

In Him is Life *The Gospel of John*

Why Trust Jesus? (It Will Change the World...And You...) *John 1:1 – 18*

Introduction: Jesus Can Change You Completely

(SLIDE 1) From God's standpoint, He must change human nature because the main obstacle to His blessing of humanity is...humanity. We are the obstacle. We obstruct His blessing. We obstruct the flow of His love to each other. So God must change human nature while respecting human choice. He does that in Jesus. (SLIDE 2) This morning I want to talk about the question, 'Why Trust Jesus?'

(SLIDE 3) Let me share with you some stories of real people. One of the first students in this fellowship was a young man by the name of Joe Lin. He is Taiwanese-American, from Illinois. Joe was a guy who fought hard for himself early on in life, but that became a problem until Jesus transformed him. Joe grew up being told that he wasn't smart enough, that he couldn't do this or that, and so on. Who told him that? His parents and other Asian-Americans. All the negativity made him an angry young man, and by his own admission, he was a punk when he was younger. He was a terror to his mother. Strangely enough, he got a scholarship to go to a boarding school called 'The Hill' in Pennsylvania, where he had to dress like Harry Potter with a tie and jacket. Though he did not come from a wealthy family, he suddenly found himself a classmate to two of Donald Trump's children. Joe's school counselors told him that he would probably go to a community college, not a liberal arts college like BC. But he did get in, and he came.

He didn't make close friends his own year at school, and he was ready to fight for himself by getting his transfer apps sent out. But he had met Jesus late in high school, after his second junior year, in fact, and that began Jesus' process of transformation in Joe to become a new person. Jesus began to transform him into a guy who fights hard for others, not just for himself. Despite his feeling of being alone, Joe started to care that Christians become more of a presence on campus. He began to look after others, not just himself. Jesus essentially said, 'Let's fight for them.' He encouraged others to grow spiritually. He invited me to this campus; and he did volunteer staff with me after he graduated. He thought he wanted to be a youth pastor at that point. But he then went to a ministry training program which brought him to Cambodia for three months. Seeing children being forced into sex slavery made him pray, 'Lord Jesus, what do you want me to do about this, now that I've seen it?' Jesus' response was, 'Let's fight for them, too.' He decided to apply to law schools, even though he only had a 2.783 GPA from BC. He got into one; it was not a great law school. He failed a class during his first semester, lost his scholarship, and was on academic probation. But rather than focus on himself, Joe felt Jesus calling him to serve others. He went to Urbana, InterVarsity's missions conference, because he felt God call him to serve there; he worked in the book store and wondered, 'Why am I here?' Jesus' unspoken response was, 'To learn how to fight for others with me.' At one meal, he met Sharon Cohn and Larry Martin, who were, respectively, the #2 person at International Justice Mission and the Director of Church Education. International Justice Mission is an organization of Christian lawyers trying to free people from slavery around the world. They encouraged him to apply for a summer internship and he got it. He spent a summer helping free Cambodian children from sex slavery. He stayed for another semester. When he got back, the Illinois Bar Association gave him an award, saying that Joe Lin had done more public service good in 6 months than most lawyers do in a lifetime. They had never given that award to anyone from his law school, or someone only in their 2nd year. As a result, he got speaking engagements; he did an interview with NPR; and got an offer to work at a big private practice law firm. But Joe knew in his heart that Jesus wanted him in public law to fight for others who needed more help fighting; so he worked instead at a housing discrimination clinic in Chicago, helping African-American and Latino people who were denied housing because of race. He also became a board member of a Hagar International, a Christian ministry focusing on helping Cambodian former sex slaves heal and reintegrate back into society. Then, because of his experience and the love of Jesus, he decided to study human rights and international justice so he applied to Columbia's graduate school of policy, and got in. He will now become a Foreign Service officer and, with a Korean-American wife and their one year old daughter, is going to China as a diplomat – which could be difficult on a personal level assignment as a Taiwanese-American. But Jesus transformed Joe Lin from a person who fought for himself, to a person who fights for others.

