

Why is Jesus So Important?

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Purpose, meaning, a reason for living—these are all things we desire and search for in life. Despite steps each one of us takes to find purpose and meaning in life, we still feel empty, and unfulfilled. That is because there is a spiritual emptiness in each of our lives. We each have a hole in our heart, a spiritual vacuum deep within our soul—a “God-shaped blank.” Possessions won’t fill this hole, nor will success. Relationships alone cannot satisfy this emptiness, and morality, in and of itself, falls miserably short of occupying this space. In fact, even religion cannot fill the void in our heart.

There is only one way to effectively fill that void. This way will not only help us to have a life that is full and rich on this earth, but—more important—will give us the absolute hope of spending eternity in the presence of God. Before we can truly appreciate this good news though, we need to understand the bad news, which is a serious problem we all have.

The Problem: Sin

The Bible clearly identifies our serious problem as sin. Sin is not just an act but the actual nature of our being. In other words, we are not sinners because we sin. Rather, we sin because we are sinners! We are born with a nature to do wrong. King David, the Old Testament Israelite ruler, wrote, *“For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.”* (Psalm 51:5). Because we are born sinners, sinning comes to all of us naturally. That is why it is futile to think that the answer to all of life’s problems comes from “within.” According to the Bible, the *problem* is within! Scripture tells us, *“The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

Although it is not a ‘politically correct’ statement, the Bible makes it clear, we are not basically good—we are basically sinful. This sinfulness spills out into everything we do. Every problem we experience in our society today can be traced back to our refusal to live God’s way. Clear back to the Garden of Eden, Adam made his choice, and he suffered the consequences of it, setting the pattern that all humanity would follow. The Bible explains, *“When Adam sinned, sin entered the entire human race. Adam’s sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned...Yes, Adam’s one sin brought condemnation upon everyone.”* (Romans 5:12,18).

“That’s not fair!” you may protest. Why should we suffer because of what someone else has done? Yet, given the opportunity, each one of us would have done the same thing as Adam. In fact, not a single day passes that we do not face the same test that was set before Adam. God has given us the freedom to choose between two separate paths: the path that leads to life and the path that leads to death. The Bible says, *“Today, I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings*

and curses. I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, that you and your descendants might live!" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

Without A Leg to Stand On

Someone may say, "But I live a good life. I try to be kind and considerate to others. I live by the Ten Commandments." But the truth of the matter is that the Ten Commandments, or the law, as they are called in the Bible, were not given to make us good but to show us our sinful heart. The Bible tells us, "*No one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what his law commands. For the more we know God's law, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying it.*" (Romans 3:20). The purpose of the law is to make us realize how sinful we are. You might say that God's law was given to "shut our mouths" and show us that we desperately need his help and forgiveness for our terminal condition as sinners. Look at the passages on the next page to get a better understanding of the nature and seriousness of sin.

We Have All Missed the Mark Or 'Fallen Short':

For all have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard. Romans 3:23 [NLT]

Romans 3:23 says we have *all* sinned. For those that would claim to be the sole exception to this eternal truth, verse 10 of this chapter plainly says, "*No one is good—not even one.*" (Romans 3:10). Another word for *good* is *righteous*. The word *righteous* means, "One who is as he or she ought to be." When the Bible says that no one is righteous, or good, it is not so much referring to behavior but to inner character.

What exactly is "God's glorious standard" that Romans 3:23 says we have failed to meet? God's standard is absolute perfection. One definition of *sin*, derived from the Greek word *hamartia*, is to "miss the mark." As far as the mark of perfection goes, we miss it by a mile. Although our sinful nature makes it impossible for us to live up to God's standard, we cannot blame sin on our nature alone. Sin is also a deliberate act.

Sin Is a Deliberate Act

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. Ephesians 2:1-3 [NIV]

Another word for *sins* is *transgressions* or *trespasses*. This word speaks of a lapse or deviation from truth. In contrast to simply "missing the mark," this is a deliberate action. Because sin is a deliberate action, we cannot blame our sin on our society or our environment or our mental or physical state. Everyone has chosen to do what was wrong. The Bible says, If we protest this point we are only try to fool ourselves or pretend not to know what we truly know.

