

**TURN MY
HEART
AROUND**
DNUORA

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Formerly titled *Repent or Ruin*

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Introduction - A Great Need

What do you need most? Better healthcare? A better job? More money? A safer place to live? People who understand and love you? Nicer, more considerate neighbors? A way to make a difference? To just be left alone?

What if you had it? What if you not only had it, but had even more than you wanted? Would you be happy then? Would it be enough?

No, it wouldn't.

It might feel that way for a little while, but if you take a deep and honest look into yourself and your past, you will see time after time when you've gotten something you really wanted and

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that it didn't satisfy like you thought it would. It just wasn't enough.

“Fine,” some people have said. “More stuff isn't what I need. Material things won't make me happy.” But...then what? Maybe, we think, it's something abstract or intangible, like a relationship, or better education, or some transcendent experience we're missing. But then people who chase after those things find the same frustrations and dissatisfaction as they find chasing after material things.

We all pursue things and each of us has our own little obsessions and motivations that drive us to take more and more for ourselves.

Others have made an observation as to why we seem to be perpetually unsatisfied in life: in every other area of human life, when we have a need it usually points to the existence of something that can satisfy that need. If you find yourself thirsty, it's a signal from your body that

you need water. If you're hungry it is likewise a signal that your body needs food.

What then, is the reason that we all share such a compelling need for something that we cannot seem to identify and no matter what we try to use to fulfill that need, it simply fails to satisfy? The nature of our need appears to be endless and so large that nothing can fill it. Or perhaps we should say that no *temporary* thing can satisfy that seemingly *infinite* need. The reason is we all share the exact same need for a real relationship with a transcendent, infinite God. If the need is infinite, then the solution, too, must be infinite.

Our greatest need is a relationship with the one true God that we meet in a book called *The Bible*. He's real, he's good, and he's infinitely satisfying.

If this is true, you might be thinking, then how do I get into a relationship with this God?

This is where it might get interesting.

A Single, Scary Word

Repent! What images come to mind when you read or hear that word? Many people automatically think of some creepy, dirty smelly guy with wild eyes wearing a giant sandwich-board sign with angry looking words painted in red that read: “Repent sinners! The End is NEAR!” If you’ve ever seen somebody like that, you’ve no doubt scurried to the other side of the road and avoided eye contact.

I don’t blame you. I would probably do that, too.

It’s funny, isn’t it, how some words - even a small one like “repent” - bring up all kinds of stuff we find uncomfortable, annoying, and perhaps even a trifle scary. Negative images like the one mentioned above are usually what come to mind when we encounter the word “repent.” That’s really unfortunate because repentance is

our friend...wacky, mean-spirited religious zealots notwithstanding.

Despite what you may think, repentance is not about an attitude of condemnation, but saving people from condemnation. If your doctor sat you down and told you he was sorry to have to tell you this, but you have a deadly disease, but if you acted quickly you could be cured, you wouldn't get defensive and tell him to stop being so condemning. You would go through a number of different emotions and thoughts, probably including things like sadness and fear and then you would likely resolve to opt for the cure.

We live in a very sick world where every living breathing human being is born with a deadly disease called sin. But it is not deadly in the sense that it *could* kill us physically, but in that it already *has* killed us spiritually. The Bible says that people *are* dead in their transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1; Colossians 2:13; Romans

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5:12, 6:23). Sin is that which is wrong with us (our disobedience to God's perfect standard and inability to live up to it). It's a condition that affects every part of our lives and bends us away from God and healthy relationships with other people. But by the generosity of God there is a cure and it is free (Romans 6:23).

God himself came and lived among humanity, taking on human flesh and blood, lived a life completely without sin, and died as a substitute in your place and mine to pay the deadly penalty of our sin. This is Jesus who is also called the *Christ* (the Messiah or the anointed/chosen one).

An Invitation and an Opportunity

The call to repent is both an invitation and an opportunity.

Invitation. Instead of hearing the call to repent as a repulsive thing, something that scares and pushes us away, we need to see it as a truly

positive, warm, open-armed invitation from the very God we wrong and offend with our sin.

Despite the offensive nature of our sin, God wants to be in relationship with us, he actually loves us. But since he is completely holy and good and right, he cannot have friendship with a person tainted by sin. That is why he provided a way for us to be saved from sin: Jesus Christ's sacrificial death in our place. But it isn't enough that he died: we have to be made alive again and the only way to do that is to receive the free salvation he offers.

Therefore, we are invited by God to repent: to turn away from sin and turn to God by having faith that Jesus' death in our place is enough to save us.

Repentance is the God-appointed pathway and invitation to leave a life dominated by sin and death, and then to enter a life that is eternal and characterized by God's love and goodness.

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Opportunity. Let's be clear: the call to repent is our great opportunity to be saved. God could have let us remain in sin and death. He didn't have to provide us with a way to be saved, yet Jesus still came and died for us so that we might live forever if we accept salvation. This is a tremendous opportunity, unlike any you will find elsewhere.

No one else can offer salvation. There is no business, no social club, no religion, no philosophy, no single person or group of people, no object, no magical spell that can grant you salvation. Only God can do that...and he has, but you must receive it.

There is no telling what tomorrow - or even the next moment! - will bring. None of us knows when our time will be up. So, the call to repent is not only an opportunity, but an *urgent* opportunity for all people to be saved.

But, if you do not pounce upon the opportunity and receive this free and great

salvation from God, you will not have it. That's how an opportunity works: It's about things that can be...if you decide to act. To not take up the opportunity means you choose to live apart from the God who made you, and designed you so that you would live with him forever. The opportunity means choosing one of two paths: Repent or Ruin.

Seize the opportunity now, because you don't know if you'll be around to seize it tomorrow.

Jesus and the salvation he offers is the greatest human need of all time and the Bible tells us the way to have a relationship with God, the way to receive salvation is to repent and believe in Jesus.

So, what is repentance?

1. What is Repentance?

Before we define “repentance” we need to take a step back and find out why people need to repent in the first place. What caused the need for repentance? For that we turn to the Bible.

God Created All Things Good

All things that exist were made by God. And the Bible tells us that when God made all things he called it all good (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) and very good (Genesis 1:31). One thing this tells us is that God cares about goodness.

