



When John, an oiler, joined a ship for his next contract, he expected that it would be similar to the others he had experienced. However, the adventures he had to face changed his whole life. Although already a religious man, John got to know Jesus in a very personal way.

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Volker Lamaack

The Prison at Sea

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How often John, a sailor, had thought that life on board can be compared to being in prison.



Jesus used fourteen adventures to lead John to an inner freedom and a fundamental change in his life.

Seamen's Christian Friend Society Edition 1

Volker Lamaack

**The Prison at Sea**

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## Acknowledgments

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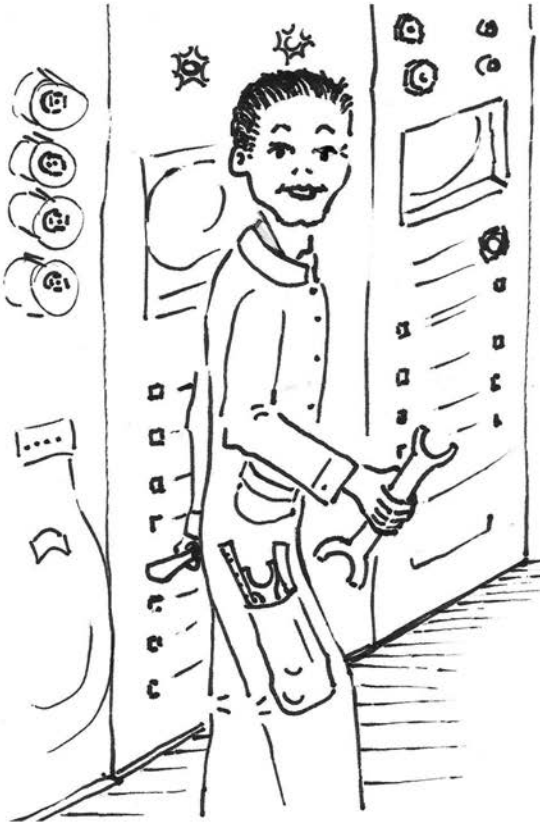




## THE PRISON AT SEA

How often John, a sailor, had thought that life on board can be compared to being in prison.

Jesus used fourteen adventures to lead John to an inner freedom and a fundamental change in his life.



Jesus said: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free."

Luke 4:18-19



# The Storm

## *First Adventure*

*“To all who did receive Jesus, to those who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God.”*

John 1:12

**JOHN** had been only three days on board. His contract would last almost a year. Even though he had been going to sea for about nine years, and knew that he would spend most of his lifetime far from home, the beginnings of his contracts were always difficult times. Remembering the tears of his wife and little son at his departure, his eyes became wet again.

The ship is like a prison, he thought. Separated from his family he would have to bear many months of nothing but working, eating and sleeping. The vessel on which he found himself spent only short periods in port, which meant very few opportunities to go ashore. A neighbour of his had spent ten months in prison for theft, and during that time had seen his wife and children once a week; but, John thought sadly, his contract was to last eleven months and he would not see his family at all. His job made him really a prisoner.

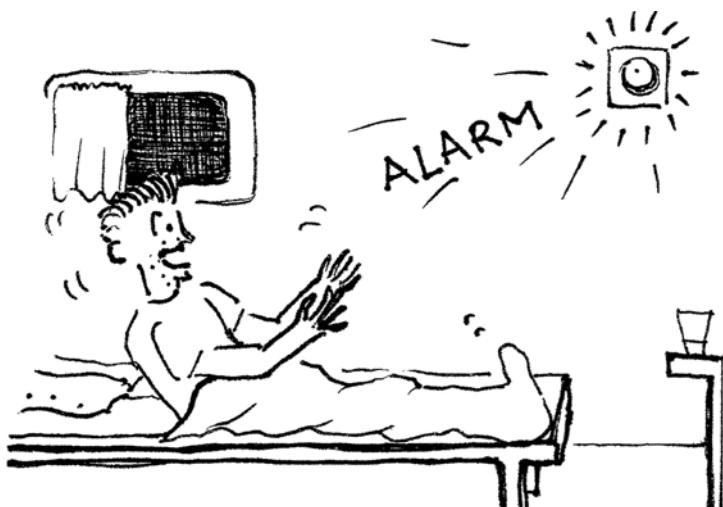
He worked as an oiler in the engine room. His watch ran from midnight till six in the morning. It was already nine o'clock and he tried to sleep a little, but could not rest at all. A violent storm had been forecast and already waves were throwing the ship to and fro.

He switched on the light to read. Suddenly the vessel vibrated heavily then the main engine fell silent. Shortly after, the alarm sounded. He dressed quickly and hurried to the engine room. If the main machinery had failed in this weather! – a terrible thought; he almost panicked. The ship's violent movement in the heavy seas made it difficult to keep his balance and avoid a fall.

In the engine room, he heard the chief engineer shouting commands. The second and third engineers were working energetically while James, the wiper, held a lamp for them. John saw panic in their eyes. In such heavy weather the ship could not remain long disabled without, in the worst case, risk of sinking. He didn't want to die; and besides he was not yet ready; there were things in his life of which he felt God had not approved.

He wanted to help, but got in the way and was pushed aside. After about forty-five minutes, which seemed like hours, the main engine suddenly started again, to everyone's great relief. John saw Jeff the fitter close his eyes and move his lips, surely praying.

Next day, he was alone in the mess-room when Jeff entered; an experienced seaman, he was about sixty years of age. Being new on board, John did not know him well but had noticed that he was a friendly man and probably religious, for the day before, in his cabin, John had seen him reading a Bible.



**Jeff:** Hi John, how are you doing? Yesterday the situation was dramatic, right?

**John:** Yes indeed, something I have never experienced. If the engineers had not solved the problem – unthinkable!

**Jeff:** Were you afraid?

**John:** Honestly – yes. Not you?

**Jeff:** Of course! After all, I have a family that needs me. On the other hand, I know where I am going!

**John:** How do you mean?

**Jeff:** Well, I know I will be with Jesus!

**John:** You know that? I always thought that no one could be sure. After all, it is God's decision – nobody is perfect.

**Jeff:** True, no one is sinless. If only sinless people are going to heaven, then we have no chance. However, isn't it great that not the fault-

less will be saved, but those whose sins have been forgiven? Beside of this, nobody is sinless.

**John:** Well, I pray every night that God forgives me my sins.

**Jeff:** If you do that, do you mean it seriously or is it just routine?

**John:** No, no, I mean this very seriously! I definitely want to go to heaven!

**Jeff:** If you confess your sin to God, don't you think that he forgives you?

**John:** Well, I think so, but if I sin again, how can I be sure that I am really saved?

**Jeff:** Listen John, I'll try to explain. God knows that you are not able to live a sinless life. However, Jesus died for your sins. Moreover, not only for the sins of the past and the present. No, his grace also counts for your future sins.

**John:** Sure? This seems to be too easy. If all sins will be forgiven anyway, then it doesn't matter at all, how we behave.

**Jeff:** No that isn't true. God's condition for forgiveness is that we ask it honestly, although whoever does so will continue sinning, because no one is perfect. However, he will not play with God's grace. There are some great verses in the Word of God. I have my Bible here. Please read 1 John 2:1-2:

**John:** *"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

**Jeff:** Look, here we find both: On the one hand, the apostle says that we should not sin. Of course, God wants us to keep his commandments. On the other hand, we read that God knows that we cannot present a perfect life to him. Here it is written: *"... if anybody does sin ..."* The Lord knows that it will happen again and again and he has a solution for such cases!

**John:** What?

**Jeff:** What does the text say? In these cases, Jesus speaks – he intercedes for us. We can say that he is our advocate with the Father. In fact, the devil accuses us, but Jesus is our lawyer. Whose words have more weight in the eyes of God?

**John:** The words Jesus speaks?

**Jeff:** Yes! Listen, you just read *"he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

Now, "atoning sacrifice" means that by giving his life, he took the penalty for our sins. He has taken your personal sins upon his own shoulders. Do you know when that happened?

**John:** When he was crucified – on Good Friday?

**Jeff:** Sure! Just try to see it this way: it would make no sense for Jesus to suffer death if it were not certain that by doing so all our sins would be finally forgiven.

**John:** You are right! The price Christ paid would have been much too high!

**Jeff:** Exactly! And God could have paid no higher price than to give his son Jesus for us. It was so high that it is sufficient for all our sins.

**John:** Does it mean that now I will definitely go to heaven?

**Jeff:** Well, the Bible says that we need first to become members of God's family. Do you know what that means?

**John:** Not really.

**Jeff:** All right – please, from my Bible read John 1:12.

**John:** *“All who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*

**Jeff:** Who can become a child of God?

**John:** It says here that we have to believe in Jesus and have to receive him.

**Jeff:** Correct! First, we have to believe in our Saviour!

**John:** But I do already!

**Jeff:** Wait. First, we must be clear about what the Bible means. It is not enough to believe in the existence of Jesus. It is not even enough to believe without question that he died for our sins. The best way to explain the word “believe” is to say that we should put our trust in him. I trust the Bible's word that Jesus died around two thousand years ago for my personal sins. In other words, I am not assuming that he just died, but I deeply trust that he did so for me.

**John:** But isn't it important to follow God's commandments if we are to go to heaven? Isn't it enough simply to believe?

**Jeff:** Sure, God wants us to keep his commandments. However, even the best person in the world isn't good enough. Let's put it this way: Always try to obey God, but don't think you are good enough to redeem or save yourself. Nobody can do it!

**John:** Maybe it is to be understood that both come together: first, Jesus died for our sins, and second, we must struggle to be good people.

**Jeff:** You mean that we are saved 50% by Jesus and 50% by our efforts to keep the Ten Commandments?

**John:** Something like that.

**Jeff:** It wouldn't work, because the Bible says in James 2:10 that only one sin would be too much.

**John:** One sin too much? So who can go to heaven?

**Jeff:** The point is that it is not 50/50 between Jesus and ourselves. It is 100% Jesus! He alone saves us!

**John:** Then we cannot do anything?

**Jeff:** True, except for believing in Jesus. That is, by trusting and inviting him into our lives.

**John:** Invite! – I think he is already here.

**Jeff:** Yes, he is everywhere! Nevertheless, he challenges us to decide either to manage our lives ourselves, or hand them over to him.

**John:** I will gladly invite him. How do I do it?

**Jeff:** Very simple. Just be sincere. I'll give you an example: If you are in your cabin and I knock, then you have two options. You either open the door and invite me to enter, or not. It is your decision.

**John:** Sure, but how can I do that with Jesus?

**Jeff:** Read Revelation 3:20.

**John:** Jesus said: *"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."*<sup>1</sup>

Is it so easy?

**Jeff:** Yes, it is! However, it is important that you honestly and wholeheartedly believe!

**John:** Is it true that it does not matter how good we are?

**Jeff:** Look, in Ephesians 2:8-9 it's clear: *"God's grace has saved you because of your faith in Christ. Your salvation doesn't come from anything you do. It is God's gift. It is not based on anything you have done. No one can be proud about earning it."*

After you have invited Jesus into your life, he will begin to change you gradually. You will even enjoy it, to obey him. Because you love Jesus, you will not play with his grace by constantly sinning intentionally. Nevertheless, you will depend until the end of your life on the knowledge that Jesus forgives. Finally, you are just a human and not perfect.

**John:** Then I can be sure of going to heaven?

**Jeff:** Definitely! Many Bible verses promise it. Read, for example, John 5:24.

**John:** Jesus said: *"What I'm about to tell you is true. Anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. They will not be judged. They have crossed over from death to life."*

Amazing! I had never really understood it. I always thought that only good people have a chance of going to heaven.

**Jeff:** No, anyone who is sincere will be saved. Shall I summarize the main points briefly?



**John:** Yes, sure!

**Jeff:** Right!

- ✓ Every human being is a sinner and therefore separated from God. Because God is holy, we are all liable to be judged.
- ✓ Nobody can save himself by trying to be good.
- ✓ Some believe that both save us together: first, Jesus's death on the cross and, second, by doing good things. This is not true. Jesus gave his life for our sins. That alone is what counts.
- ✓ To observe God's commandments is of course very important. Nevertheless, we remain all our lives dependent on the fact that the Lord forgives us.
- ✓ What matters is to believe in Jesus. To be born to a Christian background or to be traditionally religious is not enough. It is important that you trust with all your heart in the knowledge that the Lord died and rose for your salvation.
- ✓ To receive salvation, you have to turn to Jesus. You must confess your faults and be sorry for your sins.
- ✓ Moreover, it is important to invite him into your life, so that you become a child of God. Then you will belong forever to his family.
- ✓ It is also important to allow Jesus to be your Boss from now on. On a ship the captain has the final say; in your life, Jesus has to be the captain.
- ✓ Obeying Jesus should be as a result of your salvation and not its cause! The only reason for Jesus's sacrifice on the cross was your salvation.
- ✓ If you are child of God, you will surely go to heaven. Jesus has been punished for your sins. No longer is any judgement waiting for you.

**John:** Jeff, I believe this with all my heart! What shall I do now?

**Jeff:** Tell Jesus anything you want. He hears you.

**John:** What exactly am I supposed to tell him?

**Jeff:** Here in my Bible I have a prayer on a piece of paper. It might help. Read it first and then aloud as a prayer if you really wish to.

After a few minutes, John started to pray:

Dear God, I am coming to you. I have lived for a long time without you. I have been in control of my life, and have done many things which were not according to how you would have liked it. I am guilty!<sup>2</sup> I am sorry for them. Please forgive me.

I ask you to set me free from the bondage of sin and the devil. I want to belong to you alone.

Dear Lord Jesus, I am counting on you. Thank you that you have given your life for my sins. Please come into my heart through your Holy Spirit.

I want to become God's child. I want you to be with me always.

I ask you to be my guide from now on. Please go before me, and show me the way I should go.

Change me where you think I need to be changed. I am willing to obey you.

Thank you for everything you have done for me. Glory, praise and worship are to you alone. Amen!

Dear Sailor,

you also can speak to God with this prayer. It is important that you do so honestly, because by it you make a decision that will change your whole life. Perhaps it would be useful to read the conversation between Jeff and John again, and think about it. Appendix 1 at the end of the book will again talk about salvation, and you may take this step later, after you have read it.

*To all who did receive Jesus, to those who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God.*

John 1:12



# The unfriendly 2nd Engineer

## Second Adventure

Jesus said: *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.”*  
John 15:13-14

It was now four weeks since John had invited Jesus into his life. What a difference it had made! His friend Jeff had shown him some verses that he had underlined in his Bible.

To be a child of God:

*“All who did receive Jesus, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”*  
(John 1:12)

All sins are forgiven:

*“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*  
(1 John 1:9)

Eternal life is guaranteed:

*“This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”*  
(1 John 5:11-13)

There is no more condemnation:

*“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”*  
(Romans 8:1)

Jesus is always with us:

Jesus said: *“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*  
(Matthew 28:20)

Nothing more can separate him from God’s love:

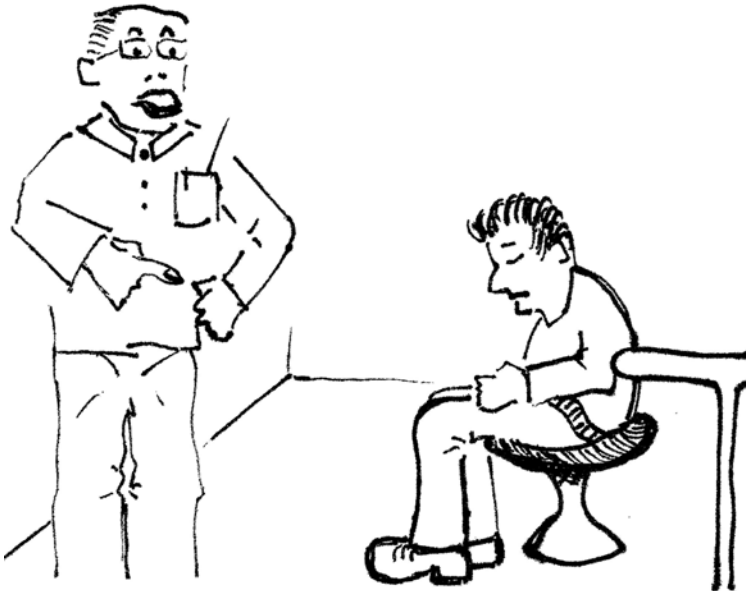
*“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*  
(Romans 8:38-39)

God will listen to our prayers and answer them according to his will:

*"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us - whatever we ask - we know that we have what we asked of him."* (1 John 5:14-15)

John had thought that his ship was like a prison on the sea. That was certainly still true. However, he felt much freer now. He knew it was because he belonged to Jesus. Christ had set him free from his sins. Besides, he had freed him from the fear of being judged and condemned. He had not known this sense of freedom before. What a big difference! He was so grateful to Jesus.

However, recently he had not felt so happy. Jayson, the 2nd Engineer, was often rude to him. Three days ago, when John had made a small mistake, Jayson shouted at him: "You fool ... you are good for nothing ... you are useless ... you are not worth anything; without you everything would work out better."



John did not know why Jayson had been so hard on him. It had reminded him of his childhood. He drank too much and as a result would become unpredictable. Sometimes, when John met him on the street, he did not even greet him. He knew that his father didn't care about his wellbeing.

There was never any praise even if he had worked hard and tried his best to please. As a little boy how much he had longed to be loved by his father. Instead, he had repeatedly called him “fool” – just as Jayson had done now.

His mother had been overburdened with the upbringing of her four children. As the eldest, John had had to take a lot of responsibility for the three younger ones. Rarely could he meet with his friends. Yet he got hardly any recognition from his mother. When she came home from work, she was usually tired and impatient at even small things. How many times had he been sad that his troubles were seldom noticed. Even minor mistakes often caused him much distress. And now he was experiencing exactly the same thing with Jayson.

His desire had been to attend high school and college. As an engineer, he could have earned a lot of money, and recognition and respect besides. However, that would remain a dream forever.

This feeling of not being loved, being considered not very intelligent, even seemingly worthless, somehow became part of his whole life. It was always there, even though he was now married to a good woman and had a son. As a sailor he earned at least more money than most of his friends at home, yet he could not free himself from these negative feelings. They belonged to him as much as the nose on his face.

It was Sunday afternoon and, like many of his colleagues, he was off duty. Suddenly someone knocked at his door. Outside stood Jeff, his new friend.

**John:** Come in!

**Jeff:** Hi John, how are you doing?

**John:** Honestly speaking – not so well.

**Jeff:** Yes, I can see it in you. Two weeks ago, you looked much more cheerful. Now something seemingly burdens you.

John told Jeff how Jayson’s behaviour reminded him of his childhood. He shared with him all his memories of his father and mother and even the feelings of worthlessness he had had ever since.

**Jeff:** John, these negative emotions can be very persistent. Our early experiences in life shape us strongly.

**John:** Then I will probably never get rid of my feelings?

**Jeff:** Not necessarily. It is important, how you think of yourself, because little by little our thoughts can change our feelings.

**John:** How do you mean?

**Jeff:** One question: How do you see yourself? Are you really a useless person?

**John:** Well, maybe, not completely useless. However, I am not a very special one.

**Jeff:** Do you think that you are worthless, as you have heard many times from your father and now from the engineer?

**John:** Probably nobody is worthless. However, I still believe that I don't matter so much.

**Jeff:** Do you consider yourself lovable?

**John:** Lovable! – a difficult question. Sometimes I have the feeling that I can't really love and accept myself.

**Jeff:** John, what do you mean? Who can tell whether or not a person is useless, worthless and unlovable?

**John:** I don't know. But my parents and some of my teachers quite often spoke of me negatively; and now Jayson.

**Jeff:** Did they have the right to do so?

**John:** They just did it – even repeatedly.

**Jeff:** That's right, people judge other people. The only question is whether they have the right to do so and whether their judgment is true at all.

**John:** So who can stop them?

**Jeff:** It's not possible. Nevertheless, the question is whether one believes them or not. Do you think it makes sense to believe lies?

**John:** Lies! – of course not! Are you sure that their judgments are wrong?

**Jeff:** They probably don't realize how much they burden you with those statements. Nevertheless, they are not true!

**John:** How do you know?

**Jeff:** Just think. How could I know?

**John:** Do you mean through the Bible?

**Jeff:** Sure – of course! God thinks very differently about you!

**John:** I can't imagine or feel it.

**Jeff:** You feel differently because you have been wrongly taught about people. It's important to know that it is not what people say, or even what you feel. Feelings can deceive us as well.

**John:** Yes, but who is able to change his feelings?

**Jeff:** People have told you wrong things, both by their words and by their behaviour. Now you have believed these lies for too long. A small child doesn't understand, but because you still believe the lies as an adult, your thinking is wrong. And because of it you feel bad.

**John:** Then we should trust neither our fellows nor our thoughts, nor our feelings?

**Jeff:** It all depends on what is true and what false. Only God can decide what is true, no one else!

**John:** And what is the truth?

**Jeff:** I will give you an example. You've said that you sometimes even do not think you're lovable. Let's look in the Bible. Here we find the truth about whether you're lovable or not. We have looked at this verse before, but read again John 3:16:

**John:** *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

**Jeff:** God loves us so much that he gave Jesus for each of us. For you as well!

**John:** I can't imagine it.

**Jeff:** But it is true, because the Bible never lies. Now it depends on whether you believe your fellows, false thoughts, feelings or God.

**John:** I have never seen it this way.

**Jeff:** We have to struggle every day with lies, which we can believe or not. Anyone familiar with the Bible learns gradually to distinguish lies from the truth. Here is a wonderful statement about love. Please read Jeremiah 31:3:

**John:** God said: *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness."*

**Jeff:** Again can you ask the question: Who speaks the truth – God, or any human? In your early childhood, you experienced only a little love from close relatives. This was very hard to bear and can burden your whole life. However, it doesn't have to be the case. It is indeed true that the love of people is important to us. Nevertheless, more important is that God always loves you.

**John:** Now I understand what you mean.

**Jeff:** One question: Who is more important, the chief engineer, or an oiler, just like you?

**John:** Of course, the chief engineer. That is obvious.

**Jeff:** Yes, it is true on the one hand, because the chief engineer carries more responsibility than you do. However, does he therefore have a greater value than you have?

**John:** I'm not sure.

**Jeff:** The Bible answers the question. In God's eyes, the value of a human being doesn't depend on his position. You, John, are very important and valuable, because you're a creation of God, and now even his child.

**John:** Probably you're right.



**Jeff:** That's for sure! Another question: Do you love your little son and is he precious in your eyes?

**John:** Silly question – of course!

**Jeff:** I do not understand that. Your son is small, has no education, no profession, no position in society and earns no money. For many activities, he needs help and hasn't done anything special in life yet. Why do you love him? Why is he so important and valuable to you?

**John:** Well, just because he is my son. That is reason enough to love him. He doesn't need to do or possess anything.

**Jeff:** John, this is exactly how God behaves. He loves you because he has created you. That is enough to be very precious in his eyes. Moreover, he has given you exactly the gifts you need.

**John:** But other people are more talented.

**Jeff:** Maybe that's true. However, God gives people their value and dignity, regardless of their abilities.

**John:** How is it with money or possessions? Others have much more than I will ever have.

**Jeff:** I am sure you can find the answer for yourself.

**John:** You are right! Money and possessions have nothing to do with a human being's value.

**Jeff:** Neither profession, nor position in a company, nor talents, nor what one has done, nor possessions have anything to do with the value and dignity of a human being. Please read Genesis 1:27:

**John:** *"God created mankind in his own image; in the image of God, he created them."*

**Jeff:** We humans are naturally not as God is. Nevertheless, we are created in his image. That's why everyone has the dignity that God gave him.

For this, one does not need to be or do anything special. Beside this, whoever is a child of God has a particularly close relationship with him. It's a close father-child relationship. These two facts determine who you are. They make up your identity.

**John:** Identity?

**Jeff:** Exactly!

**John:** I do not understand yet.

**Jeff:** OK, then I ask you the following question: Who are you?

**John:** You know that – I'm John.

**Jeff:** No, that's just your name. Who are you?

**John:** I'm an oiler.

**Jeff:** No, that's only your position. Who are you?

**John:** Do you mean the country I come from?

**Jeff:** No, that's your nationality. Who are you?

**John:** What do you want me to say? My religion?

**Jeff:** You could tell me of many more things that affect you as a person, but none of them define you. However, there are three facts which really count and make up who you are:

- ✓ You are a creation of God.
- ✓ You are created in God's image.
- ✓ You are even a child of God and belong to his family. These facts identify you.<sup>3</sup>

**John:** Slowly I start to understand.

**Jeff:** Do you remember what we talked about earlier? We have discovered that we often feel bad because we think wrong. Moreover, we think wrongly, because we believe lies or half-truths. When we think correctly, as with the truth of the Bible, slowly our feelings will change positively. Remember, in the eyes of God the beggar on the street is worth just as much as our country's president.

**John:** Jeff, this has helped me a lot. Next time Jayson speaks badly about me, I will not believe him.

**Jeff:** Right! Probably you will not succeed at first, and sometimes you may fall back into the old way of thinking. However, you are on the right track. In summary, we can say everyone longs for at least four things:

- ✓ to be loved,
- ✓ to be considered being important or significant,
- ✓ to be secure or safe,
- ✓ and to belong to someone.<sup>4</sup>

For those four human needs, God has a wonderful answer:

- ✓ God loves us. In John 16:27 Jesus said:  
*"The Father Himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God."*
- ✓ Everyone has an infinitely high value. That is the case because we are created in God's image. In Romans 8:31-32 we read that God is on our side. He gave his best – Jesus – for us.  
*"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"*
- ✓ Safety and security we get when we entrust our lives to Jesus. This does not mean that nothing could happen to us. However, we are always in his hands. In John 10:28-29 it is even written that children of God are both in the hands of Jesus and in the hand of the Father. This means double security:

Jesus said: *"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."*

- ✓ We need to know to whom we belong. As children of God, we belong to the Father and to Jesus, who laid down his life for us. This is already the case here on earth. Moreover, we have the promise that we will belong to him after death as well. Jesus actually ensures that for each of us an apartment is prepared in heaven. To his disciples he once said:

*"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."* John 14:2-3.

Jesus has promised us that we are his friends. Isn't it great?

Jesus said: *"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command."*

John 15:13-14

# Locked in the repair shop

## *Third Adventure*

*“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.  
Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves  
be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”*

Galatians 5:1

John had received an order from the chief engineer to fix a defective part in the repair shop, a job which could take two to three hours.

He began his work cheerfully, listening to loud music on his headphones. Many thoughts went through his mind. How fortunate that God had brought him to this ship, where he'd got to know Jeff. His fitter was a man unlike any he had met before. Not that he was without faults. A weakness was that he sometimes forgot appointments. For example, yesterday they had arranged to talk together, a meeting Jeff had totally forgotten. Nevertheless, conversations with him were always very helpful. Jeff patiently explained things from the Bible, and, John thought, the nicest experience is that I now belong to Jesus, together with Jeff.

- ✓ He had always believed in Jesus. But through the conversations with Jeff it had become clear what it meant to invite Jesus into his life.
- ✓ He had always thought that it was enough to believe everything in the Bible – just to assume that it was true. Now he knew that true belief meant to put trust fully in Jesus. To believe also meant to trust in the Bible's many promises.
- ✓ He'd always thought that he had a chance to be saved, if he only belonged to the right religion. Now he knew that no religion saves anyone, but only one person – Jesus.
- ✓ He'd always believed that no one could be sure of his salvation, since nobody is sinless. Now he knew that his salvation was certain because Jesus had died for his sins. The condition was that he put his trust in Jesus, repented his sins honestly, and became his disciple.
- ✓ He had always thought that both by believing in Jesus and by doing good deeds, he could earn eternal life. Now he knew that Je-

sus alone saves, and that good deeds just follow, after receiving salvation as a gift.



Finally, John finished his work and wanted to leave the repair shop. He switched off the music and tried to open the door, but found it was locked. Obviously, someone had shut him in by accident.

He began to knock and call, though he knew no one was around except for one person in the control-room, which was quite a distance away in the noisy engine-room. John shouted and knocked even louder, but nobody responded. It was now 21.00 and probably no one even missed him. They would assume that he was in his cabin. Had he to spend the whole night here in the repair shop?

He forced himself to remain calm and not to panic. It wasn't easy, because he felt very uncomfortable in locked rooms, certainly to do with the fact that his father used to shut him in a narrow dark room in order to punish him, often for hours, regardless of his screaming and crying.

Again it came to mind that the ship was like a prison, and now he was locked up in a much smaller space – just as in a real prison.

Maybe I should pray, John thought. If it is true that Jesus is everywhere, then he sees and hears me even now. In simple words, he asked Jesus to help him.

