

ONE MAN'S JOURNEY FROM RELIGION TO
A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

THE
*Free
Gift*

A silhouette of a man and a child sitting on a rocky cliff, looking out over a sunset. The man is on the right, and the child is on the left, leaning against him. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and red, with some clouds. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

KEN WILLIG

Endorsements

Les Hughey, Mark Yule, Jason Fritz, Bob Wade, and Tyler McGrath,
Pastors. Highlands Church, Scottsdale, AZ

Ken Willig has done a wonderful job of enlightening us on the difference between “religion” and “a relationship with God.” Many try to make Christianity way too difficult, when it is one of the simplest things in the world. So simple that Jesus equated faith with “child-like” faith. Ken has been gifted with capturing the simple, yet profound truth of what Christianity is all about.

R. C. Sproul, Founder and President, Ligonier Ministries. Senior Minister of Preaching at Saint Andrews Chapel, Sanford, Florida.

This book sets forth reasons for faith. It also mirrors the transforming impact that the Scriptures have had on the man who wrote it. What Willig is saying is that vital Christianity is not a matter of abstract theory; it is a matter of life.

Joseph M. Stowell, Former President, Moody Bible Institute. Teaching Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel, Rolling Meadows, IL.

THE FREE GIFT is a good read to grow on. Ken Willig has done us all a favor by letting us walk with him on a dramatic life journey! One look into God’s work in his life will both inspire and instruct!

Darryl DelHousaye, President of Phoenix Seminary, Scottsdale, AZ

THE FREE GIFT is refreshing. Ken Willig expresses faith in terms that are true and straightforward. It is a must read for anyone who is disillusioned by religion or thinks that God is keeping score on how one must live.

Alan Sears, President, Alliance Defense Fund, Scottsdale, AZ

Ken Willig tells the exciting story about “the free gift.” What’s more, he explains what that gift is, how to get it, and how it will change your life!

Merrill Oster, Founder of Pinnacle Forum America, Aurora, IL

THE FREE GIFT is a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His incredible power to change lives.

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Prologue

Everyone seeks happiness, but many, as I did, confuse pleasure with happiness. There is a huge difference. Let me explain.

My business career was skyrocketing beyond my own belief. I had a plan for my success that would make me happy. My goal was to be so successful that I would own a private jet and would have sufficient money to go anywhere I wanted and never worry about the cost or the time away.

I was envisioning my ladder of success. At the top was my jet. The bottom rung of my ladder was to get the right job. Rung two: get promoted. Three: buy a nice car. Four: buy my first house. Five: vacation in Hawaii. Six: own my own company and be my own boss. Seven: buy a second car, a Mercedes. Eight: travel internationally. Nine: own a bigger and better home in an exclusive area. Ten: have mega bucks in the stock market. Eleven: belong to an exclusive private club. Twelve: buy a vacation home. Thirteen: buy a yacht. And so forth. You've got the idea. I was on my way to the jet—happiness.

I figured when I got to the top rung—the jet—I would be happy. But, something happened to my plan along the way. My possessions began to own and control me. My marriage dissolved. I had the toys but was less and less happy.

Finally, God got my attention. He humbled me and took my focus off of my self-serving, pleasure-seeking life style. I asked Jesus Christ to be the Lord of my life and accepted His gift of grace to right my relationship with God.

I learned that there is a huge and profound difference between pleasure and happiness. I had plenty of pleasure—every day. I was young—in my 40's—and wealthy. I was a friend and business partner of John Wayne. I kept company with the beautiful people in Newport Beach. I was invited to all the “in” parties. But, and this BUT is huge, I was not happy because pleasure and happiness pulled me in opposite directions.

God changed my priorities. I climbed down my ladder of success and leaned it against another wall. That “other” wall was seeking God and His will for my life.

I learned that there is no happiness apart from peace with God. I was searching for happiness in things of pleasure when all the while peace with God had eluded me. Once I got right with God and had peace with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ, my search for happiness ended. I experienced complete peace with God in spite of my sinfulness, and with that came happiness--lasting and real happiness.

Once that took place in my life, and I was at peace, I was out of the chase for things. Ever since, I have been happy, peacefully happy, and under all circumstances—financially and even physically, as in 1993 when I was told that I had an incurable and fatal disease, and had less than a year to live. My happiness is permanent. It does not go up and down with the stock market or my net worth or with undesirable health.

My most favorite of all scripture verses is this: *“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us.”* – Rom 5:1

Material things are great. They bring lots of pleasure. I enjoy having them. But if a person wants happiness--it only comes when one is at peace with God, and that only comes by placing ones faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

Consider these verses from Scripture:

Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. – Philip. 4:6

(Jesus speaking) *“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give isn’t like the peace the world gives. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”* – John 14:27

When we are at peace with God, Christ’s peace will rule in our hearts. We do not have to earn God’s peace. Jesus gives it to us freely, if we will accept it. Worldly pleasure does not bring peace with God or happiness. Happiness is peace with God through a relationship with Jesus Christ. And that’s Authentic Christianity.

Chapter 1

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY

Authentic Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship.

Authentic Christianity is not a religion or a philosophy, but a relationship and a lifestyle.

Authentic Christianity is about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Authentic Christianity is about salvation through faith in Jesus as being the way of salvation.

Timothy Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Church in Manhattan (which has 6,000 regular attendees at 5 services and a host of daughter churches), in Chapter 11 of his book *The Reason For God*, makes this point quite well. He writes:

“Christianity teaches that our main problem is sin. What then is the solution? Even if you accept the Christian diagnosis of the problem, there doesn’t seem to be any particular reason why one must look only to Christianity for the solution. You may say, ‘Fine, I understand that if you build your identity on anything but God, it leads to breakdown. Why must the solution be Jesus and Christianity? Why can’t some other religion do as well, or just my own personal faith in God?’ The answer is that there is a profound and fundamental difference between the way that religions tell us to seek salvation and the way described in the gospel of Jesus.”

His point and mine is that **all religions teach a way to salvation but only Jesus claimed to actually be the way of salvation** Himself. This difference is so great that to refer to Christianity as a religion (except in a broader sense) would be a mistake because the term “religion” refers to “salvation through moral effort” and “Christianity” refers to “salvation through grace.”

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’” – John 14:6

Authentic Biblical Christianity is about a free gift of grace that sets one free from the bondage of religion, sin and guilt.

“Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” – John 8:31, 32

THE DIFFERENCE OF GRACE

Timothy Keller, in *The Reason For God*, further emphasizes the difference between religion and Christianity. He writes: “There is, then, a great gulf between the understanding that God accepts us because of our efforts and the understanding that God accepts us because of what Jesus has done. Religion operates on the principle ‘I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.’ But the operating principle of the gospel is ‘I am accepted by God through what Christ has done—therefore I obey.’ Two people living their lives on the basis of these two different principles may sit next to each other in the church pew. They both pray, give money generously, and are loyal and faithful to their family and church, trying to live decent lives. However, they do so out of two radically different motivations, in two radically different spiritual identities, and the result is two radically different kinds of lives.

