



PRISONER

INDEPENDENT CHRISTIAN NEWSPAPER

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

John 8:32

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I WAS PARDONED, THEN THEY CHANGED THEIR MIND...

Dear friends, all of you who have supported the "Prisoner" publication for many years!

Due to the fact that I physically cannot answer all of you and explain everything that happened to me over these past ten months, I decided to write about it in "Prisoner" to answer your letters that were written and calls that were made to our editorial office.

Many of you not only supported the implementation of the project "Prisoner" publication, but also in recent years petitioned for my pardon.

I am sincerely grateful to all the staff of the international mission Hope of Freedom, the Ark of Salvation church, the president of the International Network of Prison Ministries Serge Taran, the director of Inmate Encounter Jack Murphy, the president of the public organization "Union 'Golden Age of Ukraine'" Yana Baranova, the chairman of the board of the international charitable foundation "Embassy of Life" Oksana Gritsyuk, the pastor of the Church of the Holy Trinity Petr Grechkosey, the coordinator of prison ministry of the All-Ukrainian Community of ECB Churches Viktor Dudka, the pastor of the People of God Church Viktor Mural-Sikorsky, the archpriest of the Orthodox Church Yevgeny Nazarenko, the head of the Center for Humanitarian Pedagogy Galina Sobakina, head of the "Revival of Ukraine" mission Sergey Tupchik, the pastor of the ECB church in the city of Nikopol Ivan Bokoch, the chairman of the spiritual council of the "New Generation" church Andrey Tishchenko, as well as heartfelt thanks to the prison ministry volunteers in America: Yaroslav Voytukhov, Larisa Kondrashova, Lidiya Gudyma, Angelina Maltseva and others. And off course all the prison ministry volunteers in Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Estonia, France, Czech Republic, Moldova, Canada, Germany, and Ukraine.

All of you dear friends have supported the Prisoner project financially and spiritually for many years and you also petitioned for my pardon, and with all your heart wished for my early release. Today many of you ask the question: "What happened? How can they first decide on a pardon and then cancel it?!"

I still cannot fully understand how this is possible. The rejection itself does not surprise me. What amazes me most is the cynical mockery which I cannot even compare to anything. The sad thing is that the President of Ukraine probably did not receive all of your petitions, and he has no opportunity to consider my personal petition. At first, I wanted to send an official statement to the President of Ukraine by mail, but after I lost all faith in the people in government agencies, I doubted that this statement would fall into his hands. That is why today I am forced to address the President of Ukraine from the page of "Prisoner".

I was not ashamed to repent and ask forgiveness from the pages of the Prisoner publication, for the people whom I had caused grief many years ago; I was not ashamed to speak the truth about the consequences of sin and about sinful life in general. I have always called and am calling all people to repentance, especially those with whom I am in the same bond. I hated sin many years ago and since then I have devoted my life to serving God and people. Therefore, today I will not be ashamed to address the President of Ukraine from the page of this publication, of which I am the editor, and is read by a large audience of readers in many countries around the world.

"Dear Mr. President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky!

I understand perfectly well that a person with the status of a life sentence means absolutely nothing to you. This category of people may be of no value to the country or to you. Every person sentenced to this punishment is immediately equated with such maniacs



as Tkach and Onoprienko. Life prisoners, in the opinion of many people, are the dregs of society. However, with all the clearly expressed aversion of the country towards this category of people, they are still given the right to have their vote in elections and even to submit their petition for pardon once a year addressing this petition personally to you. To my great regret, I belong to this category of convicts.

I have been serving my sentence for over twenty-seven years. A quarter of a century ago I sincerely repented of all my sins despite the fact that my crime was committed under extremely forced circumstances, which were not taken into account by either the investigation or the court, and I was simply labeled as a mercenary murderer. Now I have this stigma for life.

Today I am addressing you with only one request: despite the fact that the Constitution of Ukraine prohibits the death penalty in our country, nevertheless, issue a separate decree that it should be

During the period that I happened to be under the death penalty, I had to go through all the humiliation of human dignity. I know perfectly well what hunger is for many years, what the sub-zero temperature in the cell feels like in the autumn and winter, and what a catastrophic shortage of oxygen there is in the summer. I know

perfectly well how teeth are pulled out without anesthesia right through the food dispensing window. I know what it is like when the letter of the law is illegally applied to you, when your human dignity is humiliated in every possible way and you practically do not have a voice. I went through

all the bullying that the system applied to the former death-row prisoners. However, I had not seen such extreme bullying towards human beings, even in my greatest nightmares, as what I have recently went through.

Everything that happened in the time period from November 14, 2019 to August 31, 2020 looks more like some kind of sophisticated method of moral



and psychological sadism in relation to me and my loved ones.

The fact is since 2015 I have submitted my request for clemency to the former Administration of the President of Ukraine every year. Four times during the presidency of Mr. Poroshenko, the pardon commission refused me due to the fact that I had committed a particularly grave crime, and this was despite the fact that a lot of public organizations, churches and international missions, as well as the administration of the institution in which I am in vouched for me. These refusals came in the format of contentless formal reply without the slightest explanation in 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018. Each time the reason for the refusal was the same: that I had committed an especially serious crime. Such responses came

to literally all life prisoners, although in some cases, the Presidential Administration, when refusing, referred to the fact that the administration of the institution considers it inexpedient to pardon a particular convict, and in cases where the administration of the institution characterized the prisoner positively, this part was simply not used in the formal reply.

But now 2019 has come, the year of the new president of Ukraine, which means the year of hope for changes in all areas of life. It is for you,

dear President of Ukraine, I and all my loved ones voted in the elections with the belief that you will not divide people by status and that you will have an objective approach to everyone, including prisoners.

What happened in the period from 11/14/2019 to 08/31/2020?! The following happened:

At the beginning of November 2019, Oleksandr Marchenko called from the Office of the President of Ukraine to the Vinnytsia Penitentiary Institution (No. 1) and asked by telephone to prepare all the necessary documents for pardoning I. Trubitsin, that is, me. In response to this request, an employee of the special unit of the institution, who is directly involved in sending documents for pardon, said that Trubitsin's deadline had not yet come to submit such materials (according to the law, I had the right to submit my petition only on December 21, 2019).



applied to me as a person unworthy of pardon. The fact is that more than a quarter of a century ago I was sentenced to this exact measure of punishment, and it is not my fault that the death penalty was abolished.

(Continued on page 2)

I WAS PARDONED, THEN THEY CHANGED THEIR MIND...

(Ending. Beginning on page 1)

However, Oleksandr Marchenko replied to this that the pardon commission knew about this, and the materials were needed for study in order to present them to the commission meeting. Thus, on November 14, 2019, under registration number 12, from the Vinnytsia Penitentiary Institution (No. 1), at the request of the aforementioned Mr. Marchenko, a packet of documents for pardoning I. Trubitsin was sent to the Office of the President of Ukraine with annexes on 91 pages. Of course, this packet of documents also contained my handwritten petition to be pardoned, addressed to you, dear Mr. President.

A little later, within the statutory deadline (21/12/2019), from the institution where I am, they called the Office of the President with a question whether to send the packet of documents to Trubitsin again.

The answer was that this was not necessary, since all the documents are already in the pardon commission, and Trubitsin, if he wants, can write his petition again, although it is no longer needed either. Of course, on December 21, 2019, within the time limit established by law, I nevertheless duplicated my application in a printed form, sending it to the Office of the President of Ukraine.

I also reliably know that in December 2019, the Office of the President of Ukraine began to receive requests for my pardon from many public organizations, churches, international missions and also civilians.

In October 2019, a request was also made from the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to the institution where I am staying to provide all the materials about me. On October 18, 2019 the administration of the institution sent all the materials requested by the Secretariat.

After studying all the materials, the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights made a decision to petition for me and on December 23, 2019 he sent a petition for my pardon.

On January 8, 2020, the People's Deputy of Ukraine

Serhiy Ionushas sent an official letter (registration number 37/139) addressed to the chairman of the commission under the President of Ukraine on pardoning Oleksiy Dniprov. Here is a small excerpt from his letter:

...In October 2019, I personally managed to visit Igor Trubitsin in the state institution "Vinnytsia Penitentiary Institution (No. 1)", to talk frankly with the convict and personally make sure that this person strives to be a worthy and useful member of society, who fully realized the crime they had committed and sincerely regrets his mistakes.

It should also be noted that the administration of the penitentiary institution in which he is now serving his sentence, not only characterizes him positively, but for the third time strongly argues that the convicted I. Trubitsin deserves such an act of mercy as a pardon.

On February 4, 2020, a meeting of the pardoning commission under the President of Ukraine was held, at which the petition for my release was positively considered. After the meeting of the commission, my wife received a call from three sources at once (People's Deputy of Ukraine, member of the commission and from the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine) and informed that the commission decided to recommend me for pardon and replace my life

imprisonment with twenty-seven years total term. My wife was congratulated on a positive result and told that we would have to wait several months until these twenty-seven years were over.

The end of this period was supposed to come up on June 5, 2020. Of course, all this time I was looking forward with great impatience when you, Mr. President, will sign a decree on my pardon. At that time, for the first time in my life, I really believed that there is truth in the highest echelons of power and people are evaluated primarily by their actions and deeds that they do for the benefit of the whole society, that is, the evaluation of the convict is done not by what they did, but by what they have become over the years of their long stay in prison.

Of course, I was already making plans for how I would be free to continue to do editorial work on the Christian publication "Prisoner", of which I am the editor, as well as a rehabilitation center, which has been created three years ago under my remote guidance. I fell asleep and woke up with one thought: that I would soon be able to hug my grandchildren, children and wife, and most importantly, I would be able to fully work on the implementation of the large-scale Christian project "Prisoner". So I lived inspired by faith and hope, until June 5, 2020.

And finally, this date came, but there was neither your decree nor a response from the pardon commission.

On June 15 2020, I wrote an official letter to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights with the request to notify the administration of the institution of my status, whether they knew anything about it.

On July 10, 2020, Under the registration number of 19220.4/T-



9564.3/20/27.2 I received a reply from the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights that contained the following. I cite:

...The letter on 06/07/2020 No. 21-2035/05, 21-235/19, 21-3398/06 the Department of Citizenship, Pardons, State Awards of the Office of the President of Ukraine has informed that the Commission for the President of Ukraine on the matters of pardons on the basis of results of preliminary review of the request of pardon and of the pertinent file, which were prepared by the Department, has submitted to the Head of State an offer of applying a pardon to you, the result of which you personally will be informed of in an established procedure.

And after two months, from the Office of the President of Ukraine, a reply came on 08/31/2020 to the administration of the institution which were the results of my request for a pardon. This short letter said that as a result of me committing a very serious offense, I was denied pardon. This letter did not mention the fact that I had recommendations to pardon me and that you have denied this request. This letter just simply stated that since I committed a very serious offense, I was denied pardon. It had no concrete arguments or humanism which is mentioned in the new edict from the Ukrainian president about procedure of

pardoning; this letter did not have this at all. The letter was signed by the same exact person, Marchenko, who in November 2019 had telephoned to request documents for my pardon.

The question arises: did not mister Marchenko, when he was requesting my documents in 2019 know that I



was jailed for committing a serious offense? Or possibly, any of the people who are sentenced to life in prison are serving a sentence for committing not a serious offense? How can this even be an excuse for a denial of pardon? Did it really take ten months to request documents and then write such a contentless reply?

In every country of the world, when an appeal for a pardon is reviewed, what is considered is what a person has become during the sentence that he has served and not the severity of his crime. Among those who are sentenced to life in prison, there is not a single one who is serving their time for a non-serious offense. So, the institute of pardons cannot use this argument to issue a denial of pardon.

You know, I will tell you the truth, many years ago under forced circumstances, which were not taken into account by either the investigation or the court, I committed a truly serious offense, from which I repent to this day. I bear this burden and pain from the tragedy that occurred then. All of this happened in a state of passion.

Why do your people, who undoubtedly consider themselves holy, treat me like this so many years later? Maybe this is because of the work I have done and continue to do, turning many people to God from their criminal ways and trying to make our society a little cleaner? Or is it because I volunteered for three years or maybe this is retaliation because we, on our own, under my leadership, are creating a rehabilitation center for former prisoners who have taken the path to rehabilitation?!

You know, I was not so painful and scared as now, even when I was sentenced to death and was expecting execution from day to day. But now, I am hurting without end because I have



come face-to-face with the lies of the people who hold my future, and I am scared right now, more than ever before, because I will have to live with these lies for an unknown period of time.

How I have been tortured in these almost ten months, while the documents were reviewed by the commission of pardons, I have not been tortured even

in the most difficult days when I had the status of a death-row prisoner.

With the last, fifth contentless formal reply from the Office of the President of Ukraine, they have completely removed my faith in humanity! They have taken away that small, bright hope — to fulfill my

multifaceted Christian project! They took away any incentive to life in which I still wanted to do a lot of useful things for the whole society! I was simply buried alive...

Well okay, I, a sinful person who committed a crime many years ago and whom you can treat like this, but for what reason mock my family and friends, mock

those who believe in me and wait for long, long years? What blame do they have before society or the state as a whole?!

That is why I ask you, respected President of Ukraine, to issue a separate decree so that I personally would be shot dead as a person unworthy to return to our society. After all, if they laughed at me and all my relatives so subtly this time, then what good can lie ahead? As can be seen, the pardon limit for me has already been exhausted under your presidency.

Life imprisonment without the slightest light at the end of the tunnel is the same as the death penalty, only this happens incrementally. So why hesitate and waste government money on my being in captivity?

Sincerely,
convicted I. TRUBITSIN".

