

A Living Sacrifice



Amir was born into a Christian family in the country of Jordan. As he grew older, he developed a distain for both Islam and Christianity, but he especially loathed the Muhammadans.

He worked for a travel company and was recently required to travel to Saudi Arabia on business during the Hajj, the month-long annual pilgrimage to Mecca. However, he had no plans to get anywhere close to Mecca – he just wanted to get in the country, get his work done, and get out.

After flying to Riyadh, he got his passport stamped and headed to his hotel for the night. Later that afternoon while looking for a business card he had placed in his passport, he noticed something that shocked and infuriated him – the clerk at the airport had mistakenly stamped his passport with “Muslim”. It would forever identify him with people he despised.

That night after an expensive dinner and several hours of pay-per-view, he faded to sleep on top of the quilted bedspread.

Suddenly he awoke with a start – he heard a voice. “Pray for them,” it said. The voice came again and then an Angel appeared at the foot of his bed and said: “Pray for them. You have a mission, Amir, Go and pray for them Mecca. Be faithful, Amir.” And then it was dark again, and he was alone.

Over the next few days as he started praying again, he found his attitude towards the people around him changing. He was actually feeling compassion and tenderness toward Muslims, who only days before he had hated.

When his work was completed, he extended his stay in Saudi Arabia by several days. He downloaded a Bible to his computer and read through the book of Matthew. Then lay down to sleep.

In the dark, he heard a voice say: “Follow Me, Amir.” And then Jesus appeared to him and continued: “Come to Me and receive the Gift.” And just as quickly as He had come, Jesus was gone.

Amir went back to his computer and searched the Bible he had just downloaded for the words “Follow Me” and ended up in Mathew 9:9:

*As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector’s booth.
“Follow me and be my disciple,” Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up and followed him.
(Matthew 9:9, NLT)*

“I am Matthew in the story,” Amir observed. “Jesus has reached out to me in spite of my sinful, sarcastic emptiness.”

The stories of Jesus that Amir had listened to as a child replayed in his mind. He remember how, as a boy, he had loved Jesus. Formal Christianity eventually erased all traces of that affection, but now it rushed back into his heart

Finally, he slipped off the bed to his knees and prayed:

“Lord Jesus, I have been so far from You. I’ve even hated You. Please forgive me. Forgive my sin-infested life. You died for me just like You did for Matthew. I repent. I’m Yours, Lord. I’ll follow You anywhere.”

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We have arrived at the point in the Book of Romans that Paul has been building up to from the very first verse.

Paul has shown how all of us are sinful to the core and have no hope of becoming righteous and obtaining salvation by our own efforts. He tells us that the purpose of the law was to make this crystal clear and that no one would be saved based on keeping the law.

He then carefully laid out the gift of grace that God has provided through the sacrifice of Jesus – His life here on earth, His death, and His resurrection.

He explained that when we accept Jesus’ sacrifice and believe in Him, at that moment we are freed from the *Penalty of Sin*. We stand before God perfect and pure because Jesus has taken our penalty and covered us with His pure and perfect life.

Paul then makes it clear that, while continuing to free us from the *Penalty of Sin*, Jesus also frees us from the Power of Sin. This will bring about a change in our lives that will honor and glorify God. As long as we stay with Him, we will become more like Him and better reflect Him to others.

This will lead to the time when God will free us from the *Presence of Sin*, which will usher in a wonderful eternity of companionship with God, free of the pain, sorrow, and death we experience here.

Paul then made it clear again that this applies to everyone – Jews and Gentiles. And that all the promises of Scripture belong to Spiritual Israel which includes anyone who believes in Jesus!

Reading from **Romans 12**:

And so ... (Romans 12:1, NLT)

Some translations say “therefore” – this refers back to what Paul has already said; the stuff we just quickly reviewed; all that stuff about salvation being by His grace, not about our behavior.

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. (Romans 12:1, NLT)

Because of all God has done for us – which Paul just spent 11 chapters detailing, our response should be to give God our bodies. And notice, this is not just a casual request. Paul wrote:

... I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you.
(Romans 12:1, NLT)

This is not just for “Super Christians”, Paul is writing to the regular, everyday people who made up the church. This is written to all of us – you and me.

