

The five things you need to know to gain

Freedom

from

Hopelessness



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The Big Lie

The counselor just nodded his head when his client explained with a sigh of desperation: *You don't understand what it's like going to work every day, doing the same old boring job, trying to make ends meet! I just got my medical bills paid off, and now the car needs a new transmission. I'm already a slave to the credit card companies. The worst part of it all is, NO ONE SEEMS TO CARE!*



After another 10 minutes of listening to the man's self-pity, the counselor stops his client and tells him an ancient Greek fable about a king named Sisyphus who was punished for being full of himself. His fate—to push a rock up a mountain; upon reaching the top, it would roll back down again. This he was destined to do for all eternity.

“How did Sisyphus endure such a monotonous life?” asked the counselor. He gleefully answered his own question; “Once he acknowledged there was no hope, he became free. The moment he acknowledged the truth that there was no hope, he conquered hopelessness!” The client snapped at his therapist saying, ***That’s absurd!*** To which the counselor smugly said, “Yes, but you will never be content until you accept the same truth!”

Is the counselor right, there is no real hope for anyone? Was life meant to be one continuous and monotonous cycle of disappointments, despair and death?

The Bible, the world’s best-selling book, paints a far different picture. It is a collection of 66 smaller books written by forty different authors who lived over a period of 1600 years. Even though these authors lived at different times and wrote in different languages, the amazing theme of all the books is the same:

There is hope because God is restoring this world of absurdity!

In the first two chapters of the Bible, in the book

called Genesis, we are told that there is a personal God who created everything with beauty and purpose. He even created you and me in His own image, giving us both the pleasure of knowing Him and the purpose of ruling over the things He created.

Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image.
In the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

²⁹ Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. ³⁰ And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

³¹ Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!

God made man in His own image so that we could have a relationship with Him and enjoy the never-ending depths of His love, peace, joy, and knowledge. This personal and infinite God gave us the abilities to create, reproduce, and govern the things He had made. And if that wasn't enough, He also placed within the world, and in the universe above, such spectacular beauty that only we humans could appreciate.

But Satan, a fallen angel of God, slithered into paradise with his own evil purposes and hatred toward God. He challenged Adam and Eve's perfect world with a "Big Lie".

Genesis 3:1-21

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

² "Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the

middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, “You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.”

4 “You won’t die!” the serpent replied to the woman. 5 “God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”

6 The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful, and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. 7 At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

8 When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

10 He replied, “I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.” 11 “Who told you that you were naked?” the LORD God asked. “Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?”

12 The man replied, “It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.” 13 Then the LORD God asked the

woman, “What have you done?” “The serpent deceived me,” she replied. “That’s why I ate it.”

¹⁴ Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, you are cursed
more than all animals, domestic and wild.

You will crawl on your belly,
groveling in the dust as long as you live.

¹⁵ And I will cause hostility between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring.

He will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

¹⁶ Then he said to the woman, “I will sharpen the pain of your
pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth.

And you will desire to control your husband,
but he will rule over you.”

¹⁷ And to the man he said,

“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree
whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed
because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a
living from it.

¹⁸ It will grow thorns and thistles for you,
though you will eat of its grains.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow

will you have food to eat
until you return to the ground
from which you were made.
For you were made from dust,
and to dust you will return.”

²⁰ Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live. ²¹ And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.

Satan’s “big lie” convinced Adam and Eve God was holding out on them, and that they deserved better. At the core of all of Satan’s lies is an attempt to elevate man while diminishing God. Mankind will discover that the more you diminish God and elevate man; the more hopeless and absurd life becomes.

Is there no hope for the world? God leaves mankind a promise of a day when an offspring of Eve will fatally wound Satan, preparing the way for God to make all things new.

Reflection

1. Do you feel like Sisyphus? What kind of “rock” are you constantly trying to push up a hill, only to find it rolling back down at you?
2. Has Satan ever lied to you by telling you the following things:
 - ◇*God is holding out on you!*
 - ◇*You have no future!*
 - ◇*No one really cares about you!*
 - ◇*Your situation will never get better!*
 - ◇*Suicide is the only way out!*
3. Do you agree with the author that the more we elevate man and diminish God, the more we rob ourselves of hope?

It's a Mad, Mad World

In the Christmas classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey, Jimmy Stewart's character, decides life is hopeless because there is no justice in the world. George Bailey is a good man who worked hard, did what was right, and often sacrificed for the good of others. But a heartless, rival banker managed to steal a bank deposit away from Bailey's inept Uncle Billy on Christmas Eve. This leaves George Bailey in trouble with the bank examiner.



