

HOPE

God's Shelter in the Storms of Life

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THE NATIONS FOR CHRIST

"O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people."

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*To Chaplain Richard Steele
who gives hope to so many*

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this book is to show you that there is real hope for whatever situation you are facing in life. The old hymn, “A Shelter In The Time Of Storm,” sings about this hope...

*The Lord's our Rock, in Him we hide,
A shelter in the time of storm;
Secure whatever ill betide,
A shelter in the time of storm.*

God has a shelter for you during the storms of life. It is a place of strength and safety when doubt, discouragement, bereavement, and loneliness thunder on the horizon.

*A shade by day, defense by night,
A shelter in the time of storm;
No fears alarm, no foes affright,
A shelter in the time of storm.*

This shelter is the hope that each one of us can have in the Lord Jesus Christ! If you are thinking about reading this book, more than likely, you need hope in your life. Whatever situation you are in, Jesus Christ is the answer.

*The raging storms may round us beat,
A shelter in the time of storm;
We'll never leave our safe retreat,
A shelter in the time of storm.*

This book will teach you what the Bible says about experiencing God's hope, peace and purpose for your life. After each chapter, you will find a place to write your own notes and thoughts. At

the end, you will come to a supplemental section that deals with some tough questions that you may have wondered about. As you read, it is our prayer that you are encouraged, and that you find hope through the Lord Jesus Christ!

*Oh, Jesus is a Rock in a weary land,
A weary land, a weary land;
Oh, Jesus is a Rock in a weary land,
A shelter in the time of storm.*

“...Jesus Christ, which is our hope.”
(1 Timothy 1:1b)

CHAPTER ONE
God's Formula For Hope

GOD'S FORMULA FOR HOPE

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”

(Romans 5:5)

Hope can keep us going through the hardest times and the roughest storms that life can bring our way. Emily Dickinson, the 19th Century American poet wrote:

*"Hope" is the thing with feathers—
That perches in the soul—
And sings the tune without the words—
And never stops—at all—

And sweetest—in the Gale—is heard—
And sore must be the storm—
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm—

I've heard it in the chillest land—
And on the strangest Sea—
Yet, never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb—of Me.*

Everyone in the world wants hope, but in order to have real hope, we have to follow God's formula. God tells us, in His Word, how we can have hope that will last through the most challenging storms of life.

Verse one of Romans, chapter five says, *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Peace goes hand in hand with hope in helping me to live a

happy, successful Christian life. If I have peace with God and the hope of Jesus Christ in my heart, I can sail through the stormy seas of life in victory! The word, *justified* in this verse is a very interesting word. Let's suppose that you had just committed a crime and that you were standing before the judge. "Are you guilty of the charges?" the judge asks. "Yes, your Honor. I am guilty" you reply, with your head hung towards the ground. "Well then," says the judge. "The verdict is, NOT GUILTY – INNOCENT OF ALL CRIMES!" This may seem like an unlikely scenario in a court of law, but it is exactly what happens when a person accepts Jesus Christ as Savior. God declares him to be "not guilty" and innocent of all sin. That is what the Bible means when it says, *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:" (Romans 5:1)* The word, "justified" means *to declare a person to be innocent of sin and righteous.*

How good does a person have to be to go to Heaven? Jesus said, *"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:20) The Scribes and Pharisees were very religious, and on the outside, they were as clean as a hound's tooth. Jesus taught that outward righteousness and religion are not enough. A man or woman who will enter God's kingdom has to exceed this type of righteousness.

How good does a person have to be? Well, they would have to be good enough to not have any sin, because God promises that He will judge sin. *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die..." (Ezekiel 18:20a)* *"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:15) *"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23a)* The penalty of sin is death—separation from God forever in Hell.

I only know of one sinless, perfect person who has ever lived, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ! So when, by faith, I receive Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, this is what happens. God takes all of the sin off of my record: every time I have told a lie, stolen something, desired to have something that belonged to someone else, taken God's name in vain, or broken any of God's commandments; God takes all of my sins away! But He doesn't stop there. God places the righteousness of Jesus Christ on my record, so that in His sight, I am sinless and

perfect. Then, when God looks at my record, He has to declare me to be innocent of sin and righteous because He sees, on my record, the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ!

That is how we can experience peace with God. Everybody wants peace, but you can never have true peace with God until you are justified. The only way that you can be justified is by placing your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. *“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:1)* If you have never trusted in Jesus Christ to be your Savior, why not do it now? Christ died for your sins on the cross. He was buried, and after three days, He arose from the dead. He is alive and able to forgive your sins and save your soul. If you will trust Him as Savior, you can have peace with God. God will declare you to be righteous and innocent of all sin in His sight!

The Bible goes on to say, *“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Romans 5:2)* Grace is when I get good things from God that I don't deserve. I do not deserve to go to Heaven, but I am going there! That is God's grace. The Bible teaches that we have access into God's grace by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ is like a master key that unlocks God's treasures of grace. It is like an “all access pass.” We stand before God innocent and righteous. We do not deserve this, but it is a reality for every believer in Jesus Christ, *“By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”* While we stand before God sinless and righteous, we *“rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”* Even though I am sinless in God's sight in Heaven, I am still far from perfect here on earth. One day, I will not come short of God's glory any more. I will be like Jesus Christ. That is my hope—the glory of God!

Now here is God's formula for hope. It is: Tribulation + Patience + Experience = Hope. Notice what the Bible says. *“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope:” (Romans 5:3, 4)*

Tribulation

The first part of God's formula for hope is tribulation. In other words, we have to go through trouble to get hope. Now that is not the way I would have planned things; how about you? I don't like suffering. I do not enjoy trouble. But, God says that if you want hope, you have to go through tribulation. The good news is, if you are going through trouble in your life right now, you are a prime candidate for hope! When my mother died in 2002 of Lou Gehrig's disease, that was a time of tribulation for our family. It was also a time of hope, because we could look to God's promises in the Bible that life does not end at death. For the Christian, there is the firm hope of meeting again in Heaven! The road of tribulation takes us to a place of hope, but not before it gives us something else that we need in life. That brings us to the second part of God's formula for hope...

Patience

Patience is something that we all can use. Going through tribulation in life teaches us to patiently wait on God. Strong's Concordance says that the word translated "patience" in this verse means "cheerful (or hopeful) endurance, constancy." I do not enjoy going through trouble. I endure it. Because God is in the equation, I can endure it cheerfully or hopefully, looking to the time when I will be delivered from the situation, or when the trial will be over. The Bible says that Jesus Christ, "*...for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" (*Hebrews 12:2b*) Here was Jesus, hanging on the cross, suffering for our sins. He did not enjoy the sufferings that He went through. He endured them for the joy that was to come after. The joy of rising from the dead; the joy of seeing millions of sinners saved—this joy caused Him to endure the cross. We do not have to enjoy tribulations in life. We simply need to know that tribulation causes us to have patience, which we all need, and that it will result in hope.

I didn't get married until I was thirty years old. I wanted to, but I could not find the right girl for me. During the time of waiting for a wife, I surrendered to go to the mission field. My wife also wanted a

husband, but could not find the right man. She surrendered to the Lord and moved to Peru, South America for a year and a half to serve as a missionary. The Lord taught us to patiently wait for Him. When the time was right, He brought us together. We are so glad that we waited for one another. Both of us wanted to serve God, and now we are able to serve Him together! The loneliness of being single while others our age were married and having children was also a time of trusting God, waiting on Him and learning patience. You say, "I sure do need patience!" Good, but you cannot have patience without going through tribulation. You learn to patiently wait on God through the trials of life. You say, "Well, I've been in some tribulation and now I'm learning to patiently wait for God to work. I want to experience God's deliverance!" Then you are in the right place, because the next part of God's formula for hope is experience.

Experience

This is my favorite part of God's formula. I have seen it time and again in my own life as a Christian. I go through the trial. I wait on God. God works, and I experience His deliverance! Are you a Christian? Are you going through a trial right now? It will not last forever. Deliverance will come. You will experience God's hope in your life!

One of the Devil's tools is to make us think that there will never be an end to the trial we are going through. That is not true. There will be an end. There is light at the end of the dark tunnel we walk through. Jesus Christ is there. He has walked with us all the way and He is the light of hope when it is all over. Some Christians endure sicknesses that lasts throughout their lives, but they enjoy God's sweet presence and powerful hope here on earth. In eternity, there will be no more sickness or doctors, no more hospitals or pain.

My father's business went through some very bad years financially. He was worried and depressed. One day, he and my mother came to the Bible college and church that I was attending near Knoxville, Tennessee. The late Dr. Al Smith was there that evening singing and telling stories about some of the great hymns of the

Christian faith. He told the story of Stillman and Civilla Martin and their hymn, “God Will Take Care of You.” As Dr. Smith sang the song,

*Be not dismayed whate'er betide,
God will take care of you;
Beneath His wings of love abide,
God will take care of you.
God will take care of you,
Thro' ev'ry day, O'er all the way;
He will take care of you,
God will take care of you.*

Dad realized that God would take care of him. He did not need to be depressed. My mother was a musician; dad was not. I do remember, though, how he learned to play “God Will Take Care of You” on our family piano, and he would practice it over and over again, reminding himself of God's concern for his situation. The Lord did deliver, and when he should have gone out of business, dad recovered and began to do well again!

John the Baptist sat in prison, depressed and doubting who Jesus was. He sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the Son of God, or if they should look for another. *“Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”* (Luke 7:22, 23) Jesus gave the answer when John needed to hear it most, and John experienced God's hope in the midst of his prison cell. Where are you today? God can give you hope. Jesus Christ can deliver you from your doubts, from your depression, from your loneliness. Jesus Christ is the answer to whatever problem you are going through!

“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope:” (Romans 5:3, 4) By the way, I can understand

glorying in victory or glorying when things go well. But, the Bible says, “...not only so, but we glory in tribulations also...” After studying this subject, we understand why a Christian glories in tribulations also. Because, tribulation gives us patience, experience and finally...

Hope

All of us need hope during the storms of life. How do we get the hope that we need? When we go through tribulation, we learn to patiently wait on God. When God's deliverance comes and we experience it, the next time we go through a trial we will have hope based on what God has done for us in the past. To illustrate, the first time I ever went into a prison to preach it was a frightening experience. It is not as frightening now as it was then, because I know basically what to expect. My past experiences prepare me for the future. It is similar to the way a soldier who is well trained for combat is better prepared to face the situation than one who is not. The battle-hardened soldier is even better prepared than the fresh troops who have just entered the theater of combat. Through experience, God prepares us for future trials.

One of the most troubling things about a trial is the fact that we cannot tell for sure what the future holds. We do not know what will happen next. We do, however, learn from past experience that God remains the same. The Lord Jesus Christ is a certainty. “*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.*” (Hebrews 13:8) I may not necessarily know what to expect from a situation in life, but I do know, from experience, what to expect from God! He is always there. “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*” (Hebrews 13:5) God cares about me. “*Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.*” (1 Peter 5:7) No situation of life is too hard for Him to handle. “*Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?*” (Jeremiah 32:27)

So, experiencing God in my life during a time of trial gives me hope for the future. It can also give hope to others. The Bible says, “*Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father*

of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” (2 Corinthians 1:3, 4) When we go through a time of trouble in our lives, God comforts us and gives us hope. The Bible teaches that we can take the comfort that God has given to us, and use it to help others. I remember Pastor Clarence Sexton telling a story about Dr. Curtis Hutson, the late editor of “The Sword of The Lord” newspaper, and former pastor of the largest church in the State of Georgia, who died of cancer.¹ Dr. Hutson said that it never helped when someone told him that they had cancer. It did help, however, when they told him that God had strengthened them during their cancer. Everyone is going through, or has gone through some trial. If God has been a strength and encouragement to you during yours, telling another person what God has done for you helps to spread hope. By the way, it will make you feel good too. Sharing God's comfort in your own life will comfort others, and give you happiness in knowing that you can minister to someone else and be used of God to bring hope to someone who needs it!

The Bible goes on to say in Romans 5:5-9,

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”

The greatest hope that any one of us can have in life is that Jesus Christ demonstrated His love toward us, while we were yet sinners, by dying in our place on the cross. This hope means that I can

¹ Dr. Curtis Hutson pastored the Forest Hills Baptist Church near Atlanta, GA which grew from 40 in attendance to nearly 8,000 during his tenure there as pastor. The “Sword of the Lord” is a bimonthly Christian newspaper that takes its name from Judges 7:20 in the Old Testament. He served as the editor there until his death in 1995 of Cancer. Dr. Hutson died preaching the Word of God, for 24 hours straight, from his bed.

be sure that God loves me through the trials of life, and I am guaranteed a future of hope when I die. I will be "...*saved from wrath through him.*" (*Romans 5:9b*) I never will experience God's wrath against my sins. Jesus Christ took my place on the cross, and I believe in Him. God promises me salvation from the penalty of sin and everlasting life in Heaven. This is true hope! We can place our faith in Jesus Christ through the trials of life. He will never let us down.

*My faith has found a resting-place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the Ever-living One;
His wounds for me shall plead.*

Refrain:

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

*Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him,
He'll never cast me out.*

*My heart is leaning on the Word,
The written Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's name,
Salvation thro' His blood.*

*My great Physician heals the sick,
The lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed,*

For me His life He gave

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea;
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

-Lidie H. Edmunds

CHAPTER TWO
Peace In The Storm

PEACE IN THE STORM

“The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.”

