

GANGS: Will They Get You What You Want?

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Revised 2014

Printed In The United States Of America

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**This is dedicated to all the gang bangers and
wannabe’s whom I’ve known and worked with.**

GETTING REAL

“Gangs will give you money, sex, drugs and excitement!—Wanna join?”

“Join a gang and you’ll most likely be dead within 3-8 years, or else you’ll spend much of your life in prison, catch a sexually transmitted disease such as AIDS, become an addict, and see some friends get killed.—Wanna join?”

Both of the above statements are true; the first is *behavior*, the other is *consequences*. Welcome to the world of gangs! Gangs promise money, sex, drugs, excitement and a sense of belonging; and they do. Let me be very clear; gangs work! But, putting a loaded gun to your head and pulling the trigger will also work. The question is not, “*Do gangs work?*” but “*Where will they get you?*”

If you are old enough to read this, you are probably old enough to be tried in a court of law as an adult. Teens as young as 15 years old are being tried as adults in some states, especially for gang-related crimes. Do you think you’ll beat the odds?—The odds are you won’t. If you play the game long enough, you will go down.—It is only a matter of time. If the cops don’t get you, a rival gang will, and if they don’t, AIDS or cancer probably will. Is this what you want? Is this why you were born? Is this going to make your mama proud of you?—“*Yeah, my Johnny is a stud. He’s in prison doing life for capping a rival gang member; shot him in the back. Boy, am I proud of my son!*”

Have you ever heard of or been around *crack babies*? Many children are doomed to a life of hell on earth, and some may spend most of their lives in mental institutions through no fault of their own, all because their mama was doing crack while pregnant. Where do you suppose crack babies come from? Mostly from *gangs* selling crack to young teenage girls.

How would you like to look some six year old kid in the eye, and tell him the reason he's so screwed up is because you were the one who sold his mama crack? How would you like to tell his baby sister that the reason her dad sometimes beats her and sexually abuses her is because her dad gets mean and ugly when he is high on the crack or heroin you sold him?

You've got a choice, and you may not have long to make it. If you stay with the gang, you'll like die or spend a large part of your life in prison. What is equally sad is the number of people you'll hurt and take down with you.

Your only hope is to turn your life over to God before it is too late. You may say, "*Man, don't give me none of that religious crap.*"—I'm not talking religion. I'm talking God, and I'm talking about your life. Someone needs to have the guts to tell you the truth, and you need to listen. Right now you are only one breath and one heartbeat from stepping into *eternity*. "***Oops is one word you don't want to say after you die.***" If you were shot and killed tonight in a drive-by shooting, where would you be tomorrow: Heaven or Hell?

For twelve years I did chapel servies in detention facilities for teens, and during much of that time I also worked as a chaplain and/or therapist in psychiatric hospitals dealing primarily with adolescents (teens). They were in for drugs, violence, suicide attempt(s), conduct disorders, etc. During those years I worked with teens who were Crips, Bloods, Folks, Peoples, Gangster Disciples, Skinheads, Satanists, as well as a few bikers. While I haven't "seen" a lot, I've heard a LOT of very sad stories.

Let me tell you, life "ain't working" for most of these people. Most people in gangs are unskilled, unemployed, uneducated, untrained, and addicted to drugs, alcohol and tobacco; all of which will lead to an early death. If you're able to read this booklet, you're better off than most gang members. Seventy percent of prisoners nationwide can't even read well enough to use a bus schedule. Behind the macho act, most gang members are living in fear, and they have little hope for the future. They live with guilt and shame, unless they're too stoned on drugs to feel. Life for them is trying to keep one step ahead of the law, and keep rival gang members from killing them. Ask them, and they will tell you that all the crack money in the world can't buy happiness or peace of mind.

Most gang members have sold out their own race of people: Blacks destroying Blacks, Whites destroying Whites, Asians destroying Asians, Hispanics destroying Hispanics. They're destroying those they supposed love. Drug money is blood money, and it tells a story of wrecked homes, wrecked lives, wrecked hoods, and wrecked bodies.

I once worked with a crack dealer who told me she could make \$3,000 every two hours when welfare checks were issued on paydays. Most of her family is now doing time in prison. A lot of good her money is doing her. Someday you'll stand before God, and you'll have to answer for every one of those dollars. All the drug money in the world can't buy your way out of Hell.

