

Just the Basics

BRENDON NAICKER

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INTRODUCTION



You are at the beginning of a new relationship; a relationship with God that is possible because of Jesus Christ. As with any relationship, your relationship with God will grow stronger and deeper through communication and experiences. As you learn more about God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, you will grow to love God and trust Him more and more. You will also arrive to a better understanding of how Jesus is relevant to the details of *your* life. Also, your

relationship will grow as you see God's faithfulness in certain situations in your life, particularly those situations that you have turned over to Him in prayer.

Be careful that you are not deceived into thinking that going to heaven instead of hell is the only benefit of being a Christian. If you believe this lie, you will tend to think that you have already received all that there is to receive as a Christian, and view the rest of your life as an obligation to pay God back for the gift of heaven. This erroneous view leads to the attitude that Christianity is drudgery, sacrificing all the "fun" things in the world for a life of rigidity and boredom. The Christian life is *not* receiving the gift of heaven and then trying hard from that point forward to live according to the standards of the Bible. This is the truth: God wanted you to receive Christ, not only to be forgiven of sin so that you can go to heaven instead of hell after your earthly death, but to give

you life, contentment, joy, fulfilment, and fruitfulness in Christ.

God wants you to know that, because of your faith, Christ actually lives in you, and has given you a new life. His life. God wants you to see the relevance of Christ to all of the issues in your life. Through Christ, the Father has given you an inexhaustible source of joy, contentment, power, and peace; and equipped you to be a great blessing to other people.

God wants you to get in His raft and let Him take you down a roaring river. You will not be able to control the raft; you must trust Him to do so. If you do, He will not allow you to sink, but the ride will be wild, unpredictable, and sometimes rough. Every person in your path will be affected by the roaring river of God's love and power. Hardly boring and dreadful!

THE GOSPEL

FAITH CUP

A Joyful 'toon by Mike Waters



By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

- ROMANS 5:2 KJV

The most famous passage in the Bible is in the book of John, Chapter 3, Verse 16. This is how God loved the world: he gave his one and only Son so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life and not really die. Let us look at the different parts of this verse. "This is how God loved the world." God is the starting point. He created the world and loved the world, but the people he created decided to rebel against him (which the Bible calls "sin"), and the consequence

of that decision was separation from God, and eventually death. “He gave his one and only Son.” The good news is that God gave his Son to die on the cross so that his death would pay the penalty for your sins and forgiveness could be made available. This is possible only because Jesus is not only the Son of God, but is God himself. (This can be confusing, and we will talk about it eventually).

It is also possible because Jesus was fully human, and only the sacrifice of a human being can pay the penalty of human sin. “So that everyone who believes in him.” God’s offer of salvation is for “everyone;” it is not limited to any group. But salvation is only for those who believe in Jesus; Christianity not a philosophy or a religious organisation. It is a personal relationship with God, made possible by what Jesus did on the cross. But it is not enough simply to believe certain truths about God. The faith that God requires is a faith that

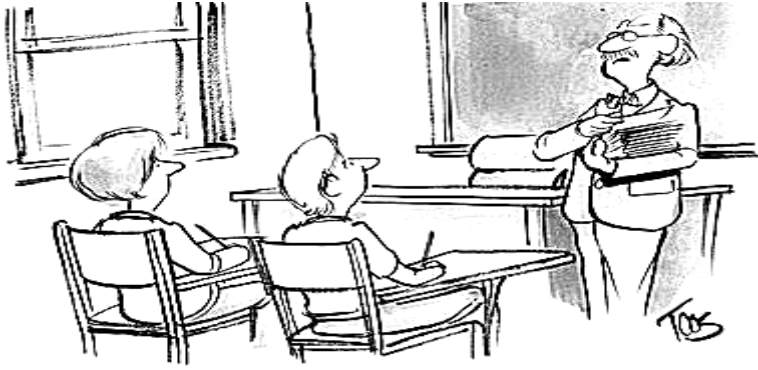
trusts not in itself but trusts in Jesus, that he is who he says he is and that he did what he said he would do.

This means that we can do nothing to earn God's favour, but simply receive his free offer of forgiveness and salvation. "Will have eternal life and not really die." Followers of Jesus may physically die, but not really die, for they live with him forever in heaven. But Jesus also wants us to count the cost before we decide to follow him. While salvation is free, it means that Jesus is our new master, and part of following Jesus is becoming like him.

