

A
DIVINE
PARDON

RICK HUGHES



Rick Hughes

EVANGELISTIC MINISTRIES

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CONTACT

rickhughesministries.org
rick@rickhughesministries.org
PO Box 100, Cropwell, AL 35054
800-831-0718
Facebook & Instagram

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A DIVINE PARDON

RICK HUGHES

RICK HUGHES EVANGELISTIC MINISTRIES
P.O. Box 100, Cropwell, Alabama 35054-0100
rickhughesministries.org 800.831.0718

INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this book, you may be incarcerated for a crime you committed. The old cliché ‘if you do the crime, you do time’ is overused; but if you have broken the law, you will be held accountable.

Yet, as long as you are alive, God has a reason for you to be here. I want you to realize that regardless of your failures, God loves you and He has a plan for you.

In the Bible, Luke records the amazing divine pardon given by Jesus Christ to one of the two criminals crucified beside Him. The first one made fun of the Lord saying, “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” The other man corrected him, “We receive the due rewards of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” He then turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom.” With these words he expressed his belief in the true identity of our Savior.

Jesus Christ’s reply was astounding, “*Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.*” Our Lord had just granted this criminal a divine pardon. You have the same offer of a divine pardon. “*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved*” (Acts 16:31).

Take the divine pardon and you are guaranteed eternal life. The moment you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, you become a new person.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things are passed away; behold, new things have come. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

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BIBLE HEROES "WITH A PAST"

Some of the most famous men in the Bible committed serious crimes and went on to become some of the greatest believers in history. Let me tell you about them.

Paul, the Pardoned Apostle

Paul the Apostle became the writer of many books in the New Testament of the Bible. But he had a rough start. His original name was Saul of Tarsus. We first meet him in Acts 7:58, where he witnessed the murder of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Saul had started a campaign to persecute Christians and was on his way to Damascus to kill Christians when Jesus Christ appeared to him.

As he neared Damascus suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Saul replied, "Who are You, Lord?" And He replied, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:3-5)

What Saul heard changed his life forever. Saul had been blinded by the sight of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the next three days, he neither ate anything nor drank anything. He spent his time praying for the restoration of his vision. God answered his request by sending Ananias who lived nearby to meet with Saul, explain what had happened and pray with him. The Lord returned Saul's sight. Instead of being eliminated by God for what he had done to Christians, Saul was granted a divine pardon because he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior.

Now the tables were turned. Since he was a Christian, a contract was put out on his head so he wouldn't convert others to this new way of living.

But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this *Jesus* is the Christ. When many days had elapsed, the Jews plotted together to do away with him. (Acts 9:22-23)

Get this, Saul, now known as Paul, went on to become one of the greatest teachers of the Bible. He later penned this fantastic verse:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works; so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Moses, a Murderer

Moses is known as one of the most humble believers in history. Yet this is the same Moses who committed murder. Numbers 12:3 tells us:

Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.

Even though Moses was of Jewish ancestry, since childhood he had lived in Egypt as a free man while his people were enslaved. One day he watched as some Jewish slaves were being mistreated by their Egyptian captors.

When Moses had grown up, he went out to his brethren and looked on their hard labors and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew,

one of his brethren. He looked this way and that, and when he saw that there was no one around, he slew the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exodus 2:11-12)

These verses show that Moses made the decision to kill an Egyptian slave master. This was clearly an act of premeditated murder. Once Moses' crime was discovered, he had no choice but to flee from Egypt. He headed for the land of Midian, roughly 700 miles away. Moses did not take a train! He walked or rode a mule the entire distance. He lived there in exile for forty years working as a shepherd.

One day while Moses was tending his sheep, the Lord appeared to him in the form of a burning bush and told him to return to Egypt to lead His people out of slavery. Moses had spent forty years living in fear and guilt and perhaps thought he was about to be punished for what he had done years earlier. Who knows what went through his mind. He probably was scared.

The Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry for I know of their suffering ... Therefore, come now, and I will send you to Pharaoh so that you may bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." (Exodus 3:7,10)

Moses was not excited about going back to Egypt where he had committed murder; but God comforted him and assured him the arrest warrant would not be served if he returned. Moses did go back as instructed. He faced opposition when he requested the release of the slaves. God put ten plagues upon the Egyptian Pharaoh because the Pharaoh would not free the Jewish slaves.

Eventually, the plagues got the Pharaoh's attention and he freed them. But after they left, he changed his mind and pursued them to the Red Sea, where he and his entire army drowned as Moses and the Jews crossed in safety. During their escape, the fleeing Jews thought they would die but Moses made an astounding proclamation, a promise from God claimed by Christians today when they face overwhelming odds.

Do not fear! Stand still and see the deliverance of the Lord which He will accomplish for you today. (Exodus 14:13)

David, an Adulterer and Murderer

Have you heard of David, the killer of the Philistine giant named Goliath? The Israelites were at war with the Philistines and were very afraid of fighting Goliath. David became a hero at a young age when he did what no one else had the courage to do. He faced the giant Goliath on the battlefield and killed him with a simple slingshot.

So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him. (1 Samuel 17:50)

This same David eventually became King of Israel. As king, he made some very bad decisions. He allowed his emotion and lust for a beautiful woman to override his thinking and he committed grievous sins. He arrogantly assumed he could have his way with another man's wife.

Bad decisions limit future options

One of Israel's greatest kings broke the rules. He stayed back from going to battle, impregnated another man's wife, and then had her husband killed to cover up his deed.

Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house; and from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful. So David sent and inquired about the woman. "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" David sent messengers, and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; and when she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant." (2 Samuel 11:2-5)

Now in the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it by the hand of Uriah. He had written in the letter saying, "Place Uriah in the front line of the fiercest battle, and withdraw from him, so that he may be struck down and die." (2 Samuel 11:14-15)

As you can see, David gave the command for one of his best warriors to be killed so he could cover up his sin. However, he did not get away with it. God saw it all and disciplined him for his crimes. David confessed these terrible sins and moved forward, accepting the divine discipline he deserved.

I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. (Psalm 32:5)

God wants you to be faithful not flawless

We all have flaws. Some of us have inherent flaws, meaning we are born with them. If we come from alcoholic parents we are cautioned we shouldn't drink alcohol because we may have a tendency to become an alcoholic. Most of us have acquired flaws. Maybe you got into substance abuse or criminality and acquired this flaw. Maybe you habitually lie, cheat or gossip. You acquired this flaw, you weren't born with it. Acquired flaws can come from hanging with the wrong crowd.

Inherent flaws and acquired flaws affect how you think and how you act. But flaws are never an excuse for wrong thinking and making bad decisions. Don't blame your present circumstances on your parents or anyone else. Recognizing you have flaws is the first step to overcoming them.

If you are a Christian, you can recover from your mistakes. God will forgive you. God isn't shocked by what you have done.

Paul, Moses and David are just a few examples of Bible heroes "with a past" who committed serious crimes. Yet, because they acknowledged their sins to God and recovered using His divine resources, they were able to put the past behind them and move on in their spiritual lives to become great mature believers.

My prayer is this will be of encouragement to you.

The Lord is patient toward us and not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance [faith in Christ].

(2 Peter 3:9)

There is no failure too great for the plan of God

THE PARDON

Every day we make decisions and these decisions have consequences, both good and bad. The worst decision we can make is to ignore accepting the divine pardon by rejecting the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. This is the unpardonable sin.

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; he who does not believe in the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him. (John 3:36)

God wants us to spend eternity with Him in heaven. In our sinful state, we cannot have a relationship with perfect God. Since we have no means of ridding ourselves of our imperfections, God devised a plan so He could separate us from our sin and allow us to have a permanent relationship with Him forever. God sent His Son to be a substitute for our punishment. Let me explain.

The Debt We Cannot Pay

In Biblical times when a man could not pay what he owed, he was thrown into debtors' prison. Because he had no means of working off his debt, he therefore had no way of freeing himself. Instead, he was forced to rely on a close friend or family member to work in his place and earn the money he owed. Only in this way would the debt be forgiven and the debtor released from prison.

