



The Head and Heart series is a collection of written works directed toward exploring the mind and heart of Christ.

I believe it's imperative to explain who God is and to make known his love (or heart) for us. It's important to let people know that it's God's desire to work in our lives in a manner that's ultimately for our good. To understand the mind of God, we must first understand his heart. If everyone could come to the basic point of trust that God loves us and wants what's best for us, then God's heart (including all of the hard teachings of Jesus, his directives, and even the confusing parts of the Bible) would become clear and digestible to us.

In order to show the truth of Scripture, we must first demonstrate how the heart behind the directive will give us the things we ultimately want in life. Once that pathway is established, then the mind (or the head) of God becomes clear and logical.

Through the Head and Heart project, we will investigate what God is like, how he loves us, and why he directs us to live in the manner he does. Using narrative teaching, humor, and practical truths that make our lives work better, I will attempt to lead you to a deeper, fully committed interaction with God.

HEAD SPACE and How to Get the Most Out of This Book

As you read through *Five Assumptions About God and Why They Are Wrong*, I want to give you space to pause and think through what we're talking about in a deeper and more purposeful way. To that end, my friend David Ferguson and I created sections called "Head Space," which we have placed at the end of each chapter. There you'll find additional quotes from the Bible to look at and think through. You'll also find questions to chew on, suggested prayers, and ideas for conversations you could have around these topics.

Each "Head Space" has three parts: the first part helps you think through your connection with God; the second part focuses on your connection with others; and the third part explores how you might live differently because of what you've learned. You might interact with the Head Space sections alone, with some friends, for a few minutes, or over the course of a few days. However you want to use these guides, I hope they're helpful as you allow your assumptions about God to be challenged on the deepest levels of your head and heart.

Lastly, please check out JeffBogue.org for more thoughts around these topics.

INTRODUCTION

**WHO
DOESN'T
WANT TO
GO TO
HELL?**

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When I was six years old, I was invited to follow God based on false premises.

A preacher came to my church. As he was preaching—or, you might say, yelling—he asked a very direct question: “Who does not want to go to hell?”

He seemed to be addressing me personally. I thought, *I don't want to go to hell!*

And then the preacher told me what to do in order not to go to hell. “If you don't want to go to hell,” he shouted, “come forward right now and receive Jesus as your Savior.”

So I did.

In the subsequent months and years, I was taught that following God meant two things: first, you accept Christ as your Savior so you don't go to hell, and second, once you've made that decision, everything else is about keeping the rules that God sets out for you in the Bible. I learned that the Bible is a rule book, an instruction manual. If you follow the rules and instructions properly, you'll stay on the right side of God and you won't go to hell.

If you *don't* follow the rules and instructions properly, then

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maybe you never even received Christ in the first place. Maybe you are going to go to hell!

“The people who love God will obey his rules. Therefore, the more you obey his rules, the more evident it is that you love God.” That’s what they told me.

So, I went to church because that was one of the rules. Our family went to church whenever the doors were open because we were very committed to keeping the rules we’d been taught, and we believed that respecting those rules would keep us safe in our relationship with God. Every week at church our pastor would give us a new set of rules, such as:

- You’re not allowed to listen to music that isn’t written by Christians.
- You’re not allowed to drink any alcohol.
- You’re not allowed to use tobacco.
- You’re not allowed to go dancing.
- You’re not allowed to play games that involve playing cards (because playing cards could also be used for poker and gambling).
- You’re not allowed to go to the drive-in movies.

As a spiritually sensitive child, I listened to my pastor, and every time he would give me a new rule, I would do my best to follow it.

Yet when I became a teenager, I started to do some of my own math regarding this rule keeping. I realized there were some rules that came straight from the Bible and some rules that were just sort of made up at church; they weren’t in the

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Bible anywhere. And yet the rules were what we talked about the most when we gathered together.

I often joke that in the little church where I grew up, you couldn't smoke, drink, or chew, or date girls who do. You didn't have to love your fellow man, you just had to be nice to the people who kept the rules. You couldn't smoke because it was bad for your body and it dishonored God—but you were more than welcome to be 150 pounds overweight. You couldn't say certain words—but saying their substitute versions was absolutely fine. You needed to tell everybody about Jesus—except for certain groups of people, because they deserved God's punishment that was coming to them.

How did all that affect me? I learned to fake my relationship with God. Throughout the week, I lived however I wanted to live, did whatever I wanted to do, and was with whomever I wanted to be with.

But when I went to church, I acted like a church person. I knew all the right words to say and how to find all the right answers in the Bible. I knew how to dress. I knew what songs to sing. And I certainly knew how to make it look as if I were keeping the rules.

Nowhere in that process did my heart ever change. Nowhere did I learn to love Jesus. I just kept the rules.

Then something dramatic happened to me when I was a junior in college. I started hanging out with some people who were very bad rule keepers, but very much loved Jesus. I had a friend named Steve, who was a terrible rule keeper. He had long hair, tattoos, pierced ears, and sometimes drank alcohol.

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Any one of those might cause the floor to open up and drop you directly into hell. Or so I was taught. Yet Steve did it all.

And he loved Jesus.

Steve was one of the kindest people I'd ever met and one of the most devout followers of Christ I had ever interacted with. He loved to read the Bible, prayed for fun, and was very committed to sexual purity. I never once saw him drunk, heard him say an unkind word, or lose his patience.

The very things Steve was known for were the kinds of things that I felt short-circuited my own interaction with God. I was often impatient and unkind. It was very typical for me to mock or to be cruel to someone.

Yes, I knew the Bible very well and knew how to behave in church. I knew how to switch on my Christianity when it was beneficial for me. But if I was honest, I also knew I really didn't love Christ.