What does God want? He wants all things to be good.

But also, and more importantly, this tells us that God is the one who determines or judges

something to be good or not good. In Genesis 2:18, after he created the first human being - a man he calls Adam - he says, "It is not good that the man should be alone." In the middle of a good creation, there was something *not* good, so God did something about it and created a companion for the first man - a woman. So it is God who decrees when something is good or not good, but also we see that when something is not good, that God feels compelled to make it good again.

God steps into the middle of a "not good" situation to make it "good."

We all have some understanding of good. I'm sure you've had at least one moment when you were at peace, at rest, able to sit back and be satisfied when something has gone well. How are you able to do this? You're able to assess goodness because God created people a little bit like him.

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The Bible says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). To be created in God’s image means something about human beings reflects the character of God. We are not gods ourselves, but we reflect God, who created us. Just like my reflection in the mirror isn’t really me...it’s a *reflection* of me, an *image* of me. It’s not like there are two of me: an outside of the mirror me and an inside the mirror me. My image can’t do what I can do, it can only mimic.

As far as the analogy goes, we can’t do all the things God can do, yet there is a distinct likeness of character and other moral similarities. We have the ability to recognize “good” and “not good.” So why do we need to be saved? Why do we need to repent?

Sin

Something went terribly wrong. Yes, God had made the whole creation, including humanity, good and all was in alignment with God's perfect will. The thing that went wrong was us: people. God created a garden and placed the first people into it to take care of it. The garden was good and enough to satisfy and sustain us. It produced fruit to enjoy and fulfilling work. But God also placed something else in the garden: a special tree. It was called the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil."

God told the first people that, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." Humanity was presented with a choice: 1) We could choose to trust and obey God, in which case we would live, or 2) We could choose to disbelieve and disobey God, in which case we would die.

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The first people chose to disbelieve and disobey God. As a result, humanity has been tainted with death ever since. Not merely the physical death of our bodies, but another and much worse kind of death: severance from God who is the author of life.

This is what the Bible calls sin: disbelief of God and disobeying God.

Disbelief. Sinful Disbelief comes in a number of different forms, but a few quick observations may help us understand the basics.

1) *Disbelief in the existence of God.* God does exist. We know this because he has revealed himself in a number of different ways, including through the things he created and through direct communication with people through his Word (the Bible). When we deny the existence of God, we are sinning because we are calling God a liar, even though he is the source of truth.

2) *Disbelief in God's Word.* God has progressively spoken to us down through the

ages through his written Word, the Bible. If someone believes God exists, yet they deny what God has said in the Bible, that is sin. God has revealed truth to us in his Word and to deny that is to deny God himself.

3) *Belief in a false god or false word.* Not long after the first people chose to disbelieve and disobey God, people began to imagine alternative gods who spoke alternative words. Maybe we did this because we were too ashamed of how we offended the one true God, but we still knew that we needed a relationship with him to save us. But instead of seeking forgiveness from the one we offended, we created our own gods who would affirm us as were instead of turning to the one who could make us better. Or maybe we were angry at God because we were now separated from him and just to stick it to him, we made up gods that weren't almost anything like him. Whatever the reason, the

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result was that we denied the true God by worshipping false gods. This too is sin.

Disobedience. Sinful Disobedience, too, wears a few different masks, though the outcome is the same.

1) *Adding to Evil.* Sometimes God commands us to not do something, like the command to Adam not to eat from the Tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. When Adam and Eve intentionally did something God told them not to do, they committed a sinful act. You could call this sinful activity or a sin of *commission*.

2) *Subtracting from Good.* There are also times when God instructs us to do something that is good. But instead of acting on the good instruction, we sit back and do nothing. Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” If you refuse to actively find ways to love your neighbor, even if you don’t act hatefully toward your neighbor, you’ve still disobeyed. This time, however, it was not because you acted wrongly,

but because you did not act rightly. It was not a sin of commission, but a sin of *omission*.

Backs & Faces

A helpful image to understand sin is this: We all start out in life with our backs turned toward God and our faces turned toward sin.

Backs. When we don't like something we see, we often instinctively turn away from it. We not only do this with things that are ugly, but also with things that might be good and beautiful, but are overwhelmingly so. Take, for example, light. Light is a good thing. It enables us to see and not crash our cars at night. But what happens when we encounter an abundance of light? We squint or turn away from it, don't we?

Also, we sometimes turn our back on something as a symbol of our disagreement. If someone says something that has made you very upset, you might want to exit the room, which

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means you'll probably turn your back on them and exit. Or, if there is no convenient exit, you might just turn your back on them to let them see your displeasure.

Finally, we sometimes turn away in shame. If we've wronged another person in a big way, it can be hard to look that person in the face.

These are the kinds of things that not only cause us to have our backs turned on God, but they also keep us that way.

Faces. When we like something we see, we often turn our faces toward it so we can keep seeing it. If you see someone attractive, you might find it hard to look away from that person. Have you ever seen something in nature that made you stop and stare and almost forget what it was you were doing before you stopped?

Here's another one: How about when you've seen something so horrible that you couldn't look away? It's not that it was so beautiful, but the spectacle of the horribleness overcame your

good sense of horror and your eyes were mysteriously drawn to it.

Why is it we can know something is bad and still be drawn to it? And on the flip side, why can we know something is good and true and beautiful and have a dislike for it? From birth, our backs are turned toward God and our faces are turned toward sin by default.

Repentance is turning around

The word “repent” very simply means “to turn.” That’s it, that’s all it means. The call to repent is a call to turn your face to one thing and your back to something else. What the Bible means by repentance is this: We begin with our backs to God and our faces to sin. Repentance is turning our backs to sin and our faces to God.

First you must recognize that you are in sin. This does not mean you have to make a list of every bad thing you’ve ever done or thought. But what you do realize is that sin is at the core

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of your being and nature and has tainted every act and thought you've ever had, even the seemingly "good" ones.

It's part of who you are. This means that you are never going to be good enough to root out and dispose of your own sin by yourself and save yourself. That means you need someone who is good enough. So you turn your back on your sin and turn your face to God. God sent his one and only Son, Jesus - God in human flesh who lived a completely sinless human life, to pay the total deadly cost of your sin. He's the only one who is able to save you or anyone else from eternal death and separation from God.

