

Start



*For the Bible's answers to
life's big questions —
start here.*

Start © Al Horn, 2000

Published in the United Kingdom by:

The Good Book Company
Elm House,
37 Elm Road, New Malden,
Surrey KT3 3HB
ph (020) 8942 0880
email: admin@thegoodbook.co.uk

Published in Australia by:

Matthias Media
PO Box 225, Kingsford NSW 2032
ph (02) 9663 1478
fax (02) 9662 4289
email: info@matthiasmedia.com.au
Internet: www.matthiasmedia.com.au
(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

Distributed in South Africa by:

Christian Book Discounters
ph (021) 685 3663
email: peter@christianbooks.co.za

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE,
NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International
Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.

ISBN 1 876326 26 3

Art direction and design by Lankshear Design Pty Ltd
Illustrations (*inc. cover*) by Michael Zarb



MATTHIAS MEDIA

thegoodbook
COMPANY

Contents



5 **Welcome**

7 **SECTION 1: Great news**

Aims to help you grasp what God has done for us through Jesus. It unpacks the Bible's main message (as set out in the book of Romans) and makes clear what becoming a Christian is all about.

15 **SECTION 2: Face the music**

Confronts you with what Jesus himself said to those who wanted to follow him. It's uncomfortable reading, but vital to take in early on. All the readings are taken from Luke's gospel.

21 **SECTION 3: Get up and grow**

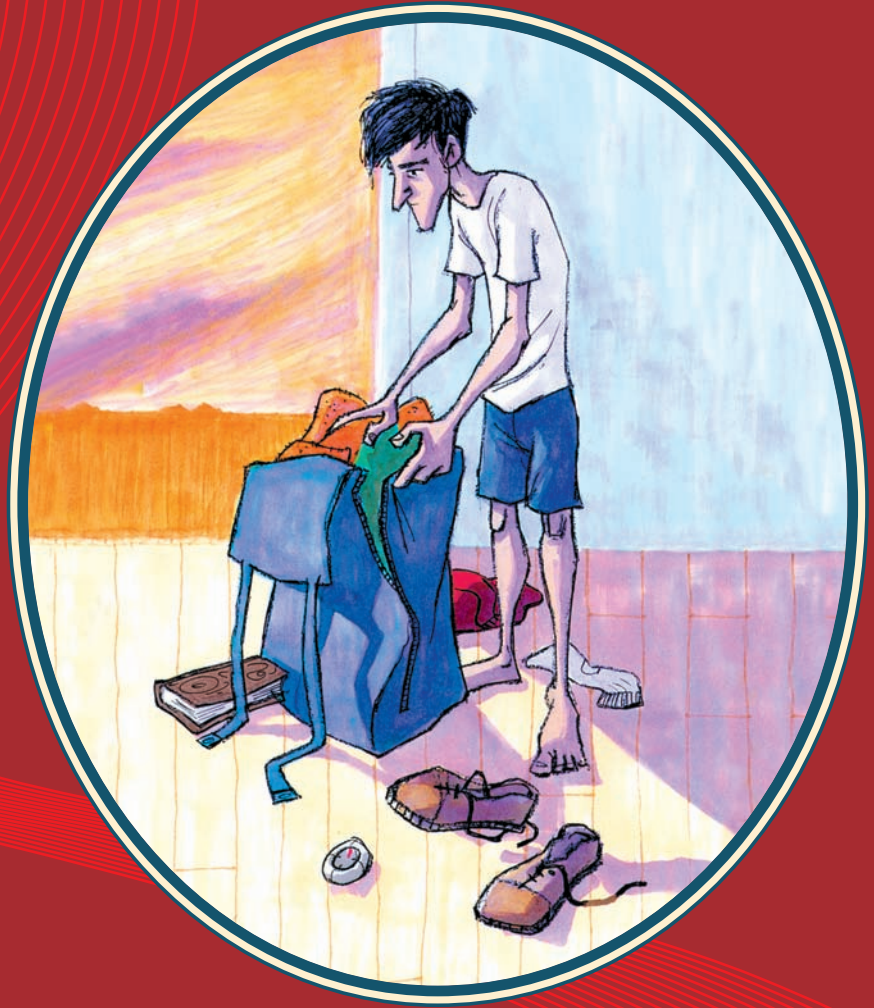
Explains practically, using the book of Colossians, how to make progress as one of God's people, trusting Jesus. What's the way forward day by day?

