

RESPONDING TO GOD

[Jesus said] “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” Mark 1:15 NLT

To become a follower of Jesus requires three things:

* Firstly, recognise and turn away from our sin. The root of sin is our attitude towards God, pushing him away and living independently of him. This is expressed in the specific ways we live in disobedience to his will. We must turn away from our sin.

* Secondly, trust Jesus to forgive us, give us new life by his Spirit and bring us through death into his renewed world. This is not a reward for being good or religious. It’s a gift made possible by Jesus’ death and resurrection. We trust Jesus to forgive and rescue us.

* Thirdly, to join with other followers of Jesus. Together with them we learn how to follow him and to announce and demonstrate to the world what he has done and will do.

GETTING STARTED

... to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:12 NLT

Would you like to become a follower of Jesus? Are you willing to turn away from your sin, to trust Jesus to forgive you and give you new life, and to join with other believers?

If you’re ready to start following Jesus you can do so by simply talking to him in prayer. You could pray something like this: “Lord Jesus, I’m sorry that I’ve been living apart from you. I now turn away from my sin (take a moment to silently confess any specific sins you’re aware of). Thank you that through your death and resurrection you offer me forgiveness and new life. I trust you now to forgive me and make me new. Please come and take the first place in my life and make me the person you created me to be.” If you’ve just prayed this prayer the next step is to find other believers who can help you get started in your new faith.

INTRODUCING GOD

Many people consider Europe to be a ‘Christian’ continent. In reality most people know very little about what the Bible teaches about God. Some basic understanding about who God is can begin to make sense of our lives and open up the possibility, not just of knowing God as an idea, but of encountering him as a living reality. In this outline we’ll consider five roles of God and what that means for us personally and the world as a whole.

I. GOD THE CREATOR

He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the mightiest mountains. The sea belongs to him, for he made it. His hands formed the dry land, too. Come, let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker.

Psalm 95:4-6 NLT

The Bible opens with the words “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” If this is true then the world has a purpose and a meaning. That meaning and purpose is found in the one who created it.

If God created the world, of which we are a part, then it all belongs to him. Our lives came to be because of his creative activity. Everything we have is a gift from him. We rightfully belong to God and live out our days in his world. Our lives make sense and find coherence as we discover our place within the purposes of our creator.

2. GOD THE KING

The Lord is king! He is robed in majesty. Indeed, the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength. The world stands firm and cannot be shaken. Your throne, O Lord, has stood from time immemorial. You yourself are from the everlasting past. Psalm 93:1-2 NLT

If the world belongs to God then he has the right to rule over it and to rule over us. God is the rightful king of the universe. If the creator is the king, then to live our lives under his rule is to live a life that's lined up with the purposes of our creator.

Sin is when we reject God as our king and swap him for something else. That's why the world is so messed up, we've rejected God and tried to run the world and our lives apart from him. War, selfishness, loneliness, hunger, poverty, injustice, racism, bitterness, meaninglessness, despair, sickness, evil and death are loose in the world because humanity has rejected and ignored God. Sin has ruined God's wonderful world.

3. GOD THE JUDGE

Arise, O judge of the earth. Give the proud what they deserve. How long, O Lord? How long will the wicked be allowed to gloat? Psalm 94:2-3 NLT

Sin and evil have ruined God's wonderful world. When God acts as judge it's not him getting even with people who've dented his ego. When God judges he's acting decisively against sin and evil. People ask why God doesn't act to sort out the world. When they ask God to sort out the world they're asking him to act as judge.

The Bible says that God has acted in Jesus to rescue us from evil and a day is coming when he will finally throw sin, evil and death out of the world. The root of the problem in the world is sin. But we can see sin, godlessness, in our own lives. As it stands I'm part of the problem. If God's going to fix the world, he'll have to judge me. Either he'll have to throw me out of the world or he'll have to change me.

4. GOD THE RESCUER

I love you, Lord; you are my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my saviour; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety. I called on the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and he saved me from my enemies. Psalm 18:1-3 NLT

God stepped into human history and acted against his enemies in Jesus. In his crucifixion he took on sin, evil and death. His resurrection from the dead shows he overcame them. He now offers us forgiveness, new and eternal life and the power to transform our lives so we can live as he intended. If we'll receive his offer, Jesus comes and transforms us from within by the Holy Spirit. When he comes again to banish sin, evil and death he'll resurrect us from death and bring us through judgement into his renewed world.

So God created a wonderful world but we rejected him as king and ruined his creation. God will one day judge the world, kicking out sin, evil and death. He's acted in Jesus to rescue us and offer us new and eternal life. That's the great invitation of the Bible.

5. GOD THE FATHER

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared... I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!"... there will be no night there, no need for lamps or sun, for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever. Revelation 21:1-5, 22:4-5 NLT

The Bible ends with an amazing picture of God's world renewed. We see fulfilled what God always intended, a world in which we share in his life, his purposes, and his heart. In the meantime those who respond to his offer of new life become his ambassadors. We're to announce and demonstrate to the world what Jesus has done in his death and resurrection and will complete when he returns.