When you stand before God as Judge, I think there are two main things God is going to ask you: "*What did you do with my Son (Jesus)?*" and "*How have you loved others?*"

If you're in a gang, or thinking about joining a gang, think again. Why do you want to join? Is it for protection? Money? A sense of belonging? Sex? Power? Revenge? Boredom? You tell me. Whatever the reason(s), however good, I can tell you, it's not worth the price you're going to pay. It may be fun while it lasts, but in the end you pay; big time. And the pain you will cause to others; you have no idea!

Without trying to dis you, I challenge you to **use your head**. Take a hard look at your life, and where it it's going. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to know you're playing with fire if you're in a gang. It is only a matter of time before you get hurt, if not killed, or spend a very long time in jail/prison.

GANGS AND YOUR FUTURE

I said you have two main choices: either stay with the gang, or get your life right with God's help. Let's talk about these choices. Ten years from now do you want to have a happy marriage, with a home, and a good job? Stay with the gang, and you can kiss those dreams goodbye. Most gang members who marry, have marriages which suck. Those who marry will probably be divorced once or twice before they turn 30 years of age [if they live that long]. Many gang members never get married. They just knock up women, get them pregnant, and never pay child support. Most of their kids will be screwed up for life.

If a gangster is able to see his kids, it's because someone was kind enough to send him photos to the prison.—I've been writing one prisoner for over 25 years. He hasn't seen his son for over 17 years, and it tears him up, especially on his son's birthday or at Christmas. He doesn't even know how to contact his son. He wants to be there for his boy, but he still has 125 more years to serve. He's 50 years old and he isn't even up for possible parole for another 25 years. Most days he spends 23 hours a day alone in his cell. He battles constant depression and feelings of hopelessness. Before he was arrested a rival gang shot at him, missed and shattered a glass window. Some of the glass got embedded in his left eye. He lived with constant pain and pressure in that eye until this last year he finally went blind in that eye. Medical attention in prison is often poor.

If you are in a gang, and if you don't get killed first, you'd better get used to the idea of spending most of your life in prison: feeling lonely, depressed, and hopeless. If you end up in a group living situation you may end up wearing a ribbon in your hair after the first couple of weeks.—You may become a sex slave to some guy a whole lot bigger and meaner than you are. Life in prison, especially for younger, good looking prisoners is a living hell. It is a place where many inmates are routinely raped by other prisoners. I was told by a prison nurse that in some prisons, new prisoners run up to a 90% chance of getting AIDS.

I remember the first time I visited a major state prison many years ago. A police officer in a bullet-proof observation room watched me enter. As I entered, I heard those big iron doors close behind me with a loud crash, and then a second set of heavy iron doors opened and closed behind me. I can't think of anything more frightening or depressing than to hear those prison doors lock knowing I would not be coming out for years and years. And why? Because I was stupid, joined a gang, and committed a major crime, or I was dumb enough to be with them when they committed a major crime, and I got busted along with them.

Because most gang members were gang banging when they should have been schooling, they haven't a clue on how to get and keep a good paying job, or how to support a family.

Gangs and drugs go together. I've seen drug addicts in the emergency rooms of hospitals. I've talked to crack-heads who were in handcuffs, bleeding, and were facing serious jail time for assault. I spoke with the emergency room nurse who tended a man who had literally clawed out his own eyeballs. He'll be blind the rest of his life because he had one bad trip on LSD. I've worked with alcoholics and addicts. I've taken suicide hotline calls from drug addicts at four o'clock in the morning. I've spent time with patients dying of AIDS. And a lot of this is because of gangs selling drugs. If the gang isn't selling crack, then it is crank, crystal meth, heroin, PCP, LSD, mushrooms, pot, prescription drugs, etc. Drugs are now a multi-billion dollar business. I once spoke with a man who lost a \$100,000 a year job, lost his wife and kids; all because he had been using crystal meth, and he waited too long to get help.

Some call gang bangin' and selling drugs cool. I look at where it leads, and I call it sad and stupid.

If you think it's too late to get out of the gang, because you've been beat-in, sexed-in, done a drive-by, or some other means of joining the gang, you're wrong. **You can get out.** Don't believe the lie, "*once a gang member, a gang member for life.*" Let me tell you some ways to get out of the gang without getting killed, being beat out, or having to kill someone. This may not be easy, but joining wasn't easy either. If you had the guts to join, then have the guts to get out.

1. Relocate and don't tell them where you moved. Get in with a good church, change your name, get into a recovery group and some others who can give you some protection. Quit dressing like a gang member. Make a clean break. Ask for help. Try to get a job.

