

The Rewards of Being a Disciple of Christ

You've received Him as your personal Savior, now He seeks to be the Lord of your life.

Salvation is through grace, which means unmerited favor, and is based on the sacrificial work that Jesus did for you on the cross, where He carried all of your sins and enabled you entrance into His kingdom.

It was the greatest act of love in all of human history.

He laid everything down for you on the cross, now He asks that you be willing to lay everything down for Him (Matthew 10:37-39).

But, what does that mean?

It means that you have made Him number one in your life, and no longer seek to do your own will, but His (Philippians 3:8-15).

Before we committed our lives to Christ, everything revolved around us _ our desires, our goals, our plans, our lifestyle, our pride, our status symbols.

When we received Christ into our hearts, though, all of that changed.

We no longer seek to please ourselves, but Him, which means that we are willing to give up things in our lives which displease Him (Ephesians 4:17-32; 5:5,17; I Peter 4:2-4).

We have removed ourselves from the throne in our lives, and placed Jesus there in accordance with His will.

As He says, "You shall love the Lord thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22: 37-40).

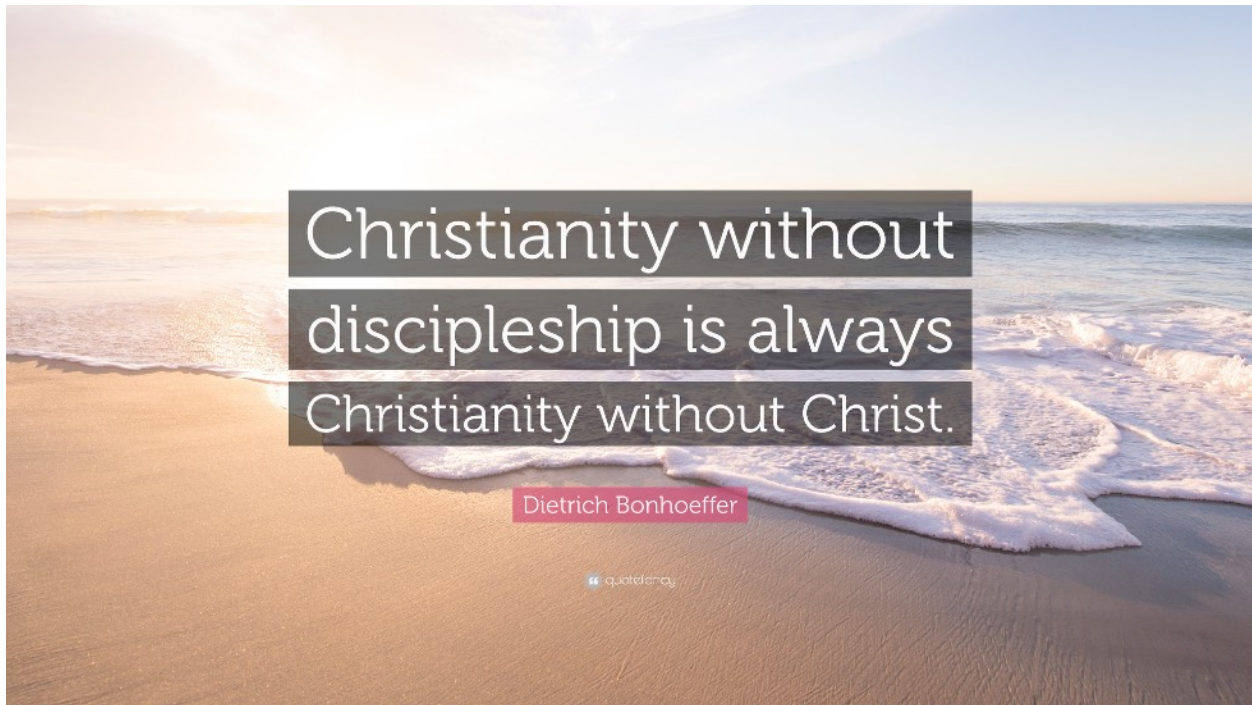
He doesn't expect us to be perfect, and knows that we can't be; that's why He had to atone for our sins.

He's simply looking for a sincere, full-hearted attempt to die to sin, and live unto Him (Philippians 3:7-15).

And serving Christ with all your heart, knowing He has already paid the price for you, is exhilarating.

Think Mount Everest, and the single-mindedness of those who reach the summit, and the ecstasy upon reaching the peak.

Think those who achieve Olympic gold and the tremendous feeling of achievement; it wasn't achieved through a half-hearted effort.



Think of being selected to a unique fighting force, such as the Navy SEALs.

It requires determination, a 100 percent commitment which, in turn, produces a joy rarely if ever experienced by folks who are half-hearted and mediocre in everything.

Being all-in with Christ produces a peace and happiness that this world simply can never give you.

“And to know the love of Christ, which passes earthly knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:19).

There’s a freedom unmatched in this world when you seek the God of peace with all your heart. “For where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Corinthians 3:17).

And once you’re all-in with Christ, you won’t want to turn back to the lifestyle you left behind because there’s nothing like freedom.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free; and be ye not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Galatians 5:1).

“And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).

Yes, being a disciple of Christ can be tough, but life itself is tough.

Think of the multitude of folks living pointless lives, consumed by vices which are destroying them, battling depression, battling hopelessness, battling loneliness, unsuccessfully attempting to fill that void in their lives that only God Himself can fill.

So, they’re experiencing physical and spiritual pain in this world, with no hope of attaining anything better.

In fact, there are repercussions for their choice to reject God: The destruction of their eternal soul.

“Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16: 25,26).

And, if we don't bother to use the talents He gave us, we'll lose whatever we did have and be cast from the presence of the Lord. “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30).

On the other hand, our efforts to serve Him will reap great, eternal rewards (Galatians 6:8).

As the Lord promises, “To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7).

As the Apostle Paul writes, “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18).

Heaven will be glorious beyond description because we will personally know and bask in God's infinite love.

“And He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people...And God shall wipe away all years from their eyes, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21: 3,4).

Jesus says whoever places Him first in their lives will receive a reward so great it nearly defies description (Matthew 19:29).

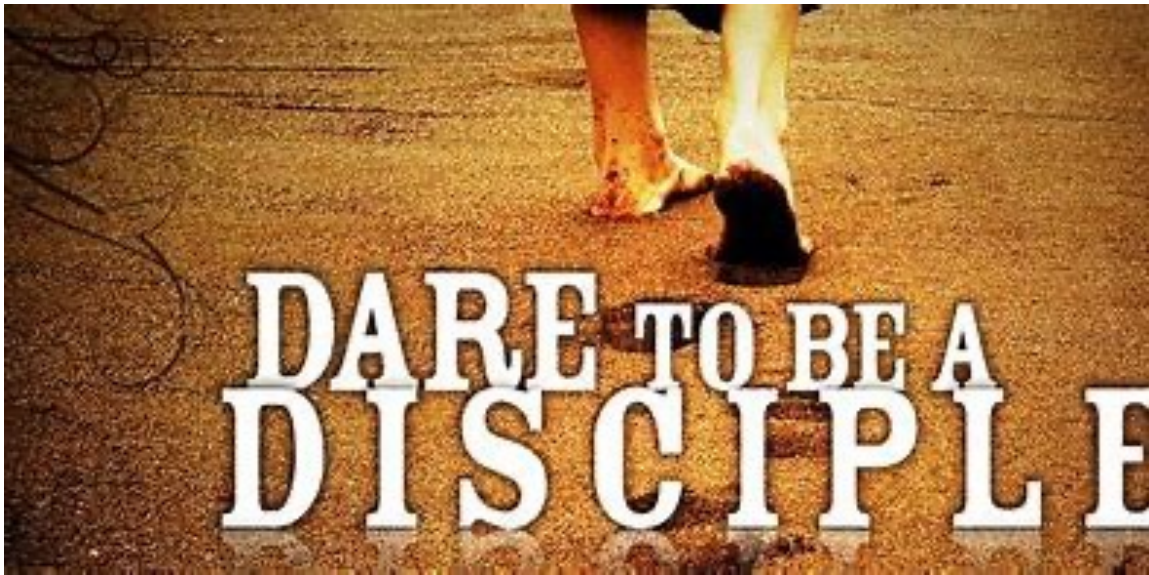
“Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he is tried He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him” (James 1:12).

Jesus' Incredible Example

In seeking to do God's will, Jesus gave the perfect example the night in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before His crucifixion (Matthew 26:36-46).

He knew the horror that He would have to endure, not only the beatings, whippings, humiliation, or even having iron stakes hammered through His body, affixing Him to the cross but, worst of all, experiencing separation from God the Father while on the cross as He bore the sins of the world upon Him.

He was in such agony that He actually sweated blood.



The medical world explains someone only sweats blood when they are in utter agony, because the heart is pounding so rapidly that it causes the capillaries to explode and its blood to then pour out onto the skin.

He even asked God the Father to reconcile mankind to Him through another means, because of the supreme emotional, physical and spiritual horror He would have to endure.

But despite the horror of what He what He knew He would have to endure, He remained faithful: "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Matthew 26:39).

Examples of things we'll have to give up are adultery, excess alcohol, drugs, backstabbing, selfishness, pride. He's asking us to give up things because they not only do harm to others, but ourselves, as well.

If we have trouble overcoming these shortcomings, He will empower us and give us the victory over these shortcomings so that we may enter into His supreme peace and rest (Philippians 4:13; I Corinthians 10:13).

He wants us all-in, that He may be able to greatly pour out his blessings on us.

As He says, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). A "god" is anything that you value more than the living God.

And sometimes the roadblocks which are the most effective at keeping us from doing the will of God are the ones closest to us, friends and family.

That's because they already have a special place in your heart, but are often living lives in rebellion against God.

