

WHO
WAS *Jesus?*

Who Was Jesus?

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excerpts from *Born to Die That We May Live*

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Who Was Jesus?

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A gift from:

Was Jesus really who He said He was?

Did He really have to die?

This short booklet is written to help you sort through these and other questions as you search for real Truth in a day of political correctness and increasing challenges of every kind. As you read, we encourage you to ask God to reveal Himself to you.

1

BORN TO DIE

Julias was a former gang member and a recovering drug addict. As a young man, he had walked the streets of Houston full of anger, hatred, and violence. Two drug overdoses made him take a close look at where he was headed, and Julias decided to clean up his life. But even after going to rehab and attending 12-step meetings for years, his past continued to haunt him. Julias could find no peace—no escape from the anger, pain, and fear of retribution from his former gang buddies. Years of internal torment left Julias angry.

One evening, Julias had an experience that changed him forever. He was sitting at his kitchen table, at home alone, cleaning his 9-millimeter gun. “I was angry at the world, and I wanted revenge,” says Julias. He thought about how he could get back at the so-called “friends” who had ruined his life.

“As I sat there cleaning my gun,” Julias recalls, “I suddenly began having a vision. It was a vision of Jesus, hanging on the cross. But He didn’t look like the Hollywood Jesus I remembered seeing, with a Pamper and a few scratches. The Jesus I saw was shredded, completely unrecognizable. And suddenly all I could think about was why all this had happened to Him. What had Jesus done to deserve this?”

“I no longer felt angry. I put my gun down and just started weeping.”

Julias’ life story changed that night. He encountered God in a way that changed him at the core, and over the next few months, found freedom from the anger, fear, and pain that had haunted him for so many years (Read more about Julias’ story in Chapter 2).

Without a doubt, it was the life-changing power of the cross that transformed Julias. The death of Jesus on the cross and subsequent resurrection aren't just historical events that took place 2,000 years ago. It isn't just a story told to children or portrayed on a movie screen. The crucifixion of Jesus was an act of sacrifice and love that transcends time and history, with the power to change you and set you free wherever you are—just as it did for Julias that night in his kitchen. Jesus' resurrection confirmed He is the Son of God, and it made a way for us to be united with Christ for all eternity.

In his vision, Julias had seen Jesus hanging upon the cross, beaten and shredded to the point that his face and body were unrecognizable. This is true to what many experts and historians tell us about the crucifixion. Crucifixion was a brutal form of capital punishment in the Roman Empire, and was considered the most humiliating and tormenting way to die. It is said that even the word “excruciating” did not exist until a word was needed to describe the pain of being crucified.

Why did Jesus die a death reserved for common criminals? He was no criminal—even the governor of the province had declared Him to be innocent. And He certainly wasn't common. Jesus was royalty. Why would a king die a criminal's death?

We all know the song, it might even be one of your favorite Christmas carols: “We three kings of Orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar...” This is part of the Christmas story, about the wise men who came from the East to find the Christ child. The Bible says that they came to find the one who had been born the King of the Jews so they could worship Him (Matthew 2:2). A star had led them to the place where the child Jesus was with His mother Mary and her husband Joseph.

Gold, frankincense, and myrrh—these are the gifts the wise men brought to Jesus. Do you know what is significant about these gifts? They were all burial items for a king. Nestled in the middle of the Christmas story was the mystery of Jesus’ life—that even though He was a king, he had been born to die.

He was born to die for you—to free you from the penalty of sin.

*Because of our sins he was wounded,
beaten because of the evil we did.
We are healed by the punishment he suffered,
made whole by the blows he received.
All of us were like sheep that were lost,
each of us going his own way.
But the LORD made the punishment fall on him,
the punishment all of us deserved.*

(Isaiah 53:5-6 Today’s English Version)

Questions for Reflection:

Has anyone ever willingly taken a punishment you deserved?

Have you ever been pardoned from a crime?

Are you suffering the consequences for a sin from which you need to be free?

2

THE PERFECT SACRIFICE

Jesus was a perfect sacrifice for a fallen world. Because He was without sin and yet took the punishment of sinners, He became a doorway to salvation and eternal life that we could not have accessed without Him. His perfect sacrifice provided our

passage from penalty to pardon, and from death to life.

But many are unaware of the life of freedom that can be theirs. Through the work of the cross, we have hope and victory in Jesus Christ. By faith in Him, we can overcome the power of sin in our lives and find a victorious life.

