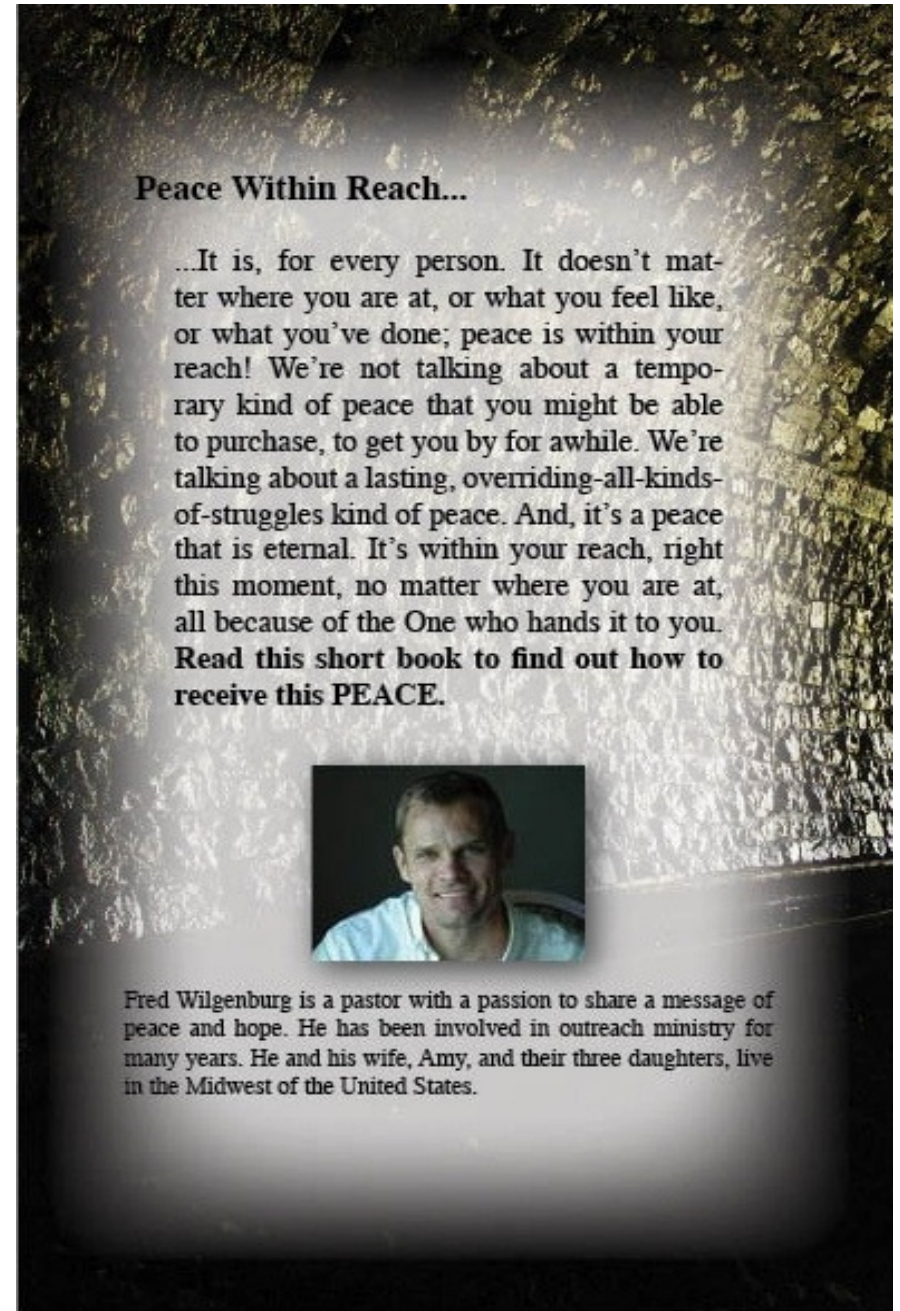


(Front Cover)



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PEACE Within Reach

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PEACE Within Reach

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**Check out our website,
www.PeaceWithinReach.com, an interactive,
engaging blogsite.**

Introduction

PEACE is 1. freedom from war and public disturbance, 2. freedom from disagreement or quarrels, 3. an undisturbed state of mind, serenity, 4. quiet, calm.
--- Webster's Dictionary

If those are meanings of "peace," then this booklet should offer you some real peace of mind. But will it bring more *quiet* and *calm*? Depending on your present lifestyle, it might do that, but not necessarily. This booklet's message may cause the level of activity in your life to increase much, even though a sense of peace will increase right along with it. Without a doubt, if people would personally receive the message of this book, there would be more peace in the world.

My assumption is that the message in these pages will frustrate some readers because it is different from how they think about life. Also, I assume that some readers may be indifferent to the message. I respect that and request you to just take this 60-minute journey of reading this short booklet. Please visit www.PeaceWithinReach.com to communicate further, including concerns you might have. We will respectfully respond.

--- Fred Wilgenburg, author

Contents:

Chapter 1 --- You Are Worth It!	<u>Page</u> 2
<i>RATIONALES</i>	
Chapter 2 --- Even Though We Make a Mess	8
Chapter 3 --- How Did They? Can I?	12
Chapter 4 --- Really Strong!	17
Chapter 5 --- What Costs Are Involved?	22
Chapter 6 --- What About Church?	26
Chapter 7 --- Putting It All Together	29
Chapter 8 --- Nine Commonly-asked Questions	35
Endnotes	48

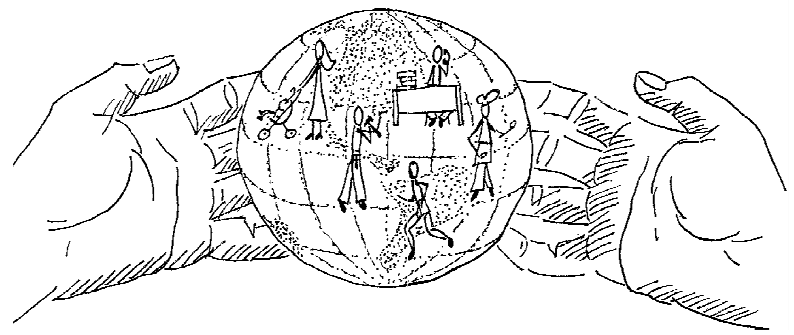
You are different from every person who has ever lived. The human body is made up of about 10,000,000,000,000 (10 trillion) cells. Each cell lives, and inside each cell there is a nucleus that is the cell's control center. The nucleus contains chromosomes that contain DNA. Every one of the 10,000,000,000,000 cells in your body has the same DNA, and your DNA is different from every person who has ever lived. Your DNA make-up determines your blood type, the color of your eyes, the color of your hair, and thousands of other characteristics. Unless we are acquainted, I probably don't know you personally. But I know you have great value; you are of great worth. I do not think that because I'm so caring, I know that because you are a human. I know that

**Chapter 1
You Are Worth It!**

God says, "I know you, John." "I see you Anneka."

As a human, I know you, Hakim. I know you, Rosa. For you and every other person living on the earth, you have the image of God in you.

(That statement, and the following paragraphs, might frustrate some people, so they desire to discard this booklet. If you also feel that way, please jump forward to the shaded area on the next page --- "Rationales," before finishing this page. It will at least allow you to understand my perspective.)



Genesis 1:26-27 (The Bible NLT) God said, "Let us make people in our image, to be like us, and fill the earth. So God created people in his own image; God patterned them after himself; male and female he created them."