THE REWARDS OF DISCIPLESHIP

"Jesus said, «I tell you the truth, there is no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive in this age a hundred times as much – homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, fields, all with persecutions– and in the age to come, eternal life»"

Mark, 10: 29-30



Friends will want you to continue in your previous lifestyle, and actively work to draw you back into that lifestyle.

Family members will often try to return you to who you were before you had that encounter with Christ.

Because they're special people in your life, they can be very effective.

Jesus knows that, which is why He says, "He that loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. He that loves son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me. And He that does not take up His cross, deny Himself daily, is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10: 37-38).

Those who have not repented and received Christ as their savior will want you to remain in their quagmire, and if we go along with their short-sighted view, then we are not worthy of Him who laid it all down for us.

The tremendous upside is that those who have chosen to place Christ and His commands first in their lives will receive massive rewards.

As Jesus told His disciples, "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, of father, or mother, or wife, of children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an *hundred fold*, and shall inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29). In a secular sense, it's like investing \$10, and getting \$1,000 in return. Not a bad deal at all.

This doesn't mean you are to walk out on our wives or kids, but that we love the Lord even more than our family so that we are influenced more by Him and what His words say, than even our own family.

It also doesn't mean you can't get a college degree, or a career, or job promotion.

Nothing of the sort. He wants you to have these things.

He simply wants us to make following Him as our top priority.

As He says, “But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and its righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33).

Discipleship No Place For The Half-Hearted

Unfortunately, many of us have a hard time making that commitment to serve Him, choosing instead to receive the benefits of living for the world, while at the same time trying to get the good things from God.

Some live a lifestyle contrary to what God wants, and only call on Him when times get tough.

Once the tough times are past they, in essence, attempt to mock God by resuming their sinful lifestyle.

They want to enjoy all the short-term pleasures and adulation of a world in rebellion against God, while still expecting God to receive them with open arms because they say a few prayers now and then.

Jesus is real clear: “No man can serve two masters, for either he will love the one and abhor the other. You cannot serve God and this world.” (Matthew 6:24).

And Jesus has this warning, “Not every one that saith unto me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Many will plead their case on Judgment Day arguing that, even though they wallowed in sin throughout their lives, they did some good stuff too.

Their argument will be in vain: “And then will I profess unto them, depart from me, ye worker of iniquity” (Matthew 7:23).

He says those who play games with God will be rejected (Revelation 3: 15-17).



Seek Out His Will For Your Life

But, how can you find His will in your life?

It happens when you seek Him with all your heart, and that only comes when you've decided that you want to serve Him 100 percent (Jeremiah 29:13).

He will place a desire in your heart and the ability to carry it out.

Each one of us has been granted special gifts and talents that He wants to use in our lives in order to glorify Him, and to advance His kingdom here on Earth (Ephesians 4:7-14; Matthew 25:14-30).

It might be preaching the word, teaching the word, leading a flock as a pastor, serving as a musician, a singer, an evangelist, or simply being someone who's always there for others, granting them a word of encouragement, lifting them up and helping to get them through tough times.

He will show you what your talents are and will help you become more and more anointed as you seek to develop your gifts in Him.

At the end of the day, all other paths lead to destruction, and will be consumed by fire on the day of Judgment (II Peter 3:7,10-15).

As the Lord says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because narrow is the way, and strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto eternal life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13,14).

Yes, making Christ number one in your life can be tough at times, but it's definitely worth it.

"And the world shall pass away, and the lusts thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abides forever" (I John 2:15).

He is no fool who loses a life he cannot keep, to gain a life he cannot lose.

God's Kingdom on Earth

Most people have heard the Lord's Prayer, in which Jesus says, "Thy kingdom come. They will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Too often folks have this misconception that in God's kingdom we'll be sitting around on a cloud all day playing harps.

Sounds kind of like a version of hell.

Imagine being stuck on a cloud forever playing the same tunes over and over again.

Thankfully, the Bible teaches us a lot about God's Kingdom, and how awesome it is.

God has granted humans free will, and allowed us to create our own political systems.

If you look at the world today, on the verge of nuclear, chemical and biological self-destruction, you'll see how "well" man has done in creating his own kingdom.

This calamity will all end with the return of Christ, upon which He will establish His kingdom, which shall be just and will last forever (Daniel 7:27).

"The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our God and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Revelation 11:15).



Now that man has proven he cannot self-govern in a just manner, Christ shall rule the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15).

There will be more wars. “And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares...nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4).

In fact, the Earth will be peaceful.

Animals will no longer prey upon each other and, because there'll be no sin, humans will also play with animals.

“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock” (Isaiah 65:25).

Atheism, secularism, agnosticism will be things of the past. “For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:5-10; Micah 4:1-4).



Death shall be vanquished, God will wipe away the tears.

“He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces” (Isaiah 25:8).

God is preparing His disciples to reign with Him over the earth (I Corinthians 6:2).

As it says in Revelation 5:10, “you have made them (Christ’s followers) a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the Earth.”

As the Apostle John wrote, “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands: and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

As Christ promises in Revelation 2:26,27, “he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron.”

As the Apostle Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:12, “If we suffer with Him, we shall reign with Him.”

God will dwell personally with His people, and it will be wondrous.

Heaven will descend to earth, and we will abide in it.

As it is written in Revelation 21:3-5, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.

“And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”

Revelation 21: 6,7 explains more of the glories that await those who are faithful to Christ until the very end.

“And He (Jesus) said unto me, ‘It is done. I am alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of life freely. He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.’”



The heaven in the Bible speaks of a glorious realm filled with God’s perfect peace, love and righteousness.

Contrary to depictions in secular media, that heavenly realm will be right here on Earth in a glorious city named New Jerusalem.

It’s wondrous glory and beauty is described in Revelation 21.

“And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it” (Revelation 21:22).

“And the city had no need of the sun, either neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof” (Revelation 21:23).

“And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it; and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it” (Revelation 21:24).

“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Revelation 21:25).

A further description continues in Revelation 22.

“And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:21).

“...And on either side of the river was there the tree of life...and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations” (Revelation 22:3)

“And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him” (Revelation 22:4).

“And they shall see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads” (Revelation 22: 5).

“And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Revelation 22:6).

God’s plans for those who remain faithful to the end are wondrous beyond description.

Please don’t miss out.



The Second Coming of Jesus Christ to Earth: Will You Be Ready?

As Christians, we look forward to the return of Jesus Christ to this world.

He will not return to be born again in a stable, but to establish His kingdom upon the Earth.

Man is making a real mess of His creation, as anybody who reads the news knows, and is on the verge of nuclear, biological and chemical self-annihilation.

Christ will return to intervene, and establish a righteous government upon Earth (Revelation 20:6; Isaiah 2: 14).

His return will not be a secret.

In fact, everybody alive when He returns will see Him.



And He won't be walking around on the Earth giving press conferences; He'll return in the sky.

“Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him...and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him” (Revelation 1:7).

We, as believers who long for His return, will be caught up in the air to be with him, shedding our mortal bodies in the process.

“For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thessalonians 4:16,17).

For those who've decided they want no part of God in their lives, it will be a moment of complete hopelessness, but for those who have given our lives over to Him and seek to serve Him, it will be a moment of extreme joy.



“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (II Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Jesus said no one will know the hour of His return (Matthew 24: 36) but added that we will have a general idea based on what is happening in the world.

As He says in Luke 21:25-28, “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the Earth, for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.”

Globalization, nuclear weaponry, mass communications, mass government surveillance are just a few of the characteristics of the time when He said He would return to gather His elect and establish His kingdom on Earth.

As anyone who just basically follows the news knows, we are in those days now.

His return will be like in the Days of Noah, when basically everybody was just doing their own thing, having kicked God to the curb, out of their life.

As Jesus says in Matthew 24:37-42, “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark.

“And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then two shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.....Watch therefore, for you know not what hour your Lord doth come.”

Before He returns, He warned that many imposters will appear, claiming to be Christ. “Then if any man shall say unto you, ‘Lo, here is Christ, or there;’ believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets’ and deceive many” (Matthew 24:23,24).

Unlike the imposters, Christ will return in the heavens, and everybody on Earth shall see Him.

Not only will everyone see Him as He returns, it will happen after the worst hours in mankind’s history.

As Jesus says in Matthew 24: 27-41, “Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light...and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.

“And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

“And He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other.”

Despite the numerous prophecies which have been fulfilled regarding the days in which we are living, many folks will, incredibly, ridicule the news that Christ will return shortly after these prophecies come to pass (II Peter 3:4).

He warned us to remain vigilant, and not caught up in the world because His return will be sudden, and dramatic.



As He says in Luke 21:34-36, “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day comes upon you unawares.

“For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

“Watch therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”

Upon His return, we will receive glorified, immortal bodies, as He has, no longer afflicted by death, illness, sin (Philippians 3:21).

As Jesus resurrected ascended into heaven, an angel told His disciples we will return in like fashion. As it is written in the Book of Acts 1:9-11, "And when He (Jesus) had spoken these things, while they (His disciples) beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

"And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel. Which also said, 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.' "

He foretold, though, in Matthew 16:27, that there will be many who, unfortunately, will not be prepared for His return.

Will you be ready when He returns shortly?

Why do we go through trials?

First of all, everybody who lives on this planet goes through trials _ saved or unsaved.

The difference is that the trials a Christian endures actually turn out to be a blessing for us, and for those around us.

As it says in Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to those who love the Lord, who are called according to His purpose."

His goal in our lives is for us to be a reflection of Him in this world, and He allows us to go through trials to achieve this.

Like silver being purified through the fire, trials eliminate the impurities in our walk with the Lord, and conform us more and more to His image (Revelation 3:18; I Peter 1:6,7; James 1:12).

Everyone He loves, He disciplines, in much the same way a loving, earthly father will discipline his kids (Hebrews 12:6,7).