2. Write a letter telling who is in your gang, their street names, all the crimes your gang has done, who your drug dealers are, etc. Write it all down, just as if you were going to narc on your entire gang and blow the whistle on the entire drug operation.

3. Give sealed copies of that letter to a lawyer, and put one copy in a safe deposit box at a bank. Show the gang leader the letter. Tell him you're leaving the gang, and as long as nothing happens to you, or your family, the letters will remain safe. Tell him that if anything happens to you, or your family, copies will be sent to the police, FBI and DEA. If the gang leaves you alone, the letters will remain safely locked up.— If they don't come after you or your family, you won't narc on them.

4. Lastly, pray and turn your life over to God. Pray for God's protection. Read the story about three young men in the Bible (Daniel, chapter 3) who had the courage to stand up against a king, how they were thrown into a blazing furnace and an angel of the Lord saved them. I once had a guy threatening to hit me. Finally he said, "*You must have a strong angel because I can't hit you.*" Pray for God's angelic protection. I also recommend you read "*The Cross And The Switchblade*" by David Wilkerson. It is an old classic about a hard core gang member who found Christ. It is truly an amazing story.

But, before all of this, do you know the first step to getting out of the gang?—You've got to be honest with yourself. You've got to want a better life. Don't lie to yourself. The sooner you admit that your life is going nowhere, the sooner you can turn around and start building a new life for yourself. You can't change or heal what you don't acknowledge. Will it be easy? No. Most really good things in life never come easy. Do you know why most pro athletes are so good? They work their butts off. If you joined a gang to prove that you're a man (or woman), then prove to yourself that you are man or woman enough to get out. Be committed to do what it takes to get what you want.

Do you know one reason why I wrote this booklet? Besides the fact that I care for you, I wanted to change your *thinking*.—Why? Because unless you change your thinking about gangs, you won't change, even if you go to prison.—Do you know why about 75% of all ex-cons return to prison a second, third, or fourth time? Their *thinking* hasn't changed. They somehow think that if they keep doing the same dumb things over and over again, that somehow things will turn out different. That is crazy thinking. What you *think* [believe] determines how you will *behave* [actions], and how you behave always has *consequences* [results]. Whenever you choose a belief, or act a certain way, whether you like it or not, you are choosing the results which go with it. If you jump off a building, you can always expect to hit the ground. One follows the other. Death or prison follow gang banging.

How you *think* determines how you will act. If you listen to gangster rap, act like a gangster, dress like a gangster, and think like a gangster, then don't be surprised when you get shot or go to prison like a gangster. If you want to start thinking right, then trash your gangster rap tapes and C.D.'s. I'm serious. It's poison to your mind. Gangster rap is like feeding your mind garbage. Garbage in, garbage out. Get rid of it!

Now, about God: if you aren't taking God seriously, some day you will awake on the other side of life, and the eyes of God and all of heaven will be looking at you. It will be too late to change then. The only thing you will have to offer God is a wasted life, because you chose to live an evil life. If you were to die tonight, because some rival gang member shot you, where would you spend eternity (forever and ever and ever and ever)? Are you ready to meet your Maker? You're only one breath away, one heartbeat away.

Whether you are a hard core gang banger, a wanna-be or just a tagger, you need God. If you have robbed, dealt drugs, acted in anger or hatred, maybe even killed somebody, slept around, dissed others, and dissed God, you need forgiveness. Without forgiveness, if you were to die, you'd be found guilty, deserving of Hell. If God were to take you to Heaven as you are right now, without you changing, you'd mess up Heaven, just as you are messing up your life down here. There are no gangs in Heaven.

Unless God forgives you, putting it bluntly, your life is screwed. Even if God forgives you, it doesn't mean that there still may not be consequences for you to bear. As one person said, "*Every act of sin is forgiveable, but the effects of some sins are not eraseable.*" There is still a chance you may have to do some jail time.

Your gang won't be there to protect you when you stand before God to give an account of your life. You

will stand before God alone. God didn't mess up your life. You did. [And yes, I know your life has been hard, and it is not all your fault. However, what you choose to make of your life is still your choice.]

I'm aware that your gang may be like family to you. Are you strong enough to leave your set and start doing what's right? If you really love those in your gang, lead the way. With God's help, get out, and help them get out. Otherwise, you might as well get used to seeing a lot of these friends get killed or spend their lives in prison.

