

THE DECISION

This is the day you must decide. You will decide for the Lord Jesus, or you will decide against Him. But there is a type of fear or dread or uneasiness in you that keeps you from letting go and accepting Christ, right? Where does that fear or dread or uneasiness come from? Answer: deep within the human spirit. There are many reasons people don't come to a saving knowledge of Christ; some are incredibly complicated with the intertwining twists and weaves of the human condition; the complexities of personality, self-image, self-esteem, pride, lust, and all the rest. We'll start with the simple, and then work up from there.

Lack of Knowledge: Some people have not come to Christ because of a lack of knowledge about Him. These people are not necessarily in the jungles of South America or Africa. They are not necessarily in China or North Korea. They can be right here in small town USA, next door to you.

These people, for whatever reason, simply have no real knowledge of God or His gospel message. Horribly, you will also find a number of these people on the membership rolls of Christian churches.

Why don't they have knowledge of Christ? I think that there are two major reasons: 1) They were never told about Jesus, or 2) They didn't hear the message presented to them. Or, those two reasons could be combined: They weren't told in an effective manner and, therefore, didn't hear the message.

Regardless of why these people have a lack of knowledge, it is the job of every Christian to convey and relate the gospel message to those with whom we come in contact, each according to his or her own style, gifts and predilections. There are countless people out in the world who are just waiting to hear about God and who will make a decision for Him.

Father in Heaven, I pray for a desire — a deep burning desire — in my heart to somehow, in the right way, at the right time, and according to Your will share my faith with those who have not heard about You. I also pray that every living person will hear the gospel message and will have the opportunity to DECIDE FOR YOU. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Pride: Another reason for not coming to Christ, and a powerful deterrent, is pride. Pride keeps you from surrendering to Him; from submitting to Him; from loving Him; from letting yourself be loved by Him; from giving your life to Him. After all, you have your professional image to consider. You don't really want to be known as one of those Bible-thumpers. The more thumping they do, the less you trust them. You are much too dignified for that sort of thing. You can't imagine yourself making a public spectacle of yourself

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by 'walking the aisle,' as the evangelicals call it. You never could see the necessity of publicly declaring your religious beliefs for all to examine, like laundry hanging on the line. Frankly, the thought of it makes you feel sort of low class — moved to extremes by emotion. You honestly don't want to be a part of the group that you have seen become 'saved,' as they call it. It seems so common, completely throwing one's intellect out as the emotion comes in. Why can't we just quietly and privately determine that we believe in God and get on with our lives? Why such a big deal; why is so much made of a decision? You, after all, are an educated professional. What would your co-workers think? Oh! You know what they would think, that you had gone off the deep end — over the edge. Your good, solid judgment would be in serious doubt. And, what would you tell your spouse; your kids? You would look so foolish, so simple-minded. How can you be expected to give up your life to an unseen God? Oh, you believe that a supreme being created all life and the heavens, and so on. But, you really don't see this Supreme Being as exactly personal. Surely being a good person, parent, and citizen will suffice. Right? It's not like you need a lot of help. You make a good living and are in need of nothing. Matter of fact, you do quite well on your own. You don't really need anyone's help. You can pretty much handle life on your own.

Well, I'll tell you something about pride. As the Scripture reads, "Pride goes before a fall." Pride is what drove Lucifer and a third of the angels from Heaven. Pride is the most dangerous condition befalling mankind. Pride puffs up, bloats, and inflates our self-image to the point of replacing the worship of God — our creator — with the worship of self — the created. Pride keeps us from God like insect repellent wards off insects. It's also hard to identify in one's self because it distorts our view of reality — like standing in a hall of mirrors. We see things through a full belly — there's no spiritual hunger.

