

A person stands on the peak of a dark, rocky mountain. Their arms are raised in a 'V' shape towards a bright sun that is partially obscured by their silhouette, creating a lens flare effect. The sky is a deep blue with scattered white clouds. The overall mood is one of triumph or achievement.

**WHAT  
AM I  
DOING  
HERE?**

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## Introduction

It's hard to think there is a meaning to life when we look around. Just look at the news to see the way humanity has deteriorated. I saw on the news where a nineteen year old girl had lighter fluid poured in her mouth, nose and all over her body and then she was set on fire. They found her walking and just before she died she tried to tell the police who did this to her. Just recently a co-pilot who suffered from depression locked out the pilot and crashed his jet with 150 people into a mountain, killing everyone. Another story told how someone threw a 2 week old baby in a dumpster, husband killing his wife and children, a daughter killing her mother, a mother her child and the terrible list goes on.

It's hard to tell sexual immorality from what we accept as the norm any more. We've become a society that is numb of all the perversion of this world and most of us might think what's the difference or what could I do anyway, so we just give up.

No wonder the suicide rate is so high and a day doesn't go by that someone decides to end their life instead of live it. So many celebrities have committed suicide or overdosed on drugs. These are people that we thought had everything and if we were like them life would be perfect. Most of us think this is what life should be: money, fame, glamour and no worries. I feel that is why so many celebrities like Whitney Houston, Michael Jackson, Demi Moore, Robin Williams, Junior Seau and others from depression come to the point of suicide. Many people say if I can get this then I'll be happy and life will have meaning. Most people may not attain their goal which they are striving for, but the wealthy can get just about anything they desire. So for them if they feel that something will fulfill them and they obtain it but, it doesn't make them feel fulfilled they might finally get tired of trying.

Another group of individuals that have an alarming high suicide rate is teenagers. The following is some statistics:

- Suicide is the SECOND leading cause of death for ages 10-24. (2010 CDC WISQARS)
- Suicide is the THIRD leading cause of death for college-age youth and ages 12-18. (2010 CDC WISQARS)
- More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, stroke, pneumonia, influenza, and chronic lung disease, COMBINED.
- Each day in our nation there is an average of over 5,400 attempts by young people grades 7-12.
- Four out of Five teens who attempt suicide have given clear warning signs

We wonder if it has always been like this, wasn't there a better time, but looking back at history each generation must have wondered, why am I here?

The wisest man of all times, Solomon, said this in Ecclesiastes.

*Eccl 1:1-11 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." 3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun? 4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again. 8 All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us. 11 There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after.*

So what's the meaning of life for you? To make a lot of money, which you won't be able to take with you when you die, to raise a family that you will have to say good bye to one day, A career that makes you feel important, at least for awhile, or for so many of us just to survive each day. Most of us might want a life that will outlive us, but we have a difficult time living the life we have each day.

Kind of a depressing start for a book, don't you think. Unfortunately it is also full of truths. So does life even have a meaning or do you believe all this is by chance?

The theory of evolution and the Big Bang theory that are being taught in our schools I believe have diminished the thought that our life has meaning and a purpose. If we did just happen then there is no meaning of life and we should do whatever we desire until we die.

We all have desires and a heart that longs for something better than this. If we didn't think so most of us wouldn't be depressed, it would be easier to accept that we are here purely here by chance so let's grab what we want before this short life is over. However in our hearts we know that's not true and there is something more that this life has to offer and there is something we should be doing.

## MY STORY

I woke up to the sun shining on my face through the window. It was another beautiful morning in Southern California. I went out on the balcony and looked out to see neighboring homes with well manicured yards each accented with a variety of shrubs and plants. I looked down to see my own yard and the walkway, which had roses of different colors bordering it. The sun glistened off the dew so brightly I had to squint to see. I went inside to get ready for my journey. I shaved, brushed my teeth and took a shower and selected the clothes I would wear for that day. I went downstairs to the kitchen to grab something to eat before I left. I took a bagel from the refrigerator and placed it in the toaster to brown. While I was waiting I went to the side door to admire my handy work in the yard from the week before. I trimmed back the bushes that had become overgrown and cleaned up the beds of unwanted weeds. After my bagel popped up from the toaster I spread a generous portion of my favorite cream cheese over the top and proceeded to go to the back door. I went out through the sliding glass door to my deck and went past my hot tub to the railing. The hill in my backyard was in full bloom of bright red flowers and the trees on the top made the perfect fence, giving me seclusion from the outside world. Today was going to be a very special day for me; I've been planning a trip to my favorite place, the Cove at La Jolla, for six days. The Cove at La Jolla is where I fell in love with California about sixteen months earlier and was the reason I decided California was going to be my new home.

Since I moved to California I had taken several trips to that special place, but this morning my trip to La Jolla was going to be different as I embarked alone. I decided to take the scenic route on the coast highway. With my windows down and my sun roof opened I enjoyed the sun and the wind as it filled my car. I enjoyed going through the small towns looking at the shops and people walking on the sidewalks. I reached one of my favorite spots where the road winds up on top of a mountain and you can look down and see the coastline for miles on a clear day. I watched in amazement while enjoying the fragrance of the salt air. I passed several white sandy beaches that had dozens of surfers heading out to the cool water to catch a wave before work. There wasn't a cloud in the sky and the bright blue reflected off the water like a mirror. I chose the perfect day to end my life.

Yes, that is what I'd been planning for the last six days. I took a couple of items: a bottle of water and an empty container of M&M's filled with an anti-depressant called Parnate. I was truly excited and relieved about my final trip to the cove. In my own way I said good-bye to my wife, son and daughter, none of them knowing of my final trip. It was an early Monday morning so the cove wasn't very busy and I was able to find a choice spot close to the water. It was a smooth flat rock with no one near-by; it was as if I had the whole beach to myself. I sat down on the rock and placed my bottle of water next to me. I sat for a while enjoying the great view I had, listening to the waves and the birds flying over the water. I thought to myself today will be the day all the hurting ends and a peace came over me. I wasn't nervous, only relieved that this terrible thing, I called life, was about to end.

This is now my sixth suicide attempt. The first one I hired someone to kill me (the person went to the wrong place), another was by electrocution (a phone call stopped me at the last moment), shoot myself (someone stopped me and found the gun), and a couple of overdoses (not quite enough I guess).

At age seventeen or eighteen I was diagnosed as having a seizure disorder. Mini epilepsy is what they called it. I would have unexpected seizures like epilepsy, but they weren't as intense. The doctors were not sure exactly what caused them, they suggested it was a chemical imbalance in the brain. They often would start with a fit of rage and I could remember falling to the floor and trying to hit my head on whatever I could find. I was told that normally a person having an epileptic seizure is unaware he is having one, but I remembered each one. This started my life on a variety of different medications to cure the unknown or the best guessed. Through the years that followed, the diagnoses included bipolar disorder, chemical imbalance and manic depressive. I was treated with just about every known anti-depressant imaginable, and hospitalized several times for depression, and as a last resort given electro shock therapy.

So why was I so depressed? Life made no sense to me. I'll get up go to work, eat, come home, watch television and go to bed. With the exception of a few high or low lights that would have been my life. I figured when I would get old and retire I wouldn't need to work anymore, but by then my body will be in such bad shape I won't be able to do anything any way. So what's the sense of it all? It's all vanities.

The doctors had all kinds of reasons for my depression from emotional to physical, but I believe it was my focus. Life is like a camera; whatever you focus on is what develops. My focus was on myself and the tedious life I created for myself. I was constantly looking at things with me as the central focus, no matter what it was. If my family wanted to do something, it depended on how I felt. If there was something I wanted, I bought it. No matter what was going on, I looked at how it affected me. I was always searching for peace and happiness, and believe me, I went to every store imaginable and didn't find it. During the course of my life I have had thirty-eight jobs, lived in thirty-two places and couldn't even count the number of cars and toys I bought looking for peace of mind. I would have done just about anything to change the state of mind I was in.

I had a tendency to look at the negative things around me, and the negative things in me, in others and in my circumstances. Sometimes I looked for the worst in others in order to make me feel better about myself. I would look for the worst in people planting negative thoughts or ideas about them. Then these are the feelings I would focus on during the course of the day. Sometimes I would look for people that are unhappy in hopes that I would feel better in comparison and usually all that happened I would confirm life is terrible, so why extend the misery.

I was married at the age of nineteen to the second girl I ever went out with, which probably wasn't the best idea since I could barely take care of myself and now I have a wife that would depend on me. A few years later I became a father and not a very good one. I really wanted to be a good husband and father, but when you put yourself first and can't even meet your own needs so you'll never meet the needs of others. It was bad enough when I was alone and I failed, but now I have a family and I knew I was going to fail them too. Can't I do anything? I felt no matter what I touched it turned into garbage. I was responsible. Isn't it remarkable the power we think we have on other people and the world? I felt I couldn't do anything right, yet I was responsible for everything bad that happened around me. Where did I get this incredible power? I was going to get a cape and be Super Screw Up, able to foul up other people's plan in an instant, dumber than a head of cabbage, able to make bad decisions in a single bound. Yes it's Super Screw up. If only I could have used my powers for good instead of stupid.

When I was twenty a friend of mine was able to get me a job with him in his father's factory, making mandrels. Mandrels you ask? A mandrel is a long pipe that is used to produce high-pressure hoses. There were a total of four of us that worked in the factory. The process was exciting, (sarcasm) you would take three ten-foot pieces of pipe and weld them together to make a thirty foot long pipe, smooth down the weld, heat treat the pipe and then grind down to a specific diameter. Most of the processes was putting one end of the pipe in a machine and holding it until the other end went through and believe it or not this did not take a college education. During this time I was taking my medications for my disorders. I say disorders because, from my teens through to my forties, the doctors would change my medication as often as they changed the diagnoses of my condition.

One day the older gentleman that worked with us started having chest pains. He started to have convulsions and fell to the floor. I sat on the floor and held his head. I had no idea what to do. He just shook and stared at me, it was as if he was trying to tell me something, but he wasn't able to speak. He finally stopped shaking and lay perfectly still, but was still staring at me. He died right in my arms. I held him until the paramedics came and they took him away. I never felt so helpless in all my life. I've often wondered what he wanted to say. After that they took him away and I went off to be by myself. Somebody I knew just died in my arms and I didn't even cry, I don't even remember feeling remorse, just confused. A person, who two hours before was cussing me out while we were working, is now dead. I didn't know much about him other than work and he loved to go fishing. He was about sixty years old doing the same thing I was doing at twenty. I wondered to myself, what kind of life could he possibly have had? Maybe it was better he was dead.

My life consisted of waking up, looking forward to going to sleep, and trying to tolerate the time in between. All I kept asking myself is, "Why am I here?" and thinking how much better it

would be if I weren't. My temper got worse and I would start to cry for no reason. My one release was to eat, and eat I did. All of my life I have been overweight. I have lost one hundred and twenty five pounds, I've lost ninety-five pounds, eighty pounds and twenty to thirty pounds several times. For the best part of my life I weighed from two hundred and eighty pounds to three hundred and twenty.

I have gone to several doctors throughout my life. One would start to treat me, then feel I should see a specialist and recommend that I see someone else. I guess none of them wanted a suicide on their record. They all gave me drugs to calm down, go to sleep, and get over anxiety. Half the time I didn't know if I was asleep or awake. Do you ever feel like maybe God didn't know what He was doing when he created you? That's the way I felt. I felt as if I was God's one mistake. I yelled once, "I'm sorry I screwed up your perfect record!"

Suffering from clinical depression I felt I wasn't good enough for anything or I was too good for everything. That's what manic depression is, it's a constant emotional roller coaster. You can be up one moment and down the next. Whether I was up or down was determined by my focus. I'm not sure what aspect of my condition was the worst, when I was up, or down. When I was down, for the most part, I was hurting myself and depressing others just because of the state of mind I was in. When I was up I was arrogant, self absorbed, unconcerned about anyone else's feelings and I would joke around just to get attention at someone else's expense. Joking around was something I was good at. I can remember growing up, people would say I should have been a comedian. They would say I was so quick witted. Well, that was easy when I was making fun of someone else. For me, finding other people's weaknesses was a way of bettering myself. Have you ever done that? Instead of making yourself excel and surpass others, it's easier to knock others down so it appears you're above them. I was so good at it I could see others flaws immediately, and with some stupid comment I could humiliate anyone in a moment's notice.

So for most of my life I felt that my life wasn't worth much and hope when I went to bed I wouldn't have to see another morning. So what happened? Why am I writing this book? Did I find the meaning of life? I believe I did!

Well we're back to La Jolla as I was sitting on my rock looking over the beautiful ocean. I didn't feel nervous, and in a way was glad that I would never have to worry about anything again. As I sat there, I listened to the sounds the waves made crashing over the rocks. I took my candy box out of my pocket and opened it. I looked over the ocean, and for the first time in my life I decided to talk to God just in case there was one. I said, "God I understand that I don't deserve to be in heaven for what I'm about to do, but I don't believe I belong in hell either. I've been a good person, there isn't anyone that could say I did anything terrible to them. I never was unfaithful to my wife and I treated my parents with respect for the most



part. I love my children and have tried to take care of their needs and raise them right. I know I haven't gone to church and I understand that I don't deserve to go to heaven. I could also understand why you wouldn't want me there. How about we just end it here? Let me just go to sleep and never wake up and it will be as if I was never here. It would have been better if I wasn't here anyway. What do you say? Is it a deal?" I waited a moment almost expecting a response. Do you believe that the first time I decided to talk to God I told him He messed up? In reality I was saying, you made a mistake, you made me. You did okay with the earth, ocean, mountains and the universe in general, but when you made me you messed up."

When it was obvious God wasn't going to answer me I took the pills then sat there and asked God for another favor, "Please God, I don't mind dying just don't let it hurt." I had ignored God all my life, now I started asking for favors. I sat there wondering what was going to happen, wondering if the medication was ever going to take effect, then all of a sudden things started to spin. I felt a wrenching in my stomach and it took everything for me not to throw-up. I started to feel this horrible pain in my head. I yelled, "I asked for no pain," as if I had really made a deal. I started to shake uncontrollably and it felt as if my heart was going to explode. My heart was beating so heavy I could feel the beat in my hands and feet. The pressure in my head was so severe I thought my eyes were going to pop out of their sockets. I pleaded to God, "Please don't let it hurt anymore make it stop." By now everything on the beach appeared to be moving and then it became dark and it appeared my prayer was answered.

I took enough medication to kill at least three people. I took the pills around nine thirty that morning and went into a coma. I sat on that rock looking up into the sky until six o'clock that evening. Someone walking on the beach saw me fall off the rock into the sand. My face was burnt and peeling from the sun. My arms with my palms pointing up were laying on my legs as if I was presenting a gift to someone. You could see the outline of my arms on my sunburned legs and how my arms were burned. All day long I must have followed the sun because as burned as my face was the top of my head was barely red at all. The person who found me called the police.

I was taken to the hospital where my family was called in and told they were not sure if I was going to make it. If I did survive I might have severe liver problems and they were not sure how much brain damage was caused. I was in a coma for several days and awoke with no side effects. Though no one is really sure how much brain damage I have, family and friends wondered about that before the overdose.

When I woke up my mind wasn't clear and I was confused on what had happened. Then it came to me and I couldn't believe I was still alive. Why would God do this to me? There are

people all over the earth dying that would give anything to stay alive and all I wanted was to die. I looked at my family and saw my daughter whose eyes were swollen from crying so much. Everything in my life has been about me. I made as if I thought about my family when I decided to commit suicide, but in reality it was the easy way out for me. I thought for sure I wasn't going to be here. I wasn't prepared and wasn't sure what I was feeling. I hurt all the people I loved and I didn't know what to say to make the hurt go away. I couldn't even say I would never do that again, even to comfort them in that moment.

The hospital room I was in was for people who had to be watched around the clock, because they suffered from severe neurological ailments. In that room was a young Marine that had been in there for two and a half months. One day he was driving a truck on maneuvers, the steering failed and the truck went up a hill and rolled over. As the truck rolled, he got thrown out of the cab, the truck landed on his leg, arm and head. He had been in that bed all that time without any emotional response with the exception of severe pain. He was being fed through a tube and could only have water by sucking on a sponge.

While the doctors were attending to me, my sister, who is actually a professional comedian, took the opportunity to perform for my new roommate. My sister did what she always did, treat everyone the same no matter what. She went over and asked what the heck he was doing just lying around. His mother who was sitting next to him was unsure what to do and didn't say anything. She went around his bed and found things to poke fun of. She did a command performance to an audience of one and it was one of her toughest. Kathy picked up the sponge that he used to moisten his mouth with and asked if it was a giant Q-tip. She showed it to his mother and asked what the heck it was for and his mother while laughing now explained that was how he drank. She said no wonder you're not getting better, you're dehydrated and proceeded to fire each nurse in the room along with the doctor that was caring for me. The young man lying in bed started to smile. His mother looked over and cried out, "He's smiling." Kathy said of course this is funny stuff and he tried to laugh. His eyes were focused on Kathy, something he wasn't able to do and the nurse rushed to his side. As the nurse was checking him, Kathy went to the opposite side of the bed and held his hand. His mother, in between her crying said, "That's the first sign of any kind he's shown. Thank you so much for making him laugh." Kathy smiled and said, "Up until now there was nothing to laugh about," then kissed him on the forehead.