*If we say we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and refusing to accept the truth.
1 John 1:8 [NLT]*

The Ultimate Penalty for Sin Is Death (see Romans 6:23)

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 [NLT]

Wages are something that you are paid for work rendered. In other words, you earn your wages. Because we have all repeatedly sinned, we have earned the penalty of death, which is eternal separation from God's presence. God is a holy, sinless God and heaven is a sinless place. If God would merely ignore our sinful condition and allow us to live in heaven without dealing with our sin, heaven would no longer be heaven. It would possess the same sins and problems that we are enduring down here.

Amid all this talk about sin and death, there is some good news. God has given us a way to escape the penalty of our sin. He has made it possible for us to have a relationship with him and enjoy the hope of eternal life without punishment.

The Solution: Jesus Christ

God understood our problem and knew that we could do nothing about it. Because God loves us, he sent his own Son, Jesus Christ, to earth to bridge the chasm of sin that separates us from him.

Why Jesus Can Bridge the Gap

There has never been anyone like Jesus. For starters, Jesus was not conceived in the womb of his mother through natural means. Rather, he was supernaturally conceived in the womb of a young woman named Mary. Because of his supernatural conception, Jesus, who is wholly God also became wholly human. This miracle is called the miracle of incarnation.

Though Jesus is God, he chose to lay aside the privileges of his deity to live on earth as a man. The Bible, describing the sacrifice Christ made in becoming a man, says that Jesus *"Made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal's death on a cross."* (Philippians 2:7-8). It is important to note that Jesus did not cease to be God when he came to earth. He simply laid aside his divine privileges and walked the earth as a man. In doing so, he was personally able to experience the gamut of human emotions, ranging from happiness to deep sorrow. He felt what it was like to be tired, cold, and hungry - even betrayed.

Moreover, he came to this earth with a clear objective in mind: to bridge that gap between us and God. When the Israelites of the Old Testament sinned, they would

have the high priest go into the Temple and offer an animal sacrifice to God to atone for their sins. In a symbolic sense, this was a way of putting one's sins on the animal, which stood in the place of the guilty person. The Bible teaches, *"Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins."* (Hebrews 9:22).

The sacrificial rituals carried out by the Israelites in the Old Testament foreshadowed what Jesus would do when he came to this earth. He took the sin of the world upon himself when he hung on the cross many years ago. Numerous Old Testament prophecies pointed not only to his birth and life but also to his death, including the way in which he would die.

Jesus knew from the beginning that he had come expressly to die for the sins of humanity. He also knew that this sacrifice would be made on a Roman cross. He began his final journey to the cross of Calvary at a place called Caesarea Philippi, and he often spoke of his impending death with his disciples. Scripture records, *"From then on Jesus began to tell his disciples plainly that he had to go to Jerusalem, and he told them what would happen to him there. He would be killed, and he would be raised on the third day."* (Matthew 16:21).

He was eventually arrested on false charges after Judas Iscariot, one of his own disciples, betrayed him. But it was no accident. If humanity was going to be put in touch with God and have the barrier that separated them removed, something drastic had to be done. In essence, with one hand Jesus took hold of a Holy God and with the other hand he took hold of the sinful human race and brought them together. As crude nails were pounded into his hands, he bridged the gap for us! We must not forget, however, that three days after his crucifixion, Jesus rose from the dead! If it is true "you can't keep a good man down," then it is even truer that you can't keep the "God-man" down.

We Were The Reason That Put Jesus On The Cross

The necessity of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross shows just how radical our situation was as sinful people. It's been said that you can tell the depth of a well by how much rope is lowered. When we look at "how much rope was lowered" from heaven, we realize how grave our situation really was.

For that reason, don't blame the people of that day for putting Jesus on the cross. We are just as guilty as they are. In reality, it was not the Roman soldiers who put him on the cross, nor was it the Jewish leaders: It was our sins that made it necessary for Jesus to volunteer for this torturous and humiliating death.

