

The Gift of God

*Completely Undeserved
& Cannot be Earned*

by John Maisel

The Gift of God: Completely Undeserved & Cannot be Earned

Published by East-West Ministries International
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Cover Design and Illustrations by Kristin Sheehy

Cover Photography by Trey Hill
www.squarerootofnine.com

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The Gift of God

INTRODUCTION

If I could ask God questions about life and death, I think I would choose these two:

- Why am I here?
- What happens when I die?

I know that everyone doesn't believe in God, but the thoughts I want to share today about really knowing God are for 90% of the people who do say they believe in God.

There was a time that I believed in God, but I didn't know God. I knew about Him, but I didn't actually know Him.

I knew Him like I know President Obama. I know things about him like ...

- He is the President of the United States.
- He lives in the White House in Washington, D.C.
- He has a wife and two children.
- His position gives him great power and authority.

But I don't *know* him personally.

When I left for college as a young man, I had a belief in God as Creator of the Universe and knew about Him,

but I certainly didn't know God until someone explained to me that the Bible says that He desires each of us to be a part of His family and know Him personally.

I also knew about Jesus Christ—what history books and the Bible said about Him—and I accepted intellectually His place in history as fact, but I certainly did not have a relationship with Him. I just accepted the facts about the Person of Jesus like I had other well-known historical people—like Napoleon, Moses, or Julius Caesar—and I know many of you could probably say the same thing.

The truth is we cannot find God on our own. God must take the initiative in showing us the right approach to knowing Him in a real, life-changing way that brings peace and joy to us in our relationship with Him.

This is what this little book is about ... how you can know that you know that you know Jesus, both intellectually and personally, in a way that leads to all the meaning and significance you desire and were created for.

COMMON VIEWS ABOUT LIFE

The world holds some common views of life that most of us can agree with. I want to share with you today some observations about these views. It's because of these common views that most of us have our own ideas of how to know God personally ... ideas that are contrary to God's point of view.

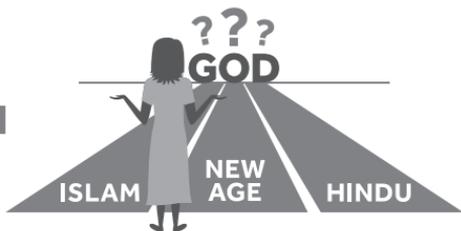
- 1 Most people feel that something is wrong on the inside of their lives.** Over 50% of all men and women say they are still trying to find the meaning and purpose of their lives.
- 2 Most people want to understand and resolve the issue of their deepest needs for love, significance and security.** Our deepest needs drive us to find a solution.
- 3 Most people believe there is an all-knowing and all-powerful God who has the answers.** Over 90% of the world believes in a supreme being called God.
- 4 Most people aren't sure who this God is or if He really cares about them.** If He does care, how can He be found? So many opinions exist about God, but who is right?

I'm going to share with you two of the wrong ways to approach knowing and experiencing God's love.

GOD



Typical Wrong Approaches to God



We think each person must make their own way to God. Individual efforts cannot lead to God.

We think all religions lead to the same God. This is impossible because of contradictions. One says "This way." Another says "No, this way."

Both of these approaches create wrong thinking about finding God and finding answers to my spiritual needs.

I think it's important that you first understand this crucial reality: You are not a result of random chance. You are a person made and loved by God.

Yes, one of the most important things for you to know is that God loves you deeply and personally, and He wants

each of us to know and experience a loving relationship with Him.

If there is just one thing you should remember from this text, it's that you are loved by God, and God has a purpose for you. You may forget everything else, but please remember this always.

The Bible says:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

From God's viewpoint there are no insignificant people. You and I are part of the work He calls "the world."

However, we often don't experience His love and plan for our lives because we have a huge disconnect between understanding who God is and why we are separated from His love for us.

The reality is that we start out on our journey with the desire to know God, but we are separated from Him even in the beginning. We each started out in life independent from Him, and this independence makes

us feel that our plans for ourselves will be better than God's plan for us.

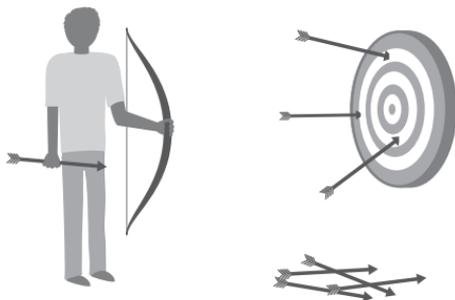
But I think our everyday lives tell us that something is still missing. Don't you?

