

# The Greatness of God's Gospel

*Surveying God's Word  
for Meaning, Hope and Joy*

Part 1: Exploring God's  
Purpose for Us

Part 2: Exploring Our  
Relationship with God

Part 3: Exploring the  
Savior and Salvation

Part 4: Exploring  
Christianity

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## Purpose of This Booklet

In 1980, my wife and I discovered some very good news, *"the gospel of the grace of God,"\** that changed our lives and we have been sharing this information with others ever since.

Recently, encouraged by our church, I taught this news as a brief review course on four consecutive Sundays. I have put this gospel study in print to share with as many others as possible.

It is my hope that this little booklet will help one understand four basic concepts on developing a loving relationship with God. I pray that you will find meaning, hope and joy that God promises for those dedicated in seeking Him.

*Chris Schmidt*

*June, 2014*

*"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people.'"*

Luke 2:10

\*Acts 20:24

## Notes and Thanks

**Bible Version:** Verses are quoted from the New King James Version

**Bold Font:** Words in bold font are for emphasis of concepts and principles.

**Brackets:** The bracketed terms within verses are added to clarify meanings.

**Dictionary:** Definitions of Biblical words are from the Online Bible Hebrew and Greek Lexicons.

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## **Part 1: Exploring God's Purpose for Us**

### **Certainty and the Gospel**

What aspects of life are you certain about?

Do you know why we exist?

What is the meaning of life?

Does anything really count in life?

Is there a solution to life's pains, sorrows and tragedies?

Do you know why we will die?

Do you know what happens after death?

Do you know why we live on a tiny, unique planet that supports abundant life while the rest of this vast universe is apparently totally lifeless?

**Can anyone ever be certain about any of these things?**

Mankind has various, conflicting answers to all of these crucial questions. Can any of these ideas be trusted?

Which man, woman, religion or philosophy has the truth? Whom do we believe?

How can any of us get through life without clear answers? Someone has to be in the know.

Fortuitously, there is Someone we can trust with reliable answers to these critical questions: He is our Creator God.

And, all of His answers are **good ones** and they are **certain!** That's why they are called the **Gospel**.

The Gospel means the **Good News!** The Gospel is the **Sure and Certain Good News** about life!

Our God describes this Good News plainly in His Word, the Holy Scriptures of the Bible. He starts this way:

*"In the beginning God created the heavens  
and the earth."*

Genesis 1:1

Immediately upon reading His Word, we see our Supreme, All-Powerful God purposefully crafting a vast universe.

But, amongst the billions upon billions of celestial bodies that He created, one is given prominence. It is singled out and given a name before all others.

# EARTH

## **Our Special World**

What is so special about our planet that God names it in the first sentence of His Word? With respect to the rest of His universe, Earth is a tiny cosmic body. We can examine this by comparing the size of Earth to four other entities in space: our Sun, our Solar System, our Milky Way Galaxy and what is beyond in the rest of the Universe.

The first image is a photo composite emphasizing how small Earth is compared to our Sun. The Sun is so much bigger that it would take 1,300,000 Earths packed together to equal its volume.





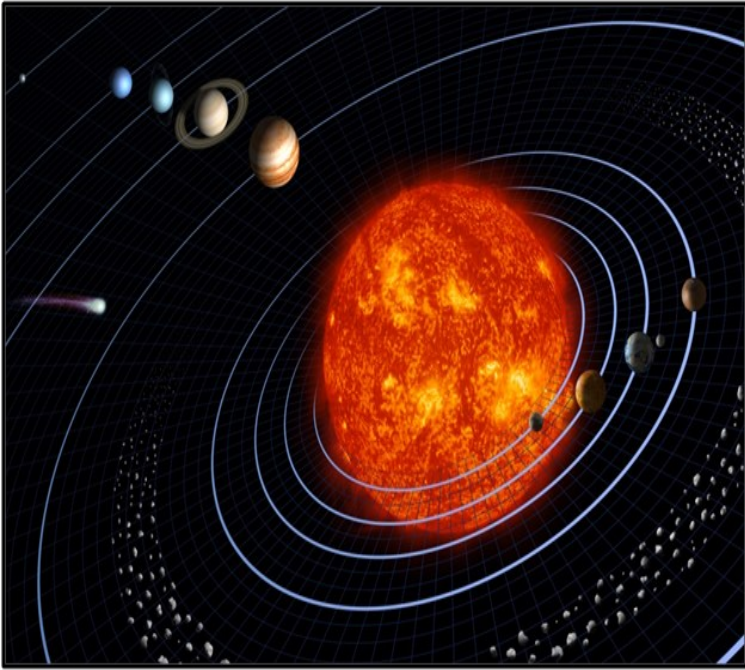
The next two pictures reveal Earth's small stature within the Solar System, comprised of the Sun and the planets orbiting it. Earth appears to be a minor and remote component. For instance:

- Comparing planet sizes by diameter, Uranus is 4 times, Saturn is 9.4 times and Jupiter is 11 times bigger than Earth.
- Pluto, the most distant dwarf planet is 2.66 billion miles away at its closest orbit to Earth. It would take 6,500 years to reach Pluto from Earth moving at a rate of 65 mph.

This next image is a photo revealing distant Earth (above arrow) from the Cassini spacecraft orbiting Saturn, a distance of about 750 million miles when both planets are at their closest orbits.

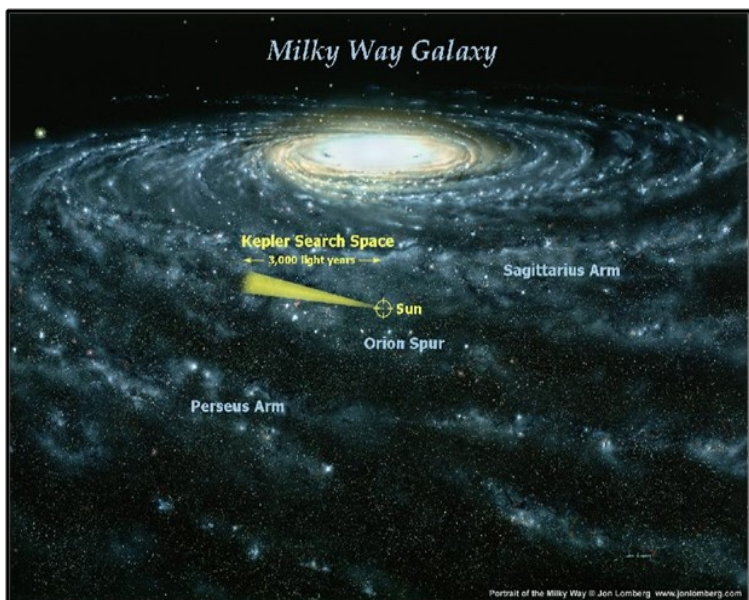
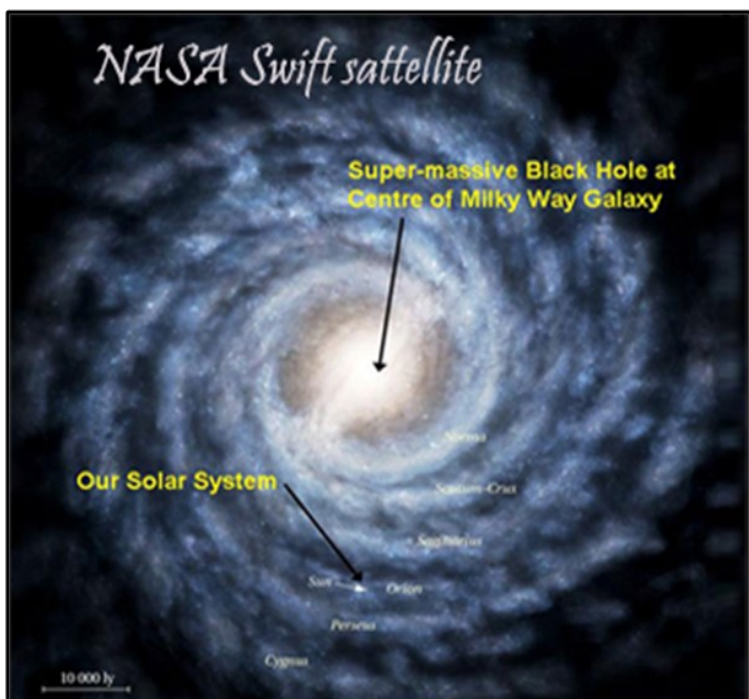


The following graphic illustrates our Solar System with Earth being the third planet from the Sun.