Read the verses and notes below to see exactly what Jesus did for us.

The Greatest Demonstration of Love (see Romans 5:6-8)

Jesus did not die for us while we were his friends, but while we were opposing him by our sinfulness. Yet, in spite of all of this, God demonstrated his love for us by dying on the cross. In this verse, the Apostle Paul explains that Jesus did not simply die for humanity as a whole, but he died for us as individuals. Elsewhere, Paul writes, *“Christ loved me and gave himself for me.”* (Galatians 2:20).

Whenever you are tempted to doubt God’s love for you, take a long look at the cross on which Jesus died. Then realize that, for all practical purposes, it was not nails that held him to the cross, but love.

Forsaken That We Might Be Forgiven (see Luke 23:32-49)

Many of us have heard this story at some point in our lives. Yet the significance behind this heart-wrenching scene is often missed or misunderstood. This was not simply some “good teacher” being crucified for his beliefs. It was God in human form who hung on that cross, bridging the gap between sinful people and a holy God.

Matthew’s Gospel tells us that when Jesus hung on that cross, he cried out, *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”* (Matthew 27:46). Many Bible scholars believe that those words marked the precise moment at which God placed the sins of the world upon his Son. The Bible, speaking of God, says, *“You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness.”* (Habakkuk 1:13, NKJV). For that reason, the Holy Father had to *“turn his face”* and pour out his wrath upon his own Son. On the cross, Jesus received the wages that were due us. He was not heard that we might be heard. The ear of God was closed to Jesus for a time that it might never be closed to us.

Christ, the Sole Mediator (see 1 Timothy 2:5-6)

Why is there only one mediator who is qualified to bridge the gap between God and people? Haven’t there been other religious leaders who have claimed to have *the way* to God? Haven’t some of them also died as a result of their message?

While the answers to these questions may be yes, the truth is that not one of these other leaders was fully God and fully human. That is why Jesus is uniquely qualified to deal with sin. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6). Acts 4:12 tells us, *“There is salvation in no one else! There is no other name in all of heaven for people to call on to save them.”* And, most important, Jesus Christ rose from the dead! His resurrection validated his claims and separated him from the rest of the good, moral teachers of history.

Though it is true that you must believe Jesus died on the cross for your sins in order to receive eternal life and be a true Christian, there is still something else you must do.

The Response: Accept God's Offer

To know Jesus Christ personally and have your sins forgiven, you must believe that you are a sinner separated from God and that your only hope is Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who came and died for your sins. To stop here, however, would be to stop short of salvation. There are two things you must now do to enter into a relationship with the God.

Turn From Your Sins

As Jesus began his public ministry, his first message was *"Turn from your sins."* (Mark 1:15). In essence, Jesus was telling the people to repent—to acknowledge their sins, change their minds, and change the direction of their lives.

Look at it this way. In the past, we have been blinded by our sins, causing us to run from God. As we repent, we do a "U-turn" and start moving toward him. It is not enough just to be sorry for our sins. We must also change our lifestyle, for the Bible teaches us that *"God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin."* (2 Corinthians 7:10). In other words, if you are really sorry for something, it will result in a change in your actions.

The apostle Paul summed up this change when he quoted Jesus, who had said that people must *"Turn from the darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. Then they will receive forgiveness for their sins and be given a place among God's people, who are set apart by faith in me."* (Acts 26:18).

You see, there are some things only God can do and some things only you can do. Only God can remove your sins and give you the gift of eternal life, but only you can turn from your sins and receive Jesus as your Savior. That brings up the second thing you must do to respond to God's offer.

Believe In Jesus Christ And Receive Him Into Your Life

Having seen the enormity of your sin and having decided to turn away from it, you then must believe in and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Becoming a Christian, however, is far more than following a creed or trying to live by certain standards. Jesus said that you must be *"born again"* or more literally, *"born from above"* (John 3:3). This spiritual rebirth happens when we personally believe in Jesus Christ, receive him by inviting him into our lives, and turn from our sins. In other words, we ask Jesus to come and take residence in our lives, making the changes he deems necessary. A person must take this all-important step in order to become a child of God.