CONGRATULATIONS!!!

The tyranny of sin is broken in your life, and you are now free to love and serve God.

THINGS ARE ABOUT TO CHANGE



"This test will be graded on the straight and narrow."

When you became a Christian, you were aware that certain things were happening. Formerly you had been separated from God, not in a relationship with him, but then you repented. Formerly you were dead but now you are alive. But much more happened, even if you were not aware of it. Before conversion, did you know that it was God drawing you to him, helping you understand your guilt and emptiness? In conversion, God rescued you from the kingdom of darkness and brought you into his kingdom of light. He forgave your

sins, acquitted you from all guilt, freed you from all condemnation, and redeemed you from the tyranny of sin. He also made you holy, made you into a new creation, adopted you into his family, made you a citizen of heaven and gave you the gift of his Holy Spirit, to live within you forever as a helper and a guarantee that you would receive the inheritance that God has promised. With all of this, it should come as no surprise that changed people will live in a changed way. Of course your life is going to be different; it cannot possibly be the same because *you* are not the same.

The Bible uses many different ways of discussing this new life. Jesus says that we become his disciples, meaning that we are his followers and learn from him. Conversion is an important first step in this new life. The Bible also talks about the “fruits of the Spirit.” “Fruits” stands for the changes that

God's Spirit is going to accomplish in your life, changes such as: love, joy, peace, patience, etc.

Do not be frightened about these changes. God is not standing there with a frown, demanding that you be perfect. However, he will give you the desire to change and then the ability to do so. This change is not automatic; you can fight him, but why would you want to do that?

Another metaphor that the Bible uses to describe followers of Jesus is that we are the "salt of the earth." Life is going to be different; you are going to be different. Things are about to change in your life.

WHEN YOU STUMBLE



When you became a Christian, you died in your old life and were raised, as it were, with Christ, to a new kind of life. This is your new life of discipleship in which you follow Christ. But this new life is not automatic. Your life does not automatically start showing the “fruits of the Spirit.” When God places the desire in your heart, you still must carry through, take the next step, and do what God has asked you to do. The bad news is that we do not always take this next step; we stumble and fall by doing what God has asked us not

to do. The good news is that God is ready to help. We believe that God is our Creator and that he is all-wise and all-good. This means that he determines what is right and what is wrong, and that his judgments are always for our good.

To use a metaphor, God has shown us the middle of the bull's-eye. When we shoot the arrows of our lives and miss the mark, when our attitudes and actions fall short of what God has asked of us, we call this "sin." Sin starts with temptation, with the enticement to miss the mark. But there is good news. Temptation is not sin. Some of the thoughts that flit through your mind are luring you to sin, but they are not sin. You do not have to give in to temptation. God is faithful and has promised always to give us a way to move through the time of temptation without sin. God is on our side. He wants us to gain mastery over temptation and helps us to do so. But what should you do if you give in to temptation?

Confess; agree with God whole-heartedly that you were wrong and he is right.

Practically speaking, we should confess early, confess often, and confess fully. And it is helpful to confess to our Christian brothers and sisters. The power of sin is usually snapped when it is brought into the light. When you do confess, you can be assured that God will fully forgive your sin, no matter how horrible it is and no matter how often you have done it. And when you are forgiven, you are cleansed and can enjoy the freedom that comes only through confession, forgiveness and cleansing.

LISTENING TO GOD



When you became a Christian, you entered into a new relationship, and one crucial element of any relationship is communication, both listening and speaking. There are several ways in which we can listen to God. He talks to us through creation. As we look at the grandeur of a sunset or the majesty of the mountains, or the beauty of a flower, all of these are teaching us about God, his grandeur, majesty and beauty. We must learn to hear God speaking in this way. But God speaks to us with the greatest clarity in the Bible. This is

the primary place where we hear his voice and learn from him and about him. There is much you will want to know about this topic. We believe that Scripture, another word for the Bible, comes from the very mouth of God through writers carried along by God's Spirit. It is therefore the authority over our lives, determining what we believe and how we should behave.