Followed with Belief

The Bible says that "without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). Also, we see in Genesis 15:6 that when a

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man called Abram believed what God had told him that God “counted it to him as righteousness.” Repentance requires belief in order to lead to salvation. God will enable you to believe in him and he will save you. But first you must turn your back to sin and your face to God.

2. Who Needs to Repent?

If at any point so far you've asked the question, "Who needs to repent?," I hope the answer is very clear: Everyone needs to repent. Everyone is born into this world broken and bent away from God by their very nature.

Everyone

There are two ways we can see this reality. First, we can begin to see through simple observation that everyone needs to repent and receive Jesus as savior. Even if you have a hard time seeing your own need for Jesus, it can often be pretty clear that other people are somehow broken on a fundamental level. Just watch people.

Our world is a messed up place. People who deny this are delusional because the reality of it stares us in the face on a daily basis. I just read a news article about two teenage boys who shot a baby in the face, killing him, when they tried to rob his mother and she didn't have any money to give them.

But wait, you might say, that's an extreme example. Not everyone goes around perpetrating evil on that level. And you would be right...on that level. But the reality is there are countless little ways we deceive each other, mistreat each other, manipulate each other, and reject each other. All of these are evil. And that is to say nothing of the ways in which we abuse ourselves.

In order to live with ourselves we massage our consciences by telling ourselves that "it's just a little thing" we're doing, that it's not *that* evil. But what happens to your character when you allow a lot of "little things" (*evil* things) to slip

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by? Given enough time they solidify an entire course of life marked by injustice and evil.

As already stated, this isn't hard to see. When someone wrongs you once, what awakens in you? Now, what about when that same person continuously wrongs you, even in lots of "little" ways? How does that affect your relationship with that person? Can you trust them? Do you want to continue association with them?

And the truth is that God is completely holy and fully just. He will not eternally partner himself with anyone who is even marginally unjust or evil. That would be contrary to *his* nature, and God will not contradict himself.

The second way we can see everyone's need to repent and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior is by believing what the Bible says about the matter.

The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Who

has sinned? *All* have sinned. That means everyone.

That Includes You

You are broken and bent away from God. It isn't just everyone else who has the problem; you have it too. The Bible says,

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience--among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

This quote from God's Word is very inclusive. It shows how a sinful nature is both an individual problem, and a problem for the entire human race.

Won't God Accept me if I'm basically a Good Person?

Probably the main way people respond to this discussion goes something like this, "But

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I'm basically a good person! I don't do any *really* bad things and actually do a lot of good things. Why isn't that enough for God to accept me?" It's actually a very good question, and to answer it I'd like to make a number of observations.

1) The problem is not one of deeds but of nature. Think of it in terms of finances and bank accounts: evil/sin being a withdrawal and good deeds being deposits. If you assume that that you start out life at a zero balance because you have done neither a good or bad thing, and that you can balance your account if you overdraw by putting more good deeds in, you've missed the reality of what the Scriptures say about our inherent human nature: human nature is sinful and broken by default. We don't start out with a zero balance, but an impossible-to-overcome deficit. No amount of good deeds will ever reduce the deficit, which is our inability to earn our way into God's favor through good deeds.

It's therefore not a matter of outweighing your sin by doing more good things than sins.

2) Regardless of how many “good” things you've done, those good things are tainted by the presence of your sinful nature. One of the writers in the Bible, the prophet Isaiah, put it this way: “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isaiah 64:6).

Just because a deed or a person *appears* good to us, doesn't actually make it good. We are not the authority on the matter of all things good and evil. We can't ever hope to be for at least two reasons: a) Our perspective is limited and we can never know fully what is in someone's heart when they speak, think, or act. God, however, does not suffer the same limitations we do, because according to the Bible, God - through his Word - discerns “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). b) Sinful human nature hinders our judgment and thus

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the ability to judge all things adequately. Again, God does not suffer from the same limitation that we do in this regard. He is not sinful, but righteous (faithful to his Word, Law, and Promises) and therefore trustworthy to act as judge over all things.

3) Ultimately, your salvation does not rest on how much good or bad you do, but on what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf. Jesus Christ was a complete and sinless sacrifice who died (as a substitution for you and me) so that we might live forever, redeemed and purified for life with God in eternity, if we repent of our sin and say yes to him as savior and Lord.

Because it is a matter of being bent away from God at the very core of our nature and being, the thing we need most is a completely new nature. And that is precisely what we find offered to us. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away;

behold, the new has come” (2nd Corinthians 5:17), and also,

...assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Ephesians 4:21-24)

Being a slightly better person who has not received the salvation offered by Jesus Christ is not enough to make you right with God and changes nothing for you. You need a new nature, to be created completely new by God himself and to have your debt stricken from the record forever. That is what we find in Jesus. The Bible tells us that God “[cancelled] the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

This is why repentance is not only a good thing, but it is one of the most freeing and

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constructive things a person can do. Repentance followed with turning to Jesus for salvation means you are freed from slavery to sin and then you are free to build a completely new identity, one centered on the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In the next two chapters we will turn our attention first to the benefits that come along with repentance followed by the consequences of non-repentance.

3. The Benefits of Repentance

The word “repent” gets some unfortunate and misguided bad press. In reality, there are a lot of positive things to be said about repentance from sin and accepting Jesus as savior. In this chapter we’ll explore a handful of the most important benefits that come to the repentant person.

Forgiveness of Sins

The first and most obvious benefit of repentance is that God forgives your sin.

All of it.

Yes, that means both the sinfulness and brokenness of your human nature as well as the entire collection of sinful deeds (those you’ve ever done, you are doing, and you will ever do)

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are forgiven. Forgiveness means that the matter is done and the accounts are closed. God will not bring up the sin of your past; he will not throw it in your face, reminding you how bad you used to be. Experiencing salvation means that the record is wiped completely clean. And yet it is more than that as well.

If it were only about the removal of the sinful nature and sinful deeds, it wouldn't be enough. The old bent and broken nature must not only be *removed* but it also must be *replaced*. Imagine your car is giving you trouble, so you take it into a shop to have it repaired. The repair people tell you they have bad news: it's your engine. The thing is basically dead and probably wouldn't get you out of the parking lot let alone get you back home. So you grudgingly authorize them to repair your car. After a long time they finish up their work, hand you a bill, you pay it (which hurts because it costs so much) and then you get behind the wheel, put your key in the

ignition and turn it. But nothing happens. There isn't even a noise.

