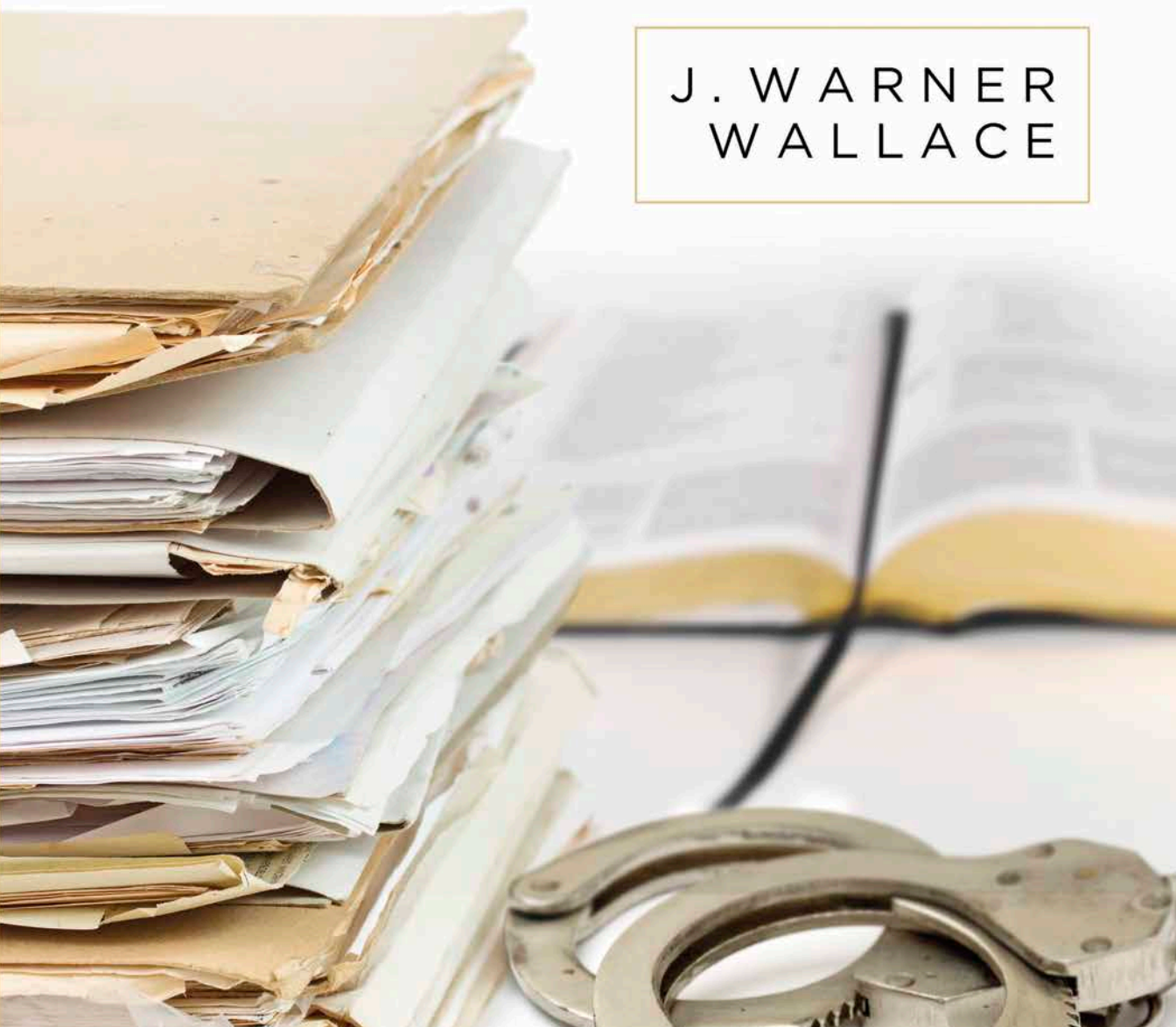


COLD-CASE CHRISTIANITY PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

A HOMICIDE DETECTIVE INVESTIGATES
THE CLAIMS OF THE GOSPELS

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C O L D - C A S E C H R I S T I A N I T Y P A R T I C I P A N T ' S G U I D E