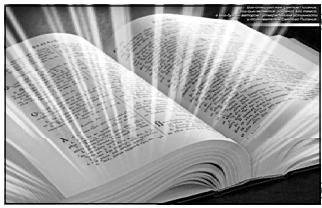
So, dear friends, I answered in front of an audience of thousands of readers to your numerous questions about what happened: why at first they pardoned me, but then the pardon was canceled. Perhaps my request to the President of Ukraine to shoot me sounds somehow pathetic. However, I will tell you honestly: living in such a lie is simply unbearable. This time I was finally trampled and destroyed. None of the higher authorities are interested in what I have been doing for many years for the whole society as a whole. They are also indifferent to all the plans that I have described for five years in a row in my petitions for clemency. Except for a few people, absolutely no one needs and cares that, thanks to faith in God, imprisoned people can really change and become useful for society. The paradox is that God forgives every repentant sinner, but the majority of people, unfortunately, are not capable of this. As I now see, earthly society does not need repentant sinners. Therefore, now more and more I often gaze

into heaven... For once Jesus Christ, being on earth, said: "I tell you that in this way there will be more joy in heaven about one sinner who repents than about ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7).

I. GORIK.

P. S. Sincere gratitude to the People's Deputies of Ukraine Alyona Shkrum and

Serhiy Ionushas for their impartiality and objectivity regarding their recommendations towards me. Also, sincere gratitude to the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights Lyudmyla Denisova for her petition for my pardon. And of course, I am sincerely grateful to the administration of the Vinnytsia Penitentiary Institution (No. 1) for its petition for my pardon for three years. Thank you all for believing in me, but alas...



PASTOR'S WORD

EXPECTATION

Why is it, that in many cases described in the Bible, the waiting period preceded the receiving of God's great blessings for certain people?

Expectation. This is the time when a person lives by what he expects: anticipations, imaginations, figurative pictures of the fulfillment of the expected. We know of cases where waiting saved people. Or, more precisely, hope. In the lives of some people, there came a period when life became a burden for them. These are cases of people being in concentration camps or on their deathbed in illness, when doctors no longer gave these people even one percent for life... What is the point of living on when your own logic insists that this is the end? Why continue to suffer? Life-sentenced prisoners who are left without the slightest hope of freedom experience something similar.

Sometimes only the expectation of change, even a slight hope, saves a person from suicide and gives strength to live on. I do not mean people who are deep believers and who completely trust their lives to God. It is much easier for those, since they do not live for themselves, but for the One to whom they have entrusted their life, although they are also subject to life trials.

But there are also negative examples, when people lost the present in anticipation of an illusory future, which never came. And how much useful could they have done if it were not for this paralyzing, unjustified expectation? How many wonderful suitors were rejected when the girl confided herself to some rogue who charmed her. I heard about cases when girls expected their suitors from the army, remaining completely faithful, but when they returned, the girls' opinion changed and the suitors married someone else. How much grief, tears and pain was brought about by the false, unreasonable expectation of something that should not have been expected! About such a phenomenon, the expectation of bad things, even Christ said: that people living in the last time will die of fear and expectation of future disasters.

Lk. 21:26 — ...men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

I am writing these lines at the same time, while a general quarantine has been declared in our state. Plants and factories have been stopped, workers are at home. And even though one category of young citizens is still careless, most of the adult population is in great anxiety. And this expectation of the dark unknown brings people to fear and unnecessary panic. These are bad examples of expectation...

Once David was addressing God with a request to save his life from fear.

Ps. 64:1 — Hear my voice, O God, in my complaint; preserve my life from dread of the enemy.

David was not afraid of the enemies, but prayed to God to save him from fear of the enemy. Yes, fear without a reason — and it almost always has justified reasons (at least, it may seem so to us) — deprives a person of sanity and pushes him to unreasonable decisions.

But for the people described in the Bible, waiting was often a great blessing. Waiting preceded the birth of such blessed men as Samuel and John the Baptist. Do you remember their birth stories?

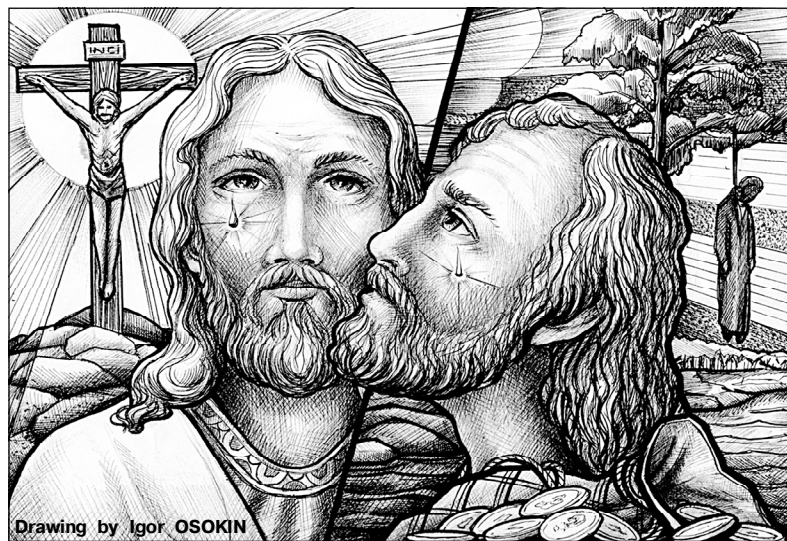
Or take Abraham, for example. The Lord called him to leave the pagan relatives and go to a land, that he had never seen before and knew

nothing about. At the same time, God promised to multiply him and give him as much offspring as sand on the seashore (**Gen. 22:17**).

And after these promises came many years of waiting. At the same time, Abraham had to spend the entire remaining childbearing period of his wife Sarah in waiting, and survive her menopause. By that time, he himself was not in the best shape for producing offspring, according to what was said about him during that period of his life:

Heb. 11:12 — Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that (Abraham), as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.

And God, as if on purpose, also said to call his wife Sarah by another name, meaning the mother of many



nations. And this in front of the servants and maidservants, whom they had up to a thousand people. What could the servants and maidservants think? How to understand an old grandpa, who has been expecting an offspring from his wife all his life, and in his old age has already... started calling his old lady the mother of many nations?

And yet, thanks to the miracle of God, a son is born to them — Isaac. Moreover, at the same time, Abraham was rejuvenated. After Sarah's death, at the age of one hundred and thirty-seven, he marries again and has six more sons. It would seem that after the birth of Isaac, the son of promises, everything will get easier! But no... Isaac gets married at forty, and he has no children. And again the wait of twenty years.

Ultimately, Abraham's first grandson from Isaac since his departure from Haran is born after a long eighty-five years. Eighty-five years of anxious anticipation of God's promise to multiply him to his first grandchild. I know a married couple who had more than a hundred grandchildren by the age of sixty-five.

God's second promise to Abraham (about receiving the Canaan land as an inheritance) did not come true at all during Abraham's lifetime. All his life Abraham wandered in a strange land, which God promised to give to his posterity. The only exception was a small piece of land, bought for the burial of his deceased wife Sarah.

Acts 7:5 — But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him.

Heb. 11:8-10 — By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the

same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

THE BENEFIT OF EXPECTING

Now let's see if there was any benefit from such anxious waiting.

The waiting time changed Abraham a lot for the better. From a pagan, whose relatives served other gods, Abraham turned into a noble righteous man, about whom people who knew him testified: *Hear us, my lord, you are a prince of God among us...* (**Gen. 23:6**).

All these changes happened to him because of his trusting expectation. Agree that it is very difficult to wait in standstill. It's no secret that doing something while waiting is much easier than just waiting. In the search for a way out, in contrast to simply waiting,

attention is always focused on something else: either on the methods of achieving the desired, or on the search for new ways and opportunities. The mind is busy with something, and it feels easier... It may seem that you are doing something. But in the case of Abraham, it was the most difficult. It was necessary to fully rely on God's words and fight off numerous attacks of doubts coming not only from people, but also from his experience, and from common sense such as "Can we continue to hope for the birth of a child from Sarah, when the usual for women with Sarah stopped?" or "Did God really tell me this, or did I instill it in myself?"

To understand whether waiting is advisable, you need to understand what is the basis of the expectation: a personal assumption, a strong desire, or, as in the case of Abraham, the voice of God, the decision of Heaven?

And during periods of such internal struggle with doubts, Abraham was forced to look for arguments and strength in order to defend God's word, which he once heard from Him. Struggling with doubts, Abraham was forced to reject not only doubts, but also to control the very channel through which temptations came. And spiritual improvement is precisely achieved by establishing control over the areas of thoughts and feelings. This means that waiting, the struggle with doubts contributed to Abraham's intensive growth! And not only Abraham's, but also those who took part in this spiritual war or were in some way associated with it. This had a beneficial effect on both Abraham's wife Sarah and their slaves. We see in the following narrative that both Hagar, Sarah's maid, and her son Ishmael knew to whom and how to turn for help, when trouble came into their lives (**Gen. 21:14-20**).

And later we encounter the story of Abraham's servant, who went to find a bride for Isaac, the son of Abraham, and who showed so much hope and trust in God, that modern Christians, who have received much

greater promises and access to God through Christ, can envy this! And all this is the result of Abraham's waiting, which promoted such a relationship with God that they became an example for all future generations. And now we will quote the entire convincing Gospel text from the Epistle to the Romans, which speaks of the result of Abraham's waiting:

Rom. 4:17-25 — ...*(as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be". Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*

CONCLUSION

In our life, there are needs and questions with which we turn to God, and to many of them we get a quick answer. I remember how, after my turning to God, I felt my guilt before those people with whom I came into contact with and for whom I was a bad example. I began to earnestly pray for their salvation. My intense prayers were filled with such a childish confidence of a newly converted person, that after a short period of time I received God's answer: my prayers were heard and the Lord will save them in due time.

But this is not always the case. Some needs are allowed to enter our lives for our spiritual growth...

I am remembering a revelation from the Lord that I received seven years ago. Here is its content:

Many of My children cling to earthly life, and then I am forced to allow shocks in their lives in order to draw their attention to Me. But they concentrate their attention not on Me, but on the problems that have arisen, and this is not pleasing to Me.

Thinking about this, we can come to the conclusion that many of our life difficulties might not be in our life, if we were diligent in what God teaches us. Besides, God has His timing for everything. When Peter at the last supper could not understand why Christ should wash his feet, Christ told him: *"What I do you do not realize now, but you will understand hereafter"* (**Jn. 13:7**).

In another case, disciples ask a question *"Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?"* (**Acts 1:6**) to which, instead of an answer, they heard: *"It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority..."* (**Acts 1:7**).

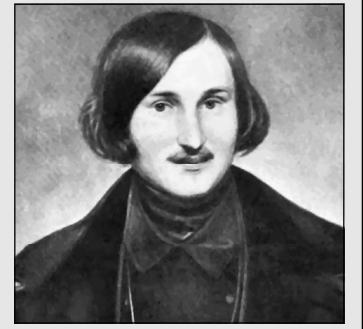
What is it? Christ's unwillingness to answer this question? No. It's just that sometimes knowledge gained ahead of time, that is, when a person does not know how to use it, can be harmful to him. This is especially understood by parents raising young children.

Returning to the topic of waiting, I would like to say: if the Lord leads us through a waiting period, let's not waste this time in bitterness or despair, but let us remember that we are in God's school, with an individually selected program for us by our loving Father!

May God bless us to grow patiently to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ (**Eph. 4:13**).

Aleksandr BORISENKO.

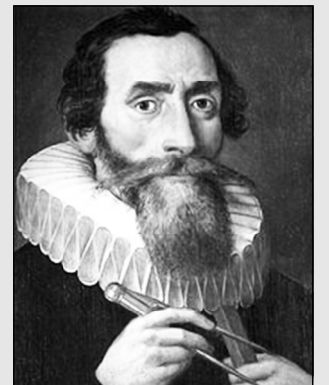
QUOTES FROM FAMOUS PEOPLE ABOUT GOD AND THE BIBLE



Nikolai Vasilievich GOGOL:

"Don't be dead in souls, but alive. There is only one door to life, and that door — Jesus Christ".

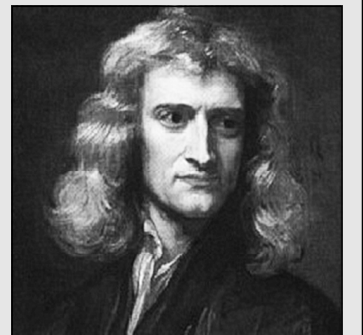
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Johannes KEPLER

The astronomer says: "In creation I feel God as if with my hands". He concludes his most important work about the harmony of the world with such beautiful words: "I give thanks to You, Lord Creator, because You have lured me into the enjoyment of Your work, and I have exulted in the works of Your hands..."

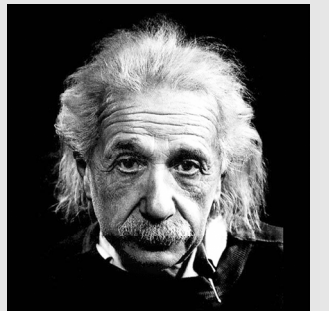
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Isaac NEWTON

The great English physicist, astronomer and mathematician, who discovered the law of gravitation, said: "We have Moses, the Prophets, and Apostles, and the words of Christ himself; and if we will not hear them, we shall be more inexcusable than the Jews".

* * *



Albert EINSTEIN,

A scientist, physicist, and mathematician, author of the Theory of Relation to Time and Space, in the article "Science and Religion" wrote: "To be sure, the doctrine of a personal God interfering with natural events could never be refuted, in the real sense, by science".

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

Olesya KOSENKO: FROM A CRIMINAL TO A CHRISTIAN**HOW I BEGAN TO USE DRUGS**

My life was pretty good before I started using drugs. I graduated high school and then was admitted to the Siberian State Geodetic Academy. It was here that I started using drugs, at first it was marijuana and hashish but then I progressed to the harder drugs.