“The primary difference is that of motivation. In religion, we try to obey the divine standards out of fear. We believe that if we don’t obey we are going to lose God’s blessing in this world and the next. In the gospel, the motivation is one of gratitude for the blessing we have already received because of Christ. While the moralist is forced into obedience, motivated by fear of rejection, a Christian rushes into obedience, motivated by a desire to please and resemble the One Who gave His life for us.”

WHAT AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY IS ALL ABOUT

By the time you’ve turned the last page of this book, whether you believe or not, you will not only have a clear understanding of what those words truly mean, but also what authentic Christianity is about. And whether you are spiritual, religious, skeptical, or scholarly, understanding is worth seeking.

MY BACKGROUND

My childhood religion was comprised of a system of beliefs governed by a highly structured, religious *way to salvation*. I grew up with an intellectual belief in God, Jesus Christ, and the stories depicted in the Bible. I truly believed that the only way to heaven was to earn it and I believed that God was keeping score of my good and bad deeds. At one point, when I looked at the scoreboard of my life, I believed losing was inevitable.

Let me explain. Although, I believed that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was available to everyone, it was my good deeds that merited the grace I needed in order to get into heaven.

To use a metaphor, I needed to do enough good deeds to fill my bathtub of grace to the brim. A full tub meant that I had done enough good deeds to please God and He would let me into heaven. But, when I committed a serious sin, God would pull the plug and all the grace I had earned would drain. I would then have an empty tub, which meant I was living in sin and heading for hell.

I was taught that when I confessed my sins, God would put the plug in my tub and start filling it again. Filling would continue until I committed another serious sin. When I did, the plug would be pulled and it would empty again. So, once again, I would confess my sins and God would put the plug back in my tub and, as I did good things, it would start filling again. There were even some things that made the tub fill faster than others. This fill—drain—fill—drain—fill cycle would repeat over and over again through the years.

I was comfortable with this religious way to salvation. It was fine until the 1970's. I was a bachelor living a fast paced, pleasure-seeking lifestyle in Newport Beach, California. I was sinning and running to confession every week. Finally, wrought with guilt, I could no longer fool myself into thinking that I was on my way to salvation. I felt that my plug had been pulled and put back so many times that it was a losing effort to fill my tub. I had to face my dilemma: the sin in my life was not going away; my tub would never be filled, and I would never have peace with God.

The system had failed. What was I supposed to do now? It was then that I was encouraged to pray and look to God's Word for

the solution to my dilemma. To my pleasant surprise, I discovered that the Bible contained some very good news that significantly changed what I believed, and then changed me.

The Bible says that if I would place my faith and trust in Jesus as my Savior, then God would fill my empty tub to the brim and overflowing, **with the plug out**, by submerging it into His ocean of grace created by Jesus Christ atoning sacrifice for my sins on the cross—the way of salvation. He filled my tub, not me. He earned my salvation, not me. He paid the penalty for all my sins, for all of my life. Jesus did it all. Nothing I did contributed to the filling—not good deeds, good works, prayers, or charitable giving. Nothing! God filled it freely while I was a sinner.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”
– Romans 10:9-11

DON'T TAKE MY WORD FOR IT

Don't take my word for it. But do take God at His Word. Throughout this book I will present God's Word to attest to what I say. The Bible says:

“God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:8

“Because of His great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in sin. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.” – Ephesians 2:4, 5, 8, 9

“God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” – Titus 3:5

God redeemed me from my corrupt lifestyle and set me free to enjoy a true and lasting peace for the first time in my life. The Bible describes it this way:

“For you know...that you were redeemed from your empty way of life with the precious blood of Christ.” – 1 Peter 1:18, 19

Chapter 2

WHAT IS GOD'S ANSWER?

My dilemma was one typical of so many: I did not know God's authentic plan for salvation. What I knew was a religious system of salvation that included many aspects of God's plan, but had been confused by numerous man-made religious requirements.

Like a spiritual flu-shot, religion had injected me with certain aspects of Christianity, but just enough to make me immune to authentic Christianity – that which would truly take away my guilt and provide total peace with God.

Then one day, God touched me and got my attention. Suddenly I saw my whole life paraded solemnly in front of me, the weight of my recent fast-lane lifestyle heavy on my heart. I didn't know what to make of it, but I sensed God's presence.

I told a friend and he suggested that I turn to God's Word, the Bible, for God's answer to my dilemma and ask Him to help me discern what He desired of me.

I was not acquainted with the Bible—many Bible stories, yes—but not the Bible as a whole. In fact, I had been discouraged from reading the Bible for fear of misinterpreting it. So, I proceeded cautiously.

I found and attended a non-denominational church. Joe Aldrich, Pastor of Mariners Church in Newport Beach mentored me at that time. He gave me a Bible. We met once a week on a bluff overlooking the ocean in Corona del Mar. First, I learned that it was reasonable to believe that the Bible is the word of God. Then, I would ask Joe questions and he would show me the answers in the Bible. I did not want his human opinion – I wanted God's answers.

All my life, I had listened to sermons and had been taught doctrine. But now, when someone began to teach me, I wanted to know, What's the authority for what you say? I did not want man's ideas, philosophy, or mere religious doctrine. I wanted it straight. What does God say? What does the Bible say?

I joined a Bible study with respected men who were knowledgeable in the Word of God. Through their help and encouragement, I began to grow in my understanding of God's authentic plan for salvation, and I learned how to study and apply God's Word to my life. Soon enough, as God's Word seeped into me, my life began to change.

As my hunger grew, I took graduate level courses in how to read, study, and interpret Scripture. R.C. Sproul, an incredibly brilliant theologian, helped mentor and teach me. I spent hours and hours meeting with teachers, asking questions and encouraging them to show me the answers in the Book. Through all this, I actually found the Bible quite understandable. I learned more and more of the good news of God's Word, and listened carefully to those who taught and explained its meaning. The Bible says that faith comes to us as we hear the Word of God.

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God."
– Romans 10:17

I responded to God's authority and accepted the Bible as the true source of His Word. God speaks for Himself, and does not need man's religious "add-ons" to speak for Him. This was not easy for me, as I had always accepted every teaching of my denomination to be identical with God's teachings.

Through what I learned from the Bible, I began a gradual spiritual metamorphosis: I began to grow in my knowledge of God, increasingly understand His plan, and grasp that Jesus Christ's purpose in life and death was to save sinners – to save me. Indeed, Jesus said, *"For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."* – Matthew 9:13. Since God's call is for sinners, that meant I qualified!