A HOMICIDE DETECTIVE INVESTIGATES
THE CLAIMS OF THE GOSPELS

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CONTENTS

SESSION ONE	
Don't Be a "Know-It-All" and Learn How to "Infer"	7
SESSION TWO	
Think "Circumstantially" and Test Your Witnesses	19
SESSION THREE	
Hang on Every Word and Separate Artifacts from Evidence	31
SESSION FOUR	
Resist Conspiracy Theories, Know When "Enough Is Enough," and Prepare for an Attack	45
SESSION FIVE	
Were They Present?	57
SESSION SIX	
Were They Corroborated?	71
SESSION SEVEN	
Were They Accurate?	85
SESSION EIGHT	
Were They Biased?	99

Session One

DON'T BE A "KNOW-IT-ALL" AND LEARN HOW TO "INFER"



I was thirty-five years old before I first paid attention to a pastor's sermon. A fellow officer had been inviting me to church for many months, and while I was able to put him off for some time, I eventually acquiesced and attended a Sunday-morning service with my family. I managed to ignore most of what the pastor talked about until he began to paint a picture of Jesus that caught my attention. He characterized Jesus as a really smart guy who had some remarkably wise things to say about life, family, relationships, and work. I began to believe that this might be true. While I was uninterested in bowing my knee to Jesus as God, I was at least willing to listen to Jesus as a teacher. A week later I purchased my first Bible.

Something about the Gospels caught my attention, more as an investigator than as someone interested in the ancient philosophy of an imaginary sage. By this time in my life, I had already served as a patrol officer and a member of the Gang Detail, the Metro Team (investigating street narcotics), the SWAT Team, and the Crime Impact Team (investigating career criminals). I had interviewed hundreds (if not thousands) of eyewitnesses and suspects. I had become familiar with the nature of eyewitness statements, and I understood how testimony was evaluated in a court of law. Something about the Gospels struck me as more than mythological storytelling. The Gospels actually appeared to be ancient eyewitness accounts. I began carefully employing my investigative training in Forensic Statement Analysis (FSA) to the gospel of Mark. Within a month, and in spite of my deep skepticism and hesitation, I concluded that Mark's gospel was the eyewitness account of the apostle Peter.

In my current assignment, I investigate cold-case murders. Unlike other lesser crimes, an unsolved homicide is never closed; time doesn't run out on a murder investigation.

There are many similarities between investigating cold cases and investigating the claims of Christianity. Cold-case homicides are events from the distant past for which there is often little or no forensic evidence. These kinds of cases are sometimes solved on the basis of eyewitness testimony, even though many years have passed between the point of the crime and the point of the investigation.

Christianity makes a claim about an event from the distant past for which there is little or no forensic evidence. Like cold cases, the truth about what happened can be discovered by examining the statements of eyewitnesses and comparing them with what additional evidence is accessible to us. If the eyewitnesses can be evaluated (and their statements can be verified by what we have available), an equally strong circumstantial case can be made for the claims of the New Testament. But, are there any reliable eyewitness statements in existence to corroborate in the first place? This became the most important question I had to answer in my personal investigation of Christianity. Were the gospel narratives eyewitness accounts or were they only moralistic mythologies? Were the Gospels reliable or were they filled with untrustworthy, supernatural absurdities? The most important questions I could ask about Christianity just so happened to fall within my area of expertise.

I hope to share some of that expertise with you in this study. A quote from C. S. Lewis in his book *God in the Dock* has stuck with me through the years. Lewis correctly noted, “Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and, if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.” Christianity, if true, is worthy of our investigation.



OPEN THE CASE FILE

(5 MINUTES - CONSIDER AND ANSWER AS MANY QUESTIONS AS POSSIBLE)



How would you define the word “faith”?



Some people define faith as believing in something even when there isn't any evidence for it. What role do you think evidence ought to play in our Christian faith?



Think about how you became a Christian. What role, if any, did evidence play in your decision to become a Christian?



What would you say to someone who said they didn't think there was any evidence for Christianity?



VIEW THE VIDEO TESTIMONY

(10 MINUTES - TAKE NOTES)

Controlling your presuppositions (trying not to be a "know-it-all")

Letting the evidence speak for itself when it comes to Christianity

Understanding the difference between “possible” and “reasonable”

Employing “Abductive Reasoning”

Evaluating the alternative explanations for the resurrection



CONDUCT A GROUP INVESTIGATION

(23 MINUTES - INVESTIGATE THE ISSUES AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS)

Christians are often accused of being “biased” simply because we believe in the supernatural. This accusation has power in our current pluralistic culture. Biased people are seen as prejudicial and unfair, arrogant and overly confident of their position. Nobody wants to be identified as someone who is biased or opinionated. But make no mistake about it, all of us have a point of view; all of us hold opinions and ideas that color the way we see the world. Anyone who tells you they are completely objective and devoid of presuppositions has another more important problem: he (or she) is either astonishingly naïve or a liar.