Pride allows for no self-doubt, or inward reflection. It allows no possibility for being wrong, or insufficient to the task. It allows no one to get too close. Why? Because you might be found out. And you don't want that degree of intimacy, even with yourself. In your heart of hearts, you know your weaknesses and vulnerability, but you don't want to explore those waters. Truth be known, your pride protects you from having to deal with who you really are. It is your protective shield, and you're not giving that up for anyone. Not anyone! You'd be nothing otherwise. Nothing! Broken. Without your pride you would have a very poor self-image, but with it, you have a stellar self-image. You are someone. Someone to be respected and to be dealt with. You can't give that up. And why should you?

Pride is actually a slow-growing cancer to the spirit. It causes one to reject God until it's too late. No medication or treatment can cure it. It's always malignant, never benign. It will cost you your eternal existence in Heaven, but will insure your eternal existence in the Place of Separation. It will consume your spirit. It is insidious, and powerful, and always deadly.

There is but one cure: surrender to the Lord, your God. Take your strength from the One who possesses all strength; look to Him for your self-image, the One who gives freely

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of indestructible self-images. Your self-image is frail, tenuous, and assailable because you look into a mirror, through your own eyes, to see yourself as you imagine others see you. Whereas an unassailable self-image emerges from looking into the heart of the Creator-God, to see yourself as He sees you.

If you do this, if this is your decision, you must let others know of this decision. Why? Because Jesus died in public disgrace to provide salvation for you. You need to accept that salvation publicly as well. If you hide your faith, then it is not faith at all. If you are embarrassed about your beliefs, then you have no real belief. If you say you believe, but then refuse to acknowledge your faith before others, then pride is your god, and pride will destroy you. Give up the pride or it will consume your spirit, as does a fierce disease. Jesus is waiting for you. He underwent a torturous death to save you. He longs for you and sheds tears for you. He hungers with great passion for you. He grieves for your soul. He doesn't want you to be lost to the Place of Separation. Give up the cancer of pride and accept the sweet salvation Christ has waiting for you. Do it now! And then tell someone.

Father in Heaven, I pray for those who are consumed by the sin of pride. Free them from the bonds of this deadly condition. Pride separates Your people from You; it puffs up, and distorts, and causes twisted thinking. It magnifies self instead of You. Father, only You can break these bonds; only You can free the spirit from the shackles of deadly pride. Father, send Your Holy Spirit to speak the truth to Your people caught up in pride, and free them to love and obey You. In Your holy name I pray. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Control: Another reason people do not surrender to Christ is also found deep in the human spirit: control. You want to be in control, not be controlled. You want to live your life the way you want to — you deserve that much. You've worked hard. And you certainly don't want to be controlled by the dictates of some religion, espousing a bunch of man-made rules. Rules, rules, rules! You know best what is right for your life.

As you think back on it, you've always wanted to be in control, not only of your own life, but also the lives of those with whom you interact. You want to be in control at work, and in control of your friends, and in control of your spouse, and children. And you certainly want to control your family's opinions — friends, too. It's for their own good. You are a natural leader and in most cases know what's best for yourself and others.

This intense, burning desire to be in control is the second reason Lucifer and his bunch were cast out of Heaven. The disease of control is almost as deadly as that of pride.

The truth is, man cannot be saved to eternity with the Creator-God as long as he insists on being in control. If you can't put God in control of your life, then He is not your Lord

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— you are! The desire for control separates you from Christ. It pits you against Him. You see, only one can be in control — either God is in control, or you are. If you insist on being in control, then you will never be able to approach God. Why? Because you are elevating yourself to His level — trying to take His job, if you will. You are challenging Him; substituting your will for His; placing yourself first, along with your perceived superior judgment.

In addition, the notion that anyone is in control of anything or anyone is truly absurd. You don't control where you are born, or to which parents. You don't control the color of your skin, or eyes, or hair. You don't control your native intelligence, or the diseases you might contract. You don't control the nation of your birth or the conditions into which you are born. Likewise you don't control the weather, the stock market, or whether the milk you bought was pasteurized properly. And, you don't and cannot control other people. Even the Creator-God refuses to control His people, allowing them free will.

Put God in control of your life now. Put the control where it belongs. To do this requires an amount of faith, and surrender. It requires humility. These are the attributes that please God. Give up your will to Him and trust Him to work in your best interest.

