



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

"And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free"

John 8:32

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"Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me', he begged, 'and I will pay back everything'. The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back'. But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant', he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matt. 18:23–35 NIV).

When you read the parable told by Jesus Christ to His disciples carefully, you unwittingly discover for yourself the



UNFORGIVENESS

very essence of our human unforgiveness towards each other. Unfortunately, most people do not know how to forgive their debtors and offenders as the Lord teaches us all. Humanity, due to its innate sinful nature, is more inclined towards selfish manifestations than admission of its own mistakes and sins. Humans are glad to accept love, forgiveness, and praise when it's directed at them. However, it is not always possible to give all this unconditionally and in full to others. It's easier to love someone who loves you and is ready to do anything for your sake. It is easier to forgive those who are not guilty against you. Well, praise is generally more pleasant to give to those who support and care for you in general. It is much more difficult to love your neighbors unconditionally without the slightest hint of them reciprocating your love and to praise and forgive those who are not afraid to tell the truth about you. It is very difficult for a person to accept reprimand from his neighbor, especially if he believes he's better than what others say about him. Possessing the sinful nature, people are more inclined to condemn others rather than themselves. For such people, the Lord once said in His Sermon on the Mount: **"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you"** (Matt. 7:1–2).

Why do we love to judge others but don't know how to forgive? Why is it so difficult to recognize our own mistakes and sins? Why do we always look for a way to excuse ourselves and our behavior?

The truth is simple. The fact is that literally everyone is a sinner and sins. The Bible says: **"There is no one righteous, not even one"** (Rom. 3:10). However, those who strive for perfection and sincerely believe in God will always admit their mistakes and in every way try to imitate Jesus Christ as a model of integrity and holiness. Those who do not work on themselves are in a much worse situation and they don't care to strive towards perfection. Hence the rejection of the idea that they aren't perfect. These people are always focused on, and seek out, the flaws of other people. Usually those who are an order of magnitude lower in their spiritual development condemn and discuss other people. They try to lessen their own mistakes and sins by judging others. It is always easier to judge others rather than admit to your own sins and love unconditionally.

I reread the Sermon on the Mount hundreds of times and every time I am delighted and continue to admire the unearthly things the Lord told us about. He commanded us to love even our enemies. As it's said, **"...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who offend you and persecute you..."** (Matt. 5:44). As it turns out, only under such conditions we can achieve perfection. Love cannot be temporary or selective: it is either

there or is not. God loves us all and calls everyone to love others. He explains this to us when He says the following: **"...if you love those who love you, what is your reward? Do not tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing special? Do not pagans do the same?"** (Matt. 5:46–47). In other words the Lord calls us all to perfection so that we all may be like Him. In all situations the Lord asks us not to condemn other people but on the contrary to learn how to love and forgive everyone. Why forgive everyone? Because, by not forgiving someone we expose ourselves to be unforgiven ourselves for it is said: **"...if you forgive people for their transgressions, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive people for their transgressions, then your Father will not forgive you your sins"** (Matt. 6:14–15).

One day, Apostle Peter asked Jesus Christ, **"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven"** (Matt. 18:21–22 KJV).

What can be added to this? Only one thing, the Lord teaches us to forgive everyone no matter how many times they sin against us.

Why is it that most people cannot forgive the sins of other people? What prevents a person from doing exactly as the Lord Himself did? The fact is that our unforgiveness of our neighbor is the result of our imperfection in love. Many say, "I love God and serve Him. I am ready to answer before Him". However, by no means have they all reconciled with their neighbors and much less truly love their neighbors. The Holy Scripture unequivocally says: **"Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen"** (1 John 4:20 NIV).

In conclusion: **"He who does not love, has not known God, because God is love"** (1 John 4:8). If a person has not learned to love, how can he forgive someone? After all, where there is no love, there is always pride, narcissism, and envy which form human egoism that does not allow one to forgive another and recognize their own sins and imperfections.

Today the Lord again and again calls all people to repentance, to love, and to forgive each other. He tolerates us for a long time. As it is said, **"The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance"** (2 Pet. 3:9).

Lastly I would like to mention, thank God for His patience with us, because today everyone has a chance to overcome unforgiveness and learn to love others.

I. GORIK

CHRISTIAN NEWS

Joyce Meyer Takes a Jab at the Prosperity Gospel, Denounces Her Past Beliefs In It

Evangelist Joyce Meyer recently admitted that in the past, her views on the "prosperity Gospel" were "out of balance".

Meyer, who has received much criticism for her preaching on the prosperity Gospel, shared the dangers in taking such theology too close to heart with her Instagram followers.

"I'm glad for what I learned about prosperity, but it got out of balance", the well-known Christian author and speaker said. "I'm glad for what I've learned about faith, but it got out of balance".

Meyer noted that this sort of theology led her to believe that the reason others experienced hardships was due to a lack of faith.

"Every time somebody had a problem in their life, [I thought] it's because they didn't have enough faith. If you got sick it's because you don't have enough faith. If your child died, it's because you don't have enough faith", Meyer said.

She explained that she has since learned that faith doesn't ensure that everything will be perfect, but rather it means simply putting your trust in God in all things.

"Faith is something God gives you that you need to use and release in your life. It's a powerful force but it's not just an automatic, you put your trust in God, you put your faith in Him", Meyer added.

Meyer's announcement came as a surprise to some as she has been a major proponent of the prosperity Gospel in the past.

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I. REGARDING NAMES

Back in the biblical times and Hebrew culture, a name always was beyond just a name. A name held meaning, for example:

☉ The name **Solomon** translates as *recompense, completeness, and peace*:

1 Chronicles 22:9 — *Behold, your son will be born: he will be a peaceful man; I will give him rest from all enemies around him: therefore Solomon will be his name. And I will give peace and tranquility to Israel in his days.*

☉ **Isaac** means *laughter*. **Genesis 21:5-6** — *Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born unto him. And Sarah said: God hath made me to laugh, so that all that hear will laugh with me.*

☉ **Elymas** is translated as *magician*: **Acts 13:8** — *But Elymas the sorcerer (for that is what his name means) opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith.*

Nowadays, names and titles serve only to distinguish one being from the other. At the same time, little attention is paid (or not at all) to the meaning of a name. This is equivalent to assigning a serial number to a thing or a person. In ancient times the attitude towards names was quite different. This should be taken into account when studying the Holy Scriptures. In the Old Testament culture, the principle by which a name was chosen was not connected with the harmonious name. The purpose of the name or calling was to characterize the person, place or subject. Therefore, all proper names used to have a certain meaning and significance. Sometimes the names reflected some expectations, concerns, or even fate.

1. Geographical names:

- ☉ **Frame** (*height*);
- ☉ **Mitzpa** (*observation*);
- ☉ **Gilgal** (*wheel, circle*);
- ☉ **Gomorrah** (*drowning, immersion*);
- ☉ **Canaan** (*subservient*) and so on.

2. Names:

- ☉ **Benjamin** (*son of happiness*)
- ☉ **Benoni** (*son of sorrow*),
- ☉ **Messiah** (*anointed*),
- ☉ **Moses** (*saved from the water*),
- ☉ **David** (*beloved*),
- ☉ **Eutychus** (*lucky*),
- ☉ **Gideon** (*cutting down*) and so on.

Since in the Hebrew language the name holds meaning, characteristics of the noun, and even personality are often the only key to understanding many biblical events. Perhaps that is why, when translating the Holy Scripture, many characteristics of people and places are translated as proper names.

Many Old Testament names reflect the attitude of people towards God. For example:

☉ Names beginning with **Jo** or ending **iah** (short form of **Yahweh**): **John** — *Yahweh is merciful*, **Isaiah** — *Yahweh is salvation*.

☉ Names that begin with **El** and end in **el** mean **God**: **Elisha** — *God helped*, **Samuel** — *one who hears God*, **Daniel** — *God is my judge*.

II. NAME CHANGING

According to the law, the name was given to a person on the eighth day after his birth: **Luke 1:59** — *So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias; Luke 2:21* — *And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.*

However, no one was surprised if during their life their name changed. One example is of **Naomi**: **Ruth 1:20** — *But she said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me."*

It is worth noting that changing a name has always been associated with a change in the nature or fate of a person. And since only a person with special powers and authority had the right to give and change a name, often a change of a name was associated with a demonstration of authority over the renamed person. For example, during the Babylonian captivity, the names of many Jews were forcibly replaced by Babylonian ones. Here is one of the biblical testimonies about this: **Daniel 1:6-7** — *Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.* Please note that the Jewish names containing a part of the name of the Lord God of Israel were replaced by pagan idols in honor of the Babylonian idols:

☉ **Daniel** [*God (El) is my Judge*] was renamed **Belteshazzar** [*May the King guard Bel* (Bel is the Babylonian god)];

☉ **Hananiah** (*Yahweh exalted me*) — to **Shadrach** (either *the servant of sin*, or this is a distorted form of the name of the Babylonian god **Marduk**);

☉ **Mishael** [*who belongs to God (El)*] — to **Meshach** [*who belongs to the goddess Sakh* (the Babylonian goddess of love and fertility)];

☉ **Azariah** (*Yahweh helped*) — to **Abed-Nego** [*a servant of Nebo* (Nebo is the name of the Babylonian god, whose middle name is Mercury)].

Often, the Lord God Himself initiated the name change: **Jeremiah 20:1-4** — *Now Pashhur the*

son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord. And it happened on the next day that Pashhur brought Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord has not called your name Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib. For thus says the Lord: 'Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it. I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword'."

Let's look at the most vivid examples of people whose name and destiny were changed throughout their lives due to divine intervention.

TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

NEW NAME

1. EXAMPLES FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT

A. Abraham

Genesis 17:4-7 — *As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you.*

Abram is the name of Abraham before being renamed by God in the ninety-ninth year of his life, which translates to *Exalted father*. The new name **Abraham** translates as *the father of a multitude*.

B. Sarah

Genesis 17:15-16 — *Then God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall be from her."*

Sarai translates as *competing*. **Sarah** translates as *princess, madam*.

C. Jacob

Genesis 32:24-28 — *Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks". But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob". And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."*

The name **Jacob** comes either from the Hebrew root meaning *to follow, to be behind* but also *to supplant, circumvent, assail, overreach*, or from the word for *heel*. But the interesting thing about this name is the **direct meaning** of the name **Jacob** — *he holds on to the heel*. If you recall, this is exactly how Jacob was born — holding on to the heel of his brother: **Genesis 25:24-26** — *So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. Simultaneously with the direct meaning, the name **Jacob** has a figurative meaning — *to deceive, to trick, to stumble*. If you recall, this is exactly how Jacob behaved before meeting God: **Genesis 27:36** — *And Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and now look, he has taken away my blessing!" And he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"*; **Hosea 12:3** — *He took his brother by the heel in the womb...**

The name **Israel** means *fighting with God*: **Genesis 32:28** — *And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed";* **Hosea 12:3** — *...in his strength he struggled with God.*

2. EXAMPLES FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT

A. Apostle Peter

John 1:41-42 — *He first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ). And he*

brought him to Jesus. Now when Jesus looked at him, He said, "You are Simon the son of Jonah. You shall be called Cephas" (which is translated, a Stone [Peter]).

Simon — from the verb *to listen*. **Peter** is derived from Greek **Petros**, meaning *stone, rock*.

B. James and John (sons of Zebedee)

Mark 3:14-17 — *Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, "Sons of Thunder"...*

Here we see that the Lord called two brothers, John and James, by one name or nickname. Most likely, it reflected their ardent temperament.

C. Apostle Paul

Acts 13:9-10 — *Then Saul, who also is*

called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, "O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord?"

Saul, a native of the city of Tarsus in Cilicia (**Acts 9:11; 21:39**), also bore a second, Roman, name — **Paul**. We do not know whether Saul received the name **Paul** from the Lord, or the brothers in faith gave him that name. But we know for sure that the name **Saul** in the New Testament is associated with the apostle **Paul** before his conversion to Christianity, when he was still the persecutor of the Church of God.

☉ Think of **Stefan**: **Acts 7:58** — *And they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul; Acts 8:1* — *Saul approved of killing him.*

☉ Remember **Saul's** zeal to exterminate the followers of Christ? **Acts 9:1-2** — *Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.*

Before **Saul** believed in Christ, the Lord **Jesus**

Ephesians 3:8 — *I, the least of all the saints, have been given the grace to preach the riches of Christ to the pagans; 1 Corinthians 15:9* — *For I am the least of the apostles, and not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

D. Barnabas

The New Testament mentions a man named **Barnabas**. Few people know that this name was given to him by his brothers and sisters in Christ. His original name was **Joses**: **Acts 4:36-37** — *And Joses [Joseph], who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement or Consolation), a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

The very meaning of the name **Barnabas** shows why **Joses** was given this name: he was a real consolation for brothers and sisters in Christ.

☉ When the church experienced financial difficulties, he was one of the first to sell his land and gave the money from the sale to the church (**Acts 4:36-37**).

☉ **Barnabas** was a comfort and encouragement for **Apostle Paul**. When he believed and became a Christian, while believers continued to fear him remembering that he was the persecutor of the church, it was **Barnabas** who introduced him to his brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, telling the story of his repentance: **Acts 9:26-27** — *And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.*

☉ And when there was a slight disagreement between **Mark John's** weakness, **Barnabas** became a consolation and encouragement for **Mark John**, giving him a second chance to become a true servant of **Jesus Christ**: **Acts 15:36-41** — *Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us now go back and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing". Now Barnabas was determined to take with them John called Mark. But Paul insisted that they should not take with them the one who had departed from them in Pamphylia, and had not gone with them to the work. Then the contention became so sharp that they parted from one another. And so Barnabas took Mark and sailed to Cyprus; but Paul chose Silas and departed, being commended by the brethren to the grace of God. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.*

III. GOD PROMISES US A NEW NAME

A letter came to the address of our discussion club with the following question: *Is it a sin to change our first and last name?*

Answering this question, we would like to say that changing our first name and last name is not a sin, if it is not done with the aim of deceiving someone or using someone in our own selfish interests and if the name is not blasphemous.

