

WHY?

Why

Why do people get cancer? Why are there earthquakes that destroy entire cities? Why do people have to work so hard just to have enough money to barely feed their families?

Subconsciously, we probably ask ourselves questions like these quite often. But consciously we rarely do. We're so busy living our lives we rarely stop and wonder WHY?

But then something happens to wake us up. Our parents get divorced. The girl down the street gets abducted. A relative gets cancer. That wakes us up for awhile. But then we can often sink back into the denial. That is, until another tragedy hits, another incongruence. Then we're likely to think, *Something isn't right here. Something is really, really wrong. This isn't how life's supposed to be!*

So, WHY do bad things happen? WHY isn't this world a better place?

There is an answer to the WHY question, found in the Bible. But it's not an answer that most people like to hear: the world is the way it is because it's the world that we, in a sense, have asked for.

Sound strange?

What or who could make this world different than the way it is? What or who could guarantee that life is pain-free, for everyone, all the time?

God could. God could accomplish that. But he doesn't. At least not right now. And we're angry with him as a result. We say, "God can't be all-powerful and all-loving. If he were, this world wouldn't be the way it is!"

We say this hoping that God will then change his position on the matter. Our hope is that putting a guilt trip on him will make him change the way he's doing things.

But he doesn't seem to budge. WHY doesn't he?

God doesn't budge -- he doesn't change things right now -- because he's giving us what we asked for: a world where we get to treat him as though he is absent and unnecessary.

Remember the story of Adam and Eve? They ate the "forbidden fruit." That fruit was the idea that they could ignore what God said or gave them, and strike out on life apart from God. For Adam and Eve sort of hoped that they could become like God,

without God. They consumed the notion that there was something more valuable in existence than God himself, something more valuable than having a personal relationship with God. And this world system -- with all of its faults -- came as a result of the choice they made.

Their story is the story of all of us, isn't it? Who hasn't said -- if not audibly at least in their hearts -- *God, I think I can do this without you. I'll just go this one alone. But thanks for the offer.*

We've all tried to make life work without God. Why do we do that? Probably because we've all bought the notion that there's something more valuable, more important, than God. For different people it's different things, but the mindset is the same: *God isn't what's most important in life. In fact, I'd just as soon do it without him altogether.*

What is God's response to that?

He allows it. Many people experience the painful results of others' or their own choices that run contrary to God's ways...murder, sexual abuse, greed, lying/fraud, slander, adultery, kidnapping, etc. All of these can be explained by people who have refused to give God access and influence over their lives. They are going about their lives as they see fit, and they and others suffer.

What's God view on all of this? He's not smug. In fact, God could rightly be viewed as leaning forward, compassionate, hoping we will turn to him so that he can bring real life to us. Jesus said, *"Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."*¹ But not all are willing to go to him. Jesus commented on this when he said: *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."*² Again, Jesus brings the issue back to our relationship with him. *"I am the light of the world. He who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*³

But what about when life is unfair? What about those horrible circumstances that hit us in life, caused by someone other than ourselves? When we are feeling victimized, it's useful to realize that God himself endured horrendous treatment from others. God more than understands what you are going through.

There is nothing in life that could be more painful than what Jesus endured on our behalf, when he was deserted by his friends, ridiculed by those who would not believe in him, beaten and tortured before his crucifixion, then nailed to a cross, in shameful public display, dying of slow suffocation. He created us, yet allowed humanity the freedom to do this, to fulfil Scripture and to set us free from our sin. This was no surprise to Jesus. He was aware of what was coming, foreknowing all the details, all the pain, all the humiliation. *"And as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside, and on the way he said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and*

*they will condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day."*⁴

Imagine knowing something that awful was going to happen to you. Jesus understands emotional and psychological anguish. The night that Jesus knew they would arrest him, he went to pray, but took some friends with him. *"And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch [keep awake] with me. And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, 'My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wills.'"*⁵ Though Jesus confided in his three friends, they didn't understand the depth of his torment, and when Jesus returned from prayer he found them asleep. Jesus understands what it's like going through pain and extreme sadness alone.

Here it is summarized, as John describes in his gospel: *"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own home, and his own people received him not. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God."*⁶ *"For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."*⁷

There is no question that there is pain and intense suffering in this world. Some of it is explained by selfish, hateful actions on the part of others. Some of it defies an explanation in this life. But God offers us himself. God gives us the knowledge that he has endured also, and is aware of our pain and needs. Jesus said to his disciples, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."*⁸ There is ample reason to be afraid, troubled, but God can give us his peace, which is greater than the problem before us. He is after all, God, the Creator. The one who has always existed. The one who created a universe on the backstroke.

Yet even in his power, he's also the one who knows us intimately, even the smallest, insignificant details. And if we will trust him with our lives, relying on him, though we encounter difficulties, he will hold us securely. Jesus said, *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*⁹ He went through our ultimate threat -- death -- and overcame it. He can take us through the difficult circumstances of this life, and then bring us into eternal life, if we will trust him.

We can either go through this life with God or without him. Jesus prayed, *"O righteous Father, although the world has not known you, yet I have known you; and these have known that you sent me; and I have made your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them."*¹⁰

Where is God in the Midst of Tragedy?

Where can we find inner strength to cope with fears, tragedy, disaster and sadness? What exactly can we count on God for?

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To what degree can we rely on God to be with us? Is He really someone we can turn to at all...in times of crisis as well as times of calm?

Tragedy, Disaster, Sadness: Where is God?

God is the Creator of the universe who yearns for us to know Him. That is why we are all here. It is His desire that we rely on and experience His strength, love, justice, holiness and compassion. So He says to all who are willing, "Come to Me."

Unlike us, God knows what will happen tomorrow, next week, next year, the next decade. He says, "I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning."¹ He knows what will happen in the world. More importantly, He knows what will occur in your life and can be there for you, if you've chosen to include Him in your life. He tells us that He can be "our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble."² But we must make a sincere effort to seek Him. He says, "you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."³

That doesn't mean that those who know God will escape difficult times. They won't. When a terrorist attack causes suffering and death, those who know God will be involved in that suffering also. But there is a peace and a strength that God's presence gives. One follower of Jesus Christ put it this way: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed."⁴ Reality tells us that we will experience problems in life. However, if we go through them while knowing God, we can react to them with a different perspective and with a strength that is not our own. No problem has the capacity to be insurmountable to God. He is bigger than all the problems that can hit us, and we are not left alone to deal with them.