The young man's name was Tim and he was one day older than my son who was now in the Army. Gail, Tim's mother, told Kathy about that day the Marines called her in Connecticut, to tell her about her son's accident. When Gail and her husband arrived, the doctor who was treating Tim told them they were keeping Tim alive with life support and he wasn't going to make it. The chaplain of the Marines had conveyed the same message to them, but they refused to have him disconnected. A few days later a miracle happened and he started

breathing on his own. Then the doctors told them his leg was shattered and he would never be able to walk on it and his throat was damaged and he probably would never be able to speak. They were also told if he did survive, he may only have the mental capacity of a first or second grader. Tim had been lying in that bed for two and a half months with his mother by his side, and the only thing she heard from him was the cry of pain, until that night.

Kathy made her way back to me as the doctor was finishing up his examination. The doctor told my family that I was very lucky and that he wanted to do other tests to see if any of my organs may have been damaged by the overdose. I laid there as the three of them gave me a lecture and took turns calling me stupid, selfish, insensitive and other descriptive words. I was still groggy and my head was spinning as they each took their well-deserved shot. When they were finished they each told me how much they loved me and the nurse told them it was time to leave. Before Kathy left she said, "Oh by the way, Tim, this is my big stupid brother Mark, big stupid brother Mark, Tim." I looked over and said, "Hi Tim," but he never looked in my direction.

The next morning about five o'clock, I woke up and standing over me was an orderly. He was a big man and introduced himself as John. He told me I stunk and needed a shower before I smelled up the whole floor. I thanked him for his discretion and agreed it would be a good idea. I tried to sit up but my back was so stiff I could barely get up. After all, I was sitting on a hard rock for approximately eight hours. John helped me get to the shower, but I was still dizzy and not standing too well. He helped me get undressed and handed me soap and a wash cloth. The water felt good and my mind was beginning to clear up a little, which wasn't necessarily a good thing. I looked down towards my feet and noticed all the sand that was washing off my body. It was forming a mud puddle in the bottom of the shower. It took most of my concentration just to wash myself. When I was finished I began to dry myself, when I heard John ask if I was okay. I told him I think I'll live. When I passed Tim's bed I looked down at him and held his hand. I told him he was going to be all right. I don't know why I said it, it just came out suddenly, but I knew it was true. I looked at him and smiled. Tim didn't look up at me or make any indication that he heard me, but I felt he did.

When I returned to my bed, there was breakfast and I uncovered it and told Tim his breakfast looked better than mine. Tim just lay there staring into space with a tube inserted in his stomach for feeding. For some reason I kept talking to Tim, as if he understood what I was saying. I told him about my son who was now in the Army in Georgia, about my daughter and how she just recently came out to California from Ohio. Periodically the nurse in charge of our room would look up, hoping Tim would give some response. At one point I said, "Well enough about me, tell me a little about you." There was a moment of silence and I said, "I see you're not much of a conversationalist," then kept on talking. It was strange, while I was

talking to Tim I told him all about the good things in my life. I told him about my family, friends and good things that had happened to me, things I should be thankful for. I normally didn't think of these things, but it felt natural to talk about them to him. The more I told Tim the better I felt. When I was finished talking, I looked at Tim. There in the bed next to me was a young man fighting for his life and here I was trying to end mine. As I looked into his face he turned his head and looked into my eyes. I looked back and smiled and again told him, you're going to be all right Tim, hang in there.

Just then Tim cried out in pain and tried to grab his stomach, but his hands were tied down. He then started going into convulsions. The nurse ran over to calm him down and pushed the button for more help. His mother held his hand and told him that she was there. I looked at his face distorted from the pain. I hurt just looking at him, feeling useless, but his mom continued to hold his hand, telling him he was going to be all right. She'd been going through this for two and a half months, but still insisted he was going to be okay. I watched as they attempted to medicate him, to subdue the pain. I looked into his mother's face to see the love she had for her son. The pain started to subside as his body relaxed and he laid his head back on the pillow. I looked over at his mother as she put her head down and sighed, "Thank you God."

I lay there that evening looking at Tim, trying to imagine what he must be going through. Then I thought about my son in the Army, how this could have been him. How would I handle this situation if it were my son? Could I give myself totally to my son and be there each day? I watched Tim as he would close his eyes and open them quickly because of the pain. I saw a young man fighting for his life and I felt the feeling inside of me wanting to help. I got out of my bed and went to his side and knelt down next to him. I whispered, "You can depend on me." I held his hand and he turned his head and looked me in the eyes. His face, which was tense with pain, relaxed and a calming look came over his face. I kissed him on the forehead and said good night, then went back to my bed.

The next day the doctor came in and said I would be released the next day and made an appointment with the doctor they wanted me to see. I said, "Great, I'm ready to get out of this place." As I said that I happened to look over at Tim's mom and saw her put her head down and then looked over and said, "I'm really going to miss you." I told her she wasn't going to get rid of me that easy. "I plan on checking up on Tim a couple times a week," I said. She said, "God must have sent you here for me." I couldn't imagine God being able to use me for anything, I've always felt so useless.

The next morning I gave Tim a cheerful, "good morning" and told him he looked lovely. I sat down, held his hand and explained to him that I was leaving, but I was going to visit. I told him he was important in my life and that I loved him and there wasn't anything I wouldn't do

for him. These just weren't words, but true feelings I felt in my heart. I looked him in the eyes and he turned and looked into mine and he squeezed my hand. I told him he had quite a grip and the nurse, stationed in the room, asked if he squeezed my hand. I said squeezed, he almost broke it, as I smiled. She came over to the bed and Tim was still holding onto my hand. She told me that was the first time he squeezed anyone's hand that wasn't related to pain. I looked at him and said I told you, you were going to be all right.

It was time to leave and I had no idea what to do next. I knew we were behind in our bills and couldn't afford to live in my dream house anymore. As I was about to feel sorry for myself, I began to think of Tim. I wondered if he was really going to be all right. I looked down to the hand Tim squeezed and smiled.

A few days later I went back to the hospital to see Tim. It seemed strange walking into the hospital, where I was wheeled out of a few days prior. I went up to Tim's room, and there was Tim's Mom in her regular seat sitting next to him. With a smile on my face I asked how my ex-roommate was. I went over, gave her a hug and kiss on the cheek, then asked how she was doing. She looked so tired and said she was doing the best that she could. I sat next to Tim, held his hand and asked him how things were going. He squeezed my hand again and then looked over at me. His mom said, "That is so strange, you're the only person that he responds to. He seems to be more alert and responsive when people talk to him." I said, "great" and turned to Tim and said, "Way to go," and put my hand out to shake his. Tim lifted his hand, put it in mine and squeezed. I looked in his eyes while he looked back in mine, then he smiled. I asked him when he learned his new trick, shaking hands. He left go of my hand and started falling asleep, because of the pain medication. I sat there and talked as if he was awake. I told him I would always be there for him, and if he needed anything that he could depend on me. Every time I would visit Tim I had a strange mixture of feelings ranging from sad to excited. I was experiencing the emotions of caring for someone above myself.

I would visit Tim three and four times a week and on one of those visits his mom was sitting at her regular spot. I smiled and cheerfully asked her how she was doing. She said fine, but the expression on her face told me she wasn't. Then I turned to Tim and said, "Hi Tim. How's it going?" He looked at me and instead of putting his hand out today he said, "Hi Mark." I almost fell on the floor and if his mom wasn't sitting down I'm sure she would have. The nurse stood up at her desk and asked if he talked. "Yes," I said like a proud father whose baby just said daddy, "He said hi Mark." Tim looked at me and smiled, I got on my knees next to him. I knelt there saying, "thank you, thank you dear God." As I prayed Tim reached over with his hand and held mine. I held his with both my hands and told him I loved him and that he was going to be all right. A gurney rolled into the room just then to take Tim down for more tests and therapy. The nurse told the orderly that Tim had talked. The orderly, surprised and excited said, "all right Tim," but Tim just laid there as he'd been doing.

"I guess you're all talked out for now," he said. They lifted him up on the gurney as Tim cried out in pain. I went over to him and said, "Everything is going to be okay, just as I told you the first time I met you." I can still hear Tim's voice in my ear, Hi Mark. I never realized how wonderful my name sounded.

There have been a lot of coincidences in my life as I'm sure there have been in yours. I heard once the definition of a coincidence is a miracle that God didn't get the credit for. Looking back on my life I can see how true that was.

## THE BIG BANG IS IT A BIG DUD?

To answer the question, “Why Am I Here?” You need to answer the question, “How Did I get here in the first place?” If we are here only by chance then life really doesn’t have any meaning or purpose.

The chance that all of this started billion of years ago with an atom as small as the head of a pin that exploded. By the way where did that atom come from or did it always exist with no beginning? If I’m going to believe there was something that has always been before time I would rather believe in a creator that created me instead of the idea I came from a rock.

I am not a scientist by any stretch of the imagination; however I feel I have the gift of common sense. The Big Bang Theory along with evolution has crept into our school books throughout the nation and has stated these theories are fact. You could look through the internet, as I did, and find scientists who would say this is proof for these theories and others to show proof that it wasn’t. The theory needs from 10 to 20 billion years to make it possible and it needed to start very small. I figure we might believe something small and a time span we can’t even imagine. I think you’ll find out of all of the professions the one that has more failures and mistakes is science. We constantly hear how this will cure you, or this is the way it was, or this was found to be the missing link and over and over again someone is proving what was proven wrong. I’m not criticizing scientists I’m just saying their work is based on speculation and a variety of circumstances that make it nearly impossible to come up with a right answer. Also I would assume being a scientist you have to earn your pay so you would need to come up with something to justify your job. I’m sure there are scientists that work their whole life with very little to show for it.

Now back to the common sense of the Big Bang Theory and evolution. The biggest problem I see is that something whether a super atomic speck or a small universe that over the years grew to become the universe we now know had to have no beginning. It had to always exist, which science has no answer for. By the way the definition for science is: the intellectual and practical activity encompassing the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment. As we can see neither one of these theories qualify as science. One of the theories for life was found in a schoolbook. It states that originally the earth was a fiery rock in the atmosphere and then it began to rain and cool of this rock and the water formed this primordial soup and it goes on to explain that cells formed from this and again one group indicating this is viable with another proving it wrong. My question is if the earth was a ball of fire where did the rain come from. One fact that has been proven, true science, is that rain is caused by evaporation into the air forming clouds and causing rain, so where did the water come from. The following is one article on the Big bang being a Big Dud.

The Big Bang theory concerning the origin of the universe was spawned about 50 years ago, and soon became the dogma of the evolutionary establishment. It has had many dissenters, however, including the British astronomer Sir Fred Hoyle, the Nobel laureate Hannes Alfvén, and astronomers Geoffrey Burbidge and Halton Arp. According to the Big Bang theory, some 10

to 20 billion years ago, all of the matter and energy of the universe was compressed into a cosmic egg, or plasma ball, consisting of sub-atomic particles and radiation. Nobody knows where the cosmic egg came from, or how it got there -- it was just there. For some equally inexplicable reason, the cosmic egg exploded. As the matter and radiation expanded, so the theory says, it cooled sufficiently for elements to form, as protons and electrons combined to form hydrogen of atomic weight one, and neutrons were subsequently captured to form helium of atomic weight four. Most of the gas that formed consisted of hydrogen. These gases, it is then supposed, expanded radially in all directions throughout the universe until they were so highly dispersed that an extremely low vacuum and temperature existed. No oxygen, nitrogen, phosphorus, carbon, sulfur, copper, iron, nickel, uranium, or other elements existed. The universe consisted essentially of hydrogen gas. Then somehow, we are told, the molecules of gas that were racing out at an enormous speed in a radial direction began to collapse in on themselves in local areas by gravitational attraction. The molecules within a space of about six trillion miles diameter collapsed to form each star, a hundred billion stars somehow collected to form each of the estimated 100 billion galaxies in the universe, and our own solar system formed about five billion years or so ago from a cloud of dust and gas made up of the exploded remnants of previously existing stars. No satisfactory theory exists to explain any of these events, but cosmologists remained firm in their conviction that all of these marvelous events would eventually yield to credible explanations. But now a cruel fate has befallen the grandest theory of all -- the Big Bang theory.

Based on the Big Bang theory, cosmologists predicted that the distribution of matter throughout the universe would be homogeneous. Thus, based upon the so-called Cosmological Principle, it was postulated that the distribution of galaxies in the universe would be essentially uniform. No matter in which direction one looked, if one looked far enough, one would see the same number of galaxies. There would be no large scale clusters of galaxies or great voids in space. Recent research, however, has revealed massive superclusters of galaxies and vast voids in space. We exist in a very "clumpy" universe.

The present crisis in Big Bang cosmologies began in 1986, when R. Brent Tully, of the University of Hawaii, showed that there were ribbons of superclusters of galaxies 300 million light-years long and 100 million light-years thick, stretching out about a billion light-years, and separated by voids about 300 million light-years across.[1] These structures are much too big for the Big Bang theory to produce. At the speeds at which galaxies are supposed to be moving, it would require 80 billion years to create such a huge complex, but the age of the universe is supposed to be somewhere between 10 and 20 billion years.

In November of 1989, Margaret Geller and John Huchra, of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, announced the results of their research. Their map of the sky revealed what they termed the "Great Wall" -- a huge sheet of galaxies 200 million light years across and 700 million light years long.[2] A team of American, British, and Hungarian astronomers, it is reported, discovered even larger structures.[3] They found galaxies clustered into thin bands spaced about 600 million light years apart. The pattern of these clusters stretched across about one-fourth of the diameter of the universe, or about seven billion light years. This huge shell and void pattern would have required nearly 150 billion years to form, based on their speed of movement, if produced by the standard Big Bang cosmology.



Even more recently (January 3, 1991), Will Saunders and nine fellow astronomers published the results of their all-sky redshift survey of galaxies detected by the Infrared Astronomical Satellite. This survey revealed the existence of a far-greater number of massive superclusters of galaxies than can be accounted for by Big Bang cosmologies.[4]

In an attempt to salvage the Big Bang theory, cosmologists have invented hypotheses to explain the failures of their hypotheses. One of these is the Cold Dark Matter (CDM) theory. According to this theory, 90-99% of the matter in the universe cannot be detected. If CDM existed, it would supply sufficient gravitational pull to create large clusters of galaxies. The structures discovered during the past few years, however, are so massive that even if CDM did exist, it could not account for their formation. Saunders and co-workers thus state that the CDM model can be ruled out to at least the 97% confidence level. In the same issue of Nature, in which is found the article by Saunders, et al, there appears an article by David Lindley in the "News and Views" section (p. 14) entitled "Cold Dark Matter Makes an Exit." Caltech cosmologist S. George Djorgovski, taking into account the astronomical observations that contradict the CDM theory, states that the demise of the notion of the existence of cold dark matter is inevitable.[5]

Also very recently, the U.S.-European Roentgen Satellite (ROSAT), detecting x-ray emissions, discovered evidence of giant superclusters of quasars on the edge of the universe, supposedly eight to 12 billion light years from the earth.[6] Physicist Paul Steinhardt, of the University of Pennsylvania, states that "This may be the start of the death knell of the cold-dark-matter theory. " Even if this hypothetical matter existed, it still could not explain the existence of these giant clusters of quasars.

If all of this weren't bad enough news for Big Bang cosmologists, results from the Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) should really make them wish they had gone into some other field. Based on the Big Bang theory, it was predicted that there should exist a background radiation equivalent to a few degrees Kelvin. Sure enough, in 1965, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson, radio engineers at Bell Telephone Laboratories in New Jersey, discovered a microwave background radiation of  $2.7^{\circ}$  K. Evolutionary cosmologists were absolutely delighted. This discovery was considered proof of the Big Bang, and Penzias and Wilson were duly awarded Nobel Prizes. It now appears, however, that the background radiation may turn out to be additional evidence against the Big Bang theory, rather than its proof.

Since the Big Bang theory predicted a homogeneous universe with matter evenly distributed throughout the universe (which it most certainly is not, as described above), evolutionary cosmologists expected that the background radiation would be perfectly smooth. That is, no matter in which direction one looked, the background radiation would be the same. Just as predicted, the background radiation was perfectly smooth. Theorists were delighted, smug in the assurance that this background radiation was the leftover whimper of the Big Bang. Now, however, it turns out that the universe is not homogeneous, but is extremely lumpy, with massive superclusters of galaxies and great voids in space. Thus, if the background radiation is left over from the Big Bang, it should not be smooth, but should be more intense in certain directions than in others, indicating inhomogeneities at the very start of the universe, immediately following the initial moments of the Big Bang. Astronomers thus began to search for differences in the background radiations. All measurements showed it to be perfectly

smooth. Thus COBE was launched to an orbit 559 miles above the earth, carrying sensitive instruments to measure the background radiation. Alas, preliminary data from COBE announced in January, show absolutely no evidence of inhomogeneity in the background radiation. It is perfectly smooth.[7]

"No energetic processes, even unknown ones, could have occurred that were vigorous enough to either create the large-scale structures astronomers have observed or stop their headlong motion once created. There is simply no way to form these structures in the 20 billion years since the Big Bang." [8]

Of course, the demise of the Big Bang theory will not discourage evolutionary theorists from proposing other theories. In fact, theories based on plasma processes and a revised steady-state theory have already been advanced to replace Big Bang cosmologies." [9],[10],[11]

Eventually, all such theories will fail, for "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork" (Psalms 19:1).