In addition, we must not forget that regardless of the names recorded in our passports, each of us has another name. The Lord gives all those who come to Him a new name, symbolizing the beginning of a new life in Christ: **1 Peter 2:9-10** — *But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.* Those who obtained mercy, belong to **Jesus Christ** and bear His name. The name is "Christian", derived from the name of Christ and translated as a *follower of Christ*: **Acts 11:26** — *They gathered in the church for a whole year and taught a considerable number of people, and the disciples in Antioch for the first time began to be called Christians.* If you believe in **Jesus Christ** and follow His teachings, then you also bear this honorable name — **Christian**.

In addition, the Lord in His Word makes a promise to give a new name to every saved person: **Revelation 2:17** — *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.* If you are not yet a Christian, we urge you to accept Christ as your God and Savior and at the same time acquire eternal life and the right to be called a Christian.

If you have already become a Christian, do not forget what honor you have received from the Lord.

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Drawing by Igor OSOKIN, Russia

addressed him by the name of **Saul**: **Acts 9:3-4** — *As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*

Later on the Lord addressed him by the name of **Paul**: **Acts 18:9** — *In the vision of the night, the Lord said to Paul: Do not be afraid, but speak and do not stop; Acts 23:11* — *The next night, the Lord appeared to him, and said, Take courage, Paul; for as you testified of me in Jerusalem, so must you testify in Rome.*

Saul (Jewish **Shaul**) means *requested* (from God) or *borrowed* (to serve God). **Paul** (from Latin **Paulus**) means *small or low*. We believe that it was not by chance that **Saul** was renamed **Paul** and that **Paul** himself was well aware of this. It is no coincidence that he called himself the least of the saints and the least of the apostles because he was once the persecutor of the Church of God:

Already being believers, many people often wonder: "Why does God not answer our prayers?" We pray, we pray, there is silence in response. God does not seem to hear us. Today, a lot of people have this question due to the Christian movement being now more widespread than it was a quarter of a century ago. In the recent past, it was popular and prestigious to be a communist or a Komsomol member (under Soviet Union). Today there are a large number of people becoming church parishioners. Many people who are disappointed in everyday life are trying to find some kind of so-called island of comfort and hope in the face of a particular church. It's no secret that people come to God for different reasons: some from exhaustion and hopelessness, some looking for profit, and some looking to be saved. However, not all people are aware of the responsibility that falls upon them after they make a promise to God to live with a clear conscience. As life itself has shown, many people quickly are zealous in their faith but fade away just as quickly. Why this happens is easy to explain: the meaningless fuss and vanity of this world overwhelms the mind, and one starts to live not with his heart and mind, but with emotions, carnal desires and human pride. People's goals are materialistic; therefore many simply forget about the heavenly things and are increasingly attracted to the earthly things. Unfortunately, this happens much more often than not.

Once, Jesus Christ told the people who gathered around Him a parable about the sower: "...behold, a sower went out to sow; and when he sowed, another fell by the way, and the birds came and devoured it; some fell on stony places, where there was little soil, and soon it sprang up, because the earth was shallow. When the sun rose, it withered, and, as it had no root, withered; Some fell into the thorns, and the thorns grew and choked it. another fell on good soil and bore fruit: one a hundred times, and another sixty, another thirty" (Matthew 13:3-8).

Sad as it may seem, the majority of the people did not understand the essence of this parable then, as, indeed, many people today do not understand its meaning. Therefore, they are similar to the seeds that the Lord mentioned. Today's colorful world so absorbs people that they simply forget about the obligations that they took upon themselves in

repentance and baptism. For this reason, many are moving away from the faith or are on a forked path. God does not listen to the prayers of such people.

When the disciples of Jesus Christ asked Him about the meaning of the parable of the sower, He explained who was being spoken of. The Lord told them: "**Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not**

left me?" After all, when we came to Christ, we agreed with all that The Lord spoke to us through His Word. At first, almost everyone is inspired by God's truth, which we took as a guide in everyday life. However, after some time, human pride takes its upper hand and we gradually without noticing it, move away from intimacy with God. After all reality shows that it is not so easy to love everyone and sacrificing oneself for the sake of

believers. In such cases human pride especially manifests itself. It does not allow a person to admit his own mistakes, forgive his neighbors, and make concessions. Pride simply makes a person godless, that is not having close contact with the Creator. The Apostle James in his letter addresses the believers with this question: "**Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God"** (James 4:1-4 NKJV).

Summarizing the above: a double minded person and a proud heart cannot count on the help of God. It is clearly stated: "**You ask, and do not receive...**" But how can you receive anything from God if requests are focused only on the personal, selfish and materialistic? God desires to see our hearts pure and open but instead they are often proud and haughty. Unless a person is freed from this vice, he will always remain unheard and distant from God. There is a very strong warning in the Book of Proverbs, where it is clearly stated: "**Pride goes before destruction, and arrogance precedes a fall"** (Prov. 16:18).

The Apostle James, in his letter, instructs and asks us. He says: "**Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you"** (James 4:7-10 ESV).

I am confident that if you follow these instructions, then God will certainly come close to you and will hear all your prayers. For in a humble heart there will no longer be a place for pride. Indeed, there is a reason that it is said: "**God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble"** (James 4:6).

I. GORIK.



understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (Matthew 13:18-23 ESV).

What else prevents us from being heard by God? Why does God oftentimes not answer our prayers? To answer these questions we first need to answer the question to ourselves: "**Am I following all the instructions and recommendations that the Lord**

others is even more difficult. Being patient, humble, and merciful is also quite difficult — even prayers become less sincere and honest. At this stage of our walk in faith we begin to notice that for some reason God does not hear them. Often in such cases we are aflame with indignation and make claims to God like "We serve you faithfully and you do not hear us!" so on and so forth.

In the Holy Scripture it is said: "**But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work"** (James 3:14-16).

When a person drifts away from God due to daily vanity, one way or another there becomes a fracture in faith and with it frustration in many things. Many falsely believe that God owes them something, especially if they participate in some kind of ministry. On this basis they are trying to distinguish themselves from other

Scars remained for life

A few years ago, on one hot summer day in South Florida a little boy decided to swim in the lake behind his house. Hurrying to dive into the cold water he ran through the back doors of the house throwing off his shoes, socks, and shirt as he ran. He flew into the water not noticing that as he was swimming towards the middle of the lake, the alligator was swimming towards the shore.

His mother was in the house watching from the window. She saw them both when they began to swim closer and closer to each other. In a fit of absolute fear, she ran to the water screaming to her son.

Hearing her voice, the little boy became alarmed and turned around to swim to-

wards his mother. But it was too late. When he got to her the alligator had already overtaken him. Standing on the dock, the mother grabbed her little boy by the arms as the alligator grabbed his legs. An incredibly fierce struggle between the two began.

The alligator was much stronger than the mother, but the mother, was too frantic to let go.

At that time a farmer was driving by. Hearing her

screams he ran out of his truck, took aim and shot the alligator. Surprisingly, after long weeks in the hospital, that little boy survived. His legs were scarred after the terrible attack of the animal. He had deep marks from his mother's nails on his hands which dug into his skin in an attempt to keep her beloved son.

A newspaper reporter who interviewed the boy after the injury asked if he could show him his scars.

The boy raised his trouser legs. And then with obvious pride he told the reporter: "But look at my hands. I have big scars on my hands, they are from my mother who did not let me go!"

You and I can identify with this little boy.

We also have scars. No, not from alligator bites but scars from a painful past. Some of these scars are invisible and are from our deepest regrets. But we have some wounds my friend, because God refused to let us go. In the midst of your suffering, He was there, holding on to you.

Giving to the poor

In Constantinople lived a man who loved the poor. The poor always followed behind him in the streets and he did not refuse anyone.

Once he was asked why he was so gracious. He said the following: "When I was ten years old. I heard a priest's sermon in Church in which he said that he who gives to a beggar gives directly into Christ's hands. I didn't believe it and I went home deep in thought. On the way I

suddenly saw a beggar in rags and above him the face of the Savior. A kind person was giving bread to the beggar, but at that moment as he stretched out his hands to give, the hands of the Savior where taking the bread and blessing the gracious man.

Seeing this, I came to believe that he who gives to the poor gives to Christ Himself. To this day I see the face of Christ over the poor man's face, and with love I hasten to give them whatever I can".

<http://bible-facts.ru>



How to explain faith to children?

Children need to be explained the basics of faith. The desire and ability to believe is innate in children. The goal of parents is to explain to the child that he/she needs to always and in everything trust God. It is necessary to plant and nurture faith in a child by telling them about God, praying with the child every day, and reading the Bible with them. It is also necessary to bless the child out loud and to pray for the child.

Tell children about God and they will believe in Him. Children believe with their heart and not with their intellect. This is what is often lacking in adults whose hearts are hardened. Children, on the other hand, believe in God with great enthusiasm. Knowing about children's predisposition to believe, Jesus Christ has called adults to follow the example of a child's simple and sincere faith: *Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 18:2-3). Also in Mark 10:15: *Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.*

Often, the barrier on the child's road to God is our laziness and lack of desire to find a free moment to tell the child about God, read a Bible story to him, or answer his seemingly stupid questions. Other barriers are our sinful habits, hypocrisy, lack of faith, and not spending enough time with the Lord in prayer and reading the Bible. Remember, children watch us and our style of life very carefully. It is impossible to hide our mistakes in our relationship with God from their sharp eyes. At the same time, they are also able to see our sincere faith in God. What does your child see while observing you: faith or the lack of it? The answer to this question will determine if you are a barrier on your child's path to God.

Do not forget that we have to nurture faith in the child, not just simply explain it to them. This is best done not by words but by personal example. If the child will hear about God from you and at the same time will see your faith and love for God, and your ability to trust in God in your every-day life, he will learn to love and trust God just like you.

How were people saved during the time of the Old Testament?

God does not change. He is a saving God and his saving principles have always been the same. During the times of the Old Testament, people were saved just as they are today, through faith. They were not saved by a blind, pagan faith but by the faith that is described in Hebrews 11:6: *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek him.*

For example, from the Bible we learn the following:

• Abraham pleased God by his faith and God counted his faith onto righteousness: **Genesis 15:6** — *And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

• The same is said about Enoch in Hebrews 11:5: *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.*

• The same also describes Abel: **Hebrews 11:4** — *By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.*

• The same is also said about other men and women of faith.

Today, you and me are saved by faith in the saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ. During Old Testament times, people were saved by obeying God's law and by faith in the cleansing power of their sacrifices that the law dictated had to be brought for the breaking it. The Old Testament law was a foreshadow of the future good things to come (Hebrews 10:1) and the sacrifices were a symbol of the future sacrifice of Jesus Christ: *the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world* (Revelations 13:8)

In Mark 12:27 it is written that *He [Lord] is not God of the dead, but of the living.* The Lord is God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the men and women of faith who are described in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. The Lord proudly calls himself their God because thanks to their faith, they found mercy in the eyes of God and were justified and saved.

The list of heroes of faith begins with Abel and is comprised of only Old Testament heroes of the faith. At the end of the list, it says that there is not enough time to tell about all of the heroes of the faith and their actions. These people are called heroes of the faith because their faith and lives, based on this faith, are an example for each one of us who live in New Testament times. The examples of their faith were given in order for us to learn what kind of faith is a "live" and saving faith. Each one of us needs to have this exact faith because without faith it is impossible to please God, be saved,

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Christ with Boy, Carl Heinrich Bloch

or receive eternal life: **Ephesians 2:8** — *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.*

What were the names of Adam's kids?

The Bible names only three of Adam and Eve's sons: Cain, Abel, and Seth. Cain was the first-born and he was also the one who killed Abel.

Cain and Abel: Genesis 4:1-2 — *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD". And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground.*

Seth: Genesis 4:25 — *And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him".*

These are the three sons of Adam and Eve that are mentioned in the Bible. The rest of the children are mentioned in the Bible in passing: **Genesis 5:4** — *The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters.*

The Bible also tells us about the descendants of Seth and tells us the names of Noah's forefathers. All of the nations that inhabit the earth have all descended from Noah. **Genesis 10:32** — *These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.*

How to understand the Biblical Text?

How to understand the Biblical text (either directly or as a parable) is heavily dependent on the text itself. Many styles of writing are employed in the Bible: storytelling, poetry, parables, letters, and prophesies. One requires wisdom and a certain skillset in order to understand an exert from the Bible. The skillset refers to certain "tactics" that experienced readers of the Bible use when studying the Holy Scriptures. One of the main "tactics" is the rule that the Bible interprets the Bible. This means that in the desire to understand a biblical text, one must not interpret it using personal life experience or the opinion of philosophers and writers of biblical commentary, but they must use the biblical context to interpret in correctly.

Besides, often times, parables and other allegories are used in the Bible to reveal a certain truth. Interpreting a text of the Bible as a metaphor is allowed only when the Bible itself speaks of its allegorical nature. Very often, God's Word gives us clues as to how to interpret this or the other passage of the Bible. It is also important to remember

that in certain circumstances, events and the locations themselves can have both a direct and allegorical meaning.

