

Couch to Christian



A course to help anyone start or grow as a Christian,
including a day-by-day journey through the
Gospel of Mark.

Emmanuel
CHURCH
NORTHSTOWE

Welcome to the **Couch to Christian** initiative from
Emmanuel Church Northstowe.

You've probably heard of "Couch to 5k". It is a way to help people who have lost fitness or never been fit to work up to running 5k. It makes the first steps easy enough for anyone to manage. It breaks down progress into small steps. And it provides a community to encourage you to keep going.

"Couch to Christian" is a two month introduction to following Jesus. Using Mark's gospel, we aim to help people to learn or refresh themselves on who Jesus is, and how we can follow him. It involves a daily Bible reading, some questions to think about, and a prayer prompt. Each Sunday, there is a community gathering ("Church") which will help dig deeper into one of the passages for the week. And there are some optional extra videos to help people explore questions and issues around the Christian faith.

We're aware not every person who starts Couch to 5k becomes a long term runner. And we know not everyone who starts Couch to Christian will choose to keep following Jesus. But we hope it provides a helpful introduction and refresher that leads to many people following Jesus through life and on to eternity.

There are three key elements to beginning to follow Jesus, and Couch to Christian has all three.

Bible: The Bible is God's message to us, written down by people inspired by God so that we can know God. To hear God's message, there is a daily Bible reading going through Mark's Gospel, a biography of Jesus. Each day you'll find a short passage from Mark's gospel to read, and some simple questions to help you think about the message of the passage. If you don't have a Bible, you can ask us for a copy of Mark's Gospel or look up the passage on biblegateway.com Many people find it helpful to have a regular time for their Bible reading to build a good habit. It is common for people to aim to do this when starting the day, so that what they read and pray helps shape their day. But if another time of day works for you, that is fine.

Prayer: is talking to God. Though there is not a set rule for how you do this, there are patterns and practices that many Christians have found helpful. So each week there will be a prayer or a guide for prayer to help you talk to God

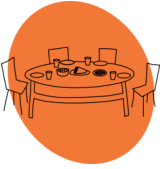
Fellowship: the Christian journey is meant to be in community with others, and each Sunday morning for October and November 2024 you can join others doing Couch to Christian and thinking more about Mark's account of Jesus' life together. Emmanuel Church meets 10:30am-12noon at Northstowe Secondary College. You are always welcome to visit, and to stay for free refreshments afterwards.

There is a fourth element for someone exploring religion: **Is this true?** So each week there is a link to a helpful video exploring some of the evidence for Christianity or answering some of the objections people raise to Christianity. If you want to read more on the evidence for Christianity, we can lend you books, including:

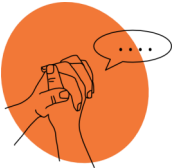
- **Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the world's largest religion** (Rebecca McLaughlin)
- **The case for Christ** (Lee Strobel)
- **The reason for God** (Tim Keller)
- **The air we breathe** (Glen Scrivener)

Week One: 06/10/2024—12/10/2024

The start of Jesus' ministry



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (6th October) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 1:1-15. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College. We'd also love you to stay around afterwards for our church lunch together.



Prayer: You can talk to God out loud or quietly in your mind. You can pray lying in bed, sitting at a table, or going for a walk. What is often helpful is to try and shut out external distractions so you can focus on God. So many people shut their eyes when they pray (though not if they are driving and praying!). Some people find a position like kneeling (to express humble dependence) or standing with arms raised (reaching out to God) helps them to focus, but no position is essential.

The exact words don't matter either. You can talk to God honestly. But sometimes it is helpful to have a guide to start off. So this week's prayer is something you could say to God before your Bible reading.

God, you inspired this message. I want to hear from you. Please help me to learn more about you today as I read and think about this passage. Please help me to know Jesus as good news for me. Amen.

Bible:



7th October	Mark 1:1-13
8th October	Mark 1:14-20
9th October	Mark 1:21-28
10th October	Mark 1:29-39
11th October	Mark 1:40-45
12th October	Mark 2:1-12

Questions for each passage:



- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?

There are some blank pages at the back of this booklet to use if you would like to make notes as you think about the questions.

Is this true?

