

Getting to Know Jesus

*I want to know
Christ....*
(Phil. 3:10)

A ten-day biblical journey of faith
and discovery

by Brian Bird

Why the Bible?

Getting to know Jesus is not meant to be read like a book. This is about a journey. Take your time and focus on one chapter a day. Think about the questions. Look up the Bible references.

For many, of course, the Bible is simply a book full of ancient myths with no possible relevance in today's world. Perhaps you are one of those people who think that way. However, whatever difficulties some passages of the Bible may present to the reader, and whatever criticisms some may have levelled against the Bible down the years, it has for centuries been a unique and reliable handbook for the traveller seeking to walk in fellowship and friendship with God.

The Bible is a compilation of 66 books written over a period of about 1 500 years by about 40 different writers coming from a wide diversity of backgrounds. Within these 66 books are included, in the words of FF Bruce, "history, law (civil, criminal, ethical, ritual, sanitary), religious poetry, didactic treatises, lyrical poetry, parable and allegory, biography, personal correspondence, personal memoirs and diaries, in addition to the distinctively biblical types of prophecy."

Given that background what makes the Bible so incredibly amazing is the unity of theme and purpose that runs through the entire book. Over 80% of its hundreds of prophecies have been accurately fulfilled. And those who have studied it have discovered not only the way of salvation that God had in mind before the world had even begun but light for their path ahead.

Jl Packer sums it up beautifully when he writes, "The collection (referring to the 66 books of the Bible) as a whole, once we start to explore it, proves to have an organic coherence that is simply stunning. Books written centuries apart seemed to be designed for the express purpose of supplementing and illuminating each other. Truly the unity of the Bible is miraculous, a sign and wonder challenging the unbelief of our sceptical age."

It is the Bible, able to inform the seeker of the way of salvation, that forms the very foundation of the Getting to Know Jesus journey. May its words, as well as the contents of this booklet, inspire you to seek a life-transforming relationship with Jesus.

Day One - An Introduction

A Journey of Discovery

In **Getting to Know Jesus** you are invited on a journey of faith and discovery. On that journey you will discover that there is a world of difference between knowing about Jesus and knowing Jesus; between thinking that the Christian Faith involves no more than taking part in religious rituals on a Sunday and discovering that it is about bringing God into every part of your life seven days a week; between thinking that Christianity is about trying to find God and discovering that God is actually looking for you; between trying to earn God's favour and forgiveness and discovering that God's mercy and forgiveness are freely given to those who turn to Him.

A Prayer

I want to invite you now to read a prayer that is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians 3 verses 14-19. As you read through it, take special note of what Paul is asking of the Father. Here is no vague "God-bless-you" type of prayer.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Why these specific requests?

You will have noticed as you read that passage that Paul makes some very important and specific requests in that prayer. So why did he pray in the way he did? It could only have been because he really believed from what he personally had experienced that each one of those requests expressed God's will and intention for our life. And if that is so, then it is important that you and I take special note of each request Paul makes in that prayer for it expresses what God wants us to have.

I would like to suggest that you read through that prayer again. As you do, in your mind underline each of the requests Paul makes. You will be amazed at what you discover.

Some incredible requests

Let me share with you what I underlined when I went through that prayer. You will notice that I have changed the passage slightly to make it your personal prayer to the Father:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before you, Father, ¹⁵ from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

There is a lot in that prayer. To make it simpler to understand I have summarised all that I underlined into FOUR main points. Then, following the principle of John Wesley who said, “I interpret Scripture with Scripture”, I have placed at least one Bible cross-reference next to each point.

I suggest you look up those references. It is a good exercise in helping to reinforce those main points in your mind. However, it also provides us with an important check-and-balance to ensure the conclusions I am making from that prayer conform to Scripture and are not just something I am making up.

If you don't have a Bible (I am using the Revised Standard Version 1984) you can find an online Bible at www.biblegateway.com. At the top of the web page place the Bible reference in the “Search” section, select the Bible version you want and then hit “Enter”.

The FOUR things God wants for your life

That you be strengthened inwardly with the power of the Holy Spirit (**cf. Zechariah 4:6; Colossians 1:9-12**)

That you have Christ within (**cf. Colossians 1:27**)

That you are able to grasp and to know in your experience the love of Christ by being rooted and grounded in his love (**cf. Romans 5:5; Ephesians 4:14**)

That you be filled with all God's fullness (**cf. Ephesians 5:18**)

Think carefully about each of those four points. As you do, consider what positive impact the Father's response to those requests could have on your life. Can you visualise it? Can you imagine just how your life would change for the better? Now make a simple resolution - resolve to make the receiving of them a priority for your life.

As you go through this **Getting to Know Jesus** study you will discover **why** you need to receive those gifts from God and **how** you receive them. Stick with the journey and let's see where God leads us.

Paul offers us an amazing prayer in Ephesians 3. Let me encourage you as you continue on this journey to use it as your own prayer to God. Why not do that each morning before you get caught up in the demands of the day? It's a wonderful way in which to begin the day. In fact, why don't you use it as a prayer to the Father right now?

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before you, Father, ¹⁵ from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

Day Two - The bad news and the good news

A reminder

We began by looking at Paul's prayer to the Father in Ephesians 3 verses 14-19. There we found some very specific and quite remarkable requests. Now if God really wants you to have all those amazing things then it can only be because:

- **God loves you!** Why else would He want you to have and to enjoy such wonderful things that we find in that prayer in Ephesians chapter 3 if He didn't love you? He loves you as though you were the only one He had to love, and it doesn't matter who you are or what you have been in the past. Why am I so sure of that? Because the Bible tells us so. Take a moment to check that out in two wonderful passages in the New Testament - 1 John 4 verses 9-10; John 3 verse 16.
- **God has a wonderful plan for your life.** He must have, otherwise why would He want to impart to you such incredible blessings that we find in that prayer? Wouldn't you agree that that places your life in a whole new perspective? Think again on those four points that summarise Paul's requests. That's what God wants you to have!

But how?

If God's love is so amazing just how do we get to experience it? And if God's plan for our life is so wonderful how do we get to discover that plan?

Let's begin a search for some answers. What we will be looking for is certainly NOT a special list of do's and don'ts - some set of rules that have to be followed. Nor will we find the answer in some special denomination or in subscribing to a particular church doctrine. The answer, we will discover, is to be found in a person - a person called Jesus who made the remarkable claim, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Just how good is good news of the Gospel?