For example, the 4th chapter of Galatians speaks about Mount Sinai as a symbol of slavery while Jerusalem is a symbol of grace. In this instance, both of these objects are real geographical locations but at the same time, they have an allegorical spiritual meaning as well.

It is customary to treat certain biblical verses as allegorical when they describe items outside of their usual context. For example, the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John where He calls himself the *door*, *bread*, *way*, *water*, etc. are to be treated as allegorical. These words were used by Jesus as metaphors.

In **Philippians 3:2**, Apostle Paul says: *Look out for the dogs.* Paul is talking about false teachers who were preaching that in order to receive salvation, one must be circumcised. In this instance, the word dogs is a metaphor and should be treated as such.

Jesus in **Luke 13:32** said: *Go and tell that fox...* Jesus is referring to Herod in this instance and we don't need to doubt that this is a metaphor.

It is also important to remember that there are certain circumstances where the exact same word that is used as a metaphor can mean absolutely different things. For example, the word *lion* is used in **1 Peter 5:8** to describe the devil while in **Revelations 5:5**, it describes Jesus Christ. Remember, in the majority of cases, the definition of a word that is used as a metaphor will be able to be understood from the context around it.

One more hint, a word cannot be used both as an analogy and itself at the same time. If a word is used as an analogy in a sentence, then its metaphorical meaning trumps its regular meaning. But if a word's regular meaning does not seem out of context, then the word can be understood to be used as itself and not as a metaphor.

Some people try to find a deeper spiritual meaning in every verse of the Bible. This leads to the intended meaning of the verse to get lost and a new, unintended, and strange meaning to be assigned to it.

Sometimes, certain texts of the Bible are used to prove spiritual truths that the text in question is not talking about. For example, in **Acts 28**, a story is told about Apostle Paul who miraculously escaped harm from the bite of a venomous snake. People who love to invent spiritual meaning for all verses of the Bible might interpret the story as follows: *Satan, who is represented by the snake, attacks a preacher but suffers defeat.* Unquestionably, the Bible confirms the above truth but this particular text from Acts has nothing to do with it. This is a very good example of how not to interpret the Bible.

Apart from everything that was said above, it is good to remember that the Word of God teaches us that God himself will open up our minds to understand the Scriptures: **2 Peter 1:19-21** — *And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

In order to learn to understand the Word of God, first, it is important to spend as much time with it as possible; reading it and trying to understand it. Second, it is important to turn to the Lord with a request that He would open up our minds to understand his truths. The Lord will surely answer this request because He promised this himself: **James 1:5-7** — *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord.* I would like to add this from myself: read the Bible, live by it.

How did the animals get to America and Australia after the world-wide flood?

After the world-wide flood, mountains appeared that were taller than the ones that previously existed and seas and oceans were deeper than they were before the flood. However, right after the flood, the earth was not divided into continents by oceans like it is right now. The animals were able to slowly and without much effort reach all parts of the world.

The division of dry land into continents occurred much later as a result of ice caps melting at the poles. This fact is mentioned in the Bible in **Genesis 10:25**: *To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg, for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan.* This happened about 100 years after the world-wide flood.

As you can see, using genealogies, we are able to easily calculate the approximate time of the division of the earth's surface into continents and many other important dates in the history of mankind.

<http://www.cogmtl.net/q.htm>

PROVERB



Do good – and you will be rewarded

A Christian slave was brought to a certain Indian island. He worked so hard that the master eventually appointed him manager over his entire estate.

One time when the slave (now manager) came to the slave market he noticed an old mutilated sick man and immediately bought him. The owner was surprised by this choice. When everyone started to work, the owner noticed that the manager carefully looked after this old slave.

He placed him in his home, fed

him from his table, protected him in every way and supported him. The owner thought that the manager found his relative, and asked if the old slave was his father.

"No, he is not my father and not even a relative", the manager answered.

"Why do you care so much about him?"

"Because he is my enemy". It was he who once sold me to a slave trader and Christ tells us to pay for evil with good.

* * * * *

MY GOD CARES FOR ME

There lived a King in his country. In the evenings he changed into simple clothes to walk unnoticed in the streets of his native city and watch how people live. During one of these walks he noticed a small house. The doors and windows were open, a lamp burned on the table, and eulogies came from the house.

He approached the house and saw the following: an elderly man was sitting at the table, the table was crammed with all kinds of food, the man gladly ate the food

that no one evades paying taxes. He issued a decree, no cobbler to work without a license. In the morning I came to work and read the decree. I wondered what to do. I don't have a license. Then I decided that I would draw water from the well and distribute it to people. By evening, I had made enough money and again went to the market and bought myself food. My God takes care of me!"

The next day, the king issued a new decree. To prevent the spread



praising and giving thanks to God. The disguised king decided to go in and ask what kind of holiday this was.

He knocked on the door "Come in, dear, sit down! A guest is a gift of God!"

"What's the matter? What are you celebrating?"

"I've had a normal day. In the afternoon I work as a shoemaker, repairing shoes for wealthy people. In the evening, I help the poor and repair their shoes for free. If one of them wishes to thank me with a little something I do not refuse".

Today on my way home I bought this food with all the money I made. My God is so kind and caring, I feel good and happy, and therefore I eat with an appetite and praise God.

"Hold up", the king thought, "I will come see how he will praise and give thanks to his God tomorrow".

In the evening, approaching the same house, the king hardly believed his eyes: the shoemaker was eating again, singing and praising God.

The king came to him and asked:

"How was your day?"

"My God, whom I serve", the man answered, "knows everything and can do anything. He holds me in his arms and makes me wise. Today he helped me live. Our king is fair and makes sure

of infections it was forbidden to distribute water to other people's homes. Everyone could draw water from a well only for himself and his family.

In the evening the king sees a familiar picture: the windows are open, the lamp is on, exclamations are being heard, and the old man is eating food.

The king came in again and asked:

"How did you live today?"

"My God takes care of me", the old man answered. "He made me wise again. I did not even know that we had such a good king. Now he takes care that no one gets sick and forbids the distribution of water to other people's homes".

"Well what about you?" The king asked.

"My God made me wise and I decided that I'll go to the forest, I will carry firewood. And now I have food again. He knows everything and can do anything; He takes care of me!"

Then the king exclaimed:

"I am powerless! You cannot knock the foundation out from under the feet of one who puts his trust in God".

To trust God like this old man you need to know Him well. The most important occupation of our life is to know the Lord, and to admire Him because the God whom we serve is the great Lord!

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QUOTES FROM FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE

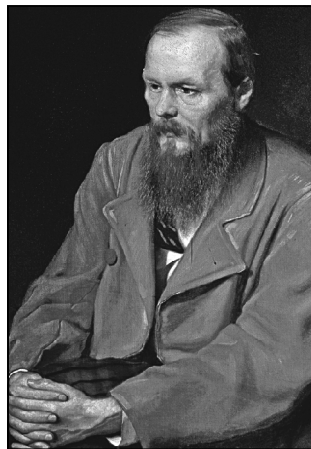


F. DOSTOEVSKY, Russian autor

In "The Karamazov Brothers", he says: "Lord! What kind of book is this Holy Scripture, what a miracle and what power is given to man! An exact depiction of the world, of man, and human nature. And many secrets are revealed! I love this book! Without the word of God humanity dies because the soul craves His Word".

A. PUSHKIN, Russian poet, Playwright

"I think that we will never give the people something better than the Scripture... In it you find the entirety of human life. Religion created art and literature, and everything that has been great since the beginning!.. Without this there would be no philosophy, no poetry, no morality. The British are right that they give the Bible to children... My children will read the Bible with me... The Bible is universal... This is the only book in the world that has everything in it".



According to contemporaries, few were as well versed in the Holy Books as Byron, and he did not allow a day to pass without reading a chapter from the



G. BYRON, English poet

Bible that was always with him. And after the death of this brilliant and moving poet the following passage, that he himself wrote, was found in his bible: "In this holy book is the secret of all secrets. Oh, happy among mortals are those to whom God has granted the mercy to listen, read, prayerfully utter, and reverently receive the words of this Book! Happy are those who are able to open the doors of the Bible and resolutely walk along its paths. But it would be better to never be born to those people who read it only for the purpose of doubting and neglecting it".

The eight most powerful couples in the Bible

Every married couple in the Bible is an example for us. Therefore, we can learn two things from them:

- 1) how to behave,
- 2) how not to behave.

We must understand that not every behavior or action described in the Bible is approved by God. There are actions that certainly should not be repeated...

It is clear that not a single biblical couple was perfect but looking at their life we can learn useful lessons for ourselves.

1. Adam and Eve: always stick together

Adam and Eve were the most ideal couple on earth. Before the fall they lived in perfect harmony. They communicated with God together, cultivated the garden of Eden together and rested together. But on the day when Eve was alone, she was tempted.

Some couples today leave their spouse for extended periods of time for money, work or other reasons. But this story teaches us that the most powerful temptations come when a spouse is left alone.

1 Corinthians

7:5 NIV — *Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

2. Abraham and Sarah: expect a miracle together

Abraham and Sarah had been expecting a child all their lives. They prayed to God and asked for a miracle. Although God was silent for a long time their faith did not weaken.

In the 11th chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, Abraham and Sarah are ranked among the heroes of the faith.

This couple teaches us, by example, to continue to believe God when He seems to be silent; continue to believe God when no result is visible on the horizon.

3. Jacob and Rachel: a radical sacrifice

Jacob loved Rachel so much that he happily agreed to work for her for seven years! It is interesting to note that these seven years seemed to him were like seven days!

Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:25**: *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*

True love manifests itself in difficult times. True love is sacrificial.

What are you ready to do for your wife?

4. Elkanah and Hannah: do not reproach, but support

Hannah was barren. This situation drove her into depression, due to which she did not want to eat and constantly cried. The husband did not reproach Hannah, unlike the rival Peninnah, but constantly inspired his wife and consoled her.

This couple teaches us by example how to support each other when things are not going according to plan; support each other when not everything works out.

5. Ruth and Boaz: regardless of your past, you have a future!

Ruth's life seemed to be over. She lost her first husband, ended up in a foreign country penniless and did not know the local language.

According to the law of Moses, being a Midian, Ruth did not even have the right to be a full citizen of Israel.

But this woman was able to overcome all difficulties, got married a second time and achieved great success! She not only joined the society of Israel, but also became the ancestor of the royal family and even entered the genealogy of Jesus!

This story teaches us that each of us, despite past sins and mistakes, has a great future with God

6. Hosea and Gomer: unconditional love

The story of Hosea and Gomer is a story of forgiveness and reconciliation. Very often spouses say: "If my wife had changed, then I would have treated her differently".

Many couples live decade with resentment and unforgiveness, thereby destroying their marriage.

The story of Hosea and Gomer teaches us to love our spouse

even if his or her behavior is far from perfect.

7. Joseph and Mary: trust each other

After his engagement to Mary, Joseph faced great challenges in life. How to accept the reality of what Mary said? Believe her or not?

Trust is the most important component in any relationship. Where there is no trust, there is jealousy, scandals and quarrels.

The relationship between Joseph and Mary teaches us about deep dedication and trust in each other.

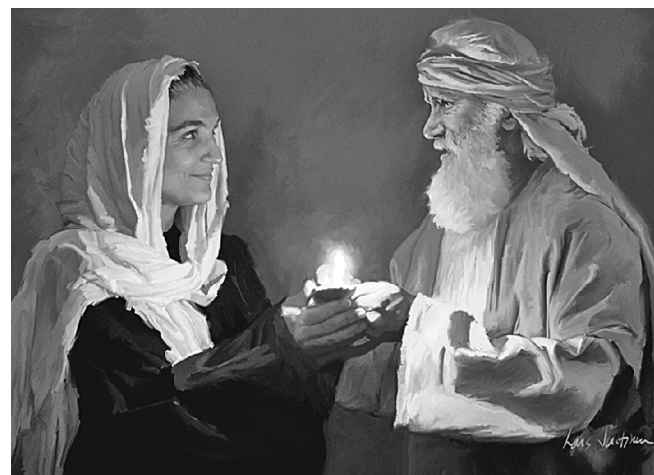
8. Priscilla and Aquila: serve God together

Priscilla and Aquila were evangelists. In the afternoon they preached the gospel together, and in the evening they made tents together. They are a prime example of how important it is to serve God as a couple.

I believe that the strongest churches are where the husband and wife not only support each other, but also serve together as one team. Not when the husband is in ministry and the wife does not even know the name of their church.

Joint ministries are the most effective and blessed.

<http://www.romansavochka.com>



TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

HEALING THROUGH REPENTANCE

I'm thirty-eight years old. I was born in a small town near Kyiv in a prosperous family. My parents worked hard so my sister and I wouldn't lack anything. I was the youngest in the family, and I was very spoiled.

When I was fourteen, I started smoking and drinking. It helped me to cope with my fears, which I had plenty of.

After graduating from high school, I started using tramadol. By the age of twenty, I was heavily addicted to heroin. I didn't see



the exit, and nor did I want to see it. The drug that used to give me the illusion of independence has completely taken over me. Paradoxically, looking for freedom, I became a slave in the truest sense of the word.

Soon due to an overdose, I was in intensive care. It was a shock to my family: having a son that was a drug addict, was a disgrace. My parents started to seek an intensive treatment for me. They tried every treatment option out there but nothing worked.

My mother often cried that she would not see her grandchildren. She suggested for me to get married, in hopes that it would help me break free of this addiction. I took her suggestion and got married in 2008. My friend's sister was the chosen one. I can't say I loved her, it was just another attempt to get away from drugs and it worked. It's a pity I was only drug free for one year.

My wife was eight years younger than me and never even smoked. After my marriage, I got a job, and soon we had a son. It would seem, what else is needed for happiness? It turned out quite a bit: for full happiness I still needed drugs!