(Psalm 29:10-11)

Psalm Twenty-Nine was written by King David. A Psalm was a type of song used for worship in ancient Israel. David was a man who had many struggles in his life. He faced many trials and heartaches.

Someone has said that life is a lot like standing in line, waiting your turn. You are either about to go through a storm, you are in a storm, or you are coming out of a storm. David wrote Psalm Twenty-Nine about a storm in Israel. He shows us that the Lord Jesus Christ is in control of the storm, and how He will give peace to His people in the middle of it.

God Is Ready to Help You—Turn to Him

“Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” (Psalm 29:1-2)

In verses one and two of Psalm Twenty-Nine, David urges the "mighty" to *"give unto the LORD glory and strength."* Many people think that they are mighty until the storm comes. They are self-confident; they trust in themselves until the rain begins to fall and the thunder begins to sound. Oftentimes, we want to handle the problems of life ourselves. We go along in life, and problems begin to arise, and we do not seek God until we are in some real trouble. If you are reading this today and you are weighed down with problems, you need to realize that there is a God in Heaven who is stronger and mightier than you, who loves you, and stands ready to help you.

Going through a storm should cause us to realize who we are and who God is. God is in control of the storm. We feel helpless because we have no control over our situation. A family member has become terminally ill and we don't know what to do. The doctor has said, "There is no hope." Someone whom we love has died and we miss them so much. We don't know how we will cope without them. Life has become confusing and complicated and we don't know where to turn. That is when we need to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of your personal storm, He is there. He is ready to strengthen you and to help you. *"Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength."*

God's Power in the Storm

The Word of God goes on to say,

"The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory." (Psalm 29:3-9)

The Bible pictures God as in control of the thunderstorm. The storm shows God's power. I read this psalm in an airport in South America one time. I was moving to a city in southern Peru for some training in the ministry and I did not want to go. I mean, I was happy living around my friends and family in the U.S.A. God used this Psalm to help calm my fears. He can calm your fears too. Whatever trouble you are going through, Jesus Christ is there. He is all-powerful, and He will walk with you in the storm, guiding you through the tossing waves, flashing lightning, and roaring thunder until you make it safely home.

God Gives Us Strength to Go Through Storms

We will all go through things in life that we do not want to go through. God does not always deliver us from those things. Sometimes, He gives us strength to go through them. Several years ago, my mother became sick. She was diagnosed with a terminal illness and she gradually grew weaker and weaker. She had always had a beautiful voice. In fact, she was in charge of the music program for the city schools in our town. As the disease progressed, she grew to where she could no longer talk plainly. In the end, she couldn't speak at all. She lay in a hospital bed for six months and couldn't get out of bed, could not breath or eat on her own. She had to be attached to a ventilator to give her air. After about a year of going through this disease, she died. I can tell you that God gave me strength to go through that storm. I was able to stand up and preach her funeral service. The Lord Jesus Christ will give you that kind of strength when you depend on Him and not on yourself. God gave my mother strength too. I remember when she was lying in the hospital bed and we would play some Christian music from my college choir. She would have a look of joy and peace on her face as they sang about the Lord Jesus Christ. God gave her peace in the midst of the storm.

I know a man whose wife has a disease that binds her to a wheelchair and causes her speech to be slurred. She has children and she has not been able to help to raise them for many years. Her husband has had to do that. Yet, God gives her such inner strength and such wonderful times of prayer. She is closer to Jesus than most of us ever will be. It is interesting to note that some of the greatest hymns in the hymnbooks, used by Christians around the world, were written by Fanny Crosby, who lost her vision when she was an infant. Fanny developed an eye infection, and the man who treated her used hot mustard for medication. For the rest of her life she never saw a sunrise or a sunset. She never knew what it was to look at the beautiful green fields or the blue sky. She never saw the vast oceans or mountains stretching across the landscape. She wrote, "*If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.*"² God gave Fanny Crosby strength to

² Quoted from the Wikipedia article on "Fanny Crosby."

go through the storm, and she used that strength to be a blessing to multitudes.

Look Away From Yourself And Look To Jesus Christ

If we are looking to ourselves, we will not be able to survive the storm. Only when we look away from ourselves, and our own strength, and see the Lord Jesus Christ, high and lifted up, and in control of the storm, can we have God's peace. Whoever you are, whatever storm you are going through, God is bigger than your storm and He can give you strength and peace to go through it. Are you a single parent, struggling to bring up your children by yourself? Are you a young person, not knowing what to do about a situation that you are facing? Are you an elderly person, feeling alone and afraid? God is there.

The Bible says, *"The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace."* (Psalm 29:10-11) God sits upon the flood. Let the storms come! Let the flood rage all around us! The Lord Jesus Christ is King for ever! He can calm the storm and give you calm in the storm. Only a God who became a man could fully understand what man goes through. I am so glad that two thousand years ago, God did become a man. The Lord Jesus Christ clothed himself in human flesh and came to live among us. He died a cruel death on the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of every human being. He was buried in a borrowed tomb and three days later, He arose from the dead. He is living today, and He understands what we are going through. He has been there. All of our heartaches, all of our tears, all of our pain, He has taken upon Himself. When we trust in Him to be our own personal Savior, the peace that only He can give is available to us as we walk through the storms of life.

CHAPTER THREE
“I Still Don't Know My Purpose.”

“I STILL DON'T KNOW MY PURPOSE”

“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. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

(Romans 8:28, 29)

“I still don't know my purpose...(Jesus) saved me for something, but I don't know what for.” An inmate in our local jail sent me a letter. He wanted to get close to God but said that he could not seem to. He wanted to know His purpose in life but wasn't sure what it could be. A lot of people are searching for the purpose of life. Knowing God's purpose gives us hope, because it shows us that we are here for a reason. It shows us that our trials in life have a meaning behind them and that nothing is in vain. God's Word gives us the answer to the question, “What is my purpose?” in Romans 8:28-30.

“According To His Purpose”

First of all, we learn from verse twenty-eight that God has a purpose for our lives. *“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.”* Many people have determined their own purpose for living, but God tells us that He has a purpose for our lives that is far greater than anything we could create. If you believe in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, then God has a wonderful purpose for you! Notice in this verse, the Bible says that Christians are *“...the called according to his purpose.”* If the President of the United States were to call you today, you can be sure that there would be a purpose behind it. When God called you to salvation, when He invited you to receive the Lord Jesus as Savior, there was a purpose in it. God has called us *“according to his purpose.”* God's purpose is more important than that of the President. It is more important than the purpose of a king! The Bible says that Jesus Christ is *“...Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”* *(Revelation 17:14b)* The Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords has called you, and His call is of paramount importance!

What This Call Means

The call of God means certain things for my life. It means, first of all, that I can know that all things work together for my good. That is what the Bible says in Romans 8:28. *“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.”* In the next two verses, the Bible explains that there are five things that are working together for our good. *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”* (Romans 8:29, 30) The first thing is God's Foreknowledge. The second, is His Predestination. The third, His Calling; the fourth, Justification. The fifth thing that works together with the other four for our good is Glorification. All of these things are necessary to accomplish God's plan for your life. All of them work together to accomplish that plan.

God's Foreknowledge and Predestination have to do with what God knows and determines. Justification is something that has already happened in your life if you are saved. Glorification is something that will happen in the future. We will study these subjects in a moment, but first let's answer an important question.

What Good is All This?

The good that God is working to accomplish in your life is His purpose—His will. To the Christian who says, “I don't know what my purpose in life is,” God tells us that He is already accomplishing His will and purpose in our lives. The Bible goes on to tell us exactly what God's purpose is. *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”* (Romans 8:29) God's purpose is to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. God's purpose, in other words, is to make us like Jesus! The good thing about all of this is that, no matter what you go through in life, God will always work all five of these things together for your good. If nothing else is going right in life for you, these things are. The Bible says, *“What shall we then say to these*

things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Romans 8:31, 32) These things, which we are about to study, show us that God is for us. God gives them to us freely because we are with Christ. When my friends and I went to London, England in 2006, we toured Parliament. We were treated very kindly by the British guards, even though we had to go through security several times, (it's a long story). But, imagine how we would have been treated if we had walked into Parliament with the Queen! God gives us the royal treatment because we are with Christ. "...*how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"* Now, let us look at these things, and study them more closely.

"Foreknow"

The Bible says, "*For whom he did foreknow...*" Did you know that God knew you before you were even born? God said to the prophet Jeremiah in the Old Testament, "*Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.*" (Jeremiah 1:5) God knew all about you before you knew about yourself! If you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior, God also chose to know you in a special way. God *foreknew* you, or knew you beforehand. You did not know God. You may have known about Him, but you did not know Jesus Christ as your Savior. God knew you; though, and now that you are saved, God knows you as one of His children.

"Predestinate"

Those whom God knew beforehand, He also predestined. People talk about destiny and what their destiny is in life. God has predetermined what every Christian's destiny will be. "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*" Before you were born, God knew you. Before you were born, God predetermined your destiny.

By the way, if you are reading this and you do not know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, don't let this confuse you. God wants to save everybody, not just a select few! First, realize that you are a sinner. Realize that the price of sin is death and that if you die without Jesus Christ, you will spend eternity separated from God in Hell. Then, realize that Jesus Christ died for your sins on the cross and the Bible teaches that after three days, He rose again from the dead. Realize that God wants to save you, no matter who you are and no matter what you have done. Then, simply trust Jesus Christ to be your Savior. If you will put your faith in Jesus Christ, He promises that you have everlasting life with God. *“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 3:16)*

If you have believed in Jesus Christ, then He has saved you, and the good news is that He also has predestined you. God has a destiny for you as a Christian. What does the Bible teach that our destiny is? *“...to be conformed to the image of his Son...”* That is God's purpose for every believer. It is our destiny to be like Jesus Christ, to be conformed to His image.

“Called”

This is talking about God's call to salvation. If you are saved today, it is not because you picked up the phone and dialed God's number. You were running from God. Before you ever came looking for God, He looked for you. *“For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10)* God called you to salvation and you answered! When you did, God justified you.

“Justified”

Justification means that God declares me to be *just as if I had always had the righteousness of Jesus Christ*. Justification is more than mere forgiveness. Let us suppose that a man who is dressed in filthy, worn-out clothes, and who hasn't had a bath in weeks, is invited to a kind person's home to clean up. His dirty, old clothes are thrown away and he takes a bath until he is sparkling clean. He then leaves the

house, clean as can be, without any clothes! That is forgiveness. Justification, though, is when the man takes a bath, is washed perfectly clean, and is given a brand new suit of clothes to wear. When God saves us, He doesn't just take our sins away. He gives us the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ! When God looks at us, clothed in Christ's righteousness, He declares us to be innocent of sin and righteous in His eyes. This is justification.

“Glorified”

It would be too bad if God gave us the righteousness of His Son, changed our lives, and then left our aging bodies to die and be forgotten. God's plan is complete salvation, both of the inside and the outside. Glorification has to do with the time when our bodies will be made like the body of Jesus Christ. Those who are alive will be transformed immediately when Christ returns. Those who are dead will be raised from death. Glorification is the end. It is the goal of God's purpose. We will be completely conformed to the image of His Son.

God Is Changing Us Into The Image of Jesus Now

I resemble my dad. He is seventy-six years old with straight, white hair. He is also partially bald. I am thirty years old. I have brown, curly hair and I am balding. But dad and I really do resemble one another, not necessarily in looks; but in mannerisms, thoughts, way of life. I even dressed like dad before I got married and my wife started trying to make me look younger. We talk about someone being “a spitting image” of someone else. God wants to change us, gradually, into the image of our Savior.

It is clear that God's purpose for our lives is that we be like Jesus. We will be, perfectly like Him one day, but right now we should be progressively becoming more and more like Him. God wants us to be kind like Jesus. He wants us to do good works like Jesus. He wants us to forgive like Jesus. Wasn't Stephen like Jesus when he died as the first martyr of the Christian church? As he was being pelted with rocks the Bible says, *“And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice,*

Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:60) He was being like Jesus who said, as He hung on Calvary's cross, “...*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...*” (Luke 23:34) God often uses the things that happen in our lives, good things and bad, to conform us to the likeness of Jesus Christ. Can you learn to forgive your enemies? Can you learn to pray for those who treat you wrong? Can you show the kindness of Jesus Christ to those around you? Can you win souls like Jesus Christ did—explain to lost sinners how to go to Heaven when they die? One day, we will be just like Jesus Christ. Until then, God is slowly conforming us to His image. There is a great purpose for your life, and it is to be like Jesus Christ, in word, in deed, and in attitude. In every area of life, God is working to make us more and more like His Son.

Walking Into A Freight Train

God has been teaching me about praying for my enemies and about the attitude that I should have towards them. He has been teaching me about some areas in my life that are not what they ought to be. I have a choice to make and so do you. Some Christians choose to fight against what God is doing in their lives. They walk contrary to the will of God. But, fighting with God is like walking into a freight train. You will get knocked down every time. Some of you reading this, God is trying to do a work in your life and you always seem to be getting knocked down. You go back to your old, sinful ways, and God judges you. You say, “Why do things in my life always turn out wrong?” Maybe it is because you are walking against God's will. If you will turn around and follow Christ and do what the Bible says, you will find the blessings that come, as God changes your life from the inside out.