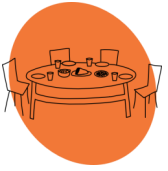
Why trust the Bible and specifically why trust Mark's Gospel to give us historical truth about Jesus:

<https://www.bethinking.org/is-the-bible-reliable/mark-reliability>



Week Two: 13/10/2024—19/10/2024

The new kingdom of Jesus



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (13th October) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 2:13-22. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College.

Bible:



14th October	Mark 2:13-17
15th October	Mark 2:18-22
16th October	Mark 2:23-3:6
17th October	Mark 3:7-19
18th October	Mark 3:30-34
19th October	Mark 4:1-20

Questions for each passage:

- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?



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Prayer: Pray after reading and thinking about the bible passage.

When Jesus' followers asked him how to pray, he gave them a pattern for praying that many people memorise as the Lord's Prayer (found in Matthew 6:9-13)

*Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.*

Some people find it helpful to pause after each phrase, to say something to God in their own words on that theme.

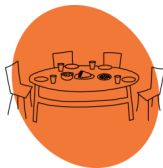
Is this true?

As we get into the details of Jesus' actions and teachings, it might be helpful to have a big picture summary of the Christian message:



Week Three: 20/10/2024—26/10/2024

The teaching and power of Jesus



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (20th October) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 4:26-41. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College.

Bible:



21st October	Mark 4:21-34
22nd October	Mark 4:35-41
23rd October	Mark 5:1-20
24th October	Mark 5:21-43
25th October	Mark 6:1-13
26th October	Mark 6:14-29

Questions for each passage:

- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?



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Prayer: God wants us to be in conversation with him. We hear God in the Bible. And then we speak to him in prayer. So it is often helpful to talk to God about what you are learning. Some people find the ACTS summary for prayer helpful, and you could use it to help you talk to God after reading the Bible.

ADORATION- what have I learned about God and Jesus that leads me to admire and love them? Declare that truth to God.

CONFESSION- what have I learned about myself as a creature and as a sinner that I should admit to God? Say sorry for your sins.

THANKS- what have I learned about what God has done for me as Creator and as Rescuer that leads me to be thankful? (That might include that God is making himself known through the Bible.)

SUPPLICATION (ASKING)- what things do I want to ask God for, either as a result of what I have understood in the Bible, or what I don't yet understand? And what needs in my life and for those around me do I want to ask for God to be at work and changing? (Christians say Amen at the end of praying. Amen means something like "this is the truth" or "I agree".)

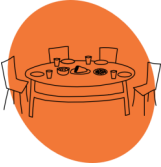
Is this true?

Listen to a talk on suffering: <https://www.bethinking.org/would-a-good-god-allow-suffering/suffering-if-god-is-good-why-is-there-so-much-evil-in-the-world>



Week Four: 27/10/2024—02/11/2024

The prophet for the world



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (27th October) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 7:24-37. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College.

Bible:



28th October	Mark 6:30-44
29th October	Mark 6:45-56
30th October	Mark 7:1-23
31st October	Mark 7:24-37
1st November	Mark 8:1-13
2nd November	Mark 8:14-21

Questions for each passage:

- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?



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Prayer: Many Christians use the moment before a meal to remember God's goodness and give thanks for the food. Here are two prayers you could use:

*Dear Heavenly Father,
We thank you for the food before us,
For the hands that prepared it and for your abundant provision.
Bless this meal, nourish our bodies, and strengthen our spirits.
May our conversation be filled with love and gratitude.
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

Superman grace (to the theme tune of Superman!)

*Thank you Lord, for giving us food,
Thanks you Lord, for giving us food,
For daily bread, and the words you said,
Thank you Lord, for giving us food.*

Is this true?

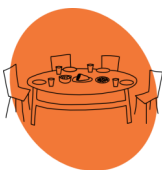
Another summary of the Christian message, again giving the big picture in a short video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8lJa-PcEGE4>



Week Five: 03/11/2024—09/11/2024

The cross-shaped kingdom



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (3rd November) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 8:27-38. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College. We'd also love you to stay around afterwards for our church lunch together.

Bible:



4th November	Mark 6:30-44
5th November	Mark 6:45-56
6th November	Mark 7:1-23
7th November	Mark 7:24-37
8th November	Mark 8:1-13
9th November	Mark 8:14-21

Questions for each passage:

- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?



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Prayer: Confession

We can admit our sin to God and say sorry, knowing he forgives us through Jesus' sacrifice. There are no set words we have to use. But this prayer from the Book of Common prayer helps us see the depth of our sin problem:

Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.