When my wife went to the hospital to give birth, my friend, my wife's brother, came to visit me. He brought a lot of drugs with him that he was selling. Due to my unrestricted access to the drug I started using it systematically again. At the same time I continued to go to work, to create a semblance of a normal life, to raise my son but I was still injecting. Something had to change. Again I went clinics, wasting money and so on — running in a circle. But nothing worked. My family life was hopelessly ruined. My son was growing up and starting to realize that I was a drug addict.

In 2010 my father passed away. He was very worried about me, and his heart couldn't handle it.

My antics became unbearable for my family. I took everything out of the house indiscriminately. In 2014, my wife took her belongings, the baby, and left.

After that I started using drugs and drinking without measure. I used to run home to my mother only to steal something, including the refrigerator. My son went to school and I studiously avoided meeting him. People were spitting in my direction. I was called a names. I stole literally everything I could. It would have been easier for me if I had been killed. And prison didn't seem like the worst option to me. It was a shame to live like this. Often, lying on the floor and suffering from withdrawals, I cried and asked God if I could die. I didn't dream of forgiveness, I thought I had no forgiveness. I wanted to die so I wouldn't torture anyone. And I didn't have the courage to kill myself.

I was taken back to a psychiatric hospital. There I had another overdose, and the doctor

refused to treat me further. He said that in my case only God could help.

My mother was given the information of a Christian rehabilitation center. I agreed to go there. I just wanted to die, and it didn't matter where. I wasn't looking for God, He found me. It happened at the end of 2016.

Miracles began to happen in the center. To my surprise I did not die and the end of the world did not come. I was getting better, I wanted to live. The weight was lifted, and I began to try to take small steps towards the Lord, to help the people around me. Sometimes I succeeded and I rejoiced in these small victories.

At the end of my rehabilitation, before my baptism, I had a very high fever. The doctors could not figure out what was wrong with me but I knew there must be a serious reason for it. I thought I was going to die. The whole church and rehabilitation center prayed for me.

On the 4th of March, I made a covenant with the Lord. In the morning my temperature was still thirty-nine point five (103.1 °F), but by the evening I was soundly sleeping. I still don't understand why.

After a while I took an HIV test. The result was positive as I suspected. Antiretroviral therapy was needed. Turns out I also had tuberculosis. All my tests were bad. They couldn't prescribe therapy to me: was sent to the regional hospital to see a professor. I went to hear how much I had left to live. I prayed like never before. The situation was hopeless.

I remember that day well. The professor at the table spent a long time sorting through my papers. I sat and prayed. He looked up at me and asked if I understood what had happened. I said I didn't. He was muttering, but I didn't understand him. All I heard was that I had tb on my feet. I told him it was God's glory. He said he wouldn't argue, but he wouldn't explain anything. He cancelled my tuberculosis therapy and prevention. I left the office in complete bewilderment. Then I went to the consultant for an explanation. She looked at my papers and said my case was an isolated one. That everything is normal, and the fact that I'm alive and not TB is a miracle. That's not something she'd seen before. She told me you can't keep quiet about it.

On the way home, I cried like a baby. I struggled to understand why the Lord had pardoned me, why I was alive, and found no reason. It was beyond my comprehension, such boundless Love for Me.

Today I serve people in a rehabilitation center. This is where I'm needed. I sincerely rejoice in helping people like me.

I made peace with my son and ex-wife. She got married, had a second child and rejoices in my relationship with our son, taking care of him. I know it's not their fault. It's hard for me to realize how much I've been tormenting them for so long. Only the Lord could have helped them forgive me. For my mother, I'm a welcome guest again. Together with her sister, her husband and nephews, we often gather for festive dinners in the parents' house.

God gave me a girl I loved. She's from our church. Now we are one family.

Today I can say that I am truly happy and free. Now I know what real freedom is — freedom from the love of drugs! I realize that I could never have been free from it were it not for God's love and His mercy to me. Only Jesus Christ gives such freedom!

Anatoly NAZARENKO,
Ukraine,
<http://revival.kiev.ua>

I'm twenty-nine years old. I was born in Crimea, in Eupatoria. I don't remember my father because he was in foreign countries all the time. Often drank and eventually divorced my mother. My mother and grandmother were involved in my upbringing. They loved me very much and to their misfortune raised a terrible and selfish person.

When our family suffered grief (my grandmother died), my mother decided to sell the apartment. After selling the apartment, she was attacked, beaten, and robbed. My mother was in intensive care and died six months later. I was left alone...

IF YOU NEED HELP, ENTRUST YOUR LIFE TO THE LORD AND HE WILL FIX IT

I was fourteen at the time. That's why they took me to boarding school. After spending a week there, I ran away. I got acquainted with an older group. At first everyone felt sorry for me, as I knew how to play on pity, as I had no one... Then there were drugs and alcohol and I was told to figure something out because "no one will give you drugs for free". After that I started stealing, engaging in prostitution, still continuing use drugs. I wasn't squeamish about getting money. All my friends were afraid to let me past the doorstep. My only distant relative, my aunt, seeing me from a distance, crossed to the other side of the street to get away from me. I lived like this for five or six years.

The consequences of such a life were not long in coming. Health deteriorated, there was nowhere to prick: veins could not be seen. All sorts of wounds appeared on my arms and legs that did not heal for a long time. One day after another injection, I freaked out. The dirty needle caused blood poisoning — sepsis. I had a temperature between forty-one and forty-two degrees (105–107 °F) for eight days. I was slowly burning. They put a cross on me. In the end, I was taken by ambulance, and I was prescribed a huge list of drugs. There were only fifty hryvnias in my pocket (~\$2). And since it was clear that I was a drug addict (bruises and injection sites...), I was left on a cold couch with no one attending to me. Using the last bit of strength I had I got home. I was living with a

legs quickly healed in the pre-trial denton center, as there was no access to the destruction of myself, as there was when I was at large. I felt better, and I thought, "It's good that I'm locked up, I'm alive".

I spent the next three and a half years in the camp. There I was the supply manager and I even managed to exist there normally. I didn't notice the time flying. It was time to be free. Deep down, I wanted to stop using and change my lifestyle although I was well aware that, once released, I would go back to my old ways.

Before my release, as I did not have a residence permit, I was offered

rehabilitation as a halfway house. There was a choice between a Christian and a social center. Before that, people came to the camp and witnessed how after liberation in the Christian center they recognized the One who gives true freedom. The right thought flashed in my head: "I must go to a place



where God will change my life". But carnal desires took over so went to the social center as there you can smoke. So I got to the Lozova Kharkiv region. I went through three months of rehabilitation there. I got a job, I rented a place to live. Literally on the second day of work I saw a girl at work high. I made friends with her quickly and after a few weeks she brought what I needed directly to work. Everything was repeating again as in Eupatoria. I knew all of Lozova's drug addicts. I didn't go to check in (I had supervision), the police were looking for me again. Once they gave a day of arrest, the second... Life was flying to hell.

Then I met a man who was helping me. His name was Gennady. He took me to Kharkiv, rented me a house. There I got a job with as a seamstress and firmly decided to quit. But Gennady was married and his wife was very jealous and turned me in to the cops. I went on the run and came to Kyiv. There was nowhere to live. There was nothing to eat. I went to such extremes that I could spend the night at the train station. And one day the moment came when I turned to God and asked him to take me away... I wanted to smoke, but had no matches, so I went up to the guys to ask them for a light. Instead, they started telling me the gospel. They said God loved me. I was so moved that the tears rolled out of my eyes. Fifteen minutes later, I begged them not to leave me. They took me, found me a place and a week later sent me to rehab in a Christian center. After going through a six-month course of rehabilitation, I realized what a life in freedom was that only God can give. I can't stop marveling God saved me many times.

After rehabilitation I repeatedly sinned, and this rehabilitation was not the last, but I already knew firmly then where to look for a way out.

Now I don't want to fight God. I am grateful to Him for giving me a new life, surrounding me with care and love, giving me a family, a loving husband, a church, friends... Praise Him for everything!

If you need help, entrust your life to the Lord, and He will fix it.

Svetlana NAZARENKO,
Ukraine,
<http://revival.kiev.ua>



guy back then and there I was small doses of drugs and a week later my temperature dropped to normal. It felt like I was going through a rebirth. The sepsis went into my leg. My entire right leg below the knee was covered with chemical burns and trophic ulcers. I thought I was going to be without a leg.

On top of that, the police started looking for me. I had a lot of convictions at the time but they were all limited to fines and suspended sentences. I've been running for a month. They found me in Simferopol, and then I ended up in prison. The court sentenced me to three and a half years in prison and sent me to the camp. I believe that what happened was God's decision and that it saved me from death. After all, my

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Do not be afraid to take a step forward to mark the beginning of a new chapter

I am thirty-six years old. I was born in Kyiv, in a wealthy family. I was mostly raised by my mother, grandmother and aunt. I basically did not see my dad: he was constantly working. We were building a house. We needed a lot of money. These were the dashing nineties, only the lazy did not earn.

I started smoking in the fifth grade. I was told that it is very cool and fashionable, and I really wanted to match my surroundings. At the same age, I learned what theft is. My friend asked me to stand watch while he crawled into his house for money. I quickly realized that I could do the same. I never needed money: everything I wanted was bought for me. Only now I didn't have to ask. I could just steal the money. It lay in packs in our home and no one counted it. And I began to steal without a twinge of conscience. And with the appearance of money, many friends appeared.

The need for money grew exponentially. The kiosks offered everything new and unknown: liquors, brandy, gin, cigars and much more. I did not deny myself anything. My parents did not suspect anything. I was able to skillfully hide my adventures and the constant theft of money. To them, I remained a good son.

I constantly lied. It fascinated me so much that at some point I began to consider myself a super genius. I lived as I wanted, did what I wanted. Everyone believed me, and I successfully avoided punishment. It seemed to me that the world around me was created for my pleasure.

I tried drugs for the first time in college. I was advised to try Tramadol tablets. Life immediately began to sparkle with new colors. And I realized that this was ideal. My parents and teachers would not know: there was no smell, my behavior was adequate. I did not experience shame, fatigue or worry. This was perfect!

For two years, everything was the best it could be, and then my body began to reject the pills. I vomited from them. My next step was the heroin. It was "love from

the first injection". Everything else receded into the background.

At eighteen, I got my driver's license. My father, not suspecting anything, bought me a car. The timing was perfect, because there were no good drugs in the city. If you had a car, you could get around. After, I met a serious guy, and we began to go to a nearby town for poppy straws and cook the heroin ourselves. David (that was the name of my new friend) was a drug dealer. We divided the money in half, made new friends, and had prostitutes constantly surrounding us. Drugs and money flowed in. Life was great, though not for long.

We transported the substance used for heroin in large quantities and barely hid. Because of this, we fell into an operational development. They detained us effectively, like in a movie. The arrest was shown in the news. Dad's money didn't help me, and I was locked away for three years. The zone did not correct me, because I was comfortable there.

On the first day of freedom, I injected myself. My parents did not believe me any longer, so I left for the village to my grandmother. I met a girl there with two young children. She was not addicted to any rubbish. Soon we began to live together. I continued to drink and inject, even when my son was born. Then I went back to prison for three years.

There was a guy who slept next to me in the barrack, whom everyone considered off. He constantly read the Bible and

recounted the Bible stories to me. His stories were colorful, as in reality. It was interesting to listen to him. That was how I came to understand that God exists. But upon release, it quickly disappeared from my head and I continued to inject myself. And after

centers, but I didn't stay anywhere for long, although every time I changed a little. In them I heard what sin is, who is God, what Jesus Christ did for me. I began to realize that I was going in the right direction.

The fifth rehabilitation center

of the center. I saw God in everything that surrounded me. I suddenly realized how He had kept me safe all this time and realized how much He loved me. After some time, I was baptized.

The second stage was the adaptation center. The first difficulties began. I tried to restore my family, but my wife did not want to. She lived in Poland with another man. The children were in a boarding school. Unfortunately, I was not able to take them out of there, since officially I was nobody to them. I was very worried and anxious throughout all these moments, but the Lord supported me.

Soon I got a job and started helping my children with money. I also made peace with my parents and began to talk with a girl who lived in an adaptation center with her small daughter. Her name was Love. I introduced her to my children and became very attached to her daughter. We recently got married.

Now I live together with my wife and daughter. The Lord is restoring in my life everything that I was breaking for many years. Work brings in a good income. For the first time in many years, I began to communicate with my father as close people. I like that I am sober

and make plans for the future. My wife and I are praying for our own home and a joint ministry.

I made a lot of mistakes and I understand that I did not deserve a second chance. However, God gave it to me. I did not even dare to dream of what I have now. Therefore, do not be afraid to take a step that will be the beginning of a completely new story in your life.

Oleg TKACHUK,
Ukraine,

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ten years of marriage with my wife, we divorced, and I moved back to my parents.

During my short life, I visited four psychiatric hospitals, was treated about fifty times in drug dispensaries, was in prison twice, suffered from epilepsy, but nothing could stop me or change me. I was afraid to be sober.

One day I was told about Christian rehabilitation centers for addicted people, and I decided to give it a try. I visited four such

was the last. To be honest, I went there not hoping for anything. I did not know how it would be this time.

The first days were bad. However, the leaders of the center were praying for me, and on the fifth day I suddenly realized that I was not experiencing withdrawal. I believed that this was God's miracle. Then I asked Him to change my life, and God answered. I began to like the analysis of Scripture, the lessons, the sermons, the very atmosphere

REHABILITATION CENTER IS A WAY TO RETURN TO NORMAL LIFE

I grew up in a prosperous, wealthy family. From childhood I was not in need of anything. But I was not lucky: my brother (he was six years older than me) got to know drugs early. Therefore, at the age of six I had already tried to inhale glue for the first time, and the next year I started smoking "weed".

