ARE YOU DROWNING?

Years ago, I was with my youngest son, Jonathan. We were out on the ocean. He was a little guy and I was helping him catch some waves. I had my feet planted in the sand. I would wait until the wave broke and kind of push him into it. He was having a good time. Suddenly the current picked my feet up and now I am treading water, which is fine. We are catching waves. All of a sudden, I get caught in a riptide. Here is the irony of it: I am so close to the beach, but I am caught in the riptide. Now, people drown in riptides because they try to get away from it by swimming toward the shore, and they end up exhausting themselves. The way to get out of a riptide is to go sideways, parallel to the shore, to get out. Then you can get to the beach.

So here I am. It’s pulling me. I am thinking, “Oh man. I can’t get my feet on the ground.” I am swimming sideways. Nothing is working. I am holding Jonathan up so he has air. And there is a lifeguard sitting right there—a female lifeguard. That’s fine; I am all for female lifeguards, but I am not calling out for that lifeguard to come save me. I have been around the water my whole life. But I couldn’t get my feet on the ground. Now I am getting a little worn out. I finally say, “Help.” She bolts out. She has her little buoyancy device. She throws it and starts swimming toward me. Then I got my feet on the ground and I said, “It’s OK! Thank you.”

Why didn’t I want to call out to that lifeguard to help me? It was because I was proud. “I don’t need a lifeguard. I can save myself.” But I couldn’t.

Sadly, you might be in a worse situation. Maybe you are in a lifestyle that you can’t get out of. You are drowning. You know that you need help, but you are saying, “I will get myself out of this. I don’t want to call on God. I can fix it.” But you can’t fix it. And it will only get worse.

You have tried to be free from these things before, but you can’t do it alone. That pattern of behavior can only be broken by the power of God. You need God. He can help you. He loves you and He wants to reach out and save you.
GOD LOVES YOU!

Without question, God loves you! I know that you have heard it before. I know it may seem cliché. But it is absolutely true. He has a custom-designed plan for your life. He wants to flood you with peace, joy, and purpose, because ultimately He wants you to spend all eternity with Him in a place that will exceed your wildest dreams called Heaven. You might say, “God doesn’t love me. Not after what I have done.” Oh no, He does love you. God loves you if you are an adulterer, a liar, a thief, or a murderer. Listen to this: He loves you no matter what you have done.

You may be cynical about love. I understand that. I didn’t grow up in an affectionate home. My mom was married and divorced seven times and had a bunch of boyfriends in between. She never showed affection toward me. She never said “I love you” to me. So it was very hard for me to accept love, and it was certainly hard for me to give love. I remember the first time I went to a church and some random person walked up to me, threw their arms around me and said, “I love you brother.” I was thinking, “Get me out of this place.” I couldn’t connect there. You may feel that way right now—you don’t really want to feel God’s love or accept it. But He loves you and He wants to change you for the better.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is found in the New Testament book of Luke¹. It is the story Jesus told to show us what God is like. It is called the story of the prodigal son, where a father had a son that ran away. The son took his portion of the inheritance and he made a mess of his life. He was involved with hookers, drinking, and partying, and lost all of his money. One day the boy came to his senses and said, “I am going to go home.” Because you know what? That boy knew that his father loved him. And the boy said, “When I get home I will just say, ‘Dad, I am not even worthy to be called your son anymore. Just give me a job as a hired hand or whatever. Anything is better than where I have been in this miserable state.”

The story goes on to say that while the boy was a great way off, the father saw him and ran to him and kissed him. By the way, in the original language it means he kissed him again and again. He said, “This is my son who was dead and is now alive again. He who was lost is found.” Notice that the father didn’t say, “Whoa son, where have you been? You

¹. See Luke 15:11–32 (NKJV)
stink. Take a shower. Change your clothes and then I will accept you.” No. The father accepted him as he was.

See, you don’t clean your life up and come to Christ. You come to Christ and He will clean your life up. You come as you are—with your problems and your sins. You come with your addictions. Whatever your problems are, you come to Him. Listen to this: Jesus loves immoral people. I want to share with you another story from the Bible. It’s the story of a woman caught in the act of having sex with some guy who wasn’t her husband. Here is what it says.

