

# AN ORIENTATION TO DISCIPLESHIP



**Real**

It's hard to know what's real these days isn't it? Take another look at the picture on the front cover.

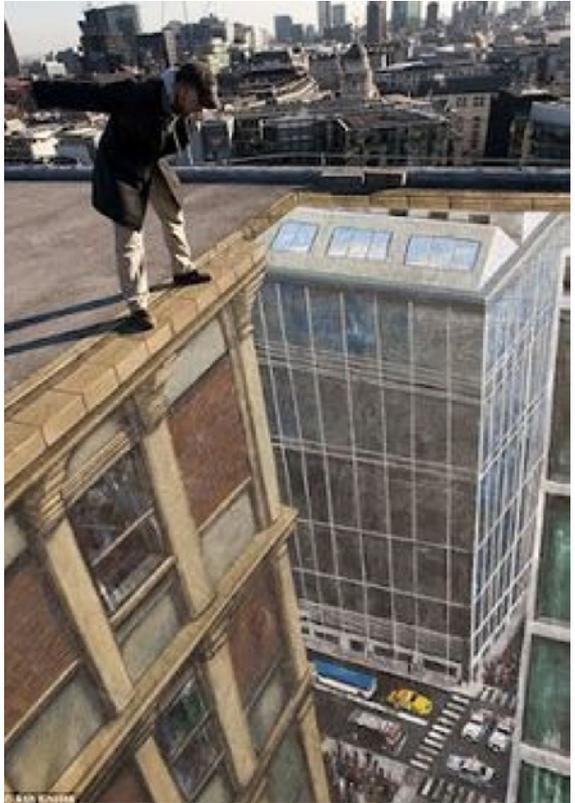
*Would you drive that road?*

Would you stand on the side of this building? It's a long way down. Are you afraid of heights?

Here's the thing. Neither of them are real. These are very well done 3-D paintings that truly bend your mind.

But there's the problem. It's hard to know what's real anymore. What's honest? What's the truth? And maybe nowhere is this as difficult a question to answer as at church. Are the people really that nice? Are they judging me behind my back? Do I really fit in?

If you've spent any time looking for a church home, you know how difficult it is to find a place where you feel comfortable, that speaks to you spiritually, and the people (and Pastor) are real and honest with you!



*What has your experience been in finding a church home?*

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First and foremost, we would like to let you know that we are honored that you feel at home enough at Immanuel to consider being a part of our faith community.



And just in case you were wondering... we aren't the perfect church. We are a great church, but not a perfect church. The seats aren't filled with perfect people either. We all have our difficulties and our doubts. We've all got things that aren't the first thing we are going to share with you or with anyone else for that matter. In other words, we're sinners. Imperfect people who choose to walk together with one another, accepting one another, caring for one another, encouraging each other, each and every day. But that's what makes us great... and unique. We Give. Real. Grace. So relax... and just be yourself! God made you just the way he wanted and needed to make you to show how great he is!

*Before we go any further, are there any questions that you have about what you've seen, heard, or experienced at Immanuel?*

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Finding places to be real and honest can be difficult today. But that's who Immanuel is and that's what we aim to be for one another. A place of real community and real relationships with one another. We seek to meet people exactly where they are and serve them in the way that is best for them.

Now we have to be honest with you. We didn't come up with this on our own. We borrowed it from God. It was his idea first (most things are!).

If you recall, in God's Story, he created the world so that he could have a relationship with his creation. He created us to be like him. Or as he said, he made us "in his image" (*Genesis 1*). He made us to have a real, open, honest and perfect relationship with him.

More than that, he also created a partner for us. For Adam, Eve. For Eve, Adam. In other words, we were made to belong! We were made to belong perfectly to God and to one another. Again, open, honest, real relationships that defined us from the very beginning.

*What does it mean for you to belong? How would you define "community" for you?*

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## NOT “REAL”!

So what happened? You got it! Sin. Remember that everything that God made, everything that he had made perfect, was affected by our sin. That includes our relationships with God and with one another.

The good news, as you will recall, is that God wanted that relationship restored so badly that he sent Jesus to fix it and repair it.



