



discover steps

*Uncover the steps to accept God's rescue offer
and find joy in unconditional acceptance*

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Her name was Danielle. For her 18th birthday she got an unexpected present: A pregnancy test that came back positive. She wrestled for so long about an abortion that it soon became too late in her country, and so she brought the foetus to term. An adoption was arranged. No sooner had the child been born than it was taken away, by her own choice, without her ever seeing or holding the new born. All she knew was that it was a boy.

Afterward, she suffered doubt, guilt, and recriminations. Whenever she walked by someone holding an infant, she'd do a double-take. Was that her child? Whenever she'd see someone pushing an infant in a stroller, she'd peer in, looking to see if the child resembled her or the father. As the years went by, she looked at older kids - toddlers, pre-schoolers, children in the earlier grades. She would stare at little boys running around playgrounds, looking for the one who had been hers. She would actually take a bus to various schools around the city and watch children play, in hopes of finding him. Numerous times, over the years, she was sure she had found her lost child, but in each case she could do nothing but stare - and weep.

At times the darkness was so great she didn't think she could go on. Even in sleep, dreams betrayed her with images of her little boy, or who she thought was her little boy, reaching up with his tiny arms and crying, *Mommy! Mommy! I'm here! I'm here.*

Only when she became suicidal did she get professional help. Still, the guilt, though not as bad, never left.

Like Danielle, most of us, for our own secret reasons - and sometimes not-so-secret - have struggled with guilt, with a conscience that knows that we have done wrong.

Most of us, anyway.

A GUILTY RACE

Guilt to some degree is part of being human. And that's because we are all sinners, because we all have violated God's law, and because we all have been born with fallen sinful natures. And, if all that weren't bad enough, we are in the midst of a great contest between good and evil. Also dark and demonic forces exist, and take great delight in enticing us to do wrong, and then making us feel so guilty that we are sure we can't be forgiven for what we have done!

Paul passed on God's word to us when he wrote:



For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.

Romans 3:9-12

Nothing in two thousand years has changed about humanity, has it?

Look at this quote from the irreverent, foul-mouthed late comedian George Carlin.

I'm also tired of hearing about innocent victims; this is an outmoded idea. There are no innocent victims. If you're born on this world you're guilty, period ... end of report, next case. Your birth certificate is proof of guilt.

If even George Carlin could see it ...?

THE FAILURE OF THE FIG LEAVES

There's an old saying about someone who inherits a character trait: They got it honestly. That goes for our sinfulness, and for the guilt too, with the shame and the darkness that they bring.

As we read in an earlier booklet, the world was originally created perfect, pristine, and inhabited by perfect and pristine beings. However, part of that perfection included the capacity to love, and love - to be love - demands freedom. A robot could be programmed to obey - even perfectly - but never to love. God wanted us to love. Hence He created humans, not robots.

And, as we saw, the devil, who was also created with free choice, abused that freedom, and brought his rebellion to earth where he led other free creatures into sin. Notice what the Bible said happened after humans sinned, after they ate from the tree that they had been expressly commanded not to eat from. See Genesis 2:16-17.



Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, Where are you? So he said, I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.

Genesis 3:7-10

Two crucial points:

Firstly, they were ashamed and guilty, which is why they hid themselves from God. The first recorded human emotions after sin were guilt, shame, and fear - traits that have been handed down through every generation since then until even we, thousands of years later, have them entwined in our DNA.

Secondly, and most important for our immediate purposes, is what Adam said: *I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.*

The great irony, however, was that he was not naked. He had covered himself in *fig leaves*. Adam obviously sensed that this covering wasn't enough, that his works - that of covering himself with fig leaves - could not cover his shame and guilt.

What we have here is the first example of humanity trying to cover up - by its own works - its own guilt and shame. And the attempt failed as miserably then as it has failed ever since. We can immerse ourselves in fashion, sex, drugs, booze, entertainment, work, whatever. But all that only diverts us from the dragons that hibernate - at least part of the time - within our brains. The rest of the time they can ravage us, body and soul.

And that's exactly why we need a Saviour - a hero. And that's why Jesus came, to do for us what we can never do for ourselves.



***For when we were still without strength, in due time
Christ died for the ungodly.***

Romans 5:6

Fig leaves won't cut it. As George Carlin said, you are guilty - *end of report, next case. Your birth certificate is proof of guilt.* Only the sacrifice of Jesus in our stead is sufficient.

And that is mainly what the plan of salvation is all about - Jesus removing our guilt. Because, at the cross, He took it all upon Himself. For we are ... *justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*
Romans 3:24

The good news is that because of Jesus our guilt can be washed away, eradicated, and never used against us anymore. The darkness of guilt can be gone, and we can walk in the light of God's love and forgiveness.

HEIRS

A newspaper in a major city had a full-page ad telling people that millions of dollars of unclaimed estate assets were sitting there, waiting for the rightful heirs to claim them. In other words, the ones for whom it was left needed to come and claim what had been granted them. If they accepted it, it would be their own.

Notice the imagery in the following texts:



For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect.

Romans 4:13-14



For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:15-17



And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29

The language is that of adoption, of heirs, of receiving an inheritance. That's why the newspaper ad was such a powerful analogy for what has been done for us in Christ. As we saw earlier, even before the world began, God's plan was for you to have the wonderful inheritance of eternal life in Christ. You are supposed to have salvation, you are supposed to be redeemed, you are supposed to have eternal life in Christ.

You just need to claim it for yourself. You need to make it your own. You need to reach out in faith and grasp what has to be given you as a gift, because you could never earn it yourself.