You get out, unlatch the hood, and prop it open. As you stare into the machine you immediately see the problem: they took the old dead engine out, but they neglected put a new one in. You're going nowhere in that thing.

You and I are like that car – we need an engine to move. Your old nature - the one you're born with - might get you around, but it isn't as it should be. It won't get you home to God. You need God to not only remove the old nature, but also to put a new one in you, one that does the job of getting you home. That is part of the “forgiveness of sins” package deal.

So, after God takes away that which is wrong he replaces it with that which is right. God grants us an entirely new nature, one that is unmarked by the corruption of sin. The Bible says, “Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices, and

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have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Colossians 3:9-10).

The Bible calls this the *grace* of God. Grace is favor, and it is not something we deserve or earn, but instead it’s a gift freely given to us by God. On this point the Bible says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

Other religions and belief systems focus on the things you have to do in order to get right with God or maybe the universe. In those systems you have to do the right things and say the right words. The problem with that is you might do all the right stuff on the outside and still have a terribly messed up, sinful heart. In other words, even though the core of your being is corrupt, you think you’ve saved yourself by your good works and words.

Christianity, however, emphasizes the need for your sinful nature to be removed and replaced before changing your actions is ever addressed. The Bible also reveals how this only happens as a direct work of God. Only God can forgive your sins and give you the new nature you need in order to follow him.

Friendship with God

God is many things to the repentant sinner. He is savior, he is master, he is sovereign, he is father, he is...friend.

Many people have a view of God that understands him as a distant figure sitting on a cloudy throne, with a long white beard, and mostly passing out judgment to people he doesn't like. That image is a very unfriendly one. Besides that, it's also utterly false. God, throughout the Bible, shows himself in a very different manner.

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One of the great mysteries¹ of just who God is, is to be found in an ancient teaching of God's people – the teaching of the *Trinity*. Trinity means that there is only one God, but that he eternally exists as three distinct persons: God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit. These are three separate divine intelligences that coexist together as one unified God. Therefore God is not a lonely entity, but instead he is an eternal community. God experiences togetherness as part of his nature and character. Thus, God values community. This is why community (church) must be a high value and priority for the rescued people of God.

God, as he has revealed himself in the Bible, desires to be close with and to live among his people. This is part of the reason he has provided salvation to us in the first place. The purity of his eternal character cannot share

¹ “Mystery” is an appropriate word because the truth of the Trinity is nearly impossible to understand.

relationship with sinful, corrupt, broken humanity. So, in order to come back together with the people he made, he chose to provide the way of salvation - and thus the way of friendship with him - at great personal cost to himself.

Jesus himself puts it this way: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:13-15).

Therefore, through salvation God provides the benefits of forgiveness of sins and friendship to the lonely. God is a friend to the repentant sinner. God also provides another benefit to the person who repents: a whole other community of forgiven friends – the church.

Friendship with Other Forgiven People

God knows we cannot do this life alone, so wherever people have turned away from sin and turned to God, there must be a gathering of God's rescued people. In fact, from ancient times God has called people to gather together in his name to be his people. Yet it's not just about having some kind of social club where people hang out and talk about improving their golf swing or trade baking tips. No, the friendship God has designed to exist among his people has eternal significance as well as urgent purpose. Let's take a look at some of the purposes of God's gathered people.

1) *Worship*. As the repentant, redeemed people of God, our attention is to be focused upon him, which is why we give worship to God. Worship is simply ascribing to God his proper worth. This means if you had a list of values which showed the order in which you

valued the things in your life, God would be at the top and most valued position. Yet it's also more than that because it isn't just that God is one among many items on your list of values, but that God himself decrees what is (and isn't) to be on and permeates the rest of your list.

Repentance is itself an act of worship because it is the reordering of values: God takes the place of prominence over sin, indeed God pushes sin off the list of values altogether.

Worship is to be both individual and communal. Some people have a tendency to want to go off and be alone to worship how they want, and to a certain degree that is okay, but it should be observed that God designed worship first and foremost to function in his *gathered* people. Part of why the community aspect of worship is important is that people have a tendency to think and act in ways outside of what God designed when they are alone. It's easier to sin alone because there's no one there

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to call you out on your sinful behavior. Individual worship should come after a person has been together with other believers and learned how true worship happens so that they may worship appropriately when alone. The basic principle is the life of the community informs the life of the individual.

2) *Bible Teaching.* When God's people gather, God's Word (The Holy Bible) should be opened and proclaimed. There is no better way to learn God's view on life and what is true than to study what he has said to us. The first way this happens is that when God's people gather for church a person who has been trained how to handle the Bible will step forward and teach from it to those present. The person who performs this task is sometimes called a pastor, minister, or simply a Bible teacher.

Many pastors, ministers, and teachers have different ways of doing this all-important task, but it's important that this does activity does not

deteriorate into therapy, life coaching, or motivational speaking. For the people of God to be in direct connection with God, they must hear from him, and this happens primarily through the exposition of his Word.

3) *Mutual Encouragement.* Friendship with other forgiven people means that you actually get to become friends with them. It should be noted, however, that this friendship is not one that can remain at a surface level of pleasantries exchanges. The relationship that exists between one member of God's church and another is designed to be mutually beneficial. This begins with an encouragement which passes between members.

At one point the Bible says, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Hebrews 10:24-25). The priority

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of meeting is clear, followed by an understanding that meeting will include encouragement to “love and good works.” This kind of activity only happens well when people are forged together in positive relationship.

4) *Preparation for Service.* Our salvation is not intended to be something we keep for ourselves, but it is something we get to share in service to others. There are as many ways of serving others as there are people to do the serving. The beauty of God’s Church is that it is made of a diverse array of talented, skilled, and gifted people. God loves variety.

There are several sections of the Bible that talk about how God has gifted his gathered people with a multiplicity of abilities in order to advance God’s salvation purposes in the world. At the end of one of these lists, the purpose of the gifts given is “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:12). “Saints” is one of

the New Testament's ways of referring to those who have believed in Jesus Christ for salvation and have been set apart for new life.²

Some people think church is about getting “my spiritual needs” met, like a weekly religious therapy session. It isn't. Church is about getting equipped and prepared to serve. To become a part of God's gathered people means we will learn to check our egos at the door.

