

HOW CAN I BE SAVED

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© May 2011

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Introduction

Being saved is like walking into a whole new life, in a whole new world, as a whole new you. This book talks about what it means to be saved and how you can experience this for yourself. If you are already saved, it will be a blessing as you are reminded about what this experience opened up for you. I pray that through reading this book God helps you realize what you are saved from and what you are saved to. I pray that God opens your eyes. Ephesians 3:17-19 talks about what it means to be saved. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height. And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." There are countless promises for God's children, those who are walking in salvation. You become a child of God. You belong to Him. You are hidden in the palms of His hand. You can have peace of mind in knowing you are right with Him. You can know that you don't have to fear because He is with you. You can know that He will take the worst things that happen to you and turn them around so that they work for your good. You can find peace of mind instead of fear in today's world where men's hearts are failing them because of fear. Peace is a wonderful thing.

I dedicate this book to everyone who has asked what does it mean to be saved. To everyone who has asked the question, "How can I be saved?" To everyone who has doubted whether or not they were saved. To everyone who wanted to be saved, but thought they couldn't do it, so they never have. To everyone who has just gotten saved and isn't sure what all that means. Even to those who have been saved who are forgetting what all this means. This book is for you.

Each chapter of this book is titled using questions that people ask about salvation. Each question is answered in that particular chapter. These are questions that many people ask us.

These are questions about salvation. Questions like: What does it mean to be saved? What is right and what is wrong? Why does my lifestyle change when I am saved? What about when I do wrong? What about forgiveness? How can God help me to do right when I am saved? How can I get to heaven? These and more questions are answered using God's Word. It is my prayer that your questions can be answered by reading this book.

Chapter 1. What Does It Mean To Be Saved?

When I ask that question, I get a lot of answers. Some are a little strange. Some look at me and say, saved from what? That is a good question. What are we saved from? We are saved from spending eternity in hell. But there is a lot more. We are saved from a lot of things. One thing that we are saved from is loneliness. Loneliness drives a lot of young people (and old) into doing stupid things just to have friends. Have you ever been there? Loneliness drives us into doing anything just so we can fit into a crowd. Who cares what the crowd is doing, just as long as we fit in. When I first got saved, one of the things that I noticed right away was that my loneliness was gone. God is the best friend you can ever have. He is always there. He knows you better than anyone else can, and loves you like you are. He sees all your weaknesses and still loves you. The Bible says that we are precious to Him.

We are loved. Jeremiah 31:3 says, “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn thee.” God loves you with an everlasting love. He will never let you down. God’s love is the reason why we can be saved in the first place. We can be saved because God sent His son to die for our sins. John 3:16 tells us, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” To be saved we have to be forgiven of all our sins. Part of what we are saved from is our sin, our wrong, our messes that we make in our lives when we don’t do right. Jesus didn’t die for us because we were good. He died for us because someone had to take the punishment for our sin, for our wrong. Jesus left heaven where He lived with God, to be born on earth as a baby, to grow up here so that He could understand what it is like to be human, and so that He could die on the cross to take the punishment for all your sin.

That is why and how you can be saved. That is how much God loves you. He sent His only Son, the one that came out from being a part of Him, to die on the cross for you. I don't understand how Jesus did all that, but that doesn't change the fact that He did it. I don't understand exactly all of the reasons why it had to be that way, I just know that it did. I don't understand everything there is to know about God, because God is a whole lot bigger than I am. God is a whole lot smarter than me, and He has been around for forever. I do know that for most of my life, He has walked with me every day, keeping me, guiding me, strengthening me, making the rough places smooth, loving me when it seemed like no one else was there, being the best friend that I could have, keeping me straight when I needed Him to. Still I don't understand all there is to know about God. He is that big. We may not understand it all. That is what faith is all about. Faith is taking Him at His Word and accepting what He says, and what He has done as true. I don't understand why He would love me as much as He does, but that doesn't change the fact that He does. We even have to take His love by faith. He says it is so and that settles it. That is what faith is. Faith is taking God at His Word even when we don't understand how it could be that way.

Before we get saved, God starts dealing with our heart. What does that mean? He starts showing us that He is real. He starts showing us that we are doing wrong. We feel conviction because of our sin. The Bible says that we are all so bad that we really can't naturally by ourselves do anything good. Just naturally, on our own, if God doesn't show us what is right and what is wrong, then we can't know it on our own. It isn't in our nature to know the difference. It is our nature to want it our way. It is our nature to make excuses for the wrong we do so that we can keep on doing it. Doing things our way won't give us a peaceful victorious live on earth, and it certainly won't lead us to heaven. God shows us what is wrong when He convicts us. Then He starts leading us to give our heart and our life to Him. We start to feel His love.

Somebody will say something about Him, and we start to feel lonely for Him. We start to want to have His help in our lives. Then we might be at church or talking to one of His children, or just lying by ourselves in bed at night and it happens. We start to feel God's presence. We feel His love just like He is there wrapping His arms around us. Nobody has to tell us He is real because we feel Him there with us. We may start to cry. We know that He is asking us to make a decision to give our heart and life to Him. We do. We say yes. We pray, God I give you my heart and life. We ask Him to come into our heart. We confess our sin and repent. We tell Him that we are sorry. Our heart breaks because we can feel His love and we are sorry that we ever hurt Him by doing wrong. Then we ask Him to forgive us. Maybe we remember John 3:16. We know He will forgive us if we ask. Then we feel a load lift up off us. We know somehow that we have been washed clean from the inside out. We feel His love in a mighty way and we know that we are forgiven. We ask Him to come into our heart, and we know that He does. His Spirit comes inside of us. We feel different-new and changed. And we aren't lonely any more.

We don't have that empty feeling inside of us any longer. We know that we are loved with a great love-the greatest love we could ever find. We know that we are precious in His eyes. We become God's own children. We are special. We fit into a crowd that is the best crowd that anyone could ever belong to, God's family. It doesn't matter after that what anyone thinks about us or says about us. It doesn't change how we feel about ourselves. We are loved. No we aren't perfect. No matter. That doesn't change His love. God's love will love us like we are, but it is a love that will change us. There is a little song that says, "He's still working on me. To make me what I ought to be". That is how we are. We are a work in progress. We can be proud of who we are, even if we know we aren't perfect, because we know that God is working on the things that aren't perfect if we yield to Him and let Him, and we are willing to do it His way.

Another thing that we are saved from is hopelessness. We don't have to be hopeless. God is our Father. He spoke and made the whole world. He made it right. It is a mess because we messed it up. If He can speak and create the whole world, then we know that He can take care of us. No matter how big your problems seem, or how bad the world seems, you have hope that things will turn out better. Romans 8:28 tells us, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." You might go through bad things, but even those will be turned into good. The Bible says plainly that you don't have to be afraid. You don't have to worry. 366 times in the Word of God it says to "fear not". If I look at the world and all the bad situations my heart will fail me with fear. If I concentrate on all the bad things around me, I will feel bad all the time. Some people actually are sick because all they think of all the time is the bad things around them. If I think on things that cause me to be afraid all the time, I will have panic attacks and health problems. If I think about God and his Word, His love and His promises to me, I will be all right. No fear.

Another thing that we are saved from is having no direction. The people who have a purpose for their lives are the ones who stay out of trouble. Their life and their future is valuable, so they try not to do stupid things to mess them up. They are swimming strong, heading in a definite direction. They don't get pulled down as easily as the drifters. When you are saved, you get a new direction for your life. God calls us according to a purpose. He creates us with that special purpose in mind. He works on us getting us ready for that purpose. Yes, God calls preachers, evangelists, missionaries, singers, songwriters, people who work in churches and ministries. But He also calls teachers, mechanics, dentists, accountants, computer specialists, and more. This world is full of people without God who have no hope or purpose for their lives. Because of this, it is filled with people who don't know right and wrong. Many don't care if they do a good job at all.

When they do their jobs, they do them poorly. Because they don't know right from wrong, you can't trust them to be honest. Where would we be without Christian workers doing their jobs in the world? Find out God's purpose for your life. You have a reason to be alive.

God also saves us from failure. We talked about how in the last paragraph some people give up because they fail so many times that they are afraid to try. When God comes into your heart, and helps you, you no longer have to be afraid to try. He gives you the strength to make it. We can't face life on our own. It is impossible. We can't overcome all there is to overcome on our own. We will fail, time and time and time again. But with God, when we fail, He will pick us up. When we keep trying, we will get it right, with His help. We don't have to stay a failure.

God also saves us from ourselves. I was a mess when I came to God. I had been saved when I was in the 6th grade. But when I was in college I left everything I had learned about God and headed out to find out what the big, bad world was all about. It didn't take long for me to wreck my life. I was an alcoholic by the time I was in my 20's. I was a reject from the 60's. I had tried every kind of drugs there were to try. I had done all the sinning there was to do until I was a total wreck. Like I said earlier, I had been saved when I was in the 6th grade. I knew right from wrong. My parents had taught me. I read the Bible when I was young. I went to church. Then one day I decided I was tired of being good. I wanted to know what it was like to be bad. I found out. It only took me a few years to wreck my life to the place that I couldn't fix it. I didn't care about anything because I had messed up for so long that I thought there was no hope for me.

I am thankful that God kept me safe and kept me alive because I know that without a doubt if I had died in those days, I would have gone to hell. Then God opened up my eyes so that I could see again. He started dealing with me about coming back home to His love where I belonged. When He saved me, He saved me from my worst enemy, myself.

You might be like I was. If you have left God and you have paid a price because of that, then don't give up hope. God still loves you. He will take you back home. One of my favorite stories is the Prodigal son. It is a story Jesus told to teach about God's love. A son left home with his inheritance. Partied it all away. Had a big time. Then reality hit. He found that when his money was gone, so were all his friends. He found himself working in a pigpen, feeding the pigs, so hungry that he ate the pig's food. He decided to go back home. He was afraid his father wouldn't welcome him home. As he went toward home, he saw his father, standing on a hill looking for him, where he had been every day since he left. Your heavenly father wants you to come home. When you come, you'll find His love for you just like it was before you left. Come home to His love. That is what I did, and I have never regretted it. God helped me to get my life together. He gave me hope, and saved me from myself.

When I started this, I mentioned how I always try to ask people if they have been saved. I do this because I know who I was when He saved me. I don't want them to go through things I went through. When I ask people this, I get all kinds of answers. Some people tell me that they know they are saved because they go to church. The Bible tells us there is only one way to heaven and that is by having a real relationship with God. It is important to go to church. The Bible tells us to do that. It strengthens us. It puts us in the middle of the right crowd, and we need that. But church can't save us. We have to be forgiven, to ask Jesus to come into our heart, and then we have to serve Him with our whole heart. Jesus says in John 14:6, "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Then in verse 15 He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." How many people do you know that go to church on Sunday, and go out during the week and act like the devil, cussing, drinking, smoking, partying, and doing whatever. Then they go back to church on Sunday. Do they really know Jesus? Do they really love Him? Are they keeping His commandments?

Are they really saved? Going to church can't save you. It can help keep you, but it can't save you.

Some people say that they are saved because they don't drink or party. They say that they are a good person and go to church, and because of that they are saved. Some say that because they are baptized they are saved. The Bible tells us that accepting Jesus is the only way to be saved. We can't earn our way to heaven. No matter how hard we try, we can't be good enough. The Bible tells us that our best is just filthy rags in the sight of a holy and perfect God. We can't be perfect and holy. We are saved when we repent and ask His forgiveness. When we ask Him in our heart, then we start to take on His holy nature. We do this because He is inside of us making a difference in us. That is the only way that we can ever be good enough to get to go to heaven. Being baptized can't save us. Baptism is something that you do to show people that you have been saved and forgiven of your sins. We are baptized because it represents that we have been saved and made new. The water doesn't save us or make us new. The blood of Jesus shed on Calvary, and our accepting it and the forgiveness that it brings is what saves us.

The saddest thing that I've heard people say is "I am too young to make that choice. I am too young to decide now. I don't want to decide that right now. There are other things that I want to do. I will put off being saved so that I can do those things." Then something happens and they die and go to hell because they put off the most important decision that they could ever make.