After a while, he took a look round the back of the repair shop. It was the first time he had had to fix something here, so he did not know the room. He found a lot of spare parts and tools, and became curious to

know what was behind some large metal plates. He pushed them aside and discovered a door. Nervously he turned the handle. What a relief – it opened. He was free.

He decided not to tell his colleagues anything. They would only laugh at him because he'd known nothing of the repair shop's second door. However, with Jeff he could talk things through, so the next day he went to tell him of his adventure.

**Jeff:** I can well understand that it was not nice for you to be in a locked room.

**John:** That's true! I've told you already of my father, who used to punish me by putting me into the cellar.

**Jeff:** You never forget such experiences.

**John:** You said the other day that Jesus sets us free. What does it mean? In what sense does he free us?

**Jeff:** Jesus wants to free us of many things. For instance from our sin.

**John:** I know. That was the reason he gave his life. When he forgives, we get rid of our sins and experience freedom.

**Jeff:** That's right. However, sin is not only like a burden he takes from us. It's also like a chain that keeps us in bondage. Just like a prisoner who is also chained. Nevertheless, Jesus can break it.

**John:** I have not yet fully understood. How does sin tie us up?

**Jeff:** Well, for example it keeps us in bondage to the devil. Satan is the one who first tempts us to sin. Once we have followed him and disobeyed God, we bind ourselves to Satan.

**John:** I always thought that we have the freedom to decide whether to sin or not.

**Jeff:** On one side, it is true. We always have the choice to obey God or follow the devil. On the other hand, the devil has an interest in keeping us in bondage. This might mean that we cannot escape a certain sin even though we wish to. Many possible negative habits can spoil our lives. Think about smoking, drinking too much alcohol, addiction to porno material ...

**John:** Does that have anything to do with the devil?

**Jeff:** We need to see that there is no neutral territory. We never belong only to ourselves. We are just human beings. Creatures cannot live and decide completely independently. Either we turn to Jesus or we stay under the devil's influence.

**John:** But I have allowed Jesus to come into my heart. Now I belong to him, don't I?

**Jeff:** Yes, that's right; you belong entirely to him.

**John:** And you told me that I am saved and will definitely go to heaven.

**Jeff:** That's also correct. God gave that promise in the Bible. You can fully trust in it.

**John:** But children of God are still able to sin. They are not yet perfect.

**Jeff:** Yes, that is true. We are not yet in heaven. Here on earth the devil can still influence us negatively. He may also try to rob us of the freedom we have through Jesus. He wants to prevent our realising who we are in him and what we have through him.

**John:** I don't understand.

**Jeff:** Yesterday, when you were in the repair room – were you free or locked in?

**John:** Actually, I was free, because the second door wasn't locked. It was unnecessary to spend two more hours in that room. I could have got out.

**Jeff:** That's right! But because you thought you were locked in, you behaved like a prisoner and not like a free man.

**John:** You think that God's children sometimes don't realize the freedom they have in Christ?

**Jeff:** Yes, it can happen to any of us. Even though we belong to God and are free, it is possible to slide back into the former way of thinking. One question: What does the Bible say about you? Are you still considered to be a sinner, in spite of the fact that you are now a child of God?

**John:** Yes, I am certainly still a sinner!

**Jeff:** That's true: you are still a sinner. Nevertheless, the Bible calls God's children saints and not primarily sinners.

**John:** Saints? Where in the Bible? I always thought that only the very best people are saints.

**Jeff:** Please open Romans 1 and read verse 7.

**John:** *"To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his saints."*<sup>5</sup>

**Jeff:** The apostle Paul wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome, and they were all called "holy people" or "saints". Now please also read Ephesians 1:1.

**John:** *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. To God's holy people [saints] in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus."*

**Jeff:** Here in Ephesus also, believers are called holy people.

**John:** How is that possible? Were they all extraordinary persons?

**Jeff:** I think they were ordinary Christians. In fact, in the Bible everyone who belongs to God is considered to be a holy person. This does not mean to be better than others, but simply as a result of their be-

longing to God. Because God is holy, he makes people who are united to him holy.

**John:** That is very interesting.

**Jeff:** Now read 1 Peter 2:9.

**John:** *"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*

**Jeff:** Please tell me, what is said about God's children? What are they?

**John:** They are:

- ✓ chosen
- ✓ a royal priesthood
- ✓ a holy nation
- ✓ God's special possession
- ✓ called out of darkness into his wonderful light.

**Jeff:** That's right.

**John:** I thought until now that as children of God only our sins are forgiven and that we have eternal life. However, here are a lot more things mentioned.

**Jeff:** That's right, but it's only one verse. There are many other promises that we can apply to ourselves. All of them have something to do with the idea of "freedom".

- ✓ To be chosen means freedom, because you don't belong to Satan any longer.
- ✓ To belong to a royal priesthood means freedom, because kings and priests are free people, not slaves.
- ✓ To be part of a group of holy people also means freedom. It's because they belong to God and not to Satan.
- ✓ Darkness scares and imprisons us. God's marvellous light gives us sight and allows us to enjoy freedom.

This does not mean that children of God are sinless. Until the ends of our lives, we have to depend on his forgiveness. Nevertheless, it is important that we recognize who and what we are in Christ. Perhaps one can put it like this: in the Bible God's children are not called sinners. However, they are considered holy people who are still able to sin.

**John:** What do you think about this idea? – A child of God who sees himself in the first place as a sinner is like someone who lies on the ground. But a child of God who sees himself as holy, even though he still sins, has a different perspective. He is like somebody who from time to time falls, but always gets up again.



**Jeff:** You've found a great expression. Someone who sees himself only as a sinner will go through life rather negatively. Someone who sees himself as sanctified through Jesus – even though he still sins at times – is much more grateful to Jesus.

**John:** However, could there be a danger that such a person fools himself just by believing positive things? After all, everyone knows that positive thinking brings success.

**Jeff:** Actually, positive thinking is always better than to constantly doubt yourself. But this is not the issue. What matters is that you believe the Bible's promises. It's about taking all the statements of the Bible seriously – both the commandment and the promises. To doubt the word of God is never helpful.

**John:** But sometimes people have doubts, don't they?

**Jeff:** Sure, anyone can find himself in a situation where doubts are stronger than his faith. In this case, you should not put pressure on people, but show understanding and encourage them.

**John:** That is true!

**Jeff:** Another point is that the many promises of the Bible should never make us proud. No child of God should consider himself better than others. Everything we are and have is by God's grace alone and not because of our own qualities. However, we should pay a lot of attention to the many encouragements of the Bible to be grateful and humble.

**John:** Are there more promises I should know in God's word?

**Jeff:** Oh yes, plenty. I have a whole list. You can take it and read them from time to time.

### Who am I through Jesus?

- ✓ *"I am the salt of the earth."* (Matthew 5:13)
- ✓ *"I am the light of the world."* (Matthew 5:14)
- ✓ *"I am a child of God."* (John 1:12)
- ✓ *"I am part of the true vine and appointed to bear fruit."* (John 15:5)
- ✓ *"I am Christ's friend."* (John 15:15)
- ✓ *"I am chosen to bear his fruit that remains."* (John 15:16)
- ✓ *"I am a slave of righteousness."* (Romans 6:18)
- ✓ *"I am enslaved to God."* (Romans 6:22)
- ✓ *"I am a son of God; God is spiritually my Father."* (Romans 8:14-15)
- ✓ *"I am sharing the inheritance with Christ."* (Romans 8:17)
- ✓ *"I am a temple – a dwelling place – of God. His Spirit and his life dwells in me."* (1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19)

- ✓ *"I am united to the Lord and am one spirit with him."* (1 Corinthians 6:17)
- ✓ *"I am a member of Christ's body."* (1 Corinthians 12:27 and Ephesians 5:30)
- ✓ *"I am a new creation."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- ✓ *"I am reconciled to God and am a minister of reconciliation."* (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)
- ✓ *"I am a son of God and one in Christ."* (Galatians 3:26 and 28)
- ✓ *"I am an heir of God since I am his son."* (Galatians 4:6-7)
- ✓ *"I am a saint or a holy person."* (Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2)
- ✓ *"I am God's workmanship - his handiwork - newly born in Christ to do his work."* (Ephesians 2:10)
- ✓ *"I am a fellow citizen with the rest of God's family."* (Ephesians 2:19)
- ✓ *"I am a prisoner of Christ."* (Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1)
- ✓ *"I am righteous and holy."* (Ephesians 4:24)
- ✓ *"I am a citizen of heaven, seated in heaven right now."* (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:6)
- ✓ *"I am hidden with Christ in God."* (Colossians 3:3)
- ✓ *"I am an expression of the life of Christ because he is my life."* (Colossians 3:4)
- ✓ *"I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loves."* (Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4)
- ✓ *"I am a son of light and not of darkness."* (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
- ✓ *"I am a holy partaker of a heavenly calling."* (Hebrews 3:1)
- ✓ *"I am a partaker of Christ; I share in his life."* (Hebrews 3:14)
- ✓ *"I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house."* (1 Peter 2:5)
- ✓ *"I am a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."* (1 Peter 2:9-10)
- ✓ *"I am a foreigners and stranger to this world in which I temporarily live."* (1 Peter 2:11)
- ✓ *"I am an enemy of the devil."* (1 Peter 5:8)
- ✓ *"I am a child of God and I will be like Christ when he returns."* (1 John 3:1-2)
- ✓ *"I am born of God, and the evil one - the devil - cannot touch me."* (1 John 5:18)
- ✓ *"By the grace of God, I am what I am."* (1 Corinthians 15:10)<sup>6</sup>

**John:** Really a surprising number of promises!

**Jeff:** That's true. There are probably many more. It is certainly a good thing to read this list aloud from time to time. It encourages and strengthens our faith.

**John:** And it helps us not to stay in a prison with open doors.

**Jeff:** Exactly! You've understood it very well! Children of God are indeed free people! Since the Apostle Paul wrote:

*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."*

Galatians 5:1

# Seven or eight bottles of beer

## Fourth Adventure

*"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,<sup>7</sup> and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*  
1 John 2:1-2

Jeff had advised John to tell his colleagues that he now lived with Jesus. "It is important to profess our faith and have courage to stand up for the Lord," Jeff explained. John followed the counsel of his friend. His colleagues' reactions varied. Two of them gave a quite positive response. Some did not seem particularly interested. Others smiled just a little ironically. Bill and Frank however, two of the AB's, from now on took every opportunity to provoke him.

One evening John sat alone in the crew mess-room. Some of his companions slept while others had gone to the seamen's club. Suddenly the door opened and Bill came in with Frank.

**Bill:** Come John, let's have fun together.

**John:** Well, I am tired. I want to go to bed soon.

**Bill:** Come on – life on board is boring. Let's enjoy the evening. Hi Frank, turn on the music.

**John:** I am not sure. Tomorrow I have to get up very early.

**Bill:** Oh boy – just one hour. We don't need to party all night. Frank, get us each a bottle of beer from the fridge.

**John:** I don't want any alcohol now.

**Bill:** Just one bottle! John – don't spoil our mood. Are you already so holy that not even a small bottle of beer is allowed?

**John:** I don't think one bottle is a problem as long you can control yourself.

**Bill:** That's exactly what I'm talking about. Just one bottle – no more. We are one crew on this ship. Nobody should exclude himself. We need to stick together. Or do you think you are better than we are?

**John:** No, no! Not at all!



Three hours later, John lay in his bed and felt dizzy. Had he drunk six or seven bottles? He could not remember. However, it was not just the alcohol. The talk had been quite dirty. Gradually the situation had got out of control. John felt guilty. He had honestly tried not to participate because he even guessed what they had in mind. However, Bill and Frank pushed him until he had finally given in. Next morning, as six crew-members sat together at breakfast Bill and Frank came in. "Good morning," Frank said, louder than necessary. "Last night we had a really good time together."

"Hi John, do you have a headache?" Bill asked with a dirty grin. "You should have seen him last night. Since becoming so religious, John tells us that only Jesus counts. But yesterday he drank until he could no longer count to three. Finally, we had to carry him to his cabin. You're a very special saint!" He shouted with laughter.

John said nothing. He felt bad and very much ashamed. But they were right. He had completely failed and spoiled everything. Certainly, he was no longer worthy of Jesus.

When Jeff left the mess-room a few minutes later he whispered to John: "Let's meet tonight in my cabin and talk about it." John nodded.

**John:** I tried not to join them; they forced me to drink just a bottle of beer.

**Jeff:** Sure! I know Bill and Frank from my previous ship. Actually, I didn't expect anything else of them. They are mockers and push others to join their evil behaviour.

**John:** I should have resisted them anyway.

**Jeff:** That's true. Nevertheless, we are still human – this means not perfect yet. Moreover, Jesus still loves you and is willing to forgive. Did you repent of the things that happened?

**John:** Yes, I did – at least three times this morning.

**Jeff:** Why three times?

**John:** Well – I don't know. I still feel guilty.

**Jeff:** Do you remember 1 John 1:9? Here's my Bible. Please read the verse.

**John:** *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*

**Jeff:** And Hebrews 8:12.

**John:** *"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

**Jeff:** How many times do you need to confess until Jesus forgives?

**John:** Probably only one?

**Jeff:** Yes, that's sufficient, if repentance comes from the heart. We've spoken already about the fact that confession is useless if it's just because of tradition. However, the Lord will never reject anyone who feels deeply sorry for his sin.

**John:** Thanks Jeff, I feel really relieved. Now I will try my very best to make sure this will never happen again.

**Jeff:** Wait! Certainly, you should avoid doing these things again. However, don't expect that you will always succeed.

**John:** But I cannot take sin lightly.

**Jeff:** That's true. In Romans 6:1-2 Paul writes:

*"Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?"*

Maybe later you would like to read the whole of Romans 6. It explains very well that we are not enslaved to sin any longer. We are free from it even though we are not perfect yet. Anyone who loves Jesus has a great desire to obey him.

**John:** I always thought that we have to obey Jesus because we fear the last judgment.

**Jeff:** True, someone who does not belong to Jesus should fear it. Often it is fear that brings us to the right conclusions. I'll give you an example: no-one likes surgical operations. Nevertheless, the fear of cancer will persuade us to undergo an operation we think will bring about a cure.

Similarly, the fear of judgment can bring people to put their lives right with God. However, it isn't God's will that we are constantly afraid of him. On the contrary: He wants obedience because of love. In the same way as children obey their parents if they love

them, we should do so as well. Remember, God is our good Father and Jesus gave his life for us. These are reasons enough to love them with all our heart. Please read John 14:21.

**John:** *"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."*

**Jeff:** We have considered both: on the one hand, it is true that we should not sin lightly, thinking we are dead to sin. On the other hand, it is also true that we humans are still capable of sinning. 1 John 1:1-2 expresses these facts very well:

*"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins<sup>8</sup>, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

**John:** But I was not able to resist the temptation, when Bill and Frank came. Why?

**Jeff:** Listen, here in 1 John 2:1-2 you read that Jesus is our advocate or lawyer. However, there is also someone who first tries to tempt us to sin and afterwards accuses us.

**John:** Whom do you mean – the devil?

**Jeff:** Sure! Let's look at his strategy: the first step he always takes is to tempt us to sin. It started with Adam and Eve. God had forbidden them to eat the fruit of a certain tree on pain of punishment. However, the devil declared that this would never happen. On the contrary, they could expect to be like God.

It was not primarily a fruit, which made them desire to disobey the Lord. There were plenty of other kinds of fruit to eat. What mattered was Satan's promise that they would be equal to God. It was this that was attractive to them. You can read about it in Genesis 3:1-6.

**John:** But it was a big lie!

**Jeff:** Of course – when the devil tempts us, he always lies. Please read John 8:44.

**John:** *"The devil was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*

**Jeff:** He is a murderer and a liar. If he spoke the truth he would never be very successful, so he cannot help but lie. It is his nature.

**John:** I understand!

**Jeff:** Yes, it is the first step in his strategy. Now listen: once he succeeds in tempting people to sin, the second step is to accuse them of their faults.

**John:** I can't believe it. He has no right to accuse anyone, because nobody is more guilty than he is!

**Jeff:** You are right! However, he doesn't care, and starts making accusations as soon as we have done something wrong.

**John:** Do we also find this in the Bible?

**Jeff:** Sure, for example, Revelation 12:10 describes the devil in this way:

*"He is the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night ..."*

Later, in Zechariah 3:1-6, you can read an interesting story, in which Satan accused Joshua, the former High Priest, of personal sin as well as those of Israel.

**John:** I understand. But yesterday I read in John 16:8: *"When the Holy Spirit comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment."*

**Jeff:** John, this is an excellent argument! It is actually true! When Jesus told his disciples, that he would soon return to God, he also announced the coming of the Holy Spirit. One of whose many tasks would be to touch our conscience in order to convince us of our sin.

**John:** But how do we know whether it is the Holy Spirit or the devil who causes our guilty conscience?

**Jeff:** Again a very good question! Listen, if you commit a sin it is first the Holy Spirit who whispers in your heart that you have done something wrong. His intention is to lead you to repentance in order to receive forgiveness. In other words, he wants to restore your relationship to God again.

This is the moment where sometimes the devil tries to step in. Although he does not have the right to do so, he begins to accuse you.

**John:** Why doesn't he have the right to do it?

**Jeff:** First of all, he is more guilty than any of us. Secondly, he starts to accuse even though the sin is already forgiven. Remember: he who repents of his sin and confesses honestly, will be completely forgiven. So Satan's charges are completely unjustified. However, do you know why he is so often successful with his accusations?

**John:** Please tell me.

**Jeff:** We too often believe him.

**John:** I would never do so.

**Jeff:** Well, remember what you told me before. You said that you had asked at least three times for forgiveness because of the alcohol abuse. Yet you still feel guilty. Do you think this is from of the Holy Spirit?



**John:** Probably not, because God promised to forgive.

**Jeff:** Yet you still have a guilty conscience, because you believe a lie.

**John:** A lie?

**Jeff:** Yes, the lie that your sins are not yet forgiven, while in God's eyes they no longer exist. If he forgives, he does it completely.

**John:** I understand!

**Jeff:** Satan is sometimes successful in deceiving us in two ways:

- ✓ First, if we commit a sin of which we feel especially ashamed. Something we consider a big sin.
- ✓ Second, if we have a weakness that leads us to commit one particular sin repeatedly. It has happened already so often that we doubt God will still forgive. However, that's not true! He always forgives if our repentance is honest and sincere.

**John:** Can it be said in summary, then, that Satan first tempts us by lying, and afterwards changes his position by accusing us of wrongdoing?

**Jeff:** Exactly! What have you noticed about the behaviour of Bill and Frank?

**John:** I don't understand.

**Jeff:** Well, first they tempted you to drink too much. Then, when they were successful, they started to blame and accuse you.

**John:** Now, I can see it. The same strategy as the devil's.

**Jeff:** Yes! Nevertheless, it's important to see that they were only used by the devil. The devil often does it this way in order to carry out his evil plans. Satan always stands behind people's evil behaviour. Now please read 1 Peter 5:8.

**John:** *"Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."*

**Jeff:** Can you recall what the Bible verses we read said about the devil?

**John:** Yes, he is

- ✓ a liar
- ✓ a murderer
- ✓ an accuser
- ✓ like a lion who wants to devour us

**Jeff:** Well remembered!

Now let's talk about his role as an accuser. What is God's response to it on our behalf?

**John:** I am not sure.

**Jeff:** Remember 1 John 2:1-2. It's good to read it again.

**John:** *"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father - Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the*

*atonement sacrifice for our sins<sup>9</sup>, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

**Jeff:** Think of a court hearing.

**John:** Do you mean a trial?

**Jeff:** Yes! There are four key persons:

- ✓ the accused; the person who is guilty;
- ✓ the accuser; the prosecutor who points to our sin;
- ✓ the advocate or lawyer, who speaks on behalf of the accused;
- ✓ the judge who passes the final judgment

Take this to illustrate our situation. Who are the key persons?

**John:** All right.

- ✓ we are the accused, because we have sinned;
- ✓ the accuser is Satan;
- ✓ the advocate is Jesus, who speaks on our behalf;
- ✓ the judge is God.

**Jeff:** Exactly, you have understood it! Next questions:

- ✓ how will the process end?
- ✓ what judgment will be passed?
- ✓ what will be the punishment?

**John:** Please tell me!

**Jeff:** The process ends with a big shock and a big surprise:

- ✓ shock, because the judgement is death by crucifixion
- ✓ surprise, since the death penalty was passed upon Jesus on our behalf, and by it we are released – if we trust in him.

**John:** Now I can see clearly! Jesus acts in two ways:

- ✓ in the past, when he took our penalty, dying on the cross for our sins; and
- ✓ in the present, when he speaks as lawyer or advocate on our behalf.

**Jeff:** Exactly, you’ve got it! What are you going to do next time you commit a sin?

**John:** Of course, I will repent honestly and tell Jesus everything. The guilty conscience is caused by the Holy Spirit in order that I can return to the Lord.

**Jeff:** Yes, and if you harmed another person you’d better ask him also to forgive you. In addition, what are you going to do if you still feel guilty afterwards?

**John:** I will not believe such feelings because I know that they are from the devil and he always lies.

**Jeff:** Yes, never trust a liar! Satan is the father of lies. Finally, we can say that 1 John 1:1-2 speaks about both:

- ✓ God doesn't want us to sin or to take it lightly.
- ✓ Because we are just humans, we will sin again. However, Jesus is our advocate who never fails when he speaks on behalf of God's children.

**John:** Although a ship is like a prison on the sea, I am now a free man. Jesus, who is my advocate, has suffered the punishment in my place. Satan has no claim on me. Because I belong to him, Jesus has set me free.

*"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

1 John 2:1-2

# **Will Raffy die?**

## *Fifth Adventure*

*“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*

I Corinthians 15:10

John sat in his cabin and looked at a picture of his son Raffy. The boy had recently celebrated his third birthday. Unfortunately, because John had already joined the ship he had not been with him. A few minutes ago, he had received a call from his wife. Sobbing, she had told him that Raffy had been taken to hospital with a high fever. His condition was so bad that he had already lost consciousness.

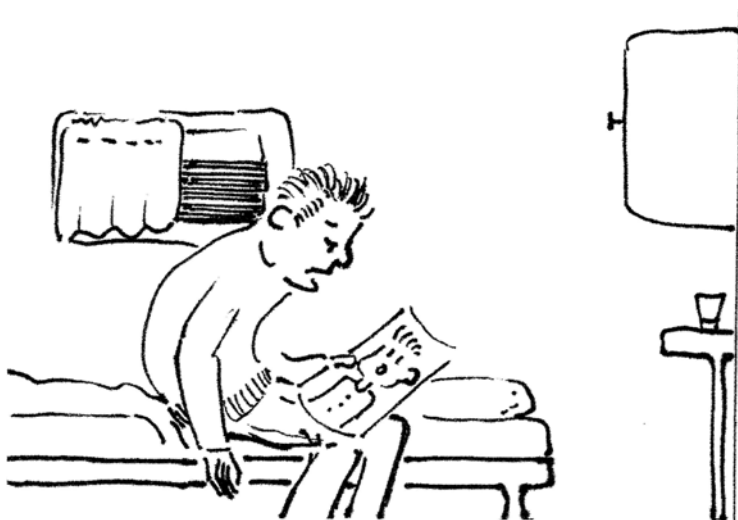
The doctor had told John's wife that their son's life was in danger. For the treatment, very expensive medicine was necessary. However, John had no money, for he had just bought the family a house, for which he had taken out a large bank loan.

At the hospital his wife was told that they could not continue to treat Raffy if she didn't pay. In my country a child's life does not count for much, John thought angrily. Many people die just because they are poor. Often even bribes were expected. What was he supposed to do, he thought desperately. Finally, he ran over to the his friend's cabin. “Jeff!” he shouted, “please let me in!” It took a while before Jeff opened the door, because he had been sleeping. After John told him everything, he suggested that they should first pray for Raffy.

After they had brought John's misery before God, Jeff said that he would cover the payment for the treatment. He picked up his cell-phone and called his wife. In a brief conversation he explained the situation and asked her to take care of the payment. “You will get the whole amount back!” John said with tears in his eyes.

“Don't worry about the money. There is nothing to repay; it's all right,” Jeff replied.

Two weeks later, John got the wonderful news that their son Raffy was well again and had been discharged from hospital. The infection had been life-threatening. Now, with his boy recovered, John was overjoyed and exceedingly grateful. He went to Jeff's cabin in order to bring him the good news.



**John:** Jeff, I'm so glad, Raffy is back home. Thank you so much for lending me the money. It was very expensive – about 3,000 USD. But believe me, I will repay every single cent. Do you agree that I will give you 200 USD monthly? I would really like to repay more, but because of the loan for my house my finances are limited.

**Jeff:** John, I've told you already that you don't need to worry about the money. Forget it. There's nothing to repay.

**John:** No, such a big gift I can never accept. The sum is too large. You can't give me so much money, even though we are good friends.

**Jeff:** John, what I tell you now, you have to keep to yourself: I'm a rich man, even though I don't look it. Three months ago, my uncle died; he was the owner of two major department stores. He was unmarried and had no children or other relatives. The last few years my wife and I took care of him. Now we've inherited all his possessions. This is my last contract on a ship for sure. I'm sixty years old and have more than enough money for the rest of my life. 3,000 USD are no problem at all for my wife and me. It gives us real pleasure to be able to help you.

**John:** Sorry Jeff, I can't accept it. I'll work hard and make a lot of overtime, in order to repay the money as soon as possible.

**Jeff:** Why don't you accept? It comes from my heart.

**John:** No, no, no! This shouldn't be! I cannot accept such a big gift! Never!

**Jeff:** John, please stop and relax! I have more than enough. Sometimes we should be humble and accept that we need help. We all have our limits. There's no reason to reject the offer.

**John:** What do you mean by saying that I have to be humble?

**Jeff:** A good question. Do you remember that we talked about the fact that salvation is pure grace? We don't deserve it. We can't work for it. We have to depend on what Jesus has done for us. It is necessary to accept it. Otherwise, grace is no grace.

**John:** Yes, I do remember.

**Jeff:** There are people who are too proud. They refuse to receive salvation as a gift by grace alone. They constantly try to gain it by good works.

**John:** Well, but I have received it by grace.

**Jeff:** Yes, that's true; but it's not the end. Even as children of God, we still depend on his grace every single day. Remember the list of Bible words that I gave you. Most of them have nothing to do with salvation. However, they point to many more facts that apply to God's children. All those promises are his gifts to us. As we have received God's salvation by grace, we get them as well, just by grace alone. A proud person hopes that he can manage everything alone, but a humble person understands that he is dependent on Jesus and needs help – always!

**John:** Well, I do know that I'm dependent on Jesus.

**Jeff:** Maybe. However, my experience is that it's a lifetime process, to understand even deeper our dependence on him.

**John:** Okay – please explain it!

**Jeff:** It's interesting to see that our struggles to do everything on our own can be compared with being in a prison. I'll give you an example:

Remember what happened yesterday. The 2nd Engineer had to carry a very long and heavy pipe down from the engine room up to the fourth deck. The 3rd Engineer offered to help, but the 2nd Engineer refused. He tried alone for at least fifteen minutes and even did some damage with the pipe. He got more and more nervous and impatient, even shouting at everyone. Finally, he had to give in and accept help. He often behaves like a stubborn child. His pride is like a self-made prison. It's much better to accept help, and it's no shame for you to accept my gift. I'm rich enough. Don't be proud.

**John:** Please tell me what else we need if we are to receive by grace alone – I mean from God and not from man.

**Jeff:** Everything, actually! Being a Christian isn't just a matter of getting something; it's a matter of being someone, which must also be received by grace. A Christian isn't simply a person who gets forgiveness, who gets to go to heaven, who gets the Holy Spirit and a new nature. In terms of our deepest identity a Christian is a saint, a spiritually born child of God, a divine masterpiece, a child of light, a citizen of heaven.<sup>10</sup> Being born again transforms you into someone who didn't exist before. What you receive as a Christian isn't the point alone; it's what you are. It's not what you do as a Christian that determines who you are; it's who you are that determines what you do.

Please read 2 Corinthians 5:17.

**John:** *"If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"*

A new creation? Well, it's true, there is a big difference since I have received Jesus in my heart. However I don't feel completely new. I'm still the same person.

**Jeff:** John, remember what we recently talked about. It's useless to trust our feelings. They are constantly changing. They can't tell us anything about what is true in God's eyes. True is what the Lord says. Real is what the Bible promises. To be a new creation is one of the many gifts, which can be received only by grace and not by good works. We never deserve it. Be humble and accept the present.

**John:** Is it true that the fact that we are a new creation also has something to do with our identity in Christ?

**Jeff:** You've got it!

Understanding your identity in Christ is essential to your success in living the Christian life. No person can consistently behave in a way that's inconsistent with the way he perceives himself.<sup>11</sup>

**John:** Sorry, I don't understand.

**Jeff:** For instance, if you think you're a nobody, you'll probably live like a nobody. But if you see yourself as a child of God who is spiritually alive in Christ, you'll begin to live in victory and freedom, as he lived.