And here is where the doubt creeps in. Here is where that nagging question of, “Is the story real?” might start to nag a little bit. In our society today, questioning reality, questioning truth is second nature. We watch the news and we wonder if there is a certain spin that is being put on the story to push an agenda. We see a story on Facebook and wonder, “Is that real?”

Unfortunately, the doubting that something is real goes much further than just what we consume with media. It’s infected our personal relationships as well. We wonder if people are being honest... because white lies are so common. We question if our coworkers are being honest in their assessment of our work. We even struggle with honesty in the closest romantic relationships.

Doubting our belonging. Doubting our connection with one another. It’s an affect of sin. So is it any wonder that we doubt our connection with God? Is it any wonder why we struggle to believe that the Creator loves us? Is it any wonder why we would doubt that God sent Jesus to rebuild our connection with him? Is it any wonder, when all Satan has to say is, “Did God really say?” to get us to turn our eyes from what God desires for us?

*Where do your biggest doubts creep in when it comes to God’s story?*

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## GET “REAL”

It would be hard to blame anyone for doubting. Why? Because we all have doubts. All of us. (I told you we were honest!) It's normal. If we struggle to maintain relationships and trust with the people we see, how much more difficult would it be to maintain a relationship with someone you can't see?

*So put yourself in God's position, just for a minute. If you wanted people to know you and have the deep and loving relationship that you created them to have with you, how would you overcome the skepticism and doubt?*

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*For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly... but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*Romans 5:6,8*

God's answer to that question was simply to “get real,” to make himself, his plan, and his will for the world known. Jesus is the answer to “how can we be sure?” He was born in a real place, Bethlehem. His earthly parents were real people with real genealogies, Mary and Joseph. You can go there today and see where he was born. He lived in a real small town, Nazareth. Jesus walked the roads of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem from 4 BC to 30 AD. He met real people, had real relationships and did real miracles. And it's not just Christians who would admit this. History itself, secular history admits that Jesus did all of these things.

From as early as a few years after Jesus' death, humanity as a whole has had to deal with the Jesus question. The most famous of these historians is a man named Josephus. He wrote a history of the Jewish people called Antiquities. This was written in 93 AD. He wrote it while employed by the Roman emperor Vespasian. At this time, Christianity was very new and not well respected by the Roman empire. They saw Christianity as a problem that needed to be fixed.

Yet in this work, widely regarded as one of the most important historical books of the 1st century, Josephus wrote this about Jesus.

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*“Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man; for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. And when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him... And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.”*

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And it's not only Josephus. There are other historical accounts of Jesus from the first century written by people who had no reason to lift him up as a great man. In fact, Jesus is the most written about person in all of human history! No matter what, people have to deal with Jesus!

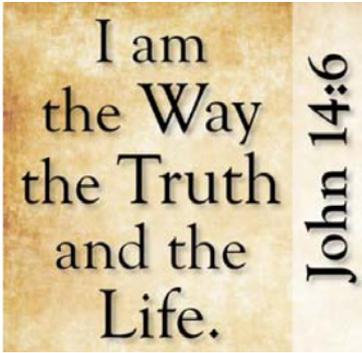
## **YOU'RE NOT ALONE!**

But it wasn't only people outside of the church that wanted to make sure that Jesus' life was placed in history. The early church also made sure that followers knew that Jesus was a true and real historical figure. The Gospel accounts of Jesus take great pains to make sure people are aware of the political and church leaders who were alive during Jesus' life and ministry. This helped to put Jesus' life in context and also to give people a reference to check the honesty and truth of the claims that followers were making about Jesus. We call these historical statements of faith the Creeds. There are three Creeds that have been used throughout the life of the church: The Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed.

The Apostles Creed is the oldest, with its first written form coming in the 1st Century, just 70 years after Jesus' death. While 70 years might seem like a lot, in ancient history, that's nothing. To put it in context, stories about Buddha weren't written down until 600 years after his death. Yet no one doubts that he was a real person!

## SO WHAT?

You might be saying to yourself, “That’s a nice history lesson, but what does that have to do with me?”



*The answer?* Everything. If you want to let people know you’re real, you show up. You let them see you. If you want people to believe what you’re saying, you show them proof. That’s what God did. He broke into human history. He sent his Son, Jesus, to show that he had not forgotten his people or his promise to fix the broken relationship that sin had caused. He made his promise real, visible, and historical through Jesus.