Because of that, He has known a personal relationship with God, in which you can talk to Him in prayer. Having the image of God in you, you reflect the wisdom of God. You can think and make choices, unlike animals that do things by instinct. You have a

Rationales
For many years, some scientists have tried to prove that the existence of God is false. Rather, they have tried to prove that everything has solely evolved (grown) over millions and billions of years to what it is today. Through that, many have admitted to proving that their theories are actually false. In his book, How

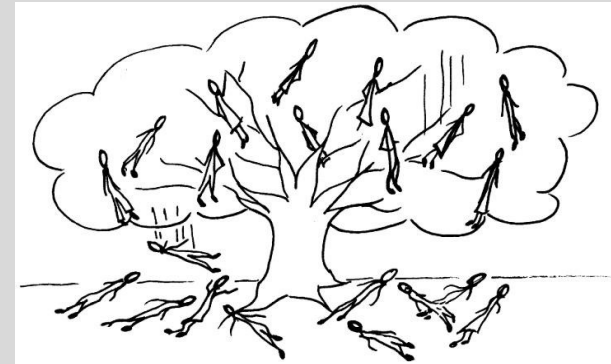
Now Shall We Live?, Charles Colson describes how this has happened. Long before the information age [when microscopes, telescopes, and computers became available], the living cell was thought to be quite simple, and it was easy enough to think life arose by **chance**, that it just kept growing on its own to whatever]. [A cell is the basic unit of life; all living things are made up of a bunch of cells.] Biologists took refuge in the idea of nearly endless time. Given enough time, anything can happen. But as science began uncovering the complexity of the cell, it became harder and harder to hold on to chance theories.

The computer revolution put an end to any chance theory of life's origin. Beginning in the 1960s, mathematicians began writing computer programs which simulated [imitated] evolution over the equivalent of [what would equal] billions of years. The outcome was jolting: The computers showed that the **probability [likelihood]** of evolution by chance processes **is essentially zero**. Today it is common to hear prominent scientists scoff at the idea that life arose by chance.²

But some scientists, in still trying to support that theory, have taken on the task of proving then that life has arisen (started) . . . by forces in matter itself. These scientists are searching for some force within matter that directed the process.³ They call this "force" the Big Bang which they say occurred about 15 billion years ago. Though it is unknown what caused the Big Bang, they say the Big Bang laid the foundations for the universe. It happened as tremendous heat was caused by the Big Bang, which caused common particles to form. These common particles are known as atoms. These atoms combined in certain ways to become amino acids, the building blocks of the rest of matter, including cells. From here, things have just kept evolving to what they are today.

The problem with this Big Bang theory is explained by Professor Dean Kenyon of San Francisco State University. He was one of the original strong supporters of the evolution by

chance theory and one of the authors of Biochemical Predestination, a widely used college textbook. If you look at the experiments, Kenyon states, "one thing that stands out is that you do not get ordered sequences of amino acids If we thought we were going to see a lot of spontaneous (automatic) ordering, something must have been wrong with our theory."⁴ What the experiments (as performed in neat, controlled, laboratory environments) do produce is mostly a sludge of gummy brown tar, a non-biological material from which nothing can grow.⁵ Professor Kenyon, among others, has since accepted the idea of an Intelligent Designer (God) as the answer to the origin of life.⁶ Some of life does evolve, but not by chance.



A strictly evolutionistic, god-less understanding of the world would view every living thing, including us humans, as if we were leaves in a forest. The leaves grow, living on trees for their season, until Autumn. Then, they die and fall off, joining other fallen leaves, and over time they rot away and are buried by falling leaves of the next year, and the next. The leaf, a human life, lived during its season and now its life is over; it falls to the ground, likely to be forgotten in this impersonal, cold, 'world-machine' that somehow started millions or billions of years ago. It's done. Make room for the next. **Do you see that for yourself?**

I believe that God is the Creator, the Intelligent Designer, behind the amazingly detailed and complex world; He's the

Cause of life. Believing that God is behind all of it is not unscientific. Atoms, amino acids, and DNA are all real and carefully selected, arranged, controlled, and organized by an Intelligent Cause -- by God.

That naturally leads me to the Bible, the most widely read book in the world, the one book on which a hand is placed as oaths are made in the courtroom or at a presidential inauguration. The Bible is defined as God's Word.

In II Timothy 3:16 of the Bible (NLT), it is written, "All Scripture is inspired by God . . ." This means that God breathed His Spirit on the writers of the books of the Bible to write what He desired to communicate to us. That verse then goes on to add that the Bible ". . . is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right."

Can I prove to you that the Bible is God's Word, and that it's trustworthy? No, not completely, but we can get close. Like all other ancient books, the hand-written original of the Bible is not available, so we turn to the earliest manuscripts available. As more manuscripts, that is, ancient copies, are found, then the original can more accurately be reproduced. Regarding the New Testament (2nd-half) portion of the Bible, there are more than 24,000 ancient hand-written copies of the New Testament in various ancient languages, including 5300 known manuscripts in the original Greek language. In comparison, the 643 manuscript copies that exist of Homer's Iliad, a well-respected classic, is the most for any other ancient work. There are only 10 manuscripts ever found of Caesar's War Commentaries, and 7 for Plato's Tetralogies.⁷

Okay, but how early were the manuscript copies written in comparison to when the events in the Bible took place; that is, when were the originals written? One manuscript copy, John Ryland's papyrus, containing a few verses of the Gospel of John of the Bible, dates only some 35 years after the original was written by John. The Bodmer & Chester Beatty papyri, which

contains a majority of the Bible's New Testament, dates only 100-150 years after the originals were written. In comparison, the next major ancient writing, that of author Virgil, has earliest manuscript copies having been written 300 years after the originals were written. The next ones, including Homer's Iliad, range from 500-1000 years after the originals.⁸

Research has also shown a much higher degree of copying accuracy from ancient manuscripts of the Bible in comparison to ancient classics like Homer's Iliad or Mahabharata, a popular ancient religious book.⁹

As well, much evidence of archaeology (study of ancient civilizations and its relics or remains) has proven that events and places described throughout the Bible were there and did happen.

It cannot be proven that God is the Designer and Manager of the world against the thought that the world with everything in it has somehow evolved on its own to where it is now and it just manages itself. But looking at all of the evidence, such as an ordered solar system which keeps the earth just far enough away from the sun so that we neither burn up nor freeze, or the fact that there are over 600,000 different kinds of insects, or that some animals have the ability to hibernate in the winter --- staying alive for months without eating or drinking, or the fact that the life of a mother and father can develop a completely original, new life in the form of a baby, all give me a strong faith that God, an incredibly intelligent Designer, is behind it.

Hebrews 11:1 of the Bible (NIV) defines faith as "being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see."

As well, I can't prove that the Bible is God's Word. But looking at the research that shows the Bible has a much higher degree of being an accurate, real copy of the original manuscripts, in comparison to any other major ancient writings, and seeing in life how the Bible consistently rings true gives me a strong faith that the Bible is God's Word for us.

Chapter 2

Even Though We Make a Mess

Because we are made in God's image, we have the ability to have a personal relationship with God. Within that ability we can honor God or dishonor God. Sadly, we often dishonor God. People have been dishonoring God since the beginning of time when the first people described in the Bible, sinned. This means they did something that was contrary to God's will. Their first sins included falling to temptations, disobeying a direct order from God, and blaming others instead of taking responsibility for their actions. These are described in Genesis 3 of the Bible.