Next to a knowledge of God, a knowledge of who you are is by far the most important truth you can possess.<sup>12</sup>

**John:** You mean that we need to understand who Jesus is and who we are in him?

**Jeff:** Exactly! Just believing these truths will bring about a big change!

**John:** Do you think that most believers have understood it?

**Jeff:** I fear that to many it isn't yet clear.

**John:** Why?

**Jeff:** I think the devil is actively trying to deceive the believers. He knows that he can't take our salvation. However, his deception concerning our identity is his major weapon against our growth and maturity in Christ.<sup>13</sup>

**John:** Do you mean that many believers who have been saved for some time are still baby-Christians, because they've never understood their position in Christ?

**Jeff:** Yes, I think it's true – unfortunately.

I gave you recently a list of Bible verses with the title “*Who am I through Jesus?*” There's another list which supplements it. I've made a Xerox copy for you. Read it aloud to yourself repeatedly until it becomes a part of you. Pray through the list occasionally, asking God to fix these truths in your heart. Why not read through it right now?

### **Since I am in Christ, by the grace of God ...**

- ✓ “*I have been justified – completely forgiven and made righteous.*” (Romans 5:1)
- ✓ “*I died with Christ and died to the power of sin's rule over my life.*” (Romans 6:1-6)
- ✓ “*I am free for ever from condemnation.*” (Romans 8:1)
- ✓ “*I have been placed in Christ by God's doing.*” (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- ✓ “*I have received the Spirit of God into my life that I might know the things freely given to me by God.*” (1 Corinthians 2:12)
- ✓ “*I have been given the mind of Christ.*” (1 Corinthians 2:16)
- ✓ “*I have been bought with a price; I am not my own; I belong to God.*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- ✓ “*I have been established, anointed and sealed by God in Christ, and I have been given the Holy Spirit as a pledge guaranteeing my inheritance to come.*” (2 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 1:13-14)
- ✓ “*Since I have died, I no longer live for myself, but for Christ.*” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
- ✓ “*I have been made righteous.*” (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- ✓ “*I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I am now living is Christ's life.*” (Galatians 2:20)
- ✓ “*I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing.*” (Ephesians 1:3)
- ✓ “*I was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and am without blame before him.*” (Ephesians 1:4)
- ✓ “*I was predestined – determined by God – to be adopted as God's son/daughter.*” (Ephesians 1:5)



- ✓ *"I have been redeemed and forgiven, and I am a recipient of his generous grace."* (Ephesians 1:7)
- ✓ *"I have been made alive together with Christ."* (Ephesians 2:5)
- ✓ *"I have been raised up and seated with Christ in heaven."* (Ephesians 2:6)
- ✓ *"I have direct access to God through the Spirit."* (Ephesians 2:18)
- ✓ *"I may approach God with boldness, freedom and confidence."* (Ephesians 3:12)
- ✓ *"I have been rescued from the domain of Satan's rule and transferred to the kingdom of Christ."* (Colossians 1:13)
- ✓ *"I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. The debt against me has been cancelled."* (Colossians 1:14)
- ✓ *"Christ himself is in me."* (Colossians 1:27)
- ✓ *"I am firmly rooted in Christ and am now being built in him."* (Colossians 2:7)
- ✓ *"I have been spiritually circumcised. My old unregenerate nature has been removed."* (Colossians 2:11)
- ✓ *"I have been made complete in Christ."* (Colossians 2:10)
- ✓ *"I have been buried, raised and made alive with Christ."* (Colossians 2:12-13)
- ✓ *"I died with Christ and I have been raised up with him. My life is now hidden with Christ in God. Christ is now my life."* (Colossians 3:1-4)
- ✓ *"I have been given a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."* (2 Timothy 1:9)
- ✓ *"I have been saved and set apart according to God's doing."* (2 Timothy 1:9)
- ✓ *"Because I am sanctified and am now with the Sanctifier. He is not ashamed to call me brother."* (Hebrews 2:11)
- ✓ *"I have the right to come boldly before the throne of God to find mercy and grace in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:16)
- ✓ *"I have been given exceedingly great and precious promises by God by which I am a partaker of God's divine nature."* (2 Peter 1:4)<sup>14</sup>

**John:** Wow, to live with Jesus is far more than I ever imagined. It's almost too much for me to realize.

**Jeff:** Don't think that I have understood everything in depth even though I've already lived forty years with the Lord. It's too much and deep to grasp during our lifetime. However, the longer we live with Jesus and meditate upon his word, the more we love him.

**John:** And everything is by grace alone!

**Jeff:** You got it. Grace is his major gift, which makes available all these precious promises. Even so, although they are millionaires there are many believers who live like beggars – in a spiritual sense. However, Jesus is more than glad to share his incredible riches with us. Be humble and take what he offers you. In addition, be humble and accept my offer to cover Raffi's hospital expenses.

**John:** I'll do it! Thank you so much!

**Jeff:** Everything is because of Jesus, living in us. Now please read Colossians 1:27.

**John:** *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

*"By the grace of God I am what I am."*

I Corinthians 15:10



# The rejected promotion

## Sixth Adventure

*“Fix your eyes on Jesus, the beginner of our faith  
and who makes it complete.”*

Hebrews 12:2

**JOHN** knew he no longer had the opportunity to become an engineer, for he lacked the appropriate university training. However, on the next vessel he hoped to get a job as a fitter. He was convinced he had enough experience for the position. In addition, a higher income would certainly be very helpful, particularly to repay the loan for his house. George, his chief engineer, had promised to write a letter of recommendation to the shipping company. His friend Jeff, the present fitter, would sign off one month ahead of him. If the promotion were granted he would be able to take the position for the rest of his contract.

Of course, his brother supported the idea and promised to pray for its success. He even spent some extra time to talk to John about being a good fitter. John learned that there are three important points to consider:

- ✓ he has to perform well professionally;
- ✓ he should endeavour to have a good relationship with the engineers, his superiors;
- ✓ good communication with the crew is also needed. Being the link between the engineers and the ratings he would sometimes need to cope with tensions between them.

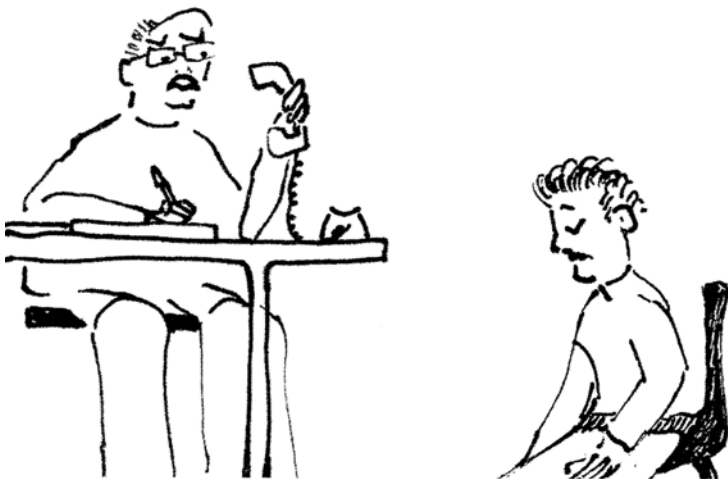
Meanwhile, a whole month had passed by. John was still waiting to get a response from his company. One evening, he was in his cabin when the chief engineer called him to his office. John was excited, because he was pretty sure of a positive response to his request.

“Sorry, John,” his chief engineer started. “I wrote a very positive recommendation to the company. Unfortunately, they have refused your request in just a few sentences. They didn’t give any reason.”

John left deeply disappointed and went back to his cabin. He didn’t want to talk to anybody, not even his brother Jeff. The next day it was quite difficult for him to hide his feelings when doing his job.

During lunch break, the chief engineer called him again. “John, good news! A few minutes ago, I got a telephone call from the company. They

have granted your promotion. It was simply because of an error that your request was rejected. It was not about you, but an oiler on another ship. His performance wasn't considered very positive. To cut the story short, your application is granted, his was declined. When Jeff signs off in four months from now, you are the one to replace him. Congratulations!"



When John went back to work, he felt as if he was flying. He couldn't wait to call his wife and talk to Jeff. After dinner, his friend knocked at his cabin door.

**Jeff:** This is really good news! Praise the Lord!

**John:** Indeed! I didn't expect it after the chief engineer delivered the negative response.

**Jeff:** I do believe that your feelings were low.

**John:** And afterwards they went to the top.

**Jeff:** The funny thing is that your request was already granted when the chief received the refusal from the company. It was just because of wrong information passed on to someone. This means there were no different facts between the message yesterday and the telephone call at noon. It was the different news that caused your different feelings.

**John:** Certainly, bad news causes bad feelings and good news causes positive emotions. That goes without saying.

**Jeff:** So your low spirits were unjustified because your promotion was granted already. To think wrong often leads to low spirits.

**John:** Yes, that's true!

**Jeff:** But sometimes we feel bad even though we have the correct information about something.

**John:** Are you sure – when?

**Jeff:** There are different possibilities. For example if we forget the truth because of negative circumstances.

**John:** To forget the truth? How is this possible? Do you mean elderly people with a weak memory?

**Jeff:** Well, it can happen also to young men. This morning I read an interesting passage in the Bible. Please turn to Lamentations 3:1-20. Here we find the prophet Jeremiah really frustrated because he's forgotten some important truths.

**John:** *"I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod (or stick) of the Lord's wrath. He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long. He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has overburdened me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has blocked my way with stone; he has made my paths crooked. Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me from the path and tore me and left me without help. He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows. He pierced my heart with arrows. All of my people laughed at me; they mock me in song all day long. He has filled me with bitter herbs and given me gall to drink. He has broken my teeth with stones; he has trampled me in the dust. I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is. So I say, 'My splendour is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord.' I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me."*

**Jeff:** What do you think of it?

**John:** I can't believe it! This man was God's prophet? How could he talk this way?

**Jeff:** Well, you need to understand that he was in a very difficult situation for a long time. He preached in the name of the Lord for about fifty years and almost nobody listened. All the time nothing except opposition, mockery and threats.

**John:** Sure, this is very difficult to endure. However, it is not right to talk this way about the Lord.

**Jeff:** Of course, we aren't supposed to. But he was entirely downcast. Be sure, the Lord is merciful to his servants; he understands.

However, what I want to point out is this: our feelings are not only down, when we have wrong and negative information – for example when your promotion was seemingly refused. They can also be downcast when we have forgotten the truth, because of difficult circumstances. This can happen to every one of us. We are certainly not better or stronger than Jeremiah was. However, it is true that he thought completely wrongly about the Lord.

What did Jeremiah know about God? Is it correct that:

- ✓ He has driven Jeremiah away and made him walk in darkness?
- ✓ He has turned his hand against him?
- ✓ He has broken his bones?
- ✓ He has surrounded him with bitterness and hardship?
- ✓ He has overburdened Jeremiah with chains?
- ✓ He has shut out his prayer?
- ✓ He lay in wait like a bear and a lion?
- ✓ He shot his arrows at Jeremiah?
- ✓ ...

**John:** Not at all! Nothing is true!

**Jeff:** Remember what we talked about some time ago. If we forget the truth about the Lord and believe lies from the devil, we may end like Jeremiah. Believing lies cause negative feelings. Satan is not able to take away the salvation of God's children. However, if he frustrates us with lies as he did Jeremiah, we lose hope, our faith becomes weak and our Christian life is ineffective.

**John:** But how could Jeremiah be a prophet of the Lord, with such wrong ideas of him?

**Jeff:** Well, the Bible is very honest. Most of the prophets and apostles had many weaknesses and committed plenty of sins. However, the Lord was still able to use them for his good purposes. Thus, the glory goes to him and not to any people.

However, this is not the end of the story. Please read how Jeremiah continued. Lamentations 3:21-33:

**John:** *"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.' The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust – there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For no one is*

*cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.”<sup>15</sup>*

**Jeff:** Do you see any differences from his former statements?

**John:** Even though he is seemingly still struggling with his difficulties, he speaks much more positively about the Lord. He talks about his love, his compassion and faithfulness.

**Jeff:** Yes, that's true. When he started to recall what he knew about God, he changed his way of thinking. Remember: to think and believe the truth results in positive feelings.

**John:** Do you assume that his situation changed in the meantime?

**Jeff:** I don't think so. Nothing has changed; neither the Lord and his character and nor the troubles Jeremiah had.

**John:** Maybe this is another reason to read the Bible regularly – to be permanently encouraged by the many promises.

**Jeff:** Exactly! Many people think we should read the Bible daily because it is a Christian duty. However, that is not true. We are supposed to read the Word of God because we love the Author.

**John:** The Author?

**Jeff:** Yes, of course! God is the Author. Our motivation to read the Bible is that we love God. Remember what we talked about recently. The motivation to obey God is our love towards him. Our whole Christian life is based on his love towards us and our response to it: love.

**John:** But what shall I do if sometimes there is no desire to read the Bible?

**Jeff:** You should still study it.

**John:** Without strong emotions?

**Jeff:** Of course, to love someone is much more than always to have overwhelming emotions.

**John:** Sure?

**Jeff:** I'll give you an example: when you go home after nine months and you embrace your wife, do you have great feelings?

**John:** Certainly!

**Jeff:** If you have been with her for several months, do you still have deep emotions when you meet her?

**John:** Rather not.

**Jeff:** But you still love her.

**John:** Sure!

**Jeff:** Would you listen to her if she talks to you, even without having strong feelings?

**John:** Yes!

**Jeff:** Why?



**John:** Stupid question; she is still my wife and I love her on principle.

**Jeff:** This is what I am talking about. To pray means to talk to God. To read the Bible means to listen him. Listening and talking means to communicate with God. You do it because you love God and you want to be close to him. This is true in moments of strong emotions and it is also true every ordinary day.

**John:** Now I understand. Even when we don't have strong feelings, we should still study his word. This keeps our relationship alive and expresses our gratitude and love toward him.

**Jeff:** Exactly! Beside this think of Jeremiah. When he was deeply depressed and downcast, he recalled the truth of God's word. This brought forth the big change in his thinking and feeling.

Remember John 8:32: Please read it again.

**John:** I think I can quote it from memory:

**Jeff:** Great!

**John:** Jesus said: *"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

I understand this is a wonderful promise to step out of captivity to freedom.

Another question: you said that prayer means to talk to God and to read the Bible means that he speaks to us. How shall we pray?

**Jeff:** Simply talk to him:

- ✓ if you have sinned, confess your guilt to Jesus;
- ✓ if you are happy, thank God;
- ✓ if you have a problem, tell him;
- ✓ bring to Jesus the needs of others also;
- ✓ praise the Lord for what he is and what he has done.

**John:** In which way am I supposed to talk to him?

**Jeff:** Jesus is glad if you are honest and sincere. Just speak to him as to a close friend, but with respect. Finally, he is the Lord.

However, prayer is more than just speaking. You talk to him as well, when you praise him by singing songs.

Someone once said: Anything you do that brings pleasure to God is an act of worship.<sup>16</sup> It is not just about talking. Our whole life should bring glory to him, even our thoughts and actions.

**John:** I understand!

**Jeff:** Remember, you once said that a ship is like a prison. To receive Jesus into your heart means to step out of a spiritual prison. It's the jail of being in bondage to the devil. However, even believers, who are saved, sometimes keep themselves in additional prisons. For instance the prison of negative thoughts – like Jeremiah. It can happen when they fail to keep their eyes on Jesus. In this case, they are

in danger of being downcast by people or circumstances.

Satan wants us to be hopeless. However, the good news is: even though negative thoughts are like a prison, the doors are open already. Just as Jeremiah stepped out of this prison when he realized the truth about God, we can follow his example. The best way to do it is expressed in Hebrews 12:2. Please read it.

**John:** *“Fix your eyes on Jesus, the beginner of our faith and who makes it complete.”*

Please kindly explain it to me.

**Jeff:** It's not difficult to understand. Try to do it on your own.

**John:** Okay: when we fix our eyes on Jesus we look up instead of down, to our misery.

**Jeff:** Sure! Positive thoughts are always full of faith and hope. Negative thoughts are always full of fear and doubt.<sup>17</sup>

Those who love Jesus think of him and look at him and will soon feel better, even if circumstances have not yet changed.

**John:** Have you tried it?

**Jeff:** Sure, often; but sometimes I forget. It's always good to have a friend who reminds us to fix our eyes on Jesus, if the soul is downcast.

Here's another good thought to keep in mind permanently: “I believe God. I trust that he is working in me no matter what I may feel or how the situation may look. The Lord has begun a good work in me, and he will bring it to full completion.”<sup>18</sup>

**John:** A great encouragement!

Recently, I read this:

### **For this I have Jesus!**

It had this explanation:

Instead of the word, “this” you can put anything – for instance:

- ✓ for my **problems** I have Jesus;
- ✓ for my **weaknesses** I have Jesus;
- ✓ for my **fear** I have Jesus;
- ✓ for my **doubts** I have Jesus;
- ✓ for my **sin** I have Jesus;
- ✓ for my **limitations** I have Jesus;
- ✓ ...

**Jeff:** This is great! Why don't you write down the sentence and fix it above your bed? I will certainly do it! We need such reminders to lift our eyes to the Lord.

Working on a ship is sometimes like being in a prison because

we are seldom able to leave it. Negative feelings can also be compared to a prison. The life becomes narrow like a cell in a jail with just two square metres of floor space. To fix our eyes on Jesus means to step out of this small space. Because of Jesus and because of the many promises in the Bible we will regain hope. Please read in Colossians 1:27 about Jesus who is our real hope.

**John:** *“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”*

**Jeff:** Continue with Colossians 1:12-14. Here you find some more wonderful promises.

**John:** *“Joyfully give thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son [Jesus] he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

**Jeff:** Finally open your Bible at Colossians 2:2-3. The apostle Paul gives another reason why we should fix our eyes on Jesus.

**John:** *“My goal is that you may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that you may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that you may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*

**Jeff:** If we have Jesus, we are indeed rich – richer than anyone else.

*“Fix your eyes on Jesus, the beginner of our faith  
and who makes it complete.”*

Hebrews 12:2

# John has to die

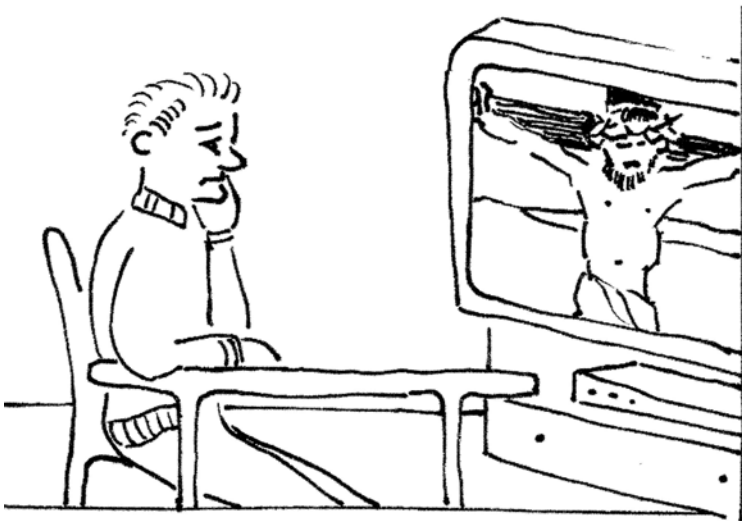
## Seventh Adventure

*“Whoever wants to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”*

Mark 8:35

**JOHN** sat alone in his cabin. It was a very special day – Good Friday. Jeff was on duty in the engine-room. Some colleagues were sleeping; others spending their free time in the mess-room, singing karaoke. For this he felt no motivation at all. His desire was to have a special time alone with Jesus; not just his regular devotion time of 30 minutes daily.

The day before, a chaplain of one of the seamen’s missions had come on board and given him a DVD about the life of Jesus. It was a two-hour movie, telling his whole story according to the gospel of Luke. The chaplain also left some other good reading material.



John started watching the movie. He had never read the Gospel of Luke as a whole. It was fascinating to see how Jesus was born in a stable, of a poor insignificant woman. Although he was the Son of God, he did not enter

the world in a palace. His first bed was a manger among animals. The stable was dark, dirty, smelly and not at all comfortable. Shepherds came, saw Jesus and became his first worshipper. They were poor people of low position. However, they were privileged to know that the Saviour of the world was born. Angels had told them when they were with their sheep in the field.

John was deeply moved when he saw how Jesus thought, talked and acted. At the very beginning of his public ministry, he said something important in a speech, which caught John's attention:

Jesus said: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* (Luke 4:18-19)

This is what Jesus planned to do during the next few years:

- ✓ proclaim good news to the poor;
- ✓ set prisoners and oppressed people free of the devil and of sin;
- ✓ restore the sight of the spiritually blind;
- ✓ proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

John had some knowledge of the founders of other religions and discovered again that Jesus was completely different. He gave the outcast and oppressed people back their dignity. He touched the unclean, for example those who suffered from leprosy. He honoured women who didn't count for much in their society. He received children when his disciples wanted to drive them away impatiently. The Lord healed the sick and raised the dead. Yes, he even set free people who were in the devil's bondage.

Again John was reminded of the fact that a ship is like a prison on the sea. He knew that he had been in a spiritual prison, but had gained freedom through Jesus. His love and gratitude towards the Lord became even greater when he continued watching the movie.

Then the Lord announced his forthcoming suffering and death. John understood deeper than ever before that this had happened because of him and the sin he had committed. When he saw how Jesus was beaten, humiliated and spat upon, he could no longer hold back his tears. Sobbing, he saw Jesus hanging bleeding on the cross. He did it for me, John thought! I will never be able to fully understand what happened when the Son of God died.

Later, when he lay in bed, he had mixed feelings. In him was both deep grief and great gratitude towards his Lord. Never before had he experienced such a Good Friday. He knew that his relationship to the Christ was deeper now than ever.

Next day he went to Jeff's cabin and spent some time with his friend reflecting upon his experiences.

**Jeff:** I know this movie. It's really a very good one. I've seen it several times.

**John:** I've never been touched by a film before this one.

**Jeff:** Yes, I understand your feelings well. It's amazing to realize how Jesus died for us, but do you know that you also have to die?

**John:** Funny statement – certainly everyone has to die.

**Jeff:** No, that's not what I'm talking about.

**John:** Okay, do you mean that I need to be ready to die for Jesus, as many persecuted Christians in several countries?

**Jeff:** That's so, but I'm thinking of another death. Please open your Bible at Mark 8:34-38 and read.

**John:** Jesus said: *"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for his soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."*

**Jeff:** Do you understand what Jesus means when he speaks about denying yourself?

**John:** Maybe that I should stop being an egoistic person?

**Jeff:** Yes, that's also a task we have to work on with the help of the Holy Spirit. However, what Jesus expects goes even deeper. Listen: when Jesus knocked at the door of your heart, you had to give a response. You said "Yes" and invited Jesus to come into your life. This was the most important "Yes", you have ever spoken, because thus you became a child of God. Your eternal life is now sure. But Jesus wants more than just to save people from hell.

**John:** What else does he expect?

**Jeff:** He want us to become his disciples. Do you know what discipleship means?

**John:** I only have a rough idea.

**Jeff:** Jesus asks you: Do you really want to surrender your life to me?

Let me tell you why this is so important. It seems to be an easy step to say "Yes" to salvation. Once people have understood the misery of their life and the danger of facing judgment and hell, they want to avoid them. Because of fear of hell or the realization of Jesus' love, many give a positive response and allow Jesus to enter

their hearts. However, Christ is not only our Saviour but also our Lord. I know that we have already talked about it, but it needs to become more and more real in our lives. Please read Matthew 11:29.

**John:** Jesus said: *“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”*

**Jeff:** Jesus is a gentle and humble Lord and offers us rest and peace of mind. But he also talks about his yoke, which we have to bear. Before you turned to Jesus you used to carry the devil’s yoke – even without fully realizing it. It was a heavy load and Satan was a cruel and unmerciful slave-driver. Jesus is completely different and as our desires become increasingly one with his desire that we follow in his footsteps, our discipleship will become a joy and no longer a burden. It’s also true that discipleship is not an option but a foundation of a fruitful Christian life.

**John:** Certainly, I’m willing to learn how to become a true disciple.

**Jeff:** Discipleship means to be willing to obey Jesus. Moreover, he asks you to be his witness among your family and friends, here on board, and wherever he wants to use you. Are you willing to become his co-worker? Are you ready to obey him even if sometimes his commandments seem a big challenge for you?

**John:** How can I obey him if he expects too much from me?

**Jeff:** The Lord sometimes demands difficult things from us. But don’t worry, he will always be with you. He has already given you his Holy Spirit, which will enable you to do what is necessary. He has all power.

He will never expect more from you than you can perform with your own limited strength. Your weakness should encourage you to fix your eyes on Jesus. His strength is sufficient in your weakness.

All good parents challenge their children from time to time to do things that they have never done before, and they offer help if necessary. Keep in mind the fact that there is no growth without challenges.

There are millions of Christians who said “Yes” to salvation. However, they failed to surrender themselves to him and never allowed Jesus to be Lord of all areas of their life. And they also failed to accept his commission as his representatives on earth.

**John:** I always thought that this refers mainly to priests, chaplains and full-time missionaries.

**Jeff:** No, every believer is a full-time servant of Jesus! You are an oiler; soon you will be a fitter by the grace of God. You are a husband to your wife and a father to your child. You are a friend, colleague and

relative to many other people. Your positions and roles may change, but you are and will be a child of God and his servant as well.

Remember, when I started to share the good news with you, I did it because I liked you; but it was also my duty. How could I have received all the good things from the Lord and be so selfish as not to tell you about it?

Please read what the Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20.

**John:** *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."*

**Jeff:** Paul died in order to live a new life. You and I have to experience the same. Every true believer needs to die this particular death that Paul spoke about: *"I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me!"*

**John:** These are certainly deep words and hard to put into practice.

**Jeff:** It seems to be difficult; however, if you consider the second part of the verse the difficulty fades away. It speaks about the love of Jesus, who gave his life for us.

**John:** This is true! It's easy to give my life to someone who first gave his life for me.

**Jeff:** You have it! However, it is still necessary to promise Jesus daily to be his disciple and representative. Why daily? Because it is possible for the Christian life to become routine. Sometimes we are in danger of sliding back or of a selfish attitude of heart again taking possession of us. If we do not remain close to the Lord, our lifestyle easily returns to one similar to that of people who don't know Jesus.

**John:** Last year I received a postcard, a picture of Jesus's crucifixion. Underneath was written: "Look what he did for you. What will you do for him?"

**Jeff:** That puts it in a nutshell!

We have already talked a lot about the new identity that we have in Christ. However, this new identity is not simply to put over the old one. The old one has to die first in order to let the new one develop its beauty.

Don't build your identity on things you gain from this world. In many countries, you are nothing if you are not married or have no children. Others strive for money, honour, a good reputation and status. Most people believe their identity depends on their performance, achievements and bank account.

However, Jesus says that this will never work. Even if you win



the whole world, it will not fill the emptiness of your soul.

If you build your identity on the fact that a particular person loves you or that your profession gives fulfilment, you are lost. What happens if the relationship breaks down or you lose your job? Your identity will collapse. Jesus tells us that we shall not exchange our achievement-oriented identity for another one. No, he expects you to surrender your old ego, your old selfish nature, to the Lord. Base everything on him alone and the gospel.<sup>19</sup>

**John:** I am afraid that some people will say that this is close to fanaticism. Those who take religion too seriously will become crazy and a danger to society.

**Jeff:** True, I sometimes hear this objection. However, first of all we are not asked to be serious about religion but serious about Jesus. We don't follow a system, we don't obey a set of rules and we are not driven by any organization. No, we follow a person – Jesus! He is the centre of our lives.

To be daily willing to follow in Jesus's footsteps is simply a response to his love, devotion and sacrifice for us. A true disciple of Jesus will not be fanatical and hostile to others. On the contrary: he will love more – even his enemies; he will respect the positions of others – even if he does not agree with them; and he will serve his fellows because Jesus served him first.

**John:** What do you think about this example? Suppose you are bankrupt and receive from somebody one million dollars as a present. The rest of your life you will devote yourself fully to him and serve him with love and faithfulness. At the end of your life you realize that everything you did and gave was no more than just a few cents compared to his generous gift. Similarly, what Jesus has given us weighs a million times more than what we could ever do for him.

**Jeff:** A very good example! Listen: the tricky fact is that we can even do good things without putting our old life to death. It is possible to help others in order to be praised. And even if no-one knows some of our good actions, they can be done in order to feel morally superior. We step so easily into the ego-trap, often without realizing it.