Trusted Heavenly Father, please forgive those who, knowingly or unknowingly compete with You for control of their lives. Teach them the futility of striving to control circumstances, lives, opinions, actions and all the rest. Plant deep in the hearts of such as these the penetrating desire to allow You to control their lives, in every respect. Help them to trust You to guide and direct them through the agonies, the perils, the offensive mistakes, and, yes, even the good times of their lives. This, I pray knowing this is in Your wondrous will. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Just Don't Want To: Another reason people don't surrender to God is because they simply 'don't want to.' They enjoy their life-style; they enjoy the activities in which they are involved. They are quite comfortable with their attitudes, mind-set and ways. They 'just don't want to.'

This type of person is, at the core, hedonistic and hard-of-heart. He or she is into a lifestyle that is enjoyable, pleasing, and satisfying. You might say: What could possibly be wrong with that?

It's the hedonism itself that's wrong. To one such as this, the chief aim in life is pleasure. Pleasure is to be coveted, sought after, and lusted after, like one dying of thirst would seek water. The soul longs for providing pleasure to self. Self is the focus, and envy and covetness are the necessary fruits of this mind-set. The spirit is, therefore, lethargic, and the spirit is quenched, knowing nothing of God and desiring Him not.

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The 'don't-want-tos' do not want to change their focus. They don't like the concept, of course, of not being in control of their own lives, and they are prideful as well. Most of us have the control and pride problem — it comes with the human condition. But, the 'don't-want-tos' really have a serious problem with the Christian teachings of service to others (first) and morality.

Service to others, prior to meeting all of one's own needs, seems decidedly ludicrous, and, frankly, altogether weak and deleterious to one's well being. The 'don't-want-to' people grab at life rapaciously.

And then, there's this Christian concept of morality, especially sexual morality. What's that all about? Sex is like a good oatmeal-raisin cookie: it's to be enjoyed anywhere, anytime, and as often as possible. Commitment and marriage are not part of the recipe.

The 'don't-want-tos' consider the entire issue of ethical behavior to be situational. They take umbrage with the notion of absolutes, as in right and wrong, or that morality has a provenance dating back to God, Himself. The 'don't-want-tos' define ethics or morality for themselves, to suit the situation at hand, and so that maximum pleasure is provided, and their current lifestyle justified. A common condition of the human race is to justify one's actions. Some seek justification from God, others from self, through a series of jumbled arguments crafted to meet the desired hypothesis.

Now, don't think for a minute that the 'don't-want-tos' consist of only ethically or morally degenerate people. Not so at all. In fact, many of this group are seen as good, solid citizens. Some do charity work — not connected with church, of course. Others are seen as trustworthy in the community and in their place of employment. But, deep down inside — in that deeply hidden place — there is something they are holding on to that they will not give up. It might be drinking too much, drugs, pornography, an affair, living with someone outside of marriage, homosexuality, an extremely poor self-image that simply must be fed with haughtiness, arrogance, power over others, fear of being rejected (even by God), dreadful sin (or, not so dreadful sin, but sin nevertheless), a past abortion, a murder, stealing, lying, inability to face the truth, gluttony for food, gluttony for money or success or fame, an insatiable desire to promote oneself, extreme craving for power, a desire to be worshiped, a grumbling and caustic attitude, acrimony toward people in general and in your family, a deep soul-destroying veneration of education and learnedness and credentials. Or, it could be that one simply does not believe in God at all, and does not intend to further visit the question.

It is my observation that the two largest groups within the 'don't-want-tos' are those living immorally and those who venerate education. Those living immorally enjoy it. Immorality is a natural course for mankind and it is, according to the Scriptures, the only sin against one's own body. Immorality, especially the sexual type, changes people inside

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their souls. It creates appetites and carnivorous desires that lead down a definable path to destruction of self, careers and family. Immorality is pleasurable to the body and temporarily feeds the ravenous monster of lust that dwells deep inside many, but it scars our spirits and destroys lives. Immorality is like hard-core drugs, which provide pleasure instantly, but slowly creates an insatiable craving that leads to destruction. In the same way, immorality is addictive, and will lead to sorrow so deep that your very soul will cry out uncontrollably.