Notice that this offer is yours for the asking, and it is free. You don't have to work for it, trying to cleanup your life before you make this life-changing decision. The Bible says, *"The free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 6:23).

Being a Christian also means having a relationship with the living God. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus said, *"Look! Here I stand at the door and knock. If you hear me calling and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal as friends."* To better understand the meaning of this verse, it is important to understand the culture at the time it was written. Eating together in Bible times was a long, drawn-out affair. People would not sit on chairs behind tables in a formal setting as we do, but they would sit on the floor reclining on pillows around a low table. The relaxed atmosphere made meals a time when you would not only satisfy your appetite but also receive a gratifying serving of enjoyable table conversation. You would share your heart and life with those who sat beside you.

Consequently, when Jesus says that he will "share a meal" with us, it implies intimacy, closeness, and friendship. He offers this to us, but we must first "hear him calling" us. To hear God calling us, we must know how he speaks. One way in which God speaks to us is described in the Bible as a "still, small voice." This could be described in another way as that tug you may have felt on your heart from the Holy Spirit showing you your need for Jesus. He may even be speaking to you right now! It is at that point that you must "open the door." Only you can do that. Jesus will not force his way in.

Receiving Jesus Christ Into Your Heart

If you are ready to turn from your sins and believe in Jesus Christ so that you can receive the forgiveness of sin and the hope of eternal life, then take a moment to bow your head and pray a prayer like this one:

God, I'm sorry for my sin. I turn from it right now. I thank you for sending Jesus Christ to die on the cross for my sin. Jesus, I ask you to come into my heart and life right now. Be my Lord, Savior, and friend. Help me to follow you all the days of my life as your disciple. Thank you for forgiving and receiving me right now. Thank you that my sin is forgiven and that I am going to heaven. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Rededicating Your Life to Jesus Christ

Perhaps you are already a Christian but you have strayed from Jesus Christ. You have been a prodigal son or daughter. God will forgive you right now if you will return to him. He tells us in Scripture, *"My wayward children, come back to me and I will heal your wayward hearts."* (Jeremiah 3:22). If you would like to return to God and rededicate your life to him right now, you may want to pray something like this:

God, I am sorry for my sin. I am sorry that I have strayed from you. I ask you to forgive me now as I repent of my sin. I don't want to live like a prodigal any longer. Renew and revive me as I once again follow you as my God. Thank you for your forgiveness. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Whether you prayed to make a first time commitment or a recommitment, you have made the right decision. God has forgiven and received you if you really meant it. Know that your relationship with Jesus Christ will bring radical and dramatic changes in your life. Describing this, the Bible says, *"Those who become Christians become new persons!" They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Now that is good news! But more important, God has changed your eternal destiny. Instead of anticipating judgment for your sins, you will spend eternity in God's presence in heaven.

Read the next section to see what else God has done for you now that you have taken this step.

What God Has Done for You

What actually happens when Jesus Christ comes into your life? First, he saves you from your sins and the punishment you deserve as a result of them— a Christ-less eternity. This is called salvation, or regeneration, and has to do with what takes place in your heart: God gives you new life. Second, he justifies you. Justification has to do with your standing before God and includes the complete removal and forgiveness of your sins. Think about it! When you receive Jesus Christ into your life, you are completely forgiven. God's Word tells us, *"Brothers, listen! In this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins! Everyone who believes in him is freed from all guilt and declared right with God Justified - something the Jewish law could never do"* (Acts 13:38-39). Speaking of our sins, God says, *"I will never again remember your sins and lawless deeds."* (Hebrews 10:17). What a wonderful promise!

Justification, however, is more than just the forgiveness and removal of the guilt and condemnation that accompany sin. While God has removed your sins and forgiven you of them, he has also placed the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ "into your account," so to speak. You don't have to earn it or try to achieve it. It is yours as a gracious gift from the God who loves you. To understand justification more fully, read the following Scripture passages and notes below.

