

Is Jesus Real?  
Conversations With Gio  
-Short Stories-

Coach Theo

## PREFACE

What started out as writing cliff notes for my friends about the book *The Case For Christ*, by Lee Strobel, turned into this parable for my son.

I want to make it clear, half of the words and information in this short story are copied directly from the book. I copied notes when I read it and when I transferred the content to this parable, I didn't want to distract the reader with all sorts of technical references and citations. So after each body of information that I copied verbatim, I simply put the page number in parentheses. I think a guy like Lee would agree, getting the message across is the most important thing, not so much making sure my references would earn a passing grade in English class.

Why did I write this? I heard a statement a long time ago that has always stuck with me: Know What You Believe And Why.

Churches need to teach us this stuff more. Faith isn't just based on faith. Faith is based on facts. We all need to know and armor up with the facts that prove Jesus didn't just exist, but is Who He says He is.

The *Case For Christ* book will make you believe, or make your belief stronger. Someone who isn't open to faith may not understand it. But for those that are, it will clear up your own doubts and help you DEFEND what you believe.

Lee Strobel was an atheist. When his wife became a Christian and encouraged him to become one also, he set out to prove her wrong. Using his investigative journalist tactics, he researched every possible book and article and also interviewed the best scholars around the world. He wanted to know the facts, the evidence, and the reliability of the bible. The data he collected not only proved Jesus was real, but that he was indeed not a myth, not a man, but the Messiah. His quest to disprove his wife resulted in the opposite. He became a Christian.

## Part 1

### Wonder if people just made him up?

Fall was approaching, yet even though it was late September, it was still a hot summer night. Kneeling by his bedside feeling the cool air from the ceiling fan, Gio and I began to talk. First about his Captain Underpants comic book that he just drew, then about his next birthday party that he wanted to have, then to the deep stuff about whether or not Jesus was real.

He has always done this since he was little. Gio would ask super tough questions right before he went to bed. I remember one time, at about three years old, he asked how to get to heaven. And then if he could go there soon. "Will God drop down a ladder so I can climb through the clouds?"

So I shouldn't be surprised. He's seven years old now. He's thinking about stuff even more. Even though I'm extremely tired and just want to crawl to my bed, I can't let this question pass. I need to answer it.

"Daddy, wonder if people just made him up?"

"Who, Jesus?"

"Yea. My friend said his friend said he's just make-believe."

Well, he's definitely not made up. Historical facts prove it. Even non-Christian historians validate that he existed and that what he did---how he lived and died---really did happen. There's no doubt about that.

You'll have to be careful about listening to what others say. Most of the time they just spew out what someone else told them. They're essentially giving you opinions based on no solid ground. Do your research. Find your facts before you claim your beliefs are right. Among the intelligent, educated, well-known scholars and historians out there, the question is not "did Jesus exist?" The only question is, "was He a man or the Messiah?"

"Alright it's getting late buddy, time for bed."

"But dad, wait."

## What makes the difference? How do we know?

“Oh boy. Do we really need to go there right now? Ok, let me do this fast.”

The main differentiating factor that separates Jesus from any other religion is the Resurrection. No other religions consist of a God who resurrected himself. Well, if they did, they didn't pop up until after the New Testament, which means they copied from the story of Jesus, not the other way around.

Regardless, of all the false prophets out there who claimed to be the living God, once they physically died, so did their religious following. When Jesus died and rose again, His enormous following just began. It was the end, but it was just the beginning. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:17 that the Resurrection is the very linchpin of the Christian faith: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins.” (206)

When Jesus was crucified even his disciples at first got nervous that this was all just a hoax. Then Jesus appeared to them after his death. He did what He said he was going to do and everything He preached and claimed became REAL. In fact, He appeared to many people after His death:

- To Mary Magdalene, in John 20:10-18
- To the other women, in Matthew 28:8-10
- To Cleopas and another disciple on the road to Emmaus, in Luke 24:13-32
- To eleven disciples and others, in Luke 24:33-49
- To ten apostles and others, with Thomas absent, in John 20:26-30
- To seven apostles, in John 21:1-14
- He was with the apostles at the Mount of Olives before his ascension, in Luke 24:50-52 and Acts 1:4-9
- And right before he ascended he gave the great commission to his disciples---to make disciples of all nations, in Matthew 28:16-20 (234)

“Remember the Great Commission. It's one of the three main things that God calls you to do as a Christian. Love Him, love His people, and make disciples of all nations.

Also, keep a note of these scriptures of Jesus' appearances. You'll need them one day to defend what you believe and also to share with other new believers that are struggling with doubts.”

## Then what happened?

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“What happened after Jesus appeared to people after his Resurrection?”