Is this true?

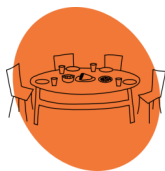
One problem many people have is that Christians seem so unlike Jesus. They are hypocrites, judgemental, and sometimes seem less moral than less religious people. If that is a problem holding you back from Christianity, why not listen to this talk:



<https://www.bethinking.org/is-religion-harmful/why-are-christians-so-hypocritical>

Week Six: 10/11/2024—16/11/2024

The king comes to the temple



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (10th November) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 12:1-12. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College.

Bible:



11th November	Mark 11:1-11
12th November	Mark 11:12-25
13th November	Mark 11:27-12:12
14th November	Mark 12:13-27
15th November	Mark 12:28-37
16th November	Mark 12:38-44

Questions for each passage:

- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?



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Prayer: Singing

Christians have found music and singing to be helpful ways for them to focus on God, to worship him, and to help shape their own hearts.

You can find a playlist of songs used at Emmanuel here: youtube.com/playlist?list=PLY-6mlzvoc9ttM3cGDmWGDc6ARcLPOODK

You could listen or sing along to one song each day, or perhaps use them during car journeys.



The Bible's songs are found in the book of Psalms. Many Christians will read a Psalm each day, and use it to help them pray to God.

Is this true?

In popular culture, there is a perception that science and faith are enemies. And that in the battle between science and faith, science has won. Professor John Lennox addresses some of those perceptions in many talks. Here is one of them:

<https://www.bethinking.org/does-science-disprove-god/christianity-and-the-tooth-fairy>



Week Seven: 17/11/2024—23/11/2024

Preparation for the end



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (17th November) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 14:12-26. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College.

Bible:



18th November	Mark 13:1-23
19th November	Mark 13:24-36
20th November	Mark 14:1-11
21st November	Mark 14:12-26
22nd November	Mark 14:27-42
23rd November	Mark 14:43-52

Questions for each passage:

- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?



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Prayer:

Reflecting on the day: some questions to think about quietly with God in the evening before going to sleep.

- What good things am I grateful for?
- What sad things am I grieving over?
- What things did I do wrong and need to ask forgiveness?
- What things am I worried about and need to hand over to God?
- What changes do I want to ask the Spirit to help me make?

Is this true?

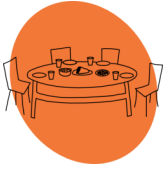
One area many people today find hard to understand is why Christian ethics seems so out of step with modern views on sexuality and gender. It can seem that the Christian view is both outdated and hateful. So what is the Bible's teaching on these sensitive issues, and how is it good news for everyone?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vC-S-EiqmYw>

Week Eight: 24/11/2024—30/11/2024

The death and resurrection of Jesus



Fellowship: This week's Sunday gathering (24th November) of Emmanuel Church Northstowe is looking particularly at Mark 15:21-39. Join us from 10:30am at Northstowe Secondary College.

Bible:



25th November	Mark 14:53-72
26th November	Mark 15:1-15
27th November	Mark 15:16-32
28th November	Mark 15:33-47
29th November	Mark 16:1-8
30th November	Mark 16:9-20

Questions for each passage:

- What do we learn about Jesus? How does that help us know God better?
- What do the people around Jesus show us about our problem?
- How is Jesus good news for people like us?
- What are we called to do by this passage?



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Becoming a Christian is not a matter of country or family background. It is not a matter of being moral, or even spiritual, or attending church. Becoming a Christian means believing certain facts about Jesus, and choosing to trust Jesus as saviour (the one who dies to rescue us from sin and judgment) and Lord (the God who lives and rules forever). Romans 10:9: *If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*



Prayer: Here is a prayer you could say to God if you want to become a Christian.

Father God, I admit that I have often ignored you. I confess that I have acted selfishly towards others. I do not deserve your love and rescue.