I share that story because you need to know what Jesus can bring about in you, if you allow him. The specifics may look very different from Joe's, but the deep underlying transformation caused by Jesus is the same. It is a transformation from self to Jesus, and Jesus' love for others. It doesn't matter what your GPA is. It doesn't matter what you think you're doing now. It doesn't matter who you're dating or not dating now. The more you entrust your life to Jesus, the more Jesus will change you from within and bring about the blessing of God to others around you, and even you. When I spoke with Joe last week on the phone, he asked me to stress that his life was not easy; none of his decisions were easy; and he struggled with them. Jesus does not guarantee a life of ease, but a life of incredible meaning as God's new humanity.

Relevance: Why Trust Jesus?

How does Jesus do that? What is it like to trust Jesus? And what will happen if you do? That is the subject we want to talk about now. We're going to jump over from the Old Testament to the New Testament, to the Gospel of John. John's explicit purpose in writing is to encourage you to trust Jesus. He says at the very end of his book, that he wrote 'so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in his name' (Jn.20:31). In other words, he wants us to trust Jesus. So let's look at that. Why trust Jesus?

Because Jesus is the Word of God: v.1 – 3

(SLIDE 4) The first reason is that Jesus is the Word of this very good and very unusual God. '1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and apart from him nothing came into being that has come into being.'

How do you receive Jesus? We've heard spoken word pieces. When people do that, they give a piece of themselves. They have put themselves out there. It is similar with Jesus, but deeper. Jesus is the way this God puts Himself – His very self – out there for us and to us. He is the spoken Word, capital W, WORD. To a Jewish audience, who knew from the Old Testament that this God revealed His actions through His words, they would have understood that this God is now revealing Himself – His *being* – through His Word. In today's language, Jesus is, in some sense, the 'mouth' of God out of which all the other words of God proceed – if we can use that anthropomorphism. He is the one Word through whom God has spoken and speaks all His words. So when we hear Jesus speaking to us, it is God Himself speaking to us.

Because Jesus Reveals God as the One Who Heals Humanity: v.14

So how do you receive Jesus? Well, let's look at what else he did. (SLIDE 5) Let's jump down to John 1:14, 'the Word became flesh and dwelled among us.'

Illus: In the movie Avatar, there is the story of the human race colonizing another planet, and fighting the alien race, the Na'vi, to get a precious metal. The strategy that the humans have is to enter into the Na'vi as one of them. The way they do this is to grow in labs bodies of the Na'vi mixed with human DNA. Jake can then transfer his consciousness into his Na'vi body and become one of them. Except that the humans are the imperialists replaying the recent history of European conquest of native ('Na'vi' = native) lands, or the Japanese conquest of Asia, or the Spanish conquest in the Americas, and so on. What becomes clear is humanity is messed up. Someone needs to step into a human body and not just subvert our society but change human nature!

Who can do that but the God who created us? But let's look more deeply that what that meant. (SLIDE 6) He became *flesh* (Greek *sarx*). 'The word became *flesh*.' That's not a neutral term. John the writer could have said that the Word became *soma* (a body) or *anthropos* (a man); that would be a neutral way of saying it. But to say that the Word became *sarx*, flesh, is the most negative way of saying that Jesus became human. Flesh in the ancient world was understood to be the corrupt aspect of us – our depravity. In another part of the New Testament, Paul says, 'Nothing good dwells in my *flesh*.' The Jewish commentator Philo of Alexandria said, 'The Lord said, 'My Spirit shall not remain among men forever, because they are *flesh*.'" (Philo, 'On the Giants', *Commentary on Genesis*, V.19 – 21)

God originally and carefully designed human nature as good and inclined towards Him. That is what it means to have been created in the image of God. But we have tainted it and corrupted it, and that

phenomenon in the New Testament is called *flesh*. It's not just a physical issue, that we are skin and bones. It's a physical, spiritual, moral, and ontological issue; it's our whole being that is affected. *Flesh* is like the side of a magnet that opposes another magnet, God's side. You try to bring those two sides of those magnets together, and they will oppose each other. That is what happens when you try to approach God on your own. You think that you want God, and there is a part of you that is drawn to Him, yes. But there is another part of you that opposes Him. Why? He is pure love; we have self-centeredness coursing through our veins, and He asks us to entrust our whole selves to Him so He can make us more like Himself, more radically like Jesus. So how can a loving God reconcile Himself to a self-centered humanity? He becomes one of us, takes on the fallen human nature, and forces it to change.