Then there are the people who get saved. They do all the right things to get saved, they are convicted, they repent, they ask Jesus into their heart, then they go out and keep doing the same things that they were doing before they were saved. They don't find a relationship with God that is real. They don't love Him. He isn't their best friend. They are too in love with the world and the crowd to love God enough to give them up. They act one way with the crowd and another with God, but God sees them in both worlds. This world is hard.

There is an enemy, the devil, who wants to destroy you and keep you from serving God. There will be people around you who don't know God, who will try to pull you down. Being saved is something we have to live every single day of our life if we want to stay strong to overcome all this. It isn't like a new suit of clothes that we can put on when we want to, and take it off when we don't want to wear them. It is a change that takes place in our lives for real. It is a heart's commitment to serve someone Who we love with all our hearts. We have to care enough that we want to do what is right because we know that pleases Him.

You won't be perfect. You will mess up. But the Bible tells us that we have an advocate with God, like a lawyer pleading our case. His name is Jesus. Jesus died to forgive us so you can be sure that He will forgive you. If you repent and you ask His forgiveness, He will forgive you. But some people take this way too far. I had one girl tell me, "I can drink, I can smoke, I can do whatever I want to, because I have been saved. Jesus will forgive me" Something is wrong with this kind of thinking. When I think back to my years when I left God, I did just that. I left Him. It is like I moved away from God's love. I moved out of His grace. I no longer obeyed Him, and I didn't care that I didn't. I stopped letting Him convict me. I stopped asking Him to forgive me. I was not forgiven. If I had died then, I would have died in my sin. I know without a shadow of doubt that I would have gone to hell. John 20:23 tells us, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained". We have to make up our mind Who we want to serve. We can't act like the world and say we are God's children. It doesn't work that way. Revelations 3:15-16 tells us how Jesus feels about people who are neither cold or hot, but they keep things in the middle of the road, trying to have it both ways. He says, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

You can be saved. You can know that you are saved. Some young people, and old, tell me that they don't know if they are saved or not. Make up your mind. Commit your heart to the Lord. God will meet you more than halfway. If when you read this chapter you feel Him dealing with your heart, don't turn Him away. If you feel Him talking to you in your heart, if you feel His conviction, don't shove it away or ignore it. It is precious. If you haven't been saved, don't ignore that feeling that He is knocking on your heart's door. Open wide your heart. Let Him in. If you have been saved, and you feel His conviction, that feeling that lets you know that you are not where you should be in your relationship with Him, that you are doing things or having attitudes that aren't according to the best that you can be in Him, don't run from Him. Repent. Ask for His forgiveness. Ask Him to help you change through the power of His Spirit that is in your heart. He loves you so much and you need that love more than you'll ever know. Run to Him. I know that He will be there.

We live in a mixed up world. Wrong is made to seem right and right is made to seem wrong. The Bible talks about an "untoward generation", a backward generation. Here are some examples. I see people who constantly smell like cigarettes and liquor. They can't open their mouth without cussing. But if you mention God to them, they quickly turn religious and talk about how they pray and how God is there for them. I know people who live like the devil, but if something goes wrong, they right away start praying and expect God to be there for them. They don't commit a thing to do it God's way, but expect Him to commit to them. I know a guy who everybody said was the best. He loved people. He constantly was doing things to help them. He was an all around good fellow. But he never acknowledged Jesus as His Savior. When he died everybody talked about how surely he went to heaven. I know a guy who used to sing in bars. He says that most nights in some of the nightclubs they would end with people requesting Gospel music. I guess it was because everybody got drunk by the end of the night.

By then they would get more and more guilty feeling, so they would start singing Gospel music. What about all these people that we talked about in this paragraph? Were they saved? When they die, if they don't change anything in their lives, will they go to heaven?

The Bible says in John 14:6 that there is only one way to heaven. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Salvation comes through Jesus who died so that we could be forgiven. We have to acknowledge that Jesus is the Son of God. Mary was the mother of Jesus, but she isn't the most important. She was just flesh and blood like us. We don't worship her. We worship Jesus. Then to be saved we have to accept Jesus as our Savior. We have to acknowledge that salvation comes through Him and we have to acknowledge our need to accept salvation. We have to be sorry for what we have done wrong, we have to repent of our wrongdoing, our sin. We can't make excuses for our sin. If you aren't sorry for your sin, and admit your sin, then you won't ever be able to change. You will never be set free from it. You have to let go of the old ways to take on the new ways. You can't hold on to anything that you do wrong if you want to be a new person. The Bible says that we can be "new creatures" in Christ. God can make us new, clean our slate and start us over.

When we repent, it can't be a casual "I'm sorry, God". It has to come from the depths of our heart. Then He will forgive us and clean us up. It will be like a soul washing and cleaning experience. You will definitely know when that happens for real.

We acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. We acknowledge our need for salvation. We repent because God's Spirit is dealing with our hearts, leading us to Him. Then we ask Jesus to come into our heart. The Holy Spirit, a part of God, comes into our heart to live. We were created to have a place in us where God's Spirit can live. Sounds pretty fantastic to be true, but that doesn't mean that it isn't true. Before we are saved, we have an empty place inside of us.

When we are saved, God's Spirit comes in and we are no longer empty. When He comes into our hearts there is a change. God wipes us clean. I have known people to lose years off their faces, even their looks changed. When God changed their life through salvation, years of hard living, the wages of sin, rolls away and they were made new. When that happens, we no longer want to do the things that are destroying us. We open our eyes and see things the way they are. Bad no longer looks good. We have someone inside of us helping us to stay away from those things that can destroy us. Addictions no longer bind us. All the mess of our life begins to straighten up. We are made new. We have the Spirit of God inside our heart to help us stay new. God helps us to change from the inside out. He comes in and enables us to change.

We then acknowledge our commitment to God because of His love for us. Salvation is like marriage. The Bible compares the church-God's people-to a bride. One such verse is Isaiah 62:5, "...as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Salvation is like saying your marriage vows. It is a lifetime commitment because of God's love for you and your love for Him. Then you start to grow in your relationship with Him, just like you would grow in your relationship with your spouse. You get to know God. You get to know Jesus. You get to know the Holy Spirit, God's Spirit. They lead you and keep you. They strengthen you. They continue to change you and enable you to win whatever battles you face. All this is what it means to be saved. Do you have to be like all those people I mentioned in the paragraphs before this one: the guys at the bar singing Gospel music in their beers, the man who was good but didn't know the joy of loving and serving God, the people bound in their sin. Praise God, no you don't have to be that way. You are saved.

Chapter 2. Why Change

I hear people say that when you are saved you have to change the things that you do? What am I supposed to do after I am saved?

How do I know what is wrong and what is right?

Does my lifestyle have to change when I've been saved?

Why does my life style change when I've been saved?

The first thing that I want to say in answer to these questions is that one of the reasons your life style will change when you've been saved is because you will change. God's Spirit comes into your heart and mind. He will change your "want to". You won't want to do the things that you did before. You will look at things differently. When I got saved I knew that God was in me because I changed. I didn't think it was such great fun to go out and drink myself senseless any more. I took a look at the things I had done, and they didn't look the same any more. I realized that they were destroying me. I knew that at last I had help to be able to overcome them. I was set free. My "want to" was changed. We don't have to stay stuck in our sins, our weaknesses, and our failures. We don't have to stay condemned because we can't do it right. We don't have to constantly have that struggle that comes when we know we should do better but can't. We are made new. God sets us free to be the best that we can be, and He gives us the strength to do this. He helps us from the inside of us out. When you have been saved you are set free. People look at this all backwards. They put off being saved because they think that will be a bondage to them. Then when they finally come to their senses and get saved, they wonder why in the world they didn't do it before. One of my deepest regrets was having waited until I got done having my fun before I gave in and let God have His way with my life. It took a while for God to pick the pieces of my life together that I had scattered here and there while having fun.

We've talked a lot about this before. God wants the best for you because He loves you. His ways aren't our ways. Isaiah 55:9 says, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." He is that much smarter than we are. He is a righteous God—a right walking and thinking God. He isn't so weak that He winks at sin like it is OK while He watches us destroy our lives by doing wrong. He isn't so wishy-washy that He lets some people get by with doing some things while He penalizes others. He is righteous. He is right. He knows what is best for us when in our weakness we can't see past our own noses and past what we want to do for the moment. If you want to have a good life full of good things and peace of mind, you have to admit that He knows what is best for you, and His ways are the best.

Human nature is terrible. The Bible talks about it in Job 5:7, "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." We are prone to trouble. We have to admit that to be able to change. We have to admit that our way doesn't work, and we need God's guidance and help to be able to make a lasting change in our lives. We have to be willing to submit to God's love to be able to yield to His way. We have to be able to say, "God, I know that you love me. I know that your way is right. My way is a mess. I need you. I need you to help me to do it your way." When we do this, then we can change with an everlasting change. If we don't, then even though we have been saved and have changed because of our salvation experience, we will eventually go back to being the way we were before we were saved. We have to let go of our self-will and our own way to let God work in our lives.

Serving God isn't about just having a set of rules to live by. It is about allowing God to change us for the better. It is about letting Him love us into shape. It is about letting Him lead us into better things. Read Psalms 23. It talks about how our good Shepherd leads us by still waters and green pastures. Everyday I talk to Christians who are going through constant battles and struggles in their lives, constant turmoil.

Their families stay in trouble. They go from one bad situation into another one. There are no green pastures and still waters in their life. What is the problem? They aren't yielding to God. They aren't letting their Shepherd lead them into those places. When God leads them to go one way, they pull in the opposite direction. When He shows them how to fix a problem, they do the opposite and mess things up even more. When He leads them beside still waters, they run in the opposite direction and make it all worse. Why is it important to admit God's way is best and yield to His will?

Doing what is right is just the beginning. Letting God lead you and help you is the next step. It starts with you learning what is wrong and what is right. Even that isn't just about a list of do's and don'ts that are just there to cramp our style. It is about a journey and the best path to take to get where we are going. It is about having a life that is full of peace, or choosing a life full of turmoil. It is about making heaven our home.

I have worked with young people for the better part of the last 30 years. I hope that makes me qualified to understand what young people go through. I have watched a lot of young people grow up. Some did well with their lives while others didn't. I can say that most of those who did well had an understanding of two things. They understood about having a relationship with God that was real. They had His help. The second thing was that they understood about right and wrong and how to tell the difference. They were committed to following the right way. Can knowing the difference between right and wrong make that much difference in your life? After all, isn't right and wrong just everyone's opinion? Doesn't everyone have their own ideas of what is right and what is wrong? Seems like it? When you talk to different people about the difference between the two you sure can get a lot of different answers. To answer this question, think for a minute of some of the people you know that are having a hard time in their lives because they have made wrong decisions. Maybe they are trapped in addiction, sexual sins, drugs or drinking.

Maybe they are pregnant. Maybe they have situations in their lives that are just down right scary to have to go through. I'm sure that they didn't just wake up one morning and decide to go out and ruin their lives. I'm sure they didn't choose the outcome. So how did their problems come about? Maybe it was because they lost sight of the difference between wrong and right. Maybe it was because they drifted into things that weren't good for them because they lost sight of this. I hope and I pray that when you read this book it can help to guide you away from some of the things that happen that destroy so many young people. I pray that you can learn the difference between wrong and right and this changes your lives.

Too many times it is easy just to drift through life. We tend to follow whoever is in front of us and we hope that they are going in the right direction. Your life and your future are too important for you to just drift and follow. You need to have direction in your life. You need to stand for something or you will fall for anything. Sometimes we put too much emphasis in having friends and being accepted in a crowd. Who cares what crowd, just any crowd will do. When young people get in trouble do you know who automatically is blamed? Their friends. I hear parents say every day, "My child wouldn't have gotten into this or that situation if it hadn't been for their friends or the crowd that they were hanging around with". They forget that you can't blame what happens to you on other people. What you choose to do is what you choose. That can't be blamed on others. Still there is a little truth in what they say. If you don't have a sense of what is right and what is wrong, then it is easy to get in with the wrong crowd and become a follower. You will eventually wind up in the wrong place at the wrong time. Maybe this has already happened to you. If it has then you know what I am talking about. If it has, then you'll know that you can't blame the crowd or your friends. You are the one who did it. It was your choice.