The other major sub-group of the 'don't-want-tos' is the worshipers of education. Education is, of course, a good thing, a worthy pursuit and necessary to the improvement of self and the human race. Education is critical and necessary. Having said that, I am not speaking here about the worthiness of education, but of a rapacious need for it, deep in the spirits of some.

Education can become an object of worship and envy, to be sought after and possessed at any cost. When acquired, as if anyone could actually acquire or possess it, education, which is attested to by the college degrees one has and the initials after one's name, provides membership to an elite club. And, that club has certain membership levels: Master's Degree; Ph.D.; Th.D.; DBA; JD; Harvard; Yale; Oxford; Cambridge, or the lesser degrees and universities. It's all so organized. One can work hard and move up the ladder of the sociological hierarchy to a definable spot, where one is clearly more capable than, more clever than, smarter than, more ambitious than, more respected than, more important than, and, yes, simply better than all those possessed with less educational rank.

Although not all people who obtain terminal degrees and who have excelled in their disciplines are worshipers of education, the educational gluttons certainly are, and they look solely to education to provide self-image, status and worthiness. Why? Because they need these things desperately — as all human beings do — and find that they, themselves, can work for and achieve their own deep need for self-respect and the respect and admiration of the world. Christians, on the other hand, look to God to provide all these things.

The educational gluttons are close kin to the prideful and controllers, but are differentiated by having this one powerful tool to hang on to: the pursuit of, and obtaining of education.

The educational gluttons are normally of one mind — in a general sense. That is to say: Truth is defined by the overall consensus of the community of educated elite. The community of educated elite does not and cannot accept the concept of a personal Lord and Savior God. Why? Because they have already ascribed to the throne of supreme human beings. A supreme God would dethrone them. Can't have that!

The 'don't-want-tos' are the most difficult group to reach. They enjoy their lives and are self-satisfied, they don't want to change the way they think or what they do. They just don't want to. Some may actually believe in God on some intellectual level, but they don't want to live His way, and they certainly don't intend to obey Him, unless, of course, they

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happen to agree on a particular point. They don't like Christians and they don't love God. They just don't want any part of it all.

Lord, my Father, I ask that You continue to reveal Yourself to those who don't want any part of You. I pray that the Holy Spirit will touch them in the deep and secret places of their spirits, and that these people will see the truth and let You in. If they do not let You in, Lord, then they are lost and I pray for their families and all those they influenced, that Your truth might be revealed to them. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Turned Off: Another group who steadfastly refuses to give themselves to Christ, and who are closely akin to, although not the same as, the 'don't-want-tos,' are the 'turned-off' crowd. Now, this group is perhaps the most self-righteous of all because they once (and probably for a period of time) attended church and were a part of the Christian community, but were 'turned-off' by bad experiences, usually in church, and usually, although not always, in their childhood.

These past unpleasant experiences came from a variety of sources: over-bearing parents, or pastor; a church that emphasizes criticism and all the "don'ts" of life; being the recipient of rigid and harsh judgments; not being loved by family, or pastor, or church congregation. A common thread running through the 'turned-off' group is a hatred of legalism. Unfortunately, the church can be a powerful dispenser of legalism, which comes in many forms: you must go to church three times a week; you must speak Christianese (if you've ever heard this distinctive language, you know what I mean); you must read only this or that version of the Bible; you must not drink, smoke, dance, have too much fun, gamble, divorce, question the Bible or any tenant of the faith; you must (or must not) speak in tongues; you must (or must not) believe in miraculous healing; you must (or must not) read from a certain prayer book; you must go to confession; you must not go to confession; you must be in a prayer group; you must read the Bible daily; you must not associate with...well, a whole bunch of different types of people. And, the list goes on and on.

