

## Be Careful What You See

“Oh be careful little eyes what you see. Oh be careful little ears what you hear. Oh be careful little feet where you go. For the Father’s up above and he’s looking down in LOVE.”

Kid’s songs are the best. Working with kids is awesome. When I meet people in the *public* arena and in the course of the conversation I say I *minister* to kids NOT ONCE has anyone said, “Well that is terrible, you should let them find their own way in life!”

Usually culturally polite strangers say nice things and sound like they almost wish *they* could be as noble as to impact kids for *good*, then steer the conversation with lightning speed away to topics more fun like why their favorite sports team needs a new coach.

I am a creative person, I love drama and stories and the creative process of getting down to the real issues of life in simple yet creative terms. I guess working with kids is a good fit. With kids we **MUST** keep it simple. That is why Jesus said “If you wanna come to me you gotta be like a kid.” Read the Gospels, Jesus said ‘*wanna*’ and ‘*gotta*’ all the time, right?

Movies and television are so powerful in influencing minds young and old. As a personal follower of Jesus I have been impacted to tears many times by *secular* and *religious* programming. Unfortunately I have also been slimed beyond reason with maximum icky feelings of temptation to lust by *lies* coming from those same electronic rectangle screen communicators. These lies are always about what will satisfy me now like cool clear water in a desert to thirsty lips, for real.

The song above is cute, but is it accurate and does it work? Is it even possible to be careful what you see? If a person’s eye balls are working and their eye lids are functional and open, can they control *everything* that comes into their view? Of course one can **LIMIT** the possibility they will see bad things by where they go and what they turn on and whom they associate with, but it is impossible to filter out **all** negative, slimy images from our minds.

What I dislike *most* about the song is the *unspoken* message that *if only I never* see bad things, go bad places or touch bad things, then everything will be ok, God will be happy with me and give me everything I want, just like Santa. I agree that being careful from harmful images is a good thing. I agree that *knowing* that God sees *everything* is beneficial. With every ounce of passion in my spirit I **DISAGREE** that I have **ANY** power in *myself* to please God in word or deed. The Apostle Paul agrees also because he is the one who said, “The very things I want to do, I do not!”

I may be reading things into the song that are not there. If when you hear the song, you think ‘be careful because you are following Jesus and love him and want to serve him in every area of your life!’, then I am ok, but if you are anything like me in my fallen performance mentality, this just becomes another *add on* to the very long list of things I must do to prove to God I love him.

I submit to my readers a more doable option. “Be careful how you *think* and *pray* about what you see, feel and experience.” Probably won’t work in a song, but I think it is more beneficial.

Every time I receive input into my spirit through any of my senses, my choices are very simple. Choice #1: Interpret the message received from my own thinking and desires for what I *think* will satisfy me. Choice #2: Invite Jesus whom I follow to use *every* input to *demonstrate* to me how much HE loves ME. HE wants to heal ME. HE wants to transform ME into HIS image.

These two choices cannot be more opposed to each other. One blindly adopts the messages of media and input from the point of view of the creators and the person’s grid for finding meaning in life.

The other takes ALL input and shines the light of true, historical truth from God’s amazing Word and filters out “God LOVES ME” messages from *everything*. To take a brief philosophical trip, all of creation and creativity points to a creator. All of our ability as humans to choose points to a creator who is relational and chooses to make a way for us to be relational *back* to him even possible. Any philosophy that worships the

creation rather than the creator leaves us thirsty for more, again, like someone dying of thirst in the desert who just lifted a canteen expecting pure water and got sand instead. No personal creator, no meaning.

If we *learn* from everything we see around us to *look* for the messages about what brings true meaning compared with the ultimate truth of accurate scripture, we can learn to *turn* every movie, every TV show, every conversation, every song, every painting, every temptation and every failure INTO another step of faith moment by moment.

Way back in the 'old days' when I went to Bible college, one of the schools I went to had a rule against going to movies in the theatre. My father had similar guidelines which he made one exception to so our family could see BEN HUR when I was quite young, because it had huge Biblical overtones to the story. Ironic and tragic is the reality that *even to this day*, over forty years later I can remember being majorly slimed watching a movie on *CABLE* in my off campus housing *while* I was going to that same college. No college security came knocking at my door in the middle of the night! What *unintentional* message did I pick up from the externally driven policies of my college and parents who wanted God's best for me? "*Controlling the external behavior* is most important in the life of following Jesus."

Colossians talks about substance which is Christ and shadow which is the *externals* that people so often *focus* on and try to emulate so when others observe behavior they will *think* the substance of Christ is present and at work.

When I was honest with Christ, well after college about my wicked heart, he took my sin as if for the first time and *gave* me his righteousness. Now He *continues* to transform the way I live from the inside out. Not to be seen by men or externally impress, but to obey God who is inside me and *allow* the Holy Spirit to filter everything for God's glory.

To illustrate the mind and will transformation that God has wrought in me over time, I would like to break down some recent TV episodes and movies seen, and conversations had, and show you the "God LOVES me" messages I am deriving from them. My prayer is that these illustrations of thought processes help you access more of the true truth of what God wants you to get on the inside while casting off any thought patterns based on lies or externals.

### THIS IS US:

My wife and I heard from family that the show was great so we caught up on all episodes using On Demand. The show is enjoyable on many levels and cuts right to the heart of what the desires of most parents are for their kids when they reach adulthood. The audience gets glimpses of the lives of three kids at various stages of growing up and shows how the past is impacting the unique three as adults.

To paraphrase the show without too many spoilers, when Caucasian triplets were delivered at the hospital one did not survive and an African American child which had been left at a nearby fire station was brought in by a fireman. The parents' hearts were set on bringing home three so they adopted the abandoned child and still got their BIG three. As adults the big three have challenges which make them feel anything but big. Weight challenges plague the woman, Kate, even though she is the emotional rock for her quite different brothers. Her brother who shared the womb struggles to be considered a serious actor and quits a successful but fluffy sitcom which unashamedly prostituted his good looks for ratings while he seeks to reconnect with his childhood sweet heart whom he cheated on and she divorced him. The adopted son becomes financially successful at a job that puts people to sleep when described, but struggles with finding his birth father and feeling his parents *treated* him different out of guilty trying to make him not feel different.

The title of the show is clear to say that warts and all, the family unit is there for each other and is doing their best to be good citizens and happy. I even pick up a not so subtle message, THIS IS US, "take us or leave us!" I resonate with that emotion, there have been many times where I have felt misunderstood by others who are seeking to put me into their boxes of what they think I should be and this has induced sorrowful rage.

I feel the reason the show has been popular is many relate to the feeling that “We may be messed up, but we are sticking together no matter what.” I applaud the show for elevating the importance of a family unit made up of a man and a woman who love each other and want kids to grow up secure and productive. The show is so close to *reality* dealing with real life solutions to real life problems. Unfortunately Hollywood philosophy denies the power and existence of the one person who can bring these solutions into reality, Jesus.

Here are some examples that evoked passion from inside me as I talked to my TV and said “Jesus so wants to help with that!”

