

What people are saying about Tricky

“This book is for you if you are not a Christian but you’re seeking answers, or if you are a Christian who is struggling with the tough questions of life. Intelligent, honest and compassionate, reading this is like having a conversation with friends.”

Rebecca Manley Pippert, author of *Out of the Saltshaker* and *Uncover*; founder of Saltshaker Ministries

“An excellent book that answers some of the hardest questions about the Christian faith, and keeps coming back to Christ to do so. Read it, then give it to your friends so they can read it.”

Rico Tice, Associate Minister at All Soul’s Langham Place, London; founder of Christianity Explored Ministries

“Straightforward, down to earth and Bible-based, a good introduction for anyone in their twenties or teenage years who is looking for answers on some tricky issues.”

Jon Fenton, Senior Research Fellow, London Centre for Nanotechnology at University College London

“This book brilliantly articulates the concerns we have, and distils complex answers into easily digestible chapters.”

Nick McDonald, blogger at Scribblepreach.com and Youth Pastor at Carlisle Congregational Church, Massachusetts

“I love this book! It tackles the big questions and shows how ultimately only Jesus makes sense of things.”

Jonty Allcock, Pastor of Bush Hill Park Community Church, London; author of *Lost* and *Fearless*

“A really easy read that answers challenging questions in a loving but honest way. I would definitely recommend this to you if you have questions about Jesus, and what it means to follow him.”

Lottie Jones, Youth Pastor at St George’s Leeds, England

“Michael and Carl do not run from tough questions—they face them with humour and above all a clear conviction that life makes sense when Jesus is allowed to speak for himself.”

Glen Scrivener, evangelist and blogger



Tricky

The hardest questions
to ask about Christianity...

...and some answers

Michael Dormandy
and Carl Laferton


the goodbook
COMPANY



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Tricky

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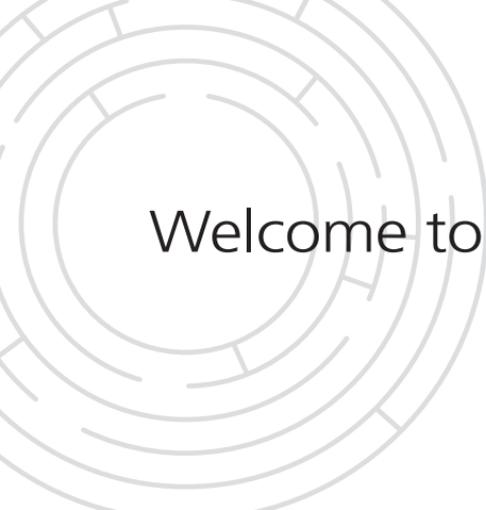
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Welcome to *Tricky*

In the olden days (20 years ago), people sent messages with a pen and paper. When they wanted to know the news or sports results, they bought a newspaper. When they took photos, they had to take them to a shop and wait for them to be developed before they could discover that they were all out of focus. And people used plastic rectangles a bit bigger than this book, called videos, to watch films.

Now we can do all these things in seconds, using something half the size of this book. As Bob Dylan sang: “The times they are a-changin’”. (If you don’t know, Dylan was a singer from the days before iPhones or even videos).

Many people think the Christian faith belongs with videos. Old, outdated, irrelevant. It’s a leftover from a time that’s gone. It doesn’t really have a place in our world of iPads and google and social media.

And yet... not *everyone* thinks like that. In fact, a lot of people think the opposite. We’ve met people from all nations, all ages, all religious backgrounds and all personality types who have found themselves drawn to the man at the centre of Christianity, Jesus.

And that's really strange. Here's a guy who lived 2,000 years ago, worked as a carpenter, never left his home state, and died as a criminal. Yet here we are, in a very different world, and what he said and what he did is still the subject of dozens of films, and books, and arguments. Some love him. Some hate him. But, unlike all the other carpenters who lived in the middle east in AD1, almost everyone has some opinion of him.

So it makes sense to ask questions about Jesus—about who he really was (and whether we can really know), what he really said, and whether and how it matters to you. Maybe you know Jesus made some extravagant promises about life and eternity—but you really don't think you can trust that they're true. Maybe you've only just started looking into it, and you want to see if the whole Christianity thing stands up to reason. Maybe you're pretty sure it's all rubbish, but you're willing to give him the time it takes you to read this book before you make your mind up. Maybe you've been brought up being told Christianity is true, but you have your own tricky questions and they're not going away.

That's why we wrote this book, and why we're thrilled you've opened it up. It's great to ask questions. We ask them ourselves. If Jesus is who he said he was, he won't be embarrassed by questions or afraid of them. He might not always give the answers we'd like, but he'll give the best answers we can get.

So in this book, you'll find the hardest questions that we think anyone can ask about Christianity. And in each chapter, we'll see what Jesus has to say in answer to them. Of course, a book this length doesn't tell you everything there is to say. But we're aiming to help you think things through, get your head round Jesus' answers, and see what you make of them.

You can read the chapters in any order—just start with the one that most grabs your attention, and go from there.