Before I go any further with that, let me explain why it's important that we try to understand Jesus' experience as a human being. His experience tells us the truth about our problem. The problem is human nature. It is internal to us. Now we tend to think that human nature is just ignorant, or the product of bad circumstances. We look at the Holocaust – there's a whole class devoted to it at BC – or we look at war and violence and racism. And there's a tendency for us to think that better education and better circumstances will solve our problems. But see, education often becomes part of the problem: every empire believes they are more educated and more civilized than the people they conquer, and they conquer in order to educate and civilize. So education can help but it often becomes part of the problem. Better circumstances can help but how do you explain all the crimes done by rich people? How do I explain my own evil? How do you explain yours?

Because we like to blame other people or other things, and minimize our own fault, we wind up not telling the truth about ourselves. We don't tell the truth about the human condition. We have fantasies, like, 'I will save the world.' Really? You??? Why don't you come to my neighborhood with your 'good ideas'!! Or we go the other direction and give in and let the world go down the tubes. But when we look at the life of Jesus, and how he resisted all the evil around him, and also the evil he was tempted to do, then we see the truth. It took God Himself to save us from the flesh, from human evil.

Illus: Do you know how hard it is to resist temptation? To resist evil? No. You don't. You have very little idea. Why? Because the only way to really know how evil and self-centered you are is to try to resist it. And the more you resist it, the more you realize how strong it is. How many of you struggle with killing other people? Well, that's a relief! Why is it relatively easy to resist the sin of killing someone? Because there are lots of things that could happen to you if you do. You could get caught. You could do time. Your parents would be really mad at you. But how many of you struggle with gossiping about that person, or feeling spite towards those people? Why is it hard to resist those internal sins? Because you don't think there are consequences for them. The further upstream you try to resist your own evil, the harder it gets.

Illus: If you read the saints of the past, they were really aware of their self-centeredness because they were pushing so hard against it. We're not really aware of our self-centeredness because we pamper ourselves so quickly. We eat when we want, change the channel when we want, we listen to the music we want, we listen to the news we want. We have no idea how evil we can be because we protect ourselves from it. How many of you say to your parents when they take you shopping, 'Mom and Dad, I'd like to give that money to children in poverty instead'? How many of you guys are virgins, not because you've resisted temptation, but because you've not had the opportunity?!? How many of us really engage with the racial tension here at BC for the good of the campus? That's the difference here. The only way we know how strong our own evil is, is to resist it. Resist our tendency to consume, to indulge, to self-protect. And the longer we resist it, the more we feel it.

Jesus resisted it at the source. When his flesh wanted to just have an easy life, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his flesh wanted to lash out at his enemies, Jesus said, 'No, my life belongs to God.' When his flesh wanted to sin, Jesus said, 'No. I belong to God.' He constantly took his own humanity and redirected it to God, to receive the love of God to the fullest, to love God absolutely. (SLIDE 7) When Jesus grew up, he increased in stature, says Luke in Luke 2:52. But the word for 'increased' is *proeokopten*, which is the Greek word that means 'to hammer out with blows.' He was reshaping his flesh like a blacksmith reshapes a piece of metal that has its own way of resisting him. Jesus' life was a life of struggle to manifest the pure love of the Father. The letter to the Hebrews refers to the 'loud cryings and tears' of Jesus (Heb.5:7).

(SLIDE 8) Illus: The best way I have of understanding this struggle is to look at Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*. Frodo carried the Ring of Power. The moment Jesus entered into the womb of Mary is like the moment Frodo took hold of the Ring of Power. It wasn't just this neutral thing. The same thing is true with Jesus. It began affecting him. It fought with him. It tried to take him over. It tried to make him as self-centered as we are. But he never let it. And Jesus couldn't just put down some object like the Ring. It was part of him. He couldn't say, 'Hey, where's my Sam???' Can't I give this to someone else? But he resisted the flesh, every moment, at the source, all the way to the end. He never sinned – in action, and further upstream in emotion, and further upstream in thought, at the very source of his will where he gave himself to the love of the Father. The Word became *flesh*.

