

place of human failure. God then treats you and loves you as He does His own Son, Jesus.

HOW TO RESPOND TO THE ENEMY

Satan wants to destroy your faith and your hope so that you will give up on God. He wants you to believe that you are too bad for God to save, that your case is hopeless, that you have been too bad for God to love you and forgive you. Satan may make you believe that you cannot come to God until you have made yourself good enough. You can answer Satan's accusations with God's promise that "the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (**John 6:37**). Tell the enemy that Christ's blood shed on the cross cleanses from all sin. If you take even one step toward God in repentance, He is listening, waiting eagerly for you to give your life to Him.

As Martin Luther's friend told him wisely, "Listen to the Son of God. He became man to give you the assurance of divine favor." He assured Luther that we have a kind heavenly Father, and counseled him, "Love Him who first loved you."

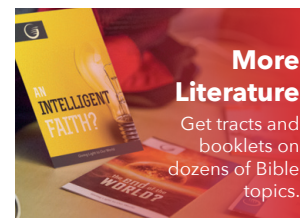
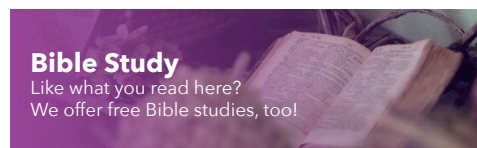
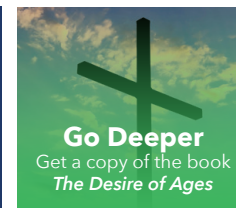
Jesus loves to have us come to Him just as we are, sinful, helpless, and dependent. We may come with all our weakness, our foolishness, our sinfulness—our messed-up lives—and fall at His feet in

repentance. He wants to encircle us in His love, to heal our wounded lives, and to clean us from all our sins. It is true that God hates sin, but He loves every sinner. He sent Jesus to our world so that everyone who chooses to accept His love and forgiveness can experience the peace and joy that come with freedom from guilt.

You may, like the apostle Paul, say, "Jesus Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (**1 Timothy 1:15**). Yet Jesus would have died for even one sinner. **John 3:16** assures us that God loved the world so much that whoever believes in Him will not perish (die eternally) but will have everlasting life.

That "whoever" means Ryan. And it also means YOU.

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Giving Light to Our World

Ryan grew up a religious person. He enjoyed having a little fun here and there, a harmless practical joke now and then. But he regularly attended worship services. He married a lovely woman, and they sang beautifully together as she played the old piano. They mostly performed songs about God's love. Their favorite said, "I've wandered far away from God; now I'm coming home."

But then his wife found another man. From there, Ryan's life quickly fell apart. He had one problem after another, until finally he went to prison for selling stolen cars. Home from prison at last, he took a new job—still breaking the law—and returned to prison for a few more years.

Late in Ryan's life, as family and an occasional friend tried to persuade him to return to God, he quietly let them know, "I'm not good enough for God to take me back."

Have you ever felt that you were never good enough? Maybe one or both of your parents made you feel that way. Maybe it was the students at school. Or your teachers. It might have been your boss. Or all of the above. Somehow you just knew that you didn't meet the expectations of the important people in your life—people whose love and respect you most wanted and needed. And if

you weren't good enough for them, how could you EVER hope to be good enough for God?

CLIMBING STAIRS ON YOUR KNEES

Martin Luther felt that way, too. The beliefs and superstitions of his religion filled him with fear of God as a cruel dictator, a harsh judge. As a young man, he constantly feared that he would upset or offend God. The more he thought about it, the more guilty he felt. He tried hard to find pardon and peace by fasting, studying day and night, beating himself, until at last his health was gone and he still felt only guilt and despair.

Finally, when everything seemed hopeless, a new-found friend brought him a completely different idea of God. The older man showed Luther in the Bible how he should stop looking at himself, stop thinking about the terrible punishment for breaking God's law. Instead he should look to Jesus, his sin-pardoning Savior. "Instead of torturing yourself on account of your sins," he said, "throw yourself into the Redeemer's arms. Trust in Him."

In one last effort to find freedom from his sins, Luther began to climb "Pilate's staircase" (a long flight of stairs) on his knees. Suddenly he heard a loud voice saying, "The just shall live by

faith"—there is nothing you can DO to save yourself. The idea that man can save himself by his own works is at the foundation of every false religion. God does not require you to do some dreadful, difficult thing in order to have the forgiveness of sin. You don't need to make long, tiring pilgrimages or perform painful penance to gain His forgiveness. **Romans 3:20** says that no person can be declared righteous and forgiven, except by faith.

Every effort to live a righteous, holy life through your own strength is doomed to failure. The Bible says that there is NO ONE who is righteous—not even one. ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God—every person in the world (**Romans 3:10, 23**)! Then is your case hopeless? Is mine?

You might think you have been too bad for God to love. But even if you have been very sinful, the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. There is only one "unpardonable sin"—only one sin that God will not forgive (**Matthew 12:31**). It is to stubbornly refuse throughout your life to accept God's invitation to repent and let His Holy Spirit work in your life.

If you deliberately choose to continue sinning, there is no sacrifice, nothing that you can do, that will cover your sins (**Hebrews 10:26**). But He has

promised that if you confess your sins to Him, He is faithful and just—completely fair—to forgive you from sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness (**1 John 1:9**). Whoever tries to hide his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and gives them up, will receive God's mercy (**Proverbs 28:13**). Christ said that everyone who has sinned is "a slave of sin" (**John 8:34**). Sin does produce guilt. Guilt can be a heavy load to carry, damaging its victim not only spiritually and emotionally but even physically and mentally. The cure—the antidote—for guilt is forgiveness, which gives a clear conscience and peace of mind. Jesus assured, "If the Son [Jesus Christ] makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (**John 8:36**).

Don't think that you can ever be "good enough." Only Jesus can be. Yet God still expects obedience to His law. No one is capable of obeying God in every thought and word and action. It is only through His power and by His Holy Spirit that people can ever be changed. As you trust God completely, and as you daily search for His will in your life, you will desire to do what He wants. It is by faith—by complete trust in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for your sins—that God, the Father and Judge of all mankind, accepts Christ's righteousness in the