God's Word tells us, "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him."⁵ And, "The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfils the desires of those who fear him; he hears their cry and saves them."⁶

Jesus Christ told His followers these comforting words: "Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows."⁷ If you truly turn to God, He will care for you as no one else does, and in a way that no one else can.

Tragedy, Disaster, Sadness: Our Free Will

God has created humanity with the ability to choose. This means that we are not forced into a relationship with Him. He allows us to reject Him and to commit other

evil acts as well. He could force us to be loving. He could force us to be good. But then what kind of relationship would we have with Him? It would not be a relationship at all, but a forced, absolutely controlled obedience. Instead He gave us the human dignity of free will.



Naturally, we cry from the depths of our souls... "But God, how could You let something of this magnitude happen?"

How would we want God to act? Do we want Him to control the actions of people? In the case of dealing with a terrorist attack, what could possibly be an acceptable number of deaths for God to allow?! Would we feel better if God allowed only the murder of hundreds? Would we rather God allowed only the death of one person? Yet if God would prevent the murder of even one person, there is no longer freedom to choose. People choose to ignore God, to defy God, to go their own way and commit horrible acts against others.

Tragedy, Disaster, Sadness: Our World

This planet is not a safe place. Someone might shoot us. Or we might be hit by a car. Or we might have to jump from a building attacked by terrorists. Or any number of things that might happen to us in this harsh environment called Earth, the place where God's will is not always followed.

Yet, God is not at the mercy of people, but the other way around. We are at His mercy, fortunately. This is God who created the universe with its uncountable stars, simply by speaking the words, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky."⁸ This is God who says He "reigns over the nations."⁹ He is unlimited in power and wisdom. Though problems seem insurmountable to us, we have an incredibly capable God who reminds us, "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too hard for Me?"¹⁰ Somehow He is able to maintain the freedom of sinful humans, yet still bring about His will. God clearly says, "My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all My purpose."¹¹ And we can draw comfort from that if our lives are submitted to Him. "For God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."¹²

Fears, Tragedy, Disaster: Where Is God Now?

Many of us -- no, all of us -- choose at times to stiff-arm God and His ways. Compared to others, certainly compared to a terrorist, we might consider ourselves to be respectable, loving people. But in the raw honesty of our own hearts, if we were to face God, it would be with the knowledge of our sin. As we begin to address God in prayer, are we not caught short, paused by the sense that God is well aware of our thoughts, actions and self-centeredness? We have...by our lives and actions...distanced ourselves from God. We have often lived like we could run our lives just fine without Him. The Bible says that "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."¹³

The consequences? Our sin has separated us from God, and it affects more than this life. The penalty for our sin is death, or eternal separation from God. However, God has provided a way for us to be forgiven and know Him.



Inner Strength Through God's Love

God came to earth to rescue us. "For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him."¹⁴

God knows the pain and suffering we encounter in this world. Jesus left the safety and security of His home, and entered the hard environment we live in. Jesus got tired, knew hunger and thirst, battled accusations from others and was ostracized by family and friends. But Jesus experienced far more than daily hardships. Jesus, the Son of God in human form, willingly took all of our sin on Himself and paid our penalty of death. "In this is love that he laid down his life for us."¹⁵ He went through torture, dying a slow, humiliating death of suffocation on a cross, so that we could be forgiven.

Jesus told others ahead of time that He would be crucified. He said that three days after His death He would come back to life, proving that He is God. He didn't say He would reincarnate someday. (Who would know if He actually did it?) He said three days after being buried He would show Himself physically alive to those who saw His crucifixion. On that third day, Jesus' tomb was found empty and many people testified to seeing Him alive.

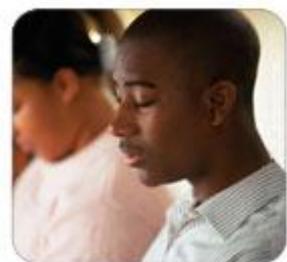
He now offers us eternal life. We don't earn this. It is a gift from God offered to us, which we receive when we ask Him to enter our lives. "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus."¹⁶ If we repent of our sin and turn back to God, we can have the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. It's pretty simple. "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."¹⁷ He wants to enter our lives.

Inner Strength through God's Plan

What about heaven? The Bible says that God has "set eternity in the hearts of men."¹⁸ Maybe that means we know, in our hearts, what a better world would look like. The death of people we love convinces us that there's something very wrong with this life and this world. Somewhere deep down in our souls, we know that there must be a much better place to live, free from heart-wrenching difficulties and pain. To be sure, God does have a better place He offers us. It will be a completely different system in which His will is done all the time. In this world, God will wipe every tear from people's eyes. There will be no more mourning, crying, death or pain.¹⁹ And God, by His Spirit, will dwell in people in such a way that they will never sin again.²⁰

The events of a terrorist attack are horrific enough. Refusing an eternal relationship with God, which Jesus offers you, would be worse. Not just in light of eternal life, but there is no relationship which compares to knowing God in this life. He is our purpose in life, our source of comfort, our wisdom in confusing times, our strength and hope. "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him."²¹

It has been said by some that God is just a crutch. But it is likely that He is the only reliable one.



Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."²² For those who will rely on Jesus during their lives, He says it is like building your life on a Rock. Whatever crises attack you in this life, He can keep you strong.

Inner Strength through God's Son

You can receive Jesus into your life right now. "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."²³ It is through Jesus Christ that we can come back to God. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me."²⁴ Jesus offered, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him."²⁵

Right now you can ask God to enter your life. You can do this through prayer. Prayer means talking honestly with God. At this moment you can call out to God by telling Him something like this in sincerity:

"God, I have turned away from You in my heart, but I want to change that. I want to know You. I want to receive Jesus Christ and His forgiveness into my life. I don't want to be separated from You anymore. Be the God of my life from this day onward. Thank you God."

Have you just now sincerely asked God into your life? If you have, you have a lot to look forward to. God promises to make your present life one of greater satisfaction through knowing Him.²⁶ Where is God? He promises to make His home in you.²⁷ And He gives you eternal life.²⁸

No matter what happens in the world around you, God can be there for you. Though people do not follow God's ways, God is able to take horrible circumstances and bring about His plan anyway. God is ultimately in control over world events. If you are God's, then you can rest on the promise that, "All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose."²⁹

Jesus Christ said, "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."³⁰ He promises never to fail us or forsake us.³¹

To grow in your knowledge of God and His will for your life, read the sections Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Bible.

