



CAN CHRISTIANITY BE BOTH?

ONWARD youth

Devotions

ONWARD23 DEVOTIONS

Welcome to the Onward devotional series! These are written to help you engage with God over the holidays and reflect on the topics that were discussed at Onward23.

There are 5 short devotions. Go through them by yourself, with your friends, online or in person.

The devotions are structured in this way:

- Prayer
- Reflection on Onward 2023
- Bible Reading
- Reflection
- Encouragement

Before you start each devotion, begin by praying to God, asking for help to understand his word, and to continue shaping your thoughts and actions to be more like Jesus.

DEVOTION 1: ONWARD23

"Dear God, speak through your word and by your spirit, that we may grow to see your truth and goodness. In Jesus' name, amen."

We're starting with reflecting on Onward23. Even though you may have already discussed some of your thoughts at an Afterward session, use this time to go over that night!

1. We looked at the topics of whether Christianity is True and Good in Love, Justice, Freedom and Hope; for each session what were some:
 - a. Feelings
 - b. Thoughts
 - c. Actions ...

... You had?

Jot them down in the space below.

2. Looking at the reflection you made on those four topics, what are some questions that you or your friends might still have about whether Christianity is true and good? Jot them down next to them.

Read John 3:16

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

ENCOURAGEMENT

We have read this passage so many times, we might even have created memory verse songs about it when we were kids! When I was reading it preparing for Onward, I realised that our four ideas are in here:

LOVE: For God so loved the world...

JUSTICE: he sent his only son...

FREEDOM: that whoever may believe in him,

HOPE: shall not perish but have eternal life.

Christianity is good and true because God loves the world.

Christianity is good and true because in Jesus we find justice and mercy for all of us.

Christianity is good and true because in believing in Jesus we find real freedom.

Christianity is good and true because in Jesus we have eternal hope.

John 3:16 might not be a deep answer to our doubts of whether Christianity is good and true, but it does begin to give an answer. John 3:16 begins by showing us that the question of whether Christianity is good and true is in the person of Jesus.

When God comes to us as a human, Jesus, in living a beautifully good life, by taking the justice of God on the cross for our sins, by showing us mercy by offering forgiveness, by dying and rising again so that we might have eternal life — Jesus shows us true and good love, justice, freedom and hope. Truth and Goodness, for Christians, is Jesus shaped!

FINAL REFLECTION

At the end of the conference, you wrote down one sentence to encourage yourself to keep following Jesus. What was that encouragement? Read it again and remind yourself.

Is there someone you know and trust who you can ask to discuss some of the doubts and questions that you have? Can you try and reach out to them this week?

PRAYER

God our Father,

Creator, and Sustainer of all things, you love me!

Lead me ever more in your love.

Open my eyes to behold your wonder,

and let my spirit never tire of giving you praise.

Thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord

Whom you sent for the redemption of the whole world.

*Strengthen my faith in him, that I may walk with him all the days of my life
through the power of your Holy Spirit.*

Amen.

DEVOTION 2: LOVE

"Dear God, speak through your word and by your spirit, that we may grow to see your truth and goodness. In Jesus' name, amen."

Today, we're reflecting on love.

Christianity is good and true by showing us that God loves the world. Every person, whether they believe in Jesus or not, is carefully 'knit together... fearfully and wonderfully made' (Ps 139:13-14) and made in the 'image of God' (Gen 1:27). We are all made to be seen, known, and loved.

1. What are the ways that you want to be seen, known and loved?

Read John 15:9-13

Jesus says:

⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where does Jesus' love come from?
2. How does Jesus show his love?
3. How does Jesus commands his followers to show love?

ENCOURAGEMENT

We all want to be seen, known and loved. We want to love others and be loved by others.

And that's because love is good!

We see the truest and best love in God when he lovingly created the universe.

We see the truest and best love in God when he made us in his image, to love and be loved, to be in a relationship with our loving God.

We see the truest and best love in God, that even when we have torn ourselves away from him, he becomes a man, Jesus, and out of his great love, sacrifices his life for us on the cross so that we can come back to a loving relationship with him.

