

Light

Devotional



Light.

A Daily Devotional

Copyright © 2022 by John Howard
Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved

Unless otherwise noted, all Bible texts are from the New King James Version (NKJV), copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Nelson, Inc., Publishers.

...One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Phil. 3:13, 14

Looking back on life, it is easy to feel overwhelmed with pain or regret. Sometimes we are haunted by things we said or did. Other times we are haunted by things people said or did to us. No matter what the case is, there is one thing that all these things have in common. They are in the past. These memories pull at us in the quiet moments of our lives until they eat away all our zeal for life. Maybe you are living under the shadow cast by a bad relationship, and it's hard for you to trust others. Maybe rejection or some form of abuse has left scars on you that keep you feeling insecure and uncertain of yourself. Maybe you are haunted by memories of death, debt, or disease. Perhaps you are plagued by feelings of anxiety, fear, or depression, and you feel trapped by insecurities. For those who at times feel overwhelmed by the pains of the past, this verse is for you. God is telling you to stop lamenting your past. Let it go. If you are suffering from guilt over something you did, ask for God's forgiveness, and embrace His healing. If you are suffering from pain over something someone did to you, forgive them and give the situation to God. God can wash away the pain of your past, but you must let Him. Whatever is haunting you, it's time to move forward. Today is a new day. Don't lament over the pains of yesterday. Start focusing on present and future goals. Start planning right now for all the great things God has in store for your amazing life!

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways... Jeremiah 17:9, 10

The song *Heart of Gold*, by Neil Young, reached number one in the year 1972. In 2004, *Rolling Stone* named it among their top 500 songs of all time. It wasn't until after I became a Christian that I really thought about the lyrics. In the song, Young sings of how he has been across the world searching for a heart of gold but still has not found it, and he's getting old. As I pondered the words, I thought about how tragic the theme was. After searching everywhere, he has still not found the key to true purity, and he is running out of time! While others try to tell us that we are naturally good at heart, the song painfully admits that the heart is not good. While many search Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and other religions trying to make the heart pure, the Bible is the only book honest enough to tell us our true condition. It says we are born "in sin," and the heart is ruined beyond repair (Ps. 51:5; See Jer. 13:23). The only way to get a heart of gold is to "get...a new heart" (Ezek. 18:31). Since Jesus was the only One to ever live without sin, our only hope is to invite Jesus into our heart. When we invite Jesus Christ into our heart, He takes our old sinful heart and replaces it with His new pure heart. Jesus removes our sinful nature, and we become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). Through Christ, we can receive a pure heart. So for those longing for a heart of gold, the search is over. Invite Jesus in and let the healing begin today.

...The Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound... Isa. 61:1

I once wrote an allegory called ‘*The Open Door.*’ In the story, a man entered a prison late at night and unlocked all the prison doors. When morning came, one prisoner discovered that the doors had been unlocked and began to share the good news with the rest of the prisoners. Others soon discovered this to be true, but some refused to believe and check the doors. Similarly, the Bible refers to sin as a sort of prison, and many are content living in the devil’s prison of sin when God has already paid the bail. When Jesus died on the cross, the price for your freedom was paid. You are free. The door is unlocked. All you have to do is walk out. God has such an adventure prepared before you. He has such an amazing path planned for your life. We so often dwell in dungeons of gloom and despair instead of God’s mansions of glory. We choose mediocre over miraculous because we are afraid to leave our prison cells. We become gripped so tightly by sin that we feel trapped. Some are trapped by debt, circumstances, or bad relationships. Some are trapped in chains of addiction to sex, gambling, alcohol, or drugs. Some are trapped in mental chains, like stress, depression, guilt, pain from the past, or fear of the future. What many don’t realize is that the chains that bind them have been broken! Jesus paid the bail. Just try Jesus, and you will find that He has made a “way of escape” (1 Cor. 10:13). The door is unlocked. You are free.

Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none... Psalm 139:16

Some people think their lives have no real meaning. They think that they were born by luck and that life is just an accident. As a result, they drift through life like butterflies with no direction, following their feelings wherever they lead, but the Bible says that your life is not an accident. The Bible says you were “wonderfully made” by God (Ps. 139:14). In God’s eyes, you are amazing! God says, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you” (Jer. 1:5). God knows the very “street” you live on (Acts 9:11). God knows how many “tears” you cry (Ps. 56:8). God even knows how many “hairs” are on your head (Luke 12:7). God says He has great plans for your “future” if you will just let Him guide you (Jer. 29:11). Your life did not just happen by accident. God designed you for a reason. Each person alive has their own special beauty and skill that God placed inside when He made us. Each person has different skills that God wants to cultivate in our lives. Each person is unique and has their own special purpose. No one else can be you. God has a special plan for each person’s life. Your job is to find the plan God has for your life. He wants to give you an amazing life if you will just let Him. While you may not get everything you want in life, if you submit to God’s plan, you will find that God has a more amazing life than you could imagine because in God’s eyes, you are like a precious jewel. So be encouraged. Your life is a beautiful gift. Become what God wants you to be.