U.S. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law on January 1, 1863, freeing millions of slaves across the nation. It was more than two years later, however, that slaves in the Gulf Coast region of Texas finally learned they had been released from their bondage. This wasn't because the Emancipation Proclamation hadn't applied to them, but simply because no one delivered the news!

The cross of Jesus is good news to millions upon millions who are in bondage—in bondage to sin, fear, anger, shame, depression, lust, loneliness, addiction, sickness, disease, and every other affliction that enslaves us. Jesus emancipated us from this slavery through his death on the cross.

Unfortunately, many are like the Texas slaves—never knowing that their freedom has already been secured. They remain stuck in the same situations, suffering under the oppression of a cruel master. If this is you, your freedom has been won! Jesus has saved you from a life of slavery to sin!

Do you remember Julias from Chapter 1? Julias had been a gang member and a former drug addict, but when he gave his life to Jesus, he found freedom from a past that had enslaved him for years.

Julias' father lived a similar lifestyle. He would sit Julias on his

lap when he was young and tell him stories of how he'd shot and stabbed people. He also spent time in and out of jail. As his son, Julius felt like a slave to his lifestyle. He was a slave to the anger, drugs, and violence that pervaded the gang culture. Even after going to rehab and getting distance from the group, he still lived as a prisoner to fear, never knowing if his former friends would come after him in revenge for leaving the gang.

Sometime after Julius had experienced his vision of Jesus on the cross, he came to one of 'Turning Point Ministries' Friday night services. Pastor Doug Stringer gave an invitation to those who had grown up without a father, or who had been let down by their earthly father, to allow God to be their heavenly Father. Pastor Stringer shared how God was a Father to the fatherless and was waiting to bring each of us into His family. Julius responded to the invitation and surrendered his life to Christ.

"Jesus offered me a gift," Julius says, "and when I chose His gift, I was changed. He did that for me, in spite of all my sin, in spite of how I had lived, doing everything I wanted to do. He looked at the good, the bad, and the ugly, and still He had grace on me and gave me eternal life."

The penalty of sin is death (Romans 6:16, Romans 6:23, James 1:15), but through Jesus Christ, we are given the gift of eternal life. What an awesome gift! But not only does Jesus save us from the penalty of sin. He also saves us from its power to rule over us. By believing in Jesus and the work He completed on the cross, we receive a full pardon from sin and full empowerment to overcome our fallen nature and become new creatures in Christ.

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

How do we access the freedom Jesus provided for us? How do we begin a new life?

The Bible tells us that Abraham and his descendants, Israel, entered into a covenant with God entailing the shedding of blood. To remain in right relationship with God and receive forgiveness from sins, the people of ancient Israel would sacrifice an animal without any defects. This covenant ensured blessing, protection, and provision.

While ancient Israel under the Old Covenant gave sacrifices for the atonement of their sins, Jesus has given us a New Covenant. Jesus was the perfect Lamb of God and the blood He shed on the cross satisfied all that God required through His Son's own sacrifice. As a result, through Him we can enter into the New Covenant with access to freedom from sin's penalty and power. We have access to God's provision for our lives and His protection over our families. God commits Himself to us as a loving Father who adopts us into His family, and in return, we commit ourselves to a relationship with Him, and to living according to His ways.

Julias knows what it's like to live under the covenant protection of His heavenly Father. Gang members simply aren't allowed to leave the group. Those who leave, like Julias had, are often in fear for their lives. "I thought I would never live a normal life," Julias says. "Fear crippled me." But by coming into relationship with His heavenly Father, Julias found freedom and protection from above. "Throughout the years, I've run into several of them when I was by myself, like sitting at a stop light when they could have easily wiped me out. But they never laid a hand on me," Julias says. "They had power over me before, but Jesus broke it. He gave me a new life."

Questions for Reflection:

Do you feel like a slave to anything? Fear? Anger? Depression? Addiction?

What do you think is stopping you from coming to Jesus and receiving the freedom He purchased on the cross?

3

SHADOWS & SYMBOLS

Did you know that the entire Bible is about Jesus?

Even the detailed descriptions about priestly duties and sacrifices in the Old Testament all point to Jesus. For example, in the New Testament, Jesus was called the Lamb of God. This title referred to the Old Testament practice of sacrificing a spotless lamb for the remission of sins. The Old Testament sacrifices were a shadow, or a symbol, of what was to come. They foretold of Jesus and the freedom made available to us by His sacrifice.

