

HEARthis

God's Good News

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DayOne



*“O Lord, you awaken us to delight in your praise,
for you made us for yourself,
and our heart is restless,
until it rests in you.”*

That’s a quote from Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (A. D. 401) in his book, *Confessions*. He hits on something basic to being a human being. It involves a relationship with God and a restlessness without him.

That relationship is what the Bible talks about. It’s a subject that reaches to the very core of life.

This little booklet traces the broad strokes of the Bible’s message. It addresses the issue of the restlessness, discontentment, loneliness, out-of-whackness, ill-at-easeness, wondering-what-it’s-all-aboutness we all face in life.

Please find a quiet spot and spend some time reading what follows. You might even offer a prayer, asking God to help you think through these things. The Bible passages from which these thoughts are drawn are listed toward the end of the booklet.





Creation

(krē-āt, to bring into being from nothing; to cause to exist)

God created us for a relationship with himself

The opening chapters of the Bible make one thing abundantly clear: life has everything to do with God. We were created by the eternal God to know and enjoy him. The book of Genesis tells us God made us *in his image*.

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”¹

Being made in the image of God has to do with relationship with God and our very existence in this world. As image bearers of God:



- ➔ Of all living creatures, we alone have the **ability** for spiritual relationship with God. God has endowed us with a rational intellect and a spiritual capacity to know and relate to him as God. Animals don't pray. We can and do.² Prayer reminds us of this ability for relationship.

- ➔ Like a reflection in a mirror, an image finds its true **identity** in the one whose image is reflected.³ As ones created in God's image, we can answer the question, "Who am I?" only in relationship to God.⁴

- ➔ **Meaning** in life for us is found in respect to God. He gives direction and purpose in life.⁵ The image of





God gives us understanding of why we are here and what life is all about.

The image of God we bear says that we belong to God and that our lives are understood and lived in reference to him⁶.

The psalmist declares:

Know that the LORD, he is God. It is he who made us and we are his.⁷

God's design in creation paints a picture of fullness and delight⁸ in knowing, loving and serving our Creator.

But something happened...





Alienation

(ā'-lē-ə-nāt, to estrange; to make unfriendly or hostile where a relationship formerly existed)

The relationship with God was broken by sinful rebellion

The same opening chapters of the Bible that describe personal and intimate relationship of people with their Creator also tell of the *tragedy* of that relationship being broken by sin.⁹ This account is not only an event of history, but is the story of every ordinary human being since.¹⁰ Because of those events, every one of us is a sinner, in rebellion against God, in violation of his moral law, in danger of eternal punishment, in desperate need of salvation, and deprived of true life. The Bible declares in sweeping terms:

*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*¹¹



*Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God; your sins have hidden his face from you.*¹²

This broken relationship with God has left all of us lacking and looking—lacking in the joy and meaning of lives lived with God, and looking for some way to fill that void. The image of God in us is now deformed and defaced.

- ➔ Now our lives are characterized by **hollowness**. We have lost that meaning, purpose, and identity that were part of God's design in relationship with him. A void exists in the very center of our beings in our separation from God by sin. Of course, voids seek to be filled; they *motivate* us to fill them.¹³ And so we try to find satisfaction in all sorts of things—career, material possessions, money, educational degrees, appearance, athletics, religious practices and involvement, and the list goes on.

- ➔ We are **helpless** to deal with this sin that grips us. God is holy.¹⁴ He is perfectly and morally pure and



cannot tolerate sin.¹⁵ Our predicament is not just our sin but our sinfulness. We sin because we are sinners.¹⁶ We break God's law by what we do¹⁷ and what we fail to do,¹⁸ not only in action,¹⁹ but even in our thoughts.²⁰ There is nothing we can do, either to *make up* for the guilt of our past sin or to *measure up* to God's unchanging standard of perfection²¹ that he requires.

- ➔ We are left **hopeless**. Incapable of dealing with the condition of sin in our lives, we can only expect the punishment of God upon us for our sin.²² Not only are we without God and without hope in this life,²³ the gavel of God's judgment on us as violators of his moral law is poised to fall at our physical death.²⁴ God's pronouncement of "guilty" hangs over our heads and his sentence of eternal separation looms before us.²⁵

What a tragic and terrifying predicament! In our separation from God we live an awkward and anemic life in this world,



trying to make the best of things, satisfying ourselves with temporary and illusory measures.²⁶ We are impotent to deal with the guilt of sin that condemns²⁷ us and the power of sin that enslaves²⁸ us. (What is sin all about? See sin FAQs on page 30.)