Chapter 3

A NEW LIFE of FREEDOM

ACCEPTING THE FREE GIFT

One morning, during the period when Pastor Joe Aldrich was mentoring me, what I was learning came together in my heart and mind. I was alone. I knelt alongside my bed, and I asked God for His forgiveness. I thanked Him for His love. I asked Him to come into my life. I humbly accepted the undeserved and indescribable free gift of Jesus Christ that God had given me. From that moment, it felt as if a great burden had been lifted from me. As the weight was lifted, the tears poured down, years of guilt and shame spilling from my eyes. I cried like a baby. And for the first time ever in my life, I was at complete peace with God...and have been every minute since.

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. We rejoice in the hope of glory in God.” – Romans 5:1, 2

Now I understand the necessity of this event. When Adam disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-7), he brought spiritual death upon himself and his descendants – all of mankind, for all time.

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned.” – Romans 5:12

OUR INNATE CONDITION

Everyone is born with an innate propensity to sin. Sinning is not an acquired habit. We are not sinners because we sin – we sin because we are sinners. Everyone is born spiritually dead and must have a spiritual rebirth in order to have fellowship with God. This comes from accepting God’s free gift of Jesus Christ as our Redeemer.

“You were dead in your transgressions and sins.” – Ephesians 2:1

This is why Jesus taught that we must have spiritual birth.

“In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” – John 3:3

A NEW BEGINNING

My new life – having been born again – came because I believed God and put my trust in Jesus Christ to save me from my sins.

“For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God.”
1 Peter 1:23

No matter how good or bad we think we are no one meets God’s standards for goodness and holiness. He calls us to be as perfect as He is.

“Be holy, because I am holy.” – 1 Peter 1:16

If we think we do not sin we are engaging in self-deceptive and foolish rationalization. We are only kidding ourselves, not God.

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

Let’s face the reality: if God is the “Scorekeeper” as I thought He was, there is no hope for anyone.

“If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord. Who could stand?”
– Psalms 130:3

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
– Romans 3:23

Chapter 4

RELATIONSHIP VS. RELIGION

THE ANSWER

Finally, here was the answer to my dilemma. It was not Christianity I was disillusioned with, but man's religious requirements that had perverted my perception of the truth. The Apostle Paul's words 2,000 years ago to Christ's followers in Galatia applied to me as well. Paul wrote:

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" – Galatians 1:6-9

I had been taught a *different gospel*—a way to salvation—that was not what Paul preached or wrote about. He taught authentic Christianity—a relationship with God through the free gift of faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior—the *way of salvation*.

Paul wrote to the Church at Ephesus: *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast."* – Eph 2:8-9

For so long I had been frustrated by a man-centered religion that promoted a *way of salvation* by doing good deeds, when God's Word, the Bible, presents the God-centered truth of authentic Christianity—the *way of salvation*. It was right there all along. Religions fashion God into what they want God to be rather than the God who has revealed Himself to us in the Bible.

Finally, as I put my trust in Christ, I began to experience a life of joyous thanksgiving for the free gift I had accepted from Him, rather than feeling helplessly trapped in guilt and fear.

I was liberated from the effort-driven system of salvation I had grown up with. At the very point I feared all was lost, God graciously set me free by the Good News given to us in His Word.

“But now you have been set free from sin and have become enslaved to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 8:22, 23

I realized that authentic Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship: a relationship with a personal and just God through the perfect life of Christ and His sacrifice for my sins.

Authentic Christianity is a relationship that purifies me through the Holy Spirit, changes my life to joyful thanks to the King who has already granted me access to His Kingdom, and forever ensures that I will never be separated from Him again.

Authentic Christianity is about a free gift that sets man free from the bondage of religion, sin and guilt – emancipation!

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

Chapter 5

GOD'S AUTHORITY, NOT MAN'S

I have used the phrase “Authentic Christianity” which must raise questions in your mind such as, “Doesn't everyone claim their religion is the only true religion?” – “How can you make that claim?”

The answer is straightforward: my claim is based on truth as found in the Bible, not on a set of religious doctrines. I put my faith on the Bible, the Word of God, only, with none of man's add-ons. It is not subjective. It is not based on my opinion, or any council, or any church, or any human entity.

It is reasonable to believe that the Bible is the Word of God. It means what it means. It can be understood. It is not some mystical document written in code requiring some guru to interpret it. The object of my faith is the revealed truth of God, a solid foundation on which I can build. The Bible has stood up to the most severe, critical scrutiny and has passed every test.

Think about this. It is not how passionately you believe or the degree of faith one has that is critical, but rather what you believe that counts. Suppose I decided to go ice-skating at the local pond. If I believed the ice was two feet thick and more than adequate to support me, when in reality the ice was only paper thin, as soon as my skates hit the ice, I would fall straight through into the freezing water. My faith was not lacking; the object of my faith, what I believed, was. Even though I had acted in accord with what I believed, what I believed was not the truth.

In the case of my spiritual faith, I wanted to be certain that the object of my faith was solid – the truth. What I learned, confirmed from reason, was that the Bible in its entirety ought to be accepted as what it represents itself to be – the true Word of God.

Everything can ultimately be boiled down to this question: **“Do you believe God?”**

Over the ages, man has acted quite nobly and methodically with the highest of intentions and sincerest of philosophies. But when men, organizations, denominations, philosophers or church leaders disagree with what God has clearly said in His written Word, **who will you believe?**

A SOLID OBJECT OF MY FAITH

The foundation of everything I now believe is in the Bible, and only the Bible. Scripture must support everything I share with you. I rely upon God's authority, not mine, and I recommend you do the same. Why would you risk your eternal destiny on what a person claims to be true just because they have an ecclesiastic title? I urge you to do as I did and receive the gospel with great eagerness but then constantly examine the Scriptures to ensure what you are being taught is true.

The Apostle Paul made the same recommendation:

“Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.” – Acts 17:11

I urge you to examine the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul, Pastors, teachers, or myself say is true. Because:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.” – 2 Timothy 3:16

“The Word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” – Hebrews 4:12

GOD IS GOD, AND MAN MUST DEAL WITH THAT

Until I was enlightened to make a commitment to the authority of the Bible as God's Word, I had been building my life around man's teachings and religious traditions. The Bible is not man's pronouncements, philosophy, or psychology. It is the inspired Word of God.

“For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”
– 2 Peter 1:21

“This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught us by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.” – I Corinthians 2:13

As noted above in Acts 17:11, when Paul spoke to the Thessalonians, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures. As we move through the next few pages, I ask you to do with me as they did with him.

Chapter 6

HE CAME FOR ME AND YOU

The first good news I learned was that Christ associated with sinners and, in fact, He came for sinners.

“For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
– Matthew 9:13b

This verse is taken from the story of how Matthew (then known as Levi) came to know Jesus. Matthew was a customs agent who served under the officers who were concessionaires for taxes according to the Roman custom of the day. Tax collectors such as Matthew were sinners who were scorned for cheating their fellow Jews.