I paused for a second. It's getting late. Don't think about the clock. These are amazing questions I thought to myself. This is what you want your son to talk about.

I refocused, and then continued.

Well, his disciples and followers were on fire. You have to remember, even Jesus' own brother didn't believe he was Lord until he resurrected himself. Then his brother James believed. And guess what happened to him, he was stoned to death after announcing that his brother was the Savior.

Ten of the eleven remaining disciples (the twelfth, Judas, left the pack when he betrayed Jesus) went on a mission to talk about Jesus to everyone they could. They were beaten, imprisoned, hated. But they didn't stop, to the point of grisly deaths. (45)

1. Andrew was crucified and tied to the cross instead of being nailed, so he would suffer longer. He lived for two days and preached to passersby.
2. James (son of Zebedee) was beheaded.
3. Philip was crucified.
4. Bartholomew was crucified, one account claiming he was skinned alive and then beheaded.
5. Thomas was killed by local religious authorities who speared him.
6. Matthew was stabbed in the back by a swordsmen.
7. Thaddaeus was crucified.
8. Simon the Canaanite was crucified.
9. Peter was crucified and as the story goes, asked to be hung upside down so that his death would not be seen as equal to Jesus.
10. John was the only one of the original disciples that didn't die a violent death.

Who do you know would do that today? I know I don't have the guts. I'm afraid that if someone put a gun to my head and told me to recant my faith, I would in order to save my life for you and your sister and your mom. I really love Jesus, Gio. But I couldn't do what those guys did back then.

For them to literally die for the sake of telling others about Jesus means they were convinced that what they saw was real. That would be like Jesus popping up in this room right now for us. Could you imagine what would happen to us? We would never again be afraid to tell people about him. We would devote the rest of our lives to it. We wouldn't be afraid to die doing it either, because we would know what was on the other side.

You know what, after saying that I realize that's actually how we need to be right now. As Christians we're supposed to die to ourselves and be willing to put our lives on the line for him. I feel Jesus. I really do. But I'm also human. To get to that point, I would need to see him.

After I yawned again, "Alright that's a lot for tonight. Your brain is going to explode."

"Ok. I get what you're saying about all of this dad. His disciples were on fire. The Resurrection was the main part of the entire story. Once that happened, people really started believing. But..."

## PART 2

# Wonder if the roman soldier let him out?

“Man, how does your mind even think like that?”

“Well, you said he appeared to his disciples after he died. Maybe he didn’t die. Maybe the tomb guards just let him out?”

“Ok that’s it.” I sat up tall on top of his bed. I turned his night light back on. “You really want to go there don’t you? You promise you won’t get nightmares? I’m about to tell you some grim details.”

“Dad, you know that stuff doesn’t bother me.”

Ok, there’s two things you have to remember here. Number one, there’s no way Jesus physically survived the crucifixion itself. The roman soldiers were responsible for ensuring that their prisoners were dead. Their jobs and lives depended on it. The responsible soldier would be put to death themselves, so they had a huge incentive to make absolutely sure that each and every victim was dead when he was removed from the cross. (201)

They were cruel, heartless, worst of the worst individuals. They whipped Jesus and tortured him in the most inhumane way. Brace yourself, this is going to be hard to hear.

Jesus was in critical condition before he even got to the cross. The soldiers flogged him for hours. Roman floggings were extremely brutal. They used whips with metal balls woven into them. These balls ripped apart the flesh, exposing muscles and bones. A third-century historian by the name of Eusebius described flogging by saying, ‘The sufferer’s veins were laid bare, and the very muscles, sinews, and bowels of the victim were open to exposure.’ (195)

He then had to carry the cross through all of this pain. This kind of beating would kill most people. The tremendous pain caused hypovolemic shock, meaning the person is suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood. (196)

Jesus was in hypovolemic shock as he staggered up the road to the execution site at Calvary, carrying the horizontal beam of the cross. Finally Jesus collapsed and the Roman soldiers ordered Simon to carry the cross for him. (196)

The roman soldiers then used spikes that were 5-7 inches long and drove them into Jesus’ wrists. And it’s important to understand that the nail would go through the place where the median nerve runs. This is the largest nerve going out to the hand, and it would be crushed by the nail that was pounded into it. (197)

Did you ever get hit in the elbow on your funny bone? That's actually another nerve called the ulna nerve. It's so painful that some people pass out after having something called a vasovagal response.

Well, picture someone taking a pair of pliers and squeezing and crushing that nerve. That effect would be similar to what Jesus experienced. (197)

The pain was unbearable. They actually had to come up with another word to describe it. Did you know excruciating means, "out of the cross?" (198)

Nails were then driven into Jesus' feet, through nerves that would again cause similar nerve pain.