It is so easy to get side tracked. Everybody is out there saying, "Hey try this. It is really great. Nothing but fun here.

Hey, you need to go this way. It is definitely the way to go. This is the thing that you need to do.” Every day we have choices that we are asked to make. Lots of times we can get on the wrong road because we haven’t made up our minds which roads are the best ones to take. We really don’t sit down and think about which ones are the right ones, so when someone says, hey this is it, we just follow them. We let life happen to us. We don’t think things through. We hear about how a lot of young people made mistakes because they made wrong decisions. I’m not sure that everybody who has problems made a wrong decision. They just failed to make any decision at all. They didn’t decide on a course of action that would help them have a good life. They didn’t decide what was right and what was wrong. They just let life happen. They just let whatever wind was blowing that particular day blow them along, even if it was a bad wind which was blowing in entirely the wrong direction. I hope that as you read this book you see the importance of taking hold of your life and your future.

A lot of young people are genuinely confused about all this. They want to do right, but aren’t sure what right is. It is hard to make up your mind to run a race as hard as you can if you have no idea which direction to run in. I won’t tell you my opinion about this. I will talk about what God’s Word says about the subject. Also, it is one thing to know the difference between right and wrong and another to be strong enough to do what is right. We’ll talk about how God can strengthen you to be able to do right.

I can remember when I was a teenager how my grandmother taught us about right and wrong. She would hold up two fingers and put her other hand between them. Her one hand would separate her two fingers so that they were distinctly separate. She would say, “There are two sides. I don’t care about what everyone else says, there is a right and there is a wrong, and there is a difference between the two.” That has been a lot of years. Since then this world has gotten really confused about this subject. Lots of churches, preachers and congregations, have gotten this totally confused.

I've talked to a lot of young people who have lost sight of what is wrong and what is right and they really don't know which is which. That is because everywhere you go people have a different opinion. But just because everyone has a different opinion, that doesn't change the truth. There is a black and there is a white. There is a day and there is a night. There is a wrong and there is a right. As the old saying goes, "If you don't stand for something you will fall for anything". I have watched so many young people make choices that wrecked their lives. They got caught in a crowd that got caught up in doing wrong. They did wrong. All the sudden they found themselves in situations that destroyed their whole world in only just a few moments. I believe that is because they really didn't see the difference between right and wrong and if they did, they lacked the strength to stand against what is wrong. How can you tell right from wrong? Who sets the rules? Does it really matter? What difference does it make? When you know right from wrong, how can you find the strength to do what is right? Are you alone when you stand up for what is right? I want to try to help you to find the answers to these questions.

As I mentioned earlier, it is easy to decide what is wrong and right by doing what everybody else is doing. I know young people who excuse having sex outside of marriage because they say it is OK to do that. They say it must be OK because everybody else is doing it. I talked to a girl not long ago. She had been a Christian for some time. She gave in on the issue of not having sex because she thought everybody else was doing it. Now she has a baby. It only took once. She had talked to other people who hadn't gotten pregnant and thought that just once was OK. After all how could it be so wrong if everyone else was doing it? Now she has a little one on the way and she is not doing well with that. A lifetime of responsibility isn't as fun as some people make it out to be. I know someone who took the attitude that it isn't bad to smoke pot; everybody is doing it. So what if it is illegal. They thought they were smart enough to get by.

It didn't happen that way, and now they are facing intent to distribute charges, and it looks as if prison is a plan for their future. Hey, how could it be wrong? Everybody else is doing it. I know someone who thought it was gay to be "gay". When they got into that life style they did it as much for attention as for anything. Now they regret it, but they feel trapped and don't know how to get out. It isn't what they thought it would be, and the emotional scars and physical problems that this created are getting them down. They feel so trapped by it all that they are beginning to think that the only way out of it all is death. But at the time when they started this lifestyle the world made it look fine, so they did it. I know someone who thought drinking was cool, because everybody else did it. Now they are living with the scars of killing a buddy while driving drunk. Of course, they never planned on that and never thought it would happen to them. All those people in this paragraph never thought that would happen to them. They just did it because it couldn't be wrong; everybody was doing it. The scars and battles, the problems and situations that came from the things they did will be with them for a lifetime if they don't find deliverance.

What about smoking and drinking? Are they wrong? Is it a sin to put something that costs thousands of dollars in our mouth that causes us to have cancer? What do you think? Is that pleasing to God when you blow smoke in His face? What about alcohol? Some people act like it is fine to drink as long as you don't get drunk. The Bible says when grape juice turns to wine, that you aren't even supposed to look on it. In another part of the scriptures it says that it is fine to take a little wine for your stomach's sake. How can both these be true? The Greek word for wine that has fermented is different than the Greek word for grape juice. One uses the one word and the other scripture uses the other. Both were translated to be wine. Besides this, why mess with anything that can destroy your life. Why start in that direction. Isn't it better to stay away from things that can destroy you? Isn't it better to run from those things? Why hang around with disaster?

When I talk about doing right, some people assume that I am just talking about not doing the “biggies”. They think that I mean not drinking, not doing drugs, not having sex, not smoking. Some people think that saying no to those things is all there is to the decisions that have to be made about doing right and wrong. I guess a lot of people think that if they don’t do the big things then they are OK in every thing else. Here is a thought. Are you only called on to do right when those kinds of things come up? What about the other things that you face everyday? Let’s talk about some of the things that are not “biggies” but that can shape your life all the same.

The Bible talks about the little foxes spoiling the vine. That means the little things that can mess us up. One example that I can think about is lying. I guess as a teacher that is one that I deal with a lot. That and cheating which is really a form of lying. Did you hear the story about the boy who cried wolf? You may have heard it when you were a kid. It tells about a boy who was a shepherd. He would get bored up there sitting with the sheep and he would think up ways to have a little action. He would yell out, wolf!! Everybody would come running. Sheep would scatter. People would yell and freak out. He thought it was great fun. He did it several times.... Until. Until the day that the wolf really came. He yelled for help, but nobody came. They thought he was doing the same thing that he had before. Because he had lied so much, no one paid any attention to him when he told the truth. If we aren’t careful, that can happen to us when we lie. One day it might be important that people believe us, but nobody does because we have lied. It is that way with anything that we do wrong. If we don’t do what is right, if we only half way try to do our best, then one day it will cost us.

I was talking with someone on the day that I wrote this chapter. They worked in the guidance office in the public school. We were talking about how it seemed like the word “morals” was a word that isn’t understood any more. When you have morals, it means you are concerned with doing right.

It isn't just that you don't do drugs, or don't drink, or other things like that. It means that on an everyday basis you are concerned with doing the best that you can do and being the best you can be. It means that you know the difference between right and wrong and your decisions show this.

One of the places in the Bible that people often go to find out what they should and shouldn't do is the Ten Commandments. Everybody these days, even people who don't read their Bibles, knows about the Ten Commandments. They have become even more known because of the government's decision to take them out of public buildings. I think that it is sad, and more than a little scary, that our government wants to take down the most basic and complete rule for moral standards that there is. What are the Ten Commandments? When Moses led the children of Israel in to the desert to escape from Egypt, he went on a mountain. While he was there God gave him a list of rules that the Israelites were to follow. God did this so that they would have a healthy and happy life if they kept these guides. What do the Ten Commandments say? Let's read them. They are found in Exodus 20:1. I haven't written them out word for word like they are in the Bible. I just summarized them.

- I. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. That means that we aren't to worship anybody or anything other than God. A lot of people get messed up in religions that aren't true because they forget this commandment.
- II. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. This means that we don't worship statues or idols. There are lots of religions today where people worship a statue or idol. There is a lot of ways of thinking that are tied up with these religions. Be careful of any kind of thinking that is related to Eastern religions. I'm talking about karate, meditation, and other similar practices. These things have in them a way of thinking that comes from Hindu, Buddhists, and other religions that are pagan.

Most of these people worship statues and idols. Avoid that. That is what God is saying here.

- III. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. This is something that is done a lot if we aren't careful. It means don't cuss by saying God's name.
- IV. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. That means go to church and keep Sunday to think about God. Also it talks about resting on Sunday. That is a good healthy practice, physically and mentally, and spiritually. Doctors today talk about how this is a way to stay healthy and have less stress.
- V. Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land...WOW. Did you know that how you treat your Mom and Dad might have a lot to do with how old you will be when you die? Think about it. How many times have you known someone to do something in rebellion to what their parents wanted and they died because of it. Their parents didn't want them to do it because they knew it was bad, but they didn't listen, and they were killed because they didn't hear and do.
- VI. Thou shalt not kill.
- VII. Thou shalt not commit adultery. That means don't have sex with someone who is married if you aren't the one that is married to them. The Bible says don't commit fornication either. That means don't have sex with anybody if you aren't married to them.
- VIII. Thou shalt not steal.
- IX. Thou shalt not bear false witness. This means don't lie. This means don't cheat, either. That is a form of lying. By the way, there is no such thing as a little white lie. If you tell something that isn't true, then you have lied.
- X. Thou shalt not covet. That means don't want what other people have. Be content with what you have.

There is a word of wisdom here. Some people spend a lifetime wishing that they were like this or that person, wishing that they had something someone else had, or wishing they could be someone else. They aren't happy with themselves. God made you to be you. Nobody can be you like you can. It is important that you learn to see yourself as special, and that you be proud of being you.

These are just 10 simple rules. God gave them to Moses to give to His people. I have heard doctors, psychiatrists, and many other professionals say that if we live by these 10 simple rules, we will have a healthy, happy, and successful life.

One of the main reasons why it is important to decide to do right in all that you do is so that you can have peace of mind. I know a lot of people who struggle with mental and emotional problems because they have settled for doing wrong. They constantly feel bad for what they have done. They have no peace of mind. When they lay their head on their pillow at night, they have to think about what they have done. When you choose to do right, you can have peace with God, peace with others, and most of all you can find peace with yourself.

One of the best rules to go by in choosing what to do is this. Ask yourself, "What would Jesus do? Would Jesus go here? Would Jesus say this? Would Jesus do this? How would Jesus react to this? What would He do if He was faced with this same situation?" If you ask yourself this before you act it will change your life. Everyday you'll have to choose what is right and what is wrong. Everywhere you go (work, home, school, personal life) your success will be dependent on whether you do right. If you lie, steal, cheat, have poor attitudes at home, you will have a rocky home life. If you do the same at school, you won't have peace there for sure. If you do these things on the job, then you will get fired. I see a lot of young people who haven't learned how to have good moral character on the job. They lose a job, go to another.

They lose that one, go to the next and lose that one as well. All the while they blame the people at their workplaces for their problems. I'll hear them say, "If my boss hadn't done this or that, I would still be working there. If everybody at my job had acted right, I would still be working there." All the while it was their own problem that caused them to lose all those jobs. If you don't have good morals, if you don't choose to do what is right, it will affect every part of your life. Everywhere in life it is important to do what is right. If you want to have a successful happy life that is full of peace, do what is right. If you want to have a happy home, do what is right. If you want to do well in the work place, do what is right. If you want to be proud of who you are and what you have accomplished, do what is right.

Have you ever thought about who came up with rules for doing right? Have you ever wondered who it was that decided what was right and what was wrong? Let's talk about that. These are some of the questions that a lot of young people ask me when we are talking about what is wrong and what is right. Just who decides what is wrong and what is right? What is the difference between the two and how do we tell? For that matter, who decides what is true as far as religion goes? What is wrong and right there? Everyone knows there are more religions out there than we can even know about. All of these people say that what they believe is right. People like the Moslems die for their God. Their beliefs are certainly different than ours as Christians. Some of them think that the way to serve God is to kill Christians. Who is to say which belief is right and which is wrong? Even in the Christian world, there are so many different churches, all with different beliefs. I have heard some young people tell me that one reason they don't go to church is that they are afraid that they might get into a church that doesn't believe the truth. All this is so confusing that they don't know which way to go, so they don't go anywhere. Some feel like they feel when they go into a huge candy store and they don't pick out anything, because it is too overwhelming to try to decide on something else.