“As [Jesus] was speaking, the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. ‘Teacher,’ they said to Jesus, ‘this woman was caught in the act of adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?’ They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, ‘All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!’ Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, ‘Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?’ ‘No, Lord,’ she said. And Jesus said, ‘Neither do I. Go and sin no more.’”

SECRETS OF THE HEART

Do you think you can hide anything from God? He knows everything. The Bible says He knows the secrets of the heart. Jesus knew all about these accusers. So they left. These people felt guilt and it drove them away from Jesus.

Meanwhile here is this woman. The Bible says Jesus looked at her. He looked at her like no man had ever looked at her before. Normally when men looked at her, they probably looked at her with lust. I am sure she

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2. John 8:3-11 (NLT)
3. See Psalm 44:21 (NKJV)
was a very attractive woman. But Jesus didn’t look at her that way. The phrase that is used for Jesus looking at her could be translated, *Jesus looked right through her*. Have you ever had anyone look right through you? Let me restate the question. Do you have a mother? Maybe you were out a little too late past your curfew. Your mother says, “Where have you been?” You answer, “Nowhere, Mom.” She says, “Look at me.” And then, the piercing look. Right?

Jesus looked right through her. Not with a look of anger. Certainly not with a look of lust. He looked at her with love. Then He says this (I love it): “Woman, where are those accusers of yours?” We can miss that. He called her *woman*. The phrase that Jesus used in calling her *woman* could be translated as *lady*. It was the same term He used when He addressed His own mother. Now, I am sure she had been called a lot of things. She had probably been called a whore. She had probably been called a hooker, or far worse. He calls her a woman. It is almost like He said, “Lady (or Ma’am), where are your accusers?” You say, “But Greg, this woman was caught in the act of sexual sin. He calls her a lady. What she did wasn’t very ladylike.” But hold on. Jesus saw her potential. No, she wasn’t living like a lady at this point, but she would in time because she would change.

**HOW GOD SEES YOU**

God doesn’t just see you for what you are right now. He sees you for what you can become. He sees you for what He can make you into. Maybe you look at your own life and say, “Man, all I see is failure.” But God sees potential. You see the past. He sees the future. You see a mess. He sees a message.

So I don’t know what state your life is in. But I am telling you this on the authority of the Bible: God can change your life. He can change your history and He can certainly change your future if you will come to Jesus. The Bible says if anyone is in Christ, they are an altogether different kind of person. The old things have passed away. Behold everything becomes fresh and new. He did that for this woman. He can do it for you.

Do you know how long it takes to become a Christian? Sometimes you will meet people and they will say, “I am in the process of converting.”

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4. John 8:10 (NKJV)
5. See 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV)
Really? News flash: either you are converted or you are not converted. Conversion does not take years. It does not take months. It does not take weeks. It doesn’t take days or hours. You can be changed and forgiven of your sin in a second. In a flash. In a moment.

Years ago, there was a young man who was unhappy with his life. He was ready to commit suicide. He actually loaded a gun and was ready to shoot himself. But out of fear he momentarily just set the gun down on the table. He picked up the remote control, turned on the TV, and came across a program where I was speaking in a stadium somewhere. As I called people to Jesus Christ, he prayed and gave his life to God. Thankfully, he didn’t commit suicide. His life was changed because he believed the message of the gospel.

What is the gospel? We throw that term around a lot. Let me break it down for you. The gospel, technically defined, means good news. The good news is that there is a God in Heaven who loves you, who has a plan for your life, and will forgive you of all of your sin.

Here is the bad news. We are separated from God by our sins that we have committed. The word sin means to cross a line. It also means to fall short of a goal. Every one of us has crossed God’s line. We have broken His commandments. Every one of us has fallen short of His standard. What is His standard? Perfection. Jesus said, “Be perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect.”6 None of us are perfect, though, are we? That is why we need Jesus. But Jesus Christ, who was God’s Son, came to this planet and died on the cross for our sin. He took the penalty that should have come down upon you and upon me. He took it upon Himself. Then He rose again from the dead three days later. And that same Jesus who died and rose is right now standing at the door of your life and He is knocking. He is saying if you will hear His voice and open the door, He will come in.