The word "Gospel" means "Good news". The Gospel is about good news - the good news about Jesus and what he came to do through his teaching, his death and his resurrection. But we are only going to appreciate just how good that good news is when we also understand just how bad the bad news is. The Bible is not just about good news. It is also about bad news. Unfortunately there are

some who believe they can make the Gospel more attractive and appealing if they leave out the bad news. But that is not what the Bible does. After all it is the bad news in the Bible that helps us to appreciate just how wonderful the good news really is!

Using your own Bible or the online Bible at www.biblegateway.com take some time now to look up the passages below.

The Bad News	The Good News
Romans 3 verse 23	Matthew 1 verse 21
Romans 6 verse 23a	Romans 6 verse 23b
Ephesians 2 verse 1	Ephesians 2 verses 4-6
1 John 1 verse 8	1 John 1 verse 9

The bad news and the good news run through the whole of the New Testament. Any presentation of the Gospel, therefore, that emphasises the one and excludes the other is an unbalanced Gospel.

While the bad news enables us to appreciate just how good the good news really is, there is another reason why we should not ignore the bad news.

It is important in helping us understand that the Gospel about Jesus the Saviour is not just for some people but for everyone. It is not just for people who obviously have a problem too big for them to handle – a drink problem, a drug problem, a marriage problem, a bad habit problem, a family problem, a business problem, or any other problem.

Perhaps we know people with problems like that. Perhaps we may even be one of those people ourselves. But that is not the only reason why people need a Saviour to rescue them. If that were true then people who don't have any major problems in their life or who feel they are capable of handling their personal problems would not need a Saviour.

But the bad news in the Bible is there to help us understand that **EVERYONE (NO EXCEPTIONS)** needs a Saviour to rescue them. So let me ask you a question: what does the bad news show you about your own need of a Saviour? Do you, whoever you are and whatever you have achieved in this world, need a Saviour? Yes or no?

We need a Saviour not because we HAVE a problem but because we ARE a problem!

Created by God for God, there is something in all of us that has disconnected us from God. And that disconnection from God carries consequences. That's what the bad news makes clear.

Over the next few chapters of ***Getting to know Jesus*** we are going to be focusing on the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis to find out why we ended up disconnected from God and what consequences that carries for all of us. Those three chapters of Genesis not only provide a vital backdrop to what unfolds through the rest of the Bible but help us to understand why it is not only the so-called 'bad' people who need a Saviour. We all do!

Preparing yourself

In preparation for what follows on our journey, make the time between now and tomorrow thoughtfully to read through some key passages in the first 3 chapters of the Book of Genesis: Chapter 1:1 (the first four words); Chapter 1: 26-31; Chapter 2: 16-17; Chapter 3: 4-6, 8-9 and 24.

Day Three - In the beginning God

A reminder

Yesterday we did a simple but important exercise – we looked up passages in the Bible that contrasted the bad news and the good news. And I encouraged you to do that for two special reasons:

Firstly, it enables us to see with a greater clarity just how good the good news of the Gospel really is and, secondly, it helps us to understand why it isn't just some people who need a Saviour – we all do.

We share a common need

No matter who we are or what our background is we all share a common need. Rich and poor, royalty and commoner, those who have succeeded in this world and those who have failed - we have all ended up disconnected from the Creator and incapable of putting that right through any effort on our part. The question is why? Why do we all share in this common need?

I want to invite you now to look at the first of those key passages in the first three chapters of Genesis. They will help us to understand how we came to be disconnected from God and why it is so essential that we have that connection re-established if our life on this earth is to fulfil God's purpose and plan.

These three chapters in Genesis, and in particular the key passages in those chapters, provide the background to everything that follows in the Bible.

They will help us understand:

Why the human race needs more than religion
Why everyone needs a Saviour
Why no one can ever be good enough to earn a relationship with God
Why Jesus had to die and rise again
Why the grace of God is so amazing

The message of Genesis 1 verse 1 (the first four words)

“In the beginning God.....”

What a challenging and important message comes across in those four words. Just think - if God existed from the very beginning then nothing can be before Him. The Universe and the human race owe their existence to God. Nothing and no one is more important than God. Nothing or no one has a greater claim upon our life than God. Because of who He is we owe it to Him to give to Him the place He deserves in our life.

If God is first in everything – if He is in the beginning then He has to be the beginning of our own life too.

He has to be the **beginning** of our day;
the **beginning** of our hopes and dreams;
the **beginning** of our ambitions;
the **beginning** of our goals in life;
the **beginning** of our finances;
the **beginning** of our marriage and family relationships;
the **beginning** of whatever it is that we do or plan to do each day;
the **beginning** of our work time and our leisure time.

First place, and only first place, belongs to the One who is before everything.

You and I can, of course, live out our life without giving God first place. Or we may give Him first place in some of the areas of our life and push Him to one side in other areas. We may do that and still have the appearance of success. We may do that and still achieve great things in the eyes of others. But somewhere our life will be out of balance. And when our life is out of balance it not only affects our relationship with God but impacts on the people around us.

Something to think about isn't it? If God isn't first in your life then who is? As you reflect on that let me take you to that prayer in Ephesians again:

For this reason I kneel before you, Father, from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints,

to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

Think about those requests and you will have a clearer understanding of why the receiving of them is so important in helping us gain the determination and motivation to want to put God first. From the contents of that prayer it is clear that Paul never believed that God wanted to do a patched-up job on our life. He did believe, however, that God wanted to do something in us that resulted in a radical transformation. As he writes in his letter to the Corinthian Church, ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*** (2 Corinthians 5 verse 17).

Was that to mean that we would become instantly perfect? Not according to the New Testament. But there can be no doubt that God wants to do something amazing and wonderful in those who receive His answers to that prayer. We may from time to time slip and fall but always there is the inner motivation to want to go back to the Cross, seek His forgiveness and move on with our new life in Christ.

Action

Based on what we have looked at thus far, I want to invite you now to take a few minutes to think about what you feel you have learnt thus far on the journey. And when you have done that consider carefully the action you will need to take to put that learning into practical action. Learning always calls for some action.

Day Four - Created in His image

A reminder

Yesterday we began looking at the first of some key passages in Genesis chapters 1-3 to gain an insight into why everyone, irrespective of who they are, needs a Saviour. Our focus was the first four words in Genesis 1 verse 1 - *"In the beginning God....."*

Our world with all its rich and wonderful diversity exists because of God. Our amazing universe with its billions of galaxies and trillions of stars exists because of God. You and I live and breathe because of God. We are created, finite beings - God is uncreated, eternal. "In the beginning God....." Nothing or no one can be more important than God. Nothing or no one has a greater claim upon our life than God. If we owe our beginning to God then everything we do and are in this life needs to begin with God. He alone has the right to first place in our life.