Furthermore, look at the social-political context in which Jesus struggled. Think about it this way: It's possible that you would exaggerate and lie just to get a job that pays a little better, or to get into a grad school. It's hard for us to resist our fear, anger, lust, and anxiety even when we live in an affluent nation with government welfare and our parents' house to go back to. Look at what Jesus faced. 'The Word became flesh *and dwelled among us*.' The 'us' refers first and foremost to the Jewish people. That provides the context in which Jesus resisted the flesh that he took on. And what was that? Well, I composed a poem to tell you:

He was born into oppression, Roman exploitation put high taxation on the Jewish nation;
he became a refugee; because his family had to flee
when he was an infant, a genocidal tyrant
came after him; it was sink or swim
so he grew up in a poor family,
on the margins of his community;
'isn't he the bastard son?' some whispered with impunity;
Joseph died early so he had to grow up fast
did he have stretch marks and pimples? did the chicken pox scars last?
at the right time, he faced down the devil; but Jewish leaders thought he meddled;
he protected prostitutes and crowds;
he cared about oppressors, the Samaritans he wowed;
but 'you're not Jewish enough,' some retorted;
most of his own family thought his mission should be aborted;
but he kept on reaching out,
the Father's love was what he was all about
day after day
time after time
person after person
patiently explaining
enduring all of the complaining
his closest friends were draining
and then they caught him
in the grip of police brutality; a crazy racist illegality;
they called him a terrorist; the soldiers struck with whip and fist
in the shady backroom, they brought out their list, and they beat him;
he was betrayed;
all his friends left;
his enemies spread rumors; by the crowds he suddenly was hated
he faced trumped up charges; all his rights were violated;
they killed him 'for the greater good' they said;
and that was what most understood; he bled
as he forgave, and was publicly displayed
in nothing but his underwear
but this humiliation he was glad to bear,
for to you and me and all humanity, this showed the utmost of his care

Just as the Ring of Power drew all the attackers on Frodo, Jesus' taking on flesh drew all these external attacks on him. But he never gave in to the evil out there nor the flesh within himself, and he never stopped drawing from the love of God. You and I have a hard time when someone ignores us on Facebook. We have a hard time when some drunk person throws up in our hallway. Look at what Jesus faced. Most of the representative evils of humanity (that I can think of) were put on him. And under all that pressure, Jesus never, ever so much as put his own survival ahead of the love of God. He was a perfect vessel for God's love.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, the closer the Ring got to Mordor, the stronger it became. It became heavier on Frodo. The same is true of Jesus. It became heavier on Jesus. But where Frodo failed, Jesus succeeded. Frodo couldn't throw the Ring into the fire. But Jesus threw himself into a violent death. In the end, he pushed his flesh all the way to his death on a cross. He took it all the way into the ultimate self-sacrifice. That is the wrath of God on human sin – it is totality of Jesus' refusal to sin over the course of his life, and it culminated in his pushing his flesh to death. He pushed it into the fullness of the wrath of God so it could be purged out of his humanity. And when Jesus was raised into a new resurrection life, he had a God-drenched, God-soaked new humanity. And he shares the Spirit of his new humanity with us, a new humanity that is now joined to God and transformed in the love of this magnificent God.

This way of saying it might be new for some of you. Some of you think about only Jesus' death on the cross. You think that Jesus at his death absorbed a punishment that people deserve from God. But if that's all that happened, then why didn't Jesus die on the cross at age 5? Why wasn't Jesus born onto the cross? What's the point of his *life*? But in reality, it's not just Jesus' death that deals with sin. It's Jesus' entire life, death, and resurrection.

(SLIDE 9) Here is what John Calvin said about that: 'When it is asked how, after abolishing sins, Christ removed the discord between us and God and acquired a righteousness, it may be replied generally that he provided us with this by the whole course of his obedience...From the moment he put on the person of a servant, he began to pay the price of liberation for our redemption...In order, however, to define the manner of salvation more surely, scripture ascribes it to Christ's death as its property and attribute. Yet there is no exclusion of the rest of the obedience which he performed in his life; (SLIDE 10) as Paul comprehends the whole of it, from the beginning to the end, when he says, 'he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross'...Nor was this without inward conflict, because he had taken our infirmities, and it was necessary to give this proof of his obedience to his Father. And it was no mean specimen of his incomparable love to us, to contend with horrible fear, and amid those dreadful torments to neglect all care of himself, that he might promote our benefit.' (John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.16.5) Calvin himself says that it's not just Jesus' death. It's his whole life that was atoning. His whole life was the undoing of human sin and the forging of a new humanity. If you claim to be Calvinist, read Calvin's *Institutes*, and then we will have much to talk about, you and I.