The Bible is full of so many truths about Jesus and how His work on the cross applies to our daily lives, but some of these truths must be uncovered. If you will take the time to turn to God's word, you will find the answers you need. You will discover how the Bible applies to your daily life and how the cross of Jesus Christ can bring you freedom in every area where you may be struggling.

Bob had been coming to Turning Point Ministries' Friday night services, where Pastor Stringer was teaching an eight-week series called "The Work of the Cross" that examined the book of Leviticus and the sacrifices described there. Bob had first come to the meetings as a skeptic, but on the final night of the series, he came down the aisle with tears in his eyes.

“God is real! God is real!” Bob exclaimed.

Who would have imagined how profoundly a study on the book of Leviticus could have changed a man’s life—a wrecker truck driver who, for 19 years, had been a hard-core heroin-methadone addict! But today, years later, Bob is still an integral part of Turning Point Ministries.

He has impacted hundreds of lives through the *Jesus in the Steps* ministry he founded, along with his ministry to AIDS patients. Groups such as *Jesus in the Steps* are occurring around the city. Those from similar backgrounds are ministering to many looking for freedom in Christ.

Studying the Bible shouldn’t be about learning religious facts. The goal of the Bible is to bring us into a relationship with Jesus! Like Bob, you too can find Jesus in the Scriptures. Discover how real He can be in your life.

Five different sacrifices in the book of Leviticus were fulfilled by Jesus in His life and death. These sacrifices provide the doorway to our freedom, as well as serving as an example of how we should live our lives.

1. The **Burnt Offering** describes how Jesus was in **total surrender** to His Father. Likewise, when we surrender to God, we find freedom from the destructive results of sin in our lives.
2. The **Grain Offering** symbolized the **life of obedience** Jesus lived—a life of **sinless** service to God. By living in obedience to God’s Word, we enjoy unbroken relationship with Him and have access to His favor and blessing.

3. The **Peace Offering** was a symbol of **friendship** and **reconciliation** with God. Jesus became our peace and provided a way for us back to the Father.
4. The **Sin Offering** was a mandatory offering that typified Jesus as the guilt substitute for our sins. Nothing we could ever do on our own could make us righteous, but Jesus took away our guilt and washed us white as snow.
5. The **Trespass Offering** signifies our need for Jesus to heal the damage done by sin. Oftentimes, an important part of this process is to make restitution for the wrong we've done to others.

In one moment of time 2,000 years ago, Jesus fulfilled all of these sacrifices when He died upon the cross. He was the perfect Lamb of God, who took away the sins of the world. No longer do we need to sacrifice animals, for their blood under the Old Testament was just a foreshadowing of the blood of Jesus, which was shed once and for all to reconcile us to God.

The Bible is different from any other book written. Its words are alive and full of power to change lives. The shadows and symbols, stories and teachings are to help us live a better way.

Lisa was a young woman who was lost and confused. She struggled with low self-esteem and was weighed down in depression. "I was aimless," Lisa says. "I had no idea who I was. I had no interests, and so I spent my life drinking and going from one relationship to the next."

Lisa had been to counselors and to Alcoholics Anonymous, trying to make sense of her life. At one critical point in her life, when yet another relationship had ended, she felt like she was

about to lose her mind. She thought seriously of checking herself into a facility.

Instead, a co-worker invited her to a Bible seminar where the speaker was teaching on “Basic Life Principles.” These principles were based on the Ten Commandments, teaching God’s will for how we should live our lives. Don’t steal. Don’t lie. Honor your father and mother.

“No wonder my life was so screwed up,” Lisa said. “I’d been living contrary to God’s will for my whole life. Hearing the way God wanted me to live made me realize I was just reaping the consequences from living in sin for so long.”

Lisa soon met some friends who invited her to their church. At the end of the service, Lisa says a strange thing happened to her. “Before I knew what I was doing, my feet started carrying me up to the front. I was crying and didn’t know what was happening to me. A woman at the front asked me if I wanted to give my life to Jesus. I didn’t even know what that meant, but I prayed with her anyway.”

“God radically changed me. Almost instantaneously, I was free from anger and anxiety, which I had felt constantly for so many years. I had always used a lot of profanity. Instantly, it stopped, without even having to try. I had been promiscuous in my behavior and the way I dressed and carried myself, but now I walked completely away from my old lifestyle.”