Legalism has hurt countless people since the first church in Antioch, which was pastored by Paul and Barnabas. It is interesting that the issue of legalism was the first major issue to be brought before the church council in Jerusalem. Peter and the other Apostles dealt with that problem quickly by declaring that new Gentile-Christians (non-Jews) did not have to be circumcised or follow the laws of Moses. Peter, Paul, and the other Apostles knew even then that a person comes to God and is saved by faith, through the grace of our Lord.¹

1. The following passages speak clearly to salvation coming ONLY through the grace of Jesus: Jn 14:6; Acts 10:43; & 3:38-39; Rom 3:21-26; Eph 2:8-9; 1 Tim 4:10; Heb 10:2-14; & 11:6.

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Legalism still flourishes today, however, and is responsible for driving countless seeking souls from God. Legalism is adding to God's word; improving upon the requirements of God and the Scriptures; adding man's self-described superior knowledge, intellect, and understanding to the requirements of the faith. Legalism is humanism in its ugliest form. It assumes that God somehow left out some very important requirements for entering the kingdom of heaven, and that we humans will help Him out of this obvious oversight by filling in the necessary rules. Legalism is hateful and exclusive; it requires that you agree with me, instead of agreeing with God. It seeks to divide and exclude, and it seeks superiority, and, yes, even worship.

Many of this 'turned-off' group today were the children of yesterday who were preached to about their many inadequacies and lack of moral stature. Parents, pastors, and teachers alike — well meaning as they might have been — have often turned the hearts of young people away from organized religion and God by systematically reducing a child's otherwise healthy self-image to ashes. One method of doing this, among many, is to pound away at a teenager until it is clear that he or she is wrong, sinful, and evil for the feelings he or she has. Young people (or any of us, really) can't just stop feeling the feelings they have. Finally, out of self-preservation, people reject the messenger and the message, too.

Young people (and the rest of us, too) are also driven away from organized religion by the "religious" who see evil in virtually all forms of fun and every facet of life. Kids grow up convinced that Christianity is excruciatingly boring, fit only for the very old.

Now, the 'tuned-off' group often has a fair understanding of the Christian faith, and they have often studied the Bible. Many with whom I have spoken are very much convinced of the existence of God, they're just not so sure they like Him, or want to buy in to all the perceived rules. They are sure, however, that they don't like the "church people," as they are referred to. The "church people" are the dispensers of rules and judgments; the good people who do no wrong.

The 'turned-off' are not agnostic, or atheist by any means. They are by and large believers in God, but cannot seem to be reconciled with Him. They are tortured to a small degree, or to a large degree. They are not at peace. They are very weary of those who proclaim a belief in Christ. Why, because they have seen so many false proclaimers, and blatant inconsistencies among those who loudly announce their faith (and goodness, of course) in a public manner, and then go on to act in a manner contradictory to their proclamations.

For these people, I want to offer a deeply religious and philosophical suggestion: GET OVER IT!! You are an adult now. You should be able to recognize that Christians are not perfect, but they can still be Christians. You know that you are not perfect, and you ex-

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pect God to accept you; you should be as forthcoming with those who have hurt you. You should be able to discern the truth of Scripture and the perfection of Jesus. You should know by now that the place for those of us who are imperfect and sinners is in church, where God can minister to us and teach us. Does it make sense to forego Christianity and lose your eternal life, all because of those bad experiences years ago? Down deep, you really do know the truth. Now it's time to do something about it. Come back to the Lord. Worship in His house. Give yourself to Him. Don't worry about the "religious." The Bible will guide, direct, and, when necessary, chastise you. Remember this, too: There is another group of people in the church that you haven't mentioned: loving, godly, committed Christians who are just waiting to love you; humble people who are too aware of their own inadequacies to worry about yours. And, they happen to out number the other group by a large margin.