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure... meditate on these things. Phil. 4:8

Our minds get so filled with junk that it leads us to feelings of depression, despair, and even hopelessness. Whether we realize it or not, these feelings are often perpetuated by the video games we play, the things we watch on television, or even the music we listen to. While the very act of sitting in front of a screen too long can depress the mind, more important is the content of our mental diet. Most of us understand that the food we put in our body has long-term effects on our physical health, but many do not take into consideration that the things we feed into our brain through digital media begin to have an effect on our mental and emotional health. This should be obvious, but it is often overlooked. Perhaps that is why mental health issues are an epidemic today. While doctors love to throw drugs at patients, many do not consider the root cause; our mental diet. So take a little time to nurture the mind with positive influences. It may require a degree of effort and self-control, but take a step to positively change your mental diet. Don't watch or listen to things that are scary, violent, sexualized, immoral, or depressing. Movies and music have an amazing power to alter moods. Watch shows that educate, elevate, or uplift. Choose things that are noble, just, and pure. And listen to music that is cheerful and inspiring. Even if you aren't used to it, give Christian music a chance, or try watching a sermon sometimes. Carefully choose the diet that you put in your brain.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. 2 Tim. 3:16

After Christopher Reeves, actor and star of the seventies movie version of *Superman*, fell off a horse, leaving him a quadriplegic, he wrote a book called, *Still Me*. Since he was not able to move his arms, someone else had to write the words out for him, but the words were his own. Although someone else wrote the words, they came from his mind. Similarly, the words of Scripture, also known as the Bible, were written out by men, but God was the real Author. We are told that all Scripture was given “by inspiration of God.” While men were like pencils in His hand, God was the inspiration behind the words. We are told that these words did not come “by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). That means, through the Holy Spirit, God told, showed, and inspired these men with the words to write. How else can you explain the prophecies foretold, the scientific facts foretold thousands of years before scientists uncovered them, and the countless lives changed! There is a reason that the Bible is the all-time best-selling book! It is different than other books. Still, in spite of its evidence of inspiration, many refuse to accept the Bible as God’s word, claiming that it cannot be trusted because it was written by men, so the best advice I could give you is to study it for yourself. Don’t just read through parts of it. Study it seriously, with an open mind and a heart willing to follow it, accept it, and change if it is true.

Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? Job 4:17

Some time back, I decided to take a video camera on the campus of Ohio State University and interview students about Bible subjects. One question I asked was, “Do you think people have an immortal soul”? Those who claimed to be Christians typically said they did, but when asked why, most did not have a Bible verse to support their belief. Perhaps the reason for this is because there *is* no verse. On the contrary! The Bible repeatedly says that man is “mortal” (Rom. 6:12). In fact, Paul tells us very plainly that immortality comes from the “Lord of lords, who alone has immortality” (1 Tim. 6:15, 16). In spite of this, many Christians have been led to believe that man is born with an immortal soul. Many then reason that if the soul does not die, when the body dies, the soul must go straight to heaven or hell the moment the body dies. Of course, when people say that the soul continues to live after death, I would follow up by asking why the Bible talks about a resurrection. If the righteous go straight to heaven at death, then why would the Bible talk about the “blessed hope” of the resurrection (Titus 2:13)? This typically got people scratching their heads, as many confessed, “I don’t know.” The truth is, immortality is a gift that is only given to the righteous at the resurrection when we will receive “everlasting life” (John 3:16). Until then, we are stuck in these mortal bodies to await the day when “this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Cor. 15:54).

...Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom... Matt. 18:3, 4

Why did Jesus say that unless we become like little children, we won't make it to heaven? There are some basic behaviors of little children which Jesus was drawing our attention to that are essential for us to make it to heaven. First, little children are fast to obey. They are generally willing to obey even if they do not understand the reason for a request. In the same way, even if we do not understand God's ways, we should strive to obey. Second, children don't worry. They are not concerned about how their parents are going to provide food and necessities. Many people waste needless hours, days, and even years worrying about things when God has promised to provide for our needs. We must learn to trust God, which brings us to the next point. Third, children are trusting. They trust their parents in the same way that we should learn to trust God. Fourth, children are fast to forgive. All parents make mistakes at times, but children typically don't hold grudges for long. They are quick to forget wrongs done to them. Similarly, we should not hold grudges but learn to forgive those who have hurt us. Fifth, children are not proud. They do not strive to protect their image or their ego. Similarly, we should not be proud, but humble. This was probably the main point Jesus was making. Jesus said we must humble ourselves as children. If we want to make it to heaven, we must learn to imitate children in these areas.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many... Hebrews 9:27, 28

I had a good friend who suffered from cancer for a couple of years before it finally took her life. By the time death came, it was no surprise. She was ready. While at times death comes slowly, much of the time, it comes suddenly and catches us by surprise. It is for this reason that we must always be ready for death. The Bible tries to prepare us by telling us that after we die, we will all have to face God in the judgment. On that day, “each of us shall give account of himself to God,” and God will “give to every one according to his work” (Rom. 14:12; Rev. 22:12). It doesn’t matter who you are or what you believe; all will have to give an answer to God. At the moment we die, the very next thing we will realize will be seeing God in the judgment. Those who have rejected God in life will not be ready for this and will lose out on God’s gift of eternal life. This is so tragic because God is offering everyone the chance to live forever. How terrible to wake up after death and see that we could have seen our loved ones again; we could have lived with God in heaven forever, but we were so busy trying to find a lover, have a baby, make more money, get nicer homes, better jobs, or other “cares of this world” that we failed to search for God, and missed out on what was most important in life (Mark 4:19). If you have not accepted Jesus, when you face God in the judgment, you will miss out on eternal life, but there is still time. You can accept Christ today and live forever with God in heaven.

It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Eccl. 7:2

This seems like a strange thing to say! Why would the writer say that it is better to go to the house of mourning than feasting? He says this because the house of mourning is a place of contemplation, where we think about the more important things in life. I spent many of my early years thinking that feasting, alcohol, and parties were the way to happiness, but as I grew up, it started to get boring. While drinking parties gave me seasons of fun, inside, I felt empty. The fun that I had did not give me any real meaning or fulfillment. When my grandmother died, I started to think about the deeper things of life. Why am I here? What is my purpose in life? What will I leave behind after I die? It amazes me that, even though all of us know we are going to die, no one ever talks about death until it happens. We seem to think that by not talking about it, we can avoid it, but death comes to all. Tragically, most are not ready when death comes. The time to think about death is before it happens. Now is the time to ask ourselves why we are here, how we got here, and what the purpose of our life is. Sadly, most of us wait until someone dies, then we start to think about what really matters in life. That's why the Bible says it is better to go to the house of mourning. When death comes, some begin to ask the more important questions of life. If it takes death to finally get us to start searching for God and eternal life, then it is far better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting.

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 1 John 2:3, 4

While salvation comes through knowing Christ, Jesus tells us that many who claim to be believers will approach Him in the end only to hear the response, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). So how can we be sure we are saved? John gives us the answer. He says that the proof that we are really heaven-bound is if we are consistently trying to obey God. For example, the Bible clearly says that getting drunk is a sin, and yet many Christians justify getting drunk once in a while. The Bible tells us lying is a sin, and yet many Christians justify telling lies. The Bible says looking lustfully at the opposite sex is sin, and yet some Christians look at pornography. The Bible says fornication is a sin, but some professed Christians who have sex refuse to get married. The Bible tells us not to use God's name in vain, while many Christians continue to use God's name as a cuss word. While no Christian is perfect, the difference between the saved and the lost is that those who are saved are making real efforts, trying to obey God in all things, even the little things. If you are not really making efforts to overcome your sins, then you should probably be concerned that in the end, you may approach Jesus only to hear the words, "I never knew you." So if you really want the assurance that you will be in heaven, maybe it's time to repent, recommit your life to Christ, and strive to obey God in all things.