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## IF WE ARE NOT EVOLVED THEN WHAT?

If we came into existence as theorized by the Big Bang and evolution, basically we came from a rock then how is our spirit explained? Have you ever seen a beautiful sunset, snow on the top of a far away mountain, the ocean as the waves come crashing in, a baby or a puppy. Don't we look in awe as we see these things? Why is that? We weren't taught to see things like this and react the way we do. What about our conscience? Most everyone knows what is right or wrong, whether we keep to those beliefs or not. Why would something like that be instilled in our hearts the way they are? How about a sad movie or situation, what stirs us to the point of tears? If we just came to be without any spirit or feelings we wouldn't be affected by such things. In fact can you imagine if we didn't have this spirit what life would look like? Murder and theft would just be natural, survival of the fittest. If we thought this is all we have on this earth at this time wouldn't we try to make the best of it, stealing what we want? There wouldn't be any rules or laws who could make them up with no conscience to guide them.

You can look through the internet and self help books for human basic needs and desires. Why would we have those if we just happened to be? Here is motivational speaker, Anthony Robbins core human needs.

According to Anthony Robbins, there are seven core soul needs that people are looking to fulfill.

1. **Significance** – people want to matter and to make a difference.
2. **Certainty** – people seek stability and reassurance.
3. **Variety** – people want to be stimulated and to have choice.
4. **Love** – people need to experience many kinds and levels of love.
5. **Connection** – people seek connection with Self, Source and each other.
6. **Contribution** – people want to give to make things better in the world.
7. **Growth** – people want to learn, grow and become more of their best self.

If you look at this list and again there are many others but very similar, these attributes came from something more than mere existence. If we are just some collection of cells derived by accident over millions of years none of this should mean anything to us.

In an article by Mario Seiglie he spells out an acronym FALSE. Again using science and common sense he spells out why it takes more faith to believe in evolution than God.

Prove Evolution Is False - Even Without the Bible

*article by Mario Seiglie*

There are logical reasons apart from Scripture's direct testimony to reject the theory of evolution and accept creation and a Creator.

Can we prove that evolution is false without using the Bible? Certainly we can! Evolution is a scientific theory that stands or falls on the physical evidence. In fact, one can be an atheist, a person who doesn't believe in God, and still not believe in evolution!

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, as taught at school, is a biological explanation of how creatures have supposedly "evolved" or developed progressively through natural selection and variation (now known as mutation) over eons of time from the tiny cell to the largest creatures on earth today. What is taught in classrooms is not mere *micro*evolution—small changes within a species—but *macro* evolution, the change from one type of creature to another quite distinct life form.

What many evolutionists are trying to convince you of is that there is no need for a Creator since, as they say, evolution can substitute as the mechanism for creating and transforming life. They teach that life arose from non-life and evolved from simpler creatures to more complex life forms. In other words, the tiny cell eventually became an amoeba, then a lizard, then a monkey, and finally— *you* !

In order to remember key points that disprove Darwinian evolution—the "molecules to man" theory—we'll use the acronym FALSE. (A few of these points also disprove the compromise of theistic evolution—the notion that God employed macroevolution over eons in forming the creatures we see on earth today.)

### **F for Fossils**

A fossil is the preserved remains of a living thing. The fossil record around the earth extends an average of one mile deep. Below this level we come up with a blank slate as far as living, complex creatures are concerned.

I collect fossils of what are deemed the earliest type of complex creatures with hard bodies—trilobites. No previous ancestors of these arthropods have been found. Similar to some marine "bugs" we see today on the seashore that disappear into the sand when the waves retreat, trilobites had hard shells, all the basic organs, and complex eyes like those of flies, with hundreds of sophisticated lenses connected to the optic nerve going to the brain. Trilobite fossils are found around the earth, and in all cases the level of rock beneath them does not reveal other creatures with similar features.

As one source states: "The dominant life form was the now-extinct sea creature known as a trilobite, up to a foot long, with a distinctive head and tail, a body made up of several parts, and a complex respiratory system. But although there are many places on earth where 5,000 feet of sedimentary rock stretch unbroken and uniformly beneath the Cambrian [layer], not a single indisputable multi-celled fossil has been found there. It is 'the enigma of paleontological [fossil studies] enigmas,' according to Stephen Gould. Darwin himself said he could give 'no satisfactory answer' to why no fossils had been discovered. Today's scientists are none the wiser" (Francis Hitching, *The Neck of the Giraffe* , 1982, pp. 26-27).

Question: If, after almost two centuries of digging beneath all the world's continents, no previous ancestor of this first hard-bodied creature has been found, how then did the ubiquitous trilobite evolve? There should be some previous ancestor if evolution were true. It's like finding an exquisite watch on the seashore and yet never finding any previous primitive models of the watch on earth. If you reasoned as an evolutionist, you would deny there was a need for a watchmaker at all, maintaining that time, water, sand, minerals and actions of the elements are sufficient to producing a fully functional watch that runs. This is part of the reason it takes more faith to believe in evolution than in a Creator!

Further important evidence from the fossil record is the absence of transitional forms between species. Darwin was concerned that the thousands of intermediate stages between creatures needed to prove his theory were not in evidence, but he expected they would eventually be found. Yet those thousands of missing transitional forms are still missing!

Another reference explains: "If throughout past ages life was actually drifting over in one continual stream from one form to another, it is to be expected that as many samples of the intermediate stages between species should be discovered in fossil condition as of the species themselves ... All should be in a state of flux. But these missing links are wanting. There are no fossils of creatures whose scales were changing into feathers or whose feet were changing into wings, no fossils of fish getting legs or of reptiles getting hair. The real task of the geological evolutionist is not to find 'the' missing link, as if there were only one. The task is to find those thousands upon thousands of missing links that connect the many fossil species with one another" (Byron Nelson, *After Its Kind*, 1970, pp. 60-62).

The absence of transitional forms is an insurmountable hurdle for theistic evolutionists as well. It also fits with our next point.

### **A for Assumption**

When there is no real evidence, evolutionary scientists simply make assumptions. If evolution were true, then where is the evidence of different types of animals now "evolving" into other types? Where is the evidence of cats, dogs and horses gradually turning into something else? We do see changes within species, but we do not see any changes into other species. And, as mentioned, we see no evidence of gradual change in the fossil record either. Yet evolutionists continue to assume that transitional forms must have existed.

In Darwin's landmark book *On the Origin of Species* there are some 800 subjective clauses, with uncertainty repeatedly admitted instead of proof. Words such as "could," "perhaps" and "possibly" plague the entire book.

Evolution is still called a theory—a possible explanation or assumption—because it is not testable according to the scientific method, as this would require thousands or millions of years. Evolutionists will counter that a theory is not a mere hypothesis but is a widely affirmed

intellectual construct that generally appears to fit all the facts. Yet evolution in no way fits all the facts available. Evidence does not support it—and in many respects runs counter to it.

### **L for Life**

The law of biogenesis as taught in biology class states that only life can produce life. You've probably heard the famous question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? It's a real dilemma for an evolutionist to answer. An egg comes from a chicken, yet the chicken comes from an egg. How can there be one without the other? To complicate matters even more, the chicken has to come from a *fertilized* egg that has the mixture of two different genetic strains from both its parents. So the problem of the origin of life and initial reproduction is still a mystery that evolutionary science cannot adequately answer.

Yet for someone who believes in special creation by a Creator, there is no dilemma here. First God made the male and female chickens, which produced the first fertilized egg—and the rest is history.

### **S for Symbiosis**

When one living thing needs another different living thing to survive, it's called a symbiotic relationship.

A good example of this is the relationship between bees and flowers. The bees need the nectar from some types of flowers to feed while these flowers need bees to pollinate them. Both depend on each other to exist and survive. The question for evolutionists is: How did these plants exist without the bees, and how did the bees exist without these plants?

Again, atheistic scientists are stumped. Theistic evolutionists are perplexed as well. Yet if you believe in a Creator who specially created the various forms of life on earth, the answer is simple—both were created at about the same time.

### **E for Engineering**

All living things are exquisitely engineered or designed. Qualitatively, a bacterium is as majestically built for its purpose as a human body is for its function. Yet evolution says it's only an *illusion* of design—that there is no real designer behind it. Reality is not an illusion! Living things are multi-functional, which means they do many complex things at the same time, something evolution with its step-by-step process has never been able to demonstrate.

One example of a living thing with exquisite engineering is the tree. It provides breathable oxygen for us while processing carbon dioxide, which would in high amounts in the air be toxic to us. It supplies wood, housing for birds, roots to limit erosion, fruit and seeds to eat, is biodegradable and gives shade. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, "A healthy tree provides a cooling effect that is equivalent to 10 room-size air conditioners operating 20 hours a day." How could something so complex arise from a random, undirected evolutionary process?

Again, you need more "faith" to believe in blind evolution than in an all-knowing Creator who designed the marvelous tree in the first place.

Now you have five proofs that evolution is F-A-L-S-E and that special creation is true—and we didn't even use the Bible. Remember the acronym FALSE when you read or hear about evolution.

## Can We Trust the Bible?

by [CHARLIE H. CAMPBELL](#)

Director of The Always Be Ready Apologetics Ministry

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Author of *Scrolls and Stones: Compelling Evidence  
the Bible Can Be Trusted*

The Bible is unarguably an incredible book. It is the best-selling, most quoted, most published, most circulated, most translated, most influential book in the history of mankind. [1] There is no close second.

How can we know that the Bible isn't just an ancient book of fiction, folklore, or cleverly devised tales invented by deceitful men?

Haven't the contents of the Bible been tampered with down through the centuries?

Isn't the Bible out-of-sync with scientific discoveries?

What makes the Bible any different than other religious books like the Quran or the Book of Mormon?

Those are questions that intelligent, critical thinking people are asking today and those are questions they have a *right* to ask. I think they *should* be asking those questions. Those are questions I used to ask. And God's heart for His people is that we be able to provide answers to people (e.g., 1 Peter 3:15, Jude 1:3).

So, in this article I'm going to lay out a broad, but somewhat concise overview of ten different lines of evidence that I think demonstrate (when considered in their totality) that the Bible is indeed what it claims to be: the trustworthy Word of God—written by men yes—but men who were guided by God as they penned the words they penned (2 Peter 1:21, 2 Timothy 3:16).

The first line of evidence for the Bible is...

### 1. FULFILLED PROPHECY

Fulfilled prophecy is something that sets the Bible apart from every other religious book. And the Bible does have some competition today. There are 26 other religious books that people of faith believe are divinely inspired (the Hindu Vedas, the Quran, the Book of Mormon, etc.). Of these twenty-six books, none of them contain any specific, fulfilled prophecies. None.



In stark contrast to these other writings, the Bible is literally filled with hundreds of specific, detailed prophecies that were written hundreds of years before their fulfillment. In fact 27% of the Bible contains what was predictive prophecy at the time that it was written. And the authors of the Bible did not just predict some vague things like Nostradamus or Jeane Dixon (who have proven to have been false prophets over and over again), they were very specific. Consider a few of the Old Testament prophecies made regarding the Messiah (the Savior that God promised He would send into the world) hundreds of years before they were fulfilled.

For example, the Old Testament prophesied that He would be born of the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3, 22:18), of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10), and in the lineage of David (2 Samuel 7:12f). Micah 5:2 said that He would be born in Bethlehem, that He'd come while the temple was still standing (Malachi 3:1), that He would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14), that He would open the eyes of the blind, unstop the ears of the deaf, and cause the lame to walk (Isaiah 35:5-6), that He'd be rejected by His own people (Psalm 118:22; 1 Peter 2:7). The Scriptures foretold the precise time in history when He would die (Daniel 9:24-26), how He would die (Psalm 22:16-18, Isaiah 53; Zechariah 12:10), and that He would rise from the dead (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27-32).

These are just a few of the prophecies related to the coming of the Messiah. And there are lots of other prophecies about the rise and fall of nations, the regathering of the Jewish people back into their homeland (something that's being fulfilled right now). The fact that these prophecies and hundreds of others have been fulfilled, even though they were spoken hundreds and even thousands of years before their fulfillment is strong evidence that a God who is all-knowing and all-powerful orchestrated the Bible's completion. No other religious writing is able to substantiate its claims with this kind of supernatural evidence.

**SKEPTIC:** "Hold on a second Charlie. Maybe the disciples just made up all of these things that Jesus supposedly did. Perhaps they read all of those prophecies in the Old Testament and decided to make up an elaborate story about Jesus fulfilling them!"

Ahh, that is a legitimate concern (that the disciples were just lying, just fabricating the whole story about Jesus). Well, I'm going to address that concern and show you why I don't think they *were* lying later on in the study when we get to evidence number eight.

If you'd like to learn more about fulfilled prophecies, I urge you to pick up a copy of this fantastic book: ***Every Prophecy of the Bible*** by Dr. John Walvoord.

## **2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE**

Many critics who brush off the Bible as a compilation of folklore and legends, do so overlooking the fact that thousands of archaeological discoveries over the past century have verified the truthfulness of the Bible.

Nelson Glueck, who appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and who is considered one of the greatest archaeologists ever, wrote:

"No archeological discovery has ever controverted [overturned] a Biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries." [Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, p. 31.]

These are the words of a man who has been credited with uncovering more than fifteen hundred ancient sites in the Middle East. ["Archaeology: The Shards of History," *Time*, December 13, 1963.]

James Mann of U. S. News and World Report said:

"A wave of archaeological discoveries is altering old ideas about the roots of Christianity and Judaism—and affirming that the Bible is more historically accurate than many scholars thought." [James Mann, "New Finds Cast Fresh Light on the Bible," U. S. News and World Report, August 24, 1981, 34.]

Dr. Clifford Wilson, the former Director of the Australian Institute of Archaeology, stated:

"It is remarkable that where confirmation is possible and has come to light, the Bible stands investigation in ways that are unique in all literature. Its superiority to attack, its capacity to withstand criticism, its amazing facility to be proved right after all, are all staggering by any standards of scholarship. Seemingly assured results "disproving" the Bible have a habit of backfiring. Over and over again the Bible has been vindicated." [Clifford Wilson, *Archaeology—the Bible and Christ*, volume 17, (Victoria, Australia: Pacific Christian Ministries), no page number available. Cited in John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Handbook of Biblical Evidences* (1997), 288–289]

Allow me to share a few examples of discoveries that have helped to shed light on the Bible's reliability.

## **A. DAVID**

Until 1993, not a shred of evidence could be found anywhere outside the Bible that David, the king of Israel, ever existed and so it had become fashionable in some academic circles to dismiss the David stories as mere invention. The critics' verdict was that David was "nothing more than a figure of religious and political mythology." [Jeffrey Sheler, *Is the Bible True?* (1999), 95–96]

Well, their skepticism regarding David collapsed overnight in 1993 when a nearly 3000-year-old inscription was unearthed in Israel mentioning David the king of Israel. This was a tremendous discovery and helped to verify for the first time outside the Bible that David was an actual historical figure. In light of this discovery, *Time* magazine stated:

“The skeptics’ claim that King David never existed is now hard to defend.” [Michael D. Lemonick, “Are the Bible’s Stories True? Archaeology’s Evidence,” Time magazine, December 18, 1995]

Indeed it is.

## **B. PONTIUS PILATE**

Another fascinating discovery concerns Pontius Pilate. The New Testament authors tell us he was the Roman governor of Judea at the time of Jesus who oversaw His trial and then sentenced Him to death by crucifixion (Matthew 27:2; Luke 3:1). Was Pilate a legendary figure? No.

In 1961, a team of Italian archaeologists was digging in Caesarea, on the shore of the beautiful Mediterranean Sea in Israel. While clearing away the sand and overgrowth from the jumbled ruins of a Roman theater, these archaeologists made an astonishing find. They uncovered a limestone block that bore an inscription in Latin dating to the early part of the first century that mentioned “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea.” This inscription verifies that Pontius Pilate was an actual historical person, that he reigned in the very position ascribed to him by the Gospels, and as prefect he would have had the authority to condemn or pardon Jesus, just as the Gospel accounts report.