But God...

CAUSE FOR PAUSE: *Do I find an emptiness in my own heart and restlessness in my life?*



Initiation

(in-ish' -ē-āt, to start, to cause the beginning of, take the first step)

God took the initiative to restore that relationship

What is extraordinary is that while we were without God and without hope in the world, separated from our Creator God in our sinfulness, unable to do anything to save ourselves from the judgment of God and consequences of our sinful rebellion, God took the initiative. God, the Holy





One who was wronged, set his undeserved, unexpected and unmerited love on sinners to save them.²⁹ Notice God's **initiative** in saving his people from their sins:

*But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners...*³⁰

*We... were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses...*³¹

God took this initiative not because he had to or because he saw anything worthy in us,³² but only because of his own decision.³³ The Bible expresses this in three ways:

- ➔ God set his **love** on sinners in spite of their rebellion.³⁴ In the Bible God's love is an act of his will to save.³⁵ God's justice is not the *opposite* of his love. Rather, God's just wrath is the *backdrop* to his love.³⁶ If the dark and bleak backdrop of God's



wrath is removed, the brilliant glory and warmth of his love is dimmed. The teaching of the Bible is that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not *perish*...”³⁷ Remove the backdrop (the “perish” of God’s wrath), and the love doesn’t make any sense.

- ➔ To those who deserve condemnation and eternal punishment in satisfaction of his justice, God shows **mercy**.³⁸ Mercy does *not* give a person what he or she deserves. Mercy spares justice due. The Bible says, “But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.”³⁹

- ➔ If mercy does not give us what we do deserve, **grace**⁴⁰ gives us what we do not deserve. To say that God’s salvation (rescue from sin for eternal life) is by grace means that it comes to us as a *gift*. It is not something we can earn by our efforts at obeying God’s law or



by trying to make up for the sin we have done in the past. A gift is free, not something we deserve. Salvation does not come by turning over a new leaf or trying harder, but by the grace of God to bestow new life.⁴¹ In fact, the Bible says that “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”⁴² Faith comes as a gift of new life.

As sinners we are unlovely and unlovable. Yet, amazingly, God set his love upon sinners such as us to provide salvation and to restore that broken relationship. But that begs the question, how can we as *sinners* possibly⁴³ find acceptance and a restored relationship with a *holy* God who must punish us for our sin?⁴⁴

The only way God could reconcile sinners to himself was...

CAUSE FOR PAUSE: *Do I suppose God will ignore my sin and accept me because I am basically a good person?*



Reconciliation

(rek' -ən-sīl, to bring into harmony; to restore)

God sent his Son to accomplish that restored relationship

Everything that was needed for salvation and a restored relationship with God, which was impossible for us, God *himself* did through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. The whole Old Testament speaks of God's promise of salvation and presents previews to help us understand what God would do on the behalf of sinners. Then in God's perfect timing:





*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*⁴⁵

What exactly did Jesus do to reconcile sinners to God?

- ➔ Jesus, the eternal Son of God,⁴⁶ also became a real human being⁴⁷ so that he could stand in the place of sinful human beings as their sinless representative.⁴⁸ This is what we celebrate at **Christmas**.⁴⁹ As God *incarnate* (God in full humanity), Jesus came to live a perfect sinless life of flawless obedience⁵⁰ that we could not, and to pay the penalty of the lawbreaker that we deserved.⁵¹

- ➔ In order to satisfy the justice of a holy God, Jesus gave his life as a sacrifice by *dying* on the cross as a sinless substitute.⁵² This is what we celebrate at **Good Friday**. Jesus arrived at the cross with no sin of his own, and so was able to serve as a substitute



for sinners. On the cross: (1) Jesus atoned for⁵³ (paid the price for, removing the guilt) the sins of those he came to save; (2) he suffered the full wrath of God to satisfy the justice⁵⁴ of God's holiness; and (3) he made those who were the objects of his wrath⁵⁵ acceptable and pleasing to him.⁵⁶

➔ And in approval of Jesus' sacrifice⁵⁷ and declaration of his victory,⁵⁸ God *raised Jesus from the dead*. This is what we celebrate at **Easter**. His resurrection means that Jesus' mission to redeem (pay the price for) a people for God was a success.⁵⁹ God had provided the way for forgiveness of sins, newness of life and reconciliation of sinners with himself, all without compromising his character. In fact, God has provided no other way. As Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."⁶⁰ The Bible's message of life has to do with Jesus.