5) *Inviting Others to Salvation.* Jesus is God, who came from heaven to earth, born in human flesh and blood, grew up sinless and died as a substitute for all who would place their faith in him as savior and Lord. Then he returned to heaven to reign over his people until he returns to establish his full reign over all creation and set all things right and judge the living and the dead. But, just before he returned to heaven, he gave his followers instructions. He said, “All authority

² You might be tempted to make the mistake of thinking a saint is a person who is especially holy, but that is not the case. The word “saint” simply means “one who is set apart.”

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in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

The prime directive of all Christians is to share the good news of Jesus with others. This is why being a part of the gathered people of God can be so encouraging: that can be intimidating when you have to think about doing it alone. As members of the Church, we get backup and support from other members. Many people think evangelism is something they have to do alone, but early on in his ministry, when Jesus first sent his students out to tell others about the good news, he sent them out in pairs.

The Church is in place so that through worshipping God, solid Bible teaching, and mutual encouragement, we will be prepared for

service and equipped to share Jesus with others and invite them to the salvation he offers.

Sacred Work

One of the fundamental benefits we receive from repentance is purpose. But not just any old purpose. It isn't something we can manufacture for ourselves or catch from attending some seminar. It is awakened exclusively through the reception of salvation from Jesus Christ. In other words, the instant you're saved, you've got it.

And because it comes only through Jesus, its nature and value are eternal in character. The purpose we get from salvation permeates all corners and spaces of your being. It is safe to say that the way you do everything is to be affected by repentance.

A large aspect of this new God-given purpose is the sacred calling we all share in Jesus. The purpose God has in mind for those he saves

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is to make each and every one of us an integral part of his ongoing work to bring more and more people into relationship with himself, to save and restore them.

This doesn't mean you have to become a professional minister or a missionary who lives in a mud hut somewhere...although it might. God often surprises us with longings we never would have expected. But understand that whatever job or career you find yourself in, that it is in some fundamental way changed because of what God has done and will continue to do inside of you.

If God has transformed you, he will transform your work.

These are but a few of the benefits of repentance, and each branches out in finer detail the more you explore them and journey with God. But it is also important for us to observe the consequences of non-repentance as revealed in the Bible.

4. The Consequences of Non-Repentance

In the last chapter we explored the benefits of repentance, those things that enter the life of the follower of Jesus Christ which are the unique gifts that are not shared by those people who refuse repentance and reject Jesus and his offer of salvation. In this chapter I want to help you examine the opposite reality: we will explore some of the major consequences of refusing repentance.

For the sake simplicity, I have taken each of the benefits from the previous chapter and will show what the consequence of non-repentance means in those same areas.

Remain in Sins

If the first benefit of genuine repentance is that we can experience forgiveness of sins, then

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the consequence of refusing repentance logically means that a person will remain in a sinful and broken state in which they will continue to be bent away from God by nature. Do not assume this means that nothing will change for the unrepentant person. The difficulties you face as a result of sinfulness and sinful acts in your life at present always have the possibility of getting worse. Just because things can't go up doesn't also mean they can't go further down.

Sin always has a degrading effect: it seeks to either make the present conditions worse or to invent new ways to lower the standards of things like life, goodness, and justice. Think, for example, of someone who suffers an addiction to alcohol or some other kind of drug. Does that person tend to stay at the same basic degree of addiction or do they tend to get worse over time? In most cases, unaddressed addiction takes a person downward because the object of the addiction is never enough. The addict always has

to have one more, then one more, then two more, then three more, then...

That's sin at work. It will gradually dehumanize the person caught in its grip. The reason for this is that every sin problem is basically a worship problem. God created us for himself, so that we would worship him. Something in our basic nature compels us to worship. Because we are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27), we are only worshipping rightly when our worship is directed to God.

Sin entered the picture, according to the Bible, when instead of worshipping God we began to worship the things God had made. The Bible says, "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature

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rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen” (Romans 1:24-25).

When the Bible says “God gave them up,” we see that God allows people to enter into and suffer the consequences of sin, of worshipping the things God made rather than worshipping God. If you continue to read in Romans 1 from that point onward, you see a very degrading picture, one that shows all humanity slowly drifting away from God with heartbreaking and dire consequences.

This is what happens to the person who remains in sin: you become gradually mastered and defeated by sin so that your every thought and action is dictated by the objects of your desire and worship and you become helpless to stop doing those things which bring you shame and guilt. Your identity becomes so rooted in it that you will not be able to imagine your life without your sin, no matter how self-destructive it makes you.

Distance with God

While God greatly desires to be your friend and to have eternal relationship with you, if you do not repent and believe in Jesus, that kind of relationship is impossible. This isn't because God has some silly set of rules or feels he has to set up some hoops for us to jump through in order for him to love us. The reason is that God's character and nature is incompatible with our sinful human character and nature. Just as oil will not mix with water, God's holiness and righteousness will not mix with our sinfulness and rebelliousness.

It is only through repentance and faith that we will draw close to God and receive salvation. The Bible, describing the situation of those who have placed their faith in Jesus, says, "remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no

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hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12-13).

And make no mistake; you were designed to be in direct relationship with God. In the last chapter we looked at how God, in his eternal nature and character, is a three-in-one community we’ve come to call the *Trinity* and how this means God values community. We’ve also already examined the fact that we are made in the image and likeness of God, meaning we share certain facets of his character, albeit in a limited manner. One of the results of this is that we desire to connect to community in general, but more importantly we instinctively crave connection with the eternal community of God.

This means that apart from entering into a saving relationship with God through Jesus we remain disconnected from God and experience the denial of our basic eternal relational need.

Not only that, but we will continue to seek to meet this need through all manner of means that can never fulfill that need. This will result in dissatisfaction and frustration and perhaps becoming stuck with a set of hobbies, relationships, and obsessions that are in fact harmful because they direct us farther away from God and because they cannot bear the weight of the need that only God can fulfill.