By surrendering her life to God’s ways, Lisa found freedom. “I felt God’s presence with me all the time,” she said. “I didn’t feel lost and hopeless any more. For the first time, I felt like I had hope.”

The Bible is more than just a book. It is God's love letter to a world lost without Him. It is a guide book for how to live our life in a way that brings freedom, peace, and joy. And most of all, the Bible points us to Jesus and the work He accomplished for us on the cross.

Questions for Reflection:

When was the last time you read the Bible? Did it make you uncomfortable? Did it make you think about how you were living your life?

Take the time to read God's Word. Jesus is waiting for you there.

4

SURRENDER, FREEDOM & PEACE

The book of Leviticus (the third book of the Bible) tells us about the offerings and priestly sacrifices that were required to atone for the peoples' sins. These were a foreshadowing of Jesus, who would fulfill the requirements of God's law and purify all who believe in Him from sin.

So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that he made of his own body once and for all (Hebrews 10:9-10, Today's English Version).

The first sacrifice Jesus fulfilled was the **Burnt Offering**. The burnt offering signified a total surrender to God and His will, since the animal being offered had to be completely consumed upon the altar of sacrifice. Jesus exemplified this with His entire life, but perhaps the most vivid example was the prayer He

prayed just before His arrest, trial, and death: “Not my will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Many people think living a life surrendered to God restricts their freedom and keeps them from enjoying life. They don’t realize the opposite is true.

Vickie gave up everything for her man. Her parents had offered to pay for college after graduation, but when Vickie found out she was pregnant, she dropped out of school. She and her boyfriend were soon married.

The cheating started immediately—before the wedding, actually. The first time he cheated on Vickie was at his bachelor party the night before their wedding. The new bride found out about it a week later.

Vickie’s husband was constantly unfaithful. “Women would call the house all the time, and sometimes he’d be gone for days,” Vickie recalls. If she confronted him about his behavior, he would beat her. There was also verbal abuse. He would tell her no one else would love her, and that if she didn’t have him, she’d be all alone. After a while, she believed it.

In addition to the abuse and unfaithfulness, Vickie’s husband was also an alcoholic. Over the years, he had seven DWIs. He was in and out of jail all the time. One of these times was on the day she found out she was pregnant with their daughter.

Her desperation reached its peak when her daughter was 10 days old and very sick. Vickie, who had once given her heart to Jesus as a young girl, cried out to God once again. “Heal my daughter, Lord, and I’ll give you my life,” she prayed.

The Lord heard her prayer and now, decades later, Vickie is still serving the Lord. Although her marriage did not last and finances were very rocky for a while, God has restored to Vickie many things she lost over the years. She went back to school, received her diploma, and even went on to college. She worked hard and became the vice president of a successful construction company. Later in her life, the Lord brought her a godly husband and together they are enjoying life, family, and the faith that they share.

By surrendering herself and following Jesus completely, Vickie discovered the freedom, joy, and love she craved.

Can you relate to Vickie's story? Have you sacrificed your happiness, peace, and future for destructive relationships? Many people give up a promising future on a spur-of-the-moment decision that is no good for them. They'll give up friends, family, and even their own self-respect for someone who will treat them poorly, but won't take the step to surrender to a God who will love them perfectly.

There are many reasons why this is the case. Often times, we are programmed by parents or early relationships to think that we don't deserve any better. But no matter your past, God is waiting to love you. He will never leave you or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:8).

Surrender to Jesus and let him restore you to a brighter future!

The world's philosophy is that the less restricted we are, the more fun we will have and the freer we will be. "If it feels good, do it." But God's laws were designed to protect us and free us to enjoy a healthy, prosperous life.

The **Grain Offering** was the second offering in Leviticus that Jesus fulfilled during His time on earth. The grain offering referred to grain without leaven, or yeast. Leaven is often used in the Bible to represent sin. Jesus exemplified the grain offering in that he lived a sinless life, the kind that flows naturally out of a surrendered heart.

This is what happened to Lisa, whose story we saw in the previous chapter. When she surrendered her heart to Christ, her old habits died, many of them instantaneously! Drinking, cussing, promiscuous behavior—Lisa no longer struggled in these areas. Her heart and motives were changed, to the point that all she wanted to do was be closer to God and share His love with others who were hurting.