In answer to the question, "Who crucified Christ?" the



ultimate answer of the Bible is: “For *God* so loved the world that he gave his only Son;”⁶¹ “It was the *will of the LORD* to crush him.”⁶² God himself accomplished salvation and so all the credit goes to him.

So we see that God did not just ignore the sin of those he decided to save. Nor did he simply issue a pardon. No, God paid for the sins of his people by sending his Son to give his life a ransom⁶³ for them and to provide the righteousness (perfect obedience) required by his law so that they could be acceptable to him.⁶⁴

The question, now, is how can you be reconciled to God?

CAUSE FOR PAUSE: *Have I ever really thought about those Christian holidays in terms of Jesus and what he did that relates to me?*



Obligation

(äb´lā-gāt, to bind or constrain; to impose a demand or responsibility)

God calls us to return to him on his terms

God's good news is that he has accomplished the salvation of sinners through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. That which we could never do nor would we ever deserve, God did in Christ. He reconciled people to himself, not counting their sins against them.⁶⁵ Not that those sins were ignored; quite the contrary, they were met head on in all their ugliness and violence by the Son of God. God has made Jesus Lord and Christ.⁶⁶ Our response is to humble ourselves





before Jesus as the risen Lord he is.⁶⁷ As the Bible says:

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”⁶⁸

God’s gracious invitation is to turn to his Son, Jesus Christ, and follow him. What is involved in following Christ? The Bible describes three proper reactions to this Jesus who is Savior of sinners and Lord of life.

- ➔ We are to **repent**.⁶⁹ Repentance is not merely being sorry for something. It is turning from our sinful rebellion against God, out of a deep awareness of our sin and sorrow⁷⁰ over that sin because it dishonors and displeases God.⁷¹ Repentance (1) turns from any effort to be our own savior, trying to do something to earn salvation; and (2) turns from being our own



lord, living our lives independently of God.

- ➔ Not only are we to turn *from*, we are to turn *to*.⁷² We are to turn from self to Jesus Christ.⁷³ We are to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Bible calls **faith**. Such faith (1) knows the facts (about sin and where salvation is found), (2) admits they are true, and (3) places sole trust and confidence in God's provision for sinners—Jesus Christ.⁷⁴ Faith is not wishful thinking, but complete *trust* in an unseen (that is, spiritual) reality.⁷⁵ We are justified (declared 'not guilty') in God's sight not by our efforts at obedience to his law, but by faith in Jesus and his perfect obedience for us.⁷⁶

- ➔ Since Jesus is Lord, we are now to live our lives in submission to him.⁷⁷ We are to **follow** Jesus as his disciples.⁷⁸ We commit our way to him, seeking him and serving him in all our ways⁷⁹ because we are his⁸⁰—not that we either earn our acceptance by God or add to the work of Christ. But if God has given us

new life to hear the voice of the Shepherd,⁸¹ that new life will result in a new orientation to God.⁸² A true change of heart by the Spirit of God will manifest itself in a change of life in new relationship to God.⁸³

God's *command* is to repent⁸⁴ and believe.⁸⁵ All of this is God's handiwork of love and power in our lives as he is the one to restore us to relationship with himself, both for this life and the life to come.⁸⁶ Perhaps the most amazing thing is this: the relationship to which God brings us is not just as reconciled sinners but as his own adopted *children*,⁸⁷ heirs of eternal life.⁸⁸ While God commands that we turn to Christ, his promise is that all who acknowledge Jesus as the one he claimed to be and believe on (completely put our confidence, trust, reliance and expectation in; not just believe in his existence but put personal trust in) him are given the right to become children of God.⁸⁹

Now what?

CAUSE FOR PAUSE:

Do I have confidence before God in what I do or could do, or totally in what Jesus did?



Response

God lays before us one of two responses to his mercy and love

There you have it, God's good news, the wonderful account of what God did in reconciling sinners to himself. Does this make sense to you? Has the Spirit of God convicted you of your sin, convinced you of your need and of what God has done in his Son to meet that need? Has he brought you to a point where you want to repent of your sin and place your trust in Christ? If so, review what you have read above, and express to God in prayer your understanding, your repentance and your trust in his Son.