SIN

The Bible says:

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

Sin simply means that I miss the standard of God's perfect qualities—His perfect righteousness, goodness, and love. I'm aiming for these qualities, but I miss the target.



MAN: Sin means to miss the mark of God's perfect standard

GOD: He is perfectly right, perfectly just, perfectly good

Everyone will fall short of God's standard. As a result, each one of us lives apart from God in thought, word or deed.

RESULTS OF THIS SEPARATION FROM GOD ARE:

Feelings/Thoughts

- Guilt from the past
- Fear of the future
- Anxiety about the present
- Lack of true meaning
- No peace in life
- Fear of death

Behavior

- Adultery
- Hate, bitterness
- Cheating, lying
- Stealing
- Immorality
- Killing
- Pride

Not one person is perfect in righteousness, goodness, and love. Certainly some people are more loving, kind, and selfless than others, but even the best people fall short of God's perfect standard. I think it's easy for all of us to accept that no one is perfect—no matter how good they may seem.

THE CONSEQUENCE OF SIN

Because of my sin and yours, there is a consequence: separation from God's love and His plan for our lives.

The Bible says:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)

A wage is something we earn. Because of our lack of perfection, *we earn* “death,” which means spiritual separation from God. Because of this spiritual separation from God, we experience different degrees of the following:

- Fear of the future
- Fear of death
- Despair and emptiness
- Lack of true meaning
- Uncertainty about the afterlife

In addition, sin is present in all of our lives. For example, I’m sure each of us has ...

- Thought we were better than others
- Intentionally deceived others
- Hurt others physically or emotionally
- Stolen from others
- And a multitude of other sins both big and small

We all have questions about life and its meaning because

of our separation from God through sin. We recognize there's a gap between us and the answers, so we try to jump across the chasm on our own to reach God.

MAN

If God is good and righteous, we know it will take those qualities to experience His love and goodness to us...

Giving Money:

"I help the poor"

Going to Church:

"I'm religious"

Good Works:

"I don't do anything bad"

Good Person:

"I try to be a good person"

GOD

...but we can never jump to the other side to perfection.

Must be perfectly good, and have perfect love for others – because He made the world and established the rules to live by.

We will never succeed in our attempts to jump across this chasm that separates sinful man from a holy God. Trying to reach God in our own strength or effort is what the world calls religion, and religion never brings anyone close to God.

You may jump farther and get closer to the other side than others, but you will still end up in the bottom

of the canyon—unable to reach the other side to God without His help.

THE SACRIFICE

Because you and I are guilty of breaking God’s perfect laws and falling short of His standard, the penalty of “death”—separation from God—has been carried out on us. Just like in our own justice system, when laws are broken, penalties are assigned and must be paid.

I can’t pay your penalty because I had my own penalty, but God’s love for us resulted in the desire of His Son—Jesus Christ—to take the initiative and pay the penalty of our sin for us.

Jesus Christ—both fully God and fully man—came to earth as God and put on human flesh. He lived a perfect life with no sin of His own.

Then He died in your place—paying a debt you could not pay and offering you His life as a free gift ... one that you cannot earn.

You can think of it like this:

Let’s suppose you are in the hospital dying of cancer. I

come to you and say, “Let’s take the cancer cells from your body and put them into my body.” If that was possible, what would happen? I would die and you would live. I would be your substitute.

That is what happened when Jesus Christ died in your place on the cross. He took the cancer cells of sin from you, put them in His body and died in your place. Why? Because He wanted you to know God and become a member of His forever family.

Let me quickly summarize all that we have talked about so far.

Because of our sinfulness, we are separated from a holy and righteous God, but God, in His love for you, desired for you to know Him and experience His love. This means that God took the initiative in reconciling mankind back to Himself. He provided a way for us to step away from the sin that separates us from Him through Jesus Christ’s perfect life, sacrificial death, and physical resurrection.

God demonstrated His love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ Jesus died for us. (Romans 5:8)

God Takes the Initiative

1. Because He cares for us, God took the initiative by the way He made the world. "For the truth about God is known to them instinctively; God had put this knowledge in their hearts. Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, and have known about His existence and great eternal power. So they will have no excuse." (Romans 1:19-20)

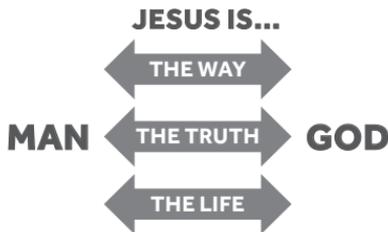


2. Because He cares for us, God takes the initiative by showing us His love through Jesus Christ. "For God so loved the world



that He gave his one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) **Because God loves you He sent His Son.** "Here I am! I stand at the door (of your life) and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me." (Revelation 3:20) **Because He cares for you, He comes knocking.**