On the very day his brother comes home to a hero's parade as a navy pilot, George faces bankruptcy and even criminal charges. His rival even taunts him by pointing out that Bailey is worth more dead than alive because of his life insurance policy.

Those words and the hopelessness of the situation had George Bailey wishing he had never been born. He runs to the local bridge to end his life until an angel appears and intentionally jumps into the river instead forcing Baily to rescue him. After the rescue, Clarence the angel, introduces himself and shows George Bailey what life would have been like had he not been born.

What would the world be like. . .

George Bailey discovered what the world would be like without him, leaving him both grateful for, and desirous of his former life. And of course, the story ends with the townspeople giving George enough money to cover the missing bank deposit.

Not all hopeless situations end so happily. That's the case for the world during the time of the flood. In Genesis 6, God tells us how the world developed after Adam and Eve left the Garden of Eden.

Then the people began to multiply on the earth, and daughters were born to them. ²The sons of God saw the beautiful women and took any they wanted as their wives. ³Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not put up with humans for such a long time, for they are only mortal

flesh. In the future, their normal lifespan will be no more than 120 years.”⁴ In those days, and for some time after, giant Nephilites lived on the earth, for whenever the sons of God had intercourse with women, they gave birth to children who became the heroes and famous warriors of ancient times.

⁵ The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. ⁶ So the LORD was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart. ⁷ And the LORD said, “I will wipe this human race I have created from the face of the earth. Yes, and I will destroy every living thing—all the people, the large animals, the small animals that scurry along the ground, and even the birds of the sky. I am sorry I ever made them.”⁸ But Noah found favor with the LORD.

What happened to the world? The lifespan of Adam and Eve and their descendants was far longer than 120 years. Methuselah, the oldest man who ever lived, died at the age of 969 years. But even a thousand years seems short when you consider God had intended Adam and Eve to live forever. Living such a long time isn’t so far-fetched when you consider a great many of our body parts are constantly repairing and replacing themselves through cell division.

Can you imagine what a person could do or achieve if he or she lived over 500 years? Consider the decades of new discoveries made through trial and error. Consider the shared learning experiences of people over the course of hundreds of years. Consider the number of offspring just one couple could produce over the span of half a millennia. And consider what audacious pride would develop in the hearts of people who expected to live centuries!

The Bible passage from Genesis 6 tells us that eventually, pride caused even the righteous people who trusted in God, to turn their backs upon Him and intermarry with the women who had no faith in God. Faith and love for God soon became extinct, except for Noah and his family. All the inhabitants of the world elevated themselves to such a point that God was nothing more than a distant memory. Satan's goal to elevate man and diminish God succeeded to a level never seen before or since. The end result brought about a race of people so barbaric and dead of conscience that they were named the "Nephilites" meaning giants or warrior-monsters. Whatever kindness, love, or peace mankind had once enjoyed was now a thing of the past

as evil and unbridled selfishness filled the hearts and imaginations of everyone who lived.

Adolf Hitler was not the first leader to dream of and implement a master race of warriors bred and raised to be monsters. Hitler promised the German people his Third Reich would last a thousand years. But can you imagine living at a time when such a promise was becoming reality?

You ask, why didn't God stop this mess or intervene before it became such a mad, mad world? The answer goes back to George Bailey. What would life be like without God? What would the world really be like if God allowed man to be god? There would be no hope in such a world, only more oppression, despair and absurdity.

A hopeful sign in the skies. . .

Despite the world going mad with evil and rebellion, God gives the world hope. This hope would come through one man and his family and through a promise in the skies.

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God told Noah and his sons, ⁹ “I hereby confirm my covenant with you and your descendants, ¹⁰ and with all the animals that were on the boat with you—the birds, the livestock, and all the wild animals—every living creature on earth. ¹¹ Yes, I am confirming my covenant with you. Never again will floodwaters kill all living creatures; never again will a flood destroy the earth.”

¹² Then God said, “I am giving you a sign of my covenant with you and with all living creatures, for all generations to come. ¹³ I have placed my rainbow in the clouds. It is the sign of my covenant with you and with all the earth. ¹⁴ When I send clouds over the earth, the rainbow will appear in the clouds, ¹⁵ and I will remember my covenant with you and with all living creatures. Never again will the floodwaters destroy all life. ¹⁶ When I see the rainbow in the clouds, I will remember the eternal covenant between God and every living creature on earth.” ¹⁷ Then God said to Noah, “Yes, this rainbow is the sign of the covenant I am confirming with all the creatures on earth.”