The daughter starts to date a guy she met at an over eaters support group, he is funny and from the start has the desire to date her. Jokes about the sacrifice of taste for eating healthy are over the top and clever. She resists at first and then decides to take the plunge and date even though she is concerned about not being worthy because of her size. After dating for a while her boyfriend decides to give up on the whole weight loss program. Over a dinner where she is eating like a snail and he is enjoying way too much, big calories in a meal, she drops a blow.

She says, “I can’t do this anymore”.

He says “Why?”

“I got to get my s\*\*t together. I got to lose the weight and being with you when you are eating whatever you want is not working for me.”

Hollywood would not let me within two miles of their writer’s room, but if I was sitting at that table in that restaurant with that couple battling the bulge, here is what I would implore them with.

Many times in my life I have tried *so hard* to get *my s\*\*t* together. It never worked, ever. God does not want to *improve* my life, he wants to *replace* it with HIS life. His power, His mercy, His joy, His love.

Romans 5:8 says that “God *demonstrates* his love for us in that while we are yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

So many live in the joy draining lie that *if only* they lost the weight; got better looking; had more talent; found the perfect relationship; had happy kids; made more money; increased in fame; *then everything* would be ok. Only trouble is, when we get any of that stuff even for a fleeting moment, it *never* is enough because then we have to worry about *losing it*.

The demonstrated LOVE of God is perfect and everlasting and only has to be received like a little child to benefit from it in huge proportions.

Later in the show the ex-boyfriend cannot live without this determined woman who is considering lap band surgery. He flies across the country to join the family for their infamous unique Christmas celebration and proposes marriage with new promises to stay on the weight loss wagon. After she says yes, in a tacky way only television writers who love easy sex would write, he asks for intercourse. She of course says yes, which *everyone* in media has so masterfully turned into the norm by repeating the same scenario over and over again to ad nauseam. “*Everyone* sleeps together and lives together before getting married, right?” Soon after, he collapses with a cardiac event and we do not know if his married life will end before it has a chance to start.

“By their fruit you will know them.” This quote is in scripture and applies to people, but I also think we should apply the principle to proposed options of navigating life. What is the fruit or result of trying to live life as prescribed by this show? I would ask my reader to think, have you done any of the prescribed and promoted behaviors depicted by this show? What has been the *fruit* or consequence of those things in your life? Does *any* of it satisfy?

Without being tawdry or giving too much detail, my wife and I have been married for over twenty years and what happens in our bedroom is our business, totally righteous before God and wholesome. We have no regret baggage that comes as a result of rebelling against God ordained protections for all people’s benefit. Our marriage covenant safeguards physical union between a man and a woman, but even as *great* as this gift is, it PALES compared to the *real* LOVE of God pulsing through my heart. I often must guard against little

meaningless spats happening right after intimacy. My dear friend, with all the passion I can muster, please hear me when I say that even good, pure pleasure in this life that honors God's Word does not *come close* to satisfying us like the pure, sweet Love and Grace of God can satisfy us. God is the one who said "Taste and see that the Lord is GOOD."

When I cry out to God in prayer and worship and surrender and invite him to come into *all* my pain and sin and sorrow and clean me up, He does it *every time*. He *really does* satisfy my soul.

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results. Are you sick and tired of all the fruit of lies that people have been telling you? Are you tired of working so hard to be smart enough, thin enough, rich enough, sexy enough, spiritual enough, cool enough? Jesus says "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest!"

'Love' that is earned is never secure and never lasts, therefore is it really love?

In the show the adopted brother who becomes successful in the eyes of society, always wonders about his birth father and goes to great lengths to find him using a private investigator. When he summons the courage to confront his parent who rejected him without even knowing him, we get the full picture that the life he would have lived with an addict in need of recovery paled in comparison to the life he now leads.

In a classic confrontation at the front door of his now drug free biological father, the seeking son launches into a tirade about never forgiving his dad for leaving him and brags at the same time about the car he drives. When the telling off is complete and final, the winsome father says "You wanna come in for a few minutes?"

Casually the son agrees as if to negate all the boundaries just set forth in his tirade minutes earlier. Soon, after knowing the reasons why his father gave him up, he finds out the father is dying of cancer and is gay. He invites his dad to live with his wife and two girls as long as he needs.

Dramas and plot lines live and breathe on misunderstandings and assumptions of motives behind actions. *Perspective* on the actual experience of the person who abandoned him and why, totally changed the son's emotions and responses to his dad.

As we think about God and his perspective on all that is spinning around on this crazy planet we call earth, are we doing the same thing as we assign motives to why God acts or doesn't act as he does?

There are *three* areas of life that I am certain affect all humans and as we scurry around on this big planet like ants looking for food we can benefit from understanding God's perspective since he is much bigger than us.

### ***Sin, Circumstances and Hell:***

No matter what my reader thinks about the above words, please hang in there and consider the *difference* between our *perceptions* of God's motives in these areas and the *reality* of what God's motives are and how those motives are proved in his actions, based on the verifiable historical truth of scripture.

From my earliest understanding I always thought sin was all the exciting fun things that I could *not* do if I wanted people in my family and church to accept me and think I was somebody. I always knew what was wrong because of a rich heritage of being a child of those in ministry and much exposure to protestant church activities. At age seven I received God's forgiveness for my sin based on the shed blood of Jesus on the cross for me. Growing in my battle against sin and desire to follow Jesus was always present, but *success* in staying away from all kinds of sin is *exhausting*.

There are sins of commission which are thoughts and actions, then there are sins of omission which are challenging to even define. Many religious people of all denominations, when faced with the immensity of sinful actions and thoughts and inactions, just *default* to what *appears* to be a much easier way called *spiritual external performance*. The only problem is, that whatever external religious performance we set up for ourselves, we cannot even keep *those* up very well so we keep *lowering* even our man made standards. Soon everybody is just living by the unspoken rule. "Do the best you can and try not to sin as much as most of the people that you respect."

Rationalizations are like opinions and hairs, everybody has them.

“If God did not want me to look at porn, why did he create me so I want to?”

“If God is all powerful, why doesn’t he just reveal himself so everyone can see him?”

“If God is loving, why does he even allow evil in the world?”

“If God does not want me to make *idols* out of all my stuff, my work, my reputation, my family, then why did he *bless* me with all that stuff?”

“If all sin is so bad for us, why make it feel so good on the front end and the consequences for doing it so bad on the back end?”

Many think the problem of evil is a major hoop for people of faith to overcome, I propose the problem of *sin* is a way bigger hoop. If a person goes to church, any church, when they walk in and are asked the standard “How you are doing?” do they say without hesitation, “I am great, I *only* lusted fourteen times this week, yelled at my wife three times, was jealous of my neighbor’s new Porsche once and gained three pounds, how are you?” Nope, we keep things nice and civil and cultured and talk about our sports teams and hunting trips and job promotions and accomplishments.