We've already talked several times about being in different kinds of prisons. Here again the devil is very tricky, out to catch people. He tries to convince them that they have maximum freedom when their desires are fulfilled; they are able to force through their intentions and they are always at the centre of attention. But this is nothing other than egoism. "I am important, I want to feel good, I want others to serve me, I, I, I." Such people will never expe-

rience freedom but find themselves in a jail with very strong walls. They are in bondage to themselves by always pursuing satisfaction, but without ever getting it.

**John:** How can we avoid it?

**Jeff:** You know the answer. We need to look at someone other than ourselves. We have to fix our eyes on Jesus. He is our atoning sacrifice. He paid the price for our sin. He shows our small, restless hearts that we are infinitely precious in his eyes. Through Jesus's grace we have everything we need. This is the end of our desperate attempts at self-realization. Those who have learned to fix their eyes on Jesus will learn to mind the needs of others. Their desire of being served will change to being a true selfless servant.

Only because of the Lord are we able to learn not to do good things merely in order to feel better or to get the praise of people. This will lead only to a very small improvement of our self-image. This is nothing compared to what we have and are in Christ.

A millionaire does not care about a few cents. Those who discover their riches in Jesus are spiritual millionaires. There is no further need to look constantly for the approval of people in order to feel better.

Once we have understood this, we don't have to help others, but need it ourselves. We strive to imitate Jesus and desire to delight him. Whether or not others appreciate what we are doing doesn't matter any more. The gospel is able to give us the eagerness for an unselfish life-style.<sup>20</sup>

Please open your Bible and read 1 Corinthians 10:24 and Philipians 2:4.

**John:** *"No one should seek his own good, but the good of others. ... not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others."*

**Jeff:** Remember how the devil tempted Adam and Eve: *"... if you eat of this fruit you will be like God!"* (Genesis 3:5).

This is the ultimate lie. We will never become God, or even a god. That prideful lie is Satan's first temptation. Many religions and new-age philosophies still promote this old idea that we are divine or can become gods.

This desire to be a god shows up every time we try to control our circumstances, our future and people around us. But as creatures, we will never be the Creator. God doesn't want us to become gods; he wants us to become godly – taking on his values, attitudes and character. The Bible challenges us to take on an entirely new way of life – a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside as

the Lord reproduces his character in us.

God's ultimate goal for our life on earth is not comfort, but character development. He wants us to grow spiritually and become more like Christ. Becoming like him does not mean losing your personality or becoming mindless. God created your uniqueness, so He certainly doesn't want to destroy it. Being like Christ is all about transforming your character, not your personality.

**John:** Do you mean that putting our selfish life to death is necessary in order to become more like him?

**Jeff:** Exactly!

Many Christians misinterpret Jesus's promise of the "abundant life". They think that perfect health, a comfortable lifestyle, constant happiness, full realization of their dreams, and instant relief from problems through faith and prayer are to be expected. In other words, they want the Christian life to be easy. They expect heaven on earth. However, God is not a servant in our selfish pursuit of personal fulfilment. We should never forget that life is not about us! We exist for God's purposes and not vice versa.<sup>21</sup>

**John:** Is there any other Bible text which helps us to learn putting our selfish life to death?

**Jeff:** Sure, let's take for instance the great passage about Jesus in Philipians 2:3-8. Again he is our model.

**John:** *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!"*

Amazing, what Jesus has done for us!

*"Whoever wants to save his life will lose it,  
but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it."*

Mark 8:35

# **“I hate my parents!”**

## *Eighth Adventure*

*“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.  
Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.  
Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”  
Luke 6:37*

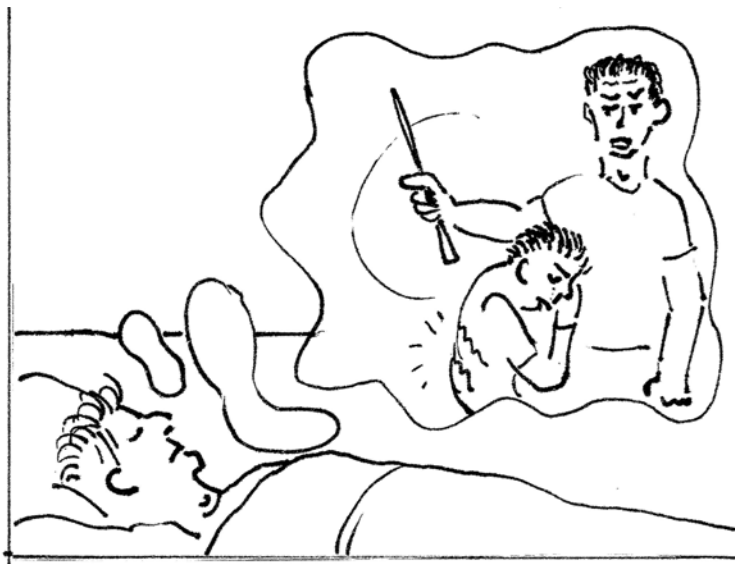
**JOHN** had not slept very well for about three weeks. The reason was that he had started to dream, often badly. In his nightmares he always experienced the same scenes from his childhood.

At the age of about seven his father began to treat him very brutally. Often he hit him for minor reasons. Even at an earlier age his father's behaviour towards him was not very warm-hearted. However now it became so dreadful that little John was never without fear when his Dad was at home.

He was often drunk, at which times he lost control completely. When he came home from the bars late at night he sometimes dragged John out of bed and gave him orders; for example, to kindle a fire in the stove. Despite his age, John was quite skilful. Normally he quickly got the wood burning, but his father usually stood impatiently by and shouted at him if he did not succeed straight away. Little John became nervous, and the more nervous he became the longer it took. Then his father usually gave him a hard slap. If John dared to cry, he was sometimes beaten with a stick until his whole body was painful. Often he was dragged into the cellar and had to spend hours locked in a dark chamber. And it was a terrible fact that his mother was at home and did not help him. Next morning she told him only that he should do what his father wanted in order to avoid problems.

This terrible time lasted almost six years. At the age of fourteen he left his parents to live with an uncle, who treated him much better. He found a job and earned his own money. It seemed a miracle that he was accepted by the Marine Academy to become a wiper in the engine room. Now he was financially independent.

As time passed he saw his mother seldom and his father never since leaving his family. He had no desire at all to meet him. On the contrary, he tried to forget everything about his difficult childhood.



The next few years were quite happy. John got to know a good girl, whom he married. It was not long before she delivered their son. John was able to buy a small plot of land and build a house. Although he and his family were often separated because of his occupation, John was grateful. He hoped to leave the memory of his bad childhood behind, but now, in the nightmares, which were completely unexpected, his early years returned to worry him.

I should talk to Jeff, John thought, and went to his cabin to tell him about his bad experiences. Jeff was a good listener and gave him time to tell his story.

**Jeff:** John, do you hate your parents?

**John:** I think that I am not supposed to.

**Jeff:** But it is hard to stay away from hatred after suffering so many years because of them.

**John:** Yes, that's true. If I'm honest, I have to admit that I hate both of them, my father because of his cruelty and my mother because she ignored my pain and for her lack of compassion. For a long time I was almost able to suppress the memory of this terrible period. I don't know why the nightmares started after so many years.

**Jeff:** John, what you have experienced is like a heavy burden that you have carried since your childhood. But you will never get rid of it by trying to forget the experience. It's impossible!

**John:** But what shall I do? I don't want to be reminded of those events.

**Jeff:** There is only one way to overcome it. But I can't promise you that it will be easy. In the contrary, it will be hard. However, there is hope for you.

**John:** What would you suggest?

**Jeff:** You won't overcome it by forgetting, but by forgiving your parents.

**John:** To forgive them – does God really expect it from me?

**Jeff:** Honestly speaking – yes!

**John:** I am not sure that I am able to do it.

**Jeff:** I am convinced that this is impossible for you. I would not be able to do so either.

**John:** But if you, a mature Christian, are not capable of it, what can I do?

**Jeff:** We are indeed too weak and the Lord certainly knows it. John, there is a very important truth we need to understand:

God sometimes requires us to do things that seem to overburden us. However, if we decide to obey him, he will give us the strength to do them. It may take time and we may need help from an experienced Christian, but God will bless those who desire to do his will.

**John:** What do you suggest?

**Jeff:** Most important is not to follow your feelings, but your mind, and make a decision. This is to forgive, because it is God's will, and based on the conviction that he knows what is best for you.

**John:** But how can I ignore my feelings?

**Jeff:** I don't suggest that you ignore them, but make this decision in spite of them.

I will give a simple example: If, for instance, you have an acute appendicitis and the doctor advises surgery, your feelings will not be very pleasant. Nobody likes to be operated on. It costs a lot of money, there is a risk including the anaesthetic, pain afterwards and usually a general fear. Nevertheless, you will make the decision even against your feelings, because otherwise you are likely to die from the ruptured appendix. Likewise, it is possible to decide to forgive in spite of the negative feelings.

**John:** But will the decision last if the feelings overwhelm me again?

**Jeff:** This is a good question! Maybe at first they will seem to get the upper hand, but you can expect Jesus to help. You'll never struggle alone. His strength will make the difference.

However, I suggest that we first read some Bible passages about the subject of forgiveness. Let's start with Matthew 6:12, which is part of the prayer the Lord taught us.

**John:** I don't need to look it up because I have learned it by heart: "*Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.*"

Jeff, I fully understand that God expects us to forgive if we receive his forgiveness. But the sins of my parents are more and bigger than any I have committed. Is this fair?

**Jeff:** A good point! But consider this: forgiveness is never fair, never just and never deserved. If we demand justice, we have to pursue punishment. Every sin, small or big, deserves a penalty. But the Lord decided to offer us grace, which is in principle undeserved. Grace is never just but always demands a high price.

**John:** What kind of price?

**Jeff:** It is to abstain from justice, not to demand punishment even though it would be more than deserved.

What your parents did to you makes them guilty by state authority as well as God's law. Maybe one day a court will hold your parents responsible for their deeds. Maybe even God will judge them, if they don't repent. However, you have to abstain from revenge; and you need to forgive.

**John:** You said that a price is to be paid. Please give me an example to help me understand what you mean.

**Jeff:** Okay! Let me compare sin with financial debt. Suppose a friend of yours smashed your TV through carelessness. It cost you 500 USD. There are two options now: the first is to demand the money from him; the second is that you cover the expense. But either way someone has to pay for the breakage. If you demand that your friend pays the price, it is certainly just. On the other hand, if you decide to bear the cost it would not be fair, but it is grace!<sup>22</sup>

The same applies to damages which are not material. If someone robs you of a good chance, ruins your reputation, good luck or even your health, that person becomes your debtor. Again, there are two options: the first is that you make your debtor pay. You do it by trying to rob him of his chances and ruin his reputation. You will seek opportunities to make him suffer and to pay him back, maybe even double.

However, this course has a major disadvantage. You will become like him and will turn out to be a hard, cold person, full of hatred and contempt.

**John:** You mean that the victim becomes like the offender?

**Jeff:** Yes, that's what I am talking about!

The alternative would be to forgive. But true forgiveness is not easy. Knowing that to avenge yourself would be just, declining to do it can be very painful. Why? Because you pay the price for someone's injustice towards you. True forgiveness means to accept suffering.

**John:** Maybe this is the reason why Jesus suffered for our sins?

**Jeff:** Yes John, someone had to suffer for our sins and Jesus decided to pay our price.<sup>23</sup>

**John:** How often do we have to forgive?

**Jeff:** Once, the disciple Peter confronted Jesus with the same question.

Please read Matthew 18:21.

**John:** *"Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, 'I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven.'"*

Really 490 times?

**Jeff:** Seventy times seven stands even for unlimited forgiveness and not for any particular figure.

Please open your Bible next to Ephesians 4:32.

**John:** *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

**Jeff:** Besides other reasons to forgive here we find again the main one: Jesus forgave us and we are supposed to forgive others as well.

Now please read Colossians 3:13.

**John:** *"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a complaint against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

**Jeff:** Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth that he had already forgiven those in the church who wronged him. Then he gave an interesting reason we should consider. Please read 2 Corinthians 2:10-11.

**John:** *"I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not cheat us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."*

**Jeff:** We need to forgive in order not to stumble into the Satan's trap. Unwillingness to forgive is one main entrance for the devil in our lives. It is one of his chains to keep us in bondage, one of his prisons to lock us in.

**John:** Do you think that Christians who don't forgive are not free and have no peace of mind?

**Jeff:** Yes, you are right. They are in bondage – often for many years; some even up to the end of their lives. A person who is not willing to forgive is beset by evil thoughts. There is something like an invisible chain between the hurt person and the offender. This results



in hatred, bitterness and all kinds of negative feelings. Moreover, they even tend to grow instead of becoming smaller. The strange thing is that the offender often forgets his sin or doesn't care much about it. He does not bother, but the victim who refuses to forgive suffers.

Please be so kind as to read Romans 12:19.

**John:** *"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."*

**Jeff:** To forgive does not mean that justice will never happen. On the contrary, God is the judge and his judgements will come and will be righteous. Our judgement would not be fair, because we are prejudiced.

**John:** Another question: Is it necessary to forgive even if my parents have never asked me to?

**Jeff:** Remember what Jesus said when he hung on the cross: *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* Christ forgave his wrongdoers and even asked his father to do so. None of them has repented yet.

**John:** I would like to forgive my parents, but how?

**Jeff:** Recently I read in a good book that it is helpful to do it in twelve steps. I will lend it to you and you can take your time to read and reflect on it. Maybe there are even others you need to forgive besides your parents. I took the twelve steps some time ago and they helped me to gain more freedom in Christ. Lack of forgiveness certainly keeps us in a prison.

**John:** Thank you; I will follow your suggestion. Please do lend me your book.

John went back to his cabin and read the passage Jeff advised. It took a few days to reflect upon the contents.

### Step 1

Write the names of those who hurt you on a sheet of paper. Describe exactly what they did to you (for example: rejection, withdrawal of love, injustice, wickedness, any abuse of verbal, physical, emotional and sexual nature, deception, disregarding, etc.). Very often, the first or second name on the list is the father, mother or other close relative.

### Step 2

Write down your negative feelings and be very honest. It is not a sin to

accept their existence. God knows your emotions whether you admit them or not. If you hide your feelings, you will not be able to forgive.

### **Step 3**

Remember the significance of the cross. The cross of Jesus Christ makes forgiveness a legitimate, morally right thing. Jesus took all the sin of the world on himself – including the one you have committed. He died once and for all. Be willing to forgive, even if your heart cries out: “That’s not fair, where is the righteousness?” Justice happened on the cross of Calvary.

### **Step 4**

Decide to bear the load of those who have wronged you. Decide as well not talk about their sin to others. True forgiveness is always on behalf, as Jesus died on your behalf.

### **Step 5**

Decide to forgive. This is an act of will, a conscious decision to release the person and to let the past go. Do it in spite of negative feelings you may have. God commands it but you have the choice of whether to obey or not.

The other person has acted completely wrongly and maybe will be brought to justice. But that’s none of your business. It is your responsibility to release the person. If you make this decision, in spite of your negative feelings – don’t worry, they will change over time.

### **Step 6**

Take the list with the names of those who have hurt you and pray in each case: “I forgive (speak the name) that he/she (speak the nature of the injury)”.

If the offence done to you is especially big or if are very bitter, pray together with a person whom you trust. The common prayer has a special promise.

### **Step 7**

Destroy the list with the names. You are now free! Those who hurt you don’t need to know it. The act of forgiveness is something between God and you alone.

### **Step 8**

It may happen that the persons you have forgiven will change. Pray for them in order that they will gain the freedom of forgiveness as well.

However, don't make your act of forgiveness dependent on their reaction.

**Step 9**

Try to understand the guilty people. They have often been victims as well.

**Step 10**

Expect positive developments in your own life if you have forgiven. Over time you can think of the people who have harmed you without pain, anger or feeling of vengeance. You can be in the presence of those people without reacting negatively.

**Step 11**

Thank God for what he has taught you and for the maturity you have gained.

**Step 12**

Think about whether you are partly responsible for the injuries you have suffered. Confess to God, if necessary, your share of the blame.<sup>24</sup>

After John had gone through the twelve steps, he felt great relief. He didn't know yet what he should do next, whether to meet his father later at home or not. I will leave it to the Lord, he thought. Before he switched off his cabin light he fixed a piece of paper to the bulkhead with some words he had copied from an article:

To forgive others is the key to peace. When God forgives us, he changes our past. By giving us promises, he secures our future. By his grace, we participate in his power to change the past and to secure the future. We are able to forgive and to keep promises as he does.<sup>25</sup>

*“Do not judge, and you will not be judged.  
Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.  
Forgive, and you will be forgiven.”*  
Luke 6:37

# **“God, why don’t you answer me?”**

## *Ninth Adventure*

*“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.”*

Psalm 43:5

JOHN lay in bed with a high fever for five days. He was not sure of its cause; perhaps a violent flu. Because his ship was in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, he couldn’t see a doctor. He felt weak and depressed, not only because of his sickness, but also because of several other things that had gone wrong recently.

About four weeks before, he had made a major mistake in the engine-room. This caused a lot of problems, because a pump had to be replaced. In the next port they had to get an imported spare part and the necessary repairs took two whole days. The chief engineer was very angry and reported the case to the company. Now John was afraid that his promotion as a fitter could be cancelled.

Although the damage was finally resolved, the other engineers hadn’t treated him very well since then. Also the ratings seemed to distance themselves from him and the atmosphere was not as relaxed as before.

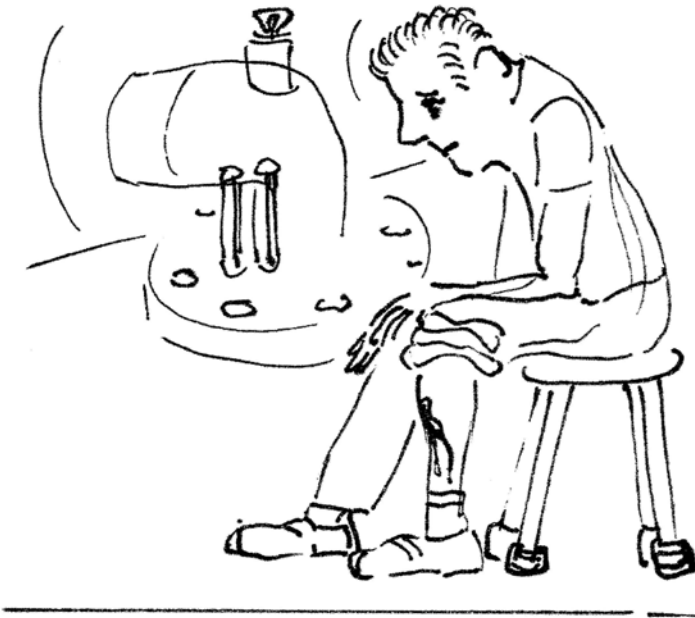
He prayed earnestly that God would help him out of this difficult situation. But somehow the Lord seemed to be far away. John could no longer feel his presence, as he had previously.

A few days later he got the news that his uncle, who had taken him in as a teenager, had died from a heart attack. This was completely unexpected and very hard for him to bear because he had really loved his uncle.

John followed Jeff’s advice and took even more time to spend with God. But he found it hard to concentrate when he read the Bible and prayed. His thoughts wandered back and forth and he didn’t take any encouragement from what he studied. In sleepless hours, he prayed earnestly, but God didn’t answer. He seemed to have turned away.

Two days later John had a little accident during his duty. It was not very serious, but his leg was bleeding and painful and he couldn’t do his job well for two days. David, the second oiler, had to take some of his responsibilities and was apparently not happy about it. Moreover, Jayson,

the second engineer, who a few months ago had treated him very badly, again became impatient with him.



Now John was in bed with fever and pretty desperate. Why didn't God answer him; why didn't he help?

Suddenly he heard a knocking at his cabin door and Jeff's voice outside. John had no desire to talk to him, but decided to let him in.

**Jeff:** Hi John, how are you doing?

**John:** Honestly speaking – not well.

**Jeff:** Is the fever still high?

**John:** Yes, but it is not only the fever.

**Jeff:** I know, the damage with the pump, the death of your uncle, the accident with your leg and now the fever.

**John:** Yes, and besides that I fear my promotion will be cancelled, and the way most of the others treat me is not very pleasant. I don't understand why God allows these problems, why he doesn't answer any prayers and why I don't feel his presence any more. Maybe I have committed a big sin and now I have to suffer his punishment.

**Jeff:** It is true that sometimes sin is the reason for problems we have. God allows them in order that we realize something is wrong. How-

ever, I don’t think this is the reason for your problems. Though you aren’t perfect, you don’t commit sins wilfully and stubbornly and I do see that you are always willing to repent if necessary.

**John:** But why does God allow all my problems and to feel so distant from him, unlike when I newly accepted him as my Saviour?

**Jeff:** What’s happening to you is quite normal. Many have felt God’s presence very strongly particularly when they began their walk with him. But the Lord wants to teach us to trust in him even if there are a lot of difficulties and we don’t feel his presence.

**John:** But how do I know that Jesus is still with me, if he seems to be so distant?

**Jeff:** Keep this in mind: God is real, no matter how you feel!

**John:** But it’s much easier to trust if we feel close to him.

**Jeff:** Sure, but he wants to teach us to put our lives on solid and not on shaky ground. Nothing is so unsteadily as our feelings. We can compare them with waves on the ocean; they are always going up and down, up and down.

**John:** Yes, that’s true. Tell me, what is this solid ground?

**Jeff:** We have the Bible, his word. It is necessary to learn to believe his promises, because they are absolutely trustworthy. Please read for instance Matthew 24:35.

**John:** *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”*

**Jeff:** Human words are often meaningless and fade quickly. However, the Bible is eternal, as you can also read in Psalms 119:89.

**John:** *“Your word, Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.”*

**Jeff:** There are many more verses, for example Isaiah 40:8 and 1 Peter 1:25.

*“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”*

*“The word of the Lord endures forever and this is the word that was preached to you.”*

Nowhere does the Bible encourage us to trust in feelings, but often to believe in the word of God.

**John:** Well, I understand! But why doesn’t the Lord answer my prayers and take away my problems?

**Jeff:** The deepest level of worship is praising God in spite of pain, thanking him during a trial, trusting him when tempted, surrendering while suffering and loving him when he seems distant.

Even though Jesus is the Almighty Lord, he offers us his friendships. You may remember that we read John 15:13-15 some time ago.

**John:** *“Greater love has no-one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”*

**Jeff:** Human friendships are often tested by separation and silence; either you are divided by physical distance or you are unable to talk. Similarly in your friendship with Jesus, you won’t always feel close to him. Any relationship involves times of closeness and times of distance, also in regards to the Lord. That’s when worship gets difficult.

For your friendship to mature, God will test it with periods of seeming separation, times when it feels as if he has abandoned or forgotten you. Sometimes God feels a million miles away.<sup>26</sup>

**John:** But in the Bible, I read that the believers had so many great experiences with the Lord.

**Jeff:** That’s true, but not all the time. King David, for instance, was called a man after God’s heart. He enjoyed a very close friendship with the Lord. But quite often he complained that God didn’t answer his prayers and seemed to be distant from him.

**John:** Can you give me an example?

**Jeff:** Please read for instance Psalms 5:1-3.

**John:** *“Give ear to my words, O Lord, consider my sighing. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my request before you and wait in expectation.”*

**Jeff:** Turn now to Psalm 22:1-2.

**John:** *“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent.”*

**Jeff:** About half of the Psalms are written by King David. Once you read them you will be surprised how often he was downcast because God didn’t answer his prayers straight away and because he had many troubles. In the book of Psalms, we find everything:

- ✓ adoration,
- ✓ thanksgiving,
- ✓ description of the wonderful works of God,
- ✓ anger because of injustice,
- ✓ expressions of fear and despair,
- ✓ complaints that God didn’t help and was seemingly far away.

**John:** I have been thinking that something is wrong with me.

**Jeff:** Probably not! Have you ever heard of Job?

**John:** Yes, he had to suffer a lot and didn’t understand why.

**Jeff:** That’s true. Job was a god-fearing man and was puzzled that in spite of his faithfulness towards the Lord his situation became increasingly worse. Please read Job 23:8-12.

**John:** *“If I go to the east, he is not there; if I go to the west, I do not find him. When he is at work in the north, I do not see him; when he turns to the south, I catch no glimpse of him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.”*

Was anything else wrong with him?

**Jeff:** The truth is that he didn’t suffer because of any sins he had committed. The Lord tested his faith and his aim was to deepen it. Though certainly most people don’t have to suffer as much as Job, testing our faith is part of God’s way to mature our friendship with him.

When God seems distant, you might conclude that he is angry with you or disciplining you for some sin. In fact, sin does disconnect us from an intimate fellowship with him by disobedience, conflict with others, busyness, friendship with the world and other sins. But often this feeling of abandonment or estrangement from God has nothing to do with sin. It is a test of faith – one we must all face: Will you continue to love, trust, obey and worship God, even when you have no sense of his presence or visible evidence of his work in your life?

The most common mistake Christians make in worship today is seeking an experience rather than seeking God. They look for a feeling, and if it happens, they conclude that they have worshipped. Wrong! In fact, God often removes our feelings so we won’t depend on them. Seeking a feeling, even the feeling of closeness to Christ, is not yet worship.

When you are a baby Christian, God gives you a lot of confirming emotions and often answers the most immature, self-centred prayers – so you’ll know he exists. However, he wants your relationship with him to mature.

The situations that will stretch your faith most will be those times when life falls apart and God is nowhere to be found. This happened to Job. On a single day he lost everything – his family, his business, his health and everything he owned. Most discouraging –



for thirty-seven chapters, a very long time, God said nothing.

How do you praise God, when you don't understand what's happening in your life and the Lord is silent? In a crisis, how do you stay connected without communication? How do you keep your eyes on Jesus when they're full of tears?<sup>27</sup> Please read in Job 1:21 what he did:

**John:** *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."*

**Jeff:** Job poured out his heart to God and still worshipped him. It was a long time before the Lord started to speak to Job again. One of Job's final statements is in chapter 42:5. Please take your Bible and read it.

**John:** *"My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you."*

**Jeff:** Can you imagine what Job tried to express?

**John:** Maybe that he had now got to know the Lord much better, somehow more personally?

**Jeff:** Exactly! To know of a person just means to be aware of some facts and details of his life. To really know someone goes much deeper. You step into a very personal relationship.

**John:** Does the New Testament also speak about this subject?

**Jeff:** Sure, for instance in the book of James is an important statement. Please open your Bible to James 1:2-4 and 12.

**John:** *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

*"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."*

**Jeff:** John, you read that we should consider it a joy when we are tested. What do you think – why?

**John:** Here it is written that this way we learn perseverance and become spiritually mature.

**Jeff:** Yes, that's true. Our normal reaction to difficulties is not joy. We rather tend to complain and pray that the problems will be immediately removed from us. We usually desire quick solutions.

**John:** Is it a mistake to ask Jesus to take away our problems?

**Jeff:** No, there's nothing wrong with it! On the contrary, we are invited to share everything with him! However, we have to learn to leave it to the Lord when and how he responds.

**John:** I always thought that we would experience spiritual growth best when all our prayers are answered and we feel that the Lord’s presence is permanent.

**Jeff:** God will answer our prayers according to his wisdom. However, he often takes time to give us a response in order to teach us patience or because he has different timing.

An immature child will start crying if a particular desire is not satisfied immediately. A mature person has learned to wait. It is similar with a spiritually-mature person.

Besides this, please consider the fact that sometimes we don’t notice his response because it is different from what we expect. If we have a problem, we usually also have a clear idea of how God should solve it for us. But he is the Lord and it is up to him how he reacts. Certainly, he has different options. He can say:

- ✓ Yes, I’ll grant your request and give you straight away exactly what you desire.
- ✓ Yes, I’ll grant your request, but not yet. I want to teach you patience and to trust in me even though you don’t get a quick response.
- ✓ Yes, I want to help you, but in a different way from what you have in mind.
- ✓ No, I won’t take away your problem, but I promise to be with you and help you to endure.

**John:** Well, now I understand better. Still I think that it is not easy if the problems are many and big and God seems to be so distant.

**Jeff:** Sure! Here is an article by Rick Warren, an American Pastor. I don’t agree with everything he ever said and did, but these are very true and wise thoughts. I will leave you now and you may take time to read it.

Article (source unknown).

***That’s Why We’re Called Human Beings, Not Human Doings.***

*People often ask me what the purpose of life is. Usually I reply: life is preparation for eternity. We were created to last forever and God wants us to be to be with him in heaven.*

*One day my heart will cease to beat. This will be the end of my body but not the end of my being. Maybe I will live 60 to 100 years here on earth. However, I will spend billions of years in eternity. Life on earth is just to warm up. God wants to train us now for what we will do and to be forever in heaven.*

We were not only created by God but as well for God. If you haven't realized this, your life is meaningless.