GETTING REAL WITH GOD

You may be thinking, "How do I know all this God stuff is real?" Just as no one is ever half pregnant, in the same way, either God exists or God does not exist. Either all this stuff about God is real, or it is a bunch of crap. Correct?

How do I know God is real? Let me tell you a true story. One night a woman brought her husband into the psychiatric hospital where I work. The man was as drunk as drunk could be. I asked him if he went to A.A. [Alcoholics Anonymous]. He said, "*No, I don't believe in all that God stuff.*" His wife said, "*You should!*" He responded, "*I don't believe there is a God.*" At that point I couldn't resist, so I said, "*I think there is an easy way to prove to you there is a God.*" He took the bait, so I said, "*See that picture behind you? . . . Would you believe me if I said there was an explosion at a paint factory and it blew paint everywhere and just by chance made that painting?*" He said, "*No.*" I asked, "*Why not?*" He said, "*It couldn't happen.*"—"So, whenever you see design, there is usually a designer; or when you see art, there is usually an artist, right?" He said, "*Yeah.*" Then I said, "When you look at Cindy Crawford, the super model, or an Arabian stallion, a rose, or a New England Fall, do they look like something the universe puked out by accident, or does it look like there's design?" He said, "*Design.*"—I said, "*Then there must be a Designer; and that is God.*" He said, "*####, you got me!*"

Whether it took God six days, or six billion years to create the universe, the point is, it would never happen by accident. Whether it takes an artist six hours or six years to finish a work of art, it is still a work of art; not a freak accident.

There are many other reasons why I believe in God, which I won't go into now. Read my booklet, "*Belief In A God You Can't See*" if you want more facts.

You may be thinking, "*I have time to get right with God later.*"—Don't count on it. Right now you are standing on the edge of forever. Your whole life is like a split second compared to eternity (time which never ends). Gang banging, making money, doing drugs—even sex—doesn't compare with where you will spend eternity. If you're smart, you'd better think twice, because once you die, the party is over—forever. It is too late to seek God then. Janis Joplin, famous rock singer who died of a drug overdose in the 1960's, said, "*Take good care of your future, because that is where you are going to spend the rest of your life.*"

Whether you consider yourself a religious person or not, I'd like to tell you how you can have a personal relationship with God. Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship with God through Jesus Christ [who is God become man]. How do I know that salvation is through Jesus, and that he really is God?

1. Jesus claimed to be God; just like an author who wrote himself into his own story as one of the characters.
2. Any guy walking around claiming to be God would be a liar, a lunatic [crazy], or else he would be God. We know that Jesus was not crazy, nor did He seem to be a liar. He gave the world its highest moral teachings. Therefore, he must be God.
3. All the evidence points to the fact that Jesus was telling the truth; that he really was/is God become man.
 - a. He arose from the dead [called the *resurrection*]. Over 500 people saw him alive three days after his death.
 - b. He performed miracles [healing people, walking on water, casting out demons, etc.].
 - c. The Bible told in advance that God was coming into our world and how to recognize him. For example, the Bible told the town he would be born in [Bethlehem, Israel], how he would die

[with hands and feet pierced—Psalm 22], the exact year he would die [483 years after the command to rebuild the Jewish temple—Daniel 9:24-27]. There were almost 50 exact predictions telling before hand how we would know he truly was who he claimed to be.

- d. His followers who wrote about him walked the walk, and talked the talk. They were willing to die for what they believed, including the fact that they saw him alive three days after he had been crucified [nailed to a cross]. People don't knowingly die for a lie.
- e. The Bible can be trusted. People who study history say the Bible is 99.99% accurate.

I'd like to share what the Bible has to say about Jesus, and how you can know that when you die you will go to Heaven. I will list where each idea is found in the Bible so you can look them up. [In case someone has never showed you, the Bible is like a bunch of small books, all in one big book. Each small book within the Bible has a name, and each book is divided into chapters, and each chapter is divided into verses. For example, John 3:16 means this verse is found in the book of John, the third chapter, the sixteenth verse. Got it? Got it.]

HOW YOU KNOW GOD

There are four spiritual truths you especially need to know. These are like the A,B,C's of knowing God.

Truth # 1. God loves you, and has a plan and purpose for your life.

God is a God of love [I John 4:16]. No matter how bad you've screwed up, he loves you [John 3:16], and has a wonderful plan for your life [John 10:10, Ephesians 2:10]. What God wants for you is awesome beyond belief [Ephesians 3:14-21].