None of us is perfect. Jesus Christ is the only human to have walked this earth without sin. That's why He alone was qualified to become the sacrifice that would save us all. But He is also able to empower us to live a renewed life, free from old habits and destructive behaviors.

We are a society without peace. Depression, anxiety, fear, loneliness—it seems as though more people than ever before are experiencing a lack of peace. The evening news recounts stories of natural disasters, terrorist attacks, wars, and economic crises. Compound all this with the troubles so many are facing in their homes and their relationships, and it only gets worse.

Talking to His followers, Jesus said in John 16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

The **Peace Offering** represented the sacrifice needed to restore people to peace and friendship with God. As we have learned,

Jesus became that sacrifice. He opened the way for us to reconcile to God. This is at the core of the “peace problem.” As a society, and as individuals, we lack peace because of our separation from God. By reconciling us to God, Jesus became our peace.

Randall was a young man, full of life and vitality. He was a dancer, specializing in jazz, ballet, and contemporary dance. Full of health on the outside, internally Randall had no peace. He was searching for significance and meaning in his life.

“Dancing became a security blanket for me. We hold to what we are strong in, because we are scared of our weaknesses. I was searching for significance through my artistry, looking for love and recognition. But it was never enough. You can only dance so hard and so fast. And after the applause is done, where do you go?”

“I felt like I was always dancing, and never arriving.”

Randall’s lack of peace came from his distance from his heavenly Father. Growing up Catholic, Randall had always thought of God as a Supreme Punisher. But one day, he saw a documentary film about a young woman (Joni Eareckson Tada) who had been paralyzed in a terrible accident. As someone dependent on the health and movement of his body for both his livelihood and his sense of worth, Randall was very moved by the story. What moved him most was Joni’s relationship to God.

“She called him ‘Father,’” Randall recalled, “and she wasn’t afraid to take all of her hurts and fears before Him. This was so far from the dynamic I had with my own father; to argue or question him would mean banishment. But she took all of her cares to God.”

“I realized I was an orphan. But the Lord took me in that day.”

Randall was reconciled to God and began to see Him not as a cruel master, but as a loving Father whose arms were always open to him. Instead of estrangement, there was now friendship. Instead of fear, there was love. This is the relationship Jesus made possible through the cross.

Randall is now the Artistic Director of the Ad Deum Dance Company, based in Houston.

Questions for Reflection:

Have you ever given up everything for something or someone who let you down? How do you view God—as a supreme punisher or a loving Father?

Do you believe that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross allows you to enjoy friendship and peace with God?

5

A SECOND CHANCE AT LIFE

We have all messed up. We haven’t lived perfect lives. We haven’t made all the best choices. None of us can say that we are without sin.

In Scripture, our sins are referred to as stains. Deep stains. Our choices, our behaviors, our inward thoughts and motives—they are like soiled garments with no hope of ever coming clean again.

For all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23).

Is there hope to have a second chance?

The **Sin Offering** was the fourth type of offering described in the book of Leviticus. The sin offering depicts Jesus as our expunger, purifier, and guilt-bearer. Jesus paid a debt He did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay.

To “expunge” means to erase or strike out, to eliminate completely, to annihilate. This is what God has promised to do with our sins, all because Jesus became a sin offering for us! Isaiah 1:18 says, “The LORD says, ‘Now, let’s settle the matter. You are stained red with sin, but I will wash you as clean as snow.’”

No matter how desperate the circumstance, no matter how hopeless or dark things are, the blood of Jesus spilled out upon the cross opened the way to new life. A second chance!

Scott was a 22-year-old man facing 80 years in prison on drug trafficking charges. The son of a minister, Scott had rebelled as a teenager, running from God and separating himself from his parents through a lifestyle of deceit. What started as seeking acceptance and popularity among his peers led to lies, drugs, and a downward spiral that didn’t stop until he hit bottom.

Sitting in jail after his arrest, an officer came and told Scott his father was there to see him. Scott recalls walking to the visiting area where his dad was waiting to talk to him. “It felt like I was walking out of a fog that I had been in for years. Suddenly I was faced with justice and the consequences of my actions.”

He sat down at the window with his dad, who delivered the shocking news that he and Scott’s mom would not be bailing their son out of jail. Scott would have to stay there and wait for

the legal proceedings to play out to learn his fate.

