



# HOPE FOR THE PRISONER



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# INTRODUCTION

Dear Friend,

I was born in Melbourne, Australia without arms and legs even though three sonograms had never revealed any complications. Growing up, it wasn't easy. Throughout my childhood, I struggled with depression and loneliness. I even questioned the purpose of my life and tried to take my own life when I was ten years old.

But Jesus met me in my pain and I decided to give my life to him. Since then, I've travelled to 74 countries to share my story with millions of people just like yourself, from students and young people to business professionals and even world leaders. I want to share a special message with the world based on my own story and encounter with Jesus: there is hope.

I may not know what you're struggling with today. But like I've seen in my own life, the Bible teaches us that Jesus is not only present in our pain, but that He is the answer to our heaviest struggles. Jesus says, *"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"* (John 16:33).

I'm here to tell you today that you are special, you are loved, and that God does have an amazing plan for your life. He will never leave or forsake you. And if God can use me, a man without arms and legs, to be His hands and feet, then He will certainly use any willing heart. Throughout my life I've always held onto a special verse that says: *"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you **hope** and a **future**"* (Jeremiah 29:11). If we give our lives to him, he promises to give us hope and a future. Now that is amazing!

Here at Life Without Limbs, we love you and we're praying for you. We're here to be your Champions and to point you back to the true Champion: Jesus. We pray that these resources will help you through whatever challenges you may be facing and bring hope for the way forward.

Thank you and God Bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nick". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Nick Vujicic and the Life Without Limbs Team

# GUILT

## *Living Guilt Free*

### What Is God's Heart on Guilt?

God's grace is greater than our guilt. It's one of the most central and remarkable truths of the Bible. For every sin and for *all* our sin—God has grace for us. The Bible says, “*he gives us more grace*” (James 4:6).

We all experience guilt. We've all said or done things we shouldn't have, and we've all failed to do things we know we should have done.

Guilt can lead to two very different responses. On one hand, guilt can drive us *away* from God. This often leads us to cover up our sin and guilt, try to ignore it, or we attempt to “earn” God's approval through our “good works” or trying harder or beating ourselves up. This usually leads to feeling more guilt, shame, and frustration.

On the other hand, guilt can drive us *to* God. Guilt can serve as a signal that we've done something wrong and we need to come back to God to receive His grace and forgiveness.

Realize, no matter what you've said or done, no matter how many times you've failed, no matter how great your sin—you're never outside the reach of God's love and mercy. The Lord extends forgiveness to you and calls you to walk in the freedom of His grace.

*“Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence,  
so that we may receive mercy and find grace  
to help us in our time of need.”*

(HEBREWS 4:16)

#### **God is gracious and forgiving, yet He does not overlook or excuse the guilty.**

*“The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty”* (EXODUS 34:6–7 NLT).

#### **God declares that all people are guilty of sin.**

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (ROMANS 3:23).

#### **God placed our sin and guilt on Christ so we could be forgiven.**

*“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all”* (ISAIAH 53:5–6).

“For every sin and  
for all our sin—  
God has grace  
for us.”

#### **God does not condemn those who are in Christ—who have received Jesus as their Lord and Savior.**

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

#### **God will judge those who reject Christ and His free gift of salvation.**

*“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them”* (JOHN 3:36).

**God doesn't want you to hide your sin and guilt but to confess it and receive His grace.**

*"People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy"*  
(PROVERBS 28:13 NLT).

**God wants you to repent with godly sorrow, not worldly sorrow.**

*"For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death"* (2 CORINTHIANS 7:10 NLT).

**God completely forgives and cleanses you of all sin.**

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

**God calls you by His grace to live holy and leave sin behind you.**

*"Neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin"* (JOHN 8:11).

**God wants you to regularly remind yourself that He is gracious and compassionate.**

*"The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made"* (PSALM 145:8-9).

**God wants you to forgive others who are guilty of wronging you.**

*"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you"* (COLOSSIANS 3:13).

**God wants you to tell others about His forgiveness.**

*"My friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you"* (ACTS 13:38).

## Key Verse to Memorize

*"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

(ROMANS 8:1)

## Key Passage to Read

*"Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!*

*<sup>2</sup> Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt,  
whose lives are lived in complete honesty!*

*<sup>3</sup> When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.*

*<sup>4</sup> Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me.  
My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat.*

*<sup>5</sup> Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt.*

*I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD."*

*And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."*

(PSALM 32:1-5 NLT)

## How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

“I’ll never tell anyone.”

“No one will love me if they find out.”

“I feel dirty. Damaged.”

“God will never forgive me.”

Statements like these reveal the lasting sense of guilt and shame. If these emotions go unaddressed, they can impact how you view yourself, how you interact in your relationships, and how you relate to God. In order to break free from these strongholds, the feelings of guilt and shame need to be correctly defined and dealt with God’s way. With God’s help, you can start walking in the freedom of His grace.

*“In my distress I prayed to the LORD,  
and the LORD answered me and set me free.”*  
(PSALM 118:5 NLT)

### The Difference Between Guilt and Shame

**Guilt and shame are not the same.** **Guilt** focuses on your behavior; **shame** focuses on you.

**Shame** can be a response to what was done to you, but **guilt** is a response to something you have done.

**Shame** is a painful emotion of disgrace caused by a strong sense of real or imagined **guilt**.

**Shame** focuses on who you are, but **guilt** focuses on what you’ve done.

**Shame** is experienced when your **guilt** moves from knowing you have done something bad to feeling that you are bad.

**Shame** creates an inner desire to maintain rigid control over emotions and behavior; **guilt** can motivate a desire to change—or justify emotions and behavior.

**Shame** produces feelings of loneliness that foster unhealthy dependencies, but **guilt** produces inner longings that foster healthy repentance in relationships.

**Shame** steals the joy of your salvation; **guilt** confessed restores joy in salvation.

*“Restore to me the joy of your salvation  
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”*  
(PSALM 51:12)

## The Difference Between True Guilt and False Guilt

False guilt can blind and deceive people from seeing the truth about themselves, their situation, and God. False guilt adds another unhealthy dynamic to already difficult emotions. Realize, there's a vast difference between true guilt and false guilt. ...