From there I got new acquaintances with whom I began to steal to get money for drugs. One day I got caught. I was convicted and sentenced to three years in prison. When I got out, I didn't change. I was tried again and given four and a half years.

FIRST TERM BEHIND BARS

I acquired many diseases in my time behind bars. Once I was out, I began to question "Does a happy life exist?" And suddenly I remembered the friends I had in the past who also used drugs but managed to get rid of this addiction. They became an example for me to follow.

These friends invited me to a Sunday service. I went, but I did not like it because during the sermon all I could think about was how I could go out to smoke. After that I attended three more meetings and stopped going because I thought I didn't have enough strength to give up sin.

I did not really believe in God at that time. Yes, I knew there was something out there however I did not believe in any miracles. I

thought they were not there, if you do not help yourself, then no one will help you. I believed that I could do everything myself!

A little later, I founded my own business, a cleaning company. I had money. I have always worked and the stealing was more of an indulgence, a search for

security section which had stricter rules which I continued to break.

Wanting to maintain my authority among my prison friends I did not contact the administration under no circumstances. Neither the tears of my mother, nor the deprivation of no visitations would break me.

came to us twice a month, and at one of these meetings I repented. Soon my cellmates began to show an interest in Christianity. In addition to this, Victoria Ivakina regularly wrote to me, inviting me to the rehabilitation center. In one of her letters, she warned me that if I did not go to the center after my

release, then our friendship would be over. All this led to me seriously thinking about rehab towards the end of my prison sentence. Although by that time almost five years had passed since my last drug use and the addiction was gone! The drugs and prison conditions left many consequences; a number of diseases. I thought then: "Why do I need rehabilitation? I need doctors!" At the same time, I often heard from people: God can heal.



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THE LAST WORD

Thanks to the fact that I studied the Scriptures while I was in prison, it was easy for me to merge into the life of the center and understand how great God is and how He loves me. Of course, the mentors in the center, who prayed and fasted for me, also played a significant role in this. There I realized that through me, my family will find salvation in Christ. Currently my brother, daughter-in-law and parents have come to believe in Jesus. True, of these, only my mom attends church and home groups. She notes that her health has improved. Today, despite years of strife, I am welcomed at home as the most honored guest.

After undergoing rehabilitation, I stayed at the center for some time to help drug addicts like me find freedom from their addiction, and then I went to Novosibirsk to study at the Pobeda biblical training center. In the future, I see myself as a missionary, but I cannot say in which country.

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thrills. When I stopped going to church, I realized that I could hold out on my own in sobriety. However, I soon met some guys who had access to good drugs. So, I was convicted again, but this time for drugs.

SECOND TERM

In prisons, I constantly broke the rules and for this reason I constantly sat in the punishment cells. The administration of the colony, not knowing what to do with me, transferred me to high

thrills. When I stopped going to church, I realized that I could hold out on my own in sobriety. However, I soon met some guys who had access to good drugs. So, I was convicted again, but this time for drugs.

REPENTANCE

At this time, believers began visiting the prison. Wishing to regularly attend their services, I went to meet the administration and began to behave more calmly. Believers

When I returned home, my family treated me like a sick person and did not believe that I could live in sobriety. A week later, I had a telephone conversation with the wife of the head of the rehabilitation center, Shogakat Kondratova, from whom I again heard that God has a miracle for me — healing! Without thinking twice, I decided to go to a rehabilitation center in

My name is Mikhail, I'm forty-three. I had an ordinary youth as a boy of the eighties: the streets, freedom, and imitating various role models. But now I understand that I imitated the wrong people.

Such a life led to stealing from an early age. As a result, I ended up in prison instead of the army. When I was released, I began to use drugs which is why I was imprisoned again. After my second release I did not stop using drugs and as a result I ended up behind bars yet again. But in prison I continued to use drugs.

Upon release everything continued. My relatives, of course, tried to protect me and even locked me in the apartment. But I jumped out of the window and fell from the fifth floor. Miraculously I survived. I needed to go to church but I didn't even consider it.

At that time, I did not believe in God, I never read the Bible. I just thought I was lucky in everything. But it was the Lord who kept me. I will not list all my illnesses; I will only say that God pulled me out of that world many times.

When I would experience the consequences of drug addiction I usually switched from drugs to alcohol, but I could not completely stop. And probably because of this, God immobilized. There were times when I couldn't walk at all. Apparently, there was no other way to stop me. And every time that I prayed, asked God to

forgive me and promised that I would quit drinking, smoking and so on I would start right back up when I became able to move independently. I forgot how I screamed and groaned, being surrounded by jars, because I could not go to the toilet on my own. I forgot about how the neighbors would pound on the walls because I moaned too loudly. I forgot about everything, but God did not forget me.

The last time, when I was on a binge for a year and a half, I got erysipelas on my legs. There was no longer any strength to walk. No medication helped. I would quit for a while but slowly everything came back.

But one time as I was walking past the church on Popudrenko Street, a guy came down. His name was Yuri Onishchuk. We talked, he fed me and began to take care of me. It was he who revealed Christ to me. Then he took me to rehab, from where I left a week later. Oh, how Yuri scolded me then! Not me, of course, but the sin that was killing me. "You're going to hell! You don't understand what you are doing!" And not a word of reproach about how much money or how much time he spent on me...

After that, my memory is fragmented: I sit with someone unfamiliar, I drink, then I deliriously go somewhere, then



again, I am talking to someone. I was falling into the abyss, remembering nothing, and not understanding anything. A week passed like this.

A week later I opened my eyes in the morgue. People are lying around me dead. I sat up on my gurney and a young orderly looked at me in shock. I took my documents and left. Then again, I don't remember anything.

The next memory: I walk along the street with some unfamiliar lads to drink away someone's paycheck. And then I saw a number drawn on my hand with a marker which was

done in the morgue. I was suddenly seized with terror. As in childhood, when I realized that one day I would die and I would be gone, everything snapped inside. I began to quickly erase the numbers from my hand, I turned sharply and walked in the opposite direction. They shouted to my back: "Misha, where are you going?" But I realized that I didn't want anything anymore...

I had no money at that moment. I only had a goal and a decision. But I approached a woman in the subway at the turnstiles and

begged her to let me through, I said I was going to rehab and she let me through. And when I got off the subway some strangers paid for my fare to Makarov. So, I again got to the rehabilitation center, although I was not even sure that they would take me again. Now I understand that it was the Lord who led me and provided all these people in my life.

God saved me. Saved by fear. With love. The change in my life was by no means quick or easy. But now I don't use alcohol, drugs and I don't smoke. I see this as a great joy and peace of mind for my future. I have been forgiven so much that when I now go out into the field to pray, I cry, realizing how much grace God has given me. I am very grateful to God for all His patience towards me.

I was baptized in 2017. Now I help others go through rehab, change, find a way to a new life, and see Christ and make a decision to serve only Him.

Friends, if you haven't been able to stop yet, then it's time for you to hurry. Hurry to change your life. Until your life stops you. Because then it will be too late to change anything.

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HURRY TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

TESTIMONIES OF BORN-AGAIN CHRISTIANS

My name is Georgy Shchavlik. For a long period of my life I was lost. By the age of twenty-six I had come to such a condition in my life that just a little more and I would die. I had already been to prison, dealt with drugs and alcohol, despite the fact that I grew up in a normal family and my mother and grandmother gave me a lot of love. But it so happened that over time my priorities in life have shifted. At the age of seventeen I started using drugs and have been using them for over ten years. I started with glue, then there were pills, marijuana and more serious drugs: heroin, opium. I used them every day, and even several times a day. As a teenager, I



MY NEW LIFE

met a girl with whom we later began to live together. Over time she also got addicted to drugs. At first, we used them on weekends to relax, and then more and more often.

Nastya repeatedly has gone to the hospitals, trying to get freedom from addiction. She also persuaded me to start life anew. She believed that we would break through, that we would be able to free ourselves. Thanks to her, I did not eventually give up. However, I ruined my life! The body simply could not withstand the chemical toxins that I poured into it: I had alcoholic pancreatitis, my stomach refused to work and receive nourishment. I weighed forty-nine kilograms. Because of drugs, an abscess began to develop on my left arm, which progressed into gangrene. The doctors said that they might have to cut off the arm, but, thank God, they managed to save it. However, despite my critical condition, I continued to use drugs. Literally the next day after the operation, I was already injecting drugs into the catheter that was under my collarbone. In the hospital I repented for the first time: a priest came, I read a prayer of repentance, they gave me a cross, a testimony that I was baptized... but my life did not change. I asked the priest what to do next. He replied: "Go and sin no more". But how is it not to sin? I did not know this and, of course, returned to the old way of life. After a while I got tired of taking drugs, and I became addicted to alcohol. I drank it with horse dosages. I drank one bottle of vodka in one gulp and passed out. I would come to senses and drank again. This went on for four months. Then, I began to use drugs along with alcohol and almost lost my mind.

Once we had a violent fight with my girlfriend, and I kicked her out of the house. But after a while Nastya came back and said: "You can't live like that! Let's try to change something. Let's go to the rehab center". Before that, I had already heard about rehabilitation centers. Friends came and told me that they were helping to get rid of addiction. But I was very skeptical about their stories, claiming that I myself could tie up with everything. I just don't want to, everything suits me. But, of course, I lied to myself! There was a lot of suffering, pain, disappointment in my life. And nothing ahead only fear and despair filled me. Nearby no friends, no relatives. Even my mother, after ten years of trying to help me, became exhausted and retreated. And in 2013, Nastya and I finally went to the rehab center: I went to the men's center, she to the women's one. Of course, at first I was very ill physically. I even wanted to leave to ease my pain. But God gave me some kind of inner understanding that my new life will begin here and I have to endure this suffering. Certainly, I was worried about Nastya and because of her I wanted to leave in order to be with her and support her. But the guys at the rehab center helped me stay. They brought me words from the Bible that a blind person will not help another blind person: both

will fall into a pit (Matthew 15:14). I understood that if I, myself, get freedom then, I could help Nastya.

Initially, I did not understand what it means to live with God and, in general, what He is like, this God. But, then, I began to listen, ponder upon and reflect. As a result, I was freed from drugs, cigarettes, alcohol. After two months of my stay at the rehab center, I was able to meet with Nastya (unfortunately, she could not stay in the rehab center for a long time and left after three days). We went with her to the church for the service, she saw the changes in me and said that she would return to the rehab center again. But two days later she died... At that moment, my life seemed to end. All this time I prayed for Nastya, for our new life and suddenly such an end. Who knows what loneliness is, he will understand me. I didn't know what to do next. I felt such bitterness, such devastation, as if I were alone in the whole world. I asked God: "What now?" And one day He said to me: "Look back. What do you see there?" I replied: "I see nothing, only pain, suffering, ruined health or everything is a ruin". He continued: "Look where you are now. What do you see?" I say: "I am in the rehab center, where many people support me". Then God asked: "What do you see ahead?" I replied: "I don't see anything. And I don't understand how to live". Then God told me: "You are right, there is nothing in your future yet. But we can start writing a new chapter of your life together!" And I decided to choose my future with God. From that moment on, my attitude towards Him changed a lot. I realized that the games of "I believe I do not believe", "I want or I do not want to" are over. Now, I need to entrust my life to God, delve into His Word, the Bible, apply everything that is written in it. And when I started doing this, my life began to change. Once I was asked to go to a Christian children's camp to help with the housework. And there I felt such God's love! I saw how children experience the love of Heavenly Father, and I myself felt like a child of God. I realized that Christianity is not a dead religion, it is a real life! Now, I am doing well. Relations with my mother and relatives were restored. I do not smoke, do not drink, do not use drugs. I always dreamed of driving a car, and now I have a car and a license. Before, I could not write properly, I made a bunch of mistakes, I read by syllables. I couldn't speak without a curse word, and now everything has changed. But the most important thing is that I myself have become different! I have a meaning in life, I get joy from every day. God gave me the desire to serve children. And not only to tell them about God, but also to do everything so that they do not experience what I experienced. Now I am serving in a Sunday school, I am engaged in children's Christian camps. I'm sure this is just the beginning. With God, the most interesting is still ahead!

The material prepared by Ekaterina YUKHNEVICH, <http://www.kolokol.net>

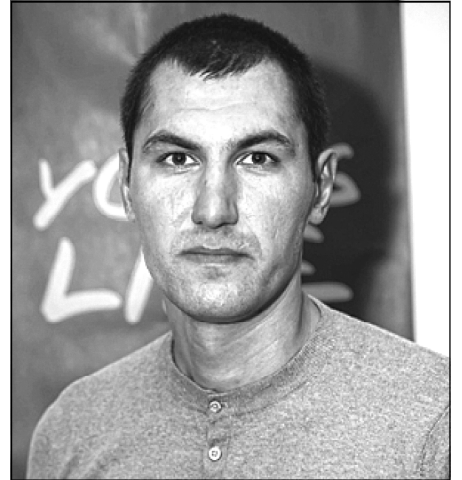
GOD IS NOT A FAKE!

My name is Evgeny Tazheev and I am thirty years old. Before coming to God, I used drugs for ten years. It all started in school, when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. That is when I first tried marijuana. Prior to that, I already smoked regular cigarettes and drank. I always wanted to be cool, occupy a leading position, and at that time, if you smoked and drank, it made you stand out, made you popular. I started talking with the older guys. Many of them were former criminals and were engaged in criminal works. They had a lot of money; they drove cool cars. I, like them, also wanted to be the same so, I started to steal. As a result, at thirteen years old, I stole a radio tape recorder and for the first time I got caught by the police. By the age of fifteen, I began to engage in apartment thefts. The most interesting thing is that I studied well at school, I even went to the Olympiads in mathematics and physics, but my fascination with the criminal world led to the fact that, instead of university at the age of sixteen, I was imprisoned for burglary. Of course, when I first got into the temporary detention center, I got scared. I looked at the gloomy walls of the cell which nailed me to the ground so to speak. But when I was transferred to a pre-trial detention center and I met other convicts there, I felt better and the prison was no longer so frightening.