## **C. FIRST CENTURY CRUCIFIXION**

Another discovery helped to verify the reality of crucifixion in Israel in the first century. According to the Bible, Jesus’s hands or wrists were nailed to the cross (John 20:25). But at one time, critics said crucifixions with nails never took place in Israel in the first century. No evidence of any crucified victim had ever been uncovered in Israel—so skeptics and scholars dismissed the Gospels’ accounts as either imagined or inaccurate. Well, critics of the Bible were shown to be wrong again in 1968. It was then that a crew of builders from the Israel Ministry of Housing working in Jerusalem accidentally discovered an ancient Jewish cemetery that contained the remains of several men who were killed during the Jewish revolt against Rome in approximately AD 70. One of the bone ossuaries contained the skeleton of a young man and an inscription of the man’s name (Yohanan Ben Ha’galgol).

What stunned the archaeologists most though was how this man died. He was put to death by crucifixion with nails. How was that determined? He still had an iron spike driven through his heel bone. The Romans typically removed the nails from their victims—iron was expensive—but apparently this nail was too difficult to remove. The tip of the nail had been bent back toward the head, likely the result of hitting a knot in the wood. And so, the soldiers left it there. And now we have solid archaeological evidence that the Romans did crucify people in Israel, in the first century, with nails—just as the Bible said.

Other discoveries include:

- Ancient extrabiblical accounts of a catastrophic flood (Genesis 6–8)
- The palace of Sennacherib the king of Assyria (2 Chronicles 32:1f) and a wall relief depicting the Assyrian siege on Lachish (2 Kings 18:13–17; Isaiah 36:1–2)
- The ruins of Jericho (Joshua 6) along with evidence the city wall “fell down flat” (6:20) at the very time the Old Testament dates the crossing of the Hebrew people into Canaan (c. 1400 BC)
- Hezekiah’s tunnel (2 Kings 20:20) built to secretly channel water into the city of Jerusalem c. 700 BC
- The ancient ruins of Babylon (Book of Daniel), including the ruins of king Nebuchadnezzar’s palaces, temples, city walls, houses, inscriptions mentioning “Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon”
- The Babylonian Chronicle. These ancient historical records verify that the Babylonians invaded the land of Judah, besieged the city of Jerusalem, and took the Jews captive back to Babylon...just as the Bible said they did (2 Kings 24; Daniel 1).
- The “Pool of Siloam” (John 9:1–12) where Jesus sent the blind man with mud on his eyes to wash and receive healing
- The well called “Jacob’s Well” (John 4:6) where Jesus met the Samaritan woman
- The pool called “Bethesda” (John 5:2) where Jesus told the man who had been lame for 38 years to take up his bed and walk
- Herod’s palace (Mark 6:14–29) where John the Baptist was imprisoned and killed; the historian Josephus mentions this palace and John the Baptist’s imprisonment and murder there
- A bone ossuary mentioning Caiaphas the Jewish high priest (Matthew 26:3) who presided over Jesus’s late night trial (Matthew 26:57–68)
- The synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21) on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee where Jesus often taught
- Mosaic tile floor of an early Christian church in Megiddo, Israel, that says the church was built in the memory of “the God Jesus Christ”—evidence the early Christians believed Jesus was God

My book, ***Archaeological Evidence for the Bible***, discusses these and many other discoveries in greater detail (along with full citations/footnotes).

Archaeology has not proven so helpful for other religious writings. Consider the Book of Mormon.

“Not one piece of evidence has ever been found to support the Book of Mormon -- not a trace of the large cities it names, no ruins, no coins, no letters or documents or monuments, nothing in writing. Not even one of the rivers or mountains or any of the topography it mentions has ever been identified.” [Dave Hunt, p.156, *In Defense of the Faith*; also see p. 107 in *The Case for Christ*, by Lee Strobel].

Nothing which demonstrates that the Book of Mormon is anything other than an early nineteenth century piece of American fiction, invented by Joseph Smith has ever been found. We address numerous other problems with the Book of Mormon here.

### **3. THE BIBLE’S INTERNAL CONSISTENCY**

What do I mean when I speak of the Bible’s internal consistency? I am talking about the Bible’s internal harmony. From the first book of the Bible, Genesis, to the last book, Revelation, the Bible is absolutely consistent in what it teaches.

**SKEPTIC:** “Why is that an evidence of the Bible’s trustworthiness? There are plenty of books that are internally consistent.”

I agree. Back in the 1990s, I worked at a surfing magazine in Laguna Beach, California. And we put out an internally consistent magazine every month. Does that mean then that the authors of our different articles were writing down God-inspired Scripture? No. I can assure you of that!

**SKEPTIC:** "Well then, what makes the Bible any different than some other book or magazine that is internally consistent?"

Well, let me share with you a few reasons I think the internal harmony of the Bible is an amazing evidence of its divine origin.

#### **A. The Bible addresses life’s most controversial questions.**

At the surfing magazine, we wrote about who won the latest surfing contest, surf wax, sunscreen. Pretty trivial matters looking back on it all now. But these aren't the type of matter the authors of the Bible wrote about. They weren't writing about surf wax and sunscreen. No. From beginning to end they tackled the big questions of life. Questions like:

- How did the universe come into existence?
- Does God exist? And if so, what is He like?
- Why does man exist?
- What is our purpose for being here?
- Why is there evil and suffering in the world?
- What happens to us after we die?

These are the big controversial questions of life. These are the kinds of questions that people tend to disagree about (ask your neighbors!) and yet these are the very questions the authors of the Bible tackle head on, chapter after chapter, book after book, and they do so absolutely consistently.

**B. The Bible is a collection of 66 different documents.**

It might be easy to have internal harmony if the Bible was a single book, but it's not. It's a compilation of more than five-dozen different books.

**C. The Bible was written by approximately 40 different authors.**

It would be easy to have internal harmony in the Quran. It contains the teachings of just one man—Muhammad, born about 570 years after Jesus. The Bible is completely different than the Quran in this regard; it contains the teachings, the writings, of approximately 40 different people.

**D. Many of the Bible's authors came from different educational and cultural backgrounds.**

Peter was a fisherman. Paul was a scholar. Daniel was a prime minister. Asaph was a musician. Matthew was a tax collector. David was a shepherd, then a king. Luke was a historian and medical doctor.

**E. The Bible was written over a period of approximately 1500+ years.**

Many of the authors did not even know one another.

**F. Many of the authors were separated by hundreds of miles geographically.**

The Bible was written in a variety of places on three different continents: Africa, Asia and Europe. For example, Paul wrote four letters imprisoned in Rome. The apostle John, wrote while a prisoner banished to the Isle of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea. The prophet Ezekiel wrote his work while held captive in Babylon.

**G. The Bible was written in three different languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.**

Now, I don't know about you, but when I think of pulling together forty different people (spread out over fifteen centuries, on three different continents, who speak three different languages) and having them write sixty-six different documents regarding life's most controversial questions—I'm thinking we are going to have some serious problems. That book is a going to be a confusing and difficult read!

Yet, in spite of all these factors, the Bible is a perfectly harmonious, consistent account of how God is seeking

to reconcile sinners like you and me back into relationship with to Himself. This internal consistency is powerful evidence the authors of the Bible were being guided by the Holy Spirit when they wrote the different books of the Bible.

#### 4. EXTRABIBLICAL WRITINGS

What am I talking about? I'm talking about the fact that there are dozens of writings that survive *outside* of the Bible (in the records of the Assyrians, Babylonians and Romans) that verify the historical accuracy of the Bible's records of different persons, places, and events. External sources verify that 50 persons mentioned in the Old Testament and 30 persons written about in the New Testament were actual historical figures (see list of names and sources on p. 270 in *I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist* by Norman Geisler and Frank Turek). Because of engravings and statues, we even know what 18 (12 from the OT and 6 from the NT) of them looked like!

These extrabiblical writings have helped corroborate numerous details in the Bible, including details surrounding Jesus' life. Now, some critics of Christianity today are telling people that Jesus Himself never existed, that He was the invention of some clever deceivers in the first century. This is absurd and only demonstrates their ignorance of the facts or willingness to overlook the facts. There actually is very good historical evidence *outside* of the Bible that Jesus lived.

There are more than 30 sources outside of the Bible, written within 150 years of Jesus' life that attest to more than 100 facts regarding Jesus' life, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection. (See: ***The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ*** by Gary R. Habermas).

One of these external sources was the first century historian Flavius Josephus. In his writings Josephus mentions more than a dozen individuals talked about in the Bible, including: Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, Caiaphas, Pontius Pilate, John the Baptist, James "the brother of Jesus," Felix, Festus, and even Jesus. Listen to one of Josephus' statements about Jesus:

"At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive..." (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18:63-64, from a surviving manuscript in Arabic)

These are not the words of the Bible or a Christian, but a historian writing outside of the pages of Scripture. He verifies for us that Jesus actually lived and was even crucified under the reign of Pontius Pilate. Some of the other sources that mention Jesus include:

- A. Cornelius Tacitus (ca. A.D. 55 –120) a Roman Historian
- B. Gaius Suetonius (the chief secretary of Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 117 –138)
- C. The Jewish Talmud (Sanhedrin 43A)

Other historical sources outside of the Bible corroborate details surrounding:

- The Flood
- Long life spans prior to the Flood
- Details surrounding the Exodus
- The Assyrian invasion of Israel
- Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Judah
- Cyrus's freeing of Jews from Babylon
- John the Baptist's murder
- The prolonged darkness on the day Jesus died
- Herod Agrippa's sudden death after being hailed as a god

Friend, these are just a few examples—all written about outside the Bible. Critics of the Bible who brush off the Biblical accounts as mere legends or “ancient fiction” only reveal their ignorance of these discoveries. If you'd like to read more about these matters (with full citations/footnotes), please see my books: ***Archaeological Evidence for the Bible*** and ***Scrolls and Stones***.

## 5. THE BIBLE'S AMAZING SCIENTIFIC ACCURACY AND FORESIGHT

Of course many critics of the Bible would disagree that the Bible is scientifically accurate. They point to verses that say things like “the sun stood still” in Joshua 10:13 or John's reference to “the four corners of the Earth” (Rev. 7:1). And they conclude that the Bible teaches that the Sun revolves around a flat, four-cornered Earth.

Well, they are overlooking the fact that the writers of the Bible were not writing a technical textbook on astronomy. They were describing things as they appeared to the eye (as was the case in Joshua 10) or employing normal figures of speech, as was the case with John's reference to the “four corners of the Earth.”

And we, living in this scientifically advanced age, still do the same thing! We don't wake up early in the morning, throw open the Eastern window and say, “What a beautiful Earth



revolve!” No. We say, “What a beautiful sunrise!” Technically speaking, that is unscientific terminology. Meteorologists tell us on the nightly news what time the “sunset” will be. We don’t accuse them of being unscientific. They’re using simple, straightforward language to describe the way things appear.

When the apostle John referred to the “four corners of the Earth” in Revelation 7:1 he was using a figure of speech to describe the extremities of the land in the four cardinal directions: North, South, East and West. And we still use this figure of speech today. News agencies boast about how they have sent out their reporters to the four corners of the Earth to track down their stories.

So, keeping in mind that the writers of the Bible described things in simple terms as they appeared to the eye, and that they employed figures of speech (metaphors, personification and such) does away with many of the alleged scientific inaccuracies in the Bible.

Now, granted, Scripture is out-of-sync with some of the *philosophies* and *theories* some scientists hold to. The most obvious being atheistic naturalism and the theory of biological macro-evolution. If a scientist believes everything that exists came into being from nothing and by nothing and then evolved to its current state via a mindless series of unguided natural causes, then yes!—the Bible is out-of-sync with that. That goes without saying. But when it comes to known, testable, verifiable facts, the Bible has been found to be in perfect harmony with the way things really are, which is incredible when you think about it, because as you know the Bible was written two to four thousand years ago—long before the invention of microscopes, telescopes, satellites, and other technologies that have allowed us to investigate our Earth and the universe.

The fact that the Bible was written so long ago and yet does not contain any scientific errors, might be considered a miracle in itself. Why? Without exception, every ancient religious writing has certain unscientific views of astronomy, medicine, hygiene, and so on.

For example, the Hindu Vedas teach that the Earth is flat and triangular. They also teach that earthquakes are the result of elephants shaking their bodies underneath the ground.

The Qur’an 18:86 says that the Sun sets in a muddy spring. The Qur’an says, “when he reached the setting-place of the Sun, he found it setting in a muddy spring.” You could get away with an unscientific statement like that in certain parts of the world in the seventh century.

The Bible steers free of these kinds of errors. But not only that, it makes known amazing facts about our world and the universe thousands of years before scientists discovered that they were actually true. Allow me to share with you a few examples:

### **A. The Sun**

In contrast to the Qur'an, the Bible teaches that the Sun is actually on a circuit through space. Writing of the Sun in Psalm 19:6, David said, "Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end." For many years critics scoffed at this verse, claiming that it taught that the Sun revolves around the Earth. Scientists at that time thought the Sun was stationary. However, it has been discovered in recent years that the Sun is in fact on a circuit through space, just like the Bible says.

## **B. The Shape of the Earth**

Long before the Greeks figured out that the world was round, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians and Chinese believed the world was flat. Amazingly, the Bible went against the grain and gave indications that the Earth was a sphere. In a book thought to be written about 2000 BC, Job 26:10 tells us that God "has inscribed a *circle* on the surface of the waters at the boundary of light and darkness." That's interesting. Stay with me on this. Job says God has drawn "a circle on the surface of the waters at the boundary of light and darkness." This boundary between light and darkness is where evening and morning occur. Notice that the boundary is not a square or a triangle. It's a circle. Why? Because the Earth is round. Another verse that speaks of the circular shape of the Earth is found in Isaiah 40:22, written about 700 BC: "It is He [God] who sits above the circle of the Earth."

## **C. The Suspension of the Earth**

Before Isaac Newton discovered gravity, Hindus believed that the Earth rested on the back of an elephant who stood on the back of a turtle that was swimming in a great endless sea. The Greeks believed that the mythical god Atlas carried the Earth on his shoulders. What did the Bible say? In one of the oldest books in the Bible, Job said in Job 26:7, "He [God] hangs the Earth on *nothing*." Scientists did not discover that the Earth hangs on nothing until 1650.

## **D. The Stars**

Before the invention of the telescope, people believed the stars could all be numbered. People were so confident of this, they drew up star charts, with all the stars named and numbered. The Greek astronomer and mathematician Hipparchus (190-120 B.C.) claimed there were 1,026 stars. The astronomer and mathematician Ptolemy (c. 85-A.D. 165) said there were 1,056 stars. The German astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) counted 1,006.

When Galileo (a devout Christian) pointed his telescope to the heavens in 1608, he discovered these previous counts were way off and that the Bible was actually right. What had the Bible said?

God said in Jeremiah 33:22, "The host of heaven [a reference to the stars] cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured." God says, the stars *cannot* be numbered. In fact, trying to do so would be about as futile as trying to count the grains of sand floating around in the sea, obviously an impossible task. Jeremiah wrote that more than 2,000 years *before* Galileo made

his discovery.

Today, with the help of powerful telescopes, astronomers tell us that the universe contains somewhere between 100 billion and a trillion galaxies containing anywhere between 100 billion and 10 trillion stars each. [Source: [AP/Washington Times](#)]

This all adds up to a lot of stars! Astronomers have to keep revising their estimates of how many stars have been discovered. A new study, published in the journal *Nature*, suggests there are a mind-blowing 300 sextillion stars. That is a 3 followed by 23 zeros, or take 3 trillion and multiply it by 100 billion. [Source: [AP/Washington Times](#)]

Surely the host of heaven cannot be numbered! ([Jeremiah 33:22](#)).

Now all of these statements in the Bible about the stars, the universe, and the Earth raise a question: How did the authors of the Bible know these kinds of things? Were they taking wild guesses?

I don't think so. I think their perfect accuracy rules that out, especially when you consider the fact that there are dozens of statements like these in the Bible.

Well, the Bible tells us how they knew these things in 2 Peter 1:21. It says there that "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." That is to say, God, who knows all there is to know about the universe He created, superintended (came along side) the writing of the Bible to make sure that what He *wanted* written, *was* written.

You can remember these first five evidences with the acronym **F.A.C.E.S.**

## 6. THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

Critics of the Bible

like Bart Ehrman, Muslims, and Mormons commonly say the Bible has been translated and copied so many times down through the centuries we can't trust what it says today—even if the Bible was once trustworthy. Well, as popular as this belief may be, it's a mistaken one. And the manuscript evidence actually proves this to be the case.

What is a manuscript? A manuscript is any surviving hand-written copy of an ancient document that predates the invention of the printing press in 1455.

Today there survives more some 25,000 partial and complete, ancient handwritten manuscript copies of the New Testament, as well as thousands of copies of the Old Testament...many of them predating the time of Christ. Did you realize that? We have copies of the Old Testament that are older than the time of Jesus. Let me tell you how they were found (a fascinating story).

In 1947 a shepherd boy tending his father's sheep in Qumran, north and to the west of the Dead Sea in Israel, made an amazing discovery while looking for a lost goat. There in Qumran, in a hillside cave that had laid untouched for nearly two thousand years, this twelve-year-old Muslim boy discovered a collection of large clay jars containing carefully wrapped leather manuscripts. What this boy stumbled upon was an ancient collection of handwritten copies of the Old Testament that dated as far back as the third century before Christ. This was truly an amazing discovery!