If He didn't discipline us, the Bible says that we're simply not His children, but bastards (Hebrews 12:8).

Sometimes we go through trials because God wants to correct something in our walk with Him.

Are you prideful? God will bring you down (I Corinthians 10:12; Proverbs 16:18).



Are you trying to serve God and the world? He'll let you know that we can't serve two masters (Matthew 6:24).

Have you strayed from your walk with Him? He'll let you know, so that you return to fellowship with Him (Luke 15:11-32).

Committing adultery? He'll find a way to remedy that. Drinking too much? He'll find the way to fix that problem.

Moreover, going through trials allow us to empathize and help others who are passing through the same rough patch you went through (II Corinthians 1:4-6).

How can you possibly relate to anybody if your life has been a bed of roses? You can't.

Marital troubles? Backstabbed by a so-called friend? Lost your job? Struggling to make ends meet? Illness?

Going through these tough experiences help us help others get through similar problems.

He allows trials to test our faith, and strengthen it (I Peter 1:6,7; James 1:12).

If you never pass through anything, how will you ever develop the strength of character that God wants to build in us? He wants us to be able to lead others in Christ, and He uses trials to achieve that purpose.

The Bible likens His disciples as soldiers _ strong, determined, disciplined, unwavering (II Timothy 2:2).

How can we possibly be that strong, determined soldier if we've always had everything easy?

Emerging victorious from a trial teaches us to be more thankful.

You can't experience the joy of victory unless you have been through a battle (2 Thessalonians 5:16-18).



The Bible uses the example of precious metals which can only be purified by passing it through fire (Job 23:10; Zechariah 13:9).

A gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without trials.

The greater the trial, the greater the reward.

If you've never been through anything, how can you truly appreciate the good things the Lord gives us? How can we possibly love and appreciate His peace unless we have passed through a tempestuous storm?



How can we fully appreciate God's sheer justice, unless we have experienced the injustice of this world?

How can we fully appreciate God's love, unless we have experienced the disdain, rejection that we undergo in this life?

And the uplifting message is that if we pass through trials we'll be able to appreciate heaven even more.

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

God may even send a trial your way in order to actually protect you from something far worse in the future based on how you're living.

You may be dabbling in certain lifestyles which can cause much greater damage if you persist in it.

It may be drugs, adultery, materialism. These are just a few of the long list of examples that can lead to far greater problems the longer you persist in them.

Ask addicts when their drug troubles began. They'll tell you it began with their initiation into the drug world. It started with a hit, a snort, a toke, and spiraled downward from there, leading to full-blown addiction and even death.

Ask someone with a broken home due to his/her infidelity.

It all began with a simple flirt, and from there spiraled downward, causing physical, emotional, financial and spiritual damage to not only the two adults, but untold grief to their young, impressionable children.

The same can be said for materialism. How many people get in over their head in debt because they want to show the world how successful they are based on how much stuff they say they have?

At the end of the day, they've got to pay for the status symbols they ultimately couldn't afford, and realize _ too late _ that they can't, resulting in bankruptcy. That in turn, leaves to feelings of hopelessness, depression which, in turn, leads to a far worse situation, including homelessness, broken homes, addiction, and even death (James 1:13-16; Psalm 121:5-8).

Maybe your once-ferveat desire to serve the Lord has waned. You no longer spend much if any time praying, studying His Word, and have neglected the call He has in your life.

To get your attention, He may send a trial your way to bring you back to the time when you really loved the things of God (Revelation 2:2-5).

Have you started to give yourself all the credit for what you've accomplished and as a result become lifted up in pride? He can put you through a trial to remind you that, at the end of the day, all the glory belongs to God, not yourself (II Corinthians 12:7), and "Pride comes before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

If everything's always Easy Street, chances are you're not going to learn much which you can then pass on to others.

Passing through trials grants you greater wisdom and teaches lots of valuable lessons which you can then use to pass on to others. (Psalm 119: 71-77; Psalm 119: 64-68.)



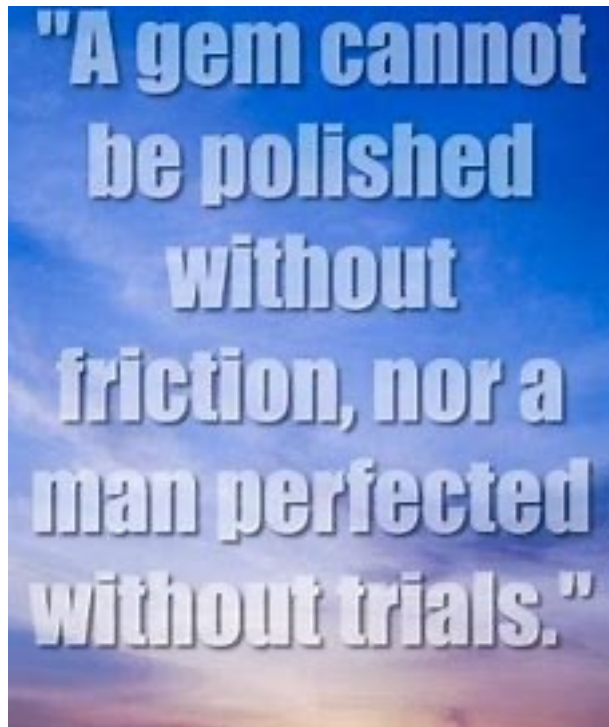
Passing victoriously through a time of testing can also be used as a witness to the world.

When they observe the strength and peace you have passing through the fire, it might get them to wonder where you found that strength and that peace which, in turn, may induce them to want to know the God that you serve.

Unlike those living for the world, the Lord always shows us the way to gain victory over the trial. (I Corinthian 10:13).

We emerge stronger, wiser, more able to help others, and more reflective of God's glory in our lives.

And, unlike those who choose to live far from God in this world, every trial serves a positive purpose.



What is heaven? And what will we do there?

Heaven is God's Kingdom, His realm.

It is a place of infinite love, peace, righteousness and harmony.

Here, we only get tiny snippets of these attributes which means when we get there, we'll be overwhelmed by how wondrous and awesome God's Kingdom is.

The most important thing to know about heaven is not what you'll be doing, but what you will be *experiencing*.

As we've shed our current body of death, filled with disease, pain, sin, thirst, hunger, etc., we will be filled with the complete manifestation of God's infinite love, peace and happiness.

Have you ever felt happy in this life?

The joy you'll feel in heaven will make the happiest moment here seem dull and tinged with sadness because this world is so dark and laden with sin.

Have you ever felt loved in this life? It's a great feeling but nothing compared to being enveloped completely in God's infinite love.

That's why Paul wrote, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18)

And Paul had to do a lot of suffering, including imprisonment, being shipwrecked, whipped, beaten, and nearly stoned to death.



Those in heaven experience a state of sheer, eternal peace, love, and fulfillment. For those reasons and more, we will want to thank and worship the eternal, living God (Revelation 7:9-17; Revelation).

We will be overwhelmed by God Himself, the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-merciful creator of the universe.

If we get awe struck by such relatively tiny things here on Earth, such as a beautiful snow-capped mountain, how much more when we are allowed to behold He who speaks things into existence.

Worship will spring forth as we marvel at the spectacular beauty of His realm, and the unmerited favor He lavishes on us.



Along with worship, the Bible says that we will rule with Christ (II Timothy 2:12; Revelation 3:26, 27; 20:4) over fallen realms within His eternal universe. And for those who love the pure righteousness of Christ, it'll be fantastic.

It won't be tiresome as it can sometimes be here on earth because we will no longer inhabit our present bodies which are given to tiredness, pain, sickness, thirst, hunger, decay and death.

The Bible says we will be granted glorified, eternal bodies which are not susceptible to the physical strain and pain of this life, and are no longer constrained by time/space and the law of gravity (Philippians 3:21; I Corinthians 15:42-53).

Empowered by God, we will no longer be subjected to the weakness of sin.

The Bible says our glorified bodies will not be nebulous, but have clear, concise human form (Luke 24:39,40) and we'll likely be able to enjoy food, though we won't need it (Luke 24:41-43).

Like Moses and Elijah, we'll be able to bask in God's infinite love (Matthew 17:2,3; Philipians 3:10)..

We'll be glorified with Christ (Romans 8:30), and that glory will be extended to the bodies we'll inhabit.

As we are filled with God's infinite love, peace and righteousness, it'll be joy beyond description in carrying out universal reconciliation under Christ's leadership (I Corinthians 2:9).

Ever feel happy carrying out something here on earth, such as helping someone out? It will be like that times a million when we are already in God's pure presence.

We will be reunited with loved ones, which will make an unspeakably wondrous experience even more so (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

We'll also be shown the endless wonders of God's eternal, infinite kingdom (Ephesians 2:6,7). It will make the most spectacular trip here on earth seem dull and listless by comparison.

Everyone on earth, about eight billion of us, longs for what is in heaven _ infinite joy, peace, love.

Unfortunately, most of us seek to find this in drugs, alcohol, materialism, adultery, status symbols, power. As Jesus says, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14).

These indulgences give us moments of fleshly delights, but then quickly wear off, leaving us to scramble around trying to, again, find snippets of the characteristics which define heaven _ happiness, peace and love.

Whether it be drugs, status symbols, sex, travel, career, it may bring a fleeting feeling of satisfaction, but strongly pales in comparison to the infinite ecstasy of simply being in God's awesome presence.

The never-ending quest to fill the void by seeking to satisfy the flesh often leads to tragic results. As nothing else offered by this fallen world can fill the void in our hearts that only God can fill, the futile pursuit of an earthly, fleshly heaven often causes lives to spiral downward, leading to disastrous results, such as loss of family and friends, loss of employment, mental illness, etc.

The great wonder of heaven is that the embodiment of love, peace, happiness is God, who will grant all of that freely.