Mistaken Identity?

After John the Baptist was executed, King Herod, who had him put to death, heard about Jesus. He said, “...*This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead; and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.*” (Matthew 14:2) Most people would say that they would like to be more like Jesus, but here, Herod says that Jesus must be John the Baptist! What a man John must have been! Of course,

John was just trying to be like Jesus Christ. In Herod's mind, there was a family resemblance. There was a likeness. When people see us, they should see Jesus in the way we live our lives. If they do, we will be fulfilling the purpose for which God has saved us.

Like Jesus

Now you know what your purpose is, and that should give you hope. No matter where your life is today, if you are saved, one day you will be like Jesus Christ. *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”* (Romans 8:29) Jesus was the *“firstborn among many brethren”* that is, He was the first to rise from the dead with a perfect, resurrection body. One day, at the resurrection of believers, our bodies will be changed into perfect human bodies that can never die, never get sick and never grow old. In Philippians 3:21, the Bible says that Jesus Christ *“...shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* No matter where you are right now, your future is guaranteed. It is your destiny to be like Jesus.

“If”

By Rudyard Kipling³

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or, being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;*

*If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn out tools;*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breath a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,*

³ Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) was a British writer and poet. “If” is one of his most famous works. I have included it here, not only because it is a very good and thought provoking poem, but because I hope that it will be an encouragement to someone who is trying to do the right thing and struggling against opposition.

*And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on";
If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with kings - nor lose the common touch;
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you;
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run -
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man my son!*

CHAPTER FOUR

“I remember the day that the Lord
saved me”

A Story Of Hope

“I Remember The Day That The Lord Saved Me”

A STORY OF HOPE

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Larry Styles is an amazing man. Amazing, because of what God has done in his life. Larry is a member of Whitfield Baptist Church in Dalton, Georgia and serves there as a Deacon. Every week, he goes to the Whitfield County Jail, to minister to the men who are incarcerated there. Larry is married and has two children. God has used his life in a great way, to have a positive impact on many people.

It was not always this way though. Larry was a founding member of a local street gang. He was a drug dealer and addict, and an inmate in the same correctional system where he now ministers. I know Larry Styles personally, and he is for real. God has radically changed his life. Here is his story...

A Troubled Past

My name is Larry Styles.⁴ I'm a member of Whitfield Baptist Church. I'm an ex-drug addict/dealer and convicted felon. I've been in and out of jail since I was fifteen years old. I was a member of the “Rat Hole Gang” from 1972 until 1981. I've been arrested for burglary, assault, contributing, three misdemeanor and two felony drug charges.

Hope In A Jail Cell

⁴ If you would like to order copies of this testimony in pamphlet form, Larry has them available in a letter-sized (8.5 x 11) three column brochure, in both English and Spanish. The testimony also includes pictures and a Gospel presentation and invitation at the end. You may duplicate these brochures on a copier for use in your church, jail or prison ministry. Please write to: Larry J. Styles, P.O. Box 472, Dalton, GA 30722

On August 28, 1981 I was arrested on the felony drug charges and placed in the Whitfield County Jail. On August 30, 1981, while sitting in cell block A-East, Frank B. McCarty, a Gideon, came to my cell and asked if he could talk to me. He told me that God loved me, and that it didn't matter what I had done; God would forgive me. He said that even though I was behind bars, God could set me free on the inside. He showed me, from God's Word, that I was a sinner, and that I needed a Savior. That morning, I prayed and received Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. God changed my whole life that day. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, *"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."*

Changing My Plea

The first time I went to court, I plead "not guilty." Judge Pannel told me that he was going to run a pre-sentence investigation on me. While waiting to go back to court, the Holy Spirit started convicting me and showing me that by pleading "not guilty," I was lying. I prayed and told God that I was trusting Him, and that if He saw that I needed the twenty years, I was willing to accept it as His will for my life, and that I would do the time serving Him. I told the judge that I wanted to change my plea to "guilty." He told me that by changing it, he could give me twenty years in prison and a twenty thousand dollar fine. He asked me if I still wanted to change it. I told him that I did. He then said that he was going to give me three years on count one, and three years on count two. He asked me if I understood, and I told him that I did. Then he said that he didn't know why, but he was going to run them concurrent. I ended up getting three years to serve. I knew, then, that God heard my prayer.

Trust In The Lord

After getting back to the jail, Officer Parker asked me what happened. I told him that I got three years. He told me that the state of Georgia had recently passed a law that said I would only have to do one third of my sentence. Proverbs 3:5,6 says, *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."* I knew that

all I had to do was trust God and He would help me through all of this. God had brought my sentence down from twenty years to six years, then down to three years and on down to twelve months. No matter what the situation may be, remember God is always in control.

Answered Prayers

I stayed in the Dalton Jail for thirteen months. During that time, God answered several prayers. He put my marriage back together. I was baptized on October 4, 1981 while locked up. I prayed for a good study Bible and God provided it for me. I prayed to get on run-around;⁵ God worked that out also. Then, about two months before my release, I prayed about getting on the work release program. God came through again. I got a job working twelve hours a night in a carpet mill, then I would sleep at the jail during the day. I thank God for the time I spent locked up. It was one of the best things that has ever happened to me because it gave me time to get grounded in God's Word so when I did get out, I wouldn't go back to my old life.

A Changed Life

When God saved me, He gave me a new want-to. I didn't want to listen to rock music. I didn't want to use filthy words. I didn't want to use drugs anymore. I didn't want to do the things I used to do. I wanted to do what He wanted me to do. Yes, I have failed Him many times, but He has never failed me. I was released on September 23, 1982. I then started going to the jail services with Mr. McCarty, and helping him in the Mailbox Club Prison Ministry. Bibles and Bible studies were being sent into over 160 jails and prisons throughout the United States. The reason I still go to the jail is because I know that what God has done for me, He can and will do for others.

There Is Hope For You

⁵ Run Around – A section of the jail where inmates are allowed to do some sort of work such as kitchen duty, or clean up crew.

I was twenty-eight years old when God saved me. All that time, no one had ever told me that God loved me, and that He could save me and change my whole life. If you don't know Jesus as your personal Savior, I pray that you will ask Him to save you now. Remember, no matter who you are, where you have been or what you have done, God still loves you.

YOUR DECISION FOR JESUS CHRIST

You have just read Larry Style's testimony detailing the amazing change that Jesus Christ made in his life. No matter what situation you are in today, there is hope for you in the Lord Jesus Christ! If you will acknowledge that you are a sinner and that you cannot do anything to deserve Heaven, and if you will believe in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the Bible promises that God will forgive you, save your soul from Hell, and give you eternal life with Him. *“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 3:16)* If you will, right now, receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, please copy the words below into a letter and mail it to us. We would like to know about your decision and send some information that will help you to live the Christian life.

My Decision:

Realizing that I am a sinner and that I cannot do anything to deserve Heaven, and also believing that Jesus Christ died for me on the cross and arose from the dead three days later, I now believe in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. I am trusting in Christ alone to forgive my sins, to save me from Hell and to take me to Heaven when I die. Please send me the information that you mentioned that will help me in my Christian life.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Please Mail To:
The Nations For Christ
c/o Whitfield Baptist Church
2134 Dug Gap Road
Dalton, GA 30720

CHAPTER FIVE

“If God is so powerful, why does He allow bad things to happen?”

“IF GOD IS SO POWERFUL, WHY DOES HE ALLOW BAD THINGS TO HAPPEN?”

“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope.” (Job 7:6)

“If God is so powerful, why does He allow bad things to happen?” A young skeptic on the street in Northern Ireland asked me this question one night. It is a good question that many people have wondered about. The Old Testament figure, Job, when he had lost his health, his wealth, and his children to violent deaths said in despair, *“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and are spent without hope.” (Job 7:6)* A weaver's shuttle is a mechanism that shoots thread quickly from one side of a piece of cloth that is being sewn to the other. Job used this as an illustration of how quickly his time on earth was passing by. He was not enjoying life. He felt like he was just rushing towards death. The life that he did live was a life without hope. Job asked God many questions during his trial. Interestingly enough, when God answered Job, He answered by asking Job a lot of questions. If you are wondering why God would allow bad things to happen in the world, here are some things to think about.

There are two kinds of “bad things” that take place in the world: 1. natural and 2. man-made. Many of the bad things are man-made, and take place because of foolish or sinful choices that human beings make. For instance, the holocaust was a horrible chapter in human history. Six million Jewish people died as a result of Adolf Hitler's atrocities. Was it God's fault that Adolf Hitler chose to hate Jews and to murder them? Was it God's fault that the people around Hitler followed his leadership? Was it God's fault that the German people at the time embraced Hitler as their leader? Does God's Word, the Bible, teach that we should hate Jews or murder them? One of the Ten Commandments says, *“Thou shalt not kill.” (Exodus 20:13)* The fact is that God, in His power, has given us His Word. When we choose to disobey it, that is not God's fault. It is our fault. When leaders of countries slaughter their own people is that God's fault, or did they choose to disobey His Word? When a criminal breaks into your house and steals your stereo, did God do that, or the criminal who disobeyed God's command? In addition to His Word, God has set up

several means to prevent bad things from happening, and to take care of those who violate His laws.

The Bible tells us in Romans chapter thirteen, that God has instituted the power of government on earth to prevent crime and punish criminals. *“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”* (Romans 13:3-4)

We must also remember that according to Scripture, judgment is coming. Those who have hated God and rejected Him will stand before His judgment seat. Adolf Hitler, who in the 1940's felt God's judgment through the governments of this world and their military powers will one day stand before God's judgment seat to experience His eternal wrath. So will every murderer, thief, adulterer and breaker of God's law who does not repent and turn to Jesus Christ for mercy and forgiveness. *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:”* (Hebrews 9:27)

God punishes sin all of the time. He just does not always punish it immediately or in the way that we would expect. We might expect to see lightning bolts coming out of the sky to zap someone. Instead, we see a criminal sitting in a cell in the county jail. I work a lot in the jail and the men there will tell you that they are being judged for their sins. Could God stop sin from happening? Certainly He could, but He chooses rather to give us His Word, a conscience, and human authority. When we willfully and wickedly choose to violate these restraints, judgment will come.

Does the fact that God chooses not to judge sin in the way that we think He should mean that He is wrong? Is it possible that we are wrong? Could God, perhaps, know more than we do about running the Universe? I know that I'm being sarcastic, but dear friend, we would do well to think about these things before we jump to conclusions about God being unjust.

It is important, also, to remember several things.

1. God did not create the world this way. When God created the world, there was no sin, death, suffering or sorrow. When Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, chose to disobey God's law in the Garden of Eden; sin, death, sorrow and pain entered into the world. *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned”* (Romans 5:12)

2. If we believe the Bible then we believe that there is a Devil and demons who are working against God in this world. So, they are the source of some of the bad things that happen.

3. God is not mad at you if you don't understand what He is doing or have questions. God is a big God; He can handle your questions. The book of Job does not tell us whether or not Job ever found out why he went through his trials. We know some of the reasons because the Bible tells us what was going on in Heaven while Job was being tried on earth. But most of us, like Job, may never fully understand the purpose of our trials until we see Jesus. My mother became terminally ill and died several years ago. She was a good, Christian woman. She was in a hospital bed for six months unable to breath on her own and unable to swallow food or to get out of bed; then she died. Do I understand that? No. But that doesn't mean that I react by hating God and refusing to believe in Him or serve Him. I understand that God is more intelligent than I am. When we cannot trace God, we must trust Him. If that is hard for you to do, pray like a man did in the Bible, *“And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”* (Mark 9:24) There is nothing wrong with asking God to help us to trust Him. We cannot understand all of the natural disasters in the world. The Bible teaches that the earth itself has been, for lack of a better term, “messed up” because of sin. According to Romans 8:20-22, the whole creation is under the curse of sin. God certainly did not create the world this way originally. Suffering, death and even an imperfect environment came because of Adam's Original Sin. As a result, there are tornadoes and hurricanes, tsunamis and floods. We do not understand why God allows those things to happen. One day, the Lord Jesus Christ will set up His Kingdom upon the earth and

straighten everything out. The Bible teaches this. We will understand “why” some day, but for now we must trust in the Lord. Believers in Jesus Christ who have lost their homes and possessions to flood, fire, tornado, etc. continue to find great peace and comfort in their belief in God. We can either choose to go through life bitter at God, thinking He is a cruel tyrant who finds pleasure in hurting people, or we can find peace and hope through faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. I would personally rather live a life of peace and hope.

CHAPTER SIX
The Death Of Lazarus

THE DEATH OF LAZARUS

“Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.”

(John 11:14)

There is a story in the Bible about a man named Lazarus who died, and whom Jesus raised from the dead. Jesus was close friends with Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha, so when Lazarus became sick, his sisters sent word to the Lord to come and heal him. Read about it in John 11:1-6.

“Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard that, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When he had heard therefore that he was sick, he abode two days still in the same place where he was.”