Thank you that you love me, and sent Jesus to die for me, paying the price for my sins. I trust in Jesus as my saviour. I seek to follow Jesus as my living Lord

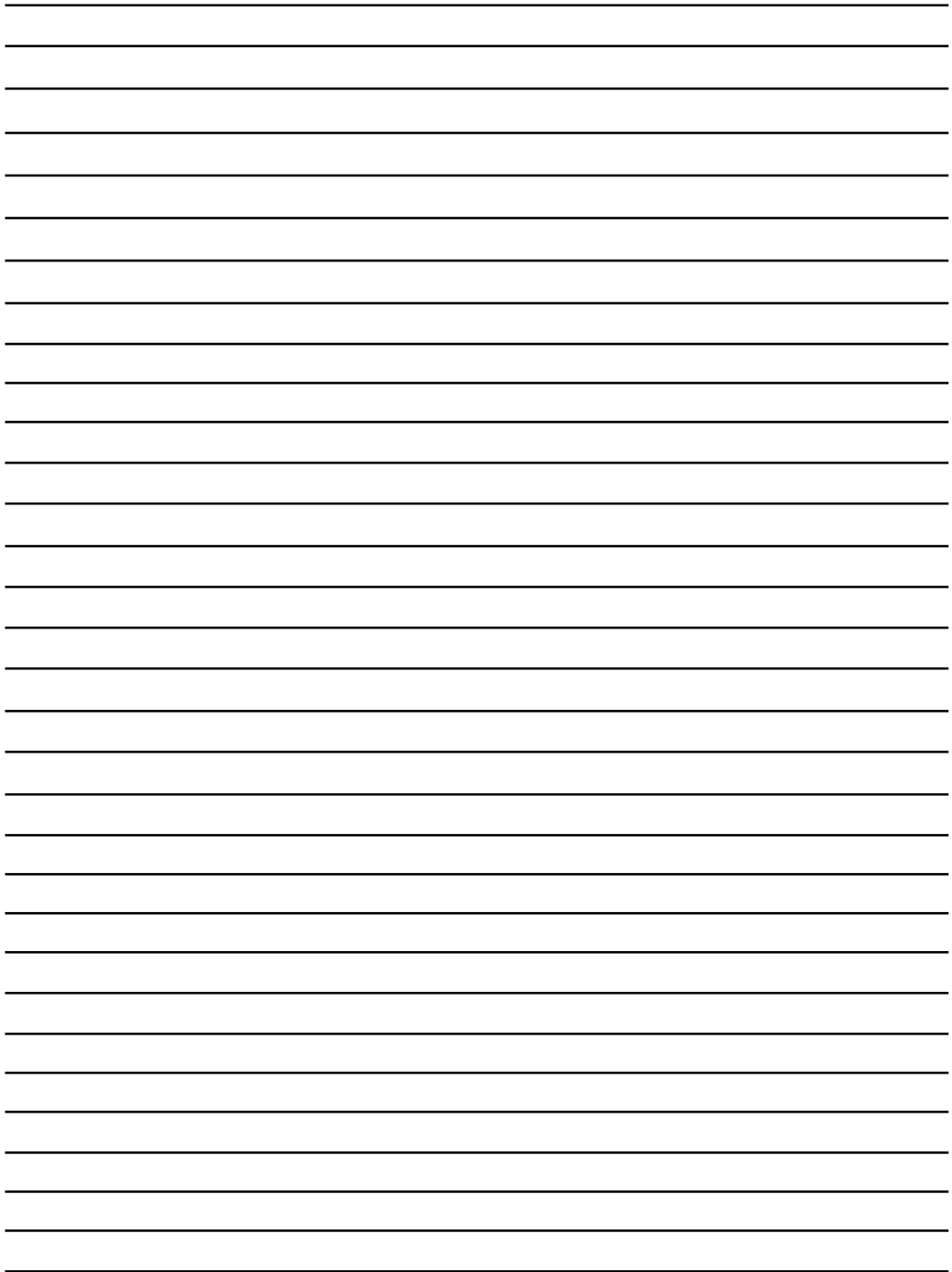
Please live in me by your Holy Spirit, filling me with your love and peace, and helping me to walk day by day with you. Please change me to be more like Jesus in this life, raise me at the last day to enjoy life forever with you in your new creation. Amen