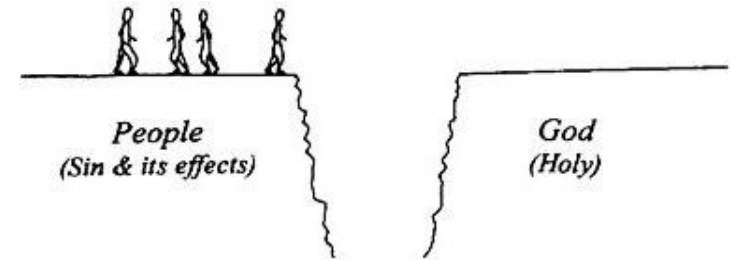
Sin includes lying, stealing, murdering, gossiping, being controlled by addictions, being jealous or selfish, hating others, degrading others, falling to hurtful temptations, profaning others, and anything else that dishonors God, our perfect Creator. Sin hurts everyone. In many cases, the sins that people commit are harmful to themselves, physically and emotionally. Sin causes pain for others affected by a person's sin. Sometimes large groups of people, even an entire country of people, are hurt by the effects of the country's oppressive, selfish leader. Sin hurts everything. Genesis 3 of the Bible explains how pain, suffering, diseases, and natural disasters resulted from sin. A frightening disease like cancer was not in the world at the beginning of time. It entered the world after people began to sin, as an effect of sin. Finally, death is the ultimate effect of sin for every person.

Romans 6:23 of the Bible (NIV) reads, "for the wages [the cost] of sin is death . . ."

We have the image of God in us, but sin delivers a nasty blow to our ability to be good reflections of God's image.

Isaiah 59:2 of the Bible (NLT) reads, "Your sins have cut you off from God," who is holy.

Being holy, God is perfect and set apart from all sin and evil and He requires some justice, and some punishment for our sinfulness, because since the beginning of time, we as humans have made the choice to sin. Sin separates us from God, like a deep canyon that cannot be crossed.



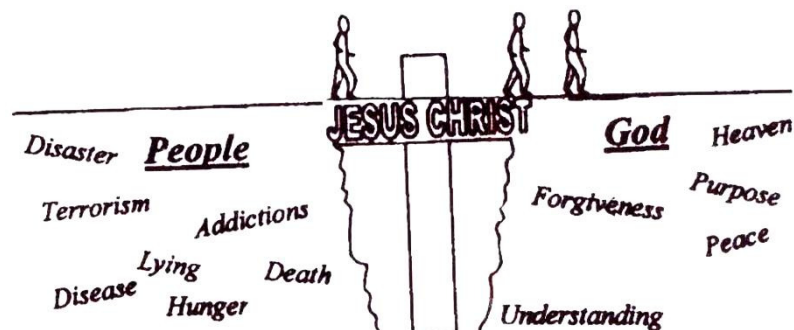
That separation of us from God does not have to stay that way. God is holy, but He is also loving and gracious. God offers to each person the opportunity to be cleaned up from sin, to be brought back into a good relationship with Him.

John 3:16 of the Bible (NLT) reads, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish [die] but have eternal life [go to heaven]"

This 'Son' is Jesus Christ. *(I imagine the name 'Jesus' may have struck a nerve for some readers, especially if you are of another faith. Would you please strive to read on with an open mind? At the very least we can admit that Jesus lived a good life, he taught many good things, and he was unjustly killed).* Over thousands of years during which the Old Testament (the 1st part of the Bible) was written, the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Redeemer, was forecast, and He finally came.

As Romans 5:8 of the Bible (NLT) reads, "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."

The Bible describes how Jesus Christ is God Himself, the only perfect One who could handle punishment for sin. He took humanity's punishment, died on the Cross, and then He defeated death as He came alive again from the grave, so that we also



can rise from death and go to heaven. (*'Jesus as God' is explained in #6 on page 41.*) Jesus Christ offers a bridge over the deep canyon of sin that separates us from God. The only step that you and I need to take is to believe.

Most religions and religious cults leave the burden of getting right with God up to people. If people will just live good-enough, holy-enough lives, they can reach God. Or, if people can just find god-like qualities and abilities somewhere deep within themselves, they can reach God. Or, if people just live better and better lives, they will keep coming back in future lives as higher order beings, and finally reach God. Some people rely on some vague understanding of a very distant Higher Power that may have been shared with them by their forefathers.

These systems of relying on ourselves fall short. Live good enough? I cannot, on my own. I know how 'human' I am, far from reaching God on my own through certain spiritual exercises. And the idea that someday I will reach a vague spirit-world because ancestors may have said it would happen? What assurance is that? What we could not do for ourselves, God did for us. Through Jesus He offers us salvation from our sin and its effects.

Murderers can even reach God through Jesus Christ. A certain man was a serial killer and a cannibal. A few years after he was imprisoned, he learned about God's acceptance of him and he put his faith in God. He faithfully attended chapel in prison before being killed there by another inmate.¹⁰ A certain woman was known as the pick-ax killer and was executed in prison for her crimes. A heroin user at age 10 and a prostitute as a teenager, she placed her faith in God six months following her arrest. Among her last words before being executed was a plea for people to accept God's love and forgiveness.¹¹

God says in Isaiah 44:22 of the Bible (NLT), "I have swept away your sins like the morning mists. I have scattered your offenses like the clouds. Oh, return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free."

Chapter 3

How Did They? Can I?

Imagine standing in the middle of a wide river where the water is up to your chest. The water is flowing downstream at a fast enough pace that you can just barely remain standing in one place. A powerful, crushing waterfall is 400 meters downstream. Your life depends on you getting to the side which is 200 meters away. You are not a very strong swimmer but you try to swim anyway. Meanwhile, a boat has pulled up next to you and you are offered a ride free of charge. Are you going to accept what seems to be the only good choice --- the boat ride?

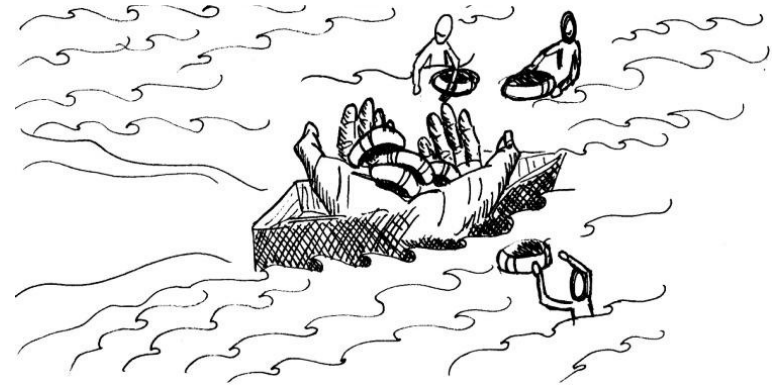


In life, God is the captain of the boat, offering that ride.

Jesus said in Matthew 11:28 of the Bible (NLT), "Come to me, all of you who are weary [tired] and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

Ahhh, rest. It is amazing how often we decline God's/Jesus' offer. Sometimes it is with an attitude which says, "I will do it my way, by myself. The money that I am already getting tired of working for is buying me a lot of happiness,

right?" At other times, people seem to enjoy, at least in the short-term, the rut that they are in, and which keeps growing deeper. In a way, the troubles and problems are exciting, and they choose to deal with the consequences later. "No one is going to tell me how to live my life." Sometimes people believe that getting into the boat would mean giving up on themselves and entering a rigid or boring life.



The choice of getting into the boat offers tremendous "goods" for life! But, it does require one big step. In the middle of the river, as you are trying to hold your own as time is running out, and as the Captain of the boat is offering you a ride, you must finally be able to say, "I cannot make it; I need your help."