And that leads us to the Jesus problem, as author C.S. Lewis called it. If Jesus truly lived in human history, as we have seen. If he truly did miracles, something that even his detractors didn’t dispute. If he died under the edict of Pontius Pilate, a historical figure. And if his body was not where it was supposed to be three days later, something that has never been disputed, then we have three choices, especially when Jesus makes a claim like the one above. He is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord. He is who he says he is. That’s the Jesus problem. Said another way, again C.S. Lewis, Jesus is the question that everyone will have to answer.

When it comes to proving it, God did everything that we would ask of him. He made himself visible. He walked among us. He talked with us. He showed us what he had in mind for all of humanity. He sent Jesus!

*Have you ever considered that Jesus is God’s proof?*

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## **BELONGING**

But again, why did God do all this? Why did he send Jesus into human history to prove his love for you? To show you that you belong! You belong in the perfect relationship that God had in mind for you from the start. You belong in eternal life, where there are no more broken relationships with one another. You belong to something that stretches beyond your lifetime, through all of human history, into eternity itself: God's Family.

That's what the Church is. It's God's children joined together under God's promises in Jesus Christ. If Jesus really was sent by God, lived, died, and rose again, then all of God's promises to us are true as well. Jesus is God's promise that we belong to him!

So if God's promise in Jesus Christ is true, then a few other things are true for you as well. These are also in the Apostles Creed.

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*I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
maker of Heaven and Earth.*

(God is your Father who gives you all of Creation as a gift,  
including life itself. You matter to God!)

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*I Believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried.  
He descended into hell. The third day he rose again  
and ascended into heaven  
where he sits at the right hand of God the Father.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

(Jesus came for you to rebuild the broken relationship  
with you. He is the Lord of your life!)

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*I Believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.*

(You belong!)

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## REAL COMMUNITY

We look forward to doing what Jesus did for all of us: making God's promises real for you! As a church family seek to meet each individual and family where they are. We don't want you to feel forced or coerced into anything. We believe that every person that God has brought into our church is uniquely gifted and called by God to be a part of our shared ministry. That means that each person has a part to play in our work to Give. Real. Grace.

However, that doesn't mean that we expect everyone to be at the same place in their faith walk. That's why we are striving to develop the real sense of community around each individual. What does that look like?

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- **Sunday Morning Worship and Fellowship**

Sunday morning is the time when the whole family gets together. Think of Sunday Dinner on an eternal scale. Our Father has some words he wants to share with us. But it's always great to see all the brothers and sisters, to catch up, and to check in with one another.

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- **Sunday Morning Bible Study**

This is an opportunity for more discussion and deeper conversations about faith.

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- **Wednesday Nights**

For those who can't make it on Sunday, or those who are looking for a contemporary worship offering, Immanuel provides another worship setting. This is a casual, conversational service that opens up the weekend!

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- **Service Projects**

As we discussed last week, a major mark of Immanuel is our generosity. Throughout the year, we come together to make a difference in our community.

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- **Fellowship Meals**

There's nothing like food to make people feel comfortable.

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- **In-Home Gatherings**

You'll find that Immanuel likes to spend time with one another... and we don't even have to plan to do it! Don't be surprised if you're invited to Pastor's house or someone else's home just to hang out!

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- **Trips Just For Fun!**

Who says that church has to be boring? Members get together to go to the movies, go out for dinner and drinks, and even go shopping with one another. Keep an eye out for activities that might just bring a smile to your face.

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**BUT IT'S NOT ABOUT US!**

Enough about us. Let's take a couple of minutes just to find out what you're looking for and what belonging means for you!

*What kinds of activities would be helpful in making you feel at home at Immanuel?*

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*What kind of church community activities would be most helpful in strengthening your relationship with God?*

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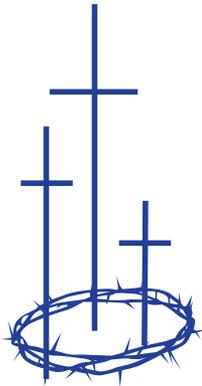
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# Immanuel

Give. Real. Grace.

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