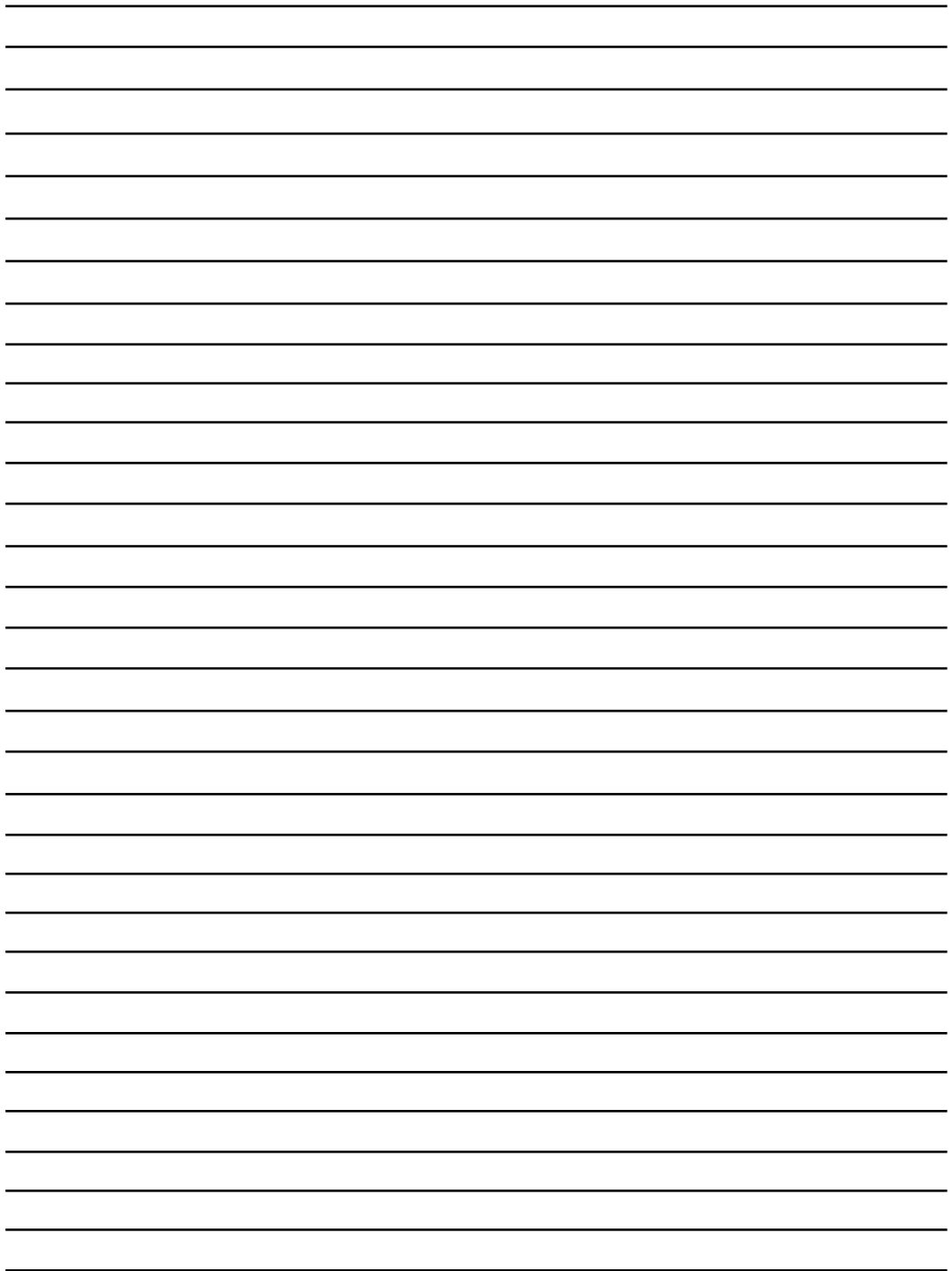
Is this true?