When He heard that Lazarus was sick, Jesus did not do what we would expect Him to do. He did not go immediately to help His friend. Instead, He stayed where He was for two days. Because of this delay, Lazarus died before Jesus arrived. Prior to telling us that Jesus waited two days to go to visit Lazarus, the Bible says,

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.”

(John 11:5)

This is important—Jesus loved them. He waited two days to go see his friends, but He still loved them. He allowed Lazarus to die, but *“...Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.”* The truth of the matter is that God loves you too. Jesus loves you when you are healthy, and He loves you when you are sick. He loves you when you

are financially secure and when you hit the bottom of the economic barrel, Jesus still loves you. He loves you when your marriage is filled with love and happiness; but when the tragedy of divorce visits your home, Jesus loves you still. Before the Bible ever tells us that Jesus waited two days, before we are told that Lazarus' sickness caused death, before we find Mary and Martha broken-hearted and weeping for the loss of their brother, we find a loving Savior.

Maybe you are reading this and something is going on in your life that you can't understand. It doesn't make any sense why it should happen. After all, you have tried to live a decent life. You have prayed and gone to church and you don't deserve this. Maybe God has forgotten about you or could care less. Perhaps the one truth that you need to hang onto today is that Jesus Christ loves you and He cares deeply about the condition that you are in. You see, when Jesus says, "I love you," He backs it up with action. It is not just something that is said because you are going through a hard time. God's love for you is true love.

1. God Proves His Love For Us Through The Death Of His Son.

When the Bible tells us that "*Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus*" we are also told what Jesus did. He went to them and wept with them. He spoke words of comfort to them. He gave them hope, and He brought their brother back to life. When God says, "I love you," He also proves His love through the fact that Jesus Christ gave His life for you, so that you can have eternal life with Him. Christ died for all of us. He suffered in our place. The Bible says in Isaiah 53:4, "*Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*" Jesus did not just talk about loving people. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He suffered for our sins on the cross of Calvary. You can argue with Christianity and the Bible, and say that God is unjust for sending sinners to Hell who do not receive Jesus Christ as Savior, but you cannot argue with the fact that the Son of God died for you. If that is true, then God really does love you. He truly cares about your life, because He gave His life in exchange for yours.

2. God Comforts Us Through The Holy Spirit.

If you are a Christian today and you are suffering, Jesus Christ comes to you through the Holy Spirit to comfort you, in the same way that He came to Mary and Martha. The Bible says, *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”* (John 14:26) When Jesus went back to Heaven, God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to come in His name, to do what Jesus was doing on earth. God the Holy Spirit comforts us in the midst of our trials. He also dwells inside every person who has received Christ as Savior, so He is always close to us, knowing the trials that we go through and also knowing how to comfort us during them. It was amazing when my mother died, the grace and comfort that God brought to my dad and me through the Holy Ghost. There was the sweet assurance that she was with the Lord in Heaven, and strength to go through our time of sadness trusting God. Some of you who are reading this know what I am talking about. Others who are suffering and searching for strength and words of encouragement may need to look no farther than your Bible, and prayer. The Holy Spirit is waiting to give you comfort today.

3. God Gives Us Real Hope For The Future.

Jesus also demonstrates His love for us by giving us real hope for the future. There is a Heaven to look forward to after death for every believer. One day, our bodies will be raised like Lazarus, but even better. Lazarus was raised with the same old body that he had before. We will be raised with a body like that of Jesus Christ. *“So also is the resurrection of the dead. It (the body) is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”* (1 Corinthians 15:42-44) Jesus does not say, “I love you” and leave it at that. He shows that He loves us. When you suffer, the first thing to remember is that God loves you.

“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

The second thing that we notice from this story is that *“Jesus wept.”* This is a verse that every little child learns in Sunday School. It

is short, but profound. Have you ever cared enough about someone to weep for them? That is how much Jesus cares about you. After the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001, I was listening to a Jewish Christian minister talking on the radio. He said that people had asked him, “Where was God when the terrorists flew those planes into the World Trade Center towers?” He responded by saying that “God was there—weeping.” I believe that He was. He weeps with us today during our sufferings as well. Christian, do you think that nobody knows what you are going through? Jesus knows. Do you think that nobody cares much of anything about you? Jesus cares. He weeps with you today in the middle of your trouble. Jesus cares.

*Does Jesus care when my heart is pained
Too deeply for mirth or song,
As the burdens press, And the cares distress,
And the day grows weary and long?*

*Does Jesus care when my way is dark
With a nameless dread and fear?
As the daylight fades Into deep night shades,
Does He care enough to be near?*

*Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed
To resist some temptation strong;
When in my deep grief I find no relief,
Tho' my tears flow all the night long?*

*Does Jesus care when I've said goodbye,
To the dearest on earth to me,
And my sad heart aches Till it nearly breaks,
Is this aught to Him? Does He see?*

O yes, He cares; I know He cares;

*His heart is touched with my grief;
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,
I know my Savior cares.*

-Frank E. Graeff

“Jesus wept.” I think that this is such a wonderful truth. When my pastor's father died, the preacher who spoke at the funeral talked about how it was wrong for Christians to weep over the loss of a loved one. Some people think that men shouldn't cry. The truth of the matter is that Jesus wept and it is all right for us to weep too. I didn't weep for my mother after she died. After all, she was with the Lord in Heaven! I did weep, however, over the fact that it would be a while before I would see her again. We miss our loved ones when they pass away. It is good for us to weep. It is even better that Jesus Christ weeps with us. Whether it is the death of a loved one, a broken heart over some trouble that has come into your life, loneliness, depression, whatever it may be; Jesus weeps with you today and He cares about your situation. So, during your trial remember, Jesus loves you. *“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” (John 11:5)* Jesus weeps with you. *“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)* Finally,

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:” (John 11:25)

Jesus is The Resurrection and The Life. He reminded Martha of this. The Bible says, *“Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house.” (John 11:20)* Martha went to meet Jesus as soon as she heard that He was coming towards Bethany. Why didn't Mary go out to meet Him as well? It may have been that she didn't know that He was near. It may have been that she was hurt. “Jesus is our friend. How could He have let this happen?” Have you ever been there? Have you ever asked God the question, “Why?” If you are hurting today, wondering why God hasn't come to help you, you can be sure that He is on the way. God knows about your problem. He is not asleep or uncaring. Jesus may not have gotten to the place where you are yet, but He is on the way. I heard a sermon one time on “Life's Hardest Four Days” from this

story. Jesus told the people to take away the stone from the entrance to the tomb. *“Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.”* (John 11:39) You see, by the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus had been dead for four days. The preacher said that life's hardest four days were the time between when your trial starts and when Jesus shows up. It may be that you are in that time now. It may have been days, weeks or months, but Jesus Christ is coming. He will help you. You can be sure of that.

Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, but Martha did not see it at first. *“Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”* (John 11:21-24) Jesus told Martha that Lazarus would live again. Martha said, *“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”* Martha was saying, “My hope is in the resurrection of the dead. When that happens, I will see my brother again.” Many of us are like that. Our hope is in a certain event, a certain set of circumstances. “Why, if this happens, then everything will be fine. If such and such comes to pass then things will be ok.” Martha's hope was in the resurrection, but, *“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”* (John 11:25, 26) You see, Martha's hope was in an event, the resurrection of the dead; but Jesus is the One who causes that event. He is the Resurrection and the Life!

You may be reading this today and thinking, “Oh, if things would just work out this way then everything would be fine.” But what if they don't work out that way? What happens when life doesn't work the way you had hoped it would? I remember preaching in a jail near Knoxville Tennessee. An inmate there had been coming to the services faithfully. He was trusting God. He thought that He was going to get out of jail on a certain date but it didn't happen, so he lost his faith in God. Look, things don't always work out the way we think they should. We all know that, but sometimes we have the tendency to say that God has to do so and so or He hasn't helped us. Martha and Mary never would have wanted their brother to die in the first place. They

had to go through four long days of waiting for Jesus. That is not the way they wanted it. I didn't want my mother to die. I didn't want to go through some of the things that I have been through in life and neither did you. We don't need to look to an event as our hope. We need to look to Christ. Jesus is our only true hope during the storms of life!

*Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same;
All may change, but Jesus never— Glory to His name!
Glory to His name,
Glory to His name;
All may change, but Jesus never— Glory to His name!*

-Albert B. Simpson

Jesus never changes. People may change. Circumstances may change. But, Jesus Christ is a solid foundation. When Jesus showed up, He did something more wonderful than they could have ever expected. He raised Lazarus from the dead.

“Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.” (John 11:41-44)

I have often found that God did not work things out the way that I would have liked. I have always found that He worked things out better than I could have expected. When Larry Styles was locked up in jail on felony drug charges, that was not what He wanted. When Frank McCarty came by his jail cell to tell him the good news of Jesus

Christ, that was better than he expected.⁶ Whatever problems you are facing today, God may work them out exactly like you want. Then again, He may not. He may let you go through some trial so that your life can be used for His glory in a much greater way than it could have been before. *“Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.” (John 11:45)* The result of the death of Lazarus was that many were saved. Many believed on Jesus Christ.

“I’m going through this trial in my life. Does God love me?”

“Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.” (John 11:5)

“Does Jesus really care?”

“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

“What if things don’t work out the way I want them to?”

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:” (John 11:25)

While I was in Bible College, I saw an old man of God give this illustration.⁷ It is actually an illustration for children, but it will be a blessing to you, no matter what your age. He took a box, like a Christmas gift, which had strings of yarn running out of it and pieces of paper attached to the ends of the strings. The papers had different words written on them like “hope” and “peace” and “purpose.” He said, “I went to God and said, ‘Lord, can I have peace?’ And God said, ‘No, you cannot have peace.’” Then, he put the paper that had the word, “peace” written on it into the box. “Well, then Lord,” I said, “What about purpose? Can I have purpose in my life?” God said, “No, you cannot have purpose.” And he put “purpose” into the box. “Can I have forgiveness of my sins? What about that?”

⁶ You can read Larry Styles’ testimony in chapter 4.

⁷ The late Dr. Frank Sells.

“No,' said God, 'You cannot have forgiveness.’” He placed “forgiveness” into the box. “But, I don't understand. I asked for peace and you won't give me that. I asked for forgiveness and you won't give me forgiveness. I wanted a purpose for my life but you would not give me a purpose! Lord, what can I have?”

“You can have Jesus', God said. The Bible says, '*...but Christ is all, and in all.*'” (*Colossians 3:11b*)

He began to take hope out of the box, and peace out of the box. He took forgiveness out of the box. You see, the truth is, if you have Jesus Christ, you have hope, and peace and forgiveness of sin. If you do not have Christ, you don't have anything. “*...But Christ is all, and in all.*” All the world searches for peace and hope and forgiveness without Jesus Christ and they will never find it. If you have Jesus, then you have it all! All the hope in the world is yours because Jesus Christ is your Lord and your Savior.

CHAPTER SEVEN
Lessons Learned In The House Of
Mourning

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE HOUSE OF MOURNING

“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.” (Ecclesiastes 7:2)

King Solomon is well-known as a man who had great wisdom. Ecclesiastes is a book that records his thoughts on life, both in its good and bad aspects. Solomon said that it is better to go to a funeral home where there is weeping, than it is to go to a festival house where there is feasting, because everyone is going to die one day. God is certainly not against His children enjoying life and having fun, but the living will learn better lessons in the house of mourning than in the house of feasting.

Here are a few lessons that we can learn from the house of mourning. Everyone enters this house at some point during their life. I'm not just talking about a funeral home. I'm talking about the house of a broken heart, the house of discouragement, the house of sorrow. Solomon said, *“Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.” (Ecclesiastes 7:3)*

Lesson One:

Death Is Coming; Be Prepared.

“It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart.” Solomon tells us that the end of everyone is the funeral home. Of course, if you are a Christian, you have two possibilities. One is death; the other is the Rapture. I personally don't want to go by way of the undertaker, but rather, by way of the Upper Taker! If Jesus Christ were to return today, every born-again person would be taken up in the air to be with Him.⁸ That is a wonderful truth! However, whether or not we leave earth by the Rapture or by “rest in peace” we need to be prepared to meet God.

⁸ See 1Thessalonians 4:17

If You Are Not Saved...

“How can I prepare to meet God? What do I need to do?” Well, basically, it is very simple. If you are not a Christian, that is, if you have never received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the only way for you to prepare for death is to believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior now. I say *now* because we don't have a promise of another breath. It is impossible to put into words how important it is that you receive Jesus Christ as Savior! The Word of God says, “*And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.*” (1 John 5:11, 12) If you do not have Jesus Christ, then you do not have spiritual life. You are separated from God, and if you die without Christ, you will be separated from God forever in Hell. The good news is that God loves you, and gave His Son to die for your sins on the cross, to be buried in a tomb for three days, and to rise from the dead. When you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, every sin that you have ever committed is forgiven. Eternal life is yours, and you will be prepared for eternity!

If You Are Saved...