(SLIDE 11) The great 4th century theologian Athanasius said: 'Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature and were bereft of the grace which belonged to them as creatures in the Image of God. No, repentance could not meet the case. What – or rather Who – was it that was needed for such grace and such recall as we required? Who, save the Word of God Himself, Who also in the beginning had made all things out of nothing?... (SLIDE 12) Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father...This He did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection. Thus He would make death to disappear from them as utterly as straw from fire.' (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 2:8 – 9) Athanasius gave us the final form of the New Testament; he defended the deity of Jesus against the Roman Emperor Constantine when Constantine fell into heresy; and he is revered by Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions. This is what we should all be able to agree on.

So in reality, Jesus deals with our *corruption*, our *evil*, our *ontology*. He doesn't just absorb some punishment from God that was headed our way. He absorbs our nature to give us a new nature. He doesn't change God's mind; he changes us. He gives us a new identity that is fully forgiven and fully reconciled to God and fully transformed and fully human. Who else can do that? Can Judaism or Islam, which only give us laws external to us? Can atheism, which does the same thing? Can Buddhism, which tells us to not desire anything, to suppress ourselves? Only Jesus deals with our internal issue, our very being. He gives us his new humanity – the fresh, healed, 'full of resurrection power' new humanity he has perfected in the love of God and brought to a full and glorious union with God. God's answer to the problem of humanity is: *Jesus' new humanity*.

(SLIDE 13) Just so you can see that this is also the main idea of John the Gospel writer, look at the literary structure of John's Gospel. John is echoing Genesis. In the same way that Puff Daddy, in *I'll Be Missing You*, put his own layer on Sting's *Every Breath You Take*, John puts his own layer on Genesis.

Old Creation	New Creation
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)	In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

	7 Miracles	7 Discourses	7 'I AM' statements
1	Emptiness to joy. Water into wine at Cana. (2:1-10)	Second birth with Nicodemus (Jn.3:1-21)	I am the bread of life (6:35)
2	Sickness to health. Healing of the royal official's sick son. (4:46-54)	Living water with Samaritan woman (Jn.4:1-42)	I am the light of the world (8:12)
3	Debilitation to wholeness. Healing the invalid man. (5:1-15)	The 'Son and Father relationship' debate with the Pharisees (Jn.5:16-45)	I am the door (10:7)
4	Hunger to satisfaction. Multiplication of bread. (6:1-14)	Bread of Life (Jn.6:22-71)	I am the good shepherd (10:11)
5	Fear to peace. Walking on water. (6:16-21)	Abraham debate with the Pharisees (Jn.8:12-59)	I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)
6	Blindness to sight. Healing of the blind man. (9:1-41)	Good shepherd (Jn.10:1-38)	I am the way, the truth, and the life (14:6)
7	Death to life. Resuscitation of Lazarus. (11:17-44)	Upper Room discourse (Jn.13:1-17:26)	I am the true vine (15:1)

Old Creation	New Creation
Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)	Jesus breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' (John 20:22)

The literary allusion and structure is unmistakable. It is a reflection on Genesis and the first creation of humanity. What is John's Gospel about? The overarching point: Jesus is God, and he is bringing forth a new humanity. How does that work? Let me give you a parallel.