Heavenly Father, I especially understand those who are 'turned-off' by religion, and I ask Your special blessings for them. Bring them, Lord, to maturity; help them to not judge You by those of us who don't reflect Your loving spirit. Send the Holy Spirit to them and convict them deep within their spirits that You are God, and that You loved them so much that You were tortured for them, and died for them. Help these hurting souls, Lord, to understand that You are not about religion (that's man-made), You are about truth and love, and a relationship with the one God, who created all that was created. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Deceived Christianizers: Yet another group that resolutely avoids a deep commitment to Christ is the Deceived Christianizers. This is a complicated group, and it is quite easy to miss them altogether. You see, the Deceived Christianizers go to church regularly. They speak the language of the religious, and they go through all the various forms of public worship, just like they were taught: attend church, become baptized, go through confirmation, read from the prayer book, pray in a group, go to formal confession, attend prayer meetings, join committees, attend Sunday School, take communion, have a church wedding, teach a Sunday School class, serve on the governing board, attend home Bible studies, and all the rest. They grew up doing these things, all of which are good things to do, because that's all they have ever known. Somewhere along the way this group of churchgoers came to believe that their salvation became assured as a result of doing these things. All their lives have been an example of walking with Christ; doing the things they should be doing and avoiding all the rest. They don't remember not attending church regularly, missing a sermon, or a Sunday school social. Their actions represent their lives. It's the doing that counts. The Deceived Christianizers are fully engaged in a lifestyle that fosters and engenders religious activity and religious speech. This lifestyle becomes so ingrained that it finally becomes comfortable, and then commonplace.

Now, this group of people would be horrified if you were to suggest that their spiritual

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life, or commitment to Christ is perhaps lacking. They would immediately turn on you and with great loquaciousness, begin offering proof of their commitment, which, of course, is found in their never-ending list of religious activities. It rarely occurs to this group that they could have simply missed the mark, or the point of the whole religious experience: submitting to Christ, with a broken heart and humble spirit. Really giving yourself to Him.

The Deceived Christianizers have been at this religious thing so long that they sort of forgot what it's all about. The worship experience and all the various ways of being of service to one's church and community somehow got lost in the activity of doing. It all becomes so commonplace, so rote, and so ordinary.

It is my impression that this particular group of people comprises a large percentage of the average congregation. This is what we've come to in the twenty-first century church. The fire is largely out. The rote activity is in. The Deceived Christianizers become deceived by their activities and good deeds, as mankind has always done. At our base level, the human race wants to control everything and take credit for all the good that comes from our activity. Perhaps the biggest enemy of mankind is the deep desire to earn our own salvation by our good deeds.² The evil one, Satan, preys on this weakness with great success. This primal desire to earn our own salvation is closely associated with unabashed humanism, which then feeds the fierce religious activity described above. Surely the more we do the better we are.

These people are very difficult to reach - ask any pastor. They believe they are believers and will not tolerate discussion to the contrary. And perhaps they are believers, but only in an intellectual sense. Many evangelical churches are so concerned about this phenomenon that they have regular revivals to renew and regenerate the tired spirits of the churchgoers. We humans can take anything for granted - even Christ Jesus, Himself. But there is hope. There is always hope, as long as Christ is in charge.

Father in Heaven, please send the Holy Spirit to those who are caught up in the practice of religion, while missing the object of our faith. Father, we don't need any more religion, we need Jesus in our lives, and in our activities, and in our hearts. Only You can break through the deception that darkens the spirits of those who are bound by the practice of religion to the exclusion of living the faith. Please send the Holy Spirit to those who need you so desperately. Open their hearts to understand; open their eyes to see Your truth. Save them, Father. In Jesus' precious name I pray. Amen and Amen.

Deep Sin: And then there are those tortured souls who have sinned so grievously that they are convinced that God has completely rejected them. Their hurt is so deep that

2. No one can earn his own salvation, regardless of his good works. Jn 14:6.

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they cannot bare to face themselves with the truth of their lives, not to speak of facing the God-creator of the universe. Inside they moan and grieve over lost opportunity, lost relationships, plans gone wrong, and sins committed. They, like all of us, want so desperately to be loved; to be accepted. To all those who suffer under the burden of sin, Jesus has written you a personal letter...