Why the focus on our bodies? Why not just say give Him yourself?

Paul is giving us a word picture to illustrate a spiritual truth. We live in our body, it’s our only home. We consider ourselves in charge of our bodies. To give God our body means we have invited Him to come into our space and take it over. It is an acknowledgment that now we belong to God.

To the Church in Corinth, Paul wrote:

Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, NLT)

God is not asking to just be a part of your life. He does not want to be just that casual friend you meet with Sabbath mornings or that rich, kind grandpa you visit every now and then – especially when you need something.

Total Control

God knows that if you don’t give Him total control, that piece you hold back will eventually take over your life and pull you out of His reach. He loves you too much to just settle for a part of you.

Paul turns up the heat a bit more:

Let them ...

Your body – and because Paul used the plural form here, it indicates he is addressing everyone who reads this letter.

Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. (Romans 12:1, NLT)

I’m not sure what image comes to your mind when you hear “sacrifice” – I usually picture something or someone who died. We recently celebrated Memorial Day, which is a day to remember those people who have died in the service of our country.

But, in many ways, doesn't everyone in the service make a sacrifice? Many have entered the service whole and healthy, and have left it with broken bodies and damaged minds and hearts – their sacrifice continues every day they live.

God is asking for that level of commitment to Him. There is a big difference though between serving God and serving your country – God loves us as His children and has promised an end to the pain, sickness, struggles, and death we find so difficult to deal with. And He has the power to make it happen.

Paul points out that making this commitment is true worship. What we do here at church and call worship is just a shadow. It points our attention towards God if we allow it too; but, real worship is taking God at His Word. It is offering God the place of honor in the home we call our body. It is more about what we give Him than what we say or sing.

So, what does a living sacrifice look like? How can you know if you're on the right track?

Paul continues:

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. (Romans 12:2, NLT)

Don't look to the world for our cues on what to think or how to act. But, let God actually transform you according to His will by allowing Him to change the way you think.

I find this comforting. If you're like me, the thought of being a living sacrifice is a bit scary. I fight it in my mind because I'm worried that I will have to give up things I enjoy and do things I don't like doing.

In this I forget that God loves me as His son. While I must cooperate, it is His job to bring about the change in my thinking that will affect the direction of my life..

I don't have to generate these feelings or actions – they come about as I stay connected with God and allow Him to actually be God. Paul adds this:

Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (Romans 12:2, NLT)

When you offer your body as a living sacrifice – God's Word will become your life. He will transform you by changing the way you think. You will then be able to clearly see what God's will for you is. When you come to God with the intent to follow His directions, you will know what He wants you to do.

And, you will find in the end, that it is good, pleasing, and perfect. Looking back on your life you will realize that you would not have wanted God to lead you in any other way.

Basically, Paul is telling us this: When you really understand your condition and all God has done for you – you will be ready to trust Him with your life!

Amir Continued

When we left Amir, he was on his knees in his hotel room praying:

“Lord Jesus, I have been so far from You. I’ve even hated You. Please forgive me. Forgive my sin-infested life. You died for me just like You did for Matthew. I repent. I’m Yours, Lord. I’ll follow You anywhere.”

Do you remember what the angel told him? “You have a mission, Amir, Go and pray for them in Mecca.”

And, do you remember what happened to his passport as he entered Saudi Arabia? It had “mistakenly” been stamped “Muslim” – without that stamp, he could never get into Mecca.

Putting all this together, Amir purchased the appropriate clothing and boarded a bus headed to Mecca.

The 400-mile trip passed quickly. He was lost in his new experience of inner peace. As he rode, he prayed; for himself, for the others on the bus, for his friends and family, and for Mecca.

In the fading evening light as his bus neared Mecca, the flash of a sign in the bus headlights interrupted his prayers: “Non-Muslims who enter this city will be killed.” It was the final warning to unwelcome visitors.

“I’ll never get out of here alive,” he thought. “There are so many watching for infiltrators and religious violations at every site. Sharia is the law here.”