Archaeologists spent years searching the surrounding caves. By the time they were done, copies of every book of the Old Testament had been discovered (with the exception of Esther). In some cases there were multiple copies of the same book. For example, there were nineteen copies of the Book of Isaiah, twenty-five copies of Deuteronomy and thirty copies of the Psalms.

Now why do I mention the Dead Sea Scrolls? Because manuscripts like the Dead Sea Scrolls have allowed Biblical scholars and textual critics to go back and verify that the Bible we have today is the same Bible the early church had 2,000 years ago. And you can see these manuscripts on display at the British Museum, Cambridge University Library, Oxford University, the National Library at Paris, and Israel Museum.

Now, even if we did not have any manuscripts copies of the Bible, there is another way of verifying that we have accurate copies of the Bible, and that is by examining the writings of the church fathers. By church fathers I am referring to those leaders in the church, of the first three centuries A.D., following the original disciples. I'm talking about men like Justin Martyr, Eusebius, Tertullian, Polycarp. These men, in their writings and correspondence with one another, and in their letters to different churches, quote the Old and New Testament over and over again. In fact, the early church fathers quote the New Testament alone more than 86,000 times. And here is something most people don't realize. Their writings survive to this day! You can go to Amazon.com right now and buy an encyclopedic size set of the writings of the church fathers and see with your own eyes their numerous quotations of both the Old and New Testaments.

There are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single manuscript copy of the Bible, scholars could still reconstruct most of the New Testament today just from their writings [Norman Geisler and William Nix, *General Introduction to the Bible*, 430]. This shouldn't come as a surprise to us. Isaiah 40:8 says, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

For more on the manuscript evidence, I recommend:

- Norman Geisler: ***From God to Us: How We Got the Bible***
- F. F. Bruce: ***The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?***
- Walter C. Kaiser: *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?*

## **7. THE BIBLE'S FORTHRIGHTNESS ABOUT ITS AUTHORS' AND CHARACTERS' FAILURES**

What am I talking about? I'm speaking about the authors' openness regarding their failures and sins. Unlike the authors of other religious writings, the authors of the Bible did not seek to cast themselves in good light or to elevate themselves at all.

Of course, this doesn't prove that the Bible is true, but it does help strengthen our case that the Bible appears to be an honest work. Listen to some of the things we read about in the Bible. We read of...

- Noah getting drunk shortly after getting off the ark (Genesis 9:21)
- Abraham lying (on more than one occasion) about Sarah being his sister (Genesis 12:13, 20:2)
- Moses's murder of a man in Egypt (Exodus 2:11–12), his outburst of anger in the wilderness, how he misrepresented God and as a result wasn't allowed to enter into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:10-12). Who wrote the books of Exodus and Numbers where these matters are explained? Moses.

He tells us about his failures in his own writings. These sound like the words of someone who was committed to communicating the truth.

- The nation of Israel rejecting God on numerous occasions to worship other false gods (e.g., the Book of Judges). Who gave us the Scriptures? The Jews. Is this the kind of thing they would make up?
- David's adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11)
- Jesus called Peter "Satan" (Mark 8:33)
- Peter denying that he knew Jesus, after promising he would never do such a thing (Matthew 26:72)
- Peter's fear of being seen eating with Gentiles (Galatians 2:11-12)
- The disciples' prideful argument over which one of them was the greatest (Luke 22:24)
- The disciples falling asleep when Jesus asked them to pray (Mark 14:32-41)
- The disciples running away to save their own necks when Jesus was arrested (Mark 14:50)...not to mention Peter cutting off the ear of the priest's servant a short time earlier, swiftly drawing a rebuke from Jesus (John 18:10)
- Paul's confession that he was "a wretched man" (Romans 7:24) and the "chief" of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15)
- Paul and Barnabas's argument over Mark being allowed to travel with them (Acts 15:37-39)

I could go on. Question for you: Do these sound like the words of men who were lying?

Not at all. And if you add to this evidence the fact that these men imparted to the world the highest standards of conduct the world has ever seen, the case is only strengthened.

## **8. THE PERSECUTION THE EARLY CHRISTIANS ENDURED**

Now, earlier tonight the skeptic raised a legitimate concern when it came to the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. He said, "Maybe the disciples just made up all of these things that Jesus supposedly did. Perhaps they read all of those prophecies in the Old Testament and decided to make up an elaborate story about Jesus fulfilling them!"

Well, in addition to their forthrightness about their sins and failures, there's another reason why I don't think the disciples were lying. Flavius Josephus, Eusebius, Tertullian, and other independent extrabiblical sources\* record for us that many of Jesus' earliest followers, including the apostles, suffered intense persecution and even death for their on-going belief and preaching that Jesus was Lord and was risen from the dead.

[\*Hegesippus, Polycarp, Ignatius, Cornelius Tacitus, Dionysius, Clement of Alexandria, Clement of Rome, Origen. For a good overview of these sources and what they said regarding this matter, see Gary Habermas and Michael Licona, *The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus*, 56–62.]

We are told in these extrabiblical sources that:

- Matthew was slain with an axe in a city of Ethiopia
- Mark died in Alexandria, in Northern Egypt after having been cruelly dragged through the streets of that city.
- Luke was hung to death in Greece
- John was tortured and then banished to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9)
- James, the brother of John, was beheaded in Jerusalem (see Acts 12:2)
- James the Less (as he's called in Mark 15:40) was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple and then stoned
- Philip was hung up against a pillar in Heiropolis and then stoned
- Bartholomew was flayed alive
- Andrew was bound to a cross and left to die
- Jude was shot to death with arrows
- Matthias (the apostle chosen to replace Judas) was first stoned, and then beheaded
- Barnabas was stoned to death
- Paul, after a variety of tortures and imprisonments, was beheaded in Rome
- Thomas was run through the body with a spear in southeast India
- Peter was crucified upside down in Rome

Question for you: Were these men lying? I find it hard to believe that men willing to die excruciatingly painful deaths for telling people about Jesus were just “making up a story of Him.” Nobody willingly endures persecution and these kinds of deaths for something they are just making up.

Oh sure, there are some Muslim terrorists today who are willing to die (and unfortunately murder!) for what they believe in: Islam. But that's because they think Muhammad was a prophet. And Muhammad promised those who died in jihad immediate entry to Paradise and 72 virgins. And so, some Muslim men, hoping that's true, thinking that's true, are willing to die for Islam. If these Muslim men lived back in the seventh century at the time of Muhammad and knew for certain that Muhammad was not a prophet of God, they would not strap explosives around their waist and blow themselves up.

Nobody willingly dies for someone they know is a false prophet.

Jesus' disciples (who lived all the way back in the first century and who were at a place historically to know for certain whether or not they had seen Jesus alive after His crucifixion) traveled all over the Roman Empire and beyond telling people about Jesus. They endured persecution, torture, and martyrdom, claiming all the way to the end that the long-awaited Messiah and Savior of the world lived among them, became a sacrifice for our sins, and that He rose from the dead. That, to me, is compelling evidence these men were telling the truth about Jesus.

## **9. THE BIBLE'S TRANSFORMING POWER FOR GOOD**

The Bible claims to be living and powerful (Hebrews 4:12, Psalm 19:7-10). And that has indeed proven to be the case. No other book in the world has had the transforming effect upon lives and societies for good, than that of the Bible. Now, of course, this alone does not prove that the Bible is the Word of God, but I do think that this fits into the case I've been building.

God didn't have the Bible written down to entertain us. The Bible was given to us so that we might know God, be reconciled to Him, and live our lives for Him in a way that is pleasing to Him. Do we see that happening in the lives of those who read it? Absolutely!

Wherever the gospel has gone and been received—from prisons to remote villages deep inside third world countries—it has had a transforming effect on people's lives for good. Down through the centuries, its words have converted millions of unbelievers to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.

Countless people (including myself!) who would testify that they were immoral, godless sinners, drowning in a cesspool of sins (harmful to themselves and others), have been transformed into men and women who reflect Jesus as they have prayerfully read the Bible. I have seen it over and over!

In addition to changing lives, the Bible has inspired people:

- to build countless hospitals and orphanages
- start many of the world's greatest universities (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, were started by Christians for Christian purposes)
- launch innumerable humanitarian efforts to the poor
- work for the equality of men and women and those of different skin colors
- investigate the world and universe scientifically
- further the development of great art and music
- abolish slavery (William Wilberforce, an evangelical Christian and member of the British Parliament in the early 19th century, was the one largely responsible for the abolition of the slave trade).

Now, obviously a lot more could be said about all this. If you'd like to read about how the Bible has changed the world for good, I highly recommend the book ***What if the Bible Had Never Been Written?*** by D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe. It is excellent!

The historian Philip Schaff summarized the enormous impact the Bible has had on people when he wrote this about Jesus:

"Jesus of Nazareth, without money and arms, conquered more millions than Alexander, Caesar, Mohammed, and Napoleon; without science and learning, He shed more light on things human and divine than all philosophers and scholars combined; without the eloquence of schools, He spoke such words of life as were never spoken before or since, and produced effects which lie beyond the reach of orator or poet; without writing a single line, He set more pens in motion, and furnished themes for more sermons, orations, discussions, learned volumes, works of art, and songs of praise than the whole army of great men of ancient and modern times." (Schaff, *The Person of Christ*, p. 29)

No other book in the world has had the kind of far-reaching, culture-crossing, multi-generational transforming effect on human lives and societies for good, the Bible has.

## **10. THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS, THE SON OF GOD**

Another reason that you can be sure that the Bible is trustworthy is because Jesus said it was! If there's anyone we can trust regarding the Word of God, it's the One who proved Himself to be the Son of God by fulfilling hundreds of Old Testament prophecies, living a sinless life, performing numerous miracles and His resurrection from the dead. And Jesus assured us that the Jewish Scriptures could be trusted: Jesus taught that the Scriptures were:

### **A. Without Error**

In John 17:17, Jesus said in His prayer to His Father, "Thy word is [Full of contradictions? Errors? No.] truth."

### **B. Historically Reliable**

Jesus affirmed as historically true some of the most disputed passages of the Old Testament, including the story of Jonah in the great fish (Matt. 12:40), the destruction of the world by a flood in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:37-39), and others (for more, see Dan Story, *Defending Your Faith*, p. 55-60 and Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 559).

### **C. Divinely Authoritative**

When Jesus was in the wilderness being tempted by Satan (Matt. 4:1-11), He resisted this ungodly foe by quoting Scripture. Over and over again, Jesus responded to Satan and His other critics (the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes) by pointing to Scripture, saying: "It is written...it is



written...it is written" (Matt. 4:4-10). He did the same with His disciples (Matthew 26:31; Mark 14:21; Luke 24:46). Why? Because He believed Scripture is authoritative on all matters related to faith and practice.

#### **D. Accurate Regarding Human Origins**

For example, when it comes to the whole debate today over evolution versus creation, Jesus affirmed that the early chapters of Genesis were accurate when He said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female..." (Matthew 19:4). Adam and Eve didn't come on the scene after billions of years of mutations and evolution. No. God created them all the way back in the beginning—just like Moses reported in the Book of Genesis.

#### **E. Infallible (Dependable, or Unbreakable)**

In John 10:35 Jesus said, "The Scripture cannot be broken."

You can build your life on the Word of God. You can stand upon God's promises. The Word of God is not going to collapse underneath you.

#### **F. Indestructible**

In Matthew 5:18 Jesus said, "For truly I say to you, until heaven and Earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished."

If Jesus was a prophet of God, as even the Qur'an teaches (Surah 4:171), or even if He was a good teacher (as so many are willing to believe today), it would be wise for us to take His Word on the matter: the Bible is a historically reliable, divinely authoritative, dependable, error free, indestructible book!

**SKEPTIC:** "Come on, Charlie, you're referring to the words of Jesus *in* the Bible to prove the Bible. That's circular reasoning!"

It isn't. As I pointed out earlier, the Bible is not a single book. It is a collection of 66 books written by numerous authors. So, to quote Jesus' words recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John to help shed light on the reliability of something Moses or another author wrote in a different book is not circular reasoning at all. I'm quoting independent sources

**SKEPTIC:** "Okay Charlie! But, Jesus was only talking about the *Old* Testament when He said those things. The New Testament had not been written."

That's right! Jesus did say those things about the Old Testament. But He also promised His disciples God's aid (the Holy Spirit) to write the New Testament. On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus told them, "The Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will

teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). A short time later that same evening, Jesus told His disciples in John 16:13, “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.”

As these men went out into the world to tell people about Jesus (Matthew 28:18–20), whether by preaching and teaching, or penning the Gospels and epistles, they were going to have the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit to guide them. Jesus assured them of that.

So, Jesus validated the trustworthiness of the Old Testament and He promised the trustworthiness of the New. Based on Jesus’ testimony, you can trust both.

### **CONCLUSION: GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS**

Friend, you can trust the Bible! You can read it with confidence! You can stand upon its promises! You can draw comfort from its passages. You can gain wisdom from its pages and best of all, you can know your creator by reading it. What a joy it is to know God and to live for Him!

Do you know the God of the Bible? Do you know your creator? Are you experiencing the joy of walking with God? Are you experiencing the peace that comes with knowing your sins have been forgiven and that all is right between you and God? You can.

That is why Jesus, God in the flesh, suffered on that cruel wooden cross two thousand years ago. He was paying the penalty for your sins so that you could be forgiven, so that you could escape eternity in Hell and be brought back into a right relationship with your creator. He rose from the grave three days later, ascended into Heaven and today He is offering all of mankind—you!—the complete forgiveness of sins and everlasting life to all who will place their faith in Him. Have you done that? Is Jesus Christ your Lord?

The Bible says that one day you will stand before God to give an account for your life. If you have never placed your faith in Jesus Christ, the Bible says that books will be opened that contain a thorough record of all the sinful things you have ever done, the lies you told, the things you stole, the immoral behavior, even those things you thought you got away with in secret, the things you thought no one else found out about (Matthew 12:36, Revelation 20:12).

Your guilty standing before God will result in your judgment, condemnation and separation from God for all eternity (Romans 2:5; Revelation 20:11–15).

Is that what you want—an eternity of misery apart from God—the very source of love, hope, peace, joy and all that is good? If you are like most people I have met, the answer is no. You want to go to Heaven. And there is a good chance you think you *are* going to Heaven. Most people believe they are. They think they are going to Heaven because they are basically good people. Maybe you think that. And you may be a good person if you compare yourself to a

murderer or the drug lord locked up in the state penitentiary. But how you measure up against other people does nothing to affect your standing before a holy, sinless, just God. How you compare to others does nothing to undo the thousands of sins you have committed over the course of your lifetime.

So, let's make sure you are going to Heaven, not on your terms, but on God's terms.

### **Doing What We Were Made For**

So if the Big Bang theory is a dud and evolution was evolved from a fairy tale, and there is enough proof that the Bible is true, then our life might just have a purpose and meaning. Instead of just existing merely by chance, we have been created individually for an exact purpose. This would shed a lot of light on our feelings, emotions, thoughts and desires don't you think? Now that we know we have a purpose what exactly are we suppose to be doing? God doesn't leave that question unanswered. First He has given us rules and guidelines to follow for our life recorded in the Bible. What He has blessed each one of us with is a special set of talents and gifts, things that we are good at and desire to do. So many people seem to be afraid that God wants them to do something they don't want to do. What's the sense in that? Once the name, "God the Father," sinks into our heart we'll realize God wants the best for us. That He loves us and He knows we are not going to have the joy He desires for us until we are doing what He has made us to do.

Knowing that God is real and that I was created for a purpose didn't come from research, it came from a firsthand experience. I discovered the Bible is true after I experienced it, I discovered God loved me and was watching over me when I looked back on my life. The things that I have done could only have been done with God's guidance and love. I've felt God's presence so many times and know for a fact that He loves me even after all the terrible things that I've done. I may not understand why, but I know it as sure as anything else. God put me on a journey to show me what I was supposed to be doing before going home. God uses other people to introduce himself to us.

When they called my daughter after my suicide attempt and told her that I was in the hospital she was with a fellow she was only dating for a couple of weeks, Justin. Justin volunteered to take her to the hospital and sat outside the room while Danielle was there with me. I'm not sure how long he waited for her, but now knowing this young man as my son-in-law he would have been there as long as it took.