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him. Psalm34:8

My step-dad used to compare Jesus to a juicy peach! He loved peaches. He said that when you get a really good peach, words just cannot describe it, and no one can really understand how good the peach is until they try it for themselves. That is what the Bible says about Jesus. David challenges us to try Jesus for ourselves. Try church. Try reading your Bible. Try praying. Try getting to know God. Taste and see for yourself. Sadly, most people base their opinion of God, or religion, on things they've seen or heard. They have met Christians. They have heard about Jesus. Maybe they have even gone to church, but in order to really know, you have to see God for yourself. Like Job, we must come to the point where we say, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). When we see God, we will see His goodness. Notice that David does not say, "See *if* the Lord is good," but rather, he says, "See *that* the Lord is good." David knows that God is good because he has already experienced God personally in His life. David talks of God's goodness because he has met God. Perhaps you have met someone who is a very nice person. You can tell others, "That person is so nice," but they may not believe you until they see for themselves. That's what David is doing here. David says, "Let me introduce you to God. I know that He is good, but I want you to come and see for yourself that God is good." God wants to be your friend. Go to church. Pray. Read your Bible. Come and see for yourself that God is good.

What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. Psalm 8:4, 5

My father was a pilot, and when I was young, he would take my brothers and me up in small private airplanes. When the airplane is still close to the ground, everything looks the same, and when it ascends too high, everything looks like little dots, but there is a certain point when you are not too low or too high when everything looks like little toys: toy cars, toy houses, and little toy people. As I looked at all the little people so involved in their little lives, I thought of how small and insignificant everything seemed from this viewpoint. I saw the traffic jams, and I thought of how every single car had a life inside of it. Each person was so involved in their problems and concerns, but from so far above the ground, it all seemed so small. We so often worry and stress about things that we don't need to worry about. The failed test. The lost job. Saving for the new home. We are so consumed by "cares, riches, and pleasures of life" that we forget to look at life from God's eyes (Luke 8:14). Our lives are fleeting moments in the eyes of eternity. While life may at times seem long, from our perspective, from God's eyes, it is short and fleeting, but God is offering us more than this life. God wants us to refocus our attention on the bigger picture. It's time we rise higher and look down on life from God's eyes, realizing that there is more to this life than what this world has to offer. God wants to offer us eternal life.

But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work... Exodus 20:10

In response to the rise of social media addiction, a non-profit organization called 'Reboot' initiated the National Day of Unplugging. On this day, they call people to fast for twenty-four hours from their electronic devices. While a day of unplugging may sound strange to us, it's really not a new idea at all. In fact, it is as ancient as time itself. The Bible calls it Sabbath. Because time is the most crucial element in any relationship, God commanded His followers to set aside every seventh day to cease from secular work and spend time with Him. While most Christians go to church on Sunday, all through the Bible, God commanded us to observe the seventh day, which is Saturday. Today, many Christians claim that the Sabbath was for the Jews, but the Sabbath was actually instituted long before the Jewish nation even existed, then it was placed in the heart of the Ten Commandments, tagged with the word "Remember." Ironically the world has forgotten the one day that God said to remember. As a result, many people are losing their spiritual connection. They seem to think that God looks at all days the same because "they have not distinguished between the holy and unholy... and they have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them" (Ezek. 22:26). Those who try to worship God their way, instead of His way, will find that they are plugging into powerless outlets. God has a special blessing for those who worship His way on His day. This Saturday, why don't you try unplugging?

Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. Mark 16:9

We are told that Jesus died on Friday, just before the Sabbath, and then He rose on Sunday morning. It seems curious that Jesus waited for an entire day before He was resurrected, and in an attempt to explain this, many today say that Christ was creating a new Sabbath. Tragically, I fear that they have missed the point. If Christ was going to change one of the commandments from the very law of God, certainly He would have mentioned His intent to change the law. But there is no such claim anywhere in the Bible, so some use obscure verses to say Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday, while the obvious delay of Christ's resurrection is overlooked by nearly all Christians today. Think about it. After the work of creation, God rested on the Sabbath as a sign that the work was finished. After sin, God put the plan of redemption into effect, and for thousands of years, God's people were killing animal sacrifices as a symbol of God's coming redemption. Ironically, Jesus completed the work of redemption on the day just before the Sabbath, and then He rested in the grave during the Sabbath hours as a sign that the work of redemption was finished. Could it be that the very event many people use to claim that Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday, the first day of the week, was meant to reveal that God's Sabbath was still in effect after the resurrection of Christ, and that because the Jews failed to keep it correctly there still "remains therefore a rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9)?