Sin is like dirt in snow, once snow gets dirty there is no cleaning it up. The only way to get it white again is to have *new snow*. God’s showed us his perspective on sin when he said “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” Isaiah 1:18

I have done much cleaning in my years and *nothing* is cleaner than when it is *brand new*. God is the only one who can make a life *new* over and over again, because he is the only one who made everything and made a way for us to obtain his perfection. That is why we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, because he is the only one who can fix the sin problem over and over again. One sacrifice, multiple applications, one amazing GOD.

The simple answer to all of the above rationalizing questions regarding why God *allows* sin is this. “God is personal and wants *personal* relationship with you and me.”

Part of being a person is volition, the ability to choose. My favorite statement which I have used many times in sharing my faith is this, “God does not need our *help* to work in our lives, he does need our permission.”

A key component of repentance is gut wrenching honesty with our creator. Many times I have shared when my personal battle against sin *changed*. According to Psalms 51, I gave God permission to accelerate his work in my life which started when I was a child. I prayed “God I know you are real and I know you love me, but I cannot love you and *obey* you unless you help me!”

I also told God I was *not* going to crank out external religious performance, instead I was going to keep asking for internal healing and power to obey and put that to use from the *inside out*. Larry Crabb’s book called “Inside out” was instrumental in my growth.

The only cure for sin is the growing *internal* power and love of all three persons of the Godhead. “Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

What always evokes huge emotion in me is the fact that as much of a slap in the face my sin is to God every time I sin. God’s *perspective* when I confess my sin and receive his forgiveness, over and over again, is *excitement* because I put to use the provision he went to *great lengths* to provide for me, personally.

Ephesians 5:1-2 says “Therefore be followers of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a *sweet smelling aroma*.”

What makes the sacrifice on the cross of Christ so *sweet smelling* to God, is the *truth* that it takes our sin away so we can be in relationship with Him forever. Even the most callous parent would *never* consider the cruel murder of their only child on a cross to save a relationship with immature repeat offenders as a sweet smelling *anything!*

Romans is so clear that “All things work together for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.” One of the things included in ‘*all things*’ is even our *sin* is useful to *show* us we need the solution only God can provide. Amazing Grace.

What has captured my heart and motivates me to follow Jesus with passion personally, is *every time* I sin he is faithful and just to forgive me my sin and cleanse me from all unrighteousness. When I *confess* and *engage* again and put to use his provision for me my *loyalty* to Him grows. Loyalty, bought and paid for by forgiveness of sin grows into unbounded boldness. Because of what He has done for me to fix my sin, I will *never* be silent.

Pray this prayer to make *sure* your sin problem is settled once and for all. “Jesus, thank you for going to the cross to buy my forgiveness. I confess all my sins of trying to do things my way. Be my Lord and Savior and help me follow you all the days of my life. Amen.”

### Circumstances:

Throughout all media outlets and cultural messages the perspective on circumstances is the same. Good circumstance equal a good happy life. Bad circumstances equal misery and discouragement. In business and sales the talk of having a good attitude even in tough circumstances is mainly used to keep people motivated to keep selling and making their employer money. Turning lemons into lemonade was even referenced by the doctor who delivered the triplets and one died.

I agree, attitude is important and so is learning to look for the good in every situation is helpful as well. The reason most references to circumstances and how to navigate the good and the bad in life successfully fall short is the scope of *time* and *space* of those circumstances.

Every person from every philosophy will talk about learning from past mistakes and how time allows greater perspective. “Time heals all wounds” is so overused, but I feel many adhere to it. Physically time does heal flesh wounds, *but* try getting stabbed in the heart and healing without surgery. Still there is the unspoken message that with *enough* time comes enough perspective to *overcome* bad circumstances. Time is a huge part of the theory evolution. Time is needed to learn and grow as humans.

Space relates to the place where circumstances happen. Running out of gas in the middle of a city is inconvenient. Running out of gas in a subzero blizzard in North Dakota miles from help is deadly. I am using the word space to define the parameters of any circumstance. For example, finding out a loved one has cancer creates a certain space of the doctors and hospitals and chemo and telling friends what is going on, and so on.

Having been on this planet for a while, I have seen my share of circumstances and every time and space of the circumstance has been *different*. Understanding the how to navigate circumstances in a different way has been so transforming for me. To be blunt, I had to come to the end of *my way* of dealing with stuff and learn to invite in God’s way and perspective for handling life.

Real change in my perspective on the time and space of my circumstances has only come in the transformation of my thinking as a direct result of applying true truth from God’s perspective to every situation in my life *in prayer*.

Applied truth is actual truth. Unapplied truth is just fluffy sounding theory with no teeth or power.

In an episode the father losing the fight with cancer and his dotting son separated for so many years take a road trip for the son to reconnect with his culture and get a picture of what his father’s life was like as a struggling musician.

They stopped by where the adoptive dad’s ashes were spread and the father by blood pays his respects and thanks the memory of the man who was there for his son for much of his growing into a success.

“When I was having a panic attack because of the pressure, my dad used to place his hands on the sides of my face and tell me to breathe because everything was going to be just fine.” The son with two dads at two different times recounted.

“He was a good man.” Says the wistful father companion on the road trip.

“The best.” Says the son as he studies the face of his blood line.

“Thank you for raising my son.” Says the biological father with feeling to the place where the remains of that good man have long disappeared into decay.

They go to Memphis and reconnect with the old musician friends of the dad. While cool music is going down on stage an impromptu jam session evolves in the middle of the day. The son who has been drinking calls his wife to say he is having the best time! She says “Are you drunk?”

He says “A little” and laughs with the joy of reconnection with not only his father, but his history and taste and smell of his culture.

While brashly toasting anybody that moves he says “I am sorry, I don’t know how to do this I was raised white.”

The next morning the son awakens with a smile on his face ready to see more of his history through his daddy’s eyes and when he approaches his shivering clammy father in the bed he knows the victory of cancer over his father is approaching at lightning speed and their trip appears to be a one way trip for his dear dad whom he only just found out even existed.

At the hospital his fears are confirmed and he goes to say his final personal goodbye to lose his blood father for a second time. The second loss being much tougher because now he *knows* what he will be missing. When he was left at the fire station he felt a generic ache. Now he was to feel a specific pain for a second time with his first father.

He puts his hands on the sides of the face of his blood father like his adoptive father did for him and tells him “Just breath, everything is going to be ok!”

I said to my TV “Is everything really going to be ok?”

Next scene we see the son who lost two dads driving home with tears streaming down his face.

Developing understanding and perspective around the time and space of *dealing* with the circumstance of the double death of fathers adopted and by blood are important to navigate immense pain now and in the future.

I lost my father to sudden unexpected death at age 77 over ten years ago. Dealing with one loss of a father figure is quite enough for any grown man to handle. My father was a huge influence on me in how to best navigate the bumps and bruises of the time and space of circumstances of life from God’s perspective.

As long as I can remember, growing up, the rock solid reality of eternal time and space which was bought and paid for by my *personal* savior Jesus Christ on the cross was lauded and illuminated. I was most profoundly impacted toward selling out to Jesus, by the time my Dad *cried* in brokenness over disciplining me in error. God is such a master of using *everything* to draw us to himself. Amazing.