And, once we're there, we will have no desire to return to this dark, troubled, painful, unjust world.

There will be no more sorrow, pain, hunger, thirst, death, decay. There will also be no more loneliness, lies, sadness, hate, envy, strife, and all the other characteristics that make this world such a sad and hopeless place.

As it is written, "The tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God.

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:3,4).

Revelation chapters 21 and 22 speak volumes of the wondrous glory that is heaven.

The sufferings of this life will make heaven only sweeter.

You can't appreciate health until you've been sick.

You can't appreciate a true friend until you've been betrayed.

You can't appreciate peace until you've known anxiety and torment.

After experiencing the pain and suffering of this world, the glory of heaven will be wondrous beyond words.

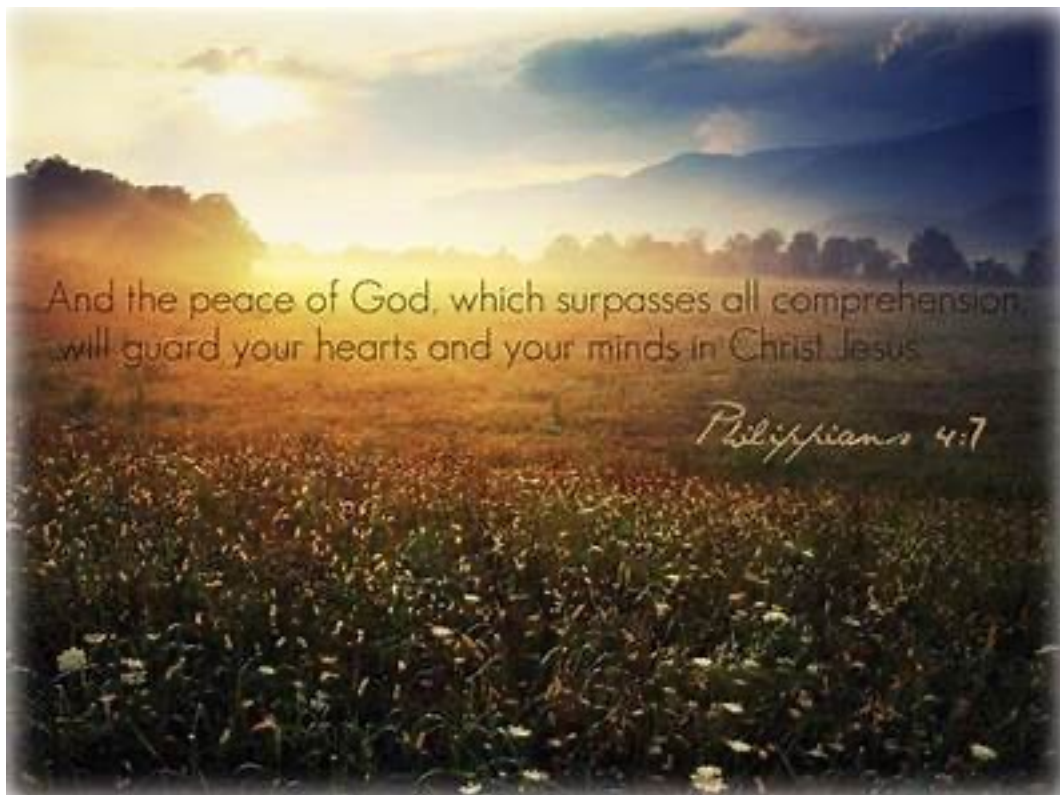
But not everyone will enter heaven; in fact, most will miss out, choosing to live for this world instead of living for Christ.

That's why Jesus says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to temptation, and many there be that go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13,14).

By carrying our sins on the cross, Jesus has done everything for us to be able to enter His kingdom.

He won't force us, though; we have to make the choice to serve Him in this short, fleeting life.

Please don't miss out.



Encouragement

The Bible is full of examples of Godly men and women having to struggle through hard times to before obtaining the blessing that the Lord had in store for them.

Consider Joseph, who was imprisoned on a blatant lie, but who would later emerge as pharaoh's right hand man in ruling Egypt.

Then there's Elijah, who was suicidal before God lifted him out of the pit of despair to carry out many powerful exploits in His name.

Consider the life of David, who lived in caves for years as Saul sought to kill him. He survived, and became Israel's greatest king.

Moses fled into the desert, considering himself a failure, before God called upon him to lead the greatest deliverance of a people in the history of the world.

He took a fearful man, Gideon, to lead an army to victory, even though they were greatly outnumbered.

There is no limit to what the Lord can do for you in your life.



The key is to forge ahead in times of trouble with the understanding that, after passing through the storm, you'll enter God's blessing and emerge stronger than ever before.

All of us go through tough times and need some encouragement; it's part of life.

Here are some verses from the Bible urging you to stand strong because, in due time, you'll gain the victory:

* "Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

* "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

* "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" (Romans 8:28).

* "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

* "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Psalm 23:4).

* "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (Psalm 126:5).

* "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

* "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Romans 8:37).

* "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14).



* "The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such that be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivereth them out of all their troubles" (Psalm 34:17-19).

* "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He heard my cry. He brought me up out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth..." (Psalm 40:1-3).

* "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea..." (Psalm 46:1,2).

* "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5).

* "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble. And they that know your name will put their trust in thee, for though, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee" (Psalm 9:9,10).

* "Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in de time. Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you" (I Peter 5:6,7).

* "For we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:7-9).

* "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when He is tried He shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him" (James 1:12).

* "And He (Jesus) said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

* "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper..." (Isaiah 54:17).

* "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord" (Zechariah 4:6).

* "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication let your requests be known by God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your mind and heart through Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6).

* "Trust in the Lord with all thy heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

* "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon thee..." (Isaiah 26:3).

* "The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25).

Do you know Christ? Or just know *about* Him?

There is a huge, eternal difference between knowing Jesus, and knowing *about* Him.

Many folks are satisfied with just a casual, nominal belief in God, heaven and Jesus.

For them, He's out there 7 trillion light years away, and when they have a problem or want something, they shoot up a prayer.

To them, Jesus is kind of like Santa Claus, or an Excedrin pill.

But the Bible teaches us far differently.

In fact, throughout God's Word, we learn that God wants to have a living relationship with us, even in the most minimal parts of our lives (Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 4:6; Matthew 22:37-40; John 15:4-6; Matthew 11:28; Galatians 2:20; Revelation 3:20; I Peter 5:7; Colossians 3:1-4; I John 1:9; II Timothy 2:10-12, James 1:5-7, etc.).

He wants to have a *relationship* with us, through which He leads, guides, comforts, admonishes, rather than just a stale, ritualistic *religion* in which we mutter phrases given to us to read.

It's convenient for the secular world to claim He's far away, disinterested, because they have no desire to enter into this vibrant, living relationship, preferring to live a life far from Him, doing their own thing.

This way they can do whatever they want, and it's all good _ at least in their minds.

In the Bible, we learn that the first step in living the Christian life occurs when we come to the cross in prayer, and admit we are sinners who fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23; Romans 10:9,10).

We ask the Lord to forgive us and enter us through a heart-felt prayer in which we repent of our sins and pledge to serve Him (Acts 2:38; 3:19; Romans 10:9,10).

Christ, who carried all our sins on the cross, forgives us, enters into our being, and we are allowed entrance into His eternal kingdom (John 3:36; Ephesians 2:7-9; Colossians 1:13). He is not a vague being somewhere in the universe. He lives within us (Colossians 1:27; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 2:10).

At this point, we no longer know about Christ, but come to know Him personally (Ephesians 1:13; 5:8; Romans 8:9-11).

It's such a vital, eternal moment that the Bible says we are now a new creation in Him (II Corinthians 5:7).

Because Christ now lives within us, the world no longer revolves around us, and our goals and desires, but what Christ wants to do *through* us (Philippians 3:7-15; Colossians 2:6).

As Jesus says in John 15:5, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth much fruit, for without Me, you can do nothing."

Because Christ now lives in us, we actually *want* Him to lead us, guide us, comfort us, and even discipline us as we no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him (John 14:15; Romans 14:7; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Hebrews 12:6; I Peter 5:7; John 8:31,32; Ephesians 5:17).

The Lord even refers to our bodies as His temple.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Our decision to commit our lives to doing God’s will is so dramatic that Jesus called it being born a second time (John 3:3).

As Jesus Himself says, “Except a man be born of water (mother’s womb) and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God” (John 3:5)

The Bible says the moment we allow Christ into our hearts as not only our Savior, but Lord (boss), we are no longer spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1), no longer “children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3) no longer “alienated from the life of God” (Ephesians 4:18) and that we have become “citizens of the kingdom of God” (Colossians 1:13) and inherited life eternal in God’s kingdom (Romans 6:23; John 5:24).

He has freed us (Galatians 5:1), redeemed us (Ephesians 1:7), made us holy and blameless before God through His eternal sacrifice on the cross (Ephesians 1:4), made our spirits rest in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:7; Colossians 3:1-3), sanctified and glorified us (Romans 8:30) and granted us abundant life (John 10:10).

And, because He lives inside us, His glorious, eternal kingdom will bring ecstasy beyond words.

“For I am certain that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be **revealed in us.**” (Romans 8:18).

The world may not make much of this eternal spiritual transformation, but the Bible certainly does.

In fact, the Bible message is centered around this dramatic moment.

Such a far cry from the fallacious understanding the secular world wants to project.

People will say, “that’s your interpretation.”

They never, though, can point to any Scripture that can back up their own alternative opinion because there is no Scripture in the Bible that backs up their opinion.

None.

Nowhere.

If they do decide to argue their case, they’ll come up woefully short and they’ll be embarrassed.

So it all comes down to this: Do you believe what society, which has never seriously cracked open the Bible, has to say about Christ?