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin... Heb. 11:24, 25

My entire young life was spent looking for pleasure. I looked for pleasure in food, drugs, alcohol, friends, lovers, cars, sports, music, movies, video games, and more. As a result, I was led into one sin after another, thinking that these sinful delicacies could somehow bring me real happiness, peace, and fulfillment in life. Of course, the Bible does not deny that sin brings pleasure. There is an initial pleasure, or thrill, that comes with any sin, but the Bible says these are passing pleasures. The pleasures of sin quickly fade. It's funny that people have not figured this out yet, but sin always ends badly, resulting in guilt, despair, depression, and feelings of hopelessness (See Prov. 13:15). That's why so many famous people who have money, lovers, beautiful homes, cars, friends, popularity, and seemingly everything often suffer from anxiety, depression, and many of them end up killing themselves. Apparently, money, fame, and fortune are not the key to peace, joy, and real fulfillment in life. Of course, I found this out the hard way. Through all my pleasures, there was a gnawing sense of unrest until I looked somewhere else for happiness. Like Moses, I finally turned from the passing pleasures of sin and gave Jesus a try. That's when I found real joy, peace, and fulfillment in life. Aren't you tired of chasing after the passing pleasures of sin and feeling empty? Don't wait until it's too late. Give Jesus a try today!

And a slave does not abide in a house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. John 8:35, 36

Many people think freedom comes in being allowed to do whatever they want. Sadly, many who claim to be free are trapped in slavery. The Bible says, “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34). In my youth, when I smoked cigarettes, I thought that freedom came in the choice to smoke. I thought my choice was my freedom, but I soon found this so-called freedom led to slavery. Once addicted, I no longer had the choice to smoke or not. I was controlled by cigarettes. They would send me to the store at all hours, just to buy a pack. This is how sin is. Whatever sin it is, the desire may fade for a season, but it eventually wakes up and calls you again, and you must answer. What is more tragic is that sin is leading to death. The Bible says, “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). That means we are addicted to death. Just like my addiction to cigarettes was slowly killing me, our addiction to sin is slowly killing us, and many do not realize it. Whatever the sin is, it has you hooked. It calls, and you must obey. Paul says, “to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16). Whether it is sex, drugs, alcohol, pride, anger, or whatever, sin must be let go. The bad news is, it is impossible to get free on your own. You are driven by your passion. The good news is that Jesus can give you that power. Jesus can set you free, and when He sets you free, you are free indeed!

I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied... He has put eternity in their hearts... Eccl. 3:10, 11

At times, all of us feel an internal emptiness, a longing or restlessness that burns within the deepest part of our hearts. Tragically, we often try to fill these deep heart longings with shallow pleasures. Maybe we go out to the bar for a drink, take drugs, fill our inner longings with sexual satisfaction, or marinate our minds in movies or games until those deeper longings of the soul are once again forgotten. Still, somewhere deep within all of us, we at times feel a yearning for more out of life. We realize that the temporary pleasures don't really satisfy the deeper cravings inside us for real peace and fulfillment. Whether we use sinful pleasures or innocent fun, whatever we fill the hole with cannot satisfy for long. We want more. That longing is a God-inspired craving placed in us by the One who made us. The Bible says that God has put "eternity" in our hearts. God has put a desire to live for eternity inside us: a longing for more than this life has to offer. Something within us knows that there has got to be more to life than this. It is too amazing that we are alive here and now and that this world is so perfectly adapted for life. There are too many coincidences to believe that life is just an accident. Somewhere deep inside your heart, you know there must be more to life. That realization is God speaking to your heart. He has placed a little piece of heaven inside you. He has put a longing for eternity in your heart, and He is calling you to come to Him, so He can give you eternal life.

Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God watched over me; when His lamp shone upon my head, and when by His light I walked... Job 29:2, 3

Most of us have felt seasons of regret, lamenting some part of the past that we can't get back. That bitter emptiness we feel when a loved one dies, a lover leaves us, or after some missed opportunity. But that feeling is nothing compared to the final day when God returns. At that time, God's people will go up into heaven, and those who never accepted God will be left behind to perish. Those who do not believe in God do not realize how much they owe God. The Bible says that God's blessings are given to all. God "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Matt. 5:45). Any time we feel "love, joy, peace" or any good feeling, it is a gift from God (Gal. 5:22). The Bible says, "every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father" (Jas. 1:17). So whether you believe in God or not, you share in His blessings all the time. In the end, when God finally removes His Spirit from the heart, a cold and empty chill will fill the soul. Words cannot describe the bitter emptiness and agony, as the lost cry out, "Oh, that I were as in months past, as in the days when God watched over me." As they see the great cloud of believers entering into the gates of heaven, while they are left outside, they will cry out in agony, but it will be too late. The good news is that there is still time. There is time to accept Jesus and His free gift of salvation today, so when He returns, you can live forever in peace with God. Won't you ask Jesus into your heart today while there is time?