From childhood, I was attracted to the other world. I once came across the book "White Magic" by Yury Longo. At a construction site in our makeshift hut, my friends and I smoked weed and called out for spirits...

When I tried to look into the spiritual world, I had powerful hallucinations and I saw crazy, terrible entities. I think flirting with demons, in many respects, determined my fate.

But over time, I abandoned this entertainment, because I had become a drug addict. My brother put me on Pervitin, and already at thirteen I was a full-fledged drug addict. When I came home from school, drugs were waiting for me at home.

Then I switched to opiates, and my brother and I began to make drugs at home. Our parents soon divorced, and I stayed with my father.

My father couldn't do anything with me, and our apartment turned into a stash house, in which up to fifteen people gathered every day to cook drugs. Life was collapsing, almost without having begun.

Despite the fact that school was thirty meters from my house, I still stopped going there. Instead of school, my brother taught me how to steal car radios. And that is how I became a thief.

But thank God that theft didn't really entice me, and when my brother was sent to prison, I was able to stop for a short while. Not for long, but still. Then we moved to another area, and the cycle began again: drugs, sleepless nights, constant depression...

After his release, my brother tried to start a new life, but after half a year everything gradually returned to how it was. I grew up in the stash house that our parents' apartment turned into, but when my brother returned from jail, all hell broke loose: constant scandals, police searches, even axes flew out of the window of our apartment.

One day my brother and I went for methadone. Took a little. However, my brother was drunk, and the drug was so high-quality that we overdosed. My brother died in my arms. When my brother was taken to the morgue, and I to the police, I realized that life had to change.

Following my brother, my father died of alcohol, and I was left alone. After many unsuccessful attempts to quit drugs, I became addicted to alcohol too. At the same time, I did not stop using drugs. As a result, I also became an alcoholic. I felt a terrible void inside of me. Neither drugs nor alcohol no longer brought me satisfaction.

In the morning, when I went to the "bottle" near my house, they would ask me: "As usual?" I would answer: "Yes!" — and two hundred grams of vodka were poured into my jar. It

was into a jar, and not into a glass, because my hands were shaking so bad that I would splash vodka from any dish except a jar. And from the neighbors behind me, I heard statements such as "He doesn't have much time left", "He'll only live one more month maximum"...

Then I miraculously found out about a rehabilitation center. When I went there, I realized that this was my last resort. In front of the center I attended a church service and when I saw how those people were singing to God, I thought: "They're mental".

Upon arrival at the center, they could not cut my hair. The fact is that I have psoriasis and it had worsened at that time, so the machine would just get stuck and clogged. When the guys who were then in the rehabilitation center saw this, they suggested to me: "Let's pray for you and fast". I told them in response: "If you want to go hungry, go hungry", and to myself I thought: "They really are completely mental".

Literally three days later, my psoriasis was gone, the withdrawal symptoms disappeared. They explained to me: "All of this is God's doing", but I did not believe that, justifying all these miracles in my own way.

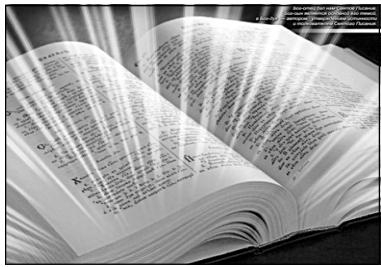
I saw God in one former criminal authority when he washed dishes after me. That's when I realized that I need God. I needed to find Him and cling to Him. Jesus revealed himself to me mainly through the people around me, through my communication with them.

Then I repented, and later, decided to follow the Lord. I've been free from drugs and alcohol for several years now and I have a goal in my life — to glorify Jesus daily, fulfilling the will of the Father. My life has become wonderful, and every day I rejoice at the awareness of His presence. I was also able to pay off unrealistic debts, because of which my apartment was about to be taken away from me. And the non-Christian lawyer who helped me in the fight for my apartment wrote to me on Viber when everything ended well: "The Heavenly Father keeps His children safe".

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Humans have five senses: smell, touch, hearing, eyesight, and taste. Sometimes people call intuition the sixth sense, but it is not a feeling, since we do not have physical receptors for it. Rather, it is the ability of the human spirit to foresee the future or intuitively know what is generally beyond human capabilities.

Being in the same conditions, different people feel differently. For example, at a certain temperature, one is hot and the other cold. A person who has lost a lot of blood will freeze, while another will be hot. When people eat the same food, to one it is delicious, to another it is not very good, and to the third it is disgusting. A certain sound is not annoying for some, but for others it is unbearable. People who have witnessed the same incident, under the influence of their feelings, retell differently what they saw and heard. Their stories will be different based on the emotions they felt. Feelings do not always reflect reality.

Under the influence of feelings, people sometimes do things that they later regret all their lives. Esau, the son of the biblical patriarch Jacob, sold his birthright under the influence of hunger. Amnon, driven by lust, raped his paternal sister Tamar, and after that he hated her. Under the influence of resentment and surging anger, people destroy friendships, and sometimes inflict physical injuries even to their loved ones. Sometimes feelings of oppression and depression are completely unrelated to the realities of life. They come from nowhere, completely unreasonably, and bring torment. All this suggests that feelings are deceiving and relative, and they can not always be trusted.

WHAT ARE FEELINGS?

Feelings (or sentiments) — emotional experiences of a person that arise in the process of his relationship with the outside world. Feelings express our reaction to what is happening in the physical and spiritual worlds.

There are feelings of physical and mental origin.

Feelings of physical origin include cold, heat, bitter, sweet, sour, hunger, pain.

Physiological feelings are attached to the receptors of our body and sometimes manifest subconsciously and instinctively. Sometimes it is simply impossible to control them. For example, when a person hears a sharp sound near him or a shot, he flinches or jumps, not having time to process. Sensing the smell of smoke in the apartment, a person will automatically search for its source.

Soul feelings include: love, joy, anger, hatred, sadness, sorrow, disappointment, despondency, embarrassment.

Soul feelings and their manifestations often depend on the person himself. Sometimes they express the essence of the person himself. Over the years, they are formed in the process of his development and education. Their manifestations are directly related to the moral and life position of a person. A highly moral person will show a feeling of indignation at the immoral acts of the person next to him, while an immoral person may

FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS

show feelings of approval and even delight.

In the days of Christ's life on earth, when a person was healed on Saturday, some people rejoiced, but the Pharisees were indignant; in their understanding — this was a violation of the Sabbath, a day of rest, which they tried to observe zealously (**Luke 6:10-11**). One and the same action aroused feelings of approval and joy in some, while in others — indignation and condemnation, due to their personal understanding of the celebration of the Sabbath rest. Had the teaching of the Pharisees about the Sabbath been different — there would not have been such a negative reaction and feelings of indignation.

The brothers of the biblical Joseph changed their feelings for their brother from goodwill to hostility, after they began to notice that their father loved Joseph more than themselves. In this case, envy affected their feelings.

Gen. 37:4 — *When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.*

Because of the visual presentation of the devil's "advertisement" of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, Eve developed a feeling of longing to try this fruit. This reached such an apogee in her that, succumbing to this feeling, she made an irreparable mistake that affected the whole human race.

Gen. 3:6 — *When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

Why are we talking about this? The intention is to show that human feelings depend on such factors over which we have power. If we desire, by changing our point of view, we can easily change these feelings from bad to good, or, by changing our attitude towards certain things, we can get rid of many destructive feelings. Although, by the way, not all painful feelings are bad. For example, the feeling of inner torment for our mistakes can lead to good results: repentance and a cautiousness against more bad decisions. In this case, the more regret is experienced, the longer the memories are retained that warn against repetition. The more lighthearted a person's attitude is to his vices, the greater the likelihood that they will be repeated.

2 Cor. 7:10 — *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

WHAT INFLUENCES OUR FEELINGS?

A person, depending on what he has heard and seen, experiences corresponding feelings. He has a choice: indulge in these feelings or oppose them. Let us cite as an example a biblical character who at some point in his life ignored unjust bad rumors about himself, but at that time God was with him. But at another time, when God was not with him, he listened to very slightly negative information, which led to his downfall. This led to the fact that even God departed from him completely. This is the king of Israel, Saul. When he was anointed as king, there were unkind people who humiliated him,

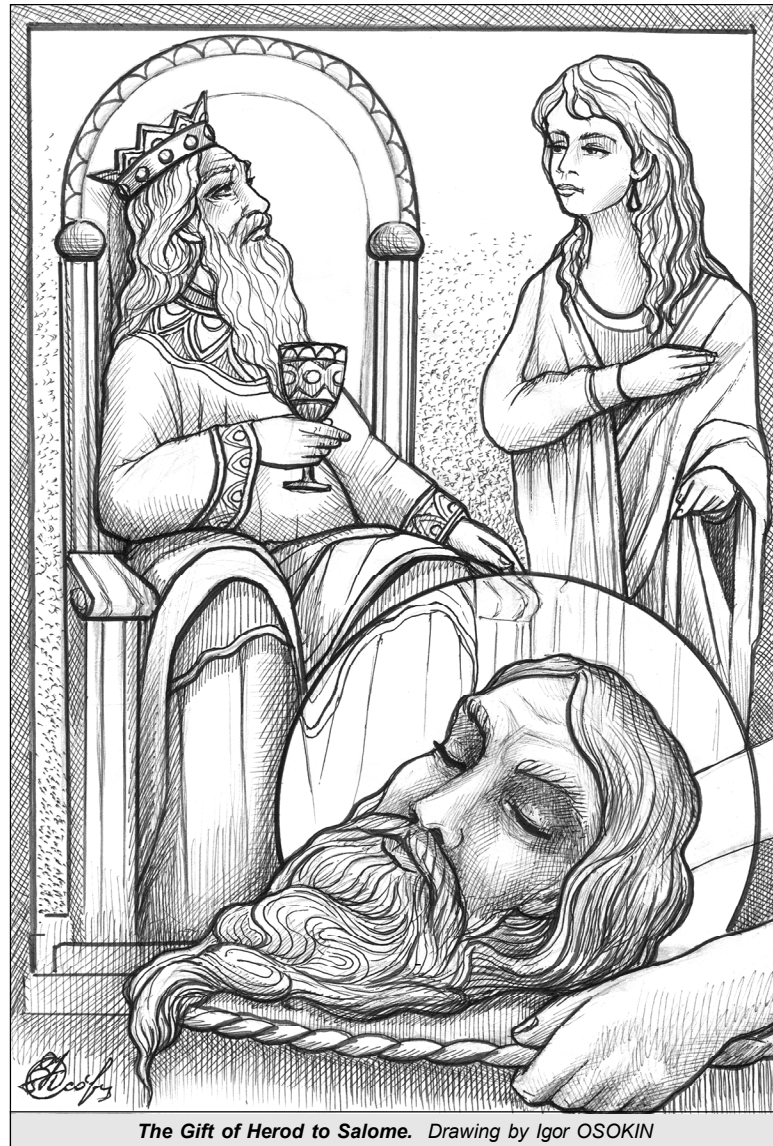
but he generously dismissed it like it never happened. True, there were those who paid attention to it and even demanded reprisals against them, but Saul showed goodness.

1 Samuel 10:27 — *But some scoundrels said, "How can this fellow save us?" They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent.*

1 Samuel 11:12-13 — *The people then said to Samuel, "Who was it that asked, 'Shall Saul reign over us?' Turn these men over to us so that we may put them to death". But Saul said, "No one will be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel".*

But after one victory over the enemies, in which God did not use him but the young David, upon returning from the war, Saul heard joyful songs in which David's name was exalted more than his, and became sick with envy and suspicion.

1 Samuel 18:6-9 — *When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands". Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. "They have credited David with tens of thousands", he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.*



The Gift of Herod to Salome. Drawing by Igor OSOKIN

In these cases, Saul's feelings depended on his attitude to the information received. He had a choice to keep calm, or indulge in negativity, and accordingly have negative feelings.

Here is another example — the reaction of the Apostle Paul to the absence of his partner Titus, whom he hoped to meet in

the area where he came to.

2 Cor. 2:12-13 — *Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia. The spiritual world can also influence spiritual feelings. By influencing our feelings, the devil can get us to fulfill his will, which he in fact does, using sometimes even the physical needs of our body as a tool to achieve his goal.*

Eph. 2:1-3 — *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 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. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*

RELATIONSHIP OF FEELINGS TO THOUGHTS

Feelings are directly related to what we think about. In order to change feelings, sometimes it is enough to change our thoughts. Feelings follow thoughts. This applies to painful periods of life with the loss of people dear to us. The more our thoughts will be focused on those who have left the earth, people dear to us, the more we will have painful feelings of loss and suffering again and again. But

HURT FEELINGS

You may have heard statements such as "You hurt me", "You offended my feelings", "I got sick after these words". The meaning of these statements, I hope, is clear to everyone, since most people experience this in their personal lives. But what is this phenomenon?

Questions arise: "Is it so tragic for a person when his feelings are injured? What suffers in an affronted or humiliated person — is it not his vanity? And what feelings does the fulfillment of Christ's command arouse in us?"

Matt. 5:44 — *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...*

Will our feelings be injured from trying to fulfill this command? That depends on your spiritual state. Are you crucified with Christ? If yes, then you will be filled with love to those who do you harm — as Jesus was.

HOW ELSE CAN WE INFLUENCE OUR FEELINGS?

Feelings, feelings... What does the Bible say about them?