Our Milky Way Galaxy is believed to contain up to 400 billion stars and be about 100,000 light years in diameter. One light year equals 5,882,695,039,663 miles long. Multiplying that number by 100,000 shows how enormous our Galaxy is.

The next two theoretical illustrations compare our Solar System's place and relevance in our Milky Way Galaxy. Earth is imagined only as a tiny speck in these sketches.

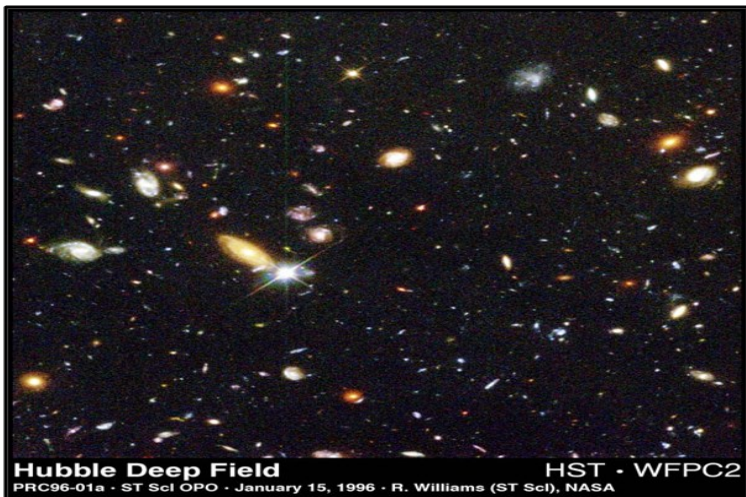


Continuing on with how small Earth is compared to the total size of our Galaxy, we find that:

- After the Sun, the nearest star to Earth is called Proxima Centauri but it is 25 trillion miles away!
- It will take the Voyager One spacecraft 76,000 years traveling at 38,000 mph to reach Proxima Centauri!

But, that's not all! Our Galaxy is surrounded by billions of other galaxies each with their own billions upon billions of stars, each galaxy being multiple light years apart from each other!

Below is a photo of what's beyond our Milky Way Galaxy. Other than a few local stars in the foreground, all the rest are entire galaxies far out in space. Yet, only a small fraction of outer space is being photographed. It is unimaginable how many galaxies there are in our universe!



So, in size, Earth is truly inconsequential and miniscule compared to the rest of the universe. God must have some other interest in this planet than its size. We will find that Earth is a very unique and exquisitely special creation of God.



### **Earth has a Purpose**

Exploring why our world is especially important to God, we discover that all of creation is intentionally purposed by God.

*"You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created."*

Revelation 4:11

Earth, as everything else, was willfully and precisely crafted by our Supreme God.

*“The heavens are Yours, the **earth** also is Yours; The **world** and all its fullness, You have founded them.”*

Psalm 89:11

He ordered everything that makes up our world.

*“For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on **earth**, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.”*

Colossians 1:16

God is up to something on Earth. He provides a clue as to His intentions.

*“All things were created through Him and for Him.”*

Colossians 1:16

This verse details that Earth, as everything else, was created by God **for Himself**. It appears that He wants to accomplish something special on Earth.

What's His intention? He tells us.



*“For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the **earth** and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, **Who formed it to be inhabited. . .**”*

Isaiah 45:18

Astounding! God made Earth to be populated and inhabited by mankind. It is the only known place in the entire universe that fosters and sustains life! Our beautiful world was created as a place where we can exist safely and abundantly!

### **God’s Plan for Us**

What is He after? Why create us? God explains.

*“God, who made the **world** and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the **earth**, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should **seek the Lord**, in the hope that they might grope for Him and **find Him**, though He is not far from each one of us; **for in Him we live and move and have our being . . .**”*

Acts 17:24-28

So begins the amazing Sure and Certain Good News from God. He made us to exist with Him! God wants us to find Him! God wants to relate with us! This is our reason for existing: ***“for in Him we live and move and have our being.”***

### **We Need God**

In other words, we need God for a full, satisfying and meaningful life. Without Him, life is lacking.

Here’s what the wise and powerful King Solomon said about life without God.

*“Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher;  
Vanity of vanities, all is vanity . . .*

*I have seen all the works that are done  
under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity  
and grasping for the wind.”*

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14

*“Under the sun”* means existing with blinders on, separated from God and His higher plans for us. Solomon goes so far to say that such a life can end up as a *“vanity.”* This is a strong term describing a life that is ultimately meaningless and useless for it misses out on the immediate and eternal benefits of knowing God, as we shall fully explore later.



Solomon details how he attempted to find meaning in life on his own.

*“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure’; but surely, this also was vanity . . . Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, For my heart rejoiced in all my labor; And this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”*

Ecclesiastes 2:1, 10, 11

Finally, after searching for substance in life, King Solomon shares his findings. Solomon concluded that God Himself is our life’s purpose.

*“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all.”*

Ecclesiastes 12:13

To “*fear God*” means to respect and accept Him as our personal God and Leader in life. To “*keep His commandments*” means recognizing that He guides us with all of life’s solutions.

*“This is man’s all”* is Solomon’s way of explaining that this is man’s purpose and ultimate goal in life.

Solomon’s testimony is found in the Old Testament but this message is also in the New Testament. There, we read that Paul, once a strict and powerful Jewish leader, gave up empty religious traditions because they fostered no enduring significance. The following three verses written by him describe his new life in God the Son, Jesus Christ, of whom we will learn more.

*“When Christ who is our life appears . . .”*

Colossians 3:4

*“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may gain Christ . . .”*

Philippians 3:8

*“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”*

1Corinthians 2:2

Solomon tried pleasures, riches and work. Paul tried religion. Both realized that they had missed out. They had not found God in their endeavors. They wrote their stories so that this does not have to happen to us.

Look how personally involved God is in our lives!

*“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has **determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings**, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him . . .”*

Acts 17:26, 27

God plans when and where in history each of us is born for the sole purpose of discovering Him!

He knows what nation, what city and in what family to place us that would give us the best opportunity of finding Him.

Again, here’s His reason for doing this.

*“for in Him we live and move  
and have our being.”*

Acts 17:28

### **God is Interested in Us**

Why does God desire a relationship with us?

We are small, weak, mistake-prone and sometimes sad and dangerous people.

It seems inexplicable how a mighty, pure God could be so tolerant and patient with us. Why is He so interested in us?

Does He need us?

**NO.**

*“God . . . does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything . . .”*

Acts 17:24, 25

There is only one thing left that explains God’s special treatment and focus on us.

*“And we have known and believed **the love that God has for us. God is love . . .**”*

1John 4:16

**True love loves to love!**

**God loves to love others. It pleases Him to do so.**

Love is the driving force behind God’s creation of Earth and us. This is the remarkable will of God. He desires a loving relationship with all of us!

But, that's not all. This one-on-one relationship with God can continue everlastingly!

*"For God so loved the world  
that He gave His only begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in Him  
should not perish  
but have everlasting life."*

John 3:16

### **The Best Pursuit in Life is God**

Nothing in life beats God's love for you and me. Solomon's father, King David, discovered this, too, and expressed it in a prayer.

***"Because Your love is better than life . . ."***

Psalms 63:3

The Bible explains how complete this love bond with God can be. It's for now and forever.

*"For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to  
obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who died for us, that whether  
we wake [remain alive] or sleep [die],  
**we should live together with Him.**"*

1Thessalonians 5:9, 10

Anyone can find God and experience His undying, devoted love. The starting point is to be serious about seeking Him. Here is His promise.

*“And you will seek Me and find Me,  
when you search for Me with all your heart.”*

Jeremiah 29:13

First proofs of His love for us and why we should seek Him:

- We are alive on earth.
- Our time and place in history is purposed.
- He is near and can easily be found.
- He can provide hope and meaning.
- He wants to share His life with us now and eternally.

Yet, there is much, much more to this Good News!

Please don't neglect the time and opportunity God has provided to include Him in your life.

Invest in Him and your life will become abundantly fulfilled and satisfying - He promises.

## The Character of God

In the next sections, there will be remarks about God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit. Yet, there is only one God. So how can this be?

God is a unique Being. He is so far above us that we have a hard time grasping the nature of a Supreme Being. God is ultimate in every way; eternal, all powerful, all knowing, in all places, all good, all righteous, all perfect, all loving. But, there are things he cannot do. He cannot change, fail, lie, tempt or do evil.