I call heaven and earth as witness today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life... Deut. 30:19

When I was young, I used to smoke cigarettes. One day an older lady approached me and told me very politely that “those things will end up killing you.” I smiled and nodded. I had read the reports. I knew cigarettes were deadly, and I did not want to die, but I kept smoking. So many people today are in the same situation. God says, “I’m giving you a choice between life and death. Which one do you choose?” It doesn’t seem like a hard choice. If the question were posed to us, we would surely say, “I choose life,” but while we are saying we want to live with our mouth, we keep living apart from God. We refuse to accept God’s free gift of eternal life. God is saying, “I have an amazing plan for your life. I will show you a better way, I will help you overcome your bad habits, and in the end, I will give you eternal life, but you must first give your life to Me!” What an amazing offer! Sadly, most people refuse to accept this offer. We say we want life. We say that we want to live forever in heaven, but like me with the cigarettes, we continue living in our sinful ways without making any effort to turn to God. Tragically, God has to say, “I call heaven and earth as a witness.” He is saying, “Everyone has seen that I offered you this and gave you a chance, but many of you said no!” Please don’t be one of them. I finally gave up cigarettes and eventually gave my life to Christ. I hope you will try Jesus too. Don’t miss out on the chance to live forever in heaven. Please give your heart to Jesus, and choose life.

Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day...For David did not ascend into the heavens... Acts 2:29, 34

While death is a mystery to many, it does not have to be. Paul says, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep," or died (1 Thess. 4:13), and yet, even many Christians are ignorant on this subject. The popular theory in most churches is that we go straight to heaven at death, but Paul clearly says that even David has not yet ascended to heaven. Jesus said that same thing when He was resurrected from the dead. He said, "I have not yet ascended to My Father" (John 20:17). And when Lazarus was dead, Jesus simply said, "Lazarus sleeps" (John 11:11). Why? Because death is like sleep without dreams. That's why David says, "The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence" (Ps. 115:17). In spite of the popular belief among many Christians, the Bible teaches that when a person dies, they do not go straight to heaven or hell. Solomon tells us that "the dead know nothing" and "there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Eccl. 9:5, 10). When a person dies, "his sons come to honor, and he does not know it" (Job 14:21). No. According to the Bible, when we die, we simply rest in the grave until Jesus comes. Then we are told "the dead in Christ will rise," "those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (1 Thess. 4:16; John 5:29).

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:11

In my life, there have been countless times when I've felt like I was drowning in darkness and despair, feeling lonely, guilt-ridden, depressed, and hopeless. I've had friends desert me. I've had loved ones die. I've flunked out of school. I've suffered a divorce. I've lost jobs. I've been thrown in jail, and more. I've suffered things in my life that I can't even mention. I don't say these things to lament my past, but so you know that the author of this paper is not sitting on some cloud above you without knowing what it's like to be in your shoes. Chances are, I've been there, and you have too, or else you probably wouldn't still be reading this. The fact is, all of us have gone through seasons of pain in life. All of us have suffered in countless ways, and while some will start to accuse God in their trials, the reality is that these trials are not God's doing. While God allows trials, He assures us that "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Rom. 8:28). You see, God can bring good out of pain if we let Him. While the trials in our lives are not pleasant, God says that He can turn these trials into training grounds for those who are willing to be trained by them. God can bring good out of the pain if you will let the trials teach you lessons, so don't lament your trials. Let them be your teachers. If you hold on, trust God, and wait on His timing, you will see that God can bring good from the most horrible circumstances.

The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Psalm 90:10

Recently a friend of mine told me about an exchange he had with a taxi driver. He sparked up a conversation, and the driver said, “Life is so busy for nothing. We are constantly in a hurry. We go to work and try to get money, but it’s really all for nothing. What’s the point?” Have you ever felt that way? Many of us are always in such a hurry. Our lives are so full of things to do. We work so hard that we barely have time to enjoy life. We wake up, eat, go to work, eat, come home, eat again, and then go to bed. The little moments we enjoy go so fast, and it’s back to work again, trying to get more money, and all for what? That’s what the Bible is expressing. It says, “We live seventy years, or if we are lucky, we may live eighty, or even a hundred years, but what is the point? Our years are meaningless!” However, those who read on will find that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. There is good news. Life does not have to be meaningless. In fact, life should be full of hope, joy, and true fulfillment. God has such great plans for us, but so often, we get caught up in chasing money, fame, or whatever we are chasing that we miss out on God’s plan for our lives! The verse goes on to say that God can “satisfy us,” so we can “be glad all our days” (Ps. 90:14). Life is supposed to be exciting, and with Christ, it *can* be. With Christ, life is the most amazing adventure you will ever have! With Christ, life has purpose.