Scott was furious at his father. “What type of love was this?” he wondered. Little did Scott know at the time, but leaving him in jail that day was the hardest decision Scott’s father had ever made. Scott found out later that his father drove away from the jail in tears, crying out to God for his son. “Deal with him, Lord, with your love and your discipline. Fill him with your Spirit.”

Scott was angry at his parents for days, still hardly believing they’d left him there alone. But after about a week, Scott picked up a Bible and began to read. As soon as he opened it, the words leapt off the page and pierced his heart. “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Hebrews 12:5-6).

Scott was troubled by the words. Could this be God? Could everything that was happening to him be God’s love working in his life? The next day, Scott went to the Sunday School service at the jail. He was shocked to find the message being preached was the same one he had read in his cell—Hebrews 12 and the discipline of God toward those He loves.

That night back in his cell, Scott prayed, “If you’re real, I’ve got to know you.” And that was the moment his life was forever changed.

The Bible is a living book, different from any other book ever written. Because its words were inspired by God, it carries His breath of life. To open up your heart to its message gives you the opportunity to experience its life-changing power.

Scott’s story continues: “The Holy Spirit came into my cell that

night, and made the Word come alive.” For the next week, Scott did nothing but read his Bible, the words piercing his heart and transforming his life. Even though there were drugs in the jail and others were using, Scott’s desire was gone for everything but God’s word.

Scott spent nearly five months in this small town jail, waiting for his case to come before the circuit court judge. He spent nearly all his time alone in his cell, communing with God. At night, the process of transformation continued. “God used my dreams to set me free,” Scott says. “My dreams were so vivid, fighting, struggling, facing death. But God used them to deliver me. When I would wake up, I’d feel free.”

And free, he was. Scott’s transformation from an angry, young man in a drug-induced fog into a passionate believer full of love, joy, and hope soon became evident to everyone around him. The guards, the other prisoners, even the sheriff took notice of what had happened to Scott.

Scott’s day in court finally arrived. After waiting for months in the small, mountain town for the circuit judge to come through, the sheriff came and got Scott and said, “It’s time to go to court; let’s go.” As they walked over to the courthouse in the two-stop-light town, the sheriff spoke to Scott.

“You’ve been here too long. You’re making everyone miserable. You’re just too happy. You’re completely different from when you came.” As they entered the courtroom, Scott saw his father, his attorney, and the district attorney. The sheriff pulled the DA aside.

To Scott and everyone else’s surprise, the sheriff signed and posted the bond for Scott, putting his reputation on the line for a \$50,000 bond. Scott was released from jail and free to go home,

told that he simply had to come back in three months and wait for his case to be called on the docket.

For the next 18 months, Scott had to go back up to the courthouse every three months to plead guilty and wait for the circuit judge's decision on his case. In the meantime, he was living at a Christian halfway house, working a job, studying the Bible, and living each moment as if the next day was not promised to him, since he knew it was not. Finally, on his seventh trip to the courthouse, his case was called and he stood before the judge.

“We’re going to try something completely new,” the judge stated. “Everyone who has seen this man’s life change says they’ve never seen anything like this.” The testimony of what God had done in Scott’s life spoke loudly and clearly, so much so that the judge settled Scott’s fines down from several hundred thousand dollars to just a couple thousand, and pushed back his mandatory sentencing of 8-20 years in exchange for unsupervised probation. Certain restrictions were put in place on Scott, but for the most part, Scott had received a new life, released from the sentence that had awaited him for nearly two years.

The slate had been wiped clean. The debt had been paid. Scott had a second chance at life.

The love and mercy of God, demonstrated through the power of the cross, completely reversed the course of Scott’s life. As miraculous as it was for Scott to receive mercy for his crimes from the court, an even greater miracle occurred in his soul. His sins had been expunged. His stains had been washed clean. Jesus, the purifier, paid the debt Scott could not pay and set him free to live a new life.

Scott was restored in his relationship with his parents, as well as in

many other relationships in his life. This process of restoration is signified by the **Trespass Offering**, which has to do with healing the damage done by sin, including the harm suffered by others. By dealing honestly with our sins, taking responsibility for the wrongs we have done, and doing what we can to make amends, we can experience healing in our relationships to God and others.

Do you need a second chance at life? What about a third or fourth chance? There is good news for you! The mercy of God is available to you every single day to start anew.