Heb. 5:13-14 — *Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

The word "must" encourages the Christian to have the same feelings that Jesus Christ had. And the word trained has a common root with the word "learn", which means a process associated with the expenditure of time and the application of effort. According to the Bible, feelings can be developed, suppressed and trained, that is, directed in the right direction.

A person who is not spiritual thinks, speaks, and acts in accordance with external factors. The Apostle Judas, describing people living in the flesh, speaks of these: driven by lusts (desires), implying that the behavior of such people is a natural reaction to the requests and desires of the body and soul. This is a very dangerous path and anyone not led by the Spirit is doomed to go down it.

In a person who is not spiritual, feelings dictate a line of behavior. In a spiritual person, everything is subordinate to the Spirit. Spiritual is that person who is not controlled by human feelings, but is led by the Spirit. This type of leadership is much deeper than our human feelings and is not dependent upon circumstances that surround us. Living by the Spirit is above human logic and is always in line with the will of God.

As we said before, feelings are connected with thoughts, and when we change our thoughts, we can change our feelings. We must remember that it is in our power to surrender to the will of certain feelings, or opposing these feelings, we get out from under their control.

For example, in the much-suffering biblical Job, one can see the moment when he refuses to fight with surging negative feelings, after which they overwhelmed him.

Job 10:1 — *I loathe my very life; therefore I will give free rein to my complaint and speak out in the bitterness of my soul.*

Proverbs 20:5 — *The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out.*

Proverbs 23:19 — *Listen, my son, and be wise, and set your heart on the right path:*

PASTOR'S WORD

A MAN SHOULD CONTROL SOME OF HIS FEELINGS IN ORDER TO NOT MAKE THEM HIS MASTER

Some feelings can heal a person and make his life pleasant and joyful, while others can be destructive. We must curb these destructive feelings so as not to reap the bitter fruits of their manifestations. It is especially necessary to be irreconcilable with feelings of anger, nosiness, envy, and fleshly merriness, which all lead to a loose tongue.

Proverbs 10:19 — *Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.*

Proverbs 12:16 — *Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.*

Proverbs 15:18 — *A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel.*

Proverbs 16:32 — *Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city.*

Proverbs 19:11 — *A person's wisdom yields patience; it is to one's glory to overlook an offense.*

Proverbs 21:23 — *Those who guard their mouths and their tongues keep themselves from calamity.*

APPLICATION OF FEELINGS IN COMMUNICATION WITH OTHER PEOPLE

If we refer to inner turmoil as feelings, then what we express are emotions.

Manifesting our feelings and emotions, we in one way or another affect the people around us.

By expressing anxiety, we can transmit anxiety to the surrounding people. Likewise, when the internal state of the heart of a peaceful person affects the people with whom he communicates.

Our facial expressions convey our thoughts during communication with each other. We can use the expression of positive feelings to build good relationships, show compassion, and relieve unnecessary stress. God Himself possesses and displays a diverse range of feelings. In the Bible, God is associated with feelings such as love, mercy, patience, compassion and others.

Jer. 31:20 — *Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him...*

We can develop these feelings and successfully use them to build up the Body of Christ — the church. By manifesting feelings of inner goodwill, we can encourage others and create the unity that is so needed for spiritual mentorship. The apostle Paul prayed that believers would grow love and pointed out that the serving through righteousness, peace and joy (peace and joy — feelings) is pleasing to God and is positively perceived by people.

Rom. 14:17-18 — *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval.*

We will serve God and each other with our feelings and deeds.

Gal. 5:13 — *...but serve one another humbly in love.*

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

I once read that we cannot return to our past and change our start but we can start today and change our finish. You know, it's true. Often times, we complain about life — the injustice we encountered and possibly continue to encounter on a daily basis. We blame our parents who didn't give us what other kids had. We blame the government that blatantly lies. We blame the system that shatters truth. We are upset with God who, by golly, let this all happen. Did He not see anything?! Was He unable to help?!

While we think about life, it is important to accept everything that happened (because it happened) and learn to live with what we have. Frankly, we pray most sincerely amidst hardships! That is exactly when we become stronger! That is exactly where we are closest to God even if it does not outwardly appear that way!

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

In my opinion, respect is earned not by those who achieve success after being caved in by their circumstances. Respect is earned by those who challenge the reality they live in because it merely did not suit them. Respect is earned by those who did not betray their conscious even under the pressures of life. It is earned by those who were capable of seeing the purpose of their life in what by first glance seemed to lack purpose. It is earned by those who find the strength to thank God for everything that they lived through! Such people are heroes. Everyday they would reach great feats that brought them to the current moment. Every single day they had to fight for freedom — the freedom of their spirit.

Everything will be tested in this life. Every decision that we take and who we consider ourselves to be. Everything that we chase after. Our honesty, faith, love toward God, love toward our neighbors,

We Cannot Return to the Past...

friendship, loyalty to our work, everything. In this test, all superfluous and artificialness burn and only the true and authentic remain. In times of our trials, we cannot imitate and pretend to be heroes. You're either it or you are not. If you aren't, that's not the end of the world. What matters is if you will remain in your past state or whether you will fight for your future (?).



In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:6-9).

It is easy to grow dissatisfied with life. It is comfortable to climb into our shell. Yet, it is more noteworthy to stop hiding and look reality in the eyes, acknowledge our mistakes, and entrust our life to Him who gave it to us.

We cannot turn to our past and change our start; but we can start today and change our finish. Isn't that so?

* * *

*We look closely,
But little see.
We blindly love some,
While others we hate.
Sometimes we judge the entire world.
And ourselves.*

*We do a lot that is not important.
How foolish we are and simply funny!..
Today we are gods, tomorrow — slaves!
Today we are poor, tomorrow — wealthy!
Today — happy,
tomorrow — unhappy...*

*Who thinks, while standing still, —
Be careful, the paths are slippery.
Like children, we play captain.
Yet, God is at the helm wheel
Controlling the universe and worlds!*

*He holds the key
From life and death! So what that we are sinners!
But, He is frightening in his court,*

*holy Lord
He loves, protects, and yearns for a hug?
We do not understand who God is and who
we are...*

*We think — alive. In reality — dead.
It seems like heaven is silent for centuries!
But the rain pours on the kind and evil?
And the sun showers over the world
with its rays,*

*It gifts us day, it gifts us chance?
Amidst the world's evil, the father's
love warms.*

Is that not an answer from above?

Tatyana TSALKOVSKAYA,
Ukraine.

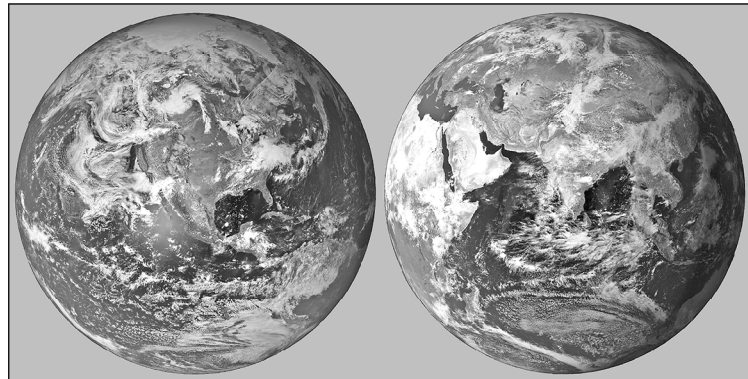
EIGHT INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE CREATION OF OUR PLANET

The likelihood of having life on Planet Earth is practically equal to zero. Yes, yes, there was only one chance, out of a staggering number — we're talking about digits with 53 zeroes, when the natural conditions coincided, supporting our everyday life. And yet, we exist!

THE RIGHT DISTANCE FROM THE SUN

Our planet is the "right" distance away from the Sun — almost 150 million kilometers. That is the distance that gives a suitable temperature range from 60 °C to -90 °C at an average temperature of +15 °C. If this distance was bigger by even 1 %, Earth would become an icy land and if it was smaller than 2 %, everything would burn.

It is absolutely mandatory to have a massive neighboring planet like Jupiter. Thanks to its large mass and not too



much of an elongated orbit, Jupiter imparts stability to Earth's almost perfectly circular orbit and protects it by taking on the bombardment of the cosmic bodies or deflecting their trajectory from Earth.

THE RIGHT SIZE OF EARTH

The equatorial diameter of the Earth is 12,756 km. This means that the planet's gravity is just such that it preserves its air shell — the atmosphere. If the earth were at least 10 % smaller, the atmosphere would not exist; meaning life would not be possible. The variations in Earth's size and gravity in one way or another would bring to problems of weight and movement of living things. A person would need an entirely different construction of the musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, and other systems.

THE RIGHT ROTATION SPEED

Earth's rotation speed around its axis is 1670 km/hour. This gives the surface of the planet a chance to optimally warm up and cool down throughout the day. A slower rotation of Earth around its axis would bring a longer day and night and colossal shifts in temperature. Mercury's day is equivalent to earth's two months. The difference between their day and night temperature is 600 °C (from -170 °C to +430 °C). A faster rotation of Earth around its axis would lead to an increase in the atmospheric temperature and catastrophic increase in the speed of wind. For instance, Jupiter has a faster rotation speed and its winds reach up to 1,000 km/hour.

THE RIGHT MOON

The Earth's satellite, the Moon, has the perfect size — 3,475 km. It is 38,400 km away from Earth and that keeps Earth's axis angle stable. With the axis maintained, the vital ocean tides occur to purify coastal waters and enrich them with oxygen. If, for example, the Moon was larger and closer to us, it would cause hurricanes, flooding, and the destruction of mountains.

THE RIGHT AIR COMPOSITION

The atmosphere is surprisingly matched in composition and density. Deviations in one direction or another in this proportion would have disastrous consequences for life. For instance, a 25 % oxygen content in the atmosphere would lead to a fire hazard on Earth, and the effect on living organisms would be adverse due to the chemical aggressiveness of this element. If the fraction of oxygen in the atmosphere would drop by at least 2 %, we would suffocate, and the formation of a protective ozone screen would decrease. Deviations in the carbon dioxide content in one way or another would be unfavorable for the vital activity of plant and animal organisms. Thanks to its presence, a greenhouse effect is created on our planet that raises the average temperature on Earth to 15 °C.

RIGHT WATER SUPPLY

Life on Earth is also possible due to the huge reserves of water: 70 % of the Earth's surface is the optimal amount to maintain the temperature regime on the planet and to make the extremely necessary water cycle in nature. Otherwise, the climate would be too dry and unsuitable for living things.

RANDOM EXISTENCE IS EQUAL TO ZERO

We can bring many more examples that can be brought up regarding the physical parameters that are implemented on Earth in a narrow range suitable for life. Who calculated the size of this interval and selected such amazingly accurate conditions? Who has taken care to protect the planet from all unimaginable dangers? Is random coincidence in so many ways real and possible? The skeptic may object, "But the stars and the planets in the Universe are countless, so at least somewhere all of these happy coincidences could coincide. This is our lucky land". Let's see if that is so. The probability of accidental coincidences of such parameters is estimated as one chance out of 10⁵³ (and only 41 physical parameters were taken into account). It is believed that there are approximately 10²⁰-10²² planets in the Universe (each digit is equivalent to 20-22 zeroes). For comparison, let us note that there are about 10⁸⁰ atoms in the universe. In mathematics, the probability of an event having one chance out of 10⁵⁰ is equal to zero. This means that the random appearance of a planet suitable for life is absolutely unbelievable. And if not by chance, then what? The answer is clear: creation. The unique planet — Earth — was wisely arranged for life. It convincingly shows us the majestic design of the Almighty and caring Creator.

I admire the work of Thy hands.

Yelena TITOVA,
PhD, Biological Sciences,
<https://proekt7d.ru>

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRUST GOD!

I am forty-two years old. I was born in Kerch. My parents got divorced when I was three years old: my dad drank heavily. Then another "dad" appeared, followed by a third. Basically, adults did not exert an authoritative influence on me throughout my childhood.

At eleven, I began to smoke weed and drink. This usually happened in the basement of my five-story building. We had backyard with youth parties there. We were very friendly and spent a lot of time there. Little by little, I began to skip school, and then run away from home.

At fourteen, I committed my first theft. My girlfriend and I climbed into the apartment of some acquaintances and took out all the gold from there. We were lucky: we fell under an amnesty.

The second time I stole at fifteen. Together with the same girlfriend, we took a million rubles from my father and left for Russia. At that time, it was more than a thousand dollars — you could do a lot! This whole story ended in Simferopol, in the reception center. From there, we were brought by stage to Kerch. True, we were immediately released, since my stepfather wrote a statement to the police saying it was only for educational purposes. However, my relationship with my stepfather was already ruined. So, I went to live with my grandfather.

After some time, I met my future roommate Pavel. He used drugs, and I began to inject myself together with him. At first, we obtained money for drugs, engaged in petty fraud: we deceived people on currency exchanges. Over time the doses grew because we no longer disdained anything, but committed thefts, robberies... This went on for eight years, until Pavel thundered into prison. Three serious criminal cases were brought against me, and I was wanted. In order not to go to jail after Pavel, I fled to Odessa.

In Odessa, everything went according to the old scheme. There I met another guy. His name was Sergey. In a terrible "system" (the systematic use of drugs), I became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, Masha. Sergey was soon imprisoned, and my mother took my daughter to the Crimea. Sergey's mother kicked me out from his apartment, where we lived. I could have returned home, but I was wanted there. And to be honest, I didn't care where or how I lived. The main thing was that there needed to be drugs.

The police couldn't catch me for a long time, because I used other people's data. But as you know, everything has an end. When I was caught once again, everything was figured out and I went to prison for three and a half years. Now, it's hard to say why the episodes in Kerch and the fact that I was wanted did not come up. I think the term would have increased significantly.