Amir remembered a documentary he had seen about Abu Badr’s work. He is one of only six in his country and has followed in his father’s path. He decapitates people for a living. He is the chief executioner for the city of Mecca.

In an interview, he said: “... Along with the hundreds of beheadings I’ve handled, I carry out the punishment of cutting off thieves’ hands, as well as the cutting off of a hand and a leg on alternate sides, as instructed in the Qur’an. I have beheaded many people who were my friends, but anyone who commits an offense brings it on himself.”

Amir remembered Abu Badr’s manic chuckle over the assignment of beheading several people in one execution session.

He remembered his friend’s description of the killings he had witnessed: “One by one they were pronounced apostate. In seconds – with no hope of appeal and certainly no mercy, Badr severed the victim’s head, and a team of assistants tossed two lifeless body parts in a pile.”

The bus stopped within sight of the Sacred Mosque, and with surprising calm, Amir thought, “So, this is where I die.”

The next day, He joined the crowds and was surprised at his compassion for the people around him and his desire for them to know Jesus. His heart broke to see so many well-intentioned people torturing themselves to placate a false god. All came in search of a blessing from Allah, and all left still searching.

Amir smelled the cigarette smoke as soon as he unlocked the door to his hotel room that evening. His clothes were scattered across the bed and his laptop no longer lay on the chair where he had left it but now sat on the desk.

“Secret police” he muttered to himself, as he recalled the chaotic taxi ride here and the one crucial fact he hadn’t noticed before – he never told the taxi driver where to go.

The next morning He awoke to a renewed sense of boldness for his mission. Several times during the next few days he realized he was carefully being watched.

On the last day of the Hajj, Amir’s soul wept at the sight of the mass animal sacrifice. He cried to the real God of Abraham to set these people free from their torturous existence.

It was also the day Amir finally saw Abu Badr. He flinched as he watched him amputate another head. One execution was enough, and Amir turned away, yet not in fear. He had never, in fact, felt less fear. He thought of nothing but his new-found love for the Muslims.

As he was headed back to his hotel that afternoon, emotionally and physically exhausted, he overheard two sentences of a conversation that electrified him. “It is my third dream about Jesus since I have been here – I wonder what it means.”

Amir was so energized by what he heard, he wandered around for another few hours praying for those he was rubbing shoulders with.

As he headed back to his hotel, he noticed a man following him – matching him step for step about three paces back. Amir finally turned to confront the man. They eyed one another for several tense seconds before the man spoke.

“I am your friend,” he said. “My name is Muhammad.” With that, he turned and disappeared into the crowd. (To be concluded next week)

Did you Notice ...

Did you notice the changes that came in Amir’s life once he offered his body as a living sacrifice?

- His hate and disgust turned to love and compassion
- He became aware of what God wanted Him to do, and with enthusiasm went into a hostile environment to carry it out
- His focus turned from himself – from his desires and wants – to loving others

These changes are impossible for you to fake or to produce through self-discipline. They only happen as a result of God working inside of you to renew your mind and transform your life.

Amir's life is an prime example of God's work in fulfilling the promise recorded by the Prophet Ezekiel. God said:

"... I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations." (Ezekiel 36:26-27, NLT)

Notice it is God doing the work. He will remove your stubborn heart. He will give you a new one – a heart that is tender and responsive. And He will put His Spirit in your life and because it is there, you will naturally obey His laws and follow His leading.

God only invites us to come to Him and stay with Him - He will teach us and recreate us into who He wants us to be (see [Matthew 11:28-30](#)).

When Amir prayed:

"Lord Jesus, I have been so far from You. I've even hated You. Please forgive me. Forgive my sin-infested life. You died for me just like You did for Matthew. I repent. I'm Yours, Lord. I'll follow You anywhere."

There was nothing magical or special about the words of this prayer, it was powerful because it expressed the desire of his heart. And God took him at his word and immediately began the process of giving him a new heart and of putting the Holy Spirit in his life. Amir simply accepted it and followed.