Illus: Last year at this time, I was recovering from surgery. I had donated one of my kidneys to my wife's brother. Paul, my brother-in-law, was at a crossroads. Healthy kidneys normally filter out toxins from your bloodstream. Those toxins make your urine yellow. They need to leave your body. But Paul's kidneys weren't filtering those toxins out. So his skin had an unhealthy yellow tinge to it. Being Chinese, he looked especially weird. The lactic acid that your muscles give off when you're sore after a workout was not leaving his body, so he felt tired and sore. Potassium, which we need in small quantities, was building up in his bloodstream, and unfortunately potassium is what is injected into death sentence prisoners in large quantities to send their hearts into cardiac arrest. These poisons were circulating in Paul's body and he was in danger of heart failure. Although dialysis was an option, it wasn't a good one in his case. His dad wasn't eligible because he had had heart surgery before. My wife Ming was an option but she had already delivered each of our two children by C-section, and I felt like that was enough for her. I was the best option. I was 34, so relatively young. And male kidneys are bigger and could filter more blood. So we went to the hospital. I had never had surgery before, so I was nervous. The surgeon had told me what would happen. I would become unconscious. They would turn me on my side. He would make an incision right above my belly button, through my abdominal muscles, or what little I have left after my swimming days. They would put two catheters into my side which had small scissors at the ends. When the surgeon put his hand into my gut, the catheters would snip my left kidney loose, and it would roll right into the surgeon's hand. Then they would stitch me up and put the kidney in Paul's right side, under his own kidney. So, as they sedated me, I thought about all that, and I wondered, 'Am I going to die?!?' I prayed, 'Lord...' and then passed out. Meanwhile they did all that. As soon as the surgeon put the kidney into Paul, it began to filter out the poisons. He peed yellow, as he should. Within 48 hours, his creatinine levels dropped from 13 to 2, and 1.6 is normal. So when I got up and saw Paul, he looked great. His skin color was already looking normal. They didn't cut through much muscle for him, so there wasn't that much

incisional pain. It was like getting a new oil filter in your car. He was feeling better than he had felt in many months. But I felt awful. Until they switched me from morphine to vicodin, I was in pain. But what happened in him was amazing.

I think that's a good parallel because Jesus is our organ donor. All of us have a poison in our bodies, a disease called evil or self-centeredness. We need healing from it. The reason why God became a human being – why the Word became flesh – was to *acquire our disease*. That is the entire punishment Jesus took on. To have the disease that coursed in his veins, and fight it at every moment. Second, it's to assure you that God understands what it's like to be you, what it's like to be human, with all your struggles. In fact, He understands it better than you, because in the person of Jesus, He struggled harder than you *as a human being depending on God's Spirit*. The only thing we know more than Jesus is how to be *inhuman*. Third, it was to have a human body in which to *develop the antidote* to the disease. In the physical body of Jesus, God resisted every shred of self-centeredness living in that body, pushing it all the way to its death. He *cleansed that humanity* and crucified the flesh. And by raising Jesus from the dead, God gave Jesus a fresh, new humanity perfectly fused with the divine. Jesus is our organ donor spiritually. When we entrust our lives to him, he joins himself to us by his Spirit. He places in us a cleansed spirit, a new spiritual heart, the beginning of a fresh new humanity that is just like Jesus because it comes from him. And he begins to filter out the toxins. Hebrews says, ⁷ 'In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety.' ⁸ Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. ⁹ And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation' (Hebrews 5:7 – 9).

Illus: Let me tell you a fairly poignant story of Jesus doing that. (SLIDE 14) The bloody civil war in Liberia was ended by Christian women who said to their husbands, 'We will not have sex with you until you end this war.' They went on a sex strike! There is a documentary about these women called *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. How the heck did that happen? Leymah Gbowee was a 17 year-old girl when the war first came to the city of Monrovia in the nation of Liberia. As she says, she turned, 'from a child into an adult in a matter of hours.' As the civil war dragged on, Leymah was bitter about not being able to go to college, and out of bitterness she dodged any political or social involvement. It's easy to be self-focused and bitter. But as time wore on, Jesus spoke to her. He started to filter out the toxins and heal her. He woke her up to see that it would be up to the citizens of Liberia, especially its women, to bring the country back from the insanity of civil war. She trained as a trauma counselor and worked with the ex-child soldiers of Charles Taylor's army. The more she worked with them the more she came to see that they were too were victims. Leymah joined the Woman in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) and quickly rose to leadership thanks to her leadership and organizing skills. She brought all the women of the Christian Churches together into a group called the Christian Women's Initiative and, after a lot of prayer and discussion, began issuing a series of calls for peace. How did they do it? They went on a strike from sex. They said to their men, 'Look, no more sex, until you end this war.' These women allowed Jesus to help them deal with their *flesh*, literally! Not just in terms of abstaining from sex but also in terms of their fear of the men, their desire for acceptance, their desire for comfort and whatever small shred of peace they could have at home with their husbands. They found peace with Jesus. They were led by the Spirit of Jesus, not their flesh. Jesus filtered out the toxins of fear and self-protectiveness. And they helped to end the civil war.