**True guilt** is an emotional response as a result of any wrong attitude or action contrary to the will of God—and refers to the fact of being at fault.

- **False guilt** is an emotional response of (1) self-blame even though no wrong has been committed, or (2) self-blame that continues even after confessing and repenting of a sin that is no longer a part of a person's life.
- **False guilt** is based on self-condemning feelings that you have not lived up to your own expectations or to the expectations of someone else.

**True guilt** leads to freedom, as it leads you to repent of sin and wrongdoing, turn to God, and receive His grace and forgiveness.

- **False guilt** keeps you in bondage to three weapons of destruction: shame, fear, and anger.
- **False guilt** is not resolved by confession because there is nothing to confess.
- **False guilt** is resolved by rejecting the lies of the enemy and believing the truth of God's Word. Revelation 12:10 says that Satan is the "*accuser of our brothers and sisters.*" He loves to burden believers with false guilt and condemnation. Some of his favorite strategies are: bringing up the past, reminding you of your failures, and making you feel unforgiven and unaccepted by God.

The next time your mind begins to replay sins which you have confessed and repented of, realize this taunting comes from Satan, the accuser, to discourage you. Ask yourself:

- "What am I hearing?" (Accusation.)
- "What am I feeling?" (False Guilt.)
- "What are the facts?" (I am not guilty. I am fully forgiven.)

Use Scripture as your standard to determine true and false guilt. Memorize Romans 8:1 and turn it into a prayer: "Thank you, Father, that you don't condemn me and don't want me to condemn myself. These feelings of false guilt are not valid because I am accepted in Christ."

*"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

(ROMANS 8:1)

## How to Break Free from Guilt and Shame

**If you are experiencing true guilt** (feeling bad about what you've done), confess your sins to God and receive His forgiveness.

*"I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the LORD.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone" (PSALM 32:5 NLT).*

**If you are experiencing false guilt** (feeling bad although you've done no wrong), reject the false guilt and replace the lies you've been led to believe with the truth of God's Word.

*"Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you" (PSALM 25:5 NLT).*

**If you are experiencing shame** (feeling bad about who you are), embrace God's love for you and meditate regularly on your identity in Christ as a chosen, beloved child of God.

*"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"* (1 JOHN 3:1).

The powerful emotions of guilt and shame can take time to untangle and overcome. In addition to believing the truth of God's Word, talk with a wise friend, counselor, or pastor to help you gain victory over these feelings.

*"In abundance of counselors there is victory."*  
(PROVERBS 11:14 NASB)

## How to See Yourself through God's Eyes

Underneath much of our sin and struggles are lies we believe about ourselves, others, our situation, and about God. These lies are often connected with a sense of guilt and shame or painful experience of our past. They can negatively impact our behavior, decisions, and relationships ... and lead us to believe we are worthless, insignificant, unlovable, or not "good enough."

These lies need to be met with the truth of God's Word. His Word speaks of His boundless love for you and the life-changing identity you have in Christ.

Healing and transformation can occur when you begin to see yourself through God's eyes, believing what He says about you. Therefore, it is important to identify the lies you've been led to believe and replace them with God's truth.

*"You will know the truth,  
and the truth will set you free."*  
(JOHN 8:32)

### Seeing Yourself through God's Eyes

This process of change involves: (1) identifying the image you presently have of yourself, (2) identifying the contrasting image God has of you, and then (3) choosing to believe from His perspective rather than your own perception. It is that simple . . . and yet that profound.

**Do you think** . . . you are unacceptable?

**God says** . . . you are accepted by Him.

*"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God"* (ROMANS 15:7).

**Do you think** . . . you are alone?

**God says** . . . He will never leave you nor forsake you.

*"The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged"* (DEUTERONOMY 31:8).

**Do you think** . . . you are incompetent, a failure?

**God says** . . . He has made you competent.

*“Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God”*  
(2 CORINTHIANS 3:5).

**Do you think** . . . you are bad, not good enough?

**God says** . . . He sees you through the lens of His mercy.

*“He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy”* (TITUS 3:5).

**Do you think** . . . you are a mistake?

**God says** . . . you are wonderfully made.

*“I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well”*  
(PSALM 139:14).

**Do you think** . . . you are defeated?

**God says** . . . you are more than a conqueror.

*“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”* (ROMANS 8:37).

**Do you think** . . . you are unloved?

**God says** . . . He has great love for you.

*“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved”* (EPHESIANS 2:4-5).

**Do you think** . . . you can't be forgiven?

**God says** . . . your sins are forgiven.

*“He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins”*  
(EPHESIANS 1:7 NLT).

**Do you think** . . . you don't have enough strength?

**God says** . . . He will strengthen you Himself.

*“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand”* (ISAIAH 41:10).

**Do you think** . . . you can't have victory over a sinful habit?

**God says** . . . You have victory through Jesus.

*“Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 CORINTHIANS 15:57).

# IDENTITY & SELF-IMAGE

*Knowing What's True about You*

## What Is God's Heart on Your Identity?

Paul had it all—born into the right family, educated by the best teachers, and held the top status job and position in his culture as a religious teacher, a Pharisee. He said, *“I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault”* (Philippians 3:5–6 NLT).

His identity was wrapped up in where he was born, who he knew, and what he did. But that all changed when he met Jesus. Paul continues, *“I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord”* (Philippians 3:7–8 NLT).

As Paul compared his past identity to his identity in Christ, there was no contest. He even says about his former accolades and accomplishments: *“I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him”* (Philippians 3:8–9).

When you are *“found in him,”* everything changes. The identity you receive in Christ far outweighs any other identity you may have. Your gender, your family, your age, race, culture, school, job, accomplishments, status, and hobbies may all reveal important aspects about you—but they are not where your ultimate identity is found. Your identity is to be rooted in Christ.

*“Just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord,  
you must continue to follow him.  
Let your roots grow down into him,  
and let your lives be built on him.  
Then your faith will grow strong  
in the truth you were taught,  
and you will overflow with thankfulness.”*  
(COLOSSIANS 2:6–7 NLT)

## 12 Truths about Your Identity in Christ

### **You are loved.**

*“God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people”* (1 THESSALONIANS 1:4 NLT).

### **You are chosen.**

*“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes”* (EPHESIANS 1:4 NLT).