God is extremely active. He has responsibilities and different roles. We have many roles to complete our responsibilities also. We are child, parent, spouse, aunt, uncle, cousin, brother, sister, friend, neighbor, worker, boss. However, notice that we cannot act in more than one role at a time. It would be grand if we could multiply ourselves and be more consistent and productive in our roles. How often have we said, "I can't be in two places at the same time?"

Yet, with God this is possible! He performs His three roles and responsibilities continually and perpetually, **all at the same time!** He is always the same God, but working as Father, Son and Spirit simultaneously. There is one God in three Persons.

## **Part 2: Exploring Our Relationship with God**

### **God Starts Relating with Us**

The word relationship denotes that we are social creatures. We have bonds and share our lives with others in various degrees, common examples being:

- Sharing our skills with coworkers
- Sharing helps with our neighbors
- Sharing support with our friends
- Sharing love with family members

Every social bond begins when someone opens up his or her life for someone else.

Examples of how they start include:

- Employment - one applies or one is recruited
- Friendship - one begins a conversation
- Courtship - one seeks to marry another
- Parenting - a couple decides to have children



God is the One who begins relating with us! We aren't the ones who first pursue God - He's the One who pursues us. His intent is for a permanent, friendly union with each one of us!

### **Understanding and Knowing God**

This relationship between God and us is to be uniquely personal as Jesus Christ details.

*"And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent."*

John 17:3

The word "*know*" signifies an intimate familiarity between two people; a companionship. Imagine having this type of connection with God.

God has always desired that we understand Him and know Him personally. Around 620 BC, the Prophet Jeremiah revealed these intentions for us. As we read Jeremiah's passage, notice how our Lord describes the principles that Solomon and Paul eventually discovered - that the pursuit of wisdom, power and riches never supersedes the advantages of knowing and understanding God.

*"Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; **But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the LORD.**"*

Jeremiah 9:23, 24

### **How Does God Begin Our Relationship?**

God starts relating with us by personally creating you and me and granting the right amount of time for each one of our lives.

*"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well . . . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them."*

Psalms 139:13, 14, 16

*“Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves . . .”*

Psalm 100:3

With an intimate touch, God reaches out to us. We had no say in our existence. He planned it all and made it happen. He has a purpose in mind for each one of us.

### **How Does One Begin Relating to God?**

Exploring how we can connect with God is clear. We can begin as if you were meeting God today.

What would He say to you and me? What would be His approach in securing a close fellowship with us?

Here is one of the first things that God desires that everyone know.

*“Can two walk together,  
unless they are agreed?”*

Amos 3:3

The word “walk” means live. We read the passage from 1Thessalonians 5:9, 10 stating that “***we should live together with Him.***” Living together requires that both parties be in agreement. They can’t be opposites fighting, arguing, and constantly at odds.

Enduring relationships occur when both persons are agreed in their beliefs, goals, behaviors and responsibilities.

The first items that God hopes we will agree on were discovered in Part 1: Exploring God's Purpose for Us. In summary, these are:

- God is needed to fulfill one's life.
- He can easily be found and known.
- God does not dwell in our church buildings or temples.
- God does not need anything from us.

### **The Core Agreement Between God and Us**

Yet, there is one agreement that cements a lasting bond with God. It can be stated in two ways.

*"Therefore you shall be perfect,  
just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*

Matthew 5:48

*"... but as He who called you is holy, you  
also be holy in all your conduct, because it is  
written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'"*

1Peter 1:15-16

The words “*perfect*” and “*holy*” are synonyms. To “*be holy*” means to be absolutely clean spiritually in one’s heart, soul, spirit and conscience and being pure, good and right in all ways. To “*be perfect*” is to be spiritually mature, having a faultless integrity and lacking no good thing. In other words, both verses declare that God expects us to have His character!

Why is this so important to Him?

God can’t change from His pure state. He is good, right and true and cannot permanently reside with anyone who is not as holy as He is. Why would He?

So, this forces us to review our hearts. What do we find? Are we holy and spiritually pure with faultless integrity or do we have problems?

### **Our Major Problem in Life**

God helps us answer these questions. He already knows us better than we know ourselves. This is how He had His close follower Paul summarize our situation.

*“ . . . for all have sinned and  
fall short of the glory of God . . . ”*

Romans 3:23

God knows and declares that we all fall short of matching His glory - His magnificent excellence, honor and majesty. We lack spiritual maturity and holiness.

God wants a close bond with us but we can't match up to His expectations in the partnership. God explains that our problem is **sin**. Sin keeps us out of line and out of agreement with God's pure character.

God's Word explains just how pervasive this sin problem is.

*"For there is not a just man on earth  
who does good and does not sin."*

Ecclesiastes 7:20

*"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive  
ourselves, and the truth is not in us."*

1John 1:8

*"As it is written: 'There is none righteous,  
no, not one . . .'"*

Romans 3:10

Being “*righteous*” is being right in all ways even being innocent, faultless, guiltless and approved by God. Sin prevents one from being righteous.

Sin, then, is our chief problem in all of life!

### **What Exactly is Sin?**

Sin literally means missing the mark, missing the goal, not being on the right path and, instead, going the wrong way. Worse, sin incurs guilt, judgment and a penalty.

The following four Bible verses reveal that all of us are guilty of sin.

#### **Proof 1:**

*“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*

James 4:17

How many times have we purposely chosen to do something bad or wrong instead of good and right?

## Proof 2:

*“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.”*

1John 3:4

*“Lawlessness”* is breaking God’s laws summarized by the Ten Commandments which are explained by the two great commandments of loving God and loving others. Jesus Christ explains this.

*“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.’”*

Matthew 22:37-40

If one cannot honestly admit that he or she loves God with all of one’s being such that God comes first in life, then His first chief commandment has been broken.

If one has ever acted selfishly towards another person, said something harshly or been unkind or uncaring, His second chief commandment has been broken.



In fact, just breaking one of God's good laws means we broke the whole set.

*"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all."*

James 2:10

**Proof 3:**

*"All unrighteousness is sin . . ."*

1John 5:17

*"Unrighteousness"* means not doing what's right. Wronging God or someone else even just once makes us unrighteous.

**Proof 4:**

*". . . for whatever is not from faith is sin."*

Romans 14:23

*"Faith"* here means a sure belief, a wholehearted trust in God. Doing anything without assurance that it pleases Him, means we did it without faith.

At some point in our lives haven't we all put our interests above God's or neglected to review if a decision offends or honors Him?

### **Sin Leaves us in a Desperate Predicament**

Being sinful is the opposite of being perfect and holy. It prevents a solid, healthy relationship with our God. Worse, it exacts a severe penalty that permanently separates us from Him.

*"For the wages of sin is death . . ."*

Romans 6:23

The word "*wages*" means payment or penalty. Sin, then, explains why we die.

*"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned . . ."*

Romans 5:12

Exploring how serious this penalty is, we discover that sin triggers two deaths. Physical death is called the first death and spiritual death is called the second death.

The following true Scripture story is an example of both deaths.

*“ . . . The rich man also **died** [first death] and was buried . . . And being in torments in **Hades** [second death] he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off . . . he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham . . . I am tormented in this flame’ . . . But Abraham said . . . ‘between us and you there is a **great gulf fixed**, so that those who want to pass from here [Heaven] to you cannot, nor can those from there [Hades; second death] pass to us.’ ”*

Luke 16:22-26

The tragedy of being sentenced to the second death is that it is a state of being separated from God and His love forever. God is love and is the source of safety, security, rest, contentment, joy, caring and wholeness. Try to fathom the sorrow and fear of never being loved by anyone forever and ever and ever. That’s why it’s called hell; it’s permanent separation from a loving God.

We can see now why sin is mankind’s greatest problem. This upsets God. It stops His original plans for us.

*“The soul who sins shall die . . . For I have  
**no pleasure** in the death of one who dies,’  
says the Lord GOD.  
**‘Therefore turn and live!’”***

Ezekiel 18:20, 32

God never intended that mankind would ever die. He didn’t create Earth and populate it to watch us suffer and reach the second death.

Rather, God wants us alive and spiritually well to perpetuate a loving companionship with Him. But, how can sin and its separating penalty be solved?

### **Sin Can Be Conquered!**

Sin, our greatest predicament, can be resolved!

It’s important to note in the prior Bible verse that God describes dying as our problem and our responsibility. We can do something about it. He tells us that the solution is to *“turn and live.”*

God provides a clear path for us to *“turn and live.”* The following three verses assure us that death, the first and second, can be beaten.