I don’t know where you are at right now. You might be under the power of some addiction. Maybe you are doing drugs. Maybe you claim to be a Christian, but you are not. Maybe you are getting drunk and partying with your friends. Maybe you are having sex with a boyfriend or a girlfriend. Maybe you are a homosexual and you think that it is OK. You

6. Matthew 5:48 (TLB)
need to know, and I say this with as much compassion as I can, that it is not. It is a sin before God.

The Bible says if you practice things like that, you will not inherit the kingdom of God. He warns you. I don’t say that to drive you away in despair, but to give you hope. I say that to point out that Jesus Christ will free you from the power of addiction. He can free you from the power of drugs. He can free you from the power of smoking. He can free you from the power of drinking. He can free you from any power you might be under right now.

You might say, “But Greg, I have tried everything. I have tried the patch. I have gone through the programs.” I understand that you have tried. But this is not about you doing it. This is about Jesus doing it for you. You need to call out to Him.

Maybe you are not struggling with an addiction. You might say, “I am not into drugs; I am not into those things that you have mentioned. I am a very cultured person. I am very educated. I am very spiritual. I am into spiritual things.” Don’t you know that you can be ripped off by another ploy of the devil, which is religious nonsense that is keeping you from Jesus?

I don’t care if it is drugs. I don’t care if it is sex or religion. If it is keeping you from Jesus, it is the wrong thing. Don’t settle for a cheap substitute. The real Jesus, who died on the cross for you, loves you and is willing to forgive you. You must come to Him.

A while ago, I ran into a guy I used to hang out with in high school. He contacted me and said he would like to come to our church and hear me speak. I said, “You are more than welcome. Please come.” We arranged to meet before the service. We were talking for a few moments. He was very honest with me. He said, “My life has been a mess. I was married twice. I am divorced right now. I basically drank my marriages away.” He acknowledged he was an alcoholic and that booze had ruined his life. I thought, “This guy wants spiritual help.” I said to him, “God says those that seek Me will find me.” To my surprise he shoots back, “You have your book and I have mine.” Then he says, “I am in fellowship too. I am in a 12-step program.”

Listen, I have something better than a 12-step program. I have a one-step program. It is one step to God, where you turn from your sin and He will forgive you of all of it.
Before I was a Christian, I thought I was the coolest guy around. I went to this little Bible study on the front lawn of my high school campus in Newport Beach because I saw a cute girl I wanted to check out. No one invited me to the meeting; I just went because of the girl. I sat close enough where I could eavesdrop on their conversation but far enough away that no one would think I was joining up with the Jesus freaks.

I was watching them sing their songs and I thought, “These people, they are so crazy. This is so lame.” But the problem was there were a few of them that I knew from the old days. There were a few of them I used to party with. I knew how their lives had changed. It kind of messed up my theory a little bit. Then, just for a moment, I tried on a new thought. I thought, “This couldn’t be true, but what if the Christians are right? What if God is real? What if Jesus is alive? What if He has really come in their lives? If that is true and I am not a Christian, what does that mean? But that can’t be true. It couldn’t be true. . . . But what if it is?”

Maybe that has been happening to you. You read this book and you are thinking, “Maybe this is true. Maybe this is right.” I am just going to tell you: it is. He is real. He is true. He will prove it to you if you will ask Him into your life. I guarantee that.

**LET HIM CHANGE YOU**

Sometimes people will say, “You know, God loves me just like I am.” That is true. God does love you just like you are. But He doesn’t want to leave you that way. He wants to change you. The Bible says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”[7](#) The word confess means to agree with God. A lot of times we rationalize sin. We justify it. We say, “You know what? Everybody else is doing it. It is not that bad. I am still a good person.” Wait a second. To confess your sins means you agree with God. You say, “God, You are right about that.” Stop making excuses for it. It is so easy to blame others.