Before the court date, I served three months, and then I was released. I received a suspended sentence of three years with a two-year suspension. Of course, after three months in prison, I didn't understand anything. On the contrary, I became even stronger in what I was doing. I began to steal even more, met with people who were even more influential at that time in the criminal world. I also got more money and greater opportunities. But... six months later I was jailed. They gave me three and a half years for burglary and rowdiness. At that time I was eighteen years old. If you are in the criminal world, there will always be mutual acquaintances. Thanks to such acquaintances, in the prison I entered a certain circle of people where everyone uses drugs. It was there that I tried some serious drugs and I liked it.

Because of my frequent violations of order, I was transferred to a strict prison. I stayed in this prison for the remaining year and a half, and there was no opportunity to get drugs. Therefore, when I was released, for about a year not only did I not use drugs, nor drink nor smoke, I began to play sports. I did not leave my criminal actions, I continued to steal. One day my new acquaintance offered to relax after another criminal activity, to get to a place and take drugs called amphetamines. I agreed. And then, for half a year I used them every day. It is psychologically very difficult to move away from such drugs: you feel overwhelmed and nervous. And to alleviate this condition, my friend suggested trying heroin. I had already used it in prison and knew that it could end badly. I say: "Sanya, you don't understand, we can start and not stop!" And he replies: "Everything will be fine; we will use only once". Essentially, it didn't end after that one time of usage. For six years I used drugs every day, although I was sure that I could quit if I wanted to. And once for three or four months I pulled myself together and did not use drugs. Then, a lot of money came and I got hooked again. The first five years everything seemed to be fine: you always have drugs and you still do not feel the devastating consequences from them. But over time, my friends began to notice serious changes in me. After all, drugs change the whole person, his whole world. I began to cheat every now and then, let down on important issues, I could take money from someone and not give it back. In general, the relationships with everybody began to deteriorate and collapse. I hated myself for it, but I couldn't do anything about it. For two years, I destroyed relations with almost all of my acquaintances and, of course, with my relatives. At first you think: "Yes, I don't need anyone!" But then a terrible melancholy sets in, such a depression comes that you can't even leave the house. Just at that time I remembered that there is Yury Barabanov, the director of the rehabilitation center for the Christian church in Vitebsk. Before that, I somehow got to know him in a drug dispensary, where I went with a friend. Yury and I got to talking then. He said that he was a former drug addict, that he believed in God who freed him from addiction. Yury then invited me to the rehab center, but I refused. After all, everything was cool with me! And with the thought of Yury and the rehab center, I somehow walked through the district where many gypsies live. Suddenly a gypsy woman called me to her home. I knew that she became a believer and previously used to sell drugs. Then, it seemed to me that this woman got crazy about God, but still I went to her. She had a man and a woman as guests. They asked me if I believe in God, and I answered: "Yes, but in my own way". They said: "Let's pray for you!" I agreed. And after a week and a half, I was already in the center! Although, then, I could not even imagine that this would happen.

At that time, I pulled off a scam and started getting good money... but suddenly, in that week and a half, everything fell apart! Moreover, my accomplice was captured and imprisoned for a long time. I had no choice but to go to the rehab center! In the rehab center, at first, I thought that I had come to some strange people, out of touch with reality. I did not see the danger in them, nor any benefits. And then I began to notice that they seemed to be drug addicts too, many of them were also in prison, and yet they were different. There was some kind of light and peace in their eyes. I started to communicate with them. Then, Nikolai Yunoshev, the pastor of the Vitebsk church, came and we talked a lot. He invited me to pray a prayer of repentance. I prayed and did not immediately feel any changes... but after a month I suddenly realized that I didn't want to use drugs, I don't even think about them! Generally, giving up drugs is very difficult, almost impossible! You become so dependent on them not only physically that the drugs get into your brains, and you cannot even think without them. And then I realized that I became a different person, began to treat everything differently. I began to get to know God, worked on my character. I read a lot and prayed a lot. I didn't just spend time in the rehab center, but tried to understand and comprehend: is God and faith in Him real or a fake? If it was a fake, I would leave everything and return to my past life. But I realized that God is real! And for almost three years now, since I have not taken drugs, I have been free from this addiction! I have a good job, good friends. When I came to faith in God, my parents accepted Jesus Christ into their lives. My brother, who, like me, was a drug addict, also underwent rehabilitation and does not use drugs now. At the moment, I am a member of the church city of Vitebsk and mainly serve in rehab centers, and I also do evangelism. I think it is very important to tell all people about Jesus Christ. After all, if I had not once been told about Him and had not been prayed for, I would never have known God and would not have been free from drugs!



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The Bible Says

...*Thy Word is truth*, says Jesus Christ in **John 17:17**, and His statement contains the strongest evidence that the Bible truly is the Word of God. Whoever accepts this, he feels the divine power emanating from the words of Christ, perceives as a miracle the fact that the words written down thousands of years ago, to this day disturb the conscience and change lives. There is only one explanation for this phenomenon: the Spirit of God speaks through the words of Holy Scripture. Countless examples show how the words of the Bible change a person's life when he suddenly realizes: This is about me! It's me in this state!

Luther lived like a monk, not knowing the peace of his soul and being in constant fear of God. Hearing about the justice of God, he remembered the unfulfilled requirements of the holy and punishing Almighty and fell into despair. At this time, he met in the Bible a text from the Epistle to the Romans: it reveals the truth of God from faith to faith, as it is written: *the righteous shall live by faith (Rom. 1:17)*. Suddenly it dawned on Luther: the Bible speaks here about righteousness, which given through the exploits of deliverance, accomplished by Christ, and which can be received by faith. Through Christ, and not through my feeble efforts, I become righteous before God! From that moment on, Luther found peace, which changed not only his life.

What a powerful source of comfort and strength the Bible is, the philosopher of reason Immanuel Kant also knew that:

None of the books I read gave me such comfort as the 22nd psalm: *...and I will go through the valley of the shadow of death; I will not fear evil, because you are with me (Psalm 22:4)*. Who can tell how many people were inspired by David's shepherd's psalm?! To how many people did the parable of the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke (in the 15th chapter) served as a cause to return to God! Perhaps some of you once experienced a feeling similar to that experienced by one person who in despair walked through the streets of Berlin with a rope in his pocket; he was going to end his lost life. Finally, he decided to look where his believing wife, long abandoned by him, regularly went. The man wandered into the church and sat down in the darkest corner. That very day a sermon on the merciful Samaritan was being read (**Luke 10:30-37**). The words of the preaching sunk deeply into the soul of man and changed his life to its very foundations.

Another story. In Sumatra, a Dutch soldier was imprisoned for attacking the head leader. The court sentenced him to death. The missionary Nommensen, who came to the prison, tried to strike up a conversation with the condemned man, but he was gloomily silent. Before leaving, Nommensen once again looked firmly into the eyes of the young man and said: *Return, lost son, and God will not look at you with anger (Jer. 3:12)*. Then the prisoner, turning pale as chalk, babbled in tears: These were the last words of my mother when I left her several years ago. A few days before the execution, the young man turned to God.

It is hard for a person to come forward when the Bible speaks of their sins and inexorably demands repentance. Jeremiah said: *Thy ways and thy deeds have caused this to thee; from your wickedness you are so bitter that it reaches your heart (Jer. 4:18)*. Scripture not only reveals the guilt of a person, it also calls him to acknowledge his apostasy and ask for forgiveness. In doing so, it bestows good consolation. *...By the grace of the Lord, we have not disappeared, says the Lamentations of Jeremiah, for His mercy was not exhausted. ...He sits alone and is silent, for He has imposed it on him; He lays down his mouth in the dust, thinking: "Perhaps there is still hope" ... for the Lord does not leave forever. But he sent sorrow, and he will have mercy according to his great goodness (Lamentations 3:22, 28-29, 31-32)*.

There is no situation in life for which there would not be a word in the Bible. Those who study the Bible with faith are surprised to find that what has long been written in it exactly corresponds to his life. And there is no doubt that God speaks to everyone separately.

How Do I Start?

Whoever wants to hear what the Bible tells them must first of all know the Bible well. Here are some tips for a beginner:

1. It is necessary to have your own Bible in which you can make notes and inscriptions. Don't be hasty in jumping from one to another edition of the Bible!
2. It is best to start reading with the New Testament, with the Gospel of Matthew or Luke.
3. It is recommended to immediately read no more than one or two chapters, since the text needs to be assimilated spiritually.
4. The location of the texts deemed most important should be marked in the margins so that they can be easily found in case of need.
5. Don't stop reading in a place that is hard to understand! You can talk about it with a more knowledgeable person or continue reading and there will be an explanation.
6. You need to read the Bible every day, even if it's just a small portion.
7. The truth and power of the Bible will be felt only by one who turns to its true author, God. He hears every request for understanding.

Auxiliary Resources

In numerous editions of the Bible, verses in bold print are immediately apparent. These texts are highlighted because they are fundamental. As a rule, they lend themselves to understanding and out of context. However, the study of the Bible should not be limited only to them. Next to some verses you can see the small print, as a footnote, indicating a parallel passage in the Bible. Thanks to this footnote, we can see in what other place in Scripture the same concept is found, or at least something similar is said. The parallel passages make it easier to learn biblical relationships.

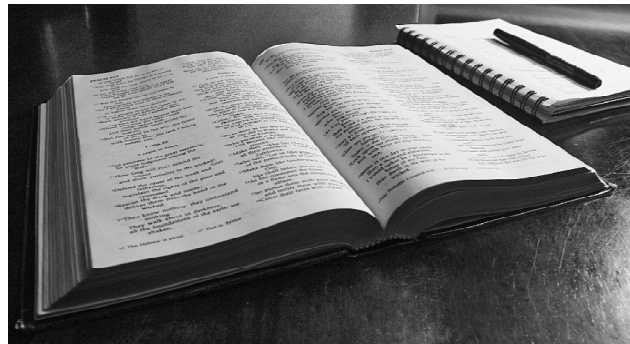
For those who want to more thoroughly engage in independent Bible study, we recommend buying the Concordance. It lists biblical texts by keywords. For example, we have discovered the text of **Matt. 26:41**: *...watch and pray, lest you fall into temptation: spirit is cheerful, but the flesh is weak*. Now we are looking for the key word to stay awake in the Concordance, and without difficulty we find all the most important texts in which it occurs. We get the opportunity to personally determine how often and in what connection the word stay awake is used in the Bible. In the same way, you can, based on the named verse, find the key words pray, temptation, spirit, flesh. In this way, you can

commandments of God. A believer, before committing an act, asks every time: What will God say to this? Such a person realizes that he can either belong to God entirely, or not at all. How important it is to subordinate life to God's instructions, Jesus showed in his parable: *So everyone who hears these words of mine and does them, I will liken a wise man who built his house on a stone; and the rain fell, and the rivers flowed, and the winds blew and rushed on that house; and he did not fall because it was founded on stone. And everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not fulfill them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain fell, and the rivers overflowed, and the winds blew, and they poured over that house; and he fell, and there was a great fall (Matt. 7:24-27)*. Whoever accepts the Bible, soon feel the authority of the Author in it. Some may not like this. But whoever understands that this is God speaking, who wants to make us His children, they find the true purpose for their life.

Even when the Bible has become a guide in the life of a believer, it may happen that they face a question to which they do not know the answer. There are many surprises in life, from which no one is immune. But it is in unforeseen situations that a Christian turns to prayer to the Lord and looks for an answer in Scripture. The answer is not always found. It may

not appear on the page the person is reading! But they will find it! And when God speaks through His Word, the seeker will rejoice and immediately understand: this is the answer!

«MY» BIBLE



learn how one passage in the Bible explains another.

A concordance is necessary when the text (or part of it) is known, but you do not remember exactly which part of the book it is in. Then you simply select a word from this text and use this keyword to search for the necessary place in Concordance. Further assistance in studying the Bible can be provided by the appendix to it. Depending on the edition, it is more or less exhaustive. The appendix usually contains indications of measures, units of weight, coins, the interpretation of difficult words, a chronological table, geographical maps, and sometimes even a list of keywords, making it easier to find your own names, locations and events.

From Reading to Teaching

Reading the Bible is of the greatest importance to faith. Without knowing the Word of God, no one can become a good Christian. However, it is impossible to comprehend all Bible truths solely with the help of the Bible supplement and the Concordance. This requires guidance. After all, if someone wants, for example, to learn about the second coming of Christ, he may not necessarily himself guess that something on this topic can be found from the Concordance through the words revelation, open, appearance, appear, day (the day of Christ, the day of the Lord) and the end.

In short, one who wants to know what the Bible teaches on a particular topic needs skillful guidance and help. The proclamation of the Word of God is based on long, thorough study; it cannot be achieved by one's own efforts. Communicate as much as possible with people who know the Bible well.

There are a large number of Bible reading groups. However, you should be careful. Not every circle of people who seek to explain the Bible fulfills what they have promised. Often, discussions cover up ignorance of the truth. The safest thing to do is to ask God to lead you to a place where the Bible is treated with reverence and profound examination, and in any situation, you should not be content with occasional reading. We must constantly strive to delve deeper into the Word of God and comprehend His truth.

Living With the Bible

The Bible is the book with which millions have completed, are completing, or will continue to complete their life's journey to the end. Where the Bible is accepted as the Word of God, there it changes lives.