But when Jesus invited Matthew to follow Him, he gave up his tax collector’s post to become an apostle. Later, Matthew invited his fellow tax collectors and sinners for a feast at his home. When the Pharisees (the most religious scorekeepers of that day) saw Jesus eating and socializing with such a group, they asked Jesus’ disciples what he was doing with sinners. Jesus said in reply that He had come for them.

Jesus came for sinners. Wow! That meant He came for me, a sinner. You can see what good news that was. I had been taught that because of my sinful lifestyle, I had alienated myself from my religion and consequently from God, yet the Son of God said He came for sinners. So then, why should I be separated from someone who came for me? I wanted to learn more.

Chapter nineteen of the Gospel of Luke records a very similar story. It is also about a wealthy tax collector by the name of Zacchaeus, who was a short man. Once, when Jesus was passing nearby, Zacchaeus wanted to catch a glimpse of Him. So the little man scrambled up a tree to look over the crowd. Jesus called to him and said, *“Let’s go to your house for dinner tonight”*. The so-called religious leaders criticized Jesus’ association with such a sinner. To this, Jesus said that He *“came to seek and to save the lost.”*

As one who felt lost, I could certainly identify with that. I was happy with this good news I was learning.

From my perspective, the most significant story of all is found in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. The incident took place in Samaria, which was a territory Jews took pains to avoid. But Jesus, Himself a Jew, traveled through Samaria instead of going around it on His way from Judea to Galilee. While His disciples went off to purchase food, Jesus stopped to rest at a well just outside of the town of Sychar.

In the hottest time of the day, a Samaritan woman came to draw water. She probably came at that time of day to avoid the townspeople, who shunned her as wicked and corrupt. Jesus surprised the woman by talking to her. Since Jews and Samaritans did not normally associate with one another.

After Jesus asked her for a drink from the well, He told her that she should be asking Him for *“living water.”* Puzzled, the woman replied: *“Sir, you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?”* – John 4:11

Jesus told her to get her husband, to which she replied she did not have one. At this, He shocked her by saying: *“You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband.”* – John 4:17, 18

Subsequently, Jesus revealed to her that He was the Messiah. She believed Him and went into town to tell the people about Jesus, and *“Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him because of the woman's testimony.”* – John 4:39

If Jesus used a woman who had been married five times and was now living with a man to bring people to Him, He can also use me and you. That's more good news.

That explains what qualifies a sinful person like me to write this booklet and share God's good news with you.

Chapter 7

THEN WHY DID GOD GIVE US THE LAW?

THE MYTH

Allow me to dispel a myth: God did not give us the Ten Commandments or the law to provide a way to salvation—that is, to show us what we must do to save ourselves. The purpose of God’s law is to prove to us that we cannot do all that it says and that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. Its purpose is to show us the imperfection that separates us from God, and then to lead us to Christ so that we will put our faith in Him.

“What, then, was the purpose of the law? ...So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.”
– Galatians 3:19a, 24

The primary function of the law is that of a mirror. The law reflects the righteousness of God and reveals our own sinfulness. By studying the law, we recognize our ever-present sin and our need for forgiveness. False teachers deceive us into thinking that God gave us the law as a means to save ourselves. But, God gave us the law to prove us sinners.

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin.” – Ro. 3:20

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

So, no one – not anyone – can earn his or her salvation through the law, through trying to meet its demands of do’s and don’ts.

“All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’ Clearly no one is justified before God by the law...Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.” – Galatians 3:10,11a, 23

“There is no one righteous, not even one.” – Romans 3:10

God's good law defines that which is sinful and creates death for us.

"Once I was alive apart from the Law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death." – Ro. 7:9, 10

No matter how well anyone keeps the law, when we break one point of it, we are guilty of breaking all of it.

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." – James 2:10

The Bible clearly and emphatically provides the answer to those struggling to earn their salvation through their own effort.

"...If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing." – Galatians 2:21

Wow! If it were at all possible to get to heaven – to gain salvation and to be justified before God – by following rules and traditions, or through a religious do-it-yourself system of do's and don'ts to merit salvation, then Christ died for nothing!

To summarize, there are only two ways to get into heaven. The first is to obey the law of God perfectly; the second is to go to heaven on the coattails of someone who has—namely, Jesus.

Since no one (except Jesus) can or has lived his or her life obeying God's law perfectly, the second way is our only option. This is done by placing our trust and faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Any other way alienates us from Christ.

"You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace... The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." – Galatians 5:4, 6b

Chapter 8

GOD'S PLAN IS DIFFERENT

I found God's plan for salvation to be considerably different from any logical reward or work system, especially the one I had been disillusioned with before accepting Christ. My eternal life – getting into heaven – and my peace with God could not be earned by observing the law; I could only accept it as a free gift, the grace of God.

“Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.” – Galatians 2:16-19

There is no doubt that I was guilty of breaking God's law. And there is no doubt that a holy and just God requires payment to atone for the penalty for sin. However, unlike man's system of justice for breaking the law, God's plan is different.

Because of God's love for me, He sent His Son to save me by paying the penalty for my sins with His death.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” – John 3:16

Jesus took upon Himself the punishment for my sins because of His unconditional love for me.

“God demonstrates His own love for us in this; While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:8

My sins brought me eternal death, but God's gift gave me eternal life.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 6:23

Here's our problem: in order for us to go to heaven—to enjoy an eternal relationship with a perfect God—we must be without any

sin whatsoever. And in order for justice to be served, the entire penalty due God for our sins must be paid in full.

Only Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless, and righteous life. So only He has earned the right to enter into the presence of our holy and perfect God. Only His perfect life merits eternal life.

So where does that put us? The good news is that God's plan provides everything we need to get to heaven. His plan provides for our salvation. It is a free gift. We cannot earn it. We can only accept it, say "thank you", and display our gratitude.

"For Christ died for your sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteousness, to bring you to God." – 1 Peter 3:18

Christ died for our sins in our place, so we would not have to suffer the punishment we deserve. In theology this is called substitutionary atonement.

When by faith we accept God's free gift of His Son's righteous, meritorious life and bloody, atoning death, He assigns His righteousness to us and simultaneously pays the entire reconciling penalty due God for our sins. So then, God views us as righteous and sinless in Jesus Christ.

"For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! ...so also through the obedience of the one Man the many will be made righteous." – Romans 5:10, 19b

That is God's gracious plan for salvation. That is how we become righteous before God. That is how we get to heaven.

"What does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.' " – Romans 4:3

Only the bloody sacrifice of the perfect, sinless life of Jesus is sufficient atonement for our sins. No sacrifice or good deeds we can do can add anything at all to the sufficiency of Jesus' death on the cross, nor does anything need to be added to what Jesus has done.

"God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood. He did this to demonstrate His justice..." – Romans 3:25, 26

Jesus earned righteousness for us and paid the penalty for all our sins. That is the finished work of Jesus Christ.

“The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” – Romans 6:10, 11

We can add nothing to that which Jesus has done perfectly. His plan is the only way we can get into heaven.