Repenting is a big part of this. "To repent" is to reflect on who God made you to be as a person made in His image, to express a sincere apology for the sins that you do, and to have a sincere desire to be cleaned up in order to live a better life. Repenting is "letting go" of your sins that are nearly toppling you over in that tough river called life, and "letting God," as you climb into His boat. Through all that Jesus did, God has already written out your "Certificate of Forgiveness;" you just need to go up and receive it.

How did the people described at the end of the last chapter receive peace from God? They believed! In other words, they saw the grace and the love that God offers to people, which they had not yet received, and then they humbled themselves and

said, "God, I'm sorry. Please forgive me and lead me." In doing that, they started to have some real peace and hope and they started to feel some real purpose in their lives. Climbing into God's boat of grace doesn't mean that all of your sinful habits, and the consequences of your sins, will just disappear. Though we will do our best to honor God because we will be thankful to God, we will still stumble; pain of various kinds will still come into our lives; death is still approaching. We are still human! But as God forgives us through Jesus Christ, and as He gives us healthy purpose in life, and as He holds a room in heaven for us, we will become more free from sin, and better able to deal with consequences of sin, even death.

I admit, I don't know what your life is like, or where you've been. You may be in a situation that is tougher and rougher than I could ever imagine. You may be lonely and feeling depressed, and feeling like no one cares. I am sorry for you and how you are feeling.

When I met Rebecca, she was fifteen years old. She was raised mostly by her dad after her parents broke up. Her mom was an alcoholic who went to jail frequently for alcohol violations. Though Rebecca loved her dad, she was often bullied by her older brothers and sisters, especially her one sister. Her older, stronger sister would often threaten Rebecca with serious physical harm. Once the older sister was sitting on Rebecca and choking her. Rebecca grabbed a knife and stabbed her sister in the side. Violence, which first was a way of defense, soon became Rebecca's way of life. She became mixed up with a violent gang. Her initiation into the gang was to carry out an act of serious violence. Rebecca shot an innocent bystander in the kneecap. She thinks the victim had to have part of his leg amputated because of the injury, for which Rebecca later felt very bad. Rebecca sold illegal drugs for the gang. Through all of this, Rebecca became distrustful and depressed, and she felt used and hopeless.

I met Rebecca when she moved to our city to again try to live with her mom to get away from things back home. But shortly after Rebecca arrived, her mom again wouldn't show up at night or would come home drunk. She would be mean to Rebecca, often cussing her out. Rebecca started staying at friends' houses and skipping school again. The authorities put Rebecca in the Juvenile Detention Center for skipping too much school. Her mom, who was in jail at the time, asked me to visit Rebecca because she was worried about a question Rebecca kept asking her and Rebecca's father. Rebecca's question was, "What do you think heaven will be like?" Rebecca was depressed and thinking about taking her own life.

But Rebecca's question was a good one. "Rebecca, according to the Bible, heaven is a wonderful place to look forward to, where there will not be any more pain and suffering and abuse, and where you will be in the presence of God forever." (*Consider reading more about 'Heaven' in # 9 of page 46.*) Soon after, Rebecca started on a healthy, meaningful walk through life, hand-in-hand with Jesus, and understanding that she will go to heaven some day, according to God's time.

Many people, like Rebecca, live in difficult conditions. What is the worth of living in conditions where there is not enough food and medicine to keep your child healthy, or where you have been violated physically and sexually by thugs who were maybe even hired by government officials (as is the case in some countries) to hurt you, or where you have a disease that will not go away, but will only get worse until you die? It is sad what some people must live through, and even worse, many people live with these difficult conditions alone, not knowing that they can look above and beyond this earth, to God, the One of peace and hope that cannot be stripped away. With God, we can know we are not alone. He, the Almighty Creator, will personally walk with us. Remember, through Jesus and His death on the cross, God was at the receiving end of the worst of cruelty, by the hands

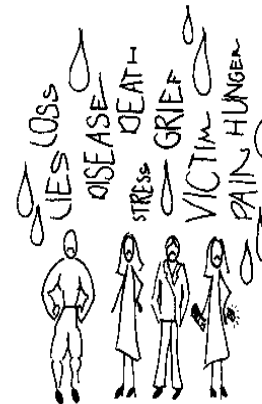
of people. He has been there, and He cares about what we go through. And, if we are willing to listen, God, the Understanding One, will reveal to each of us His special call for our lives -- for one thing, maybe to have us help others through a similar situation.

Angola Prison is home to some 5,000 men --- rapists, robbers, and murderers, 61 percent of whom will die there. It is a prison that, in the last several years, has been transformed from being one of America's bloodiest prisons to one alive with hope. Much of this transformation is due to the prison warden, Burl Cain, and to God. When he became warden, Warden Cain erected a huge concrete sculpture at the front gate that reads: **"Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14 of the Bible (RSV))**. Every incoming inmate sees it. Throughout the prison and its programs, inmates are encouraged to accept God's grace and the purpose and meaning for life that it brings, even in prison, encouraging them to live as better men. Even when a punishment of execution is to be carried out, Warden Cain holds the prisoner's hand, praying for him and telling him that if he trusts in Jesus Christ, he will be met on the other side by an angel who will take his hand from there and guide him home (TO HEAVEN). Through the grace and truth of God, the once bloodiest prison in America has become one marked by grace, compassion, love, and hope.¹²

Chapter 4 Really Strong!

Earlier it was described how God, the Creator and Sustainer of the world, knows you personally. He uniquely designed you as a person made in His image. Acceptance of that truth will offer some hope and strength. Next, we talked about our sin, but how God's love was then specially expressed as God the Son, Jesus, took our punishment of death on Himself to offer us forgiveness of our sins, and heaven, when we die. Personal acceptance of that truth will offer even more hope and strength.

Without God



With God



There is more. As Jesus saw that His time on earth was coming to an end, He promised His followers that He would send to them the Holy Spirit of God.

In John 16:5-7 of the Bible (NIV), Jesus said, "Now I am going to him [God] who sent me, . . . it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not

come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Verse 13 reads, "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."

God never leaves you and me alone to somehow get through life on our own. He never says, "I'll see you later. Good luck on your way through life!" No. All along the way, God is with us. He encourages us with the truth of His love and grace when we are down. He gives us the courage and wisdom to be all that He made us to be. And, He pricks our consciences and brings us back on the right path when we fail. This is all done through the Holy Spirit.



God is constantly there with you -- in your home, in your car, in your room, at work, in your cell -- through the Holy Spirit. He is just a prayer away. Maybe you are thinking, "But I don't know how to pray."

In Romans 8:26-27 of the Bible (NLT), it reads, "And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father [God] who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying."

(Read more about 'how to pray' in #5 on Page 39.) God is completely on your side, working out the best for you and those around you, even when you don't know what to do, or how to do it. He can read your deep, inner struggles and concerns, and the

fact that you sincerely want help, and He helps you. Prayer is just telling it to God.

God the Holy Spirit works through our prayers, but He also works through us. Do you ever ask yourself big questions like, "Why am I here?" "Is there any purpose to my being here?" "What am I supposed to do in life?" Over time, God will reveal answers to these questions. Often it goes along with your natural talents and abilities.

In I Corinthians 12 of the Bible (NLT), it's written, "A spiritual gift is given to each of us.... To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice...The Spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick..."

Several more spiritual gifts are mentioned and it is the Holy Spirit of God who gives these gifts. He decides which gift each person should have. When you begin to know God personally and to have a relationship with God, He begins to turn your talents and abilities into gifts --- gifts that benefit those around you and honor God.