The Bible not only gives an impetus to faith, not only shows the beginning of a new path, but becomes a daily spiritual food, without which it is impossible to live. *Your words were found, and I ate them; And Thy word came to me for the joy and gladness of my heart; for Thy name is called on me, O Lord, the God of hosts (Jer. 15:16)*.

Gradually there is a growing into the world of faith, into communion with God. A person gets acquainted with Bible principles and lives by them. The Word of God is recognized as the standard for good and evil. Conscience is sharpened by the

Life With a Future

The Bible must become my Bible, so that I can get to know it, so that God's Spirit could speak to me in silence. Despite the fact that I call one copy of the Bible my property, it still remains the foundation of the faith of the entire Christian church, all Christians. It is God's guidance for humanity. In the Bible we read about the destinies of nations, about God's plan for humanity, about the goal of history. It's not about me alone. To live with the Bible also means to live with the people of God.

On this rock I will build My church, says Christ in **Matt. 16:18**. And in Acts of the Apostles we read: *the Lord daily added those who were being saved to the church (Acts 2:47)*. The church does not exist for its own sake, it is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (**Matt. 5:13-14**). She has a commission from her Lord to proclaim His word throughout the world (**Matt. 28:18-20**). For this purpose, God has prepared a task for everyone who believes in Him. The Bible is a book that connects the followers of Jesus around the world and at all times. Only a church that faithfully implements the Word of God can tell an individual person what commission the Lord has provided for them. The selfishness of faith, when the individual believer is concerned only with the salvation of their own soul, is a fatal impasse. Christ frees oneself from self-love and grants the ability to serve one's neighbor. One who unites with the church should not fear that in their Bible study they will freeze on the spot in powerlessness and confusion. Through the proclamation, they receive more and more vitality.

The Spirit of God gives the church a sign which biblical messages are especially effective for the present time and what significance they have for the whole world. We know that Jesus Christ will soon come a second time, but not as a baby in a manger, as two thousand years ago, but as the Judge of the world: *...then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven; and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory... (Matt. 24:30)*. The Son of Man, about whom the evangelist speaks, is none other than Christ, the Son of God, who became a Man for us, who died for our sins on the cross and then was resurrected to return to heaven. It is He who said: *...All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18)*. That all authority has indeed been given to Christ will become evident when He comes again as Master of the world to execute judgment and establish His Kingdom. Like no other book, the Bible shows us the beginning and end of human history. And only Scripture can convince us that we have a future, for our future is God Himself! *...And you will see Me, for I live, and you will live, Jesus promises to all who trust Him (John 14:19)*.

And the Apostle John, to whom God showed the future in visions, assures: *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. ...And He will dwell with them; they will be His people, and God Himself will be their God with them. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more; there will be neither sorrow nor crying, no sickness; for the former has passed away. And He who sat on the throne said: Behold, I am creating everything new. And he says to me: write, for these words are true and faithful (Rev. 21:1, 3-5)*.

Everyone who has felt the power of the Word of God knows that what God has promised, it will certainly come true. *For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty (2 Peter 1:16)*.



CHRISTIAN NEWS

Parties at the Drew Barrymore pool, meetings with show business and fashion stars, parties at the Grammy Awards and Paris Fashion Week. A successful fashion designer, part of the Hollywood elite was openly homosexual with Christian parents who condemn this sin. That was Beckett Cook's lifestyle, and he loved it until one day everything changed in an instant!

Cook recounts this profound moment in his life in his book *A Change of Affection: A Gay Man's Incredible Story of Redemption*.



«The Holy Spirit has changed me». Hollywood homosexual became a Christian

Beckett Cook, a successful fashion designer, was part of the Hollywood elite as well as an outspoken homosexual. But despite the fact that he had everything he could wish for, there was something he desperately lacked.

As a child, Cook led a double life: "I pretended that I was a normal child, but inside I was dealing with 'a love that does not dare to pronounce its name'. The older I got, the more homosexuality became a part of my personality. Christians were enemies".

"I went to fashion weeks, went to all the shows, was a regular at parties", he recalls. "And then one night at one of these parties, when I was looking at the amusing crowd, I thought, I can't do this anymore. I can't and I don't want to".

In his book, Cook tells how God turned his personality upside down and brought him such peace and freedom that he could not even imagine.

During an interview on a talk show The Club 700, the former Los Angeles-based designer recounted how he was abused by a friend of his father's when he was just ten years old. Cook told this only to a close friend and to no one else.

"I didn't tell my parents because my father would have killed this man", he said. "My father was a very influential lawyer in Texas. I just didn't want him to go to jail for murder".

"I didn't want people to know", Cook continued. "It was a very embarrassing piece of my life, and I didn't want anyone to ever know what happened".

When asked if this "experience" influenced his sexual years later, Beckett replied: "For many, many years living as a homosexual, I never thought it would affect me. I strongly denied this, probably because I did not want my sexual identity as a homosexual to be tied to that terrible, terrible night".

"But after I became a Christian, I realized that this night had a huge impact on my sexuality and the path I took afterwards", said Cook.

"My parents really loved me very much", Cook recalls. "I was the youngest of eight children, so when I announced my gay orientation, they said, 'Oh, are you gay? Okay'", laughs Beckett. "My parents were Christians and they believed it was a sin. But they were super delicate and loved me very much".

While living in Los Angeles, Cook had serious relationships with five different men, but constantly felt dead inside. "I was at Paris Fashion Week in March 2009", he said. "I was at this party. It was very glamorous. Everyone from the fashion world was there. So that night in Paris, I looked at the crowd and thought, 'This is not it. This is not the meaning of life. What am I going to do with the rest of my life?'"

"Then one day I was drinking coffee at my favorite coffee shop and saw people with Bibles. My best friend and I got to talking to them, and they invited me to their church in Hollywood next Sunday", Cook recalls. "And I asked them: 'What does your church think about homosexuality?' And they answered: 'Well, we believe that it is a sin'".

"So the next Sunday I went to church and heard the pastor preach on the seventh chapter of Romans. These words pierced my mind and heart, I literally could not sit in my place during the sermon.

Then I was invited to pray, and when I returned to my seat, I thought about what I heard in the sermon, listened to worship music and everything else", he said. "Suddenly the Holy Spirit crushed me. And God spoke to me: 'I am God. Jesus is my Son. Heaven is real. Hell is real. The Bible is true. Now you are accepted into My Kingdom. Welcome!' I cried like I never cried in my life. It seems that someone pulled back the curtain, and for the first time in my life I saw the truth", he explained. "For the first time I learned the meaning of life".

Cook also said that at that very moment he realized that God did not create him as a homosexual and that this is not at all who he was.

"It's over", he said. "I'm done with this".

<https://gshelp.org>

THE INFLUENCE OF WORDS IN OUR LIVES

I. WORDS IN A HUMAN LIFE
The role of words in everyday life. Is our tongue an enemy or a friend?

Anger, arguments, resentments, curses all starts with the tongue. So, what should we do with it?

If you understand the meaning of words in your life, if you understand how much you can use them both for good intentions and for evil, I am convinced that your life will change a lot. I have experienced this in my life.

When we first got married with my wife, words, like sharp swords, caused us to hurt each other. And many disagreements that began with innocent words ended in serious fights.

Over time, both my wife and I realized that it was words that played one of the key roles in life. And not only in the family.

Words play a fundamental role in every area of life:

- ☉ in self-awareness,
- ☉ in the formation of your business,
- ☉ in raising children,
- ☉ in relationships with others.

If during a crisis you talk about it all the time, think about it, then it is that crisis that will manifest itself in your life. The meaning of words in your life plays a huge role.

Example: Influence of words on water

An experiment was carried out. A sheet of paper with the words printed on it was wrapped around a bottle of water. Each word displayed a different crystal of water. It is very significant that when the water was wrapped in a paper with negative words, the crystals were uneven and ugly. When the words were positive and kind, the crystals were of the correct shape.

The impact of words on water is enormous. All the more so on human consciousness. **Therefore, it is very important for you to work with your words.**

According to the chronicles, in 1472, Abbot Karl Hastinstings was captured and interrogated on a false denunciation in the case of bringing illness to a certain respected woman. The abbot who was imprisoned was given only a piece of dry bread and a ladle of rotten, foul water every day. Forty days later, the jailer noticed that during this time the Monk Karl not only did not lose, but, it seemed, gained health and strength, which only convinced the inquisitors of the abbot's connection with evil spirits. Later, under severe torture, Karl Hastinstings confessed that over the rotten water that was brought to him, he read a prayer, thanking the Lord for the trials sent down to him, after which the water became soft in taste, fresh and transparent.

A prime example. God created the world with a word

According to the Bible, God

created the whole world with a word. Everything that you see around (fields, forests, starry sky, mountains, animals), as well as what you cannot see (the Universe, constellations, molecules and DNA), was created in one word. Nothing can stand in the way of the words that God said. There is no power in the entire universe that can refute, oppose, or hinder the power of God's word. God's word cannot be canceled!

Because with God nothing is impossible, and no word of God will remain without power or without its fulfillment (Luke 1:37).

The heavens were created by the word of the Lord... (Psalm 33:6).

Let's look at the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, the book of the beginnings.

seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so (Genesis 1:3-15).

Think what a tremendous power the words have that are spoken by God, if everything He said came into being. Nothing can be opposed to God's word. Because it is strong and always brings forth what God said it for. **There is no circumstance that cannot overcome God's word.** There is no problem that the word of God cannot overcome.

Think about this. God could create the world in any way he wanted. He could strike his hand in hand and create the entire universe with that. Or create a huge explosion from which everything would happen and in a split second the world would begin its existence.

But God used the words *Let there be.* And when He said it, it happened.

Words in a person's life

Consider another statement that is very important for our study. Man is created in the image and likeness of God, that is, we also create with our words. Now look around. Foul language, cursing, swearing, quarrels, accusations, slander, lies and a lot of words that satisfy. But what? They create only evil in a person's life. What words do you hear most often in a person's life? This is exactly what this person has in his life.

The influence of words on a person

You will not give any thought to what you say with your lips.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof (Proverbs 18:21).

The Word is the seed in your life. What you say is what you have.

☉ If you are starving, you say the wrong words.

☉ If you are unhappy, the words in your life are wrong.

☉ If you are a selfish, angry person, you are sowing the wrong words.

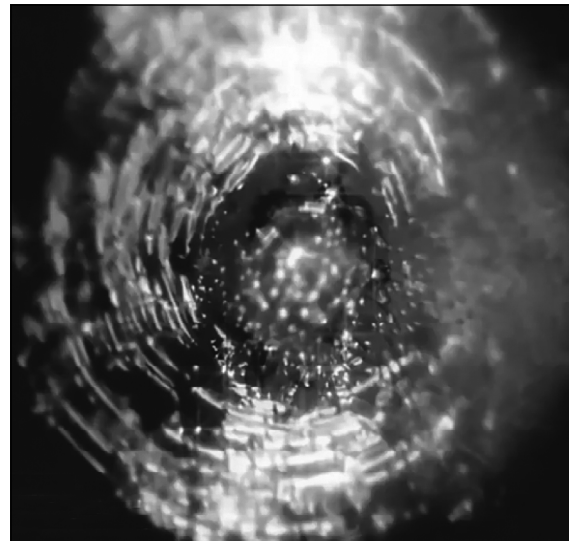
☉ If you are poor, check what you say.

A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled (Proverbs 18:20).

II. COMMUNICATION IN THE FAMILY. WORDS OF SUPPORT

Family life is a test of a person's character. If there are constant arguments, conflicts and scandals in the family, then, most likely, one of the spouses or both are overwhelmed with selfishness, pride and unwillingness to find a common language.

(Continued on the 8th page)



Water crystals after the words "You are a fool"

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day. And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day. And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called the Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day. And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for

PROVERB Name in the garden

A father drew three initial letters of his son's name on the garden bed and covered these grooves with lettuce seeds. Ten days later, the boy ran to his father and was surprised to tell him that he had found his name growing up in the garden. The father smiled and pretended not to believe such a miracle. Then the child began to insist that the father go to the garden and see for himself. The parent agreed and, going up to the garden, said:

"It's a simple coincidence".

The boy thought about it.

"How did my name grow out of the blue?" he said. "Someone certainly arranged it, but I do not know who and how".

Taking this opportunity, the father told his son:



"You're right, it couldn't have happened by itself. This is how the whole world that you see could not have formed by itself, if it had not been created by God, whom we call therefore the Creator of not only the earth, but also the sky".

<https://pritchi.ru>

(Ending.
Beginning on the 7th page)

And by the way, the tongue is not only the main problem, but also the main solution to all problems in the family. Let's find out more about it.

What is family for?

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light (Genesis 1:3).

Then God said, "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters" (Genesis 1:6).

Then God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear"; and it was so (Genesis 1:9).

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth"; and it was so (Genesis 1:11).

Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14).

Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens" (Genesis 1:20).

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so (Genesis 1:24).

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Genesis 2:18).

The great God created our earth with a word. And He said it was not good for man to be alone. In creating the very idea of a family, God wanted man and woman to live in unity, love and harmony. But what is happening today in the modern world? Conflicts and divorce have become commonplace not only in the news about Hollywood stars, but also in the lives of friends, neighbors, parents and even presidents of countries.

The question arises: *Why do families collapse, and people who once loved each other become so hated by each other?*

One of the reasons (but not the only one) is words. Our words are powerful. The Bible pays special attention to such a small member of our body — the tongue.

Death and life are in the power of the tongue... (Proverbs 18:21).

Jesus healed and raised people from the dead with the help of a word.