Have you been convicted to say something similar to God? I'm going give you a few quiet moments right now to say it to Him. You can say it out loud if you want or just within your heart. If you are feeling a nudge from God in this direction, don't resist it.

Let's pray!

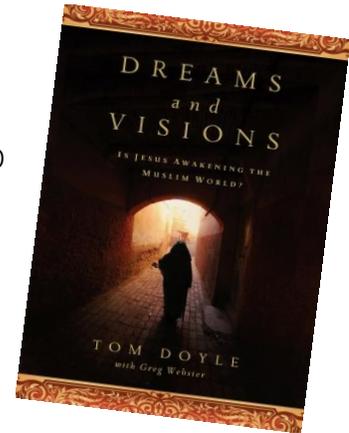
Next Sabbath, we will finish Amir's story. And, we will explore how Paul paints a picture of what a life that has been offered as a *Living Sacrifice* looks like.

Notes

Text you find in **this color** is a link to more information. It may take you to the Bible verse in context and/or in several different translations utilizing BibleGateway.com. In some cases, it may take you to a website where there is additional information. And, it may take you to a PDF copy of previous sermons in this series.

Dreams & Visions

Amir's story, along with many others, is found in the book *Dreams & Visions: Is God Awakening the Muslim World?*, written by Tom Doyle, © 2012, published by Thomas Nelson, Inc. To purchase a copy, [click here](#). To purchase an e-book for iTunes, [click here](#); for a Kindle, [click here](#); or for a Nook Book, [click here](#).



Previous Sermons in this Series

- January 5, 2019: [Welcome to Rome \(Romans, Part 1\)](#)
- January 26, 2019: [The Big Problem, Part 1 \(Romans, Part 2a\)](#)
- February 2, 2019: [The Big Problem, Part 2 \(Romans, Part 2b\)](#)
- February 16, 2019: [The Incredible Solution, Part 1 \(Romans, Part 3a\)](#)
- March 2, 2019: [The Incredible Solution, Part 2 \(Romans, Part 3b\)](#)
- March 30, 2019: [The Wonderful Promise \(Romans, Part 4\)](#)
- April 6, 2019: [The Wonderful Promise, Part 2 \(Romans, Part 4b\)](#)
- May 4, 2019: [The Wonderful Promise, Part 3 \(Romans, Part 4c\)](#)
- June 15, 2019: [People of the Promise \(Romans, Part 5\)](#)

Scripture References

Isaiah 53:1-12 (NLT): *Who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm? ²My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. ³He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.*

⁴Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! ⁵But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. ⁶All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

⁷ He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. ⁸ Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people. ⁹ He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave.

¹⁰ But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands. ¹¹ When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. ¹² I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels. (**Isaiah 53:1-12**, NLT)

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (NLT): "The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. ³² This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the LORD.

³³ "But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel after those days," says the LORD. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ³⁴ And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the LORD. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins." (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**, NLT)

Ezekiel 36:25-27 (NLT): "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations." (**Ezekiel 36:25-27**, NLT)

Matthew 5:43-48 (NLT): "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (**Matthew 5:43-48**, NLT)

Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT): *Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30, NLT)*

John 3:14-17 (NLT): *And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life.*

¹⁶ *“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:14-17, NLT)*

Romans 12:1-21 (NLT): *And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice – the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. ² Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

³ *Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don’t think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us. ⁴ Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, ⁵ so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other.*

⁶ *In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. ⁷ If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. ⁸ If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.*

⁹ *Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.*

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you. Don’t curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don’t be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don’t think you know it all!*

¹⁷ *Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.*

¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say,

“I will take revenge; I will pay them back,” (Deuteronomy 32:35) says the LORD.

²⁰ Instead,

“If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.”

(Proverbs 25:21-22)

²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good. (**Romans 12:1-21**, NLT)

1 Corinthians 6:12-20 (NLT): You say, “I am allowed to do anything” – but not everything is good for you. And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything.

¹³ You say, “Food was made for the stomach, and the stomach for food.” (This is true, though someday God will do away with both of them.) But you can't say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. ¹⁴ And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead.

¹⁵ Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “The two are united into one.” ¹⁷ But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

¹⁸ Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. ¹⁹ Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, ²⁰ for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.