Or would you rather open your mind, leave your comfort zone, and discover what Jesus Christ tells us repeatedly and urgently?

If you want to call yourself a Christian, you must follow what our leader, Christ, has to say.

Another convenient smokescreen the secular world uses is that all good people enter heaven.

Most people will argue they’re “good,” and therefore deserving entrance into God’s paradise.

The Bible is very clear that this is not the case (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5; Isaiah 64:6).

If it were, Christ never would have had to enter this beleaguered world in order to suffer on the cross and carry the sins of the world upon Him, dying even for “good” people.

Heaven is a realm of perfection.

It is sheer peace, sheer righteousness, sheer peace. Why? Because there is no sin in heaven.

Are you perfect, sinless? I didn’t think so; neither am I.

A good person, no matter how moral, is not perfect, and carries some sort of sin in their lives (Romans 3:12). God can’t let that sin enter His paradise because it would contaminate it, much the way a bacteria would contaminate a pristine, mountain pond.

Again, that is the reason why God sent His Son to come into this world, lay His life down for us, bearing all our sins on the cross so that we, by coming to Him, may receive forgiveness and be cleansed of all sin, thus allowing us entrance into His kingdom.

Frankly a lot of people use the “good person” argument as a smokescreen to continue living in sin and hoping the “Big Man Upstairs” somehow doesn’t notice.

There really isn’t enough time or space to cite the multitude of scriptures which hammer home the necessity of this personal, Scripture-led daily walk with the Lord.

And this personal relationship which Christ offers is so much better than anything in this world, where people are running around seeking unsuccessfully to find happiness and fulfillment in their godless lives, seeking to fill that void in their heart that only their Creator can fill.

If I’m truly a Christian, I will choose to follow the words of Christ, not man.

When you just know *about* Jesus, you might utter a few superficial prayers in times of dire straits, recite a few words at a Christmas Mass, or at a funeral. Then we kick Him to the curb, He’s out of our life and we resume doing our own thing.

When we actually encounter Him, we live for him every day, and seek to glorify Him in all that we do (I Corinthians 10:31).

The Lord, out of love, has a stern warning to those who wish to play games with Him, rather than just give their lives to Him.

“Not everyone who says unto me Lord, Lord shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven, but he that does the will of my father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

He warns there’ll be plenty on Judgment Day pleading their case, bragging about all the good works they did, and the Lord won’t be impressed.

He’ll say, “Depart from me, I never knew you (Matthew 7:23).

So, obviously knowing Jesus as your Lord and Savior, versus just knowing about Jesus is very critical; in actuality, it’s a question of eternal life or an eternal existence of suffering far from the blessed presence of God.

Which road will you choose?

When Would You Quit?

Jesus' remarkable sacrifice for us

Billions of people have heard that Jesus Christ came into the world to save mankind from its sins.

Few, though, understand all that He gave up and endured to be able to carry out this eternal mission.

When you read all that Jesus had to endure to redeem us, the question is not whether you would just decide to call it quits; it's *when* you would call it quits.

know a breakdown on how Christ lived in heavenly glory, and decided to come to this world to live a hard life as a laborer in a frontier village, cutting trees with rudimentary tools to eke out a living.

Would you quit here? Being born in a worldly body racked by pain, exhaustion, hunger, thirst is a big drop off from when He was in heaven, not subject to the pains of sin.

In heaven, He was the object of adulation. He willingly entered this world, born in a stable surrounded by animals.

Would you quit at this point and just say, "Father, life was good in heaven. Now I've been thrown into a world filled with pain, suffering, injustice, poverty, lies, darkness. I don't think I can go through with the mission you're asking me to carry out."

Though He is the Son of God, and rules the universe, He now agrees to be born in poverty, although He could have been born into royalty, living a cushy life.

Instead, He volunteers to spend His formative years in a frontier town, Nazareth, eking out a living by doing harsh manual labor. Long before there were power saws, he had to use the rudimentary tools of the day in order to cut trees, haul them to his carpentry site, and then cut them some more to make tables, chairs and beds.

Would you have quit at this point? Would you have argued, "I'm the Son of God. I deserved an easier life on earth. I deserve to live as royalty, with servants at my beck and call."

He launches His ministry, preaching the gospel to people anxious for healing and deliverance, but not wishing to actually try to follow His teachings.

He lives a hardscrabble, exhausting lifestyle, sleeping under the stars, walking from village to village, attempting to get people to turn from sin and serve the living God.

In spite of His healings, miracles, teachings, though, most folks just want to see what they can get from Him with no plans to adjust their lifestyle.

Would you quit here? Would you say, "Father, these people just follow me for free food and miracles. They're not worth it."

As He preaches, heals, does miracles, delivers people from bondage, He's assailed day and night by the religious establishment, which hurls every false accusation at Him relentlessly, and often tries to incite violence against Him.

Would you quit here? Would you say, "Father, the situation here is hopeless. The entire religious establishment is stacked against me, attacking me day and night to prevent me from getting my message

across to the people. They're even planning to kill me, and they have the Roman government on their side."

He's teaching love, forgiveness, compassion, mercy, and yet they say He's the devil.

Would you quit? Would you just say, "Father, these people's hearts are so hardened, and they are so reprobate, that they are absolutely impossible to redeem."

After years of non-stop ministry, He's done everything possible to bring hope, healing and spiritual truth to the people. Despite all His efforts, only a few have decided to follow Him.

As if that weren't discouraging enough, one of these few not only turns on Him, but goes out of his way to get Him arrested so that He could be killed.

Would you quit here? Would you say the situation here is so bad, so hopeless, that despite all I've done in the last three years, I only have a few followers _ and one of them has betrayed me by turning me over to authorities so that they could put me to death for doing nothing wrong!

After He is arrested for no legitimate reason, the religious establishment bring in false witnesses to lie about Him and, after this farcical "trial," have declared Him guilty.

Not only that, these hypocrites are now going out of their way to have you put to death by the most painful, humiliating way during those times _ the crucifixion.

Would you quit now? You know that you have been completely "railroaded" by the most bogus, unjust trial in history by the people you are trying to save from damnation. Would you say, "Father, these people prefer to live a lie and be damned. There's nothing more I can do for them."

The religious people convince the public that He's a blasphemer, although He had fulfilled all of the prophetic requirements of the Messiah that the Jewish people had awaited for hundreds of years.

Roman Magistrate Pontius Pilate gives the public a choice. Should the Romans release a murderer, Barabbas? Or release Jesus?

Instead of fighting to defend the One who had brought nothing but love, healing, redemption and hope to them, the masses call for the murderer to be released and for the One who did everything in His power to help them to be put to death.

Would you quit? Would you conclude that there was absolutely no hope for a people who wanted you dead in spite of all the good works you had done for them while asking nothing in return?

Even His few disciples ran for their lives, unable to stand by their leader in his greatest moment of need. The man who Jesus said He would build his church upon, Peter, deliberately denied three times that he even knew Jesus.

Would you quit at this point? Wouldn't it be logical to conclude that your mission had failed because even the people you chose proved to be a bunch of weak, feckless cowards?

Even though He has legions of angels who could rescue Him at His command, He willingly undergoes beatings and whippings from the Romans who scourged and bloodied Him to the brink of killing His mortal body.

As He deals with the excruciating pain of having iron nails plunged through His body to attach Him to a cross, He's mocked.

As He's heaving for breath on the cross, the humanity He came to rescue from their fates continue to mock and berate Him.

Nearing the end, He reaches the most painful point _ separation from God the Father by carrying the sins of the world upon Him.

At this point He who knew no sin became sin so that we, through Him, could be reconciled to God the Father.

And in doing so, He has to descend to the deepest part of hell in order to give everyone a chance to be reconciled to God.

As He is literally experiencing sheer hell for all humanity, He asks God the Father to forgive them in spite of the horrific, unconscionable acts that they have committed against Him.

After undergoing this unfathomable suffering, injustice, and indifference, He declares as His final words before His mortal body died, "It is done."

Despite the entire forces of hell arrayed against Him, He carried out the mission God gave Him: Making Himself a living sacrifice so that, through His work of atonement on the cross, we can be reconciled to God the Father.

Jesus has a love for us which is so mighty, and for which we are so undeserving.

If you were in His shoes, at what point would you have simply thrown in the towel and said, "These people don't deserve what I'm doing for them"?

Be honest.

Yet He did all this for us, so that we, by accepting Him into our hearts and making Him Lord in our lives, may inherit eternal life.

After seeing all He went through for us, we have to ask: "How can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"

Can you be too “good” for heaven?

Absolutely.

In fact, most folks will miss out on heaven because they believe their “goodness” alone will impress God so much He’ll allow them entrance, not understanding that heaven is a glorious realm which allows no imperfections.

Unless you are perfect, as nobody is, God will not allow you and your sins to enter His Kingdom.

“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

He saw that no matter how hard we try, we cannot rid ourselves of all sin.

And that is precisely why God had to send His Son into this world to lay down His life for you on the cross, carrying your sins (I Corinthians 5:21).

Once you accept Christ as your savior and decide to follow Him, you have been cleansed of all unrighteousness, and made holy and blameless before God (Ephesians 1:4,5).

“For by grace are you saved by faith, and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8,9).

Once we have allowed Christ into our life and are reliant upon Him for our eternal salvation, we will change and the good works will follow. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:9).

This is at the center of the gospel message; we are saved by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross and not by our own good works.

Those who are reliant on their good works getting them into heaven will sadly realize, too late, that their “goodness” alone will not grant them entrance into His Kingdom.

In fact, God likens our “good works” outside of Christ as “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6).

In heaven, there’ll be no one pounding their chests and bragging about what great people they were on earth. There will be no self-righteousness or pride there.

We will be there praising our God for the incredible sacrifice which Christ made on the cross for us.

Has God Called All Christians to Evangelize?

Yes.