Two more things. First, whenever you read "I" in a chapter, "I" means Michael, because he supplied the stories. And second, we

want to say a quick, but very big, thank you to everyone who's helped us with the book. We wish we had space to name you. But we don't, because people reading this book want to get on with thinking about the tricky questions.





1. Doesn't Jesus spoil your fun?

Let us introduce you to ourselves and to some of our friends. Lots of us have bad hair. We wear clothes that haven't been fashionable for decades (if they ever were). We like country dancing and we love board games. We occasionally play poker, but never, ever for money. Some of us quite like sport, but we're too nice to be competitive. What we'd call radical, you'd call dull.

We're not really like that. But that's the image we think lots of people have of anyone who takes living Jesus' way seriously. Because isn't being a Christian about becoming a bit more boring than you otherwise would have been? Doesn't following Jesus spoil your fun?

Christians can come across as boring, restricted or just a bit strange. Church has got itself a reputation for being where the dull people hang out. But here's the thing: when Jesus, the founder of Christianity, lived on earth, he didn't get accused of being boring.

In fact, the opposite happened. People told Jesus off for having too much fun.

Here's what people said about him:

"Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners." (Luke chapter 7 verse 34*)

"A glutton"—someone who loves good food so much that he's never far from the "all you can eat" restaurant. "A drunkard"—someone who's always at the bar. "A friend of tax collectors and sinners"—the people in town who don't bother with the rules, live how they like, enjoy spending their money, and ignore the authorities. That's what people said about Jesus: *You eat too well, you drink too much, you hang around with the crowd that has too much of the wrong kind of fun.*

The serious types around in Jesus' day really didn't like him. Why? He enjoyed himself too much. He wasn't boring enough!

Have life

In the Gospel of John, one of the four historical biographies of Jesus' life, his first miracle was to produce a large amount of something. What do you think he made? Hymn books? No. Board games? No. Charity publicity? No. He made wine. Really good wine, out of really boring water. About 800 bottles of really good wine, to be enjoyed at a wedding reception.

Jesus was accused of a lot of things. But never of being boring.

And Jesus wanted to share the joy around. He didn't make the wine for himself, but for others. He didn't come to enjoy his own life, but to give others that kind of life. Here's what he said he was all about:

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10 v 10)

* To help people find their way around the 66 books that are in the Bible, someone helpfully once split it into chapters, and then split the chapters into verses. So Bible references are followed by the name of the book, the chapter number, and then the verse number.

Jesus is offering life. Not merely lungs-working, heart-beating, brain-working kind of life (we've got that already), but life "to the full". Life at its best. Life that lasts for ever. Life as it should be lived.

Aren't we all looking for this kind of life? I'm guessing you want a life that's full, instead of empty—exciting, instead of boring? Well, this is exactly what Jesus promises. We don't have to tell Jesus to get a life; Jesus gives us life.

Our culture tends to have an image of Jesus as quite a dull man, coming to take the life out of life. Don't fall for the fake. The real Jesus came to put the life into your life.

But what does this look like in practice? Well, to give "life to the full" Jesus does three things.

1. Jesus says "yes" to good things.

Jesus wants people—you—to enjoy life. God filled the world with good and fun and beautiful things. He made some wonderful stuff to see, smell, taste and do. Then he gave that world to you and me. And he said: "Enjoy!" He told us to enjoy the world, enjoy each other and enjoy life. What things do you do for fun? Chances are at least one of those things is mentioned positively in the Bible. The Bible tells us to enjoy drinking and dancing, food and friendship, exercise and art.

Yes, but... what about sex? One part of life where Christians have a really anti-fun reputation is sex. Maybe you've heard that Christians think sex is disgusting, embarrassing, even scary. Doesn't the Bible tell us not to talk about it, not to enjoy it, and not to do it unless absolutely necessary?

Erm... not really. Here's Exhibit A: the first command God gave to the first man and woman:

"Be fruitful and increase in number." (Genesis 1 v 28)

In other words, have sex and have kids!

Here are Exhibits B and C, taken from two books in the Bible written to show how to enjoy life and relationships to the full:

“May you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
[She is like] A loving doe, a graceful deer—
may her breasts satisfy you always,
may you ever be intoxicated with her love.”
(Proverbs 5 v 18-19)

“My beloved is ... outstanding among ten thousand ...
His body is like polished ivory ...
His mouth is sweetness itself;
he is altogether lovely.” (Song of Songs 5 v 10, 14, 16)

According to the Bible, sex within marriage is an exciting, beautiful and precious gift. God encourages us to enjoy it. He even encourages husbands to delight in their wife’s breasts and wives to love looking at their husband’s body—if that makes us giggle, it just shows we’re far more embarrassed about sex than God is! Like with a lot of good things in life, you might think Christians hate sex. You might be right about some Christians. But Jesus says yes to good things. After all, that’s why he made them.