29 **SECTION 4: Great expectations**

What's it like following Christ? Satisfying, difficult, enjoyable—or all three? Discover from the book of 1 Peter what to expect in the Christian life.

35 **SECTION 5: Help!**

Covers questions commonly asked by those who've just become Christians or those investigating Jesus and the Bible. Such as: 'What if I sin really badly?' or 'Can we trust the Bible?' Answers to these and other questions could just stop you from getting tripped up along the way.



Welcome

The big idea

The aim of ***Start*** is to help you sort out what it is to *become* a Christian and then what it is to *be* one.

It's written for people who want to find out about Jesus and for those who have just become Christians. It will also help anyone who's confused or intrigued about these matters. Whichever your situation, we want to help you get things clear and get started as a Christian.

The Bible says that it is vital you take this seriously. These matters are critically and eternally significant, as we'll see in the next few pages. Choosing to become a Christian is by far the most important and exciting step you'll ever take.

AI Horn

The small print

You can use **Start** on your own, with a friend or in a group. You'll find things are easier if you remember the following:

- Each study page in **Start** looks at part of the Bible and asks some questions about it. We use mainly the parts of the Bible called Romans, Luke, Colossians and 1 Peter. Check the 'table of contents' in your Bible to find out where they are.
- Each Bible book is divided up into chapters and verses. So when you see a reference like "Colossians 2 v6-7", then you'll need to find verses 6-7 of the second chapter of Colossians.
- Sometimes we write: "v6a". That means the first half of verse 6; likewise, if we write "v6b" we mean the second half of verse 6.
- In **Start**, we use and quote from the New International Version of the Bible. It would make sense for you to use this version too.
- Some pages have a longer Bible passage to read, some have more questions. Tackle them at your own pace and in a way you can take in thoughtfully. One day could be about right if you are using **Start** by yourself.
- Feel free to write answers, questions, thoughts and anything else in this book as you go along.
- The Bible is more than just a good read. It's the way that God speaks to us today. And therefore it's a good idea to ask God to teach you and help you understand what you read. Talking to God may be something new to you—you may not even be sure that there is a God out there who's listening! But God loves to answer our prayers—even if it's a hesitant start like this: "Um, I'm not sure that there's Anyone out there, but if there is, please show yourself to me as I read this bit of the Bible."
- When you've completed each page, take the time to absorb the Bible truths, to thank God for what you've learnt, and to ask him to help you change as a result.
- When you've finished **Start**, we've listed some ideas at the end for what you might do next.

Now, let's get started...

Great news



We'll begin with the momentous news that is the Bible's central message. It's often called the 'gospel' (which is an old fashioned word for 'momentous news'), and it is all about what God has done through Jesus Christ.

We'll learn truths about God, Jesus and ourselves—and see the far-reaching consequences of what God has done.

All the readings in this section come from the New Testament letter to the Romans. It was written by a converted Jew named Paul, who was chosen by Jesus to be a unique messenger for him.

ABOUT... GOD

Romans 1 v18-20

THINK



- *What reasons do people give for saying there is a God?*
- *What reasons do others give for saying there isn't?*
- *If there is a God, how do we know what he might be like?*

Today's Bible passage helps answer these three questions.

READ



Romans 1 v18-20.

ANSWER



Does the passage cast any light on the three questions above?