If you are a Christian, live right! Trust God, treat others right, stay in the Bible and in church. The Word of God says, “*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*” (2 Corinthians 5:10) When Jesus Christ returns, every believer will stand before His judgment seat. A careful study of the judgments in the Bible will show us that no one who stands at this judgment seat will be in danger of going to Hell. This judgment is for Christians only. It is a judgment to determine whether we receive rewards in Christ's Kingdom, or suffer loss. Whether or not I go to Heaven or Hell has already been determined. The moment I believed in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, God gave me everlasting life and promised that I would never perish in Hell. “*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 3:16) But rewards will be given in Christ's Kingdom to

those who have faithfully served Him here on earth. I do not want to lose my rewards! So, we should live a life that glorifies Jesus Christ now, so that we can be prepared for the judgment seat then.

Lesson Two:
God Is Doing Something Big!

When God works, it doesn't just affect one person. He is working in many people's lives. God is doing something big! *We desire for God to work quickly, but God desires to work thoroughly.* If Lazarus had been healed of his sickness immediately, many people would have never believed in Jesus and been saved.⁹ My wife and I were driving toward Gwinnett Medical Center near Atlanta, Georgia to see my dad. He had been hospitalized after suffering a mild heart attack. I had taken him to the emergency room on Friday night when the symptoms started. It was now Sunday, and on the way, we passed by a church sign that read, "*A contrary wind makes the kite fly higher.*" Troubles that effect us and those we love can either cause us to spiral out of control or to draw closer to God. The problem you are facing now can be the very thing that allows your life to give the hope of Jesus Christ to others. It can also be the thing that causes you to see God work in a powerful way in your own life.

Lesson Three:
God Has A Purpose For Your Life.

I remember one day my car was broken down, and I was sitting on the front porch of the house where our church's assistant pastor lives. I started reading my New Testament in the book of Acts about the life of the Apostle Paul. Paul went through a lot of persecution, trials and troubles in his life. He said, "*But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.*" (Philippians 1:12) Everything that happened to Paul worked to make the cause of Jesus Christ go forward. I wrote a note in the front of my New Testament that read, "*God has a plan for my life. He called me by His grace. Everything that happens to me, whether good or bad, works to*

⁹ See John 11

further that plan.” Do you think that there's no hope in the situation that you are in right now? Ever think that God has abandoned you? He hasn't. God has a purpose for your life. If you are a Christian, every trouble that you face is like a puzzle piece that fits in place. Just like the death of Lazarus,¹⁰ there is a purpose in the problems that you go through. We only see a mess of jumbled pieces. God sees the finished picture that the puzzle pieces make.

Lesson Four: The Example of Job

When Job went through his troubles,¹¹ He sought God, but couldn't find him. His friends criticized him, and his wife told him to “...curse God, and die.” (*Job 2:9b*) When it was all over, God blessed him in a way he would never have expected. In the end, Job told God, “*I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.*” (*Job 42:5*) The Bible says that God blessed Job more after his problems than He did before they began. “*So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning...*” (*Job 42:12a*) Many scholars believe that Job is the oldest book in the Bible. Even though Genesis records the beginning of the world, Job was the first to be written. It is interesting that there is only one mention of Job in the entire New Testament. The Bible says in James 5:11, “*Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.*” The New Testament explains, and helps us to understand the Old Testament. God's only comment on Job in the New Testament is about *the patience of Job and the end of the Lord*. The book of Job teaches us that when we face trouble in our lives, we should patiently wait for the Lord to work. The temptation for us is to become bitter with God, to give up and quit serving Him. The patience of Job was in trusting God until the end. His faith wavered, but he did not turn against the Lord. He said, “...*the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*” (*Job 1:21*)

The Patience of Job

¹⁰ See Chapter 6 on “The Death of Lazarus.”

¹¹ See Chapter 5 on “If God Is So Powerful, Why Does He Allow Bad Things to Happen?” Also read Job 1:1–2:13 for background information on Job's troubles.

While I was attending Crown College near Knoxville, TN, several of the students were killed when their car was hit by a drunk driver. He was driving at high speeds down a country road at night with his headlights turned off to avoid being seen by the police. One of the girls who died was Misty Carrier. Her father served as a missionary overseas, and he was on the mission field when the pastor called to tell him that his daughter was with the Lord. When he heard the news he quoted Job, “...*the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*” That is the patience of Job! That is trusting God despite the circumstances! Remember, when you cannot trace God, you must trust Him. Whatever you are going through, if you will wait on the Lord, you will see hope come through the dark clouds.

The End of The Lord

The end of the Lord is one thing. The end that the Devil tries to convince you is coming is another. The end of the Lord for Job was that God blessed him in an even greater way than he had been blessed before. The end of the Lord for Mary and Martha was that their brother was restored to life. The end of the Lord for the missionary family that we just read about is that they will be reunited with their daughter one day, for all eternity. The Devil will try to convince you that it is all over. “*Martha, Jesus doesn't care about you. Where was He when Lazarus was sick? Mary, if Jesus loved you, He would not have let your brother die.*” The truth is that the end of the Lord came in their lives, and it will come in your life too if you are a Christian. What will happen if you give up before you see the end of the Lord? What if Job had taken Mrs. Job's advise to, “...*curse God, and die?*” He never would have seen God work. He never would have seen God's mighty power. He never would have experienced God's deliverance. Neither will you, if you give up too soon!

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Galatians 6:9)

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James 5:11).

“Don't Quit”

By Pastor Jack Hyles

*When the cup is turned to wormwood,
And the wormwood turns to gall;¹²
When your walking turns to stumbling,
And the stumbling to a fall;
When you've climbed above the mountains,
Yet the Alps rise rough and tall;
DON'T QUIT.*

*When the path ahead is crooked,
And the road's too rough to tread;
When the best upon the table
Is replaced by sorrow's bread;
When you've crossed some troubled waters,
Yet a Marah's¹³ just ahead;
DON'T QUIT.*

*When the vultures have descended
And disturbed your downy nest;
When sweet fruit has changed to thistle,
While the thorns disturb your rest;
When a deep to deep is calling,¹⁴
And when failure seems your best;
DON'T QUIT.*

12 Wormwood and Gall. A reference to bitterness and poison.

13 “Marah” means “bitter.” Read Exodus 15 and 16 for background to this reference. The point is, “When you've just gone through trouble and more trouble is ahead...”

14 See Psalm 42:7

*When the Lord has cleansed the table;
Then He takes away the fat;
And the best wine has been taken,
Till you find an empty vat;
When another fills the throne room
Where once you proudly sat;
DON'T QUIT.*

*When your health is feeling sickly,
And the medicine tastes bad;
When your fellowship is lonely,
And your happiness is sad;
When your warmth is getting colder,
And in clouds your sunshine's clad;
DON'T QUIT.*

*When you find your wins are losses,
And that all your gains are lacks;
When ill things never come alone,
And your troubles run in packs;
When your soul is bruised and battered
From the Tempter's¹⁵ fierce attacks;
DON'T QUIT.*

*Be not weary in well doing,
For due seasons bring the grain;¹⁶
He who on the Lord hath waited
Shall never run in vain;¹⁷*

¹⁵ Tempter – A reference to Satan.

¹⁶ See Galatians 6:9

¹⁷ See Isaiah 40:31

*The just man falleth seven times,
Yet riseth up again,¹⁸
DON'T QUIT.*

¹⁸ See Proverbs 24:16

CHAPTER EIGHT
Jesus Christ,
The Son Of David

JESUS CHRIST, THE SON OF DAVID

“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”

(Matthew 1:1)

As we read the Bible there are several things that are crystal clear. God created the world. The Bible is God's Word. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose from the dead on the third day. I could go on and on listing things that the Bible makes plain. Among those things is this fact: Jesus Christ is the son of David. Matthew 1:1 says, *“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”*

Now, the fact that Jesus Christ is the son of David is extremely important. It was immensely important to the Jewish people. It was vital because of a promise that God had made to David, the great Jewish king who ruled over Israel about 1,000 years before Jesus Christ was born at Bethlehem. God had promised David that his descendant would sit on his throne to rule Israel for ever. *“The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne.”* (Psalm 132:11) God's promise was clear. *“He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.”* (2 Samuel 7:13) The Jewish people understood the prophecies of the Old Testament to teach that the Messiah (Christ) would be one of David's descendants and that He would carry on David's kingdom. I cannot tell you how important it was and is that Jesus Christ is the son of David! If Jesus were not David's Son, (and when the Bible uses “son” in this way it means descendant), then He would not have fulfilled the prophecies. When Christ came, He absolutely had to be a descendant of David.

As we study through the book of Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, we find that the first verse of this first book states emphatically that Jesus Christ is David's Son. *“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.”* Matthew records Jesus' genealogy from Joseph, Mary's husband. Although Joseph was not His real father, (God was) Joseph was Jesus'

father by law. The Bible says in Matthew 1:20, *“But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.”* Joseph was a son of David, and as the king's descendant, he gave legal standing to Jesus as David's Son. Luke gives us Jesus' family history through His mother who was also a descendant of David. Jesus Christ is both physically and legally the son of David. He fits the prophesied description of the Messiah faultlessly.

As we read through the book of Matthew and study this subject, notice all of the people who knew that Jesus Christ was David's Son.

The Blind Knew It

“And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us.” (Matthew 9:27)

Crowds of People Knew It

“And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?” (Matthew 12:23)

A Gentile (non-Jewish) Woman Knew It

“And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” (Matthew 15:22) Here is a woman who was not even a Jew, but she knew that Jesus Christ was the Son of David. She could have just said, “Have mercy on me, O Lord.” But, she realized that it was important that Christ was David's Son.

Again, The Blind Knew It

“And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.” (Matthew 20:30)

The Multitudes Knew It

“And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.” (Matthew 21:9) As Jesus went toward Jerusalem, the multitudes of people who walked before him and behind him were crying, *“Hosanna to the Son of David.”* The word, *hosanna*, means *“save us now.”* They wanted David's Son to save them, and to do it immediately. They were not asking Jesus to save their souls from Hell, though. They were asking Him to save them from the Roman Empire. The Roman military occupied the Holy Land, and the people expected the Son of David to do something about it! *“Save now!”* they shouted.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ will set up a kingdom one day, and rule the earth from Jerusalem. But Jesus did not come the first time to set up a physical kingdom, where He would overthrow armies and corrupt politicians to bring perfect government to mankind. He came to die for our sins, to be buried and to rise again! They wanted Jesus to save them from the immediate threat of Rome, but He came the first time to save them from the eternal threat of Hell.

Many people are like that. They trust Jesus Christ for the immediate, but not for the eternal. When they are sick, they ask Jesus to heal them, and trust Him to do it. When they are in financial trouble, they call on Jesus. But, when it comes to eternity, they cannot say for sure that they will go to Heaven when they die.

Jesus Christ promised to give everlasting life to everyone who would believe in Him for it. *“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 3:16) If a person really believes in Jesus Christ, he will believe Jesus' words. I know that I will go to Heaven when I die, not because I am a preacher, or a good person, or whatever; but because I believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior, and He promises that I have eternal life and that I will never perish in Hell. You can trust in Jesus all day long for health, healing, happiness and wealth. But, until you believe Jesus' promise that you have eternal life, and will never perish in Hell, because you put your faith in Him—until you believe that, you are like the passengers on the Titanic who thought that the ship would never sink. It didn't matter what they believed or what they were told. It still sank to the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean where it remains today. You may make yourself feel better by saying, “I believe in Jesus Christ.” But, do you believe, are you absolutely sure that you will go to Heaven when you die? “Hope so” is not good enough. You must believe in Jesus Christ as your eternal Savior, not just as a temporary help!

The Religious Hypocrites

“And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,” (Matthew 21:15) There are two interesting things about this verse. One is the fact that the religious leaders of Jesus' day were unhappy with the people's response to Him. They were not worried about the truth. They were worried that Jesus would upset everything, and that they would lose their power and positions. Of course, later they stirred up the people to have Jesus crucified. The other interesting thing is that even the children were crying, “*Hosanna to the Son of David.*” Everyone knew that Jesus Christ was David's Son, except for the religious hypocrites, who didn't want to believe it.

Whose Son Is He Anyway?

Jesus spoke to the religious leaders in Jerusalem and asked the question, “*...What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?*” Now, we all know the answer to that, right? So did they. “*...They say unto him, The Son of David.*” (Matthew 22:42)

Now, look very carefully at Jesus' response to them.

“He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.” (Matthew 22:43-46)

Now, that is an interesting question isn't it? *If David called Christ “Lord,” a Superior, then how can He be David's son?* It is fascinating that not just in the book of Matthew, but also in Mark, this same thing is repeated. Jesus Christ is called the Son of David; but in Mark 12:37 Jesus asked, *“David therefore himself calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly.”* And, in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is referred to as the Son of David; but in Luke 20:44, the Bible says, *“David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?”*

How Can This Be?

How can Jesus Christ be both the Lord of David and the Son of David at the same time? For the answer, we will look in the Gospel of John, chapter one. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” (John 1:1-5)* The word, “Word” here, is another name for Jesus Christ. The Bible says that Jesus Christ was in the beginning. In the beginning of all things, He already existed. The Bible tells us that, in the beginning, He was with God and was God. This leads us into the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. God is one God, existing in three eternal Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If you do not completely understand that, don't worry. Neither do I. If we could fully understand everything about God, then He wouldn't be much of a God would He? One way to illustrate the concept of God as the Trinity is by using the example of water. If water is frozen, then it becomes ice. If it melts, it is water. If it is heated to a certain point, it becomes steam. Water,

steam and ice are all H₂O, three-in-one. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)* In the beginning of all things, Jesus Christ was God, and with God because He is Three-in-One.