As we think more about the time and space of the circumstances of our lives it does not take much analysis to realize there is junky pain and the only way *out* is *through*. Too often when we try to avoid pain and make everything “ok” in our own power we actually make things *worse*. This is exactly why God will never allow us to invent time travel, because we would be *skipping ahead* to the good circumstances and MISS the good lessons that pain can teach us. When people who go to the gym to work out they are actually *breaking down* their muscles. I am sure if those muscles could talk they would be saying “Stop the insanity, are you crazy? This hurts!”

I submit that the reality that the only way *out* is *through*, is actually a *blessing* and an opportunity to learn dependence on our loving creator *in everything*. Romans chapter eight slaps our perspective that this life is all that matters across the face with a wet wash cloth, “In ALL THESE THINGS we overwhelmingly conquer *through* him you loves us.”

The truth is that some conquer our circumstances here on earth through Christ's love by healing now. Some conquer through suffering and dying and holding on to their hope of Heaven. Some conquer through dying suddenly. Some suffer from feeling guilty because they have things quite good, but don't feel they deserve it because of secret sins. The variations of suffering in time and space are as myriad as the number of persons who ever lived, but the ultimate way *through* the suffering is hope and the fulfillment of that hope, ETERNITY in joy with God.

Eternity *must* be the string of hope that pulls us forward through our troubles of many kinds. Without eternity in Heaven the mess of life is just a cruel joke because even if someone does learn from their mistakes and troubles, they still just stop existing at some point and crumble into dust once decaying completes its work. The *meaningless* platitude that so many writers keep puking up on us is, "We live on in the memories of those who care about us."

Really? What happens when those who care about us die too and they fail to tell anyone else about us how are we going to *live on* then? Even if we could live on in someone's memory do we only experience life when they *think* about us? That is just creepy and a theory that is kind of hard to prove. Jesus came and lived and said he was going to die, then rise again. He did exactly what He said he was going to do and was witnessed by many who had ample opportunity to dispute the written, historical accounts which we can still see right now. This person who proved he has beaten death is offering us the same wondrous future. Eternal hope of heaven through the finished work of Christ on the cross and the resurrection is not a pipe dream or sappy sentiment, it is a rock solid truth that is the best and only real option for when this blink of an eye we call life on earth ends.

The only healthy way *through* all circumstances is through the love of the one who has already been through and come out the other side, Jesus. Every head ache I have gone through has been because I got impatient and wanted to run ahead of what God was doing. Thankfully God can even use those bumps to teach me trust and dependence and reliance on Him.

Insert again my talking to my television as the characters of this hard hitting and gutsy show waft in the wind of trying their best to put a happy spin on the trauma of circumstances WITHOUT even *considering* the possibility that there is a personal creator who not only understands all the ick, but went to the cross to make a way so all that ick can actually turn out for good.

Try providing comfort to someone dying of cancer using the theory of evolution or humanism. Where is the evolving first of all? Secondly, how can millions of years of animals and humans living and dying bring any understanding and comfort to the person writhing and dying in pain? Thirdly, how can the belief that *humans* will eventually *figure out* a way to solve all our problems solve painful death?

A large percentage of American culture believes in some kind of a personal creator, but do you think the writers of a show that is *trying* to be real and depict ordinary people struggling with ordinary life would at least represent the *possibility* of a way that works for millions to overcome unspeakable trauma? Of course they will sprinkle in the obligatory reference to church like the time the father went to church to pray for help to not 'kill' his wife because of a fight they just had, but these references are a sprinkled like a garnish on the chef's plate for appearances but NEVER used for the heavy lifting of dealing with the hard, bitter tasting pills in life to swallow. Looking to the very *person* who gave up all to *save* us to also *help* us to thrive on the *inside* because our creator not only understands our pain, but paid the ultimate bloody price to *remove* pain and sin forever and ever in heaven someday is the *only* way through energy draining agony and despair.

Read the stories of Corrie Ten Boom, Joni Erickson Tada and the Apostle Paul. All went through hell on earth but inch by inch overwhelmingly conquered the time and space of their circumstances.

Here is a suggested prayer to invite God into your time and space of circumstance.

"Jesus, thank you for going to the cross to *buy* me. I receive your gift of forgiveness and help to go through the circumstances of my life. Help me forgive whom I need to forgive. Help me follow you in the good, the bad and the ugly. Help me grow up in knowing *all things* are the raw materials of how you *use* me to reach others for you. Amen."

## Hell:

Why is it important to talk about hell? Why do so many people *not* want to talk about hell? We need to know well about hell because this motivates us on a grand scale to make *sure* we don't go there. We have already looked at why the existence of eternity is the only logical option, because Humanism and the lunacy of thinking that we can solve all our problems *outside* of an eternal God does not hold up when we consider the facts.

Consider a few facts easily found with a simple internet search, which is so common place now. Please do not quibble about the precise accuracy of these stats, just look at the trends they show.

1 in 4 girls are sexually molested. 1 in 10 boys are sexually molested. Over one million people take their own life each year worldwide. That is 16 out of every 100,000. Global suicide rates have risen 60% in the last 45 years. 12% of all websites are pornographic. 40 million Americans are regular visitors to porn sites. 26.9% of people 18 and older have participated in binge drinking in the last month. Every day in America 28 people die from drunk driving. In 2009, 23.9 million people 12 and older needed treatment for drug addiction. 549,928 people were homeless in January 2016. 15% of Americans gamble once a week. Nearly 700,000 children are abused every year in America. 4 out of 5 of those abused are abused by a parent. Every 62 minutes someone dies as a result of an eating disorder.

Speaking as a human who has had my share of personal struggles with some of the areas that the above statistics illustrate, looking to myself and my fellow humans NEVER helped me fix anything. Big struggles, little addictions, medium sized conflicts win every time when their only competition is the paltry attempts of humans to fix ourselves.

When I was on my way to conduct an after school GOOD NEWS CLUB at an elementary school, I walked by a teacher saying goodbye to excited students boarding the bus to go home. She said "Be kind to each other!"

In my mind, I screamed 'Why?'

If we all are just a bunch of chance arrangements of cells doomed to decay trying to survive as the evolutionists want to tell us, being kind gets you killed. Does a deer be kind to a lion? Even if we could get enough humanists to agree that it is *mutually beneficial* for society to be kind to each other, how do we define kind without defining *standards* of what kindness means and exactly what it looks like? Wait a minute, since the 1960s haven't we been ramming down everyone's throats the philosophy that we are free and not held in by ANY stringent boring rules trying to ruin our fun and unlimited liberty to be ourselves? Also, I thought we took religion out of the schools, why is this teacher ordering her kids to follow the *idea* of kindness which is present in many religions? What if a child created their own religion and what makes them fulfilled and happy is being mean to fellow students? That teacher would be quashing their free speech rights to express what makes them *feel* alive and free.

