, a servant of the Lord, through whom we have received grace, to the church and congregation of God on the web, to those who strive to love unconditionally, to all God's beloved: peace be unto you.

Blessed are you! For the grace of God pours forth upon you, enriching and strengthening your love and kindness that you may, in like fashion, encourage and support one another, thereby multiplying the gifts you have received while I have been absent from you in my epistles. You have never been far from my thoughts, often standing as examples of God's divine creation, as I toil elsewhere to spread those seeds of the Lord's grace upon the parched soils of this land.

I have, however, noticed, when viewed from afar, a disquieting and uneasy sensation growing in me, reminding me to presume your innocence in what I observe, knowing you as I do to be true to your faith. As humans who err or become distracted, wandering near the edges of the path we have set ourselves upon, we might occasionally take a brief step just off the line of our intent. Our path is tight and narrow, making it understandable to let one foot fall off the narrow line. Our intent and desires are to see the next step return to the fine and delicate way. With all we try to do, it is no wonder we cannot walk the tightrope without any missteps.

Please remember, my love and admiration for your efforts are not conditional. Our Creator and ever-loving God emboldens me to instill in you what gifts I can, that you may better live in the manner we have set for ourselves. It is this love for you I must remind you of our foundation. Even more than simply our foundation, but the whole of our fellowship and gift we offer up to that which created us and all around. Without us conscientiously adhering to our faith, it is easy to, with ongoing distractions, follow one slight

misstep with another, then another - walking further from the path of our intent.

The foundation of our faith is but one: clearly defined and simply stated. It produces the narrowest of paths. This is our path and the burden to walk it we put upon ourselves and no others. It is not a privilege or an honor. Instead, it is the result of understanding God's desire for us and our acceptance to honor the Creator. Regularly reminding ourselves of our foundation aids our efforts of avoiding distractions and accidental wandering.

Jesus referenced Hillel when he spoke the first and most important tenet of our faith, namely, to love God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind. The path it defines limits us in our day-to-day behavior for it demands of us to see everything from the creator's perspective and appreciate the desirable and undesirable equally. What God creates; we must love. It takes effort to appreciate all the creator's work, particularly what wars against our personal desires. Nonetheless, this is the greatest and most vital of understanding.

But today, I am called to talk in detail of a facet of this teaching of our faith, for it draws our path more narrowly - love unconditionally. Jesus called all others 'your neighbor'. He did not limit your neighbor to being those in your religious neighborhood or any other restriction to 'neighbor'. Instead, taking what his audience would consider the most extreme, showed the proper application of love to one another. Pushing beyond cultural, religious, and social boundaries, Jesus applauds the actions of a Samaritan,

someone his audience found vile and despised, who stretches forth a helping hand to give aid and comfort. When the Samaritan left, he provided coins to a caretaker to cover the ongoing needs of the person and would pay any additional expense on their return. In this way, Jesus defined 'neighbor' to include everyone, and our love must extend beyond the here and now. In like manner, the second tenet of our faith says to love unconditionally. For this, I tell you, Jesus taught that upon these two commandments hangs all the laws and the Prophets. He echoed Hillel who concluded "What you find hateful do not do to another. This is the whole of the law. Everything else is commentary."

Thus, our path is narrowed. To love unconditionally demands of us to love those who hate us, to gently go out of our way to care for their safety and wellbeing. More than that, we, like the good Samaritan, when we must leave, ensure others are provided to continue the care.

It is this which often causes our missteps off the thread-thin path we choose to travel. Keep faith, make every effort, remember God gave us free will and with it our imperfections. The creator loves us and knows we are not perfect. Honest efforts regularly applied is our goal for our path is difficult.

Praise and glory be to our creator who loves and cherishes the created, giving revelations to the mystery and gospel for us to grow. May we endeavor to live our lives according to the two tenets of our faith that we may, in so doing, glorify the Lord our God. Amen.

5 Doug

Doug, a disciple of God and humble servant of all, to the church and congregation of God on the web wherever dispersed: peace.

Praise God for all creation. We did nothing to deserve any of God's design, yet blessed with it do each of us live our lives, enveloped in it with all the beauty and variety of the universal design. It is the Lord God, creator of the all that has provided us with everything to marvel upon.

I am ever grateful for the help and support I see in you. Charity breaks down boundaries and raises up everyone. As you give to others, as I see you do, you are improving the world around you and accomplishing God's work. Blessings to all of you.

As Jesus taught us, give without expectation of any return. Love without attachments. Be generous and kind. Never mistake kindness for weakness. On the contrary, the kindness you show requires far more strength. It is not hard to love someone who already loves you. It takes strength to give to someone who doesn't. Never stop loving and giving, for that is the message we are commanded to follow.

While we do not expect reciprocation, how great it is in creating bonds between people. For example, in my marriage, both my wife and I put the wants and needs of the other person before our own. Because I fulfill her every want and need, and she does the same for me, there is no selfishness in us. Each of us gains all we ever want without worry. When our cup is ever filled, as the Lord God does to each of us, it is easy to be selfless.

We help each other feel less selfish, allowing us to be more generous to others.

We do argue, but our arguments do not start with 'but I want ...' For example, if we are choosing where to eat, our arguments are more like "but we went to my favorite place last time, let's go to yours. You deserve to be treated well too."

This reciprocity does not appear at once and is not the goal of loving unconditionally. It might take a lifetime for some people, particularly those who are hurting from many years of neglect or suffering. We are not loving unconditionally to increase our church's membership, or for any self-gain. We do it because it is what Jesus taught us to do.

We love unconditionally because it is the message of God and we have made a commitment to God and one another to live by God's message. We understand others are not so committed and do not hold it against them. That is the diversity of this world we encourage.

When I see selfishness, I do not see hatred or animosity. I do not see laziness. There are no lazy people. They are simply not motivated with the same goals and priorities. Instead of berating them, I inquire to see what it is they feel is more important to them at that moment in time. If I am able to help them resolve their greater need, then I know they will once again be able to give.

I raise you up before God and rejoice in your love. If ever I can help you, please let me or your community know. Praise God and continue your generosity.

6 Doug

Doug, a servant of the Creator, called by God to be a disciple, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe: peace and love do I share with you. May you be blessed with love now and always.

I give thanks to God always for you, because the grace of God which was given to you that, in every way, enriched your lives. Be at peace knowing your efforts strengthen the whole and contribute to the betterment of all. For it is in each of you the understanding of that spiritual gift which makes peace possible and binds this world into a healthy and vibrant experience.

When we love unconditionally, separation and selfishness are removed and replaced with a bond of comfort and joy. Seeing the reason to love awakens the mind and warms the heart. It banishes the sense of loneliness and bonds us closer.

Love begets love. Actions and feelings generate like actions and feelings in those around us. What we think and feel is sent into the world around us and affects those nearby. That, in turn, impacts them who then pass it on. What better way to spread the word of God than to let it simply replicate itself in others because we have offered it untainted to everyone we encounter.

Go in peace. Love unconditionally. Spread God's message of love through your thoughts and actions with everyone you meet. Amen.

7 Doug

Doug, a conveyer of God's message and fellow creation of God's divine inspiration, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe: joy and acceptance do I have for you. May you know your individuality brings joy to everyone now and always.

God created diversity from the beginning of time: Light and dark, Heaven and earth, land and sea, as well as the many degrees of these qualities between them. God disperses things so that variety is enhanced. As creations of the great diversity God has produced, we are encouraged to do the same within our reach.

Let us help one another evolve into unique and different people, thereby adding degrees of color and interest to this creation of God. Let us embody goals and desires God has shown by helping others see the value of themselves without them changing from who they are to some conforming state. Let us help them be them.

There is no greater value to be gained by forcing everyone to conform to our standards. On the contrary, universal conformity would be in direct conflict with God and counter to our teachings. Let us, therefore, stop fighting God's will and instead, help God by encouraging that which God has shown us is God's will.

Go in peace Encourage diversity. Let the world know that our differences improve the world God has created thereby honoring the goals and intentions of the Divine Creator. Amen

8 Doug

Doug, a servant of God's message inspired by God to share, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe: may I ever be a humble servant administering to your needs now and always.

The Lord God, creator of the universe, saw fit to create us and all things visible and invisible. While we may never know the reason for the creation, we are indebted to God for all we are and know. What, then, can we do to show our gratitude?

As we are but elements of the grand creation of the universe, our role is simply to be an element of God's creation. In the grand scheme of things, we are but a humble piece of the bigger picture. What better way to show our role than to be a humble servant to those we encounter.

God's creation is a complex interaction of different items, all working together to be the inspiring display of coordination and evolution. We, too, interact with different elements of the grand design. Recognizing our part in helping the creation evolve by serving the greater vision requires we serve. We are but servants of the whole creation and live most in tune with that creation when we are servants of God's will. Being humble servants to God and God's creation amplifies the glory and beauty of divine plan.

Go in peace. Be a humble servant. Support one another and to everyone you encounter now and forever. Amen

9 Doug

Doug, a simple component of God's divine inspiration, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe: I come to you with God's revelation that you may live according to the world God has envisioned. May the message of God increase your compassion now and always.

Who are we to go against the will of God? God choose diversity, so why do we not embrace it ourselves? Why do we cast out that which does not conform to our views and understandings? Is it not God's will to make each of us different? Why, then, do you judge others by the standards you have set for yourself?

It is true we must encourage diversity and your actions divert from the message of God. It is well and good for people not following this way to be so biased and judgmental. Our faith, however, is what sets us apart from the common and adds to the diversity.

Our vow to encourage diversity means we cease the common behavior of insisting people be of one mind and conform to our standards. We do this because we know our path is the harder path to travel and not everyone is ready or able to walk this path we have set before us. Insisting others do what we have tasked ourselves with doing creates animosity and conflict. Let them be them while we be ourselves.

Go in peace. Encourage diversity. Help others see their value in them being themselves now and forever. Amen.

10 Doug

Doug, a servant of the Divine, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe: How wonderful it is to hear from you so that I may be of service to you. May you encourage diversity now and always.

Allow me an opportunity to answer your question. A church does not need to wait until it has thirty members before it divides into two or more churches. Most churches have less than a dozen members as it simplifies church services.

Smaller groups are more able to focus on the needs of the individuals than larger groups. Smaller churches also have the advantage of being able to meet without costly overhead expenses. At the same time, they provide for more diversity by finding common interests among the members of the church.

The limit of thirty members per church is an upper limit on the human ability to intimately interact with everyone in the group while still being able to gather privately in a home. There is nothing magical about the number.

Groups that split are encouraged to continue to interact with other churches as we are all of the same faith. Social gatherings of multiple churches are not forbidden. However, the church, remaining small, provides for a more focused help to the other church members become better followers of the faith.

Go in peace. Encourage diversity by intimately helping one another become stronger in their faith now and forever. Amen.

11 Doug

Doug, a humble servant called by the Creator to share lessons that others might benefit, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe. May you remain ever faithful to your promise to live by God's words now and always.

Like Jesus discovered in the desert after his baptism with John, we must avoid asking the Lord God to change the world for us. We are God's creation, not God's commander. When we pray, we thank God for our creation and show God our appreciation for the many splendors around us.

God loves this creation, for the Lord God has kept it growing and evolving for longer than mankind can imagine. The many splendors of just the part we know suggests the whole creation must be marvelous indeed. Let us share with God our experiences, that the Divine Creator might see from our perspective the beauty and glory of the world we live in.

There may be conflicts and strife around us. Those are things we are to resolve. Let us, when we pray, tell God how we are doing with our work as opposed to asking God to make the world conform to our desires. God empowered us to have an impact over our surroundings. Let us use what we have been given and show our gratitude for the gifts already in our possession.

Go in peace. Work together to improve the world around us and let God know how grateful we are for being created and allowed to make an impact on the world around us now and forever. Amen.

12 Doug

Doug, a grateful servant of the Creator, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe. May you live according to the message of God now and always.

We are asked how to live in accordance to the teachings, and the most common response is the tenets or our faith: love unconditionally, encourage diversity, and to be a humble servant. How would we describe such a person?

Like the ‘seven deadly sins’, there are seven behaviors of the members of this faith. These ‘Seven Holy Behaviors’ are: humbly, gratefully, kindly, patiently, forgivingly, understandably, and servantly.

We honor the Divine when we behave in these manners. What more, these behaviors improve the world around us and make the creation all the better for it. We are empowered with the ability to change and evolve our part of the creation. What can we do to let the Creator know of our grateful appreciation for that which has been provided to us? How can our behaviors help bring peace and comfort to all the creations of this world?

Behaving according to the seven behaviors listed above will empower us to live as God has asked us to live. It is our thoughts and deeds which create the chain of effects to evolve the world to a better future for all.

Go in peace. Remember our thoughts and deeds create ripples of responses in the world around us now and forever. Amen.

13 Doug

Doug, repeating God's message to this world, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe. May your lives be full of joy and happiness now and always.

I have heard some of you have ignored the sacrament of confession and am concerned for your growth in following the message of the Great Creator of the universe. While we accept that we are not perfect in the fulfillment of our goals in becoming an ideal example of God's intent for us, we must endeavor to improve ourselves to make us better examples of the ideal. How can we recognize our successes and focus on our shortcomings without taking a short moment to evaluate our state?

Are you embarrassed to reveal to the other members of your intimate house church what you have done and left undone? The members of your church are there to support you and help you improve yourself. Discussing these things also provides the others in your church to be able to offer their help, enabling them to practice our faith as well.

The bonds of love and friendship are strongest when people open their hearts to those they are already close to. By sharing both the struggles and accomplishments we connect with one another and help others to review themselves to see if they also need to work on improving themselves.

Go in peace. Grow in the faith so that your thoughts and deeds may improve the whole world now and forever. Amen.

14 Doug

Doug, a humble recipient of God's love, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe. May your service to that same Creator bring you closer together in your efforts fulfill God's will.