3. Because He cares for us, God takes the initiative by showing us how to reach Him. "Jesus answered, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'" (John 14:6) **Because Jesus came, you can have life.**

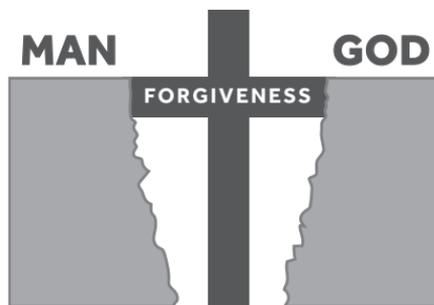


God loves each person even though we have lived independently and apart from Him. He knew that we could not get across the separation that sin causes. So Jesus Christ built a bridge across the great canyon of separation—from God’s side of perfect holiness to our side of separation.

Why did Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, need to become a man and pay the penalty of our sin by dying for you and me? He did this to provide a way for us to know God personally. We only have to believe and thank Jesus for His great act of love on our behalf to be reconciled to God.

Why is Jesus the only bridge?

Jesus is the Only Bridge to God



“For there is one God and one mediator between God and Man, the man Jesus Christ.”
(1 Timothy 2:5)

“Jesus answered ...
‘No one comes to the Father except through me.’” (John 14:6)

Speaking of Jesus Christ as God. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)

A declaration of Jesus as God. “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30)

Jesus returning as God. “While we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...” (Titus 2:13)

THUS, YOUR ENCOUNTER WITH JESUS CHRIST IS AN ENCOUNTER WITH GOD.

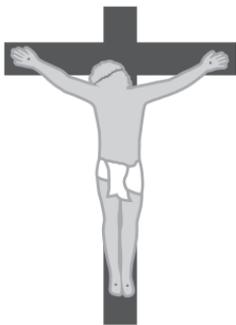
Because He is the only one who has lived a sinless life, and he chose to lay it down to pay your debt of sin—dying in your place so you can be forgiven of all of your sins for all of time.

The Bible says:

For what I received I pass on to you as of first importance; that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:3-7)

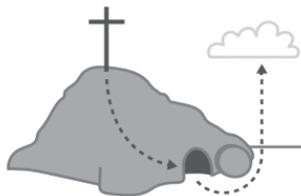
As you can see here, Jesus died so you can be forgiven of all sins. Jesus then rose from the dead so you can receive the free gift of eternal life and God's presence in your life today. Three days after Jesus was buried, He came back to life to prove that sin and death had been conquered and that His claim to be God was true.

Know Why Jesus Christ is the Only Way



Because only Jesus died for you. "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23) "God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us." (2 Corinthians 5:21) "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18) **Christ alone died in your place and PAID the penalty of your sins, not Buddha, not Confucius, not any other religious leader.**

Because only Jesus was resurrected. "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." (Romans 4:25) "God has raised this Jesus to LIFE, and we are all witnesses of the fact." (Acts 2:32) **Christ alone conquered death and gives forgiveness and eternal life.**



A FREE GIFT

God tells us that He has already proven His love for us. Jesus Christ said, “I will pay the debt of everyone’s sin.” Then Christ Jesus died for you. Now God offers us eternal life and forgiveness for all sins as a “freely offered gift.” If I trust what Christ did for me personally, the best way to acknowledge His gift of “new life” is by simply thanking Him as an act of faith.

Yes, forgiveness of all sin is freely offered to all people ... but the offer of this free gift did not come without a cost. The cost was paid by Jesus Christ because of His love for you. He took what you deserved—death—and offers you life everlasting, completely free as a love gift to you.

If something is **free** all we can do is **receive it** and say, **“Thank you.”**

This gift is not something we have earned, but it is given to us unconditionally. We are not being offered this free gift because of righteous acts we have done.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things

*we had done, but because of his mercy – God saved us.
(Titus 3:5, emphasis added)*

But how can He give this astonishing gift? He does it by His grace, which is love offered to you that is not earned or merited. It is not because of any good works we may have tried to do for Him.

*The Bible says, “For by GRACE (undeserved love) He saved us, by faith, it is the GIFT of God (to us) – not according to our WORKS, so no one can boast.”
(Ephesians 2:8-9, emphasis and notes added)*

The Gift is my forgiveness ... If I receive it and say, “Thank you, Jesus.”

But as many (that includes you) as received Him (Jesus Christ, the Gift), to them God gives the right to become sons and daughters of God (join God’s family), to those who believe in Him. (John 1:12, emphasis and notes added)

The Gift is eternal life ...