THE INFLUENCE OF WORDS IN OUR LIVES

Communication within the family

The Bible says: *He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit (1 Peter 3:10).*

In order for our family, and even us, ourselves, to be happy, we must always watch what we say. **Communication between spouses** is the key to a happy marriage. However, this important aspect of life can take place in different ways.

Communication between husband and wife can be:

- ☉ superficial — when only everyday issues are resolved (work, family, home, children);

- ☉ deep and high-quality — when a husband and wife, in all their busyness, find time for each other, share the most intimate details (their worries, dreams), together make some plans for the future; when the husband compliments his wife, and the wife praises and thanks her other half, because praise to a man is a powerful tool that can inspire him.

The impact of family communication on the development of each spouse

The Bible says that a person's tongue can be filled with deadly poison: *...it is full of deadly poison (James 3:8).* Here we are not talking about poison, the substance that is familiar to our understanding. The author says that **our words can have the same effect as poison.** Unbridled and rash words spoken to a person can bring them to death, as a murderous substance does.

A person who from childhood hears only bad things in their address cannot become successful and complete. It would seem that they're just insignificant words, but they can completely destroy the fate of a person.

When **communication between spouses** occurs with a raised voice, then very often we are unable to restrain our emotions and, using our tongue, we try to hurt our soul mate. You can regret the words spoken for a long time and even ask for forgiveness from your wife or husband, but they were said and heard and managed to take root deeply in their heart.

I know a family that has two children. In their house, screams were often heard, the dishes were breaking, and the children were crying. Once again, having quarreled, the wife shouted to her

husband as he was going to work: *Let the stove crush you!* Of course, she didn't really want that to happen, and only wanted to hurt her husband with her words, but in the evening, she received bad news. She was told that her husband was crushed by a stove and he died. The wife realized that it was her fault and lost her mind. This is just a confirmation of the Word of God: *Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things (James 3:5).*

Praising the man. Words of support to your loved one

And when it comes to family, the words we utter can either destroy or

Examples of praising a man

Here are some examples.
1. For example, the husband returned home from work. He is hungry and tired. At this moment, you should not surprise him from the doorway with new shoes, demand money or tell him funny stories.

Examples of appropriate words:

- ☉ *You did a great job today,*
- ☉ *Your help is very important.*

At the same time, it is important to say such words casually, as you're doing something, so that he won't suspect you of deliberate praise. Otherwise, he might not believe it.

2. The husband is not able to figure out some serious situation at work. At the same time, he is noticeably nervous. And after work, he slugs his fork through the food on the plate, although he usually eats the food with an undisguised appetite.

The task is not to ask him to clean the snow, take out the trash, or fix the sink. Leave these important tasks until a better time.

Examples of appropriate words:

- ☉ *You will succeed,*
- ☉ *Darling, don't get discouraged,*
- ☉ *I believe that everything will be fine. Let's trust God together*

in this situation.

Words of support to your beloved woman

If, in the case of men, words are simply important, then with women, words play an overriding, fundamental role. **A woman loves with her ears.** It is also amazing how good words affect a marriage. A husband who expresses words of support to his beloved will receive care and love in return. **Hearing compliments and praise from a loved one, the wife will want to stay true to what is said about her.** She will also want to please her lover with something.

Examples of words to support a woman

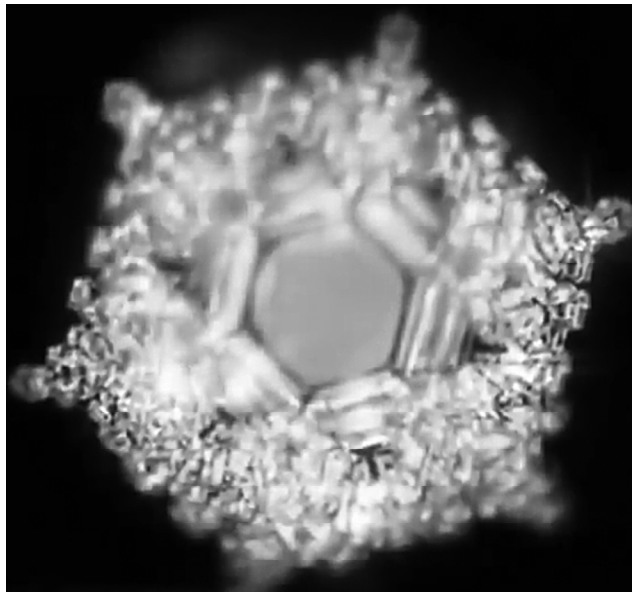
There are many more suitable words for a woman than for a man: women have many more reasons to feel despondent.

- ☉ If you see that she is nervous, in no case should you teach her. Calm her down and then spend time with her.

- ☉ If she is angry, try to find out the reason and talk to her lovingly.

- ☉ If she is crying, do not say anything extra. Find out the reason and take care of her.

- ☉ If she is happy, laugh with her.



Water crystals after the words "love" and "gratitude"

create family relationships; there is no other option.

Thus, by speaking **words of support to their loved one**, women give them confidence and strength to effectively carry out their duties. After all, if every day you "nag" and express your dissatisfaction toward your spouse, you should not expect that such a relationship will lead to a happy ending.

Men are, of course, independent, and also strong and confident. But this is only in public. In hardships, strong men need support no less than others. And it is the words from their beloved wife that can either strengthen and support him or crush him.

Family communication problems begin with our words. Sometimes, only thanks to a small word spoken at the right time, we are able to resolve and smooth out many conflicts without giving them the slightest chance to drive a wedge into the marriage bond.

A Russian wisdom proverb says: *The word is not a sparrow: if it flies out, you will not catch it.* On the other hand, a thoughtless word spoken in irritation can sink deep into the heart, causing great harm to your soul mate every day.

Peace be to you, brothers and sisters!

WE WILL LOVE EACH OTHER AS GOD LOVED US

I want to support those who are in prison to do the work for which Christ has called us. *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... (Matthew 28:19).* And the Lord also speaks to us through the Apostle Paul: *And let us not grow weary while doing good... (Galatians 6:9).*

When in 2006 I was convicted and given a life sentence, I was in a disastrous state: no one wrote, there was nothing in the cell, I didn't get any parcels either, the food was disgusting, with my height of 173 cm I weighed 50 kg. But I thank God that He led me through all this!

When I arrived in Vinnytsia in July 2011, a month later I was already in a cell with a Christian who pointed out Christ to me. His name was Pavel. In 2012, the Lord called him to eternity. But God took care of me through this brother.

The fact is that Pavel, shortly before the Lord called him to Himself, said that he wanted to sit with brother Oleg, and we parted. After the move, Pavel asked Oleg to take care of me. And it so happened that after a short time, Pavel departed to the Lord. As a result, since 2012, Oleg and I have been together. We have a home church, for the Lord said: *For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them (Matthew*

18:20). Since then, the Lord has helped us more than once and kept us from different troubles, and for every good deed He rewarded us many times. So, brothers and sisters, let's love the God that so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Also, in **Romans 5:8** it says: *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* In the same way, may we love one another, as God loved us.

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There are several universal words for a beloved woman:

- ☉ *I love you,*
- ☉ *You are so beautiful,*
- ☉ *It's so amazing that you are in my life.*

Just don't use them all at once, because otherwise she will suspect something and stop believing you. It is best to use such words no more than once every two to three hours and when appropriate. In some moments, you can "shoot in bursts", but with a sincere heart and a desire to really please her.

Decisions. Family communication. Words of support

Man, being created in the image and likeness of God, can do a lot, but he cannot deal with his tongue. The Bible says that *A wholesome tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit (Proverbs 15:4).*

Decide that nothing evil will ever come from your lips, but only good. Just like it's written in the Word of God.

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers (Ephesians 4:29).

If you are a professional user of foul language, it won't be easy for you. If you are used to burdening others when you feel sick yourself, this decision will be very difficult. But gradually you will learn to say exceptionally kind words to your significant other. And then you will know what heaven on earth is.

To finish things off, I'll leave you with an image. Just imagine that your words are capsules. What they are filled with — that is what you have in your family. And it is the made decision that allows these capsules to be filled with exceptionally good content.

If we do not begin to control what comes out of our lips, then we, ourselves, and those whom we love very much will suffer from this. This is hard work on yourself, which is worth a lot of effort. However, a happy family and loving spouses are much more important. Therefore, say only good and kind things, praise your other half, support her with words and deeds, and in the end, you will be rewarded.

A word of encouragement

Happy families exist. They didn't die out with the mammoths. And the first thing they start with is dealing with their own tongue. Try it yourself — it's so exciting.

If you don't like what you see in your family, change what you say.

A man will be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth... (Proverbs 12:14).

Minzilya MATSEYKA,
Vladimir BAGNENKO,
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A continuation of this topic will be present in the next issue.



TOPIC FOR REFLECTION

Blessing. The literal meaning of this word is a *kind, good word*.

In the Biblical context, blessing means a proclamation or a wish of good in the life of an individual or a group of people in the name of the Lord.

The Greek word **eulogeo** (blessing) originates from the combination of two other words: **eu** (good, graceful) and **logos** (word, sentence).

I. BLESSING IN THE BIBLE

1. God's relation towards blessing

☉ **Bless those that curse you: Luke 6:28** — ...*bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

☉ **Bless those that persecute you: Romans 12:14** — *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*

☉ **Advice of Apostle Peter: 1 Peter 3:9-12** — *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him*

is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

☉ Blessed are those who overcome temptation: **James 1:12** — *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.*

☉ Blessed are those who are mocked because of Christ: **1 Peter 4:14** — *If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

☉ Blessed are those who hear and obey God's Word: **James 1:25** — *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing;* **Revelations 1:3** — *Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near;* **Revelations 22:7** — *...blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book;* **Revelations 22:14** — *Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.*

From all that was said above, we can make a conclusion

☉ **Moses blessed the tribes of Israel before his death: Deuteronomy 33.**

☉ **Elizabeth blessed Mary: Luke 1:41-45** — *And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.*

This is the principle of God's blessing: **Acts 3:26** — *God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness. How did He bless us? By turning every one of you from your wickedness. This is the greatest blessing that God has blessed us with in Christ. In the same manner we should bless our neighbors by turning them away from evil deeds.*

IV. WE CAN BLESS GOD

Do you know that we — people — can bless not only one another but we can also bless the Creator?! The following Bible verses speak about this:

☉ **Psalms 103:1-2** — *Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.*

☉ **Psalms 96:1-4** — *Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.*

☉ **Psalms 145:1-3** — *I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.*

☉ **Psalms 100:4-5** — *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.*

1. Who blesses and worships God?

☉ **Psalms 103:20-22** — *Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

☉ **Psalms 145:10-13** — *All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you! They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

Based on these verses, The Lord is praised and glorified by:

- ☉ all of **God's angels** — angels who serve God;
- ☉ all of **God's hosts** — all of the other spiritual beings who worship Him;
- ☉ all of **God's ministers** — all those who serve Him;
- ☉ all of **God's works** — all of God's creation;
- ☉ all of **God's saints** — all of us who love the Lord and who have been reconciled with the Father through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ; those who have dedicated their lives to serving the Lord;
- ☉ **my soul** — the soul of every person who loves the Lord with all of his heart.

2. How to bless the Lord

☉ **Psalms 103:20-22** — *Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his word, obeying the voice of his word! Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers, who do his will! Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion. Bless the LORD, O my soul!*

In the same way as the painting praises the artist and the symphony praises its composer, all of God's creation should praise and bless its Creator. Otherwise, it does not fulfill its purpose. This is why it says in **Psalms 103: Bless the Lord... all of his works...**

Me and you are a creation of God. Man was created in the image and likeness of God and was supposed to from the very beginning to reflect in his words and actions the holiness, glory, and wisdom of his Creator. Sin has corrupted God's image in us. But thanks to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his glorious resurrection, today all of us have received the opportunity to reconcile with God and to restore His image and likeness in us which was once lost in the garden of Eden.

All that is necessary for this is to by faith accept Jesus Christ — God, who came down to earth in a human body; repent of your sins and to turn to God with a request to be forgiven of sins. The Lord has promised: *Whoever comes to me I will never cast out...* (**John 6:37**). He is faithful and righteous and will never break His word.

If you have not yet reconciled with God, **do this today! If you have already done this, worship and bless the Lord:**

- ☉ by serving Him and others in the name of Christ Jesus;
- ☉ by testifying to others about God and His great works;
- ☉ by praying to the Creator in the name of Christ Jesus;
- ☉ by your obedience to His Word — The Bible;
- ☉ by worshiping Him with your mouth through songs and hymns.

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seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil".

☉ **Solomon about the blessing of the Lord: Proverbs 10:22** — *The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it.*

2. Examples of blessing in the New Testament

☉ Jesus blesses the children: **Mark 10:13-16** — *And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it". And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.*

☉ Jesus on the cross: **Luke 23:33-34** — *And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do".*

☉ Jesus blesses the disciples before ascending into heaven: **Luke 24:50-52** — *And He led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them. While He blessed them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing God.*

☉ Stephan, when he was stoned: **Acts 7:59-60** — *And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit". And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them".*

☉ Apostles: **1 Corinthians 4:12** — *When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure...*

II. WHO IS BLESSED?

1. The teaching of Jesus Christ about those who are blessed

☉ **Blessed** are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; **blessed** are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account (**Matthew 5:3-11**).

☉ **Matthew 11:6** — *...blessed is the one who is not offended by me.*

☉ **Luke 11:28** — *...blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*

☉ **John 13:17** — *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.*

☉ **John 20:29** — *...blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*

2. The New Testament about those who are blessed

☉ Blessed are those who are forgiven by the Lord: **Romans 4:7-8** — *Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed*

that not only can we be blessed, but we can bless other people around us.

It is written in the Bible: *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear (Ephesians 4:29).* This is the principle by which we as Christians share the blessing with others around us: we bless them with our words and actions.