They don't pick out anything because there are too many choices. How are you supposed to tell the difference between wrong and right churches? Between wrong and right religions? What does this have to do with being able to tell the difference between right and wrong? The world will tell you that it is wrong to judge between the two. But if you don't, then you will wind up in something that could destroy you, so you had better be able to tell the difference. How can you tell what is the truth?

A lot of people will tell you that there isn't a real truth. They say that every thing has an element of truth in it, so it doesn't matter what you believe. They will tell you that there isn't really a wrong and right, that it is your choice to decide this. They will tell you that everybody's religion, no matter how strange, is OK. They say that there are no absolute truths, so we just have to believe something and hope for the best. They say that what is right for you might not be right for me, and what is wrong for you might not be wrong for me. That makes everything even more confusing. Are they right? Where can you find the answers to all this?

There is one book that has been around since the beginning of time. It has been on the bestseller list for thousands of years, and if you'll check it out, it is still on the bestseller list today. For real. It has a unique history like no other book that has ever been written. What are some other facts that prove the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible was written for over a 1,500 year span for over 40 generations by over 40 authors from every walk of life. It was written in many different places, and at many different times. It was written on three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. It was written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Its subject matter includes hundreds of subjects. Subjects that now can't be agreed on when mentioned or discussed. Yet there is an agreement between the writers that could only exist because God's Spirit inspired them. They agree as if one author had written what they wrote. These are only a few of the reasons why we know that the Bible is God's Word.

Let's read what the Bible has to say about itself:

Psalm 119:89 says, "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." From the beginning of time to the end of time, God's Word will stand.

In II Timothy 3:16 we read why the Bible was given to us. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness."

Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Thy word is a lamp unto feet, and a light unto my path."

The main reason why the Bible was written is found in John 20:31, "But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Even though there were several men who helped write the Bible, God is the author. That is why throughout the Bible it is referred to as being God's Word. The book of Jeremiah is a part of the Old Testament. Jeremiah 36:2 tells how the Bible was written. In this verse God tells Jeremiah to get a scroll and write down the words that God spoke to him. That is how it was written. God told people what to write, and they wrote it. Ezekiel 1:3 tells how the book of Ezekiel was written. "The Word of God came expressly unto Ezekiel, the priest...and the hand of the Lord was there upon him." Here are some more verses that tell how the Bible was written. Acts 1:16 tells us about something that happened in Acts, "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." The Holy Ghost will speak through and to people. That is how the Bible was written. God's Spirit told people what to write and they did. That is why the Bible is such a different book.

I've had young people ask me this. Anyone can say that God told them to write something, and then just write anything. How do we know that this might be what happened? The hundreds of prophecies that are in the Bible is one of the things that prove God's Spirit led people what to write. What are prophecies? Prophecies were written about an event before it happened. They tell the details of things that happen sometimes hundreds of years before an event has happened. There are hundreds of prophecies in the Bible. There are three hundred prophecies that are just about Jesus, His life on earth and how He died. We can even read in the Bible about things that are happening today. How can this be so? God knows everything. Time means nothing to God. He is so big that in the past He could see the future. He knows your future as well as He knows the day you were born. He knows all the details about you. He even knows how many hairs are on your head. Matthew 10:30 says, "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." He is different than us. In Isaiah 55:9, God tells us, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Time, future or past, is all the same to God. He knows everything. So thousands of years ago He was able to tell the Bible's writers what is going to happen even today.

Let's talk about some of the prophecies in the Bible that were written about Jesus. Here are only a few of them. Keep in mind that these verses were written sometimes hundreds of years before Jesus was even born. Micah 5:2 said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. We read in the Christmas story that this was so and how that came about. I am sure that the king that declared that they should go to their families' birth city to be taxed didn't read the scriptures and decide to make this decree so that this verse would be true. Psalms 41:9 tells us that Jesus' friend would be the one to betray him and deliver him to the soldiers to kill him. We know this is true because Judas was a friend of Jesus. Isaiah 50:6 says that they would spit on Jesus and pluck out his beard and his hair.

We read in Mark, written hundreds of years later, that is just what happened. Isaiah 53:5 tells us that Jesus would have stripes. Hundreds of years after that was written the Roman soldiers whipped Jesus with a whip leaving stripes on His back. These are only a few of the prophecies about Jesus in the Bible that came to pass. Remember, there were over three hundred prophecies in the Bible concerning Jesus.

The prophecies that were written about Jesus aren't the only prophecies in the Bible. There were prophecies about who would be King, which country would be the most powerful, which countries would fall, which countries would try to overthrow other countries, cities that would be destroyed, and much more. There are even prophecies about certain things that are happening overseas and to America today that were written about in the Bible. Through all this we can see that it is easy to know that the Bible was written because God told the people what to write. How else could have all these prophecies have been true?

Let's talk a little about something else. A lot of young people ask me how we know that Christianity is true and other religions are not. All religions have a central figure, someone who started that religion and caused it to grow. In Christianity, that central figure is Jesus. In the Moslem religion, that central figure is Mohammed. In Buddhism, the central figure is Buddha. These are just a couple of examples. Christianity is the only religion in the world that has historic proof that the main person in their religion was raised from the dead. How could a religion say this if it wasn't true? There had to be proof that it was true before something so out of the ordinary could be accepted as the truth. To start with, Jesus appeared to over thousands of people after He rose from the dead. He spent 40 days on the earth, teaching people after He came back from the dead. His death was on public record. Hundreds saw Him die. When He came back from the dead you can be sure it caused a stir. It was talked about all over for years. It was written down and recorded as historical fact, not only in the Bible, but also in lots of historical documents from that day.

I am sure that if the Moslems could have gotten by with it, they would have claimed that Mohammed came back from the dead. I'm sure that if the Buddhists could have gotten by with it, they would have claimed that Buddha came back from the dead. The same is true with all religions. They couldn't say it because it wasn't proven to be true. This is one reason why we know that Christianity is a true religion.

Another way that we know that Christianity is true is because of salvation. When you get saved, you ask Jesus into your heart. He really comes in. He makes a change when He comes in. You know that He is real because He is in your heart. What other religion can say that their main figure came back from the dead, still lives, and can come into your heart today? Isn't that kind of far out for someone to say? If you have asked Jesus to come into your heart, if you have been saved, then you know that this is true. It really does happen. I know Jesus is alive because He is inside of me. I know him personally. I walk with Him every day. I am not worshipping a memory of some dead guy. I am serving a living, loving Savior who died because He loves me, who came back from the dead, and now lives inside of me. He helps me to do what I am supposed to do because He is in my heart. That is certainly proof enough for me. I know that Jesus rose from the dead. He is my best friend today. I know Him. He is not just a figment of my imagination. I have seen evidence of His presence in my life for over 30 years.

So with all this proof about the Bible being God's Word and Christianity being the truth, are you convinced that the Bible is the place to go to find out the difference between right and wrong? It has many guides for our lives. Psalms 119:138 tells us, "Thy testimonies (meaning God's) that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful." The things that He tells us to do can be trusted. God's Word teaches us right from wrong.

We need to remember that we have an anchor, something that holds us steady through the storm. Something that we can depend on. Just like a ship's anchor holds the ship.

It keeps it from drifting in the current. It holds it steady in rough, stormy waters. The Bible holds us steady today when things get scary. When it seems like there is so much wrong, and so much bad stuff around us, it is good to know that there is something that tells us that we can make it. It is good to know that there is something that is true that we can hold on to. Something that will guide us. Something that we can count on to be true. God's Word can help us find out what is wrong and what is right. But it doesn't stop there. It shows us how to find strength to be able to do right, and it shows us how we can change.

Chapter 3. How Can God Help Me to Do Right

I can't do right. Often I can't make the right choices. I want to get saved, but I know that I can't do right. Is there help for me?

I am a Christian but it is hard for me to do right? Is there help for me?

I used to work in a children's home. The kids lived there. It was a Christian home and every day those kids were taught Bible verses. They were even memorizing verses in kindergarten. Learning scripture is a very good thing to do. I don't mean at all to sound like it isn't important to learn verses, because it is. The Bible will help you in life. What you eat becomes a part of you. I can tell who likes lots of junk food, and who tries to eat healthy foods just by looking at them. We are what we eat. It's the same way with what you take into your spirit. What you take into the inside of you becomes a part of who and what you are. This is what I mean. If you take into your mind and heart and spirit things that are Godly and good, they will help to make you stronger in God. If you listen to sermons, read the Bible, pray, listen to Gospel music, hang around Christian friends, go to church, all these things will feed your Spirit and strengthen the Spirit of God in you. If you listen to rock music, hang around with friends who aren't Christians, never pray or read your Bible, then don't be surprised when you get weak and eventually stop serving God. This is important to remember especially if you are trying to change for the better.

I've known lots of young people who start out serving God. Then I run into them one day and they are back out doing the same old things that they were doing before they got saved. Matter of fact, they are worse. How does that happen? They stop feeding the Spirit man good things. They stop strengthening that part of them. They stop putting an importance on the things of God in their lives. Maybe they get a job that won't let them go to church because they have to work at church time. Maybe they start hanging around with their old crowd. Little by little they change back to the way they were.

They begin to change in how they act, talk, and look. Instead of hanging out in church around Christians they start hanging out in places they shouldn't be in. They lose sight of what is wrong and what is right.

Matthew 13:3-23 is a story that Jesus told that explains what I am trying to tell you. This is a parable, one of the stories Jesus told to illustrate different points that He was teaching about. Jesus tells us that a man went out sowing seed. Some of the seeds fell on ground that was so hard that it wouldn't even grow. Some of it fell on good ground, but the birds ate it before it could take root and grow anything. Some of the seed fell in the middle of thorns and the thorns choked out the plant as it grew. Some of it fell on good ground and had lots of fruit.

In this story, the seed that Jesus talks about is God's Word. Some people hear God's Word but their heart is so hard it won't sink in. Some people hear it and the devil comes along and lies to them and talks them out of believing that it is true. This is like the seed that was eaten by the birds. Some people hear God's Word, but they let the thorns (the cares of this world) choke it out so that it doesn't grow. Some people let it grow in their heart and they grow and change and their lives have fruit, good things that God grows. God's Word is the same for all of them, just like the seed is the same for all the sowers. But what they do with that seed determines whether or not it grows well in their lives. What you do with God's Word determines whether or not you change for the better, and whether or not that change lasts. We need to fill up on things that strengthen us so that we can do right. All those things are like the water that waters the plant that grows from the seed of God's Word.

So like I said at the beginning of this chapter reading the Bible is very important. But when those kids at that children's home memorized all that scripture it had a bad effect. Wow, that is really something to say, but it was true. What do I mean by this? They would memorize scripture all day long, but they wouldn't put it to practice in their lives.

It was just words that they were memorizing. They didn't have a real relationship with God. Lots of them weren't even Christians. They would memorize the verses that said if you sin you would die. They would memorize verses that said the disobedient would be punished. They would talk about hell and how they didn't want to go there, but nobody told them how to get to go to heaven. The Bible was used like a paddle to spank them when they did bad, but nobody told them how to do good. Have you ever had a teacher at school that stayed on your case about not learning, but never taught you? Have you ever had a teacher that kept hounding you to do better, but never told you how? You probably got defensive and more than just a little rebellious. That is what happened to these kids. They were some of the most rebellious kids I have ever known. It is important to know right from wrong. You also have to learn how to be able to do right.

It is human nature to do badly. Without God, there is no way that we can do right. Like we talked about earlier, we can't even know the difference between good and bad on our own. How do I know? Those of you that baby sit, or have little brothers or sisters, do you have to teach them how to do wrong, or do you have to teach them how to do right? Even the smallest ones already know how to get into trouble. It is in their nature. That is why you have to teach them to obey and listen to what you say. They are born wanting to do what is wrong. We are all that way. God says it in Job 5:7, "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." As natural as it is for sparks of a fire to fly up, it is as natural for us to get into trouble.

A man named Paul wrote most of the New Testament. We'll talk more about him later on. In Romans 7:14-15 Paul says, "For we know that the law (of God) is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." He says that the things of God are spiritual. God is a spirit. He isn't a flesh person like we are. He is perfect. We aren't. We are what the Bible calls carnal. We are born with a sin nature.