You have asked how to be a more humble servant to the Lord and your inquiry has been heard. We know, for the sacred texts to love unconditionally. Not just our friends and family, but unconditionally to all we encounter, including ourselves. We have been taught to love without ceasing or constraint – to love without judgement.

We know our role is that of a humble servant. But how can we better understand what we can do to be more humble? In a word: compassion. When we open our hearts to compassion, we are encouraged to take action to help.

When we focus on compassion, we connect with others in a caring way that engages us to respond in a loving way. Compassion comes with a desire to help, a forgiving heart without judging, and an attentiveness to the needs of others.

Compassion provides the service. Humility comes from knowing we are all alike. We each have strengths and our weaknesses. While each person's strengths and weaknesses will differ between people; nonetheless, we all have a mix of both. Use your strengths to provide support for another's weakness and you will both be stronger.

Go in peace. Have compassionate heart that your deeds will be loving and supportive to all both now and forever. Amen.

15 Doug

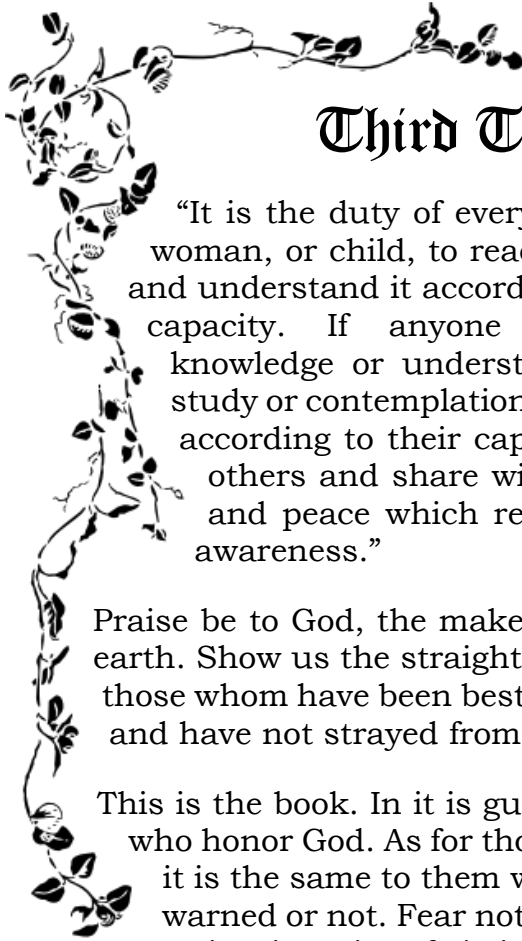
Doug, a servant of God, to the churches and congregation wherever dispersed around the globe. May you ever see the Divine's beauty in all you survey.

It has been said "seek, and you shall find". This is a great truth, for it is founded on the simple assumption that we see what we want to see. If we focus our attention on something, then we will look until we find what we are looking for. If we lose a sheep, will we look for it until it is found? Will we keep looking for it after we have found it? So, it is with words and lessons as it is with experiences. What we choose to perceive, that we shall find. When we expect someone to say an unkind thought, then whatever words we hear, we will see the lack of kindness in them. Yet, if we presume innocence, we will hear innocent remarks spoken. We hear what we expect.

A behavior is not, in its basic nature, good or bad. It is simply a behavior. What adds meaning to the behavior is how we filter the behavior through our own values and filters. What, then, can we do? Our interpretation of what we see forces us to judge what we perceive. Will we not fall short of God's calling to have us not judge?

We can be at peace, for God does not say avoid all judgement. Rather, we are taught that we will be judged in the same manner we judge others. Choose how you wish to be judged and use it as your rule and guide. Then, when the Creator sees you, God will see you as you have seen others.

Go in peace. Open your heart to see in a loving and understanding way now and forever. Amen.



Third Testament⁷⁸

“It is the duty of every believer, man, woman, or child, to read the good book and understand it according to their own capacity. If anyone attains some knowledge or understanding of it by study or contemplation, it is their duty, according to their capacity, to inform others and share with them the joy and peace which resulted from the awareness.”

Praise be to God, the maker of heaven and earth. Show us the straight way, the way of those whom have been bestowed with grace and have not strayed from your teachings.

This is the book. In it is guidance for those who honor God. As for those who reject it, it is the same to them whether they are warned or not. Fear not. They are God’s creation in spite of their rejections, and they are not asked to follow these teachings.

When it is written to believe as the others believe, remember the response, “Must we believe like the single minded believe?” Those with the belief that there is only one way are blinded to the multitude of paths that stretch forth to the same destination.

⁷⁸ This third testament was written about 600 years after the preceding testament and tells the same story from another perspective.

To those who say they believe, yet do not truly believe, God knows their heart, and we must leave it in God's hands what will be done. Remember well, God will judge us as we judge others.

O ye people! Adore your God who created you and those who came before you that you have the opportunity to learn righteousness. If any of you doubt what has been revealed from time to time by Our servants, then produce a Surah⁷⁹ and call your witnesses.

O ye people of the Book! Believe in what We have now revealed, confirming what was with you before. For we revealed ourselves to the people and each have over time, strayed from the lessons of love and compassion.

God sent an Apostle, to show God's forgiveness that all would see and repeat. But each time, the lessons were twisted and reframed that the intent no longer prevailed.

If a non-believer repents and establishes regular prayers and practices charity, then open the way for them. God is forgiving and merciful. Be so too.

Indeed, it is true that God did make day and night as a sign of God's power and authority.

Glory to God who took a servant from the sacred place to the temple in Jerusalem in one night that lessons would be given for all people.

The Lord decreed that you worship none more highly than God. To parents, respect them

⁷⁹ A surah is a chapter of sacred scripture.

whether one or both of them become old in your lifetime, do not be contemptuous or repel them. Instead address them with honor and kindness.

Born was Isa⁸⁰ to Maryam. For God selected Maryam to bring into the world a great prophet to teach the message of God. God made Isa blessed, enjoining him with prayer and charity that signs would show the righteousness of Isa to the glory of God. Isa, but a servant of God, revealed the straight path to any who watched and listened.

O believers, avoid ridicule. Perhaps they may be better. Do not insult one another and do not call each other using offensive nicknames.

Believers are family, so make reconciliation and God will return mercy in like manner.

Do not raise your voices above that of the Prophet, or your deed become vain and worthless. Those who shout often lack understanding.

If a wicked person comes to you with news, discover the truth before you harm others unwittingly. And why do you say what you do not do? God hates deception.

God! There is no god but the living, self-subsisting, eternal who never sleeps.

Insha'Allah⁸¹

⁸⁰ Also known as Yeshua or Jesus.

⁸¹ Translates to "If God is willing". It encourages believers to adopt a mindset of patience, acceptance, and trust in God's wisdom, reminding us to remain humble and open to the possibility that circumstances may change.



Sayings of Doug

Love unconditionally.

This is the foundational tenet of our faith. This sums up everything God wants from us.

It is just two simple words, each with their own power, but combined speaks volumes. What is love? It is a deep affection, attachment, or care for someone or something.

Love is not limited to mere feelings or emotions; it is often accompanied by actions and behaviors that demonstrate care, support, and selflessness towards the loved one. These actions can include acts of kindness, sacrifice, understanding, forgiveness, and nurturing.

Unconditionally is also not limited or limiting. The feelings and behaviors of love are to be extended to everyone and everything. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Love the unloveable.

Love unconditionally. This is our greatest goal and what we strive to do at all times and for all who our lives connect with, even remotely. If we are to judge ourselves, we would ask ourselves if we are being loving in an unconditional way. If so, we are doing God's work assigned to us.

Encourage diversity.

Not only are we to love those who are different, we honor their differences. More than that, we

encourage others to be different from us. It is what God has created. God, whose wisdom is beyond our understanding, has shared some of that wisdom by the actions God has taken.

Those actions include creating a vast spectrum of things. Since God did not make everything the same, it stands to reason God wants things to be varied. Why, then, should we encourage anything other than the spectrum of diversity God has created? Let us rejoice in the variety and differences instead of condemning or banishing those who are different.

Be a humble servant.

This is a constant reminder that our egos get in the way of understanding others. While 'our way' may work, it is not always the only way. Moreover, since each person comes to a problem or situation from their own perspective, their train of thought will be different. It is better to aid and assist without ego than to take over. Helping others become better at being themselves is more important than converting them to our own way of thinking or perceiving.

There are no lazy people.

They are simply not motivated with the same goals and priorities. Instead of judging a person based on our own value system or priority list, take the time to understand their perspective. They may have a similar set of values, but lack the skills to do something. They may be embarrassed by their quality of work. Then again, they may have different values.

Purple polka-dotted grass

People don't talk about purple polka-dotted grass. There's a reason for it, and it has nothing to do with the existence of it. We talk about dragons and fairies. We tell stories of magical kingdoms that never existed. Yet, purple polka-dotted grass is never talked about. The reason for this is that nobody has ever thought about it.

In order for someone to bring up a topic, they had to have thought about it recently. This is insightful. If you ever hear someone change a conversation topic to something you would consider 'out of the blue', it may be off topic for you, but it is not off topic for what the speaker is thinking. When I hear someone bring up a new topic of conversation, I tend to ask myself what made them think about it.

Nothing is obvious to the uninformed.

I cannot count the number of times I have seen the impact of this statement at work. 'They should know it.' or 'How can someone not see it?' Sometimes, different people have different perspectives or education. They (or I) may not know the background of what is being discussed and therefore may not draw the same conclusions or understanding.

Presume innocence.

People have differing value systems. People have differing perspectives. People have differing backgrounds. If we misunderstand someone, start by asking clarifying questions instead of judging them based on our own value system. Often, we agree about more than we disagree and where we differ is based less on our values and more on how we prioritize them.

Happiness is a choice.

Our perspective on things impacts how we respond to them. If we always look for the bad or wrong in something, we will find what we are looking for. If we look for the good, we will find good. What we choose to look for determines what we will find. If we are disappointed because we are not happy, then we simply need to look at the world around us and search for the happiness in it. It is there. We simply need to choose to look for it instead.

To help change our perspective so that happiness is what we will find, we can approach the situation one of two ways. Unhappiness about people is cured by forgiveness. Unhappiness about things and conditions is cured by gratitude.

If you can't say anything nice, keep looking . . .

This was something my mother would say. The more common statement is if you cannot say anything nice, don't say anything. Saying nothing doesn't help anyone. Instead, it simply leaves things unchanged. Taking the time to find something nice to say makes us find the perspective needed to better understand the other and keep the conversation going in a positive direction.

If we don't feel heard, we tend to scream louder.

Sometimes, it is simply exaggerated behaviors. Other times, it is verbally louder. In either case, finding what the person is saying and confirming with them that you heard them will often lower the intensity of the conversation and improve communications.

Children learn what parents tolerate.

The same goes for students and teachers, employees and employers, or even players and coaches. Anytime there is someone making rules for others, the people expected to follow those rules will test the toleration of the rule maker.

If the rules are not enforced, then people learn that the rule is not a rule, but a guideline. That guideline can be ignored if we can encourage toleration of the guideline.

Independence is a progression.

Children are born completely dependent on their parents. At some point in time, they become completely independent of their parents. The goal of parents is to help their children make that progress.

This is a difficult balancing act. At some stages in a child's life, they will want more independence than they can manage. At other times, parents need to back away and let the child take a more independent role. Since each child is different, there is no hard and fast formula for everyone.

While studying education, I came across a quote that has stuck with me throughout my adult life. It was written by an educator who expanded on a quote from George Eliot. "The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice; can our students make these choices in our classrooms? To be human is to err; Do we encourage risk, or do we punish mistakes?"

We learn from our mistakes. Simply getting it right the first time doesn't enable us to understand what we did that was right.

Pain is a great motivator.

Pain and failure, when mixed with love and encouragement, helps us progress. If we are comfortable, we are unlikely to want to change, even if that change is an improvement.

When we constrain our children too much, they do not learn to think and develop on their own. Instead, they learn to not think, and not develop their own skills and strengths.

My mother had a saying she would tell people. “A parent’s job is not to prevent their child from falling. It’s to make sure no permanent injury happens from the fall.” Sometimes she would add a bit more. “Every now and then, a parent’s job is to trip them up.” I love that she meant it with all her very loving heart.

A person won’t change if they do not see an issue with their actions.

In general, people are creatures of habit. We rely on the belief that past performance will yield similar results in the future. As such, we resist changing anything that works. If we believe what we are doing is working, we tend to stick to the behavior that produces the known result.

In order to consider changing a behavior or an opinion, the person needs to consider the possibility that a better result would be obtained with a different behavior. Without that thought, people fall back on the more tried-and-true action which their past experiences have told them work.

Change does not equal loss. Change equals change.

Gain and loss only exist when evaluated from a given perspective. Without that perspective, it is simply a change.

An error doesn't become a mistake until you refuse to correct it.

First off, we do not learn by doing something right. We learn by correcting our errors. A teacher friend of mine would tell me that my mistakes were not failures. They were simply 'delayed success'. As long as we continue to strive to improve ourselves, we have not settled for accepting the error as a solution.

Never mistake kindness for weakness.

Kindness, particularly in the face of adversity, requires strength and commitment. It takes a special kind of strength to not respond with the perceived treatment we receive. While others may teach an eye for an eye, Jesus teaches us to turn the other cheek. Be kind.

Life becomes easier when you learn to accept an apology you never got.

Perhaps they don't know they need to apologize. Perhaps they do and choose to not apologize. In either case, that is their issue, not yours. How you respond will say more about you than if they do or do not apologize.

They may see your demand for an apology as you blaming them for something they may not have done. It may only be your perception of their action. Presume innocence and let go of your need to have your perceptions redressed.

Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.