God Promises Us His Gracious Forgiveness

*But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong. **1 John 1:9 [NLT]***

The word *confess* means "to say the same thing as another" or "to agree with." To confess means that we are agreeing with God about our sin. We are seeing it

as he does. We know that God hates sin. Therefore, to truly confess our sin means that we essentially feel the same way God feels about what we have done. After committing that sin, we will be determined to put it out of our lives and never do it again. That is true confession in the biblical sense. The reason many believers are not experiencing the forgiveness and joy they desire is because they have not yet truly confessed! Once we have met God's conditions, however, we will know his gracious forgiveness. We may not "feel" forgiven, but we are. We have his word on it.

God Has Balanced Our Moral and Spiritual Budget (see Romans 5:1-2)

When God justifies us, he does so by placing all of the righteousness of Christ to our credit. This balances the moral and spiritual budget for us. We now have sufficient "capital of character" to get on with the business of living.

Up to this point, salvation has been God's responsibility. From this point on, it continues to be his responsibility except that we are responsible for the wise investment of our "capital of character"—that is, we are responsible for living as God desires us to. It is as if your checking account was empty, but then someone made a \$100,000 deposit. What you do with that money is up to you.

God Calls Us His Children (see Luke 15:11-32)

This incredible story illustrates what happens when a person turns from sin and returns to God. First, notice that the father in the story did not give this prodigal son what he deserved—judgment and banishment. In the same way, we do not receive from God what we deserve—judgment and punishment for sin. Second, the young man was given what he did not deserve—the rights and privileges of full sonship. Likewise, although we are not worthy to be called children of God, he calls us sons and daughters. In summary, he doesn't give us what we deserve (judgement). He gives us what we don't deserve (forgiveness and justification).

Speaking of our sons and daughters, read on to see how God has adopted you into his family.

Adopted and Assured

We have looked at what happens when we are regenerated (when Christ comes into our lives) and when we are justified (when God forgives our sin and puts his righteousness in its place). Now let's look at another incredible thing God has done for us. He adopted us into his family as his children!

Adoption means “to be given the rights of a son or daughter.” In essence, you have been given the full rights of sonship in the family of God as though you were born that way. The story of the Prodigal Son illustrates this (Luke 15:11-32). The wayward son thought that after leaving home, he would no longer be considered a son but would instead be treated as a hired servant. Much to his surprise, when he made the long journey home, his father welcomed him and smothered him with kisses. He then gave orders to bring out the best robe and to put a ring on his finger, signifying full rights as a son. That is exactly what God has done for you! Take some time to examine three scripture passages that assure you of your adoption into God’s family.

God Disciplines His Children (see Hebrews 12:5-9)

Recognizing you are now a child of God is not some distant hope but a present reality. One of the ways God will remind you of this is by correcting you and bringing you back into line like a loving father when you stray away from him. Before we were believers, we may have felt no sense of guilt for certain things we did or did not do. But now that we are Christians, God’s Holy Spirit shows us the way to live, which includes correcting us. He does this not because he hates us, but because he loves us as his own dear children. Understanding this truth should help us in the way we behave.

You Have an Approachable Father (see Galatians 4:6)

The Hebrew word translated “dear Father” is *abba*, which is a word of affection that a young child would use endearingly toward his or her father. A western equivalent of that phrase would be “papa” or “daddy.” God does not want to be viewed as some distant, disinterested father, but as a loving, approachable father to whom you can turn at any time because you are his child.

His Promises Are Not Based upon Your Feelings (see 1 John 5:11-13)

There will be times as a Christian when you may not “feel” God’s presence. You may even be tempted to doubt that he has come into your life. But 1 John 5:13 does not say, “I write this to you who believe in the son of God so that you may *feel* you have eternal life.” This is because feelings come and go. They fluctuate. Nor does the Bible say, “I write this so that you may *hope*—if God is in a really good mood—that you have eternal life.” It says, “*so that you may know*. . .” Eternal life is yours! Stand on God’s promise to you. You are forgiven, justified, adopted into his family, and assured of salvation. Now that is reason to rejoice!