We are born with a tendency to sin. God is our only hope to be able to be any different. Paul says that the things that he wanted to do he didn't do, and the things that he didn't want to do, he did. Does that sound familiar? Have you ever felt that way? Paul wanted to do right. He said in verse 22, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man." Part of him wanted to do right, but it seemed like he couldn't. Well, it sounds like from what he is saying that it is OK to do wrong and to do whatever we want to. If we already know that we can't do it, why try. Is that the attitude to take about things? That is just like those of you who have failed grades in the past. You come to school with the attitude I can't do it so why try. Who cares whether or not I graduate. Then you realize that you can do it after all. Some of you get so excited by knowing this that you start doing more than anyone in the class and you'll graduate early. You figured out that you could do it after you spent all that time feeling like a loser. Look what happened. Life is the same way. If you think that there is no way that you can live life as a Christian, then you won't be able to. You will fail.

Some of you may have tried to be a Christian before and every time it just turned out wrong. You went back to your old ways. You still know that it is right, but you don't know how to do it, so you quit trying. It is one thing to know the difference between wrong and right, but it is another to be able to do right. That is what Paul is saying. In verse 24 he says, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" This sounds pretty desperate. Have you ever felt that bad when you were trying to do right and no matter how you tried you only messed up? Is there a way out of all this?

Paul was a pretty smart guy. If you read in chapter 8 you'll see that he found the answer. Now remember, when we talk about the flesh part of us, or the carnal part, that is us minus God trying to do things on our own. When we talk about the spirit part of us, that is the Spirit of God that comes into our lives, our heart and mind, when we are saved.

Paul says in verse 5, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.” If we ignore the things of God and build our lives around everything else but Him, we are minding the things of the flesh. If we value the things of God and we concentrate on them, we are spiritually minded. One way leads to death and the other to life. We are talking about eternal death. Verse 9-14 says, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”

Wow. That is a tongue twister. Sounds hard to understand when you first read it, but it is kind of like those Algebra questions that sound hard at first, but when you break it down it really isn't hard after all. Paul is saying here that the way to have a good life is to concentrate on the things that God wants you to concentrate on and to do the things that God wants you to do. The way to have a life filled with being a winner over things that get us down (or what we call a victorious life) is to concentrate on God, His Word, listening to His voice, and obeying Him. We can have a victorious life by letting the Spirit of God in us be stronger than the flesh part of us.

If you have been saved, the Spirit of God dwells in you. Have you ever wondered why God did that, made us so that we are like a vessel, a container that can hold His Spirit? He did that because that is how we can do right. He comes inside of us to live. He quickens our bodies with life.

He strengthens us to be able to do right from the inside out. We no longer let our flesh, our will, our body, and our mind have their way. We know the trouble that can lead to. We let God have His way inside of us. Just like the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead, it can raise us up above the things in us that will cause us to die. We will live when we let the Spirit of God live in us and be strong in us. We yield to His Spirit.

We fail when we try to do it on our own. I can't live a victorious Christian life on my own, without God's Spirit in me helping me, strengthening me, leading me. I've been a Christian for lots of years, but I still can't. Nobody can. God knew that. That is why He made us to hold His Spirit, so He could come inside of us and help us. Wouldn't that be great if somebody could do an implant for you and put in you the mind of a genius, the physical reflexes of the greatest athlete in the world, and the abilities of the most gifted people? You would really be something. That is true. But you still wouldn't be able to do right. Because Jesus himself comes into our heart through the Holy Spirit, we can do the things that we need to do. We can do right. We don't have to fail.

So does that mean that we are automatically perfect? Does that mean after we get saved that we won't mess up ever again because God is in us helping us to be perfect? We all know that isn't true. Why? Do you know any people who are perfect? We aren't perfect because we still have our flesh side in us. Our flesh is that side of us that is bent toward trouble. But we have help to overcome that side of us. So things are better. But we still have that old nature. How do we overcome that side of us? Like we said earlier in the chapter, we do the things that feed that part of us and make it stronger so that it overcomes the flesh part of us. We let God's Spirit be strong in our lives. We read His Word. We do what He says to do. We hang around with Christian people. We go to church. We listen to Gospel music. We pray. We spend time with God talking to Him. We listen to Him. Most of all we yield to God's Spirit. We yield and we let Him have His will.

We let Him have His way. All of these are ways that we can be stronger. This is how the change that God works in us at salvation will stick around for good.

One of the most important things that we can do is to submit to God. That means that we decide that we want His way in our life. We don't want our way. If we are really hard headed, we won't be able to let God be strong in our lives. We will want to be number one. We will want our way all the time. That is human nature, too. If we are hard headed at home with our parents about getting our way, then it will be easy to be that way with God. We will be in the habit of acting that way, and we will act that way with Him. If you find yourself being that way, ask God to help you to overcome this. Ask Him to help you to give in to those around you, so that you can give in to Him and let Him change you.

Another thing that helps us to be able to do right is the Bible. We've already talked about how the Word of God can change us. The Bible says that it can purify us, strengthen us to be able to do right, show us what to do, and perfect us to be like Jesus. The Bible is compared to a sword that can cut out of your heart and mind the things that you wish you didn't have there. WOW! What a book. Can you think of any other book that can do that? There are two things though that you have to do so that the Bible can work in your life. Can the Bible help you if you never pick it up and read it? How would that work with your books at school? Let's say that you want to be a mechanic. You have a mechanics book. What if you never picked it up, and you came to school and told me that you knew everything in it, and it was going to help you to be able to be a good mechanic, but you never opened it. Would it do you much good? How could it? You have to read it to learn what it is all about. You have to read the Bible to learn what it is all about. It can't help you unless you do. Then you have to do what the book says. If you just read the mechanics manual and you never work on a car, will you be a good mechanic. Maybe the mechanics manual is written like an instruction manual and it gives you steps in what to do.

Maybe it tells you how to change a carburetor. Or how to change a filter. What if you never pick up a tool and start? Will that car run when you are done? You have to put the instructions to use. You have to do what it says. The Bible is the same way. In James 1:23-25, we read about a curious acting man. He looks in the mirror and sees what a mess he is, but then he goes on and doesn't brush his hair, wash his face, or do anything to help fix the mess he is in. Sometimes we are like that. "For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." If we read the Bible, but never do what it says, we are like that man that stays a mess even after he looks in the mirror. If we read it, and never do what it says, how can it help us.

It's the same with letting the Spirit of God live inside of us. We'll talk more in a chapter coming up in a little bit about how the Spirit of God can change us. God convicts us when we do wrong. He is inside of us so He knows when we do wrong. He gives us this feeling in our heart that lets us know that we have disobeyed Him. If we go away and do nothing about it, then that can't help us. When He convicts us we need to repent and be determined not to do that again. With His Spirit to help us, we can go on and be stronger the next time. That will change our lives. We have to do what He tells us to do. He can speak to our hearts. He can show us what to do, and what not to do. But if we don't do what He tells us, it won't help us.

Everyday we need God's help. Every day we have to say no to certain things. Just as important we have to say yes to certain things as well. Just to be able to get up in the morning and go to school or to work, we need God's help. We need His help to be able to do well in class or on the job. We need His help when people get on our case or in our face.

We have to have His help when people try to make us feel like we are nothing. We need His help to get along with everyone in our families. We need His help every day, every minute to be and to do the best we can be and do. We can't do it alone, but with Him all things are possible. Matthew 19:26, "...with God all things are possible." Phillipians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Chapter 4. What About Forgiveness?

What does it mean to be forgiven?

How can I get God's forgiveness? Why should I need to?

Why will He forgive me?

We've talked about how important it is to do right. We've talked about how God helps us to be able to do that. We've also talked about how there will still be times when we mess up. How can we deal with those times? How does God help us when we mess up? That is what this chapter is about. When we mess up, how do we know that we have messed up? If God never shows us that we are sinning, then we won't be able to get forgiveness. If we never get forgiveness then we can never go to heaven. How does God show us that we have done wrong? One way is by conviction. Conviction is the feeling that we have like a rock in our heart when we have done something wrong. It is a heaviness that we feel when we do wrong. God uses conviction to show us right from wrong. It is like an onboard "wrong detector". What if a parent never told his child that he was doing wrong? What if they let their child do anything that they wanted, even if it was damaging to them? Would that child know that their parent really loved them? Probably not. We show our love by teaching and directing our children. God is a good parent. He teaches by His Word. He teaches us by His Spirit in our heart. But He doesn't just stop there.

I have heard a lot of kids talk about some of the worst teachers that they had. Some of them had teachers that would punish them if they missed the answer. They would make fun of them and ridicule them in front of the class if they messed up. They would tell them they were wrong, but they would never show them how to do it right. I am glad that God isn't that way. He convicts us by telling us when we do wrong, and then He makes a way for us to get it right. After conviction comes repentance. Repentance comes when we feel sorry.

We are sorry for what we have done. Then after that comes forgiveness. That forgiveness was paid for when Jesus died on the cross. He forgives us. Then He teaches us how to do better. He strengthens us by putting His Spirit in us to be able to help us to do better. That in itself brings about a change in our lives. With all that on our side, how can we loose, even when we mess up.

What does repentance have to do with all this? Here's an example. Lets say you have a squabble with someone out on the ball field and they punch you in the nose. After you get over being mad, they say I'm sorry. Then things are OK between you. Then they turn around and before they leave they punch you in the nose again. Then they say sorry, but they do it again. Are they really sorry? Did they really repent? The dictionary defines repentance as "feeling such regret over an action, intentions to change one's mind". When we repent there will be a change. We won't be like the fellow on the ball field. We won't turn around and do it again. God loves us. He loves us with a love greater than anyone else can love us. He is perfect and His love for us is perfect. He knows that we can't be perfect, but He wants the best for us. He has done all He can do to help us to be able to do our best. When we fail Him, we need to be sorry. Genuinely sorry for what we have done. Some people aren't really sorry when they sin. They don't want to stop what they are doing. They make excuses for what they do wrong. God convicts them, but they do it again and again. Then before long they talk themselves into believing that it doesn't matter if they do this. They begin to tune out God's conviction. Then they come to the place where nobody can tell them that they are doing wrong. How can they ever be forgiven if they won't admit their sin? How can they go to heaven if they are never forgiven? To be forgiven we have to ask God for forgiveness. It isn't automatic.

When we repent, when we are really sorry for what we have done, God will forgive us. I John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins

and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” We have to confess our sins, own up to it, admit it, and repent from it. Then He is faithful to forgive us our sins, then He goes a step further. If we submit to Him and let His Spirit work in us, He will cleanse us from that unrighteous thing.

Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. Without Jesus’ death, we could never come back into God’s love after we messed up. We would have no hope of getting to heaven. Jesus died so we could be forgiven. That is why we shouldn’t take forgiveness for granted. We should never take the attitude that we can do anything we want because God will forgive us. When God deals with your heart, you will know. He will convict you. He will lead you to repentance. Jeremiah 31:19 says, “Surely after that I was turned. I repented: and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh; I was ashamed yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.”

When we know God’s love, and His mercy and His grace, it gives us peace and strength to try our best. When we mess up and we experience His love and grace, that will give us the strength to keep trying. God loves us. He knows that we will mess up. That is why Jesus died for us. The Bible tells us the story of the prodigal son. It is a story that Jesus told to teach his disciples about what God’s love was like. We talked about it earlier in short version form. Here is the whole story. You can read about it in Luke 15:11-32. It is really a good story. Get your Bible out and read it. It is a story about a teenager that wasn’t a lot different than you. It was set in a different place and time, but as a whole people are people. He was tired of living by his dad’s rules. He was tired of having to do what his parents wanted him to do. He was ready to get out on his own and see the world. He knew that he was ready for whatever came his way no matter what anybody said. Parents in those days were probably a lot like parents in these days. Knowing parents like I do, I’d say that his dad argued with him trying to convince him to see reason. He refused to listen. So one day his dad just said, “OK. You get your way.