Like many other variations of this quote, it teaches us that we should not hurt ourselves because others do not live as we want them to live. First off, who are we to judge another person? Second, if someone else does not live according to our expectations, what good is hurting ourselves? We are better off accepting an apology we never got and go back to finding ways to be kind and compassionate.

Our thoughts are not private.

Our thoughts and feelings come out as attitude and body language. What you think affects the world around you even when you think you are being secretive.

The study of behavioral kinesiology shows us our thoughts and feelings are received by the world around us even when we do not say what is on our minds. Even our perception of the world produces a form of communication which others respond to.

Behind every thought is another thought that generated it.

I often wonder why a person says something that seems unusual or off topic. When I hear something I am not sure I agree with, I think of this saying.

If you really want to understand someone, talk about the generating thought, then talk about the thought that generated it. In the end, you will get to their basic values. Those basic values are the values and ideas they used to make the conclusions you first heard.

People don't disagree on values. We disagree on priorities.

When someone behaves in a way we disagree with, often it is because their values are ordered differently. We are motivated by our priorities, not by those desires viewed independently.

A current example of this is the pro-life versus pro-choice debate. There are some people who say abortion is killing a life and killing is wrong. There are others who say a woman has the right to her body. If you ask everyone if killing, in general, is good or bad, people will agree that murder is undesirable. If asked if individuals are entitled to bodily autonomy, everyone will say every individual is entitled to live do with their body as they so choose. So, why do we disagree on the topic of abortion? Everyone agrees to the values supporting both sides of the topic. What we don't agree to is which value is more important than the other when the two values come in conflict with each other.

When we argue, it is often not what upsets us.

Often, we let issues build before we blow up and start arguing with someone. Then when the actual argument begins, we use the current example to represent the issue when the real issue is something more underlying. For example, if one person claims the other person is an idiot for not doing something right, what may be going on is the complainer is really upset that they were not consulted on the activity and feel cast aside. While the argument will be about how badly the activity went and how much the person screwed it up, what really is going on is the underlying issue of not being consulted.

Definition of stress

Stress is caused by two or more conflicting desires. To remove stress, choose one, and be happy with your choice. While it might be hard to make a decision between the two choices, dragging out the decision enables stress a place to exist.

My advice is to recognize the two desires, honor both of them, and then prioritize them. The desire that comes in second is not bad. It is simply the less desired. Then, go for what you want more, and the stress will go away.

Nature's medicine

There are three natural medicines to help us with emotional situations. The three natural ones are:

- ✦ Sleep
- ✦ Laughter
- ✦ Tears

There is one more medicine, but it involves some introspection and a change in perspective. That is done by considering what is the compassionate and selfless solution to the situation. It is often easier to start with the natural solutions and then take the time and effort to follow up with the more lasting method of change.

Just Joking

Saying 'Just joking' means you are not.⁸² People use this phrase to save themselves from the hatred of people they just insulted.

⁸² . . . just joking.

True objectivity doesn't exist.

As a person, it is impossible to be objective. At best, objectivity is simply the sum of a collection of individual subjective points of view. The weight attributed to each view is subjective; and the interpretation of the whole is subjective.

When a person says 'Let's look at this objectively.', what they are really saying is 'I don't like your interpretation/perspective and I want you to consider my point of view in the situation. Oh, and value it sufficiently to agree with me.'

By integrating their subjective viewpoint into our own we can improve the objectivity of our perspective. In the end, it is not possible to view something truly objectively.

The more a person tries to convince me, the more I wonder why.

The first question I ask myself is 'who are they really trying to convince?' Often, a person is trying to get me to agree with them so that they will feel justified in believing it themselves. If someone else agrees, then it must be true. Unfortunately, agreement doesn't make something true.

Sometimes, they are looking for agreement so that they can use it as supporting evidence in an argument they are having with someone else. 'Since he agrees with me, you must be wrong.' This logic is equally flawed.

On occasions, someone thinks it is my best interest to change my thinking. It is these moments where I like to actually consider what they are proposing as they may be correct.

Perception is reality

Okay, not really. The first thing people see is their perception. Truth is revealed later and takes more time/effort to discover. The extra effort is often dismissed if the perception conforms to the perceiver's accepted values and beliefs.

What complicates matters is the fact that what we perceive is filtered through our own bias and beliefs before being brought forth for evaluation. This means our view on how the world operates interprets how we evaluate what we perceive and thereby colors our perception to validate our bias.

For example, imagine two different people experiencing the same event. The first person was brought up with the understanding that all actions have consequences. Those consequences are because of the actions taken. Imagine another person was raised to believe there is no correlation between actions and consequences. Instead, the world is a hopeless place where people are simply condemned and nothing can make things better.

In this example, the two people observe a murder trial. The first person, will ask if the defendant did it. If so, they should be found guilty and be punished. They see the trial as an opportunity for the defendant to defend their innocence. The second person, will not care if the person is guilty or not. They will simply see the suffering the defendant is going through by being on trial and feel the hopelessness. It doesn't matter if the defendant is innocent. They are already paying a price regardless. In their despair, they become apathetic at a condemning world.

People wear masks.

We wear masks to hide something we don't like about ourselves. To distance ourselves from what we don't like, we try to convince others that we are anything but the thing we don't like about ourselves. Read: opposite. When you see someone trying to hide behind a mask, remember, they are hiding from what they think they are (and don't like), not who they really are. They're hiding from their self-image, and the mask usually appears as the opposite of what the wearer believes they look like.

Different jobs need different skills.

When it comes to finding and keeping jobs, I've always said: It's not what you know, but who you know that gets you a job. It's not who you know, but what you know that lets you keep it.

Job searching is a different skill from performing the job you are seeking to do. While they may ask you questions pertaining to the skills of the job you are applying for, it is your ability to communicate that is used to convey your abilities. Moreover, people don't tend to trust others when they talk about themselves. In general, we offer more weight to the words of a trusted third party over anything a person says about themselves.

Another saying I often remind myself is: Just because you can do a job doesn't mean you can teach it.

In a similar vein, teaching requires a different set of skills than the skill being taught. Teaching is more difficult because you need to have a basic understand of what is being taught as well as knowing how/if the student is learning.

Ladder of success

There are two ways to climb the ladder of success:

- ✦ Reach up for the next rung as you work your way up the ladder.
- ✦ Or push the people above you off so you look higher up than them.

The Church Of Doug does not endorse the second option. Instead, it is mentioned for the purpose of explaining people's behaviors.

Forgiveness is for me.

When I forgive, I am not forgiving you for your behavior. I'm forgiving myself for judging you.

People do not ask for forgiveness unless the other person has judged the person and found them to be guilty of something. Often, the person asking for forgiveness wants the other person to stop judging them, either because they feel bad for doing that something or because they want the ongoing judgement to stop.

The past is the past. Nothing can change it. Living in the past will not let us live today. The person asking to be forgiven is likely beating themselves up without anybody's help. Nothing is gained by reliving the past or letting a person wallow in self reprisal of what cannot be changed. Both people need to let it go and move on with living.

We are taught to let God judge, not us. Let us forgive others by recognizing our part in the event. By judging, we took on a role that is not ours. We relive the past when we should be living today. Forgiving others is about accepting and forgiving ourselves for not helping others become better.

I shall not pass this way again.

I shall pass through this world but once.
Any good therefore that I can do
or any kindness that I can show to any
human being,
let me do it now.
Let me not defer or neglect it,
for I shall not pass this way again.

Written by Stephen Grellet. I am told this was my father's favorite saying. I like how it does not differentiate between groups of people. Everyone is to be shown any and all kindness now. Not some kindness or maybe later, but all kindness now.

The purpose of life is to live the journey, not reach the destination.

This life is not a test. It is not a waystation on an eternal trip. The goal is not to get to the end. It is about what we do. The journey is the purpose.

If God created the universe with the intent to make it last as long as possible, our goals should be in alignment with our creator. Living in each moment, connecting with one another, and helping with compassion to improve the lives of all those we meet aligns us with the creator's goal.

Lead by serving others.

Lead by example. Lead by being the best we can be at honoring our creator, which means being of service to everyone. To encourage others to help one another, be the best example you can be.

Do not compare your accomplishments to any other person. Instead, help others as best you can and it will lead others to do the same.

'Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him to fish and you feed him for life.' But sometimes, giving first makes teaching easier.

In general, it is better to help a person become self-sufficient and able to provide support and help to others. If we only ever give out 'fishes', we build a reliance on our generosity. By teaching someone to be self-reliant, we are able to help them be self-supporting while we are able to expand our help to even more people and groups.

There are situations where it is best to simply give a fish instead of teaching. Sometimes, there is a short-term need. In those situations, addressing the immediate need will resolve the situation. For example, if you encounter a group of starving people, giving them a fish to eat now will enable them the ability to concentrate on learning to fish.

There are two types of people in this world: those who do and those who let them.

This was my mother's saying. Sometimes, it is not about can and cannot. There can be all kinds of reasons why someone is not doing something.

Just because something 'bad' happens to you, doesn't mean God is testing you.

A far more common explanation is someone else has different priorities, and their attaining their prioritized goal means you did not get what your prioritized.

Mind over matter

If you don't mind, it doesn't matter. We set priorities for everything we value. What we care most about is what matters to us. The less we care, or mind, the less it matters how it turns out.

Don't save for a rainy day.

People are creatures of habit. If we focus on saving up for a future rainy day, where we will need something more, then we end up defining today as 'not as bad as it could/will be'. This type of thinking will have us live our entire lives without the pleasures we gave up for a day that will never come. It is good to set a little aside for the future, but not at the cost of enjoying the here and now. In other words, our focus should be on today without completely ignoring the future.

The secret to a great relationship

A strong and lasting relationship happens when both peoples' goals are to satisfy the needs and desires of the other person. It eliminates selfishness and significantly reduces division between the two people. At the same time, it increases the interaction and bond between them.

You can't get what you want if you keep taking what you don't need.

My wife taught me this one. It is easy to settle for what we know, even if it is not completely fulfilling. If we want more, or simply something different, we need to give up what we have or do that does not result in achieving our goals.

No decision is so important that you cannot afford to take some time and think it over.

Okay, maybe one decision: to act when someone's is actually dying or about to be permanently injured. Even in these situations, making decisions in a panic does not produce the best solutions. Taking a quick moment to consider the situation will improve the outcome. Never let someone tell you that you must act now, or else.

Ignore everything before the but.

When people join two ideas with the word ‘but’, what they are really saying is the first idea is designed to placate or distract you. What is said after the but is what they really think. They felt they needed to distract you or otherwise lessen your reaction from what follows the ‘but’. For example: “I love you, but . . .”

We respond based on our filters.

Events have no meaning until we apply meaning to it. If someone else gets hired for a job we want, how we respond is related to our overall view of the world. If we see the world as a hopeless place, the failure to get the job will be seen with confirmation of our despair. On the other hand, if we see the world as antagonistic, we will respond with hate. Yet, if we see the world as harmonious, we are more likely to accept not being selected and will transcend beyond the moment. The same will happen if we see the world as meaningful. We will realize there is some understandable reason why we did not get the job.

In a similar fashion, if the conversation is about “a quick brown fox jumping over the lazy dogs”, there is a multitude of responses we could make. We could talk about foxes or their quickness/brownness. We could follow react to the topic by discussing jumping or dogs. What a person replies will be based on the element of the conversation that their filter most triggers a reaction in them, for positive or negative.

Yet, the world, and the events within it are simply events. We apply meaning and values to those events based on how we filter what we perceive.

If you think you are leading, and nobody follows, then you are simply on a long walk.

Often, we have big plans for ourselves and others. We enact those plans without checking in with the people we involve in our plans. This often ends up with a lack of commitment from others and the plan failing.

The best time to plant a shade tree was 50 years ago. The second-best time is now.

Complaining about the past does not help build the future. If you didn't do something you need, then wasting more time bemoaning your past failure only delays the issue further.

Do not seek to follow in the steps of buddha.
Seek what he sought.

Visiting the places Jesus or buddha lived will not make you enlightened. Repeating the words of an enlightened person will no enlighten you. Honoring the enlightened person will not make you enlightened. If your goal to be enlightened, then seek enlightenment.

Don't start with don't.

If you want something, ask for it. If your child is running beside a pool, telling them to "don't run" is not telling them what you want from them. Instead, say "walk, please". This helps the child focus on your expectations instead of all the options that are not running at the original pace.

Avoid focusing on don't. If you are sitting in a quandary and trying to figure something out. Focusing on what you don't know is vaster and more varied than what you do know. Start with the known and work outward.

Lighting a candle creates a shadow.

You cannot avoid something by running away. You cannot ignore something you are making a point of ignoring. The more you run from something, the more connected you are to the thing you are running from. Extreme opposites are more closely tied to each other. In the end, if you want to avoid something, embrace it and move on.

The opposite of love is not hate.

It's apathy. Hate, like love, is a strong emotion. We only have strong emotions for the people and things we are most connected with. When someone says they hate me, I know there is something about me that connects me to them. It may be something in themselves or their past that they do not like. Nonetheless, the connection is there, and that relationship can be the link to build a bond.

They say . . .

The word 'they,' as in 'they say...' is a way for someone to state their own feelings without saying they are including themselves. We use this phrase when we want to tell someone something the listener doesn't want to hear and we don't want to be associated with the information. Often, it is to tell the listener to change some behavior or attitude we want them to change.

The three things

There are three things that are related:

- ✦ time
- ✦ knowledge
- ✦ money

To gain one, it costs one or both of the others.

Looking for excuses for why you cannot do something prevents you from looking for ways to do that something.

The time spent one why we cannot be successful is time we cannot spend on being successful. The same goes for time spent panicking over something. If we focus on anything other than our options and possible solutions, we are not working towards solving whatever issue is before us.

I'm not suggesting we are guaranteed to solve an issue by not panicking and by not getting wrapped up in our inability to succeed. Some situations are not capable of being solved. However, focusing on what we cannot do denies us the time and energy to figure out what we can do in the situation.