The message of Genesis 1 verse 26

We are going to look now at the second of those key passages in Genesis:

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.....'"

Some people find the idea of their needing a Saviour offensive. It offends them to think they need someone to rescue them when it is clear in their minds that if a Saviour exists at all then it is only those who are too weak, too stupid or too bad in this world who actually need rescuing. What do you feel? Do you think you need to be rescued? Or do you also think it is only those too weak, too stupid or too bad who need a Saviour?

What makes those first three chapters of Genesis so important is they dispel this false idea that it is only some people who need a Saviour.

Now let's explore the message of Genesis 1 verse 26 – *Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness....'*

There is a great deal that can be said about the biblical statement that we were created in the image of God, but for the purposes of this study we will seek to keep it simple.

Nothing else God created was created in His image – only the human race. So what did God have in mind when He created us in His image? Whatever else is implied in that statement, it is

clear from what follows in the creation story as well as in the rest of the Bible that God wanted to have fellowship with us. He wanted to know us and for us to know Him. He wanted to enjoy us and for us to enjoy Him. He wanted to love us and for us to love Him. He wanted to communicate with us and for us to communicate with him.

In existing in God's image we were given the ability to know Him, enjoy Him, love Him and communicate with Him. Or to put it simply - we were created by God for God.

The importance of knowing God

Think about that for a moment. If we are going to enjoy God, love God and communicate with God then we first have to know God. If we do not know Him it is clear we cannot enjoy Him, love Him or communicate with Him.

What do you think it means when we say we know someone? Is it possible to know a lot about someone without actually knowing them personally?

All of us, I am sure, believe that we can know a lot about someone without ever really knowing them personally. TV, newspapers, the Internet all provide us with mounds of information about celebrities. We can almost feel that we know them if we take the trouble to dig into the many sources of information that are readily available. But it is highly unlikely that we will ever meet them personally or that they will ever know anything about us. Our knowledge of such people is simply based on head knowledge. Do you not think that that can be just as true of God - that we can know about Him yet not know Him personally?

We may have listened to sermons, read books, watched religious programmes on TV and feel we know a great deal about God and about Jesus yet it can all be nothing more than head knowledge without our ever having had a personal encounter with God.

Fellowship with God, with all that that implies, is at the very heart of the reason why we were created in His image. If we are not having fellowship with God; if we don't know Him in a real, personal way, we can't enjoy Him, love Him and communicate with Him. And that can only mean one thing - we are actually **DISCONNECTED FROM GOD!** Something has come between God and us. And with all we might have achieved in this world, if we are disconnected from God we have missed the mark of God's purpose in creating us in His image.

Keep this in mind

I am going to invite you in a moment to pray the prayer of Ephesians 3 verses 14-19. As you utter that prayer take special note of the word 'know' in line 6 – *To know this love that surpasses knowledge...* The word 'know' is not used simply in the sense of knowing some facts in one's head but knowing in a deep personal way, knowing in one's experience, knowing in a way that changes our life.

Knowing God in this personal way influences what we do in this world and how we do it. It means our thoughts and actions are not influenced by what others around us are thinking and doing but by our personal knowledge of God Himself.

You were created in God's image so you could know him in a deep personal way. Keep that thought in mind as you pray that prayer now. Everything you are asking from God in that prayer is aimed at enabling you to **KNOW** God.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before you, Father, ¹⁵ from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

Well, do you know Him? Do you know God in a way that enables you to enjoy Him, love Him and communicate with Him? Before you move on to the next chapter, spend a few moments reflecting on what you know about God. Give it some thought. It is not about what you heard from others. It is not what you learnt at Sunday School, or read in a book or heard in a sermon. Think about what you know about God from your personal experience - the things God has revealed to you personally about Himself. Don't try to make something up. Be honest with yourself. If you find that there is very little you know or perhaps even nothing that you know personally then admit that to yourself. This is not a test. It is an opportunity for you to discover whether you have a relationship with God or whether you don't.

Day Five - Freedom but not absolute freedom

A reminder

Pride, ignorance, an unwillingness to change our lifestyle because we enjoy it too much, a sense of shame - these things often make it difficult for us to face up to the reality of our own need of a Saviour. That is why we need to be confronted with the truth of God's Word.

What we have been looking at in those key passages in Genesis is aimed at helping us to look into the mirror of God's Word and to begin to see ourselves as God sees us – not as we imagine ourselves to be; not as others see us. It is the first step towards accepting Jesus as Saviour – recognising we have a need to be rescued that maybe we didn't even know that we had until now.

The message of Genesis 2 verses 16-17

"And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'"

In creating us in His image God gave us a wonderful freedom. He wanted us to be free to enjoy this incredible thing called life. But He also wanted us to know that the freedom He gave us was never intended to be an absolute freedom. It is not a freedom to do just anything we choose to do. That's what these verses make clear. Absolute freedom belongs only to God. We do not have the capacity for absolute freedom. We need boundaries.

For the human good and to protect those whom He had created in His image, those whom He had created for himself, God set parameters beyond which the human race was not to go. And as long as the human race operated within those parameters, as long as they remained in submission to His ultimate authority, it enjoyed the wonderful blessings of the freedom God promised. And there was and is so much to enjoy, so much to explore, so much to discover. What an incredible world and what an incredible life God gave to us when He created us in His image.

God makes the rules

So what exactly are those parameters that God set? In a simple graphic way God, in those two verses in Genesis, presents us with an eternal truth – It is He who defines good and evil – not

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us, not our culture, not our traditions. It is God alone who defines the limits of our human freedom. When we decide to make our own rules and live in whatever way WE choose, we step outside of God's parameters. Consequences follow – ***when you eat of it you will surely die.***

But what is this death that is the consequence of disobedience – of stepping outside the parameters God has set? Death in the Bible does not mean ceasing to exist. God is not saying that if the human race stepped outside of the parameters He had set it would cease to exist. It is obvious that the human race did not cease to exist, or you wouldn't be reading this.

To understand what God meant we have to understand what the Bible means by death. Death in the Bible is a conscious existence in separation from God. Life in the Bible is just the opposite. It is conscious existence in communion with God.