I'll give you your inheritance early. You can have what is coming to you and you are free to go." I'm sure that before that happened there was a lot of noise around that household. Then his dad just gave in. This guy's dad just gave up and gave in and let this boy leave. He gave him his part of his inheritance money early. He let him go and do his thing. Sometimes if you aren't careful, you can outrun a parent's love. You can worry them until they say go ahead and do your own thing and find out the hard way. Like the old saying goes, "If you don't listen, then you can just feel." That is what this dad did.

This young man took off to see the world. He partied big time. He rolled in the dough. He spent a lot. He lived the life he'd dreamed of. He had it made. Everything he wanted, he had. You know, he was the best in town. The crowd came to him. It is easy to buy friends. I've known people who tried to buy a girl or boy friend. They would spend their last dollar on them. Then when the spending stopped, the boyfriend, or girlfriend was gone. You can't buy people's love. You can't buy peoples' friendship. This kind of love or friendship is not real at all. That is what this fellow found out. His money soon ran out. So did his friends. He was left in a strange place away from his family. He was all alone. He had nothing. Nobody cared. There wasn't any welfare. So he found the only job that he could find. He was a pig feeder. One day, he was so hungry that he found himself eating the slop with the pigs. That was when he came to himself. He knew that it was time to go home. Luke 15:17-19 tells us, "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger: I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." He said to himself that his father's servants had it better off than he did. He would go home, and if his father was mad at him for what he had done, he might let him come home as a servant. That was better than what he had now.

The Bible tells us that his father saw him coming even when he was a good distance away. How could he see him when he didn't even know he was coming? His father had to have been going and standing there watching the road every day, hoping that he would come home. When his son returned, this father gave a big welcome home party, taking him back in like a son. He was home. He was loved.

I love that story because it reminds me of my own life. When I left God and the things of God, I had my good time. When my life got so bad, I could no longer stand it, I came to myself like this boy in the story. When I came back home, my Father, God, had been there waiting for me all the time. He wrapped me in His love. God is talked about in the Bible as loving us with a Father's love. My heavenly Father welcomed me home. He forgave me for all I had done while I was away from Him. He wiped it away with His love. It was gone. Because He forgave me, I forgave myself. Because He loved me, I learned to love myself. That changed my life. I no longer hated myself.

What about you? Are you living where God wants you to live? Be real with Him. If you are not living where you should be, He already knows. He is waiting for you to come to yourself and turn around to head in the right direction. He knows where you are. You can't fool Him. Isn't it time for you to come back home? He has been there waiting for you the whole time, ready to welcome you back home.

When we do wrong, the worst thing that we can do is try to hide it from God or run away from Him. He already knows. Remember when I was talking in the beginning of this chapter about how it was when I was younger and I did something wrong. Those times when I tried to hide it. I just had to sweat longer. I could have gotten it all over with quicker if I had just come clean. God already knows. Go ahead and confess.

Adam and Eve lived in a perfect place, the Garden of Eden, when God first made the world. They listened to the devil and sinned. They ran and hid. God knew all the time.

He knew what they had done the minute they did it. He called to them. He knew where they were hiding all along. God knows what you do before you do it. He isn't just there in church on Sunday. He is there 7 days a week. Matter of fact, if you have been saved, He is in your heart and you carry Him with you wherever you go. If you go to places that you know He wouldn't go, you carry Him with you into those places. If you do something that is wrong, then He does it with you, because He is inside of you. The Bible refers to our body as being the temple of God because it is where He lives. He loves you. When you do wrong, don't hide it. Repent. Confess up. Ask for His forgiveness. Better yet, don't do it in the first place.

You also have to remember that you have an enemy who hates you because he hates God and everything that God loves. The devil wants to destroy you. The devil wants to discourage you and get you to give up on serving God. The Bible says that when you fail, the devil will condemn you. The Bible calls the devil the accuser of the brethren both day and night.

What is the difference between conviction and condemnation? Conviction comes when God gives you that feeling that lets you know that you have sinned. God does this so that you can repent and be forgiven. Condemnation comes when the devil beats you over the head with every mistake and sin that you have ever done. He does this so that he can discourage you from trying. God loves you. When God forgives you, He cleans you and makes you new. He removes your sin away from you as far as the east is from the west. God won't remind you of your sin every day. He forgets it. Psalm 103:12 says, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." Transgressions are sins. The east and the west will never meet. You can't get any further apart than that. Your sin is gone. If you keep thinking about your sin after God has forgiven you and you feel a weight on you because you feel so bad about it, that may be the devil condemning you instead of God convicting you.

If you have asked God to forgive you and you have done all He tells you to do to make it right, then you are forgiven. You don't have to feel condemned any longer. Tell the devil to go away and leave you alone. When you tell the devil to flee the Bible tells us that he has to go.

Then you have to forgive yourself. When God forgives you, you are forgiven. You don't have to hold it against yourself. You don't have to beat yourself up over every thing that you do wrong. I have known young people who failed God. God is ready to forgive them, but they won't let it go themselves. They keep feeling guilty. They won't forgive themselves. They eventually quit trying. That is what the devil wants us to do. Don't beat yourself up. Let God love you.

Another reason why we can't be forgiven is because we don't forgive others. The Lord's Prayer teaches us this. It says, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors". Our debts are our sins. If we hold things against people and we don't forgive them, then we can't be forgiven. Sometimes that is hard to do. How can we forgive someone who has hurt us bad? Remember, Jesus is in you. He can help you do the things that you can't do on your own. You have to be willing to try. He is the one who forgave those that nailed Him to the cross. He can surely help you to forgive. He can help you to forgive those who have hurt you. When you hold grudges against people, it never hurts them. It just hurts you. Bitterness and unforgiveness have been proven to cause cancer and hardening of the arteries, and more. Doctors have proven this. If there is someone who has hurt you, let God help you to forgive them.

That sounds like a lot to remember. Conviction, repentance, forgiveness, condemnation. Conviction is God's way of letting you know that you have sinned. Repentance is your part. You repent when you are really sorry for what you did to the point that you won't do that again willingly and knowingly. Forgiveness is God's part. It happens when He forgives us. Forgiveness cleans us up and makes us new.

Condemnation is the feeling you get when the devil tries to discourage you by making you feel like you aren't forgiven when he throws everything you do wrong in your face to discourage you.

Did everybody in the Bible always do right? Weren't they perfect people so that is how they got written about? We'll talk more about what to do when you have done wrong.

Chapter 5. What Do I Do When I Have Done Wrong?

Even if you haven't read the Bible much, you probably have heard about David, the shepherd boy who became king. His story is found in II Samuel and in I Kings. It is a great story. You should read it some time. It is a war story, drama story, and love story, all rolled into one. Matter of fact, there have been several movies made of the life of David. David starts out as a shepherd boy. God chose him to become king of Israel. That is what he became. In one verse the Bible talks about David as being a man after God's own heart. David was very human. He made a lot of mistakes. Wait a minute, how could he be a man after God's own heart if he made a lot of mistakes. He wasn't called that because he was perfect. He wasn't called that because he didn't make mistakes. It is what he did with his mistakes after he made them that was important. He never stopped loving God and serving him with his whole heart. He never stopped obeying God. When he messed up, he repented and asked forgiveness. Throughout his story you'll read mistakes that he made. He always repented and asked God to forgive him. Then he got back up and kept trying. He had to pay for his sin. Sin will cost you. David had to pay dearly for some of his sin. Let's read about his story.

Read II Samuel 11 and 12. It tells the story of how David was looking down from his roof and saw a beautiful woman washing herself. She was married. Her name was Bathsheeba. David gave into what was wrong and sent for her. Just so we don't blame it all on him, she went. She got pregnant. Bathsheeba's husband was Urriah. He was a soldier. At the time this happened, Urriah was gone to battle. David knew that if Bathsheeba got pregnant while Urriah was gone, everyone could figure out that Urriah wasn't the baby's daddy. So he got a plan to cast the suspicion off of them. At that time women could be stoned for committing adultery. That meant people threw rocks at you until you were dead. So he didn't want anyone to find out what had happened.

David sent his general to the battlefield to get Urriah. Urriah was cool. He was so dedicated to his country that when he came home, he told David that he couldn't spend time at home and be with his wife while everyone else in his outfit was in the battlefield. David tried for several nights to get him to go home, but he refused. David knew that everybody, including Urriah, would figure out that there was no way Urriah could be the baby's father. So David got an idea of how he could work it all out. He had his chief general send Urriah into the hottest part of the battle so that he would get killed. It happened just that way. Urriah was killed and David got Bathsheeba.

David thought that everything after that was cool. He thought that he had gotten away with everything. That was until a prophet named Nathan came by with a message from God. Then David knew. He knew that he hadn't hidden what he'd done from God. God spoke to David and told him that because he had done this thing, his country and his children would have to pay the consequences. His son died. His children had lots of turmoil. His country later became divided in a civil war when one of his children tried to take over and be king. That son died a tragic death. Did this mean that God turned his back on David? Did that mean that God no longer used him or loved him? The book of Psalms is filled with songs that David wrote about God's love. Here is one that talks about God's forgiveness. Psalms 51:6-14 says, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit in me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not they Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O

God, thou God of my salvation; and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.”

David served God all the rest of his life. I Chronicles 29:10-30 tells about how David died. Verse 17 is part of a prayer that David prayed just before he died. It says, “I know also, my God, that thou triest the heart, and hast pleasure in uprightness. As for me, in the uprightness of mine heart I have willingly offered all these things...” David was upright in heart because God had forgiven, and had restored him in His love. What would have happened in this story if David had quit from discouragement when he messed up? What would have happened if David had kept on sinning, making excuses? Would things have turned out the same? He kept serving God, loving Him with all his heart.

Let’s look at someone in the New Testament for just a minute. This person that we are going to talk about next was guilty of one of the worst things that the New Testament talks about. This man was a Christian killer. His name was Saul. He was a Jew. The Jews at that time didn’t believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Some of them still don’t today. When the Christians started saying that Jesus was the Son of God, the Jews thought that this was something that was against God. They started persecuting the church. They even started killing them. They actually thought that this was what God wanted them to do. The first time that the Bible mentions Saul is in Acts 7:58. This story is about a man named Stephen who was stoned to death for being a Christian. In Acts 8 it says, “and Saul was consenting unto his death.” He even held the coats for them while they stoned Stephen. Talk about being in the wrong crowd doing the wrong thing. Things went from there on to get worse for this young man. The next time that we read about him he is going to take men and women who were Christians to be killed. But God had other plans for him. While he was on this trip to take these people to be killed, or tortured, or both, Jesus spoke to him. What was different about this? At this time, Jesus had already died on the cross. He had come back to life, and had gone back to heaven. Jesus

spoke to Saul from heaven. He spoke to him out loud. He said, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutedst." Can he talk to you just like he did to Saul? He sure can. God can speak out loud to us. Mostly though God speaks to us inside of our hearts. When Jesus spoke to Saul it changed his life. When He speaks to us today, it will do the same. Paul became one of the people that spread the church around the world. He wrote most of the books of the New Testament. They were actually letters that he wrote teaching the Christians in the churches that he had helped start. God forgave him and he turned his world upside down.

Paul has written a lot about forgiveness. I guess this was because as he said it, he was the chief among sinners. He wrote a lot about forgiveness in the book of Romans, which he wrote to the church in Rome. Romans chapter 6 is a good chapter to read about sin, how to overcome it, and how God forgives us. It closes with verse 23. It says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sin will earn us death. There is a price to pay. Like David, sometimes that price can be dear. When we mess up our lives, we have to pay the consequences. Because Jesus died for us, we can be forgiven. Through the power of the Holy Spirit inside of us, God strengthens us so that we won't do this same thing again. This chapter that Paul wrote also tells us how to overcome when we do wrong. It talks about how the Spirit of God gives us power to overcome sin. We'll talk more about that in a later chapter. We'll talk about how God makes us new when we mess up. We've talked about how God can help us to pick up the pieces when we make a mess of our lives. We've talked about how He forgives us when we repent and how He can start us over.

What about those people who haven't sinned? They haven't drank and partied and done all the things that the rest of the crowd has done. Are they OK? Do they still need God's forgiveness too? The Bible says that everyone has sinned and come short of the glory of God. It says that no one is perfect when compared to God and His perfection. So everybody comes up short. We all need forgiveness. We all need God. All of us need God's help even if we think that we aren't that bad. On our own we can't manage to keep the 10 commandments.