Similarly, we can't pay the debt we owe. We are all sinners. We are unable to free ourselves from the penalty of sin because we are imperfect and fall way short of God's perfection. Isaiah 64:6 tells us, "*For all of us have*

become like one who is unclean, and all of our righteous deeds are like a filthy rag.” Our best deeds do not measure up to perfect, holy, righteous God.

Jesus Christ was born sinless. He never sinned during His earthly ministry, not even once. Had He done so, He would not have been qualified to take our place. Through Jesus Christ’s sacrificial and finished work on the cross, we not only are freed from eternal separation from God (pardoned), but our sins (debts) are forgiven forever.

Jesus Christ Paid Our Debt for Us

Only Jesus Christ in His perfection could bear our sins in His body and serve as mediator between perfect God the Father and imperfect, sinful man. It is through Jesus Christ all are offered a divine pardon.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.
(John 14:6)

He who knew no sin was made sin for us so that we may be made the righteousness of God through Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Even when we were dead in sin, He has made us alive together with Christ. (Ephesians 2:5)

God’s promise of a divine pardon is available to us because of His unfailing love. God’s love is eternal and unchangeable based on His righteousness and justice.

For God so loved the world that He gave His uniquely born Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

I started this book with the grievous sins of the great believers Paul, Moses and David so you can see there is hope, even for those who murder. Don't ever think God doesn't love you because of the crimes you have committed.

**God loves you
He always has and He always will**

God demonstrated His love for you years ago when He sent His Son to be your substitute on the cross. Jesus Christ paid our debt. God's love is the basis of you knowing with confidence that nothing can separate you from Him. We have all failed and some of us have committed big-time sins, but we all have the opportunity for a new life in Christ, even if incarcerated.

Accepting God's Grace Gift of Salvation

Life is about decisions. The decisions you make determine the life you lead. You will make millions of decisions in your lifetime and many of them will have lasting impact. The most important decision you need to make is:

**What think you of Christ?
(Matthew 22:42)**

If you choose for Jesus Christ, then you will spend eternity in heaven, regardless of what you have done on this earth. Otherwise, you face eternity separated from God, enveloped in the agony of the Lake of Fire.

You will spend forever either in heaven or baking in the Lake. The choice is yours.

Take the divine pardon!

Let's say you are willing to take the pardon today. You accept Jesus Christ as your Savior. Then what happens?

God's Royal Family

The Bible says you are given the righteousness of God and adopted into God's Royal Family. You become a child of God with an eternal inheritance. *"An inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation"* (1 Peter 1:4-5). Jesus Christ died for all members of the human race. God does not discriminate. **There are no racial, cultural or gender distinctions in God's eyes.** We are all one in Christ.

You will always be a member of God's Royal Family. God can't disown you. Just as you can't be unborn from your physical family, you can't be unborn from God's Royal Family. God will never turn His back on you.

To as many as receive Him, to them He gave the power to become the children of God to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26)

Therefore you are no longer a servant but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:7)

I have given you a lot of Bible verses to show you, without a doubt, that God loves you and me. If the truth were known many of us should have been six feet under by now, yet we are still alive. The message for each of us is this - God is not finished with us.

Redeem the time - Tomorrow is not guaranteed

THE BIG LIE & THE SIMPLE TRUTH

People will tell you there are hoops to jump through if you want to go to heaven, such as: don't drink, don't smoke, don't cuss, don't do this or that. This is not what the Bible says. The big lie is that following some taboo, being good or doing works will get you saved.

You cannot be saved by not sinning. Every one of us sins. Sin is not the issue. Salvation has nothing to do with sin or being good or bad. God is not impressed with a morally good person. He can go to church, read the Bible every day, never cheat or lie, and do community service but none of these good works can save him.

Many people remain lost to God because they have a false sense of security from their own talents, intellect or from wealth, material things and status. They don't see the need to be saved. **An individual has to realize he is lost before he can see his need for a Savior.** *“For the Son of Man [Jesus Christ] has come to seek and to save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10).

The simple truth is Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. God sent His Son to pay for your sins. This is His grace gift to you.

Having been justified by His grace we are made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:7)

For the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)

Are you familiar with the word grace? Grace is God's policy. Grace is God doing all the work. Salvation is a grace gift from God. You can't do anything to earn salvation nor do you deserve it by being good or working for it. God does it all. Here are the facts.

Not by works of righteousness which we have done but according to His mercy He has saved us. (Titus 3:5)

Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:1)

**You can be saved at any age
at any time and in any place**

All you need is faith. In other words, you believe in what Jesus Christ did for you. This is a decision you have to make. You express your faith to God silently in prayer. Salvation only takes a second and in that second you are given eternal life.

These have been written that you may know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you will have eternal life through His name. (John 20:31)

He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through the Holy Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8:11)

HOW TO RECEIVE YOUR PARDON

It's easy! You simply tell God the Father silently in prayer that you believe Jesus Christ died in your place on the cross and paid the penalty for your sins. You are now guaranteed everlasting life in heaven after death. God's Word makes this very clear:

I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. (John 10:28)

This is the promise which He Himself made to us: eternal life. (1 John 2:25)

Once you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, God's righteousness is given to you. You have eternal security. Have no doubt; it is permanent. Just as you were born into your human family and can't be unborn from your family, at the moment of salvation you were born into God's Royal Family and you can't be unborn. Once in the family of God you can't be removed. God's righteousness is in you and He cannot deny Himself.

If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Timothy 2:13)

Maybe you went down the My Way Highway and your life has taken a terrible direction. Maybe you have failed and done some miserable things. Maybe you've asked, "Can God cancel my eternal life if I really mess up?" The answer is No. God cannot and will not cancel any commitment He makes to you.

If you didn't do anything to earn salvation, how can you do something to lose it? You can't. Even if you deny your salvation, you are going to heaven. God will not deny you. Even if you commit the horrible sin of taking your own life it won't cancel your salvation. You may turn your back on God but God will continue to love you from behind. God will never abandon you. He won't throw you under the bus.

I will never desert you nor will I ever forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5)

Once Saved - Always Saved

Eternal security is having absolute confidence you are going to heaven, in spite of your flaws and your failures, because you have a permanent relationship with God.

These things I have written to you who believe in the person of the Son of God so you may be confident you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13)

This is your choice, your decision to make. No one can make it for you. You can put it off and make excuses, but why gamble with your eternal security? You have just read the truth. Now it is time to do something about it.

In silent prayer think something such as this, "Heavenly Father, I believe your Son Jesus Christ died on the cross for me. I accept Him as my Savior. In Jesus Christ's name I pray, Amen."

As the imprisoned Apostle Paul told a Roman guard:

Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. (Acts 16:31)

UNDERSTAND SIN

Not long after I accepted Christ, I discovered I still had tendencies to sin. I didn't understand why my temper still easily flared. All of my life I had battled a bitter mental attitude. I figured I had gotten a raw deal in life and I took out my frustration on those around me. I wasn't a bully, but I sure had a chip on my shoulder. I wondered if I had really been saved. It took a year or so before I met a pastor who helped me sort things out. He showed me where the Bible teaches that we all sin. "*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us*" (1 John 1:8). Let's take a look at why we sin, and then we'll see what we can do about it.

Why We Sin

Have you ever felt like two different people? At times you do the right things, other times you invariably do the wrong things. There was a popular candy commercial with the lyrics, "sometimes you feel like a nut, sometimes you don't." Does this sound like you? It certainly sounds like me. There are times I want to do the right things yet I do what I know I should not. The reason for this is stated in the Bible.

Let's start with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Bible teaches us that Adam sinned of his own free will. Adam made a bad choice which he was free to do because God gave him volition. Adam's choice resulted in sin entering the world. Until Adam sinned, he had a great spiritual life with God. However, after he sinned, he died spiritually and no longer had a relationship with perfect God.