Keeping calm increases options.

The more you are able to focus on what you are dealing with and what you can do about it, the more likely you will be able to identify solutions.

Worry helps.

Worry is a way we tell ourselves that we care about someone or something, and that we have no control over it or its safety. The key takeaway here is that we remind ourselves of how much we care. Use that knowledge to remind yourself of your love, then move on. Perhaps, you do not have complete control over the loved one's safety, but you might have some control. Sometimes, you are choosing to give up control to help the other person become more self-reliant or independent. Let them know you care and that you are

available to them if they need you, then move on so they can grow.

Guilt is the tension we feel to change our past, present, or future for someone else's sake.

Guilt involves failure to live up to a standard. These standards are set by someone else and we have been convinced to live up to those standards. When we fail to live up to those standards, we can respond in one of a number of different ways. One common way is to wish we could go back and do something differently so we don't have to experience the consequences of our past decision or action.

We are creatures of habit.

We will repeat behaviors without realizing it when placed in familiar situations. We will even repeat behaviors we have observed by others without thinking. If we want to change our thinking or behavior, we need to question everything we respond to, both the obvious and the not so obvious. We have to be diligent for many repeated occurrences until the new behavior becomes the habit we naturally use when we are not thinking.

Never take sides.

When two of your friends get into a fight, never take sides. First off, you lack enough information to judge them. Second, never judge. If that is not enough reason, consider what your relationship with them will be like if they get back together.

A friend is someone who knows your past and likes you for who you are.

None of us are perfect. None of us live up to the standards we set for ourselves, let alone what we

want in other. Friends can overlook our shortcomings and be friends despite ourselves.

Keeping up with the Jones

This is often used by others to mean getting what anyone else is getting. To me, it means living someone else's dreams and not your own. If someone else values owning a late model vehicle over everything else, then making sure you have one too means giving up your goals and values to be seen as keeping pace with someone else's goals and values. Instead, feel good for them when they get what they strive to obtain. In the meantime, stay focused on your own goals and values.

If a problem could be solved by throwing money at it, it isn't a real problem.

This isn't about having the money to throw at a problem. It's about evaluating the importance of the issue. Real problems cannot be solved with money or other material things.

You can lead a horse to water, but to get it to drink, you must wait until it is thirsty.

It is not for us to dictate to others how they should feel or what they desire. That is between them, their values, and God. We can only help people achieve their goals, not pressure them to achieve our goals.

There is a difference between being a humble giver and being walked all over.

The difference is choice and perspective. If you proactively choose to give something, then it is your choice. 'Being walked all over' implies being taken advantage of. How can you be taken advantage of if it was your choice to give? Besides,

the person warning you that you are being walked all over is usually someone with their own agenda on the issue or the helped person.

Tolerate the intolerant.

By tolerate, I mean to allow, without judging, another person to think or feel differently from you. The goals and values you hold most dearly do not match with the goals and values others consider their most important. Having differences improves the diversity of this world and adds to the variety and interest.

Not everyone agrees that diversity is good. Some people are intolerant of people and things that do not conform to their value system. We must, without judging, permit intolerance to exist in other people. We don't have to listen to intolerant speech or sit by idly watching victims of intolerance suffer. We have the ability to not listen. We have the ability to help people who are suffering due to another's intolerance. We have the right to love unconditionally everyone, including those who suffer at the hands of the intolerant.

Before we leave this topic, let us consider the intolerant person. What is the cause of them being intolerant? Is it retaliation from a wrong they received? Is it generational teaching? How can we give our unconditional love to them too?

First impressions last

Humans tend to jump to conclusions quickly. Once a conclusion is made, it takes more effort to change the conclusion than it takes to validate it.

There is a difference between being alone and being lonely.

Introverts often like being alone. Some people prefer having time for themselves. Everyone is different.

Natural Law of Equilibrium

There are two laws of equilibrium. They are: 'There is no free lunch.' and 'No good deed goes unpunished.' The first teaches us that someone, somewhere has to pay for it. Since nothing is created or destroyed, it had to come from somewhere, and that somewhere is now without it.

The second law also points out that there is always a price. Every action has an equal and opposite reaction. This world is balanced and will remain so. It may not remain balanced with dinosaurs, but something will fill the void. The same is true with humans. What we selfishly call good may in fact be our demise.

The law of equilibrium isn't concerned with specific actions or the micro level. It is the grand overall equilibrium that will remain in balance.

Another way to view this is that what we call extreme is only extreme because we know of nothing more extreme. There will always be extremes because there will always be points so far removed from 'normal' that, whatever it might be, is the extreme. There is nothing to be gained by fighting to eliminate the opposite extreme because there will always be an opposite extreme.

Everything has its beauty

But not everyone sees it. We all have different ideas of what is beautiful. Just because the people you currently associate with don't see your beauty doesn't mean you lack beauty. It means you are not their definition of beauty. It's okay to feel different than those around you as it is okay to go find people who will see you as beautiful.

It's amazing how great people think you are when you show genuine interest in them.

Do you want people to think of you as impressive? Start by showing genuine interest in them.

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

Sometimes we have an opportunity to show great kindness, and other times the opportunity is smaller. It doesn't matter. Showing kindness is never wasted. Sometimes, the kindness we show to others is giving them a chance to be kind too.

The Seven Heavenly Behaviors

For ages, there has been the seven deadly sins and the seven virtues. But nobody talks about the behaviors we are to exhibit if we want to live a life according to God's message. Often, doing something leads to understanding the value and virtues. Here, then, are the seven behaviors:

- ✦ Humble
- ✦ Grateful
- ✦ Kind
- ✦ Patient
- ✦ Forgiving
- ✦ Understanding
- ✦ Compassionate

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity.

There is nothing wrong with boredom. It is telling us that the routine we are in is no longer satisfying. Boredom is informative. We can ask ourselves why we are no longer interested in something or we can ask ourselves what else is there we can do. Curiosity helps us find new ways to explore the world.

If you don't laugh, you'll cry.

Sometimes we are reduced to strong emotions and the issue before us demands a response. If we don't look for the joy in something, then we are likely to see the horror instead.

When scary things happen, you can stay focused on the event or look for the helpers. You can also become a helper yourself.

Why people talk

Nobody ever says anything unless:

- ✦ there is a reason to say it, and
- ✦ an intended audience who could hear it

The reason is usually because they are thinking of it. The audience can be any of the three: themselves, the people hearing them, or the person speaking believes the people hearing it will tell the intended audience. People often say things, more to convince themselves than anything else.

Putting wallpaper up on a broken wall doesn't fix the broken wall.

It takes time and effort to put up wallpaper or do any task. Ask yourself. Is the effort you are about to do going to last the lifetime it is intended to

last? Are you simply trying to mask something in a deceitful way? Be honest with yourself. Is this the best use of your time and energy? Sometimes, the answer is to spend the time and energy for a short-term solution to prevent a greater issue if you took the time to do it right the first time.

Be careful of what you ask for.

You just might get it. The ramifications of a desire or goal may not be apparent when the goal is sought. Sometimes those ramifications are more costly than anticipated. Other times, they may produce unexpected, but desirable results.

Forgiveness takes place in our mind.

It really has nothing to do with the other person. In a similar saying, 'Forgive others, not because they deserve forgiveness, but because you deserve peace.'

When others forgive us, what we are experiencing is the promise by the person we hurt or offended that they will not retaliate against us. Demanding others forgive us is to avoid punishment for what we know we did wrong.

On the other hand, forgiving others has a powerful effect on ourselves. It frees us of the burden of animosity and hatred. It ends our judging the other person for what we deem as wrong. Finally, it opens our heart to find a connection with the other person.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over expecting different results.

Often, we repeat our behavior because we have built a habit and don't even think about the outcome of our behavior. Other times, we simply

choose the familiar because we know it cannot be any worse than last time. Perhaps, it is not insanity so much as a combination of thoughtlessness and fear of the unknown being worse than the bad we are used to. Remember: we cannot improve without learning from our mistakes.

Man destroys what he does not understand.

It seems to be human nature that we judge negatively anything which does not fit our image or values. First, we tend to reject it. If that doesn't make it go away, we destroy it.

One man's trash is another man's treasure.

We all have different goals and values. What is dismissed as useless for one person may be useful to another. This goes for people too. Just because someone else see no value in you doesn't mean you are of no value. Someone else will see something in you they have been searching for. Flipping this around: Just because you don't see value in someone doesn't mean they are useless. Perhaps you have not seen something in them that you consider important.

Do not seek to follow in the steps of buddha, seek what he sought.

Visiting the bodhi tree will not give a person the same experience it did for Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha. Walking from Jerusalem to Golgotha will not imbue you with the understandings of Jesus. These messengers of God's word sought God in the chaos of contemporary beliefs. By following their example, we will find what they found. If we simply mimic their behaviors, we end up with a better understanding of the person, not their discovery.

What's more important? The messenger or the message?

It a frequent question I ask myself. While I agree it is good to honor the discoverer of some knowledge, the information is the real focus.

Don't should on yourself.

When I hear the word 'should', the first thing I think about is 'whose rules should I follow?' Should implies that there is an approved behavior that we are being told to follow. 'You should do this.' It comes with an underlying assumption that is not up for discussion. Instead, the resulting behavior of that rule is what you should do. Before I proceed, I want to know what that rule is and who made the rule. Additionally, knowing the answer helps me understand the speaker's priorities. Often, should is used to make the listener reprioritize their values to conform with the speaker's values.

Are you a satellite in their universe, or are they a satellite in yours?

Sometimes, the other person is the better choice. For example, when learning a new skill, the instructor is probably worth listening to and emulating. Other times, being the leader helps the group. At any given moment in every relationship, there is a leader and there are followers. The leader may change as time or circumstances present themselves, but at a given moment, there is either a leader or a vacuum.

It is good to know what situation you are in. Only then can you ask if the leader is leading well. Only then can you determine if there is a lack of leadership and direction. Only then can you take

the time to ask if the direction the leader is going is beneficial to the group.

There is no one right answer to this question. The purpose of asking yourself the question is to better understand the environment you are in.

Solutions change as situations change.

When starting out on a new adventure, my saying to myself is: 'Two steps forward and one step back is often better than one step forward.' This way I can get a glimpse of the future before I'm fully committed to it. It helps adjust for the unknown. However, as I'm approaching the destination, I say to myself 'Smaller changes over a longer time produce more accurate and desired results.' Knowing when to switch is important.

Ichi go

This is the first part of a Japanese saying which translates roughly into 'This is the only opportunity to experience this event.' Perhaps it is the first time you try something. You can never experience that first discovery of it ever again. Every event comes with a unique combination of things that make the experience unique. Treasure the moment and its uniqueness, for it will never happen again. To do so, we need to learn to live in the present moment and enjoy what it offers.

Rules don't exist until someone breaks them.

Nobody creates rules for no reason. Rules are created to establish guidelines for a community. Following the logic of nothing is obvious to the uninformed, thinking of a rule requires someone to have thought about the issue the rule is being made to address. So, when I see absurd rules or

disclaimers, I have to ask myself what/why did someone do the behavior that the rule addresses?

Only Allah (God) is perfect.

An Islamic saying that keeps me in focus. Not only am I not perfect, I cannot expect other people to be perfect. Instead, I need to be understanding of the mistakes/failures of both myself and other.

Why does a cup have to be half full or half empty?

People often perceive things based on their perspective and then argue their point. Both interpretations are correct. The cup is both half full and half empty. The question is often asked to determine if the person answering sees the world positively or negatively. Unfortunately, there are other ways of seeing the world which this question doesn't address. For example, it could be answered with 'It is always full: half with liquid and half with air.' We sometime forget that there is more to this world than a simply black and white dichotomy. Is all the water in the cup purely water, or are there dissolved solids in the water? Why can't the cup simply just be a cup?

A politician's response

Politicians (as well as people not wanting to upset their listeners) do not answer the question asked of them. They answer the question they wish was asked of them. When listening to an answer, ask yourself if the response addresses the question or discusses a tangent message. Often, what is left unsaid says more about the answer than what is spoken.

Preparation will set you free.

I first came to fully appreciate this when I learned to cook. Taking the time to prepare and organize

makes a process work faster and with less error. It also reduces the emotional stress and makes problem solving easier.

Man destroys what he does not understand.

It is human nature to push away anything that is different or not what is considered normal. When something unknown shows up, our first instinct is to remove or destroy it.

'Lucky' is a lazy man's excuse for another man's success.

Luck plays a much smaller part of this world's events than most people give it credit for. More often than not, what is perceived as luck is a collection of causes and effects that create the observed result. Sometimes it is a collection of little things that add up to a larger reaction.

When someone justifies another person's good fortune as 'lucky', they are overlooking the preparation that went into situation. Perhaps they saw an opportunity and had prepared for the required skills to be able to take advantage of the situation. The person making the claim that the other person was lucky probably did not do the needed preparation, so they were unable to see how the other person was able to take advantage of what was presented to them.


Lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency for me.

Own your own issues and shortcomings. When planning, plan not only for the expected results, but for what to do if the expected results do not happen. By doing so, you will be better prepared. Preparation needs to be more than dumping any issue on others to resolve, particularly if they are

not informed early enough to create plans for or with you.

From the other point of view, if we see someone struggling because they failed to plan sufficiently well enough to resolve their issues, we should always remember that, as a humble servant who loves unconditionally, we need to be ever ready to give a helping hand to anyone we encounter.

Legend Of Doug



He was born on holy Dougmas, nearly two millennia into the new era. Doug was born, the last of three, to William and Eleanor, a loving couple devoted to God. William, a preacher, and faithful servant to all, raised Doug to know God. Doug's mother, Eleanor, was a devout and faithful follower of God. She taught Doug by example and by providing Doug with opportunities to grow in his studies.