The question is not whether or not we have ideas, opinions, or preexisting points of view; the question is whether or not we will allow these perspectives to prevent us from examining the evidence objectively. It's possible to have a prior opinion, yet leave this presupposition at the door in order to examine the evidence fairly. We ask jurors to do this all the time. In the state of California, jurors are repeatedly instructed to “keep an open mind throughout the trial” and not to “let bias, sympathy, prejudice or public opinion influence

your decision.” The courts assume that people have biases, hold sympathies and prejudices, and are aware of public opinion. In spite of this, jurors are required to “keep an open mind.”

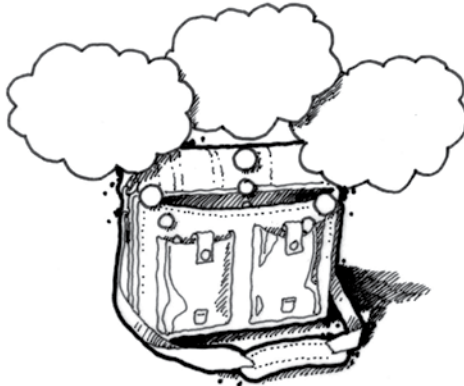


In the following diagram from *Cold-Case Christianity*, fill in three presuppositions people might possess in a jury trial. Then fill in three presuppositions people might have when considering the claims of Christianity:



PHILOSOPHICAL NATURALISM

The presuppositional belief that only natural laws and forces (as opposed to supernatural forces) operate in the world. Philosophical naturalists believe that nothing exists beyond the natural realm.



**Dangerous Presuppositions
for Jurors**



**Dangerous Presuppositions
for Truth Seekers**

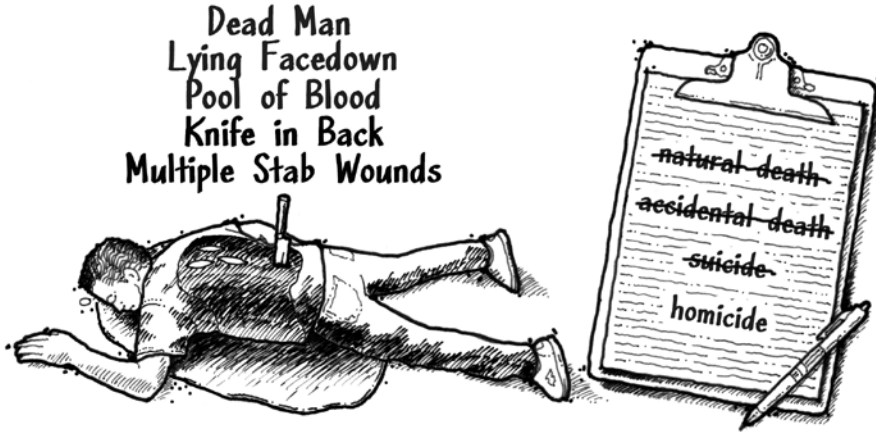


People often develop presuppositions from watching the Christians in their lives. In general, how might we live as Christians to prevent our friends and family members from developing presuppositional biases against Christianity?



There are times when our friends or family members resist our efforts to share the truth about Christianity. How might the understanding of the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard of proof help us overcome their resistance?

Imagine you have been called to the scene of a DBR (a “Dead Body Report”), as J. Warner described in the video. Use abductive reasoning to determine the most reasonable explanation. Examine the scene illustrated below (from the book *Cold-Case Christianity*). Given the evidence described in the diagram, which of the four potential explanations is most reasonable? Cross out the explanations that are unreasonable, then write why you think the explanation you’ve picked is most reasonable:





Abductive reasoning is a skill each of us can employ on a daily basis. Pick one of the following activities and describe how abductive reasoning might be used to make the best decision:

1. Purchasing a new car.
2. Deciding who to marry.
3. Deciding what is true about God.

Dr. Gary Habermas has taken the time to identify the “minimal facts” (or evidences) related to the resurrection. While there are many claims in the New Testament related to this important event, not all are accepted by skeptics and wary investigators. Dr. Habermas surveyed the most respected and well-established historical scholars and identified a number of facts that *are* accepted by the vast majority of researchers in the field.