“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” – Romans 9:16

We are saved, receive eternal life and gain entrance into heaven, by placing our trust and faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone. The evidence that our faith is real is shown by how we live our lives after asking Jesus to be our Lord and Savior.

Our response to this free gift is to do what God asks us to the best of our ability. The motive for our obedience and good deeds is not to gain heaven, but to honor and give thanks to the King who has already given us access to His Kingdom.

Good deeds after being saved verify and authenticate the genuineness of our faith. If a pattern of good works does not follow, then the faith was never for real. It was a dead and useless faith.

Consider this simple illustration: Suppose a man says he loves his wife but he repeatedly abuses, embarrasses and vilifies her. He cheats on her and has affairs with other women. Is that man’s love for his wife for real? No. That love is dead and is worthless. Evidence of true love is to honor one’s wife through a consistent desire to please her as best as one can.

Of course God knows everyone’s heart so He does not need any evidence to know whether our faith is for real or not. But we are not God. We do need to see evidence by what one does to know that a person’s faith is authentic, just like a woman needs evidence from what her husband does to know that he truly loves her. James made this point when he wrote:

“Faith without deeds is worthless...you see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.” – James 2:20, 24

WHY HAS GOD CHOSEN THIS FOR HIS PLAN?

Why must we place our trust and faith in Jesus for salvation? Why doesn't God just keep score on our good deeds and withhold heaven only from those who are not trying their best to lead good lives? Since God made us the way we are, and as long as we are trying our best to be good even though we all slip from time to time – after all, no one is perfect – why doesn't He grade on a curve? The Bible says that God “*wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*” – 1 Timothy 2:4

So why doesn't He just do what He wants? After all, He is God.

That argument, or variation of it, quickly falls apart by considering a few of God's attributes – perfect, just, and holy – and His demands of us.

God is perfect. Sin is imperfection. God would not be perfect if imperfection were in His presence.

God is just. God would not be just if He graded on a curve. In order for justice to be served, He must punish sin – even the tiniest sin. God owes you and me nothing except justice. I don't know about you, but frankly, I tremble at the mere thought of receiving God's justice rather than grace, knowing how imperfect I really am.

Justice is what I am entitled to from a just God. On the other hand, grace is a free gift of unmerited favor from a loving and merciful God. I'd like grace over justice, wouldn't you?

God is holy. God's Word says that “*just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'*” – 1 Peter 1:15, 16. God wants me to be as holy, free from sin and perfect, as Jesus Christ.

I LIKE GOD'S PLAN, DON'T YOU?

As the above Scripture states, God wants all men to come to knowledge of the truth. The truth of God's plan is found in His word, the Bible. So, instead of trying to second-guess God with what you would do if you were God, simply accept God as God and His word as truth.

God's plan displays His unlimited grace and patience, and gives honor and glory to Him forever. When I really think about it, I am eternally grateful that He chose this as His plan. Aren't you? Paul penned my feelings about myself in His letter to Timothy:

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life." – 1 Timothy 1:15, 16

You and I are saved by the gift from God of His Son's sinless and unblemished life to earn our right to enter the presence of our just, holy and perfect God, and by Jesus' death. It is by God's grace, an unmerited free gift that we are saved. So, I have nothing about which I can boast. Paul summarizes this point in his letter to the Ephesians:

"But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." – Ephesians 2:4-9

In the past I believed that I could earn grace through performing certain good works. Imagine how I felt when I finally realized that what I had been working so hard to attain was, in fact, unattainable. And, as with any gift, it must be given and accepted. If it is earned, it is not a gift.

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." – Romans 3:23, 24

FREE, AS IN GIFT

You were given this booklet. It is a free gift from me to you. You accepted it. You did not earn it or pay for it. You received it freely. You owe nothing for it. In like manner, grace is a gift from God.

The gift is God giving His Son to die and pay the penalty for our sins. We cannot earn it, but in order to complete the giving, we must accept it.

Grace isn't God's help for those who help themselves, because that wouldn't be grace. Grace cannot be earned; it is unmerited favor from God. Grace that's conditional isn't grace. Instead, grace is God loving the least likely, even His enemies.

FREE FOR THE ASKING

When we work for someone, we earn our wages. We are entitled to them. These wages are not a gift; they are earned by work. Salvation is not payday for how well we have lived our lives. Wages are not a gift and God is not obligated to pay us anything. We cannot earn grace or our salvation—not through any amount of works, deeds, or actions--no matter how good, religious, or humanitarian they may be.

“Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” – Romans 4:4, 5

Salvation—justification before God and entrance to heaven—cannot be earned by good deeds, praying, charitable giving, being an exemplary humanitarian, or anything else.

Salvation is a free gift given to you or me when we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, and make Jesus the Lord of our lives. Our right relationship with God, our righteousness, and our entrance to heaven, is through Jesus Christ alone.

So I learned that my reconciliation with God is through the meritorious life and the atoning death of Jesus Christ alone.

“Jesus answered, ‘I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’ ” – John 14:6

IN RETROSPECT

In retrospect, I am ashamed of how arrogant I was for believing it was necessary to add my merit-earning good works to what Jesus had done in order for me to enter heaven.

After viewing the depiction of Jesus' suffering and death in Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, how could I, or anyone, possibly think that what Jesus did was inadequate to atone for my sins? The audacity of believing that Jesus' perfect life, passion, death upon the cross, and resurrection was not sufficient payment for salvation is deplorable and embarrassing. I can do nothing for God. He needs nothing from me. I cannot improve upon His perfect free gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

"The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." – Acts 17:24, 25

So it is not through the commandments, traditions, works, or anything else, but through trusting in Jesus Christ only as my Savior, that I have eternal life. Everlasting life becomes mine only through the acceptance of the unearned gift of His unconditional love – through believing that He died to pay the penalty for all my sins: past, present, and future.

I also learned that anyone who rejects the grace of His Son will not enter heaven, for that is the requirement of justice – and God is just – there must be payment made for sin. Jesus confirmed this when He said: *"Whoever puts his faith in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see that life, for God's wrath remains on him."* – John 3:36

Do you recall the circumstances that created my dilemma to start with? I had been alienated from my religion because of my sin.

NOW, IT SEEMS SO PARADOXICAL THAT I HAD:

- Identified my religion and God as one and the same.
- Felt alienated from God because my religion said I was.

- Believed the reason for this permanent separation was because I could not keep the law consistently.

BUT FROM GOD’S WORD I LEARNED THAT:

- No one can keep God’s law perfectly – those who think they can are mistaken.
- Jesus died to pay the penalty for breaking the law.
- Jesus came for sinners. He came for me. That was His purpose in coming to earth.
- Alienation from God really comes from not believing and not accepting God’s grace, His free gift of the atoning death of Jesus Christ.
- Alienation from God was a result of trying to be saved by keeping the law and doing the good works as required by religion.