III. HOW TO BLESS CORRECTLY

Many ask the question: *how do I bless correctly?*

1. The answer consists of several parts:

A. We can bless by **word and deed**.

B. True blessing can only come from **blessed people** (part II talks about who is blessed). This is also talked about in **Hebrews 7:7**: *It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior.*

C. True blessing is blessing in the **Name of the Lord** (when we bless by His name, from His name, or in His name). We should not confuse pagan blessing with God's blessing.

2. Words by which people have blessed each other in the Bible

☉ **God blessed humankind in the face of Adam and Eve: Genesis 1:22, 28** — *And God blessed them, saying, be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.*

☉ **Isaac blessed Jacob: Genesis 27:26-29** — *Then his father Isaac said to him, come near and kiss me, my son. So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, see, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the LORD has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you!*

☉ **Jacob blessed the tribes of Israel before his death: Genesis 49.**

☉ **Balaam blessed the Children of Israel: Numbers 24:3-9** — *And he took up his discourse and said, "The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, the oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down with his eyes uncovered: How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! Like palm groves that stretch afar, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. Water shall flow from his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters; his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt and is for him like the horns of the wild ox; he shall eat up the nations, his adversaries, and shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them through with his arrows. He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up? Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you".*

THE GREAT BEGINNING

What event in a person's life can be considered the beginning of the Christian life? Responding to a preacher's call to raise his hand as a sign of accepting Christ? Immersion in baptismal? Acceptance of prayer-sanctified bread and wine during the sacrament? Putting a cross around your neck for the first time or a pilgrimage to holy places? Alas, many mistakenly consider these events to be the beginning of the Christian path. In fact, it begins with a sincere, voluntary response to Jesus' call to discipleship. To become a true Christian — means to imitate the Lord in words and deeds.

After these things He went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, "Follow Me". So he left all, rose up, and followed Him. Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them. And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Luke 5:27-32).

When presidents, elected by the people, are building a team, they look for the most competent and trustworthy people, who with their work will increase their popularity. The King of kings does things differently.

Christ calls the unworthy

Levi, aka Matthew, was a tax collector. For our contemporaries, the profession of a tax inspector belongs to the category of respected, but in occupied Judea of the first century it was in unimaginable contempt among the people. This was unwittingly facilitated by the Roman government, which established a mandatory amount of taxes that had to be delivered to the treasury, and allowed the publicans to come up with additional income for their life. And they tried diligently to tax everything that was possible: every wheel axle, every unit of goods, and even travel through the city or across the bridge...

The people considered the publicans to be thieves and robbers. They were hated as traitors to their homeland and faith, because they collected money for the Roman occupiers. The tax collector was strictly forbidden to visit the synagogue; he was included in the list of impure objects and living beings, contact with which defiled. He could not act as a witness in court. No Jew would have given his daughter in marriage to him. If a girl, against the will of her parents, nevertheless dared to marry a publican, a symbolic funeral was arranged for her. This is the kind of a despicable man Christ has called to Himself for service! The grace of God seeks the most insignificant and wretched, to transform into good and glorious.

The apostle Paul writes about this amazing strategy of God: *For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:26-30).*

This approach testifies to the divine origin of christianity. A proud human mind is basically incapable of generating such ideas. The pursuit of people to achieve success in art, sports, and business is driven by vanity. Christ never called anyone to raise their self-esteem, did not appeal to self-respect. He did not indulge human pride; on the contrary, he belittled it with all his might: *...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant (Matt. 20:26).*

That is why many talented people did not become christians. They prefer proud independence, overt ambition, public recognition. They are alien to Christ's calls for belittling before God and humility before people. Their imitators also find no reason to boast only of Christ. Their own joys and achievements are dearer to them than His feat.

Even religious people make the same mistake, when they boast about the age of origin of their confession, its rich history, contribution to the progress of mankind, the names of famous adherents, the luxury of jewelry, administrative or military power. However, this boast is inappropriate, for it has no foundation in the Gospel. You need to boast about something else — the work of Christ.

Once, the preacher of the Gospel, Lord Redstock, was shown the decoration of churches in St. Petersburg. At the end of the tour, the lord said to the guide: "Thank you for showing me your museums! When you come to England, I will show you hundreds of men and women whom the Lord saved from drunkenness, debauchery and who have become useful to society".

Dear friends! You may enjoy hearing about Christ and His teachings, but because of your many sins, do not expect to become good Christians. Don't try to measure Christ's attitude towards sinners by human standards! He recruits disciples for Himself those, who to the point of despair, have become disillusioned with themselves and rely only on His great mercy.

I love the parable, that Jesus told about Himself as a good shepherd. In the evening it turned out there were ninety-nine sheep in the pen, there was just one missing. And so the shepherd leaves them and goes in search of the lost. Of course, it takes effort, time, nerves, but for the sake of the lost sheep, He does not spare himself. And when He does find the missing one, He does not hit her or scold her, but takes her on his shoulders and happily carries her home. Then he calls his friends: "Rejoice with me, I have found the lost sheep". With this parable, Christ shows his kindest feelings for lost sinners. He wants to help them in trouble and lead them to Heavenly Father. It gives him joy to save the unworthy!

Christ calls to follow Him

I cannot imagine that Matthew's response was spontaneous, otherwise the universal law of the origin of faith would be violated: *...faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17)*. Undoubtedly, Matthew heard about the miracles of the Lord, about His compassionate attitude towards sick, possessed, sinful people. He heard the teachings of Christ, which were awakening in his soul the striving for righteousness. He did not want to live in a draft between heaven and hell. But he dared not follow Christ. Perhaps he thought that Christ would not spoil His reputation by communicating with a man, on whose conscience there is so much deception and violence.

And then one day Jesus passed by the tax collector. Looking at the publican, Christ uttered one short phrase. No, He didn't say: "I hope you die, you wicked!" Jesus addressed him as if he were his best friend: "Follow Me!"

And this graceful attitude of the Lord indescribably rejoiced, inspired Matthew: "He did not reckon with my sins, did not remind me of a single evil deed, did not set any conditions for following! He invited me to be His disciple!" And Matthew believed this word of Christ and immediately went after Him, without asking about the benefit.

What an important lesson for us! To become a disciple of Christ, does not require an impeccable job qualification; it does not require the most holy life. A voluntary response of faith to the call of the gospel is required, faith in the fact that Christ is able to correct the most broken life and make the most unfit person useful to God. It is not in

vain that Scripture says: *we who have believed do enter that rest... (Heb. 4:3)*

Christ saved Matthew in the simplest and most reliable way — called him to follow Him. In the same way, He still saves souls. Even through this sermon, he is calling you right now to become His disciples. People miserably vegetate in despondency, aimlessness, materialism. And not God is to blame for this, but their unbelief.

Many hear the gospel of Christ, but do not believe, that it is addressed to them. They continue to be in the fetters of Satan, instead of praying, "Lord! If you recruit the most unworthy as your students, I am just that! Take my hand and lead me!"

To follow Christ — means to always be in constant communion with Him, to follow the path of life under His wise guidance, left in the Gospel. This is the greatest happiness in the world!



Christ calls to service

Levi-Matthew from the very first minute of his conversion became a minister. He gave up his craft and hastened to gather all his friends to a meeting with Jesus. He wished them the same good — the salvation that he himself had found. Matthew prepared a meal, opened the doors of his house for guests, and thanks to this the world heard the great words of Christ: *"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"*. These words saved many people from despair, led many to salvation. After all, they testify that Christ is on the side of sinners to help them become saints!

Levi joined an already existing modest group of disciples. Then others were added to it. What a motley company this was! There were fishermen and artisans. There was a former partisan nationalist Simon-Zealot and even Judas the traitor. They were all young, energetic and did not shy away from controversy over which of them was more. It was in this team that Matthew learned patience and cooperation.

Christianity for loners does not exist! It is impossible to be a disciple of Christ and not belong to the church. We need other Christians who are more experienced than we are so that we can learn from them how to cope with difficulties and serve the Lord. We also need the less experienced so that we can serve them.

Matthew labored quite a bit for Christ. And the main business of his life became the writing of the gospel. W. Barkley skillfully shows the greatness of Matthew's work, which does not strike the eye of an inattentive reader. Here are some amazing thoughts:

"First and foremost, the gospel of Matthew was written by a Jew to convert the Jews. One of the main purposes of the gospel of Matthew was to show that

in Jesus all the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled and therefore He must be the Messiah. One phrase (a recurring theme) runs throughout the book: "This was to fulfill what has been spoken through the prophet". This phrase is repeated in the gospel of Matthew no less than sixteen times...

The Jewish origin and Jewish orientation of the gospel of Matthew are also seen in relation to the law. Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. Even the smallest part of the law will not be violated. No need to teach people to break the law. The righteousness of a Christian must exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:17-20).

In addition, it should be noted the obvious paradox in the attitude of the author of the gospel of Matthew to the scribes and Pharisees. He recognizes them with special credentials: *The*

scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do... (Matt. 23:2-3). But in no other gospel they are condemned so strictly and consistently as in Matthew... In the entire New Testament, there is no other chapter like Matt. 23, which condemns not what the scribes and Pharisees teach, but their behavior and way of life...

The author of the gospel of Matthew is also very interested in the church. Of all the synoptic gospels, the word 'church' is found only in the gospel of Matthew. Only in the gospel of Matthew is a passage included, about the church after Peter's confession in Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13-23; cf. Mk. 8:27-33; Luke 9:18-22). Only Matthew says that disputes should be resolved by the church (Matt. 18:17).

The gospel according to Matthew especially reflected an interest in the apocalyptic... In Matt. 24 is a fuller account of Jesus' apocalyptic discourse than any other gospel. Only in the gospel of Matthew there is a parable about talents (Matt. 25:14-30), about wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13), about sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46).

But this is not the most important feature of the gospel of Matthew. Matthew was a great organizer. He collected in one place everything that he knew about the teaching of Jesus on this or that issue, and therefore we find in the gospel of Matthew five large complexes, in which the teaching of Christ is collected and systematized. All of these five complexes are associated with the Kingdom of God. They are: a) the Sermon on the Mount, or the law of the Kingdom (Matt. 5-7), b) the duty of the leaders of the Kingdom (Matt. 10), c) parables about the Kingdom (Matt. 13), d) greatness and forgiveness in the Kingdom (Matt. 18), e) the coming of the King (Matt. 24:25).

But Matthew not only collected, but also systematized the material. He arranges material in threes and sevens:

CHRISTIAN NEWS

Harvard physician discovered that Faith is correlated with better mental health and less risk of depression

An American doctor has found that faith, instilled from a young age, helps children and adolescents fight depression, and even advises unbelieving parents to educate their children in faith for their mental health, Christianpost reports. A healthy and kind imagination, the right attitude, according to the psychoanalyst, affects how children cope with difficulties.

Even without believing in God, parents still need to instill faith in their children, since faith helps improve mental health, according to the popular American psychoanalyst, family trainer and Jewish writer Erica Komisar. Backing up her findings with research from Harvard scientists and other scientific evidence, Komisar strongly recommends the Law of God even for unbelieving families in an interview with The Wall Street Journal.



As a therapist, I'm often asked to explain why depression and anxiety are both so common among children and adolescents. One of the most important explanations — and perhaps the most neglected — is declining interest in religion. This cultural shift already has proved disastrous for millions of vulnerable young people.

A 2018 study in the American Journal of Epidemiology examined how being raised in a family with religious or spiritual beliefs affects mental health. Harvard researchers had examined religious involvement within a data set of approximately 5,000 people collected over an extensive period, with controls for socio-demographic characteristics and maternal health.

The result? Children or teens who reported attending a religious service at least once per week scored higher on psychological well-being measurements and had lower risks of mental illness. Weekly attendance was associated with higher rates of volunteering, a sense of mission, forgiveness, and lower probabilities of drug use and early sexual initiation. Pity then that the U.S. has seen a 20% decrease in attendance at formal religious services in the past 20 years, according to a Gallup report earlier this year. In 2018 the American Family Survey showed that nearly half of adults under 30 do not identify with any religion.

Nihilism (the rejection of all religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless) is fertilizer for anxiety and depression and being "realistic" is overrated. The belief in God — in a protective and guiding figure to rely on when times are tough — is one of the best kinds of support for kids in an increasingly pessimistic world. That's only one reason, from a purely mental-health perspective, to pass down a faith tradition.

I am often asked by parents, "How do I talk to my child about death if I don't believe in God or heaven?" My answer is always the same: "Lie". The idea that you simply die and turn to dust may work for some adults, but it doesn't help children. Belief in heaven helps them grapple with this tremendous and incomprehensible loss. In an age of broken families, distracted parents, school violence and nightmarish global-warming predictions, imagination plays a big part in children's ability to cope.

I also am frequently asked about how parents can instill gratitude and empathy in their children. These virtues are inherent in most religions. The concept of tikkun olam, or healing the world, is one of the pillars of my Jewish faith. In accordance with this belief, we expect our children to perform community service in our synagogue and in the community at large. As they grow older, young Jews take independent responsibility for this sacred activity. One of my sons cooks for our temple's homeless shelter. The other volunteers at a prison, while my daughter helps out at an animal shelter.

Such values can be found among countless other religious groups. It's rare to find a faith that doesn't encourage gratitude as an antidote to entitlement or empathy for anyone who needs nurturing. These are the building blocks of strong character. They are also protective against depression and anxiety.

In an individualistic, narcissistic and lonely society, religion provides children a rare opportunity for natural community. My rabbi always says that being Jewish is not only about ethnic identity

and bagels and lox: It's about community. The idea that hundreds of people can gather together and sing joyful prayers as a collective is a buffer against the emptiness of modern culture. It's more necessary than ever in a world where teens can have hundreds of virtual friends and few real ones, where parents are often too distracted physically or emotionally to soothe their children's distress.