Death is conscious existence in separation from God
Life is conscious existence in fellowship with God

Death, in its biblical meaning, is a contradiction of all God purposed for us when he created us in His image. Yet it is a fact that even outside of communion with God some individuals in particular and the human race in general have achieved some really amazing things when measured by human standards. But whatever the human race may have achieved, and, no doubt, will continue to achieve while outside of communion with God, what it cannot achieve is to fulfil the purpose of having been created in God's image. Disconnected from God we cannot know him, enjoy him, love him and communicate with him. And in the end those are the only things that will count.

Stepping outside the parameters God has set sums up what the Bible means by **sin**. As much as some people dislike the word; as much as some people may feel the church has used the word as a stick to beat people into submission, we cannot avoid it. The word 'sin' is used too frequently in the Bible for us simply to ignore it.

Action

I want to invite you now to take a few moments to look at two of the many passages in the New Testament that relate to sin – **Romans 3:23** and **1 John 1:8**. They appear below.

Romans 3 v 23 : ***For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God***

1 John 1v 8 : ***If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.***

Having just read those two verses I wonder if you would go through them again. This time, however, as you read them think of the key words or phrases in those verses.

What would your response be if I had to ask you whether, on the basis of those two verses, you believe you have ever acted on a decision to make your own rules and do whatever it was that pleased you without concerning yourself as to whether it pleased God? Have you ever done that? Of course you have, just as I have and everyone else has.

Now if you think back to Genesis 2 what did God say the consequences of those actions would be? Do you remember? God said, “When you eat of it you will surely die” – conscious existence in separation from God.

When we are not where we should be with God there is always something missing in our life. As a result we tend to grab with both hands at the substitutes the world offers. But no matter how much it offers it is never enough, is it?

Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee

(St Augustine)

In all of us there is a God-shaped blank that only God can fill (Unknown)

I am going to invite you to go through Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3 again. But before you pray that prayer, have a moment of quiet reflection as you think on what we have looked at thus far on our journey. Think of those times when you stepped outside of God’s parameters and acted without reference to God and without concern as to what He wanted for your life. Take your time. Don’t hurry.

Now offer to the Father Paul’s prayer:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before you, Father, ¹⁵ from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

Day Six - The downward spiral into disobedience

A reminder

When God created us in His image He wanted us to know Him, enjoy Him, love Him and communicate with Him. He wanted us to be free, free to enjoy all that He, as our Creator, has given us. What an incredible freedom He wanted us to have.

But as we saw last week, the freedom He gave was not an absolute freedom. It was not the freedom to do absolutely anything we want. It was not the freedom to make and live by our own rules. Only God can handle such absolute freedom. So God set parameters for our own protection. And in setting those parameters He made it clear that HE SETS THE RULES. Step outside of those parameters and there are consequences. And those consequences are summed up in one word – DEATH. Death, as we saw last week, does not mean in the Bible ‘ceasing to exist’ but ‘conscious existence in separation from God.’

The message of Genesis 3 verses 1-9 and 23-24

Below is the passage taken from the Revised Standard Version (1984) of the Bible. I want to suggest you read through it a couple of times. As you do take special note of the words or phrases I have underlined.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees of the garden,³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”⁴ “You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman.⁵ “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden.⁹ But the Lord God called to the man “Where are you?”²³ So the Lord God banished him from the Garden of

Eden.....²⁴ *After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*

Should we regard this passage as an historical account of real, actual events? Did it happen exactly that way? Are we meant to take those opening chapters in Genesis literally?

There are those who will argue that it is imperative we do so. Some, on the other hand, may find that very difficult to accept. We are not going to spend time now discussing which approach is right. Rather I want us to focus on what each of us can learn from this story that in our 21st century world will enable us to see why all of us need a Saviour to rescue us and to transform us into what God purposed us to be.

The key phrases

You will have noticed in the Genesis passage above that I have underlined **EIGHT** key phrases.

The first four phrases that have been underlined are the four temptations that led the man and woman in Genesis 3 on a downward spiral that finally resulted in their act of defiance against God's command. The next four highlight what followed their act of defiance.

The four temptations leading to disobedience:

Temptation number one: "Did God really say....?"

It is a question intended to sow the seeds of doubt in the mind of the woman. Are you sure you heard God correctly? Does God really possess the ability to follow through on the warnings He has given? Should you really be attaching any importance to God? In fact, is it God who said it or is it just something that you simply imagined God to have said?

From her act of disobedience that was ultimately to follow it is clear in the story that the question had succeeded in planting the seeds of doubt in her mind. For the woman and the man entertaining rather than rejecting the question was the first step in a downward spiral.

You and I are faced with the same temptation to doubt when it comes to the Bible. How can we be sure that what we read there is really God's word and not just the words of the writers, the myths of the dim and distant past? After all, the Bible was written so long ago. How can we be sure that it is true? Once we entertain that doubt the next step on the downward spiral soon follows.

Temptation number two: “You will not surely die”

The words that were intended to sow doubt and uncertainty are then followed up by a statement from the tempter that is a clear and direct contradiction of God’s warning. The truth is made out to be a lie and a lie made out to be the truth – ***You will not surely die!***

Once she began to doubt, the woman, like us, appears to find it easy to believe the lie. After all, a lie is often more comfortable than the truth. Who wants to hear that death is the consequence that follows sin? Who wants to believe that God holds us responsible for how we live? It is far easier and more comfortable to think of ourselves as free agents able to make up our own mind and decide our own destiny. *You shall NOT die!* Doubt now gives way to unbelief. It was the second step in their downward spiral.

Temptation number three: “You will be like God”

Why be under God when you can be god yourself? You can decide what is right and wrong. You are the measure of your own standard. You are your own god. If you want, take. If you desire, have. You owe allegiance to no one except yourself. You can write God out of the picture altogether. He is irrelevant. There is no price to pay for disobeying God for YOU are god. You have all the wisdom to determine your own destiny.

The doubt and the lie have successfully blinded the woman to the seriousness of what she was about to do. God’s warnings were brushed aside for the sake of the sheer pleasure of the moment – the thought of being able to decide her own destiny. Unbelief now gives way to blasphemy of thinking they can be like God. It was the third step on their downward spiral.

Temptation number four: “When the woman saw”

Once the inner restraints had successfully been eroded by doubt and by believing a lie, the forbidden fruit became irresistible. And the more the woman focused on it the more attractive it became. *When the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise she took from its fruit.* It was the final step in their downward spiral.