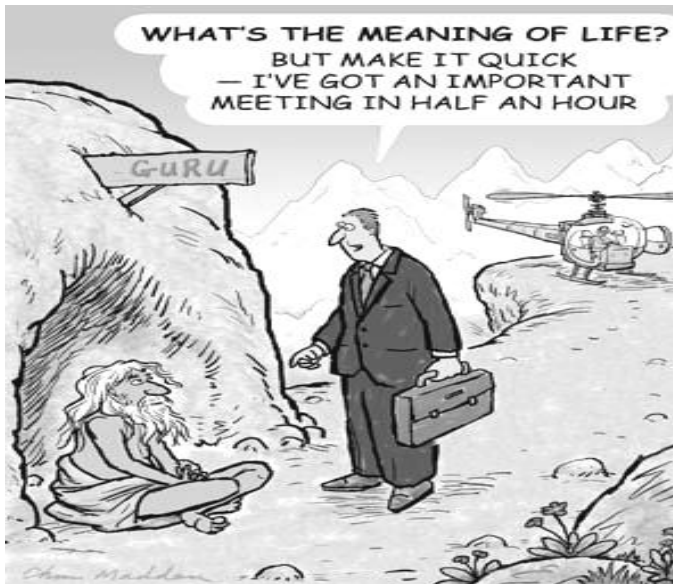
We believe the Holy Spirit watched over the process of collecting the books that we have in the Bible, and that these are the books that God inspired, and therefore these books are absolutely trustworthy. While these are important topics, the most important is what we actually do with the Bible.

There are four suggestions:

1. **Read it.** This is the only way we will truly know God's heart, and when it is confusing, we can ask God's Spirit to help us understand.
2. **Meditate on it.** Some things take time to digest. We need to fill our minds with God's word, reflect on it, and mull it over.
3. **Memorise it.** If our minds are saturated with God's word, and if his words are on the tip of our tongue, we will often know how to face the challenges of life.
4. **Obey it.** The purpose of Bible study is not to accumulate information. It is to know the mind of God and gladly obey it.

As we obey it, we learn to trust it, and as we trust it, we are transformed through God's Spirit and by God's word. We are people of the book.

SPEAKING WITH GOD



Communication goes in both directions; you both listen and speak. The same is true of your relationship with God. We *listen* primarily through reading the Bible and we *speak* with him in prayer. Prayer is simply talking with God. You can pray anywhere and at any time, whether your prayer is long or short, a quick snippet or a long discussion. When Jesus' disciples asked him how they should pray, he responded with what we call the "Lord's Prayer." The prayer begins by

addressing God as “Our Father in heaven.” We can approach God on familiar terms, as our father, while at the same time always remembering that he is in heaven, and that he is the God who made the heavens and the earth. We pray with a balance of familiarity and reverence. The general pattern is that we focus on God. We pray that his concerns, his desires for us and the world, be met. This means that people see him for who he is, a holy God who is without sin. We ask that his sovereign rule in our life is spread throughout the world, and that we will live according to his will. Prayer starts by putting God first.

Then we can admit our dependency on him by asking that he takes care of us. We ask that he supplies our daily needs for food, clothing, shelter, and any other specific needs that we may have. God is interested in the details of our life, even the mundane. Never feel that you cannot ask him for the

little things. We are also dependent on him to meet our spiritual needs. We ask for forgiveness of our sins, and if we are truly sorry for what we have done, we will show it by forgiving others who have hurt us. If we do not forgive others, God will not forgive us and our friendship with him will be damaged. We also pray that God keeps us safe from evil and especially the Evil One, Satan.

On a practical level, we should remember that prayer is speaking with God. We go back and forth between listening and responding. The encouragement is to read your Bible, and as things come to your mind, stop and thank God, or ask him for something, whatever the Bible prompts you to do.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT GOD



When you became a Christian, there were certain things you knew about God, but it is important to fill out your understanding of who God is. But a warning: ultimately, we can never know everything about God. There are many things that he has revealed about himself, but his ways will always be “higher” than our ways, and his thoughts “deeper” than our thoughts. This is called God’s “incomprehensibility.” God is “omniscient.” This means God knows everything. He knows

your thoughts before you say them; he knows the past, present and future. He is as acquainted with the movements of distant galaxies as he is with the number of hairs on your head. We will never, ultimately, be able to grasp God's omniscience, but are you not glad that he is omniscient?