Religion or spiritual practices can teach children mindfulness, a sense of physical and emotional presence necessary for mental health. No matter how active my children were when they were young, they knew when they entered our temple for services, they had to calm their bodies and relax their minds. Though they complained when they were kids, and still complain at times as adolescents, they have developed the ability to calm themselves when overwhelmed.

Today the U.S. is a competitive, scary and stressful place that idealizes perfectionism, materialism, selfishness and virtual rather than real human connection. Religion is the best bulwark against that kind of society. Spiritual belief and practice reinforce collective kindness, empathy, gratitude and real connection. Whether children choose to continue to practice as adults is something parents cannot control. But that spiritual or religious center will benefit them their entire lives.

<https://www.wsj.com>

Missionary Benedictine in Ecuador opened a baby drop-off box to reduce abortions

A group of religious sisters in Santo Domingo, Ecuador have installed the country's first baby drop-off box, as an alternative to abortion for mothers who find themselves unable to care for their newborns. The Missionary Benedictine inaugurated the country's first "Cradle of Life" baby drop-off box in Santo Domingo. The box is located in the exterior wall of their Happy Valley Home, a temporary shelter providing foster care for at-risk girls and adolescents.

The sisters will support babies left in the box for up to three months. If the mother wishes to come back for the baby, she can also receive support from the Happy Valley Home. If the mother does not return after three months, the baby will be given up for adoption.

Sister Carmela Ewa Pilarska, a member of the home's leadership team, said the project hopes to respond to cases of abandoned infants, such as those found occasionally in cardboard boxes or abandoned houses.

"We would like to be the voice for so many newborns who struggled to survive, and we're speaking up for those newborns who didn't have the same fate", she said at a presentation of the "Cradle of Life" project. Inside the drop-off box is a bassinet and a letter assuring mothers that their babies will be cared for with love and medical attention. "We don't know what happened in your life that you're making this decision, and we're not judging it", the letter says.

Women can leave their babies safely and anonymously in the box. Once the door to the box is closed from the outside, it cannot be reopened, thus ensuring the baby's safety. An alarm sounds inside the home, alerting the personnel of the baby's arrival. "After waiting a short interval to protect the anonymity of the person leaving the baby, the inner door is opened, the baby is retrieved and immediately given the necessary care", sister Pilarska explained.

"Every life is a gift. Mother Teresa of Kolkata said that children are like stars, there's never too many", she stressed.

The "Cradle for Life" initiative seeks to provide an alternative to abortions and follows in the footsteps of similar initiatives created in the United States and Europe. Notable efforts include Germany with 99 baby drop-off boxes, Poland with 45, the Czech Republic with 44, Hungary with 26 and Italy with eight. Such boxes are also present in Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, Malaysia and Japan, according to the Missionary Benedictine Sisters.

The Cradle for Life project for foundlings, which offers mothers an alternative to abortion, follows in the footsteps of similar initiatives in the United States and Europe. In particular, in Germany today there are already 99 reception centers for abandoned babies, in Poland there are 45, in the Czech Republic 44, in Hungary 26, in Italy 8. There are such centers, according to the Benedictine sisters, also in Belgium, Switzerland, Canada, Malaysia and Japan.

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com>



PROVERB

Truly a man of God

Once robbers came to a monastery of an elder and said to him:

"We want to take away everything that you have in your home".

He replied:

"If you want to take something, then take it".

They took whatever they could find and left. However, they did not think to find a pouch that was hidden. The elder, taking the pouch, hurried after the robbers, calling out to them:

"Men! Take what you have forgotten".

The robbers, astonished at the elder's words, brought back all his things to his home, repented and said to each other, "He is truly a man of God".

<https://pritchi.ru>

YOUR LETTERS

Thank you for your publications

Dear brother Igor, sister Irina and all those who are involved in publishing the newspaper "Prisoner". Blessed by the Lord and beloved by us, I sincerely thank you for publishing the poems that reflect my state of mind. Thanksgiving and praise to the One who inspired and blessed me to write them down for the glory of God! The Lord, using the Prisoner and your work, continues to enrich me with His friends, thanks to whom my spirit and faith grow stronger. Therefore, my soul burns and rejoices, glorifying its Savior, who prepares with Himself for his worker and intercedes for His work to be done! Last year I became a grandfather; the Lord blessed me with the birth of a granddaughter, who was named Mashenka! This is one of the two names I've dreamed of! When my children told me what they had named my granddaughter, the Lord immediately reminded me of the scripture that says, ...*whatever you ask for in prayer,*

believe that you will receive it and it will be for yours (Mark 11:24). Therefore, tears of joy and thanksgiving to the Lord flowed in me like a river. Glory and Praise to our Savior! All the miracles that the Lord began in Cana of Galilee (John 2:11) and which He continues to perform in my life through His faithful children, simply cannot be described!

I am sending you several new poems, in which are just a part of my indescribable gratitude to the Lord and to all of you, dear brothers and sisters! May our faith, based on the victory of Christ at Calvary, strengthen us, motivating us to do great things in this last time! If He has overcome, then we will overcome with Him. Bless you! And may the Lord bless you! With gratitude and love in Christ Jesus, your brother.



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three messages of Joseph, three denials of Peter, three questions of Pontius Pilate, seven parables about the Kingdom in Matt. 13, sevenfold woe to you Pharisees and scribes in Matt. 23. A good example of this is the genealogy of Jesus, with which the gospel begins. The purpose of the genealogy is to prove that Jesus is the son of David. In Hebraic there are no numbers, they are symbolized by letters. In addition, Hebraic has no signs (letters) for vowels. David in Hebraic will be, accordingly, 'Dvd'. If this is taken as numbers and not as letters, their sum is fourteen. Genealogy of Jesus consists of three groups of names, each of which has fourteen names. Matthew does his best to arrange the teachings of Jesus so that people can assimilate and remember it. Every teacher should be grateful to Matthew, because what he wrote is, first of all, the gospel for teaching the people.

The gospel of Matthew has one more feature: the dominant thought of Jesus the King. The author writes this gospel to show the royal lineage of Jesus. The genealogy must prove from the beginning that Jesus is the son of King David (Matt. 1:1-17). This title — Son of David — is used in the gospel of Matthew more often than in any other gospel (Matt. 15:22; 21:9, 15). The Magi came to see the King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is a deliberately dramatized declaration by Jesus of His rights as King (Matt. 21:1-11). Before Pontius Pilate, Jesus consciously assumes the royal title (Matt. 27:11). Even on the cross over His head, even thought for mockery, there is also a royal title (Matt. 27:37). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes the law, and then refutes it with royal words: *But I say to you...* (Matt. 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). Jesus declares: *All authority has been given to Me...* (Matt. 28:18). In the gospel of Matthew, we see Jesus the Man, born to be King. Jesus walks through the pages of the gospel of Matthew as if dressed in royal purple and gold".

Matthew's work was not in vain. Millions of people owe to him their salvation, because they read his gospel or heard a sermon on his text. And there is no greater joy in the world than to contribute to the eternal salvation of man.

We are not given to be the authors of the gospel, but it is in our power to spread it first of all by the example of our life: ...*clearly you are an epistle of Christ (2 Cor. 3:3)*, and then — our testimony. And of special importance before God is caring for the needy: the sick, the hungry, the homeless, the prisoners. In the eyes of God, he will be appreciated no less than the work of a preacher and pastor. One day a ninety-year-old woman turned to me — weak, almost blind and deaf. She was oppressed by a useless existence: "It would be better if I had died! I cannot do anything and became a burden for my relatives!" In response, I said: "Your relatives should bow down to you at your feet, because thanks to you they are earning themselves a heavenly reward. The Lord said: ...*inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me (Matt. 25:40)*. Their reward would not have been so great without you! The church also needs your prayers. You are not as busy as working believers and you can devote more time to prayer. Don't think that you are living in vain. Such thoughts are not from God!" Grandma cheered up and did not seek advice again. Soon the Lord called her to eternity.

What a joy it is to know that the Lord does not want our vegetation. Who would have remembered Matthew if he had said in response to Christ's call: "I am good as it is: well fed, dressed, shod, I have a house and plenty of money. And what will this Galilean preacher who has not a penny offer me?" But Matthew followed Christ. To this day, people remember him, and the gospel written by him will bring great blessing to humanity until the end of earthly history. And if you, dear friend, become a disciple of Jesus, your name will not sink into oblivion. God will know you, and this is the most important thing!

Viktor RYAGUZOV,
<http://ryagusov.ru>

Can demons receive salvation?

The answer to the question is: of course not! Let us explain why.

First, it is necessary to refer to the scripture mentioned in the question, read it in context and determine what was being discussed.

James 2:14-26 — *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed", but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds". Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness", and he was called God's friend. You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

The context of this verse is that dead faith cannot save anyone. It is not enough just to believe in the existence of God. Real, living faith manifests itself in deeds of faith, and not only in words.

Jesus said in this regard in **Matthew 7:21-23**: *Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord", will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"* and also, in **Luke 6:46**: *Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord", and do not do what I say?*

So, proceeding from the context, Jesus does not at all say that demons have a chance of salvation, but, on the contrary, He says that if our faith is like the demonic — dead — faith, then we, like demons, will not receive salvation even if we believe in the existence of God.

Secondly, you need to find out who is destined for salvation. The Bible teaches that in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, one must be born of water and the Spirit: **John 3:5** — *Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit".*

To be born of water means physical birth: *Flesh gives birth to flesh... (John 3:6a).*

To be born of the Spirit means to be spiritually born from the Holy Spirit: *...but the spirit gives birth to spirit (John 3:6b).*

Thus, only those who were first born of the flesh and then received a spiritual birth (being born again) are destined for salvation. Now let's think, who are they who are first born of the flesh, and then of the Spirit? It's about people! Demons, although they believe in God, do not possess a body (flesh and blood). This means that they are not meant to be saved and salvation is not meant for them. The only thing that God has prepared for them is a lake of fire: **Matthew 25:41** — *Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels".*

Thirdly, the Bible teaches that after a person's death, judgment awaits: *Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment... (Hebrews 9:27).*

The decision of the court will depend on what choice the person made during his lifetime: he believed in Jesus Christ or refused God's saving sacrifice: *Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).*

We know from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (**Luke 16:19-31**) that no one can go from heaven to hell and from hell to heaven, and after death nothing can be changed. Thus, a person has a chance to receive salvation only while they are alive. And when they die, nothing can be changed.

The Bible says that in the end, all of creation will bow down before the name of Jesus: *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).*

Even non-believers after death will see God and believe in Him, as well as worship Him (**Revelation 5:13-14**), but it will be too late... The demons are in the same situation now. They know about God; they believe in Him. But they cannot be saved because they have already missed their chance.

Dear friend, how did you live your life on earth? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your God and Savior? If not, what are you waiting for? Tomorrow may never come.

Where does the soul go if a person dies in a fire?

There are only two places where souls go after the death of the body: hell, or heaven.

People who are reconciled with God through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ go to heaven. The rest go to hell. It makes no difference exactly how a person died or dies. It makes no difference to a person's soul how the body perished, because after death — with the resurrection of the dead — the Lord will give everyone a new incorruptible body.

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

QUESTION AND ANSWER



believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (John 3:18).

PLATO

I took this pseudonym for a reason. For all my life I have been paying for my sins of childhood, and young adulthood. It happens that the consequences come immediately. But more often after years, when you see that your apple tree, planted during this period of life, does not bloom and does not bear good fruits but with a fragrant aftertaste of your works. Then you understand that, having planted a fruit tree, you did not grow it, did not care for it, did not water it, but slowly by your inaction you killed it. So, looking back into the past, you see a withered, perished garden... This is payment for your sins, for a life that has burned out like a match in vain. Who pays? The one who has not sowed and plowed, who has not grown. And if they sowed, then later they trample the good that was sowed. It is clear that often a person sins blindly, unconsciously, not knowing what they are doing. The time will come — when you will have to pay! It often happens that the price is your life. Only the Highest can change something in your life! But even when He cleans you and brings you into the light, you will still see bills from your past that you still have to pay. And although the Lord abolished "an eye for an eye", "a tooth for a tooth", He did not abolish the work of the soul, heart, remorse. That is why I took this pseudonym. My payment price is the destruction of the past. Tens of years of prison dungeons and the wretched pain and emptiness in my heart. Forgive me Lord, for all my grave sins! Forgive me, friends, family and all people!

Андрей БАРЫГИН,
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PROVERB

USE NOW

"Holy father", the newcomer said to the priest, "my heart is filled with love for the world, and it is cleansed of the temptations of the devil. What's the next step?"

The priest asked the disciple to go with him to a sick man who needed a confession. After the priest consoled the family, he noticed a chest in the corner of the room.

"What's in this chest?" he asked.

"Clothes my uncle never wore", his niece said. "He always thought he needed some special reason to put these things on, and as a result, they rot in the chest".

"Remember the chest", the priest said to the disciple when they left. "If you have treasures in your heart, use them right now. Otherwise, they will rot".

<https://pritchi.ru>



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.

Hope of Freedom
P.O. Box 4053
Everett, WA 98208

Hope of Freedom

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

MY DONATION:

For prison ministry For the publication of this newsletter (Prisoner)

Amount: _____
Name: _____ Phone: _____
Address: _____

Questions:
Peter: (425) 346-4945, petyawa@gmail.com
Dasha: (206) 604-4594, dasha1@uw.edu

You may also donate online through PayPal at our website www.hopeoffreedom.org

We are now a federally-recognized 501(c)3 organization, so you can deduct your donations to us from your taxes!

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!"



PRISONER

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God bless you all!

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