In fact, His final words after His resurrection and as He ascended to heaven were these: “Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

And, He says, “Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven (Matthew 10:33).

If someone’s house were on fire in the middle of the night, wouldn’t you feel compelled to wake them up and let them know about it?

If the bridge ahead on the highway has collapsed, wouldn’t you feel compelled to let other drivers know?

Of course you would.

In the same way, when we see that someone is walking on the broad path to eternal destruction, shouldn’t we feel concerned for their eternal well-being?

If they reject salvation, we’ve done our part and now that person is accountable before God on Judgment Day (Ezekiel 3:18,19).

And, because Christ laid it all down on the cross to redeem us, they will have no excuse when they kneel before Him on the Day of Judgment (Mark 16:16).

On the other hand, if we simply share the gospel, some people will accept Christ into their hearts, granting them eternal life in heaven and an abundant, happy life here (John 3:36; John 10:10).

Their eternal destination will be forever altered for the better.

The gospel is the most important message in the history of the world because our eternal destination will be based on whether we accept or reject it (Luke 10:10-16).

Jesus Himself said that there are a multitude of people who will come to Him, if we just open our mouths and share the Good News: “The harvest is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye the Lord of harvest that He send forth laborers into His harvest” (Matthew 9:37,38).

We can’t make them believe; that’s the work of the Holy Spirit. They deserve, though, the chance to at least hear the words of eternal life.

As the Apostle Paul asks, “How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14). And, “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing of the Word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Evangelizing can be as simple as leaving gospel tracts at a gas station, to passing out tracts at a thoroughfare.

It can range from speaking on a bullhorn to just sharing what Jesus has done in your life to a friend or acquaintance.

If they reject you, Ok.

They can do nothing against the truth, only for the truth (II Corinthians 13:8).

As Jesus said, they're not rejecting you, they're rejecting Him, so don't take it personally (Luke 10:16).

When we kneel before Christ on Judgment Day, we'll be rewarded for our faithfulness. "He therefore that confesses me before men, him also shall I confess before my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).

Is it OK to Judge?

It has become fashionable recently to stop all criticism of sin by using Matthew 7:1, which says, "Judge not, that ye may not be judged."

When Jesus said that, He was referring to folks who put themselves on a moral pedestal, acting holier-than-thou in criticizing others for their faults.

The Bible is very clear that we are to speak up when others are living in sin. The following are just a few verses dealing with this subject: Luke 17:3,4; Proverbs 10:17; Leviticus 19:17-19; Proverbs 12:1.

If we see someone who's destroying a family by his/her actions, we're supposed to call them out.

If we see folks who are actively deceiving others, we need to call them out.

If we see folks living a lifestyle not condoned by God, we're supposed to call them out.

The important key to remember, though, is that *all* of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Therefore, we can't put ourselves on a pedestal and claim we're better than them.

We need to speak the truth in love, with humility (Galatians 6:1), all the while remembering that we also need forgiveness for the wrong things we do and say (Matthew 6:14).

As we work to draw closer to God by having Him remove our shortcomings, we can't simply close our eyes to the wrongdoing around us. In doing so, we would abdicate our responsibility before God (2 Timothy 4:2).

If you see someone whose conduct is leading them to hell, should you remain silent? The Lord says we shouldn't (James 5:19,20).

Jesus is our leader, and His actions are our example. His central message was "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

By calling upon us to repent, He is calling out sin everywhere, urging us to stop doing things which displease God, and start living the life that God wants us to live.

By not calling out wrongdoing, we're essentially giving everybody the green light to keep on sinning until they die, appear before Christ on the Day of Judgment, and then suffer eternal damnation.

Is there any sin so great that even God can't forgive it?

When Jesus carried all of your sins on the Cross, He didn't pick and choose.

He carried all of them, even the most atrocious.

It's one of the most amazing aspects about His amazing work of atonement.

He forgave heroes of the Bible, such as David, who not only committed adultery, but murdered an innocent man.

He forgave Abraham, who allowed his wife, Sarah, to sleep with pharaoh, because he was afraid of what this powerful ruler would do to him if he refused.

He forgave Paul, even though when he was a Pharisee he worked tirelessly to persecute the church and imprison all Jews who had converted to Christ.

He forgave Peter, even though this powerful apostle denied Him three times in His greatest hour of need.

The sin He cannot forgive is when someone rejects the One who seeks to forgive him/her.

If you reject the Holy Spirit, which is the One God has sent to convict you of your sins, then there is absolutely nothing more that God can do for you (Matthew 12:31,32).

You have willfully decided you don't want Christ in your life.

God has given all humans free will, the ability to accept or reject Him, to receive forgiveness of sins or to not receive forgiveness of sins.

Once you decide that you don't want to be saved, then God has no choice but to honor your decision, making it impossible for God to forgive you.

Are we going to be persecuted if we are Christians?

Yes.

The darkness hates the light and therefore will do anything to destroy it.

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall* suffer persecution” (II Timothy 3:12).

Note that it doesn't say “maybe;” you “shall” suffer persecution.

The Bible says persecution is a blessing, and that our reward will be great due to it.

As Jesus says, “Blessed are ye when men shall persecute you and revile you and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my name's sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matthew 5:10-12).

If Jesus, who lived a sinless life, was persecuted and even put to death, how much more shall His followers be hated and rejected in a world which is in direct rebellion against God? (Philippians 1:29).

As He told His followers, “If they call the master of the house Beelzebub (Satan), how much more shall they call those of his household” (Matthew 10:25).

History has a long record of Christians not only being persecuted, but tortured, imprisoned and even martyred.

Currently, more than 250 million Christians around the world being seriously persecuted for their faith, making Christianity the most persecuted religion in the world.

In many cases, strong persecution has prompted the church to grow and be stronger because it makes His followers more powerful in Him, leading to a greater anointing.

As He promised in Matthew 10:22, “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But he that endureth until the end shall be saved”

Prophecies which foretold the life and ministry of Jesus

Unlike other so-called religious leaders such as Buddha or Mohammed, there are scores of prophecies in the Old Testament which foretold not only where Jesus was to be born, but His manner of ministry, how Israel would respond to Him, how He would be betrayed and for how much, and all the events surrounding His crucifixion, burial and resurrection.

The chances of even eight of these prophecies coming to pass in the life of one man are 1 in 1017, according to professional mathematicians.

To the layman, 1 in 1017 is 1 in 100,000,000,000,000,000.

Put another way, according to mathematicians, the odds are equivalent to covering Texas with 2 feet of silver dollars and having a blindfolded man find the one you marked on the very first try!

Here are some of the prophecies regarding the Messiah fulfilled in the life and ministry of Jesus.

- 1) He was to be born in Bethlehem (Micah 4:1-8);
- 2) He was to be born of a virgin, prophesied by Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14) and Moses (Genesis 3:15);
- 3) He would be announced to his people 483 years to the day after the Persian king Cyrus would decree that Jerusalem be rebuilt, according to Daniel (Daniel 9:24,25);
- 4) A prophet would announce his arrival (Isaiah 40:3-5), This was fulfilled through John the Baptist;
- 5) He would be humble, and have a ministry of miracles and healing (Isaiah 42:2, Isaiah 35:5);
- 6) He would be despised, rejected and know great sorrow (Isaiah 53:3);
- 7) He would teach in parables and that these parables will fall on deaf ears, as prophesied by David (Psalm 78:1,2) and Isaiah (Isaiah 6:9,10);
- 8) He would enter Jerusalem in triumph (Zechariah 9:9) and hailed as a king, though he would be humble, riding on a donkey. This occurred on Palm Sunday
- 9) Israel would reject its own Messiah (Isaiah 53:3-5). This happened when the multitude called out for His crucifixion on Good Friday, just days after hailing Him as their king ;

- 10) He would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver _ and then those 30 pieces of silver would be thrown into the Temple (Zechariah 11:12,13). This was fulfilled through Judas Iscariot who received the money from the religious establishment to hand Jesus over to them. Out of remorse, he returned the money by throwing it into the temple and then hanging himself;
- 11) The money would be used to buy a potter's field (Zechariah 11:13). The religious establishment looked upon the silver as "blood money" and therefore couldn't be used for religious purposes, so religious leaders bought property with it;
- 12) He would suffer sheer anguish before His crucifixion, according to King David (Psalm 69:14-20). Jesus was in such anguish knowing that He would have to carry the sins of the world upon Him that He sweated blood in the Garden of Gethsemane;
- 13) The Messiah would be silent before his accusers (Isaiah 53:7). He refused to defend Himself before religious and political leaders in the hours after His arrest and before His crucifixion;
- 14) Several more prophecies were fulfilled by Roman and Jewish authorities just prior to His crucifixion and during His crucifixion. For example, He would be confined, persecuted and judged before finally being executed (Isaiah 53:8);
- 15) He would be physically tormented, smacked on his cheeks and spat upon (Isaiah 50:6);
- 16) He would be stripped publicly (Psalm 22:17,18);
- 17) Then, he would have His hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16);
- 18) He would die alongside common criminals (Isaiah 53:2);
- 19) As he is dying, His murderers would be casting lots for his garments (Psalm 22:18);
- 20) He would be given vinegar and gall in his last moments (Psalm 69:21);
- 21) Though he would die a bloody, violent death, not one single, solitary bone would be broken, according to Moses (Exodus 12:36, Numbers 9:12);
- 22) Although the Messiah will have arrived, men will hide from being associated with Him (Isaiah 53:3). His closest followers, who would become His apostles, fled in fear after Jesus' arrest;
- 23) Even his friends would stand afar off after his arrest and execution (Psalm 38:11);

- 24) The Messiah would die a violent death not only for the good of Israel, but for the good of all mankind (Isaiah 53:5-12);
- 25) He would be buried in a rich man's grave (Isaiah 50:3; 53:9);
- 26) The Messiah would lay his life down to atone for the sins of the world (Daniel 9:26, Isaiah 53:8,11);
- 27) He would be fully God and fully God's image (Jeremiah 23:5,6);
- 28) The Messiah, after rising from the dead, would ascend to heaven (Psalm 110:1);
- 29) The Messiah would not only lay His life down for the sins of this world _ but rise again from the dead and live forevermore, as prophesied by Isaiah and Job (Isaiah 53:10, Job 19:23);
- 30) The Messiah would see His followers proclaim His name after being forgiven of their sins (Isaiah 53:10,11);
- 31) The Messiah would ultimately rule over the nations of the Earth (Daniel 7:13,14);
- 32) Israel would be scattered as a result of the nation rejecting him (Zechariah 13:7). In 79 AD, the Romans destroyed the nation of Israel, causing Jews to disperse into the rest of the world;

Yes, critics would say he could have orchestrated some of these prophecies, by acting meek and lowly, not defending himself at his trial, and arranging to have his lifeless body placed in a rich man's tomb.