*"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."*

1Corinthians 15:26

*"He who overcomes shall not be hurt  
by the second death."*

Revelation 2:11

*"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the  
dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the  
dead will also give life to your mortal bodies  
through His Spirit who dwells in you."*

Romans 8:11

### **No Other Options**

Before looking at God's magnificent solution, we should realize that there are no other options.

We can't hide our sin from God.

*"Can anyone hide himself in secret places, So I  
shall not see him?" says the LORD; 'Do I not fill  
heaven and earth?" says the LORD.*

Jeremiah 23:24

*"And there is no creature hidden from His sight,  
but all things are naked and open to the eyes of  
Him to whom we must give account."*

Hebrews 4:13

Covering up the problem won't solve it.

*“For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,’ says the Lord GOD.”*

Jeremiah 2:22

No one can correct his or her fallen heart.

*“What is man, that he could be pure?  
And he who is born of a woman,  
that he could be righteous?”*

Job 15:14

*“Who can say, ‘I have made my heart clean,  
I am pure from my sin’?”*

Proverbs 20:9

Being rich offers no advantages.

*“And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”*

Matthew 19:24-26

We can't help anyone else resolve their sinfulness  
no matter how many offerings we make.

*“Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the  
multitude of their riches, none of them can by any  
means redeem his brother, nor give to God a  
ransom for him – for the redemption  
of their souls is costly . . .”*

Psalm 49:6-8

There is no set of religious duties, achievements  
or deeds that award us points for righteousness  
and a place in Heaven.

*“. . . a man is not justified by the works of the law  
but by faith in Jesus Christ,  
even we have believed in Christ Jesus,  
that we might be justified by faith in Christ  
and not by the works of the law; for by the works  
of the law no flesh shall be justified.”*

Galatians 2:16

*“not by works of righteousness which we have  
done, but according to His mercy He saved us,  
through the washing of regeneration and  
renewing of the Holy Spirit . . .”*

Titus 3:5

We can't blame others for our sinfulness.

*"The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. . ."*

Ezekiel 18:20

*". . . The fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall the children be put to death for their fathers; but a person shall die for his own sin."*

2Chronicles 25:4

Lastly, we cannot save ourselves.

*"For whoever desires to save his life will lose it . . ."*

Mark 8:35

*"Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it . . ."*

Luke 17:33



Look how desperate our sin situation is!

*“If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,  
O Lord, who could stand?”*

Psalm 130:3

*“But I see another law in my members, warring  
against the law of my mind, and bringing me  
into captivity to the law of sin which is in my  
members. O wretched man that I am!  
Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*

Romans 7:23-24

### **God as Our Rescuer**

So, we are stuck in deep trouble. If I agree with God about being holy, perfect and righteous, how can I change and meet His obligations to obtain and sustain an eternal relationship with Him? How can I *“turn and live”* as He advises?

Well, the Good News about sin is that something can be done about it. It can be cured by God. Our hope is to recognize our problem and cry out and reach out to Him for His solution.

*“Then He spoke a parable to them, that men  
always ought to pray and not lose heart . . .”*

Luke 18:1

*“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD . . .”*

Jeremiah 29:11-14

God is in the business of rescuing people. All we have to do is ask Him. If we call out to Him, He promises to come to our rescue.

*“He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”*

Micah 7:19

*“ . . . and the one who comes to Me  
I will by no means cast out.”*

John 6:37

In Part 3, we will explore how His rescue plan works as summarized by His four words.

*“Therefore, turn and live!”*

Ezekiel 18:32

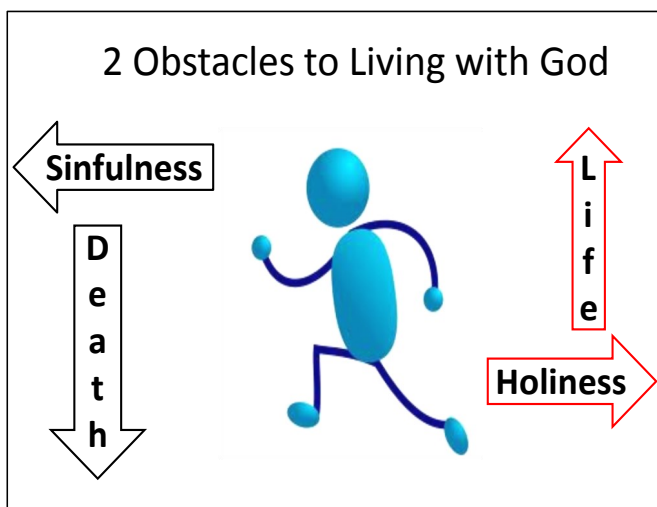
## Part 3: Exploring the Savior and Salvation

### ***“Turn and Live”***

In Part 2, we discovered that all of us start out life with a broken relationship with God due to sin and its penalty of death.

Sinfulness means missing God’s mark and being on the wrong path of living. It’s the opposite of holiness. Death brings separation from God and the loss of an eternally fulfilling life with Him.

We can picture our dilemma this way.



Since God takes no pleasure in people dying from sin, He gives us hopeful instructions to reverse this by telling us to *“turn and live.”*

How do we turn our hearts of sin back to the right path of holiness? How can we remove the death penalty and enter eternal life with God? This is what we will explore in Part 3.

### **Salvation**

As mentioned earlier, Jesus Christ had this eye-popping conversation with his disciples.

*“And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘**Who then can be saved?**’ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**”*

Matthew 19:24-26

Being *“saved”* means being rescued from danger and destruction. It means complete deliverance from sin and includes total victory, being healed and restored back to full spiritual health. Only God can make this possible. Plus, He wants to do it. He desires to save us!

The Bible throughout confirms these two facts.

*"Salvation belongs to the LORD."*

Psalm 3:8

*"Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other."*

Isaiah 45:22

If we can understand God's plan of salvation, then we can *"turn"* to it and *"live."*

This is exactly God's approach. He wants all to hear and understand His solution.

*"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, **who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**"*

1Timothy 2:3, 4

The first people to hear this salvation plan were the Hebrews as recorded in the Bible. A Hebrew prophet named John the Baptist provided further details on how God's solution works. That was his life's mission.

*"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,  
To give knowledge of salvation to His people  
By the remission of their sins . . ."*

Luke 1:76, 77

This Bible passage confirms that God wants us to have "*knowledge of salvation*" and we are to discover its means, the "*remission*" of our sins.

### **Salvation by Remission or Pardon of Sins**

*"Remission"* means "release from bondage or imprisonment; an act of forgiveness; a pardon."

But this is very different from the usual releases and pardons we know of.

Legal pardons by kings, queens, presidents and other heads of state only allow the criminal to escape jail or execution so that their penalty is never fully paid.

But these legal pardons never change the record of a criminal. They do not declare that the criminal is innocent and never committed a crime. In fact, if one accepts a pardon one is admitting guilt.

Also, these pardons by state leaders never change the character or inner nature of the criminal.

Past United States presidents have pardoned criminals for treason, sedition, piracy, polygamy, theft, espionage, etc. But these criminals never had their records swept clean, never had their hearts purified, never had their lives and broken relationships repaired by their pardons.

But, God's remission for sinfulness is entirely different. It is packed with wide-ranging benefits. Besides releasing the sinner from punishment, the infractions of sin are forever wiped off God's legal record. Each sinner is declared sin-free and he or she is set right in all ways.

Also, God's pardon changes a sinner's heart - his or her life is completely and radically changed for good, forever!

Summary of God's remission plan:

- 1) Immediate release from sin's bondage, guilt and death penalty.
- 2) Legal record of sins is wiped clean as if the sins had never been committed.
- 3) Restoration of one's broken relationship with God.
- 4) A changed heart and a new identity.

We find the following confirming Bible passages.

**1) Our immediate release from sin's ruinous power and its guilt.**

*"Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin . . . Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.'"*

John 8:34-36

*"As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."*

Psalms 103:12

**2) Our life record of sins is wiped clean and we are forgiven.**

*"Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord . . ."*

Acts 3:19

*"And you . . . He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us."*

Colossians 2:13, 14



### **3) Restoration of our broken relationship with God.**

*“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name . . .”*

John 1:12

*“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”*

1John 3:1

### **4) A changed heart and new identity.**

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

2Corinthians 5:17

*“But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus . . . that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Ephesians 4:20-24

## **Salvation by Remission Requires an Atonement**

We can see why people who believed in God many centuries ago prayed to Him for the final solution to their sin problem.

*“Help us, O God of our salvation, For the glory of Your name; And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, For Your name’s sake!”*

Psalm 79:9

[circa 920 BC]

The word “*atonement*” means to cover over or to pacify. God applies a new covering, a completely new identity that solves our sin condition and pacifies His requirement that we be spiritually righteous and holy.