God in His patience and justice did something. He washed the madness away with a flood. This was not a permanent fix—that day is coming. But as God saved Noah and even the animals, living together in the ark,

He gives us a future glimpse of a fully restored world with all of God's creation living in peace. The rainbow in the sky is a sign of hope that God will never send another flood to totally destroy the world, nor will He allow man or anything else in nature to destroy His world. He will not allow atom bombs, asteroids, or even global warming to ruin this world until His purposes are fulfilled.

Reflection

1. Noah and family spent 100 years building the ark. What do you suppose encouraged them to keep building day in and day out?
2. What message is Satan sending when you hear him whisper the following things:

◇There is no justice in this world!

◇This world is a hopeless mess!

◇It's a sign of weakness and failure to ask for help!

◇You're the only one who can fix this problem!

Meaningless, Meaningless

The 1960's rock group, the Byrds, made famous King Solomon's words from the Bible:

To everything (turn, turn, turn)

There is a season (turn, turn, turn)

And a time to every purpose, under heaven

Solomon was the son of King David, and when he came into power God offered to give him anything he wanted. His request was wisdom to lead the nation of Israel. God gave him that and so much more.

II Chronicles 9:22-28

²² So King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king on earth. ²³ Kings from every nation came to consult him and to hear the wisdom God had given him. ²⁴ Year after year everyone who visited brought him gifts of silver and gold, clothing, weapons, spices, horses, and mules. ²⁵ Solomon had 4,000 stalls for his horses and chariots, and he had 12,000 horses. He stationed some of them in the chariot cities, and some near him in Jerusalem. ²⁶ He ruled over all the kings

from the Euphrates River in the north to the land of the Philistines and the border of Egypt in the south. ²⁷The king made silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as stone. And valuable cedar timber was as common as the sycamore-fig trees that grow in the foothills of Judah. ²⁸Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and many other countries.

Solomon was truly blessed by God in every way, but there was still something missing from his life. The book of Ecclesiastes, the source of the lyrics for the Byrd's song, begins with these troubling lines: *Everything is meaningless, says the Teacher, completely meaningless!*

How could a man who had so much and had so much going for him, conclude that life was meaningless? The rest of the book of Ecclesiastes explores that very question. The answer may surprise you.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

I said to myself, "Come on, let's try pleasure. Let's look for the 'good things' in life." But I found that this, too, was meaningless. ² So I said, "Laughter is silly. What good does it do to seek pleasure?" ³ After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only

happiness most people find during their brief life in this world.

⁴ I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. ⁵ I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶ I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. ⁷ I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. ⁸ I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire!

⁹ So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. ¹⁰ Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. ¹¹ But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere.

In the remaining chapters of Ecclesiastes, Solomon systematically declares everything man lives and dies for as meaningless. All of man's efforts in life goes to meet needs that are never satisfied. Any success that

one achieves is soon forgotten. Riches are fleeting because at death, they are usually given to people who didn't work for it or deserve it. Power and wealth never satisfy when there are others who are wealthier. Even wisdom and knowledge have their limits as Solomon confessed: *The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.*

What Solomon discovered, as he applied his great wisdom to the affairs of life, is that there is *a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. . . I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time.*



In short, Solomon advises everyone to enjoy their work while they can, enjoy friends while you can, enjoy wealth as long as you have it, enjoy your spouse while you can, enjoy your youth while you can, and keep sowing your seeds while you can, not letting your hands

grow idle. This, man should do, until his dust returns to the ground and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

An eternal vacuum in our hearts. . .

It almost seems as if Solomon is giving the same advice our counselor friend gave in the first section of this booklet. “There is no hope. Life is filled with endless futility. So learn to make the best of it.”

But Solomon also believed that the same God who gave him so much, including his great wisdom, also gave to all mankind a natural born sense that there is more; there is something else in life. Solomon understood that there are a great many things human wisdom will never be able to comprehend and there is a dimension in every person that no human being or activity can fill.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-14

¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has placed on us all. ¹¹ Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end. ¹² So I concluded there is nothing better than to be happy and enjoy ourselves as long as we can. ¹³ And people should

eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labor, for these are gifts from God.

¹⁴ And I know that whatever God does is final. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God's purpose is that people should fear him.

Solomon desperately tried to put all the pieces of life together, only to find, there is a critical piece missing. Like a near-sighted man, he sees many of God's good gifts. He knows that God is active and in control of the world and has a purpose for everything. But what is missing in Solomon's world, and perhaps even in your world, is a panoramic view of it all from beginning to end. What is the significance of it all?

Through his keen observations, Solomon sees patterns in life even though time and life are both linear. There is purposeful progression, with all of life advancing forward fulfilling God's purposes.