**You are accepted.**

*“Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory” (ROMANS 15:7 NLT).*

**You are redeemed.**

*“But now, this is what the LORD says—he who created you . . . he who formed you . . . ‘Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine’” (ISAIAH 43:1).*

**You are precious.**

*“You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you” (ISAIAH 43:4 NLT).*

**You are forgiven.**

*“You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins” (COLOSSIANS 2:13 NLT).*

**You are cleansed.**

*“But you were cleansed; you were made holy; you were made right with God by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 CORINTHIANS 6:11 NLT).*

**You are renewed.**

*“Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 NLT).*

**You are empowered.**

*“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 PETER 1:3).*

**You are gifted.**

*“In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well” (ROMANS 12:6 NLT).*

**You are useful.**

*“We are God’s handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (EPHESIANS 2:10).*

**You are blessed.**

*“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ” (EPHESIANS 1:3 NLT).*

*“The identity you receive in Christ far outweighs any other identity you may have.”*

## Key Verse to Memorize

Heart transplant stories inspire and amaze. With the wonders of modern surgery and the generosity of organ donors, a dying individual can receive new life from another. There's a sense in which the donor's life continues, living in and through the recipient. The new life of the recipient is due to the generosity of the donor.

However, astounding stories of successful heart transplants are but a dim reflection of an incredible biblical reality. When you become a follower of Christ, God gives you a new heart, a new identity, a new family, and a new purpose. Through the Holy Spirit, Christ's life becomes yours as He lives in you and through you. This new life and identity is due entirely to the generous grace of God in Christ.

*"I have been crucified with Christ  
and I no longer live,  
but Christ lives in me.  
The life I now live in the body,  
I live by faith in the Son of God,  
who loved me and gave himself for me."  
(GALATIANS 2:20)*

## Key Passage to Read

God's Word describes each person in two different ways. There's the "you" before receiving Christ, and there the "you" after receiving Christ. The Bible describes this difference as your "old self" and your "new self."

The old self, like Adam, disobeyed God, lived independently of God, and generally lived to please self. But in and through Christ, we are given a new nature. The new self seeks to obey God, lives dependently on Him, and desires to please God. Everything about the old self was centered on self; everything about the new self is centered on Christ.

*"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off  
your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;  
to be made new in the attitude of your minds;  
and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true  
righteousness and holiness."  
(EPHESIANS 4:22-24)*

## Colossians 3:1-17

### Putting on the New Self

**You are with Christ and in Christ**—so focus on Him. ....v. 1

*“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”*

**You have died to your old self**—so look to Christ to find life. ....vv. 2-3

*“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”*

**You have a new, glorious future**—so live with joyful expectation. ....v. 4

*“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

**You are not defined by the sins of your past**—so you can conquer them. .... vv. 5-9

*“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices . . .”*

**You are made new**—so grow to be more and more like Christ. ....v. 10

*“and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*

**You belong to Christ**—so find your primary identity in Him. .... v. 11

*“Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.”*

**You are chosen, holy and loved**—so love and forgive as Christ does. .... vv. 12-14

*“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*

**You have the peace of Christ**—so live a life of peace and gratitude. ....v. 15

*“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”*

**You have a new purpose in Christ**—so share Him with others. ....v. 16

*“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”*

**You have a new motivation in Christ**—so do everything to the glory of God. .... v. 17

*“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

## How to Live Out Your Identity in Christ

The apostle Paul once told a church *“You should imitate me”* (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT). On the surface, that sounds like a boastful, if not outright prideful, claim. Some might have been cautious about following such an instruction, considering Paul once described himself as a *“blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man”* (1 Timothy 1:13). Why imitate Paul? He explains, *“You should imitate me just as I imitate Christ”* (1 Corinthians 11:1 NLT).

Paul’s life shows that when Jesus gives you a new identity, He also makes your life reflect His life. Jesus can take the “chief” of sinners (as Paul once called himself) and make each a shining example of His love and grace (1 Timothy 1:15–16). God can change your identity and life so much that you’ll be able to say, like Paul, *“Imitate me just as I imitate Christ.”*

But what does it look like to imitate Christ? Once you receive your identity in Christ, how are you to live it out?

*“Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.”*

(1 JOHN 2:6)

### Love God Like Jesus

Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment was in all of God’s Word. He said, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment”* (Matthew 22:37–38). What does it mean to love God like Jesus?

#### Obey completely

*“For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will”* (JOHN 6:38 NLT).

#### Pray reverently

*“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission”* (HEBREWS 5:7).

#### Work heartily

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving”* (COLOSSIANS 3:23–24).

#### Deny your self daily

*“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me”* (LUKE 9:23 NLT).

#### Suffer willingly

*“For God called you to do good, even if it means suffering, just as Christ suffered for you. He is your example, and you must follow in his steps”* (1 PETER 2:21 NLT).

#### Give thanks consistently

*“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”* (1 THESSALONIANS 5:18).

## Love Others Like Jesus Did

In addition to loving God, Jesus also spoke of a similar commandment of equal importance. Jesus said, “*And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments*” (Matthew 22:39–40). What does it mean to love others like Jesus did?

### Love sacrificially

*“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”* (JOHN 15:12–13).

### Serve humbly

*“Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you”* (JOHN 13:14–15).

### Forgive completely

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”* (EPHESIANS 4:32).

### Build up others spiritually

*“We must not just please ourselves. We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. For even Christ didn’t live to please himself”* (ROMANS 15:2–3 NLT).

### Accept others graciously

*“Accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory”* (ROMANS 15:7 NLT).

### Help others practically

*“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?”* (1 JOHN 3:16–17).

As a child of God, living out your identity in Christ means loving God and loving others. Jesus said, “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another*” (John 13:34–35). The same Paul who told people to imitate him also told others to imitate God, which he described as a life of love. . . .

*“Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do,  
because you are his dear children.  
Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.  
He loved us and offered himself  
as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.”  
(EPHESIANS 5:1–2 NLT)*

# DEPRESSION

*Walking from Darkness into the Dawn*

## What Is God's Heart on Depression?

The pressures and stresses of life often weigh us down. When our hearts are heavy and our heads are low, the clouds of depression seem to block out any ray of hope. But even in our depression, God walks with us, carries our burdens, and shines the light of His Word on our despair.