Now, Jesus has always existed because God is eternal. That is why David was able to call Him Lord back in the Old Testament. But, the Bible goes on to say, *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)* There was a point in time at which the “Word” was made flesh. That’s what we celebrate at Christmas. There was a day when Jesus Christ, the eternal God, became like us. He became a man. Jesus did this without ceasing to be God. In His human body, He still accepted worship as God, because He never stopped being God when He became man. Notice this conversation between Jesus, and one of His disciples named Thomas, after He rose from the dead.

“And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:26-29)

Thomas called Jesus, *“My Lord and my God”* because Jesus Christ is God. But, Thomas could also feel the nail prints in His hands, because Jesus is man as well. Now, the mystery is solved. David called Jesus Lord because He is Lord, but He is also the Son of David because He became a man.

The Wonderful Truth

This seeming contradiction becomes a wonderful truth for us. As a man, Jesus Christ can understand what we are going through and

the problems we face. He can weep with us when we suffer loneliness, loss or sorrow. He knows what it is to lose a friend, because he wept at the grave of his friend Lazarus. As a man, Jesus can sympathize with us; but as God, He is all powerful, able to help us, hear us, and answer our prayers! As man, Jesus Christ can understand what it is to be tempted to sin, because He was tempted. He did not sin, but He was tempted just like we are. As man, He can understand; but as God, He is able to forgive our sins and save our souls from Hell!

I go to Jesus and say, “Lord, I am going through some struggles in my life. I feel like giving up. I need hope. Can you understand?”

“Yes, child. I can understand. I am a man also, and I've been through trials myself. On the way to the cross, I was afraid, and prayed that the cup of sufferings could pass from me. I know the struggles you are facing. I can help you.”

“Yes, Jesus. I know that you understand, because you are a man like me. But what can you do to help me?”

“Child, I am not only a man. I am also God.”

“Jesus, You are God. You are up in Heaven, and I am down here on earth. Can you really sympathize with me? It seems like it is so hard to serve You. I try, but I need Your help. Can You hear me? Do You understand?”

“Child, I am not only God, the Lord of all. I am also a man. I can empathize with you, because I am made of flesh and bone just like you.” That is a wonderful truth! The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. But, He is also the Son of David. Whatever you are going through today, David's Son is there, able to sympathize with you, and to be a friend. God's Son is there too. He is able to help you with divine power. He is able to answer prayer, forgive sins, give healing, strength and hope. Whatever the situation may be in your own life, you can be sure that you have a Friend who is bigger than your biggest

challenge. You have the God-Man. The Lord Jesus Christ—Son of David. The Lord Jesus Christ—Son of God.

APPENDIX

Hope For Various Situations In Life

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1. HOPE FOR A CURSED GENERATION

Some people believe that they are under a curse from God because of sins committed by their ancestors. God warned His people in the Old Testament about the sin and consequences of following other gods. *“Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me,”* (Deuteronomy 5:9) It is clear from this verse that the third and fourth generations would suffer because of the sins of the first. Are you under a curse like this? The key to understanding the “generational curse,” is the phrase at the end of Deuteronomy 5:9 which says, *“...of them that hate me.”* God does not promise to punish the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generations. He promises to visit the sins of the fathers upon the third and fourth generations of those who hate God.

Now, the point here is this. If my grandfather hated God, then my father probably would have hated God, because he would have been taught to do so. If my father hated God, then I might have hated God as well. Therefore, the first generation was punished for his sins, and the generations to follow, who chose to hate God, would be punished for their sins as well. The good news is, you don't have to hate God! If your ancestors were not saved, you can still be saved. If your forefathers did not live right, that doesn't mean that you cannot live right. If you grew up in a bad environment, that means that you grew up in a bad environment. It doesn't mean anything more than that. It does not mean that you cannot have a Christian home, or bring up your children the right way!

The past does not have to dictate your present, or future! If you read the history of the kings of Judah in the Old Testament, you will find that one king would come along who was bad, and God would curse him. Then, his son would be a good king, and God would bless the kingdom! The Bible says, *“But he slew not their children, but did as it is written in the law in the book of Moses, where the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers, but every man shall die for his own sin.”* (2 Chronicles 25:4) God's policy always has been *personal responsibility*. It is not someone else's fault that you are what you are.

You can make your own decisions in life, and you can choose to serve God and to receive His blessings!

2. HOPE IF YOU THINK THAT YOU ARE TOO BAD TO BE FORGIVEN

Do you think that you are too bad to be forgiven? Well, it's better to think that, than to think that you are too good to need forgiveness! The main problem that the Lord Jesus Christ had with the Jewish religious leaders of His day, was the fact that they were self-righteous and did not believe that they needed a Savior.

If you believe that you are beyond God's forgiveness, then consider this. The Bible says, *“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”* (Isaiah 1:18) The color red in the Bible is a symbol of sin. The color white, is a symbol of purity and righteousness. God says that He can make scarlet sins as pure as snow. God can take whatever sin you have committed, and make your life pure and holy again! The Word of God says, *“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:”* (Romans 5:20) The more sin there is in your life, the more grace God has to forgive that sin!

Think about this. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, He died for all of your sins. Christ did this before you were ever born. In Revelation 13:8, the Bible says that Jesus Christ is *“...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”* God looked through time, from the very start of the world, and knew every sin that you would ever commit. Jesus chose to die for those sins. How then, could you possibly commit a sin that Christ can't forgive?

It is fair to say that no one, outside of the Lord Jesus Christ, has had a greater impact on Christianity than the Apostle Paul. He wrote much of the New Testament, and spread the Gospel of the Lord around the world through missionary journeys, and his writings. Yet, before Paul became a believer in Jesus Christ, he was a blasphemer and a staunch persecutor of Christians. When Paul reflected on the purpose behind his salvation and call into the ministry, this is what he wrote.

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.” (1 Timothy 1:12-16)

Paul said that he was saved to be a pattern of God's patience for those of us who would believe in Jesus Christ in the future. God put up with all of Paul's sins, forgave him, and changed his life in such a radical way that he shook the world for Jesus Christ! If you think that you are too bad for Jesus Christ, you cannot possibly be worse than Paul. Yet, God saved him, and He will save you too, if you will put your faith in Jesus Christ.

No one who wants God's forgiveness is ever turned down for it. Jesus Christ came to save sinners, and He will save and forgive you, if you will believe in Him. *“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 3:16)*

3. HOPE FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE LOST THEIR SALVATION

Jesus said, *“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. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”* (John 10:27-30) Believers in Jesus Christ are compared to sheep in the Bible. They follow Christ in their hearts like sheep follow the shepherd. Jesus says that He gives those who believe in Him eternal life. *“...I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish...”* We do not give ourselves eternal life. Christ gives it to us. It is not our good works that earn salvation. It is Christ's death on the cross!

The Lord Jesus also says, *“...and they shall never perish...”* If Jesus Christ has given you eternal life, you will never perish in Hell. This is the same as God's promise in John 3:16. *“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.”* Simple faith in Jesus Christ brings eternal salvation to the sinner.

Everlasting life is not just simply existing forever. Everyone will exist forever somewhere. Those who do not believe in Jesus Christ as Savior are described by the Word of God as being spiritually dead. Death, in the Bible, means *separation*. Spiritually dead sinners are separated from God. When they die, they will exist forever, separated from God in Hell. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, He gives us spiritual life.

“And you hath he quickened,¹⁹ who were dead in trespasses and sins;” (Ephesians 2:1)

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” (John 5:24)

¹⁹ The word, “quickened” means “made alive.” It comes from the Old English word, “cwic” meaning “alive.”

“And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.” (1 John 5:11-13)

Eternal life is God's life. It is life with God that lasts forever and it is the privilege of knowing God forever. *“And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3)*

“And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” No man can pluck you out of the Lord Jesus Christ's hand! “Well,” you say. “I can pluck my self out of God's hand!” You are a man, aren't you? Some lady reading this might say, “What about me?” Well, the word “man” in this verse means “mankind” so it is talking about a man or woman. If you are a human being, you cannot pluck yourself out of Jesus' hand. That is what the Bible says, *“...neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”*

People do not want to believe that they will be saved forever because it doesn't make sense. Despite the hundreds of clear verses that teach that believers in Jesus Christ have everlasting life with God, men and women still don't believe it. We must remember, though, that just because a thing doesn't make sense to our finite, human minds, that doesn't mean that it doesn't make sense to God! *“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.” (Isaiah 55:8, 9)*

Also, some Christians have the tendency to dismiss hundreds of plain verses that teach that salvation is eternal, for a few that seem to indicate that salvation can be lost. What you believe about this issue has more than likely been shaped by what you were taught when you were growing up, and what kind of church you attend. In the end, we have to remember that the Bible is the supreme authority. Tradition,

or even someone whom we love, trust and have confidence in, cannot override the authority of Scripture. In 2 Peter 2:16-21, Peter tells us that he and other disciples were eyewitnesses of the glory of Jesus Christ. He tells us that they heard, with their own ears, the voice of God. Yet, he says, *“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.”* (2 Peter 1:19, 20) Peter saw and heard Jesus Christ, but he said that the *“more sure word of prophecy”* was Scripture. If Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, viewed the Bible as being more authoritative than his own eyes and ears, then maybe we should look at it in the same way. Here are some of the most popular verses that have been used to teach that salvation can be lost, and what the Bible actually says.

What If I Don't Endure To The End?

“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” (Mark 13:13)

If you do not endure to the end, you will not be saved (if you miss the Rapture and are living on earth during the Tribulation). Of course, no Christian will miss the Rapture or be left here for the Tribulation. This verse is talking about people who live during the Tribulation time, enduring till the end of it. Those who are alive when it is all over will be saved from physical death, and will enter the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ alive. With Mark 13:13, as with all other verses that you study, “context is king.” Never take a verse out of context to try to prove a point. Knowing the verses that come before and after the verse that you are studying, and knowing what the chapter you are reading is talking about, is helpful in finding out the context. If Mark 13:13 is studied in context, “enduring to the end to be saved” is clearly talking about the time of the Tribulation, not today. We must also remember that the word, “saved” in the Bible doesn't always refer to saving a person's soul. For instance, Matthew 24:22 says, *“And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved...”* In this verse, as in Mark 13:13, “saved” refers to salvation of the flesh (or life), not the soul.

I Have Fallen From Grace.

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” (Galatians 5:4)

It would be a terrible thing for Christ to have no effect on our lives! That is what the first part of this verse is saying. *“Christ is become of no effect unto you...”* It is talking to a particular group of people. These are not people who get drunk or use drugs or commit other sins. The people here who have “fallen from grace” are those who are “justified by the law.” This verse comes from the book of Galatians which was written to Christians who had been deceived into thinking that they needed more than Jesus Christ for salvation and the Christian life. They were convinced that they also needed the laws of the Old Testament. To be “justified by the law” means that you are trying to keep the Ten Commandments and live according to the Old Testament so that God will count you as righteousness in His sight. If you are not trusting in the Old Testament Law, but rather, your faith is in Jesus Christ, then you are in no danger of falling from grace.

A person who chooses the Old Testament Law over faith in Jesus Christ has hit “rock bottom” spiritually. If I were to leave the high ground of living the Christian life by grace, to try to live it in the basement of the Law,²⁰ then I would have fallen. It is not that the people to whom Paul was writing wanted to reject Jesus Christ. They simply wanted to add Old Testament Law to faith in Him. In Christ is love, hope and peace. In the Law is fear, burden and judgment. Therefore, a person who chooses the Law over, or in addition to Christ, has “fallen from grace.” If you are in this situation, turn to God and start trusting in Jesus Christ alone. God will pick you back up and forgive you. You can start living by grace alone once again.

20 This is not to imply that the Old Testament Law of God is bad. It is simply to say that in comparison, Jesus Christ is so much better. (cf. the book of Hebrews) Christians living in this New Testament Age are to obey laws. However, we are to obey the Law of Christ. This Law works through love, while the Old Testament Law worked through fear. God loves me, therefore, I love God and desire to obey God. Because God loves me, I can be filled with His love and show it to others. For example, if I love my neighbor, I will not steal from him or try to hurt him, etc. Therefore, Romans 13:10 says, *“Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Romans 13:10)*

Impossible To Repent?

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.” (Hebrews 6:4-6)

These verses in the book of Hebrews are given as a hypothetical situation. If a saved person fell away from faith in Jesus Christ, rejected Christianity, and returned to the Old Testament Law, it would be impossible to renew them to a place of repentance. Notice, that the writer of Hebrews never says that His readers have done this. *“But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.” (Hebrews 6:9)* In other words, he is saying, “Even though we are speaking about people who fall from faith in Christ and cannot repent, we are not talking about you.”

“Falling away” is a situation that will never happen to you if you are a true believer in Jesus Christ. Believers will struggle with doubt. They may even be led astray by false teachers, as the Christians to whom Paul wrote the book of Galatians had been. But, they will never, in their hearts, reject Christianity and Jesus Christ. Listen to what the author of Hebrews says about himself and his readers. *“But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.” (Hebrews 10:39)* True believers do not “draw back unto perdition (Hell).” True believers believe in Jesus Christ “to the saving of the soul.”