God is "omnipresent." This means that God is present everywhere. There is no place in which God is not present. It's not that God is huge; he simply has no spatial dimensions. "Omnipresence" also means that God is not localised here, there and everywhere. Rather, we exist in him. He is separate from creation, and yet we live and move and have our being in him. What is even more amazing is that God exists in his fullness everywhere in creation. He is not spread thinly throughout the universe. We will never, ultimately, be able to grasp God's omnipresence, but are you not glad that he is omnipresent?

God is “omnipotent.” This means that God is all powerful, and sovereign over all. God does all that he pleases. We will never, ultimately, be able to grasp God’s omnipotence, but are you not glad that he is omnipotent? The question then, is how we are going to respond. And the answer is, we worship him.

“Worship” is defined as “our faithful response to God’s gracious revelation.” Worship begins with hearing who God is and what he has done, and it necessarily continues with our appropriate response to what we know about God. God reveals his holiness, and we respond by acknowledging our sin. God reveals that he is merciful, and we accept his merciful forgiveness. God reveals that he has a will, and we respond by asking how we can do what he desires. We can never let God become small and weak in our minds. He is without limitation in all things.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT WHO JESUS IS



The question “Who is Jesus?” is the central question of the early church and the preaching of Paul. Our very name as “*Christ*-ians” shows that we are not primarily about religion but about the person of Jesus Christ. There are many common answers to this question: ‘a good man’, ‘a teacher’, ‘a prophet’, and ‘a demon-possessed fanatic’, all of which are incomplete or wrong. The fact of the matter is that everything

in life and death hinges on a person's answer to this question. In Peter's first sermon (Acts 2), we see him primarily dealing with this question. Peter shows how Jesus was a real human being, while at the same time, being much more. Jesus is "Lord," which means not only "sir" or "master" but also "God." The phrase "Son of God" is used repeatedly of Jesus, and yet today we easily misunderstand it. "Son of God" does not mean Jesus was a created being or someone less than God.

When the Jews of Jesus' day heard the phrase, they understood it in their own language and culture as a claim to be God, and they tried to kill him for his supposed "blasphemy." The Bible also explicitly calls Jesus "God." Jesus was "in the beginning with God and was God." He is "the only God." "I and the Father," says Jesus, "are One." Thomas calls him, "My Lord and my God." Paul calls Jesus, "Our great God

and Saviour.” While this language allows for the Trinity — that Jesus is God the Son but not God the Father — it clearly shows that he is God.

All of this is called the “Incarnation.” Jesus “became flesh,” being fully God and fully human at the same time. He did not merely *appear* to be both; he *was* both. If Jesus were not fully God *and* fully human, then he could not have died for our sins. A human death was needed for human sin, but only God on the cross could bear the wrath of God, as God paid the penalty for all human sin. It can get a little confusing, but it is true. In order to be a Christian, a person must believe both sides of the incarnation. We must believe that Jesus came in the flesh, and we must confess that Jesus is Lord. This is the central question of our life: “Who is Jesus?”

LEARNING MORE ABOUT WHAT JESUS DID



Romans 6:23

I'LL GET THIS ONE

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, he cried out, *“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”* John is teaching us that Jesus was to die on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. Sin against a holy God is a serious thing that is punishable by death, and yet God in his mercy accepts the death of an innocent sacrifice in our place. Only the Lamb of God can take away our sin because only Jesus did something about sin. This is not Christian arrogance or elitism; it is the truth. Jesus claimed that only he provides the way through

forgiveness to gain access to God, and that only he died to make it happen.

Jesus' death was sufficient to cover the sins of the world. This means that all who believe in him can know with absolute confidence that their sins are forgiven. Jesus' last words on the cross were, "*It is finished.*" This is Jesus' promise that he did everything that was necessary for our sins to be forgiven, and for us to gain access to God.

The temple curtain was also torn. The curtain separated the "Holy of Holies" from the rest of the temple. The "Holy of Holies" was the place where God's presence at one time dwelt. The curtain represents God's presence among his people and yet his people's separation from their God. That separation is now gone because of Jesus' work on the cross. The word "atonement" describes what actually happened on the cross. Now, the sins of all people are not

automatically forgiven, but only the sins of those who respond by believing Jesus did in fact pay the penalty of our sins. We must respond in faith to the message of the atonement. The truth of the “gospel” message, the “good news” of Jesus, is wonderfully taught in a ritual of the church called “Communion” (also called “The Lord’s Supper”). In this, we are reminded that Jesus’ body was broken for us, that his blood was spilt so that our sin can be forgiven, and that we can come into the presence of God.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT



"YES, BUT I WAS INNOCENT UNTIL
I WAS PROVEN GUILTY."