(1 Corinthians 6:12-20, NLT)

Galatians 5:16-26 (NLT): So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. ¹⁷ The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions. ¹⁸ But when you are directed by the Spirit, you are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

¹⁹ When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. ²⁵ Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another. (**Galatians 5:16-26**, NLT)

Philippians 2:1-11 (NLT): *Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate?* ² Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

³ Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

⁵ You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

⁶ Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (**Philippians 2:1-11**, NLT)

1 Timothy 1:15-17 (NLT): *This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" – and I am the worst of them all.* ¹⁶ But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen. (**1 Timothy 1:15-17**, NLT)

E.G. White Resources

Desire of Ages, page 439:

Let the repenting sinner fix his eyes upon "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); and by beholding, he becomes changed. His fear is turned to joy, his doubts to hope. Gratitude springs up. The stony heart is broken. A tide of love sweeps into the soul. Christ is in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life. When we see Jesus, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, working to save the lost, slighted, scorned, derided, driven from city to city till His mission was accomplished; when we behold Him in Gethsemane, sweating great drops of blood, and on the cross dying in agony,—when we see this, self will no longer clamor to be recognized. Looking unto Jesus, we shall be ashamed of our coldness, our

lethargy, our self-seeking. We shall be willing to be anything or nothing, so that we may do heart service for the Master. We shall rejoice to bear the cross after Jesus, to endure trial, shame, or persecution for His dear sake. (Desire of Ages, page 439)

Steps to Christ, pages 23-35: *How shall a man be just with God? How shall the sinner be made righteous? It is only through Christ that we can be brought into harmony with God, with holiness; but how are we to come to Christ? Many are asking the same question as did the multitude on the Day of Pentecost, when, convicted of sin, they cried out, "What shall we do?" The first word of Peter's answer was, "Repent." Acts 2:37, 38. At another time, shortly after, he said, "Repent, ... and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." Acts 3:19.*

Repentance includes sorrow for sin and a turning away from it. We shall not renounce sin unless we see its sinfulness; until we turn away from it in heart, there will be no real change in the life.

There are many who fail to understand the true nature of repentance. Multitudes sorrow that they have sinned and even make an outward reformation because they fear that their wrongdoing will bring suffering upon themselves. But this is not repentance in the Bible sense. They lament the suffering rather than the sin. Such was the grief of Esau when he saw that the birthright was lost to him forever. Balaam, terrified by the angel standing in his pathway with drawn sword, acknowledged his guilt lest he should lose his life; but there was no genuine repentance for sin, no conversion of purpose, no abhorrence of evil. Judas Iscariot, after betraying his Lord, exclaimed, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Matthew 27:4. (24)

The confession was forced from his guilty soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a fearful looking for of judgment. The consequences that were to result to him filled him with terror, but there was no deep, heartbreaking grief in his soul, that he had betrayed the spotless Son of God and denied the Holy One of Israel. Pharaoh, when suffering under the judgments of God, acknowledged his sin in order to escape further punishment, but returned to his defiance of Heaven as soon as the plagues were stayed. These all lamented the results of sin, but did not sorrow for the sin itself.

But when the heart yields to the influence of the Spirit of God, the conscience will be quickened, and the sinner will discern something of the depth and sacredness of God's holy law, the foundation of His government in heaven and on earth. The "Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," illumines the secret chambers of the soul, and the hidden things of darkness are made manifest. John 1:9. Conviction takes hold upon the mind and heart. The sinner has a sense of the righteousness of Jehovah and feels the terror of appearing, in his own guilt and uncleanness, before the Searcher of hearts. He sees the love of God, the beauty of holiness, the joy of purity; he longs to be cleansed and to be restored to communion with Heaven.

The prayer of David after his fall, illustrates the nature of true sorrow for sin. His repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his guilt; no desire to escape the judgment threatened, inspired his prayer. David saw the enormity of his transgression; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart. He longed for the joy of holiness – to be restored to harmony and communion with God. This was the language of his soul: (25)

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” Psalm 32:1, 2.

