

direction. I strive to know and apply God's Word, the Bible, to my daily life. 4) I know that God is using the problems and difficulties in my life to draw me closer to him and make me more like Jesus Christ in my every thought, word, and deed -- and occasionally I even cooperate with him!



BETTER THAN A PARDON FROM THE GOVERNOR

While doing research for an article on forgiveness, I came across the following, which for me pretty much sums it all up: "Divine forgiveness means more than pardon. The pardoned criminal is still a guilty person. Everybody knows that he committed the sin for which he has received his pardon. It is the punishment, not the guilt that is gone. But Christ's forgiveness also means that the sin is gone. The sinner has been cleansed as well as pardoned. Sinners were dead in their trespasses but God has made them alive together with Christ, 'having forgiven us all our trespasses' (Col. 2:13). Our sins are forgiven for Christ's sake (Eph. 4:32; 1 Jn. 2:12)" (*New Dictionary of Theology*).

THE GREATEST MIRACLE

Renowned Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe has noted: "Forgiveness is the greatest miracle that Jesus ever performs. It meets the greatest need; it costs the greatest price; and it brings the greatest blessing and the most lasting results." (*The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*)



No matter what you have been through, no matter what mistakes you have made, God loves you and is offering you forgiveness and new life. That's right, God loves *you* and he wants to have a real, personal, lasting relationship with *you*.

Here is what God's inspired, authoritative Word, the Bible, teaches regarding our need for God and what he has done to meet that need: 1) Every human being is sinful (often felt as personal shame and guilt) and thus separated from a pure and holy God (Rom 3:23). 2) The penalty for sin is death -- that is, eternal separation from God (Rom 6:23a). 3) Jesus Christ died in your place so that your sin can be forgiven and you can be brought into a right relationship with God (Rom 5:8). 4) To be forgiven for your sin and brought into a right relationship with God, you

must accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior (Rom 10:9-10). 5) Having given control of your life to Christ, you must decide to stop living for yourself and start living for him (Mark 8:34-35).

My prayer is that you will take a serious look at where you are in life. If you are living without Christ, you are not really living at all. Even more than that, the Bible teaches us that this life is a stepping stone to eternity and that anyone who leaves this life without first having been made right with God through personal, saving faith in Jesus Christ will spend eternity in painful separation from him (Revelation 20:10, 12a, 15). In hell "there is the loss and absence of all good, and the misery and torment of an evil conscience. The most terrifying aspect is the complete and deserved separation from God and from all that is pure, holy, and beautiful. In addition there is the awareness of being under the wrath of God and of enduring the curse of a righteous sentence because of one's sins that were consciously and voluntarily committed" (*Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*).

SPIRITUAL GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Once you have accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, then the next step is to start growing and maturing in your faith. The key is to focus on the basic building blocks of the Christian life: prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. It is vital that you find and join a Bible believing church as soon as possible. And you may wish to check out this list of free, excellent informational resource-es that can prove especially helpful for the new Christian: www.ligonier.org/learn/collections/what-do-christians-believe/

You should also be aware that, as a new Christian, at some point you will probably have doubts regarding your salvation. This is actually normal, and there is no reason for alarm (for more info: ac21doj.org/contents/articles/assuranceOfSalvation).

Greg Williamson / AC21DOJ

This testimony, along with links to more info and additional resources, is available at AC21DOJ.org

A Century 21 Disciple of Jesus
<https://www.ac21doj.org>

How Jesus Changed My Life ... And How He Wants To Change Yours

GROWING UP ON FALSE RELIGION



My parents divorced when I was about ten years old and my mother, not having completed high school, proceeded as best she could to raise my older brother, my younger sister, and myself on what she could earn working as a waitress at a corner café.

It was through the influence of my (older) half-sister that I became involved in the Jehovah's Witnesses. Because I was hungry for the acceptance they offered, I threw myself into studying their teachings and never doubted anything I learned. After about five years in the organization, however, I began to seriously question what they were teaching. Jehovah (God) was supposed to be kind and loving, and yet he seemed more like the ruler of a foreign country -- powerful but distant and unapproachable.



I became severely depressed. Previously a good student, I began skipping classes and eventually dropped out of high school. I tried to commit suicide.

LIQUOR, DRUGS, & THE MARINE CORPS



About that time one of the few non-Witness friends I had told me about his plans to join the Marine Corps and travel around the world. It sounded great, and I decided to give it a shot. Mom gave her permission for me to enlist (at age 17), and I was sent to the USMC Recruit Depot, Parris Island SC for basic training. From Parris Island, I was sent to Meridian MS for training in my dual job field: Aviation Operations Clerical/Flight Clearance Dispatch (MOS 7041). Meridian is also where I began drinking heavily.