When Doug was young, William took his family to the poorer parts of the world, so that William could care and serve the neediest. William did not back away from anyone, knowing both the rich and the poor need help and guidance. He helped people where he found them and took Doug with him on many of his journeys. In such a way, Doug learned to love everyone unconditionally and how to be a servant of all.

Doug was with his family one day when they were traveling to an area heavily populated with beggars and people without work. When William pulled the car over, many beggars came to the windows, asking for help. Doug, knowing William was himself handicapped and unable to walk without braces for his legs and canes to support himself, watched as William went through the routine effort of



getting out of the car. Having to lift one leg out at a time meant the process was time consuming. Nonetheless, William kept the beggars' attention as he proceeded to stand up. When the beggars saw that William was worse than them, they became afraid and wanted to go elsewhere. But William held their attention and kept them there until he was able to give them the attention they wanted. Finally, William gave each of them his contact information and told each of them they would have a paying job when they contacted him. Doug learned that day that nobody is beyond helping and nobody is so poor off they cannot find some way to help others.

Even at a young age, Doug performed magical miracles. He could pass solid objects through other solid objects and make things disappear from one place and show up somewhere else. He could also read peoples thoughts and feelings. At first, he performed these miracles to entertain people. Later, he learned how to use these skills to help others improve their lives.

Alas, before Doug could finish his studies, William passed away. Eleanor, not feeling she could provide for her three children in the ways each child needed, sent Doug to the north field of Mount Hermon, to further study and learn God's message. She felt Doug



would be able to continue growing and learning there. Doug stayed for three years.

While Doug had a strong foundation in his understanding of God's message, Doug was not yet ready to teach what he knew. Doug continued to learn through trial and error as well as experimentation. He learned through correcting his failures and questioning others.

When Doug was in his early thirties, he became an ordained minister, teaching the word of God to the unsuspecting. He would not go into the large churches to profess his understanding. Rather, he would find those in need of God's love where they were at and at their level of understanding.

If that meant being a washed out drunk or unclean leper, Doug did not hesitate to be amongst them and serve the people where he found them. He taught them by showing them the way to God's love and showing them compassion and forgiveness in terms they understood.

God showed Doug people who hated others for being different. God showed how people would hate or cast away anyone or anything that did not agree with a person's view of the world. God wanted Doug to remind the world of the importance of compassion and understanding. God showed Doug the



importance of unconditional love. God showed Doug how simply accepting diversity was not enough. Embracing and encouraging diversity was needed in this world to address the hatred and animosity so common in everyday life.

One day, Doug was wandering the local streets and found a couple French maidens being harassed by monks thinking they knew best. The monks twisted the words of God to their own means, thereby justifying their inconsiderate and belittling rants. Doug, feeling compassion for the maidens, reached out to them and offered them peace and redemption from the wayward monks.

This did not sit well with the monks, who ruled the town and all within. The monks arrested Doug and put him on trial that very day. Without due process or a chance to defend himself, Doug was convicted and executed the same morning. Some say his last words were a prayer of forgiveness to the monks which was cut short by the executioner's ax. Everyone watching stopped what they were doing to offer a prayer for Doug. Doug's body was then carried back to his home with a great procession.

When Doug ascended, he asked to be allowed to journey to hell so he could help the souls lost there. Doug pleaded, for he had not finished his work as a



servant of God, nor had he felt he had gathered enough souls to understand his perspective of God's message. For this reason, Doug was returned to this earth to write this bible, teaching others God's long forgotten message:

- ✦ Love unconditionally.
- ✦ Encourage diversity.
- ✦ Be a humble servant.



All legends are fanciful stories based on some degree of truth. Their purpose is to teach a lesson. This legend is no different.



Church Of Doug

Guide to Faith

Suggestions and discussion
on a way to celebrate
the faith



Our Tenets

The Church Of Doug pronounces the message of God as communicated through the various prophets and sages over the ages. Regardless of religion, the foundation of all faiths has a common base, which we believe is the message of God. We live, as best we can, according to those tenets, which are:

- ✦ Love unconditionally.
- ✦ Encourage diversity.
- ✦ Be a humble servant.

The first of these, 'love unconditionally' is the principle message. The other two support the core message with behaviors and attitudes needed to focus on loving unconditionally.

Creed

Some denominations have codified their beliefs in a creed or confession. The Church Of Doug, if it has to have one, would use something like:

“We worship one God, creator of the universe with all its diversity both seen and unseen, who was, is, and will be. We are all God’s creation whom God loves equally and we try to emulate God’s love for all of God’s creation as a humble servant honors their Lord and Creator.”

We believe God has inspired individuals throughout time and place to understand what God wants for and of us, helping us learn the message of God. These individuals, while important to us hearing the message of God, are not God. Rather, they are a vessel for conveying the message.”

Theological Position

The Church Of Doug focuses on living according to the message of God and not exalting any person.⁸³ While we draw from early Christian teachings, we recognize other religions hold the same foundational message and are equally valid. We do not presume God spoke only to the Jews. Instead, God influenced people to accomplish God's will whenever and wherever needed. We use the teachings of Jesus to understand God.

Because of the evolutionary nature of God's creation, everything evolves from its most pure form. This is true of both objects and ideas. Even Christianity evolved from its earliest form to what we see today. While we encourage evolution, and the changes it brings, we also need to take the time to remind ourselves of God's message in its purest form, for that is the foundation of our belief and behavior.

The Church Of Doug evaluates our beliefs and behaviors by asking ourselves if the item in question fulfills the basic tenants of our faith. Does some decision or action emulate our tenants or does it ultimately work against our beliefs?

Other Denominations

We recognize each church denomination as part of the diversity which Jesus and the Apostles encouraged. Nothing in the Church Of Doug statement of faith is, in any way, intended to judge, chastise, or belittle other understandings of the faith.

⁸³ This includes messengers of God's word like me.

On the contrary, we embrace anyone who lives according to the teachings of Jesus, regardless of faith or denomination. We recognize different people learn and perceive God differently. Thus, having alternative views provides a foundation where every person can experience God from their own perspective. Besides, a variety of faiths complies with our encouraging diversity.

Trinity

With respect to the concept of the Christian 'trinity', the Church Of Doug differs from many modern denominations. We find no logic in the current definition of what the trinity is; and we fail to see the relevance of the discussion. The Church Of Doug focuses on the lessons Jesus taught over the divine status of the person of Jesus. What Jesus said and did, we believe, represents our focus for how to live our lives. Turning Jesus into a Christian 'golden calf' does not seem to agree with the Older Testament lessons. While we focus our lives based on the teachings of Jesus, as opposed to the degree of divinity attributed to the person, we do not judge other denominations on what they feel is relevant to their understanding of Christianity.

Satan and Hell

A similar argument can be said for Satan. The Church Of Doug does not see any reason to be concerned with such a being, if Satan even exists. Satan's existence or non-existence has no impact on a person striving to love unconditionally. The Church Of Doug does not hold a 'Love or else' attitude, therefore Satan's existence becomes immaterial. The same goes for the existence of hell. Our focus is on living this life without any concern for any future existence.

Baptism

Baptism is not a required sacrament. The Church Of Doug does not view getting wet as a method of removing sin. It can be a symbol of a person washing away the past dirt and debris as they start something new and fresh. To that end, some congregations may incorporate baptism into how they celebrate their faith. For them, it is a symbolic way of confirming their choice to follow the tenets of our faith. Babies cannot make the conscience choice to join the church.

Original Sin

As for original sin, if it existed, it doesn't exist any longer. According to the Torah, "generational sin" extends three and four generations. We've had more than four generations since the Garden of Eden. Besides, if you believe Jesus' death washed away all sins, then the original sin is long gone now. If none of these apply, then there is the question of its existence in the first place. How can the first humans understand the ramifications of their actions if they don't have a knowledge of good or evil? Such knowledge was not available until after creating the original sin of eating the fruit⁸⁴ in the Garden of Eden. The other interpretation of the cause of original sin is the 'godless state' of our birth. This is equally meaningless as life, according to the same accounts, begins with the breath of God imbuing each person with a piece of the immaterial realm.

⁸⁴ The most likely fruit the story originally referenced would have been figs. The earliest text does not specify the type of fruit; however, the story does say that after eating the fruit, they became modest and covered themselves with the leaves. Most early stories say they used fig leaves.

Sex, Drugs, and more

The Church Of Doug takes no stance on homosexuality, same-sex marriages, divorce, tobacco use, drugs, and many of the other topics currently circulating in other denominations. We see no conflict with our stance regarding love or diversity. Some of the items, like tobacco or recreational drugs, may be unhealthy, but that would not constitute a sin or reason to condemn it from a religious point of view.

With respect to homosexuality and same-sex marriages, we know that gender is not binary. Moreover, relationships can exist for more reasons than simply procreating. For these reasons and more, we do not condemn diversity in relationships and marriages.

Euthanasia⁸⁵ is not against the tenants of our faith when the patient is fully informed. Patients in an irreversible coma need to be addressed on a case-by-case basis as their choice is not available. Compassion is a key factor in considering how to handle irreversible comas.

War and Violence

The Church Of Doug takes a strong stand against the use of war and violence as a means to control or dominate. It is completely incompatible with loving unconditionally or forgiveness.

⁸⁵ Euthanasia is the painless killing of a patient suffering from an incurable and severely painful disease or in an irreversible coma.

Salvation

Salvation is meaningless. We begin by asking what is salvation? If it is salvation from sin⁸⁶ and its consequences, then we are already saved, for God gives forgiveness freely. If it is to gain eternal life, then the immaterial part of us already has it, for that part of us is outside the material concept of time. Nobody needs to die to save us from sin.

On Tithing

We see around us many denominations insisting their membership give some percentage of their income to the church with various reasons to justify their demand. The Church Of Doug does not demand, nor want tithings.⁸⁷ The organization is not intended to be a centralized clearing house for charity. Instead, we encourage each member to personally involve themselves in charities of their choice as this is a way to support being a humble servant.

If something is offered to a member, the member is not expected to reject the other person's offer. Giving sometimes also means letting someone else give, and that giving may be directed at a member. Receiving graciously is equally valuable. If one member is working God's will and another member wants to donate their time or money to help, neither person needs to feel bad about their own choice. What matters is avoiding demands, direct or implied, for compensation.

⁸⁶ Many groups define 'sin; as any transgression against the message of God.

⁸⁷ The only cost to a church would be the elements of the sacrament of communion, and that can be as simple as a slice of bread and a cup of water.

In the earliest writings after Jesus died, Christians charged one another to not ask for money. If a person claimed to speak the words of God and asked for money, their identity as a false prophet was confirmed. Money spent to create a greater cathedral or house of worship does not help those in need. If one person's duties to their church takes all their time, then let them divide their work amongst the congregation that all can share in the experience.

Size Matters

Like the earliest Christian churches, members of the Church Of Doug gather in small communities. Each church⁸⁸ meets in homes or other places conducive to the purpose of the gathering.

In order to keep each church intimate, the number of members per church is restricted to a maximum of thirty members.⁸⁹ This allows for each member to get to know the other members of their congregation well and build a more intimate bond between them. Churches are not expected to have thirty members. A typical church may have eight to twelve members.

It also permits the membership to not spend money on the religious organization, and instead, use it to support themselves and the world

⁸⁸ A 'church' is a group of members who regularly meet together to celebrate their common faith. It comes from the Greek word 'kuriakon' which translates roughly into 'dedicated to God'. When the Greek was translated into Latin, the word became 'ekklesia' or, in English, 'assembly'.

⁸⁹ Children of members are typically not counted towards the maximum per church until they are of an age where they can understand the tenets of our faith and can choose for themselves to participate in the faith.

around them. Spending money for material items solely for the purpose of displaying the church ignores the tenet of being a humble servant.

Dividing an oversized group into two or more smaller churches also improves the diversity our tenets encourage. Each church will be better able to focus on the needs of their church members. It also reduces the cost to each member to participate in the activities of the church.

Leadership and Roles

Leadership and hierarchy do not exist within the Church Of Doug. The only hierarchy is simply God is foremost. All people are equal, for we are all equally the creation of God.

A church may choose for themselves to create roles, such as cook, server, prayer reader, or any other role. These roles are not superior in any manner compared to others. The Church Of Doug does not support a priestly hierarchy. Such ranking presumes the message of God is too complicated for the membership to understand, and needs specialized knowledge that deserves elevating someone above others. If some church wants to appoint someone to read the prayers, that is simply an assigned role and not an elevated position. Likewise, if one person's house is favored by the members of the church for their gatherings, hosting the gatherings is a legitimate role a church may consider. No church is obligated to have these roles, as diversity, even within the Church Of Doug is encouraged.

Sacraments and Gatherings

The Church Of Doug recognizes three sacraments, namely: confession, communion, and the dead.

The first two are performed on a regular basis to remind ourselves of our faith, our relationship to God, and our goal to become better at living according to God's message. The third, the sacrament of the dead, is done as needed.

A church gathers together on a regular basis to perform the sacraments of confession and communion.⁹⁰ This can be daily, weekly, monthly, or any frequency the church chooses. It can be part of an evening meal shared with one another or as a stand-alone activity. If it is a shared meal, then it can be of any type, from snacks, to potluck, to a formal dinner. Each church can choose for itself how to handle the details and can change whenever the church agrees.⁹¹

A church gathering may also be members taking a weekly hike up a nearby hill or vista where they stop along the way to celebrate a church service. While private homes have fewer distractions and disruptions, there is nothing to prevent using public locations for services. With this said, a church service is not intended to be a public spectacle.

⁹⁰ Church gatherings where confession and communion are performed are often referred to as a church service. When possible, the service is performed on a regular frequency with all members of the church present. It would not be uncommon for guests to join, particularly visiting members from distant churches.