- *What are the right conclusions to draw from looking at the world around us (v19-20)?*
- *Where does that leave everybody (v20)?*
- *Why is that a serious position to be in (v18)?*

List all that v18-20 teach us about:

- God's existence:
- God's character:
- God's ability:
- God's relationship to the world:

GRASP



The way the world and human beings are made points clearly to the powerful God who made everything. So it's rather stupid to say we can't know if there's a God. He's made it clear.

And it's just as stupid to ignore him: the rest of the Bible shows that God made us to enjoy a relationship with him, living under his loving rule. This is life at its best.

But it's more than just silly to live in God's world as if he didn't rule. It's dangerous. Verse 18 says that such behaviour makes God angry. More on this in the next study...

SUMMARY



God made the world and rules it.

APPLY



- *How do these verses change your thinking?*
- *What's the right response to God now?*

ABOUT... US

Romans 3 v10-18

THINK



- What do this week's newspaper stories or television shows suggest to us is the world's biggest problem?
- Would you agree?

God rules. He created the world and made us to live in his world, recognising he's in charge. Do people do that?

In Romans chapter 3, Paul argues that every human being (Jew and non-Jew) is in the same grim situation.

READ



Romans 3 v9-20.

- 'Under sin' (v9b) = burdened and trapped by wrongdoing
- 'Righteous' (v10) = living fully as God wants; being 'right' before him
- 'The law' (v19a) = the whole Old Testament

ANSWER



Count how often v10-12 say 'no-one...'

Summarise God's verdict from that.

Use v13-15 and 18 to list all the ways we oppose God:

- Where does that leave absolutely everybody (v16-17, 19b)?
- How would you now answer the questions at the start (under 'Think')?

GRASP



It's worse than pushing your granny down the stairs. Every human being opposes God, elbows him out of the picture and opts to go solo. We want to run our lives our own way. Every bit of us reflects this defiance: speech, actions, mind, will, emotions, and conscience.

We may show our opposition to God in different ways (some of us openly challenge him, while most just ignore him) but we're all guilty of it. More in the next study on the consequences.

SUMMARY

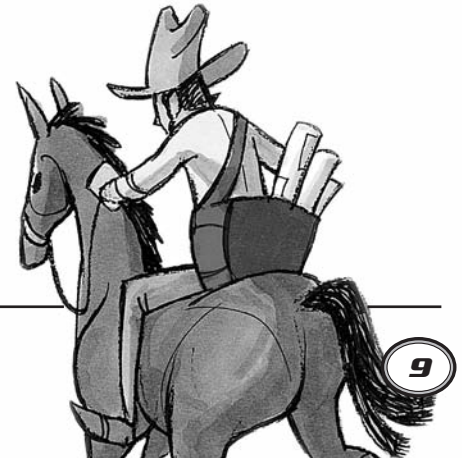


Every human being chooses to oppose God.


APPLY



- How easy/hard do you find it to accept this verdict?
- Why must we?



ABOUT... CONSEQUENCES (i) Romans 6 v23

THINK 


Tick your response below to the following statement:

'I'm not perfect, but then who is? The point is I'm not that bad and I can't believe in a God who's got a problem with me.'


Agree Disagree Not sure

■ *What are your reasons?*

When we oppose God's rule (what the Bible calls 'sin'), there are serious consequences. Romans chapter 6 spells them out.

READ 

Romans 6 v20-23 twice.

ANSWER 

Chapter 6 talks of slaves and masters. Complete the box below:

Two masters: v20:	v22:
Two outcomes: v23a:	v23b:

One master (sin) pays wages (what's deserved), the other (God) presents a gift (what's not deserved).

■ *What does it mean that sin earns us death?*


GRASP 

Elsewhere in the Bible, we see that death means separation from God. God's punishment for our opposition to him is to separate us from himself, both now and after we die (see, for example, 2 Thessalonians 1 v8-9).


Is this fair? Yes. God gives us what we choose: if we don't want anything to do with God now, that's what we'll get in eternity.