Christians are “Monotheists,” meaning that we believe that there is only one God. But we are also “Trinitarians,” which means we believe this one God is at the same time three: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This ultimately is a mystery, but we believe it because the Bible teaches it. The third “person” of the “God-head” (as we call him) performs two basic tasks. The first is his work in “*regeneration*,” the process by which we are given a new birth. This begins when the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin

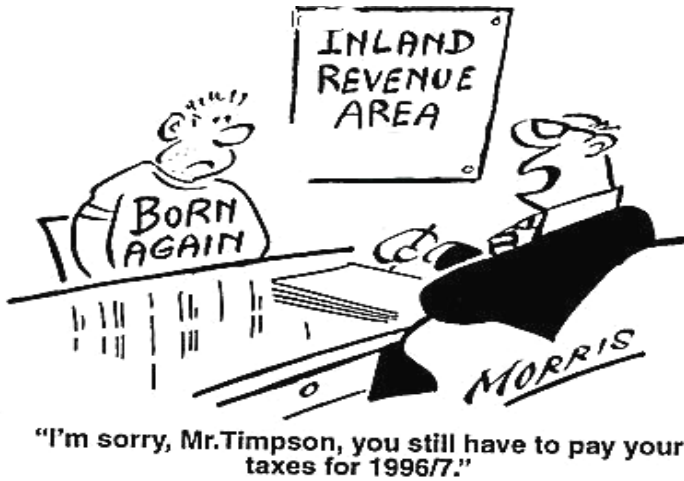
and draws us toward God. In conversion he makes us into a new creation and then seals us - a metaphor that means he marks us as belonging to God and protects us from the world. The second basic task is called the “indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”

In conversion the Holy Spirit actually takes up residence in our lives, assures us that we are God’s children, helps us to pray, and guarantees our final resurrection and many other wonderful things. Daily he guides us by showing us what is true through the Bible and prompts us to do what is right. He also empowers us, enabling us not only to hear his voice but then to do what he is calling us to do. One of the ways that he empowers us is to give us what are called “spiritual gifts.”

Every believer, at conversion, is given a supernatural empowerment to help meet the needs of the church: teaching, serving, encouraging, showing mercy, etc. The purpose of this empowerment is to change our lives so that we start to look more like Jesus. These changes are called the “fruits of the Spirit.” However, he will not empower us without our cooperation.

We can fight the Spirit’s leading if we wish and suffer the consequences, but how much better to hear and obey. Living life by the guidance and empowerment of the Spirit is a fascinating journey. It begins by our admission that we cannot live the life that God wants for us in our own ability, and then the Spirit is freed up to do his work in our lives. Where would we be without the regeneration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

WALKING WITH GOD



When we became Christians, we were in a sense “babes in Christ.” But all babies are to grow up, and as we grow up we start to look less and less like the world, and more and more like Jesus, as our attitudes and behaviour reflect *his* attitudes and behaviour. The technical term for this is “sanctification,” the process of growth in ‘Christ-likeness’, into spiritual maturity, into holiness.

To help us grow, our all-powerful, all-loving God allows difficult circumstances into our life. When these difficult things happen, you might be tempted to think that you did something wrong, but it may be that God is doing something right. When we are in the midst of difficult circumstances, we often grow spiritually the most. Our faith is being refined and our character is being developed.

The question is, how will you respond when the difficult times come? Not to be a prophet of doom, but all Christians are tempted to “compartmentalise” their lives. We think that if we hold back this part of our life from God, and that part, then this will reduce the pain. You will be tempted to compartmentalise your time, to give some of it to God and to keep back the rest for yourself. You will be tempted to compartmentalise your money and your affections. You must resist these temptations. When Jesus saved you from your

sins, he came into your life as not only Saviour but also as Lord, as ‘the boss’, and he wants all of you. If you give-in to compartmentalisation, it will first of all harm your relationship with God; but this can be corrected by repenting - by admitting that God is right and you are wrong, and he will forgive you.