⁹¹ These details are not central to the faith and therefore can vary from church to church and from time to time. It is assumed they will change as the circumstances of the church members change to accommodate their needs.

Sacrament for the Dead

We are upon this earth for a limited time and the impact we have upon it lasts beyond those years. The impact we have on those still living here deserves attention as well. Funerals are for the living who must now find a path through this life without the deceased having any new impact on them. The dead have moved on the next phase of God's plan.

A follower of the Church Of Doug, when they pass beyond this world, is remembered in this sacrament with an emphasis on the love and joy they brought to this world. By taking time to honor them, those who remain are afforded the opportunity to consider taking up the deceased's goals and responsibilities, thereby keeping the community, and the world at large moving towards the ideal of loving unconditionally.

This sacrament also affords the living to forgive anything they have failed to forgive with respect to the departed.

Death is a time of change for everyone, not just the departed. Their spouse and children (if any), the congregation, and the rest of the world are impacted. What better time than now to praise the accomplishments of a person?

There is no set ceremony for this sacrament. The guidelines are to gather to remember the good they have done to the world and to others. If the deceased had described any particular location, time, or other detail, those directions are to be used, if possible.

Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession)

Reconciliation through confession is the act of identifying one's shortcomings and successes in a manner which helps the person better focus on how to live a life more in line with the message of God. By confessing our achievements and shortcomings to others in the intimate setting of the church, a person can openly confess and expect other members of the church to support and help with the struggles of life or to celebrate the accomplishments in the case of successes. Openly confessing enables others in the church to humbly serve as a supporting friend.

Confession involves verbally confessing to one another what was attempted and the success it produced, as well as any failures to live by the tenets of the faith. It is followed by how the person intends to correct the failures. Other members of the church may offer to help if needed.

The Church Of Doug does not support the need for confession to be forgiven. Forgiveness is given freely. No penance is required beyond trying to do better in the future.

The Church Of Doug, instead, loves unconditionally and uses confession to help the confessor focus on how they have exemplified their faith and to identify what they need to do to improve themselves. It also benefits the rest of the congregation by helping one another see what issues the group may have in common and to know what they can do to support the confessor.

Confession is to help focus the confessing person on what is desired. It is not to be seen or treated as a punishment or 'sin'.

Sacrament of Communion

Communion is a community act of coming together to share the common elements symbolized through food and drink. It is often the final part of a church service, sometimes followed by casual conversation.

The purpose of the sacrament of communion is to remind each of us of the community of the faithful we belong to, to remind us of the relationship we have with God and God's creation, and to reaffirm our commitment to remain in communion with the divine.

The Church Of Doug does not stipulate the type of food, although a sourdough bread made from some form of grain is preferred. Likewise, the drink does not have to be red wine or red grape juice, although those are preferred. A bread which can be broken or torn into pieces and a drink that can be consumed by all the participants is important to creating a sense of community. The purpose is to use elements that are typically associated with the sustenance for supporting life.

Who can participate in communion? Anyone from any congregation of the Church Of Doug who has been confirmed⁹², has recently confessed, and wants to participate in communion. Additionally, any Christian of other denominations who, by their denomination's standards, would permit them to partake in a communion service.

⁹² To be confirmed, the person simply must have made the decision to join the Church. This requires they have the ability to fully understand the ramifications of joining.

Format of a Church Service

A Church Of Doug service ⁹³ tends to be considerably more informal than other denominations. In the Church Of Doug, services are often centered around communal meals, typically potluck style. The congregation gathers and enjoys the company of one another, while partaking in the communal meal.

The purpose of the service is to honor God the creator, remember God's message, and to work towards improving oneself in achieving the goal to love as God has asked us to love.

The service itself is a short sequence of events. The general order is unimportant other than confession being before communion. Those two are the only required elements of a service. A common outline would be as follows:

- ✦ A prayer, followed by the 'kiss of peace'.⁹⁴
- ✦ Confession⁹⁵
- ✦ Sacred reading and optional homily⁹⁶
- ✦ Communion
- ✦ Collect⁹⁷

⁹³ Can be led by any member, often the homeowner.

⁹⁴ The 'kiss of peace' is given by slightly embracing one another (or handshake) while saying "Peace be with you."

⁹⁵ This is not intended to be a long-drawn out process. It is assumed most (if not all) confessions are done prior to the service, but some may be worthy of bringing before the whole congregation.

⁹⁶ A homily is an explanation or further commentary as opposed to a talk about a religious or moral subject. The Church Of Doug avoids 'sermons.

⁹⁷ A collect is a short prayer to collect the focus of the service.

A sample service could look like the following. This example assumes the church meets weekly for a potluck dinner in a member's home.

The members gather at a prescribed location, a home of one of the members. They bring with them something to eat with enough to share. They greet each other with an embrace and help the host with any preparations left to be done.

Once everyone has arrived, each member of the church describes how their life has been since their last meeting, highlighting their best and worst parts. In this example, someone might point out that the animosity they have been feeling for a coworker has gone away but they are still working on being less jealous of that coworker's possessions by reminding themselves of the choices they made which prioritized something else. The rest of the congregation listen in a supporting manner.

When the food is ready and most (or everyone) has had their time to talk, the host may ring a bell to let people know it is time to eat. Someone says a short prayer, thanking God for all that has been provided, and to the members of the assembled group for their support. The conversations and confessions may continue during the meal.

At some point, one member will read a parable or other writing. This may be something related to an experience they had that week or something that hasn't been read in some time. This reading may (or may not) spark a conversation with some or all of the members. The conversation can continue as the members eat the potluck meal.

There is no expectation that this is the only conversation during the meal.

At some point, a member of the church will gather the food and drink to be used in the communion. They will take a cup and pray over it, saying:

“We give thanks to you, O Lord, for your ever flowing gifts of life and love. Glory to you forever.”

The cup is passed around and each person drinks from the cup or pours a small portion into a separate cup to drink from.

Afterwards, a loaf of bread is held up and the person conducting the communion, says:

“We give thanks to you, O Lord, for the creation and knowledge that you made known to us. Glory to you forever. As this bread was scattered over the hills and was brought together becoming one, so gather your church from the ends of the earth into your kingdom, for you have all glory forever.”

The bread is passed around, allowing each member of the congregation to take a piece for themselves to eat.

Visiting members from other congregations or denominations may participate as they choose.

The service ends with the collect:

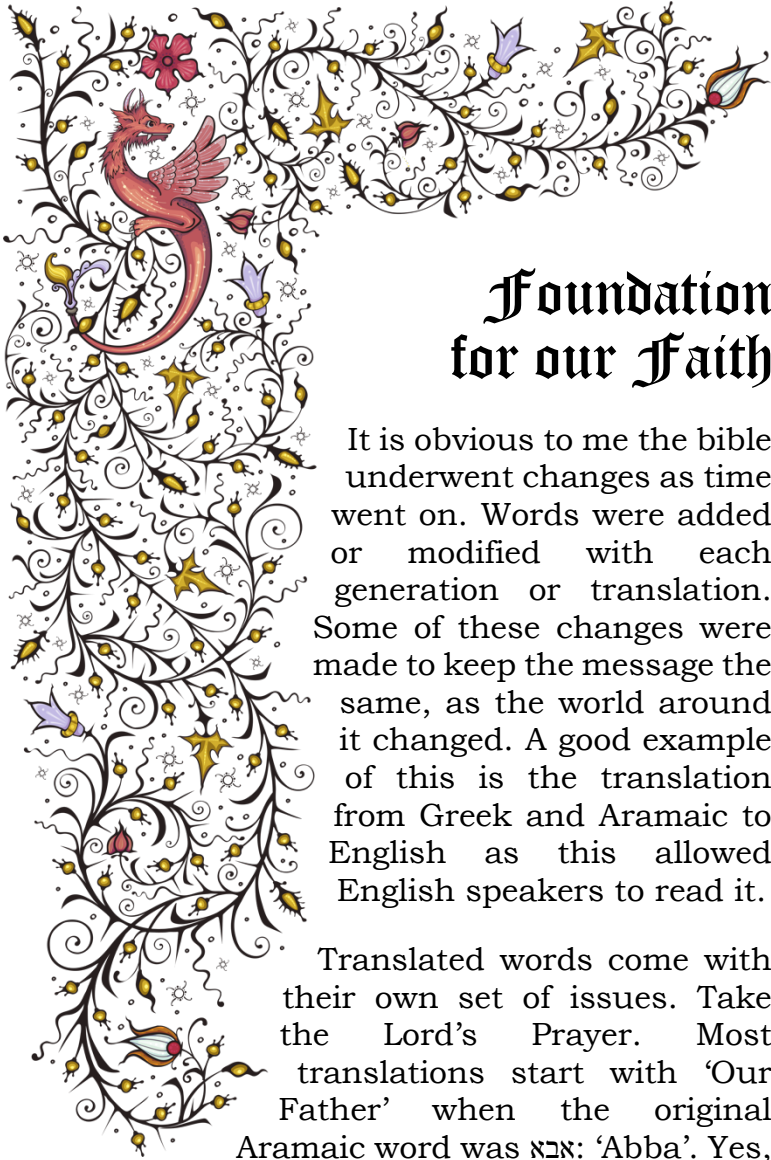
“Go forth in peace. Love unconditionally. Encourage diversity. Be a humble servant. May the message of God increase your compassion now and always. Amen”

With the conclusion of the service, the membership can stay or disperse as needed or is common for the congregation. If there are any members too sick to attend, or for any other reason, a piece of the bread can be taken to them later. Leftover food can be distributed to the poor or needy.

Variations can and should be made to the service to address individual church needs. For example, if a church meets daily, it may not be expected to have confession and communion at every meeting. Likewise, if the church meets in the early afternoon, it may not have a full meal. Some churches may gather at a shared interest, such as hiking.

God's Kingdom

Members of the Church Of Doug strive to build God's kingdom on this earth and wherever we travel. This means we strive to honor God and support God's message in our daily lives, thereby building a world of compassion and love. God's reigning command to love unconditionally is the commandment we focus on because we believe firmly that God is the lord of all people. While we burden ourselves with God's will, we do not force others to agree. Instead, we hope others will come to know God as we understand the Lord by our actions, compassion, and love.



Foundation for our Faith

It is obvious to me the bible underwent changes as time went on. Words were added or modified with each generation or translation. Some of these changes were made to keep the message the same, as the world around it changed. A good example of this is the translation from Greek and Aramaic to English as this allowed English speakers to read it.

Translated words come with their own set of issues. Take the Lord's Prayer. Most translations start with 'Our Father' when the original Aramaic word was אבא: 'Abba'. Yes, abba means father, but it comes with a couple concepts built in. Abba is an intimate way to say father. Father, in English, is not the same. Perhaps 'daddy' is a better fit. However, if the word is translated to daddy, then it misses out on the other element associated with abba. Abba also comes with a sense of complete obedience.

English does not have a word that implies an intimate daddy combined with absolute obedience to the father. Whatever English word is chosen; part of the meaning is eliminated, making the whole picture incomplete.

There were content changes as well. The various letters to the different groups of Christians were often applying the message of Jesus to a situation these groups were experiencing. Was Jesus applying the message to the situation or was it some later person, like Paul? Does it accurately reflect the intentions of Jesus or is it influenced by the writer's understanding of Jesus? Paul's views did not reflect the views of the apostles. Was Paul the only one who got it right or did Paul take Christianity in a different direction - perhaps more like the message of the pharisees? Jesus told his apostles they did not understand the whole picture. Did they start getting it right immediately after his death?

Many of the parables Jesus taught are followed by an explanation of what the parable means. Why would Jesus tell us a parable, only to explain it to us right afterwards? It doesn't make sense; unless the explanation was added by the writers because the writers wanted to apply the parable's lesson to a contemporary issue, they saw going on around them. In other words, the writers did not want people to interpret parables in what the writer thought was the wrong meaning. They each applied their own perspective into what they wrote. What would the bible look like with the parables and not the explanations? In other words, what would the bible look like if we eliminated what is attributed to Jesus and left just what he said?

Objectivity is only ever multiple subjectivities

When some groups called other groups heretical, it made Christianity evolve into a ‘there can be only one’ view. I’m not saying the orthodox view is wrong. It is just one perspective of a larger image. I am saying any single view, including this one, is not objective. Bashing other subjective views simply because they do not agree with you eliminates the ability to see the whole picture.

There’s a story of three blind people describing an elephant. One said its defining characteristic is long curved hard things (tusks). Another argued that the curved thing is not hard, but swishes (tail). The third called the others insane because it was not long, hard, or swishing. It had folds and wrinkles (the belly). Which one was right?

We only see the world through our subjective perspective. Our perspective can be widened by adding other people’s subjective perspectives. However, our ‘objective’ understanding is never more than the collection of subjective viewpoints we integrate into our understanding.

Since the ‘victor’ of these debates retained the ability to control what is canonical, the story became one-sided. Any reference to the losing side’s ‘heretical’ perspective was eliminated or ridiculed. Inserting ‘correcting word choices’ in the translations ensured future people would not be persuaded to commit the same heresy.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ ‘Heresy’ comes from the Greek *haíresis* (αἵρεσις), the English heresy originally meant ‘choice’ or ‘thing chosen’.

When we start calling others heretical, and ban them out of all conversations, we limit our view of the overall picture.⁹⁹ If we then start picking writings that only support our view of thinking about a religion, we lose objectivity. But can we be objective devoid of others' subjectivity? I don't think so. We need the other versions to better understand the bigger picture. So, if the orthodox view is already well documented, what about the other perspectives?

So, if the generally accepted bible skips over the other writings, generated at the same time, because the victorious writers considered them heretical to the one perspective, what truths are being skipped over? Gnostics, in all their different flavors, are not in the canon. Why? Gnosticism was common and widespread in the very early years of Christianity.

Message or Messenger?