Here are some people who opened their lives to God. They were Holy Spirit-strong! Betsie and Corrie Ten Boom were sisters who were prisoners in a concentration camp during World War II. Corrie wrote about their concentration camp experiences and about her sister Betsie's unshakable faith in God. The conditions in the women's concentration camp at Ravensbruck were terrible. During the war, over 132,000 women went through the camp; an estimated 92,000 of them died there --- many in the gas chambers or from starvation.¹³ Corrie wrote about their barracks, "Fleas! Betsie, the place is swarming with them! Here! And here another one! Betsie, how can we live in such a place!?" Meanwhile, Betsie prayed, "Show us. Show us how." She then responded, "That's it, Corrie! That's His answer. 'Give thanks in all circumstances!' That's what we can do. We can start right now to thank God for every single thing about this new barracks! 'Thank-You,' Betsie went on serenely, 'for the fleas and for . . .'"

Days later, Betsie said to Corrie, "You know we've never understood why we had so much freedom in the big room (for holding Bible studies with the other prisoners). Well, I've found out. The guards wouldn't step through the door. And you know why?" With triumph in her voice: "Because of the fleas! The place is crawling with fleas!" Corrie wrote, "My mind rushed back to our first hour in this place. I remembered Betsie's bowed head, remembered her thanks to God for creatures I could see no use for." Betsie, who was very sick during her time at the camp, later died there in great peace, despite the awful physical surroundings.¹⁴

In the 1950's, Jim Elliot was killed, along with some others, by native peoples in the jungles of Ecuador as they sought to become friends with the native people and to spread the good news of God's love to those who had never heard of it. Jim Elliot once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep [his life] to gain what he cannot lose [heaven]."¹⁵

Mother Teresa, a famous Catholic nun who won the Nobel Peace Prize for her care of those living in poverty, said the following. "I see God in every human being. When I wash the leper's wounds, I feel I am nursing the Lord Himself. Is it not a beautiful experience!?"¹⁶ Mother Teresa's daily prayer was, "Dear Jesus, help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go. Flood my soul with Thy spirit and love. Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine. Shine through me and be so in that every soul I come in contact with may feel Thy presence in my soul. Let them look up and see no longer me but only Jesus. Stay with me and then I shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others."¹⁷

The Apostle Paul, who wrote several of the New Testament letters in the Bible, and who was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, put in prison, and finally executed, wrote in

Philippians 1:21 of the Bible (NIV), "For to me, to live is Christ [Jesus], and to die is gain."

In other words, no matter what, I am okay because I belong to God. **Each of us can be Holy Spirit-strong, too, by personally entering a relationship with God.** (*The process of entering a personal relationship with God is explained in the section, "Putting It All Together," on page 30.*)

which expresses thanks to God for all that He gives. God, who is holy, asks us to put aside sin in our lives. Usually these sins have been tripping us up and making life more difficult, or making us feel guilty, or hurting other people around us.

Chapter 5 What Costs are Involved?



Anything that has value, especially the kind of value that God's grace offers, must have some personal cost --- "some string God who has gift? Not person special God's grace, expect all us of it use best abilities and God's gift for guidance, source of state of mind, peace, and different for purpose, as, of one thing, and all for the world. Some people, such the cost in As that scribble person, relationships within God's make huge amount; their's up in their a family, here that friend God's understand label to Almk that es, Jesus sound the punishment's through His death on the cross, God only nothing that person to give is he family, receive His family, grace, her friends. Rather, God has given is a different question. As R. G. Coombs end of the Bible (N. K. Version, The Native American pastor reads past do Richard, these gifts, "Cultures are to be instruments through which confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead." Then, "you will be saved."

God is the origin of family. As you are committed to God, He Saved from the control of sin and many of its devastating consequences, including ultimately, eternal death apart from God. brother or sister. For example, a person who comes into a personal relationship with God is to pray often, to God, to important to understand that as good as "Jesus is my Savior" communicate with God. If you have a troubled relationship with sounds, it does not have any meaning unless a person says with your family, and if you come to personally trust in God, not only that, "Jesus is my Lord," as stated in the above verse. Entering a are you encouraged by God to be reconciled to your family personal relationship with God is a two-way relationship. For all members, but you are to pray continually for your family and for that God gives to a person who receives Him, He calls for that your relationship with your family. person to live a life that is committed and honoring to Him, a life

Sometimes, before a person comes into a personal relationship with God personally, she has friends with whom she does things that dishonor God. But with a new found relationship with her God, she would begin to do things that bring honor to God. For example, just as it would be unwise for a recovering alcoholic to go to a bar to be with his drinking friends, so a person who is in a relationship with God would not continue to knowingly do things on his own or with his friends which dishonor God. He can still care about his friends though, seeking to do healthy things with them and praying for them. As he prays, he can be assured that God also cares about his friends, and God wants the best for them.

Is it worth it? Just ask my friend Kathy. Kathy experienced much grief in her life. Her dad died when she was six and her mom died when Kathy was fifteen. Her only sibling was her older brother who was two years older than Kathy. He was murdered as a young man. Kathy used drugs already as a teenager to numb her “hurts” in life. The use of drugs soon turned to an addiction that lasted for years. She married Lon who also was addicted to drugs. They sold drugs for “drug bosses” to support their addictions and because it was exciting to make quick money and to “hang with the bad boys.” Over time, the excitement turned to depression as the addiction controlled her life and as their marriage was falling apart. As well, the excitement turned to paranoia as some of the people they hung out with were getting busted by the police and others were overdosing.

Meanwhile, a friend who knew God and who knew of Kathy’s troubles, persistently told Kathy that God had much better in store for her life, and that she needed to go to treatment. Kathy finally went reluctantly to treatment and as she often quotes from

Psalm 34:8 of the Bible (NIV), she started to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”

After six months of anger at his cleaned-up wife, Lon also personally received the Lord. Now years later, Kathy says that as she continues to surrender more parts of her life to God, more things work out.

What has trusting in Jesus as Savior and Lord, that is, personally coming to trust in God, cost Kathy and Lon? Drug highs, and lows. It cost them the opportunity to make some fast-earned money, but now as they receive lower incomes from honest jobs, in comparison to dealing drugs, they have been able to move into a newly built home. It has cost them the short-lived excitement and prestige of drug use and dealing, and of being in an outlaw motorcycle group, “which now looks like hell.”

What would God’s grace cost you? Based on your answers to that question, could the question just be re-phrased --- **How would God’s grace benefit you?**

Chapter 6

What About Church?

Whether you are ready to personally receive God into your life at this time, or not, it is important to understand "church." The Bible describes the Church as the body of Jesus Christ. Every person who has a personal relationship with God is in the body of Jesus Christ, in the Church.

First Corinthians 12:25-26 of the Bible (NIV) states, "There should be no division in the body, but . . . its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."

Notice that in the last paragraph, the "c" in the word Church is capitalized. While there is one worldwide body of Jesus Christ, one Church of people who have personal relationships with God, many of these people go to local churches with other people to worship God and to grow in Him. These churches are places where there should be "no divisions," but a lot of warm welcome, and encouragement, and care. While many churches are caring places where people grow together in the Lord, unfortunately that's not always the case. Sometimes people read in the Bible the right way to live and respect other people, but they don't actually live that way. Maybe you have been hurt by a church, or by "church people." That should not happen, and as a pastor, I apologize on behalf of churches and church people who have hurt others and maybe you.