How does God do it? How does He save? How does He pardon our sins through this process called atonement?

The answer involves the shedding of blood.

*“. . . and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”*

Hebrews 9:22

*“For the life of the flesh is in the blood . . .  
for it is the blood that makes  
atonement for the soul.”*

Leviticus 17:11

Remember that *“remission”* means pardon, a release from bondage and forgiveness of sins. It requires the *“shedding of blood!”* Something needs to be killed or sacrificed. But, what does *“blood makes atonement for the soul”* mean?

Instead of a physical, impersonal legal document inked on paper by the President freeing someone from jail, God applies a spiritually effective cover of blood to the guilty sinner that wipes away all guilt, changes his or her life and pacifies the legal demands of God that every sin penalty be paid.

### **It's God's Blood and Sacrifice**

It is not the killing or sacrifice of an animal that works this remission for God.

*“For it is not possible that the blood of bulls  
and goats could take away sins.”*

Hebrews 10:4

Rather, it's the blood of God! Can you believe it? God would die for us? Unimaginable! This next statement by Jesus Christ, assures us that this is all true!

*"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*

Matthew 26:28

The word "*covenant*" means an agreement or contract. Jesus Christ is declaring that through Him and His sacrifice, a new agreement between God and mankind would be enacted. This new agreement or covenant is the legal nucleus of God's Gospel.

In fact, without Jesus Christ's voluntary sacrifice for us, we could not be saved and there would not be any Good News for any of us.

How does Jesus Christ's sacrifice work for us? God cannot ignore error. Not only must all the errors of our sin be corrected but sin's penalty of death must be paid for if we are to receive the full benefits of God's pardoning plan. We discovered that, with man, this is impossible to achieve, but God devised a precious solution.

## **Jesus Christ is our Substitute and Savior**

Our God would send Someone who would stand in as our Perfect Substitute and not only take on our sinfulness and its guilt, but also pay the death penalty for us!

The Perfect Substitute was God the Son, Jesus of Nazareth, who took the form of a man specifically to carry out His Father's purpose to save mankind.

*"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world."*

1John 4:14

*"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."*

John 3:17

This Savior was known as the Messiah [Hebrew terminology] or the Christ [Greek terminology], both of which mean the Promised and Anointed One from Heaven. It turns out that this Special One would be God Himself, Jesus of Nazareth.

*"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

Luke 2:11

*"He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah (which is translated, the Christ)."*

John 1:41

*"but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."*

John 20:31

This has been God's plan all along. Long ago, it was predicted that this Messiah or Christ would perform this sacrificial act. The following nine verses were written by the Prophet Isaiah around the year 700 BC.

*"Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed."*

Isaiah 53:4, 5

*"All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth . . . For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken . . . Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin . . . My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities . . . And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors."*

Isaiah 53:6, 7, 8, 10-12

### **Our Substitute Would be Crucified**

This Christ would have to suffer an agonizing, tortuous death, that of barbaric crucifixion.

*"You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."*

Matthew 26:2

*“And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.”*

Luke 23:33

Now, this is the greatness of God’s gospel - Jesus Christ, God Himself, willingly was crucified for you and me!

*“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”*

Matthew 20:28

*“For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all . . .”*

1Timothy 2:5, 6

God did it! The penalty of death for our sins was paid by Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and our broken relationship with God the Father can now be restored. His miraculous resurrection proves that God beats death and can grant that ability to us.



*“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit . . .”*

1Peter 3:18

*“But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”*

Romans 8:11

*“And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.”*

1Corinthians 6:14

## **Jesus Christ Solves Everything**

This salvation plan by Jesus Christ completely changes our hearts and lives. It gives us a new identity.

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”*

2Corinthians 5:17

## **All Because of God's Love for Us**

Why would God the Father send His Son to be our Savior and why would the Son willingly suffer so much for you and me? Again, the sole driving force impelling God the Father and the Son to do all this is their devoted, faithful love for us.

*"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Romans 5:8

*"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us . . ."*

1John 3:16

*"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."*

1John 4:9, 10

## **A Pardon Must be Accepted**

Now, to be effective, this sacrificial substitution and spiritual transaction by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ must be voluntarily accepted by us.

Even a presidential pardon is not automatic; the criminal has to agree to receive it.

On June 14, 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed a pardon for a violent thief named George Wilson. Mr. Wilson declined the pardon and refused to leave prison. His case reached the Supreme Court. The Justices declared the following in their final decision three years later.

*“A pardon is an act of grace, proceeding from the power entrusted with the execution of the laws, which exempts the individual on whom it is bestowed from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed . . . A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered; and if it is rejected, we have discovered no power in this court to force it upon him.”*

George Wilson refused the pardon and was not set free! In fact, history reports that he was hanged for his act of violence.

Likewise, God's pardon and atonement offering of His Son as our Substitute cannot be forced upon us. Allowing it to become effective in our lives is voluntary and optional. Accepting God's pardon is simple and easy. Receiving its benefits can begin to change one's life immediately - starting with its power to release us from the burden and penalty of sin. Plus, this remission offer is entirely free!

### **Repentance Means Turning**

So, it's up to us if we want to be saved and changed. Jesus Christ traveled about expressing this Good News message to all would listen.

*“ . . . Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. **Repent, and believe in the gospel.**’ ”*

Mark 1:14, 15

“*Repent*” literally means to change one's mind for the better. It is a decision to turn one's life around, change one's beliefs and adopt a new way. With God, it results in a new position, a new purpose, a new identity and a new future.

Jesus Christ traveled extensively teaching people that their lives could be radically, but easily, changed for the better just by accepting Him and His Good News. That's why He came to Earth - to explain and enact the great plan of salvation.

God still implores us to turn to His Son as our Lord and Savior. However, He never forces this upon anyone. It's our decision to accept or reject His offer.

What Jesus Christ taught in the book of Mark is the essence of what God said approximately 600 years earlier in the book of Ezekiel.

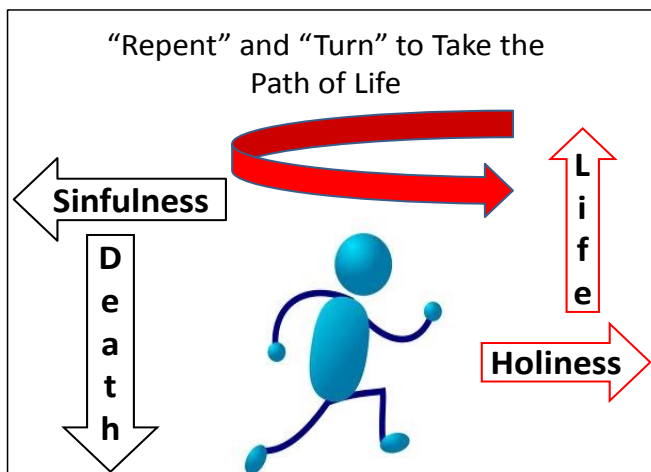
*"Repent, and believe in the gospel"*

**is the certain hope and equivalent of**

*"Therefore turn and live!"*

Mark 1:15; Ezekiel 18:32

The following illustration shows what God pleads that we do.



### **Believing In and Receiving Christ**

Jesus Christ explains further that to believe in the Gospel is the same as believing in the Person who makes the Gospel come true - Himself.

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved . . . He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life . . ."*

John 3:16, 17, 36

God makes it easy for us to “*repent*” and “*turn*” to a new life. The decision to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior involves receiving the gospel into one’s life and standing firm by it.

*“Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the **gospel** which I preached to you, which also you **received** and in which you **stand**, by which also you are **saved**, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you **believed** in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also **received**: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures . . . ”*

1 Corinthians 15:1-3

John, a close follower of Jesus Christ, details that believing in Him brings Him into our lives.

*“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name . . . ”*

John 1:12

Thus, by **believing** in Jesus Christ and the Gospel, one **receives** the good news and the Savior as the life-changing Power who saves him or her. By **standing** in the Gospel, one adopts it as his or her new faith system.

### **Why Faith Matters**

The terms believing, receiving, faith and trust are all synonyms for our responsibility in accepting God's loving salvation plan. It's important to know how important faith is to God.

*"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*

Hebrews 11:6

One cannot be saved without faith in Jesus Christ.