Truth #2. Your sin has cut you off from God.

Why don't people know God? The Bible says it is because our sin cuts us off from God who is holy [which means pure and without any sin—Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23]. Sin is rebelling, not obeying God. It is like missing shooting at God's target and missing. Because God is pure and blameless, totally without sin [Isaiah 6:1-5, I John 1:5], we cannot just bop into God's presence. Just as you would not allow someone to walk on your expensive white carpet if they had oily, muddy shoes, neither will God allow sin in Heaven. If we went to Heaven as we are now, we would mess up Heaven, just as we have the earth.

We all fail God's test, and we deserve to go to Hell. If we all lined up in front of the Grand Canyon, and tried to jump across it, some might jump further than others; but the point is, we would all fall short. [Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; Romans 1:18]. Because Adam and Eve [the first man and first woman] chose to sin, the Bible teaches that their sin nature got passed on to all people; the same way you inherited stuff from your parents [Genesis 3; Psalm 51:5; Romans 5:12-21].

The Bible teaches that we are all guilty before God, no matter whether we have sinned a little or a lot [James 2:10].—It is like the man who said, "*But, judge, look at all the people I didn't kill.*"—The point? None of us deserves to go to Heaven. Scripture teaches that we have all sinned against an eternal God and committed eternal crimes. [Romans 3:23; 6:23]—Stating it bluntly, unless God forgives you, you're doomed to live in hell. Because God is a good and righteous judge, he cannot just sweep our sins under the rug.

Truth # 3. Christ died for you and he is the only way to God.

The story is told of a young woman who got a phone call stating her dad was ill, and that he only had a matter of hours to live. Because she lived a couple hundred miles away, she got in her car and began driving to see her father. As she was going through a small southern town, she looked in her rear view mirror, and there was a cop car chasing her. Because she was going so fast, the officer didn't merely give her a ticket, he arrested her. The next day she appeared before the local county judge who told her that for going 50 miles per hour above the speed limit, her fine would be \$300 or three days in jail. She pleaded with the judge. "Your honor,

you don't understand, I don't have \$300 with me, and I can't spend three days in jail. I must go see my father who is dying." The judge said, "I'm sorry, young lady, but the law says you must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail."

As she began to weep, the judge was moved with compassion. To the surprise of everyone in the court, he stood up, stepped down from the bench, walked over, took off his robe, put on his sport coat, walked around in front of the bench, pulled out his checkbook, wrote a check for \$300, and laid it on the bench. Then he walked back around, took off his sport coat, put back on his robe, and resumed his seat. He said, "Young lady, the law is very clear. You must pay \$300 or spend three days in jail. But, I see someone has paid the fine for you. Case dismissed."

This is what God did for us. Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin [II Thessalonians 1:8-9; John 3:16; Romans 5:8, Acts 20:28]. He is the bridge that connects a holy God with sinful man. Either we go to God through him, or we do not get to God [I Timothy 2:5]. The Bible says that the penalty for sin is death [Romans 6:23]. When we stood guilty and condemned before God, without hope, deserving death and hell, God took off his robe of Godhood, put on a robe of humanity, became a man in the person of Jesus Christ, and died for you. God did for you what you could never do for yourself [Romans 5:6]. According to scripture, Jesus is both God and man. He has two natures: one human, the other one God [Philippians 2:6,7 and Romans 1:3,4]. As man, he bridged the gap between us and God. If we've been forgiven, when we stand before God as Judge, we will be standing before the very One who loved us and paid the fine for us.—*Case dismissed.*

Truth # 4. You must receive God's gift of forgiveness.

Knowing the first three principles is not enough. It takes a response on our part. While we cannot earn salvation [Isaiah 64:6; Ephesians 2:8-9], it is a *gift* which must be received. John 1:12 says, "*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*"—How do you receive the gift of salvation?

First, you must *believe* that Jesus died for your sins, and that he arose from the dead [I Corinthians 15:3-5, Romans 10:9]. Since it is your sin which has been keeping you from God, you must admit your sin and be willing to turn away from it [Mark 1:14,15]. The Bible calls this *repentance*, which simply means to *turn around*.—If you are headed down a one way street the wrong direction, away from God, turn around. As you turn back to God, ask God to forgive you and make you part of his family. The Bible says that if you will confess [admit] your sins, no matter how great or small they are, God will forgive you [Isaiah 1:18; I John 1:9]. The moment you do this you are totally, 100%, forgiven. Your sins will *never* be held against you [Romans 4:7,8].