Steve and I were talking one day, and he asked me, "Have you ever accepted Christ as your Savior?"

"Yes," I said. "I was sitting in church when I was a kid and some preacher asked me if I wanted to go to hell or not and I said no. So I accepted Christ as my Savior and now I'm a Christian."

Steve listened, then asked, "What if you're just assuming that's what it means to be a Christ follower? What if working at being a good person is not what God is really looking for?"

What if you're following rules instead of following God himself?"

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At that moment, I started a journey of spiritual discovery. I began to question if I really knew what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. Was I a Christ follower ... or a committed rule keeper? I was discovering the two were very different.

Before long, I came to a powerful and shocking conclusion: I had been assuming that being a follower of Christ meant wanting to avoid going to hell, and that you needed to work hard to keep the rules if you wanted to keep being his follower. But I learned that ...

Jesus never asked anyone, “Who doesn’t want to go to hell?” Instead, the call of Jesus is, “Who will follow me?”

Following Jesus and loving him is very, very different from knowing and keeping rules we think are in the Bible. I started to think about how “loving Jesus” played out in Steve’s life. His love for Jesus translated into loving people. His deeply held faith showed up in very practical, even tangible ways.

I started to ask myself some profound questions. I wondered, *If following Jesus means that I love him with all of my heart, soul, mind, and strength, then wouldn’t that present itself as me loving my neighbor as myself?* (Matthew 22:37–39).

I began to question whether or not I was a true follower of Jesus.

After all, my heart had never really changed. I never developed genuine, unconditional love for other people. The desire to follow God because I loved him wasn’t there.

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All that had really happened in my life was that I'd adopted a false assumption that I wasn't going to hell. And I'd decided to keep certain rules at convenient times in order to maintain the false security and reputation that I was a Christian.

So I gave up trying to be a rule keeper.

Once I gave up and surrendered myself to the love of Jesus, I began to love him back. His love for me and mine for him began to define my life. My life began to change radically for the better.

Since then, I have spent most of my adult life trying to understand what it means to fully download the love of Christ into my life, and to embrace the transformation that comes with his love. I continue to discover new ways to love him back. This is a lot different from following a rulebook. I am always learning to hear him better, and he adjusts my assumptions along the way.

Through the pages of this book, I want to explore these ideas with you. I want to tell you some of the ways I heard about and experienced God. I want to talk to you about different, false assumptions I made about my relationship with God.

I wonder if maybe you are making some of the same assumptions I was making. Ask yourself, *what if these assumptions are wrong?*

This will be a journey of discovery. But that one question could change your life as much as it did mine. Could your understanding of the heart and mind of God change as dramatically as mine did?

By the end of this book, could you find yourself overwhelmed by the love of Jesus? Could you become transformed and empowered through your personal relationship with God?

I dare you to find out!

HEAD SPACE

CONNECT WITH GOD

During his last few moments on earth, Jesus had some of his most meaningful conversations with the disciples (the people who followed Jesus' teachings). In one of these conversations, a disciple asked, "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" (John 14:5 NLT). The disciple's question clearly revealed how little he knew about Jesus' thoughts and feelings. Jesus responded, "Have I been with you all this time ... and yet you still don't know who I am?" (v. 9).

Be careful how you hear the words above. There was no shame in Jesus' voice. His face wasn't stern or disappointed. Jesus wasn't disgusted or condemning. He was sad. Jesus desperately wanted his disciples to know him, because he loved them! So if you need to, stop, and reread his words:

"Have I been with you all this time ... and yet you still don't know who I am?"

Hear his gentle and compassionate tone?

Now, chew on this idea. Jesus has this same desire for you and for me. He wants us to know him—the real Jesus. He wants us to know his true character, so we can have a close friendship with him.

Think these questions through:

- ◆ What assumptions do I sometimes make about God?
- ◆ How might I misunderstand God?

Spend the next few minutes talking to God (as you would talk to a close friend). Ask him to bring any wrong assumptions to the

surface. Ask him to change your assumptions and allow you to understand Jesus more clearly.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Our wrong assumptions about God are, at times, challenged by how others live their lives. Take a couple of minutes and think about how you've seen other people love, forgive, or accept another person. Now consider:

- ◆ Could the story of their lives challenge one of your false assumptions about God? Could their lives show what God is really like?
- ◆ Has there been another person who has impacted your life in such a positive way that you couldn't help but ask the question: Where did he get all of that compassion, kindness, and selflessness? He's the nicest person I know. What if that person was acting on a correct understanding of what God is really like?
- ◆ How might these observations confirm or go against some of your previous assumptions about God's character?

After you've thought about these experiences, you might even want to call or text the people who've made such a positive impact. Thank them for making a difference in your life.

HOW MIGHT I CHANGE?

"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion" (Isaiah 30:18). This Bible verse describes one aspect of God. Here are some things you can learn about God from this verse:

- ◆ God is *not* out to get you; he loves you even if you don't feel like you deserve it.
- ◆ God is *not* focused on how well you are keeping "the rules." Instead, he is focused on having a relationship with you!
- ◆ God isn't stuck with you; he looks forward to loving you and showing you compassion.

Imagine this scene playing out in real life: You run into Jesus at a coffee shop and he automatically recognizes that you are having "one of those days." He knows the hard places of your life and everything you are going through. When you sit down, order coffee, and start talking, you notice all of Jesus' responses are kind. At the same time, he's also strong. As you get up to leave, you realize Jesus is a true friend who is really concerned about your life!

If you wanted to live like the "real Jesus"—gracious and compassionate, and moving toward people in need—how might your relationships change? How might you approach people differently?