- (1) Isaiah 46:9
- (2) Psalm 46:1
- (3) Jeremiah 29:13
- (4) 2Corinthians 4:8-9
- (5) Nahum 1:7
- (6) Psalms 145:18-19
- (7) Matthew 10:29-31

- (8) Genesis 1:14
- (9) Psalms 47:8
- (10) Jeremiah 32:27
- (11) Isaiah 46:11
- (12) James 4:6
- (13) Isaiah 53:6
- (14) John 3:16-17
- (15) 1John 3:16
- (16) Romans 6:23
- (17) 1John 5:12
- (18) Ecclesiastes 3:11
- (19) Revelation 21:4
- (20) Revelation 21:27; 1Corinthians 15:28
- (21) Psalm 34:8
- (22) John 14:27
- (23) John 1:12
- (24) John 14:6
- (25) Revelation 3:20
- (26) John 10:10
- (27) John 14:23
- (28) 1John 5:11-13
- (29) Romans 8:28
- (30) John 14:27 and 16:33
- (31) Hebrews 13:5

Paralyzed But Not Down

After a diving accident, how one person dealt with a spinal cord injury, feelings of grief and despair, and found hope.

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by Stacy James

As a junior in college, I was paralyzed from the neck down in a diving accident. In a split second, my world changed forever. I went from an extremely active college student to someone who would never do the things I once loved: run, dance, twirl the baton, and play piano and guitar. I had planned on being a missionary and serving God with my life. How could he let this happen to me?

I often would lay in my bed and cry, cry because I was trapped in a body I could no longer control, cry because I was alienated from friends, cry because the doctors were supposed to be able to fix this. I was angry at times when some doctors seemed so matter-of-fact about my situation, and embarrassed at the stares of other college students as I wheeled down the hall.

I had read in the Bible that God says once we come to know him, he will never leave us. Even though I lay there in despair, I knew there was hope because God loved me and still had a purpose for my life. It was my choice to believe that and let him go through this with me, or to be bitter and angry at him. I chose to follow him, even though my feelings didn't necessarily agree at the time.

Often when bad things happen to us, we are tempted to doubt God's love for us: "God, if you love me, you wouldn't let me suffer like this." I learned that we can't let our situations determine God's love for us. "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). That is the one thing we must look at to determine God's love. Not our blessings or absence of them.

I learned that love does not mean the absence of pain and problems. God often uses these very things to help us mature and grow. Life is and will continue to be difficult. I still experience complications from my accident, and I have had loved ones pass away. The nature of life is a mixture of good and bad. I am learning to accept that more and more the longer I live.

God also gives us the freedom to hurt and to cry. Not to express our feelings is to bottle up pain that will eventually release itself in possibly destructive ways. When we suffer, we need time to work through the loss or crisis, to express our grief in the right ways. We don't have to put up a front, especially to God. He made us and knows exactly how we feel. I still take my questions and feelings to God in prayer, and to close friends when I need someone with skin on.



God also promises a future hope. The more I live with the problems of a spinal cord injury, the more I look forward to the day when I will walk again in heaven. He has created for us a place where there will be no more crying, pain, sickness, or death.

To this day, I am not bitter about the circumstances of my life. I have seen the goodness of God, I have become a stronger person, and I would rather be in a wheelchair and know God than be a million-dollar professional athlete and spend an eternity apart from him.

To see more of Stacy's story, see her website at www.walkingvictorious.com.

So Why Do Bad Things Happen?

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by Stacy James

The biggest question with evil is, "Why doesn't God prevent it from happening?" If God is really an all-good and all-powerful being, why doesn't he do something?

First of all, God does not create evil; he allows it to occur. When he originally created the world, he created all things good. He created people, however, with the freedom to choose. This includes the freedom to make right and wrong choices. Often those wrong choices bring about consequences that end up hurting ourselves or other people, sometimes innocent victims who didn't deserve it.

As a college student, I was paralyzed in a diving accident. God did not push me in the water to punish me or necessarily teach me a lesson; I chose to dive off my friend's shoulders. As horrible as the consequences were, I can blame no one but myself.

Of course, God could intervene and control everything about our lives -- the good and the bad -- but then we would merely be robots and not truly free. He could even force us to love him if he wanted, but then forced love isn't true love. He gives us the freedom to choose or not to choose him, the freedom to live and enjoy life, and the freedom to make right and wrong choices. Unfortunately, we are left to deal with the consequences of our own and other people's actions.

Author C. S. Lewis said that 80 percent of suffering comes from the moral evil of mankind. So what about the other 20 percent? There are some things we will never truly understand here on Earth.

There is good news, however. First of all, the God of love is also a God of justice. For all those who make wrong choices, hurt innocent victims, and get off scot-free, a time is coming when they will face the consequences of their actions. God is the Ultimate Judge, and in due season, God will judge everyone for all their deeds. "Nothing in all

creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13).

Second, God often uses the trials of life for a greater good, often to develop our character and make us better people. And we are able to help others in similar circumstances. I have been able to reach out to disabled students (after my character was changed from complacency to compassion!). Trials also force us to see what is important in life, and often drive us to God when nothing else will. We see the importance of faith, of love, of caring, and of family and friends.

Third, God has provided a way out. A time is coming when there will be no more suffering. In heaven, people will enjoy a paradise beyond imagination. God has created a place of eternal glory where there will be no more crying, pain, sickness, or death; a place where people will share his joy forever.

Finally, God does care. He never promised life would be problem-free, but he promised to be with people. Jesus himself felt love, compassion, and sorrow, and was drawn like a magnet to those who were hurting. God, in his love, wants a relationship with us. "For God so loved the world, that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Is God a Good Director?



What's wrong with the world? Why can't we have a whole new world - a good life - without suffering?

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What if someone were to say to you, "I don't believe in the existence of good movie directors, because all the movies I see are lousy"? That's a somewhat logical argument, right?

The argument implies that good movies are possible. Therefore, the argument is actually something like this: "Since I believe that good movies are possible, and since all the movies I see are lousy, I don't think there are any good movie directors."