When I finally got home from the hospital, totally lost in what I was going to do, Justin came up to me and handed me a book entitled Prison to Praise. This was actually one of the first times I met him and yet he had the courage to approach this obviously troubled man and offer help. He told me that maybe this book would be able to help me sort things out. I thanked him for the book and placed the book on the end table

The next morning I sat down on the couch and looked over to see the book on the end table. I was never a good reader and rarely attempted to read a book. I always had trouble focusing my thoughts. When I did try to read, my mind would wander and I wouldn't

remember what I read. However, I still picked up the book and began to read. The book opened with the author, Merlin Carothers, talking about his time in the army. Since my son was in the army that drew my attention. After a couple of pages he talked about being stationed in Fort Benning, Georgia, the same place where my son was stationed. Now it really got my attention. I sat down that day and read the entire book. The book described how thanking God changed his life. The book talked about Christianity, something I knew nothing about and how he became a chaplain in the army helping people. The main principle I received from the book was to thank God each day for everything you have in your life. The book described that we have so much to be thankful for. The fact we are breathing and had the opportunity to improve our life each day was a miracle. It spoke of putting the focus on God, not you and to trust in God. All these ideas were new to me. After I was finished reading I knelt down in front of the couch, put my hands together and started thinking of things to thank God for. I started by thanking Him for my wife, my daughter, my son and sister. I then went on to thank God for my mother, father, brother and friends. The more I thanked God, the more there was to be thankful for. Finally after several minutes of thanking God, I got up and sat on the couch. I felt different, in fact I felt pretty good. I went and put my shoes on and went for a walk with my dog. It was a beautiful day so I thanked God for that, I looked down at my dog as she sniffed everything in sight and I thanked God for her. I noticed things I never noticed before such as plants, small animals and my neighbors working in a yard. Even the air smelled different, but everything that I noticed I thanked God for. Even with all the problems I had, at that moment I felt better than I remember feeling in a long time.

That Sunday Justin invited us to his church. I figured since I've been talking to God each day it was time to visit Him at home. The only church I had ever attended before was Catholic Church when I was young. Today however, I was about to attend a Christian church. I had no idea what to expect, but I knew I was searching for something that was missing in my life and this seemed as good a place as any to find it. As we pulled up to the church there were several people waving as we came in so I waved back. We pulled into the parking lot, again there were people directing us where to park and smiling and waving at us. The church was a large building with a row of palm trees lining the walkway. It didn't look like a church, there was no steeple or church bells. We got out of the car and walked to the entrance of the church. There were people smiling and shaking my hand to welcome me as we walked through the untraditional glass doors. The inside foyer looked just like any building with no crucifixes or Stations of the Cross, nothing indicating that it was a church. We walked into the sanctuary and again someone was shaking my hand and giving me a program. Walking inside it looked more like an auditorium with white patio chairs instead of pews and with the exception of a large sign over the stage reading Jesus, I thought I was in a theatre. Off to one side of the stage were musical instruments, on the other were microphones and music

stands. We all sat down while I tried to get comfortable in my plastic chair. I sat there confused about my surroundings and lack of religious artifacts. I watched as several musicians with saxophones, trumpets, clarinets, and guitars filled the area next to the stage along with a drummer. Then the choir marched on stage along with the conductor of the group. I wasn't sure if I was in church or at a concert. I was ready to hear a slow gospel song with a solo done by a woman who could reach a note only my dog could hear. Then the music started. It had an upbeat tempo, instantly everyone stood and started to clap their hands. I began clapping, and the choir started to sing. There were two large television monitors on either side of the stage with the words of the song. There were plenty of people singing and I was sure they would be able to drown out my terrible voice, so I began to sing. The song was about Jesus, how He is with us, how He is our brother and cares for us. The song went on to tell how He gave his life so that we would be saved. They played a couple more songs and ended with a song called "Shout to the Lord." The woman who sang it sang with such conviction, I was moved. The song was over and the pastor came out yelling, "Let's hear it for the Lord," and started applauding while everyone was standing and clapping with him. My first thoughts were about those television evangelists with the rhinestone jackets, asking for money and healing people on stage. He finally had everyone sit down and asked, "Isn't the Lord good?" People all over the sanctuary were either yelling yes or amen. This was definitely different from the church I was used to. He told everyone to get out his or her Bible. I had never owned a Bible and had only seen one in a motel room. I looked around and it seemed as though everyone else had one. I felt as though I were back in school and had forgotten my books at home, ready for the teacher to notice I had forgotten.

The message that day was about how the devil can influence our thinking. He asked if we ever tell ourselves that we're no good or incapable of doing things right. He went on to say that the devil was the father of lies and if we let him, he can lead us astray. The things he was saying and the way he was saying them made me feel as though he was talking just to me. I had to look around to see if there was anyone else there. The pastor didn't give the message with fire and brimstone or shout, "repent." He simply told of everyday occurrences that may happen to anyone. He told humorous stories that related to his message. As he spoke I thought about the way I looked at life and how I always put myself down and looked at the worst side of a situation. The idea of Satan causing some of the negative ways I thought seemed far-fetched. As I thought about it, a feeling of hope came over me. The situations he talked about were situations that had happened to me, but I always thought they only happened to me. It was comforting to find out that I wasn't the only one. The pastor said, "All the answers are written right here in the word," as he held up the Bible. He said, "Jesus had already won the fight against Satan and if you let Him, He will fight for each one of you." I wanted to believe, but it still seemed strange to me. At the end of his message he asked us to bow our head in prayer. He gave a beautiful prayer, at the end of

which he asked if anyone wanted to accept Jesus as his or her personal savior. I didn't know exactly what that meant, and I didn't feel as if I should raise my hand, so I sat there.

Normally when I would leave church everyone would be quiet and rush to get to their cars to go get breakfast or go home. Not at this church. People stood outside and talked to each other. A couple came up to us and introduced themselves. Justin saw a few of his friends and they came over and also introduced themselves.

I left that day curious about what was said. I made plans to go back the following Sunday, but I wanted to stop and buy a Bible. I wanted to be ready in case there was a test.

I sat at my desk and there lying on it was my new Bible. I took my Bible, went out on the patio, sat down and began to read. I started at the beginning, but I didn't understand what was happening. I remembered that the pastor gave us notes, with Bible verses to look up. I found my notes and started to look up different scriptures. I realized the version I had, had notes on the bottom explaining certain passages. I spent most of that day reading different parts of the Bible, finding stories I had seen on movies like, Moses, Samson and Delilah, David and Goliath and realized Ben Hur wasn't actually a Bible story. When I went to bed that night I prayed, thanking God for that day. I was turning into a praying machine, two times in one day. Along with thanking Him, I asked him to show me what it is I was supposed to do. Something was happening to me, but I didn't know what it was, or what I was supposed to do about it.

The rest of the week I made phone calls to find a permanent job, worked around the house and read. It was time I had never had before. Kathy called the next day to check up on me, as she had been doing. I told her I had a strange question for her and she replied, "So what's new?" I told her about my experiences in regards to the church, thanking God each day and praying at night. "It's about time," Kathy said. She asked me, "How do you think I'm able to speak in front of so many people? How do you think I survived everything I survived, and how do you think I'm able to help people. God has directed my life and has taken care of me all these years." She then told me about the day that she found out I took the overdose. She said, "I was so mad at God for letting this happen that I yelled, how could you let this happen to my brother? As I was lying there crying I heard a voice say, why are you crying, he's still alive isn't he?" God isn't finished with you yet. Kathy told me about situations that she had been in that only God could have gotten her out of and about all the gifts He had given her. Before she hung up she said, "Be patient and watch God work in your life." It was as if everyone else knew about God, but me.

Then came Sunday and time to go to church. This time I waved back to the people standing on the corner and in the parking lot. I even felt comfortable shaking the occasional hand that was extended as we went through to the sanctuary. We took our seats right before the

music began. After a couple of songs they announced, "Turn to five people around you and welcome them to the church." I always hated shaking hands with strangers. I turned around pretending I was shaking hands, but in this church people were determined to shake your hand and they didn't look down when they approached you. One woman even came up and gave me a hug. I looked around to see if my wife saw it and if she was going to deck the lady right there on the spot.

The pastor came out, as he has done the weeks before, yelling and clapping for Jesus. The man was so full of energy, some of it spills over onto you as you watch him. This week's message was about the burdens we all carry around with us. He talked about the burdens of guilt, pride, jealousy, past experiences, desire to impress others and the list went on. He talked about the burden of the past and how no matter what we do we take that burden with us wherever we go. He talked about how that burden continually grows, since we never throw any of it away and we keep adding to it. Then he really hit home when he said, "The burden can grow into depression and some of us may get to a place where we feel ending our life is the only way out." The pastor went on to say that some of us can't enjoy our lives because we feel there is no present, only the bad memories of the past and the worries of tomorrow. As he was speaking I wanted to cry out loud. My body was shaking and it took everything to hold back the tears. I couldn't even look up at him as he spoke I sat there with my head down looking at the back of the chair in front of me. He went on to say, "Life is right now, this moment and as soon as I speak it's already in the past and nothing I can do will change that. The past is history, tomorrow a mystery and right now is a gift. That's why it's called the present." Then he asked, "Do you want to know how to get rid of your burdens?" I almost stood up right there and yelled, yes. He said, "Give them to God, He wants them. He loves us so much that he was ridiculed, beaten, tortured and died for our sins so that we may have peace. Take your burdens and lay them at the foot of the cross. He doesn't just want you to give your burdens to Him He commands it." Then the Pastor read John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." He then said, "Thank God for all your blessings and ask Him to take your burdens and turn them into blessings." I thought to myself, "I've been thanking God for what He has given me and that has already helped me. I don't know how He could take the past bitter memories and make them a blessing, but I was willing to ask Him." That day after the message he asked again for us to bow our heads as he prayed. When he came to the part and asked, "Who wants to have a personal relationship with Jesus? Who believes that Jesus rose from the dead so that we may have life everlasting? Raise your hand so we may pray for you." I raised my hand so hard I thought my arm was going to come out of the socket. With my hand up and head down I felt a chill come over my body and I began to cry. Not tears of sadness, but tears of joy and I didn't care who saw me.



When service was just about over the pastor said, "Anyone who made a decision for Christ, there will be prayer partners to pray with you." I went up after service, my eyes still red from crying and my body shaking. We met with one of the pastors there in front of the stage and I told him I wanted to do what was right. He smiled at me and gave me a hug. I couldn't believe I was doing this, something I would have thought was strange, bizarre and would have probably made fun of. We prayed together and at the end of the prayer he told us we were now born again. What a terrific thought, to be born again. A chance to do it all over, but this time to do it right.

I left the church that day feeling different, with hope and joy. I couldn't explain it, and didn't care to; I just wanted to enjoy it. The rest of that day was spent walking around the neighborhood, over to a nearby park and watching the children play. I took time to read the Bible, visited with God, relaxed and celebrated my new birthday.

It's been over eighteen years since the Lord led me to Him. I'll never forget the day I sat in that chair and raised my hand to give my life to my savior, Jesus. God used so many people to lead me in the right direction and I have been free from all medication even after I was told I would be under a doctor's care and on medication for the rest of my life.

So how did He do it? He helped me take the focus off of me. He took the burdens I carried all my life, He lightened my load and gave my life meaning and purpose. He put the Holy Spirit within me and changed me as it says in

*2 Corinthians 5:[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!*

I've talked to so many Christians about the change in their lives that happened when they received Jesus as Lord and Savior and each one had something different that changed within them. I remember one of the first things that happened was I couldn't swear anymore and when I heard God's name used in vain I would get a sharp pain in my heart. But the one thing that really changed was the way I looked at people. I rarely even noticed or cared about them at all. I was so wrapped up in my own life, but now things were different. The homeless were no longer disgusting to me but unfortunate, the elderly no longer were just someone I needed to pass on the road, but full of wisdom and love and children were not a bother, but a blessing.

Once I lived by the beach in a small apartment and I started work early so I would get up at 2:00 a.m. and walk along the beach and pray. I noticed so many homeless people sleeping on the park benches and my heart went out to them. So each week I would purchase several gift cards to the nearby Dairy Queen and place them in a card I made that had

*Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart  
and lean not on your own understanding;*

*6 in all your ways acknowledge him,  
and he will make your paths straight.*

on the front and

*John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

inside and the words "May God continue to bless you and keep you safe, for He cares and loves you." While the people were sleeping I placed the card next to them and quietly left. I would volunteer to help any ministry feed the poor, did a beach barbecue for those in need, and led the Thanksgiving Dinner at the church I was at.

One day I was going through a very tough time in my life and had no direction on what God wanted me to do. I was heading for work when I saw this one homeless man that stood at the corner each day walking towards the tracks where he slept. It was Sunday and early so there was no traffic on the road and God put on my heart to stop and give him some money. Like Jonah I didn't want to stop and I made excuses like; I was going the opposite way and there was no way to turn around, I have my own problems and I was running late. One thing I learned God doesn't see our problems the same way we do and had me turn around. I stopped and looked in my wallet and I had a twenty and a one dollar bill in my pocket and looked up to see which one He wanted me to give, as if I didn't know. So I ran over to the man and got his attention. I said I feel I'm supposed to give this to you. Pretty heartfelt don't you think? As I handed the money to him I began to walk away and he stopped me and said, "What's your name?" Startled I turned around and said "I'm sorry my name is Mark." The man looked at me and said, "Wow that's my name too." As I looked into his face for the first time I noticed his eyes were this bright blue and his toothless smile warming as he said thank you. I did say God Bless as I left and take care. I walked back to my car wondering what just happened, and realized my anxiety was gone and proceeded to go to work. I never saw Mark again, but I'll never forget him.

*Hebrews 13: [2] Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

I was involved in a couple small church groups and one of the men in the group owned a nursing home. We thought it would be great to prepare a dinner and then show a movie one evening. Some of the men brought their children to help serve. We all showed up early and the people were more than anxious to talk with us. I talked to a man who won the PGA Golf Tournament in 1968 and my friend found Freddy who use to box and knew Rocky Graciono. Freddy had a hunchback and my friend was over six foot five, but Freddy stood firm and occasionally gave him a jab to his stomach. I watched as the kids took the orders after everyone was seated, as our guests ordered shrimp and filet mignon when we only had burgers and hot dogs. However, that day was a banquet, a banquet of love.

After dinner we set up the movie on a large screen. It was called, "Joshua", a Christian movie about a modern day Jesus. At the end of the movie, Freddy came up to me with tears in his eyes. I know what it meant and I hugged him with tears in my eyes and an indescribable wonderful feeling in my spirit. As I was getting things together to leave, a woman came up to me and said, "I know who sent you." I looked at her and said, "You do, do you." Then she just looked at me. I looked back and said, "I love Him so much." She said, "It shows," and gave me a big hug. I never truly loved anyone or anything my entire life and now I love someone so much it showed. What a change.

I then got involved in the CARE (Child Abuse Recovery Education) ministry for abused children. The church would host events at the church inviting different agencies to bring kids. I hardly spent any time with my own children and now God wanted me to be involved with children going through the worst kind of abuse. They needed a Santa for the Christmas party being held and I stepped up to the challenge. The children have been so abused that no one was allowed to hug them because they were afraid of people, everyone except for Santa. That day I had everyone sitting on my lap from small children to mothers going through substance abuse, seeing their children maybe for the first time in months. I was laughing and hugging everyone. It was as if I was born to do this. Maybe I was. As I would reach out for children and place them on my knee and ask what they wanted, I saw in line a little boy about four or five. He had burn marks all over his face, he had freckles and it seems as though someone tried to burn the freckles off with a cigarette. I was afraid to reach out to him and said from a distance, "what would you like for Christmas little boy." He looked up at me and said, "I want a hug Santa." I couldn't hold back the tears and I reached out to him and just held him in my arms as he embraced me. His name was Mikey and I asked him to help me pass out the candy and toys to the other boys and girls. He was so excited and stuck by his new best friend Santa the rest of the day. When it was time to go home he ran up to me and gave me a big hug and told me that he loved me. I took off my gloves and glasses and handed them to him then said, "I love you too," and he got on the bus. I don't know if Mikey will remember that day, but I know Santa will never forget.

I'm Santa every year and God has used me to touch others from praying with moms sitting on my lap while others waited in line, encouraging ladies that God has a plan for their life and touching the lives of children. Not bad for someone who's a mistake.

I became a leader for children with autism at the church. It was a class held on Saturday night and I was the only man who volunteered. I remember one night as the parents were picking up their children this one lady had two sons and they were about to leave. I shouted, "hey what about me," the two boys turned and wrapped their arms around me and kissed me on the cheek. I looked up and there was their mom with tears in her eyes and said, "thank you for showing my boys some love." I found out most children with autism usually only have a mother, because the father can't take the pressure of dealing with a child with autism. Imagine God used someone who couldn't love anyone, even himself, to show love to those who need it.