Even gorillas blame others. I read a newspaper article about a gorilla named Coco, a sign-language-speaking gorilla. Can you imagine that? One day, Coco tore the sink off the wall. When her keepers came in and

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7. 1 John 1:9 (ESV)
demanded an explanation, she signed out, “The cat did it.” They had given a pet cat to Coco and Coco blamed the cat.

God will not only forgive you, but He forgets your sin. God says, “I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”8 Listen, we should not choose to remember what God has chosen to forget. God takes your sins and throws them into the sea of forgetfulness and He posts a sign that says, “No fishing allowed.” Your sins can be forgiven and your sins can be forgotten, no matter what they are. If you will put your faith in Jesus Christ, you don’t have to fear the judgment day. Yes, there is a judgment day. The Bible says, one day everyone who does not believe will stand before God.

Coming back to the story we read, Jesus said to the woman, “Neither do I condemn you.” She didn’t have to fear. It is so great to know that when you put your faith in Jesus, you are forgiven and don’t have to be afraid of judgment day because God already put His judgment on Jesus, who died in your place on the cross 2,000 years ago. Christ paid the price for your sin so you don’t have to be held responsible for it. That is what He did for the woman caught in adultery. That is what He can do for you.

She had a new power to face her problems. Jesus told her, “Go and sin no more.” You can be a different person.

Can a person really change? No. Not by themselves. But God can change you. He could do it just like that.

Maybe you have been caught in your sin. This woman was busted. Maybe you have been busted lately. Maybe you were found out. Maybe you got pregnant. Maybe you got a DUI. Maybe you were caught cheating, stealing, or doing something wrong. You were busted. This woman was busted, but she turned to God. Sometimes those things can happen in our lives to get our attention.

Maybe something has happened in your life that has been a bit of a wakeup call for you. Perhaps you had a close brush with death and it got you thinking of your own mortality. It got you thinking about the meaning of your life.

8. Hebrews 8:12 (NLT)
Maybe you are trapped in some lifestyle, some vice or addiction. You have tried to shake it. Maybe people don’t know about it. You do it in secret. But it has you, and it has you good. You have tried to get free from it and nothing has worked. Christ can free you from it.

Maybe you have been dabbling in the occult. Maybe it is one of the things that I mentioned earlier. Maybe it is something I have not mentioned at all. Whatever it is, Jesus Christ will transform you if you will come to Him. But you must ask for His forgiveness, and He will give it to you. You can believe in the same Jesus that the woman believed in and you can be forgiven of all of your sin.

Sadly, you might be reading this book and thinking, “I don’t need God. I am a good person. Look at the life that I have built. Look at the business that I have built. Look at my family and the money that I have made.” And you go around in life swaggering and boasting, thinking you have done it all. What is it going to take to bring you to your senses? To realize that the heart that pumps blood into your body right now beats by the grace of God? That the breath that you draw into your lungs right now is a gift to you from God? That those hands that you work with, and that brain you think with, are gifts to you from God?

I just pray that you will see your need for God. I pray that you will see that eternity is at stake. I pray that you will see that these are the most serious matters there are. More important than anything else is where you will spend eternity when you leave this earth.

**DON’T WAIT! DO IT NOW!**

You say, “OK Greg, what do I need to do? How can I get out of this trap? How can I have this change in my life and know that I will go to Heaven when I die?” Here’s how:

1) **You need to admit you are a sinner.** The Bible says, “All have sinned and continually fall short of the glory of God.” You say, “Greg, give me a break. I mean, some people are really sinful. I haven’t sinned as much as some people have.” That may be true. But listen to this, God does not grade on the curve. One sin is enough to keep you out of Heaven.

9. Romans 3:23 (AMP)
Bible says, “For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God’s laws.”\textsuperscript{10} Every one of us has sinned. So let’s stop excusing it or blaming it on others.