*"knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus. . ."*

Galatians 2:16

*". . . having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . ."*

Romans 5:1



## **Faith is a Natural Aspect of Life**

*“By faith in Jesus Christ”* signifies that the decision to believe in our Lord and Savior is life-changing in all areas. Christians turn and redirect their faith convictions to Jesus Christ. Currently, all of us live our lives by faith. All aspects of life involve trusting in something or someone. Examples:

- We have faith that our heart will keep beating and our lungs will keep breathing all day long.
- We have faith that we will be safe while we sleep and be able to awaken to another day.
- We have faith that our air is safe to breathe and our water is safe to drink.
- We have faith that airplanes will stay aloft until we reach our destinations.
- We have faith that our auto tires will not spin off and every bridge we cross will not collapse.
- We have faith that our medicines will deliver benefits.
- We have faith that our spouses will love us, be true to us and our friends will not abandon us.
- We have faith that our employers will treat us fairly and that banks will preserve our money.
- We have faith that our police and our armed forces will protect us.

Studying this further we can see that all of us live by a faith system, a set of beliefs that we hope will successfully propel us through all the stages of life.

Common faith systems can be categorized as being religious, philosophical, scientific, humanistic, pleasure-centered, financial and or ideological. Whether we adopt one or blend them, we all trust in a set of motivating values and principles.

God made us operate in this fashion. He wouldn't want it any other way. If we didn't have the ability to choose our beliefs, the only other option is to live under the control of someone or something else. Being controlled is the opposite of being loved and a loving God cannot dominate others. He wants us to choose Him out of loving respect for Him. This explains why faith is the only way to please Him.

The key benefits of adopting a new faith system in Jesus Christ will be reviewed in Part 4 and it will be clear that none other can beat it. What God the Father and Jesus Christ offer are immeasurable. Each aspect of our lives profits from faith in Jesus Christ.

## **A True Story of Salvation by Jesus Christ**

The benefits of salvation start immediately. There are clear examples of this in the Bible, one of them being a jailer who faced execution for not doing his job. Panicking, he asked two Christians the following:

*“ . . . Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*

Acts 16:30

The Christians explained God’s simple salvation plan.

*“So they said, ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”*

Acts 16:31

The desperate jailer quickly responded and brought the Christians home to his family so that they could hear the Gospel as well.

*“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.”*

Acts 16:32

And the jailer and his family believed the gospel and in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and were saved that night!

*“. . . And immediately he and all his family were baptized . . . and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”*

Acts 16:33, 34

### **Grace and Mercy**

How can salvation be so easy?

The Bible explains repeatedly that only by God’s loving grace and mercy can we be saved. As we discovered earlier, even presidential pardons are based on this same concept – that of grace.

*“A pardon is an act of grace, proceeding from the power entrusted with the execution of the laws . . .”*

Likewise, God’s pardons are all from grace.

*“For by **grace** you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the **gift of God**, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

Ephesians 2:8, 9

*“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the **riches of His grace** . . .”*

Ephesians 1:7

“Grace” means unmerited favor plus abundant blessings including “that which affords pleasure, joy, delight, sweetness, charm and loveliness.” Grace is also “good will and lovingkindness” for another person. Think of all these free benefits from God!

Salvation by God’s grace is His gift to us when we didn’t deserve it! Now that is true love!

Mercy is another component of God’s love for us.

*“But when the **kindness and the love of God** our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to **His mercy** He saved us . . .”*

Titus 3:4, 5

*“His mercy”* describes God’s “kindness or good will towards the miserable and the afflicted, joined with a desire to help them.”

Grace and mercy reveal the heart of God’s Good News. The Gospel comes out of the loving will of the God who created us. His kind intentions are to do everything possible to save and change us so that we can live with Him.

### **Jesus Christ is the Focal Point of Human History**

*“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”*

John 20:30, 31

This last verse explains why the Bible has been summarized as the Book that explains how and why God saves sinners with Jesus Christ being the focal point of it all.

There is no other grander purpose for us than seeking Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

*"And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."*

1John 5:11, 12

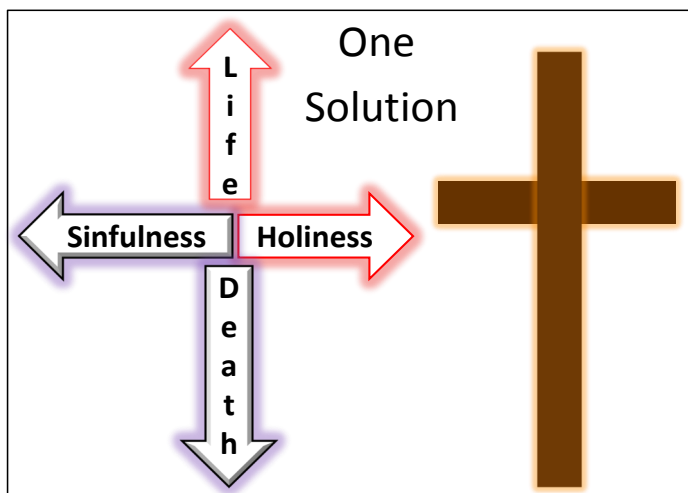
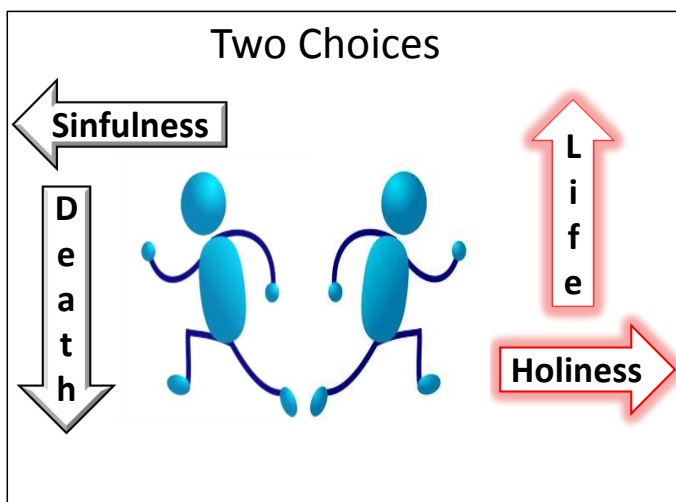
*"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"*

John 14:6

*"let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead . . . This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."*

Acts 4: 10-12

The following two graphics summarize this great Gospel message.





In Part 4, we will explore the motivation for one's constant faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the meantime, please don't ignore what Jesus Christ did for you and me.

*“ . . . how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him . . . ”*

Hebrews 2:3

## Part 4: Exploring Christianity

### Jesus Christ's Mission and Message

Learning the wonderful aspects of God's gospel is new to all of us. It was also new to those whom Jesus Christ met when He lived on Earth.

He went about the land, healing illnesses and teaching this good news. Many people heard the marvelous truths and prospects of salvation.

*"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, **preaching the gospel of the kingdom**, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people."*

Matthew 4:23

Unfortunately, many listeners refused to believe that they needed a Savior. This did not stop Him from His mission.

*"And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching."*

Mark 6:6

## **The Disciples Become Known as Christians**

Those who believed in Jesus Christ began a new way of living and became His disciples. The term “disciple” means a pupil. These disciples followed Him to learn as much as possible.

*“And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them . . .”*

Matthew 5:1, 2

About the year 43 A.D., these followers of Jesus Christ became known as Christians.

*“. . . And the disciples were first called **Christians** in Antioch.”*

Acts 11:26

Christianity is the term for how one follows Jesus Christ. There is a right way for believing disciples to follow their Lord and Savior.

## **False Teachers, Gospels and Christianity**

As it so commonly happens with mankind, things can get twisted and perverted.

Alternative ideas about Christianity sprung up and substitutes for true Christianity developed. Jesus Christ predicted that this would happen.

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing . . .”*

Matthew 7:15

Sure enough, early on, counterfeits competed with true Christianity as documented by Jesus’ companions, John and Paul.

**John:**

*“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”*

1John 4:1

**Paul:**

*“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”*

Galatians 1:6, 7

## Jesus Christ Explains Himself

Providentially, before Jesus Christ returned to heaven at the completion of His ministry, He left us with a model of true Christianity. It happened during the 40 days that He remained on Earth after being resurrected and is found in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the gospel of John.

We will review the details of this important event. It occurred on Jesus' third meeting with seven of His disciples and can be divided into two parts – the message of how God relates to believers and then how believers should relate to God. Here is how the story begins.

*“After these things Jesus **showed Himself** again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He **showed Himself** . . .”*

John 21:1

*“This is now the third time Jesus **showed Himself** to His disciples after He was raised from the dead.”*

John 21:14

The word “*showed*” means more than a physical appearance. It’s to explain one’s self as “who and what one is.”