That's just the sort of argument that's often used to discount the existence of God. People will say, "**I don't believe in a God, because this world is so awful.**" The implication, whether the person realizes it or not, is that a good world is possible.

A Whole New World

So, how do we arrive at that good world? Through evolution? In an evolutionary model, we are supposed to be improving. Maybe, if we evolve long enough, we will finally have a good movie. But if we are improving, why do we have more wars, more crime, more injustice, more divorce, more abuse? In a way, our movie seems to be getting worse, not better.

Maybe that's the truth we don't like to face. We can't usher in a good world, because we are bad movie directors. We are flawed, sinful beings. Greater intelligence and technology do not solve the problems of crime and greed and deceit. The human heart is the problem, no matter how much we "evolve." We are self-cantered and self-promoting -- which evolution (survival of the fittest) actually encourages.

What's Wrong with the World

One question to ask is, **is this world pleasing to God?** The Bible tells us that "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1John 2:16). The world runs on lust of the flesh ("I need that"), lust of the eyes ("I want that"), and the boastful pride of life ("I deserve that"). Isn't it possible that these three attitudes are the cause of most of the problems in our world? And isn't it possible that these things are not pleasing to God?

A second question to ask is, **is God fully running the show?** The Bible says yes and no. God is sovereign, but he also gives us freedom to make choices. He's not policing our every thought and action. This freedom of choice can lead to a bad movie. Add to this that, while God is "the King of all the earth" (Psalm 47:7), for some reason the Bible still calls the devil "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; 1John 5:19). So we see again that while God is sovereign, he allows for free will among beings.

A third question to ask is, **is this world God's kingdom?** The Bible says no. Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). At this moment in time, God's kingdom is invisible and spiritual. Even though he is King over all of us, not all of us have allowed him to be the King in our hearts and lives. Those who have are part of His invisible kingdom (even if they live in the world, which is not his kingdom).

A Whole New World - Without Suffering

So God's actual movie hasn't been shown yet. But there will come a day when "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15). In that day, we'll see a much better movie, for a better director will be manning the helm. God has plans for a better world, and it won't look anything like this one. He is a good movie director. Here's a sneak preview:

"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)

God has a better plan for a better movie, and he wants you in it.

A student living with HIV and haemophilia lived with hope...for a reason. How you can have hope no matter what life throws at you.



By Steve Sawyer

A personal, true story... In grade school, Steve Sawyer, with haemophilia, contracted the HIV virus and hepatitis C from unscreened blood supplies. Years later, at 19 years old, knowing his death was imminent, Steve used his remaining years travelling to hundreds of college campuses, sharing with students what he learned about living with hope and peace in the midst of terrible circumstances. Thousands of the students who heard Steve would tell you that his true story about hope and God's love changed their lives forever. The following edited talk is one Steve gave at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Off the coast of Maine, there was a Navy ship sailing in a very dense fog. This night, the midshipman saw a fixed light in the distance and immediately contacted his captain. "There's a light in the distance heading straight for us, what do you want me to do?" The captain told him to flash a signal to the vessel, directing it to change course. The vessel signalled back, "No, you change your course." Again the captain instructed the midshipman to command the oncoming vessel to change its course immediately. Again the reply was, "No, you change your course." With one last attempt, the midshipman signalled the vessel saying, "This is the Captain of a U.S. Navy battleship and you are to change your course immediately." The reply was, "No, you change your course. This is a lighthouse."

That story illustrates how we as humans tend to deal with pain and suffering. We always want the circumstances around us to change course, rather than changing ourselves to meet those circumstances. My life has been a perfect example of this.

Living with HIV: Early Stages

I was born with haemophilia, a blood disorder which makes my bones and joints swell for no reason. Haemophilia is treated with a protein gathered from pools of donated blood. Well, somewhere between 1980 and 1983, one of the donors to my particular donor pool was infected with the HIV virus. As a result, all the medications I received from that particular pool (possibly hundreds) were infected with HIV. I also later contracted hepatitis C the same way.

I actually wasn't told I was HIV positive until years later in my sophomore year of high school. When I was told, my initial reaction was a fairly common one when we're dealt with something we can't handle. I simply denied that I was HIV positive and tried to pretend it wasn't there. HIV didn't hurt like haemophilia did. With haemophilia, when your joints and muscles swell, it is very, very painful. But HIV had no outward symptoms. You couldn't really notice it, so it was easy to just pretend

it wasn't there. That's the way my parents dealt with it, too. "You look good, you look okay, so you must be okay," they said.

Living with HIV: Denial

A great example of this kind of denial is in the movie, *Monty Python's In Search of the Holy Grail*. In one scene, King Arthur is trotting through the forest and comes across a knight wearing beat-up, black armour. The knight is blocking his path, and King Arthur realizes that he's not going to get by unless he defeats the knight in battle. A battle ensues and King Arthur manages to sever the arm of the black knight. King Arthur sheathes his sword, bows and begins to walk by, but the knight says, "No!" And King Arthur says, "I cut off your arm!" The knight looks at it and says, "No you didn't!" So King Arthur looks at the ground and says, "There's your arm right there!" And the knight says, "It's just a flesh wound." King Arthur realizes that he's going to have to severely maim this guy in order to get by him. So the battle continues and Arthur severs all the limbs from the knight's body until all that's left of the knight is just a stump on the ground with a head. As King Arthur trots by, you can hear the knight in the background yelling, "Come back you coward, I'll bite your knees off!"

Well, needless to say, that knight was in denial. He couldn't face the fact that he had lost the fight. And although that's a humorous example of denial, the dangers of denial are very, very real. If I had continued to deny the fact that I was HIV positive, I might not have taken the right precautions with little cuts on my fingers or things like that, and I could have severely hurt or even killed someone. But the dangers to yourself when you deny something like that are also very dangerous and very painful. When you push something down for that long, and you try to pretend it's not there, it builds up. And eventually it explodes.

Living with HIV: The Futility of Denial

I was able to deny that I was HIV positive for about three years. My senior year of high school, however, I got very sick. I started showing symptoms of the disease. T-cells are the white blood cells that fight infection, and the number of T-cells you have in your body tells whether you are HIV positive and whether you have AIDS. When your T-cells drop below 200, you are considered to have full-blown AIDS. Well, my T-cell count was at 213 and dropping. I was very, very sick and very pale, and I couldn't hold down food. I could no longer pretend my AIDS/HIV wasn't real -- it was very, very real.