We can experience true and good love, when we see, know and love Jesus - who sees, knows and loves us.

FINAL REFLECTION

1. At Onward23, we reflected on how Christians in our lives have been loving towards us, maybe it could be that your leader drove you forty five minutes to the conference, and turns up every Friday night to lead youth group. Or it could be your parent who thanklessly packs your lunch every day. Can you write down some ways in which you have seen the love of God this week?
2. We read earlier that Jesus says: "Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." The way that Jesus loves is obedience to God (v10) and sacrificial for others (v13). These Christians who showed you love, have followed Jesus! What are some ways that you can love God and love others in obedience and sacrifice this coming week?

PRAYER

God of Love,
You have made me in your image.
You have called me to mirror your love in all my life.
Yet, Lord my heart is often far from you.
I love neither you nor my neighbour as you have asked.
Forgive me Lord.
Restore in me a heart that loves like you.
Where I feel empty, fill me with your Spirit, remind me
that you have loved me with an everlasting love.
Soften the pride of my heart, that I may not so much seek to be loved as to show love
and grant me eyes to see the opportunities to love those round me.
Amen

DEVOTION 3: JUSTICE

"Dear God, speak through your word and by your spirit, that we may grow to see your truth and goodness. In Jesus' name, amen."

Today we're reflecting on justice.

When we look at events around us and people who are hurting, we might be overwhelmed with seeing injustice and unfairness.

Reflect:

What are some injustices that you see?

How do they make you feel?

We were reminded at Onward23 that there is real brokenness and injustice in our world, we are all affected in our broken world. Seeing our broken world, God "sent his only son" (John 3:16) to show us true and good justice.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:19-21

¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

Read this reflection:

Confronted by human evil, how could God be true to himself as holy love? In Isaiah's words, how could he be simultaneously "a righteous God and a Saviour" (Is 45:21)? ... At the cross in holy love God through Christ paid the full penalty of our disobedience himself. He bore the judgement we deserve in order to bring us the forgiveness we do not deserve. On the cross divine mercy and justice were equally expressed and eternally reconciled. God's holy love was "satisfied."

The Cross of Christ — John Stott (p.95)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. True and good justice is shown when "God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin," what is the purpose of this justice?
2. Paul reminds us that we have been reconciled, and we have "this wonderful message of reconciliation." Can you describe this message of reconciliation in your own words?
3. "We are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us." What are the ways that you can continue to be Christ's ambassadors to the people around you? How can you be a part of restoring this broken world? Who can you share the gospel of Jesus with?

ENCOURAGEMENT

*Do you ever feel like the world isn't how it's supposed to be?
We all sense there is a brokenness to this world. We all have an inner cry for justice.
However, God doesn't ignore the state of the world as it is. In fact, he has already done something about it. God sends Jesus into the world, who himself wept over the brokenness of the world.
Furthermore, Jesus willingly sacrificed himself at the cross to reconcile the world to God. He did this because we are all broken inside.*

This means we can rely on Jesus to restore us. Jesus is the answer to our cry for true justice.

PRAYER

*God of Justice,
Turn your face to our broken world!
Day after day there is trouble and pain,
the scales are uneven, the poor unfairly treated, your children cry out.
My heart grows weary amid all the suffering.
Turn your face toward us, bring justice, bring healing.
Bind up the broken hearted, straighten the worlds crooked justice, bring wrongdoers to account.
Yet, Lord it is easy to look out, but it is hard to look within.
I know that I have been a part of the injustice of this world
I have overlooked the lonely and the left out
I have sought too much my own comfort and reputation
I have with tight fists held on to what you have given me
and I am frequently uninterested to the struggles of others
I have been too concerned with my own life and I have ignored the needs of your children
I deserve your judgment
Yet Lord please pardon my offences, wash my sin away
not because of my own merits but because of the blood of your son Jesus.
Restore in me a new heart that seeks your will in all things
loosen my hands that I may share freely the gifts you have given to me
Grow a spirit of generosity and a spirit of service in me
that I like Christ may offer my life to the glory of God and the service of others.
Amen*

DEVOTION 4: FREEDOM

Today we are looking at freedom. Christianity shows that good freedom is found in good boundaries.