Life is never without problems: Either you're stuck in the middle of them or you have them just behind you or you soon have to face the next ones. The reason is that God is primarily interested in developing your character and not that you always feel pleasant. The Lord is rather interested to sanctify you instead giving you ordinary happiness. It is possible on earth to be to some extent happy, but this is not the purpose of life. The goal is to grow in character and Christ-likeness.

The last year was the most wonderful of my life, however also the most difficult, because my wife Kay got cancer. We discovered quickly that God didn't intend to heal Kay or to make it easy for her, despite the prayers of hundreds of thousands of people. It became very difficult for her, yet God strengthened her character. Through the example of her sickness and with the Lord's help she was able to give hope to others in similar circumstances. Before, I thought that life could be compared with walking, sometimes over hills and then through valleys. There are easy times, followed by difficult periods – up and down, up and down. However, I no longer believe that this is true. One can compare life rather with two rail tracks. At any time there is something good and bad in life. No matter how good it is at the moment, there is always something bad where you have to work on. And no matter how bad your life, there's always something good you can thank God for.

Alternatively, you can look at either your life's problems or its purpose. When you look at your problems, you turn only to yourself, your difficulties, your cause, your pain. However, the easiest way to get rid of the pain is to turn your gaze away from yourself in order to look at Jesus and others.

You have to learn to get along with both the good and the hard things in life. Indeed, sometimes it is more difficult to deal with the seemingly easy periods.

You have to ask yourself frequently: Shall I live for my possessions and my reputation? Shall I always be driven by superficial urgencies? Is it guilt, bitterness or materialism which pushes me? Or is it God's purpose and meaning that drives my life?

When I get up in the morning, I always pray: "God, even if I don't get anything achieved today, I still want to know you better and love you more." God didn't put me primarily into this world in order to carry out a list of duties. He is more interested in what I am than what I do.

John thought, because of my many problems, I felt as if I were in a prison. There seemed to be no escape. I didn't know how to get out of it. I cried to God and asked him to turn his ear to me. I thought that he had forsaken me. But now I know that it isn't true, since God said in Hebrews 13:5: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you!"

*“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,  
my Saviour and my God.”*

Psalm 43:5



# The horrible occult porno movie

## *Tenth Adventure*

*“Put on the full armour of God,  
so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”*  
Ephesians 6:11

JOHN felt much better now than a few weeks ago. He had recovered from the severe flu and his leg wound was completely healed. The relationship with his colleagues had returned to normal. He was particularly grateful to the Lord that his promotion as a fitter was no longer called into question, as feared.

It was Sunday and the chief engineer had given him a complete day off. He felt bored, but had no desire to read the Bible as he had over the last few days. “We should not read the Bible because we have to, but because we love the author,” he remembered Jeff saying. However, now he didn’t desire the word of God but something “exciting” to experience.

John went to the smoke-room, hoping to find a thrilling movie. One title caught his attention: “ON THE ROAD TO CONDEMNATION.” On the back of the cover was a brief summary of the film. He quickly understood that it contained some hard porno scenes, and that occult activities played a major role.

John knew that he should not watch this movie. A gentle voice inside him whispered: “Don’t do it.” But he pushed this warning aside and took the DVD back to his cabin. The story line was awful – dirty, blasphemous and scary. Repeatedly the inner voice urged him to stop watching. Although he realized very clearly that he sinned, he continued until the end because there was something fascinating about it. It seemed as if a dark force hindered his obeying the Holy Spirit.

Afterwards, however, he felt very guilty but didn’t know what to do. How could he return to the Lord after he had committed this sin intentionally and ignored permanent warnings? Finally, John took his Bible and continued reading where he had stopped six days before. He started with Mark 3:20 where Jesus quarrelled with some religious teachers who opposed him. When he read verses 28-29, he suddenly became terribly frightened:

Jesus said: *“Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”*



Could it be that he had committed the guilt that cannot be forgiven? In addition to the sinful storyline there were many curses, some against God. John couldn't rid his mind of the pictures he had seen and blasphemous words he had heard. He was compelled to think the blasphemous thoughts, even though he didn't wish to. Desperately, he ran about his small cabin, lay down on his bed, and jumped up again. Repeatedly he prayed, "God forgive me, please forgive my sin!", but could not find any peace. He knew that Jeff had just started his night watch, which would last until 6.00am. and afterwards his friend had to sleep. So John would not be able to talk to him until the following afternoon at the earliest.

He could not find any rest the whole night. Next morning he tried to perform his duties properly. Finally, around 5pm., he was able to meet Jeff in his cabin, and told him the whole story.

**John:** Do you think that I have committed the sin that will never be forgiven?

**Jeff:** John, what you did was certainly very sinful. However, you can be sure that you didn't commit this particular sin.

**John:** But since I have watched this movie, I have blasphemous thoughts permanently in my mind, even though I don't want them.

**Jeff:** These evil thoughts are an attack by the devil. Their origin is not in you, because you didn't want to think them. On the contrary, they are against anything you desire. However, because of your disregard of the voice of the Holy Spirit and because you exposed yourself to very dirty stuff, you opened a door for Satan to enter your life. It was an invitation he gladly accepted.

**John:** Are you really sure? I am so afraid of being forever condemned.

**Jeff:** No, that won't happen! This passage in Mark 3 is not easy to understand; it is important to consider the context of the story:

Some Pharisees and teachers of law had clearly realized that Jesus was sent by God. They saw many of his miracles and listened to his powerful and true messages. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to let a person understand who Jesus is, but instead of turning to the him and surrendering their lives to him, they started to blame him for performing his miracles through the power of Satan. In fact they knew better, but decided to reject the truth because of jealousy. They feared Jesus's influence among the people and the loss of their privileges.

Many have cursed the Triune God (Trinity) when they were unbelievers, but later accepted the Lord as their personal Saviour. To curse God in ignorance is certainly a big sin but will be forgiven once repented.

**John:** What exactly is the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

**Jeff:** It is when a person permanently, strongly and deliberately refuses to acknowledge the truth about Jesus as revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. To blaspheme the Holy Ghost is not to speak something bad about him because of ignorance, but to reject Christ against better judgment. Such a person knows that he should respond positively but simply doesn't want to. He hardens his heart and is not willing to acknowledge his sins in order to repent of them. Because he does not desire and receive forgiveness, he is eternally lost.

I have read in a good commentary that someone who still fears that he could have committed this particular sin has certainly not done it. His fears prove that the Holy Spirit is still touching his heart and that God hasn't rejected him.

**John:** Now I understand! I feel so relieved that I haven't committed this particular sin.

**Jeff:** All the same, you became guilty and allowed the devil a big influence in your life.



**John:** Yes, that's true! However, I have already asked Jesus to forgive me.

**Jeff:** But you still feel the attacks of the devil?

**John:** Yes, very much!

**Jeff:** I have a very helpful book, *The Bondage Breaker*, by Neil T. Anderson<sup>28</sup>. It recommends breaking away in seven steps covering sinful activities, habits and bondages. You may read and follow the first one right now.

**John:** Gladly!

**Jeff:** You may never have been involved with many of the activities Anderson writes about, but it makes sense to read the whole passage and repent the sins that concern you. Please start reading.

**John:** The first step toward experiencing your freedom in Christ is to renounce (verbally reject) all past or present involvement with occult practices, cult teachings, and rituals, as well as non-Christian religions.

You must renounce any activity or group which denies Jesus Christ or offers guidance through any source other than the absolute authority of the Bible. Any group that requires dark, secret initiations, ceremonies, promises, or pacts should also be renounced. Begin this step by praying aloud:

*Dear heavenly Father, I ask You to bring to my mind anything and everything that I have done knowingly or unknowingly that involves occult, cult, or non-Christian teachings or practices. I want to experience Your freedom by renouncing these things right now. In Jesus's name I pray, Amen.*

Even if you took part in something and thought it was just a film, game or joke, you need to renounce it. Satan will try to take advantage of anything he can in our lives, so it is always wise to do it in full. Even if you were just standing by watching others do it, you need to renounce your passive involvement. You may not have realized at the time that what was going on was evil, but still go ahead and renounce it.

If something comes to your mind and you are not sure what to do about it, trust that the Spirit of God is answering the prayer you just prayed, and go ahead and renounce it.

Pray:

*Lord, I confess that I have participated in \_\_\_\_\_ (John: watching an occult porn movie). I know it was evil and offensive in your sight.*

*Thank you for your forgiveness. I renounce any and all involvement with ----- (John: watching an occult porn movie), and I cancel out any and all ground that the enemy gained in my life through this activity. In Jesus' name, Amen.*<sup>29</sup>

The following prayer expresses the commitment of a heart that chooses to worship the Lord and serve him only (Matthew 4:10).

Pray:

*Dear Lord God, I know how easy it is to allow other things and other people to become more important to me than you. I also know that this is terribly offensive to your holy eyes as you have commanded that I "shall have no other gods" before you.*

*I confess to you that I have not loved you with all my heart and soul and mind. As a result, I have sinned against you, violating the first and greatest commandment. I repent of and turn away from this idolatry and now choose to return to you, Lord Jesus, as my first love.*

*Please reveal to my mind now any and all idols in my life. I want to renounce each of them and, in so doing, cancel out any and all ground Satan may have gained in my life through my idolatry. In the name of Jesus, the true God, Amen.*

*(See Exodus 20:3; Matthew 22:37 and Revelation 2:4-5).*<sup>30</sup>

**Jeff:** John, you may read and follow steps 2-7 later.

**John:** Yes, I certainly will!

Jeff, I thought that to live with Jesus would be easier and not involve so many struggles.

**Jeff:** Well, nowhere does the Bible promise that the Christian life is always pleasant, like a walk on a beach promenade. On the contrary, we are involved in a battle and our enemy is cruel! However, there are two pieces of good news:

- ✓ You never fight alone! Jesus, the one who lives in you, has already won the victory over the enemy! You are weak, but you plus the Lord, who has all power in heaven and earth, are in the majority! You don't need to be afraid!
- ✓ The Bible offers you a complete suit of armour and the necessary weapons.

**John:** Really?

**Jeff:** Sure! Open your Bible to Ephesians 6:10-18 and read this passage:

**John:** *"Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the*

authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the:

- ✓ **belt of truth** buckled around your waist, with the
- ✓ **breastplate of righteousness** in place, and with your
- ✓ **feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.** In addition to all this, take up the
- ✓ **shield of faith**, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the
- ✓ **helmet of salvation** and the
- ✓ **sword of the Spirit**, which is the word of God.

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people."*

**Jeff:** You have read that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

It is very important that we consider these words. Many Christians struggle against sin, impure thoughts, negative habits, irrational feelings and unpleasant character traits. They think that they alone are involved and are honestly trying to change. This passage, however, opens our eyes to the fact that we should not forget the devil and his dark world. He is much more active than often assumed.

**John:** I have never seen it this way.

**Jeff:** Many have experienced a lot of defeats because they tried to win the battle against a supernatural power with their limited human strength.

**John:** Sure, we can't overcome Satan. Does it mean we have to accept that our lives consist of a series of defeats?

**Jeff:** Certainly not, because Jesus is stronger! Read John 14:30.

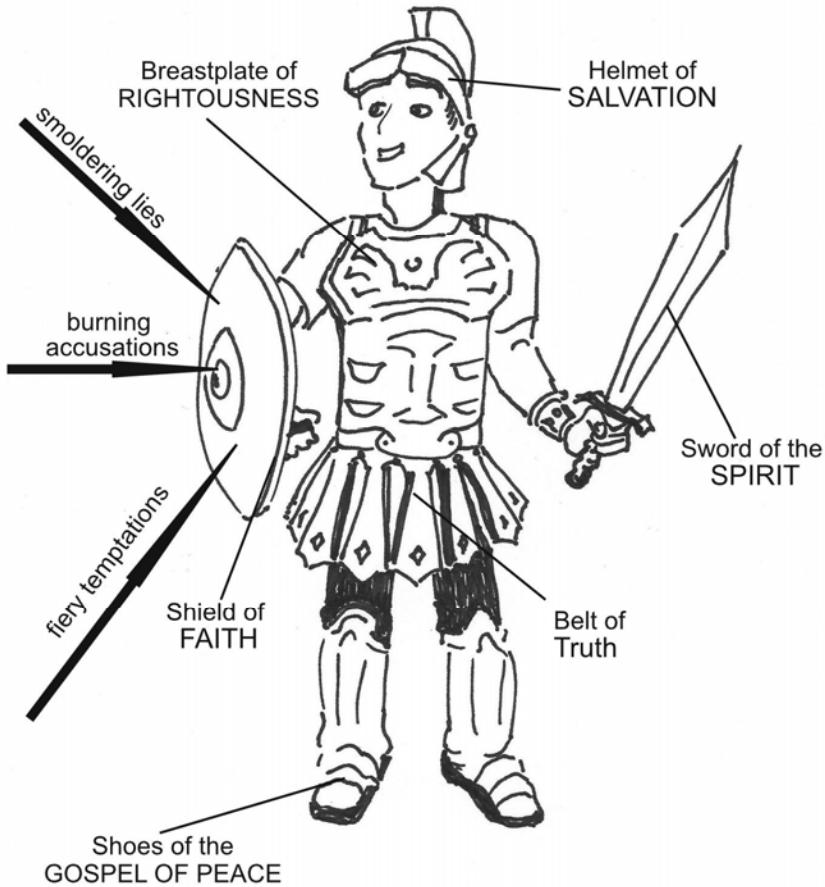
**John:** Jesus said: "*The prince of this world (Satan) is coming. He has no hold over me.*"

**Jeff:** To the extent that we put on Christ, the evil one cannot touch us. Please open your Bible to 1 John 5:18.

**John:** "*We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God (Jesus) keeps them safe, and the evil one (Satan) cannot harm them.*"

Does John speak about completely stopping sinning?

Take upon you the whole ARMOUR OF GOD



Ephesians 6:10-18

**Jeff:** I don't think so. We are still humans and weak, have sinful desires and are influenced by the world and the devil. To reach a condition of infallibility is therefore not possible here on earth. Please read 1 John 1:8.

**John:** "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

**Jeff:** On the other hand it is also true that we are not defenceless. We need to put on Christ and fix our eyes in all circumstances on him. Remember what you wrote on a piece of paper and fixed in your cabin:

**I can't, but Jesus can!**

and

**For this \_\_\_\_\_** (fill in anything you are in need of) **I have Jesus!**

After you put on Jesus, take in addition the armour he offers you. Tell me, what is the first piece?

**John:** It is **"The belt of truth"**!

**Jeff:** Jesus said in John 14:6: *"I am the way and truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

Because Jesus is in you, the truth is in you as well. The belt of truth is our defence against Satan's first weapon, which is deception. The nature of deception is that you don't realise it, whereas the light of truth reveals the lie.

Remember that we have already talked about the fact that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. The belt of truth (which holds the other pieces of the body-armour in place) is continually being attacked. The enemy is always trying to deceive us by shooting arrows of lies at us. But Jesus himself is our belt of truth and enables us to discover the lies. What comes next?

**John:** **"The breastplate of righteousness"**.

**Jeff:** Please read 1 Corinthians 1:30.

**John:** *"It is because of God that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption."*

**Jeff:** Do you notice anything?

**John:** Jesus is not only our truth, but also our righteousness in person.

**Jeff:** Exactly! Please read Romans 5:1.

**John:** *"Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

**Jeff:** When you put on Christ at salvation, you were justified before our holy God. It's not your righteousness but Christ's righteousness.

Deception is one of three arrows that Satan shoots at us. Accusation is the second, once we have sinned. Putting on the breastplate of righteousness is our defence against the accuser. So when Satan aims an arrow at you by saying, "You are not good enough to be a Christian", you can respond with Paul in Romans 8:33: *"Who will*

bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies" (through Christ).<sup>31</sup>

What is the next part of the armour?

**John:** "The feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace."

**Jeff:** Let's call them "**the shoes of the gospel of peace**". When you have received Christ, you were united with the Prince of Peace as you can read in Isaiah 9:6.

**John:** "*For to us a child is born (Jesus), to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace.*"

It is amazing, Jesus is our Truth, our Righteousness and also our Peace.

**Jeff:** You are right! Please read Colossians 3:15.

**John:** "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.*"

**Jeff:** The shoes of peace become protection against the divisive schemes of the devil when you act as a peacemaker. They bring people together. Peacemakers encourage fellowship and have a ministry of recon-ciliation.<sup>4</sup>

**John:** What about the shield of faith?

**Jeff:** You need to have faith in God and in his word! The more you know about God and his Word, the more faith you have. The less you know, the smaller your shield will be, and the easier it will be for one of Satan's fiery darts to reach its target. If you want your shield of faith to grow large and protective, your knowledge of God and his Word must increase. Please read Romans 10:17.

**John:** "*Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.*"

**Jeff:** These flaming arrows from Satan are nothing more than smoldering lies, burning accusations and fiery temptations bombarding our minds. (Please notice the illustration above) Whenever you discern a deceptive thought, accusation, or temptation, meet it directly with what you know to be true about God and his word.

How did Jesus deflect the arrows of Satan's temptation? By shielding himself with statements from the Word of God. Every time you memorize a Bible verse, listen to a sermon, or participate in a Bible study, you increase your knowledge of God and enlarge your shield of faith.<sup>32</sup>

**John:** I failed to do it, when I watched the evil movie instead of reading my Bible.

Next comes the “**helmet of salvation**”.

**Jeff:** Should your shield of faith sometimes be too small (meaning you can be defeated by Satan) be confident that the helmet of salvation still guarantees your eternal victory. As you struggle with the world, the flesh (evil human desires), and the devil every day, stand firm, knowing that your salvation is not based on your good works, but on the work of Christ. You are a child of God, and nothing can separate you from the love of Christ.<sup>33</sup>

Please read Romans 8:38-39.

**John:** *“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

**Jeff:** The last weapon is the “**sword of the Spirit**”. Our defense against direct attacks of the evil one is to speak aloud God’s truth. Why is it so important to speak God’s word, in addition to believing and thinking it? Because the devil is not almighty. He does not know our thought, but has to flee if you resist him aloud. Please read James 4:7.

**John:** *“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”*

**Jeff:** The devil fears Jesus. Since you received Christ, you need not fear him anymore. Speak the name of Jesus out loud. Satan has to depart from you.

Please read Ephesians 6:18 again – the last verse where our spiritual armour is introduced:

**John:** *“Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be watchful (alert) and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”*

**Jeff:** We should be watchful and pray. Prayer is a very strong weapon! It is true that Satan wants to lock us in his prison and keep us in bondage to him. However, Jesus is the bondage-breaker and sets us free! He is much, much stronger.

*“Put on the full armour of God,  
so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”*

Ephesians 6:2

# **“I am better than others!”**

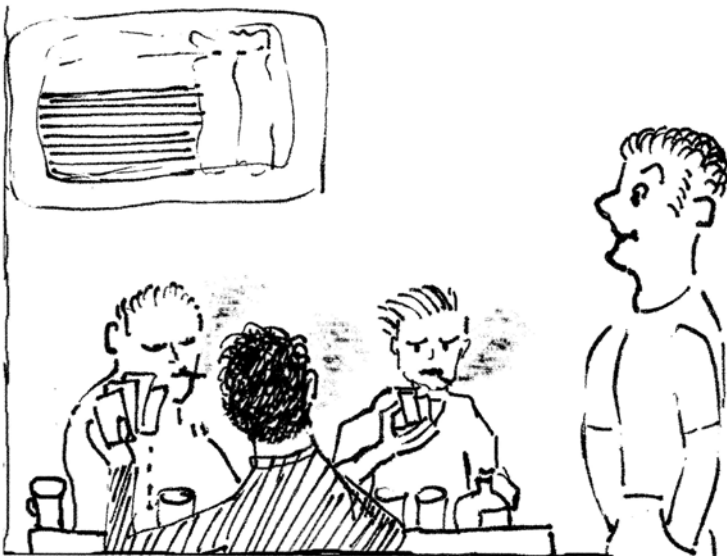
## *Eleventh Adventure*

The Apostle Paul wrote:

*“Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”*

Philippians 3:7-8

**JOHN** was glad to know that Jesus forgave his big sin of watching the terrible occult porno movie. He was sure that this would never happen to him again. Indeed, for several weeks he became much more disciplined in daily Bible reading and prayer. He was also glad to be stronger now to resist when his companions started sinful activities. Recently, when his crew mates from the engine-room invited him to watch a brutal action movie, he refused and went straight back into his cabin. A few days later he entered the mess-room, where three of his shipmates were playing cards in a half-drunken condition and the air was smoky from their ciga-





rettes. Again, they invited him to join them, but John looked at them with a superior smile and left without a word. He decided to avoid as much as possible any contact with them in his free time. It is better to be separate from these ungodly people, he thought.

Jeff observed his brother's behaviour and took the next opportunity to talk to him.

**Jeff:** How are you doing John?

**John:** Fine, very fine! Since we talked about that bad movie I watched, things have changed.

**Jeff:** Do you mean that you have changed?

**John:** Absolutely! I am now able to resist sin much better than ever before.

**Jeff:** Much better?

**John:** Sure! I believe that God is now more satisfied with my lifestyle.

**Jeff:** Why?

**John:** Well, I don't drink or smoke, I don't watch bad movies or join other sinful activities. I even avoid the company of our ungodly crew. I read my Bible daily and pray. Starting last month I've been giving 10% of my income to the Lord.

**Jeff:** Good, very good! However, does it happen sometimes that you still commit a sin?

**John:** Only seldom – just small things without great significance!

**Jeff:** Are you really sure?

**John:** Of course! Do you doubt it?

**Jeff:** John, what do you think about me? Do you assume that I am rather a good or a bad person?

**John:** Oh Jeff, surely you're a very good man! You're my model, a great example to me!

**Jeff:** Am I really a good person? Please kindly read James 2:10 and Romans 3:10-12.

**John:** *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."*

*"There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

**Jeff:** Your judgement about me isn't correct. I do know that I still have many weaknesses and commit daily sins.

**John:** But surely only small ones.

**Jeff:** Tell me, what are big and what are small sins?

**John:** I’ve never seen you doing evil things, for example watching a porno movie as I did. That was a very big sin!

**Jeff:** Well – and what, for instance, is a small one?

**John:** I don’t know – maybe tiny evil thoughts?

**Jeff:** Please kindly read 1 Samuel 16:7:

**John:** *“The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

**Jeff:** I am convinced that our judgments of people are often wrong, because we don’t know their hearts as the Lord does.

John, during the last few months you’ve told me many of your experiences and I am glad about your honesty. Now I would like to tell you about some important lessons the Lord taught me years ago.

**John:** Thank you, I would appreciate it!

**Jeff:** I grew up in a good Christian home. At an early age I accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour and become very serious in following him. I went first to a children’s, and later to a youth, group. When I was twenty the Pastor asked me to be their leader and indeed I was very proud to accept.

At first, by the Lord’s grace the group grew. I organized camps, mission activities and various other projects. This took several years and I was sure I was a good model for the young folk. I also thought I had an excellent standing in my Christian fellowship.

Years later, at the age of 29, the conviction grew in me that I was ready to take the next step. Three of the layman, who belonged to the board of our Christian fellowship, stepped down for different reasons. New ones needed to be elected, so I told the pastor to be available. He hesitated for some time, which surprised and irritated me, but finally he agreed.

The election’s result was different from what I expected. I was one of four candidates and the church members elected only the other three. This was a disaster in my eyes. I was shocked by something I thought would never happen. Deeply convinced that I was the most spiritual, devoted and qualified of the candidates, I hoped to get by far the best result. In my eyes it was a personal defeat and I felt extremely offended. Therefore I decided to give up all my positions in the church.

**John:** Did you leave your Christian fellowship?

**Jeff:** No, but I withdraw from almost everything. I just attended the services on Sundays. Usually I sat in the back row and left the meeting immediately it was over.

**John:** What happened to you was absolutely unfair. How could they fail to appreciate all your efforts?

**Jeff:** This is exactly what I thought. However, looking back I know that it was from the Lord. He used these events to teach me many important lessons.

**John:** What kind of lessons?

**Jeff:** The first one was that I discovered my arrogance. My pastor, who of course observed me, sought conversation with me. He was a sensitive and caring person and able to open my eyes in a kind way.

**John:** How did he do it?

**Jeff:** For example by asking me to study Luke 18:9-14. Please read it.

**John:** *"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

**Jeff:** I discovered that I was a very prideful person, convinced that I was superior to others. Traditional church members who lived on in their sins, I despised. Others, in which I saw weaknesses they still struggled with, I viewed with arrogance.

**John:** What kind of weaknesses?

**Jeff:** Different kinds of things. One friend tried, but was not able to stop smoking. Another person missed some worship services because he overslept. Many church members showed up on Sundays but weren't active co-workers like me. Indeed, I felt superior to all of them.

**John:** But I always thought that smoking is a big sin.

**Jeff:** Well, maybe, because you harm the body the Lord gave you. Certainly, it is not good to be addicted to something unhealthy. However, is pride not sinful? I started to understand that arrogance could be worse than smoking in the eyes of God.

**John:** Okay, sometimes we are quicker to evaluate external things than those which are unseen.

**Jeff:** Pride was an attitude of heart I wasn't aware of. However others, for example my Pastor, saw it clearly. Now I understood that I was like that Pharisee Jesus spoke about.

**John:** To understand your pride was the first lesson you learned. What else did the Lord reveal to you?

**Jeff:** I had to admit that I struggled with several sins, which were indeed unseen to others. I kept up a facade to the outside world as a morally good person.

- ✓ When I conducted Bible studies, I condemned unclean behaviour though I was controlled by many impure thoughts.
- ✓ I judged people because they lied though I was not always truthful myself.
- ✓ I talked a lot about loving the Lord above all, but loved myself more than anybody else.

During the following weeks I made a list of personal sins which the Lord revealed to me one by one. John, believe me, the list became very, very long.

**John:** Maybe it is better not to tell others what they should do if one is still struggling with some weaknesses.

**Jeff:** Well, if you lead a group, as I did, it is necessary to talk also about obedience to the Lord and how to follow in his footsteps. However, it is important to be honest and to admit personal failings. Even though I was their group leader, I was not superior to them and never will be, which I should have told them.

**John:** A sinner talks to other sinners!

**Jeff:** Exactly! Indeed, the listeners will accept the message much more willingly if we don't pretend to be better than they are.

**John:** But isn't it true that God will help us to overcome particular weaknesses?

**Jeff:** Sure, he will change us; we should expect positive results. However, it's by his grace alone and not because of our human efforts to achieve moral superiority.

**John:** This means you got a deeper understanding of grace?

**Jeff:** Yes! I came to understand that it is not only necessary for unbelievers but also for me.

**John:** In which way?

**Jeff:** Well, we always rightly emphasise that salvation is not by good works but by grace alone. You remember that we talked a lot about it. Now, my understanding was that I started my Christian life through grace, but continued by my own righteousness. This was a big mistake! Both should be based on grace alone.

In Galatians 1:6-9 the Apostle Paul seriously criticised the Christians in this local fellowship because they had made exactly this mistake. Long ago, they had understood that salvation is by grace

and trusted in righteousness only through Jesus. However, later they departed from grace and tried to claim righteousness by their own religious efforts. Please read this passage in Galatians 1:6-9.

**John:** *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!"*

**Jeff:** John, what do you think – why did Paul use such hard words?

**John:** Maybe because turning from the gospel of grace means to spoil everything?

**Jeff:** Exactly! We should never trust in our own righteousness, but only in justification through Jesus Christ. Please read Galatians 2:21.

**John:** *"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law (doing good, keeping God's commandments), Christ died for nothing!"*

I always thought we should try our best to keep God's commandments!

**Jeff:** Sure, we are supposed to do it because we love and respect Jesus. But we are never able gain righteousness by our own efforts. Do you know why?

**John:** Because even if we try our best, we are never good enough to meet God's perfect standard!

**Jeff:** Yes! Please read Galatians 3:1-3, where Paul asked the members of this fellowship some important questions.

**John:** *"Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law [keeping God's commandments], or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh [human strength]?"*

**Jeff:** Everything is only because of Jesus! 1 Corinthians 1:30 says that Jesus himself is our righteousness. But I have understood grace as an add-on to my strength.

**John:** You mean you thought in the following way: My righteousness as a devoted Christian is based first of all on my own good and moral behaviour, and grace is just additional because of a few weaknesses I still might have?

**Jeff:** You bring it to the point. But during that time I wouldn't have expressed it like that because I thought to trust fully in grace. But it was self-deception. This is typical for people with a proud attitude.

Next my pastor studied Galatians 5:22-23 with me. Please read it.