He came to the seven to be understood. The Lord took opportunity on this third meeting to reveal two crucial items.

- His loving heart toward every one of His disciples.
- What response He expects from every disciple.

### **The Setting and Situation**

The setting is the Sea of Galilee and the seven people involved are mentioned next.

*“Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, [John and James] and two others of His disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, ‘I am going fishing.’ They said to him, ‘We are going with you also.’ They went out and immediately got into the boat, and that night they caught nothing.”*

John 21:2, 3

Seven of Jesus Christ’s first apostles went fishing. Unfortunately, their overnight excursion failed to produce even one fish.

Today, happily, something was different. They were about to discover how drastic their lives had been altered for the better!

*“But when the morning had now come,  
Jesus stood on the shore; yet the disciples  
did not know that it was Jesus.”*

John 21:4

*“But . . .”* It’s a word full of hope. It introduces the idea that something changed, something was different about this new day.

That next day the seven fishermen awoke to a new life. Their crucified and resurrected Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, was intimately involved with their lives. The Lord had purposely traveled to meet them at their normal place of work. He did not demand that they meet in some man-made ceremonial or sacred place. Instead, He met them at the lake.

This confirms that it is God who pursues us. His love for people drives Him to seek a relationship with us. He is an amazingly sociable God.

Next, Jesus begins a conversation.

*“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Children, have  
you any food?’ They answered Him,  
‘No.’”*

John 21:5

By calling them “*children*,” a term of endearment, Jesus is confirming that the disciples’ identity had been altered. They were now members of His Father’s family.

### **Jesus Christ Understands and Takes Action**

Understanding their need to have a productive livelihood, He inquired about their night’s efforts. The fishermen failed.

*“And He said to them, ‘Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast, and now they were not able to draw it in because of the multitude of fish.”*

John 21:6

The Lord had become deeply involved in the lives of these seven disciples. He was committed to meet their needs and gift them with success.

John quickly realized who had done this.

*“Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord! . . .’”*

John 21:7



John wrote this story in his gospel and describes himself as *“that disciple whom Jesus loved.”* This is not a declaration of arrogance, that the Lord loved him above all others. Rather, it explains how John understood Jesus Christ. He is declaring the value of the Savior as the One who loved him enough to die for his sins.

Also, John called Him *“Lord,”* meaning the One to be followed, his personal God and Leader.

Peter then responded.

*“. . . Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his outer garment (for he had removed it), and plunged into the sea.”*

John 21:7

Peter was so elated that Jesus had come and had blessed them that he swam to shore as quickly as possible. The others remained on the job until they completed the miraculous fish haul.

*“But the other disciples came in the little boat (for they were not far from land, but about two hundred cubits), dragging the net with fish.”*

John 21:8

## **The Lord Shows His Love and Care**

Once ashore, they discovered that the Lord had caringly prepared them a meal.

*“Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread.”*

John 21:9

Next, notice that Jesus Christ, in His humility, did not take the credit for the fish haul.

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish which you have just caught.’ Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken.”*

John 21:10, 11

Now it was time to share the meal.

*“Jesus said to them, ‘Come and eat breakfast.’ Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, ‘Who are You?’ - knowing that it was the Lord.”*

John 21:12

Dining together is a time of close communion and that's what the Lord wanted with His disciples. The disciples were getting a show and tell lesson on how personable the Jesus Christ truly was.

He even served them breakfast, another act of love.

*"Jesus then came and took the bread and gave it to them, and likewise the fish."*

John 21:13

This completes the first part of the story. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, pursues a devoted, serving, loving, giving and nurturing companionship with others even after suffering a horrifically cruel death by crucifixion to pay for their sins. What more could one ask from such a Lord and Savior?

### **What the Lord Expects from Us**

The second part of the story reveals what our responsibility is toward Him. Jesus Christ shares His expectations for those whom He saves.

Here is how it developed.

*“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs.’*

*He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.’ He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep.’*

*He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep.’”*

John 21:15-17

Peter was considered a leader of these disciples but he also represents all believers in Jesus Christ. Peter was not different than any of us. Despite being a hard-working fisherman, he had certain flaws in his character evidenced during the tragic stresses of Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion.

This conversation between Jesus Christ and Peter is a lesson for every believer. One trait of Bible truths is that whatever is applicable to the most extreme case also applies to all lesser cases.

The question, “*do you love Me?*,” was asked three times. For some Biblical scholars this signified that the Lord knew that Peter had lied denying his close relationship with Him. Peter had three chances to express his devotion to Jesus Christ during the latter’s abusive arrest and torture.

Peter failed completely – he was only worried about himself. In asking three times, Jesus, being aware of his spiritual collapse, granted him full forgiveness.

Furthermore, the number three has a larger meaning with God. To Him, three signifies His fullness and perfection, His divine purpose and will.

Remember, Jesus Christ was showing Himself to these seven disciples in a way that would provide a thorough understanding of who He is and what He expects. His message would express God’s purposes and plans, His full and perfect will.

On this day, the Lord’s purpose was to ensure that every disciple of His would know how the deep connection and commitment between Him and each Christian works - the relationship that is now called Christianity.

Jesus reaffirmed that He had done everything possible to restore a loving relationship between us and His Father.

Then, He asked, ***“do you love Me?”***

The final link to our bond with Him is simply whether or not we love Him back! Do we? Will we?

### **Jesus Christ is the Heart of Christianity**

Jesus Christ is the focal point of a Christian's life. He deserves our love. Here are ten reasons to love Him.

- He is our Creator.

*“ . . . the Son of His love . . . For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible . . . ”*

Colossians 1:13, 16

*“ . . . God who created all things through Jesus Christ . . . ”*

Ephesians 3:9

- He is our Savior.

*"For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

Luke 2:11

*"... our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel ..."*

2Timothy 1:10

- His salvation efforts were painful and sacrificial.

*"... Christ died for us."*

Romans 5:8

- He mediates between us and God the Father.

*"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus ..."*

1Timothy 2:5

- He is our Legal Advocate with His Father.

*"And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*

1John 2:1

- God the Father relates to us through His Son.

*“that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”*

John 5:23

*“for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me . . .”*

John 16:27

- Through His saving act, God the Father can adopt us into His family.

*“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!”*

1John 3:1

- Through His saving act, God the Holy Spirit can become our Helper.

*"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

John 14:26



- Through His saving act, our Heavenly Father can become our Beneficiary.

*“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!”*

Matthew 7:11

*“Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you . . . For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.”*

Matthew 6:30, 32

- Jesus Christ’s friendship is permanent.

*“‘. . . and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’ Amen.”*

Matthew 28:20

*“‘. . . For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’”*

Hebrews 13:5

God's love goes far beyond feelings and emotions. It is one of loyalty, commitment, dedication, and sacrifice. He constantly protects and nurtures Christians toward higher levels of spiritual health.

This motivates Christians to respond with love to their Lord and Savior.

### **Loving Jesus Christ “More than These”**

There is another aspect of our love commitment to the Lord found in Jesus' first question to Peter.

*“... Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me  
**more than these?**”*

John 21:15

This is a critical question for Jesus Christ. What does “*more than these*” mean? The Bible doesn't mention to what Jesus was referring. It could have included friends, success, income, wealth, peace, rest, health, the free breakfast, a perfect day.

However, Jesus' comment is all-inclusive because specifics don't matter here. “*More than these*” means anything in life that would interfere with a full commitment to Him.

What we put first in our hearts becomes our chief treasure and what we treasure becomes our life pursuit.

*“For where your treasure is,  
there your heart will be also.”*

Matthew 6:21

Christians make Jesus Christ their number one treasure in life. The first command by God is about loving Him above all. When asked about this, Jesus Christ explained God’s foundational principle.

*“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.’”*

Matthew 22:36-38

In His final messages in the book of Revelation, Jesus Christ advised that He should be every Christian’s First Love. If not, one goes astray no matter how much one tries to be good or earn God’s favor. His last message to the church of Ephesus is a wake-up call for all of us, too.

*“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, **that you have left your first love.**”*

Revelation 2:2-4

Loving Jesus Christ is to follow the same pattern as God’s love for us – constant, giving, sacrificial, loyal and personal powered by devoted commitment.

### **Following Christ is the Wisest Path in Life**

Being first in our lives, Jesus Christ becomes our personal God and Leader. That’s why He is called Lord, meaning Chief and King. He can be trusted with advice, direction and counsel.