“You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.” – Galatians 5:4

In my heart and in my mind, I accepted God’s provision to end my alienation from Him. I confessed my sins and put my faith in Jesus Christ. I believed His Word that says:

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord’ and believe in you heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” – Romans 10:9

Chapter 9

BEING GOOD SAVES NO ONE

TRYING OUR BEST JUST DOES NOT GET IT DONE

I used to think God would save me because I tried to be good – I tried to obey Him – I tried to follow my religion. I was wrong. I learned that He saved me because of His own purpose and grace – not because of anything I had done.

“God has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace.” 2 Tim 1:9

“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.” – Titus 3:5

“It does not, therefore, depend on man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.” – Romans 9:16

Paul once said that if anyone had reason to boast about doing good deeds, he had more reason to do so than anyone else since he was one of the most religious men of his era. However, he learned that his religious fervor was worth nothing compared to the righteousness he received through faith in Christ.

Paul wrote: *“...though I myself have reasons for such confidence. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.” – Philippians 3:4, 7, 8, 9*

GOOD DEEDS SHOW MY LOVE

Works and good deeds are very important, but only as they reflect the desires of one’s heart to please and offer thanks to Jesus Christ who died for us and paid our penalty. Good works cannot earn salvation but as we grow in our love toward God, our resulting good works demonstrate the new life that He has given us.

“As the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” – James 2:26

OUR REWARD WILL BE IN HEAVEN

We will receive rewards for our works and good deeds in heaven – in the Kingdom of God our Father. Jesus Christ said: *“There are many rooms in my Father’s house; otherwise, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.” – John 14:2*

The good deeds we do as Christians to give thanks and glory to God will be rewarded in heaven.

“So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body whether good or bad.” – 2 Corinthians 5:9, 10

Whether we enter heaven or not does not depend on works, good deeds, or obeying the law. Our eternal life depends only upon accepting God’s gift and His plan for our salvation.

“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” – Galatians 5:6

Here are the words of Jesus Christ: *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” – John 5:24*

Eternal security – that is, assurance that we will spend eternity with God in heaven – is found through justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” – Romans 3:28

But our reward in heaven comes through the works and deeds done in faithful obedience to God.

“If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or stone, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.” – 1 Corinthians. 3:12-15

The gold, silver, costly, stones, wood, hay, or straw represent the quality of our works and deeds. How these stand up to the test of fire (God's judgment) will determine our reward in heaven. But even if the quality of our works isn't there—even if everything we have done is wood, hay, or straw and burns up in an instant—we will still be saved. We may not receive rewards, but our eternal security in Jesus Christ for all of eternity can never be shaken.

The treasures we lay up in heaven result from doing good deeds, being generous, and willing to share.

“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.” – 1 Timothy 6:18, 19

We can't just listen to the Word of God, but we must do what it says to be blessed. (Reference, James 1:19-27)

Chapter 10

CAN I JUST GO ON SINNING?

FORGIVEN BUT STILL A SINNER

My sins are forgiven through the grace of Jesus Christ, and the penalty for them is paid in full. Jesus Christ's death provided full atonement for my sins, not any penance I might do.

"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." – Romans 4:7, 8

What shall I say, then? Shall I go on sinning since the penalty for my sins – past, present, and future – is paid? The apostle Paul asked and answered this question in the sixth chapter of his letter to the Romans. Briefly stated, he said, *"By no means! ...You used to be slaves to sin...You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness...for the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."* – Romans 6:15, 17, 18, 23

I am to live as a free man and not use this freedom as a license to sin. When Jesus became my Lord and Savior, I became a servant of my Lord. As such I want to live in submission to Him – that is, to do that which pleases Him and not what offends Him.

"Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God." – 1 Peter 2:16

We are free from keeping God's law as a way to earn salvation. However, out of gratitude for our free gift of salvation, we are still to obey the teachings of the Ten Commandments, for they are an expression of God's will for us and that which pleases Him.

Since I have eternal life guaranteed, can I just go on sinning?

That is, is sinning ok? No! Will I sin? Yes. But, I don't want to because God has made a marvelous change in my heart and life. I will be in this spiritual battle (a process called sanctification) for the rest of my life. In my heart, I no longer want to sin, but instead I want to respond to God's love and grace. I desire not to sin. I seek to do God's will. When I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal

Savior, that inner desire began an ongoing process of change.

“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” – Romans 6:14

When a person comes to Christ and has his sins forgiven through the grace of Jesus, he will no longer live in a habitual sinful lifestyle embracing sin and calling it non-sin.

“No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him.” – 1 John 3:6

HEART TRANSPLANT ILLUSTRATION

(Author’s Note: I amazingly wrote the following illustration in the first edition of *The Free Gift* in 1980, fourteen years prior to getting my heart transplant and thirteen years before I knew I had heart trouble.)

Perhaps this illustration will help describe what one’s disposition becomes upon accepting the free gift of Jesus Christ. Suppose that you have heart failure and are in need of an immediate transplant. Your best friend and his son suggest an incredible plan to save your life. The son will give you his heart to be transplanted into your body. He agrees to give up his life for you so that you may live.

How would you respond to this free gift of love for you?

I think you would thank his father over and over. How would you show your appreciation to the father and his son? You would praise both of them, love and honor them. You would never want to offend them. You would tell your friends of this great sacrifice and act of love given to you.

This illustration only begins to tell of the wonderful plan God has for those He loves and the natural response you will have when you accept God’s free gift of His Son, Jesus Christ.

“But God demonstrated his own love for us in this; while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” – Romans 5:8

WHAT IS SIN?

Sin can be defined as a spirit of independence from God, doing what we want to do regardless of God's laws. The essence of sin is to choose to do my will instead of God's will.

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness."
1 Jn 3:4

This self-will can surface in active rebellion against God, or passive indifference to Him.

"Anyone then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." – James 4:17

Often, I do not do what I want to do; instead, I sin. Paul had the same experience and felt the same way, when he wrote:

"I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do-this I keep doing. Now, if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."
– Romans 7:18-20

I will never be able to stop sinning completely. In fact, the more I overcome, the more aware I become of other sin in my life. My human nature is in conflict with my spiritual nature. So I constantly struggle with what to do.

"For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." – Galatians 5:17

When I sin and acknowledge it before God, He forgives me and remembers my sins no more.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."
– 1 John 1:8-9

CHANGE IS GRADUAL

When I accepted God's unconditional love for me in the form of Christ's substitutionary death for my sins, I invited God to enter my life to change it. And He has! The changes have been gradual – but real. I did not do the changing. God did, working in me. Paul describes it this way, *“...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose.”* – Philippians 2:13

I will never reach perfection or completely overcome sinning. But my goal is to respond to God's love by asking His Spirit to transform me to live consistent with His will as revealed in His Word.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing, and perfect will.” – Romans 12:2

Transformation comes through learning the Word of God, the Bible, and applying it to my life. That's the good fight I am in – the race I am running. Paul described it this way: *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day...”* – 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Chapter 11

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

ACCEPTING GOD'S FREE GIFT

When I accepted God's free gift and received Jesus Christ, I began a relationship with Him I had never known before. He was no longer a scorekeeper but my advocate, a counselor living in me in a love relationship.