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. Psalm 103:1, 2

Whether you believe in God or not, the Bible says there are benefits that come by just believing in God, and science affirms this. It has been proven that Christians are happier, more charitable, and live longer lives. That makes sense. Think about it. If there is no God, then this world is just an accident, life has no meaning, and there is no security. We are randomly floating in space, could be killed by an asteroid at any time, and life would not have mattered. If there is no God, our bodies are blobs of matter, which means we have no more value than a rock. In addition, love is just a feeling resulting from chemical reactions, and morality has no real standard. On the other hand, if there is a God, then we are part of an amazing story with real heroes. If God is real, the presence of evil makes sense. God has a reason for letting bad things happen, and He will judge evil in the end. If God exists, you have value. You are alive for a reason, and God has an amazing plan for your life, full of meaning and purpose. If God exists, then love and moral values are principles that transcend feelings and even life itself. If God exists, there is hope after death and the offer of eternal life. Belief in God changes us, which is why belief makes life better. If we are honest, most of us can admit that somewhere deep inside, we hope there is a good God. We want life to have meaning and purpose. Why don't you take a step of faith and try God? You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Know that the Lord, He is God; it is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Psalm 100:3

Have you ever heard the term ‘self-made man’? A self-made man is someone who has made it to the top of the success ladder without any help from anybody. They did it all by themselves. We acquire this mentality early in life. If you’ve ever had children, you’ve probably heard them repeatedly say, “I want to do it by myself.” Kids get to a point where they no longer want to depend on their parents. In spite of this, children are not self-made. Their very life is a gift from their parents. While they may learn skills through hard work and determination, they are only capable of learning these skills because of the body they acquired from their parents. On a broader level, our lives are given to us by God. Every breath we take is a gift from God. Our bodies are a gift from God. Our mind is a gift from God. Our health is a gift from God. The Bible says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father” (Jas. 1:17). Whether you believe your parents gave birth to you or not, everything you have is a gift from your parents. And whether you believe in God or not, the ultimate truth is that your life is a gift from God. Everything you have is from God. While God asks us to use our bodies, lives, and talents, cultivating the gifts He has given us for good, our cultivated talents still ultimately come from God. In reality, there is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. God is the source of all good things. It is God who made us, “and not we ourselves.”

For a day in your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness. Psalm 84:10

I had often said, “My worse day as a Christian is better than my best day before I was a Christian,” and I have had some challenging times since I became a Christian. I have suffered through divorce, had close friends and family die, been in terrible car accidents, have been wrongly treated, lost jobs, struggled with financial difficulties, failed big tests, and so much more in my Christian life, but even in the worst of it, I would not trade a day of my Christian life for the best day before Christ. You see, life before God was a constant pursuit of pleasure, peace, meaning, and purpose in life. I was constantly trying to find satisfaction in life through money, alcohol, drugs, sex, music, shopping, or whatever I thought would bring my life more pleasure, but these things were empty pleasures, which only brought enjoyment for a little while but did not really satisfy the deep longings of my soul for meaning and purpose in life. When I became a Christian, I found peace and fulfillment in life apart from those things. My pursuit of peace, happiness, and meaning was fulfilled in God. It was not just the idea of God that gave me peace, but a personal experience with the living God. God entered into my heart and revealed to me eternal life. Now that I have experienced the goodness of God, nothing else can satisfy me the same anymore. I have found the answer. Now I desire to share it with the world, and I would not trade one day with God for a thousand lifetimes without Him.

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day... God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it... Gen. 2:2, 3

In 1893, the Catholic Church put out a series of articles, later published in the book *Rome's Challenge. Why Do Protestants Keep Sunday?* The articles appeal to Protestants, asking them why they worship on Sunday if the Bible says the Sabbath is on Saturday, the seventh day. While many Protestant leaders claim, "Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday in honor of the resurrection," the book reveals point by point that this is a lie. Instead, it shows us that, "The Catholic Church for over one thousand years before the existence of a Protestant, by virtue of her divine mission, changed the day from Saturday to Sunday." The Catholic Church openly admits, "Sunday is a Catholic institution... from the beginning to the end of scripture there is not a single passage that warrants the transfer of the weekly public worship from the last day of the week to the first" (*Catholic Press*, Aug. 25, 1900). The book states that because the Catholic Church claims that tradition is equal with the Bible, one can conscientiously be a Catholic and still worship on Sunday, but if Protestants stand on the Bible alone, they have no justification for worshipping on Sunday because it contradicts the Bible. The book investigates every Bible verse about Sunday, concluding that there is no evidence for the change of the Sabbath. While many well-meaning pastors twist Bible verses to support the observance of Sunday worship, the ones who claim that they changed the day say they did this without any Bible support.