I could say that it would be impossible for a man, who jumped out of an airplane without a parachute, not to get hurt or die. As true as that might be, I am not about to jump out of a plane without a parachute. In fact, I have no intention of jumping out of an airplane with a parachute! The fact that I would break my body if I did jump without a parachute does, however, serve to remind me that if I ever do jump, I should check and double-check the parachute! The point here is this. A believer will never fall away from faith in Christ. But, when

we are tempted to doubt, this hypothetical situation from Hebrews reminds us that the ultimate end of unbelief would be certain destruction. That, along with the promises that God makes to us, causes us to trust in Jesus Christ for our soul's salvation until the day that we go home to be with the Lord!²¹

21 Other common interpretations of Hebrews 6 are: (1) That it is talking about unsaved people who have committed the Unpardonable Sin. (2) That it is talking about saved people who have lost their salvation. (3) That it is talking about saved people who lose their rewards because they depart from the faith (become apostates).

4. IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR DEPRESSION?

Yes, absolutely! There is hope for depression. Here is a simple, Biblical plan from the book of Philippians²² that will help you to live a happy, hope-filled life.

1. Let Go Of The Past

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13, 14)

A good deal of depression is caused by worry. We worry about the past, and about potential things that can go wrong in the future. The Apostle Paul certainly had plenty in his past he could have worried about. He had persecuted Christians and blasphemed Jesus Christ. He was a wicked man before he was saved on the road to Damascus. Yet, Paul said, *“...this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind...”* Paul chose to forget the past. He saw Jesus Christ as his goal and He looked forward to Him. Did you fail at something yesterday? Why live your life today dwelling on it? Look forward to Jesus Christ and follow Him. Did you confess a sin to the Lord yesterday and receive forgiveness for it? Why bring it back up today? Every day, have a fresh start, forgetting the past and reaching forward to the future. The future for the Christian couldn't be better. Our future is Jesus Christ!

2. Pray About The Future

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall

²² Philippians was a “Prison Epistle” that is, a letter written by Paul while he was in prison. Although he was in a bad situation, Philippians is a book that is filled with joy and hope.

keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6, 7)

God's peace passes all understanding. The Bible says that if we pray about everything, that *“...the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* The phrase, *“Be careful for nothing...”* means, “Don't worry about anything.” The way to keep from worrying and to have peace in your life is to pray about the situation. The peace of God will then keep, which means to “guard,” your heart. Just as a squadron of soldiers guards a military base from enemy attack, the peace of God will guard your heart from the attacks of worry and doubt. The words *heart* and *mind* in this verse are talking about your thoughts and emotions. The peace of God guards our thoughts and emotions in a way that passes all understanding. No one can understand why a Christian can have peace in the midst of the storms of life, but we can through Jesus Christ!

The reason the peace of God that passes understanding *“...SHALL KEEP your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* is because, most of the time, our worry is about things that might happen in the future. “Shall” is a future word. So the peace of God looks into the future and guards our hearts and minds when we pray. Incidentally, pray for what you want to happen. If you are facing bad circumstances in the future, pray for God to change things. *“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.” (Luke 11:9)* If God doesn't want to give you what you are asking for, He will change your mind and change your prayers. But, it is not wrong at all to pray for God to answer specific needs in your life. Nothing will give you more hope than praying for the things that you want God to do for you, and seeing God respond to your prayers by doing exactly what you asked Him to do! *“Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.” (James 4:2)*

3. Change Your Way Of Thinking About The Present

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are

pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”
Philippians (4:8, 9)

Is the way you think causing you to be depressed? Change your thinking to BIBLICAL THINKING and it will cause you to have peace and contentment in your life. God outlines eight things here that we should think about. Let's study them.

The Word of God teaches that we should think about things that are:

(1) TRUE: The Devil wants to fill your mind with lies. “God doesn't love you. The Bible isn't true. God won't answer your prayer.” Don't fill your mind with things that aren't true. The best way to fill up your mind with truth is by reading and memorizing the Word of God. The Bible is truth. “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*” (John 17:17) In order for us to properly reason and think through a situation, we have to think Biblically. Knowing the Bible means knowing what God thinks about the situations of life. That will help us to think right, and to make the right decisions.

(2) HONEST: This has to do with the way we live our lives. We ought to live honorably. If you are doing things that you shouldn't do, stop. If you are not doing something that you should be doing, start. For instance, if you are a Christian, you know that you should be attending church. If you are not doing that, it may lead you to feel guilty. Guilt, then leads to depression. The easiest way to get rid of such depression is to start going to church. Solomon said, “*Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might...*” If it needs to be done, do it, and put everything that you've got into it! On the other hand, if you are committing some sort of sin, that can also lead to depression. Stop doing what you know you shouldn't do. Do what you know you should. This will help you to feel better about life, and to not live in depression.

(3) JUST: *Just things* are righteous. They are the things that are right. If we dwell on everything that is wrong with the world, and all of the wrongs that people have done to us, it will rob us of our peace. Think about things that are just, that are right with the world and with people, rather than those that are wrong. It will make you into a happier person!

It is good to note here that justice has never been better exemplified than by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. When Christ died for our sins, He was fulfilling the just demands of a holy God that sin be punished. Also, because He had no sin, Jesus was able to die for our sins, in our place, as our substitute. When a sinner believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, God declares him to be *just*, or *righteous*, not because of his own works, but because of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, when we think about things that are just, we should meditate on the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and about the righteousness that God has given to us by grace, through our faith, in Him.

Sometimes, when the Devil is beating you up, or you are beating yourself up thinking about what a sorry person you are, think of this. You are righteous in the sight of God. You have been declared, by the Lord Jesus Christ, to be just. God loves you so much, that He gave His Son to die and absorb the just punishment for your sins, the punishment that you deserve. That is true love!

(4) PURE: Pure things are clean. Christians ought to fill their minds with purity, not with filth. What we read, watch and listen to reflects on how we think. We should fill our ears with clean music. We ought to fill our minds with clean literature. If you watch television, look at things that are clean. Many Christians spend their time wasting their brains with entertainment that isn't fit for the hogs in the barnyard! Bad music and bad images lead to bad thinking. As my pastor often says, "Garbage in, garbage out. Righteousness in, righteousness out."

(5) LOVELY: Forgiveness is lovely. If you are holding a grudge, it will hold you, and you will destroy yourself with bitterness. If you are bitter towards someone, let it go for your own health and

well-being. God commands us to forgive others, and to pray for our enemies. This is not only the right thing to do, but praying for your enemies will take a lot of tension out of your life and help you to be mentally healthy.

Jesus Christ is lovely. Nothing is more lovely. Think on Christ, and it will lift you out of depression. I went to a restaurant to eat one time, and I was kind of depressed. The hymn, “Rock of Ages” started playing over the speaker system. I started thinking about Jesus Christ, and those thoughts brought me out of my depression. When Job went through all of his suffering, God did something very interesting. God got Job to look up, away from all that was going on around him. God started asking Job questions that led him to realize how powerful and wise God is. At the end of this time of questioning, Job was a changed man, and God turned things around for him. When you are depressed, get your mind off of circumstances and onto the Lord Jesus Christ. He will lift you out of your depression!

The Word of God is lovely. Meditating on the Bible is the single best way to change your thinking. The Word of God says, *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”* (Romans 12:2) A lot of junk builds up in our minds during the day. We need these negative thoughts and attitudes emptied out. The Word of God transforms us by renewing our minds. As you read the Bible each day, it will clean and renew your thoughts. The word, “renew” means to “renovate.” Have you ever seen an old house that has been renovated? That is what the Bible does to our minds. It sweeps away the sin and filthiness of the day and rebuilds our thought processes.

(6) GOOD REPORT: We ought not to fill our minds with negativity and gossip. Choose to meditate on those things that have a good report, a good reputation. You can think about every negative aspect of a person until you grow to despise them. Pick out good things to think about. A critical, cynical attitude will help to make you into a grouch that no one wants to associate with! Think about good reports, not bad. “Good report” thinking will change your whole outlook on people and life.

(7) ANY VIRTUE: These are things that are morally excellent. Any time that you find this characteristic in a person or a thing, think on it. The Apostle Paul certainly demonstrated this kind of moral excellency when he was on board a ship that was doomed to sink. He said, *“Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”* (Acts 27:25) Do you ever feel like your life is sinking? Believe God! God will take care of you. He promises in His Word to do so. There is great virtue in believing God when things go wrong. Ultimately, most depression is caused by living a life of not believing God. God is in control and He will work things out for good. The Lord Jesus Christ loves you! He will do what He has promised in His Word. Live a life of unbelief, and you will be miserable. Live in faith, and you will be happy. *“Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”*

(8) ANY PRAISE: We can spend our lives dwelling on every negative thing, or we can find things for which we can praise God. One of the easiest ways to be lifted out of depression is to think about all of the ways that God has blessed you. Do you have a roof over your head? Do you have food to eat? Do you have clothes to wear? Is God blessing you in other areas of your life?

*When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*

*Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings; ev'ry doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by.*

*When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings, money cannot buy*

Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.

*So amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.*

Refrain:

*Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.*

-Johnson Oatman Jr.

John Gill, one of England's eminent Bible commentators wrote: *"...think on these things: meditate upon them, revolve them in your minds, seriously consider them, and reason with yourselves about them, in order to put them into practice."* You don't have to live a life of depression and emptiness. Change your thinking, and God will change your life.

Summary: How to defeat depression.

1. Let Go Of The Past
2. Pray About The Future
3. Change Your Way Of Thinking About The Present

* A NOTE ABOUT MEDICATION AND DEPRESSION. While good Christians debate about whether medication is ever needed to treat depression, it is this author's opinion that in some circumstances, there are clinical reasons for depression that require a doctor's treatment. While most depression can be treated by simply following the Bible,

we must remember that God never condemns doctors or medication. In fact, the Bible books of Luke and Acts were both written by a physician. It is also important to remember that because there are dangers associated with taking certain anti-depressants, they should not be abused or taken unnecessarily.

5. THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

Some people think that they have committed the “Unpardonable Sin,” and that they cannot, therefore, be saved or forgiven. Here is what Jesus said about this sin in Mark 3:28-30. *“Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.”*

The Jewish religious leaders accused Jesus of using the power of the Devil to cast out demons. That was quite an accusation, coming from the group of people who had Christ crucified! He warned them that one who blasphemed, (spoke disrespectfully of) the Holy Ghost, would never have forgiveness, but be in danger of Hell. This is what we call the Unpardonable Sin.

Some preachers teach that a person who has committed this sin can beg and plead with God for forgiveness, but He will refuse to hear. A friend of mine relayed to me the story of a young woman who was told by her pastor that she could not be saved. She was convinced that what he had said to her was true. Christians at another church tried for a year to convince her that she could simply believe in Jesus Christ and be forgiven. Finally, she realized that they were right, and that she could be saved from her sins. She believed in Jesus Christ as her personal Savior, and now has the assurance that she is forgiven!

The main purpose of this chapter is to show you that there is hope for people who believe that their sins are unpardonable. There are several reasons why a person who believes that he or she has committed the Unpardonable Sin probably has not.

1. The Bible never teaches that God will refuse to forgive anyone who wants forgiveness.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Revelation 22:17)

Salvation is compared, in this verse, to water. It is free. Anyone who wants it can take it. It quenches man's thirst for forgiveness, and eternal life. “Whosoever will” is invited to take salvation freely. God's Word never teaches that a sinner can beg for salvation, but that the Lord will refuse to hear, or to save.

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

God never wants to send sinners to Hell. He is “...*not willing that any should perish...*” The Lord Jesus Christ wants you to come to repentance and be saved. If you want forgiveness, God wants to give it to you! The idea that God has condemned you to Hell, with no chance to be saved because of your sin, is not Biblical.

“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” (Romans 5:20)

The more sin there is, the more grace there is. If you have committed a very great sin, there is greater grace to forgive your sin. “...*Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.*”

Some use these verses from Hebrews to prove that God will refuse to save a sinner who desires to repent.

“Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no

place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”
(Hebrews 12:15-17)

The problem is that this has nothing to do with salvation. Esau was Jacob's brother. Jacob persuaded Esau to sell his birthright (a special privilege of the first-born son) to him for a bowl of soup.²³ Later, Esau wanted his father to give him the blessing that the first-born son should have received. Jacob tricked their father, Isaac, into giving him the blessing instead of Esau. Esau had lost his birthright and blessing. He cried and begged for it, but he could not have it. He could not repent, that is, he couldn't go back and undo what had been done.²⁴ This has nothing to do with Esau's salvation. It has to do with a birthright and a blessing.

2. Why would God give you a desire to be forgiven if He did not want to forgive you?

Matthew Henry, the great Puritan Bible commentator wrote,

*“But humble and conscientious believers at times are tempted to think they have committed the Unpardonable Sin, while those who have come the nearest to it, seldom have any fear about it. We may be sure that those who indeed repent and believe the gospel, have not committed this sin, or any other of the same kind; for repentance and faith are the special gifts of God, which he would not bestow on any man, if he were determined never to pardon him; and those who fear they have committed this sin, give a good sign that they have not. The trembling, contrite sinner, has the witness in himself that this is not his case.”*²⁵

Mr. Henry's argument is excellent here. Repentance and faith are gifts of God. If God did not want to forgive you, why would He give you a desire to repent and believe in Jesus Christ? Does God play games with us? Does He invite men and women to receive Christ as

²³ See Genesis 25:29-34.