The Lord God commanded the man, saying “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.” [This was a warning of spiritual death, separation from God, and eventual physical death.] (Genesis 2:16-17)

Now here comes trouble:

The serpent [Satan] said unto the woman, “You shall not surely die; for God knows that in the day you eat thereof, your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She gave also to her husband and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them opened, and they knew that they were naked. [Once they had sinned, the guilt set in because they knew they had disobeyed God.] (Genesis 3:4-7)

This was an intentional decision made by Adam. He knew better but he did it anyway. Eve, however, was deceived by Satan into thinking it would make her wise. This verse shows us that Adam committed the first sin as a result of a volitional decision, free will choice, to disobey God. Adam’s sin was then passed on to all of his descendants, including us. With Adam’s sin came spiritual death, which is separation from God. Consequently, all of us are born physically alive but spiritually dead, separated from God.

Before we can have a relationship with God, we need to be born again, not physically but spiritually, by means

of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. While being born again allows us to have a relationship with God, it does not remove the sin nature. This is why we sometimes feel like two different people. When our sin nature is controlling us, we commit sin and have guilt and shame. When God the Holy Spirit is controlling us, we do not sin and we experience peace and joy.

The Apostle Paul discusses this in Romans 7:18-20:

Nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh [sin nature] ... For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very things I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me.

Paul had a sin nature and so do we. Take a look around you and recognize that each person you interact with has a sin nature. **This may help you understand why some people are cruel and vindictive. They choose to let their sin nature control their thoughts and actions.** If we allow our sin nature to dominate, we will self-destruct.

So how do we keep our sin nature in check? By using our volition to stay under the control of the Holy Spirit.

Your Volition - Free Will

God gives you volition. It is part of your soul. Your volition gives you the freedom to think and make choices. Even under conditions of incarceration, you still have the freedom to think and to make decisions. You choose to obey the rules or break them. You can choose to hate or to forgive. If incarcerated, you have lost some of your freedom, but your volition is still very much there.

Your volition impacts your thoughts, intentions and actions. When your volition chooses to follow the temptations of your sin nature, you will disobey God. But

you don't have to, you have a choice. You are a product of your decisions.

Let me help you learn how to recognize sin.

Recognizing Sin

This is a list, not inclusive, of things God identifies as sins. These are all found in the Bible.

Mental attitude sins are things we think such as anger, arrogance, bitterness, covetousness, envy, fear, guilt, hatred, implacability, inordinate competition, jealousy, judging, malice, mental adultery, pride, self-absorption, self-pity, self-righteousness, vindictiveness and worry.

Sins of the tongue are things we say such as bullying, criticizing, cursing, deceiving, gossiping, hurtful speech, judging, lying, maligning, retaliation, slandering and having temper tantrums.

Overt sins are things we do such as abuse, addiction, civil disobedience, crime, destruction of property, drunkenness, murder, adultery, pornography and stealing.

You may be thinking, "How do I contain my sin nature and keep the Holy Spirit in control of my life?" Great question! After I became a Christian, it took me over a year before I even knew I had a sin nature and then I needed to be taught a solution. The sin nature will be with you until you transfer from this life. Don't be ignorant of this because Satan will use the sin nature to distract and discourage you and to lure you into human viewpoint thinking and sin.

**If Satan can influence your thoughts
He can control you**

THE SIN NATURE vs THE HOLY SPIRIT

Every Christian is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit at the moment he or she accepts Jesus Christ as Savior. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is the Christian's power to live the spiritual life.

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.

(Ephesians 1:13)

The fact that God the Father sealed us with the Holy Spirit is His guarantee we have eternal life. The Holy Spirit indwells us and we are mandated to let Him control our lives. The Bible clearly identifies the battle we have within us - the sin nature vs the Holy Spirit. Either one or the other is in control every moment of our lives.

Walk by the [Holy] Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh wars against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition the one to the other, so you cannot do the things you would. (Galatians 5:16-17)

The big question for you is who is going to run the show now that you are a Christian? If you allow the sin nature to run things, you will constantly commit sin. But if you choose to have God the Holy Spirit remain in control, you can keep that sin nature in check.

The Bible makes it clear that even though saved, you will sin. When you sin, you've used your volition in a way that puts the sin nature in control. Note this mandate found in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, "*Quench not the Spirit of God.*" This means don't shut off the power of the Holy Spirit, as if you took a water hose, crimped it while the water was still on and the flow ceased. God the Holy Spirit does not approve when you allow the sin nature to take control of your life. The Bible warns us against doing this in Romans 6:12, "*Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts.*"

So, what do I do when I've sinned? Am I doomed to be without the ministry of the Holy Spirit from then on? No. God provides a procedure for you to handle your personal sin and it's found in 1 John 1:9. My pastor calls it rebound and here's how I found out about it. Even though I had accepted Christ as my Savior, I was still messing up. Does this sound like you? My religious, self-righteous friends would see my failures and say I must not have really been saved because they were not tempted to sin in the same areas I was.

I needed to learn how to recover from my sin and keep moving forward in my spiritual life. Luckily, my pastor taught me a promise from God that unlocked the secret to recovering from my failures:

If we confess our [known] sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness [known, unknown and forgotten sins]. (1 John 1:9)

When you know you have committed a sin, immediately confess it to God. Name it in silent prayer saying something like this, "Heavenly Father, I name my sin of arrogance. Thank You for Your forgiveness. In Jesus Christ's name I pray, Amen."

Use Rebound to put the Holy Spirit Back in Control

Rebound, using 1 John 1:9, solves the problem of how to handle personal sin. My pastor calls this rebound because like a ball, I bounced out of fellowship with God when I sinned. In order to bounce back into fellowship, I needed to use rebound, name my sin to God.

I may sin several times a day and therefore need to use rebound frequently, and you may also. It's important to keep a short account of sin. Don't wait until nighttime to confess sin. Admit your sin to God the Father in silent prayer as soon as you realize you have sinned.

As I began to grow spiritually I came to understand how to keep my sin nature in check. I learned that using 1 John 1:9 was the way of keeping the Holy Spirit in control of my life and maintaining fellowship with God. With the Holy Spirit in control, I could avoid sinning, pray effectively, understand what I studied in God's Word, and produce divine good. These will be discussed later in the book.

So how does rebound work? Once you go to God and name your sin, the Holy Spirit is no longer grieved nor quenched. Even King David used the Old Testament equivalent of rebound. In Psalm 32:5 he said, "*I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*"

There are two points in this Scripture to learn. First, **never try to hide your sin from God**. Second, **admit your sin to God immediately**. As soon as you recognize you have sinned, name it to God. Do not worry if you can't remember every sin you commit. No one can. Just remember God says, "*He will forgive your sins, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.*" This includes the screw-ups you don't remember.

Keep a short account of sin in your life

God's grace provision as promised in 1 John 1:9 solves our dilemma of personal sin. The acrostic NICE may help you remember God's process for how to handle your sin.

N - Name It. Name your sin to God the Father in silent prayer. A lot of people say, "I don't feel bad about it, so how can I confess it and be forgiven?" Confessing doesn't have anything to do with how you feel about it. Rather, it's an acknowledgment.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

I - Isolate It. Don't let one sin expand into others. Don't be a chain sinner.

See to it that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble. (Hebrews 12:15)

C - Clear Your Conscience. Forget the sin. Don't have guilt. Don't promise God you'll never do it again, you probably will.

One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead. (Philippians 3:13)

E - Execute. Move on in executing your spiritual life. If you aren't progressing, you are regressing.

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:14)

God's grace provision for us to handle personal sin is NICE. Actually it is much more than nice, it is fantastic!

Divine Intervention

Failure to use rebound to admit your sins leads to action by your Heavenly Father. Although sins are not an issue in heaven, unconfessed sins have earthly consequences.

When we break fellowship with God by sinning and do not recover through rebound, we subject ourselves to divine discipline.

Those whom I love I reprimand; be motivated
by the love of God. (Revelation 3:19)

God disciplines us because He loves us and wants to get our attention. He does it in many different ways. The purpose is always to get us to wake up, name our sins to Him, and get back into His perfect plan. Once we have rebounded, the punishment may continue but the purpose becomes blessing.

Divine discipline is intended to get your attention

God does not discipline us because He is angry but because we are on the road to self-destruction. I suggest you read the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32. Here you will find a young man who deserted his father, believing he could do better on his own. He set off down the My Way Highway and lost about everything. Because of intense suffering from hunger and deprivation, he finally admitted his sins and went home to his father, expecting to be disowned. Much to his surprise, he was reinstated to the rank of a privileged son.