He writes these final words: ***That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is everyone's duty. ¹⁴ God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.***

There is a beginning and an end to all life, and all of us, because we are made in God's image, have a deep desire to know where life is leading. We have a desire to know our own purpose in life and find meaning in it. Ultimately, God has to reveal this to us. This He does through His Son Jesus Christ.

Reflection

1. Do you believe your life has purpose and meaning? Why or why not?
2. If Satan's goal in tempting us is to elevate ourselves and minimize God, what does Solomon's wisdom demonstrate to us about man's ability to find true meaning and significance?
3. Do you agree with King Solomon that every person has a sense that there is more to life than what we can experience with our senses? Have you sensed that "eternal vacuum" in your heart?

The Cipher on the Cross

Have you ever heard the true story of *The Cipher in the Snow*? An Idaho teacher first published this account for an educational journal back in 1964. The story is about a boy who was a cipher (which is another word for zero). He came from a broken home, where he was neglected by his stepfather and treated with coldness by his mother. He was truly a “zero” in the eyes of everyone in his world.

One day, as he was riding home on a school bus, he asked to be dropped off before reaching his house. The boy promptly got off the bus and dropped dead in the snowbank. Attempts to revive the boy failed. The cause of death—the boy’s heart had just stopped. The boy didn’t have a heart



condition or any heart defects. His heart simply stopped beating because he no longer had the will to live. The boy was neither loved, nor had any reason to hope that his condition would change in the future.

We would hope no child would face these same loveless, and hopeless conditions today with social media and with our ever-improving social awareness of bullies and bullying. But there are still a whole lot of people living today who feel like ciphers in the snow.

It's hard to believe that God would send His own Son to the world as a sort of cipher in the eyes of the world. And yet, this is exactly what happened. God even foretold this happening more than 700 years before Christ was born through the prophet Isaiah.

Isaiah 53: 2,3

My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot,

like a root in dry ground.

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance,

nothing to attract us to him.

³ He was despised and rejected—

a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief.
We turned our backs on him and looked the other way.
He was despised, and we did not care.

The New Testament fills in the picture with greater detail as we read about how Jesus was born to humble parents in Bethlehem, is hated by the Jewish leaders, and eventually suffers on a cross. In so doing, he fulfills the promise God gave the world after the fall of Adam and Eve:

And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

Jesus was born of the woman (Mary), through the power of God's Spirit. God's Son became a man with actual flesh and blood. He is the very image of the invisible God. In other words, Jesus manifested the attributes of God such as His perfection, power, wisdom, and His love. His actions and words reveal truth about God and His sacrifice will restore our fallen relationship with Him and fill our empty hearts with hope and joy.

Luke 19: 1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. ² There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. ³ He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

⁵ When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.”

⁶ Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. ⁷ But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled.

⁸ Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!”

⁹ Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Zacchaeus had a huge vacuum in his heart. As a tax collector for the Romans, his own Jewish people hated him. Tax collectors in that day were also known to cheat their neighbors and even the Romans of tax money. His height may have brought him ridicule, but his actions certainly made him a “Cipher” in the eyes of most people. But Jesus’ presence that day changed his heart and his purpose for living.

Jesus’ words and actions had the same kind of effect upon countless people who were often living under a yoke of superstition and the lifeless and legalistic teachings of the Jewish teachers. Jesus brought hope to people whose hopes were repeatedly dashed.

Mark 5:24-34

A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. ²⁷ She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. ²⁸ For she thought to herself, “If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed.” ²⁹ Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible

condition. ³⁰ Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?”

³¹ His disciples said to him, “Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

³² But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. ³⁴ And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.”

This woman who suffered so much and spent everything she had to get well; sees Jesus as her last hope. She too, left changed for the rest of her life.

One wonders why Jesus was rejected when he brought such hope and healing to so many lives? Why would His own people reject Him; the image of the invisible God? Why would they treat Him like a cipher? The prophet Isaiah gives us the answer.

Isaiah 53:4-

Yet it was our weaknesses he carried;
it was our sorrows that weighed him down.

And we thought his troubles were a punishment
from God, a punishment for his own sins!

5 But he was pierced for our rebellion,
crushed for our sins.

He was beaten so we could be whole.

He was whipped so we could be healed.

6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away.

We have left God's paths to follow our own.

Yet the LORD laid on him
the sins of us all.

7 He was oppressed and treated harshly,
yet he never said a word.

He was led like a lamb to the slaughter.

And as a sheep is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

8 Unjustly condemned,
he was led away.

No one cared that he died without descendants,
that his life was cut short in midstream.

But he was struck down
for the rebellion of my people.

9 He had done no wrong
and had never deceived anyone.

But he was buried like a criminal;
he was put in a rich man's grave.