²⁴ See Genesis 27:34-36

²⁵ Taken from Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

Savior and then refuse to save them when they come to Christ? Jesus said, “*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*” (John 6:37) Jesus Christ will not reject you if you will come to Him for salvation. He will not cast you out once you are saved either!

3. If you are saved, then you cannot commit the Unpardonable Sin because all of your sins are already pardoned.

“To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” (Acts 10:43)

Because you have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior, you have received remission, that is, forgiveness, of your sins. This verse leaves no sin out. It does not say that you will receive remission of some of your sins, or all sins but one. It says, plainly, that you will receive remission of sins.

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:” (Romans 5:1)

The man, woman, boy or girl, who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, is justified in the sight of God. To be *justified* means that I am declared to be perfectly righteousness in God's eyes. The reason for this is because, when I believe in Jesus Christ, the righteousness of the Lord is put on my account in Heaven, and my sins are taken away. A justified man cannot commit a sin that God will not forgive, because he already has received forgiveness of all sin, and been declared perfectly righteous in the sight of God!

So, What Is The Unpardonable Sin?

That's a good question. Let me begin by saying that the Bible is very clear that the Unpardonable Sin is *blasphemy against the Holy Spirit*. It is a sin, directly against the Spirit of God, that involves some sort of irreverence towards Him. There is no doubt about what the

Unpardonable Sin is. The question is, what specifically is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Here are some of the possibilities:

1. Attributing the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan.

Jesus said, *“Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.”* (Mark 3:28-30) The Bible makes it plain that the reason the Lord Jesus Christ gave this warning about the Unpardonable Sin was because the scribes accused Him of being possessed with a devil. He had done His works through the power of the Holy Spirit, and they said that He had done them through the power of Satan.

“And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end.” (Mark 3:22-26)

Jesus made a very important point here. Their arguments were foolish, because if Satan were to work against himself, his kingdom would collapse. They claimed that Jesus did His miracles through demonic power. Jesus proved that He did them through Divine power. So, the Lord warned these men about blasphemy against the Holy Ghost because of what they said. Since they attributed the work of the Holy Spirit to the Devil, many commentators conclude that the Unpardonable Sin is crediting Satan for the works of the Spirit of God.

2. Attributing the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan during the time when Jesus Christ was on earth.

This is a slight variation on the view that we just read about. The Unpardonable Sin could have happened only while Jesus Christ was on earth, according to this view, because the men saw Jesus casting out demons; they attributed His ability to do this to the power of Satan; and this unique situation cannot take place today, because Jesus Christ is not physically here casting out demons.

3. Resisting the Holy Spirit until He stops convicting.

According to this interpretation, the Unpardonable Sin happens when a sinner refuses the Holy Spirit's conviction until God permanently stops convicting. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit of God shows unbelieving sinners that they are lost, and that they need to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ. This is called *conviction*.²⁶ Without conviction, a sinner would never realize that he or she needed Jesus Christ as Savior. According to this view, there may come a time in a person's life when, if they resist the Holy Ghost long enough, He will refuse to attempt to convince them any further. When this happens, a sinner will lose all desire to be saved. No amount of preaching or persuading can get such a person to believe in Jesus Christ. Scriptures that are used to try to support this view include Genesis 6:3 and Hebrews 6.

Which View Is Right?

To be honest with you, I don't know! I used to think that number three was correct, but now, I don't believe that the Bible really supports this view. Number two has interesting possibilities. If I ever come to a conclusion, I will put it in another book! The point of this discussion on the Unpardonable Sin is not to answer every question, but to show the reader, plainly, from the Word of God, that if a person wants to be saved, God will save them. No matter what sins you have committed, or how far you have gone, there is hope for you, if you will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁶ See John 16:7-11. These are the key verses regarding the doctrine of Conviction. The word, "reprove" in John 16:8 means to *convict* or to *convince*.

6. THE UNSPEAKABLE SIN

“And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.” (2 Samuel 13:19)

In the book of Second Samuel, chapter thirteen, we read the story of a young lady named Tamar. We find her very shaken, and crying. She had become the victim of a sexual assault at the hands of her half brother, a man by the name of Amnon. Why would a brother rape his sister? Why do parents molest their children? These are uncomfortable things to think about, but for the many who have faced the reality of this type of abuse, these “uncomfortable things” need to be dealt with.

Why?

This is a good question to begin with. Why would a person become so perverse that he would molest members of his own family? The answer, in a word, is *sin*. Every human being in the world is born with a “sin nature,” the thing inside of us that pulls us in the wrong direction. The Bible teaches that we inherit this sin nature from the father of the human race, Adam. *“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:” (Romans 5:12)* This sin nature causes us to have heart trouble; but it is not the kind that my dad had when he was taken to the hospital with symptoms of a heart attack. Jesus said, *“For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.” (Mark 7:21-23)* When the word “heart” is used in this way in the Word of God, it is speaking of the mind. The Bible teaches that sin starts in the heart, and manifests itself in the life.

Sin manifests itself in different ways in different people. Many do things to restrain their sin nature. Others, indulge it. Some love to gamble, and indulge their sin until they become addicted to gambling.

Others love alcohol and indulge their desire for drink until they become drunkards. Men who become molesters typically have an addiction to pornography. They indulge their desire for ungodly sex until they become addicted. They dream of illicit fantasies until they fulfill them.

Pornography and an evil thought life have a tendency to be extremely addictive. Some people use marijuana and never use a drug that is worse. Others start with marijuana and find that it is a gateway to stronger and stronger substances. If you are filling your mind with ungodly, wicked images and thoughts, I beg you to turn to Jesus Christ for mercy and forgiveness now! Amnon indulged his thoughts until he acted on them and raped Tamar. His love for her turned to obsession and perversion. *“And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her. And Amnon was so vexed, that he fell sick for his sister Tamar; for she was a virgin; and Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her.”* (2 Samuel 13:1, 2)

If you have been the victim of sexual abuse, there is hope for you, and there is healing through the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Solution

1. Realize what God thinks of you.

Sexual predators, especially when they are relatives, tend to make their victims feel dirty, worthless, insecure and rejected. The first thing to realize is that God doesn't see you in this way at all. If you are a Christian, God doesn't see you as dirty, but rather, washed and clean from all stains of sin.²⁷ *“And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”* (1 Corinthians 6:11) *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his*

²⁷ This is not meant to imply that the victim of a sexual assault has committed a sin. Of course, we are all sinners, but in the case of molestation, the victim is not at fault. The sin is on the part of the molester, not the victim.

mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;” (Titus 3:5)

Far from seeing you as worthless, God sees great worth in you. Jesus described you, and every other believer during this age, as a pearl of great price. *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” (Matthew 13:45, 46)* Jesus Christ gave all He had for you. He died for you and bought you from the slavery of sin. He loved you enough to die for you. That is how much you are worth to God! *“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 3:16)*

If you are a dear lady who has suffered this type of abuse, God wants you to know that not every man will hurt you, leave you or forsake you. Jesus Christ is one man who won't! *“Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Hebrews 13:5)* If you are a man who has been the victim, the same holds true. The Lord will not reject you. You do not have to feel insecure. We have a strong security in Jesus Christ! If your father or mother has hurt you, the Bible says, *“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up.” (Psalm 27:10)* Even though we are talking about sexual abuse, this verse applies to physical abuse as well. God will pick you up and shelter you with the assurance that He will not forsake you. You are secure in Him.

While victims of sexual assault may feel rejected, God tells us that we are accepted in His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. *“To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.” (Ephesians 1:6)* When we are saved, God doesn't see our past, or our sins. By His grace, God sees us in Jesus Christ, holy and perfectly righteous. God accepts us as a part of His family. God loves us unconditionally. By realizing the truth about what God thinks of us, our whole outlook on life can turn around. We can move from living a depressed and defeated life to living a life of hope through Jesus Christ!

2. Realize that you are not alone

No believer in Jesus Christ is ever alone. God says, *“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”* (Isaiah 43:2) The Lord is with us everywhere we go, and through everything that we go through.

*How many times discouraged, we sink beside the way;
About us all is darkness, we hardly dare to pray;
Then from the mists and shadows, the sweetest voice e'er known,
Says, "Child, am I not with thee, never to leave thee alone?"*

-Author Unknown

It is also good to remember that there are people who care about you. You don't have to keep secrets locked up inside of you about horrible things that have happened. There are people who are willing to listen to you, pray with you and give you counsel. If you have a godly pastor or pastor's wife, they can counsel and help you. Do not let shame or the wicked person who has abused you intimidate you into not getting help. You are not alone.

3. How to treat those who have abused you.

Love Your Enemies

Jesus said, *“Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”* (Matthew 5:43-45) It is hard for me to

write to the victims of sexual assault who may be reading this and say that you should love your attacker. I would not include it if Jesus hadn't taught it. Rather than love, one of the most common emotions that you will probably experience is anger. It is fine to be angry. If you need to let off some steam, get away from people who you could hurt by your explosion; get off by yourself, and let it out!

Love is not some sort of twisted, warm feeling toward the evil person who attacked you. Rather, it is a choice to treat your enemies like God treats His. This is not an easy thing to do, but Jesus Christ taught that His children should do good to the people who have used them and mistreated them. Praying for someone who has hurt you is an excellent way to keep from getting bitter. Bitterness will damage you and cause you to live a defeated life. Show love to your enemies and God will bless you for it.

Also, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you know the love and forgiveness that God has shown to you. Pray for God to save the person who attacked you. If that person will truly turn to God and trust Jesus Christ to be his personal Savior, God will forgive him and radically change his life. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”* (2 Corinthians 5:17) If a man's life is changed by Jesus Christ, he will not do to anyone else what he did to you.

Do not take revenge

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Romans 12:19) Revenge belongs to God. It is His responsibility. Our responsibility is to love our enemies, to pray for them and to do good to them. God's responsibility is to make things right.

If necessary, go to the authorities

In Romans, chapter thirteen, the Bible tells us about God and the authority that He gives to government to punish evil. *“For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.”* (Romans 13:3,4) The police and county sheriff's department are ministers of God according to the Bible. Just as God has ministers to watch over spiritual things in the church, He appoints the government to administer civil things. The authorities have a God-given duty to revenge wrongs done to the innocent, and to execute wrath on those who violate the law. If you are a young person, living in a situation where you are being molested, you do not have to live that way until you become an adult. You also do not have to take revenge yourself. If you choose to do it, you can go to the proper authorities and file a complaint. God has established government, in situations like this, to be *“...a minister of God to thee for good.”*

If you are being abused, need help, and don't know of anyone that you feel comfortable talking with you can call:

1-800-448-3000

This national hotline is available 24 hours a day with free, confidential counseling, and help.

7. THE THIRD PSALM

A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

“LORD, how are they increased that trouble me!

many are they that rise up against me.

Many there be which say of my soul,

There is no help for him in God.

*Selah.*²⁸

But thou, O LORD, art a shield for me;

my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.

I cried unto the LORD with my voice,

and he heard me out of his holy hill.

Selah.

I laid me down and slept; I awaked;

for the LORD sustained me.

I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people,

that have set themselves against me round about.

Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God:

for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone;

thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.

Salvation belongeth unto the LORD:

thy blessing is upon thy people.

Selah.”

²⁸ Selah – Probably a musical term of some type since the Psalms were originally sung. Some look at the word “Selah” as a place in the Psalms to pause and think about what has just been read.

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6. Strong's Bible Dictionary by James Strong. Comes with the basic download of E-Sword. <http://www.e-sword.com>
7. Hymns quoted throughout the text – From the SermonAudio.com Online Hymnal. <http://www.sermonaudio.com/hymnlist.asp>
8. "Don't Quit" by Dr. Jack Hyles, late pastor of the First Baptist Church of Hammond, Indiana. Available on the web from several different sites. If you would like to find it, you can search for "Don't Quit by Jack Hyles"
9. "Hope Is the Thing With Feathers" by Emily Dickinson, a 19th Century American poet. Available at: <http://www.bartleby.com/113/1032.html> and other websites.
10. "If" by Rudyard Kipling, a 19th and 20th Century British author and poet. Available at http://www.kipling.org.uk/kip_fra.htm and other sites.
11. I Remember the Day That the Lord Saved Me by Larry Styles. Larry J. Styles, P.O. Box 472, Dalton, GA 30722
12. Letter from an inmate at the Whitfield County Jail quoted in chapter three. I have not disclosed his name for privacy reasons.

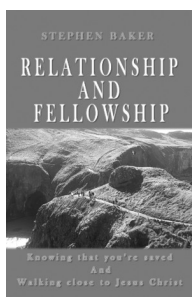
*Note: Since many of our resources are available on the internet we would like to suggest that the best way to protect yourself and your family while online is to use some type of internet filtering or

monitoring software. We use and recommend *Covenant Eyes*.
<http://www.covenanteyes.com>.

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