It is immaterial in the story what that forbidden fruit actually was. It is what it represents that is important. Taking and eating it represents the human attempt not only to be free from God’s control but to become like God. Man wants to rule his own world his way. He wants to shape his own destiny and in the end to be able to say, in the words of a song made famous by Frank Sinatra, “I did it my way.”

*It matters not how strait the gate, how charged with punishments
the scroll, I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul.*

From *Invictus* by William Henley

But are we really the master of our fate, the captain of our soul? And are there consequences that follow our trying to do things our way? In the next two chapters we will begin looking at the FOUR phrases in Genesis 3 that highlight the consequences of disobeying God.

Action

Take the time to go through the Genesis passage again and think about those four steps that led the man and the woman on a downward spiral ending in disobedience. As you reflect on them see whether they throw any light on your own actions in this world and whether they help you to understand why the world is in the mess it is and why you, like every other human being on this planet, are in need of a Saviour.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before you, Father, ¹⁵ from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

Day Seven – What follows disobedience

A reminder: In the Genesis 3 passage we underlined eight key phrases. The first four describe the steps that led the man and the woman on a downward spiral resulting in an act of defiance against God. The next four describe what followed their defiance. Disobedience always carries consequences.

Now whether we take the story in Genesis in a literal, historical sense or in a non-literal sense, there is for all of us in that story timeless truths that provide us with a clear illustration of our own moral and spiritual condition before God. In Genesis 3 the tempter came disguised as a serpent. The tempter may come in many different disguises to us, but the temptation to doubt God and to exalt ourselves to a position equal to that of God is as real for us as it was for the man and woman in the story of Genesis 3.

The consequences outlined

Let's turn now to the phrases in Genesis 3 that highlight what followed the act of disobedience of the man and the woman.

Consequence number one: They were embarrassed and tried to hide from God.

Following their disobedience, it is obvious that being in God's presence was no longer a welcoming experience for the man and the woman in the Genesis story. The sudden awareness of their physical nakedness reflected an awareness of their own moral and spiritual nakedness before God.

When we disobey God and attempt to live by our own rules God's presence is no longer inviting. Why? Well there is something about the presence of a holy and righteous God that has the uncomfortable effect of awakening in us a sense of guilt and shame at our own moral and spiritual nakedness. God's holiness exposes something in us that we don't want exposed yet can't avoid in His presence. It is like looking at ourselves in a mirror and seeing what we are really like when all along we had convinced ourselves that we were very different.

I can think of no better illustration of the impact of God's holiness than the prophet Isaiah's experience of God in the Temple. We find it in Isaiah 6 verses 1-6:

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³And they were calling to one another: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory.' ⁴At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.'

The holiness of God has this effect of awakening in us a sense of our own sinfulness. When we don't want to have to face up to the reality of our own guilt and shame we find, like the man and the woman in the Genesis story, that the only alternative is to try and hide from the presence of God. Let's think on some of the ways people still try to hide from God:

- **They can hide behind their good works.**
(How can I be guilty when I do so much that is good?)
- **They hide from places or people where God is mentioned to avoid being reminded of him.**
(I can't stand those hypocritical Christians. I stay as far away from them as I can!)
- **They hide behind a denial that God exists at all.**
(There is no God. He exists only in the mind and imagination of the weak and simple!)
- **They hide behind a religion where God is presented as being more lenient and tolerant of our human frailties and where there is no mention of sin.**
(I like this religion because there is no mention of sin. It doesn't make me feel guilty!)
- **They hide behind a preoccupation with the outward acts of religion.**
(I must be alright. Look how devoted I am to my religion!)
- **They hide behind their worldly success.**
(Who needs God when I have achieved all this without relying on Him?)

Consequence number two: The truth about their disobedience is exposed

God called out to the man and the woman in the Genesis story. "Where are you? Where are you?" The intimacy God intended for the human race to enjoy with himself when he created them in his image is now gone. Instead of rushing to meet God they hid from him.

While the man and woman may have tried to hide from God, however, there is ultimately no hiding place from Him. This is something every human being will ultimately discover – for some tragically too late! God’s call, “**Where are you?**” was finally to bring them out from their hiding place to answer to God why they were trying to hide from Him.

The sense of the inescapable presence of God is brought out clearly by the psalmist in the following psalm:

*O Lord, you have searched me, and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.
You hem me in - behind and before;
you have laid your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.*

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and
the light become night around me,”
even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

Psalm 139:1-12

Just how foolish we are to try and hide from the love and mercy of God is brought out in Francis Thompson’s moving poem entitled “The Hound of Heaven.” It begins: “I fled Him, down the nights and down the days; I fled Him, down the arches of the years; I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind; and in the midst of tears I hid from Him....” But as the poem continues it echoes the thoughts expressed by the psalmist that though we may try to flee from God His presence reaches even into the shadows of our hiding place.

In the Thompson poem God has the final word: “Alack, thou knowest not how little worthy of any love thou art! Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee, save Me, save only Me? All which I took from thee I did but take, not for thy harms, but just that thou might'st seek it in My arms. All which thy child's mistake fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home: Rise, clasp My hand, and come!”

Foolish and unworthy we indeed are, but take another look at that wonderful prayer in Ephesians 3 and see the amazing grace of God that is being offered to each of us:

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before you, Father, ¹⁵ from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

Action

We have looked at some of the ways in which people try to hide from God. Can you think of any other ways people would try to hide from God to add to the list? Now spend a little time considering whether you might be using one or other of those places to hide from God yourself. If you sense that you have been trying to hide from God then I invite you to think of God's call to the man and the woman in the Genesis story, "Where are you?" It is an invitation to you to come out of the shadows into the light of God's presence. As someone once said, "We can face God now as our Saviour or ultimately as our Judge."

Day Eight - The consequences of disobedience (contd.)

A reminder

Whether we view the opening chapters of Genesis in a literal, historical sense or simply as a divinely inspired story containing timeless truths, what emerges from them is important for it helps us to understand the events in the Bible that followed and led ultimately to the coming of Jesus Christ.

The opening chapters of Genesis highlight not only the incredible potential the human race was given in being created in God's image, but also the seriousness of the consequences that follow disobedience. The temptation to try and be equal to God and set their own agenda for life proved too much for the man and the woman in the story. In the end they chose to disobey God. It is a tragedy that is mirrored in our own experience. And in their guilt and shame at what they had done, the man and the woman, as we saw last week, tried to hide from God just as we do and missed out on the intimacy of fellowship with God.