Jesus came not only to reveal God to our empty souls, but He came so He could live in our empty vacuous hearts. His own people rejected Him and placed Him on a cross for the same reasons we still reject Him. We continue to listen to Satan's lies that elevate man while diminishing God. You may recognize some of his contradictory lies:

- *You should be offended that God thinks you are a sinner. Compared to most people you're a saint!*
- *You can always make it up to God by doing a few nice things for Him and for other people!*
- *Why do you need God anyway, what has He done for you? Educated people trust in their own wits to get by, and they learn to overlook guilt and shame.*
- *You have messed up your life so bad that God couldn't possibly forgive you or have anything to do with you!*

Luke 23:32-43

Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him.³³ When they came to a place called The Skull, they

nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice.

³⁵ The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. “He saved others,” they said, “let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.” ³⁶ The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. ³⁷ They called out to him, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ A sign was fastened above him with these words: “This is the King of the Jews.” ³⁹ One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” ⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” ⁴³ And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

The fact of the matter is that Jesus became a “Cipher” even to the point of suffering and dying on the cross so we can be forgiven, and our empty hearts filled with His

peace and with an eternal hope. Even the most mundane and fruitless activities in life are transformed into hope-filled possibilities when your heart is filled with Christ—the Living Hope!

Reflection

1. Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt like a “cipher in the snow”? What happened during this time?
2. How have you dealt with your guilt, shame, and pain over broken relationships with others?
3. Which one of Satan’s lies (pg. 32) do you most resonate with in your life?
4. How have your thoughts and ideas about Jesus changed after reading this section?

Rainy Days and Mondays. . .

It was a Sunday and Jesus' disciples were more than down, they were in a state of grief and disappointment. Jesus, their friend and teacher had died on Friday and his body was laid to rest in a borrowed grave. They had such high hopes for Jesus and what they imagined His kingdom would look like. Even though Jesus repeatedly rained on their parade of wishful thinking, they never understood why Jesus had to die, nor did they believe He would rise again.

On this Sunday morning, everything looked dark in their world, until some



women came back from Jesus' tomb with an amazing account of angels and an empty tomb.

Luke 24: 1-12

But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. ² They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. ³ So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes.

⁵ The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? ⁶ He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, ⁷ that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day."

⁸ Then they remembered that he had said this. ⁹ So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened.

Jesus appears to His disciples that same day. In fact, Jesus appeared to 500 people before He ascended into heaven. The Apostle Paul writes in a letter to Christians living in Asia Minor telling us why Jesus' resurrection should give us all hope.

I Corinthians 15: 20-26

²¹ So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²² Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. ²³ But there is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong to Christ will be raised when he comes back.

²⁴ After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. ²⁵ For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. ²⁶ And the last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Because Christ was raised from the dead, we can be assured of our own personal resurrections. There is life after death and hope in life because Christ is reigning in heaven humbling His enemies reclaiming one soul at a time. He even takes all the broken pieces of our lives and puts them together in marvelous ways, enabling us to go on living with peace, joy and purpose.

Revelation 21: 1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old

heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

³ I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

When Christ returns all the former things that polluted the world and stained it with blood, and brokenness will no longer exist. Those who thought they escaped justice through death, will face God’s eternal judgement. Even Satan the great deceiver will be locked away forever. God will live among His people; never again will they face the sorrow of this life and the hopelessness of our present fallen world. Because of Easter Sunday, there will no longer be any rainy days or Mondays to get us down—the title of the 1971 Carpenters’ song. We can taste this future life even now. All we need to do, as the Carpenters’ song goes on to suggest is to ***Run and find the one who loves me.***

Jesus loved you so much that He became a “Cipher on the Cross” in order that you can be a “10” in God’s eyes. Elevating God and trusting Him as the Lord of our lives doesn’t diminish us, as Satan wants us to believe, but rather, it elevates us to the status of God’s children—as royalty. Or, as Revelation 21 pictures, “a beautifully dressed bride.”

Reflection

1. For you, what will be the best part of heaven?

2. Would you like to live with purpose and face each new day with the sure hope that you are God’s child, deeply loved with a glorious eternal future? The first step is to run and find the One who loves you. Call out to Him with these words:

Father, I’ve tried to find purpose and meaning in my life without You and it hasn’t worked. I have a huge empty hole in my life that nothing seems to fill. Enter into my heart, cleanse me through the blood of Your Son and fill my heart with your peace and joy. Amen



We would like to send you another booklet that takes you through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and will give you a little deeper overview of the Bible and what it means to live with hope. This little

booklet is called ***Guide to Happiness.***

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