Pray and Read Romans 6:20–23

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. From Romans 6:20-23, how does God help us experience true freedom?
2. When do you believe that God's boundaries are good for you and other people?
3. When do you question that God's boundaries are good for you and other people?

ENCOURAGEMENT

Have you ever felt the satisfaction of finishing your final term exam? Of handing in that last assessment?

It gives us that feeling of freedom!

God has given us freedom, by believing in Jesus, we are freed from sin and its consequences of death. We are also freed to choose to follow God, do good, love him, and love others.

Following God means following his guidance and his direction. He guides us to safety and the best way to live by giving us boundaries. We can trust that God's boundaries for us are good because he loves us, created us, rescues us, and frees us.

Jesus shows us that the good and true life is using freedom to choose to live obeying God's boundaries, loving God and loving others.

In Jesus, we too can live a good and true life by using the freedom we've been given to obey God.

REFLECTION

How does your life look different to others if God has set you free from sin?

PRAYER

God of Freedom,

We are so easily enslaved, so easily led by the voices of:

desire,

wealth,

fame,

pleasure,

we have bought in to the consumerism of this world

and the shackles of sin are tight around our wrists and heart

Set us free Lord!

Untie the knots we have made

free us from ourself, and through your Spirit enable us to live a new life.

Lord your will is good, pleasing and perfect,

Lord your way of life brings rest for our soul.

Yet Lord we doubt this, we see your law as restraint

like Adam & Eve in the garden we think you're holding out on us

denying us the fruit we most desire,

yet all around us are the gifts you have freely given.

Lord may we understand that every time you say 'No' you are really saying 'Yes' to something else to something greater.

May we trust your heart and learn to obey your word, not out of duty but out of joy

For only in you are we truly free.

Amen

DEVOTION 5: HOPE

Our final devotion is about hope.

Christianity shows that even if following Jesus might not seem to be good at the moment, there is eternal hope.

Pray and Read 1 Peter 1:3–9

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What are the things that Peter tell us we can have hope in?
2. When are the times that make it difficult to keep following Jesus this term?
3. At the end of the conference, you wrote down one sentence to encourage yourself to keep following Jesus. What was that encouragement?
Read it again and remind yourself.
4. What are some other things that you can write down to remind you of this hope in Jesus?
What will you practically do to remember those things?

ENCOURAGEMENT

What was the last thing you hoped for? Good marks? Time to spend with your friends?

Whatever it may be, hope gives us something to look forward to in life.

When we follow Jesus, we don't only have hope for things in life, but for the life to come as well.

That's because Jesus saves us, so we can look forward to an everlasting life and relationship with God.

Jesus lived out this hope by obeying God to the cross. He was certain in the resurrection and in the new world to come.

This means that even in the toughest times, when following Jesus may not seem good, we can have a firm hope.

We can look forward to a life with God where there will be no more tears and suffering, but instead, joy.

PRAYER

God of Hope,
you hold all things in your hands,
all these shattered lives, broken hearts, and tired minds.
You know our scars and how deep our darkness runs.
You have promised redemption,
and in your son Jesus, we have seen your salvation.
In him is the restoration of all things.
The re-creation of brokenness into fullness.
The making of ill into good.
Lord, bring the day when our faith will be sight,
where your loving embrace will no longer be in a murky mirror far off,
but will be clear and so wonderfully near; when we will behold you face to face.
We know too well how the things of this world spoil, they perish and fade away,
but you have called us to deeper joys and lasting treasures.
Set our eyes and the desire of our hearts there, where you are.
For with your kingdom comes the end of our sorrow, our suffering our pain.
With your kingdom comes the end of the weight of obedience,
with your kingdom comes love, justice, freedom and joy,
the desires of all hearts.
Hopelessness is easy, call us deeper into your love
that we may live lives marked by the hard-won hopefulness of your cross
In the name of Jesus
Amen