Number three: God is hidden from us

I want us now to look at the final two consequences that followed the disobedience of the man and the woman and which is outlined in Chapter Three of Genesis.

What we discover is that disobedience resulted not only in their trying to hide from God, but ultimately in God being hidden from them – a thought that is simply but powerfully and eloquently expressed in the phrase “God banished him from the garden”. That thought is echoed in Isaiah 59 verse 2: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” The intimacy of fellowship is gone.

Disobedience, as God had warned, carries consequences. As a result of their trying to be like God and make their own rules, the man and the woman had become disconnected from God. While they continued to have physical life, something within them had died. And all the incredible possibilities that had come with their being created in God's image of knowing Him, enjoying Him, loving Him and communicating with Him were lost in that disconnection. Not only did they try to hide from God, but now God was hidden from them. Unless God chooses to reveal Himself He remains hidden even from the most powerful intellect.

Consequence number four: Loss of eternal life

In graphic story form the final consequence of their disobedience outlined in Genesis 3 is the loss of eternal life. The image of the flaming sword flashing back and forth guarding the way to the tree of life clearly suggests that there is no way through their own human efforts that they can recover what they had lost. The man and the woman cannot save themselves. Having made the choice to step beyond the parameters that God had set, the man and the woman must now accept the ultimate consequences of their choice to disobey – separation from God and therefore separation from eternal life.

What is eternal life?

But what thoughts come to your mind when you think of eternal life? Let's find out what the Bible means by eternal life? In John 17 and verse 3 John records these words of Jesus: *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

Eternal life is not simply life as we know it now going on and on indefinitely - it is, as Jesus tells us, knowing God and knowing Jesus whom the Father sent. The emphasis in a biblical understanding of eternal life is on quality and not simply quantity. It is life in fellowship with God, and it is only in that connection with God that we can know Him, enjoy Him, love Him and communicate with Him. That is eternal life. And it starts in the here and the now.

Separation from God, therefore, and separation from eternal life inevitably belong together. We cannot be separated from God and still have eternal life. And once separated from God what those opening chapters of Genesis make clear is that no effort on our part can enable us to regain what has been lost. Unless God intervenes we are separated from God forever. That is what Paul means in Romans 6 verse 23 when he says, "The wages of sin is death..." It is not only expressed in a physical death but in separation from God

Let me summarise for you the four consequences of disobedience outlined in Chapter Three of Genesis. Do you remember what they are?

Summary of consequences

In their guilt and shame the man and the woman seek to hide from God

Their guilt is exposed

They are now disconnected from God and He is hidden from them

Eternal life is lost and no amount of human effort can regain what has been lost

Conclusion based on the first 3 chapters of Genesis

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of those first three chapters of Genesis. They set an important backdrop for the rest of what unfolds in the Scriptures. But, equally important, they help us to understand why every one of us needs a Saviour – someone to rescue us - irrespective of who or what we are or what we have achieved in this world.

Something vital to our human existence was lost when the first humans became disconnected from God. Their rebellion against God mirrors our own rebellion. Their disconnection from God mirrors our own disconnection. And no human effort or achievement on our part can compensate for that loss nor reconnect us to God.

With those thoughts in mind I invite you now to make Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 verses 14-19 your own prayer to God. But before you pray that prayer, I want to invite you to reflect on some very important questions.

What has been lost in your life as a result of your own disconnection from God? How do you think that has affected the way you live out your life? How do you think your life could change if you could be reconnected to God? When you have had time to ponder on these vital questions think carefully on the words you are about to pray and on what God wants to restore to you.

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before you, Father, ¹⁵ from whom your whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of your glorious riches you may strengthen me with power through your Spirit in my inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that I, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that I may be filled to the measure of all your fullness.

Day Nine - What's So Special About Jesus?

A reminder

Let's recall what we have discovered on our spiritual journey so far:

God loves us and has a wonderful plan for our life. However, we have become disconnected from God and from His purpose for our life. What we discovered in those first three chapters of Genesis is not only the seriousness of our disconnection from God but the fact that we cannot, through our own efforts, mend that broken relationship or undo its consequences for our lives. And this despite all the self-help books and the many religions that suggest we can. We are the problem and only God has the solution to that problem. Experiencing that solution is vital if we are to fulfil God's purpose for our life.

Jesus is God's solution

Some years ago there was a bumper sticker that appeared on the back of many cars. It read, "Jesus is the answer". The sceptics had their own response – "If Jesus is the answer, what is the question?" They had a point of course. Jesus may be the answer, but to what question?

I trust that by now you not only know what that question is but are asking it yourself - "How do I get connected to God?" And the Bible makes it clear that there is only one answer - Jesus is the answer!

Now if the answer to our own disconnection from God lies in a person called Jesus and in no other, what is it that makes Jesus so special? Let's take a look at some of the things that set Jesus apart from any other person who has ever lived on this earth. It is when we begin to understand who he is that we also begin to understand how Jesus is able to rescue us.

What's so special about Jesus?

The accounts of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John show him to have been a **prophet**, a **teacher**, a **healer**, a **miracle worker**. But while Jesus was indeed all of those things, the New Testament also reveals that Jesus was infinitely more. So what was it that made him more than a prophet, more than a teacher, more than a healer, more than a miracle worker? Finding the answer is vital.

Jesus fulfils prophecy

His birth, his ministry, his death on the cross and his resurrection literally fulfilled numerous Old Testament prophecies. For those many prophecies to have been fulfilled purely by chance is so improbable as to be unthinkable. If it wasn't by chance then a man whose coming fulfils dozens of prophecies is someone very special with a unique place in history. *(For those who would like to explore those prophecies for themselves you can check out the following website:*

www.askapastor.org/proph.html)

Jesus rose from the dead

Having been crucified on a cross and buried in a tomb, Jesus rose from the dead. That fact forms the very cornerstone of the Christian faith. Biblical evidence, circumstantial evidence and the testimony of the early church all confirm that Jesus rose from the dead. Not only is that fact true of no other, but it has great significance for those who believe in him. "Because I live you shall live also, Jesus said (John 14 verse 19). *(To explore the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus look up the following website: www.christjesus.us/resurrection.html)*

Jesus has supremacy over everything

The uniqueness of Jesus is emphasised in many places in the New Testament. Let's focus on just one passage- Paul's letter to the Colossians 1 verses 15-19. Before you read it, however, there are two words that appear in that passage that need some explanation:

The first is the word **image**. It is a translation of the Greek word **eikon**, a word that contains two important thoughts – **representation** and **manifestation** or **making visible**. As the image of the invisible God, Jesus represents and manifests or makes visible "the invisible God."