*"The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us."  
(PSALM 118:27)*

**God is with us** in our depression.

*"Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (ISAIAH 41:10).*

**God sees** our pain and suffering.

*"God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand" (PSALM 10:14).*

**God hears** our cries and listens to us in our pain.

*". . . the LORD has heard my weeping" (PSALM 6:8).*

**God wants** to give us light in our darkness.

*"It is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness" (PSALM 18:28 ESV).*

**God wants** to lift us up when we're feeling down.

*"The LORD upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down" (PSALM 145:14).*

**God wants** us to talk to Him when we're depressed.

*"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge" (PSALM 62:8).*

**God wants** to comfort us.

*"I, yes I, am the one who comforts you" (ISAIAH 51:12).*

**God wants** to give us peace.

*"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (JOHN 14:27).*

**God wants** to give us hope.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (JEREMIAH 29:11).*

*"Even in our depression,  
God walks with us,  
carries our burdens,  
and shines the light  
of His Word  
on our despair."*

**God wants** us to trust Him.

*“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me” (PSALM 28:7).*

**God wants** us to comfort others who are depressed.

*“The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort . . . comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God” (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3–4).*

**God will** one day wipe away all our tears—and there will be no more sorrow or suffering.

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (REVELATION 21:4 NLT).*

## Symptoms of Depression

The American Psychiatric Association’s (APA) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (DSM-5) lists nine key symptoms of depression. It says that a person must have at least five of the following symptoms, lasting two weeks or longer, to be considered a major depressive episode. At least one of the five symptoms must be either persistent sadness or loss of interest.

- Persistent feelings of sadness, anxiousness, or “emptiness” most or all of the time
- Complete or near complete loss of interest or pleasure in activities that were once enjoyable
- Significant change in appetite or weight
- Difficulty sleeping most nights or sleeping too much
- Agitated thoughts and movements (i.e., fidgeting, pacing, tapping fingers or feet) or slowed responses (i.e., pausing more when talking; speaking slower, more quietly, or infrequently; moving slowly)
- Chronically fatigued, easily decreased energy
- Feelings of worthlessness or disappointment in oneself
- Lack of concentration, focus, memory retention, or inability to make decisions
- Recurring thoughts of death or suicide or suicide attempts

Instead of diagnosing yourself with depression, first consult a mental health professional (psychiatrist, psychologist, licensed professional counselor) who can give you an educated assessment after conducting a detailed analysis of your situation and symptoms. There is no shame in reaching out for help.

The psalmist, by his own admission, reminds us just how necessary it is to admit our need for help—first to God . . . then also to others.

*“Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am languishing;  
heal me, O LORD, for my bones are troubled.  
My soul also is greatly troubled.  
But you, O LORD—how long?  
Turn, O LORD, deliver my life;  
save me for the sake of your steadfast love.”  
(PSALM 6:2–4 ESV)*

## Key Verse to Memorize

*“Why am I so depressed? Why this turmoil within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will still praise Him,  
my Savior and my God.”*  
(PSALM 42:5 HCSB)

## Key Passage to Read

### Lamentations 3:19–26 (NLT)

*“The thought of my suffering . . . is bitter beyond words.  
<sup>20</sup> I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.  
<sup>21</sup> Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:  
<sup>22</sup> The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease.  
<sup>23</sup> Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.  
<sup>24</sup> I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!’  
<sup>25</sup> The LORD is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him.  
<sup>26</sup> So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the LORD.”*

## My Personalized Plan to Manage Depression and Live with Hope

Depression can hide the light of day from my view and leave me in the darkness of despair. A sense of hopelessness lingers. But amidst the heaviness and dark clouds of depression, God wants to lift my heavy heart and show me there is hope.

*“There is surely a future hope for you,  
and your hope will not be cut off.”*  
(PROVERBS 23:18)

Because depression can impact every area of my life, I must address it from multiple angles. As I walk through the darkness of depression into the light of dawn, **I will . . .**

**Recognize** that my depression is real.

- I will acknowledge my feelings of sadness, anger, hopelessness, and other overwhelming emotions.
- I will not live in denial about my depression but will educate myself about depression and seek help to move forward.

*“I am suffering and in pain. Rescue me, O God, by your saving power” (PSALM 69:29 NLT).*

**Remember** that my pain is temporary.

- I will put my pain in perspective and acknowledge that God can help me.
- I will remember that God will one day put an end to all pain and suffering.

*“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever” (REVELATION 21:4 NLT).*

**Reaffirm** the importance of caring for my physical needs.

- I will talk with my doctor about my depression and get regular medical check-ups.
- I will eat nutritious meals, get adequate sleep each night, and exercise regularly.

*“Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 TIMOTHY 4:8).*

**Restrict** the amount of stress in my life.

- I will identify the environmental or situational factors related to my depression, such as difficult life events, losses I’ve experienced, and the various sources of stress in my life.
- I will seek to adjust to stressful life events and deal with my losses in a healthy, productive manner.

*“Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer” (PSALM 4:1).*

**Reveal** my emotional needs.

- I will talk with a trusted friend or family member, counselor, and especially with God about my emotions.
- I will honestly confront my feelings and process them with God’s help.

*“I call to you, LORD, every day; I spread out my hands to you” (PSALM 88:9).*

**Restrain** negative thought patterns.

- I will acknowledge negative self-talk and lies I believe about myself or my situation.
- I will replace negative thoughts with God’s truth by meditating on His Word.

*“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable— if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” (PHILIPPIANS 4:8).*

**Renew** my commitment to get my spiritual needs met.

- I will cultivate my relationship with God through reflective prayer and Bible reading.
- I will attend church regularly to receive encouragement from God’s Word and to be with other believers.

*“All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer” (ACTS 2:42 NLT).*

## How to Help a Depressed Loved One

When you have depressed loved ones in your life, you want to do something that will make a difference, but the question is *what?*

First and foremost, *do not avoid them*. Because of the tendency to withdraw and isolate, help them get involved in activities whenever they are open to doing so. Encourage them to find a new hobby. Realize, you may be their only lifeline of hope, and they need to stay connected. Do what you wish someone would do for you if you were struggling with depression.