We are very similar to the Prodigal Son when we break fellowship with God through our rebellion and sin. Often our discipline is the misery we put upon ourselves. Once we use our volition to get back into fellowship with God, we can resume our spiritual lives.

Types of Divine Discipline

Divine discipline comes in three stages: Warning Discipline, Intense Discipline and Dying Discipline.

Warning Discipline. This usually comes in the form of a visual or verbal warning. In other words, the Holy Spirit will use something said or written to get your attention. If that does not get your attention and cause you to rebound (1 John 1:9), God initiates the next stage.

Intense Discipline. God intensifies the warning. This is Him “taking you to the woodshed.” God will discipline you in a way that hurts to get your attention. He will introduce pain in your life, it could be physical or emotional, for you to wake up before you destroy yourself. When I was in high school, we had a boys’ counselor who was a retired pro baseball player. His swing with a shaved-off baseball bat was enough to correct anyone’s errant ways. If the “woodshed” approach doesn’t work, the final stage kicks in.

Dying Discipline. Notice Proverbs 15:10, “*Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, and he who hates correction shall die.*” When God steps in and puts us under divine discipline, we can react or respond. The person with arrogance will always react and blame it on someone else. He will play the victim card and may even blame God Himself. The person with humility will respond, and admit his sin and failure.

You see, we can shorten our lives by continuing down the My Way Highway, making one bad decision after the next, and failing to confess our sins and get back on track. At some point, the Lord has no choice but to remove us from this life early, and bring us home before we destroy ourselves or others. He does this, as He does all things, for our own good.

**As long as you are alive
It’s never too late to recover**

Let divine discipline lead you back to God's plan

Do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd.
(Hebrews 12:5)

Volitional Responsibility

While it is true the Lord must discipline us at times in order to get our attention, it is also true that many of our hardships result from our own bad decisions. Let's face it, we can be problem-manufacturing machines. Under the law of volitional responsibility, we use our volition, our free will, to make decisions. Often we bring on much of our own misery and suffering because we mismanage our money, we mismanage our health and we mismanage our relationships.

We are the victims of our decisions, not circumstances

It's easy to blame others or circumstances for our difficulties. Don't do it. Getting a raw deal in life does not justify bitterness, anger or revenge. We must take full responsibility for our decisions and actions in life. We have to accept the consequences of our wrong thinking and bad decisions. We don't have anybody to blame but ourselves.

For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong which he has done, and there is no favoritism. (Col 3:25)

It's never too late to make a course correction in life

God gives us mandates to help us use our volition and for the orderly function of a nation. He establishes laws, as well as a system of authority to enforce these laws.

The Principle of Authority

The concept of authority is taught throughout the Bible:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God and those who resist will bring judgment upon themselves. (Romans 13:1-2)

God gives us laws in order to protect our freedom and privacy. All authority comes from God and must therefore be obeyed. We are told here that if we resist authority, we are resisting the laws of God. Those in authority include all in the judicial system: policemen, State Troopers, U.S. Marshals, immigration officials, parole officers, judges and even institutional guards.

Here is a simple example. You are driving down the freeway. Up ahead is a trooper with radar, waiting to catch you if you are speeding. If you obey the law and drive the speed limit, there is no need to worry about the officer. But if you are speeding and get caught, then you must pay the fine. You may drive off, cursing the trooper who enforced the law because you think you were treated unfairly. Such a reaction usually indicates arrogance. An arrogant person cannot handle authority. Arrogance often starts at home by rejecting the authority of parents and teachers, and progresses to rejecting higher authorities. Such a person is maladjusted to society. A person with humility may not like the idea of paying a big fine for speeding, but he respects the officer and swallows his medicine without complaining. He might even thank the officer for reminding him to slow down.

Authority is not always fair, neither is life

ARROGANCE vs HUMILITY

I will now describe the opposing attitudes of arrogance and humility and use Bible passages to help you understand the difference. The dictionary defines arrogance as “a feeling of superiority shown in an overbearing manner.” In contrast, humility is defined as “being unpretentious, modest in behavior and attitude, not prideful.” This distinction is very important in the Christian life. Whereas the attitude of Jesus Christ was always one of humility, the attitude of the sin nature, even when it tries to be good, is based on arrogance.

Arrogance is the #1 enemy of many Christians

Arrogance is a sin. Arrogance has an exaggerated opinion of one’s own importance and ability. Arrogance rejects authority and motivates emotional sins such as hatred, anger, self-pity, jealousy and even violence. Occasionally there are reasons for justified anger that are not related to arrogance. However, when a person is consumed with unrestrained anger, he is unable to think and may harm himself or others.

Cain Murders Abel

Cain murdered his brother Abel because he was jealous of the attention God showed him. Cain reacted to God’s rejection of his offering and took out his bitterness and jealousy on his brother.

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. It came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the

ground to the Lord [he was very proud of his offering]. Abel [who was humble] also brought of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. Cain was very angry. The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. Its desire is for you but you should rule over it.” It came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is Abel?” He said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” The Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.” (Genesis 4:1-10)

Arrogance must be controlled before it motivates revenge or other sins. If arrogance has caused you to do dumb things, remember what the Scripture says about it:

When arrogance comes, then comes dishonor; but with the humble is wisdom. The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them. (Proverbs 11:2-3)

There are six things that the Lord hates: arrogant eyes; a lying tongue; hands that kill innocent people; a mind devising wicked plans; feet that are quick to do wrong; a dishonest witness spitting out lies; and a person who spreads conflict among relatives. (Proverbs 6:16-19)

A stubborn fool considers his own way the right one; but a person who listens to advice is wise. When a stubborn fool is irritated, he shows it immediately; but a sensible person hides the insult. (Proverbs 12:15-16)

The Stages of Arrogance

Arrogant people have an unrealistic self-image. They don't see themselves as they really are, particularly not as God sees them. Arrogant people justify everything they do. They overlook their own failures and believe that rules are only for others. In **self-justification**, they make excuses often blaming their situation on others. This leads quickly to the second stage called **self-deception**, which keeps them from seeing life with any objectivity. Arrogant people then get into total **self-absorption**, the third stage. At this point they lose all standards and perspective. They have complete disregard for anyone but themselves.

Arrogance can destroy you

Self-destruction is the last stage of arrogance. Your life is far too meaningful and valuable for you to destroy yourself through arrogance.

The Arrogance of Religion

There's nothing worse than the arrogant person who is also religious. He never sees his own flaws and failures, but he sure is good at seeing yours. For example, the religious man may think he is gaining God's favor by not drinking or smoking, while looking down his nose at those who do. In public, he presents a squeaky-clean image. He doesn't fool God. *"For as a man thinks in his heart, so he is"* (Proverbs 23:7).

Arrogance is a subject seldom discussed in churches and for good reason. Organized religion is arrogance. Religion is man's attempt to seek God's approval. It is the height of arrogance for anyone to think they can earn their way into heaven by being good or by following some religious taboo. **Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is not a religion.**

We are all sinners and there is nothing we can do to gain God's approval on our own. We do not earn or deserve an eternal relationship with God. God in His grace provides everything we need - saving grace, living grace, dying grace and surpassing grace. Anything we add to God's grace gift of salvation neutralizes our faith.

To each one of us grace is given according to the measure of Christ's gift. (Ephesians 4:7)

This is something the religious leaders known as the Pharisees did not accept. These arrogant men saw Jesus Christ as an irreverent lawbreaker because He befriended prostitutes and tax collectors, both hated in Biblical times. When Christ made it clear that He was the Son of God the Pharisees became indignant and began plotting His death. "Surely the true Son of God would not associate with such unrighteous sinners," they thought. In reality, Jesus Christ guaranteed their means to eternal life. He did so for all of us. Such an act of grace flew in the face of the religious leaders who believed they could work their way into heaven. Here's what the Bible says:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

In their self-righteousness, the religious leaders were offended by God's policy of grace. It upset them their

works were not good enough to measure up to God's perfection and absolute righteousness. They called for the death of Jesus Christ, an innocent man. *"Then from that day forth they took counsel together to put Him to death"* (John 11:53).