God blessed me with so much joy from serving, I wanted to help others experience that same joy. I started a ministry called the C.I.A. (Christians In Action) and came up with a booklet with over one hundred ways we can bless others by serving. The first three opening paragraphs read as follows:

*The C.I.A. (Christians In Action) is an elite force of dedicated Christians who are not afraid to get their hands dirty and are focused on the mission of touching the hearts of others in the name of Jesus. Our commander and Chief, Jesus Christ, has given us our orders to help the poor and weak to spread the gospel, to love others, offer hospitality. Please refer to the following sections in the main Operation Manual (Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth) Psalm 41:1-2, Proverbs 19:17, Luke 14: 13-14, Luke 12:33, Proverbs 22:9, Luke 6:38, Isaiah 58:10, James 2:15-16, 1 Peter 4:9-10, Mark 9:41, Hebrews 13:2, Acts 20:35, 1 John 3:17, Romans 12:13, Mathew 25:31-46*

*Our goal is to make a difference for Christ in our community and to make the Christians In Action a visible force. Our targets are the homeless, elderly, poor, non believers, people that are sick and anyone that might need our help. Field agents may choose their assignments in accordance to their talents and gifts (gifts will be distributed by the Holy Spirit at conversion). For example an agent with the gifts of helps and intercession would make a good prayeramedic, praying and visiting other in the hospital. Someone with the gift of leadership would oversee a special force, code name home fellowship, to help build up and train agents. If you are unsure of your classification of gifts you may go to regional headquarters to have an assessment of your gifts. Agents we will be targeting for recruitment will have the gifts of Teaching, Wisdom, Exhortation, Giving, Helps, Intercession or Service.*

*Payroll is handled by the Heavenly Treasury Department. We offer the best retirement program even free housing, built personally by our Commandeer and Chief John 14:2,3. We offer direct deposit, all rewards will be transferred to our main headquarters in heaven and will be available when your mission here is over. All of your assignments will be recorded in the Book of Life and will be reviewed at the proper time.*

The idea was to help others realize their purpose by supporting them in whatever outreach God might have put on their heart. Most of the outreaches I did had something to do with food, since that is my gifting. One year we had a military outreach Christmas party. We invited families that their spouse was deployed or might return right before the event. We called and asked for specific gifts for the children, we had volunteers do crafts, take pictures with Santa (guess who was Santa) and had a wonderful lunch buffet.

We had a request from a soldier stationed in Afghanistan. He was hoping that somehow his family would be able to go to Disneyland on Christmas day so the family wouldn't miss him as much not being there. It would be his wife and three children. With the generosity of the church we were able to purchase all the gifts along with four tickets to Disneyland.

It was a wonderful day as our guest entered and were greeted and then directed to the crafts and pictures with Santa. I had a great time asking the children what they wanted and hugging each one. A little girl about five years old came and sat on my lap and when I asked what she wanted, she said she wanted her daddy home. I told her that was beyond what Santa could deliver, but I knew of someone who could watch over him until He gets home. I asked her if she knew Jesus and with a smile she said, yes. I asked her if she wanted to pray together to make sure her daddy gets home safely and she hugged me and said, please. We sat there talking with Jesus asking for a safe return for her dad as others waited their turn.

Right before lunch I gathered everyone together and told them about the real gift of Christmas and the reason we were there that day, to celebrate the birth of our Savior. Santa excused himself and went right to the kitchen and changed out of his Santa jacket to his chef coat. After lunch I went into the kitchen to clean up, while the others called out names to receive their special gift. Someone came back to tell me there was someone who wanted to talk to me. It was the lady and three children who received the Disneyland tickets. They took turns hugging and thanking me, but I insisted it wasn't me they should be thanking. The wife and mom gave me one last hug and said you made our Christmas, and I said no you made mine. That moment was my Christmas, the one moment I'll remember most from that year.

How can it be so rewarding putting the needs of others above our own? All I ever thought of was myself, couldn't care less about anyone else and I was miserable. God commands us to put the needs of others above our own and He is always looking out for our best interest. I guess if it was good enough for Jesus.

*Mark 10:45 (NKJV) For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

My sister Kathy is one of those people who puts others before herself. That's one thing about Kathy, she loves people, and she is not embarrassed to show it. We went to a restaurant one night, and sitting across from us was an elderly couple, just slowly eating their meal. Both of them were eating, but weren't aware of each other's presence. They seemed totally oblivious to their surroundings, and even appeared sad, until, Kathy approached their table. Kathy loves all people, but she adores senior citizens and children. Kathy went and sat in a chair next to them. She said, "I have no idea what I want for dinner, so I looked across to see what you were having. Well, this looks pretty good, she proceeded to pick up a fork and take food from the lady's plate and the lady started laughing. Next she tried to take food from the gentleman's plate. He told her that if she was going to take food off his plate, she had to give him a kiss. Sure enough, Kathy took the food, and gave him a kiss on the cheek. I couldn't hear all that she said, but the people were laughing and enjoying themselves. I saw this elderly couple become twenty years younger in just a couple of minutes. They didn't even look like the same couple. Eventually, Kathy came back to our table, I looked back at the couple, and they were still

laughing and pointing at Kathy. Kathy had just given them the gift of a special memory. They would probably leave there tonight and tell some friends or family members about the crazy woman who ate their food. Kathy gave them a gift that was priceless, and it cost her nothing. As we were eating, the gentleman came up to her and kissed her on the cheek as he and his wife softly said, "thank you." He then turned to me and said, "You have a special little lady here, take care of her." When they left, Kathy went back to eating, as if nothing had happened and said, "Weren't they cute." I sat there and stared at her and said, "Why did you do that?" She innocently said, "What do you mean?" Why did you go over to that couple, and take the chance that you might be embarrassed. Those people could have taken offense of you touching their food. She looked at me and said, "I'm not so arrogant as to think that God put me here just for me."

## TO LIVE HOMESICK

I know most of my life I didn't feel like I belonged here. I didn't seem to fit in and for the most part I didn't want to be here, like so many. If you ever felt that way don't worry you weren't made for this place, there is someplace else. Your true home.

My wife and I took a mission trip to an orphanage in Mexico. It was an awesome experience and at the end of each day our group would sit around a campfire for a devotional. The one night I was asked to lead the devotional and God placed on my heart what He wanted me to discuss. I started by going around the group and asking each person, "When I say heaven, what comes to your mind?" I also gave them an opportunity to pass if they couldn't think of something right away. The first couple of people passed, then the next said Jesus, then another love, but no one gave an answer as if heaven was on their mind.

I explained we had only been there for a couple of days without taking a shower and sleeping in tents and that I was already homesick. I've been thinking of a nice hot shower, comfortable bed, relaxing on the couch, going to the kitchen whenever I wanted to get something to eat and other comforts I missed. Yet I live in a world where sin is accepted, hate outweighs love, sexual immorality is just an alternative lifestyle, pollution, corruption, sickness and lust. This is truly Satan's playground. I know when my time is up on this earth it will be time to go home, a beautiful place, too beautiful to be able to be described in this present world where I'm going to live with the one person who loves me more than anyone could for all eternity. Yet it hardly crosses my mind. How can I get so homesick for a temporary home on this earth and not homesick for my eternal home?

A couple of days after we returned from Mexico I was talking with someone and told them about my devotional on heaven. She asked if I had ever read a book by Randy Alcorn called, "Heaven". I told her I never heard of it and she loaned me her copy. It was the most amazing and wonderful book, with the exception of the Bible, that I had ever read. Using scripture the book explains what heaven will be like and it was so reassuring and exciting, I couldn't put it down.

When we are depressed we give up hope and even the possibility of becoming happy, because we are unable to imagine that. That is also why we don't think of heaven, because we don't know what it's going to be like. Some of us have images of doing nothing for all eternity in a constant state of peaceful bliss, how boring is that? Some think we will be just spirit beings like the angels, others picture themselves just sitting around singing to God and others may think we will have a mindless existence and will have no desire to do anything except what we will be programmed to do. No wonder we don't look forward to going home.

Randy Alcorn's book however paints a totally different place, a place where you can't wait to come home to. *2 Peter 3: [13] But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Again using scripture the book explains if we were to pass away now we would be with Jesus in paradise, like the thief that was crucified next to Jesus. *Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* This will be a wonderful place, but not our eternal home. Mr. Alcorn explains that our family and friends who have gone ahead will be able to see us, we will recognize people when we get there and we will have a purpose that involves the gifts and abilities God has given us on earth.

*Revelations 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

*Revelations 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

The really exciting part for me was when Jesus returns and sets up His Kingdom He is going to make a new heaven and earth. Imagine a new heaven and earth without any sin, brand new with no destruction and we each get to start at the beginning in the presence of God. We will have a new and perfect body. *Philippians 3:[20] But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* We will recognize our loved ones, we will get to meet people we only read about in history books and the Bible, we will remember what we did on earth and we will have a job to do, the job we were created to do from the beginning. The book goes into detail of what we might expect in our new home *John 14:[2] In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.* Other questions the book answers are: will we actually rule with Christ, Will there be space and time, will we have the sun, moon, oceans and weather, will we be ourselves, what will our bodies be like, will we eat and drink, what will our daily lives be, who will we meet, will there be animals, will we see our pets again, and so many more questions are answered.

We will only be here on this earth for a little while longer before going home. I remember when my parents would go on vacation and my sister and I stayed home with our grandparents.



We couldn't wait until they came home, because they would bring us back something from their journey. When you get home what will you bring home from your journey to your Father? Will it be something priceless like a life lived for Him, doing His will? I so desperately want to hear my Lord say to me *Matthew 25:21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'*

We will get to experience Eden like Adam and Eve, only this time without the sin. When you think about it, it makes sense for God doesn't make mistakes and so many think that the Garden of Eden was a mistake, because of what Adam and Eve did, but how else could God find those who would truly love and trust Him. He choose those who through the trials and tribulations of this life and the sin of this world still said I trust you Father and thank you for the sacrifice of your Son so that I may call this home with you.

If we can visualize what our new home for all eternity will be like it will be much easier to live the life we have on Earth with a positive attitude. Our days on earth are often burdened with troubles and frustrations but seeing a vision of the New Earth can encourage us while we finish our days here. Think of what aspect of the New Earth you can focus on to encourage you in the midst of your daily circumstances.

In the Greek new means renewed or renovated. God could have said a new place, but He states it is a new Earth, which means it must have a lot of the attributes that this Earth must have or it wouldn't qualify as Earth.

The coming renewal of all things will include everything, all will be restored, returned to its original condition. Mankind will be restored to what we once were, what God designed us to be, fully embodied and righteous beings. The Universe, the rest of everything, will be restored to what it once was. God will restore everything on earth

*Acts 3:21 whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.*

My wife and I took a trip to Hawaii and it was beautiful, the awesome sunsets, beautiful ocean, wonderful waterfalls, we went whale watching and saw a whale breach and all the tropical plants were amazing. So why are these sights so beautiful, amazing, magnificent, and awe inspiring to us? Because God is beautiful, amazing, magnificent, and awe inspiring. Romans 1:20 speaks of how we can see God and how He reveals himself to us each day.

*Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,*

In order to get a glimpse into the New Earth, we must take a close look at the present earth. The people around us, the earth's natural wonders and the joys of life are all but shadows of what the earth once was and foretastes of what yet will be when it is renewed. On the New Earth, we will see this present earth in its unfallen state, full of all the good things of God's natural creation enhanced into something far greater than we've ever seen or experienced before.

If one of the reasons you're depressed is because of health issues you have a reason to rejoice. God promises us new resurrected bodies when Christ returns because of the work he did on the cross in our place. Christ's resurrection is the prototype for the resurrection of mankind and the earth. The empty tomb is the ultimate proof that Christ's resurrection body was the same body that dies on the cross. If resurrection meant the creation of a new body, Christ's original body would have remained in the tomb.

When Jesus said to his disciples after his resurrection, "It is I myself," he was emphasizing to them that he was the same person, in spirit and body, who had gone to the cross. His disciples saw the marks of his crucifixion, unmistakable evidence that this was the same body. Jesus said

*John 2:19-21 "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"*

*21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.*

On the new earth, God will give us renewed minds and marvelously constructed bodies. We'll be whole people, full of energy and vision. The work on the New Earth will be adapted to each one's special aptitude and powers. It will be the work that we can do best, work that will give us the most satisfaction. Even now under the curse, we catch glimpses of how work can be enriching, how it can build relationships, and how it can help us to improve. Work stretches us in ways that makes us smarter, wiser and more fulfilled. The God who created us to do good works will not cancel this purpose when he resurrects us to inhabit the new universe. The Bible's picture of resurrected people at work in a vibrant society on a resurrected Earth couldn't be more compelling. We're going to help God run the universe.

Will Heaven be boring? While we expect to experience disappointments in this life, the life that awaits us in Heaven is filled with excitement, adventure and fulfilled dreams. God created our desires for pleasures and the experience of joy, he made our taste buds, adrenaline and the nerve endings that convey pleasure to our brains. Likewise our imaginations and our capacity for joy and exhilaration were made by God. Sometimes we're so arrogant to think that we created fun. On this earth we sometimes think to be good is to be boring and to sin is fun. Sin doesn't make life interesting, it makes it empty. Where there's fulfillment, when there's beauty, when we see God as he truly is, an endless reservoir of fascination, boredom becomes

impossible. God promises that we'll laugh, rejoice and experience endless pleasures in Heaven. I know for me my most exciting and rewarding times on this earth have been doing things that I know honor God, being with his children, serving, doing outreaches and helping others. God has called us to enter heaven as children, expecting to enjoy ourselves with wide eyed amazements. Everything that we currently love about this creation will be renewed again on the New Earth. Not only that, but God also created us with a capacity to do the very things that he set in our hearts to dream. Heaven will be more exciting and more fulfilling than any experience we've had here on earth.

*Luke 6:23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.*

*Psalms 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

We'll experience all the best of human relationships, with none of the worst. The burdens and tragedies of life will be lifted from us. We'll be free of what displeases God and damages relationships. No Abortion clinics or psychiatric wards. No missing children. No rape or abuse. No drug rehabilitation centers. No bigotry, muggings or killings. No worry, depression or economic downturns. No wars. No unemployment. No anguish over failure and miscommunication. No pretense or wearing masks. No cliques. No hidden agendas, backroom deals, betrayals, secret ambitions, plots or schemes. Imagine meal times full of stories, laughter and joy without fear of insensitivity, inappropriate behavior, anger, gossip, lust, jealousy, hurt feelings or anything that eclipses joy. That will be Heaven.

God says set your minds on things above. Our lives can be changed by living our lives with an eternal perspective.

*Col 3:1-3 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

In 1952, Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island, California, determined to swim to the mainland. An experienced swimmer, she had already been the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. The weather that day was foggy and chilly; Florence could hardly see the boats accompanying her. Still, she swam steadily for fifteen hours. When she begged to be taken out of the water along the way, her mother, in a boat alongside, told her that she was close and that she could make it. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, Florence stopped swimming and was pulled out. It wasn't until she was aboard the boat that she discovered the shore was less than half a mile away. At a news

conference the next day, she said, “All I could see was the fog. I think if I could have seen the shore I would have made it.

If we can learn to fix our eyes on Jesus, to see through the fog of our present trials and circumstances, and picture our eternal home on our mind’s eye, it will comfort and energize us, giving us a clear view of the shore – our eternal destination. Like the apostle Paul, we are encouraged to forget what is behind and press on toward the goal to win the prize. Are you able to see the shore?

*Phil 3:13-14 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Meditating on God, God’s word and Heaven will get us ready for our final destination. However our high tolerance for sin shows us we are unprepared. Heaven should affect our activities and ambitions, our recreation and friendships, and the way we spend our money and time.

Most people do not feel satisfied and fulfilled no matter how much they have or how busy they are. That’s because God designed us for something more.

*2 Peter 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

*Heb 13:14 For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come.*

We are homesick for Eden. We’re nostalgic for what is implanted in our hearts. It’s built into us, perhaps even at a genetic level. We long for what the first man and woman enjoyed, a perfect and beautiful Earth with free and untainted relationships with God, each other, animals, and our environment. Every attempt at human progress has been an attempt to overcome what was lost in the Fall.

Without eternal perspective, without understanding the reality that the best is yet to come, we assume that people who die too young, who are handicapped, who aren’t healthy, who don’t get married or whatever other reason you might have, will inevitably miss out on the best life has to offer. But the theology behind those assumptions is fatally flawed. We’re presuming that our present Earth, bodies, culture, relationships and lives are superior to those on the New Earth.

We should be focused on Heaven each day. We should be genuinely excited about Heaven, because that is what being genuinely excited about God, because heaven is God’s home that he is preparing for us.

*Col 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

Emptiness in this life can be caused by trying to find joy or purpose that only God can fill with the things of this world. Look at all the actors, actresses, athletes, millionaires, etc. that are taking drugs or going as far as committing suicide they spent all their life looking for something they could have asked for at any time.

If you're down, you may imagine your life has no purpose, but you couldn't be more wrong. As long as God keeps you here on Earth, it's exactly where He wants you. He's preparing you for another world. He knows precisely what He's doing. Through your suffering, difficulty, and depression, he's expanding your capacity for eternal joy. Our lives on earth are a training camp to ready us for Heaven. I know depression can be debilitating. Many godly people have experienced it. But if you are considering giving up, recognize this as the devil's temptation. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and a murderer.