2. Jesus says “no” to bad things

Perhaps you’ve been thinking: “OK, you say Jesus says yes to good things. But then why are there still so many things Christians aren’t allowed to do?” Then you reached the first three words of this subtitle—“Jesus says no”—and thought: “Aha! Here comes the catch. I knew it—being a Christian is about Jesus telling me not to do things.”

And you’re right—there are things Jesus calls us not to do. There are things Jesus says no to. He tells us not to get drunk; not to have sex with people we aren’t married to; not to gossip about other people. And he also tells us not to be those really annoying people who don’t get drunk or sleep around

or gossip, but spend the whole time looking down on people who do.

No one likes to hear the word “no”. And Jesus does say “no” to things. It looks what we might call “burdensome”—a bunch of commands weighing you down, stopping your fun, squeezing the joy from life.

But let’s be honest—sometimes a “no” is for our good. Every parent says no to their young children sometimes. When I was a child, I received hundreds of “no’s”, which were for my good:

“No, you can’t play near the oven when it’s on.”

“No, you can’t run across the road without looking.”

“No, you can’t put the cleaning chemicals near your mouth.”

In other words, there are commands that aren’t a burden, but are a blessing. I’m grateful for my parents’ “no’s”—if they hadn’t bothered to say them, I’d probably be a burned, squashed, poisoned wreck by now.

The Bible claims that Jesus’ commands are in this category: “His commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5 v 3). And when we think about it, we can often begin to see why Jesus’ “no’s” are for our good.

Getting drunk gives you a headache, wipes your memory, empties your wallet, and prompts you to do things you’ll regret the next day. Long term, it wrecks your body. Jesus says there’s a better way to enjoy a night out, to have fun, and to feel confident, which doesn’t rely on alcohol—so he says a loving “no” to getting drunk.

Sex outside marriage leads to broken hearts, broken trust, and sometimes even broken bodies. Jesus knows that it’s better left for marriage, where it can be relaxed, secure, free... and more fun. So he says a loving “no” to sex outside marriage.

Talking about people behind their back might feel great at the time, but it leaves you unable to trust others, and leaves others unable to trust you. So Jesus says a loving “no” to gossiping.

But what about when we really can't see the reason for Jesus' "no"? What about when, however hard we think about them, his commands just seem unfair and unkind? I can get drunk every now and then without causing any problems, so why does the Bible say no? It's such hard work to talk to the lonely people, so can't I just sit with my friends? These commands feel so burdensome.

In the end, sometimes we have to trust Jesus that his commands are for our good, even when it's hard to understand. When I was about six, my mum was in hospital with a severe and very infectious illness. I wasn't allowed to go near her, because of the risk of infection. I had to look at her through a glass window. As we drove to see her, my dad explained all this to me—but I was six, I knew how life worked, and I wasn't buying it. She was my mum! She couldn't do me any harm. For me, that was enough. And so my father sat there in the car, arguing with a stubborn little boy who refused to accept his dad might know more about life than him. His commandment, his "no", was for my good, even though I couldn't understand why.

Sometimes Jesus says no to things we really want. That's when we ask ourselves: "Do I trust him? Do I trust that his "no" is for my good?" And that's a good question to ask. The way to work out the answer is to get to know about him some more—to see if Jesus is the kind of guy whose commands you can trust. Why not get to know him better? You can start by reading one of the accounts of his life in the Bible.

It's great that Jesus says yes to good things, and shows us how to enjoy them fully. It's good that Jesus says no to things he knows are bad, even if we can't see why. And yet there's something even more amazing that Jesus does...

3. Jesus says "Yes" to the best thing

We all want to have fun. We make decisions based on what will make our lives most enjoyable, now and in the future.

But sometimes the fun fades. The parties get dull, the friends move away, the sporting victories feel hollow. Sometimes, the fun runs out. We face illness, bereavement, relationship breakdown, failure in an exam or in a job.

Maybe the fun's run out for you at the moment. Some of us experience hopeless loneliness and bullying. Some of us feel we're never good enough (particularly if others are telling us we're not). Some of us feel we've made so many mistakes, we'll never sort life out. Some of us live in terror that we won't be able to find a relationship, a job, or a house, or money. Let's face it; even if we pretend to other people that we're fine, none of our lives are full of fun, all the time.

And all of our lives will end one day. Death isn't fun. But it is, sadly, where we're all headed. All the experiences and enjoyment of our lives now will come to a full stop. Death kind of gets in the way of fun.

Following Jesus is, as I've said, not nerdy or boring—it's enjoyable, and it's fun. But there's far more to knowing Jesus than that. Remember why Jesus came:

“that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

(John 10 v 10)

Jesus offers more than fun. He offers life, and life to the full. When we feel lonely, he'll be with us. When we feel we're not good enough, he'll tell us we don't need to be; he loves us. When we feel guilty about past mistakes, he'll promise we're forgiven. When we're worried, he'll tell us he provides for us. Finally, when death wraps up the fun of this life, Jesus can give life for ever with him, when all the hard things will be gone and there is only joy.

When you look at it like that, you begin to see that Jesus doesn't ruin our fun. Quite the opposite: he gives us life.