His arms were outstretched so much that both his shoulders would have been dislocated.

But then, here's what I really want you to remember, the cause of death.

Once a person is hanging in the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation. (198)

A person hanging on the cross would fight to get out of a slouched position, which basically puts the chest into an inhaled position. In order to exhale, Jesus would have to stand up to relax his muscles and breathe in. This would cause a lot of pain and tearing in his feet, and more ripping and tearing as his back rubs against the wooden cross. Eventually, exhaustion took over and Jesus wasn't able to push up anymore to breathe. (198)

Eventually his breathing slowed down and he went into an irregular heartbeat. When his heart was beating erratically, Jesus would have known that he was at the moment of death, which is when he said, "Lord into your hands I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46) He then died of cardiac arrest. (199)

So you see, there's no way Jesus made it off that cross alive. Let's say somehow he did. Well, there was no way Jesus was getting out of that tomb in the condition that he was in, let alone running away from anybody.

Second, like I said before, the roman soldier guarding that tomb would have never let him escape. So let's say everyone agrees Jesus died but now his friends came to remove his body in an attempt to make it look like he was missing. Again, it's not going to happen. The tomb guard's life depended on it.

But wonder if they did get his body out?

Ha. Ok fine. Even if they did get Jesus' body out, do you think an army of soldiers weren't going to chase them down on horses and catch them, who were running on foot or donkeys? They knew what was at stake. If Jesus ends up missing, Christianity not only lives, it thrives. They would never let it happen under their watch.

But actually it did. And no one could explain how.

"So the tomb was really empty?"

"Yes. Everyone acknowledged it too. Nobody, not even the Roman authorities or Jewish leaders ever claimed that the tomb still contained Jesus' body. They only came up with absurd stories to try to explain what happened."

"Who found the tomb empty?"

"Mary and her friends."

"Maybe Mary and her lady friends made up the story about Jesus being missing?"

Well, here's a really important point you have to remember. At the time of Jesus, women were looked down upon. They were not privy to many things, especially religion. Jewish leaders didn't even want them hearing the words they preached. The fact that the gospels report that women discovered the empty tomb bolsters the story's authenticity. (Page 263)

Women's testimony was regarded as so worthless that they weren't even allowed to serve as legal witnesses in a Jewish court of law. The fact that women are the first witness to an empty tomb is most plausibly explained by the reality that, like it or not, they were the discoverers of the empty tomb. This shows that the gospel writers faithfully recorded what happened, even if it was embarrassing. (218)

"How come all the Jewish people didn't immediately convert?"

"How did you even think of asking me a question like that?"

"Well dad, Jesus was Jewish and a lot of the people he talked to and lived among were Jewish. If they all saw and heard about this happening, why do we still have Jewish people today?"

Well, a lot of Jewish people did convert. In fact, over ten thousand of them. Right, not all of them. But the social structures that gave Jews their national identity were extremely important to them. It would be hard to break from that culture. (250) Your family would disown you. Your life would be lost and perhaps threatened. Think about how hard it is for people to change. We see it all the time at the gym. People know exactly what they're supposed to eat to be healthy. They know they need to workout to lose weight and be strong. How many actually do it? Change is hard.

So for ten thousand to convert just five weeks after Jesus is crucified, that's HUGE. Think about if that happened today. That's a powerful human being to convert that many people, that fast.

It's not possible. Unless you're the living God.

## PART 3

But if the bible was written by man, how can we believe everything in it?

“Where did that come from?”

“I don’t know. I’m just thinking.”

The bible was indeed written by men, but it was inspired by God. Do you know how it all came together? It’s incredible and almost unbelievable. Stories and letters that make up the bible today were found in all different parts of those early countries, from all different people completely unrelated to each other, and sometimes hundreds and hundreds of years apart.

You can trust that it’s real based on the reliability of eyewitness testimonies, like the four Gospels. The four Gospels are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Most of these guys didn’t even know each other.

Three of them were unlikely characters too. No one would have had motivation to lie by claiming these guys wrote the gospels. Mark and Luke weren’t even among the twelve disciples. Matthew was, but he was a hated tax collector. John was the only one that was extremely prominent. He wasn’t just one of the disciples, but one of Jesus’ inner three, along with James and Peter. (Page 23)

These guys worked hard to preserve Jesus’ teachings and miracles. It wasn’t like it is today. They didn’t have the technology to save information. They had to memorize stories and facts exactly as they happened. It was common practice and extremely hard work.