**John:** *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."*

**Jeff:** Do you notice anything if you think of these spiritual qualities?

**John:** Do the fruits of the Holy Spirit have something to do with changes of our character?

**Jeff:** Absolutely; very well observed! The truth is that for many years, though I was an active co-worker in my church, I still had many shortcomings with regard to all nine of them. The truth was that

- ✓ I **loved** myself more than I **loved** the Lord and others.
- ✓ I sometimes experienced fun, but never true **joy** from the Lord.
- ✓ I had no **peace of mind**, because I strived to be a successful leader in order be praised and acknowledged by others. I was restless.
- ✓ I tried to do a good job in my ministry but was **impatient** with those who made mistakes.
- ✓ I was usually correct to others, but seldom expressed **kindness**.
- ✓ I didn't show much **goodness** to people, but was rather judgmental.
- ✓ I think I was **faithful** to God in my activities in the fellowship not because I loved him more than anything else but because I feared him.
- ✓ Instead of being **gentle**, I was rather demanding.
- ✓ My **self-control** affected things that could be seen by others, but during that time I committed many secret sins, of which I feel ashamed today.

**John:** Were you aware of these things?

**Jeff:** Certainly not, but God used first of all the Bible, my pastor and two good books, to open my eyes to myself. It was not easy but rather shameful to understand the truths about my spiritual condition.

**John:** You have learned a lot.

**Jeff:** Yes, that's true! However, that wasn't the end. Later I discovered some even deeper truths about myself.

**John:** Please tell me!

**Jeff:** I understood why I was previously caught up in self-pity. The reason was that for many years I had worked hard for God's kingdom. But instead of getting the expected praise, I was blamed quite often. God allowed many to criticise me, so that I would realise my wrong motives.

**John:** You have experienced self-pity?

**Jeff:** Sure. It's true of many people! They think that they are good and hard-working Christians and complain that they don't get what they are convinced they deserve.

**John:** You are right; it's possible to do many good things with the wrong motives, with a selfish attitude of heart.

What else did the Lord teach you?

**Jeff:** Because I continually tried to prove to God and men my spiritual superiority, I became more and more restless.

**John:** But I thought that it is good to be very active for the Lord.

**Jeff:** Sure, it is even required. But we should never forget that we can't produce spiritual fruit. Though it is true that the Lord wants us to be active, it is not his will for us to burn out. God desires to use us in his kingdom, but we need to be aware that everything depends upon him and not on us. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:6: *"I planted the seed<sup>34</sup>, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow."* The Apostle understood that we have to play our part, but the Lord alone grants the growth. This takes a lot of pressure from us.

**John:** In which way?

**Jeff:** We need to be faithful workers but should leave the fruit, the spiritual results, to God. We are not responsible for them! The reason why some people suffer burn-out is usually not hard work alone, but first of all the permanent pressure they put on themselves.

**John:** What do you suggest should be done if the challenges are big and the pressure is increasing?

**Jeff:** Please read Exodus 14:14 and Zechariah 4:6.

**John:** *"The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still."*

*"It shall be done not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the Lord Almighty."*

**Jeff:** I repeat again: we are supposed to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. We don't have the right to be self-centred. However, Jesus is glad if we tell him that we are weak and trust in his strength alone. Remember what you wrote months ago on a card:

**"I can't but he can"**

and

**"For this I have Jesus"**

When we allow Jesus to take over, we step back, honour him and don't seek the praise for ourselves. Thus he gets the glory and the pressure is taken from us.

**John:** Do you think it is better not to desire any leadership?

**Jeff:** It depends. If God gave you this gift, you should use it for his glory, but with the right attitude of heart.

Once, when I wanted to become a big leader in my church, one morning God spoke to me through these verses:

*"Jesus called his disciples together and said, 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man<sup>35</sup> did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'"* (Mark 10:42-45)

**John:** Jesus, who is Lord of Lords and King of Kings gave us an example how to lead with a humble heart. He even washed the feet of his disciples, which was the duty of a slave.

**Jeff:** The right attitude of heart is very well expressed in 2 Chronicles 7:14.

**John:** *"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land."*

**Jeff:** Great promises for those who are submissive and seek his presence in prayer!

You can see that I have learned a lot about myself. I'll give you a brief summary of the most important lessons:

- ✓ Because I was very active in my church, I thought I was superior to others. This made me an arrogant and proud person. I didn't realise that my main motive for everything was to be praised.
- ✓ I desired leadership in order to control people instead of humbly serving them as Jesus did.
- ✓ Because I didn't get appreciation as expected, I blamed others and God and was full of self-pity.
- ✓ I despised people for their weaknesses of character and was blind to my own shortcomings.
- ✓ I spoke a lot about obeying Jesus but was dishonest about my many unseen sins.
- ✓ I departed from grace by trusting in my own righteousness, as the Galatians did. Because I had little understanding of my own sinful character and motives, I knew little about my personal need for mercy.
- ✓ Instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to influence my life, I trusted in my own strength, a hopeless effort. How could it be possible



to achieve spiritual results by human power? There were almost no fruits of the Holy Spirit in my life (Galatians 5:22-23).

- ✓ It was good to be active for the Lord but not to be a hectic and impatient person. It brought me to the brink of burning out. Instead, I should have sought prayer and stepped back in order to allow Jesus to fight for me.

My arrogance and self-pity, my desire for praise and to control people, my hidden sins and my human struggles to achieve spiritual results could be compared to locked doors in a prison. However, the gracious Lord opened them one by one and set me free.

**John:** Do you think that many Christians lost the right understanding about their need for grace?

**Jeff:** Yes, that's what I have often observed.

John, you are my good friend and dear brother. Because of this, please allow me to be honest to you. I have seen how you started to behave towards our colleagues. I think it is good that you tried not to join their sinful activities. On the other hand, be careful not to let any arrogance grow in your life. Jesus sought permanent contact with unbelievers because he loved them. He was even called the friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Do you love your colleagues? Do you see their need to get to know Jesus? How will you be able to reach them with the gospel if you separate yourself from them in silent contempt? Pray for them and be their friend. You will never win any of them for Jesus if they notice even a little arrogance towards them.

I repeat: Don't join their sinful activities, but never think you are better than they are. All positive changes in our lives are by grace alone. They have nothing to do with any personal spiritual superiority.

I recommend the book *From Fear to Freedom* by Rose Marie Miller<sup>36</sup>. Here is a helpful quotation:

*Christianity is rooted in the power of Jesus Christ. Eventually we come to rely on what he has already done about sin. We can still analyze our problems, but our hope for a cure rests on the grace that comes through our relationship with Jesus.*<sup>37</sup>

*"Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things.*

*I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ."*

Philippians 3:7-8

# **“They are all idiots!”**

## *Twelfth Adventure*

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or useless arrogance.  
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,  
not looking to your own interests  
but each of you to the interests of the others.”  
Philippians 2:3-4*

**JOHN** had a conversation with Ted, the cook, in the mess-room, while Jeff sat in the background reading a book:

**John:** Great lunch! It was delicious; you’re an excellent cook!

**Ted:** Thank you for the compliment! I don’t get many. On the contrary, people usually complain.

**John:** Well, I like your food!

**Ted:** You are different from the other crew. Most of them are idiots!

**John:** Idiots? Why?

**Ted:** Yesterday, for instance, I had a dispute with Harold, this stupid OS.

**John:** What was it about?

**Ted:** A month ago I lent him ten dollars and told him to return it as soon as possible. Honestly, I didn’t expect anything else, but it took very long – four whole weeks.

**John:** Anyway, you finally received it.

**Ted:** Yes, but because of the delay he should have given me at least a little more.

**John:** Sorry Ted, ten dollars is a very small amount of money. You can’t expect interest on it. Nobody would. It’s completely against our culture. Be generous!

**Ted:** No, he doesn’t deserve it!

**John:** Why? What’s the matter with him?

**Ted:** Last week I greeted him coming out of his cabin; do you think he answered? No! – he passed me by without a word!

**John:** Well, you know Harold. He’s always a bit grumpy after a long night-shift and only a few hours’ sleep.

**Ted:** But I am a chief cook and he is just an OS. He should have respected me.

**John:** Sure, we're all supposed to respect each other. But you need to understand him – he was just tired. In addition, you're not his superior. You work in different departments. Be friendly to him. He didn't want to be cross with you.

**Ted:** I am a chief cook though I am only 31 years old. I don't understand why he is still an OS. After so many years at sea, he should be at least an AB – if not a bosun. He's certainly the most stupid of the whole crew.

**John:** No need to talk that way. He isn't a bad guy. Even I like him.

**Ted:** I don't! Richard, my messman, isn't much better.

**John:** What's wrong with him?

**Ted:** He talked badly about me behind my back.

**John:** Yes, I know, but that was three months ago.

**Ted:** It doesn't matter; it was a big mistake!

**John:** As far as I know, he apologized.

**Ted:** I don't think that it was honest.

**John:** How do you know?

**Ted:** He is seldom honest!

**John:** Come on – he's never tried to fool me.

**Ted:** Don't defend him. He doesn't deserve it!

**John:** There was some truth in what he said, though it wasn't right to talk behind your back.

**Ted:** He shouldn't have done it. Moreover, he is lazy.

**John:** Lazy? I've never noticed it.

**Ted:** Yesterday he spend forty-five minutes during his duty talking to his wife.

**John:** Yes, I know. But there was a typhoon in his area, which badly damaged his home. They are in big trouble. Surely he had to comfort his wife?

**Ted:** He should have asked me for permission! I am his boss!

**John:** Yes, that's true, but you need to understand his situation.

**Ted:** I get big problems with the captain if meals are not ready on time.

**John:** Sure, but you were not too late. Lunch was already prepared. Richard lost most of his property. It's a catastrophe for him!

**Ted:** You always defend people.

**John:** I just try to understand the other side as well. Do you never make mistakes?

**Ted:** Nobody is perfect, but I do know appropriate behaviour; he doesn't! Sorry, I have to leave you now to take a little rest. I have to be back in an hour to prepare dinner.

**John:** All right, sleep well!



Ted left the mess-room, and John went over to Jeff.

**John:** Did you listen to our conversation?

**Jeff:** Sure, it couldn't be avoided; both of you spoke quite loudly.

**John:** What do you think of him?

**Jeff:** Well, what shall I say? He doesn't know the Lord.

**John:** But not all unbelievers are like him!

**Jeff:** Sure! Sometimes he is indeed an unpleasant character. However, we are all in danger of judging and criticizing and over-emphasizing our point of view. Who is always able to judge in a balanced way and to see as other people?

**John:** You are right.

**Jeff:** John, I am convinced that the Lord wishes us greater hearts.

**John:** What do you mean?

**Jeff:** We've talked a lot in recent months about Jesus wanting to set us free from different kinds of prisons. One is a narrow mind. Because of our human nature, we are in danger of judging everything and everyone by our own limited perspective. To be narrow-minded means to have a small heart.

**John:** You must have some Bible verses in mind.

**Jeff:** Well, we've already studied Philippians 2:3-4. Please take my Bible and read it again.

**John:** *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.”*

**Jeff:** These verses teaches us a lot. Tell me, what characterizes a person with a narrow mind or a small heart?

**John:** Several things:

- ✓ to act out of selfishness
- ✓ to be arrogant
- ✓ to lack humility
- ✓ to value oneself above others
- ✓ to look to one’s own interests and not to those of others

**Jeff:** Well summarized!

**John:** How can we be greater-hearted?

**Jeff:** While Ted and you were talking, I started reading this interesting book<sup>38</sup>. Please read this short passage.

**John:** *The Bible is the book that understands me.*<sup>39</sup> *Before, I studied the Bible, questioning and analysing it. But later it was as if the Bible, or maybe Someone [God], through the Bible, began to study, question and analyse me.*<sup>40</sup>

**Jeff:** It’s an interesting point of view. Usually we approach the Bible with the desire to analyse and understand the Scriptures. This certainly isn’t wrong, but it is a profound experience to realise that first the Bible knows, understands and analyses us! The Word of God calls us into question! The Scriptures are like a mirror; in them we can discover who we really are.

**John:** Do you mean the feeling that God sees through us?

**Jeff:** Exactly! You suddenly realize that it is useless to pretend or to play a role. It is almost like standing naked before God. We discover our wrong motives, egoistic ambitions and our persistent striving for recognition.

**John:** When this self-knowledge grows, it can be very humiliating.

**Jeff:** On one hand, yes. On the other, it can become something like a holy moment if it is the beginning of a fundamental personal change.

**John:** In which way?

**Jeff:** When God opens our eyes to ourselves, our hearts begin to grow.

**John:** Tell me how.

**Jeff:** He will help us to discover at least two things:

- ✓ first, how selfish and sinful we are, and
- ✓ second, that he loves us in spite of it.

Once we understand our own evil character and motives, our patience with the weaknesses of others will grow. To realise also the

unconditional love of Jesus will enable us to love our fellowmen, even though they sometimes seem unlovable. A Christian heart which has perceived these two things will certainly start to become greater.

**John:** You are right. Ted the cook blames others because he's very narrowminded. He has no understanding of his own many weaknesses.

**Jeff:** That's true; however, he is just an example: this evil root is in all of us. Because of this, we should not judge him. Please read Luke 6:42.

**John:** Jesus said: *“How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.”*

**Jeff:** Please read also Matthew 7:1-2.

**John:** *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way as you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

**Jeff:** Because God's love towards us is unconditional, we are supposed to love others in the same way. Conditional love is not divine love. It can be driven by very egoistic motives. I love because I want to be loved in return. As you learn to truly love, so your heart will become bigger. The best definition of divine love is in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Please read this important passage.

**John:** *“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”*

How is it possible to love this way?

**Jeff:** It's obvious; this passage does not talk about human, but divine, love. We need to ask the Lord to let it grow in us. We are never able to produce divine love by human effort.

**John:** Is greed also a sign of a small heart?

**Jeff:** Yes! Colossians 3:5 says that greed is a form of idolatry. If your heart is greedy for money, you put something above God. Beside that, you don't see the needs of others. As a result your heart

shrinks. To be generous is one among many other indications of a heart that gets greater.

**John:** Let's come back to Ted. He often takes offence without reason.

**Jeff:** To be touchy is a typical sign of a small heart. Such a person usually concerns himself with small matters. For example: someone speaks a careless word but without evil intent. A touchy person is immediately offended. And he can't forget, but carries the resulting anger for a long time in his heart.

Someone with a big heart doesn't always assume a bad motive and quickly forgets minor upsets. We read in 1 Corinthians that divine love is patient and not easily angered.

**John:** Ted often suspects evil intentions.

**Jeff:** Yes, I've noticed. However, I have to repeat: none of us is innocent in this matter.

Here's another very typical point: people with a narrow perspective or a small heart are often able to give good and logical reasons, but are still wrong.

**John:** Please give me an example.

**Jeff:** Let me remind you of two biblical events. In one case Jesus's disciples had good arguments in mind. But because of their wrong values, the Lord had to correct them. Please read Mark 10:13-16.

**John:** *"People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was unwilling. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them."*

**Jeff:** What do you think were the seemingly good reasons the disciples had for rebuking the children's parents?

**John:** I guess because Jesus was mostly quite busy. There were many to heal, daily sermons to give, expectations to meet and much more to do. Maybe Jesus was sometimes very tired and the disciples as well.

**Jeff:** You're right – very good grounds to send the children away. But Jesus corrected his followers because of their wrong values. Do you see them?

**John:** In the eyes of the disciples children didn't matter much. Because they considered them to be unimportant, the disciples were impatient.

**Jeff:** Exactly! Jesus, however, had completely different values. His conviction was that the little ones have a very high priority, which he

repeatedly emphasized.

Incorrect values, which are often a result of a small heart, lead to wrong conclusion, improper reactions and false decisions!

**John:** I understand. What is the other Bible passage you have in mind?

**Jeff:** Please read Mark 14:3-7.

**John:** *“While Jesus was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, ‘Why this waste of perfume? It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.’ And they rebuked her harshly. ‘Leave her alone,’ said Jesus. ‘Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.’”*

**Jeff:** This story is a good example that a small heart is sometimes very difficult to discover. Let me tell you why:

Many times the Bible emphasises that God wants us to help poor people. In fact, it is not an option, but a command. Therefore, the folk present were apparently right.

However, the deeper view points to a different conclusion. Because of their small hearts, they were not able to see the tremendous love of this woman towards Jesus. During her lifetime she would have countless more opportunities to help people in need. But this was probably her last opportunity to express her overwhelming love for Jesus, before he had to die on the cross.

The people present were not able to understand her feelings. They reacted with harsh criticism, but the Lord with approval and an amazing promise. Please read verse 9.

**John:** Jesus said: *“Truly, I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached through-out the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”*

**Jeff:** There are countless reports in the Bible where Jesus rebuked both his disciples and his opponents because of their narrow-mindedness.

**John:** I guess it can take long time until our small hearts become bigger.

**Jeff:** Sure, it is a slow growth process, which is sometimes slower because of our stubbornness.

**John:** Stubbornness?

**Jeff:** Stubbornness is often connected with a small heart. However, if we admit it and repent, and allow Jesus to correct us, it will not take long until our hearts will start to grow.



**John:** Is this the main reason why some Christians' growth is slow and others' fast?

**Jeff:** I think so. If our values, our way of thinking, our speech and our actions are wrong, the Holy Spirit will certainly touch our hearts straight away. He does it to make us realise that the Lord disagrees. This is necessary because otherwise we would hardly understand that we are mistaken.

Everything depends now on our reaction. Those who promptly respond, "Yes Jesus, I am wrong and you are right. Forgive and help me to change", will grow fast and get soon have a bigger heart.

But those who ignore the voice of the Holy Spirit, who stubbornly defend themselves and blame others or the circumstances, will remain immature. Their heart will stay small; yes, it is even possible that it will shrink.

**John:** I really desire to get a great heart!

**Jeff:** Very good! Let's try to summarize what we talked about:

- ✓ A person with a small heart can be characterized according Philippians 2:3-4 this way:
- ✓ It often acts out of selfish ambition, tends to be arrogant, sometimes lacks humility, is in danger of valuing itself above others and often looks first to its own interests and not to those of others.
- ✓ In order for a small heart to grow it needs to discover two things: First, how selfish and sinful human nature is and secondly that the Lord loves us in spite of it.
- ✓ A growing heart is slow to judge. It is able to bear with the weaknesses of others because it recognizes its own evil nature.
- ✓ Someone with a growing heart wants to learn to love unconditionally. This divine love can't be produced by ourselves, but must be received from the Lord.
- ✓ A growing heart desires to be generous and not greedy. It looks away from itself and cares for the needs of others. A small heart tends to be egoistic: my little happiness, my honour, my reputation, my needs, my feelings, my advantage: I, me, my!
- ✓ A growing heart doesn't feel easily offended because it is driven not by pride but by humility.
- ✓ People with a narrow perspective are sometimes capable of logical reasons though they are still wrong. It is because of their false values. They lack the ability to distinguish between minor and major issues. Incorrect values lead to wrong conclusions, improper reactions and false decisions!

- ✓ Stubbornness is often connected with a small heart. However, the hearts of those with an ear open to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who admit and repent from their sins straight away, will not take long to grow.
- ✓ Finally, let me remind you of the identity that we have with Jesus. Those who discover their extraordinary richness in him can't keep a small heart, which could be compared with a dark prison. Gratitude for what we are and have through Christ will let the heart grow.

By the way, gratitude is another important subject we can talk about – next time.

*“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or useless arrogance.  
Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,  
not looking to your own interests  
but each of you to the interests of others.”  
Philippians 2:3-4*



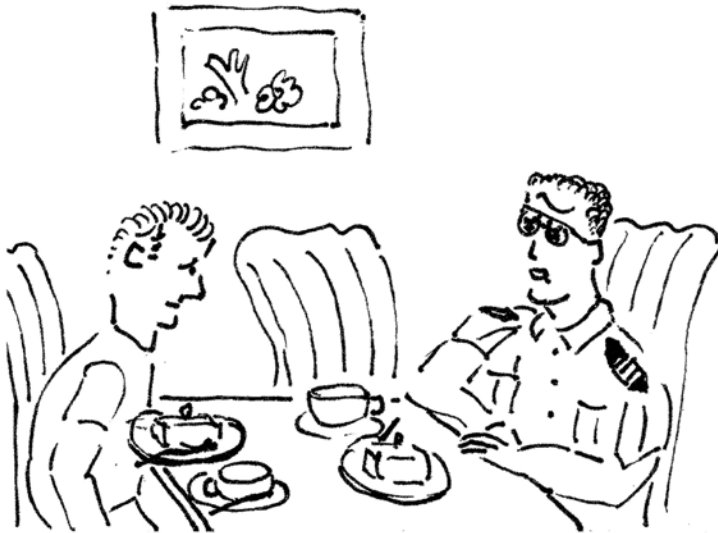
# The ungrateful captain

## Thirteenth Adventure

*“Praise the Lord, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.  
Praise the Lord my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits.”*  
Psalm 103:1-2

**JOHN** sat with his captain in a café. He was a bit nervous, because he had never before spent so long in his company. How did it happen?

Once arrived in Sydney, Australia, his plan had been to go ashore to buy a new mobile phone. When he asked the captain for permission, the captain had suggested going together, because he also planned to get some electronic items. Now, after making their purchases, the master had invited John to join him with coffee and cake.



**Cap.:** John, we have twenty-five minutes before we have to take a taxi back to the ship. Enjoy your cake!

**John:** Thank you, sir; very kind of you!

**Cap.:** Is everything all right with your job in the engine room?

**John:** Sure, everything is fine, sir. In a few days, when Jeff signs off, I will take his position as a fitter.

**Cap.:** A new step. Congratulations! Are you afraid of the heavier responsibilities?

**John:** Just a little. But Jeff instructed me very well.

How long have you been a captain, sir?

**Cap.:** Nine years. But I'm not happy with this company.

**John:** Why, sir?

**Cap.:** Well, they don't pay very well.

**John:** I know, my salary as an oiler is also not much. But I thought that captains are always well-paid, sir.

**Cap.:** Sure, more than you receive; but it could be much better.

**John:** When will you sign off, sir?

**Cap.:** There are just four more weeks to go.

**John:** I guess you have children, sir?

**Cap.:** Yes, my boy Frank is fourteen – and my girl Anna twelve years old. Unfortunately, I have only two children. My wife and I wanted at least four.

**John:** Are they doing well, sir?

**Cap.:** Well, they could do better. I was expecting Frank to be one of the three best in his class, but he failed.

**John:** Are you saying he didn't pass his examinations, sir?

**Cap.:** No, no. He did, but not as well as I had hoped.

Where do you live – in the capital?

**John:** My wife and I rent a small flat close to the border. And you, sir?

**Cap.:** We bought some land, about 0.15 hectare. Our house has seven bedrooms and a large swimming pool in the garden.

**John:** Great! I have never been in such a big private home, sir.

**Cap.:** It isn't bad, but my neighbour's land and house are bigger. Besides, I'm not happy with being close to a highway. It's too noisy and polluted.

**John:** I understand ... What is your wife's profession, sir?

**Cap.:** She runs a grocery store. Currently she has six employees.

**John:** Really? It's great, sir, to have your own business and to be independent.

**Cap.:** We've seen better times. Three years ago, she had nine workers. Things are going down. I'm not very happy with the situation.

**John:** But your family is in good health, sir?

**Cap.:** It could be better. Three months ago, my daughter had an accident with her bicycle.

**John:** Was she badly injured, sir?

**Cap.:** She broke a leg.

**John:** But she is okay now, sir?

**Cap.:** Yes, she's all right, but the bike is just scrap. I had to buy a new one. Things aren't easy! Anyway, John, it's nice talking to you, but now we must move or we'll be late.

**John:** Thanks again, sir, for your kind invitation.

**Cap.:** Not at all; let's go!

Three days later, John sat in Jeff's cabin. Next morning his dear brother would sign off. He couldn't imagine what it would be like, spending the last two months on board without him. Jeff had been used by the Lord in so many ways as a blessing for him. The only advantage was that now he would take up his position as a fitter, which gave him just a little comfort.

He was very glad that they lived on the same island, only sixty kilometres apart. He looked forward to seeing Jeff in future, but only during his vacations, because his dear brother would be leaving the sea. This ship was his last.

**Jeff:** Hi John, how was the shopping trip with the master?

**John:** Good! Very friendly and talkative and even invited me to take coffee and cake with him.

**Jeff:** What did you talk about?

**John:** Just about the job, salary, family and circumstances at home – more or less small talk. But one thing surprised me.

**Jeff:** What?

**John:** Most of the time he was complaining, though everything seemed to be well. Good job and salary, big house and land, nice wife with her own business, children, good health ... Everything better than for most of us. But he didn't seem able to see it – he has almost no appreciation of so many blessings.

**Jeff:** That's funny. Do you remember some time ago I suggested talking about gratitude, an important subject? Now it's our last evening together and the master's behaviour reminds us to do it.

**John:** Why do you think it's so important?

**Jeff:** Last month we talked a lot about different prisons people can be locked in. Ingratitude is one of them.

**John:** In which way?

**Jeff:** Discontent is often the result of lack of gratitude. All negative emotional conditions we are unable to get rid of or get out of are like

jails. In whatever direction the eyes turn they see only dark walls, called, for instance, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness.

**John:** You want to say that a grateful person is a free person?

**Jeff:** In some sense, yes. Keep it in mind: we need to have a grateful attitude.

**John:** I think one problem is that we easily get used to good things we have received. We take them for granted.

**Jeff:** Exactly! If you have had three days without food you are very grateful for a bowl of rice. If you have plenty of rice with chicken and fish for three months you could complain that there is too little beef and lamb.

**John:** Just now I'm very grateful for promotion to fitter. After a few weeks, I'll probably have got used to it and might lose my gratitude.

**Jeff:** This is the one-million dollar question: How can you avoid this mistake?

**John:** If we are aware of the possibility we can counter it.

**Jeff:** Yes! We need to understand this side of our human nature and regularly reflect upon it. This helps to fix our eyes not on things that could be better, but on undeserved blessings we should be thankful for.

Good – you brought you Bible with you. Please open it to Psalm 103 and read it through.

**John:** *“Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits – who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel: The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father he has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts. The Lord has established*

*his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who keep his commandments, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul."*

**Jeff:** In this Psalm King David gives us more than twenty reasons to be grateful and to praise the Lord.

**John:** Which?

**Jeff:** You are able to read, therefore I suggest that you (and all readers of this book) will spend some time doing so alone. It is a big help in stimulating your personal gratitude, which leads to worship.

**John:** I will do it tomorrow, when you have left.

Here's another thing: what shall we do if circumstances are really difficult and there is no reason to be grateful?

**Jeff:** Very good question! Let's turn to Ephesians 5:20 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

**John:** *"Give always thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

*"Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

Do we really have to thank him for everything and in all circumstances? How can we do it? Isn't it dishonest to thank God without being truly grateful – just because it is commanded?

**Jeff:** Sure it would, but we need to understand that there is a spiritual secret for every believer, a mystery beautifully expressed in Romans 8:28.

**John:** *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."*

**Jeff:** God is so great that he can use bad things to achieve good results, which are for our best. For instance, we think that it's good to be healthy and bad to be sick. Sure, nobody likes to be sick. Neither do I. We would pray and ask for healing, which is certainly not wrong. However, if the Lord does not heal or does not intervene with our problem, we should trust that there is a purpose behind it. Romans 8:28 promises that whatever happens works for something good for every child of God, even in spite of the pain.

**John:** But sometimes that's hard to accept, isn't it? – particularly if the problems are very big and long-lasting.

**Jeff:** I agree with you! Sometimes it is not easy, and the Lord leads us through a lengthy spiritual process. His desire is to mature us, which often happens when we have to stand different kinds of stress.



On the subject of honest gratitude in difficult situations we can say: we are not supposed to thank God for sicknesses or other pains, but for his good intentions behind everything he does for us or allows in our lives. Please open your Bible to Philippians 4:6.

**John:** *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*

**Jeff:** Often our lives are driven by fear. This verse encourages us to bring everything to God, when he will take over.

At other times we are reminded not only to express our requests, but also to thank him. Many believers perceive it as if a window of a dark room is opened, when they begin to thank and praise God. A change of perspective takes place. Instead of seeing only problems, reasons are discovered to be grateful.

Please also read Colossians 3:17.

**John:** *“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

**Jeff:** Tell me, what does this verse teach us?

**John:** Our gratitude shouldn't be only a matter of words. Through our whole lives, words and actions we are supposed to express it.

**Jeff:** Well observed! This is an important discovery. Often we read something in Bible and believe that doing it occasionally is sufficient. Of gratitude many conclude that Jesus just expects us to mention a few positive items when we pray once or twice a day. But this verse emphasizes that we need a general change in our attitude. Our whole life should reflect gratitude towards Jesus. As I said before: we need an attitude of gratitude!

**John:** I have read in the Bible many times that the Lord criticised the Pharisees, though they observed the commandments. Usually the reason was that their hearts' attitude was wrong.

**Jeff:** That's true! The Lord is much more interested in our hearts than in outward appearance.

Now please read Psalm 100:4.