I was released in 2007. Prison taught me nothing. Of my Odessa acquaintances, no one

was left alive. This fact did not scare me. Nothing changed in my life. Just some kind of vicious circle: I started to use drugs, pills and alcohol again. At the same time, there was a constant change of roommates, frequent beatings (all my roommates beat me because of my complex nature) and terrible living conditions. This continued until 2011.

It got to the point that I lived in the cellars of the janitors and ate what they brought from the trash. I no longer had money for drugs; I was



drinking too much. It was a terrible state. You wake up in the basement, and you don't know whether it is day or night, and there is only one thought in your head — to get drunk.

During my trips for a drink, I constantly came across ads for rehabilitation for alcohol and drug addicts. I understood that I couldn't continue this way anymore and decided to call. They immediately offered for me to come.

The rehabilitation center was in Odessa. I remember doubting it. I thought they would kill me and sell me for my organs. I came for rehabilitation with my only treasure — a pack of cigarette butts. I had nothing else.

At the rehabilitation center, I slowly began to get acquainted with the Bible. For a long time, I could not understand what was written there until I began to read a modern translation. Despite the good, trusting attitude of the ministers towards me, I continued to secretly smoke. Over time, they began to let me go into the city by myself to put up ads. It was a good opportunity to buy "barbiturates" (tablets of barbiturates — sedatives, sleeping pills) and energy pills. Looking at me, you

couldn't say that I had changed. God was offering me freedom, but I didn't want it. I deliberately climbed into the same swamp, knowing what all this would lead to. This went on for nine months, until they caught me with a cigarette and kicked me out of the rehabilitation center.

During the rehabilitation, I met a married couple. They came to our center and talked about God. They were Yuriy and Inna Khimchenko. Yuriy advised me to go to the rehabilitation center

where he himself underwent rehabilitation. I agreed.

After Odessa, this rehabilitation center was a bit unusual. Male and female centers were separate. Many Bible lessons were taught. We went to meetings at the house of prayer twice a week. They didn't let me go anywhere. The strange thing was that it didn't annoy me!

After Odessa, this rehabilitation center was a bit unusual. The male and female centers were separate. Many Bible lessons were taught. We went to church twice a week. They didn't let me go anywhere by myself. The strange thing was that it didn't annoy me!

Then I experienced real repentance. Gradually I began to understand what humility was. I learned to separate the important and the secondary. The Lord began to convict me through sermons. All this was new to me. My worldview was just bursting at the seams. God was gradually conquering my heart.

I felt the first real practical changes when I went to work after rehabilitation. The first day my friend and I stopped to drink coffee, and I thought of cigarettes. I really wanted to smoke,

but a Bible verse came to mind: *Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Gal. 5:1)*. It was like a cold sweat came upon me! I realized that the Lord had given me freedom. I could now not smoke!

After some time, I met my future husband. Aleksey was an assistant minister in the men's center. Aleksey, like me, lived in the street for a long time before rehabilitation, and he did not have a leg. Now I often think about what would have happened to us if the Lord had not brought us to His house.

We got married and stayed to live and serve the Lord in the center of adaptation. It was very hard. We were hard to live together. There were moments when I just wanted to run away from everything and from everyone. You just can't run away from yourself! I say this so you won't believe people who say that it will be easy. It won't! Get ready to deal with old habits and with yourself.

In 2014, I became pregnant. It was already clear from the development of the fetus that the child would be very sick and weak. The doctors openly dissuaded me from giving birth. They would scare me by saying that the child would not live up to two years, that we would suffer all our lives with him in hospitals. In my heart there was not a shadow of doubt that I should give birth. I clearly understood that abortion is a sin.

When I arrived for Cesarean delivery, the doctors said that judging by the symptoms, the child was already dead. But my husband and I trusted in the Lord. Daniel spent a month and a half after birth in intensive care. But he was alive!

With the advent of our son, our family became one. This was God's blessing for us. I saw my husband in a completely different light. I could see the love, support, and care he had for us.

Over six years, the Lord completely changed me and my life. He taught me to go forward and not be afraid of difficulties, to love, to care for others, and also to live in freedom.

Today I participate in the lives of families with children with disabilities. This is a volunteer ministry of the Salim charity for the families of Makarov and the Makarov district. I also study at the Institute of Biblical Counseling: I want to help people suffering from disasters find a living relationship with God. In church I serve as an accountant.

Our whole family is people with disabilities. Such a fate frightens many, but we, looking back at our past, thank God for our life today. Every new day gives me hope. The Lord surrounded us with amazing care and love. I want to say only one thing: do not be afraid to trust such a God!

Yelena LUBOVA,
Ukraine,
<http://revival.kiev.ua>

IT'S TIME TO LEARN TO LIVE AGAIN

I am thirty-six years old. I was born in an ordinary working-class family near Kyiv. I am not an only child in the family; I have a younger brother. I graduated the eleventh grade in good in good academic standing: I had tutors helping me. My parents considered it important to give me a good education. Then I entered college.

Education was quite expensive. My parents were trying their best to keep up monetarily. Often there was not enough money even for travel to and from school. The constant lack of money bothered me. I wanted a good life, to become independent. I started to steal and almost went to jail. I was bailed out. The likelihood that I would go to jail scared me. Prison was not in my plans at all.

At college I acquired a well-paid, demanded specialty. At twenty-one, I got a job. I began to make decent money. Now I could afford a lot: alcohol, drugs, girls, clubs, cars, vacation abroad and so on. And I took advantage of all these opportunities with pleasure! I was not really embarrassed by moral and ethical principles.

I used drugs until I was twenty-six. There was an understanding that this was a real problem. But I convinced myself that I had everything under control. At some point, I was even able to stop. My health suddenly worsened, tension appeared within family relations, at work, with friends, all of which together prompted me to decide to quit drugs. I didn't do drugs for four years. During this period, I got married.

My wife was eight years younger than me. I was in love with her, but our relationship could not be called happy. Constant disagreements, scandals. I

wanted children, stability, but she wanted to party. We were both very proud, and each defended his position. Now I understand that it was pride that ruined our marriage. No one wanted to take a step towards reconciliation. We ended up getting divorced.

After the divorce, I could not recover for a long time. I drank for a few months. Drinking interfered with work, and I understood that if I did not stop drinking, I'd be fired. A quick solution was found: I returned to drugs again. The state of drug intoxication is not as visible to others. But my family found out that I was a drug addict.

My parents immediately sent me to the clinic. First, they put up an IV, then I regularly went to a narcologist and drank pills. It was very expensive, but most importantly, for some period it helped me. I really wanted to quit. The realization came that by myself, I could not do it. I had no self-control.

I stayed sober for six months. Then I fell off. This time the "brakes" completely failed. I injected myself without measure. I started to have paranoia. My relations within the family collapsed, I stopped talking to my father and brother. The boycott subsequently lasted three years. There was negligence to my performed work, problems with coworkers. It all weighed down on me greatly, but I had no strength to change anything. And no desire either. I started to feel depressed. I lost the meaning of life. Nothing gave me joy. There was no trace of my determi-



nation. This was a scary state. In the end, I quit my job. My mom was constantly trying to persuade me to return to work or find another job, but I did not want to. There was a void inside, and I could not fill it with anything.

Then I broke my leg. They put a plate in me. Recovery was difficult. I learned to walk again. I felt completely helpless. This state of helplessness and worthlessness broke my pride completely. My hopes and self-deception that I can do something simply disappeared without a trace. I didn't want alcohol, drugs didn't give me pleasure. After the hospital, I injected myself rarely, I don't even know why. I was probably just trying to drown out the feeling of the complete fiasco in life, this inner pain of disappointment.

prayer and lasted several days. These weren't just the words "Forgive me", but rather a state of the heart. It is difficult to explain what I was experiencing, there are simply no words. I cried. Not about myself. About how the Lord loves me. I asked God to show me how I could thank Him. My personal life and my plans for the future evaporated in an instant. After going through the rehabilitation, I remained to serve in the center. That's how sixteen months flew by. And a year ago, I was baptized. Leaving the center was difficult, but I understood that it was time to take the next step. It was a difficult decision for me.

Today I live in the adaptation center, I work here. Here is my native church and my friends. Here I was born again. My relationship with my parents, brother and relatives improved. I don't know yet how the Lord will lead me further, and I'm not making any plans for the future. I firmly know only one thing: without God I don't want anything, and I can't even have anything. There was a time when I was learning to walk again. Now it's time to learn to live again. All my life I have lived for myself and have no desire to return to that. Now I want to live for the Lord. That is what inspires me to move forward.

I would like to tell those people who have lost the meaning of life or are in a state of addiction, that there is always a way out! Only in the Lord did I acquire true love, peace, joy, and comfort. I sincerely wish this upon you too.

Roman STEPANENKO,
Ukraine,
<http://revival.kiev.ua>



CHRISTIAN NEWS

Pastor from Georgia shares how he kept his faith in God after losing two sons in a car accident

A pastor from the state of Georgia, shared how he kept his faith in God after losing two sons in a car accident. He noted, "We need to have faith to change the situation but we also need to have faith to deal with the situation when God doesn't do what we thought He would do".

On Sunday, two teenagers, 17-year old Kahlil Royston and 16-year old Josh Royston, decided to visit a barber after church but they lost control of the car and the car crashed into two trees — reported WSBTV. As a result, Josh died on the spot and Kahlil passed away from serious traumas at a medical center in Atlanta.

While Kahlil was still in the ICU, many were praying for him. His dad, pastor Kevin Royston, asked all of his Facebook

friends to pray for his son's healing.

"My son, Kahlil Royston, is in critical condition. Please pray for God to make a miracle in his body. He has bodily injuries and trauma to the head. I set my faith free — please set your faith free too. Thank you!" The dad wrote this a little before 10 pm Sunday evening.

Throughout the next two days, Royston openly proclaimed his faith while citing the promises of Scripture.

"I proclaim life over the things that don't exist as if they existed. I proclaim a miracle over Kahlil. Every part of his body is now healed and his brain works normally in Christ's name (Romans 4:17)!" he wrote.

Unfortunately, the boy passed away. Despite the death, the pastor remained faithful to God.

"If God let this happen then He will give me the strength to get through this. We would like to thank everyone for all of your prayers for Kahlil. I am really going to miss Kahlil and Josh. God did not make the miracle we hoped for but He still made a miracle. Kahlil's organs will be used as a blessing to those in need of them. We need to have faith to change the situation but we also need to have faith to deal with the situation when God doesn't do what we thought He would do. Please continue to pray for our strength as we move on".

"Sometimes life gives us blows that seem unbearable. Yet, those are the times that we need to keep in touch

with the only source of life — our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We move forward in faith and not in disappointment, grief, or misunderstanding", he commented on Facebook.

"This does not mean that we don't acknowledge our pain, disappointment, but we move forward. We come to our source and ask Him how to move forward so that our life would continually bring Him praise. We must remember that He is God and He always has a way".

Despite his pain from losing two boys, Pastor Royston says that he continues to believe that God has a plan.

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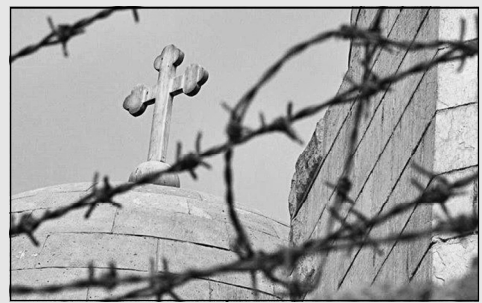
Open Doors: every third Christian in Asia encounters persecution

Open Doors, an international Christian organization, published their annual list of fifty countries where Christians are most persecuted.

Countries from Asia and Africa made the top 10 list. North Korea came in first for the 18th time in a row. Afghanistan came in second and Somalia in third. The other countries in the top 10 include Libya, Pakistan, Sudan, Eritrea, Yemen, Iran, and India.

The organization noticed Christian persecution growing in 2018. Five years ago only one country, North Korea, was categorized as an "extreme" country for Christian persecution. This year eleven countries made the "extreme" category.

China moved up from 43rd to being the 27th on the list. According to research, the reason lies in the new laws



regarding religion that came in effect starting February 2018.

Due to multinationalism, India made the top 10 for the first time.

Myanmar, 18th on the list, had tens of thousands of Christians killed among other members of the Karen Tribe. At least 120,000 people fled the country.

Two governments with Christians suffering the most from violence are Nigeria (12th place) and Pakistan (5th place).

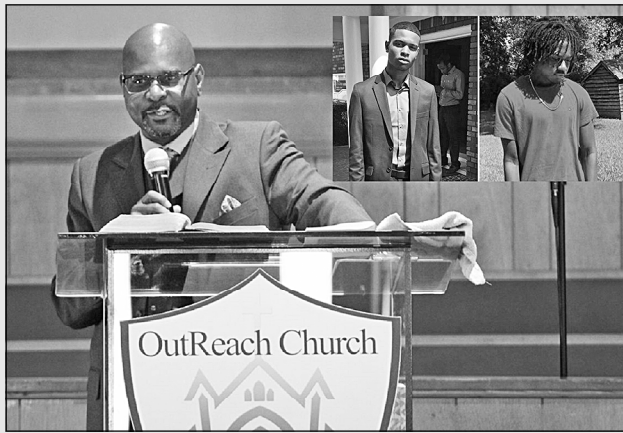
Researchers narrowed three causes for persecution: using legal norms to control religion, the idea that Christianity is a Western religion, and radical Islam moved from the Middle East to African countries south of the Sahara.