Illus: What about you? I'm coming to that. Here to share her story in spoken word form is Kat Hon.

Sex, Drugs, and Rock & Roll (Christ Remix)

Sex

Sex and our sexual desires are beautiful things

I mean, from way back in Genesis, we were made to proliferate

But open up the Bible and you'll find prostitution all over the place

Humans were always messin up, no matter what their race

A famous rapper once said, "if they say sex is overrated, they're just not doin it right."

How ironically true the statement when viewed through God's eyes

Back Freshmen year, I didn't do it right

Hollywood ain't doin it right

I'd say most of the world's not doing it right

Like a good Dad, He knew lust will hurt us in the end

Look at pornography and prostitution as outcomes of a lustful trend

Since I was a small kid, lust had already taken control

Without any Godly guidance, I began browsing yucky websites at home

It wasn't pretty, but the only one who knew was Jesus Himself
He knew the guilt and shame I had, even though I didn't know him then
so I just told myself it was natural
Fast forward to College and I find myself in a pleasure-seeking relationship
I loved it and hated it, it ended as fast as it started
This all happened as I was looking for something more,
**So when I was alone in my dorm room, I told God, right to His face,
That if there was something more, to come and give me some change.**

Then I read a story about a lady adulterer
Who was caught red handed doing her thing in the ancient red-light district
so check this, if you think our laws are strict
religious leaders from all over dragged her to Jesus
and demanded that she get stoned according to the law of Moses
this was done in order to have a basis for accusation.
But what overrode their cunning intention
Was God's unfailing compassion.
Stooping down to write words in the sand
that scholars think were the sins of man
Jesus stood back up and asked if anyone was without sin to cast the first stone
One by one, His words hit their bone
And soon enough this lady was left standing with Jesus all alone.
"what now" He asked? "has anyone condemned you?"
"no" she replied.
"and neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin"

This same Jesus is now doing the same thing
A forgiver of sins who gives us hope to change our identities from sinner to saint
An amazing feeling she must have felt to taste such redemption.
From being sealed with death to being sealed with salvation

Drugs

Walking into church with my head dipped low
Cause i know in my heart this is all a show
i smoked a blunt Saturday night
There's no way i can make myself feel comfortable in the pews
When all i feel is shame, guilt, and judgment to name a few
Last night, i dressed up fly, got high, i know it
But this morning my alarm went off and i definitely wasn't "ballin!"
"time for church, church, ugh, but my head really hurts, hurts... gotta get up, gotta get to church, gotta make up for all last night with
the make-outs, take-outs...and the pass-out."
"Gotta...get...myself...clean..."
This was my misconception:
Church was just a cleansing place for all my disgrace.
But that really disses Grace
Cause this was religion all over again. A cleansing ritual, just without any animals.
Religion that Jesus came to destroy, I continued to practice, but I got so annoyed.
This can't be it—time and time again
using God's forgiveness for my own gain.
This was my story, when I didn't get that the gospel wasn't a misleading game.
**So I told God again, directly in His face,
that if there's more to this, to come and give me some change.**

They don't call it the Living word for nothing.
John 10:10 was the start of my journey.
The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy,
but God said that He has come to redeem, to set free, and give you life most abundantly.
This abundant life started when I accepted my new identity

Rock and Roll

Galatians 5:1 says that it's for freedom that Christ has set us free
Why are so many Christians feeling the most tangled in chains?
Can't do this, and can't do that,
should I even be thinking like this?
What's wrong with me? I shouldn't have done that
And it always ends the same way... with "I'm sorry God"
Till you get sick of the repetition, and your words to God become "I'm done, I'm gone, I hate you, I'm sick of this, I'm out"
Christianity isn't a cyclical cleansing ceremony
Not trying from my own strength to be more godly, to be more holy, to do things perfectly
I'm not gonna lie, but change for me was kinda hard
But I got lucky that the gospel was made plain to me from the start

that real change happens from the inside-out
 from God speaking to my heart.
 and I finally got it. Jesus became real in my life,
 my "outside" started to shape to what God was doing on the inside.
 Life walking with Jesus is a ride, it's Rock and Roll
 Where freedom's truly lived out and the words of the living God isn't a drag
 When college kids get that the gospel's not a boring, pew sitting, stand n sit n stand lag
 When "taste and see that the Lord is good" becomes so real, we begin to rep and start to brag
 When we stop labeling, and judging, and only being good to those on the streets in rags
 When Christians quit looking on the floor when they pass a drag,
 but look into the eyes of all people, and quit calling them whack
 then maybe, people will start seeing the love of Jesus
 and remove that oh-so-common self-righteous Christian tag
 When self-righteousness will turn to...God-righteousness