But remember, they had nothing to gain except criticism. They certainly had nothing to gain financially. If anything, this would have provided pressure to keep quiet, deny Jesus, to downplay him, even to forget they ever met him---yet because of their integrity, they proclaimed what they saw, even when it meant suffering and death. (48)

We can be assured that the events they recorded are based on either direct or indirect eyewitness testimony. (25) It’s significant to note the consistency of their accounts too. There is enough discrepancy to show that there could have been no previous concert among them; and at the same time such substantial agreement as to show that they were all independent narrators of the same great transaction. No one can discount them or disprove them. (46)

“Has anyone proved the bible wrong?”

Out of all the discoveries over time and the scientists and archaeologists that have lived to disprove the bible, it still stands the test of time. No one can disprove it. The bible remains as the number one selling book each year for a reason. Over 2,000 years later Jesus continues to save people’s lives. No one in history has ever had this powerful of an influence.

“What do you mean they were  
inspired by God?”

There are times when you can say things you never thought you could say. You could write things you never thought you could write. You can do things you never thought you can do. Something is guiding you. It’s divine intervention.

God used regular people and sometimes the people you would least expect. I have no doubt he used them to get these words on paper. It would be easy to believe in Him if he somehow scribed them on a tablet himself and left for others to find. He doesn’t want it to be easy. Following God isn’t. He wants serious candidates only. And serious candidates fight hard to discover Him, and share the good news of Him.

The church was very careful selecting which gospels made up the New Testament. They weren’t ‘gung-ho,’ sweeping in every last document that happened to have anything about Jesus in it. This shows deliberation and careful analysis. (69)

The New Testament was reliably preserved. Benjamin Warfield put it this way, “If we compare the present state of the New Testament text with that of any other ancient writing, we must declare it to be marvelously correct. Such has been the care with which the New Testament has been copied---a care which has doubtless grown out of true reverence for its holy words...The New Testament is unrivaled among ancient writings in the purity of its text as actually transmitted and kept in use.” (70)

Off subject but not, here’s another fun fact. The early biography accounts of Jesus started spreading within just a few years of His Resurrection, many believe 2-5 years. In comparison, the two earliest biographies of Alexander the Great were written more than four hundred years after Alexander’s death in 323 B.C., yet historians consider them to be generally trustworthy. (33)

“I know another fun fact dad.”

“What’s that?”

“The fact that when talking about dates we say B.C., before Christ, and A.D. We learned that in Latin it means “anno domini,” in the year of the Lord.”

“That is awesome Gio.”

I could see his eyes starting to fade.

“Alright. I’m starting to get sleepy now. I just don’t want people to lie to me when I grow up.”

They will. Sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. You know how many things I learned in history class that were wrong or inaccurate? Later on in life I discovered that a lot of facts that we learned from textbooks weren’t necessarily facts.

People are people and they will misconstrued the truth. Books, videos, articles, stories, research, are all someone’s opinions. If it was created by humans, you have to constantly analyze the facts for yourself to decipher what’s truth and what’s not. That’s why we say things like listen to God’s word not the world’s.

“The world? What does that mean?”

You’ll hear this a lot in life. The world in a sense is all those who reject God and His ways. We are all sinful by nature. But Christians are supposed to break that cycle (1 John 5:4-5). Many people don’t, non-Christians and even Christians alike. If you look around at our society and witness how most people live, it’s selfish, self-destructive, hostile, and harmful to the environment and others.

You can’t think like the majority, you can’t act like the majority, and you can’t talk like them. You need to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright and godly lives. (Titus 2:12). Your challenge in life will be to be in this world and not of it. (John 17:16)

I realized it was silent. Gio’s eyes were half closed. But I was rolling now. I had to finish this comment out.

There are not many absolute truths in life. If you jump, you’ll come back down. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. You’re born and then you die. Besides facts like this, many things aren’t so black and white. The only source of truth is the bible.

I used to not understand what that meant. But it basically means, people will come up with their own opinions, philosophies, and ways of doing things. The world will create all types of corrupt ideologies, messages, and morality that can persuade your mindset. But there is only one true Way that will stick and will last when applied to your life. That’s God’s Word, the bible. It’s your blueprint. Always resort to that before anything else.

Gio’s breathing relaxed. It seemed like he was sleeping but then, he popped out one last question.

“But how will I know?”

You have to feel it. Sometimes things aren’t possible to put into words. No matter what you hear it won’t make sense until you feel it.

You now know the facts that Jesus was real. But if you really want to know, you have to feel Him. You have to have a relationship with him. You’ll start to feel His presence working in you and around you. Then you’ll know.

He was out cold. I’m not sure how much of the last statement he heard.

I pulled his sheets over him and finished with what I always tell him before bed.

“You’re an amazing kid Gio. You’ll do amazing things in life. God has big things planned for you. I’m proud of you and so is He.”

Interestingly, I was more awake now than before this conversation started. Since I couldn’t fall asleep, I decided to go downstairs and open up my computer.

That’s when I wrote this story.