The second word is the word **firstborn** (a translation of the Greek word **prototokos**). It is used to emphasise his **pre-eminence** or **superiority** rather than implying the first to be born – **his pre-eminence** or **superiority** over **creation**, his **pre-eminence** or **superiority** over **death** – "**so that in everything**", writes Paul, "**Jesus might have the supremacy.**"

Now with those thoughts in mind let's amplify the Colossian passage to bring out its full meaning:

¹⁵ *He (Jesus) is the image (representing and making visible) of the invisible God, the firstborn (having pre-eminence, superiority) over all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;*

all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn (having pre-eminence, superiority) from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus).."

Colossians 1 verses 15-19

Summary

The fact that Jesus fulfils dozens of Old Testament prophecies, rose from the dead, represents and makes visible the invisible God and is acknowledged by the Church as having supremacy in everything, sets him apart from anyone else. It identifies him as being more than just a prophet, more than just a teacher, more than just a healer, more than just a miracle worker.

His uniqueness is summed up in a phrase that is used frequently to refer to Jesus in the New Testament - ***Lord Jesus Christ***.

Lord – refers to his deity. Jesus is truly God

Jesus – refers to his humanity. Jesus is fully human

Christ – refers to his divine activity. Jesus is the promised Messiah, Saviour, Deliverer.

Background.

If Jesus is fully God yet also fully Man how can he be both at the same time? We don't have time in this present course to deal with that question at any depth, but if it is something that concerns or interests you then take some time to go through the following passage: Philippians 2 verses 5-11. It is a profound passage and will provide you with a wonderful insight into the great mystery of Jesus – fully God and fully Man.

Day Ten - Jesus the Saviour

A reminder

The Gospel, we have discovered on our journey, has two important and contrasting elements to its message – the bad news and the good news. The bad news confronts us with why we need rescuing. The good news element of the Gospel reveals God’s amazing answer to that need.

That answer, as we have discovered on the journey, is not to be found in a religion. It’s not found in a set of rules and regulations. It’s not found in a philosophy of life. It is found, however, in a relationship with a unique and without doubt the most remarkable person who has ever lived on this earth. That person is JESUS, also referred to as Lord Jesus Christ. It’s a title that emphasises his divinity, his humanity and his divine activity.

Jesus as Saviour

As we reach the final day in our journey we begin our study today with a look at an important statement about Jesus in Matthew 1:21. Matthew records these words given to Joseph by the Messenger of the Lord: “She (Mary) will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

If Jesus is God’s rescue plan for a world gone wrong, then it is clear that Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross followed by his resurrection are all part of that rescue plan. There was no quick, no easy solution to our need. And for Jesus fulfilling the Father’s rescue plan involved intense suffering and an agonising death.

But why did Jesus have to die to rescue us? Could God not just have forgiven us if we showed remorse for what we had done?

To ask those questions sounds perfectly logical but they miss **TWO** very important points:

FIRSTLY, THEY MISS THE POINT OF OUR NEEDING MORE THAN FORGIVENESS

As we have begun to discover on our journey it is not just what **WE DO** or **FAIL TO DO** that has alienated us from God – it is basically what we **ARE** within ourselves. It is our nature that we have inherited that appears in the Bible as the real root of our human problem. Paul in his letter to the Romans calls it the ‘**old self**’ or ‘**old nature.**’ Even when we want to try and please God we seem to find it easier to please ourselves.

Capable of great acts of nobility, achievement and sacrifice when measured by human standards, it remains a nature prone to sin, prone to rebellion, prone to disappoint God. Now think about that for a moment. What would be the point of our being forgiven by God for the wrong things we had done or for the things we had failed to do if there was no fundamental change within us?

If the Gospel offered no inward change we would simply be caught in an endless cycle of sinning, seeking forgiveness, being forgiven, sinning, seeking forgiveness, being forgiven.

There would be little victory in that. So God's rescue plan went deeper than just offering forgiveness. His plan involved replacing the old rebel nature (the inner you) with a new nature (inner you) that was capable of connecting with Him in a personal life-transforming way.

A new nature

That new nature doesn't impart instant perfection. However, we become like someone who has been born again. That new nature imparts to us the capacity to know God intimately as Father and gives us the divine right to call ourselves children of God. It is a nature with the capacity to listen to God, to learn from Him, to be disciplined by Him and above all to enjoy Him. It is a nature that offers life in place of death!

The cost to Jesus was enormous but the benefit and blessing to the believer are more incredible than anything this world could offer. Let's take a look for a moment at an important Scripture passage that powerfully illustrates this for us. It is found in Paul's letter to the Romans 6 verses 6-7.

For we know that our old self (old nature, our old inner self) WAS crucified with him (Jesus) so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. To make it more relevant and personal I have changed it slightly:

For I know that my old self (old nature, the old inner me) WAS crucified with him (Jesus) so that the body of (my) sin might be done away with, that I should no longer be a slave to sin – because if I have died I have been freed from sin.

So deep and personal was Jesus' connection with each of us that his death was just as if we had died. His resurrection from the dead was as just as if we had been raised to a new life. How beautifully Paul illustrates this for us: ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ (in a relationship of faith***

and trust in Christ), he is a new creation; the old (you) has gone, the new (you) has come (2 Corinthians 5 verse 17).

We need more than forgiveness. We need a new nature that can connect with God in love and obedience. To make that possible Jesus had to die to put our old nature to death in his own body.

SECONDLY, THE THOUGHT OF GOD FORGIVING US WITHOUT JESUS HAVING TO DIE ON THE CROSS OVERLOOKS THE FACT THAT GOD'S JUSTICE DEMANDED HIS JUDGEMENT AGAINST SIN BE FULFILLED

The thought that God could simply forgive us without Jesus having to suffer and die overlooks the important fact that death is the inevitable judgement of a holy God against sin.

Let's take a few moments to remind ourselves of what God said about sin:

"You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:17)

"For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 3:23)

Now all of us, without exception, have missed the mark God set. We have fallen short. All of us, therefore, without exception are under judgement of death, separated from the one and only God who created us for Himself. And all our human efforts, however well-intentioned, however sincere, however disciplined, and however religiously devout, cannot break us free from that judgement.