Our ever changing modern world has portrayed a lifestyle to match it
 Of living in a rocky Rock and Roll life by thrill seeking in Sex and Drugs.
 The ever constant God's calling for a people to portray a lifestyle to match Him.
 Of living in the Rock and Roll life He intended with Intimate Love and a Permanent High of peace and Joy.
 It's taking on a whole new identity.

**All we need to do is tell God, right to His face,
 That if there's something more to this life, to come and give us some change.**

Application: So what about you? This is why Jesus always puts opportunities before you to take a step with him. Your choices with Jesus shape who you are.

- *Global Poverty Impact:* to care for the material needs of people
- We grapple with how your major and career can serve the underserved.
- *Missional Core Meeting:* to care about the spiritual needs of people.
- *Fun events:* to care for the relational needs of people
- *Prayer and Bible study:* to help you respond to Jesus' call to grow

Who is God? Is He Trustworthy?: v.18

So who is this God revealed in the person of Jesus? Is this God trustworthy? Of course, you wouldn't expect me to say, 'No.' But let me tell you why I say, 'Yes.' (SLIDE 15) John 1:17 – 18 says, 'For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained Him.' What does that mean? Before I define those terms, let me say this: It means that Jesus explains or reveals all of who this God is. There is no aspect of God hidden behind the back of Jesus. Jesus reveals all of the Father. Jesus is not the good side of a 'god' whose other side is mean. I'm not talking about a god like that. I am not talking about a distant 'god' who hides himself from you so you have to figure him out from a distance. Rather, this God embraces humanity to change humanity from within, even when that humanity repulses him utterly. In His love, He grabs hold of humanity, transforms it and heals it in one individual, the one man Jesus, through his life, death and resurrection, and then offers the Spirit of Jesus to us while respecting human choice. Jesus is our organ donor. He reconciled his own humanity to this God so that he could reconcile all humanity to this God. The entire Old Testament was a prelude to the full self-disclosure of this God in this Jesus. His *actions* were traceable in the Old Testament. The *pattern* of His actions was traceable, too. But here in Jesus, God reveals His very *being* and his very *nature* – He is a being who is for humanity, and is therefore against human evil and self-centeredness of all kinds, no exceptions.

Every other version of 'god' that you could think of is evil, passively or actively. Just look at the world, and human evil in particular. Then ask, 'What is each version of 'god' doing about human evil?' Every other version of 'god' is passively or actively evil. The God revealed by Jesus is the only god who is doing something about it, at such a cost to Himself. That is why this God is pure goodness, pure love, pure justice, pure holiness. So is this God trustworthy? I think so. More than you can trust yourself or anyone else.

What does it mean to trust Jesus? Live in grace, and live in truth. Grace and truth were realized through Jesus. Grace is the Greek word 'charis' from which we get the word 'charisma.' It means God's gift of empowerment to live as His new humanity. This power cannot be earned. You can only receive it through trust in Jesus that he is who he is, and that he has really done what he has said he has done. You can turn to Him for understanding, forgiveness, cleansing, and power, and you live in constant dependence on him. So

ask him for his grace for an area of your life: your fear about the future, your regret about something you did that needs his redemption, how you treated that person or your parents, your character flaws, or whatever. He gives the gift of his empowerment, his grace, to live out of the new identity he gives you.

That is also what it means to live in the truth, Jesus' truth. It means that you stop lying. Stop lying about being better than you really are on your own. Stop lying about other people being fine on their own. Stop lying that you can live any part of your life without him. Face the truth about your need for Jesus. Face the truth about everyone's need for Jesus, for now, especially at BC. Face the truth about who God really is, not the passive or evil figment of your imagination. Face the truth about what God is doing through Jesus right now. Entrust yourself to him. Why? So that you can become more and more of a vessel for Jesus to pour out his life and his love to this hurting world that needs him so badly.