Denial was no longer an option, so I had to find a new way to deal with everything I was going through. The first thing I tried to do was blame someone. I thought I would feel better if someone would walk up to me and say, "Steven, this is my fault, man. I'm sorry." So initially I decided to blame the entire homosexual community. Easy cop-out. But after I thought about it, I realized it's kind of stupid to blame an entire group of people for my problem. I then decided to blame God. Now, I didn't really believe in God at the time, but I figured if anyone has control of the situation, it's got to be God. So I blamed God.

Living with HIV: Anger

When you have someplace to focus all of your built-up pain, it turns into anger. And eventually it turns into rage. Now I began to deal with everything that I encountered by getting mad. Anytime someone said something that just kind of annoyed me, I'd explode at them. Punching walls. Destroying my room. Things like that.

But I found that anger has the ability to cloud your mind, and it keeps you from acting rationally. Worse, in the process it hurts those you love. A much better way to deal with pain is to cry, because it doesn't hurt anyone and it feels really, really good.

Well, on one occasion I was in my room and had reached bottom. I was very sick and had lost a tremendous amount of weight. I was screaming, swearing at God, punching the walls in my room, and then my dad walked in. He closed the door behind him. My father is a recovering alcoholic. Through AA he learned about a Higher Power, he learned about God. My dad looked at me and said, "You know Steve, I can't help you. Your doctors can't help you. Your mom can't help you. You can't help you. The only one who can help you right now is God." And he walked out of the room and closed the door.

Living with HIV: Looking for Relief

Now, I had just finished swearing at God, so I didn't think I was quite in the right position to be asking God for help. But, there I was, with no other choice. I dropped down on my knees, and through my tears I said, "Alright God, if you're there, you help me and I'll help you." Well, in an extremely short amount of time, I gained all of my weight back. My T-cell count jumped up to about 365, which is pretty good. And I felt great. I felt great...just like that. And I thought, "Okay, thank you God. Bye. That was nice. Goodbye."

I graduated and went off to college to take my placement test the summer before my freshman year. This was when I met my roommate. I got there and finished the test, and there was this tall, skinny blonde kid standing there. He said, "Hey, you look normal. Want to be my roommate?" And I thought, *Well, okay, you don't, but...* "Sure." We became roommates, and actually we became best friends. I found out that my roommate was a Christian. At the time I had this picture of what a Christian was. To me a Christian was a hypocritical, condescending, condemning person. That's all a Christian would ever be to me, I thought. But my roommate was different.

He had a dyslexia problem. I noticed that when he would study and get to a point of frustration -- the point where I would be punching walls and destroying things -- he would just stop, close his eyes, say a prayer, take a breath and go back to work. That blew me away. I thought, "How can you not break something? You have to break something!" It really amazed me that he was able to do this.

My roommate invited me to go to spring break with him to Daytona Beach. While there, my friend started talking to the guy next to us on the beach. At first we started talking about common things, normal stuff. Then my friend decided to get into some deep, heavy issues. I didn't want to get into that. I had been struggling with a lot. It's tough to know you're dying at such a young age. And I really didn't want to talk about

that stuff with some stranger on the beach, so I kind of faded out of the conversation. They kept talking, and eventually it got around to the point where my friend tried to explain what he believed as a Christian. I always had a picture of what a Christian was, but I never actually knew what they believed or thought. So I kind of listened in on what he was saying.

Living with HIV: What God Offers

I don't know if I can explain it quite as well as he did, but he said something like this: "I believe in God, obviously. And I believe that God created us to be in relationship with him. But we don't want to be in that relationship with him, so we push him away. That pushing God away, that rebellion -- whether it's actively rebelling against him or just passive indifference -- the Bible calls sin. I don't like the word "sin," so I think of it as just pushing God away. And because we did that, and because we were created to be in a relationship with him, there's a penalty. The penalty for our rebellion is death, we die. And there's a spiritual death, we're separated from him." I thought, *Oh, that's happy.*

So I said, "But God loves us." And he said, "But God is also just. Love without justice means nothing." That didn't really make sense to me. So he said, "Well, picture the person you care about most in the world, the person you would immediately give your life for. Then picture yourself pushing that person away and not seeing him again for a long time. Then one day you see that person fifty yards away, and you go running to him and throw your arms open, but they stop you and say: 'No, you pushed me away, remember?' Now picture pushing away God, the greatest love in the universe."

And I thought, "Wow. That's not good." And he said, "Well, it doesn't end there, fortunately. Because God loves us so much and cares about us so much, he decided to pay the penalty for us. He sent his Son, Jesus, to die on the cross in our place. And because Jesus (being God in the flesh) lived a sinless life, he could pay the penalty for someone else. He paid it for us."

And he said, "Then Jesus rose from the dead three days later. He conquered that spiritual death and offers us eternal life. Now we wouldn't just die, but would then go on to spend eternity with the greatest love in the universe."

And I said, "Wow." "But," he said, "the catch is, even though he offered this and paid the penalty, if you don't accept his offer...well, it's up to you." I still wasn't really clear on this, and fortunately neither was the other guy. So my friend said, "Okay, imagine yourself driving down the road out here. You're going 90 and the speed limit is 35. You're flying down the road and a cop pulls you over and writes you a ticket. To pay the ticket, you have to go to court the next day. As you walk in the courtroom and look up, you see the judge is your dad. And you think, *Hey, that's my dad.* Your dad looks at you and goes, 'Steve, did you break the law?' And you say, 'Yeah.' So he says, 'Okay, \$500 fine or two days in jail.' He hammers down the gavel and that's it.

"Now, because he's just and fair, he had to pass sentence. But then he steps off the judge's bench, takes off his robe, reaches into his back pocket and hands you \$500. Because he loves you, he's going to pay that penalty for you. But you have to accept the payment. He's standing there with 500 bucks, saying 'Here you go.' Likewise, with

God you can just say, 'No, I'll just spend an eternity separated from you.' It's a choice you have to make."

My friend said the way we accept the payment is through prayer. He said, "You simply accept God's payment. It's by God's grace. There is nothing you have to do to earn this. It's just a gift from God." This was the first time I ever heard about grace. He said, "It's a gift that you accept by faith through prayer." And my friend offered to pray with this guy. And while he prayed out loud, I prayed too, but silently.