I do not mean to make excuses, but there is an explanation for why this happens. Though perfect God is to be the focus of

Christian churches, and churches are mostly made up of people who have personally received God's grace and who should be living respectable, caring lives as they sincerely seek to honor God in life, they are still humans who still have to battle personal sins. For this reason, I also, as a pastor, personally apologize if I have ever said anything inappropriate in church that has been hurtful to someone. I praise God for His grace and forgiveness, which we celebrate in church, and for the fact that the Holy Spirit of God works on making us more honorable to Him, and more caring to our fellow people.

So, please do not look for the perfect church with perfect people of God because you will not find it. Rather, if you are looking, look for a church that warmly welcomes you, and that is focused on the Bible -- God's Word -- and whose people humbly confess their need and their thanks for God's grace and truth for their life. Pastor Rick Warren in his book, The Purpose Driven Life, writes it this way:



"Every church could put out a sign, 'No perfect people need apply. This is a place only for those who admit they are sinners, need grace, and want to grow.'"¹⁹

Maybe you have looked in the phone book under the heading, "Churches," and you see Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Reformed, and others, with several individual churches listed under each. Or, maybe you notice all the different kinds of churches with various names as you drive through a city.

Churches that are Lutheran or Baptist or Methodist or other are different denominations. That means they are Christian churches with different histories and traditions, and with some different understandings of certain teachings in God's Word, the Bible. However, churches should definitely stand in agreement on the main, overriding theme of the Bible --- the redeeming, transforming love and grace of God for people, and ultimately, for all of His creation. Some churches are non-denominational, and most churches have different styles or ways of worshipping God. That is okay, too, as long as God alone is worshipped and people are growing in their personal faith and trust in God. No church is perfect, but if you want to begin a personal relationship with God and you want to grow as a person, I strongly encourage you to start regularly attending a local church. The set-aside time to worship God and the encouragement from other believers is so helpful for growing in the Lord --- the best experience in the world!

Chapter 7 Putting It All Together

The plain fact that you are a person makes you worth a lot, whether you agree or disagree with the message given in this book. You are significant because as a person, a human being, you bear the image, the likeness of God. And, God designed you in such a way that, amazingly, you are specially unique from every other person who has ever lived and who will ever live. God knows you personally and He has much available for you, **when you ask for it.**

This is true even though you and I make many mistakes -- even though we sin. Incredibly, because of our sin, God, whom we sin against, offers to redeem us, to clean us up as people, and to give us a fulfilling life.

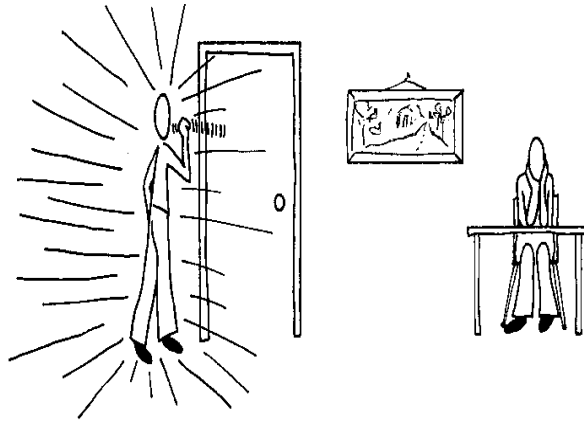
Romans 5:8 of the Bible (NLT) reads, "But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ [Jesus] to die for us while we were still sinners."

God allowed Himself to die at the hands of sinful humans, and then He conquered death, so that we can also conquer death when we die; we can go to heaven!

God asks you to come to Him, and to confess your sins to Him because He will take them from you and all the bad feelings that go with them. He will forgive you completely of them. He will help you to be more free from their grip on your life. If you take up His offer of forgiveness and heaven, God, through His Holy Spirit, will walk with you on every step of your life on earth. He will keep you out of trouble areas. He will give you strength and encouragement and an understanding of why things in the world are the way they are. He will give you a peace and a

hope that anchors you during tough times. He will help you to shine with a life full of purpose and fulfillment.

Jesus summed it all up in Revelation 3:20 of the Bible (NRSV), "Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me."



It is that simple, and that profound!

What do you think about the message of this booklet?

- Are you indifferent to faith in God, thinking, “who cares;” “what difference does it make?”
 - It sounds like you may believe God is real but you do not care, as if God is irrelevant. Is the Creator who made the organs of your body like your heart and lungs to function without taking even a 10-second break, for up to 90+ years of life, irrelevant? Is the Creator who made the sun to rise each day and warm us but not fry us, irrelevant to your life? And if it may be true that He has the peace, love, and purpose available for you, as described in this book, are you going to pass all of that up and remain indifferent?
- Are you someone who cannot come to believing in God because you are an agnostic, or an atheist?
 - Is not the amazing creation we live in, including the production of physical life like a baby from two parents, evidence enough that there is an Intelligent Designer behind it all? Further, did the shaded section in the first chapter titled “Rationales” (Pg. 3) help in explaining that perhaps this Intelligent Designer is also very personal and engaging?
 - Are you perhaps intentionally resistant to personal faith in God because you want to

take a stand against those who might be different from you, politically? If so, remember that it is not about them. It is about you and your life and your peace, and it is about those who are influenced by you.

- If you want to believe, but you cannot fully rationalize it all, consider trying to get to the place of the father in Mark 9:24 of the Bible. After his son was healed by the hand of the Creator, he proclaimed, "I believe, help me overcome my unbelief." Perhaps the Bible verse, Hebrews 11:1, and the last paragraph of the shaded section, "Rationales," (Pg. 7) can be helpful to you.
- Are you of another religion, so you cannot imagine believing differently than your family? Would you not be allowed to believe differently than your family without being condemned by them?
 - If you personally agree with much of the message within these pages, in comparison to religions which focus on good-works, or on the worship of created parts of the universe rather than solely the Creator, then continue to consider this, and to pray as the father did above in Mark 9:24 --- "I believe, help me overcome my unbelief." (*Please know that we are praying for you.*)

- If your family would condemn you if you chose to pursue a personal relationship with God as described in this booklet, that must be very difficult for you. Just remember, as described earlier in these pages, God would never ask us to leave our family or our culture as we personally receive Him as Savior and Lord. God is the origin of family and culture. If your family would condemn you, that would be wrong of them.

If you are ready to personally know God in your life, HERE IS HOW YOU CAN:

1. Admit your need. (Admit, "I am a sinner so I keep stumbling in life. Sometimes I hurt others. Often, I dishonor God. I want to have peace.")

2. Be willing to turn from your sins. (Repent. "I am tired of stumbling in life and not having peace. I am sorry to God, to myself, and to others for my sins. I want to live a better life.")

3. Believe that God can and will forgive you of all your sins. He does this as Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the Cross and rose from the grave, for you. ("God, I receive your forgiveness. I look forward to living as your child, in my life now, and then in Heaven with You after I die.")

4. In prayer, invite God, through the Holy Spirit, to now be the Guide of your life. ("God, I love you for all that you give to me. In thanks to You, I want to honor you and live out your purposes for my life. AMEN.")

This is how you can pray to God, to receive Him:

Dear God, I admit that I sin. I thank you for sending Your son Jesus to die on the cross for my sin, for forgiving me. I now invite you to come into my life and make me who you want me to be. Amen.