*“Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: According unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions ... For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me ... Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow ... Create in me a clean heart, O God; And renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit ... Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness.”
Psalm 51:1-14.*

A repentance such as this, is beyond the reach of our own power to accomplish; it is obtained only from Christ, who ascended up on high and has given gifts unto men. (26)

Just here is a point on which many may err, and hence they fail of receiving the help that Christ desires to give them. They think that they cannot come to Christ unless they first repent, and that repentance prepares for the forgiveness of their sins. It is true that repentance does precede the forgiveness of sins; for it is only the broken and contrite heart that will feel the need of a Saviour. But must the sinner wait till he has repented before he can come to Jesus? Is repentance to be made an obstacle between the sinner and the Saviour?

The Bible does not teach that the sinner must repent before he can heed the invitation of Christ, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28. It is the virtue that goes forth from Christ, that leads to genuine repentance. Peter made the matter clear in his statement to the Israelites when he said, “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Acts 5:31. We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ.

Christ is the source of every right impulse. He is the only one that can implant in the heart enmity against sin. Every desire for truth and purity, every conviction of our own sinfulness, is an evidence that His Spirit is moving upon our hearts.

Jesus has said, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." John 12:32. Christ must be revealed to the sinner as the Saviour dying for the sins of the world; and as we behold the Lamb of God upon the cross of Calvary, the mystery of redemption begins to unfold to our minds and the goodness of God leads us to repentance. In dying for sinners, Christ manifested a love that is incomprehensible; and as the sinner beholds this love, it softens the heart, impresses the mind, and inspires contrition in the soul. (27)

It is true that men sometimes become ashamed of their sinful ways, and give up some of their evil habits, before they are conscious that they are being drawn to Christ. But whenever they make an effort to reform, from a sincere desire to do right, it is the power of Christ that is drawing them. An influence of which they are unconscious works upon the soul, and the conscience is quickened, and the outward life is amended. And as Christ draws them to look upon His cross, to behold Him whom their sins have pierced, the commandment comes home to the conscience. The wickedness of their life, the deep-seated sin of the soul, is revealed to them. They begin to comprehend something of the righteousness of Christ, and exclaim, "What is sin, that it should require such a sacrifice for the redemption of its victim? Was all this love, all this suffering, all this humiliation, demanded, that we might not perish, but have everlasting life?"

The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; a knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God's dear Son. (28)

The same divine mind that is working upon the things of nature is speaking to the hearts of men and creating an inexpressible craving for something they have not. The things of the world cannot satisfy their longing. The Spirit of God is pleading with them to seek for those things that alone can give peace and rest – the grace of Christ, the joy of holiness. Through influences seen and unseen, our Saviour is constantly at work to attract the minds of men from the unsatisfying pleasures of sin to the infinite blessings that may be theirs in Him. To all these souls, who are vainly seeking to drink from the broken cisterns of this world, the divine message is addressed, "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Revelation 22:17.

You who in heart long for something better than this world can give, recognize this longing as the voice of God to your soul. Ask Him to give you repentance, to reveal Christ to you in His infinite love, in His perfect purity. In the Saviour's life the principles of God's law – love to God and man – were perfectly exemplified. Benevolence, unselfish love, was the life of His soul. It is as we behold Him, as the light from our Saviour falls upon us, that we see the sinfulness of our own hearts.

We may have flattered ourselves, as did Nicodemus, that our life has been upright, that our moral character is correct, and think that we need not humble the heart before God, like the common sinner: but when the light from Christ shines into our souls, we shall see how impure we are; we shall discern the selfishness of motive, the enmity against God, that has defiled every act

of life. Then we shall know that our own righteousness is indeed as filthy rags, and that the blood of Christ alone can cleanse us from the defilement of sin, and renew our hearts in His own likeness. (29)

One ray of the glory of God, one gleam of the purity of Christ, penetrating the soul, makes every spot of defilement painfully distinct, and lays bare the deformity and defects of the human character. It makes apparent the unhallowed desires, the infidelity of the heart, the impurity of the lips. The sinner's acts of disloyalty in making void the law of God, are exposed to his sight, and his spirit is stricken and afflicted under the searching influence of the Spirit of God. He loathes himself as he views the pure, spotless character of Christ.