Living with HIV: Coping with Fear

From that second on, my life took on a whole new perspective. I no longer had to go to bed every single night worrying about whether I was going to be alive the next day. I no longer had a fear of dying, because dying wouldn't just end in a blackness, a darkness. Now when I die I would spend an eternity, forever, with the greatest love in the universe. It was so freeing.

My parents accepted the payment as well. They prayed to God as I had done. And their lives, too, have taken on a totally new perspective. It's amazing to think that they would let me travel away from them, knowing I would probably have only six months to live. And you can imagine how difficult it's been for them to just stand there with their hands by their side and just watch as their son dies in front of them. There's nothing they can do. But now the only reason they can deal with that, and the only reason I can handle it, is that we each have Christ in our lives.

Living with HIV: Knowing God

Can I give you the chance to accept God's payment for you? If you had the cure for AIDS, I'm sure you would offer it to me. I know how to get to eternity, that it's a gift from God. So I'm trying to offer it to you. If you are going through something that you just can't handle on your own, and you would like someone there who will stand by you and pick you up when the whole world is kicking you and stabbing you in the back, then I ask you to please pray a prayer with me right now. This won't be some magic phrase or incantation. And it's not a big emotional trip or thought. Rather, it's beginning a relationship with God. And just like any relationship, it takes time. It takes effort. But I urge you: if you really feel like you need this, don't pass up the opportunity. It's free.

So I'm going to pray a prayer. Prayer has nothing to do with closing your eyes or bowing your head or folding your hands or shouting "Alleluia!" Nothing like that. It's an attitude of your heart. It is saying to God, "God, I've broken the law. I've pushed You away. And I want to come back by accepting Your payment." If you feel like you need that, please pray this prayer right now. "Lord Jesus, I need You. I thank You for dying on the cross for me. I ask that You come into my life and make me the kind of person I've always wanted to be. Amen."

Now, if you just sincerely prayed that prayer, you've begun the greatest relationship you can ever have -- a relationship with God. And it doesn't stop with a prayer. A relationship with God is a process. It means daily trusting God, trying to do not necessarily what you want or what feels good, but what you think God wants you to

do. I've had people say to me, "Christianity works for you and that's great. Couldn't other religions work for other people?" That's a good question. I believe God gave us one way to come to Him -- through Jesus' death on the cross -- even though there's an element of truth in other religions. They are largely moral codes -- "Do this seven times a day and this will bring you closer to God." But if you're trying to work toward God, how much work is enough? How do you know when you've reached that point?

I think that's where Christianity finds its truth: in the grace of God. Knowing we can never reach God's perfection, we can rely on God's forgiveness. The goal is to walk in His path, even though we will screw up a lot. You make mistakes, but you keep going, you keep working at it, trusting in God's grace. You pray. You read the Bible. You find out what God wants from you. Someday you'll reach peace. It may not be until you reach heaven, but then it's forever.

Then

Life now. Life then. Life after death?

Today you're in college. Somewhere between the ages of 18 and 24. But what about Tomorrow?

You graduate. You get a job. You get married. You have children. You go through a few more jobs. You buy a house. Okay, THEN what?

You go to soccer games for your kids. You try to be a good parent and spouse. You watch your children go to the prom. Even though Yesterday they were wearing diapers. You do and say the things your parents did and said, even though you vowed you never would.

You have a mid-life crisis or two. Your children graduate from college. You become a grandparent. Someone calls you grandma or grandpa. You live out your life in leisure, drawing income from a retirement fund. You take walks in the morning. You work in the garden. You read the newspaper. You watch TV. You talk to your children and grandchildren on the phone. You travel.

Okay, THEN what?

Well, then, someday, you die. If you are fortunate, you live a relatively long life. Seventy to 90 years. If you don't get taken away prematurely by cancer or a car accident. But always, eventually, you die. Death is the Tomorrow that awaits us all, the inevitable Then that none of us can escape.

But is that it? Is there anything more?

Someday you'll be just a corpse. They'll bury your body in the ground. Or burn your body and put your ashes in an urn. The big question is, *Will I cease after that? Will there still be a conscious ME somewhere? Is there really life after death?*

In truth, we probably all hope there is something that comes after. Maybe in the smallest recesses of our minds, we are planning on it.

What are we planning on? A life after death of some sort. Some call it paradise. Some call it heaven. Some also talk of hell.

Another thought that many people possess throughout life, often subconsciously, is: *I'm a basically good person. Therefore, I will get to go to heaven someday.*

Is that how it works?

Many people think they are "good enough" for heaven. It's an assumption we make. If we haven't robbed a bank, or murdered anyone, or cheated on our taxes, we think we're just the kind of folk God is looking for to populate his home. By golly, we are good enough.

At heaven's box office, we bought our ticket by being basically good people all throughout our lives.

But what if that thinking is incorrect? THEN what? What a thing to have been wrong about! What a misfire!

If you think you're good enough for heaven, there are two things to consider:

(1) If heaven is a place of perfection, how can *anyone* be good enough?

Most of us would say we have a "skeleton in the closet." At least one. Something we hope no one ever finds out about us. A mistake in our past. A poor decision. A moment of weakness or stupidity that we'd rather not think about.

That's the extreme. But there are many other more common things we don't really want others to know or notice about us. It might be the "little white lies" we tell. Or how we talk behind someone's back. Or how we copy other people's homework. Or the unkind words we say to people. Or the unkind thoughts we have about people.

Much more than a one-time regrettable event, our lives, if we closely scrutinize them, show a pattern of wrongdoing. We often don't do what we believe to be right. And we often do what we believe is wrong.

All of us, even people whom we would call basically good, are also basically selfish and basically very imperfect.

Everything we do is seen by God. So that means there's no fooling him. He's perfectly aware of all the good we haven't done (and yet could have), as well as all the bad we've done. He even knows all of our thoughts and all of our motives.

Here's the second thing to consider if we think we're "good enough" for heaven: **(2) Is it possible to be a basically good person and still have rejected God?**

Consider Ralph. He's a "good" person. He was ethical in his job. He never stole even a paper clip. He was a faithful father and husband. He provided for his children. He made sacrifices for them and for his wife (whom he never cheated on). He even gave money to many charities throughout his life.