Despite the increase of Christian persecution, experts see the power of the church through this all.

"First of all, this list shows us that the church is active and alive. Persecution is intensifying but this only happens when the church actively shares the Gospel and fulfills it", notes the Open Doors report.

Current ratings show that 245 million Christians deal with high-level persecution in comparison to 215 million last year.

<https://bog.news>



Dear Igor, hello! Peace to you!

A few months ago, I accidentally came across one of your monthly newspapers "Prisoner". I didn't even know it existed. I noticed your article that talked about forgiveness where you talked about asking forgiveness for bringing pain and suffering into others' lives. I thought about your actions for a long time and started to realize that a whole lot lies behind repentance — most importantly the internal realization of one's guilt before others. The decision to openly ask someone for forgiveness is not something everyone has the strength to do. One must mature to that level, grow spiritually, and that is impossible without God. I would like to believe that your personal act will encourage many readers to think that there is nothing more precious than to come to one's senses and genuinely say "sorry" in time. How often we miss the chance to ask for forgiveness and don't realize that something can happen and we won't have anyone to say "sorry" to anymore because they're no longer there.

Thank you, Igor, for sharing your thoughts that forced me to personally think about myself. So much can change in our life after we repent.

My path to God was long and difficult, even though it could have been shorter and less painful. Well, life shows us that God knows better than we do and He guides each one of us His own way.

I was born and raised in a normal family. I had a decent upbringing but because of me not understanding life in the critical 90's, my principles shattered and my life went completely downhill. I committed a crime that came as a surprise to my parents and everybody who knew me. I was shortly arrested, had court, and was convicted. I learned about the true faith and religion when I was confined for life — when life was truly hard. I then truly understood that my life can end at any moment and I had nobody to rely on. At that time I was only 26 years-old and five of those years were behind bars. There was complete emptiness behind me back. And before me — unknowness.

The thought that I was going to spend the rest of my life behind bars killed me morally. What do I live for then? What is the purpose of my life? There was no response — only hopelessness that killed me and my torn soul. They don't say — God is always with us during difficult times and brings us comfort — for nothing. There was this man in my cell who was a Christian. He would constantly pray. I once asked him: what does prayer give you? His answer was simple: peace and comfort. His answer drew out my disappointment since I wasn't a believer at that time. I now understand that he saw that in my eyes because he offered that I try and pray with him because I had nothing to lose anyway but I could gain a whole lot.

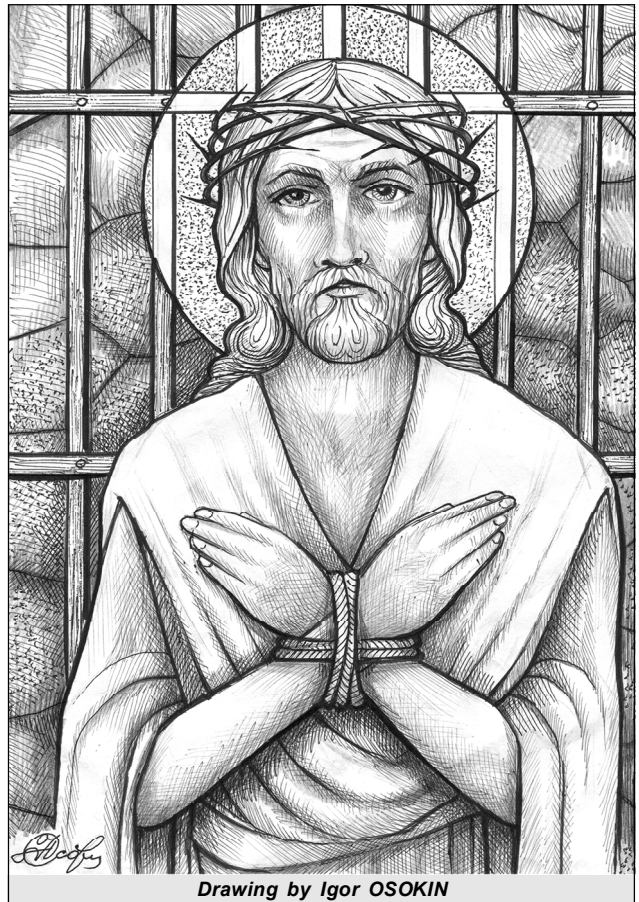
I started by reading prayers in a book and only sometime later, after I memorized some prayers, I started to experience relief. It would come in a moment and I would feel distant toward my reality while I prayed. In time, life started to change a bit, it became easier, but I started to pray less and less.

YOUR LETTERS

There can come a time when you'll have nobody to say "sorry" to

In 2005, one of my cellmates got baptized. He came back to the cell with sparkling eyes and great enlightenment. His joy did not leave him for three days. I wanted to experience something like that — whatever baptism made people feel. Because I wasn't baptized, I decided to take the step. I got baptized but I didn't experience any feeling of upliftment. Years passed on and life took its due course while my soul was still full of emptiness and hopelessness.

In 2015, I met a woman and she suggested that I read the Holy Bible. I started reading the Bible to keep up in conversation but in time, I got drawn into it and I started



Drawing by Igor OSOKIN

studying excerpts trying to figure it all out. They don't say — what you fill yourself with is what fills you — for nothing.

The Bible became my main source of reading — magazines, novels, and television became went into the background. Over time, I understood that it is necessary to work on my inner world. I needed to break myself and my principles with which I lived for 40 years. This is very difficult and there is always this temptation to put off my self-improvement until better days come around. This is a lie.

Our being starts to resist but this is not supposed to stop us. If we want to continually live a normal life and remain humans who are able to empathize, sympathize, love, and have joy then we must change and life won't lose its purpose. However, this is impossible without God. We must let Him into our heart and give him the opportunity to work in us, soften us, and have us change our lifestyle. Only then will life start changing for the better.

I think everybody remembers the parable about the Prodigal Son? Well, this parable is about a lot of us. When we become legal adults, we decide to leave our parents' home and start an independent life. This is natural. Each one of us has the freedom to choose and this is a great gift of God to people. This is a very valuable gift but it also the most dangerous. When we don't have the right understanding of life, we allow a lot of mistakes which lead us into sin. Life harshly beats us for our sins and this will continue until we realize and don't stop in our wrong path. The proverb shows us the importance of realizing and leaving our unrighteous path. The proverb shows us all who have gone astray that it is time to stop while we still have time and return to our Heavenly Father. God respects our freedom and choice. He patiently waits for when we decide on our own that we can't live like that. But this has to be our decision and this decision is often reached through the path of sorrow and hitting rock bottom. Every single action that we make has a consequence that follows and we can't always guess what the consequences will be. That's when we start understanding that we can't get anywhere without God! That is when we need to bring our repentance before God with an open heart asking him to open our eyes and direct us unto the right path.

God has one will for us all — for us to live in purity, humility, and love. Love illuminates and gives us the change to correctly understand another person. Love will teach us to act with others because it isn't hard at all.

Through this all we do a lot of good and beneficial things from the bottom of our heart and get great joy from it. This is the type of love that God awaits from us. In his time, Saint Augustine said, "Learn to love. Love — and do as you wish". Perhaps, we won't find a more accurate understanding of life than to live in love. Love — this is the goal and purpose of every Christian. Seek — and you will find: God has His hour for each one of us!

Igor, I would greatly appreciate if you could send me more newspapers.

Regards, **Aleksey BOGDANOV**
Sol-Iletsk, Russia.

Actress Letitia Wright – A Believer in God Wins Rising Star BAFTA 2019



The young lady gained fame after starring in Black Panther and Avengers: Infinity War. At the BAFTA Awards, the young actress talked about her faith in God and how He helped her deal with depression and helped her earn this victory.

“I consider myself a child of God and so I cannot stand here and not thank God” she said while receiving her award. “A few years ago, I saw myself in a deep state of depression and I literally wanted to quit acting. The only thing that pulled me out of it was God, my belief,

my faith and my family, and an email from Bafta asking me to become part of the Bafta Breakthrough Brits. That evening changed my life. This wasn’t an overnight thing, this wasn’t a click of a finger success, and I’m still a work in progress, but I want to thank God, my family, my team...” she said.

“I want to thank everybody who said yes to me, that gave me a chance, and just saw my talent and saw what God placed in me, and said ‘yes’. I want to encourage young people. You

don’t have to be young, you can be any age, but I want to encourage you — anyone going through a hard time... God made you and you’re important, there might be some of you here who might be going through a hard time. I just want to encourage you and God loves you. Just let your light shine. This means so much to me, you guys all inspire me. All of you have inspired me so much, so God bless you, thank you, Jesus thank you”.

<https://bog.news>

Understanding the Words of Jesus *Is it difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God?*

This passage is found in Luke 18:18–25: *A certain ruler asked him, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call me good?” Jesus answered. “No one is good — except God alone. You know the commandments: ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother’”. “All these I have kept since I was a boy”, he said. When Jesus heard this, he said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me”. When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God”.*

This is a famous passage of a conversation between Jesus and the rich young man.

Now, let us carefully read the words of Jesus: **Luke 18:24–25** — *How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.*

Jesus did not say that rich people cannot enter the Kingdom of God. He said that it will be **hard** for them to enter the kingdom of God. Now, let us examine two questions that present themselves: 1) Why did Jesus say *hard* not *impossible* and 2) Why is it hard for a rich man or woman to enter the Kingdom of God?

1. Why did Jesus say *hard* not *impossible*

Salvation is a gift from God. If it was not for our loving God then nobody would have salvation — no rich and no poor human. However, our God is loving and patient and merciful. The Bible says that *He is a God who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4).*

How do we understand the wording *all people*? Does this pertain explicitly to the poor? No, all people means all people: the poor, the rich, the smart, the not so smart, the good, and the bad. In God’s eyes we

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

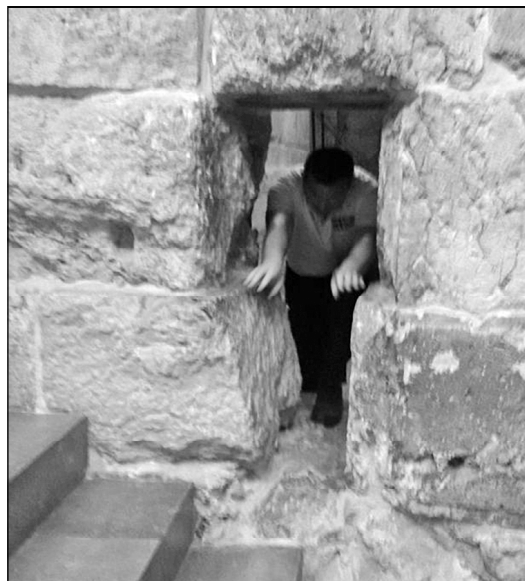


are all the same. We are all sinners who lost our likeness of God, in which we were created, due to our sinful nature. **Romans 3:23** talks about this, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Now, a human cannot save themselves. This is only possible thanks to God’s grace. This grace expands to any human who comes to God as a repenting sinner. This is something Jesus said to His disciples after speaking to the rich young man, *What is impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27).*

2. Why is it hard for a rich man or woman to enter the Kingdom of God?

Jesus gives us the answer to this question in His conversation with the rich young man. In order to find His answer, let us look to the Gospel of Mark and see how this story is written there: **Mark 10:23–25** — *Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to*



go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God”.

Now, Jesus explains that it is hard for a rich man human to enter the Kingdom of God because the person relies more on their riches rather than God.

In **Matthew 6:24**, Jesus says that it is impossible to serve two masters — God and mammon. The word *mammon* comes from an Aramaic word meaning *wealth* and it has the same root with the Jewish word that means *that which you trust or what you rely on*. God wants us to place our hope solely in God and not our abilities, talents, idols, or something else. You can read the following Bible verses that support this truth:

Isaiah 42:17 — *But those who trust in idols, who say to images, “You are our gods”, will be turned back in utter shame.*

Isaiah 40:30–31 — *Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.*

Isaiah 49:23 — *Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.*

Isaiah 57:13 — *When you cry out for help, let your collection of idols save you! The wind will carry all of them off, a mere breath will blow them away. But whoever takes refuge in me will inherit the land and possess my holy mountain.*

Proverbs 16:20 — *Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers, and blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord.*

Proverbs 28:25–26 — *The greedy stir up conflict, those who trust in the Lord will prosper. Those who trust in themselves are fools, those who walk in wisdom are kept safe.*

Proverbs 29:25 — *Fear of man will prove to be a snare, whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.*

Psalms 124:1 — *Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever.*

<http://www.cogmtl.net/q.htm>

ATTENTION!

Dear readers, today the newspaper “Prisoner” has the status of the two languages: Russian and English. “Prisoner” is printed in the Ukraine and in America. However, the newspaper is published and distributed exclusively by voluntary donations. For all those wishing to contribute to the success of “Prisoner” all the requisites are indicated in the last column of the newspaper. For those in America who wish to donate to the newspaper “Prisoner” and support the prison ministry, there is a tear off form, where you can donate and specify what you want the donation to go for. God bless you!

Our main focus is ministering to inmates in jails and prisons.

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That you may say to the prisoners, “Go forth”, To those who are in darkness, “Show yourselves” (Is. 49:9).

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Dear readers of “Prisoner”!

The publication office requests that you enclose your postal address with your material (testimonies, sermons, articles, etc.) for publication in “Prisoner”. If you enclose photos with your material, we will be glad to publish them.

And for those of you just on the way to God, it’s time to turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with a short prayer: *“Lord Jesus, I believe you are God’s Son; You died for my sins and rose again for my salvation. I accept you as my personal Lord and Savior. Please forgive all my sins and grant me eternal life. Amen!”*



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