If you do not repent and if you keep on sinning, eventually you will lose the confidence that you truly are a follower of Jesus, because our assurance is tied in with the change in our life that God brings about. For those people who claim to have become Christians but who insist on living in constant sin, there are “warning passages,” which spell out the horrible consequences of living in sin. God our Father calls us to grow up, to look and behave more and more like his son, Jesus Christ. It is part of the joy of the Christian life.

INVITING OTHERS TO WALK WITH YOU



1. Jesus calls people to "Follow me." He also expects his followers to produce more followers.
2. In conversion, God changed me, and changed people are to live in a changed way. As you do this, people will start to notice because you will stand out from the crowd. Some may even think you are a little "peculiar."
3. When people see your different life, one of two things will probably happen. You may be the aroma of life to

them, or you may be the stench of death. They may be attracted or repulsed. If you “smell” sweet to them, they will eventually want to know why, and you should be ready to give an answer for the hope that is now in you.

The Christian faith essentially is the proclamation of the good news of salvation. It is, as Paul puts it, “the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13), and therefore is the most wonderful and exciting message in the entire world.

BON VOYAGE



What makes an activity Christian is not the husk but the heart. Preaching, caring for the flock and equipping the saints can be profoundly secular. Listening to a child, designing a software package, and examining a balance sheet can be profoundly Christian. What makes a work Christian, is faith, hope and love. This is a crucial point. This misunderstanding has seduced many non-clergy laity to aspire to ministerial duties in order to be seen to be “doing ministry.” They become paraclergy instead of regarding their ordinary service

in the world as full-time ministry. It is not the religious character of the work that makes the service Christian, but the interiority of it.

William Tyndale said, *“There is no work better than another to please God; to pour water, to wash dishes, to be a souter [cobbler], or an apostle, all are one, as touching the deed, to please God.”*

Faith by definition cannot be calculating, or even self-evaluative, just as the eye cannot look at itself, designed as it is for looking at another. When the eye is single or sound the whole of one’s bodily life is filled with the light of Christ (Luke 11:34-36). Life centred on God transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. True Christian action is gratuitous, free from contrivance, free from a calculating spirit, free from contract - I do this for God and he does that for me. With Jesus in our hearts we love, because there is someone in need, not to gain approval by God or to receive the benefits of Christian action.

Faith is for the glory of God. Christian practice, whether developing a compensation package for a business or empowering the poor, is for God's glory. Whether washing dishes or preaching, being a salesperson or an apostle, "all is one, as touching the deed, to please God." Christian action is not measured by excellence, by efficiency, or by its religious character, but by faith, hope and love. We must cultivate the heart and not merely the husk of such action.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN GROWTH



Spiritual growth results from trusting Jesus Christ. "The righteous man shall live by faith" (Galatians 3:11). A life of faith will enable you to trust God increasingly with every detail of your life, and to practice the following:

Go to God in prayer daily (John 15:7).

Read God's Word daily (Acts 17:11); begin with the Gospel of John.

Obey God moment by moment (John 14:21).

Witness for Christ by your life and words (Matthew 4:19; John 15:8).

Trust God for every detail of your life (1 Peter 5:7).

Holy Spirit - allow Him to control and empower your daily life and witness (Galatians 5:16, 17; Acts 1:8).

FELLOWSHIP IN A GOOD CHURCH

God's Word instructs us not to forsake "the assembling of ourselves together" (Hebrews 10:25). Several logs burn brightly together; but put one aside on the cold hearth and the fire goes out. So it is with your relationship with other Christians. If you do not belong to a church, do not wait to be invited. Take the initiative! Call the pastor of a nearby church where Christ is honoured and His Word is preached. Start this week, and make plans to attend regularly.

Lumiere *Press*

Have you written a book, or are you writing one, or are considering it? You may be thinking that all you have to do is send it to a publisher, they will give you an “advance” to deposit in your bank account and - *hey presto* – you are on the way to your first million. Sorry, but the publishing industry just is not like that any more.

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Congratulations!!!

The tyranny of sin is broken in your life,
and you are now free to love and serve God.



Brendon Naicker is a South African residing in the United Kingdom. He is the director of Lumiere Ministries, a ministry assisting in equipping, educating, and envisioning Christians.

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