My Dear Child:

Sin! Is that your problem? Is that why you don't surrender to me? If your friends, co-workers and family knew all about you — what you have done in private — they would lose all respect and admiration for you. Some might even be sickened and shun you, or denounce any relationship with you. This is your fear, isn't it?

You hate it, but you have a secret life, and it's different from your public life. You have hateful, or hurtful thoughts — sometimes licentious and full of lust. Sometimes you want to destroy the reputation of another. You often use people to further your own agenda. You'll lie, too, if necessary. But, you won't tolerate others lying to you. Matter of fact, you have a double standard — one for you, and one (much more demanding) for others. Oh, you don't admit this to yourself, do you? Too uncomfortable. You have to be right, even righteous. That requires, of course, that others are wrong — off base, stupid, immature, naive, inexperienced, unaware. You rob the dignity of others at times, don't you. You think you can suck the dignity out of others and use it for your own; take the self-respect from others and use it for yourself. All this instead of asking Me for these things, which I would give freely.

You don't steal anything, at least not in a long time. You have just about everything you need. Except, of course, the self-respect and dignity you so thirst for. It's the sin. It just won't go away. You admit that you have a problem with a burning desire for a job and house like your friends at church have. Wouldn't mind having his wife, too. He has it made and doesn't work nearly as hard as you do. It's not fair — he's had everything handed to him. Think of the people you could impress with a house like that.

You've had a couple of affairs, but they didn't mean anything — according to your reasoning. Sex has always been a big part of your life, but no one knows about that. If people only knew what goes on in your mind; in your secret life. If they knew, all would be lost. You couldn't stand the shame. You'd end up divorced; no relationship with your children or friends. Alone! Alone! You don't want to be alone. But you're full of sin, and you know it.

I've also noticed that you can't seem to get rid of the hate you have for your brother-in-law, not to speak of your boss at work. You've been dishonest there, too, but no one knows about that. You have damaged the reputation of your company and your boss many times, and then there was the time you took company property for your own use. You don't give a full

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workday to your employer either, do you? But, that's his fault — he doesn't deserve it. And if you could only forget the abortion you encouraged and paid for years ago. After all, it was only a conglomeration of cells — not a human being, right?

This is why you don't come to your Savior, isn't it? You think that it's hopeless. You can't be forgiven such sin, so it's easier to reject Me before I reject you. Right? But you hurt so much and you want so much to be clean; to be loved, accepted, and forgiven. But, you're convinced that you cannot be forgiven, it's too late.

You might wonder how I know what is in your heart and spirit. I am He who died for your sins, hanging from a cross. I am He who loves you and wants a close personal relationship with you. Was My sacrifice not sufficient to cover your sins, when it covered all the other sins of mankind? If your sin is too great to be forgiven, then it is greater than I. Do you really believe that your sin is greater than the Lord, God of all creation. Was My death on the cross for you wasted? Did I die for nothing? Did I have nails and a sword driven into My body for nothing? Are you the only one in all of creation who could not be touched by My sacrifice?

I know your heart. I know your sin. And still I love you. Don't you know how much I love you; how much I'm willing to do for you? Please! I want you with Me and My Father for all eternity. Do you know how long eternity is? If you lived 1,000 years for each grain of sand on Earth, not one second of eternity would have yet past. Please come to Me. Will you allow your sin to separate you from Me? This is Satan's desire. Will you do this when I have already paid the price of your sin? This is My gift to you. Please accept it. All you have to do is accept My gift of forgiveness. Don't you see, the price has been paid; the punishment meted out? This, I did for you. For you! If you will receive this gift, I make this promise to you: I will remember your sins no more, and I will put them as far away from me as East is from West. This, I promise. You will then have no shame, and even I will not know of your sins, because I choose to forget them. I love you. Do you love me? Come to Me now and confess your sins. I created you and I want to be with you. I need you. Don't you know that? Why would I create one as precious as you and then die for you, if I didn't want you with Me for all eternity? You say you don't know what to say? I don't require fancy words. Here, I'll help you. Pray with Me...