Yet many of these prophecies were simply beyond his control, such as being born in Bethlehem, given vinegar and gall in his dying moments, dying by crucifixion, not having one bone broken during the crucifixion, being rejected by his own people, His murderers casting lots for his clothes, the sky darkening on a cloudless day, Judas betraying Him for 30 pieces of silver and the Pharisees using it to buy the potter's field.

In essence, Jesus' entire life was completely foretold, a mathematical impossibility.

First Steps



Studying God's Word

How can you follow Christ if you don't know what He has to say?

The answers to all your questions in your walk with Christ are in His Word, the Bible (II Timothy 3:16,17).

Jesus said, "If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31,32).

He has a plan and a purpose for your life, one that will be a blessing to you and allow you to be a blessing to others, (Jeremiah 29:11, Ephesians 5:7, Ephesians 4:7-13).

Knowing His Word and prayer will lead you to find what that plan is (II Timothy 2:15).

He doesn't want us to be nominal believers, but people who will grow in the knowledge of Him, not only for our own wellbeing but for others, as well (Matthew 25:14-30).



Through studying His word, we learn what pleases and displeases Him (Psalm 119:11) and enter into an intimate knowledge of God's character, and that He is so worthy of all our praise.

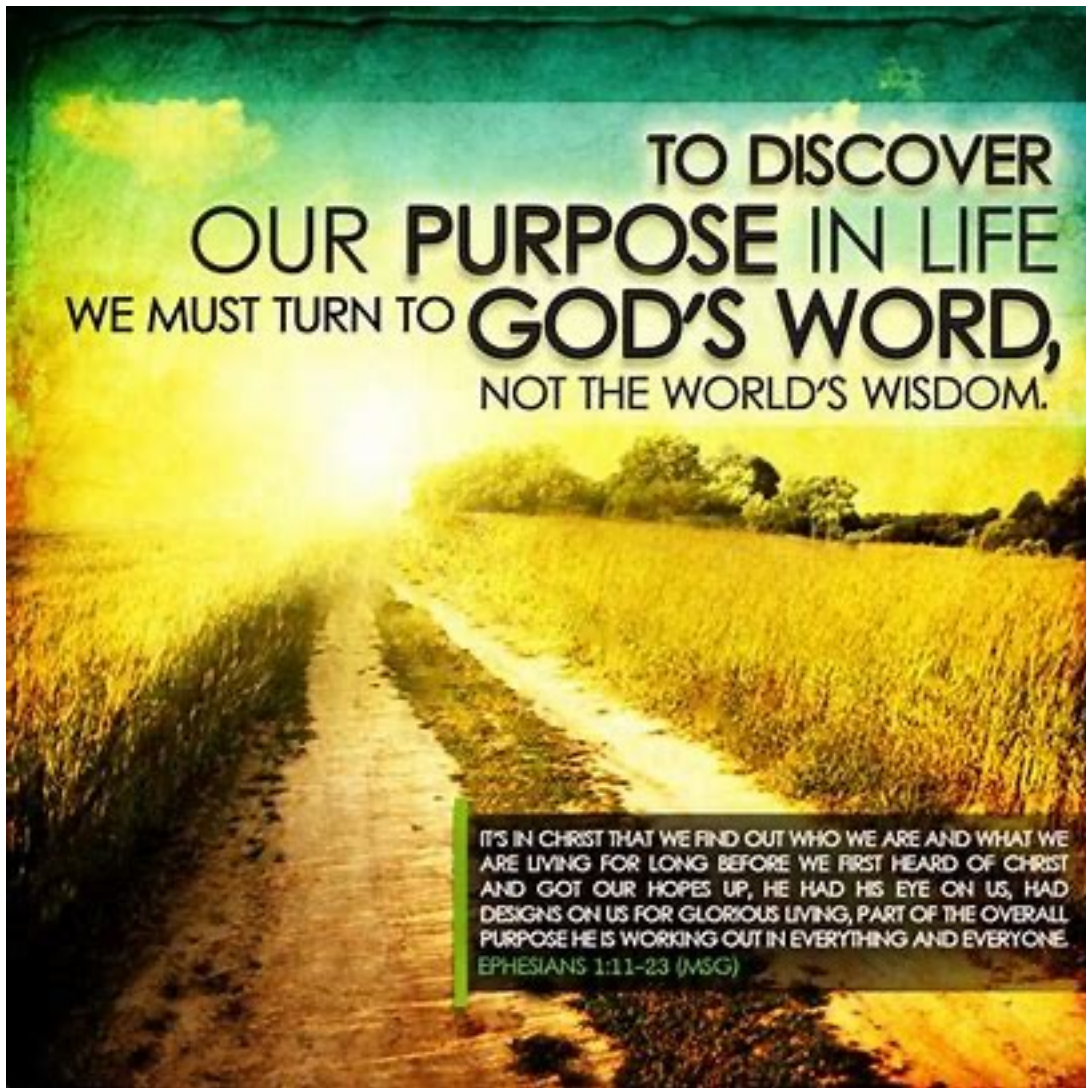
We also will not be led astray by false teachings, because we ourselves know what His word says (Ephesians 4:14,15).

By knowing His Word, we can also help other brothers and sisters in Christ grow.

He wants us to fully understand the gospel message, so that we can share the words of eternal life to those still stumbling around in darkness (Colossians 4:5,6).

He wants your life to be happy and productive, and that comes by leaving behind all the negative, toxic thinking and behavior that afflicts all of us.

"I have to come to give life, and life abundantly" (John 10:10)."



All counsel given in the Bible is for our own well-being, and that of others. For example, it teaches us that we shouldn't overdrink (Ephesians 5:18). How many millions of lives, families destroyed and lives lost because we let alcohol run our lives?

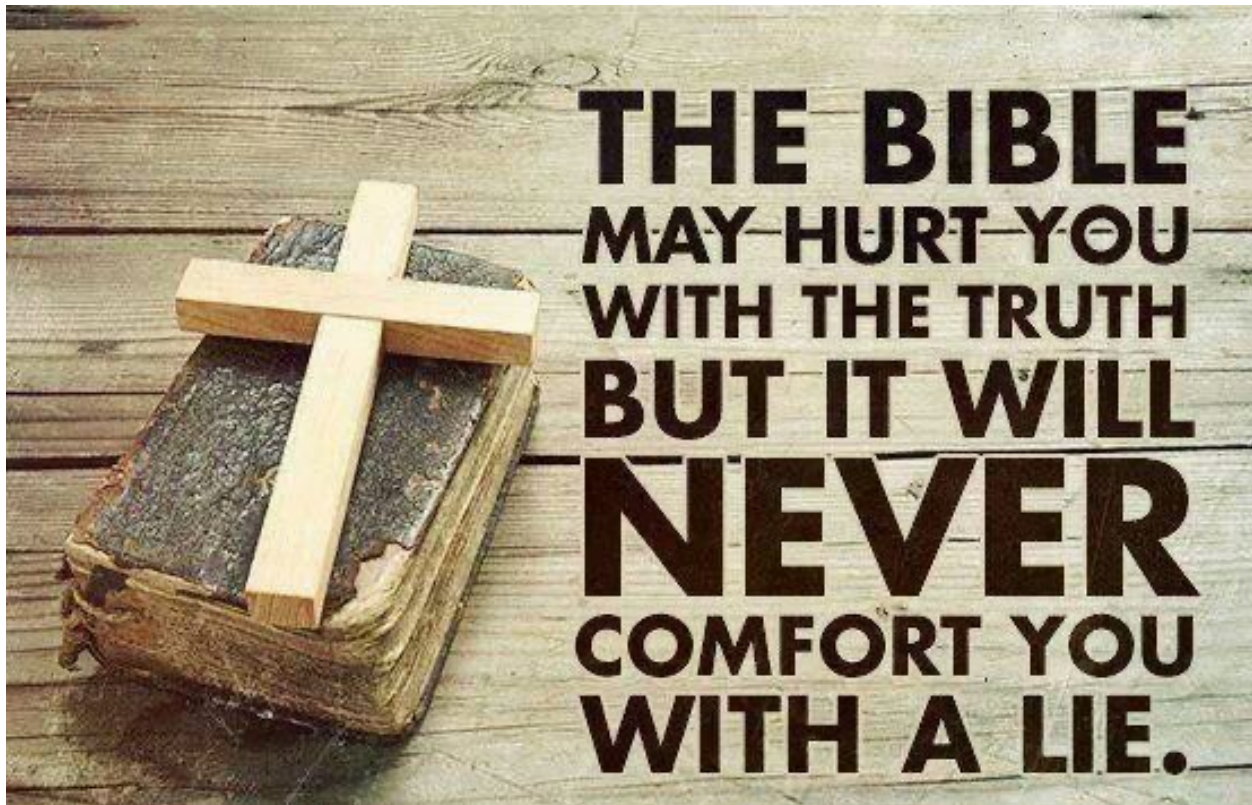
The same applies to using drugs, committing adultery, theft, greed, bitterness, lack of forgiveness, pride, hatred, selfishness. At the end of the day, we end up hurting not only ourselves, but those around us.