When the prophet Daniel beheld the glory surrounding the heavenly messenger that was sent unto him, he was overwhelmed with a sense of his own weakness and imperfection. Describing the effect of the wonderful scene, he says, "There remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." Daniel 10:8. The soul thus touched will hate its selfishness, abhor its self-love, and will seek, through Christ's righteousness, for the purity of heart that is in harmony with the law of God and the character of Christ.

Paul says that as "touching the righteousness which is in the law" – as far as outward acts were concerned – he was "blameless" (Philippians 3:6); but when the spiritual character of the law was discerned, he saw himself a sinner. Judged by the letter of the law as men apply it to the outward life, he had abstained from sin; but when he looked into the depths of its holy precepts, and saw himself as God saw him, he bowed in humiliation and confessed his guilt. He says, "I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Romans 7:9. When he saw the spiritual nature of the law, sin appeared in its true hideousness, and his self-esteem was gone. (30)

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man's judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe. He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.

The poor publican who prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13), regarded himself as a very wicked man, and others looked upon him in the same light; but he felt his need, and with his burden of guilt and shame he came before God, asking for His mercy. His heart was open for the Spirit of God to do its gracious work and set him free from the power of sin. The Pharisee's boastful, self-righteous prayer showed that his heart was closed against the influence

of the Holy Spirit. Because of his distance from God, he had no sense of his own defilement, in contrast with the perfection of the divine holiness. He felt no need, and he received nothing. (31)

If you see your sinfulness, do not wait to make yourself better. How many there are who think they are not good enough to come to Christ. Do you expect to become better through your own efforts? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." Jeremiah 13:23. There is help for us only in God. We must not wait for stronger persuasions, for better opportunities, or for holier tempers. We can do nothing of ourselves. We must come to Christ just as we are.

But let none deceive themselves with the thought that God, in His great love and mercy, will yet save even the rejecters of His grace. The exceeding sinfulness of sin can be estimated only in the light of the cross. When men urge that God is too good to cast off the sinner, let them look to Calvary. It was because there was no other way in which man could be saved, because without this sacrifice it was impossible for the human race to escape from the defiling power of sin, and be restored to communion with holy beings – impossible for them again to become partakers of spiritual life – it was because of this that Christ took upon Himself the guilt of the disobedient and suffered in the sinner's stead. The love and suffering and death of the Son of God all testify to the terrible enormity of sin and declare that there is no escape from its power, no hope of the higher life, but through the submission of the soul to Christ.

The impenitent sometimes excuse themselves by saying of professed Christians, "I am as good as they are. They are no more self-denying, sober, or circumspect in their conduct than I am. They love pleasure and self-indulgence as well as I do." Thus they make the faults of others an excuse for their own neglect of duty. But the sins and defects of others do not excuse anyone, for the Lord has not given us an erring human pattern. The spotless Son of God has been given as our example, and those who complain of the wrong course of professed Christians are the ones who should show better lives and nobler examples. If they have so high a conception of what a Christian should be, is not their own sin so much the greater? They know what is right, and yet refuse to do it. (32)

Beware of procrastination. Do not put off the work of forsaking your sins and seeking purity of heart through Jesus. Here is where thousands upon thousands have erred to their eternal loss. I will not here dwell upon the shortness and uncertainty of life; but there is a terrible danger – a danger not sufficiently understood – in delaying to yield to the pleading voice of God's Holy Spirit, in choosing to live in sin; for such this delay really is. Sin, however small it may be esteemed, can be indulged in only at the peril of infinite loss. What we do not overcome, will overcome us and work out our destruction. (33)

Adam and Eve persuaded themselves that in so small a matter as eating of the forbidden fruit there could not result such terrible consequences as God had declared. But this small matter was the transgression of God's immutable and holy law, and it separated man from God and opened the floodgates of death and untold woe upon our world. Age after age there has gone up from

our earth a continual cry of mourning, and the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain as a consequence of man's disobedience. Heaven itself has felt the effects of his rebellion against God. Calvary stands as a memorial of the amazing sacrifice required to atone for the transgression of the divine law. Let us not regard sin as a trivial thing.