Heavenly Father, I come before you frightened, sinful and ashamed. I don't have much faith or trust in You, and I have sinned against You so much. Father, please forgive me, cleanse me and take away my shame. Father, I accept the gift of salvation from Your Son, my Lord, Jesus. From this moment on, I give You my life, my heart and my soul. I offer this prayer in the name of Jesus, the Christ, my Savior, my Lord. Amen and Amen.

With All My Love Forever,
Jesus

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For those of you who aren't sure if you are forgiven and saved, I offer the following questions for your consideration:

1. Are you a new creation? Have you been born again? Please don't recoil at the phrase "born again." Jesus, Himself, used those words: *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* (Jn 3:3) To be born again means to be spiritually born into the kingdom of God. We are spiritually dead until we are born again. How does one become born again? By praying a pray like the one offered above, and by believing that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He died for you and rose again from the dead to sit at the right hand of the Father. But remember, belief is always followed by action. True spiritual belief necessarily causes change in a person's life. Have you changed?
2. Is Jesus your Lord, or is He only your Savior? Scripture makes it clear that Jesus must be your Lord and Savior. You see, it's easy to accept Him as Savior. That requires no action on your part, and no change; no discomfort. It's easy, like joining a club. But to accept Him as Lord — well, that's entirely different! If Christ is Lord, then you are NOT. If Christ is Lord, then it's His word you follow, not your own pre-conceived notions. If Christ is Lord, then you must obey Him. Is Jesus Lord, or are you? Are you willing to submit to Him?
3. Do you think about Him often? Do you think about ways to please Him?
4. Do you accept His word as truth? Or, do you accept only the parts with which you agree, and reject those parts with which you disagree?
5. Do you read His word often? If He is who He says He is, how could you not have a burning interest in what He has to say? Why would you be satisfied with hearsay, or the report of another concerning what the God of the universe has to say? Why would you just go along supposing you know what God is all about; making up your own rules? If there really is a God, and if He created you, and if He has certain requirements to please him and to be saved to eternity with Him, if all of this is true, then how can you possibly justify not studying His written word? How?
6. Do you attend church regularly? Do you enjoy being around other Christians. If not, why not? Be honest with yourself. Is it laziness? Is it ambivalence? Maybe you don't like the atmosphere; the people; the message. Think about that. Oh, I know what you're thinking: You don't have to go to church to be a Christian. You can worship God on the golf course. You know, you're right. You don't have to go to church to be a Christian. But Christians just naturally

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go to church, just like Jesus did. And you're also right about being able to worship God on the golf course. But Christians also come together and worship Him formally because it pleases Him, and it provides the opportunity to learn from each other. One more thing: I don't fall for that golf course thing, and neither do you.

7. Is your belief only intellectual in nature, or is it deep, and spiritual, and followed by action? In my opinion (and please check this with your pastor), the belief in Christ required by Scripture is not of an intellectual nature: to be pondered, weighed, and then finally decided upon — all this being of the mind, and not of the spirit. No! It is a belief resulting in action. Real belief is always followed by action. For example, if you believe that the chair is solid, you will sit in it. If you believe in Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you will take action on that belief. Such a belief will change you forever. Have you taken action on your belief?
8. When you sin, and you will, are you convicted of it? Does it hurt? Do you feel the hurt you have caused God?

These are questions for you to deeply consider. Only you know the answers. Don't let this moment pass without giving your life to Christ. He is asking for you now. There may be no other opportunity to make this decision. Your sin may be much worse than that described above, or perhaps much less. It makes no difference; one sin separates you from God, and all have sinned according to Scripture. Jesus is our only bridge from the Place of Separation to the dwelling place of God. Anyone can use the bridge of Christ, if he or she accepts Him as the bridge — the Lord and the Savior of all. Pray to Him now!

The Beginning