In philosophy class, we call this *borrowing*. As sinful little children we want our own way and to be free to do *whatever* we want with no stringent rules to keep us down, until someone else doing the SAME THING runs over our toes with THEIR freedom to be who THEY want to be. Then we have the audacity to say they *should* not do that and be kind, which is code for 'be the way I think they *should* be.'

Even if other people expressing their slavery to unfettered 'freedom' never impinges on our lives, it is that very unfettered, anything goes freedom, that is *imprisoning* us in our impulses for pleasure running wild like a locomotive with no one at the controls.

The statistics recited earlier just scratch the surface of the insanity of Hedonism, the worship of pleasure. Just take one person in one category, repeating the same insanity hoping for different results while everything they value is stripped away by their intoxication with all that does not satisfy, but is so sexy and flashy at enticing mankind to keep coming back.

Eskimos know just how to kill a wolf in winter. They take a razor sharp knife and apply blood on the blade so it freezes in layers and stick the knife in the snow, handle down and the menacing, life threatening lancer, disguised in luscious tasting blood sticking straight up. The wolf smells the blood and comes and

starts lapping it up. He loves the taste so keeps going until all the blood is gone and he does not realize he is now cutting his *own* tongue on the sharp knife and enjoying his *own* blood. The next morning the Eskimo finds and dead wolf laying in its own blood.

Satan is doomed for hell. Because misery loves company, the Bible says he is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. In the garden he appeared as a snake and tempted Adam and Eve with the ONE THING they could not have in that huge garden. Enticement of pleasure is his number one weapon that schemes to drain the life blood out of you and me. His lies of lust for anything other than God who can really satisfy our deepest longings. (“Taste and see that the LORD is GOOD”)

I promise you that *every* significant individual represented by the above statistics, when they *started* doing drugs, or looking at porn, or gambling, or cutting, or anything were looking for satisfaction and pleasure and escape from the pain of life. My story was the same. I wish I could say I learned early to follow God with my whole heart, but then again, if I did I would get *some* of the glory. I did start following Jesus early, but working out the messy, nitty gritty of complete surrender to my personal Savior is a *process* that still continues. It is called sanctification.

The ultimate deception layered upon deception gives birth *not* to death, but eternal torment. Satan is the most skilled, most elaborate and seductive liar. What is our reward for believing his lies? Not only do we spiral out of control in the insanity of doing over and over the things we *know* deep down do NOT satisfy, if we do not figure out we are being lied to on the grandest of scales before we die, and receive God’s provision of forgiveness for our messy sins, we get what we deserve because we still cling to *our* way of egotistical insanity.

The deception is rampant everywhere in our culture. When was the last time you heard a sermon dealing primarily about hell? Is hell worse than getting electrocuted? We get *way more* warnings about making sure we call the power company before digging, than we do about hell. People love to use hell as a swear word, but thinking seriously about Satan and hell is reserved for the farthest fringes of thought and discussion inside and outside the church.

The top lie used by Satan is the lie that he does not exist and neither does hell. To combat this number one lie, we must rip the band aid off and deal with this lie.

Why talk about hell?

The number one reason to talk about hell is there is nothing worse, ever. There are many reasons to believe in the existence of a very real hell. These reasons *do not* have to prove hell’s existence beyond any doubt. Pascale’s Wager deals with the ultimate survival strategy. In summary Pascale believed in finding the option to living and believing that had the greatest consequence for disobedience and hedge your bets by for sure covering that base.

For years when I have been sharing why I follow Jesus personally, I have said “If the humanist is right and I am wrong, I simply stop existing. If the believer in reincarnation is right and I am wrong, I come back as a toad. If Christ is right and I do not receive his solution for my mortality which he freely, lovingly offers, I get eternal, nasty and violent torment which was NEVER designed for me.”

My dear friend, with all of the sincerity I can muster on the flat printed surface called a page, I beg you to investigate all of the many different views on what will happen once you cease to exist on the earth. If you can find any consequence for non-compliance that is worse than HELL, you are wise to go with *that* belief system.

When talking with a renowned atheist, he identified Pascale’s wager and actually said “I cannot believe in God *just* to keep from going to Hell, because I must go where the truth is for truth’s sake and I cannot find the truth is belief in God.”

Now as I reflect on his comment I would like to pose one question to all of us. “Why do we wear seatbelts when we drive? Why do people obey speed limits? If you were flying over Mount Everest in an airplane would you get on a plane that was built in the 1960s and looked like it was going to fall apart wearing flip flops, shorts and tank top?”

Philosophers *love* to *theorize* in hypotheticals but in real life we are *hugely* motivated to take steps and actions to prevent bad consequences. Does a loving parent tell their kid to “just leave me alone and go play on the freeway”? Why are there warning labels on everything we buy? Why do people follow the rules at work? I hope there is some loyalty, but not getting *fired* also motivates.

In Luke 16:1-14 Jesus told the parable of the shrewd servant who found out he was going to be fired for not doing his job well. While he had influence he used it to cushion his blow when he became unemployed. Jesus called him *wise* because he *used* what he *had now* to *prepare* for what was to come.

We need to use *all* we know *now* to prepare for what is to come, which we can get ideas about but will only *know for sure* when we get there. Knowing what the Bible teaches about hell, even if we are still figuring out what we believe, can and must be beneficial to our survival after death. We love to watch TV shows about surviving and love theories that promote ‘survival of the fittest’. Why not do the same for eternal survival? Since by definition eternal survival never ends, the survival is not about existing or not existing. It is about the *quality* of that eternal existence.

So the way I see it there are basically four options.

#1 Eternal Joy. (Heaven as described in the Bible)

#2 Eternal torment. (Hell as described in the Bible)

#3 Eternal merit based reincarnation.

#4 Existence that becomes Non-existence. (Even those who deny we can know for sure we exist at all must themselves exist to think that thought!) Many think that scripture teaches only Satan and demons go to the Lake of fire, *but* humans who die without forgiveness through Christ simply cease to exist.

No matter *what* my reader believes about any of the above possible realities that could be *your* reality for ever and ever and ever, the competition for which is the most undesirable reality for a smart survivor to avoid at all costs *must* be Eternal Torment in Hell.

As I share what the verified historical scriptures tell us about Hell, please remember these same scriptures are clear that Hell was never *designed* to be an option for humans. Hell was created to be the final eternal judgement for Satan and all his demons. It was never created for human consumption. Jesus lived a perfect life and went to the cross to prevent humans from experiencing Hell and provide eternal Joy.

When starting my scholarly pursuit of scriptures about Hell I used the best research tool there is, the internet. Funny that the first two sites I went to were explaining myths and discrepancies in what different preachers are *saying* the Bible says about Hell. The elaborate illogical tap dance to try to minimize the reality of even the *possibility* of Hell is not only mind blowing, but sad.

Does a good parent who does not want their child to get hit by a truck in the street and die horribly invest hours of research to coming up with theories that trucks are not as capable to kill their child as *some people* say they are? I think not. If we water down the horror of Hell, it is still Hell and still exists as the worst option for eternity.