*“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”*  
(LUKE 6:31)

### 12 Things You Can Do to Help

#### **Learn all you can about depression.**

Read books, watch videos, attend conferences, visit websites such as the National Institute of Mental Health ([www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)).

*“Apply your heart to instruction and your ears to words of knowledge”* (PROVERBS 23:12).

#### **Be an accountability partner.**

Communicate both with words and actions, “I’m with you in this, and I won’t abandon you.”

*“I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare”* (PHILIPPIANS 2:20 NLT).

#### **Initiate regular dialogue.**

Send frequent text messages and phone calls. Make intentional contact and encourage them sincerely and often.

*“Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them”* (EPHESIANS 4:29 NLT).

#### **Listen to their pain.**

Take time to hear their story and let them share their feelings without fear of judgment. Listening affirms their value and helps them process their emotions and circumstances.

*“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry”* (JAMES 1:19).

#### **Talk about depression**

Talking about depression helps remove the stigma of it.

*“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver”* (PROVERBS 25:11 ESV).

#### **Help them find a support group.**

There is strength in numbers. Inquire at a nearby hospital, local church, or search the web for listings of support groups in the community dealing with depression or mental illness.

*“Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help”* (ECCLESIASTES 4:9–10 NLT).

### **Realize the power of touch.**

As appropriate, a hand on the shoulder or a hug can be a great comfort.

*“Greet one another with a kiss of love”* (1 PETER 5:14).

### **Play inspirational music when you’re with them.**

Music is therapeutic and can lift their spirit.

*“. . . speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit”* (EPHESIANS 5:19).

### **Bring laughter into their lives.**

Share funny cards, pictures, stories, videos, or movies.

*“A cheerful heart is good medicine”* (PROVERBS 17:22).

### **Work with them to set small, daily goals.**

Encourage them to set and achieve small goals that require minimal effort. Check on their progress regularly.

*“The desires of the diligent are fully satisfied”* (PROVERBS 13:4).

### **Enlist help from other family and friends.**

Be specific about your concerns and engage others in caring for the one depressed.

*“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ”* (GALATIANS 6:2).

### **Take all threats of suicide seriously.**

If suicide is a concern, ask, “Are you thinking about hurting yourself or taking your life?” While asking this may create some discomfort, awkwardness, or make them initially upset—it is worth the risk. Don’t shy away from the hard questions, but always ask them in a kind and gentle way.

*“A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions”* (PROVERBS 27:12 NLT).

## **How to Respond to Suicidal Thoughts or Threats**

If you, or a depressed loved one, are having suicidal thoughts or planning to harm yourself, it is important to talk with someone immediately. You will find information for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the Crisis Text Line below. These free and confidential services are available 24/7 to provide emotional support and helpful resources for those facing distress and having suicidal thoughts. When you contact them, you will be connected with a real person who is trained to provide guidance and support. You are *not* alone.

*“Be strong and courageous.  
Do not be afraid or terrified . . .  
for the LORD your God goes with you;  
he will never leave you nor forsake you.”*  
(DEUTERONOMY 31:6)

**NOTE:** If you are ever in imminent danger, call 911 immediately.

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

- 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
- 1-800-799-4889 (For Deaf + Hard of Hearing)
- Ayuda disponible en Español
- [www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](http://www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org) (Live chat available)

**Crisis Text Line**

- Text HOME to 741741 (United States)
- Text HOME to 686868 (Canada)
- Text HOME to 85258 (United Kingdom)
- [www.CrisisTextLine.org](http://www.CrisisTextLine.org)

Don't hesitate to call or text these hotlines if you're thinking of harming yourself. Remember, no matter what you're feeling or how bad things seem . . .

*“There is surely a future hope for you.”*

(PROVERBS 23:18)

# FORGIVENESS

*Releasing You Is Freeing Me*

## What Is God's Heart on Forgiveness?

The thought of forgiving the person who hurt you (or your loved ones) can seem unthinkable, unfair, and unequivocally wrong. For many, the pain is just too real. However, forgiveness is at the heart of God's character. It's why Jesus came. And it's at the heart of healing, growth, and freedom.

Choosing to forgive is not about letting the other person "off the hook" or ignoring the pain and damage that's been done. It's about walking in God's grace, living in freedom, and moving forward with hope.

A good way to think about forgiveness is to imagine letting go of the offense by *releasing* your offender. When you don't forgive, it's like holding on to bitterness, holding on to the pain, and holding on to the offender. When you forgive, you release your resentment, your pain, and your offender into the hands of God.

Forgiveness is difficult, but it is possible by God's grace. His grace helps you heal from past wounds and empowers you to forgive. So when you find yourself struggling to forgive, reflect on God's grace and He will help you walk in the freedom of forgiveness.

*"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence,  
so that we may receive mercy and find grace  
to help us in our time of need."*

(HEBREWS 4:16)

**God wants** us to forgive each other because He has forgiven us.

*"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (EPHESIANS 4:32).*

**God wants** us to forgive others in the same way He forgives us.

*"Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (COLOSSIANS 3:13).*

**God wants** us to see unforgiveness as sin.

*"If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them" (JAMES 4:17).*

**God wants** us to get rid of unforgiveness and have a heart of mercy.

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy" (MATTHEW 5:7).*

**God wants** us to do our part to live in peace with everyone.

*"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone" (ROMANS 12:18).*

**God wants** us to overcome evil with good.

*"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (ROMANS 12:21).*

**God wants** us to be ministers of reconciliation.

*“God . . . reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 CORINTHIANS 5:18–19).*

**God wants** us to forgive others so we will not become bitter.

*“See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many” (HEBREWS 12:15).*

**God wants** us to forgive others so we will accurately reflect the character of Jesus.

*“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (EPHESIANS 5:1–2).*

## What Is Divine Forgiveness?

Do you sometimes struggle with forgiving others? Understand that your awareness of how much God loves you and forgives you can be the catalyst that compels you to forgive others. Then you can actually forgive others with the Lord’s “divine forgiveness.” The Bible says . . .

*“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving,  
even though we have rebelled against him.”*

(DANIEL 9:9)

**Divine forgiveness** is the fact that God, in His mercy, chose to release you from the penalty for your sins. (Unfortunately, some people refuse to receive this gift from God.)