The story is told of a man who tightrope-walked across Niagara Falls with a 200 pound sack of sand on his back. Upon walking to the other side he turned to a spectator and asked, "Do you believe I could do that again?" The person said "Sure!" The tightrope walker tossed down the sand and said, "Then climb on my back."—Real believing is more than talking the talk; it is walking the walk. God asks you to "climb on board," and commit yourself to him. It is more than believing something to be true in your head. It is a commitment of the heart.

As an act of faith, in order to become a Christian, you must invite Jesus to come into your life to be your Savior and Lord. [*Savior* refers to the fact that he *saves* us from our sin, and *Lord* simply means *boss*, the One in charge.] It means getting out of the driver's seat, and letting him be in the driver's seat of your life.

Once you do this, not only are you forgiven, but God places his Holy Spirit within you. [Ephesians 1:7-14, Galatians 2:20]. You become a child of God.

Let me share a simple illustration. Would you go to a stranger's funeral and ask the family of the deceased for a share of the inheritance? You could tell them, "I'm a *good person*, and I do nice things for others."—Would that impress them? No. They'd say, "I'm sorry, but the inheritance is for family members' only. We don't even know you."

Well, the same is true with God. You must be born into God's family if you expect to *inherit* what is God's. His inheritance is for his children, for those who *know* him. That is why Jesus said unless a person is *born again*, he or she will never see the Kingdom of Heaven [John 3:3-18]. The moment you receive Christ into

your life, you are spiritually reborn into God's family. You become a joint heir with Christ [Romans 8:32]. You inherit eternal life, and glory beyond your wildest imagination awaits you [I Corinthians 2:9; 3:21-23; Ephesians 1:3; Romans 8:31,32].

If you do what God tells you to do for salvation, you can *know* and rest assured you are a child of God; that when you die you will go to Heaven, and will live with God forever [John 14:1,2; Revelation 21:1-4]. I John 5:11-13 says, "*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may KNOW you have eternal life.*" [emphasis mine]—How can you *know* for sure that you will go to Heaven? Does it depend on how you feel? No. If you do what God says, believe in Christ, God will hold up his end of the bargain. God does not lie.

The Bible says that if you pray and ask for *anything* according to God's will, He will answer you [I John 5:14].—Is it God's will that you *believe* in and *receive* Jesus? Yes. [See: II Peter 3:9.] Therefore, when you ask God to forgive you and come into your life, you can count on it [Romans 10:9, Ephesians 3:17].

Speaking for myself, I got to know Jesus when I was 14 years old. I prayed and asked Jesus to come into my life, and forgive me of my sins.—And he did. It was that simple. To my amazement, it worked. God's peace flooded through me. Old feelings of guilt were gone [II Corinthians 5:17]. As I read the Bible, it finally began to make sense. I also began seeing God answer prayer, which totally surprised me. God became real to me. While being a Christian has not always been easy, I wouldn't trade the joy of knowing Christ for anything in the world.

Christianity isn't simply a religion; it is a relationship with the living God. God doesn't want you to merely believe he exists. He wants you to *know* him, and for you to love him. Like a Lover of your soul, God has proposed to you. The question is, will you say, "I do"?

A TIME OF DECISION

If you feel the Spirit of God speaking to you, and you become convinced in your heart, and in your mind, that what I have written is true, then you face a decision.

No matter how many reasons I give you for believing in Jesus, the final step is one of faith; even though there are good reasons for our belief. For example, I can't *prove* that George Washington lived, but I can show a lot of evidence that he did. By *faith*, I believe George Washington lived, and by *faith*, I believe Christianity is true. Faith in Jesus works. I know. Jesus changed my life.

A simple way for you to see if what I say is true, is for you to seek God on His terms [as best you understand], with a will to follow the truth. Not to seek God with all of your heart is to gamble with losing your soul. Choosing not to decide is a decision. To do nothing is the same as saying "No."

You may want to pray something like this, "*Dear Lord God, if You're there, and what this booklet says is true about Jesus, then I want to know. Please show me the truth.*"—Praying this prayer will not make you a Christian, but it is an honest start.

Secondly, read.—Read the Bible. Don't just rely on what you have heard. Study it for yourself. Look up the verses in this booklet. Think with your mind; listen with your heart. There are good answers to about any question you can ask.