Tell God in your own words that you:

- ➔ Admit you are a sinner in rebellion against him
- ➔ Rightfully deserve only his justice and condemnation for your sins

- ➔ Understand what he has done through the perfect life, the sacrificial death and the victorious resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ
- ➔ See the beauty of his incredible mercy, amazing grace and glorious love
- ➔ Turn from your sinful rebellion out of a genuine sorrow for your sin because it dishonors and displeases God
- ➔ Place your complete trust, not in who you are or what you did, could do or could ever do, but entirely and exclusively in Jesus Christ and what he did in the place of sinners
- ➔ Desire from this day forward by God's grace to follow Jesus as his disciple—loving, serving, and obeying him in all of your life

What is your response to what God has told you? – repent or rebel? Those are the only two options.⁹⁰ Either we bow our hearts before Jesus, repenting of our rebellion against him, or we remain in our rebellion.⁹¹ The question that confronts us, though, is: “How could we refuse such a great

salvation and turn our back on such a loving God?”

What happens next?

If you do profess faith in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins and reconcile you to God, remember that it is all of God. And it is in dependence upon God that you will grow and mature as his child. God gives you several ways by which you can grow in your new relationship with him.

- ➔ Gather with God's people for worship⁹² and fellowship.⁹³
- ➔ Read the Bible⁹⁴ to learn of God and his will for your life.
- ➔ Approach God continually in prayer.⁹⁵
- ➔ Commit⁹⁶ your ways to the Lord.
- ➔ Engage others⁹⁷ for Christ.

If you are not at the point of turning to Jesus Christ in faith and repentance, continue to study God's Word, the Bible, asking him for his wisdom and help for you to understand

this most wonderful and urgent of messages that you might know the joy of having your sins forgiven and the peace of a personal relationship with the living God as your Father in heaven.

The Gospel of John is a great book of the Bible to learn about this life that God offers in Jesus. You might read a chapter a day, asking God to show you the beauty of his gift of life. Listen to God's promise from John's Gospel:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.⁹⁸



FAQs on Sin

Q: What exactly is sin?

A: Sin is breaking the law of God in thought, word or deed, not doing what God commands or doing what he forbids. Jesus explained that lusting in our hearts was a violation of God's command not to commit adultery, or hating another person breaks God's command not to murder.

Q: But am I a sinner?

A: The Bible says that everyone is a sinner. We sin because we are born as sinners. Sin involves not only our acts of disobedience, but includes our hearts that are full of sin and in rebellion against God.

Q: But I know plenty of people worse than I am.

A: God's standard is not other people. His standard is his own perfect holiness. God gives us his moral law to compare ourselves to, not other sinners. Jesus' point in saying that even our thought life breaks God's law makes it clear that every one of us is a sinner and that

we cannot be good enough to measure up to God's standard of perfection.

Q: Won't God give me a break if I try to be good and to obey his commandments?

A: Often we think of sin as those big crimes like murder, but the Bible says if we do any wrong, we fall short of God's standard of perfection necessary for salvation and so are guilty before him. And God must (and will) punish eternally all who are guilty.

Q: Isn't that awfully severe? It doesn't seem fair.

A: We don't grasp just how *serious* sin is because we don't understand just how holy God is. God's judgment on sin is fair and just. Not to punish sin would be to make God unjust.

Q: Can't I just try harder to obey God's commandments?

A: The Bible says even our very best efforts are contaminated by our sinful hearts. Also, God must exact the justice his holiness demands for the sins we have committed. If it were just a matter of trying harder, Jesus would not have had to die.

Q: But won't God forgive my sins if I confess them?