*“The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love . . . He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities . . . As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (PSALM 103:8, 10, 12).*

**Divine forgiveness** was extended by Jesus, who paid the penalty for our sins in full—He died on the cross as payment for the sins of all people. While we owed a debt we could not pay, He paid a debt He did not owe. One of the many Messianic prophecies states,

*“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him [Christ, the Messiah] the iniquity of us all” (ISAIAH 53:6).*

**Divine forgiveness** is an extension of grace as seen in the Greek word *charizomai*, which is translated “forgive” and means “to bestow a favor unconditionally.” The Greek word *charis* means “grace.” You are an expression of God’s grace when you forgive others with divine forgiveness.

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (EPHESIANS 4:32).*

## What Is Forgiveness *Not*?

Misconceptions abound when the word *forgiveness* is mentioned. Some think forgiveness is the equivalent of *excusing* sin, saying that what was wrong is now right. Yet this is not the example of forgiveness Jesus displayed. When He encountered the mob of men eager to stone a woman caught in adultery, He chose not to stone her. However, neither did He *excuse* her sin. Instead, He said, “*Go, and sin no more*” (John 8:11 KJV). To help correct any confusion about what forgiveness *is*, you need to know what forgiveness is *not*!

*“Let the wise listen and add to their learning,  
and let the discerning get guidance.”*

(PROVERBS 1:5)

**Forgiveness is not** circumventing God’s justice.

- It is allowing God to execute His justice in His time and in His way.

**Forgiveness is not** waiting for “time to heal all wounds.”

- It is clear that time doesn’t always heal wounds; some people will not allow healing.

**Forgiveness is not** letting the guilty “off the hook.”

- It is moving the guilty from your hook to God’s hook.

**Forgiveness is not** the same as reconciliation.

- It takes two to reconcile, but it takes only one to forgive.

**Forgiveness is not** excusing wrong behavior.

- It is acknowledging that wrong behavior is without excuse, while still forgiving.

**Forgiveness is not** explaining away the hurt.

- It is working through the hurt.

**Forgiveness is not** based on what is fair.

- It was not “fair” for Jesus to hang on the cross—but He did so that we could be forgiven.

**Forgiveness is not** being weak.

- It is being strong enough to be Christlike.

**Forgiveness is not** stuffing your anger.

- It is resolving your anger by releasing the offense to God.

**Forgiveness is not** a natural response.

- It is a supernatural response, empowered by God.

**Forgiveness is not** denying the hurt.

- It is feeling the hurt and releasing it to God.

**Forgiveness is not** being a doormat.

- It is seeing that, if this were so, Jesus would have been the greatest “doormat” of all!

**Forgiveness is not** conditional.

- It is unconditional, a mandate from God to everyone.

**Forgiveness is not** forgetting.

- It is necessary to remember before you can forgive.

**Forgiveness is not** a feeling.

- It is a choice—an act of the will.

## Is Forgiveness the Same as Reconciliation?

No. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation. *Forgiveness* focuses on the *offense*; *reconciliation* focuses on the *relationship*. Forgiveness requires no relationship. However, reconciliation requires a relationship in which two people, in agreement, are walking together toward the same goal. The Bible says . . .

*“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”*  
(AMOS 3:3)

**Forgiveness** can take place with only one person.

- **Reconciliation** requires at least two people.

**Forgiveness** is directed one-way.

- **Reconciliation** is reciprocal, occurring two ways.

**Forgiveness** is a decision to release the offender.

- **Reconciliation** is the effort to rejoin the offender.

**Forgiveness** involves a change in thinking about the offender.

- **Reconciliation** involves a change in behavior by the offender.

**Forgiveness** is a free gift to the one who has broken trust.

- **Reconciliation** is a restored relationship based on restored trust.

**Forgiveness** is extended even if it is never, ever earned.

- **Reconciliation** is offered to the offender because it has been earned.

**Forgiveness** is unconditional, regardless of a lack of repentance.

- **Reconciliation** is conditional, based on repentance.

## Key Verse to Memorize

*“Bear with each other and forgive one another  
if any of you has a grievance against someone.  
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”  
(COLOSSIANS 3:13)*

## Key Passage to Read

**Matthew 18:23–35**

## How to Truly Forgive

Have you ever said, “I was severely wronged by someone I once trusted. People tell me I should forgive, but how can I simply let my offender off the hook?” If these words have passed your lips or even crossed your mind, be assured that you are not alone. That is precisely why you need to know how to handle “the hook.”

### How to Handle “The Hook”

**Make** a list of all the offenses caused by your offender.

**Imagine** a meat hook hanging around your neck and a burlap bag hanging from the hook, laying against your chest. Then imagine all the pain caused by the offenses represented as 100 pounds of rocks dropped into the burlap bag. Now you have 100 pounds of heavy rocks—rocks of resentment—hanging from the hook around your neck.

**Ask yourself:** “Do I really want to carry all this pain with me for the rest of my life?”

**Are you willing** to take the pain from the past and release it into the hands of the Lord? If so, lift up your pain and release it all to Jesus.

**Visualize** taking the one who hurt or offended you off of your “emotional hook” and placing that person onto God’s hook.

**Remember**, the Lord knows how to deal with your offender in His time and in His way. God says, *“It is mine to avenge; I will repay”* (Romans 12:19).

**Finally, use** the following model and pray to release your offender to God.

### **Prayer to Forgive Your Offender**

*“Lord Jesus, thank you for caring about  
how much my heart has been hurt.  
You know the pain I have felt because of  
( list every offense ).*

*Right now I release all that pain into your hands.  
Thank you, Lord, for dying on the cross for me  
and extending your forgiveness to me.*

*As an act of my will, I choose to forgive ( name ).*

*Right now, I move ( name ) off of  
my emotional hook to your hook.*

*I refuse all thoughts of revenge.*

*I trust that in your time and in your way  
you will deal with ( name ) as you see fit.*

*And Lord, thank you for giving me your  
power to forgive so that I can be set free.*

*In your precious name I pray. Amen.”*

## **Genuine Forgiveness**

**Question:** “How do I know whether I have genuinely forgiven someone?”

**Answer:** Over time, as you go through the process of forgiveness, you may find old thoughts and feelings resurfacing. You may wonder if you’ve really forgiven your offender. It’s completely normal. Ask yourself the following questions:

- “Do I still expect my offender ‘to pay’ for the wrong done to me?”
- “Do I still have bitter feelings toward my offender?”
- “Do I still have vengeful thoughts toward my offender?”
- “Do I desire that my offender will one day come to have a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and experience a changed life?”
- “When is the last time I prayed for my offender?”