I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. Job 42:5, 6

After Christian singer, Sara Groves, visited war-ravished Rwanda, she later wrote a song called “*I Saw What I Saw*.” In the song, she explains that the things she saw have had an impact on her life that cannot be undone. She cannot un-see the things she saw. The slavery. The sex trafficking. The extreme poverty. The images she saw changed her. This is exactly what Job is saying. Job is not saying that he physically saw God, but that God revealed Himself to him. God showed Job that He is alive. He is real. Job finally saw it. He got it! As a result, he says, “I have heard about God, but now I have experienced God!” I had a similar experience in my life. I grew up hearing about God and hearing stories from the Bible, but I did not know God personally until I was about twenty-five years old. During a difficult time in my life, God revealed Himself to me. Words cannot explain my experience, but I will just say that once God revealed Himself to me, I knew that He was real. Once you see something, you cannot un-see it. Once you meet a person, then everyone can tell you that person does not exist, but they will never convince you because you know. You have seen the person. It’s the same with God. I know for a fact that God is real because I have experienced Him. Those who claim He is not real are wrong. Just because you have not seen God does not mean He is not real. I know because I have met God. I know God personally. I saw what I saw, and I can’t un-see it.

Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from...God... Isa. 59:1, 2

While on a spring camping trip at the North Island of Matata Beach, the Whyte family awoke on the morning of October 26, 2018, to find that their toddler Michael was missing. In horror, they followed the footprints towards the sea. Meanwhile, fisherman Gus Hutt was checking his fishing line when he spotted what he thought was a doll in the water. Reaching out his arm, he pulled it into the boat, as it let out a squeak! It was Michael, saved in the nick of time. Similarly, we too at times become engulfed by the waves of life, crying, "I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me" (Ps. 69:2). We become buried under guilt from our past, fear for our future, mountains of debt, the pain of divorce or death, chains of addiction, and we feel that our situation is beyond hope. We feel like we are drowning, and there appears to be no way of escape. The chains of addiction are too strong. The pile of debt is too high. The guilt of sin is too dark. The shame of our past is too deep. The waves of depression, despair, and hopelessness start to wash over us, but like the arm of Gus Hutt, in the darkness, an arm is reaching out to us. While your sin has separated you from God, He is holding out His arm to save you. The good news is, the arm of the Lord reaches farther than your darkest sin, your deepest pain, your strongest addiction, your highest debt, and your heaviest guilt. The arm of the Lord is not too short to save you. If you will just cry out to Him, He will rescue you.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth..." John 8:31, 32

While living in China, there have been occasions when I would talk to people about how life began, about the meaning of life, and about what happens after death. The reply to these topics is typically, "Yes, but no one really knows for sure." My answer usually surprises them. I tell them, "I know." You see, the Bible tells us that we can know the answers. If God really exists, do you think He would make us, then let us wander around the world without knowing why we are here? Of course not! God says that we *can* know, and if we turn to Him, we *will* know! We can know how life began, what the purpose of our life is, and what happens after death. Paul said, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have" died (1 Thess. 4:13). The people who say, "Nobody can know the answer to these questions" are the people who have not found the answer, but those who have found the answer, know this is not true. If you never saw a one-horned deer, then you might say that "nobody can know if they ever existed," but if you saw one with your own eyes, no one could convince you otherwise because you know the truth. The truth is, God was around to see how life began. God has seen what death is, and He has broken the chains of death. The One who knows is God, and when I had a personal experience with God, then I found all the answers. Once I found the answers, I no longer had to wonder about the deep questions of life. As Jesus promised, I found the truth. I know the truth.

Couldn't you use a little hope?

HOPE TRACTS



**FREE BIBLE
STUDIES**

**MAKE PRAYER
REQUESTS**

**WATCH VIDEOS
ONLINE**

**READ AND DOWNLOAD
BOOKS AND TRACTS**

**PURCHASE MATERIALS
AND GET INVOLVED!**

www.hopetracts.com

HOPE+TRACTS

\$1.99

ISBN 978-1-946602-14-5

5 0199 >



9 781946 602145

www.hopetracts.com