Some day you will stand before God, either forgiven or unforgiven. Hell is one of those hard teachings most Christians, myself included, don't like to discuss. However, Jesus talked about it more than all the other Bible writers put together. Not to choose God, and accept his offer of forgiveness, is to choose a life of eternal separation from Him [Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:11-15; II Thessalonians 1:8-9; Matthew 13:40-43]. God is serious when it comes to sin. God judges sin. If you refuse God's forgiveness, and you hang on to your sin, you will die with your sin. If there were any other way, Jesus would not have had to die on the cross. Scripture says, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*" [Acts 4:12]. Either you go through Jesus, or you don't go to Heaven.

There is no sin too great for God to forgive. He loves you. He died for you. Whatever you have done, whatever guilt you are carrying, God is willing to forgive. God does not lie. He promises to forgive you *if* you will

but ask [Isaiah 1:18; I John 1:9]. He will give you the strength to overcome any sin [I Corinthians 10:13; Philippians 4:13]. With God's Spirit living in and through you, you can begin to experience God's peace and joy [John 14:27; Galatians 2:20, 5:22; Romans 7:14-8:11].

This may be a hard decision for you. Much is at stake. If you receive Jesus, it will cost you. You may be misunderstood. Friends and family members may reject you.—Welcome to the club. Jesus was also misunderstood and rejected.—He was willing to die for you. Are you willing to live for him?

No one has a deciding vote in this decision but you. God votes for you. Satan, who is also very real, votes against you. I pray that you will vote before it is too late. There are no second chances in another life [Hebrews 9:27].—The question is whether you are willing to receive him and give your life to him. Jesus said, "*Here I am! I stand at the door [of your heart] and knock. If anyone [you] hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in . . .*" Revelation 3:20.

If you know that what I have said is true, then find a quiet place and make your peace with God. Invite Jesus into your life. What greater joy could you have than to know your sins are forgiven, that you have been given eternal life, and that you are ready to meet Jesus when he returns [Zechariah 14:1-9; I John 3:1-3].

When you are ready to make your peace with God, I suggest you pray something like this: "*Dear Jesus, I thank you for loving me. I am sorry for the ways that I have sinned against you. I believe you died on the cross for my sin. As best as I know how, right now, I invite you to come into my life. Please forgive me, and cleanse me, from all my sin. Make me the person you want me to be. I need you. Thank you for hearing my prayer. Amen.*"

These words are not magical. The important thing is that you mean them [I John 5:11-15]. Once you have invited Jesus Christ to be a part of your life, I encourage you to find a loving church where the Bible is both honored and taught. Get baptized to publically show you are a Christian [Matthew 28:19,20; Acts 10:47, 48a]. Visit several churches before you pick a church. Pray about it, and listen to your heart. God can lead you. It is sort of like trying on a new pair of shoes. You don't necessarily want to buy the first pair you try on.

The story is told of a native witch doctor who had done much evil in his life, causing much needless suffering through his superstitious beliefs. As a result of the love and work of some Christian workers, he prayed and asked Jesus into his heart. He called a meeting to share with those in his village the changes that had occurred in his life. He said that before he came to know Christ it was as though there was an evil dog in him that made him do cruel, hateful things. When he asked Christ into his life, he said it was as though a powerful good dog of love and peace came to live in him.

As he spoke, a small lad sitting at his feet grew more and more interested in what he was saying. When the lad couldn't take the suspense any longer, he blurted out, "Did the bad dog leave?" The former witch doctor paused and said, "No, son, he still hangs around." The boy asked "How do the two dogs get along?" The old man replied, "They fight all the time!" The little boy, with great concern in his voice said, "Well, which one wins?" The old man, with a smile and a twinkle in his eyes said, "The one I feed the most."—How true.

Life is hard. God is good. There are spiritual battles that will go on in your life. Just as God and angels are real, Satan and his demons are also real. The Bible has much to say about them. Even if you are not used to reading a lot, now is a good time to begin to grow your mind. Many of the hardest battles you will fight are between your ears: your mind.

Besides the books I've mentioned thus far, there are three books I highly recommend to help you gain and maintain spiritual victory in your life. The first two are written by Dr. Neil Anderson: *Victory Over the Darkness* and *The Bondage Breaker*.

Keep feeding the good side. Dailly pray, read scripture, and allow God to speak to you. I pray you will know and experience His love and peace.