If you think you can, then when is the last time that you lied? Even a little white lie, which is a lie all the same. We can't earn our way to heaven. We can't be good enough to get there. Repenting of our sin, getting God's forgiveness, following Jesus is the only way that we can get to heaven. Jesus is the only door. To get to heaven we have to be forgiven by Him. We have to have a relationship with Him. Don't run away from Him when you do wrong. Run to Him and get His forgiveness. Let Him convict you of your wrongdoing so that He can help you to change.

Chapter 5. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit

What does it mean when the Bible talks about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost?

How can that help me?

How can I receive it?

When I first got saved, I was a mess. I had been into drugs, and drinking, and everything else. I gave my heart to the Lord knowing He was my only hope. My life was such a mess. I thought that it couldn't be fixed. I had a hard time at first choosing to do right. I had made wrong choices so long it was easier to do wrong than to do right. Have you ever noticed how it is easy to do bad and hard to do well? We talked about this earlier in a chapter. That is because we all have a nature that is prone to get into trouble. The Bible refers to the human part of us as being the flesh. When we get saved, Jesus comes into our hearts through the Holy Ghost. He helps us to do right. He changes us from the inside out. The Bible can change us too. We've talked about that as well. The more we read and study God's Word and apply it to our lives, doing what it says to do, the more we will change. I knew all this, but I still had a hard time making right choices and staying away from the wrong. For one thing, I wouldn't leave my old friends alone. I thought that it was my responsibility to help to change them. It didn't work that way. They would wind up pulling me back down. For another thing, I was addicted to doing wrong. I was addicted to the things that were destroying me.

Addiction is a hard thing to get out from. One of the main reasons is because there are two sides to addiction. There is a physical side, and there is a spiritual side. On the physical side, our bodies become addicted to whatever it is, whether it is drugs, drinking, or smoking. All these come with physical addictions where our bodies become dependent on that substance. The other side is a spiritual side. The devil loves addiction. The devil possesses and owns people through addiction. He can manipulate them to do what he wants, and he can destroy their life, and soul.

He steps in when people become addicted which makes it all worse. I could not get free from either the physical or spiritual side of my addictions. Then I learned how God could deliver me. I had people pray for me. It was in a spiritual church where people knew about the power of prayer and God's ability to set us free. The Spirit of God delivered me physically from the symptoms of addiction. I was no longer addicted. I have seen coke addicts go free. I have seen meth addicts be delivered through prayer. I have seen alcoholics who have drunk for years get up from an altar of prayer to be totally set free. There was such a change in them that they even looked younger. God can set you free. You just have to make up your mind that you really want to be delivered. They found freedom from both the physical and the spiritual addictions that they had. You can go through all kinds of rehab, but if you don't take care of the spiritual addiction as well as the physical you won't be totally set free. Have you ever heard someone refer to "the monkey on your back"? People who have been addicted and go through physical rehab say, "You are not ever set free from an addiction. You are just a rehabilitated alcoholic, or a rehabilitated drug addict. There is no such thing as being totally free. You will always have to fight this addiction". That is not true. When you are free in Jesus, you are free indeed. When I got set free from addiction and alcoholism, I was set free for real. That has been over 30 years ago. I am not a rehabilitated alcoholic. I am not an alcoholic at all. Haven't been since God set me free.

To be set free, you have to make up your mind that you really really really want to be set free. You have to know that you are tired of your addictions, and you have to give them up. For God to set you free from anything you have to give it up and give it to Him. If you still hold onto it, He can't take it. Then we have to let God deliver us. Then we have to be filled with the Spirit of God so that we can continue to make a stand against the devil who is trying to destroy us. This life with God is a new life in a whole new world. It isn't a physical world, but a spiritual world. To fight against the enemy, you can't fight physically because it isn't a physical fight. You have to fight back spiritually through prayer, obedience, and through the Spirit of God that is in you.

You have to know that God loves you. You have to take a stand against the enemy and refuse to do it His way. You have to let God fight the battle.

So how did I get free from all that was binding me? I found God's love. I trusted Him. I gave up my way and was willing to do it His way. I gave up my addictions and everything connected with it. I had to stop hanging around with my old friends. I had to stop going to the places I had gone to. But the main thing that helped me was learning about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. I hadn't heard of this when I was growing up. I grew up in a church that didn't teach about it. That is sad because the founders of the Methodist church, which was the church I attended, had the Baptism of the Holy Ghost when they started the denomination. Some churches teach about the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and some don't. That isn't important. What is important is that the Bible teaches about it. What is important, too, is that it is real and it works. It is first mentioned in Acts in Chapter 1 verses 5-8. Jesus spoke in verse 5-8, "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence....But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the world."

After Jesus died, the disciples were afraid. They went into hiding. The enemies of Jesus were after them, too. They were afraid for their lives. Then something happened that we read about in the second chapter of Acts on the day of Pentecost. In verse 4 we read, "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance." The Holy Ghost came in and baptized, or filled them. Then we read about a change. In verse 41 of that chapter we read that on that very day over 3,000 people were saved and added to the church. What happened in the rest of the world from then on until today depended on what happened that day. If the disciples had stayed hidden away in fear, we wouldn't have the church today. These guys were the ones who started the church. They spread it around throughout the known world at that time. They were the ones who told about Jesus, and wrote His life's story.

Some of them wrote the Gospels, the first part of the New Testament. They were important. They were scared, sure. But God made a way to fire them up so that they forgot all about being scared. He filled them with His Spirit.

Maybe you are going through something a little like them. Maybe you are afraid to stand up for what is right. Maybe you want to obey God but you are not strong enough to stand up for what is right. You always get pulled back down. This is what you need. That same power that the disciples had then is available for you today. Just like it was (and still is) for me. I was up, then down, then up, then down. I was ready to give up on the whole thing. I thought that it just wasn't going to work for me. Then I received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. It gave me the power and strength to make a stand. It gave me the spiritual strength to stand against the enemy and all his addictions. It can do the same for you.

How do you get the Baptism of the Holy Ghost? The Bible says that you have to be determined to obey God. Then you have to ask God for it believing that He will give it to you. It is a gift like many other things that God has for you. You have to seek God for it and you will find it. Luke 11:9-12 tells us this. Jesus is speaking in these verses. "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." In verse 13 it goes on to say, "If ye then being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?" God knows how to give us the Spirit when we seek Him for it. Your job is to seek it and believe that He will give it to you.

I grew up in a church that didn't teach about it. How did I find it? I knew that I needed something more than what I had. I wasn't going to make it if I didn't find something else. I prayed and asked God to help me. He sent me help when He led me to go to a certain church. They believed in the Baptism of the Holy Ghost. They knew how to pray for people to receive the Baptism. They invited me to come and I went. I went with an open mind and a hungry heart. They prayed for me, and I received it.

It truly changed my whole life. It can change your life too.

When you receive the Baptism of the Spirit you have more power to help overcome your flesh. The Spirit of God will be stronger in you. We talked earlier about the two parts of us: our human nature, and God's nature in us that comes in after we get saved. The Baptism strengthens the God part of us. The Spirit begins to rule instead of our flesh. Also, the Spirit of God knows how to fight against the enemy, the devil who tries to pull us down. The Spirit of God knows how to pray for those around us. When He prays through us, He can pray for exactly the right thing.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost can give you the power to stand and do what is right, and the boldness to do so. To learn more about this experience that God gives us as a gift, read my book, *The Baptism of the Holy Ghost*.

Chapter 6. How Can I Go To Heaven

Why can I go to heaven

How do I get to go to heaven?

Can I be sure that I will go there?

Young people constantly ask me how to get to go to heaven. A lot of people have a lot of different answers to that question. Some religions don't believe that there is a heaven. Some say that all there is of heaven is what is here on earth. Some religions teach that after you die here you get to come back to earth as something, or somebody else. Kind of like a huge recycling service. Some religions teach that you go to hell for a little while then you can work your way back to heaven again. Some religions teach that we are all just little puffs of energy and when we die, we go to be with the big wind of energy that is God. We just blow around as energy in the cosmos. What is true?

Is it really important to know the truth? After all, you are young. Why do you need to make up your mind about heaven now anyway? We've already talked about a lot of young people who found out that they weren't guaranteed tomorrow. Neither are you. I'm not saying this to scare you. I am just saying it because it is true. A lot of young people today have a lot of fear. That is why there are so many young people and old ones that drink and do drugs. They don't want to face reality. They can't handle it. Believe me, I have been there and done that. This world is scary. But with God you don't have to be afraid. Matter of fact, the Bible tells us over 365 times that we are to "fear not". God loves you. He will take care of you. You can put your trust in him. I John 4:18 tells us, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear..." It goes on to say in verse 19, "We love Him, because he first loved us." II Timothy 1:7 tells us, "for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." We don't have to be afraid because God loves us and we can put our trust in Him. You can overcome the scary things of this world, and you can go on to help those around you. You have to get real with yourself and real with God to be able to make a difference. If you will, and if you will put yourself in His hands and give your life and your will to Him, things will change.

You can not only go to heaven yourself, but you can also lead those that you love to be able to go too. You have to decide what you want. Do you want the truth or do you want to follow a lie? If you want the truth, then God can show you what is true. The Spirit of God can reveal the truth to you. If you really want to go to heaven, you had better be finding out the truth.

Why are there so many different beliefs and so many different churches? People tend to want to make up their own truth. They want a truth that is easy to follow. They want a way of life that will enable them to do whatever they want to and still get by. They don't want a religion that demands that they submit and do right. They want a religion that lets them be comfortable. What happens to all these people who want something else beside the truth when they die? Will they be comfortable then? If you find the truth and live by it, then you can't lose. Then no matter what happens you will be ready. I once was witnessing to an atheist, someone who doesn't believe in God, about what he needed to do to be able to go to heaven. I simply told him, "If when I die I am right about heaven, and what it takes to get there, then I am a winner and you are a loser. If I am wrong and you are right, and I have still done all there is to do to get to go to heaven, then I am still a winner and you are a loser. So anyway I win. Why shouldn't I do right?"

Now some people will tell you that all it takes to get to go to heaven is to say the sinner's prayer. If you pray the sinner's prayer asking Jesus to come into your heart and forgive you of your sin, then no matter what you do from then on, you are saved and you can go to heaven. Is that true? Did God send His son Jesus to die on the cross so that we could do whatever we wanted to and no matter how we lived, we could still get to go to heaven? Does that sound right to you? Is God's love and the price that Jesus paid for our forgiveness something that we should take advantage of? If it were true that we could take advantage of God's forgiveness and do whatever, then what would God's love really mean to us? When we live like the devil, talking anyway that we want to, doing anything that we want to, living any way that we want to, and then we go to church on Sunday like it doesn't matter, does God know? Does He care what we do?

Are we really getting by? Is that how to go to heaven? You can make excuses for anything that you do, but will those excuses make any difference when you die? The Bible teaches that we have to repent and ask God for forgiveness. If you continue to do what you do, have you really repented? God will take those who are forgiven to heaven. There will be no excuses accepted. The Bible teaches us that what we sow we will reap. Galatians 6:7 says, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” If you want to go to heaven, then there will be some things that are required of you.

You have to find out the truth about heaven and you have to find out what it takes to be able to go there. How do you do that? Read the Bible for yourself. Ask God to show you the truth. Be determined in your heart that you want to do what is right. Give your will to God and say, “God I want to do what you want me to do and not what I want.”

I have taught school a lot of years. More years than you’ve been in school. One of the places that I often use to illustrate how God wants us to live is the classroom. Both of us can relate to that. When different people come to class they come from different backgrounds, different beliefs, and different walks of life. What should be taught in the classroom is the truth. Sometimes in public school, that isn’t always true. But what you go to class to learn is the truth. If you went to class and your teacher taught you that $2 \times 3 = 8$, then you wouldn’t want to learn anything else from that teacher. In God’s classes, the truth is taught. God uses these to teach: His Word, His Spirit, and his people who are filled with His Spirit. Now there are a lot of other classes out there that are teaching other things, but we are going to concentrate on His classes. Let’s tune in on one of those classes.