Consider the following minimal facts about the resurrection:

1. Jesus died on the cross and was buried.
2. Jesus’s tomb was empty and no one ever produced His body.
3. Jesus’s disciples believed that they saw Jesus resurrected from the dead.
4. Jesus’s disciples were transformed following their alleged resurrection observations.

In the diagram below, four explanations have been offered to explain these simple facts. Begin the process of abductive reasoning by working as a group to write the strengths and weaknesses of each explanation (refer to *Cold-Case Christianity* chapter 2 for assistance completing the diagram). Note that the first three explanations could be offered by someone who *rejects* the truthfulness of the resurrection or the claims of Christianity.

The fourth explanation is, of course, the *Christian* explanation:



THE MINIMAL-FACTS APPROACH

Gary Habermas (Distinguished Research Professor at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary) has popularized the “minimal-facts” approach to examining the resurrection. He limited his list of facts to those that were strongly supported (using the criteria of textual critics) and to those facts that were granted by virtually all scholars (from skeptics to believers). Habermas eventually wrote about his findings in *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*.

Explanation	Strengths	Weaknesses
Jesus didn't really die on the cross		
The disciples lied about the Resurrection		
The disciples hallucinated the Resurrection		
The Resurrection truly occurred		



Now, given the evidence you've examined in the chart and the evidence described in the following diagram, which of the four potential explanations is most reasonable? Cross out the explanations that are unreasonable, then write why you think the explanation you've picked is most reasonable:

Jesus Died and Was Buried
 The Tomb Was Empty
 The Disciples Claimed to See Jesus Resurrected
 The Disciples Were Transformed

~~Jesus didn't die~~
~~The disciples lied~~
~~They hallucinated~~
~~The Resurrection occurred as they reported it~~



TAKE A PERSONAL ASSESSMENT

(5 MINUTES OR MORE - EXAMINE YOUR OWN SITUATION AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS)



Think back to before you were a Christian. What presuppositional beliefs or interests do you think you might have held that distracted or prevented you from hearing the claims of Christianity? How did you overcome them?



Do you think you have enough evidence (beyond your own personal experience) to demonstrate to others that God exists or that Christianity is true? What kind of evidence would you share?



FORM A STRATEGIC PLAN

(5 MINUTES - EXAMINE YOUR CALENDAR AND CREATE AN ACTION PLAN)



Think about the presuppositions of one person you would like to see come to faith, and write them down in the space provided. What might you do specifically to help them recognize that we all hold presuppositions?



Good intentions alone rarely take us very far in our efforts. Are you willing to make a strategic plan of action and commit your plan to a date on a calendar? If so, write down a date this week, _____, when you will initiate a plan of action to begin addressing the presuppositions of the person(s) you identified above.



MAKE A CLOSING STATEMENT

(1 MINUTE - CONTEMPLATE AND PRAY)

Like other nonbelievers in our world today, I used to think of *faith* as the opposite of *reason*. In this characterization of the dichotomy, I believed that atheists were reasonable “free-thinkers” while believers were simple, mindless drones who blindly followed the unreasonable teaching of their leadership. But if you think about it, *faith* is actually the opposite of *unbelief*, not *reason*. As I began to read through the Bible as a skeptic, I came to understand that the biblical definition of faith is a well-placed and reasonable inference based on evidence. I wasn’t raised in the Christian culture and I think I have an unusually high amount of respect for evidence. Perhaps this is why this definition of faith comes easily to me. I now

understand that it's possible for reasonable people to examine the evidence and conclude that Christianity is *true*. While my skeptical friends may not agree on how the evidence related to the resurrection should be interpreted, I want them to understand that I've arrived at my conclusions reasonably.



Dear God, we thank You for Your many generous gifts. We pray that we will return Your gift of love by loving You in return with all our heart, soul, and mind. Help us to use our minds as we reason with others about the truth of Christianity. Let us be aware of presuppositions and engage others with tools of reason You provide. We want to share Your truth and Your love with everyone. In Jesus's name we pray, amen.



CONDUCT A SECONDARY INVESTIGATION

(READ ON YOUR OWN FOR BETTER UNDERSTANDING)

To better understand the issues raised in this session, read the alternative explanations for the resurrection of Jesus listed in *Cold-Case Christianity* chapter 2: "Learn How to 'Infer.'" Take notes specifically for the section entitled "An Ancient Death-Scene Investigation" (pages 40–50).