But Ralph, though good in some sense, never "let God in." Many times in his life, Ralph sensed God's desire to come into his life. It was as if God were knocking on the door of Ralph's heart. But Ralph never opened that door. He always came up with some excuse not to. Ironically, one of the recurring excuses was, *I've been a good person all my life. I will go to heaven.*

Ralph wanted to go to heaven. Everyone does. But in reality, Ralph didn't want to know God. And he didn't stop to analyze the huge implications of that decision (the decision to keep God out).

Think about it. Heaven is God's home. If Ralph didn't want to know God during his life on Earth, why would Ralph want to know God in an afterlife? In other words, what Ralph didn't calculate is how much he would LOATHE heaven.

Heaven is a place where God is very present. It's likely that every aspect of heaven will remind one of God, constantly. What a horrible place for Ralph!

Ralph always assumed heaven would be a place of ultimate comfort. But he never considered how ultimately uncomfortable it would be for him, since he didn't want to know God or have a relationship with God. For Ralph, heaven would not be heaven, but rather a type of hell.

Would you let someone into your home even if you knew they didn't want to have anything to do with you? If you knew that everywhere they turned, they'd be reminded of you?

Many people are like Ralph. They want heaven, but they don't want God. And they don't realize that, under those circumstances, heaven would be an awful place to be.

Maybe the truth of the matter is that heaven is for people who know they're not good enough to be there -- but who nonetheless want to be there solely because God is there. They want to know God and be with him forever. The life-after-death prize isn't heaven, but rather it's Primary Occupant.

Do you want to know God? Do you want to learn how to become "good enough" for heaven?

A place of perfection

"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful." (The Bible, Revelation 21:27)

Very imperfect

"All have turned aside, they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Psalms 14:3)

"There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins." (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way." (Isaiah 53:6)

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17.9)

"No one is good -- except God alone." (Luke 18:19)

"There is no one righteous, not even one." (Romans 3:10)

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23)

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." (James 2:10)

Seen by God

"There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known." (Matthew 10:26)

"He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts." (1Corinthians 4:5)

"Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (Hebrews 4:13)

If you are dealing with HIV symptoms, haemophilia, or hepatitis C like Steve -- or maybe you're dealing with other problems in life -- and you would like to see another explanation of what Steve was trying to share, please see

Steve Sawyer died of liver failure from hepatitis C on March 13, 1999. May his true story encourage you to receive Jesus, as Steve had. In the last days of Steve's life he said he wanted to speak to "just one more campus." Why? "If I had to get these diseases that are killing me for that one person to understand that they can have a relationship with Christ, then it is worth it. In light of eternity, that is all that matters."

We can have eternal life, by receiving Jesus. We do not reach heaven by doing good things. Eternal life is a free gift to those who will believe in Jesus. From the Bible...

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)

Jesus said, "Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24)

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:55)

"God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life." (1John 5:11-13)



What Will Heaven Be Like?

There is a common stereotype often given concerning heaven: someone sitting on a cloud, strumming a harp, seemingly bored out of their wits. Is that what heaven will be like? It's highly doubtful.

Think about it: we're talking about God. As you've probably noticed, he's pretty creative. If you're in doubt, just gaze at a sunset, or try to fathom how the universe is held together, or think about the vastness of space, or read about DNA. Yes, God knows a thing or two.

So, what do we know about heaven? The Bible says that, "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." That's huge, isn't it?

No more "death"? You mean, no cancer, AIDS, wars, or murders? Sounds pretty good. No more "mourning"? You mean, no young widows trying to raise four children, no toddlers kidnapped by psychos, no crosses on the side of the highway signifying someone killed by a drunk driver, no whole cities perishing in an earthquake? Ever? Sounds great!

No more "crying" or "pain"? You mean, no divorces ripping homes apart, no daughters being violated by fathers, no teenage boys or girls selling their bodies for money, no people feeling insecure because they're too tall or short or fat or skinny, no villagers starved out by governments, no lonely grandmothers whose husbands died twenty years before they will, no talented people wasting their lives through a heroin addiction, no gin-infested husbands using their wives and children as punching bags, no insults or malice just because someone has a different skin colour, no hateful words spoken or heard? That sounds like a great place.

What else will heaven be like? No one but God knows for sure. But obviously it will be a whole new way of life. And, if the current world is any indication, we can expect the next one to show even more of God's creativity. We're talking different dimensions of time and space, and new activities and recreations we never even dreamed of. And that's just the point: it's beyond our imagination.

Do you think you could have come up with the idea for the giraffe? Or the tiger? Or the zebra? Maybe. Okay, you're feeling pretty confident. What about the four

seasons? What about having the earth spin on its own axis while it rotates around the sun? (That's a pretty good one, you have to admit.) Or having the moon effect the ocean tides here on Earth? What about the human eye? Okay, what about sex? (That got your attention.) Have you ever wondered if God has something better than sex planned for the next life? You say: "No way!" But what if he does?

The point: God is very creative. All we have to do is look around us. Our world is amazing. And yet, it could be that God hasn't even shown off yet. It's likely that he hasn't. But we can be confident of this: whatever heaven is, it will be much more than we ever imagined, or could imagine. We just have no idea.

Facing the Great Inevitable

A story of facing death and learning about life after death

by Brandon Markette

Death and dying...Fear of death

If there exists one experience that, throughout history and around the world, binds mankind together, it is death. Death is something we all must face -- no exercise or diet regimen, no meditation techniques, no amount of money can avoid it. It is the great equalizer.

The finality of death, coupled with the uncertainty of an afterlife, results in fear, for many. We see it all around us as we try so hard to stop the aging process. We hope that the next pill, the next surgery, or the next genetic discovery will be the key to extending our lives.

Facing death with peace...life after death

Not everyone, however, faces death with fear and uncertainty. A few years ago a friend of mine faced this faceless enemy. At 16 he was diagnosed with stomach cancer. The doctors tried every treatment at their disposal, all to no avail. For a year and a half Rob was in three different hospitals in two different cities. In that time he lost 90 pounds and all of his hair. He was an inpatient and an outpatient. Sadly, after 18 months, nothing remained to be done for him.

Having reached the end of their rope, Rob's doctors did the only thing left to do. They sent him home to try to enjoy the last days of his life. At this point, I was horribly sad, afraid of losing a dear friend and mad at God. I was mad that God did not heal him. I was also mad that Rob would miss out on so much.

Dealing with death...