Remember, forgiving someone does not in any way mean that you do not want justice. It simply means that you are leaving the offense entirely in God’s hands. You are refusing to harbor hateful feelings toward your offender. Forgiveness is an ongoing process which requires that you choose to forgive every time the offense comes to mind. Likewise, you choose to pray for the offender every time the offense crosses your mind.

*“Pray for those who hurt you.”*

(LUKE 6:28 NLT)

# HOPE

## *The Anchor for Your Soul*

### What Is God's Heart on Hope?

The world cries out for hope. From individuals and families to cities and nations, the cries for justice, for peace, for *hope* ring out around the world. We cry out for answers, for guidance, for comfort . . . to make it through one more season, to overcome one more tragedy, to persevere one more day.

But there is only one hope that will satisfy our longings and our cries, one hope that will anchor us during the storms of life—the hope of Jesus Christ.

From His first cry as a baby to His last cry on the cross, Jesus Christ came to give us hope. The Bible says of Jesus:

*“In his name the nations will put their hope.”*

(MATTHEW 12:21)

**God is** the God of hope.

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (ROMANS 15:13).

**God is** the only lasting hope for everyone.

*“You are the hope of everyone on earth, even those who sail on distant seas”* (PSALM 65:5 NLT).

**God wants** your hope to be in Him.

*“O Lord, you alone are my hope”* (PSALM 71:5 NLT).

**God wants** His Word and His promises to be your source of hope.

*“You are my refuge and my shield; your word is my source of hope”* (PSALM 119:114 NLT).

**God does not want** you to put your hope in people or leaders.

*“It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans. It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes”* (PSALM 118:8–9).

**God does not want** your hope to be in money or wealth.

*“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment”* (1 TIMOTHY 6:17).

*“There is only one hope that will anchor us during the storms of life—the hope of Jesus Christ.”*

**God has** a plan for your life that is filled with hope.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (JEREMIAH 29:11).*

**God wants** you to have hope all day—every day.

*“Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (PSALM 25:5).*

**God gives** you hope during times of trouble and suffering.

*“Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God” (PSALM 42:5).*

**God strengthens** you with His hope.

*“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (ISAIAH 40:31).*

**God keeps** you anchored with His hope.

*“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure” (HEBREWS 6:19).*

**God wants** you to know that no matter what happens—there is always hope.

*“There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off” (PROVERBS 23:18).*

## Key Verse to Memorize

*“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”  
(JEREMIAH 29:11)*

## My Personalized Plan to Stay Anchored in Hope

True hope comes from knowing Jesus Christ, resting in Him and His plan for both my todays and my tomorrows. Therefore, when unexpected sorrows and hardships come, I will remember God’s promises to me found in the Bible.

*“I am counting on the LORD; yes, I am counting on him.  
I have put my hope in his word.”  
(PSALM 130:5 NLT)*

As I focus on renewing my mind with God's Word and deepening my hope in Christ, **I will . . .**

**Remember** that true hope is anchored in God.

- I will remember that true hope is found in God, who doesn't change—not in people, who do change.
- I will remember that true hope is found in God's unchanging Word, not in shifting circumstances or cultural opinions.
- I will remember that true hope is found in God's Son, who loves me and secured my eternity through His death and resurrection.

*"And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you" (PSALM 39:7 NLT).*

**Recognize** that when I feel hopeless, God calls me to trust Him.

- I will accept that in this broken world, I will inevitably face painful circumstances.
- I will accept that even believers can experience sorrow, loneliness, depression, and periods of desperation.
- I will accept that in dark times, God is with me and He desires to give me His love and hope.

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (ROMANS 15:13).*

**Realize** that there is always hope and God will help me overcome the obstacles in my life.

- I will trust that God is always with me, guarding and guiding me, fulfilling His purposes for me.
- I will trust that God is in control of the circumstances of my life, and I can learn and grow during both good and bad circumstances.
- I will trust that God can use me to be an encouragement to others who are facing their own obstacles.

*"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; . . . The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever" (PSALM 138:7–8 ESV).*

**Rely** on the Lord and others for support and help when I feel hopeless.

- I will remember that I don't have to suffer alone or in silence, and I will acknowledge my need for help.
- I will seek the support of a counselor, friend, or pastor when I feel unable to handle my situation or emotions.
- I will seek God in prayer, trusting Him to give me victory and use my trials for my good and His glory.

*"Where there is no guidance the people fall, But in abundance of counselors there is victory" (PROVERBS 11:14 NASB).*

**Recount** my blessings, thanking God for them.

- I will thank God for all the good things in my life—for family and friends, work and play, clothes and food, rest and inspiration.
- I will do at least one thing a day that brings me joy and focuses my attention on Jesus.
- I will remember all the things God has brought me through in the past and trust Him for my future.

*"Put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption" (PSALM 130:7).*

**Reach out** to others and share the hope of Christ.

- I will pray for those in my life who do not know the Lord—that God will save them.
- I will look for opportunities to share the hope of Christ with the lost.
- I will encourage others who are suffering or facing a trial with God's truth.

*"Encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (1 THESSALONIANS 5:11).*

# 4 POINTS OF GOD'S PLAN

Whether you're trying to make sense of your past, trying to overcome something in the present, or trying to make changes for a better future, the Lord cares about you. He loves you. No matter what challenges you or your loved ones are facing, no matter the pain or difficult feelings you may be experiencing, no matter what you've done or what's been done to you, *there is hope*. And that hope is found in Jesus Christ.

God has a plan for your life, and it begins with a personal relationship with Jesus. The most important decision you can ever make is whether you will accept His invitation. If you have never made that decision, these four simple truths can help you start your journey together with Him.