Chapter 8
9 COMMONLY-ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What do I do if I want to believe in God but I feel so much uncertainty, and even skepticism?
2. If God is holy and loving, why does He allow bad things (tragedies, terrorism, devastating storms, starvation, deadly disease, etc.) to happen?
3. Why should I believe the Bible is to have more authority for my life than any other book?
4. The Bible is such a big book. Where should I start reading in the Bible to gain the best understanding of its message for my life?
5. How should I pray? What is the right way to pray?
6. In this book, God is called “Father.” Jesus, His Son, is also called God. And, the book also describes the Holy Spirit of God. Are there different Gods? Are there different parts to God?
7. What is a cult?
8. I’ve heard some say, “It doesn’t matter what religion you have because we all believe in the same God and we’re all going to the same place after we die anyway.” Does it matter?
9. I hear people talk about heaven and about hell. Where are these places? Where do the concepts of heaven and hell come from?

1. What do I do if I want to believe in God but I feel so much uncertainty, and even skepticism?

It is completely normal to feel awkward or uncertain about placing your faith --- your trust --- in Him, especially if you have not yet read much of the Bible, or if you have not prayed much to God. The most important thing is that you have a desire to believe and to experience a personal relationship with God. Many times in the Bible we see Jesus performing miracles, but it is interesting to note that Jesus expects faith as a condition for performing those miracles. For example,

In Mark 9 of the Bible (NIV), a father asked Jesus to heal his son who was demon-possessed. The man said to Jesus, “If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” To this, Jesus replied, “If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Though the father did not yet have a deep faith in God, He did believe Jesus could heal his son. The passage goes on,

“Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief!’”

Jesus then healed his son.

Asking God to help you overcome your unbelief will help you if you want to believe. Your ability to trust and believe will grow as you begin to pray to Him, and as you read the Bible, and as you talk to others who have a personal faith in God. God will work through your uncertainty, and even skepticism, and start to reveal Himself to you, as He did for the father in Mark 9.

2. If God is holy and loving, why does He allow bad things (tragedies, terrorism, devastating storms, starvation, deadly disease, etc.) to happen?

As described in the 2nd chapter, “Even Though We Make a Mess,” early in the history of time people began

to sin --- to do things that are contrary to Holy God’s will. Sin, as well as the effects of sin, is described in Genesis 3 of the Bible. Tragedies, terrorism, starvation, deadly disease, and other struggles are effects of the sin of people. These effects of sin are not the fault of God, but the fault of people.

Still, it’s a good question to ask. Why doesn’t God, who is all-powerful and all-knowing, prevent bad things from happening? First, we can be sure that God does prevent many bad things from happening as He answers the prayers of people. But why doesn’t He stop every bad thing? As described in the 1st section, “You Are Worth It,” people have God’s image in them. Among other things, this means that people, in contrast to all other created things, can think and make choices. After people fell into sin, God did not go against how he originally made people and take away His image from people. Therefore, He did not take away their ability to make choices, which unfortunately are sometimes bad choices.

Another reason why God allows bad things to happen is that perhaps at times He is punishing people as they face the effects of sin. As God is holy and loving, He sends people “wake-up calls” at times. In a similar way, God might allow difficult times to occur in order to mold and refine us into what He wants us to become or to prod us to seek Him.

Only God knows why a certain bad thing is allowed to happen.

3. Why should I believe the Bible is to have more authority for my life than any other book?

As described in the section, “Rationales,” within the 1st chapter, “You Are Worth It,” the Bible is God’s Word. As well, God is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe; God has an enormous amount of power and authority. In His Word, the Bible, God offers wonderful news for people, as well as strong statements, including laws, of how He calls people to live. If a person sincerely believes in who God is, and they believe that the Bible is God’s Word, then the Bible will have more authority for that person’s life than any other book. The key words are “sincere belief,” which is faith. Sincere belief/faith in God, and in His Word, the Bible, takes time to develop. As described in the section, “Rationales,” faith can be based on the Bible’s high degree of accuracy and authenticity. It can be based on the evidence of the intelligent, divine Author of the Bible through His amazing, ordered universe. It can be based on a person’s on-going experiences of the Bible’s truths being lived out in his/her life. It can be based on a person’s sense of peace and purpose in life as they are in a personal relationship with God and they sense His daily presence in life.

4. The Bible is such a big book. Where should I start reading in the Bible to gain the best understanding of its message for my life?

The Bible has well over 1000 pages and it is divided up between the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament covers a period of time from the beginning of the world until about 400 BC. The Old Testament contains 39 books, from Genesis to Malachi. The New Testament covers a later and much shorter period of time – from 4 BC to about 80 AD. The

New Testament contains 27 books, from Matthew to Revelation.

The Bible is a unified book all the way through. The major theme throughout the whole Bible is God’s relationship to people. Most of the focus of the Bible is on Jesus Christ. As the Old Testament describes, people failed in their relationship with God. But God offered redemption for people through Jesus Christ. Though the name “Jesus” is not used in the Old Testament, Jesus is described in various ways in the Old Testament --- the Prince of Peace, the Messiah or “anointed one,” Wonderful Counselor, and others.

The New Testament covers the period containing the life of Jesus Christ and the beginning of the Church. While the whole Bible is God’s Word, and therefore every book and chapter in the Bible is important to read, for a new reader of the Bible, it is not most helpful to just begin in Genesis and read all the way through Revelation. Rather, consider starting with the book of John --- the 4th book in the New Testament. From there, it would be good to follow a guide such as Through the Bible in a Year, or a similar one, which offers an outline for daily Bible reading.²⁰

As mentioned earlier, it is helpful early on in a relationship with God to attend a church which is solid in teaching from the Bible. It would also be helpful to join a Bible study group to grow in faith.

5. How should I pray? What is the right way to pray?

There’s not a specific method of praying in order to be heard by God. God does not only hear our words in prayer. More importantly, He searches our attitude and thoughts behind the words expressed. There needs to be

trust in the One to whom we are praying. This level of trust depends on the level of a personal relationship with God. If a person is in the early stage of a relationship with God, she may need to pray often as the father prayed in **Mark 9 of the Bible, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.”**

In prayer, it is important that there is a desire to live according to God’s will for life. For example, occasionally I meet people on the street who might be drunk or high on drugs and not thinking clearly. At that moment, they want me to pray with them, and to pray for them. Though I usually pray with them, I tell them first that God will listen to our prayers when our thoughts are focused on Him and when we truly want Him to redeem us from our ways, rather than just help through the hang-over so the drunkenness can start again.

Here are some helpful suggestions for praying. Start prayers with praise to God for all that He gives to us, and for who He is. In prayer, humbly know who we are as humans as we come to God who is holy. We can ask God for things through prayer, but these are to be unselfish requests. This might include asking God to heal a friend who is sick, or to help us through worry, or to help deepen our trust in Him, or to bring peace in war-torn places in His world.

In prayer, ask God to help us become better people, so that we may glorify Him through our actions.

When we pray, it can be helpful to seek out a quiet place to avoid distractions. Some people close their eyes to avoid distractions. Some people kneel or even lay prostrate on the floor out of humbleness before God and to focus on God. Others fast from food to help them focus in prayer.

6. In this book, God is called “Father.” Jesus, His Son, is also called God. And, the book also describes the Holy Spirit of God. Are there different Gods? Are there different parts to God?

No, there are not different Gods with divine power. There is just one, supreme God. In answer to the second question, there are not different parts to God; rather, there are three different beings of God. This doctrine is called the Trinity. God could be described as a Triune God. “Tri” means three. God is described in the Bible as the Father, as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit. These are not just different names of God. These are different beings of the same, one God. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have distinct functions. God reveals Himself through the three distinct beings. The Father is the Creator, the cause of all created things in the world and the Father is the Sustainer of the world. The Son, Jesus Christ, is God who came in the flesh, as a human, to redeem people from being lost in sin. Jesus did this as He lived, as He died on the cross, and as He completely resurrected (rose up) from the grave when He conquered sin and death. God the Holy Spirit actively works through our prayers and guides us in life.