At the heart of the difference between modern Christianity and the Church Of Doug is the fundamental question of what is more important, the message or the messenger?

If it is the person, then what's the purpose of the bible lessons? If Paul is right and the only way to salvation is believe that Jesus is God, then nothing Jesus taught would matter. How we behave to one another is not relevant to the central message. We could hate, murder, steal, enslave, and otherwise ignore what Jesus taught provided we believe Jesus is god. We do not need

⁹⁹ If I recognize this document as lacking objectivity, why write it? Without writing it, the overall objectivity would be missing this perspective.

to go to church on Sundays. The end result of this logic is this life has no meaning beyond one thing: to live eternally in heaven, we must pass a one question exam. Is Jesus god? Say 'yes' and all the beauties of eternity are yours. Say anything else, and be tossed out in the fiery rubbish of hell. Besides, once we accept Jesus as god, our next goal ought to be to have someone kill our material body so that we can move on to that perfect heavenly after life.

On the other hand, if the message is more important than the messenger, everything changes. For one, our day-to-day behavior matters. How we treat one another matters. Our lives are not reduced to a single question, but have a daily impact on everyone and everything.

It all comes together if the message is more important. The message is about how to live in this world with others. How to behave and interact with others in this life with all the differences and variety this world presents. The message Jesus taught is God's message to us. Nearly every religion points to the same message to admire God's creation and live in peace and harmony with others.

But what was the message Jesus taught, as opposed to what was attributed to him over time and through the elimination of texts not supporting the worship 'Jesus is God' view? How would our faith look like without the encrustation that has caused hatred and isolation between people. Let's start with who was Jesus?

Jesus

The earliest Christian texts tend to suggest Jesus thought of himself as a man who prayed to God, not himself. When people suggested to him that he is God, he denied it, saying, in essence, only God is perfect.¹⁰⁰ Jesus did not perfectly behave according to his own teachings. He had human failings. He would get angry and toss around a temple merchant's table or two. He even could get frustrated and take it out on fig trees. Assuming Jesus is human, it does not change the message he delivered. It does speak to his commitment to God's words to allow himself to be crucified.

Jesus was a Jew. He saw himself as a Jew. Jesus was not part of the social elite. Instead, he was raised by a common worker and most likely taught his father's trade. He lived at a time the Jews were occupied by Romans. This foreign rule did not sit well with the Jews and numerous Jewish messiahs spoke about freedom from the Roman occupation. Like a large percentage of Jews at the time, Jesus had an apocalyptic¹⁰¹ world view. All of this filtered how Jesus saw the world, and colored his teaching.

¹⁰⁰ A common phrase of Islam is "Only Allah is perfect." The biblical phrase is "Only God is good."

¹⁰¹ Apocalypticism is the belief that the world's end is imminent. Generally, people who are oppressed, downtrodden, or otherwise socially marginalized embrace this view as a way to provide hope and comfort during their trying times. It is quite reasonable that the 'world' the Jews hoped would end was the world where Romans occupied their country as opposed to the destruction of the planet. That would make sense in light of the comments Jesus implied when he described 'heaven on earth' or the 'earthly kingdom'.

Jesus spoke to the poor and socially marginalized, offering them a different perspective to see their Jewish faith. Jesus connected with people, offering them another way to understand Judaism. His presentation of his message shocked his listeners to reevaluate what they understood, and by doing so, pointed to a different way of living and behaving. It was these pithy and shocking sayings which enabled his followers to remember his teachings more easily.

They also provided an opportunity for later followers to wrap those sayings in new stories and circumstances. Sometimes they helped make the message understandable to the newer culture and language. Sometimes, they were used for behaviors counter to the original message. When the teachings of Jesus become a weapon of hatred and war, the teachings have been warped to contradict the original message.

Teachings of Jesus

So, what are the real words of Jesus versus what was added? What would the bible look like without the extra stuff added in? That was a good enough reason to write this book.

In the end, I took the earliest gospel (Mark), added in what we know of the Q gospel, and removed anything biblical scholars generally agree was added afterwards. This produced a shorter, easier to read, 'bible'. The next thing I did was look at the stories and where people and places are named in lists, or were names that are never referenced again, I simply removed them. For example, does it matter that the father of James and John is named Zebedee? After they leave the

boat, their father is never mentioned again, and his name is simply to identify his sons.

Why not have four gospels? Since there were more gospels prior to the canonical list, why not include them all? I'm not trying to be completely objective. Rather, I want to point out a perspective that has remained hidden which I feel deserves attention as well. If I tried to merge both this perspective into the currently presented perspective, this perspective would not have the breathing room it needs to be heard.

Lastly, I noticed a number of people gloss over parts of the bible because they do not understand the back story associated with what they are reading. For them, I have added in footnotes and extra pieces to fill in the missing color.

Monolatry

Before I could say I understood the message of God as described by Jesus, I needed to better understand God and the Israelites. I think I have assumed, for most of my life, that my faith in God was monolatrist¹⁰² (or henotheist) as opposed to monotheistic. Ever since I read a version of Moses' ten sayings that said, 'you shall have no other god before me', I have been in the monolatrist camp: multiple gods, but only one matters. This generated a few questions about who created the universe, something I tended to ignore.

¹⁰² Monolatrist is defined as the worshipping of one god without denying or caring for the existence of other gods. In other words, there may be other gods, but a monolatrist doesn't care. Instead, they focus on just one god. A monotheist believes there is only one god.

Midianite Hypothesis

Well, until I began an in-depth study of the Kenite (or Midianite) hypothesis. This hypothesis assumes YHWH is not the original god of the Jews, but the god of Moses' father-in-law.¹⁰³ The logic is reasonable. Moses, born a Hebrew, was raised from infancy as an Egyptian, then spent many years with his father-in-law, a Midianite priest. It would be difficult to believe Moses held onto any pre-Egyptian theology of the Hebrews. After bringing the Hebrews out of Egypt, they hung around in the Midianite territory for many years.

It answered many questions about the biblical texts, but seriously impacted the creation myths. Who is the god of the creation myth? Was it the worshiped god or one of the others? And if it is the worshiped god, which one – as there seems to be a change in gods over time.

The God of Abraham's children, Elohim¹⁰⁴ is not the same as Yahweh (YHWH) of Moses and later Jews. Elohim, the husband of Asherah, is part of the Canaanite pantheon, whereas Yahweh is proto-Arabian (Midianite) and likely unmarried. Reconciling this issue took me down many paths. Finally, I stumbled on a set of ideas which draw these differences into one unified idea.¹⁰⁵ It presumes the pre-David stories are mythology and an amalgamation of stories.

¹⁰³ ...and by 'Moses' I really mean the Shasu prior to their migration north following the bronze age collapse.

¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, Elohim is a plural form of the word 'Eloah' meaning 'god'. Is 'Elohim' all the gods of the pantheon?

¹⁰⁵ It does rely on the concept of monolatry, but I was already fine with that concept.

Moses Mythology

The Midianite theory made good sense until a few facts were brought together. First, the Moses exodus, according to most analysis took place around 1400 years¹⁰⁶ before Jesus. At this time, Egyptian rule extended through Canaan and into modern day Syria. So, slaves escaping Egypt to go to Canaan would simply be staying in Egypt.

The Old testament's archeological evidence shows clear evidence for events after the bronze age collapse. Any evidence for the stories happening prior to that time are, at best, suspicious and conjecture... or they can be found in the stories of other cultures about those other cultures. The great flood is a Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh story.

The pottery and other physical evidence of early Israelites are compatible ancient Canaan and not Egypt. If all of them made a mass exodus from Egypt after generations of living in Egypt, Egyptian techniques would have filtered into their pottery.

The earliest evidence of Yahweh comes from the nomadic tribe called the Shasu living south of Canaan. They migrated north as a result of the bronze age collapse and not as part of an exodus from Egypt¹⁰⁷ two hundred years earlier.

With all of the above considered, creating a unifying character to symbolize the early Israelites emergence in the Levant makes sense.

¹⁰⁶ Some have it as late at 1250 BCE, or a generation before the bronze age collapse.

¹⁰⁷ Most of the Sinai was under Egyptian rule at the time of the exodus of 1400 BCE.

The 'person' could wander through all the locations of the original tribes that coalesced into the confederation of Israel. The story would add a sense of unity and history.

One Pantheon Theory

Perhaps, there is only one divine pantheon in the entire world. Could there be a god of gods with different names for different people? Could Zeus (Greek), Amon (Egyptian), Jupiter (Roman), El (Canaanite), Anu (Mesopotamian), and Dagda (Celtic), to name a few, be one and the same? The types of lesser gods generally line up. The myths and stories of the gods would certainly be based on the culture of the people to personify or understand the divine. They would, understandably, differ. The various religions share many similarities in their pantheons. It would explain the various pantheons in this world and why there are so few monotheist religions. (The followers of Yahweh are not, as described above, monotheists, but rather monolatrists.)

If this is true, then Abraham's father probably worshiped the God of the city of Ur.¹⁰⁸ The children of Abraham worshiped El (the Canaanite god of gods) and Moses worshiped Yahweh.¹⁰⁹ While it is known the Midianites¹¹⁰ worshiped a pantheon, the documentation on them is minimal at best. Additionally, the Midianites were nomadic, meaning their religion may have been influenced by other cultures they came across.

¹⁰⁸ That would be: Sin, the god of the moon.

¹⁰⁹ Yahweh is a Midianite god of unknown responsibility.

¹¹⁰ The Midianites were likely a subset of the Shasu.

Assuming Yahweh was the Midianite version of Zeus, Anu, El, etc., then it doesn't matter which name is applied to the creation story. It would still be the same god. The details of the mythology are less important than the message: God created all.

If we know that God created the heavens and the earth, then we know something about God. This made me wonder if there is anything else we know.

Who is God?

To understand God and what God wants of us, we need to see what God has done and not done. Mind you, even this exercise will not create a clear picture of God. God is outside the tangible and intangible realms. Those are creations of God and do not contain God. Moreover, any description of God would be limited by our own perspective. I didn't let this stop me from trying anyway.

A Personal God?

I hear from people that God is a 'personal god' who cares about each and every one of us, or at least those individuals who believe in him. 'God answers your prayers.' 'God loves each and every one of us.' If this were true, then why is there suffering in this world? Why didn't I get the million dollars I prayed for as a child?

Three Omnis

Is God omnipotent, ¹¹¹ omniscient, ¹¹² and omnipresent? ¹¹³ The comedian George Carlin once asked, "If God is all powerful, can He make a stone so big that He Himself can't lift it?" What

¹¹¹ All powerful

¹¹² All knowing

¹¹³ In all places - everywhere

does it mean to be omnipotent? Allow me to add similar logic, if God is omnipresent, is God in hell? Some describe hell as separation from God. So, is God in hell or not?

Even omniscience causes problems. If God is all knowing, then God already knows if we are saved, before we are born. This enforces predestination, but it also removes any control over anything after the creation of the universe. What value is any decision or action on the part of us humans if the outcome is already known and decided? Why would God interject himself into the affairs of mankind if the outcome is already known to God? For that matter, if God is omniscient, does God already know what God will do in the future?

If God already knows the outcome, then how do we understand the stories where humans have negotiated with God? Is God simply playing games with us by taunting us and teasing us with the belief our opinions and desires matter? Or, can God be persuaded to change? God's ability to change things would break God's omniscience.

After we address the above attributes of God, we need to reevaluate other assumed beliefs. If God is compassionate, does that compassion for us end when we die in a state less than grace? Is this life the only chance we have of making a good impression on God? God appears to be both compassionate and willing to negotiate. Why, then, are we told that if we die a sinner, we must rot in hell for eternity? A partial solution to this dilemma is to accept the definition of 'hell' as being erased from all existence, instead of burning and suffering for eternity.

There are some suggestions to imply hell is non-existence. This does not answer the question fully. Being blinked out of existence still means we have only one chance to get it right, or else. Either have faith in Jesus being the deity during this lifetime, or else be gone forever. While it removes the eternal suffering, it still lacks compassion. Also, what happened to the people who died before Jesus began his ministry? Are all American Indians who died before the first Christian set foot in North America, more than a thousand years later, also undeserving of God's compassion?

If you say they don't count because they are not God's chosen, then why did Jesus help gentiles? Is this religion only for Jews (God's chosen), or is it something for all people? It seems to me that all people are God's creation.

[An Alternative View of God](#)

I've heard people complain that God did not answer their prayers when they want God to intercede for them on some topic or issue. I can imagine warriors praying to God to let them be victorious in a battle. At the same time, I suspect it is equally reasonable for people on the other side of the conflict making the same request, but for them to win. Assuming one of them wins, one person goes away wondering why God didn't answer their prayer while the other feels their connection to God is strengthened because God answered their prayer.

If the likelihood of God answering a prayer request is approximately equal to the likelihood of it happening anyway, and the quantity of suffering in this world is what it is, perhaps God

is not the 'personal God' we are taught, but rather an observer with the ability to interact.

Imagine a person, creating a massive Rube Goldberg machine with switches that are manipulated by the decisions of the components of the machine. Now, imagine that person wanted to see how long the machine would run with minimal interaction on their part. Because individual components can alter the future, the outcome is uncertain. If the machine gets too far out of balance, the person could nudge or persuade a component to consider something new or different. Little children used to roll a hoop or wheel and would give it a little push every now and then to keep it going upright. A basketball player may play with a basketball by spinning it on their fingertip, gently nudging it to keep it spinning so it will not fall down. Likewise, a person may try to spin plates on the top of poles to see how many they can keep spinning without falling down. Such activities would be more challenging if the plates included elements with free will.

If this is an analogy of God and God's creation, then it would explain why there is suffering in this world. Individuals have free will. Their decisions to fulfill their values can make someone else, with different values, feel they're not getting their values fulfilled. It would also explain why I didn't get the million dollars I prayed for as a child.