To repeat what was in the previous booklet: *Though you are a sinner, though you have done wrong, when you claim for yourself the righteousness of Jesus, which is the very righteousness of God, then as sinful as your life may have been, you are now counted as perfect, holy and righteous in God's sight. Not because you really are, but because Jesus really was - and the great provision of grace is that God will accept Christ's righteousness in your stead.*

And it becomes ours by faith. That is, we have to claim it, accept it, believe it, and rest our hope upon it and nothing else. We must trust that our acceptance with God comes, not from anything that we can do, but only because of what Jesus has done for us.

THE LAW

No question, we are sinners, and as sinners we all struggle with some guilt. And yet, at the same time, God can use that guilt because it shows us that we need help, that we need forgiveness, and that we need healing.

It works so simply - we see our need, we sense the futility of trying to cover it in fig leaves, and this leads us to repentance, to confession, and to Jesus as the One who has paid the penalty for our sins and who offers us complete pardon, restoration, and forgiveness.

Look carefully at these following texts:



What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, You shall not covet.

Romans 7:7



Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:20

What's crucial here is the link between the law, grace, and sin - a theme that will be explored in a later booklet. God's law - His Ten Commandments -

shows us what is right and what is wrong. The law points out our sin, points out that we have done wrong. The law shows us just how guilty we are.

Paul's argument, however, is that though the law shows the problem, it can't solve it any more than looking in a mirror can fix your facial blemishes, acne, grey hair, or whatever flaws you see there.

No, the law helps us see that we are sinners, and that we need forgiveness, and this realisation is what leads us to Jesus. And we, knowing that we are lost, knowing that we are guilty, knowing that we have nothing in and of ourselves to make us worthy before God, claim His grace as our only hope.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

At times you might feel unworthy for salvation, or that you have crossed the line, or that it's too late and you feel enveloped in darkness. But the fact that you have those feelings is the greatest evidence that God's Holy Spirit is working on your heart, leading you to repentance, to confession, and to a commitment to accept what Christ has already done for you.

The crucial thing is never to wait until you feel good enough to be saved because, frankly, you are not good enough, and never will or can be good enough. If you could be, then Jesus would not have had to die. God could have simply made you good enough. But the fact that we can't be made good enough is precisely why Jesus came and died. Jesus - He was good enough - and that goodness is offered to you if you claim it for yourself by faith. All of us are in this together, regardless of appearances - the gossips

as well as those gossiped about; those who succeed as well as those who fail.

Look at this story Jesus told that shows how we can have the salvation He offers us. Look at how simple it is:



Also He (Jesus) spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You that I am not like other men - extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess. And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me a sinner! I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 18:9-14

God, be merciful to me a sinner!

Here is the key to salvation in Jesus - acknowledge your guilt, confess your guilt, and then throw yourself upon the mercy and grace and salvation offered you in Christ. That's essentially it!

The tax collector - the bad one - is the one who walked away justified, not only because he knew he was a sinner but, confessing it, he threw himself on the mercy of God as his only hope of forgiveness.

What must I do to be saved? You must do what the tax collector did, pray his prayer: *God, be merciful to me a sinner!* Admit you are a sinner. How do you know you are a sinner? It's not just a guilty feeling - look into the mirror of God's ten commandments, and it will show you. See Exodus 20:1-17. Then confess your guilt, and claim for yourself what has been freely offered you in Jesus - forgiveness for your sins. Not because you deserve that forgiveness - you don't - but because God is gracious enough to forgive them anyway. He loves you.

In the great controversy, Satan's greatest ploy is to whisper in your ear that you can't be forgiven. And our greatest mistake would be to believe him.

Don't!

Instead, believing in what Jesus promises, admit your guilt, confess your sin, and throw yourself on the mercy of God. And the moment you do, then that guilt and sin are all washed away, cleansed away, and you can stand perfect, holy, and accepted in Christ Jesus, no matter how bad your past has been. That is the only way to true freedom.

You have, indeed, moved from darkness to light.

As the apostle said: *This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.*

1 Timothy 1:15

This plan of salvation, worked out even before time began, is the provision made specifically for each of us, because we are all sinners. Each of us is alienated from God, and each of us has in our own way fled from Him - as did Adam in Eden - and then tried to cover our guilt and shame from the eyes of an all-knowing, all-seeing God with ... what?

Fig leaves?

And, as we saw, and as we know for ourselves - that doesn't work, no matter how hard we try, or how big the leaves are.

A PLACE FOR ME?

One of the 20th century's most famous atheists, Sir Bertrand Russell, was an unsparing critic of religion - the author of *Why I Am Not a Christian*. Russell was a sexual libertine and a loudly obnoxious New Atheist, even before today's loudly obnoxious New Atheists existed.

Yet, after his death, his daughter wrote about her father and his tumultuous life: *I believe myself that his whole life was a search for God. ... Indeed, he had first taken up philosophy in hope of finding proof of the evidence of the existence of God. ... Somewhere at the back of my father's mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depths of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God, and he never found anything else to put in it.*

A man on death row in the United States was about to be executed. His last words were: *I've lived a rough life. I wonder if God has a place for me.*

God does. That place is found in Jesus, if he, or even Bertrand Russell, would have claimed it.

So where does this personal struggle fit in with the epic story - the great controversy? Just as there are many individual battles in a war, so the great controversy is the sum of countless personal struggles over the issues raised by the devil. Not only is there a cosmic drama being played out as we have seen, but the same issues are at stake and being

played out in your life and mine. Our freedom of choice leaves us to align ourselves either with the rebellion of Lucifer and his accusations against God, and to do it my way, or align ourselves with God and His love and His purposes for us, and do it His way.

Have you made that vital choice yet? It has eternal consequences either way.



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*Uncover the new life that is found in God
as He lives in us*

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