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,  
‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,  
plans to give you hope and a future.’”*  
(JEREMIAH 29:11)

## God's Purpose for You: *Salvation*

What was God's motivation in sending Jesus Christ to earth? To express His love for you by saving you! The Bible says, *“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him”* (John 3:16–17).

What was Jesus' purpose in coming to earth? To forgive your sins, to empower you to have victory over sin, and to enable you to live a fulfilled life! Jesus said, *“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”* (John 10:10).

## The Problem: *Sin*

What exactly is sin? Sin is living independently of God's standard—knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway—also knowing what is right and choosing not to do it. The apostle Paul said, *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway”* (Romans 7:18–19 NLT).

What is the major consequence of sin? Spiritual death, eternal separation from God. The Bible says, *“Your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God”* (Isaiah 59:2). Scripture also says, *“The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 6:23).

## God's Provision for You: *The Savior*

Can anything remove the penalty for sin? Yes! Jesus died on the cross to personally pay the penalty for your sins. The Bible says, *“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8).

What is the solution to being separated from God? Belief in (entrusting your life to) Jesus Christ as the only way to God the Father. Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”* (John 14:6). The Bible says, *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved . . .”* (Acts 16:31).

## Your Part: *Surrender*

Give Christ control of your life, entrusting yourself to Him. Jesus said, *“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:24–26).

Place your faith in (rely on) Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior and reject your “good works” as a means of earning God’s approval. The Bible says, *“It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast”* (Ephesians 2:8–9).

Has there been a time in your life when you know you’ve humbled your heart and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—giving Him control of your life? You can tell God that you want to surrender your life to Christ in a simple, heartfelt prayer like this:

*“God, I want a real relationship with you.  
I admit that many times I’ve chosen to go my own way instead of your way.  
Please forgive me for my sins.  
Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins.  
Come into my life to be my Lord and my Savior.  
Change me from the inside out and make me  
the person you created me to be.  
In your holy name I pray. Amen.”*

## What Can You Now Expect?

When you surrender your life to Christ, you receive the Holy Spirit who empowers you to live a life pleasing to God. The Bible says, *“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life . . .”* (2 Peter 1:3). Jesus assures those who believe with these words:

*“Truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me  
has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.”*  
(JOHN 5:24)

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P.O. Box 7, Dallas, TX 75221  
hopefortheheart.org

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# QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

God gives us His Word not just for information but for transformation. The Lord wants you to “*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” (Romans 12:2). This isn’t something you do alone, but something God does in you by His Spirit.

The following questions are designed to help you reflect on the biblical truths in this resource. Take a moment to pray and ask God to settle your mind and quiet your spirit as you reflect on His truth.

*“Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”*  
(2 TIMOTHY 2:7)

**What are two key truths, Bible verses, or “takeaways” from this resource that you found helpful—or that you simply needed to be reminded of?**

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**In relation to these topics, what behavior(s) do you need to *begin, change, or stop* in order to help you grow into the person God created you to be?**

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**In relation to these topics, what is the biggest obstacle you need to overcome in order to move forward?**

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**What might your life look like a few years from now if you do *not* make changes regarding these issues? How might your life be different if you *do* make changes?**

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**Is there anyone in your life who needs help with these topics/issues? How can you pray for them, and what is one thing you can do to encourage them?**

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**What can you give thanks to God for today?**

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*“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself  
and God our Father, who loved us  
and by his grace gave us eternal comfort  
and a wonderful hope,  
comfort you and strengthen you  
in every good thing you do and say.”  
(2 THESSALONIANS 2:16–17 NLT)*

# GET CONNECTED



Want to learn more? Check out the many resources Life Without Limbs provides. Whether you need prayer and encouragement or simply want to learn more about Jesus, we're standing by to provide practical help. Text us or visit our website today to get connected.

**Text:** "LWLJESUS" to 50700

**Visit:** [lifewithoutlimbs.org/resources/follow-jesus/](http://lifewithoutlimbs.org/resources/follow-jesus/)



## HELPFUL RESOURCES



For more information on the topics in this resource, click on the topics to the right to find helpful books from Hope for the Heart. The resources of Hope for the Heart provide clear answers from God's Word and concise, practical guidance on life's challenges so you can grow personally and be equipped to help others.

- **Guilt**
- **Identity & Self-Image**
- **Depression**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Hope**

# A PARTNERSHIP OF HOPE



Here at Hope for the Heart, we are so excited to partner with Nick Vujicic and Life Without Limbs to bring **Hope for your current need!**

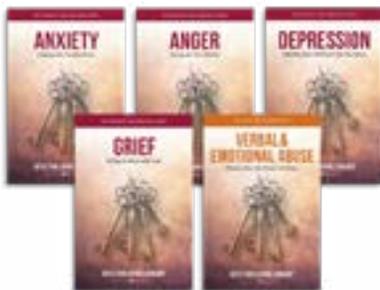
For 35 years, we've created biblical resources like this to equip people around the world with God's truth. Our resources have practical guidance from God's Word on many topics so you can overcome challenges, grow personally, and be equipped to help others. We invite you to check out our resources and find *hope* for all of life!

Special thanks to author, broadcaster, and biblical counselor June Hunt, founder of Hope for the Heart, for her years of research, writing, editing, and guidance in developing the *Keys for Living Library*.



## Free Resources

We have free downloads on nearly 60 topics. They're great for starting the conversation with God about the challenges you're facing or to help a friend in need.



## Books with Practical Steps

In our *Keys for Living Library*, we have books on many topics such as Anger, Depression, Stress, Verbal & Emotional Abuse, and more. These books provide concise answers from God's Word and have a simple format. They break down on a topic from a biblical perspective into 4 categories: Definitions, Characteristics, Causes, and Steps to Solution.

**Enjoy a 20% discount** on any *Keys for Living* book or digital book when use coupon code **LWLBOOK20** at checkout.



## Topical Videos and *Lifeline to Hope*

We have created over 20 videos that are around 60 minutes each. Each video is a dialogue with training on how to work through issues such as Grief and Anxiety. We also have a 10-session video course on becoming a better people helper called *Lifeline to Hope*.

**Enjoy a 30% discount** on our videos, include our full *Lifeline to Hope* training course, when you use coupon code **LWLVIDEO30** at checkout.

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