When the system gets too far off balanced, God could make a few minor adjustments, like talking to Moses, or Jesus, or Mohammad, or Buddha, or the Dali Llama . . . reminding them of ideas that would help extend the creation's duration. God's

interactions are based on God's goals and not our individual desires. God is not our step-and-fetch servant we can boss around. God is our creator without whom, we would not exist.

God's Message

What is it God wants us to know? Why did God walk with Adam and Eve, and give Moses laws on behavior? Why would God reach out through Jesus and Mohammad to teach the same lessons? The fundamental message, repeated over and over, is be grateful to God for creating the universe and to treat others well.

To treat others well, we would need to generate a set of rules to ensure peace and safety. Social interactions would need some guidelines to allow a community to not fall into total chaos. This would be particularly true in places where different groups and cultures encounter one another. Different cultures needing to interact was a common issue in the days of Jesus, just as it is today.

Purpose of Jesus

Perhaps, if the main purpose of Jesus is to teach us how to interact with others, then the bible lessons are important. If salvation through faith is not the primary purpose of Jesus, perhaps learning how to get along with one another is.

Letters of Paul

Why are none of the letters of Paul in this version of the bible? Perhaps it is because of the difficulty I face with Paul and his message.

It is clear to me that a key message of Jesus is to be humble. This message shows up time and time

again. Jesus washes the feet. Jesus teaches us that whoever is first will be last. Jesus takes the role as a helper. If this is a key message of Jesus, I would expect his followers to try to exemplify the teachings of Jesus.

Yet, when I read Paul's letters, it seems to me that Paul never got the message. Not surprisingly. Paul never lived with Jesus nor saw Jesus in day-to-day behaviors. Paul only knows Jesus from one short vision Paul had on the road plus the three years Paul claims he was personally taught by Jesus while he lived in Arabia. The rest of what Paul knows about Jesus is what others told him. It appears that Paul's vision changed Paul from being a hunter of Christians to presenting himself with the label of Christian.

Paul's ego, however, never wavered. Consider the following examples. Paul writes "Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ." He doesn't tell people to be imitators of Jesus. No, he has to pull the focus to himself. Does he understand Jesus' message of humility? Nope, he goes all in: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Paul draws the focus to himself in the guise of telling others that when you see him (Paul), you are seeing Jesus. This is a level of ego mania I don't see in Jesus. Paul's level of selfish ego also shows up in him implying he had the voting power of the Sanhedrin prior to his 'conversion'.

I suppose I would be fine looking past the ego of the individual if the message was compatible. Jesus taught his followers and disciples to

comply with what is commanded from the scribes and Pharisees who sit in the chair of Moses. However, Jesus went further to say 'Do as they say, not as they do.' Jesus described the leaders as preaching what they themselves do not practice. Jesus taught his followers to treat one another as equals, with nobody better, higher, or more authoritative. 'But as for you, do not be called Teacher; for only God is your Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters.' How does Paul handle this topic? Well, if you believe Paul wrote first Timothy, 'I was appointed as a preacher and an apostle -I am telling the truth, I am not lying,¹¹⁴ as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.' This would mean that Paul is claiming to be God. So much for humility... again.

Love unconditionally. That is a foundational message of Jesus. Turn the other cheek. Love your enemy. Help those who oppose you. On and on, Jesus tells us not to be judgmental. Yet, Paul writes that if someone says anything that does not agree with Paul's words, Paul invokes God that they be under God's curse.

Love unconditionally includes not being racist or sexist. Jesus never taught sexism. While the gospels seem to be thin on Jesus' interactions with women, every story shows Jesus treating them equally. Jesus talks about his 'brothers and sisters' not just his brothers. Paul is not so

¹¹⁴ I've always felt that if someone is trying this hard to convince me something is true, I begin to wonder if they are really trying to convince themselves instead. Truth should be self-evident.

considerate. In the first letter to Timothy¹¹⁵, Paul is pretty harsh with many 'I want...' and 'I do not allow...'. Paul demands women be seen and not heard... with entire submissiveness.

Then there is the discrepancy between who goes to heaven. Jesus says only the people who do the will of God will enter heaven. Paul pronounces that faith alone will save you.

God's mercy? Jesus tells us God will judge us on how we judge others. How we treat others is how God will treat us. 'Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.' Paul, however, teaches that God will do as God pleases, and mercy, from the perspective of a human is at best random.

What I conclude from this comparison of Jesus and Paul? They are not living by the tenets of the same message. Jesus, for the most part, practices what he preaches. Paul contradicts Jesus and tries to draw focus on Paul himself. Why are none of the letters of Paul in this version of the bible? Perhaps it is because of the difficulty I face with Paul and his message.

Based on Paul's history and attitudes, the most plausible description of Paul would describe Paul as someone who did not teach the word of God or the lessons of Jesus. Instead, he taught his own philosophy. As Saul, he began as a pharisee and saw himself as important. He tried rising up in

¹¹⁵ Not that I am all that certain that Paul actually wrote that letter. There is a general consensus among scholars that it was written by someone else trying to imitate Paul.

the ranks of Judaism, even implying¹¹⁶ he was one of the Sanhedrin. When in fact he was simply their step-and-fetch servant. For an egotistical person, Saul wanted more power than what he had. He saw the offshoot of Judaism spreading out and decided he could rise higher in a new group than if he stayed with the Sanhedrin. All he had to do was convince the apostles that Jesus performed a miracle¹¹⁷ on him and he could rise in power further. So, Saul made a claim that Jesus met him on a trip, and miracle of miracles, convinced Saul to change his ways. He changed his name to Paul and went away to Arabia¹¹⁸ to 'learn Christianity from Jesus'. He left the Jerusalem area so he could avoid further questioning and to claim he was taught by Jesus personally. If Paul truly talked with Jesus, none of the teachings of Jesus sunk in. The message Paul spoke was an egocentric message filled with division and condemnations unlike the teachings of Jesus. The letters of Paul often put Paul in an exalted position, even styling himself to be an apostle. Paul found a way to satisfy his ego by claiming to have seen Jesus and to found churches just beyond the sphere of influence or watchful eyes of the true apostles.

¹¹⁶ At one point he claimed to have cast a vote on the condemnation of early Christians. The Sanhedrin, a select group of 72 high ranking men, were the judges over the Jewish people and were the ones who cast the votes.

¹¹⁷ Something they were prone to believe.

¹¹⁸ An interesting way to avoid the people with real power is to avoid them through distance. Claim conversion, run away to Arabia to claim a personal tutorial in the faith, then spend the rest of the time away from the people in real power.

The Exodus

Scholars debate if the exodus ever happened. Since there is no other record of it happening, and there does not seem to be a serious change in Egypt at the time, it is reasonable to question if the exodus happened at all. I certainly don't know and don't think I can draw a conclusion based on current information. I like to think it did happen as part of the post bronze age collapse. Perhaps, not one group of people packing up their things and on the same morning, walking out of central Egypt. Perhaps it was Egyptian slaves living in the Egyptian controlled lands of Canaan who escaped during the bronze age collapse and fled to the nearby foothills.

It would support the theory of the confederation of Israel. It would explain why Egyptian slaves factored into the Moses/Exodus myth. The detour to Mount Sinai would explain the integration of the Shasu into the confederation. The entry into Canaan by crossing the Jordan would integrate the Habiru into the story and complete the 'exodus' and the creation of the people by giving them a history they could be proud of.

On a related note, the word YHWH is not used in Canaan until after the bronze age collapse.¹¹⁹ That suggests the name of the god revered by the Israelites was not part of any Canaanite religion¹²⁰ prior to the collapse.

¹¹⁹ The curse tablet, the first written record of YHWH available to modern scholars is dated to around the bronze age collapse. It may have migrated to Canaan by wandering Midianites/Shasu.

¹²⁰ ...who used the name of the Canaanite god El/Elohim.

How to feed five thousand

I've been asked how Jesus could do some of the things he did if he were not God. Only God can accomplish the things Jesus did. If that were the case, then God was roaming around in several bodies during that time. Jesus was not the only person doing miracle healings then or now. Is it not equally possible that God worked through Jesus without Jesus having to be God?

Take the feeding of the five thousand. Is it reasonable to assume that nobody brought any food with them other than the disciples? How hard would it be for Jesus to preach the idea of helping one another and sharing what you have? I can easily imagine Jesus looking at the crowd and realizing many of them had nothing with them. Jesus then took all he, and his disciples, had and told the people to share with others. Even Jesus shared everything he and his disciples had. With that kind of preaching, and the assumption that at least some people had something on them, it is very reasonable the five thousand were fed with food left over. Such teaching is completely in line with the teachings of Jesus. It is also in line with the teachings of John the Baptist. "Anyone with two coats, share one of them with someone who has none; and anyone with food, share it as well."

Was Jesus Married to Mary Magdalene?

At various places in the bible, a reference is made to the 'beloved disciple'. Many associate it with the apostle John. Some scholars place it as James, the brother of Jesus. In general, the beloved disciple was most likely someone of power or influence needing anonymity. An equally possible candidate is Mary Magdalene who is

referred to in very early texts as 'being loved by Jesus more than the others.'

This brings up the question of: was Jesus married? Again, I don't know, and it does not change the message of Jesus. As a good Jew of the day, he would have felt the pressure to marry. Jewish men between the ages of puberty and twenty would traditionally marry. Jesus didn't start his ministry for another ten years.

On the other hand, Jesus is known to have some form of connection to the Essene groups. I'm not suggesting Jesus belonged to an Essene group. The location of the last supper was in a room whose neighborhood was heavily Essene. Some say John the Baptist was an Essene. The Qumran Essene community, if they really did practice celibacy, would have been alien to mainstream Judaism. 'Alien to mainstream' groups exist in all cultures and all times. The status of the celibacy of the Essenes is still debated today. Having said that, in biblical times, men outnumbered women, meaning some men had to remain single. Finally, apocalyptic leaders in biblical times tended to remain single.

If Jesus saw himself as a Jew, he would have tried to marry before he was twenty. This would reinforce Mary as both his wife and the beloved disciple. It would also explain why she participated in various 'family only' matters, like her going to the tomb to anoint the body if she wasn't part of an inner family group. Her anonymity would be worth protecting if she were married to Jesus. Additionally, it is reasonable to eliminate any reference to women holding any significant role in the church when the church

decided to be a male dominated organization. Changing Mary's name to a generic title would hide a woman's role in the group.

Does it really matter if Jesus was married? Does it really matter if Jesus is part of some trinity? Does it matter if God is a lone God or the head of a pantheon? None of these things impact us or how we are to live our lives. So, what does matter?

What matters is the message God wants us to hear. That message has been repeated time and again. Beginning with the first people in the Garden of Eden, through Moses, and Jesus. If we strip away all but the essential, we come to the universal message of God to humans: *Love unconditionally.*

Postface

Following Buddha

The Buddhists have a saying: “Seek not to follow the footsteps of the Buddha. Seek instead what he sought.” Does it apply to Christianity? If the God of the Christians is the same god as the god of all the other religions, then the foundational beliefs of Buddhism are an equally valid message. It points back to my question of which is more important, the message or the messenger.

In the end, what differentiates the Church Of Doug from other denominations is our small churches providing help to everyone without judgment while embracing the lesson to ‘love unconditionally’ everyone at all times. We encourage diversity and recognize the value of being a humble servant with respect to our interactions with other. Our God is not expected to fulfill our desires and wishes. Instead, we are grateful for God creating us and this universe.

What joins the Church Of Doug with all faiths of every religion is the recognition that our behavior and mindset ought to be one of communal support and caring. This lesson extends beyond Christianity and is a common thread of every major religion throughout history.

While the Church Of Doug uses the Christian stories to present its lessons, it is not the intention to dismiss or belittle the other forms of faith as they teach the same message of God. Namely, humbly loving one another in a supportive way while acknowledging God, the creator.

Evaluating Actions

A good test of our actions and behaviors is to ask ourselves, 'Is this loving and am I really not being judgmental? Is this in their best interest as opposed to mine? Am I helping them?' How we answer these questions will help us become better people ourselves.

The Answer

Is the Church Of Doug the answer to all of God's mysteries? It is better than modern Christianity? No, and no. Using the history of our understanding of gravity as an analogy, each person describing gravity has improved our understanding without providing a definition of the actual mechanism. Aristotle thought that the four elements were attracted to themselves. Thus, apples, being of the material 'earth' would be attracted to the ground, another 'earth' material. Newton improved the theory by ignoring the elemental portion of Aristotle's description and simply said a mass it attracted to another mass. Einstein showed that gravity is the result of a mass warping the fabric of space-time.

But, if you ask Einstein if this is the final and definitive definition of gravity, he would say no. It is simply an improvement on the earlier theories.

I say the same about the teachings of the Church Of Doug. Earlier theologies worked within the scope of what they had around them. As human interaction expanded beyond adjacent borders and other theologies intersected with each other, a larger vision has come into focus. Is it complete? Time will prove this church's belief to be incomplete as well.

Penultimate Thought

This book is intended to change people's perspective, to see the world from a new and different angle. By doing so, we expand our understanding of the world and realize our subjective perspective, often compatible with those people we associate with, is not the only way to interpret or describe what we have been taught.

It is not intended to make the statement that the perspective presented in this book is in any way better. Different is not better. Integrating a different understanding to produce a broader awareness is. Much of this book is designed to make you question what is written, both here and in other documents. A healthy skepticism keeps our mind active.

Think of this book as one of the three blind men describing theology.

Final Thought

The Didache teaches us: "For if you are able to bear the entire yoke of the Lord's teachings, you will be perfect; but if you are not able to do this, do what you are able."

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Finally, I thank God for helping me to see what it is God wants from me. This book is my opportunity to share what I have been taught.

Go forth in peace. Love unconditionally. Encourage diversity. Be a humble servant. May the message of God increase your compassion now and always. Amen.