*John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

*1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*

Don't listen to the liar. Listen to Jesus, the truth teller. Don't make a terrible ending to your life's story-finish your God given course on Earth. When He's done-not before-he'll take you home in his own time and way. Meanwhile, God has a purpose for you here on this earth. Don't desert your post. If you don't know Jesus, confess your sins and embrace his death and resurrection on your behalf. If you do know him, make your daily decisions in light of your destiny. Ask yourself what you can do today, next week, next year, or decades from now to write the best ending to this volume of your life's story-a story that will continue gloriously on the new Earth. By God's grace, use the time you have left on the present Earth to store up for yourself treasures on the new earth, to be laid at Christ's feet for his glory. Then look forward to meeting in Heaven Jesus himself, as well as those touched by your Christ-exalting choices. So why are you still here? Because God is giving you a chance to store up treasures and earn rewards that will last for all eternity.

*Ephesians 2: [10] For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

*1 Peter 2: [12] Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

Jesus tells the hungry they'll be satisfied. Those whose eyes are swollen with tears will laugh. Those persecuted leap for joy now. Why? Because of their great reward in Heaven later.

*Matt 5:3-5 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.*

This is not our only chance at life on earth. God's promise to us is not only to remove the heartbreaks of this earth, but to make up for them. In Heaven we will experience the fulfillment of our God-given dreams and desires that went unrealized on earth.

*Luke 16:10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.*

God made us to laugh and to love to laugh. Our theology must include humor if we are to be prepared for an eternity full of celebration, spontaneous laughter, and overflowing joy. When we see God in Heaven, He won't only wipe away our tears; He'll fill our hearts with joy and our mouths with laughter.

*Psalms 16:11 You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

*Psalms 145:19 He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him; He also will hear their cry and save them.*

The best parts of this world are just sneak peeks of the New. Even though God said, no eye as seen or ear has heard for what He has in store for us, He still has given us an imagination to use. Picture flowers not wilted, grass not dying, the blue sky without pollution. People smiling and joyful, not angry or depressed. Stop and imagine the most beautiful place you have been on this earth. Think of friends or family members who loved Jesus and are with him now. Picture them with you, walking together in this place. All with powerful bodies, stronger than those of an Olympic athlete. You're laughing, playing, talking and reminiscing. You reach up to the tree to pick an apple or orange and you take a bite. It's so sweet that it's startling. You've never tasted anything so good. Now you see someone coming toward you. It's Jesus with a big smile on his face. You fall to your knees in worship. He pulls you up and embraces you. At last you're with the person you were made for, in the place you were made to be. Everywhere you

go there will be new people and places to enjoy, new things to discover. What's that you smell. A feast. A party's ahead, and you're invited. There's exploration and work to be done, and you can't wait to get started.

## THE REASON WE ARE STILL HERE

So if the Bible is true and we were created, we are here for a reason and each one of us is unique, so what should we be doing? Life is not a burden but an opportunity to make an eternal difference. If you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior as the Bible says we need to, then you are already heading home to enjoy your eternal life with Jesus. So why are we still here? After we receive Jesus and are saved can't we just go home, why be here any longer? We have an opportunity to make even our eternal life in Heaven better. All through the Bible it talks about rewards that God has planned for us, but we need to earn them. As the Bible tells us we will be busy in Heaven and not lying around on a cloud forever. Determining what we do with this time that God has blessed on with on Earth will help determine what we will be doing on the New Earth. This is our one and only chance to make a place at home with the rewards God desires to give us and we need to make it count.

We have the assurance of Scripture that all believers will survive the fire of testing and be raised. But it is not only ourselves that will outlast this world and be carried over to the new one. It is what we do with our lives. Our righteous works will follow us to Heaven. The fruits of faithful lives will endure. They will be purified and laid bare, so their beauty will be forever seen. God's fire will not destroy the whole earth, it will destroy all that displeases him. But there is much that pleases him, and these things will endure the fire, to be reconstituted after the final resurrection of the dead. Not only will acts of obedience and spiritual sacrifices be carried over from one world to the next, but everything else good will also follow.

Most religions teach what we do here on Earth will determine if we make it to Heaven. Basically if we are a good person, but the Bible teaches and also our society shows that no one is good. Our works however on this earth do make a difference, but only after we are on the road home.

If you are doing poorly now, but you are persevering for God, your reward in Heaven is so much more than all the riches in this current world. The only place you can earn rewards is here on earth before you go home. This will establish what you will be doing in Heaven and once you get home it's too late to add to your rewards.

When you look at God's attributes; His Humor, compassion, forgiveness, grace, trustworthiness, joy and one of His greatest attributes, love. All that we have that's good comes only from His love and his desire is for us to love Him back.

*1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.*



*Matt 22:37-40 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

*Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

*Romans 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

*1 Cor 2:9 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

Jesus was our example of perfect love and His desire is that we love others as He has loved them. Everyone is God's creation and not to love or like someone is telling Jesus we don't like what He created.

*John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

*John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

*John 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

In Bruce Wilkinson's book, "A Life God Rewards" he describes what the words that describe rewards means in the Bible. The word used for reward is like wages, something that is earned and not a gift. These rewards will last forever and unlike the wages of this world we will be taking them with us. The Greek word used in Jesus' teachings in Luke 6 is mishos (mees thous). Literally, it means wages. Jesus used the same word later when He spoke of earthly wages

*Matt 20:8 So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, 'Call the laborers and give them their wages, beginning with the last to the first.'*

Everyone who heard Jesus understood exactly what He meant. When you labor on earth, your employer gives you misthos. And when you labor for Me, I pay wages, too. Jesus never described His reward as a charitable tip or a token of appreciation, He called it wages, something you earn resulting from something you do.

Another word used for reward in Heaven is apodidomai. It's a compound word apo (apo') means back and didomai (did'-o-mee) means to give. Combined it means to give back in return or repay.

*Luke 14:14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."*

Jesus also used this term in His well known story about the good Samaritan, who stopped to help a traveler that had been beaten and robbed.

*Luke 10:35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'*

What Jesus is saying that we will be repaid or be reimbursed a full measure for what we do on His behalf. God will not only repay you for grand acts of personal sacrifice, but for every day acts of love.

In Hebrews the word rewarder is the combination of the words *misthos* (mees thous) and *apodidomai* and unusual combination which means God pays back your wages in return. God chooses to reward because it is an expression of His own generous nature. His plan to reward, like His provision to save, is a display of His amazing grace.

*Heb 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

Seven things that God will reward us for;

1. God will reward us for seeking Him through spiritual acts such as fasting and praying

*Matt 6:6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly*

2. God will reward us for submitting to our employer as a faithful steward.

*Matt 24:45-47 "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? **46** Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. **47** Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods.*

*Eph 6:8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.*

*Col 3:22-24 Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. **23** And whatever you*

*do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, **24** knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.*

3. God will reward us for self denial in His service

*Matt 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. **25** For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. **26** For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? **27** For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*

4. God will reward us for serving those in need in His name.

*Mark 9:40-41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.*

5. God will reward us for suffering for His name and reputation.

*Luke 6:22-23 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. **23** Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven, For in like manner their fathers did to the prophets.*

6. God will reward us for sacrifices we make for Him.

*Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.*

*Matt 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*

7. God will reward us for sharing of our time, talent and treasure to further His kingdom.

*Matt 6:3-4 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, **4** that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.*

*1 Tim 6:18-19 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, **19** storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

The Apostle Paul spoke a lot about rewards and was definitely someone who must have earned a ton of them. There are two important phrases. When Paul writes that each one may receive, he is clearly indicating reward or repayment and when he says things done in the body, he is restricting the rewards to things you did while we were on earth.

*1 Cor 3:13-15 each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. **14** If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. **15** If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

So how do we determine what works will be burned like straw or endure like gold? The fire would need to test not only what we did, but also how and why we did it. Three tests to help us evaluate whether what we do for God will endure.

1. The test of relationship. It might relieve you to know that a life God rewards is not about performance apart from relationship with Jesus. In fact just the opposite is true. Jesus said:

*John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*

In the book of Revelations Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for its many good works, but was grieved because they did not keep their love for Him alive.

*Rev 2:2-4 I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; **3** and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. **4** Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

2. The test of motive. Jesus said:

*Matt 6:1 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

What should be our motive? To serve God and bring Him glory. Even ordinary actions like eating and drinking can bring God glory.

*1 Cor 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

By contrast the most religious actions are worthless if our motive is to build up our own ego or reputation. This may cause some of us problems with me included. At times we feel we should serve or do something maybe out of guilt or we want the recognition that goes along with it. My wife and I have done different events where at one point they want to bring us out of the kitchen to thank us. We typically don't want to go but when we do we may take a bow and point upwards. The last event we did I asked for the microphone and explained before Jesus I would never have thought about doing something like this, it wasn't my nature to give or to help. I went on to say only because Jesus has changed my heart and now works in me by the Holy Spirit that I can do things like this. It has nothing to do with me and God deserves all the glory for changing this sinner. God deserves all of the glory and when we give it to Him, then He will reward us for a true heart for Him.

3. The test of love. True good works are always focused on sincerely trying to improve the well-being of another. Jesus said:

*Luke 6:35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.*

In Paul's favorite passage on love, he pointed out that good deeds done for the wrong reason will not benefit the doer.

*1 Cor 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*

To do good works for the wrong reason will just be lost.

*1 Cor 3:15 If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.*

When we stand before Jesus in judgment we may suffer loss of rewards. It is possible to step into eternity with few good works to show for our lifetime on earth if not done for the right reason.

*2 John 1:8 Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.*

Before doing anything check your heart to make sure you are doing it for our Lord. The moment Jesus gives us our rewards for our life, when we finally and completely see and understand all that God has done for us and in us and through us, and we know fully that without Him we could not have done even one commendable work for Him, our overwhelming response will be to cry out in thanks and praise Him. At that moment, out of sheer joy and

gratitude, we'll want to worship at the feet of the Lord Jesus and give back everything He has just given to us, but Jesus wants us to keep it all. His plan for us is to enjoy and make good use of the rewards for all of eternity. Do good works with the gifts and talents God has given you that's why you have them.

God's word puts service high on our list of things to do. Jesus said that was why He was here.

*Matt 20:26-28 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. **27** And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave-- **28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

We have been called to be both a servant and a steward. Both serve, but the difference is that a steward has been charged with managing his master's assets. In Jesus stories we often see a pattern: the steward/servant is charged with managing something important for his master while the master is away for an extended period of time. This is the time when the steward will either fail or succeed at his mission and impact his future. Jesus told these parables because he was going away and was intrusting us with the job to increase His kingdom. Then in the future He will ask for an accounting and reward His servants, "each according to his works."

*Matt 16:27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*

We have been commissioned to manage His asset, our life which is the sum of our talents, strengths, personality and interests. Our opportunity is to manage our life in a way that will increase our Master's kingdom. We need to ask ourselves how we are going to manage what our Master put into our care. The Bible uses the word faithful more than any other word describe the conduct of a good steward.

*1 Cor 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.*

The two best parables about stewardship are the parable of the Minas and the parable of the Talents. In the parable of the minas in Luke.

*Luke 19:12-27 Therefore He said: "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. **13** So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' **14** But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this man to reign over us.' **15** And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. **16** Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' **17** And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have*

authority over ten cities.' **18** And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' **19** Likewise he said to him, 'You also be over five cities.' **20** Then another came, saying, 'Master, here is your mina, which I have kept put away in a handkerchief. **21** For I feared you, because you are an austere man. You collect what you did not deposit, and reap what you did not sow.' **22** And he said to him, 'Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. **23** Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest?' **24** And he said to those who stood by, 'Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.' **25** (But they said to him, 'Master, he has ten minas.') **26** For I say to you, that to everyone who has will be given; and from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. **27** But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.' "

One thing I didn't notice until now as the second servant, even though he increased what his master had given him and received a reward in proportion to his return was that the master didn't tell him well done or good servant or even because you were faithful in very little. The lesser level of commendation shows that the master knew the servant could have done better. Then of course the third servant who did nothing with what he was given was condemned for his action or lack of. This is not unlike how things go here on the present earth, those who prove themselves will be given a better position, those who just get by will stay in their position and those who don't perform will get fired.

The parable about the talents is different since each servant was given a different amount.

*Matt 25:14-30 "For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. **15** And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. **16** Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. **17** And likewise he who had received two gained two more also. **18** But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. **19** After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. **20** So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' **21** His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' **22** He also who had received two talents came and said, 'Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them.' **23** His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' **24** Then he who had received the one talent came and said, 'Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. **25** And I was afraid, and*

went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' **26** But his lord answered and said to him, 'You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. **27** So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. **28** Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents. **29** For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. **30** And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

In this case two servants doubled what they had been given. Yet when the master returns, he gives the same commendation and reward to both, because a servant's reward is based on total results in the light of their potential. In the same way we will be rewarded by Jesus on what we did with what was given.

We will desperately want to serve God in Heaven. Doing is a servant's language of devotion. In heaven, more opportunity to do God's will through loving service will be our highest reward. Serving and ruling are the same in Heaven. Jesus told his disciples that.

*Matt 19:28 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

The highest reward in the parable of the minas was to rule over 10 cities and in the talents it was the same.

In the parable about the rich man who wanted to follow Jesus;

*Matt 19:21 Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."*

When the man turned down Jesus' offer and left, Peter stepped forward to ask the obvious question

*Matt 19:27 Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"*

Jesus never scolded Peter for his self-interest or smiled and said I wasn't actually serious about treasures in heaven. He gave a most revealing answer. Jesus told Peter that he and the other disciples would rule over the nation of Israel when He set up His kingdom. Then He said

*Matt 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.*



A hundredfold is the equivalent of a 10,000 percent return.

Jesus most familiar teaching on treasure is in the Sermon on the Mount.

*Matt 6:19-21 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; **20** but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **21** For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

You might think that you don't have a lot to give, but our most precious treasure here on earth is time, which we all have, 24 hours a day. Jesus wasn't saying that treasures don't matter or that He didn't want us to have any. Just the opposite. He wants us to provide for ourselves, because He knows that treasures will matter in eternity and He wants us to rich in rewards.

*Luke 16:10-12 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. **11** Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? **12** And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?*

Everything we have is on loan from God. Jesus is showing how a steward can succeed with someone else's money. He uses the word faithful four times. When you serve God you are using God's money to accomplish His wishes, but when you serve money you are using God's money to accomplish your wishes.

*Matt 6:21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

So what prevents us from building our treasures in Heaven? Do we say we don't have enough time, more important things to do, we don't feel qualified or we just don't think about it? This is Satan's battle ground, he will do whatever it takes to stop you from building your treasures in Heaven. You see when you serve God you serve others and when you serve others they will see Christ in you and Satan doesn't want anyone to acknowledge Jesus. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and a murderer

*John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.*

*1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*

There was a missionary couple who spent their entire life serving God in some far corner of the world. After forty years they wrote their supporters that they were coming home to England.

When they saw their country's coastline for the first time in decades, the man said to his wife, "I wonder if anyone will be here to welcome us home." As the ship sailed into harbor they saw to their surprise throngs of people crowded the dock, pointing in their direction and cheering. A band played, men held up a banner that read, Welcome home, we're proud of you. The husband was deeply moved and they both laughed with joy. As they went down to the gangplank they were taken aback. The crowd had already started to disperse. Soon, it became clear what had happened. The crowd was not for them, but for a politician returning from some foreign success. In fact no one was there for them at all. The husband couldn't hide his disappointment. "After a lifetime of service, this isn't much of a welcome home." His wife took his arm, "Come along sweetheart. This is just England. We're not home yet."

Sometimes we don't serve wholeheartedly, because we don't see the rewards here on earth. I know I have done things that I knew was from God and was expecting to hear the praise of the crowd, but didn't.

In Malachi a group of worshippers felt this way.

*Mal 3:14 You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?*

Have you ever felt that way or cried out to God what's the use? Here is what God did.

*Mal 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name.*

Why is God writing a book of remembrance? To reassure His people that He does watch and care. And at a point in the future, He will reveal its contents.

*Mal 3:17-18 "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him." **18** Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.*

He will open His book of remembrance. And the truth about His generosity faithfulness and justice will be evident to all. Not one act of service in His name will have gone unnoticed or unrewarded.

*Rev 22:12 "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.*

So will you live for what you can see, knowing it will soon disappear? Or will you live for eternity? One of my greatest rewards will be to hear from my Lord, "Well done good and faithful servant, welcome."

I realize not everyone will receive what is written in this book. They will go on not believing in the Bible, believing in some other religion or the religion of atheism. Yes atheism is a religion, look what you have to believe to think there is no God. That truly takes faith. So if I'm wrong my life will end the same as everyone else's and life will be vanity. However if I'm right, that God created me and I have eternal life with Him, my life hasn't even started yet. So my question do you feel so sure of your belief that you are willing to give up eternity in paradise? Seek answers and pray for guidance.

*2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

If God has moved your heart and you want to pledge to Him to live a Holy life, say this pledge.

Lord Jesus I have listened carefully to what You said about my home. I believe You, and I can't wait to be there with You. I renounce my allegiance to this visible and fleeting world and pledge my allegiance to You, King of Heaven. From this day on, I will live as a citizen of Heaven, my true home. As your faithful steward, I will take every gift, opportunity and resource that you place in my hands and multiply it greatly for You. And I eagerly look forward to the day in eternity when I will stand in Your presence and receive Your reward, and worship You forever.