Again, my logical argument is to plead with my reader to analyze all the options for what could happen when you stop breathing and be like the shrewd servant who did something NOW to prepare for the future.

**\*\*Hell, way worse than any swear word.\*\***

Strange and ironic, if so many do not believe in Hell, why do we incorporate it into so much of our culture? If something does not exist, how do we know to talk even about it?

One internet search led me to a site that simply listed 100 verses about hell. The same logic applies here as to statistics listed earlier that depict the mess we humans make of things *on our own*. Even ONE person being assaulted is too many. Even one verse about Hell, if it is true, which I will show you it is, is enough to make ANY prudent person willing to do anything to NOT go there.

The first verse on this website was Revelation 21:8 “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

As we unpack this one verse, please be aware of what came *before* this verse. Revelation 21:7 says “He who overcomes (by receiving God’s *solution* for sin which sends people to Hell) shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be MY son!”

I love how *personal* that verse is. When my life changed is when I entered into the reality that God in the NOW wants me to get his solution for my sin and when I do He says to ME, “You are MY SON”

The message according to the scriptures is so clear, there are only two eternal options and those options are light years apart in the quality of a forever existence. One is beyond the *best* we can imagine and the other beyond the *worst* thing we can imagine. Be a joyfully loved child of God for eternity in the best place ever, or cast into a pit, grave, smoldering garbage dump, lake of fire, gloomy dungeon *forever*.

The historically proven to be accurate Word of God calls Hell a few different things, once I define those different labels for the worst thing imaginable, I hope my reader is *more* motivated than ever to choose wisely for eternity.

In researching what the Bible says and does *not* say about Hell. I found four words that show that even *inside* scripture there are ‘*options*’. All bad options, but still options a shrewd survivalist would be wise to *avoid* at all costs.

Two words of the four mean the same thing, one is Hebrew, **Sheol**, and one is Greek, **Hades**. Sheol literally means grave or pit, but ancient Israelites believed that the spirit of a dead person separated from the body and took up its abode in Sheol. Greek translated Sheol as Hades. In Greek mythology Hades was the place of departed human spirits, a gloomy underworld where the dead have only a shadowy existence. The parable of Lazarus in Luke 16 shows Hades as an actual place of torment but NOT the final judgement.

The third word is only mentioned once, **Tartarus**. 2 Peter 2:4 refers to a gloomy place of restraint for fallen angels not for humans. Greek mythology places it below Hades.

The fourth word is **Gehenna** which refers to a fiery place of suffering. This is where we get the term Lake of Fire.

The article where I got this info has a poignant quote about the Lake of Fire. “Whether understood literally or figuratively, biblical references to Gehenna have little in common with the exaggerated imagery of medieval theology, such as the tortures of Dante’s Inferno.”

Dante’s Inferno scared many with vivid pictures of nine stages of Hell where the worst offenders received the worst suffering, but all still suffer.

While researching this information my mind took a while to get around it all, thankfully it did not take long to realize my original premise still holds true.

Regardless of the number of options for what happens after we die a true shrewd survivalist *must* choose wisely. C. S. Lewis said “If Christianity is false, it doesn’t matter. But if it is true, it’s the most important thing in human history!”

The above definitions add more options to the ugly reality side of the possibilities, but none of them could be considered something to be desired. Again, the reason that if following Jesus is false it *does not matter*, is the consequences for being ‘wrong’ as a Jesus follower are puny in comparison to what happens if Christianity is **true**.

Annihilation teaches that those who die without forgiveness of their sins provided by the cross of Christ simply cease to exist.

Sheol and Hades suggest an intermediate place that is no fun, but is a waiting room if you will before the final judgement.

Gehenna/Lake of Fire is clear in scripture to be the final eternal judgement of Satan and all his demons.

Pascale's desire, which mirrors mine is to stay as far as possible *away* from the worst option possible, *still applies*. When sightseeing tourists wind through the mountains of Montana, if there are no guard rails do they see how close they can get to the edge and speed?

The worst eternal option, Gehenna.

The Greek word Gehenna derives its meaning from the Hebrew word describing the Valley of Hinnom. The rocky valley is a deep, narrow ravine that runs southwest of Jerusalem. In Old Testament times it was a place of abominable pagan rites associated with the worship of Molech, including child sacrifice in a section of the valley called Tophet (2 Kings 23:10). After the Jews return from Babylonian exile, the valley became a cesspool and the city dump of Jerusalem. Fires burned continuously. Feeding on a constant supply of garbage, and occasionally the bodies of executed criminals. This is where we get the imagery for the fiery hell of final judgement.

In our day we share a common experience with all other times and cultures of the humanity. All know the reality of fire and the pain of being burned at some point and the healing time required from just *one* small burn. All know the concept of stinky garbage, refuse, waste. No elaborate description required. All who read or heard the words related to 'Gehenna' in any form knew in an instant a feeling of unending, smelly, painful remorse. A person staying as far away from even the side of Jerusalem *close* to that yuck never had their motives questioned did they? "It is gross, icky and depressing, I don't want to even go near that part of town."

While thinking about the varying views on hell, I just happened to hear Sean Hannity from Fox News talking about Dante's Inferno. Sean is one of the top political radio stars of our day since the recent troubles of Bill O' Reilly. I suspect the research effort Sean puts into his show is immense. He is motivated to know the facts on any issue so he can grow his radio and television empire. On his 4/18/17 show he was bantering with his producer Linda and a female caller and made some interesting and grieving comments. Here is what was said after he emphasized the fact that many main stream media people hate his guts and he will NEVER go to a correspondence dinner EVER.

Caller: "You are going to get extra stars in heaven."

Sean: "Listen, I don't know if I make it to heaven, if anybody is not worthy of it, it is certainly me, but if you are there, I will be happy you made it. Maybe put in a good word for me ok."

Caller: (Laughs)

Sean: "Maybe I won't go to Dante's ninth level of hell, maybe I will just go to the first level of hell which would suck! Have you ever read Dante's Inferno? (To Linda in studio) There are all these different levels of hell, *I forget* what the certain sins are, but I am sure I fit into every category, although the whole story of Jesus is about Salvation and that he forgives our sins, but I have never understood the idea that even though you ask for forgiveness and you're forgiven, why do we keep sinning? Even people that are preachers I know I have asked 'have you ever stopped sinning?' they say 'no, I sin every day'. Then I am reminded that Jesus said to one of his apostles that a just man sins seventy times seven times a day. Then I am screwed, because I am not half as good as these people!"

After bantering in studio about *digressing* he says. "Why you giving me that cold look?"

Linda: "I think you should be forgiven just for knowing that much about the Bible. I'm sure Jesus Christ is up there saying 'I've risen, I'm here I hear you.' You are good, he's only going to send you to the first level although I think once you get to hell every level sucks so what is the difference?"

Sean: "That's what I think."

After some more banter Linda says. "Listen, you did your penance, you just went to a red carpet event. You are doing your good deeds. We are going to go to the Holy Land, you can touch the wall. You can talk to Jesus, he'll be there."

After more banter Hannity teases Linda about how little she knows about all the religious and political forces in play in Israel.