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life;

*whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.
(1 John 5:11-12)*

A gift is free; it's not a gift if I need to do something for it. But it must be received. "But to all that RECEIVED HIM (Jesus, The Free Gift), to those who BELIEVED in His name, He (God) gave the right to become children of God." (John 1:12)

- **Forgiveness and eternal life are God's free gift through Jesus Christ.**
- **When received, you become a child of God (a Christian).**
- **When you become a Christian, Jesus Christ gives you Himself.**



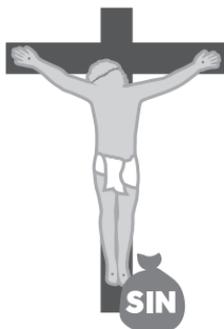
ACCEPTING THE GIFT

So to move forward, the question must be asked: What do I need to do to have this relationship with Jesus Christ?

For you to become a man or woman in relationship with God, Jesus Christ must be trusted for forgiveness and received as your personal Savior. It only takes thanking

Him for what He did for you individually. Then we can move from believing to personally trusting in Him. But it all starts with faith.

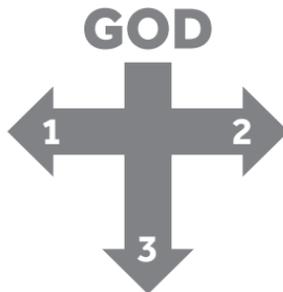
Jesus Christ Died in Your Place and Rose Again from the Dead for You Personally



HOW FAITH WORKS:

Believe what God tells you is true:

- God loves you
- You have sinned against God
- Christ died to pay the penalty of your sins



Trust what Jesus Christ did for you:

- Died for your sins
- Buried for you
- Rose to live for you so that you could receive forgiveness and eternal life

Act on these facts & Receive the free gift NOW

As a simple “I do” at the wedding altar brings a man and a woman together in a new relationship called marriage, a simple prayer can express the desire of your heart. Just a simple prayer can tell God your thoughts and desires and bring you into the family of God—making Jesus Christ your Savior and Lord because you believe and trust in His sacrifice for you.

Just look at the truths in the following prayer and see if you desire God to do this for you. Do these truths express the desire of your heart for new and eternal life as well as a relationship with God?

Dear God,

- Thank You for Your love for me.
- I know I have sinned and broken Your moral laws, but I desire to receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior today.
- I believe Jesus Christ died in my place and paid the penalty I deserved so I could know You personally.
- I now thank You, Lord Jesus, for dying for me and paying my debt to God for my sins so that His holy

justice could be satisfied.

- I now trust You alone to be my Lord and Savior and ask You to come into my life and make me the person You want me to be.
- Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me the gift of new and everlasting life in Your forever family. Amen.

Does that prayer express the desire of your heart? Are those words the thoughts and feelings you have now?

The Bible tells us that Jesus is knocking at the door of each person's life, but Jesus will not force Himself on you or break down the door. He waits for you to "open the door" and invite Him into your life as your personal Lord and Savior.

Jesus gives us this picture when He says,

I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)

He generously offers to you His love, His forgiveness of sin, and His new life in you for all eternity. Will you

open the door of your life to Jesus Christ as your Savior from all sin and the Lord of every part of your life? His life brings not only “eternal life” but also “new life” and “abundant life” for all time.

Have you said, “Yes,” in your heart and mind about what you have seen and heard? Then may I invite you to pray the prayer you already accept in your heart to the Lord right now?

Dear God,

Thank You for Your love for me. I know I have sinned and broken your moral laws, but I desire to receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior today. I believe Jesus Christ died in my place and paid the penalty I deserved so I could know You personally. I now thank You, Lord Jesus, for dying for me and paying my debt to God for my sins so that His holy justice could be satisfied.

I now trust You alone to be my Lord and Savior and ask You to come into my life and make me the person You want me to be. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me the gift of new and everlasting life in Your forever family. Amen.

If you have prayed this prayer, here are a few steps you could take to help you in this new part of your life.

First, I would love to hear from you about your decision to accept the gift of eternal life from God through Jesus Christ and to give you a gift of my own. Please send an email to info@eastwest.org and say that you have prayed to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and that you would like a *Can I Really Know for Sure?* booklet. They will send it to you free of charge to help you with this new stage of your life.

Second, you may find that you or your friends and family have difficult questions about God and the life He has now called you to. ExploreGod.com is an excellent resource full of helpful videos and articles that deal with some of those difficult questions regarding your new relationship with Jesus Christ.

Last, I want to welcome you with joy into God's forever family. I can't wait to rejoice with you and sing praises to our Lord God in Heaven some day!



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