Things are really no different today. Many people in their arrogance won't accept the fact that God's grace gift of salvation is available to all.

The Ultimate Example

In sharp contrast to the arrogance of the religious leaders is the great humility profile of our Lord Jesus Christ. We see this in the way He handled the extreme unfair treatment He received during His time on earth.

[Jesus Christ] made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. (Philippians 2:7-8)

Humility is a learned character asset that is vital to living the Christian way of life

Humility is an attitude, a mindset. Does it mean you act like a wimp or walk around all day with your shoulders slumped and your eyes on the ground? The answer is No. Humility is orientation to God's authority and His grace. It includes respect for authority, whether fair or unfair. When someone with authority over you makes decisions, you have two choices: react or respond. Arrogant people can't handle unfair treatment. They get angry, run their mouths and make threats.

Arrogance Reacts - Humility Responds

Clothe yourself with humility toward one another. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. (1 Peter 5:5-6)

People with humility keep their mouths shut when they know they are getting a bad deal and put it in the Lord's hands. The Supreme Court of Heaven is open 24/7. Let God handle the justice; He has all the facts. We can only manage to do this when we learn to think like Jesus Christ thought, when we change our thinking from human viewpoint to divine viewpoint. More on this later.

First, let me tell you what happened to Jesus Christ. When our Lord was arrested the night before He was crucified, He was subjected to six different trials. All were illegal. He was mocked and severely beaten prior to His trials. Pontius Pilate, the judge who handled His case, actually found Him innocent.

Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him and they began to come up to Him and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him slaps in the face. Pilate came out again and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no fault in Him." (John 19:1-4)

Jesus Christ was pronounced "not guilty" and yet He was still given the death penalty! Pilate succumbed to political pressure and the demands of the Pharisees. If you were in this situation, how would you have handled it? Would they have dragged you out of the courtroom kicking and screaming about how unfairly you were being treated?

Notice how Jesus Christ responded to Pilate's authority to put Him to death. Remember, all authority comes from God. Jesus Christ, as a man, submitted to this authority realizing His Heavenly Father had ordained it.

Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have the power to crucify You and the power to release You?" Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above." (John 19:10-11)

Christ Fulfilled His Mission

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew His mission was to die on the cross on our behalf. There was never a question about this. He came to earth with this mission. In His humility, He allowed Pilate to order His crucifixion. Pilate didn't have a clue about the significance of his ruling. As far as he was concerned, he was simply putting to death a man who was causing a disturbance. However, this was much more than a routine Roman execution. This was a guarantee of our salvation! It was prophesied:

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace fell upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

Matthew describes the event, "*The chief priests were mocking Him saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now if He delights in Him; for He said, I am the Son of God'*" (Matthew 27:41-43).

Of course Jesus Christ could have gotten down from that cross. He is God. However, had He done so, His mission would not have been accomplished and we would be condemned in our spiritual death for eternity. Our Lord's mindset was of humility and submission to authority, even though it was unfair. We are to have this mindset also. *"Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus who humbled Himself and made Himself of no reputation"* (Philippians 2:5-6).

Jesus Christ Pardons a Criminal

Two other men were being executed along with Christ. Their crosses were on either side of His. Luke records the amazing divine pardon issued to the second of the two criminals. While one blasphemed Christ, "If You are Christ, save Yourself and us," the other corrected his friend. "We received the due rewards of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."

He said, *"Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingdom"* (Luke 23:42). The man acknowledged his acceptance of the true identity of the Savior.

The answer Jesus Christ gave him is astounding. *"Assuredly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"* (Luke 23:43).

Jesus Christ had just granted a divine pardon, guaranteeing the believing criminal eternal life in heaven.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ
[our Savior] is born of God. (1 John 5:1)

You see, what Christ did for us was pre-determined in eternity past and promised by God. His spiritual death on the cross was the plan of God the Father by which our salvation was possible. Without Jesus Christ's sacrificial death, we could not be saved.

EMOTION vs THOUGHT

Our lives consist of thoughts, intentions and actions. Normally we think and then we do. Problems arise when we do not think but rather act only on emotion.

Each of us is born with a soul. It is the invisible part of us that goes with us into eternal life. Our soul consists of mentality, volition, conscience and self-consciousness. Emotion is also part of the human makeup and is the appreciator in life. But we were never designed by God to be controlled by our emotion. Emotions can be dangerous if we allow them to interact with our volition and run the show.

**God gave you two ends
One to think with and one to sit on
Success in life depends on which end you use
Heads you win - Tails you lose**

Volition coupled with emotion can go wild when not restrained by the conscience. Your conscience contains your norms and standards of right and wrong. You learn most of these at an early age, such as privacy, respect for human life and property and obedience to rules. When you act on emotion rather than thought, you are likely to make bad decisions.

Drugs and alcohol bring out emotion and cloud the mentality. When you get high, you stop thinking and act on feelings. At this point, the boundaries imposed by your conscience are no longer in place. You may even justify committing a crime in order to sustain a habit that is slowly destroying your life.

Your spiritual life is lived in your thoughts

Emotionalism is Not the Christian Way of Life

Contrary to what you may have been told, Christianity has nothing to do with emotion. It's not about getting worked up at a church service or feeling spiritual. It's not about singing, reciting prayers or parroting back phrases from a worship manual. These have no lasting impact. Only God's Word in the mentality of your soul will sustain you through life's ups and downs.

Living the Christian life is all about thinking. You have been given the mind of Christ as recorded in the Bible. God talks to you through His Word. Although you may not have found him yet, you have a right pastor whose job is to study and teach you what the Scripture means.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Think with sound judgment, as God has assigned to each one of us a standard of thinking from His Word. (Romans 12:2-3)

This is God telling you to renovate or change your thinking by acquiring the mind of Christ. Instead of seeing life through human viewpoint, I call this stinkin' thinkin,' you look at it through God's eyes which is divine viewpoint thinking. Divine viewpoint is like having spiritual x-ray vision. You will see what the unbelieving world can't see.

As you develop divine viewpoint, your mindset changes. You break old patterns and habits and learn a new way of living. Arrogance is broken and you start to respond to unfair situations with forgiveness, rather than reacting with bitterness and revenge. You begin to think like Christ thought during His time on earth.

It is no longer I but Christ in me. (Galatians 2:20)

BECOME A MATURE CHRISTIAN

Your unique environment gives you time to study and lots of opportunity to apply what you learn. Let's face the facts. You can sit there and be angry and plot revenge, or you can admit your sin and failure and get on with the plan God has for you. Don't live in the past. Move forward. Use your situation to your advantage and be motivated by how Paul, Moses and David recovered from sin and went on to become spiritually mature.

Live life in the light of eternity

Your Helper

Scripture shows that God offers us a second chance. The truth is, He gives us second and third and many more chances after we're saved. As we've discussed, this second chance starts with the "new birth," when you are born again. Everyone is born physically alive but spiritually dead. At the moment of salvation, God the Holy Spirit brings your dead human spirit to life.

Even when we were dead in sin, He has made us alive together with Christ [by grace you have been saved]. (Ephesians 2:5)

The Christian way of life is unique. To understand and live it, you need to use the unique resources God provides, the Bible and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

Our Lord told the disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to assist them once He had gone to be with the Father in heaven. Christ said in John 14:16, *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.”* This promise demonstrated His commitment to His disciples and to us.

As a member of the Royal Family of God, you are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit and mandated to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to reveal God’s plan to you, as well as to empower you to live your spiritual life.

He [God the Holy Spirit] will guide you in all truth. (John 16:13)

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses even to the remotest parts of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Galatians 5:16 tells us, *“I say then, walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh [sin nature control of your soul].”* Unless you understand this simple truth, you will frustrate yourself.

It is not possible to live the Christian life without the filling of the Holy Spirit

Let me emphasize this again, to be filled with the Holy Spirit use rebound after you sin. 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* This very moment, as you read these words, you are either filled with the Holy Spirit (spiritual) or under the control of your sin nature (carnal). Either you are spiritual or you are carnal. Spirituality is an absolute.