2) \textbf{You need to realize that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for your sin.} No one has ever loved you like Jesus loves you. The Bible says, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”\textsuperscript{11} Jesus said, “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”\textsuperscript{12} Christ died for you because He loves you. You say, “Well, that is a nice thing.” But it is not enough to know that Jesus died for you. You need to respond to it. You need to believe in Him.

3) \textbf{You need to repent of your sin.} What does that mean? The word repent means to change your direction. Turn around in life. The Bible says, God “commands all people everywhere to repent.” Stop rationalizing your sin.\textsuperscript{13} Turn from it and be forgiven.

4) \textbf{You need to receive Jesus Christ into your life.} You see, being a Christian is not just knowing about God. It is knowing God. It is having Christ live in you so you will never be alone again. Jesus says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in.”\textsuperscript{14} Jesus wants to come into your life right now and be your Savior, your Lord, and your Friend. But you have to ask Him in. He will not force His way into your life.

Now listen. If someone came over to your home and was knocking at your door and you didn’t answer, do you think after a while they would get the hint? To make it even more awkward, let’s say you have a glass pane in your door so they can see you and you can see them. They are knocking. They see you. “Hey,” they call. You are just going about your business. You don’t wave back. You think, “I’ll just ignore them. Maybe they’ll go away.” By not opening the door, you are leaving it closed in their face. After a while, that person would get the hint and leave.

\begin{footnotes}

\footnotetext[10]{James 2:10 (NLT)}
\footnotetext[11]{Romans 5:8 (NKJV)}
\footnotetext[12]{John 3:16 (NKJV)}
\footnotetext[13]{Acts 17:30 (NIV)}
\footnotetext[14]{Revelation 3:20 (NKJV)}
\end{footnotes}
Here is Jesus. He is knocking. But you are saying, “He will just keep knocking. I will get around to Jesus. I will believe in God later in life when I am old. But I want to have fun first.”

Here is the problem: every time you hear the gospel and you say no to it, your heart gets a little bit harder. It gets a little more calloused. The Bible says, “Whoever remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy.”\textsuperscript{15} That means every time you don’t respond appropriately, you can be a little more removed—a little more calloused.

“If you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.”\textsuperscript{16}

It is time to open the door. It is time to say, “All right, Jesus. Come into my life. Be my Savior. Be my Lord. I don’t understand it all. I don’t get it all. But I believe in You.” Will you do that?

5) One last thing. You need to do it now! Don’t say, “I will do it later.” What if there is no later for you? What if this were your last opportunity to come to Jesus? Give up your excuses and follow Jesus. That is all we hide behind—excuses. Let go of your excuses. Do it now. The Bible says, “The ‘right time’ is now. Today is the day of salvation.”\textsuperscript{17} Right now is your time to believe in Jesus and have your life changed for time and eternity.

Would you like Jesus Christ to come into your life? Are you tired of feeling trapped? Would you like to get rid of that loneliness, emptiness, guilt, and fear of death? It can happen for you right now by calling out to Christ.

You say, “How can I call out to Christ? Do you have His number?” You can call out to Him right now through prayer. He will hear your prayer wherever you are. This is a prayer where you are asking Jesus to come into your life. So pray this now.

\begin{quote}
Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. But I know that You are the Savior who died on the cross for my sin. I am sorry for these sins and I turn from them now. I ask You to come into my life and be my Savior and be my Lord and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{15} Proverbs 29:1 (NIV)
\textsuperscript{16} Hebrews 3:15 (NASB)
\textsuperscript{17} 2 Corinthians 6:2 (NLT)
be my God. I choose to follow You now, from this moment forward. Thank You for calling me and loving me and accepting me. In Your name, I pray. Amen.

Did you just pray that prayer and mean it? Did you feel something? Sometimes people do. They feel a great peace sweep over them. Sometimes it is a great joy. But if you are like me, you felt nothing. Listen, this is not about your emotional response. This is about what God has done for you. And if you prayed that prayer and meant it, Jesus Christ Himself has come to take residence in your heart. And you won’t regret it.

*To learn more about what it means to know God and follow Jesus Christ, visit know KnowGod.org.*