A: Yes, but not just because you confess them. God forgives sins only through his provision for sin that meets the demands of his justice and provides what is necessary to be right with him. Forgiveness of sin comes only from the saving work of Jesus and our resting in that work by faith. (see 1 John 1:8-2:2)

Endnotes

- 1 Genesis 1:27
- 2 Psalm 65:2
- 3 James 3:9
- 4 Psalm 8:1-9
- 5 Genesis 1:28;
Colossians 3:23-24
- 6 Acts 17:29
- 7 Psalm 100:3
- 8 Psalm 42:1-2
- 9 Genesis 2:15-17;
Genesis 3:1-12
- 10 Romans 5:12-21
- 11 Romans 3:23
- 12 Isaiah 59:2
- 13 Isaiah 55:1-2
- 14 Psalm 99:9
- 15 Psalm 5:4-6
- 16 Psalm 51:5;
Matthew 15:18-19
- 17 1 John 3:4
- 18 James 4:17
- 19 Matthew 12:36;
Romans 13:9
- 20 Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28
- 21 James 2:10;
Isaiah 64:6-7;
Romans 3:19-20
- 22 John 3:17-18,36;
Hebrews 10:31;
Isaiah 6:3-5
- 23 Ephesians 2:12
- 24 Hebrews 9:27
- 25 2 Thess 1:8-10
- 26 Ecclesiastes 2:10-11
- 27 Romans 3:9,19
- 28 Romans 6:16
- 29 Genesis 3:14-15
- 30 Romans 5:8
- 31 Ephesians 2:3-4
- 32 Deut 7:7-8
- 33 Ephesians 1:4-5
- 34 Romans 9:10-13
- 35 Romans 8:28-29
- 36 Romans 5:8-9
- 37 John 3:16
- 38 Romans 9:15-18
- 39 Titus 3:4-5
- 40 Romans 11:6
- 41 John 3:3;
1 Cor 15:50;
Ezekiel 36:26-27
- 42 Ephesians 2:8-9
- 43 Luke 18:26-27
- 44 Romans 3:26
- 45 Galatians 4:4-5
- 46 John 1:1;
Mark 2:7;
John 8:58
- 47 John 1:14
- 48 Hebrews 2:14-17
- 49 Matthew 1:21
- 50 Hebrews 4:15;
Hebrews 5:8-9;
Romans 5:19
- 51 Philippians 2:6-8;
Isaiah 53:3-5;
Galatians 3:10-13
- 52 Col 1:19-20;
Colossians 2:13-14
- 53 Ephesians 1:7;
Hebrews 9:24-28
- 54 Romans 3:23-26;
1 John 4:9-10
- 55 Ephesians 2:3-5;
Romans 9:22-24
- 56 Ephesians 1:4-7
- 57 1 Timothy 3:16
- 58 1 Cor 15:12-20
- 59 1 Thess 1:9-10
- 60 John 14:6
- 61 John 3:16
- 62 Isaiah 53:10
- 63 Acts 2:36;
John 10:14-15,27
- 64 Romans 3:19-26;
Romans 8:1, 31-34
- 65 2 Cor 5:19
- 66 Acts 2:36
- 67 Phil 2:5-11
- 68 Romans 10:9-11
- 69 Luke 24:45-47
- 70 Joel 2:12-13
- 71 2 Cor 7:8-10
- 72 1 Thess 1:9-10
- 73 Galatians 2:16
- 74 Romans 1:16-17;
Romans 4:23-25;
Romans 10:9-10
- 75 Hebrews 11:1;
1 Peter 1:3-9
- 76 Gal 2:16, 21
- 77 Luke 9:23-26
- 78 Luke 9:23-26
- 79 Proverbs 3:5-7
- 80 1 Cor 6:19-20
- 81 John 10:25-28
- 82 Acts 26:20;
James 2:17-18;
1 John 2:3
- 83 Titus 2:11-14;
Ephesians 2:10
- 84 Acts 17:29-30
- 85 1 John 3:23
- 86 John 10:10

87 1 John 3:1
88 Romans 8:16-17;
Titus 3:3-7
89 John 1:12-13;
John 20:31;
Galatians 4:4-5

90 Matthew 12:30
91 John 3:36
92 John 4:23
93 Hebrews 10:23-25
94 2 Tim 3:14-16
95 Colossians 4:2

96 Colossians 2:6-8;
1 Peter 1:14-15;
Proverbs 3:5-8
97 1 Peter 2:11-12;
1 Peter 3:15
98 John 20:30-31

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God's Good News

"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." So announced the angelic messenger to shepherds in the Judean countryside outside the town of Bethlehem. What sort of news could this be that speaks of such blessing? One New Testament writer describes the joy as "inexpressible and filled with glory." God's good news unfolds this message of the Bible, making clear its wonder and how that joy can become ours.