Spirituality is a term for someone who is filled with God the Holy Spirit. Carnality is a term for someone who has unconfessed sin in their life, meaning they are out of fellowship with God and under sin nature control. Not even our good deeds count if we are in carnality when we perform them.

Spiritual maturity is different than spirituality. Spiritual maturity is based on the filling of the Holy Spirit and the content of the Word of God in your soul.

Gaining Momentum

In Luke 11:28, our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, “*Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.*” The word *blessed* in this passage means happy.

Having positive volition for the teaching of the Word of God is the key to growing spiritually. When you think, “I’m going to do whatever it takes to get God’s Word in my life” you’re positive. This is the start of spiritual momentum. Momentum is related to staying filled with the Holy Spirit, hearing the Word of God on a consistent basis, and keeping what you hear.

Hear the Word of God taught to you by a well-qualified pastor-teacher.

Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God. (Romans 10:17)

Keep what you hear. God’s mandates are not hard. Keeping them requires submitting to God’s authority, obeying Him and consistently studying and applying His Word.

This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)

Grow to spiritual maturity. This is your objective.

Give instruction to a wise man and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man and he will increase his learning. Occupation with the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge is understanding. For by me your days will be multiplied and years of life will be added to you. (Proverbs 9:9-11)

Spiritual momentum is what keeps you moving forward running the race. *“Run in such a way that you may win. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore, I run in such a way as not to run aimlessly”* (1 Corinthians 9:24-26).

Run keeping your eyes on Jesus Christ and focusing on your objective which is to become a mature Christian. **Learn** the Word of God. **Apply** it in your life. **Grow** to spiritual maturity. **Glorify** God as you replicate Jesus Christ’s thinking and re-present Him to others in your spheres of influence.

LAG - Learn, Apply, Glorify

If you want to grow as a Christian, even in an extreme environment such as where you may be now, the next few pages of information are very important.

Doing the Right Thing in the Right Way

If anyone competes as an athlete, he will not be crowned as the winner unless he competes according to the rules. (2 Timothy 2:5)

Protocol is a word I want you to be familiar with. Simply put, you follow protocol by doing a right thing in a right way. Doing a right thing in a wrong way makes it

wrong. For example, it is always right to pray. However, you can pray the wrong way if you pray when you are out of fellowship. Psalm 66:18 tells us, *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear.”* Prayer prayed in the wrong way will not be heard.

A right thing done in the wrong way is wrong. This is called human good. Paul compares human good, done in our own energy, to flammable wood, hay and straw. Human good will not stand the test of fire in heaven. In contrast, divine good is a right thing done in the right way produced through the power of the Holy Spirit and is likened to gold, silver and precious stones. It has value, durability and meaning to the Lord.

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay or straw, each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work. If any man’s work which he has built on remains, he will receive a reward. If any man’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Cor 3:12-15)

In heaven, there will be a time when the Lord Jesus Christ at the Judgment Seat of Christ will examine each Christian’s deeds. The good deeds we produce while under the filling of the Holy Spirit will endure the test of fire. The things we do in carnality under sin nature control will burn up and not be rewarded.

This is motivating - **God promises blessings in time and rewards in eternity for those who advance to spiritual maturity and produce divine good.**

For those who do not, the loss is great. Yes, they will be in heaven but they will be there minus rewards and have reason to regret wasting their time on earth.

For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord gives grace and glory; no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, how blessed is the man who trusts in You! (Psalm 84:11-12)

These are the mandates to become a mature Christian:

Stay filled with the Holy Spirit. (Eph 5:18)

Study to show yourself approved unto God, a worker that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.
(2 Timothy 2:15)

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and **Learn from Me**; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Never forget, God loves you. He wants you to become a mature Christian and be happy and content. God's will for you now is to become a mature Christian.

**And when the Chief Shepherd appears
you will receive the never withering wreath of glory
(1 Peter 5:4)**

EXCUSE MAKER or RISK TAKER

Will you follow Christ's command, "Get in the boat and follow Me?" In Matthew 8:18-27 we learn about excuse makers and risk takers.

Now when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave orders to depart to the other side [of the Sea of Galilee]. Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." (Matthew 8:18-19)

At first glance, this appears to be a willing student. But understanding the original language will show you why the Lord Jesus Christ scolded him. The New Testament was written in the Greek. If you look at Matthew 8:19 in the Greek, you will see the scribe actually said, "I will follow You if, in fact, You really do go." He was suggesting that Jesus Christ would not leave the crowd assuming Christ thought His security was there.

Excuse Makers

Our Lord saw through this man's phoniness. "*Jesus said to him, 'The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head'*" (Matthew 8:20). In other words, "I have no tour bus and no hotel reservations, and because you are accustomed to comfort and luxury, you have no intention of following Me." This guy was an excuse maker!

In the next verse, we see the same thing. "*Another of the disciples said to Him, 'Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father'*" (Matthews 8:21). This seems to be a legitimate request. This man's father had passed away

and he wanted the Lord to hang out there for a day or two before leaving so he could attend the funeral. Notice what our Lord said to this man, “*Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead*” (Matthew 8:22). What our Lord meant was, “Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead, but you follow Me.” The disciple would not follow Christ, and used the funeral as an excuse to walk away. Another excuse maker.

I was an excuse maker, too. I grew up in a dysfunctional home without a father and seldom saw my mother. I don't say this to accuse her of not loving me. She was a single parent working a job and trying to watch over her son. I was farmed out to different guardians who would keep me on a weekly basis. Finally at twelve, I ran home, not away from home. I insisted my mother allow me to stay with her. The opportunity for trouble was around every corner. Athletics salvaged me. A football coach took an interest in me and encouraged me to achieve my full potential. As a result, I made the High School All American Football Team and received a full scholarship to the University of Alabama.

Despite these advantages, I was still an excuse maker. My grades were not good. I was not dumb, just stupid. My work ethic was not good because I was lazy. I walked away from the scholarship in a ‘frantic search for happiness.’ Meaning, I had the vain hope of finding my happiness out in the world. That search let me down the My Way Highway. As a result, I wasted years. At night, I would lie on my bed and a spotlight in my mind would show me all the bad decisions I had made. I did not know how to make them go away. Making excuses was a way of life for me.

I never really thought about God. All that changed for me one day when I attended church with a young lady because I wanted a date with her. At a Bible study following church I heard the truth of the Gospel for the very first time. What began as a date with a girl became a

lifetime relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. It was time for me to “get into the boat.”

Are you an excuse maker? It’s natural to use circumstances or environment as an excuse to not study God’s Word on a consistent daily basis. You don’t want to be ostracized being seen going to Bible study. It’s not convenient, you don’t have time, you’re too tired, you’ll do it tomorrow, or you put a premium on security and believe the details of life will protect you. You get distracted or swayed by the opposition that will most certainly come your way when you decide to make your spiritual life number one priority. Excuse making is easy.

**Leave your agenda behind and
walk into God’s plan for your life**

Risk Takers

Many Christians find the challenge of following the Lord to be too demanding. It interferes with their personal plans and ambitions. What about you? Do you have what it takes to “get in the boat and follow Christ,” to be a risk taker?

If anyone serves Me let him follow Me and
My Father will honor him. (John 12:26)

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of
witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside
every encumbrance and the sin which so
easily entangles us, and let us run with
endurance the race that is set before us.
(Hebrews 12:1)

Notice what happened to those who actually had the courage to follow Jesus Christ on that late summer evening.

When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. And suddenly there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. And His disciples came to Him and woke Him saying, “Save us, Lord, we are perishing!” (Matthew 8:23-25)

**The will of God will never lead you
to where the grace of God can't protect you**

At night, in a tremendous storm, they felt sure the boat would sink and they would drown. Our Lord was not in a panic. He was fast asleep. He would never have brought them out on the sea to let them drown. But they did not yet understand this. Yes, He could heal the sick and cast out demons, but could He calm the storm? *“He said to them, ‘Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?’ Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea and it became perfectly calm”* (Matthew 8:26).