This relationship is what makes me want to do His will. It is no longer a question of having to obey laws and perform works. I want to please Him, and He gives me the power to do just that.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." – Galatians 2:20

My justification before a just God is through faith in Jesus Christ; it is not based upon my worthiness. Justification is God's provision for the penalty of my sin. It is an immediate judicial declaration, not a gradual process. When I received Him, He immediately declared me righteous.

"Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." – Romans 4:7-8

The legal issue of sin's penalty was settled once and for all time. Jesus said: *"I tell you the truth; whoever hears my Word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life."* – John 5:24

This started a process of change in my life. I am no longer living under an intimidating system of do's and don'ts, trying to merit my salvation.

Nor do I relate to God as an impersonal scorekeeper. Instead, by the grace of God, I am now justified in Christ, as are all who accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” – 2 Corinthians 5:17

Many think that when you follow Jesus, all your problems will go away. No more bitter, only sweet. The reality, though, is that when we become Christ’s followers, there is a sense in which both the bitter and sweet intensify. Sinning becomes bitterer and doing what God wants becomes sweeter.

TRANSFORMATION

My lifestyle continues to reform as I grow in my understanding of what it means to be born of God, to be an adopted child of God and a joint-heir with Christ to His kingdom.

“Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” – John 1:12-13

As I mentioned earlier, the process of change in my life is gradual. I have learned that changes are not evident on a day-to-day basis, but are seen over longer periods of time. This process is called sanctification, God’s provision for deliverance from the power of sin. God, living in me, is changing me through His Holy Spirit’s work. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“...being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 1:6*

Prior to placing my faith in Jesus Christ as my Savior, I had taught religious doctrine for years. And yet through all of that teaching, I never noticed an impact on anyone’s life.

Now, when I share God’s plan from the Word of God, I can see real changes in the lives of those who have accepted the free gift of His saving grace.

In Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders, he told them his lifetime goal; which I have adopted. Paul said, *“I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.” – Acts 20:24*

Chapter 12

DAY-TO-DAY LIVING

CHANGE IN FOCUS

Do I continue to experience hardships, trials and difficulties? I certainly do. And temptations too! But I don't feel that awful pressure to perform any longer. I know that I am not trying to make it by my own personal merit.

My focus is on learning and doing God's will. This commitment to do His will is much greater than needing to follow rules. The motivation has changed. I know God loves me by the authority of His Word, and I know that, no matter what I do, good or bad, He will not love me any more or less. My motivation is to respond to His unconditional love by doing His will.

When temptations come my way, I rely on Him and His promise to help me through them.

"No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so you can stand up under it." – 1 Corinthians 10:13

When trials are upon me, I know God is trying to teach me something He wants me to learn.

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." – James 1:2, 3

There are times when I am frustrated and depressed by upsetting surprises, or when events take place that I simply do not understand (such as in July 1993 when I was shocked to learn that I had an incurable and terminal, extremely rare heart disease, and told that I had only one more year to live).

During times like these, we need to rely on His promise: *"And we know that all things work for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose."* – Romans 8:28

NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD

When I am persecuted, condemned, or have doubt, I find reassurance as I consider the promises of God's Word:

“What then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up for us all – how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither things present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” – Romans 8:31-39

Can you think of anything that you have done, or can do, that is not included in this list? Now that I am justified by accepting God's free gift, nothing can separate me from God's love. Nothing!

A GUARANTEE FROM GOD

If you accept God's free gift of Jesus Christ's death as payment in full for your sins, and trust Him as the Lord of your life, nothing will be able to separate you from God's love either!

At the time of believing, accepting, and trusting in Jesus Christ, your salvation will be sealed, guaranteed by the Holy Spirit of God just as it was for me. Here is how God expressed this through Paul to those who believed at Ephesus:

“You were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. In Him, when you believed, you were marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.” – Eph 1:13,14

Chapter 13

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?

YOU BE THE JUDGE

Now that I trust in Jesus Christ as my personal Savior, my life is becoming more and more meaningful each day. I am in the process of knowing God, trusting Him, and responding to His will. My life has not changed totally, but steadily.

This is authentic Christianity. It is a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Authentic Biblical Christianity is faith instead of works, grace in the place of law, and a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” – John 1:17

Authentic Christianity is emancipation from laws, rules, rituals, ceremonies, guilt, condemnation, and religiousness.

“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” – Romans 6:14

You may be thinking that this sounds too good to be true, or a little too easy. Well, I'll guarantee you that it's a lot more difficult being a Christian than it ever was being religious. But it is worth it – and infinitely more meaningful. It's heaven on earth to accept unconditional love, to realize that Jesus paid the penalty for my sins and to know I have eternal life with God.

“And this is the testimony; God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” – 1 John 5:11-13

IT'S THE PROMISE OF JESUS

Christ promises that when we accept Him as our Savior, we have (present tense) eternal life now and forever. Eternal life could be no shorter than eternity. Christ says we shall never perish – never. Christ says that nothing can pluck us out of His hand or the Father's. It's not that we hold fast to God; He holds fast to us.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and the Father are one.” – John 10:27-30

I respond to these beautiful truths by wanting to give God control of my life (which is really difficult for me, as I and the sin that lives in me keep getting back into the act). But when you think of it, I would rather have Him controlling it than me. Remember His promise in Romans 8:28? *“... in all things God works for the good of those who love Him ...”*

It seems a paradox, but I might never have known what it means to become a Christian had it not been for the fact that my own system of salvation – religious *way to salvation* took me to a dead end. Humbled, broken, and deeply aware of my imperfection, I became a candidate for the free gift.

Writing to his young friend Timothy, Paul put into words exactly how I feel:

“How thankful I am to Christ Jesus our Lord for considering me trustworthy and appointing me to serve Him, even though I used to scoff at the name of Christ...But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. Oh, how kind and gracious the Lord was! He filled me completely with faith and the love of Christ Jesus. This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – and I was the worst of them all. But that is why God had mercy on me, so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life. Glory and honor to God forever and ever. He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.” – 1 Tim. 1:12-16

Chapter 14

BELIEVE AND ACCEPT

JESUS IS KNOCKING AT THE DOOR

Are you where I was some years ago? Remember that I too felt brainwashed and disillusioned by the religion of my childhood. If you can identify with those feelings, then the information I have provided you from the Bible – from authentic Christianity – may be of some comfort.