From Meridian, I was sent to work at a CH-46 helicopter reservist training detachment aboard the world's largest naval base, in Norfolk VA. Once there, it didn't take long for me to get involved in illegal drugs -- and lots of trouble, including U.A., AWOL, destruction of government property, and fighting. I (barely) made it through two years in Norfolk and then was sent to the New River Air Station, in Jacksonville NC.

By then the Corps was getting pretty tired of my antics, and so after a couple more incidents they gave me an official invitation to leave and never return, which came just a few weeks short of the end of my four-year enlistment.

WASTELAND, PRISON, & JESUS

From Jacksonville, I headed back to my hometown of Burlington NC, got a job, and started living the bachelor lifestyle of parties, parties, and more parties. The next two years became a blur as I went from one living arrangement to another, headed steadily downhill.

Eventually I found myself out of work and evicted from my apartment. That's when I decided to rob



a convenience store in order to get enough money to leave town. Using a .25 caliber pistol, I robbed both a convenience store and a video rentals store, netting a total of about \$250. The police apprehended me at the local bus station, and I was eventually given a 17-year prison sentence for two counts of armed-robbery ("robbery with a dangerous weapon").

Between the coffee, the unfiltered tobacco, the

marijuana, and the stress, after about 16 months in prison I was a nervous wreck. That's when another inmate approached me and told me about Jesus Christ. He gave me a booklet that explained God's wonderful plan of salvation and what it means to live for Christ. I discovered that God loves all of us and wants to have a personal relationship with each one of us. Wow! I could hardly believe that *God* really cared about *me*.

There was one major problem, however: sin. As I learned, all of us are born sinful and thus separated from God. We are imperfect and unholy, while God is absolutely perfect and holy. Furthermore, God's justice demands that sin be punished by death and eternal separation from him. There is absolutely nothing any of us can do to change the situation. It's hopeless. In that respect, the most upstanding citizen is in the same boat with the worst criminal.



But God loves us so much that he made a way -- the one and only way -- for us to be made right with him. Jesus Christ came to earth to pay the price for our sins. That's right: Jesus died in *my place*! And by turning from my life of sin and placing my faith and trust in Jesus, God would forgive me for all my sins. He would even give me a real and lasting desire to know, love, and serve him.

It all sounded too good to be true. And so naturally I was a little skeptical. In fact, I was a *lot* skeptical. But God got hold of my heart and would not let go. For two entire days I was absolutely miserable, knowing that I needed to open my life and heart to Jesus but afraid of what I might be giving up (!) And so I told God I would give him one year of my life, after which we would reconvene to renegotiate the contract. And so, as sincerely as I knew how, I asked God to forgive me for my sins and for Jesus to come into my heart and be the Lord of my life.

After that, I started reading the New Testament and was constantly amazed at what I was learning about Jesus. And I found that the more I read and prayed, the more I could see my life changing for the better. I was actually becoming a new person! (Within a few weeks I had completely forgotten about my "contract" with God. That was in October 1987, and since then I have never for even one instant regretted giving my life to Christ.)

ANOTHER CHANCE

Eventually I was blessed with an inmate position at the Governor's Executive Mansion. After a little more than a year there, my sentence was commuted, and I was paroled to a halfway house for recovering alcoholics. (I had spent nearly five years in prison.) I began looking for a good church to join. Eventually I found one nearby, which is also where I met my then future wife, Sharon.



Sharon encouraged me to pursue a college degree. And so immediately after we were married I started taking courses part-time and eventually was accepted into a degree program at North Carolina State University. I worked a series of different jobs while taking classes.



Eventually I learned of the B.A. in Biblical Studies program being offered at nearby Southeastern Baptist Theological College, in Wake Forest, and I transferred in for that. Following graduation, Sharon and I moved back to Raleigh and started a family.



While God has thus far seen fit to spare me from full-time ministry, nonetheless I manage to keep very busy with work, my family, Bible study, church, and my website, A Century 21 Disciple of Jesus.

I would be remiss if I did not at least mention the fact that, contrary to what some folk teach, becoming a Christian does not make life a bed of roses. In some ways it actually makes life more difficult, since it is harder to swim against the tide than to go with the flow.

While I still experience problems and difficulties just like everyone else, there are some enormous differences between my old life without Christ and my new life with him. Simply put, today: 1) I am saved. Out of his infinite love, God has saved me from sin and its eternal consequences. 2) I am no longer alone. Christ, my family, and other Christians are with me. 3) I am headed in the right