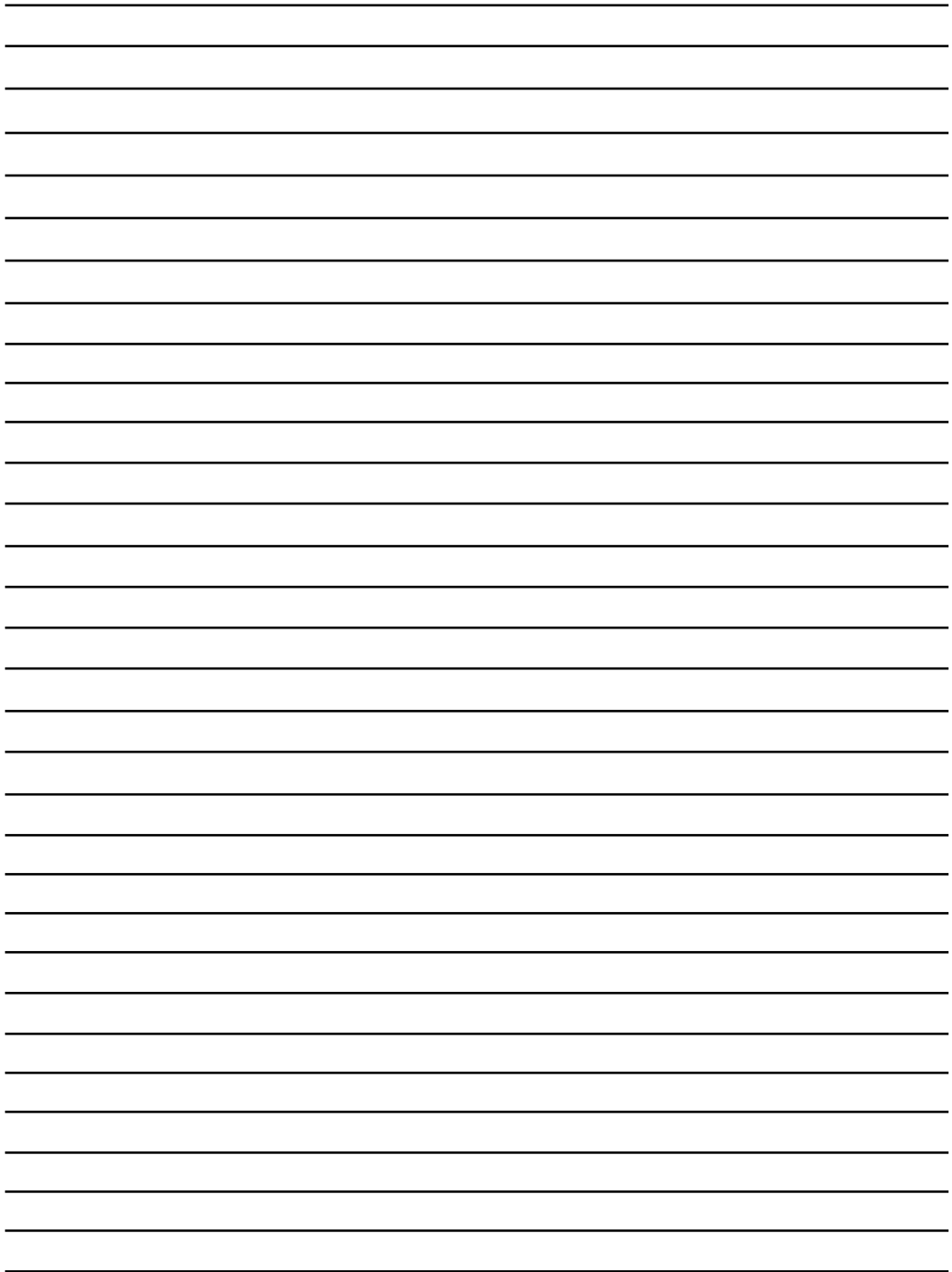
The truth of Christianity is pointed to by many different pieces of evidence. But the focus of the evidence is the historical resurrection. So here is a historian giving some evidence for the resurrection: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWSG5okmUr8&t=29s>



[v=kWSG5okmUr8&t=29s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWSG5okmUr8&t=29s)







Next Steps

Keep reading the Bible. You could read another gospel (perhaps John's Gospel), or the story of the early church (Acts).

Keep attending church on a Sunday to learn more from the Bible and be with people learning more about how to follow Jesus.

Keep praying. You can talk to God anywhere, and ask him to work in you and help you grow in your walk with him.

Keep thinking. There are lots of books and websites that can help you to keep thinking about questions you have about the truth and goodness of Christianity. We recommended some books at the start of the booklet. speaklife.org.uk/ and bethinking.org/ are two good websites for this.

Ask to explore more with us: 1-2-1 or in a group, looking at more of the Bible or focused on answering your questions, we'd love to help you keep going with your exploration of Jesus and what it means to walk with him. You can get in touch with us via contact@emmanuelchurchnorthstowe.org



www.emmanuelchurchnorthstowe.org