As I listened to this dialogue in my car and read it while I replicating it somewhat word for word for my reader to digest. My soul groaned with concern for the possible eternal state of the persons loosely dabbling in a *digression* as if it was an interlude in a conversation where friends tease each other about whose sport's team is the best in the current year.

I enjoy Sean Hannity for his quick wit and logical pursuit of truth in politics. His research mixed with persuasive style have made him a household name to a vast majority of American culture. Early in the *digression* which should be re-labeled "The most important conversation EVER!" Sean spoke of lack of understanding related to forgiveness and continuing to sin. If we called his show and accused him of having *lack of understanding* about ANY political, radio show topic which relates to being a hardworking, successful entertainer, I suspect he would fight hard to prove he *did* understand. Yet, when talking about the levels of hell and how bad they might suck and what keeps anyone from going there. Sean and Linda seemed content to casually joke about which level they could *live* with for eternity. This attitude is way more dangerous than letting your child play on the highway.

Jesus who *is* everywhere had many of his words and miracles documented in not one book, but four (The Gospels), by eye witnesses written and preserved for *all of us* to study so we can *all* have high levels of *understanding* about them said, "What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet loses his soul?"

Making sure we completely understand how to stay as far away from ANY level of hell, should be our number one priority because at any circle, any definition, interpretation of hell *is still* hell.

A three second internet search which took no effort yielded solutions to large portions of our influential radio host's questions.

To synopsize the nine circles of Dante's version of hell took a little more time, but not much.

Circle One (Limbo): An inferior form of Heaven, this is reserved for virtuous sinners, if that is possible.

Circle Two (Lust): Strong winds of restlessness plague dwellers of this circle.

Circle Three (Gluttony): Sinners in this circle forced to lie in vile icy never ending slush.

Circle Four (Greed): Hoarders and lavish spenders joust in an eternal conflict.

Circle Five (Anger): Wrathful fight each other on the surface of the river Styx.

Circle Six (Heresy): Heretics who mislead others condemned to eternal flaming tombs.

Circle Seven (Violence): Outer ring has murderers sunk in a river of boiling blood. Middle ring has suicide victims become trees and bushes eaten by harpies (big bird like monsters). Inside ring has blasphemers and sodomites residing in a desert of burning sand and burning rain from the sky.

Circle Eight (Fraud): Ten different categories of deception are separated by evil ditches.

Circle Nine (Treachery): Ninth circle is divided into four rounds according to seriousness of betrayal, but all are frozen in an icy lake. Judas is considered to be in the worst spot.

To endeavor to shine the light of understanding on a *digression* with significance at the highest level I have only simple answers from a simple carpenter who proves his love and ability to provide a solution that is immense and sufficient.

To solve Sean's question about which sins he has done, the answer is so simple a kid can explain it. ALL OF THEM. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of GOD." Romans 3:23

I wish I could say with pride that there is maybe ONE of the sins listed above that I have avoided in my heart. In Matthew 5:21 and 27 Jesus is so clear that if we wish bad things on others in our heart it is just like we have killed them. If we look on a woman with lust it is just like we slept with her. Read the entire

chapter and you will be overwhelmed like am with the wickedness of our sinful hearts. Even if Dante's circles are not taught in scripture all of us deserve all of Dante's circles of hell.

When Sean played the humility card in comparing himself to others and placing himself as lower in deeds, it may tickle the ears of his listeners and sound fun, but it is consistent with what Jesus said is the standard? Jesus sets the standard because he is the one who said he would die and rise again and he did just that and was witnessed by many as ALIVE. Otherwise we are all drowning in an icy or fiery sea of comparing ourselves with others.

Sean references seventy times seven for sinning when that is actually how many times Jesus said we should forgive others. This was mere hyperbole to say *unlimited* forgiveness which is what GOD gives to US because of Jesus death and resurrection. This same forgiveness is what we are called to give others in *unlimited* supply as well. I encourage my readers and Sean to become students of the Words of Jesus and the Bible because he proved he is trustworthy and our quality of life forever DEPENDS on it.

Sean references preachers he talks to saying that they still sin as 'confusing'. This is sad indeed, because either the preachers he hangs around are not explaining the truth of God's Word in terms easily understood or he is not listening well. In Romans the apostle Paul dealt clearly with this issue. Romans 8:14 says "Those who are *led* by the Spirit of God are the children of God." So it is bold and bright as a spot light shining through the darkness that the direction our heart is taking us *after* sin is very important to God. When we sin, if we are not *convicted* of that sin until we make it right through the blood of Jesus, we are not being led by the Holy Spirit and we need to be *redeemed*. If we are being led by the Spirit our sin WILL DECREASE as the Savior of our souls leads us in the paths of His righteousness.

There is no room in God's plan to fix our vile sin for the rationalization. "Everybody keeps sinning so what is the point?" God does not grade on a curve. Again, if we have truly been redeemed there will be progress in obedience to our heavenly loving father. The progress will wane and lurch and go up and down and for sure feel slower than we want, but heart led progress will happen because the lavish love of God received by faith brings unmatched *loyalty*.

My friend, the choice is so clear, any description of hell listed so far should be enough to motivate us to get as far away from that cliff to painful oblivion as possible, but there is one more which *by itself* is enough to stop our hearts cold in our tracks.

Psalms 16:11 says "You will show me the path of life: In your presence is fullness of joy; in the right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Of course the psalmist is talking directly to God the father, the Alpha and Omega, the one who runs the whole show. He points to the simplicity of faith in a God who wants us all to be on the path to life. He then sets up the largest "either/ or" proposition of all time and space. *If inside* God's presence is fullness of joy and *inside* the right hand (Jesus Christ, the Son is the right hand of almighty GOD) are pleasures for evermore what is outside?

My research led me to John Piper podcast number 343 from 5/16/2014 entitled "Is God everywhere and absent from hell?" I recommend by reader listens to that podcast.

One line jumped out to me as a summary. "He is present (in hell) in all the ways men do not want him to be present and NONE of the ways believers enjoy his presence."

Thessalonians 1:7-9 says, "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power!"

The consistent message of scripture is God sustains all things, therefore he still sustains eternal hell because he is eternal, but those who are in the above description of hell do NOT get the benefit of any of the attributes of God which are reserved for those who have placed their TRUST in God's solution for sin.

John Piper asserts that the *absence* of the love and kindness and joy of God in eternal hell is only part of the hideousness of the hell experience, but not the *worst*. I think it is the worst part, but either way it is bad,

horrible, ugly, painful, despairing and dark on the grandest scale. It is like comparing third degree burns over a person's entire body that never heal to fourth degree burns in the same circumstances. Either option is unworkable to even think about for very long.

In both the above verses we see the greatest of contrasts between the sweet, everlasting, loving presence of an almighty, all knowing creator who is *near* enough to give fullness of joy and hideous, complete, comprehensive, irrevocable separation from every benefit that once was offered by that same presence.