Togetherness with Other Unforgiven People

In the previous chapter we saw that one of the ways God helps the forgiven people he's saved to get on well in life is by gathering them for mutual encouragement and to give God worship. When God's people gather to study his Word and worship God and love one another they become influenced by the presence of God himself and are equipped to do God's work in the world.

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The unrepentant person lacks this togetherness. Now, to be clear, those who have not accepted Jesus as Lord and savior are completely welcome to attend church. An unsaved person may even benefit from spending time with God's gathered people. In fact, that is one of the ways in which people will encounter the living and true God and become drawn by God toward salvation. However, sitting in a building where saved people gather does not mean you are yourself saved. God saves people by convicting them of sin and regenerating their souls when they repent and accept Jesus.

While there may be some marginal benefits for the unrepentant unsaved person at gatherings of God's church, they remain unconnected to God's people in one fundamental way: in God himself. The people of God share in God, the unsaved do not. This places a person on the outside of God's people.

Consequently this means you have togetherness and friendship with those who are outside of the people of God. At first glance this may not seem like a big deal, but considering how all people derive meaning and purpose in life from those with whom they are in relationship, this begins to take on eternal implications.

We are all influenced in our thinking and actions by those people with whom we make friends. If you are in constant contact and deep friendship with people who deny God by their words, deeds, and very nature, you will be more and more influenced to walk away from God and his offer of eternal life and restoration.

Chasing after the Wind

Because an unsaved person stands apart from God, he or she won't be able derive ultimate meaning and purpose from the only possible source of it: God himself.

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This is why some people spend years in school and training for careers they believe will fulfill them only to discover they are still missing something. There may be some measure of satisfaction you feel from your work, but you inevitably come out at the end feeling somehow incomplete. That satisfaction you experience in moments of good work comes from the common grace that God gives to all people and which shows us hints of the special grace we need from Jesus in order to be saved.

Common grace is the favor God shows to all humanity. Jesus tells us, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:43-45). Jesus is encouraging us to act the same way God acts by

treating our enemies the way God treats his enemies: by loving them and not withholding goodness from them.

He reveals that God shows goodness to all people by sending things like rain and sunshine, which are absolutely necessary for people because they rely on farms for sustenance, farms that cannot produce our food without rain and sunshine alike. When you enjoy something very ordinary, like a meal or time with friends, you are experiencing common grace. God likewise instituted work in the very beginning of humanity and infused work with purpose and meaning and that, too, is an example of common grace. It is a general kind of favor God shows to you as one of his special, God's-image-bearing human creations...yet it is not enough to save you.

The book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible refers to this practice of seeking fulfillment and meaning in almost every area of life apart from

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God as chasing after the wind. You can't, of course, catch the wind, no matter how much you chase after it. It's too fast and there's nothing to hold onto.

Once you realize that there's nothing outside of yourself that will give you meaning, you are left to invent your own meaning. But if you are honest with yourself, after a while of assigning your own meaning to life you will still find that it is insufficient to bear the eternal need you carry inside of yourself.

Any meaning you conjure or receive from someone else cannot satisfy because it lacks the necessary eternal nature and character that is found only in God. All else is chasing after the wind.

Ruin

Ultimately, the price of non-repentance is ruin. This has several dimensions.

The first dimension of this ruination is found in the day-to-day reality in which you now live.

We've explored much of this already in this chapter regarding remaining in sin, distance with God, togetherness with other unforgiven people, and chasing after the wind.

The second and more severe degree of ruin is found in your eternal future. On this the Scriptures are clear:

This is the evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, **inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...** (2nd Thessalonians 1:5-9, **emphasis added**)

This is complete ruin and it is the full and final consequence faced by all who refuse to repent and receive the salvation offered by Jesus, the Son of God, the true Lord of all creation. To

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some this sounds harsh, even cruel. How could a God who claims to love all humanity subject anyone to eternal punishment?

The reality is, it is precisely because God loves humanity that he sent Jesus to provide the way of salvation. Nobody has the right to live peacefully with God in the coming renewed creation. Nobody deserves it, and nobody can earn it because we're all born broken and bent away from God by nature. And yet, nobody has to be eternally separated from God. We are presented with two options: **Repent** or **Reject**. Repentance is electing to respond to God's generous offer of salvation. Rejection of God and the gospel is election of eternal separation from God.

You either want God or you don't.

5. How do I Repent?

Having examined what repentance is, who needs to repent, the benefits of it, and the consequences of refusing to repent, we turn now to the next logical area of focus, which is to examine how a person actually repents. Please note that while repentance is a singular thing, the following explanation represents two necessary aspects or elements of the act.

Say No to Sin

Begin with the recognition that you possess a sinful nature and that out of that nature you have performed both explicitly sinful acts as well as tried to perform both mundane and good acts that were tainted by your sinful nature. Also,

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know that without God's intervention your life will continue to be this way. In other words, start with the understanding that you have a sin problem.

Having acknowledged and named the problem you are prepared to make the first necessary motion in the act of repentance: to turn. That is, after all, what the word "repent" really means – it means "to turn." If you need to go somewhere, you map out the directions you will need to follow in order to get to your destination. What happens is you take a wrong road? Do you keep going down that road and assume you will get to your destination all the same? No, of course not. You will only end up moving farther and farther away from where you mean to go. To correct this you *turn around*.

The same is true when it comes to salvation from sin and all the brokenness and ruin that it entails. When you finally understand you are headed in a sinful direction in life because of

your very nature and the deeds which spring out of it, your first necessary move is to turn around, to turn your back on sin.

Say “no” to sin. This is an act of intention in which you make a statement to God that you no longer desire to be broken and bent away from God by sin.

Say Yes to God

After having decided you no longer want to live in sin, brokenness, and deadness, you turn to face God and to say “yes” to him. This means accepting all that God has for you and wants for you. It is an entirely new agenda for life as well as a new life altogether.

Jesus died for you as a perfect sacrifice in order to provide an utterly new life, one that is not characterized by ruin. It is eternal life, meaning it is not limited by the boundaries of time and also that it is a life that will be lived alongside God himself. He is at the center of it,

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being the endless source of life that not only last forever, but it is qualitatively different as well.

Saying yes to God means accepting a life that is better than the one you had before, that it shucks away all of pettiness and evil limits that acted as a prison for your soul. When you say yes to God you are set free from the sinful nature that is broken and bent away from God. You don't need it any more.