If you are trying to earn or merit your salvation, then you are trying to do it other than God's way. If you want to know for sure that you will get to heaven and have eternal life, I urge you to acknowledge your imperfection, agree with God that you are a sinner, ask God's forgiveness and allow Him to change your life. Accept the free gift of His Son, who died to pay the penalty for your sins.

“For the free gift of eternal salvation is now being offered to everyone; and along with this gift comes the realization that God wants us to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures to live good, God-fearing lives day after day, looking forward to that wonderful time we've been expecting, when His glory shall be seen – the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” – Titus 2:11-13

By an act of faith, you can put your trust in Jesus and invite Him to come into your life. Talk to Him; He will listen and respond.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with Me.” – Revelation 3:20

I am thankful that God chose not to be a scorekeeper. God is God. I am not. So, God can do whatever He wants to do regardless of how you or I think things should be. His infinite power is ruled by His infinite wisdom. While He is sovereign, He is also just. He is faithful and compassionate. His ways, purposes, and truths do not change. He is love. While He is majestic, He is also personal.

“I tell you the truth, he who believes has eternal life.”
– John 6:47

I encourage you to believe in the Biblical truth about Jesus Christ. Be at peace with God. Lay hold of the unshakable assurance that you will spend eternity in heaven when you die. Trust in Him to give you eternal life. And even further, don't be afraid to learn more – as I did – of what the Word of God says about our past, present, and future. Learn for yourself the true nature of Christianity.

“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”
– Romans 7:25

“And we also thank God continuously because when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the Word of God, which is at work in you who believe.” – 1 Thessalonians 2:13

Chapter 15

THE BEGINNING

OPEN THE DOOR TO YOUR HEART

I urge you to respond to God's knock at your door. Open the door of your life and invite Jesus Christ in. Accept the free gift of God's love – His unconditional love – the gift of His Son's death as the full payment for all of your sins – past, present, and future. Get rid of all your guilt.

Accept God's promise of eternal life. Have your inheritance into heaven guaranteed. Turn control of your life over to God.

I urge you to seize this moment – this opportunity – and pray in your own words to God. He will hear your prayer *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.”* – Philippians 4:7

Remember, God is personal. There is no right way to pray. Pray in any manner you like, as long as it is honest and from the heart. Pray aloud or quiet, with your eyes closed or open, on your knees or jumping up and down. And set aside those rote prayers you memorized and the buzzwords that you associate with religion.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, AND FROM THE HEART, PRAY

Think about and accept your own flaws and imperfections remembering that imperfection is inherent because each of us is a sinner.

In your prayer, acknowledge your sin, tell God you are sorry and ask Him for His forgiveness.

Ask Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, and invite God and His Holy Spirit into your life.

Accept the free gift of Jesus Christ's death for your sins and thank God for His gift.

Accept God's unconditional, eternal love, and be at peace with Him forever.

IF YOUR PRAYER WAS FROM YOUR HEART, GOD'S VERDICT IS IN AND TODAY IS THE BEGINNING OF YOUR ETERNAL LIFE AND OF PEACE WITH GOD FOREVER. GUARANTEED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT!

“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord.” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame.... For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
– Romans 10:9-13

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.” – 1 Corinthians 2:9

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” – 1 Timothy 1:17

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Give friends copies of *THE FREE GIFT* so they can learn about authentic Biblical Christianity and receive the peace of God that transcends all understanding.

Order free copies by going to www.TFGBook.com

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ken Willig was born in Cincinnati and graduated from Purdue University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Engineering. His subsequent business career flourished in Southern California, Seattle and Scottsdale.

Ken Willig is an inspiring visionary. He is the classic entrepreneur, a management consultant, and coach to CEOs. He has founded and led numerous successful companies. In 1987, he received the Ernst & Young and *Inc.* magazine *Entrepreneur of the Year* award for Southern California.

Most notable among his business ventures was his friendship and partnership with John Wayne. Ken was the only person John Wayne entrusted with the use of his name during his lifetime for a business endeavor, the John Wayne Tennis Club in California.



Ken has spoken in various churches, to business groups, professional sports teams, and even inmates at San Quentin. He also has been interviewed on Know Your Bible Hour and appeared on the 700 Club.

Ken founded Christian Executive Officers (CEO) support and prayer groups in San Diego and Seattle; served on R. C. Sproul's Presidents' Council; was a member of the Advisory Committee of the Congress on Biblical Exposition; was President and Headmaster of Santa Fe Christian Schools in California; and Baseball Chapel coordinator for the San Diego Padres.

Ken designed, directed and taught the MBA program in Entrepreneurship at City University in Seattle.

Most recently, he was President of Pinnacle Forum America and served on its Board of Directors. He is the President of GoalMakers Management Consultants. The highlight of his time for the last eight years has been leading a men's Bible study group in the Troon area of Scottsdale. His hobby is golf.

A HEART REPLACEMENT

Ken has an incredible story. In July of 1993, this fit, athletic man was diagnosed with an incurable and fatal heart disease, cardiac amyloidosis. Ken's cardiologist told him he had less than a year to live and that there was no hope of survival. Naturally, the news was shocking. But while he was disappointed that God had not answered his prayers to use him as significantly as Ken had hoped God would, he felt surprisingly at peace.

Friends, family and many who did not even know Ken prayed daily that the University of Washington Medical Center would agree – against prior policy and all odds – to put Ken on the hospital's heart transplant list. All prior attempts in America to save cardiac amyloid patients by using a heart transplant had quickly failed and the patients died soon after transplant.



Given the limited number of hearts available for transplant, cardiac amyloid patients are deemed a poor risk and low priority on the waiting list. But God miraculously answered those many people's prayers and on October 4, 1994, Ken received the heart of a 16-year-old boy.

Now, over fifteen years later, Ken is strong and active. He literally made medical history, and his case has been added to medical journals. He is the only known living survivor of cardiac amyloidosis by a heart-only transplant.

Amazing? Yes, but not as amazing to Ken as the knowledge that Jesus Christ died for his sins, and that he enjoys complete peace with God – no matter what happens. Ken is "Exhibit A" demonstrating how God can and does use sinners significantly to communicate His grace and truth in love.

Ken and his wife of 29 years, Noreen, now live in Scottsdale, where he enjoys golf and being with Noreen in her pursuits. They enjoy spending time with their 6 children and 13 grandchildren.

**Ken invites you to visit his web site at:
www.FromPapaKenWithLove.com**

Authentic Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship.

Authentic Christianity is not a religion or a philosophy, but a relationship and a lifestyle.

Authentic Christianity is about a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Authentic Biblical Christianity is about a free gift that sets one free from the bondage of religion, sin and guilt.

All religions teach a way **to** salvation but only Jesus claimed to actually **be** **the** way of salvation Himself. This difference is so great that to refer to Christianity as a religion (except in a broader sense) would be a mistake because the term "religion" refers to "salvation through moral effort" and "Christianity" refers to "salvation through **the free gift** of unmerited grace."

Would you like a free gift of this book for a friend? See page 46.