**John:** *“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.”*

**Jeff:** The Psalms are a big help in expressing gratitude in times of trouble. Sometimes our heart is so depressed that we don't find proper words to thank and praise God. As we discussed before: in the Psalms, all kinds of feelings are expressed with amazing honesty: fear, wrath, anger, doubt, gladness, overwhelming joy and also gratitude – words that help us if we don't find our own.

**John:** Maybe it would be good if I made a list of personal blessings the Lord has granted me. It will help to increase my gratitude to him.

**Jeff:** A very good idea. I can guarantee that the list will be longer than you expect.

Tomorrow I'll be picked up very early to go to the airport. We'd better stop now, so I can get some rest. However, as usual let's try to make a short summary of what we've talked about. It will help us not to forget important thoughts.

- ✓ We need an attitude of gratitude.
- ✓ Lack of gratitude can be compared with being locked in a prison. All negative emotional conditions we are not able to get rid of or get out of are like jails. In whatever direction the eye turns, we see only dark walls. Their names are: dissatisfaction, discontent or unhappiness. But the Lord is willing and able to set us free from ourselves.
- ✓ One problem is that we easily get used to good things we have received; we take them for granted. It is necessary to understand this side of our human nature and regularly reflect upon it. This helps to fix our eyes not only on things that could be better, but on undeserved blessings we should be thankful for.
- ✓ There is a spiritual secret to be discovered: God is so great that he can use bad things to achieve good results for us. Knowing this truth helps us to be grateful despite difficult circumstances.
- ✓ We are not supposed to thank God for sicknesses, pains and troubles, but for the good purposes in what he does or allows in our lives.
- ✓ Our gratitude should not be only a matter of occasional prayers. Through our whole life, words and actions, we are supposed to express it.
- ✓ The Psalms are a big help in expressing gratitude in times of trouble.
- ✓ Listing from time to time reasons for thanking God is a helpful way not to forget the blessings he has given us.

*“Praise the Lord, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.  
Praise the Lord my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits.”*  
Psalm 103:1-2



# The diary in the paper garbage

## Fourteenth Adventure

Jesus said: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free."*

Luke 4:18

JOHN looked anxiously around his cabin for his diary. One more hour, and someone from the agent would come to take him to the airport. He couldn't remember where he had put the book. He had made the last entry two months before, when Jeff had signed off. It was about the experience with his captain and the talk with his brother on the subject of gratitude.

He didn't use his diary daily, but only when he had some special experience or discovered an important spiritual truth. This had usually happened after talking with Jeff. That was why his diary was so important to him. His plan was to read it through during the long flight home and to reflect about the amazing things he had discovered. And he would certainly share the contents later with his wife Mary. Suddenly he had a thought. The day before he had taken a lot of magazines and newspapers to the paper-garbage skip when he'd cleaned his cabin for his relief. Perhaps he had also dumped the diary by mistake.

Fifteen minutes before, the chief mate had announced that all ship's waste should be collected to be taken away. Hopefully it wasn't too late. John hurried to the poop deck and was relieved to find the garbage-skip still there. Frantically he searched for the diary, and soon had it in his hand. "Thank you Lord!" he whispered.

Six hours later he was in the aeroplane. The flight would take nine and a half hours, time enough to study his diary and to recall the amazing things he had experienced during his contract. He turned to the first page and started to read and was carried away by his thoughts, reflections and emotions.



### *December 10<sup>th</sup> / The storm*

After just three days on board, during a heavy storm the main engine had fallen silent. He could remember his fear very well, though it was eleven months ago. Dread, not just because of the possibility of dying but also the realisation of his not yet being ready to meet God.

Next day he had had his first conversation with Jeff, the fitter, which was the beginning of a friendship as he had never had before. "I know that I will be with Jesus!" Jeff had said this with deep conviction, but without unpleasant pride.

Being from a religious background John had already believed that Jesus died for his sin. But how could he be truly saved in spite of his inability to stop sinning? He had learned that Jesus's sacrifice is sufficient for his past, present and future sins.

John had understood next that salvation is not only through forgiveness of his sins, which is needed daily, but also, as in John 1:12, "*All who did receive him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*"

To become a child of God means to receive a wholly new position. Becoming his son would give him the right to be united with Jesus here on earth and also to spend eternity with him in heaven. This promise comes from grace alone, which is to be received by faith and not through good works.

Jeff had explained that belief must be that Jesus as the son of God died for him and that faith means putting all our hope, trust and confidence in Jesus alone. It is important to turn to Jesus with an honest, sincere and humble heart. In a simple prayer Jeff had helped him to invite Jesus into his heart. This changed everything. John knew that he now belonged to the Lord for all eternity. He had been just a creation of God, but now was his son, a member of his worldwide family. Jesus had given him a completely new foundation, position and identity.

When Jesus saved him from sin, the devil and hell, the three dark powers, he was released from the prison in which everyone without the Lord is kept. However, later he learned that even believers could be in bondage, though their salvation is still certain. John turned to the next page of his diary.

### *January 12<sup>th</sup> / The unfriendly 2nd engineer*

Jayson, the 2nd engineer, had often been rude to him, calling him a useless person. This reminded him of his childhood when his father had treated him brutally while his mother hadn't cared. This feeling of not being loved, being considered not very intelligent, even seemingly worthless, had somehow become part of his life.

Again John had sought conversation with Jeff, who told him that it is important to know how to think of oneself, because little by little our thoughts can change our feelings. Sometimes we believe lies and it is important to expose them. It is wrong to assume one is worthless. The fact that we are created in God's image gives every human being dignity. Also, to be his child means being of infinitely high value.

Jeff had said that four basic human needs must be met:

#### **1. To be loved.**

Many times the Bible emphasizes the fact that God loves us, because he is love in person. It is important to trust in this love as a love for each of us in person.

#### **2. Everyone has an infinitely high value.**

The Lord gave his best – Jesus – for us, the greatest possible sacrifice he could have made, proving without doubt that each one of us is very important.

#### **3. To be secure.**

We enjoy security when we entrust our lives to Jesus. This does not mean

that nothing could happen to us, but that we are always in his hands. In John 10:28-29 we read that children of God are in the hands of both Jesus and the Father. This means enjoying double security.

#### **4. To belong to someone.**

As children of God, we belong to the Father and to Jesus, who laid down his life for us. In John 15:15 Jesus calls his disciples friends: Jesus said: *"I have called you friends. I have told you everything I learned from my Father."*

Jesus wants to free us from the prison of unworthy feelings.

#### *January 26<sup>th</sup> / Locked in the repair shop*

John's thoughts went back to the day when the chief engineer had ordered him to fix a defective part in the repair shop, and he was accidentally locked in. It hadn't been easy for him because he always felt uncomfortable in locked rooms. That certainly had to do with the fact that his father used to punish him by locking him in a narrow, dark room. It had taken about two hours before John discovered another door, permanently open, behind some metal plates.

Jeff had asked him afterwards, "Were you really locked in?" "No", he'd answered, "because the other door was permanently open." His brother had used this example to explain more deeply the freedom we have in Christ. Though children of God are already free of the bondage of Satan and sin, many don't properly understand their liberty. Even though we belong to God and are therefore free, it is possible to slide back into our way of thinking before we turned to the Lord.

Though we are still capable of sin, according to the Bible we should consider ourselves to be *saints* (Ephesians 1:1). Besides this, we are called *"a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession"* (1 Peter 2:9). A child of God who sees himself in the first place as a sinner is like someone who lies on the ground; but a child of God who sees himself as holy, even though he sins, has a different perspective. He is like somebody who from time to time falls, but always gets up again.

Jeff had mentioned a good key verse to memorise: *"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery"* (Galatians 5:1). If we don't understand the freedom that believers have in Christ, we behave like prisoners, though we are free. Jeff had given John a list of promises of what we are through Jesus.<sup>41</sup>

*February 15<sup>th</sup> / Seven or eight bottles of beer*

John's thoughts went back to the day when Bill and Frank had insisted that he join them drinking "just a little beer". He had honestly tried not to participate because he guessed what they had in mind. However, they had pushed him until he had finally given in. Later John had lain drunk in his bed.

Next morning they had welcomed him with a dirty smile and mocking "Since becoming so religious, John tells us that only Jesus is important. But yesterday he drank until he could no longer count to three. Finally, we had to carry him to his cabin. You're a very special saint!"

He remembered how Jeff had taken the opportunity to teach him the important truth that we need to discover Satan's evil intentions:

First, he tempts us to commit a sin. Second, he blames us for it, and continues to do so even though we have honestly repented. It is important to recognise his strategy and to trust that forgiveness through our Lord is guaranteed.

In contrast, if we have done something wrong the Holy Spirit touches our hearts in order that we repent. Once we have done so sincerely, the Lord forgives us. Feelings of guilt and blame are not caused by him, but by the devil, who wants to paralyse us.

1 John 2:1-2 says that Jesus is our advocate:

*"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins [the sacrifice that takes away our sins], and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*

It can be compared with a human trial where four parties are involved:

- ✓ we stand accused of breaking God's law;
- ✓ the accuser (public prosecutor) is Satan;
- ✓ the advocate or lawyer is Jesus, who speaks on our behalf;
- ✓ the judge is God.

John thought: Although a ship is like a prison on the sea, I am now a free man. Jesus, my advocate, has suffered the punishment for my sins in my place. Satan has no claim on me. Jesus, to whom I belong, has set me free.



*March 1<sup>st</sup> / Will Raffy die?*

When John turned to the next page of his diary and his son Raffy's possible death he was again deeply touched by Jeff's generous offer to cover the hospital expenses. Several times he had refused, insisting that he would repay a loan. However, his dear brother had told him that he had inherited a great deal of money and that he could easily afford the expense.

Jeff took this event as a lesson in the meaning of grace. Many people are too proud. They refuse salvation as a gift through grace alone and constantly try to gain it by their own good works and religious activities.

Even as children of God we depend on his grace every single day. A second list of Bible words – "Since I am in Christ, by the grace of God ..." <sup>42</sup> – that he had got from his friend contained good examples of blessings promised by grace alone. Some of them have to do with salvation, while others apply to God's children. This means that our Christian life starts with faith in his grace and should continue in the same way. We should not be proud, hoping that we can manage things alone, but remain humbly dependent on Jesus alone!

Pride is like a prison. To humbly accept his grace sets us free. John memorised this short verse: "*By the grace of God I am what I am.*" (1 Corinthians 15:10).

*March 16<sup>th</sup> / The rejected promotion*

When John read this entry in his diary, he was reminded of his puzzlement in connection with his promotion. First, the chief engineer had told him that the company had rejected his promotion request as a fitter. John had been very downcast. Next day, his boss had informed him that the company had accidentally sent the wrong message and his promotion had been granted! At that John had been happy, and felt as if he were flying.

Jeff had explained that his low spirits were unjustified because his promotion had already been granted. False information and incorrect assessment of the situation often lead to low spirits.

They had read about the prophet Jeremiah, who, in spite of correct information still thought wrongly about God. The reason was his difficult circumstances (Lamentations 3:1-33). When he changed his way of thinking by recalling what he correctly knew about God, he felt much better.

If we don't consider the truth about the Lord but believe the devil's lies, we may experience Jeremiah's difficulties. Untrue thoughts cause negative feelings. Satan cannot rob God's children of salvation, but if he lies to us as he did with Jeremiah, we lose hope, our faith becomes weak and our Christian life becomes ineffective.

Jeff had explained that we need to learn not to rely on feelings but rather on the Lord's promises. It is necessary to read the Bible regularly for a firm footing in God's word.

Jesus said in John 8:32: "*You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*" This is a wonderful promise to lead us from captivity to freedom.

Jeff had told him, "Remember, you once said that a ship is like a jail. To receive Jesus into your heart means to step out of a spiritual prison, to be set free from the bondage of the devil. Therefore, avoid the kind of negative thoughts Jeremiah had, which are based on lies, keeping you bound to the evil one, but unnecessarily because we have God's promise of freedom.

Satan wants us to be without hope. However, the good news is that even though negative thoughts are like a jail, the door is open. As Jeremiah stepped out of his prison when he realised the truth about God, so we can follow his example. The best way is found in Hebrews 12:2: *'Fix your eyes on Jesus, the beginner of our faith and who makes it complete.'*

### March 25<sup>th</sup> / John has to die

On Good Friday John had been deeply moved by a DVD about the life of Jesus. At the very beginning of his public ministry he said something important which caught John's attention: "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*" (Luke 4:18-19)

When John had seen how Jesus was beaten, humiliated and spat upon, he could no longer hold back his tears. Sobbing, he'd seen Jesus hanging bleeding on the cross, and thought, "he did it for me!"

Later, when he had talked with Jeff about it, his friend told him that we have to die as well, in a special sense, as Jesus said in Mark 8:34-35: "*Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.*"

Jesus wants us to become his disciples and asks: "Are you willing to surrender your life to me?" It seems to be easy to say "Yes" to salvation.

Once people have understood the misery of their lives and the danger of facing judgment and hell, they want to avoid it, so they allow Jesus to enter their hearts. However, Christ is not only our Saviour but also our Lord. To be willing to follow in his footsteps from day to day means putting an end to our selfish lives. It is simply a response to his love, devotion and sacrifice for us.

The devil is very tricky and tries to deceive us. He promises complete freedom, our desires fulfilled, and our being the centre of attention. But egoism is another prison. "I am important, I want to feel good, I want others to serve me, I, I, I." The pursuit of self-satisfaction as a way of bringing meaning to our lives will not work.

Selfishness will mean staying in prison. To become more like Jesus and experience divine freedom we must put an end to our selfish lives.

### *April 20<sup>th</sup> / "I hate my parents!"*

John's thoughts went back to the time when he'd had very bad nightmares about his childhood. His father, a drunkard, had often beaten him brutally with a stick and locked him in a dark room, while his mother hadn't cared.

Jeff had asked him whether he still hated his parents, which he'd had to admit. Jeff had then told him that the only way to get rid of such a burden is to forgive. Trying to forget doesn't help.

This had seemed impossible, because the emotional wounds were too deep. Jeff had said that God sometimes requires us to do things that threaten to overburden us. However, if we obey him, the Lord will give us the necessary strength. It may take time and we might need help from an experienced Christian, but God blesses those who desire to do his will. It is important to follow not our feelings but our mind, and make a clear decision to forgive because it is God's will.

Jeff had explained several more things: Forgiveness is never fair, never just and never deserved. If we demand justice, we have to pursue punishment. Every sin, small or big, deserves a penalty. But the Lord decided to offer us grace, which is in principle undeserved; so we also are supposed to be gracious to our debtors.

According to Matthew 6:15 there is danger in not forgiving: "*If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.*" Once we seek revenge, we become like the offender, hard and cold, full of hatred and contempt.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:10-11: *"I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit [trick] us. For we are not unaware of his schemes."* We need to forgive in order not to stumble into the Satan's trap. Unwillingness to forgive is a major opening for the devil in our lives.

The Apostle explained in Romans 12:19: *"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay'"* To forgive does not mean that justice will never happen. On the contrary, God is the judge and his judgements will come and will be righteous.

In prayer, through twelve steps, John had finally forgiven his parents and felt great relief. It had been like stepping out of a narrow dark room.

In Luke 6:37 Jesus made three wonderful promises: *"Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven."*

### *June 1<sup>st</sup> / "God, why don't you answer me?"*

John continued reading his diary and was reminded of another difficult time. Everything had seemed to go wrong. He had made a major mistake in the engine room, which had been reported to the office and made him afraid that his promotion would be cancelled. A few days later, his dear uncle had died unexpectedly. Then he had had an accident in the engine room, and afterwards a severe flu. There had been no answer to his many cries for help and he felt as if he had been in a dark room abandoned by the Lord.

John had thought that he had committed a major sin. It had been very helpful to talk again with Jeff, who had given him several points to consider:

What had happened was quite normal. Many had felt God's presence very strongly, particularly when their walk with the Lord had begun. But he wants us to trust in him even if there are a lot of difficulties and we don't feel his presence.

God is real, no matter how we feel! He desires us to put our lives on solid, not shaky, ground. Nothing is so unsteady as our feelings. Instead, it is important to trust in his many promises, which are certain. Jesus said in Matthew 24:35: *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away."* The highest level of worship is praising God in spite of pain, thanking him during trial, trusting him when tempted, surrendering while suffering and loving him when he seems distant.

Human friendships are often tested by separation and silence; either you are divided by physical distance or you are unable to talk. Similarly, in your friendship with God, you won't always feel close to him. Any relationship involves times of closeness and times of distance; so also with God. For our friendship to mature God will test it with periods of seeming separation, times when it feels as if he has abandoned or forgotten us.<sup>43</sup>

Many figures in the Bible, for instance David, experienced times of testing. In Psalm 43:5 he wrote: *"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God."*

The situations that will stretch your faith most will be those times when life falls apart and God is nowhere to be found.

James speaks about the blessings of facing problems: *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him"*. (James 1:2-4 and 12)

### *June 25<sup>th</sup> / The horrible occult porno movie*

When John turned to the next page, he again felt shame for the great sin he had committed. In spite of the Holy Spirit's warnings, he had watched a terrible occult porno movie through to the end. Afterwards he'd felt deeply sorry and repented his sin, but had not found rest. The fear had risen in him that he could have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, which can't be forgiven. A long talk with his brother Jeff had again been very helpful.

There is danger of committing an unforgivable sin if one permanently, strongly and deliberately refuses to acknowledge the truth about Jesus as revealed by the Holy Spirit. To blaspheme against the Holy Ghost is not to say something bad about him because of ignorance, but to reject Christ against one's better judgment. Such a person knows that he should respond positively but simply doesn't want to. His heart hardens and is not willing to acknowledge its sins in order to repent of them. Because there is no desire to receive forgiveness, he is eternally lost. Someone who still fears that he could have committed this particular sin has certainly not done so. His fear proves that the Holy Spirit is still touching his heart and that God hasn't rejected him.

All the same, John had learned that he had been guilty and allowed the devil a big influence in his life. He had asked Jesus to forgive but still felt the attacks of the devil. Jeff had advised him to read a helpful book, *The Bondage Breaker*, by Neil T. Anderson. It recommends breaking away in seven steps covering sinful activities, habits and bondages.

Jeff had pointed to Ephesians 6:10-18 and its advice to “*put on the whole armour of God, to fight against our enemy, who is not of flesh and blood:*

*The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit,*” which is the word of God.

The flaming arrows of Satan are nothing more than smouldering lies, fiery temptations and burning accusations, bombarding our minds. With the armour of God, we are well prepared to conquer.

If we turn to Jesus, the devil has to release us from his bonds because the Lord is stronger. To the extent that we put on Christ, the evil one cannot touch us. We can pray:

**I can’t, but Jesus can!**

**For this \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in anything you are in need of) I have Jesus!**

Ephesians 6:18 says: “*Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be watchful [alert] and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.*”

*July 12<sup>th</sup> / “I am better than others!”*

John read the next entry in his diary:

Though a few weeks before he had committed the big sin of watching the horrible occult porno movie, he had now felt superior to his crew mates. He had even avoided their company as much as possible when they invited him to any of their activities. John’s greater discipline had become associated with arrogance.

His brother Jeff had been a great help in disclosing it by telling his own story of being a very active member of his church. This, however, had been in connection with a proud heart. He had desired to be on the board of his fellowship, but hadn’t been elected, which had led to a spiritual crisis. Jeff had told John of important things he had learned during that time.

First of all we need to see that according to Romans 3:10-12 and James 2:10 nobody is good. Because of this, there is no reason to feel superior. God said to his prophet in 1 Samuel 16:7: “*People look at the outward*

*appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*" He knows our hidden sins and the motives of our hearts.

Jesus often criticised arrogant people harshly. Looking down upon people who struggle with apparent sins while hiding one's own faults is hypocrisy.

Change for the better may be made, but by God's grace alone and not because of our moral superiority. Our Christian life starts with grace (spiritual birth) and needs to be continued with grace (growth in holiness).

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:21: *"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law [doing good, keeping God's commandments], Christ died for nothing!"*

True spiritual fruits can never be achieved by human effort, but are from Holy Spirit. *"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control"* (Galatians 5:22-23). God desires to let these fruits grow, which will change our character and motives.

Jesus, who is the Lord of Lords, gave us an example of how to lead with an obedient heart. He even washed the feet of his disciples, which was a slave's duty.

Religious self-righteousness is like a prison. After the apostle Paul got out of the jail of arrogance, he wrote in Philippians 3:7-8: *"Whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ."*

### **August 21<sup>st</sup> / "They are all idiots!"**

John smiled when his thoughts went back to a conversation he had had with Ted the cook, a person with a very narrow mind.

For minor reasons Ted had complained bitterly about two of his companions. He hadn't shown any understanding of the problems of others. Again, it had been helpful for John to talk things through with Jeff.

There are different kinds of prison from which Jesus wants to free us. One is a narrow mind. Because of our human nature, we are in danger of judging everything and everyone by our own limited perspective. Narrow-minded people have a very small heart, but God wants us to have growing hearts.

We all are in danger of judging, of criticising and of over-emphasising our own point of view. Only few are able to judge in a balanced way and to understand other people's emotions and intentions.

A key verse in this context is Philippians 2:3-4: *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."*

There is an interesting thought in the book *King's Cross* by Timothy Keller: "The Bible is the book that understands me."<sup>44</sup> Before, I studied the Bible, questioning and analysing it. But later it was as if the Bible, or maybe someone [God] through the Bible, began to study, question and analyse me.<sup>45</sup> Usually we approach the Bible with the desire to analyse and understand the Scripture. However, the Word of God calls us into question! The Scripture is like a mirror, where we can discover who we really are.

When God opens our eyes for ourselves, our heart will start to grow. He will help us to discover at least two things: first, how selfish and sinful we are and secondly, that the Lord loves us in spite of that. Once we have understood our own evil character and motives, our patience with the weaknesses of others will increase. To realise additionally the unconditional love of Jesus will enable us to love our fellow-men even though they might be not loveable in our eyes.

A growing heart desires to be generous and not greedy. It looks away from itself and cares for the needs of others. A small heart tends to be egoistic: my little happiness, my honour, my reputation, my needs, my feelings, my advantage, I, my, me!

People with a narrow perspective are sometimes capable to give logical reasons though they are still wrong. It is because of their false values. They lack ability to distinguish between minor and major issues. Incorrect values lead to wrong conclusion, improper reactions and false decisions!

Those who discover their extraordinary richness in Jesus can't keep a small heart, which again could be compared with a dark prison. The gratitude because of what we are and have through Christ will help to get out of it.

### September 20<sup>th</sup> / The ungrateful captain

John had made this entry in his diary the day before his dear brother Jeff had signed off. They had talked about his experience with their captain, who was quite ungrateful even though enjoying most of life's good things.



Jeff had again been able to open his mind to some important thoughts. One problem, he'd said, was that we easily get used to good things. We take them for granted. Because of this, we need to be grateful!

Gratitude for God's blessings leads to worship, as we see in many passages in the Bible, for instance in the Psalms. They can help us to worship when we lack words. One is Psalm 103:1-2: *"Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord my soul, and forget not all his benefits."*

The apostle Paul teaches us in Ephesians 5:20 to thank the Lord for everything: *"Give always thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."* This leads us to ask if it isn't dishonest to thank God without being truly grateful but just because it is commanded, particular if the circumstances are difficult.

There is a spiritual secret for every believer to discover, expressed in Romans 8:28: *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him."* God is so great that he can use bad things to achieve good results, which are in our best interests. We think for instance that it is good to be healthy and bad to be sick. Sure, nobody likes to be diseased. We would pray and ask for healing, which is certainly not wrong. However, if the Lord does not heal us or intervene with other problems that we might have, we should still trust that there is a good purpose to everything he does.

Discontent is often the result of lack of gratitude. All negative emotional conditions that we are not able to get rid of, or get out of, are like jails. In whichever direction the eyes turn they see only high walls, for instance, walls of dissatisfaction or walls of unhappiness.

John was indeed very grateful for the last eleven months he had spent on board. It was often not easy to face problems, but he had learned so much and experienced freedoms he had never known before.

Impatiently he desired to embrace his wife Mary and son Raffy at the airport. He had much to tell them. In his hand luggage was a booklet entitled *How Do I Reach My Destination?*<sup>46</sup> [Appendix 1]. He had got it from a seamen's chaplain. His plan was to use it in order to show Mary how to receive Jesus as her personal Saviour. John was excited as never before.

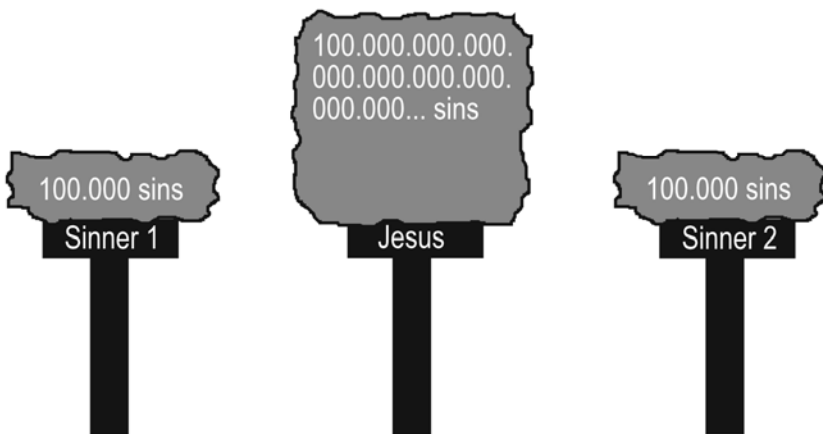
Jesus said: *"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free."*

Luke 4:18

## Appendix I<sup>47</sup>

### How do I reach my destination?

Life on earth is short, but our physical death is not the end. Our soul cannot die and will exist forever. A question that troubles many is this: Where will we spend eternity? Just hoping to enter heaven is not enough. We have to be sure of it, and God is kind enough to give us all the answers we need in the Holy Bible. The following explanation will help you to understand how you reach your destination.



"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."  
John 3:16

### Why this heavy burden on Jesus's shoulders?

What happened during the last hours before Jesus died? A deep understanding will enable us to know how God wants to save us from eternal destruction.

Please look at the illustration on the former page. When our Lord hung on the cross, he carried the sins of everyone who ever lived. We don't know the exact number and the sins are simply too many to count. They begin with the "little" things that we are capable of. For example, hatred, pride, immoral thoughts and actions, lack of love, lack of patience, etc. And it ends with the cruelty of people like Hitler and Stalin, who killed millions. All the sins committed by all generations lay like a heavy burden on Jesus's shoulders.

Two men were crucified beside him. We don't know exactly what their crimes were, but unlike Jesus, who never sinned, they had committed many. Let's imagine that both men had sinned about 100,000 times in their lives, whether in thought, word or deed. In the eyes of the people they were hopeless cases.

### Why did God the Father abandon his only Son, Jesus?

When Jesus hung on the cross he cried out with a loud voice:

"My God, my God, why did  
you leave me alone?"  
Matthew 27:46

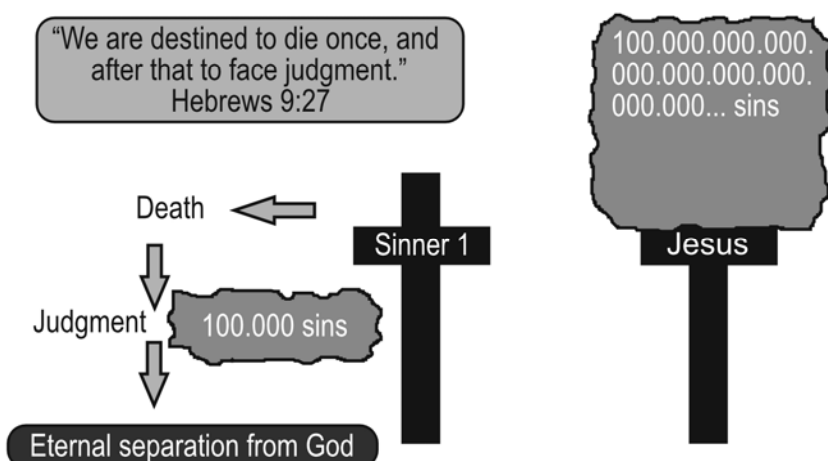
Is it true that God the Father left his Son Jesus when he needed him most? Yes, it is. Our Lord suffered the punishment for the sins all of us had committed, and still do.

- What is the punishment we deserve? It's hell.
- What is hell? It is the complete absence of God.
- Jesus suffered hell, the absence of God, during the hours he was on the cross. He died absolutely alone. This was terrible!

Both the men beside Jesus had sinned often. But one of them went to heaven after death while the other did not. How is this possible? (You find these events written in Luke 23:32-43).

### What happened to the first sinner?

Let's look at the first sinner, crucified on Jesus's left:



We read in Luke 23:39 that he mocked Jesus. A few hours later he died. Because he had not repented of his sins, he died without having received forgiveness. It's important to understand that he could not leave even one of his sins behind. They all followed him into eternity. Every sin that this criminal had committed was recorded in God's books (Revelation 20:11-15). When judgment day comes, the Lord will condemn him according to the scale of the Ten Commandments.