This is both a present reality and a future promise. In the here and now, though we live in a world filled with brokenness and sin and though we may be tempted to return to the weak, filthy, and familiar details of our old sinful nature, we have an assurance that we are new creations with an assured place in God's eternal kingdom.

Part of what we accept from God is the work of being a present manifestation of God's future kingdom. We are subjects and citizens of the future God has planned for the world and we are

colonizing the present world with its values and the good news that Jesus has made salvation and entrance into God's kingdom possible. That which is waiting for us in the future informs how we are to live today.

Mean it

This is not about a formula that when performed the right way automatically produces the desired result. It's not like a math equation and it's not about magic or ritual, but heart change. This may be the most important thing for you to grasp about repentance - that it is a matter of the heart and not a matter of performance.

You have to mean it, and I mean really mean it for it to work. It comes down to whether or not you actually believe in Jesus - who he says he is and in what he has done for you.

Belief is key.

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There is a story in the Bible where a man comes to Jesus, asking for help. His son was possessed by a demon that frequently forced the boy to harm himself. During their discussion, the father said, “But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us” (Mark 9:22). The rest of the passage reads,

And Jesus said to him, “‘If you can!’ All things are possible for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:23-24)

When we see our own sin and our disconnection from God, our hearts must cry out as the father of that demon-possessed child cried out: I believe; help my unbelief! Allow your heart to be so desperate for Jesus, for relationship and connection with the one true living God, that you would beg him to not only look upon your belief in acceptance, but that you would ask him to eradicate any unbelief that might lurk in you.

Believe God with your whole being and allow him to undo the depths of your sin and raise you to new life in Jesus Christ. Trust him with a great unflinching abandonment. Say no to sin and say yes to God and mean it entirely.

But also know this, if your faith starts out as a mere tiny spark in the darkness of your sinful heart, know that it is enough, and that the small spark of faith is itself a gift to you from God.

An Act of God

Really everything in the whole process of repentance and salvation – saying no to sin and saying yes to God – is made possible by God. We can do none of this on our own apart from the power that God gives to us to enable us to do so.

It is a communication between God and the sinner, but it is one that is begun by God. God already knows what is in your heart and your mind, but you must decide and act regarding the

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salvation he already has on offer to you. Understand that God has done all the work, prepared the way, and offered salvation. God even oversees and makes possible your ability to say yes to what Jesus has done for you.

In the deadness of our sinful nature, we never could choose God on our own. Dead men and women do not choose life: God makes them alive. Before we ever think to turn away from sin and to face God, God does something in us to wake us up to our brokenness and deadness. Repentance is merely your awakened response to the grace of God already working in you.

6. The Gospel of Jesus Christ

One of the most important words in the vocabulary of followers of Jesus is “gospel.” The word itself simply means “good news” or “good announcement.” The reason for its importance is that the gospel is all about Jesus and Jesus was all about the gospel. The Bible is very clear that the gospel is why Jesus came to live in human flesh in the first place. The Bible says, “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, **proclaiming the gospel of God**, and saying “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel**” (Mark 1:14-15, **emphasis added**).

That short passage from the Bible tells us quite a bit about what Jesus wanted most: he wanted people to repent and believe in the

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gospel so that they could enter the kingdom of God. This was his purpose, his aim. So it is important for us, then, to *know* what the gospel is and to *believe* in it. Knowing and believing the gospel is how we say “yes” to Jesus’ offer of eternal life and salvation.

Therefore we will now examine briefly, but in a complete enough manner so as to be effective, the content of the gospel so that you – the reader – may know and believe in the good news of Jesus Christ and his kingdom. So, what is the gospel?

The Gospel

First, the gospel is about God’s kingdom.

God is the king. Note, he is not *a* king, as if he was one king among many, but he is *the* king: the king of all kings, and the one from which all kings everywhere derive their temporary rule, and he is also the one to whom every king must eventually bow. He is the ultimate or primary

king because he is the creator of all things, and so all things (including all people) belong to him. By his very nature he is sovereign over all things. Everything and everyone is accountable to God.

The entirety of existence, then, is God's kingdom. The reason for all the brokenness and death in the universe is not God's fault, however: it is our fault. We are the ones who first chose to rebel against God's wise commands (Genesis chapter 3) and we are the ones who continue to do so. Because of this brokenness which bends us away from God by nature, God decided to enact a plan to restore his broken kingdom. Since the brokenness and sin began with humanity, it was toward humanity that God directed his plan. This is where Jesus and the gospel come in.

God took upon himself the form of a human – those creatures responsible for the state of brokenness in the world – and lived a life without sin, announcing that God would soon

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become king again. The Bible says, “For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17). The word ‘reign’ shows up twice in this one verse, and *reigning* is a kingly activity. Death used to reign, it says, but then it indicated now Jesus Christ reigns, and those of us who are in Christ by faith reign with him.

So what is this gospel we must believe in to be saved and enter this kingdom? At this point it is best that we let the Bible do all the talking. At one point the Bible says:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: **that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,**

and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he **appeared** to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of who are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he **appeared** to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he **appeared** to me. (1 Corinthians 15:1-8, **emphasis added**)

Here we learn the key essentials of the gospel, the truth in which we must believe. 1) Christ died for our sins, 2) He was buried, 3) He was raised three days later, and lastly, 4) He appeared to a lot of witnesses. This is what God has done so that you might enter the eternal kingdom he has prepared for those who trust him.

I Have Repented and Believe in the Gospel ...Now What?

Now you are a part of the family of God's redeemed people. But don't think that you're supposed to go on your merry way and not think about it very much again. You've only just begun your life with God and you've got a long way to

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go and a lot of things to learn. Here is a list of things to help get you started on your journey.

Note: The following list does not represent any order of importance. Everything on the list is important and should be given equal attention.

1. *Find a Bible-teaching Church.* Your first move should be to find a church that believes in and teaches the Bible. In fact, I would recommend that you find a handful of churches and begin attending their worship gatherings which will usually be on Sunday mornings. If possible ask if you can talk to the pastor (he'll probably be the one who stands up and preaches a sermon – hopefully from the Bible). Ask the pastor two questions: Does this church believe the Bible and does it teach from the Bible? If the pastor answers both questions with a “yes” then that church is a good candidate.