Amazingly, Rob did not share my anger. In fact, he seemed to be meeting this horrible fate with the anxiety one might experience on a first date. To this day, when I think of his peace in the face of the storm, I am in awe.

His peace was not merely an inborn, laid-back look at life. Nor did it spring from a devil-may-care attitude. Instead it came from a decision Rob made only months before the initial diagnosis. With that decision, Rob found peace with God.

Rob knew how to have life after death.



The peace Rob knew, he found in the Bible. In the book of Romans, he read that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). He also read, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:23).

Jesus is the one Isaiah referred to when he wrote, "And His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). The Prince of Peace came to Earth so that each person might have peace with God. Rob decided to put his trust in Jesus, and this peace became very evident.

Life after death...our decision

Rob is not the only person who needs to make this decision, we all do. We must decide if we will accept God's gift of eternal life. If we reject God's gift, we are condemned to spiritual death -- eternal separation from God. If we do accept, however, then eternal life is ours.

While this eternal life does not mean we will escape physical death, we can face death a lot easier knowing that it leads to eternal life in heaven. This is the truth which Rob discovered, and the ensuing relationship with God made all the difference in the world. This is the truth I have discovered, and the relationship makes all the difference every day of my life.

If you are facing death, and wondering about life after death, or maybe you are facing the struggle of living, you can still have peace and hope.

Knowing God Personally

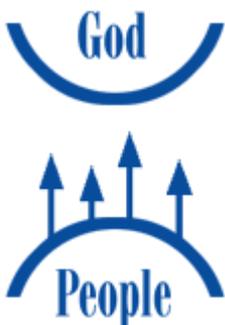
What does it take to begin a relationship with God? Wait for lightning to strike? Devote yourself to unselfish religious deeds? Become a better person so that God will accept you? NONE of these. God has made it very clear in the Bible how we can know Him. This will explain how you can personally begin a relationship with God, right now...

Principle One: God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

God created you. Not only that, he loves you so much that he wants you to know him now and spend eternity with him. Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."¹

Jesus came so that each of us could know and understand God in a personal way. Jesus alone can bring meaning and purpose to life.

What keeps us from knowing God? ...



Principle Two: All of us sin and our sin has separated us from God.

We sense that separation, that distance from God because of our sin. The Bible tells us that "All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way."²

Deep down, our attitude may be one of active rebellion or passive indifference toward God and his ways, but it's all evidence of what the Bible calls sin.

The result of sin in our lives is death -- spiritual separation from God.³ Although we may try to get close to God through our own effort, we inevitably fail.

This diagram shows the great gap that exists between us and God. The arrows illustrate how we might try to reach God through our own efforts. We may try to do good things in life, or earn God's acceptance through a good life or a moral philosophy. But our good efforts are insufficient to cover up our sin.

How can we bridge this gulf?...

Principle Three: Jesus Christ is God's only provision for our sin. Through him we can know and experience God's love and plan for our life.

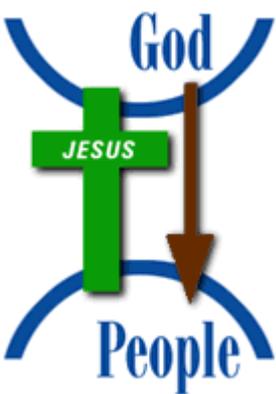
We deserve to pay for our own sin. The problem is, the payment is death. So that we would not have to die separated from God, out of his love for us, Jesus Christ died in our place. On the cross, Jesus took all of our sin on himself and completely, fully paid for it. "For Christ also died for sins...the just for the unjust, so that he might bring us to God."⁴ "...he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy."⁵ Because of Jesus' death on the cross, our sin doesn't have to separate us from God any longer.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."⁶

Jesus not only died for our sin, he rose from the dead.⁷ When he did, he proved beyond doubt that he can rightfully promise eternal life -- that he is the Son of God and the only means by which we can know God. That is why Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one can come to the Father except through me."⁸

Instead of trying harder to reach God, he tells us how we can begin a relationship with him right now. Jesus says, "Come to me." "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."⁹ It was Jesus' love for us that caused him to endure the cross. And he now invites us to come to him, that we might begin a personal relationship with God.

Just knowing what Jesus has done for us and what he is offering us is not enough. To have a relationship with God, we need to welcome him into our life...



Principle Four: We must individually accept Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

The Bible says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."¹⁰

We accept Jesus by faith. The Bible says, "God saved you by his special favour when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."¹¹

Accepting Jesus means believing that Jesus is the Son of God, who he claimed to be, then inviting him to guide and direct our lives.¹² Jesus said, "I came that you might have life, and have it more abundantly."¹³

And here is Jesus' invitation. He said, "I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in."¹⁴

How will you respond to God's invitation?

Consider these two circles:



Self-Directed Life

ⓈSelf is on the throne

†Jesus is outside the life

•Decisions and actions are solely directed by self, often resulting in frustration



Christ-Directed Life

†Jesus is in the life and on the throne

ⓈSelf is yielding to Jesus

•The person sees Jesus' influence and direction in their life

Which circle best represents your life?

Which circle would you like to have represent your life?

Begin a relationship with Jesus...

You can receive Christ right now. Remember that Jesus says, "I'm standing at the door and I'm knocking. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in."¹⁵ Would you like to respond to his invitation? Here's how.

The precise words you use to commit yourself to God are not important. He knows the intentions of your heart. If you are unsure of what to pray, this might help you put it into words:

"Jesus, I want to know you. I want you to come into my life. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin so that I could be fully accepted by you. Only you can give me the power to change and become the person you created me to be. Thank you for forgiving me and giving me eternal life with God. I give my life to you. Please do with it as you wish. Amen."

If you sincerely asked Jesus into your life just now, then he has come into your life as he promised. You have begun a personal relationship with God.

What follows is a lifelong journey of change and growth as you get to know God better through Bible reading, prayer and interaction with other Christians.

- (1) John 3:16
- (2) Isaiah 53:6
- (3) Romans 6:23
- (4) 1Peter 3:18
- (5) Titus 3:5
- (6) John 3:16
- (7) 1 Corinthians 15:3-6
- (8) John 14:6
- (9) John 7:37,38
- (10) John 1:12
- (11) Ephesians 2:8,9
- (12) John 3:1-8
- (13) John 10:10
- (14) Revelation 3:20
- (15) Revelation 3:20