- *What does v23b also suggest is possible?*
- *So what might becoming a Christian be all about?*

There's no man-made way back to God. Our sin earns us only separation from him. But v23b speaks of a gift from God: eternal life. Life with him forever. More on this next.

SUMMARY 

God rightly separates us from him, now and forever.

APPLY 

- *What does this verse teach us about God?*
- *Why is our sin so serious?*
- *Which master do you serve?*

ABOUT... JESUS (i)

Romans 5 v6-11

THINK



True or False? Jesus Christ's death 2000 years ago was...

- a) a deserved execution;
- b) an assassination;
- c) a miscarriage of justice;
- d) God's intention;
- e) just another death.

The wages of sin is death, we learnt. But eternal life is on offer from God. Romans chapter 5 tells us how that is possible.

READ



Romans 5 v6-11.

ANSWER



Find, and explain, the four descriptions of us:

- v6a
- v6b
- v8
- v10

Find the four descriptions of what God has done through Jesus Christ:

- v6
- v8
- v9
- v10

Find, and explain, the four consequences of the cross:

- v9a

v9b

v10

v11

- What does the cross tell us about ourselves and God (v8)?

GRASP



We each oppose God's rule and become God's enemy (v10a). That makes God angry ('wrath', v9) and he must separate us from himself. From this we can't save ourselves ('powerless', v6).

But there's a God-given way back to him. Out of love, God provided one man, who never opposed God or deserved death, who willingly took our place: God's Son, Jesus. He took responsibility for our sin and paid the death penalty we deserve. Separated from God. For us.

And Jesus' death isn't the end of the story. That's next.

To be a Christian means that I trust his death (and nothing I do) to bring me into relationship with God. More about this later on.

SUMMARY



God sent Jesus to die, to be separated from God his Father, for us.

APPLY



- Why is Jesus' death essential if we're to be forgiven by God?
- What truths about God do these verses bring home?

ABOUT... JESUS (ii)

Romans 1 v1-5

THINK



React to the following statement, before giving a more considered answer:

'Believing in God makes no sense, let alone trusting in Jesus' death.'

- *What's your first reaction?*
- *What's your more considered opinion?*

Incredibly, Jesus' death wasn't the last word about him, as Paul's introduction to Romans tells us.

READ



Romans 1 v1-5.

ANSWER



Paul introduces himself (v1, 5) as an apostle of Jesus: i.e., one sent by him to declare this 'momentous news' (or gospel) to others.

- *Whose gospel is it, according to Paul (v1b)?*
- *Who is it about (v3a)?*
- *What does the gospel announce about Jesus? (v3-4)?*

GRASP



In the Old Testament, God promised that a descendant of Israel's great king David would be the 'Messiah', God's chosen rescuer and ruler of the

world. The Old Testament also says this figure would be no less than God's Son.

Verse 4 tells us that it is Jesus, and we can know that for sure because God raised him from the dead.

- *What is Jesus' status now (v4b)? What does that mean?*
- *What's the right response to make to him (v5b)?*

The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Acts tell how Jesus' followers saw him after his resurrection. We can't now see Jesus; he has returned to heaven. But he is alive and unique in the universe. As the one who conquered death, Jesus is Lord. He rules!

SUMMARY



God raised Jesus to declare him Rescuer and Lord of all.

APPLY



- *Why does believing in God and trusting in Jesus make good sense?*
- *How do the historical facts of Jesus' death and resurrection help us in any thinking or discussion about God?*
- *Since Jesus has risen from the dead, how will this affect the way you relate to him now?*

Maybe you're intrigued by Jesus but
have never followed it through.

*Maybe you're curious about Christianity
but don't know who to ask.*

*Maybe you wouldn't mind reading the
Bible but aren't sure where to start.*

Start here.

Start is a lively new guide designed to
help you understand who Jesus Christ is,
and what it means to have an ongoing
relationship with him. ***Start*** helps you
to read the Bible for yourself, and to
discover firsthand the answers to life's
biggest questions.