Let’s say that there is one little group in this class called group number 1. You may recognize this group of students. They are too busy being noticed to learn anything from anyone. They don’t want to give in and go in anybody else’s direction. They want to have everything their way. Are they learning much? How can they? If you have ever fit into that group you’ll know what I mean.

Then there is group number 2. This group of students thinks that they know more than their teachers. No matter how smart and how much knowledge and experience the teacher has, they want to tell their teacher how it should be. Have you ever had anybody in class that way? Can they learn much by doing that?

Then there is group number 3. What about those kids who run together in clicks, little groups. They huddle together in little crowds for support. They aren't interested in learning anything that is outside of their little world. Can they learn much?

Then there is group number 4. They are the rebels. You know, the ones who would argue with anything anybody else said no matter how stupid they sound. They just want to argue. They don't want to do it anybody else's way. Have you ever had anybody like that in your class?

Then there are the quiet ones in group number 5. They are afraid to learn the truth because they really think that they are too stupid to learn. They think that they are so low that they don't deserve knowing anything. They might be the smartest person in the class, but they are too afraid that they will make a mistake to try.

Then in group number 6 there are the kids who think that they have everything. They think they don't need anything. They drive the sports cars to school. They play ball, or some kind of sports, or cheer lead. Everybody in school knows who they are. Some of the other kids in school will fall apart if these perfect students don't notice them. They really are perfect in their own eyes. They think that nobody else is like them, and nobody is as good as them. They really feel like there is nothing for them to learn. Can they learn?

When you read about these kids, you can probably recognize some of them as students that you've seen in some of the classes you've attended. I have had kids like that in my classes through the years, and even have had a few of them in my classes when I was in high school myself. It really is a small world. Let's look at each of these groups of kids as an illustration of how some people act in God's classes.

Then there is the group of kids who want attention.

Can we learn from God when we want everything to be centered around us and not on Him? Can we learn his truth that way? God is God. He created it all. He has to be the center. Just like that group of kids who will have to submit to their teacher to learn, we have to submit to God to learn. It's His way that matters. If we want it our way, and not His, then we will never find out the truth. I know people that go their own way for years trying to prove that their way is the best. They want to be the center of their own lives. Then when they get old, they look around at their lives and realize that they are empty and meaningless. Let go of your way and let God have His way. You won't regret it. If you do, you will make heaven.

What about group 2, the ones who think that they know more than the teacher? Most of the world thinks that they are smarter than God. Romans 1:22 talks about how people will be. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools." We are foolish. We have proved it by nearly destroying this world and each other. What a mess things are in. We have done this. God knows a lot more than we do. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." God sits in heaven and overlooks all we do, and He has done so since the beginning of time. He knows more than we'll ever be able to know. Still we read the Bible and say, how can that be true. We'll discuss it and turn it around to mean differently than how it was written, and we'll think that we are being smart. When we are like that, how can God teach us? If you think that you are smarter than God, and don't believe His Word, then you won't ever make heaven.

Then in group number 3 we talked about the kids who run in clicks, who are always in groups. You can name the groups better than me. There are the skaters, the dorks, the geeks, the jocks, the Goths, and more. You have all the different gangs too. Have you ever felt like you were a nobody and totally left out? You felt this way because you didn't fit into one of those groups? Or maybe at one time you fit in, but for some reason somebody got mad at you and the rest of the group turned their back on you.

Those crowds can really hurt. You know what I mean when I say that when you are in a little crowd like that you aren't interested in learning anything that is true. You just want to learn how to fit in. More than one kid has messed up their lives by fitting in. Sometimes it is easy to do that in the Christian world too. We get into a church that believes a certain way. We may not even know what that church believes in. We just want to feel a part of something. Do you know that there are all kinds of churches that teach things that are wrong? Some of them even teach things so wrong that if we start believing that way and if we start to live that way, we will go to hell because of how we believe. There are churches that teach that no matter what you do, you get to go to heaven. God forgives everyone even if they aren't sorry for what they do. There are churches that teach that Jesus wasn't born of a virgin, Mary. They teach that He was just a good man, a prophet. That He wasn't the Son of God. There are churches that teach that Jesus didn't really die on the cross for our sins. There are even churches that teach that to go to heaven you have to play with live snakes in their church services. Thank God that isn't how the Bible teaches. There are churches that teach that if you dress a certain way and look a certain way, then you can go to heaven. It is confusing out there. More than a little scary. I have a lot of young people say to me, "I'm scared to go to church. What if I pick the wrong one?" I tell them this, "If you want to learn the truth, God will help you to find the right church. He will lead you."

Psalm 119:105 tells us, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." He will guide you. His Word will light your way. The reason why some people never find the truth is because they settle for a church that feels comfortable. Maybe the people show them a lot of love. They want to be a part of a little group, instead of being a part of God's family. God's family is a lot bigger than one little church. It is a lot bigger than one denomination. One thing that all God's family has in common is their love for God, and their desire to follow and obey Him. They have a desire to know the truth. I meet God's people all over the world, from all denominations. We have to look past denominations to find God's true family, the spiritual family.

We don't have to fit into one little group. We have a huge group to fit into. And they will love us and accept us like we are. (We do need to go to church. I talk to people a lot who take the attitude that they don't need church. Well, I do. The church was made with the purpose of strengthening us. It is the right crowd that we have around us after all the wrong crowds that we have to be around. It lifts us up. We need to hear God's Word preached. We need good teaching. It is a like a filling station to fill us up, to get us fired up for the rest of the week. Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." God even tells us in His Word to go to church. That is why He created church to start with.) We have to let God lead us to the right church.

What about the next group, group 4? They were the rebels. They are the ones that argue about anything. If you tell them to do something, they will do the opposite just because they want to. They don't want to go by anybody else's rules. Have you had anybody in class like that before? They not only can't learn themselves, but they keep everybody else from learning, too. This world is full of rebellion. Just turn on the TV. Are the people in the spotlight the people who want to do right? Surely not. Are the famous people the ones that say, "Kids, I want to show you the right way to live. This is how you should act. Do right. Be right. And be proud of it." Today, anything goes. Most of the actors, singers, and all that do the opposite of what is right. They may do a little spotlight to teach kids how to act, but the way they live surely undoes that. Their lives more often than not are filled with doing the opposite of what is right. The Bible calls the last day's generation, an untoward generation. A generation that is backwards from what it ought to be. In today's world, it is acceptable to wear a ring in your nose or in your tongue and tattoo yourself up. (Just as a reminder, how did this stuff get started? It started with barbarians in the jungles. Think about it. Whether you like me saying this or not, if you think about it, you'll have to admit it is true. What do they really look like?)

In today's world, you wear your clothes wrong side out. You don't pull up your pants. You wear your pajamas to school and don't even comb your hair. You paint your hair green. The weirder the better it seems. Everybody does the opposite of what you should do. Most kids don't know what is right. Then their lives get wrecked because they are trying to fit in with a crowd who is trying to do the opposite of what is good and right. Most kids fall into that crowd because they are afraid that they can't do right. So they settle for doing wrong. Sometimes when we are afraid that we can't do what we need to do, when we are afraid that if we try we will just mess up, we don't try to do right. Because we aren't trying we just drift into what is wrong. When God saves you, He sends His Spirit to live in your heart. If you ask Him to, He can fill you up with His Spirit. His Spirit will strengthen you and change you from the inside out. You won't have to rebel because you are afraid that you can't do right. He loves you. He'll be there to help you.

I was a genuine rebel most of my life before God came into my heart. One of the reasons why I rebelled was because I was afraid to love people and to let people love me. So I fought everybody and everything. Rebelling was my way of being sure that everybody was shut away out of my life so that they couldn't hurt me. When I found God's love for me, I wasn't afraid any more. In His love, I had the security that I needed. Because of that I learned to submit to God. I knew that He loved me and He wanted the best for me. I learned from submitting to Him that I could submit to others. Yes, still there are times when people hurt me. But God helps me to overcome the hurt and He heals my broken pieces. I don't have to be afraid any more.

People will hurt you. They aren't perfect. Even the ones that love you the most will mess up and hurt you. But when you have God in your life, you can sort out the good and bad and go on with the good in people. You can be strong in yourself so that no matter what people do, they aren't your God. They can't make or break you. God's love and security takes rebellion away, if you'll let Him. There won't be any rebels in heaven. Just those who have realized that God's way works. It really does. We won't want to do the opposite. We want to do it His way.

We know He loves us and wants the best for us. Why would we want to do it any other way?

Then in group 5 we talked about the quiet ones. The ones who hide away and think that they are too stupid and not worth anything. There are so many young people today who feel that they are worthless. They think that they are the ugliest, the fattest, the dumbest, the clumsiest, the most unlikely to succeed, and the most of everything that is bad. They don't care about themselves because they really don't think that anyone else cares. If anyone pays attention to them, they run after that person doing anything just to get more attention. A lot of the times these are not the kids that fit into anybody's click. Even if they are in a little crowd, they don't think that they deserve being there because they don't think that they are special at all. One of my favorite sayings is this one, "I know that I am somebody because God doesn't make no junk." You are special. You were created in the image of God. The Bible says that God's love for us is a special kind of love. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever, believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 15:13 says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That talks about how great Jesus' love is for you. John 14:23 says, "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." John 16:27 says, "For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." Ephesians 2:4 says, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us." I John 3:1 says, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..." These are only a few of the verses in the Bible that talk about God's love. God loves you so much that He sent His son to die for you. That is a lot of love. He loves you so much that if you would have been the only one, He would have died for you. You are loved. When you ask Jesus to come into your heart, then He is really inside of you. How much more special can you be. You have Jesus, God's Son in you. You don't have to hide in the edge of the class anymore.

You are precious to Him. Get a relationship with Him that is real. He will teach you right and wrong. He will teach you His truth. He will keep you until that day you see Him. He will take you home.

Then we talked about the last group of kids in the classroom who thought that they were perfect. They were the popular crowd. They were the ones that everybody wanted to be like. They didn't learn because they thought that they didn't need anything. They had it all. WOW. Is that ever wrong? I talked not long ago to one of those kids who were popular. They found out that they had cancer. They were scared. They knew that they needed someone. I've talked to some of those perfect kids that found out that they were pregnant. The pregnancy was dangerous for them. They found out that they needed someone. One of those perfect football players that everyone looked up to was in a bad car wreck. Just minutes before he died, I wonder if he looked up to God. You see we really are all just the same. We are all very imperfect. We need God and we need each other. The more that we get in reality the easier it is to admit this. There is no way that we can earn a place in heaven by being perfect. The Bible teaches that only one is perfect, and that is Jesus. It teaches that there is no way that we can be perfect enough to deserve heaven. The Bible compares people to sheep because we all need a shepherd to lead us. At our best we don't know which direction to take with our lives. We need Jesus, our Good Shepherd, to lead us. We need His shelter. We need Him to show us the way so that we aren't left out in the cold. We need a Shepherd. We need to admit that we need Jesus.

How do you make heaven and avoid hell? Don't be like some of these kids that we've talked about. Trust God. Listen to him as He teaches you the truth. Get to know Him and find a relationship with Him. Be willing to do it His way and let your will and your way go. After all, He knows what is best. Stay away from all the wrong things. If God says no, then don't. Be a good student. This classroom I've been talking about is life. Let God be your teacher. He will be the best teacher that you've ever had. Guaranteed.

God will help you to get to His home. He promises us.

We have His Word for that. Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” John 14:2-3, “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” John 20, 27-28, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” Revelations 21:4, “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”. The Bible says that we don’t even have to fear death, because God has taken the sting out of death. Psalm 23:4, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” I Corinthians 15:55, “O death, where is thy sting” O grave, where is thy victory.” Psalm 48:14, “For thus God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death.” Romans 8:38-39, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Closing

In closing, it is my prayer that this book has helped you to know more about what it means to be saved. God welcomes you with open arms. We can have as much of God as we want in our lives. We can walk on the edge of it and imagine what it is like, or we can dive in and experience the depths of it all. I pray the prayer for you that Paul prayed for the early churches in Ephesians 3:17-19, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height. And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.”