God's holiness and justice demand that the sentence against sin be carried out. But God's love and mercy have provided the solution not in our death but in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In 2 Corinthians 5 verse 21 Paul writes:

God made him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (have a right standing with God)

At the cross of Jesus God's justice and God's mercy meet. The overwhelming debt we owed before a holy God paid in full in Jesus Christ who took our place, the barrier between us and God removed, and death replaced with life. ***"Because I live, you also will live (John 14:19).*** In

Christ's death you died and in Christ's resurrection you were raised a new creation made right before a holy God, the debt you owed cancelled forever.

Take a few moments now to look up a wonderful passage in Isaiah 53 verses 1-12 in the Old Testament. Written centuries before the coming of Jesus, it reflects the hope of God's people of the coming of a Redeemer whose suffering would bring deliverance. Everything about the life, death on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus fulfils that amazing prophecy.

For us to be forgiven the judgement of God against sin had to be acted on. God's justice demanded it. And for that Jesus had to die.

Everything has been done to set you free

In Christ everything that needed to be done to make it possible for us to be forgiven and restored into a relationship of love and trust with God the Father has been done in Jesus. Everything! There is nothing to be added and nothing that can be subtracted. But for that to become real and personal in our life we have to respond, you have to respond, to God's love and mercy offered to us in His Son Jesus. God's salvation is offered. Now it has to be received.

A time of silence

I want to suggest that you spend a time in silence now during which you think about what this journey has been about. And then think about what you believe your response to God's gracious offer should be.

Making your response

Jesus' invitation to you is simple and direct: "Come and follow me. Let me offer you not only forgiveness but a new life in me and with me."

There is no formula for beginning the new life with Jesus. There is no set prayer for experiencing the mercy and grace of God that is offered in Jesus Christ. God looks to the heart and not just the words of our mouth. However, here is a suggestion to help you get started. Feel free to use it and equally free to add your own words and thoughts.

Father I see now that I was created to know you, love you, enjoy you and communicate with you. Sadly I have to acknowledge that up until now I have missed out on this wonderful privilege that was given to me when you made me in your image. Other things seem to have

got in the way and I have got my priorities all mixed up as I tried to put other things in your place. But I see now that nothing can take your place for my life.

I deeply regret the hurt I have caused you and others down the years and feel ashamed of the things I have done and been and said and thought. Knowing what I am inside, I am so grateful now that you never gave up on me. I cannot thank you enough for making me aware that I needed to be rescued from my foolishness and rebellion against you.

Thank you, Father, for sending Jesus to rescue me. Thank you, Jesus, that you came. I acknowledge that you died for my sin so that I can be forgiven and start again. I acknowledge that you rose again from the dead so that I can share in your resurrection life. I receive you now as my Saviour and ask that you become the Lord of my life from this moment on.

Thank you for hearing my prayer, Father, and for receiving me into your presence. Now as one who has been forgiven by your grace and mercy I acknowledge that you have given me the right to call you not just Father, but my Father.

Amen

Whether you prayed the above prayer, added to it or simply used your own words to express your desire to be forgiven and restored into fellowship with the Father, the question is, did God answer your prayer? And how can you be sure?

Did God hear your prayer?

Most people wait for some kind of inner feeling to give them that assurance. Feelings, if they are good ones are fine, but we know they come and they go. We need something more permanent and reliable than just nice feelings. And God provides that for us in His Word. He always honours His Word irrespective of what we feel or don't feel. So take some time now to look up the passages below in your own Bible or in the online Bible at www.gateway.com and then, as a suggestion, find somewhere to write them out and keep them in your Bible.

John 1:12-13; Luke 11:9-10; John 3:16; Acts 2:37-39; Philippians 1: 9-11; Romans 10:9-11; Ephesians 2:8-10

What now?

If you have taken the step of seeking the Father's forgiveness and embracing Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, then for you the real journey of faith and discovery has just begun. Ahead lay the challenges and opportunities of serving God until that final day when you see Him face to face. So

push on. Share your new found faith with others, but do it humbly and wisely “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith.”

Make a point of meeting regularly with other believers. Join a bible-believing Church if you are not already a member. Share with your minister what you have done. Read the Scriptures. Talk to God every day. Thank Him for His love and mercy and for all He has blessed you with. You will be amazed now that your spiritual eyes are open just how truly blessed you are. Remember, prayer is not just talking to God. It is also about listening, communicating. The more you practice it the easier it becomes.

May God encourage you day by day and make you a blessing both to Him and to others. And one way in which you can bless God and others is in sharing the message of ***Getting to Know Jesus*** by passing on the booklet to people on your email contact list.

(If you have been blessed through studying this booklet or if you have any queries feel free to contact me. My email address is:

intaka2003@yahoo.co.uk)

Meaning of some key words and phrases

1. **Christ** – Means the anointed One; the One whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit; The Messiah sent by the Father to bring deliverance to God's people.
2. **Church** – In the New Testament 'church' never refers to a building but to people – people who have accepted Jesus as Saviour and Lord. The church may meet in a building but it is not the building that is important - it is those who gather there to worship God.
3. **Commandments of God** – In the New Testament all the commandments of God are summed up in two great commandments – love God and love one another.
4. **Disciple** – Jesus instructed his Church to go out and make disciples, not make 'Christians'. A disciple is a learner who learns by following Jesus and by listening and applying God's Word to his or her life.
5. **Eternal Life** – In the Bible it is not simply endless life but more about a quality of life – life in fellowship with God. The New Testament speaks about it as resurrection life.
6. **Gospel** - The word 'Gospel' comes from two old English words that mean 'good news'. It is the good news about Jesus and the Kingdom of God.
7. **Grace** – God's undeserved love or **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense
8. **Kingdom of God** - Kingly rule of God or the sphere in which God rules.
9. **Made righteous** - To be given a right standing before God because of what Jesus did for us through his death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead and his ascension into heaven.
10. **Repentance** – To change one's mind and involves turning from sin and turning to God
11. **Saint** - In the Bible a saint is not someone who is perfect but one who, because of his or her faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, has been set apart for God.
12. **Salvation** – God's action in delivering us from the effects and consequences of our rebel nature and bringing us into His glorious Kingdom. In salvation we receive the gift of eternal life through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.
13. **Saviour** – A deliverer, preserver. Jesus came into the world to rescue us from the effects and consequences of our separation from God and bring us into the Kingdom of God.
14. **Sin** – literally means to miss the mark. Whatever we may be when measured against human standards, all of us when measured against God's standards have missed the mark. We have

fallen short of the glory of God. The Bible teaches that we are not sinners because we have committed a sin. Rather we sin because by nature we are sinners – all of us, without exception.

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