### "I am not a criminal!"

You may say: "Well, that's just fair. This man was a very bad person. But don't compare him with me! Although I have my faults, I am much better. Of course I'm not a criminal!"

That brings us to this question: Will better people, as most of us are, have a better chance of passing God's judgment? For an answer, let's read Romans 3:12:

"All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."  
Romans 3:12

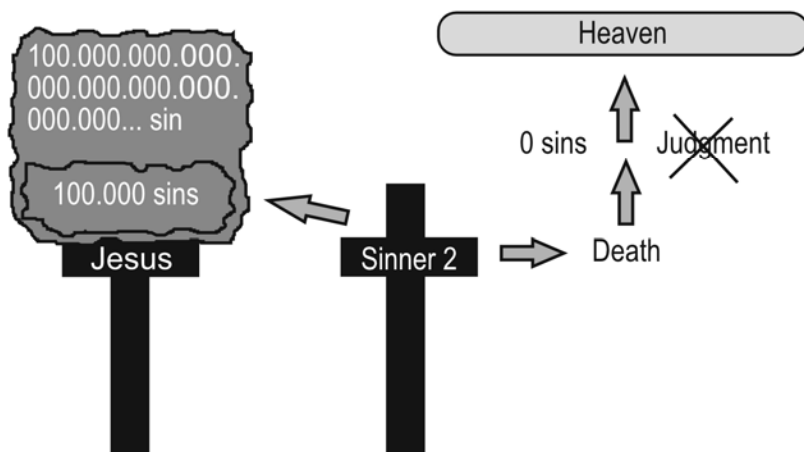
The truth is no one is able to meet God's standard. It is very clear when we read James 2:10:

"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

Is that fair? Is it true that if we commit only one sin, we have broken the whole law of God? God is holy and every sin is against him. In addition, it's important to remember that all of us have sinned many times, even those we would call good and religious people. Now let's turn to the sinner on Jesus's right.

### How did the second sinner react?

We remember that he was no better than the other. Nevertheless, he was allowed to enter heaven after his death. How was this possible? Please take a look at the next illustration.



The second sinner turned to Jesus and confessed his sin. He put his faith in Jesus as his Saviour and said:

"Jesus, remember me when you come  
into your kingdom."  
Luke 23:42

Jesus replied:

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."  
Luke 23:42

## An evil man went to heaven

Please take a close look at the illustration above. We can see that the burden of sin has shifted from this man to Jesus's shoulders. What does it mean? It means that at that very moment Jesus suffered punishment for the sin of the world; and so, of course, for the two criminals.

But while the first sinner rejected Jesus, the second turned towards him. At that very moment, the Lord took that man's sin upon himself. The load on this criminal's shoulders had gone. A few hours later, he died, but because all his sins were forgiven he was allowed to enter eternal life. And when judgment day comes, he need not fear condemnation. He will have direct access to heaven.



**AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:**  
It's not the good people who will go to heaven.  
Why not? Because no one is good in God's eyes.  
We are all sinners. Only those whose sins have  
been forgiven will gain eternal life.

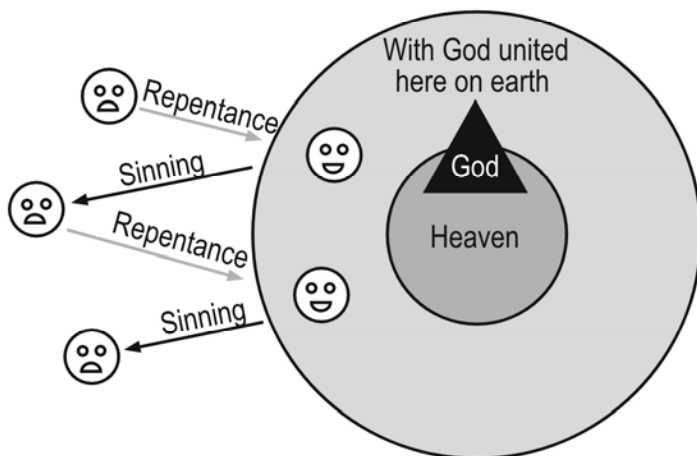
The reason the Son of God came to earth was to die for our sins. In John 1:29, John the Baptist says of Jesus:

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away  
the sin of the world!"

"In" – "Out" ... "In" – "Out" ... ... ?

Maybe you will say: "Well, that makes sense to me. But I see a big problem: The second sinner repented of his sins, received forgiveness and died shortly after. He had no time and no opportunity to sin again. But what about me? Sure, from time to time, I confess my sins to God. But I am not able to stay sinless. Does this mean that if I repent, I'm in God's presence, but if I do something wrong the Lord will throw me out again? Is it a matter of lifelong 'In' – 'Out', 'In' – 'Out'? Where will I be if I'm 'Out' at the moment of my death (see the illustration below)? This could happen if I suddenly die or unexpectedly – for example, a

heart attack or in an accident. Am I lost just because I did not have the time to repent?"



Let's look again at this illustration: The dark grey circle at the center represents heaven, where God lives. But he is not only there; the Lord is also present on earth. All peoples who live united with God here on earth belong inside the light grey circle. After death they will spend eternity with God. For them, to die means to simply step from the dark grey into the light grey circle.

You may ask, "Is it possible to be constantly 'In', in spite of our many failures?" Yes, that is true. Although we are not perfect, God has given us the opportunity to spend eternity with him.

The 'In' – 'Out' concept, as shown by the illustration, is NOT a biblical teaching! God makes it possible to be constantly 'In' by putting us in an entirely new position.



## A child of God - a new position

The Lord invites us to become his children. In the same way as a human child belongs forever to his father, a child of God will always belong to the heavenly Father.



AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:  
If someone has become God's child, he certainly has eternal life. Although God's children are not sinless, they no longer need to fear hell.

Now we need to answer the question of how to attain this new position. Let's turn to John 1:12:

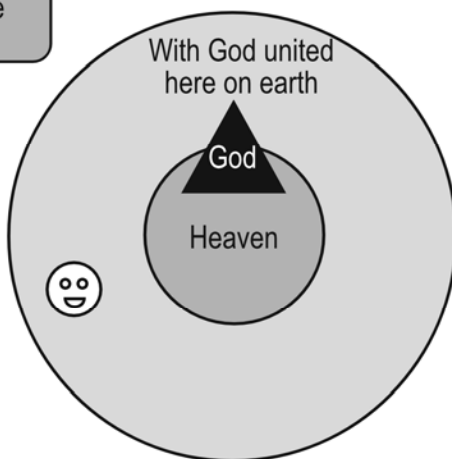
"To all who **received** him (Jesus), to those who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."



John 1:12  
A child of God



It is by **receiving** Jesus and by **believing** in him!





We will shortly consider this in more detail. But first let's think about what is meant by your being a child of God. Suppose someone is the son of a prominent person – for example, the late John Lennon, one of the Beatles. He will share in his father's wealth. He will get more attention and respect than other children. This isn't because he has done something special but because of his famous father.

Let's take this example in order to understand why God's children enjoy many benefits. It is not because they are better than others or deserve it. No, it is simply because they belong to their Father. They have a special position. John Lennon might have been a caring father, or possibly not, but to have God as our Father means having the best in the world, an amazing privilege.

### A child of God has a lot of benefits

What benefits do God's children enjoy? There are plenty! Here are a few:

- Eternal life, for sure.
- God's unfailing presence.
- The Lord's care and support.
- Joy, regardless of the circumstances.
- Peace of mind, even in times of trouble.
- God's answering their prayers according to his wisdom.
- Belonging to Jesus. The devil has no claim on them.
- A meaningful and fruitful life.
- ...

## How to become a child of God?

“To all who **received** him (Jesus), to those who **believed** in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”  
John 1:12

It's necessary to first **believe** in Jesus and to **receive** him in one's heart.

**1. Believing:** It's also important to have a proper knowledge of what 'believing' means. Many would respond "Of course I believe in Jesus. Sure, I have faith in God!" But simply using the words 'believe' or 'faith' does not necessarily mean having the right understanding. Often it is only a superficial or traditional belief. Many people simply think of dogmas learned in childhood, and agree with them. But a closer look reveals:

- Many have never totally given their lives to Jesus.
- They don't love him with all their heart.
- They don't feel truly sorry for their sins.
- Their lifestyle is not much different from that of unbelievers.

Jesus is not interested in traditions; he is not satisfied with a superficial faith. He wants our love, our heart, our devotion and obedience.

AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:  
Believing in Jesus means to put all hope, all confidence and all trust in him alone. He is the Lord and Saviour.  
We must give ourselves to him with  
a sincere and honest heart.





2. How do we **receive** Jesus? We find the answer in Revelation 3:20:

Jesus said: "Listen! I am standing and knocking at your door. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will eat together." (To have fellowship together)

Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts. He would like to enter our dark and sinful lives, to make them bright. We have to give an answer!

- When we say "No," he stays outside.
- When we say "Later," he remains outside.
- If we are not against Jesus yet don't invite him in, we exclude him from our lives.
- Only when we humbly ask Jesus to enter our hearts will he come in.



**AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:**  
Jesus must be invited by prayer to enter! He does not belong to me just because I was born into a Christian family, was baptized, and belong to a church or follow religious traditions.

**To become a child of God is a gift**



"You were saved by faith in God, who treats us much better than we deserve. This is God's gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own. It isn't something you have earned, so there is nothing you can be proud about."  
Ephesians 2:8-9

When we think of the second sinner on the cross, we learn this: Although he was a bad man, he was immediately given salvation, because he turned to Jesus. This leads us to an important truth:



**AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:**  
When it comes to salvation, it's about receiving a gift,  
not about doing something.

God does not save a sinner because

- he has already changed his life, or
- he has proven that he has gotten better, or
- he is worth it, or
- because he has done certain religious activities.

God saves a sinner only when he does exactly what the second man at the cross did:

- he repented of his sins,
- he turned with his whole heart to Jesus and believed in him,
- he humbly asked for forgiveness and eternal life.

We now turn to Ephesians 2:8-9, one of the key passages in the Bible. Here we learn that one can be saved only by grace.



Is it mercy or grace when you receive your salary? No, definitely not! If you have worked hard, then you must be paid: you do something for someone and you get something back in return.

However, this principle becomes a problem when we apply it to our relationship with God. It is wrong to think this way: "I push myself to keep God's commandments. In return, God blesses me here on earth and gives me eternal life later." Why is this wrong? Because we don't deserve to receive eternal life! We are sinners and deserve hell! The truth is that we need a Saviour! That God sent Jesus to become our Redeemer is grace, which we don't deserve!

### Is it important to keep God's commandments?



It is, of course, very important that we do. The illustration on the left shows Moses, to whom God had given the Ten Commandments. The Lord requires us to take them seriously. However, we are not good enough to save ourselves by our own righteousness. Remember James 2:10: one sin makes us guilty, and therefore breakers of the whole law – all the commandments.



#### AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:

First, we must accept salvation as a gift.  
As a result we get a deep desire to keep to  
God's commandments.

"A person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."

Galater 2:16

### SIX QUESTIONS - SIX ANSWERS

Question: Should we keep God's commandments? Does it matter?

Answer: Yes, it does matter a lot!

Question: Will we be saved by keeping God's commandments?

Answer: No, we won't!

Question: Why can't we save ourselves by keeping the law?

Answer: Because we are not good enough!

Question: How then do we receive eternal life if we can't get it by keeping the law?

Answer: It is through faith in God's grace. It's a gift.

Question: Do we keep our eternal life by keeping God's laws?

Answer: No! Eternal life is, and remains a gift.

Question: Why should we keep God's laws after we are saved?

Answer: Because we are grateful to Jesus and we want to glorify the Lord. A child of God loves him and finds pleasure in living a fruitful life.

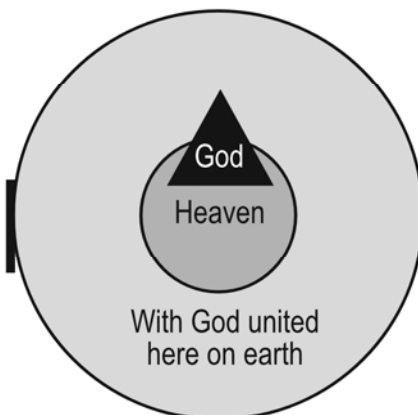
"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. We maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."

Romans 3:23-24+28

Observing the law of God is really important. But we don't become a child of God by doing it. The way is still blocked!

Observing the law of God →



## Jesus, the only way and the only gate!

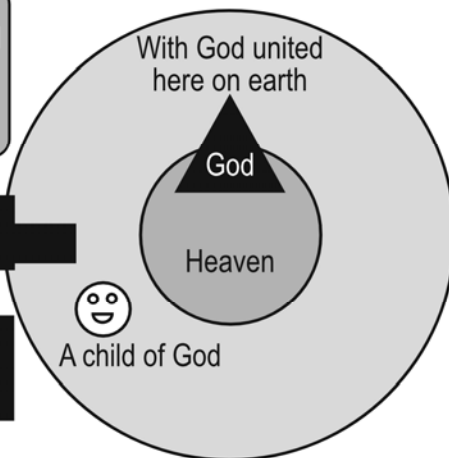
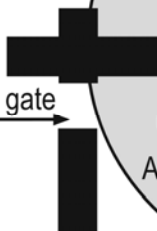
How do we get eternal life?

- Not by our good deeds and religion;
- Not through any church;
- Not through people;
- Not by baptism, communion or by receiving sacraments.

What is mentioned above is important. Salvation is possible only through Jesus Christ! We should turn to him direct.

Jesus said: "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture".  
John 10:9

Jesus, the way and the gate



**AN IMPORTANT  
THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:**  
There's absolutely no  
other way into the  
presence of the Father,  
except through Jesus!

Jesus said:  
"I am the way and the  
truth and the life. No one  
comes to the Father  
except through me."  
John 14:6



## A spiritual birth into a new life with Jesus

“God saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”  
Titus 3:5

Titus 3:5 speaks of a new birth, which is given by the Holy Spirit. It is a spiritual birth. Again the Bible points out that no man can do this. It's God's work in us.



AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:  
Through natural birth we became children  
of our parents. Through spiritual birth, we  
become God's children.

## How do we become children of God?

How do we become children of God? How do we get eternal life?

- We must turn to Jesus with all of our heart and put our faith, hope and trust in him alone.
- We need to open the door of our heart to Jesus and invite him to come in.
- We must surrender our whole life to Jesus. We need to be willing to follow and obey him.

What else is important?

We must confess our sins direct to Jesus and repent!

- Because of our sins, we are separated from God.
- Because of our sins, we have to fear judgment.
- Because of our sins, we are in the danger of eternal separation from God.

The second man on the cross confessed to Jesus that he is a sinner. The Lord forgave him everything and promised him eternal life. What an amazing proof of God's grace!

"I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."

1.John 2:1-2

The Lord does not want us to sin. Of course, it's important that we obey him. But the Lord knows our human weakness. He wants to give us a defender – Jesus Christ.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

John 1:9

It's amazing to see that even a very bad person, like the man on the cross, can receive complete forgiveness. In the same way, Jesus offers forgiveness to each of us when we earnestly repent. But a traditional confession that does not come from heart is meaningless.

**AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:**  
Someone who is honestly repentant  
will receive complete forgiveness – regardless  
of what he has done wrong.



## Are you ready to receive Jesus Christ?

God is calling you; he wants you to invite Jesus into your heart. The Lord doesn't expect from you the guarantee of a perfect life in future, only a sincere heart. He did everything for you. Are you prepared to let Jesus into your heart? Please read the following questions. Then give your personal answer after each one by underlining either "YES" or "NO".

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| • Do you believe with all your heart that Jesus is the only way to salvation?   | YES      NO |
| • Do you believe that no church, religion, other person or even your religious activity is the gate to God, but Jesus alone?    | YES      NO |
| • Do you truly feel sorry about your sins? Are you honestly willing to repent and turn away from them?                          | YES      NO |
| • Are you willing to invite Jesus into your heart in order to receive spiritual life through the Holy Ghost.                    | YES      NO |
| • Are you willing to give all areas of your life to Jesus?<br>Are you willing to follow and obey Jesus and become his disciple? | YES      NO |

If you answered "NO" to at least one question, then you're probably not yet fully prepared to receive Jesus. In this case, carry on reading this booklet. You can order a free Bible study correspondence course. It will help you get a deeper understanding of Jesus and the way to salvation. You'll find information about ordering the Bible study courses at the end of this chapter.

## A prayer that changes your life



If you answered “YES” to all the questions, this would be the time to pray to Jesus. You can use your own words, or you may follow this prayer:

“Dear God, I am coming to you. I have lived for a long time without you. I have been in control of my life, and have done many things, which were not according to how you would have liked it. I am guilty! (Here mention any sins you can recall.) I am sorry for them. Please forgive me.

“I ask you to set me free from the bondage of sin and the devil. I want to belong to you alone.

“Dear Lord Jesus, I am counting on you. Thank you that you have given your life for my sins. Please come into my heart through your Holy Spirit.

“I want to become God’s child. I want you to be with me always.

“I ask you to be my guide from now on. Please go before me, and show me the way I should go.

“Change me where you think I need to be changed. I am willing to obey you.

“Thank you for everything you have done for me. Glory, praise and worship are to you alone. Amen!”

If you have said this prayer from your heart, surely you’re now a child of God! Jesus lives through the Holy Spirit in you! Your sins are forgiven! You will belong to him forever!

If you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Saviour, you may sign here:

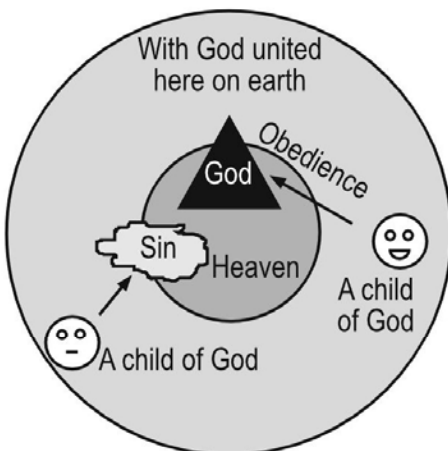
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## What happens if you sin again?

What happens if you commit sins again in the future? Remember what you read before:

**God doesn't expect a perfect life from us, but a sincere heart!**

Here you see two children of God. Both are in his presence. While one obeys him, the other commits a sin because of human weakness. It's important to note that both are still in God's presence. Both still have eternal life for sure: God doesn't want us to sin. If it happens, there's something like a cloud between God and us. Our relationship doesn't seem to be as close as it was before. Later, when we recognize our sin and we repent, he forgives us and our relationship is restored.



Think of a normal family. Supposing that in a certain situation a girl disobeys her mother. What does this mean?

Will the parents throw her out? No! The girl remains a member of the family. Will the parents stop loving their daughter? Not at all! When she rebels, they will give her even more attention in order to bring her back on the right track.

It is true that a rebellious girl disturbs the peaceful relationship with her parents. Yes, we can compare it to a cloud between them. It's necessary to talk to the girl and perhaps even to discipline her. But one thing is certain: the child remains part of the family. And if she begs for pardon, the parents will be more than happy to forgive!



**AN IMPORTANT THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:**

A child of God who sins still belongs to God's family. The Lord will not cast the child out from his presence.

Sin is like a cloud between God and his child, affecting the peace and harmony. But a sincere repentance will completely restore the relationship.

**The salvation is 100% sure!**

Religions can't give any assurance of salvation. However the Gospel is able to do so. Let's look at some biblical promises:

Jesus said: "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life."

John 5:24

This single Bible verse confirms three times that salvation is 100% sure!

- He has eternal life;
- He will not be condemned;
- He has crossed over from death to life.

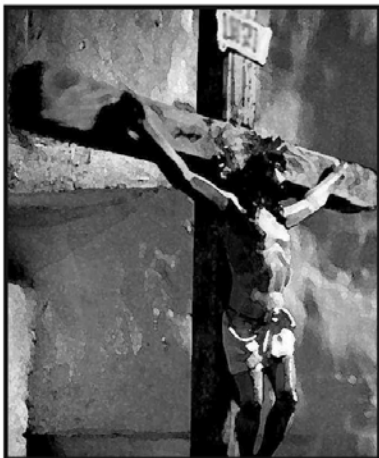
"There is no condemnation for those  
who are in Christ Jesus."  
Romans 8:1

Please read these wonderful words of the apostle Paul, which apply to those who belong to Jesus:

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."  
Romans 8:38-39

Again, we see that eternal life is to be received only through the Son - through Jesus:

"This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life,  
and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life;  
whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."  
1 John 5:11-13



AN IMPORTANT  
THOUGHT GIVES LIGHT:  
We should consider this:  
The price that Jesus paid  
on the cross was the only  
way mankind's need of  
redemption could be met.



If you need help, have any questions, would like to receive a Bible study course, or find a good fellowship of believers at home, please get in touch with:

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## Appendix 2

### Who am I through Jesus?

- ✓ *"I am the salt of the earth."* (Matthew 5:13)
- ✓ *"I am the light of the world."* (Matthew 5:14)
- ✓ *"I am a child of God."* (John 1:12)
- ✓ *"I am part of the true vine and appointed to bear fruit."* (John 15:5)
- ✓ *"I am Christ's friend."* (John 15:15)
- ✓ *"I am chosen to bear his fruit that remains."* (John 15:16)
- ✓ *"I am a slave of righteousness."* (Romans 6:18)
- ✓ *"I am enslaved to God."* (Romans 6:22)
- ✓ *"I am a son of God; God is spiritually my Father."* (Romans 8:14-15)
- ✓ *"I am sharing the inheritance with Christ."* (Romans 8:17)
- ✓ *"I am a temple - a dwelling place - of God. His Spirit and his life dwells in me."* (1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19)
- ✓ *"I am united to the Lord and am one spirit with him."* (1 Corinthians 6:17)
- ✓ *"I am a member of Christ's body."* (1 Corinthians 12:27 and Ephesians 5:30)
- ✓ *"I am a new creation."* (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- ✓ *"I am reconciled to God and am a minister of reconciliation."*  
(2 Corinthians 5:18-19)
- ✓ *"I am a son of God and one in Christ."* (Galatians 3:26 and 28)
- ✓ *"I am an heir of God since I am his son."* (Galatians 4:6-7)
- ✓ *"I am a saint or a holy person."* (Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2)
- ✓ *"I am God's workmanship - his handiwork - newly born in Christ to do his work."* (Ephesians 2:10)
- ✓ *"I am a fellow citizen with the rest of God's family."* (Ephesians 2:19)
- ✓ *"I am a prisoner of Christ."* (Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1)
- ✓ *"I am righteous and holy."* (Ephesians 4:24)
- ✓ *"I am a citizen of heaven, seated in heaven right now."*  
(Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:6)
- ✓ *"I am hidden with Christ in God."* (Colossians 3:3)
- ✓ *"I am an expression of the life of Christ because he is my life."* (Colossians 3:4)
- ✓ *"I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loves."* (Colossians 3:12; 1 Thessalonians 1:4)
- ✓ *"I am a son of light and not of darkness."* (1 Thessalonians 5:5)

- ✓ *"I am a holy partaker of a heavenly calling."* (Hebrews 3:1)
- ✓ *"I am a partaker of Christ; I share in his life."* (Hebrews 3:14)
- ✓ *"I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house."* (1 Peter 2:5)
- ✓ *"I am a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession."* (1 Peter 2:9-10)
- ✓ *"I am a foreigners and stranger to this world in which I temporarily live."* (1 Peter 2:11)
- ✓ *"I am an enemy of the devil."* (1 Peter 5:8)
- ✓ *"I am a child of God and I will be like Christ when he returns."* (1 John 3:1-2)
- ✓ *"I am born of God, and the evil one - the devil - cannot touch me."* (1 John 5:18)
- ✓ *"By the grace of God, I am what I am."* (1 Corinthians 15:10)<sup>48</sup>

### **Since I am in Christ, by the grace of God ...**

- ✓ *"I have been justified - completely forgiven and made righteous."* (Romans 5:1)
- ✓ *"I died with Christ and died to the power of sin's rule over my life."* (Romans 6:1-6)
- ✓ *"I am free for ever from condemnation."* (Romans 8:1)
- ✓ *"I have been placed in Christ by God's doing."* (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- ✓ *"I have received the Spirit of God into my life that I might know the things freely given to me by God."* (1 Corinthians 2:12)
- ✓ *"I have been given the mind of Christ."* (1 Corinthians 2:16)
- ✓ *"I have been bought with a price; I am not my own; I belong to God."* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)
- ✓ *"I have been established, anointed and sealed by God in Christ, and I have been given the Holy Spirit as a pledge guaranteeing my inheritance to come."* (2 Corinthians 1:21; Ephesians 1:13-14)
- ✓ *"Since I have died, I no longer live for myself, but for Christ."* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)
- ✓ *"I have been made righteous."* (2 Corinthians 5:21)
- ✓ *"I have been crucified with Christ and it is no longer I who live, but Christ 'lives in me. The life I am now living is Christ's life.'"* (Galatians 2:20)
- ✓ *"I have been blessed with every spiritual blessing."* (Ephesians 1:3)
- ✓ *"I was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and am without blame before him."* (Ephesians 1:4)
- ✓ *"I was predestined - determined by God - to be adopted as God's son/daughter."* (Ephesians 1:5)

- ✓ *"I have been redeemed and forgiven, and I am a recipient of his generous grace."* (Ephesians 1:7)
- ✓ *"I have been made alive together with Christ."* (Ephesians 2:5)
- ✓ *"I have been raised up and seated with Christ in heaven."* (Ephesians 2:6)
- ✓ *"I have direct access to God through the Spirit."* (Ephesians 2:18)
- ✓ *"I may approach God with boldness, freedom and confidence."* (Ephesians 3:12)
- ✓ *"I have been rescued from the domain of Satan's rule and transferred to the kingdom of Christ."* (Colossians 1:13)
- ✓ *"I have been redeemed and forgiven of all my sins. The debt against me has been cancelled."* (Colossians 1:14)
- ✓ *"Christ himself is in me."* (Colossians 1:27)
- ✓ *"I am firmly rooted in Christ and am now being built in him."* (Colossians 2:7)
- ✓ *"I have been spiritually circumcised. My old unregenerate nature has been removed."* (Colossians 2:11)
- ✓ *"I have been made complete in Christ."* (Colossians 2:10)
- ✓ *"I have been buried, raised and made alive with Christ."* (Colossians 2:12-13)
- ✓ *"I died with Christ and I have been raised up with him. My life is now hidden with Christ in God. Christ is now my life."* (Colossians 3:1-4)
- ✓ *"I have been given a spirit of power, love and self-discipline."* (2 Timothy 1:9)
- ✓ *"I have been saved and set apart according to God's doing."* (2 Timothy 1:9)
- ✓ *"Because I am sanctified and am now with the Sanctifier. He is not ashamed to call me brother."* (Hebrews 2:11)
- ✓ *"I have the right to come boldly before the throne of God to find mercy and grace in time of need."* (Hebrews 4:16)
- ✓ *"I have been given exceedingly great and precious promises by God by which I am a partaker of God's divine nature."* (2 Peter 1:4)<sup>49</sup>



# Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An invitation to share fellowship with each other.
- <sup>2</sup> Here mention any sins you can recall.
- <sup>3</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 17.
- <sup>4</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 22.
- <sup>5</sup> Holy people.
- <sup>6</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 42.
- <sup>7</sup> The sacrifice that takes away our sins.
- <sup>8</sup> The sacrifice that takes away our sins.
- <sup>9</sup> The sacrifice that takes away our sins.
- <sup>10</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 40.
- <sup>11</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 40.
- <sup>12</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 41.
- <sup>13</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 41.
- <sup>14</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 45-46.
- <sup>15</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Victory over the Darkness* (Ventura CA, Monarch Books), p. 170.
- <sup>16</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan), 2002, p. 66.
- <sup>17</sup> Joyce Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind* (Hodder & Stoughton – UK), p. 45.
- <sup>18</sup> Joyce Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind* (Hodder & Stoughton – UK), p. 42.
- <sup>19</sup> Timothy Keller, *King's Cross* (Dutton, Penguin Group, USA), 2011, chapter 9.
- <sup>20</sup> Timothy Keller, *King's Cross* (Dutton, Penguin Group, USA), 2011, chapter 12.
- <sup>21</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan), 2002, p. 172-173.
- <sup>22</sup> Timothy Keller, *King's Cross* (Dutton, Penguin Group, USA), 2011, chapter 9.
- <sup>23</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Neues Leben, neue Identität* (Lichtzeichen Verlag, Germany) p.193.
- <sup>24</sup> Neil T. Anderson, *Neues Leben, neue Identität* (Lichtzeichen Verlag, Germany) p.195-197.
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