The issue for these men in the boat was faith. Our Lord said they were men of *little faith*. They focused on the problem of the storm, instead of on the solution.

**Fear sees the problem
Faith sees the solution**

The solution was Jesus Christ! He was right there, onboard with them. When the men awakened Him, they did not immediately realize the scope of His power over nature. The men marveled, saying, *“Who can this be, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?”* (Matthew 8:27). The disciples were in the safest place they could be, in the boat with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Get your eyes off self and on Christ

The Word of God is a sedative for anxiety

I will put my trust in You, O Lord [this is a risk taker]. Never let me be ashamed. Deliver me. Be my rock. Lead me, guide me. You will pull me out of the trap laid for me. You are my strength. (Psalm 31:1-4)

In the multitude of my anxieties within me,
Your comforts delight my soul. (Psalm 94:19)

Do you allow fear to dominate your life? Fear will consume you if you let it. **There is no place for fear in the Christian's life:**

Fear not, I am with you; do not be anxious for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)

This is an amazing promise from God. Remember you are never alone. God is with you 24/7. He has you. Do not fear. Put your trust and safety in Him.

Do not be afraid of sudden terror nor the trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.
(Proverbs 3:25-26)

The Lord is for me, I will not fear; what can man do to me? (Psalm 118:6)

Be strong and courageous; the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)

Faith is spiritual stamina

The Apostle Peter: From Excuse Maker to Risk Taker

The Apostle Peter is a beautiful example of what it means to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Peter was one of our Lord's first disciples. He had followed Jesus Christ since first hearing of Him through his brother, Andrew, who had come to Peter immediately to tell him he had met the Messiah (John 1:41-42). Peter quickly became one of our Lord's most trusted disciples.

Shortly before our Lord's crucifixion, when things had really heated up, Peter got scared, and denied his relationship with Christ. This was not a surprise to our Lord. He had warned Peter that Satan wanted to test him (Luke 22:31-34). The night our Lord was arrested, Peter followed Him to see where He was being taken. Once the group arrived at the high priest's house, someone recognized Peter as a follower of Christ. Peter, being afraid, vigorously denied it. He denied knowing Christ on three different occasions in one night (Luke 22:54-62). The third time, Jesus Christ caught Peter's eye.

At this point, Peter wept bitterly and fled. You'd think this would have been the end of Peter. Not only had he failed three times to admit he was a Christian and a disciple of the Lord, but he knew our Lord had actually watched him do so (Luke 22:61).

Like you and like me, Peter was simply frightened when put to the test. He recovered and not only became a great apostle and writer of New Testament Scripture, but he was known for his strong faith and loyalty to Christ.

It's time for you to make up your mind about who you're going to follow. If you don't take control of your life now then somebody else will continue to control it.

Following Jesus Christ means that you live by His example. Listen to **1 Peter 2:21**, "*For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.*"

INVISIBLE HERO

If you are incarcerated, you may feel as if you're out of society and your life no longer matters. Perhaps you think you can't influence those you love. This isn't true. The truth is, God has a very special plan for you and this gives your life meaning and purpose.

God wants you to be one of His invisible heroes. The invisible hero is a Christian who is advancing to spiritual maturity. He isn't a hero because he impresses others with the things he does. He is a hero because he is a quiet spiritual professional. He relies on God and uses the divine resources of the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the living Word of God, the Bible, to grow spiritually.

You may be out of sight of the public but you are very visible to God. He knows exactly where you are and how you're responding to your current circumstances. He knows what you're thinking. The real you is what's in the mentality of your soul. This is where you live your spiritual life, in your thoughts.

For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His.
(2 Chronicles 16:9)

For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths.
(Proverbs 5:21)

God identifies invisible heroes by their thinking

As an invisible hero you have a lasting impact on others as God's blessings extend to your family, friends, and even fellow inmates and prison guards. Remember the Apostle Paul? He had a tremendous spiritual legacy impact on his prison guards.

Invisible heroes also have an historical impact on their community and nation. Do you want to help America remain free and continue to be God's client nation? Then be committed to do what it takes to grow to spiritual maturity. As goes your spiritual life, so goes our nation. God honors maturing Christians. God preserves the client nation with a significant number of mature believers.

There is also something called heritage impact blessings. God blesses the loved ones of a mature Christian after he or she dies. As an invisible hero, you influence the lives of others and leave a heritage for those who follow you. Your life does matter!

God is looking for invisible heroes. Here is what it takes:

Stay Filled with the Holy Spirit

God the Holy Spirit lives in you. He is your guide and mentor. He gives you spiritual IQ so you can grasp the meaning of God's Word. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is your power to learn God's Word and apply it so you can glorify God to the maximum.

That God would grant you to be made strong by means of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 3:16)

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

(1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Learn God's Word

We are mandated to learn God's Word. *"Study to show yourself approved unto God, a worker that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15). *Rightly dividing* means in a correct way. It is so easy to get lured into doing right things in the wrong way, and they're useless to God.

At the moment of salvation, God gives us a spiritual gift. *"And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers"* (Ephesians 4:11). The gifts of apostleship and prophecy no longer exist. Once the Bible was completed, they were no longer needed. Recognize that only those with the gift of pastor-teacher are qualified to teach God's Word.

There are many qualified pastors across this nation. When I say qualified, I refer to men with the gift of pastor who have studied and prepared for a lifetime of service in the pulpit. These men understand the original languages and accurately teach God's Word. It is the job of the pastor to explain the meaning of the words recorded in the Scripture. Your job is to study under a man like this, and let him feed you the Word of God on a daily basis.

Be careful of hustlers who are out to make a buck off of God. Notice what Paul wrote in one of his letters to the Corinthians: *"We are not like so many others, who handle God's message as if it were cheap merchandise; but because God has sent us, we speak with sincerity in His presence, as servants of Christ"* (2 Corinthians 2:17). The Word of God is never to be sold. No money should ever be requested in exchange for Bible teaching.

The pastors I respect do not charge for anything. They will enthusiastically provide you with hundreds of hours of study material, if you simply request it.

There is no short-cut to learning God's Word

God speaks to you through His Word, the Bible. It is absolute truth. If you want to get close to God, heed His mandate in Jeremiah 29:13, *“And you shall seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.”* This is positive volition. Do you want to know God’s plan, purpose and will for your life? Then make learning God’s Word a daily habit.

Pray Effectively

1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, **“Pray without ceasing.”** **This is a mandate from God.** Always remember to use rebound first. *“If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me”* (Psalm 66:18). You can recite the most beautiful public prayers and the sincerest private prayers, but if you offer the prayer with unconfessed sin present in your life, it will go unheard.

Another reason why prayers go unanswered is that God’s prayer protocol isn’t followed. You cannot make up your own rules when it comes to worshipping Him. Be filled with the Holy Spirit by confessing any known sins to God the Father and follow this sequence. This is God’s protocol for prayer:

- Address your prayer to God the Father, such as “Dear Heavenly Father.”
- Through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Close in the name of God the Son, “In Jesus Christ’s name, Amen.” You can bet if you hear someone praying to Jesus, they are doing a right thing, but in a wrong way.

We pray as a means of expressing adoration and thanksgiving to God for all He has done on our behalf. I often thank the Father for saving me and giving me opportunities and even adversity.

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will in Christ Jesus. (1 Thess 5:18)

Prayer also allows for intercession, praying on behalf of others. I request prayer from others as I seek to present the Gospel. Likewise, I consider it an honor to pray for others. Philippians 1:3-4 summarizes, *“I thank God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making requests for you all with joy.”*

You are to pray for our nation and its leadership. *“I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings, and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity”* (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

You should pray for those who seek to do you harm. *“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44).

I encourage you to ask for God’s guidance. *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way of everlasting”* (Psalm 139:23-24).

Praying for your own needs is called petition. Trust God to provide. You will discover He is willing to pour out many blessings, even above and beyond your needs.

Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:16)

All things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive. (Matthew 21:22)

Also be sure and request sanctification of your food before you eat. *“For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the Word of God and prayer”* (1 Timothy 4:4-5).