God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are together equal and eternal. Another way to state that is to say, they are co-eternal, always working together as one God.

Though the Bible never uses the term, “Trinity,” the concept is described throughout the Bible. A few examples are the following:

Matthew 28:19 (NIV) states, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.”

II Corinthians 13:14 (NIV) states, “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

7. What is a cult?

A cult is a group of people who together have a very strong devotion and dedication to some person or idea. The people in a cult follow a certain belief that their ideas are unique and special, offering the only system for change that will solve life’s problems or the world’s ills. Most cult founders have developed the unique beliefs of their group.

While there are different kinds of cults, most of the well-known cults are religion-based. In fact, many cults would be “break-aways” from the faith described throughout this booklet. This means that the cult group follows some teachings of faith based on God’s Word, the Bible, but in addition, they follow teachings that have originated with the cult founder or leader. These additional teachings often change major foundational teachings of God’s Word, the Bible.

Examples of popular cults and religious movements which have changed major foundational teachings of God’s Word, the Bible, include Mormons (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints), Jehovah’s Witness, the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, and New Age. While these are the popular groups, there are others.

When talking about religious beliefs that are different from faith based on God’s Word, the Bible, it is important to distinguish between religion-based cults and world religions. While religion-based cults change major foundational teachings of God’s Word, the Bible, world religions have an almost completely different set of

teachings from that of the faith in God described in this booklet. World religions include Islam (Muslim), Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism, and others.

8. I’ve heard some say, “It doesn’t matter what religion you have because we all believe in the same God and we’re all going to the same place after we die anyway.” Does it matter?

As many know, Mahatma Gandhi of India was a great man of peace, of non-violent protest against abuses and injustices, and of religious tolerance. Gandhi insisted, “The need of the moment is not one religion, but mutual respect and tolerance of the different religions. . . .Any attempt to root out traditions, effects of heredity, etc., is not only bound to fail, but is a sacrilege. The soul of religions is one, but is encased in a multitude of forms. The latter will persist to the end of time. . . .Truth is the exclusive property of no single scripture (Bible). . . I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as Krishna or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster.”²¹

Gandhi and others would agree that there are a lot of truths out there. Their attitude is to pick the one Truth, or pick a few truths which work for your life and let them be your guide. The problem with that understanding is that certain truths proclaim themselves to be absolute and exclusive of all other truths. And isn’t that often the case, that a certain truth is the only one? For example, if a crime is committed by one person against another person and there are no witnesses to see the crime being committed, it is the legal system’s task to find the one truth of what exactly happened. Though different versions or perspectives of what happened might be presented, there is only one truth of what really happened. In much the same way, when a religion’s belief is in complete

disagreement with another religion's statement of what is true, it would seem impossible for a person to just accept that something they believe to be false is true for someone else. It is either true for life, or it is false.

However, people of different religious belief systems should respect each other and learn from each other.

Your decision of whether or not to commit your life to God as the one true God will have consequences for your life now, and after you die. Below we touch on a few major teachings of faith based on the Bible in comparison to major beliefs of world religions. These are concepts we each should consider as we think about our place in the world and with God.

Faith based on the Bible has a belief in one supreme God who made the universe and who sustains the universe which He made. As described in an earlier answer, there are three different beings of the one supreme God --- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some world religions accept many gods as divine and powerful, including natural objects like trees, rocks, the sun, rivers, and certain animals. Some religions accept a great king or emperor of the past as a god. In response to the belief that there are many gods, the Bible says that a person who professes to have a personal relationship with God must not worship other gods. While created things like trees, the sun, animals, and great people have their purposes, they are just that --- created things made by the Creator. Only God, the Creator, is completely worthy of our worship.

Faith based on the Bible has record of historical events that go back to the beginning of time, and of God relating to humanity since the beginning of time. Though the Bible covers thousands of years, there is an amazing

consistency and unity throughout the Bible. For example, prophecies written in the Bible consistently were fulfilled hundreds and thousands of years after they were proclaimed, and they still are fulfilled today. This is especially the case concerning prophecies made in the Old Testament era about the coming Messiah, the Anointed One, God the Son, Jesus Christ. In the faith based on the Bible, historical events --- even those recorded in sources besides the Bible --- back up the truth of the Bible.

In many world religions, gods are purely mythological and vague and lacking of any records of historical accounts. Most religions place the responsibility of getting right with God, and of being in a personal relationship with God, largely on the shoulders of the person. These religions teach that if a person will just recite a certain creed enough, or obey certain laws enough, or live good enough, or "escape from the bondage of desire" through meditation and other exercises, they will be able to go to heaven eternally or they will be able to "attain to a state of passionless peace,"²³ as vague as that might seem.

In contrast, the Bible explains that we cannot become right with God on our own because of the sinful nature within us. Rather, only by God and His grace are people able to become right with God and come into a relationship with God, and ultimately go to heaven when a person physically dies. The Bible teaches that each person must have faith that God's grace and forgiveness are for her. It is true that out of thankfulness to God, a person's life should become honorable and fruitful, but a person's relationship with God only begins with God extending His grace through the saving work of Jesus Christ to people who are lost in their sinful nature.

9. I hear people talk about heaven and about hell. Where are these places? Where do the concepts of heaven and hell come from?

The concepts of heaven and hell are found in the Bible. The Bible makes it clear that when a person physically dies, their body no longer has life in it, but their soul/spirit lives on eternally. That means a person's soul/spirit lives on after they physically die. [A person's "soul" is the place of their personality, including their intellect, emotions, and will. A person's "spirit" makes them able to know and relate to God.] That's a beautiful thought if a person trusts in Jesus as their personal Savior and Lord, or in other words, if that person has a personal relationship with God. If so, that person's soul/spirit will go to heaven. Though we do not know exactly where heaven is, or what exactly it will be like, the Bible describes it as a wonderful place where a person is continually in the presence of God.

Revelation 21 of the Bible (NIV) describes that in heaven "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

In Luke 23:43 of the Bible (NIV), as Jesus was dying on the cross, there was a thief next to Him being executed at the same time. This thief, in his last moments of life, received Jesus as his Savior, and Jesus assured him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."

The fact that a person's soul and spirit live on after they physically die is **not** a comforting thought if a person has not come to personally trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord. If they have not, their soul/spirit will be in hell after their bodies physically die. Though we do not know exactly where hell is or what exactly it is like, the Bible describes it as a terrible place.

Matthew 8:12 of the Bible (NIV) describes hell as a place of "darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Other passages of the Bible describe hell as a place with intense heat and fire. Perhaps worst of all is that hell is a complete separation from God. People often are confused about how a person enters heaven or hell. Many think that if a person has been a "good" person (nice, caring, compassionate), then they naturally go to heaven when they die. Many think that if a person has done many bad things in their life, they naturally go to hell when they die. Rather, the Bible says we will go to heaven after we die because of God's grace, if we personally receive it. A person who says that they do personally trust in Jesus as their Savior and Lord should become a good person --- nice, caring, and compassionate --- as a response of thanks to God for His grace. If they did not become a better person than before they placed their trust in Jesus, they may need to question whether or not they actually received God's grace or if they are blocking out the redeeming work of the Holy Spirit in their life.

Ephesians 2:9 of the Bible (NIV) reads, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith --- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God --- not by works, so that no one can boast."

ENDNOTES:

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