God's presence fills the earth right now and everyone gets *some* benefit from it. Atheists still enjoy sunsets. Humanists still light up when they see the newest cutie newborn pictures on Facebook. Average Americans who try their best to love their country and family and go to church just enough to keep the wackos who promote a radical life of actually *following* Jesus at bay, still enjoy the blessings of freedom. Even death row inmates enjoy the taste of a good meal because the God who created them *invented* taste buds. Think of the worst day you have ever had. That day without the presence of God in nature, in your car, in your office, in even the most mundane tasks or conversations would be to infinity the worst ever experienced by anyone, ever.

God's sweet presence is void from hell. I hope this statement scares you and me way more than warning labels on toxic chemicals. In the Thessalonians passage the first part comforts those who follow Jesus that we can rest in hands bigger than our struggles. I trust Jesus, because he keeps track of EVERYTHING. He fights for all who humbly receive his payment for our sin. At the final judgement He will make *everything* right. He is patient, but once the door closes, the bridegroom returns, the clock runs out, His judgement is swift. He will be revealed fully from heaven and take vengeance on those who do not know him and do not obey him and punish them in everlasting destruction. The words vengeance and punish sound harsh even to me, but do you see how clear this verse is about EVERLASTING destruction?

Destruction actually is the opposite of Instruction. Instruction moves someone forward to better knowledge. Destruction tears down, eats away, explodes, and inflicts mayhem. Eternal destruction is impossible in our current reality. When a construction company destroys a building to put up a new one, they never say, "We will be doing demolition for eternity on this building."

If eternal destruction happened on this earth it would be one big trash heap! Eternal *anything* must come from an *eternal* source. An orange farmer cannot grow oranges from apple trees. It is *illogical* in the highest of forms to promote a God who eternally rewards those who believe and receive and in contrast snuffs out into *nothing* those who do not believe and obey. It is also *illogical* to promote the idea that fullness of joy is the quality of eternal life for the obedient and yet the smallest crumb of goodness, peace or joy is somehow possible to be *salvaged* in hell by the disobedient. When someone jumps out of a plane without a parachute, the fullness of the reality of gravity will splat them on the sidewalk. Is gravity mean and vengeance filled? No gravity is consistent with its nature. Same applies to every good parent and God the greatest father to the fatherless.

To experience fully what is meant by the words vengeance and punishment by God of sin and those who do not deal with their sin. I must break down a haunting story from the saga of the children of Israel as they bounced back and forth from loving and adoring God, then falling in love with his blessing and turning their backs on him until they experienced the consequences of their disobedience and came to their senses and came back to Him. Every time, He forgave their wickedness and restored relationship with them. One of the times of judgement in Numbers chapter 21 that grabbed their attention by the throat was poisonous snakes killing people left and right in the camp. God told them to put a snake up on a stick and ANYONE who simply *looked UP* at the statue when they were bit would live.

In order to live they had to trust God's provision and look up to him instead of looking down at protecting themselves from being bitten. Two choices only, looking up and trust God to live, look down and trust yourself and this world to die. How long did it take them to look up? A few seconds? No in between ground in the trust game and no long drawn out debate when you are faced with immediate death. Just look up and live. Words like vengeance and punish make much more sense when we look at them through the eyes of relationships. God is the most relational being ever, if we learn to think of him relationally we can only benefit. How many parables did Jesus tell that were all about relationships?

I once met a man who was a staunch Atheist and I believe he was demonically possessed. He told me his daughter was raped. When I said "I am so sorry for your pain." He told me not to be because the man who attacked her needed to get every bit of the judgement coming to him.

I then said, "But then we all deserve judgement and punishment!"

He said "That is just the way it is."

I said I would pray for him and his daughter and he said "Please don't."

I pray for him anyway, because there is an evil which is way worse than evil, it is called unforgiven evil. Imagine if the rapist came to deep understanding of his evil act and came to this man's daughter for forgiveness in tears. If she shuns his repentance and taking responsibility for his evil actions and turns him away IT HURTS HER, because where can she go to undo the past?

Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest!" That rest relationship is only possible as we look UP to receive God's provision of *do over* forgiveness. Rejection of the offer of forgiveness from the only one who proved he is worthy to offer it IS the highest of EVIL because it display lack of self-honesty and trust.

In relationships honesty is building block number one. How can we relate to anyone without trust in what they have said? I hear people spouting anger at others for lying to them all the time, when if they have not admitted that their way of staying away from the snakes of life is not working, they are lying to themselves. Satan is called the father of lies for a reason.

Time after time and over and over again, our beautiful, majestic heavenly father has worked to make a way for us to escape our personal patterns of evil that do not satisfy, yet always look like they can. Until our very last breath and very last heartbeat he cries with passion to have us look up to him and receive his solution for our mess. I believe as we get closer to our last breath, the kindest, most loving face alive shines brighter and brighter on us imploring us to look up and live.

In those final seconds of life, I believe all the seeds of truth that have been planted in hearts are brought to bear and one final opportunity is given to look up and live. In those final seconds and heartbeats, *after* the stark stench of the *reality* that all of the lust filled shiny promises are proven to be vicious lies, *some hearts* will still choose to NOT LOOK UP.

God is not *willing* that any should perish, therefore only those who *will*, do perish! Again, "God does not need my help to work in my life, he just needs my permission."

When I read the Thessalonians passage again about vengeance and punishment, I realized I was adding an emotion of feeling *good* about the vengeance and punishment and assigning it to God. What makes the vengeance and punishment even more horrifying is that God DOES NOT WANT to do it but he must be true to his nature. We see in our society all the time the consequences of people not being consistent with their word. Mommy tells little Johnny "If you jump on that couch one more time I am gonna spank you!"

Johnny keeps bouncing and mommy lets it slide because she does not want to be a *mean* parent. In an instant, Johnny learns he cannot trust his mom.

Dear reader you can trust God, because he moved heaven and earth and sacrificed his only son on a cruel cross to make a way for you to get the beauty of his love and learn to love him back, BUT if anyone chooses to not receive his solution for our sin, He must be true to his nature and *punish* all who choose to never bow, to eternal torment. The worst thing about eternal torment is the never ending aching regret about the wrong answer to the right question. Flashes of missed opportunities to respond plague still very active and alive minds on and on and on, in hell.

I suspect that when the snakes where biting that if Moses gave the people a three step plan they had to do to EARN freedom from the poison many would have jumped at the chance and failed miserably. Once again the matchless *wisdom* and *love* of the omnipotent, all knowing, everlasting KING are revealed in all their glory. He made a way so whosoever will, may come, but they must come through the humility of trust and dependence in their loving creator.

Pray this prayer so in the final two seconds of your life you do not even have an inkling of worry about what your destiny will be.

“Lord Jesus Christ, Thank you for paying the price for my icky, slimy sins. I choose to look up to you and receive your forgiveness for my sins. Help me to grow up in following you and bring many I love to this same place. Help me to get help at a safe church in saying no to all the things that try to take over my life. Amen.”

For more resources including blog and podcasts go to [www.GodisGoodGamez.com](http://www.GodisGoodGamez.com)