Do not be reluctant to communicate with God in prayer. This is your privilege as a member of His Royal Family.

**God will answer your prayer
in His timing, not yours**

Take comfort in knowing the Holy Spirit makes intercession on your behalf when you don't know what to pray for. *"The Holy Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us"* (Romans 8:26).

Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction,
persevere in prayer. (Romans 12:12)

Grow to Spiritual Maturity

Growing to spiritual maturity is your objective as a Christian. This is how you glorify God to the maximum in time and in eternity. We have already discussed how to do this. I can't emphasize enough that studying under the ministry of a qualified pastor is an absolute requirement to get to spiritual maturity. The Bible is not a novel. It is a textbook designed to be taught to you by your pastor. You may grow a little by studying on your own but you can't advance to spiritual maturity without studying under the ministry of a pastor.

You can't teach yourself to spiritual maturity

Through God's grace provisions you have everything you need to become an invisible hero. Now it's up to you!

**Whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God
(1 Corinthians 10:31)**

IN CONCLUSION

God promises you wonderful living grace provisions. He loves you. Trust Him to take care of you and provide for all of your needs. Remember, you are never alone. God is always with you providing overwatch.

You trust God with your life Trust Him with the details

God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19)

Let's look at some of God's provisions as described in Proverbs 2:6-11:

For the Lord gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course.

For **wisdom** will enter your heart and **knowledge** will be pleasant to your soul; **discretion** will guard you, **understanding** will watch over you.

I call these **The Fantastic Four**.

Wisdom enters your heart [thinking] from the study and the application of the Word of God. This gives you direction and purpose in life.

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
(Romans 11:33)

Knowledge is pleasant to your soul. You have a hunger for learning God's Word. There is no greater joy and contentment in life than knowing you are in the center of God's will executing the unique plan He designed for you.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)

Discretion will guard you. You are able to discern the truth from the lies of Satan's cosmic system. I call this spiritual x-ray vision. You can identify human viewpoint thinking and discern the lures of the world. There is danger in experimenting with things the world offers.

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.
(1 Peter 5:8)

Understanding will watch over you. Understanding requires you to have the right information. Where do you get your information? From what your friends say, human viewpoint, or from what the Word of God tells you, divine viewpoint? Divine viewpoint thinking will give you discretion and understanding.

Wisdom . . Knowledge . . Discretion . . Understanding

The Fantastic Four

How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels, and nothing you desire compares to her.

Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.

The Lord by wisdom founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens. By His knowledge the deeps were broken up and the skies drip with dew.

My son, let them not vanish from your sight; keep sound wisdom and discretion.
(Proverbs 3:13-21)

Acquiring The Fantastic Four depends on your volition as reflected by the word *if*. *If* is a conditional clause, meaning maybe you will or maybe you won't make the choices to learn and treasure God's Word.

My son, *if* you accept My words and store up My commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding; *if* you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding; and *if* you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure; then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5)

Your volition determines your future

Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

Be careful how you walk is a mandate from God. The word for *walk* in the original Greek is translated “regulate.” God is telling you to be careful how you regulate your life. This means redeem the time you have wisely. God wants you to make good decisions from a position of strength. Your position of strength is what the Bible says. God wants you to think and act based on what is in His Word.

Will you walk alone in this life or will you walk with God’s divine help?

Many people don’t want to devote time to learning about God. For example, I have a bike and some gym equipment in my home. But they do me no good if I don’t take the time to use them. It comes down to my desire to be fit. Am I willing to do what it takes or am I lazy and full of excuses? The same is true for spiritual growth. You need to use your volition to learn about God.

Let me ask a few questions. Are you tired of being run over by circumstances in life? Are you tired of analyzing your past and regretting your decisions? If so, this study will help you. If not, pass this book to someone else.

I can’t free your body from confinement but I have laid out how you can **free your mind through divine viewpoint thinking**. Remember, this is where you live your spiritual life, in your mind. You can be optimistic and enthusiastic about each new day and live with amazing happiness in spite of your circumstances. It’s up to you.

The Bible tells you how to be happy.

Happy are those who hear the Word of God and keep it. (Luke 11:28)

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:11)

This happiness God offers brings contentment and capacity to enjoy life, regardless of circumstances. With God's Word stored in the mentality of your soul, you can ride out even the most difficult storms, safely in the Lord's care where it is calm.

This is what God offers you in time. Yes, He offers you a divine pardon when you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior. He also offers you a life of hope and fulfillment as you follow His plan. This is why the conditional words of Proverbs 2:1-5 are so critical: *if* you treasure His commands and *if* you reach for understanding.

The only way to do this is to start a diligent study of the Scripture so you will know His mandates and come to understand His plan for you. For this, you need a qualified pastor who will act as your tour guide through the Bible. He will explain passages that seem confusing and encourage you with God's Word.

No one can do this for you. Either you make the effort to become a mature Christian or you're squandering the time God gives you. Don't miss out on what God has for you. Get in the boat and re-present Jesus Christ.

As the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8:31, "***If God be for us [and He is] who can be against us?***"

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GOD'S PROBLEM SOLVING DEVICES

REBOUND

FILLING OF THE
HOLY SPIRIT

FAITH-REST DRILL

GRACE
ORIENTATION

DOCTRINAL
ORIENTATION

PERSONAL SENSE
OF DESTINY

PERSONAL LOVE
FOR GOD

IMPERSONAL
LOVE FOR ALL
MANKIND

SHARING THE
HAPPINESS
OF GOD

OCCUPATION
WITH CHRIST

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If you, or a loved one, are incarcerated
and want to study the Word of God contact:

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Philippi Freedom Ministry presents the Gospel message of Faith Alone in Christ Alone and teaches Basic Bible Doctrines to those who are incarcerated. The purpose of this ministry is to make doctrinal Bible teaching available without charge or obligation.



RICK HUGHES, founder and President of Rick Hughes Evangelistic Ministries, Inc., communicates clear and concise Biblical principles for hearers to choose to use in their lives. For over 50 years, Rick has presented the truth to thousands of students and spoken at hundreds of schools and churches. He authored several books and hosts a weekly radio broadcast and daily podcast, *The FLOT Line*, all available, for free, on his website, rickhughesministries.org.

A native of Birmingham, Alabama, Rick was raised in a modest, single-parent home. He distinguished himself through excellence in athletics being named to the High School All American football team and set state records in the shot put and discus. The University of Florida signed Rick to a full football scholarship, but his SAT scores were too low. Challenged by a coach to overcome this failure, Rick applied himself in the classroom as he had done on the field. He seized the challenge, got a second chance, entered the University of Alabama as a football player under the training of prestigious coach Paul “Bear” Bryant, and the team won a national championship that year. After just one successful year, however, Rick quit school and drifted down the *my way highway*. Rick emphasizes *bad decisions limit future options*, and *God gave you two ends: one to sit on and one to think with. Success in life depends on which end you use. Heads you win—tails you lose*. Many of Rick’s personal experiences help to vividly teach these principles.

Rick’s turning point came when he accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior, by faith alone in Christ alone. This is the most important decision in your life, also. Rick’s decision opened a new path, not of football, but one personally designed for him by God. Through the ministry of Berachah Church in Houston, Texas, and its pastors, R. B. Thieme, Jr. and now R. B. Thieme III, Rick learned principles and promises of God’s Word that directed him into a life of Christian ministry. Rick’s life is proof that when you leave your own agenda behind and walk into God’s plan, you can have fulfillment and happiness beyond your imagination. “For with God, nothing will be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

A DIVINE PARDON

In the Bible, Luke records the amazing Divine Pardon issued by Jesus Christ to one of the two criminals crucified beside Him. The first criminal made fun of the Lord saying, “If you are the Christ, save yourself and us.” The second man corrected his friend, “We receive the due rewards of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.” He then turned to Jesus and said, “Lord, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom.” With these words he expressed his belief in the true identity of the Savior. Jesus Christ’s reply was astounding, “Assuredly I say unto you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” Our Lord had just granted this criminal a Divine Pardon. You, too, can get a Divine Pardon! “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). “Whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16).