Entering a living relationship with Christ will enable us to be immersed in a rare commodity these days _ peace. In fact, He laid down His life on Calvary so that we could inherit His peace (Philippians 4:7, John 16:13, Isaiah 9:6, Colossians 3:15).

Knowing Him and His Word helps us persevere through stormy, difficult times (Matthew 5:4, 11:28; 2 Corinthians 1:4; Romans 8:28; Psalm 119:50).

There are promises and assurances that will lift you up in hard times, and put you in a position to help others also (James 1:12).

It allows grants us practical wisdom in dealing with day-to-day issues (Isaiah 11:12, Job 12:13, 2 Timothy 3:16 and the entire book of Proverbs).



We all have what the Bible calls, the sin nature, which means we are just given to committing sin. With God's help, we can be free of sinful behavior and know through His Word that we can come to Him for forgiveness when we fall (Hebrews 4:16, I John 1:9).

But, like anything worthwhile, we need to make a commitment in order to live the life He wants us to live (Matthew 22:37-40).

Taking time daily to study God's Word will help you grow spiritually into the man/woman of God that He wants you to be (II Timothy 2:15).

Some people set aside an hour daily, others 15 minutes. It all depends on how fast you want to grow in your walk with Christ.

Start with the New Testament at first and try to stick with one book, the gospel of Luke for example, and make it a point to meditate on what you've read and then try to put it into practice.

You'll be amazed at the amazing transformation in your life and will fully understand what Jesus meant when He said, "I've come to give life, and life abundantly."

Congratulations!

If you prayed with all sincerity recognizing that Jesus Christ carried all your sins on the cross, that you cannot enter His heavenly kingdom without personally coming to Him for forgiveness of those sins, and then asked Him into your heart, a monumental moment happened in your life, one with eternal consequences.

First, your soul has been saved (I John 5:13; Romans 10:9) and you will be able to spend eternity enjoying heaven in God's glorious presence (John 3:36).

Your sins have been forgiven, and you have been made "holy and blameless before God" because of what Jesus did for you on that cross (Ephesians 1:4).

God's Holy Spirit has entered into you (Romans 8:11), and your soul has been released from the kingdom of darkness and now dwells in the Kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13).

You have passed from eternal death to eternal life (Ephesians 1:5,6).

Your name has now been placed in the Book of Life (Luke 10:20; Revelation 21:27).

You are no longer separated from God, but have become a member of His family and a citizen of His kingdom (Ephesians 2:19).

You are now "more than conquerors" because you accepted Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (Romans 8:37).

You have been justified in God's eyes (Romans 5:1, 9-18), and will inherit God's holy kingdom, also called heaven, when you leave this temporal world (Romans 8:17; John 3:36).

If you truly repented of your sins, it means that you will no longer want to continue in practices which displease God.

You *will* want to talk and act as someone trying to please God in all things (John 14:15).

You *will* want to read and learn all that God wants to reach you, and then put it into practice (Philippians 2:13).

You *will* want to abandon words and actions which are toxic and which displease God (Galatians 5:21-24).

And, by doing so, He will greatly bless you and grant you a life of peace and happiness you never knew before (Philippians 4:6,7).

You will be living a life freed (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 3:17) of all the world's destructive habits which they try to glorify but which only bring about misery, depression, illness and bitterness.

It's the start of a new, spiritual life, one in which Christ is Lord of your life (II Corinthians 5:17).

The Bible calls this amazing transformation "being born again" (John 3:3-7).

It means that before you came to Christ, you were "children of wrath" en route to hell with no hope of entering heaven (Ephesians 2:2,3).

It means that you spent your first years of life living separated from God the Father, but now have been born a second time into His kingdom (Ephesians 2:5-8).

You are literally only a few minutes old and so, as a child born from your mother, you are just getting started in an exciting, new spiritual walk with your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As you are now an infant in God's eternal kingdom, you need to grow spiritually (1 Peter 2:2).

But, how do I grow spiritually?: Prayer, reading and meditating on Christ's word in the Bible and hanging out with others who have also been born again.

By the way, there are hundreds of millions of people around the globe who have also gotten born again, including about 140 million in the United States alone. So, welcome to a very large family!

Little by little, day by day, you will grow spiritually and become the person God wants you to be (Ephesians 4:14,15).

If you truly prayed to ask Christ into your heart and repented of past practices which you know displease God, you will want to grow in the knowledge of Him, and to seek out his will for your life.

The Lord has a plan and a calling on your life and wants to use you to advance His kingdom (Matthew 25:14-30; Romans 12:1,2).

So, lets go!

Prayer



Prayer is simply sincere communication with God.

You don't need to be on your knees in church to be able to pray. You can pray anytime, anywhere because God is everywhere, has every hair on your head counted (Luke 12:7), knows every word you say, every action you take (Matthew 12:36), your motives, and actually knows you better than even you know yourself (Psalm 139:1-18).

God wants us to be more than just rocks; He wants to have a living relationship with us (John 15:1-5, Revelation 3:30, John 1:10-13, James 4:6-10).

And He wants us to be His followers, not just nominal believers (James 2:19; Revelation 3:15; Matthew 6:24).

He wants us to grow spiritually, not only for our own good but those around us as well (I Peter 2:2).

That means, day by day, we should look to Him for guidance, wisdom, help, forgiveness, strength, consolation in hard times, self-control _ everything (Psalm 23; Book of Proverbs, James 1:5, Hebrews 4:15,16, I John 1:9, II Corinthians 1:6, Matthew 5:4).

Jesus fully understands everything about this world; He lived here as a laborer and then suffered relentless persecution from those in religious and political power.

To cap it off, they whipped, tortured and crucified him, taunting him in the process. He knows full well what this world is about (Hebrews 4:15.16) and understands the trials and afflictions that we, as humans, suffer.

Prayer is the lifeline through which we will be able to understand God's Word, and help to put it in practice (II Timothy 3:16).

As we pray, we see where we're falling short and seek to correct it (I John 1:9).

He has a plan and purpose for our lives (Ephesians 5:17). Through diligently seeking Him in heartfelt communication with Him, He will reveal this to us (Jeremiah 29:13).

By coming to Him in prayer and sharing whatever trial we're going through, He will not only console us, but show where we could be falling short and reveal how to get the victory over whatever issue we're going through, be it personal, financial, work, school, relationships, health, etc. (Psalm 55:22; Matthew 11:28,29; James 1:5).

What Is Prayer?

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ has made a true and meaningful connection with God possible for everyone. God invites the followers of Christ to boldly approach him with their praises, thoughts, needs, hurts, hopes and requests.

PURPOSE OF PRAYER

- Worship God for who he is and thank him for what he's done
- Cultivate a personal relationship with God
- Reflect on daily actions
- Make requests and ask for guidance
- Express faith in God
- Repent and receive forgiveness

Eph. 1:5–6, 11–12; 3:12; Heb. 10:19–22

HOW TO PRAY

- Follow Jesus' example: honor and acknowledge God before making any requests
- Exude an attitude of love and mercy toward others
- Approach God with confidence

Matt. 5:43–45; 6:9–13; James 5:16; 1 John 5:14

HINDRANCES TO PRAYER

- Harbor hatred and anger toward others
- Neglect to confess any sin
- Doubt that prayers will be answered
- Ask with wrong motives

Mark 11:24–25; James 1:6; 4:3; 5:16

GOD'S RESPONSE TO PRAYER

- Listens to the prayers of his people
- Answers those who trust him and ask according to his will

Gen. 25:21; 1 Pet. 3:12; 1 John 5:14

As humans, we will slip and fall. Through heartfelt prayer, He will restore His relationship with us as we come to Him in prayer, seek forgiveness and seek to be freed from repeating the words, actions and lifestyle that we know displease Him (1 John 1:9).



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BIBLIATODO TIP OF THE DAY

**If you make a mistake
remember that
GOD
loves you and corrects you.
Be brave and ask for His
FORGIVENESS**

Revelation 3:19

He will give us direction in our daily walk, providing us insight, wisdom, discernment, restraint so that we avoid life's many pitfalls which attempt to deprive us of God's blessing (James 1:5; Ephesians 5:15 Psalm 119:105; Matthew 10:16, Proverbs 9:10).

The Lord has already made the sacrifice on our behalf, carrying all our sins on the cross so that we can live with Him forever in heaven. When we committed our lives to Christ, He saved us, sanctified us, and granted us eternal life (I John 5:13; Titus 3:5; Ephesians 1:4-6).



PRAYER FOR STRENGTH

Lord, you know me inside and out.
You know about my pain and distress,
you understand the fears of my heart.
At the cross you endured unabating
agony. **You have gone before me into
the darkness And emerged in power
and glory.** At this time I lean on You I
draw my strength from Your endless
love And live in Your limitless grace
Trusting in You.

Prayer is the way to thank the Lord every day for everything He has done for us (Psalm 86:12; Psalm 100:4).

In prayer, we also praise the One who is the one true God, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, all merciful. He inhabits the praise of His people (Psalms 22:3).

Through prayer and worship we enter more and more into God's presence, personally experiencing His amazing love, peace, happiness, righteousness (Philippians 4:6,7).

In prayer, we look to Him as the author and finisher of our faith, and seek to be more and more like Him every day (Hebrews 12:2).

As we look to Him daily, He will show us the way, and we will become more Christlike in our walk with Him (Matthew 7:7,8).

It's impossible to have a happy, joy-filled walk with the Lord without prayer. It's akin to getting through life without oxygen.

The closer we approach the Lord in our daily lives, the more peaceful, happy and productive our lives will be.