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 (Lamentations 3:22-23 NIV).

Questions for Reflection:

Are there broken relationships in your life that need mending?

How is your relationship with God?

Would you like to wipe the slate clean and start over with God, your family and friend?

6

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

There was an interesting ritual that took place in the Old Testament when a man or woman had been cleansed of leprosy. After the person had been cleansed, the priest would call for two live birds to be brought to him. The first bird would be killed, and the second one would be dipped in the blood of the first and then set free over an open field.

Leprosy was often used in the Bible as a symbol for sin. This ritual symbolizes the work of the cross for each one of us. Jesus was like the bird that was killed, while all who are “dipped” in His blood by faith in Him are like the bird set free. By believing in Jesus and His sacrifice, we are released from the penalty of sin and receive eternal life. This is the great exchange.

What is our part in this exchange? How should we respond to the amazing grace that is offered to us?

The first thing God asks from us for our part in this great exchange is simply to believe in Jesus. Our faith in the work He accomplished on the cross is all we need to give to participate in the divine exchange. Nothing we can do on our own will ever achieve salvation. Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to escape the penalty of sin and receive eternal life.

Although our own actions will never achieve salvation for us, there is still more that we can give out of gratitude. Romans 12:1-2 tells us that in light of God’s mercy, we should offer ourselves to God, living a life that is pleasing to Him.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1-2 NIV).

Living a life that is pleasing to God is not about religious rules, but about having a heart that is fully surrendered to Him. More than anything, God desires your heart. He wants to know you and walk in fellowship and relationship with you. Our willingness to take part in this covenant relationship with Him is demonstrated by our desire to walk in simple obedience to His ways.

In Psalm 40:6-8, King David of Israel said it this way:

Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, "Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart."

The blessings of covenant relationship with Christ are unending. In the great exchange, we receive eternal life in exchange for hell and eternal separation from God. But there is so much more in the exchange as well!

Matthew 11:28-29 tells us to give God our weariness and burdens, and in exchange He will give us rest for our souls.

1 Peter 5:7 tells us to give Him our cares and anxieties, and in exchange He will care for us.

Zechariah 3:1-4 tells us to give Him our filthy clothes (our wicked deeds) and exchange them for clean, rich garments.

No matter how soiled, stained, or hopeless you feel in your life, there is a great exchange that Jesus has made possible for you.

Russ was a young man addicted to drugs. His family was desperate to save his life and contacted Pastor Doug Stringer and Turning Point Ministries. Pastor Stringer helped the family find a fulltime recovery program called Teen Challenge, where Russ got the help he needed and found new life in Christ. Today Russ runs the family business and directs a Somebody Cares chapter serving the community. He has a beautiful family who love the Lord.

Russ once wrote to Pastor Stringer, “Thanks to you, my kids never had to see their dad drunk or on drugs.” Russ was able to exchange a life that was broken and headed for nowhere good for a life filled with love, fulfillment, and promise for the future.

Each of the stories you’ve read in this book are about the great exchange made possible by the cross of Christ.

Julias exchanged a life of violence, anger, and fear for one full of peace and freedom.

Bob exchanged a life of skepticism and doubt for one of faith and service.

Lisa exchanged depression, alcoholism, and a string of empty relationships for a life of joy and purpose.

Vickie exchanged a life of abuse and regret for one of hopes and dreams fulfilled.

Randall exchanged a life of striving for significance for the confidence of knowing he is loved by his heavenly Father.

Scott exchanged drugs, deception, and decades in prison for a second chance at life.

Every day, all over the world, Jesus steps into the lives of men and women who are facing desperate circumstances. He lifts their burdens, removes their sins, and in exchange gives them peace, joy, and freedom for a new life.

Are you ready for Him to step into your life? Are you ready for the great exchange?

You may have a stirring in your heart and questions. We want to assure you that people and resources are available to help you in your journey. To fully understand the revelation of who Jesus is, I want to encourage you to take a simple step of faith. He is the way, the truth and the life according to His own words. May I encourage you to simply say this if you have a love for truth?

“Jesus, if you are who you say you are, then please reveal yourself to me.”

If you would like prayer and want to connect to a discussion group in your area or receive a full copy of the ***Born to Die*** book and Study Guide, then please contact the Turning Point Ministries International and Somebody Cares office at P.O. Box 570007, Houston, TX 77257-0007, phone (713) 621-1498.



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