*“. . . to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*

Colossians 2:2, 3

He guarantees that our lives will be gently and wisely led by Him.

*"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."*

Matthew 11:29, 30

Following Jesus Christ is very important to God the Father. Here's what He says about it.

*". . . This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"*

Matthew 17:5

The way to hear and learn from Jesus Christ is to study His Word, the Bible.

Two true disciples, Paul and Peter, give us examples how to redirect our lives toward Jesus Christ.

**Paul said:**

***"For I determined not to **know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.**"***

1Corinthians 2:2

**Peter said:**

*“ . . . as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the **knowledge of Him** . . . ”*

2Peter 1:3

### **The Relationship Deepens**

The more we learn from and follow Jesus Christ, the more He reveals Himself and the more it blesses each one of us. Christianity is a vibrant, reciprocal, two-way relationship between Jesus Christ and each saved sinner. It should never be stagnant. It should only get richer and deeper.

Jesus Christ explains it this way.

*“If you love Me, keep My commandments . . . He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”*

John 14:15, 21

*“Manifest Myself”* describes His willingness to deepen His companionship with those He saves.

## The Relationship is Productive

Putting the Lord first in life results in a worthwhile, spiritually productive life as He explains.

*“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”*

John 15:5

Bearing “*much fruit*” means being useful for God. Jesus Christ added a duty to His questions to Peter.

“... He said to him, **‘Feed My lambs.’**”

“... He said to him, **‘Tend My sheep.’**”

“... Jesus said to him, **‘Feed My sheep.’**”

The Lord had a specific purpose for Peter’s new life. Peter was to nurture and build up new or immature Christians.

Likewise, Jesus Christ gives all Christians goals and projects. He needs us to complete His ministry of reaching and serving others.

## Would Anyone Intentionally Hurt Jesus Christ?

Finally, this seashore event provides one more lesson concerning Christianity. John mentioned that Peter was saddened by the Lord's questions.

*"... Peter **was grieved** because He said to him the third time, 'Do you love Me?'"*

John 21:17

Why did Peter react with grief? There are three possibilities and all seem to fit.

- He was sad that the Lord didn't believe him.
- He was sad that the Lord hadn't seen evidence of his love for Him.
- He was sad that he hadn't yet placed love for Jesus Christ above all other things or people.

A Christian is bothered when he lets his Lord down, that his life choices may be disappointing or hurting the One who loves him or her so much.

For Peter, this was a life-changing meeting with Jesus Christ. Although he had weaknesses, Peter turned his life around, remembering what the Lord had asked him.



From then on, he determined to the best of his ability never to let anything come between him and his fellowship with Jesus Christ.

About 35 years later, Peter wrote about his new motivation. In one of his letters, he emphasized what should matter most for all believers.

*“In this [salvation by Jesus Christ] you greatly rejoice . . . that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of **Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory . . .**”*

1Peter 1:6-8

Peter’s devotion to Jesus Christ went from denials of ever knowing Him to telling the world the joys of loving Him!

*“Joy inexpressible!”* There isn’t a better way to describe the happiness of being saved by Jesus Christ and being blessed with all the benefits of establishing a permanent bond with God the Father through Him.

## Putting it All Together - Paul's Example

Thinking Him a dangerous fraud, Paul had once hated Jesus Christ and thus persecuted Christians, arresting them and approving of their murder. God did not give up. He pursued Paul and broke through his hard heart. Faced with his sin, Paul discovered God's forgiving nature and trusted in Jesus Christ. His whole life turned around for the better. In a letter, he detailed what drove him to be faithful to his Lord and Savior.

*"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, **who loved me and gave Himself for me.**"*

Galatians 2:20

Peter and Paul's summation of Christianity are identical, each expressed in their own words. A Person had loved them despite their failures. That Person had cruelly died for them taking on their total sin load and the penalty due them. Afterward, that Person blessed them maximally.

That Person is the same One who can save and bless you, too. He is the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Peter and Paul express the unique message of the Bible and Christianity - it is the only faith system that has a Savior curing our sin problem.

Perhaps the fitting conclusion to our exploration of true Christianity comes from Jesus Christ's inspiring question.

***" . . . do you love Me?"***

John 21:16, 17

## **My Testimony**

Born into a practicing Lutheran family, I believed that God, our Supreme Creator, was interested and involved in our lives. I believed that He spoke to us through the Bible, the Holy Scriptures. For all that knowledge, I am eternally grateful to my parents and church leaders.

I learned that Jesus of Nazareth, as the Christ, was God who came to earth to save us from our sinful nature by suffering a sacrificial death by crucifixion.

Though, despite knowing many Christian facts, reading the Bible, going to Bible class, hearing sermons and being confirmed in Lutheranism, I struggled. I could not understand how God could personally affect my life and how Jesus Christ's death at Calvary actually "saved" me.

By age 16, I knew what I wanted to achieve in life; I wanted to become a physician. That would make me successful, happy and fulfilled, so I thought. Devoted to that purpose, I relentlessly strove and reached that goal in 10 years.

By the age of 26, I had my professional degree, was accepted into my top-ranked residency training program and had a loving marriage and financial security. Yet, I was empty inside!

Six months into my first year of residency training, reality struck and I found myself searching for answers. Achieving my goals had surprisingly not brought fulfillment and a sure meaning to life. I reached a point where I found myself repeating this thought, “Is this all there is?”

Being a physician means seeing every imaginable type of human suffering of all age groups whether it be from illness, trauma or self or other inflicted abuse. Doctoring is not a glorious or glamorous profession. It is the ultimate reality check. Sure, we physicians have our successes and see many patients improve with our measures. On the other hand, we see the worst that mankind can endure. The reality of experiencing medicine and its depths of human suffering affected all my fellow residents, not just me.

The saddest and lowest point in that first 6 months occurred when Gary, a fellow first-year resident, and I worked an overnight shift in the intensive care unit. The goal on these shifts was to keep these critically sick patients safe through the night. My toughest case was caring for an elderly man in shock with a life-threatening infection. Gary had a particularly tragic case, a four-year-old perfectly healthy boy had contracted a terribly aggressive infection called epiglottitis that rapidly infects and swells the larynx.

Epiglottitis patients must be treated immediately before the airway shuts off. To make matters worse in this case, the child's parents misunderstood the on-call pediatrician's directions and drove to the front of his office at night when he told them to meet him at the back entrance. There was such a long delay in treatment that the child's airway shut off and he had a respiratory arrest.

He was resuscitated in the emergency room but the lack of oxygen to the brain resulted in a comatose state. Gary vigilantly tried everything to keep the child alive but the chance of survival was bleak. At daybreak, the child died. Everyone was devastated, especially the young and caring parents. Gary took it so hard that he collapsed in sobs of grief. I grieved with him.

It was one of my final wake-up calls in a search for meaning in the midst of so many shattering sorrows in life.

In the ICU was a nurse who had a demeanor about her that was totally different than the rest of us. Instead of having an attitude of drudgery, worry, desperation or depression, she was always relaxed, cheerful, hopeful and confident. I finally asked her what made her different than the rest of us and her answer startled me. She said, "You are missing Someone in your life." It caught me off-guard and I inquired what she meant.

She explained how one needs to develop a personal relationship with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's what God wants with us. He is uninterested in religious traditions or religious formulas. He is a Person desiring holy and righteous fellowship and friendship with everyday people who turn their lives over to Him.

Encouraged to test this premise, I began a serious search and study of the Gospel messages in the Bible. Yes, it was all true! How reassuring that God had all the answers.

My wife and I soon became acquainted with other believers in Jesus Christ including her friends and relatives. We attended their church and after self-study, prayer and discussing Biblical concepts with them, we understood and believed in Jesus Christ's plan of salvation. Our lives turned around. We had a new purpose and assurance. We were at peace with God.

If I could encourage you one last time it would be in this way. We are born with a certain emptiness, an incompleteness that we try to satisfy with things religious or things temporary. Things are not right with our hearts because sin has cut us off from our Maker. No matter how hard we try to complete ourselves with substitutes or make ourselves good, we fall short. There will always be a lingering hunger for something eternal and sure.

One can only be saved and restored through trusting in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He reestablishes our relationship with God the Father. ***One can know God personally*** not just know about Him!

Hopefully, you, too, will seek Him. God promises that if you are serious, ***you will find Him.***

Therefore, I would like to ask, “Are you personally acquainted with God or are you missing Someone in your life?”

*“Also Your righteousness,  
O God, is very high,  
You who have done **great things**;  
O God, who is like You?”*

Psalm 71:19