Every act of transgression, every neglect or rejection of the grace of Christ, is reacting upon yourself; it is hardening the heart, depraving the will, benumbing the understanding, and not only making you less inclined to yield, but less capable of yielding, to the tender pleading of God's Holy Spirit.

Many are quieting a troubled conscience with the thought that they can change a course of evil when they choose; that they can trifle with the invitations of mercy, and yet be again and again impressed. They think that after doing despite to the Spirit of grace, after casting their influence on the side of Satan, in a moment of terrible extremity they can change their course. But this is not so easily done. The experience, the education, of a lifetime, has so thoroughly molded the character that few then desire to receive the image of Jesus. (34)

Even one wrong trait of character, one sinful desire, persistently cherished, will eventually neutralize all the power of the gospel. Every sinful indulgence strengthens the soul's aversion to God. The man who manifests an infidel hardihood, or a stolid indifference to divine truth, is but reaping the harvest of that which he has himself sown. In all the Bible there is not a more fearful warning against trifling with evil than the words of the wise man that the sinner "shall be holden with the cords of his sins." Proverbs 5:22.

Christ is ready to set us free from sin, but He does not force the will; and if by persistent transgression the will itself is wholly bent on evil, and we do not desire to be set free, if we will not accept His grace, what more can He do? We have destroyed ourselves by our determined rejection of His love. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." 2 Corinthians 6:2; Hebrews 3:7, 8.

"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" – the human heart, with its conflicting emotions of joy and sorrow; the wandering, wayward heart, which is the abode of so much impurity and deceit. 1 Samuel 16:7. He knows its motives, its very intents and purposes. Go to Him with your soul all stained as it is. Like the psalmist, throw its chambers open to the all-seeing eye, exclaiming, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Psalm 139:23, 24. (35)

Many accept an intellectual religion, a form of godliness, when the heart is not cleansed. Let it be your prayer, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me." Psalm 51:10. Deal truly with your own soul. Be as earnest, as persistent, as you would be if your mortal life were at stake. This is a matter to be settled between God and your own soul, settled for eternity. A supposed hope, and nothing more, will prove your ruin.

Study God's word prayerfully. That word presents before you, in the law of God and the life of Christ, the great principles of holiness, without which "no man shall see the Lord." Hebrews 12:14. It convinces of sin; it plainly reveals the way of salvation. Give heed to it as the voice of God speaking to your soul.

As you see the enormity of sin, as you see yourself as you really are, do not give up to despair. It was sinners that Christ came to save. We have not to reconcile God to us, but – O wondrous love! – God in Christ is "reconciling the world unto Himself." 2 Corinthians 5:19. He is wooing by His tender love the hearts of His erring children. No earthly parent could be as patient with the faults and mistakes of his children, as is God with those He seeks to save. No one could plead more tenderly with the transgressor. No human lips ever poured out more tender entreaties to the wanderer than does He. All His promises, His warnings, are but the breathing of unutterable love.

When Satan comes to tell you that you are a great sinner, look up to your Redeemer and talk of His merits. That which will help you is to look to His light. Acknowledge your sin, but tell the enemy that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" and that you may be saved by His matchless love. 1 Timothy 1:15. Jesus asked Simon a question in regard to two debtors. One owed his Lord a small sum, and the other owed him a very large sum; but he forgave them both, and Christ asked Simon which debtor would love his Lord most. Simon answered, "He to whom he forgave most." Luke 7:43. We have been great sinners, but Christ died that we might be forgiven. The merits of His sacrifice are sufficient to present to the Father in our behalf. Those to whom He has forgiven most will love Him most, and will stand nearest to His throne to praise Him for His great love and infinite sacrifice. It is when we most fully comprehend the love of God that we best realize the sinfulness of sin. When we see the length of the chain that was let down for us, when we understand something of the infinite sacrifice that Christ has made in our behalf, the heart is melted with tenderness and contrition. (Steps to Christ, pages 23-35)