Wherever you end up you should make an effort to regularly attend at least the regular weekly worship gatherings. The reason for this is

that you will want to be in regular connection with other believers. Many of them will have been followers of Jesus for a while and may be able to answer questions you might have. Additionally, it is just good to be with other Christians who love God and care about each other.

Other things to consider in selecting a church: 1) Aside from the regular weekly worship gathering, does the church do any small groups and Bible studies throughout the week? 2) Are the regular members of the church generally warm, friendly and accepting? 3) Do they care about people in the community who don't attend the church, and how do they show this? 4) Does the church talk about and care about Jesus?

2. *Get a Bible & read it.* God has sought us out to have a relationship with us, has even caused himself great personal pain in order to make that connection possible, so it only makes sense that

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we do everything we can to step into and maintain that relationship. The Bible is one of your two most direct ways to connect with God. The other way is Prayer, which we will take a closer look at in a moment.

The Bible is God's Word and therefore represents his thinking, values, and will for us. The Bible tells us, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teach, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2nd Timothy 3:16-17). God has breathed out his Word and it was recorded by human authors, working in conjunction with God to express the truth of God in ways to be apprehended by people. "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2nd Peter 1:21).

While it is a book, it is unlike any other book. Here is something else fascinating the Bible says about itself: it is alive.

For **the word of God is living and active**, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:12-13, **emphasis added**)

When you open the Bible and begin to read it, you might find God reading you right back. This is part of the reason I have included a lot of Scripture passages throughout this little book; I have done so with the hope that your encounter with God's Word will affect you. It is divided into two major sections: The Old Testament – in which sin entered the world and people waited for the coming of a savior – and the New Testament – in which the savior, Jesus Christ, finally came and opened up the way of salvation to all who repent and believe the gospel.

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The Bible is actually a collection of sixty-six smaller books written over hundreds of years by over forty different human authors working in conjunction with God to record his Word for us. The languages that the Bible was originally written in were Hebrew (the Old Testament) and Greek (the New Testament), so it had to be translated into other languages such as English.

Several good translations exist, and some not-so-good translations exist. Therefore when you are selecting a Bible to read and study, it is important to select a good translation which is the product of the tremendous efforts of many serious and trained scholars. The version I have quoted throughout this book is the English Standard Version (ESV), which I believe to be one of the absolute best English translations available. Two other very good translations are the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) and the New International Version (NIV). Each version will translate the ancient languages in

slightly different ways, but they all report to us the same Word of God.

3. *Pray.* Prayer is simply talking with God. That's how you maintain most of your normal friendships, isn't it? You talk with them and spend time with them. This is what prayer is for the follower of Jesus Christ: active time in friendship with God.

You don't have to do anything special. Many people close their eyes and lower their heads. These are fine, but not necessary...also they are not advisable if you are driving your car on the freeway or operating any other heavy machinery. You can pray anytime and anywhere. You don't even have to open your mouth to speak the words, though you may certainly choose to do so if you find it helpful. God knows your every thought, so you may choose to simply *think* your prayers at God if you want.

But prayer is vital because it is the other very important and direct way in which you connect

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with God and align yourself with him and his agenda for the world. Think of prayer as one of your hands and studying the Bible as your other hand. What would happen to your ability to do certain things in life if one of your hands was destroyed? It would become a lot harder to do many things, wouldn't it? In the same way if you neglect studying the Bible and/or prayer and only focus on one of them, you are cheating yourself.

Additionally, just as it is often helpful to use both hands at the same time during a single task, so too, prayer and studying the Bible go well together. You may even find it beneficial to pray in your heart and mind toward God the very things that you have read in the Bible.

4. *Get baptized.* In case you are unfamiliar with that word, baptism is an ancient act involving water, in which a new believer in Jesus makes a public commitment to following Christ with his or her whole life. Two people are usually

involved: The person who is getting baptized and the person who does the baptizing.

The word “baptize” means “to immerse.” The baptizer immerses the new believer in water (usually in a laying backward motion, relaxing them into the water) and then pulls the new believer right back out again. Often there are a few words spoken, such as, “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This comes from Jesus’ important command to all of his followers when he said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20, **emphasis** added).

Baptism is an important symbolic act which represents Jesus Christ’s own death, burial, and resurrection. Immersion into the water

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represents his death and burial and coming up out of the water represents his resurrection. But it also represents all of these things happening to us as well, because Jesus died for our sins, in our place and then rose again from death on our behalf, and when we repent and believe the gospel, we are placed in Christ and receive his life as our own. Baptism is then a symbolic act which represents our reception of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

5. *Share with others.* As we saw two paragraphs ago, Jesus commanded those of us who have been saved to “Go...and make disciples of all nations.” When something good happens to you, you often want others to know about it. So if you have been redeemed, saved from a path of ruin, consider sharing the good news with someone else who needs it.

This is our most important, our most urgent calling and task as followers of Jesus Christ, to share with others the good news with someone

else who is on the path of brokenness and ruin. Remember, everyone needs to repent and receive salvation because everyone is born broken and bent away from God by nature.

There is more than enough salvation to go around. Remember, in the Bible we discover that, “For **God so loved the world**, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, **emphasis** added). God loved the world. Not just you. Jesus’ gospel is enough to provide salvation for the entire world.

6. *Keep repenting.* If you have repented and believed the gospel you are saved. Period. But you will also notice in very short order that you still sin. Unfortunately that does not go away automatically, as nice as that would be. So what’s the deal?

You only need to be eternally saved once. You might call that being saved from the *penalty* of sin. The Bible tells us, “Who shall separate us

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from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:35, 37-39). We will not be separated from Christ’s eternal love for us, nor his salvation of us.

But this world is still full of sin and brokenness, and though your old sinful nature has been given a death sentence and you have been separated from it and have been given a new nature in Christ, the old nature is still hanging around, reminding you of your favorite sins from your old life. Therefore we find a continuing need to repent of individual sins we

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do, to turn away from those things and reorient our lives to face God and accept his ways for us.

God himself will help you in this. The best way to allow God to do work in your life, to save you daily from the *power* of sin is to be in his Word and in prayer, connecting with him.

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