

God's Plan for Your Salvation

The Privilege God's Invitation to You

I can remember, as a seven-year-old, going to my grandparents' house for a week. Mom and Dad bought a ticket, gave me some spending money, put me on a Greyhound bus, and told me not to talk to strangers or get off the bus until I saw my grandma out the window. They made it very clear to me that my destiny was Ralls, Texas.

God has done the same for you. He has placed you on a journey. He has a destiny for your life (and you'll be glad to know it's not Ralls, Texas).

"For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ"
(1 Thessalonians 5:9, NRSV).

According to the Bible, God's destiny for your life is salvation. Your intended destination is heaven. God has done exactly what my parents did. He has purchased your passage. He has equipped you for the journey. God loves you so much that he wants you to be with him forever.

The choice, however, is up to you. Even though he stands at the door with ticket paid and pocket money for the trip...many choose to go in directions other than the one God intends. That is the problem.

Our Problem: SIN (We're on the Wrong Bus)

When my parents gave me the ticket and told me which bus to board, I believed them and did what they said. I trusted them. I knew they loved me, and I knew they knew more than I did...so I got on board.

Becoming a Christian is getting on board with Christ. Jesus stands at the door of the bus and says, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."* (John 14:6 NKJV). Unfortunately, not all accept his invitation. I know I didn't the first time he invited. I spent some time on the wrong bus.

There are many buses, each of them promising to take you to happiness. There is the bus of pleasure, possessions, power, and passion. I saw a bus called *party* and got on board. It was full of people laughing and carousing; they seemed to be enjoying a nonstop party. It was quite some time before I learned they had to be loud to cover up all the pain inside.

The word for getting on the wrong bus is *sin*. Sin is when we say, *I'll go my way instead of God's way*. Right in the middle of the word sin is the word I. Sin is when we say, *I'll do what I want, no matter what God says*. Only God can fulfill our needs. Sin is the act of going to everyone but God for what only God can give. Am I the only one who has spent time on the wrong bus? No. Some buses are more violent than others. Some rides are more lengthy than others but:

"All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way"
(Isaiah 53:6, NASB)

"If we say that we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves, and refusing to accept the truth"
(1 John 1:8, TLB)

We're sinners, every one of us, in the same sinking boat with everybody else"
(Romans 3:20, MSG)

To board the wrong bus is a serious mistake. Sin breaks our relationship with God. We were intended to journey with him. But when we are on a different bus headed the wrong direction, we feel far from God. This is why life can seem so cruddy. We aren't fulfilling our destiny.

Sin not only breaks our relationship with God, it also hampers our relationships with others. Can you imagine taking a long trip to the wrong place with a busload of people? With time, everyone gets cranky. Nobody likes the trip. The journey is miserable.

We try to cope with the problems by therapy or recreation or prescriptions. But nothing helps. The Bible says:

"There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death"
(Proverbs 16:25, NLT)

You see, the end result of sin is death... spiritual death. *"The wages of sin,"* Paul writes, *"is death..."* (Romans 6:23, NIV). Spend a life on the wrong bus headed in the wrong direction, and you'll end up in the wrong place. You'll end up in hell. Not because God wants you in hell. His plan is for you in heaven. Your destiny is heaven. He'll do anything to get you to heaven, with one exception. There is one thing he won't do. He won't force you. The decision is yours. But he has done everything else. Let me show you what I mean.

The Solution: GRACE (Go to the Right Bus)

If the problem is sin and all have sinned, what can you do? Well, you can go to church, but that won't make you a Christian. Just like going to a rodeo doesn't make you a cowboy, going to church doesn't make you a Christian. You could work really hard to please God. You could do a lot of good stuff, give away a lot of things... the only problem with that is that you don't know how many good things you have to do. Or you could compare yourself with others: "I may be bad, but at least I'm better than Hitler." The problem with comparisons is that other people aren't the standard; God is!

So what are you going to do? If you aren't saved by going to church or doing good works or by comparing yourself to others, how are you saved? The answer is simple: Go to the right bus.

"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, NIV)

Note what God did: "... *He gave his only Son.*" This is how he dealt with your sin. Imagine it this way. Suppose you are found guilty of a crime. You are in a courtroom in front of the judge, and he sentences you to death for your crime. His sentence is just. You are guilty, and the punishment for your crime is death. But suppose that the judge is your father. He knows the law; he knows your crime demands death. But he knows love; he knows that he loves you too much to let you die. So in a wonderful act of love, he stands and removes his robe and stands by your side and says, "I'm going to die in your place."

That is what God did for you. The wages of sin is death. Heaven's justice demands a death for your sin. Heaven's love, however, can't bear to see you die. So here is what God did. He stood and removed his heavenly robes. He came to earth to tell us that he would die for us. He would be our Savior. And that is what he did.

"God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins... God put on him the wrong who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God" (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21, MSG)

The Response: TRUST (Getting on the Right Bus)

What does God want you to do? He wants you to get on his bus. How is this done? Three simple steps: admit, agree, accept.

1. **Admit** that God has not been first place in your life, and ask him to forgive your sins.

"If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong" (1 John 1:9, NLT)

2. **Agree** that Jesus died to pay for your sins and that he rose from the dead and is alive today.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9, NIV)

“Salvation is found in no one else [Jesus], for there is no other name by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NIV)

3. **Accept** God’s free gift of salvation. Don’t try to earn it.

“For 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, NIV)

“To all who received him, he gave the right to become children of God. All they needed to do was to trust him to save them. All those who believe this are reborn!—not a physical rebirth... but from the will of God” (John 1:12,13, TLB).

Jesus says, *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in...”* (Revelation 3:20, NIV)

With all of my heart, I urge you to accept God’s destiny for your life. I urge you to get on board with Christ. According to the Bible, “Jesus is the only One who can save people. His name is the only power in the world that has been given to save people. We must be saved through him” (Acts 4:12, NCV).

Would you let him save you? This is the most important decision you will ever make. Why don’t you give your heart to him right now? **Admit** your need. **Agree** with his work. **Accept** his gift. Go to God in prayer and tell him, I am a sinner in need of grace. *I believe that Jesus died for me on the cross. I accept your offer of salvation.* It’s a simple prayer with eternal results.

Your Response

I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God. I want him to be the Lord of my life.

Signed

Date

Once you've placed your faith in Christ, I urge you to take three steps. You'll find them easy to remember. Just think of these three words. They each start with a "b": *baptism*, *Bible*, and *belonging*.

Baptism demonstrates and celebrates our decision to follow Jesus. The water of baptism symbolizes God's grace. Just as water cleanses the body, so grace cleanses the soul. Jesus said, "*Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved. . .*" (Mark 16:16, NCV). When the apostle Paul became a believer, he was asked this question: "Now, why wait any longer: Get up, be baptized, and wash your sins away, trusting in him to save you" (Acts 22:16, NCV). Paul responded by being baptized immediately. You can, too.

Bible reading brings us face to face with God. God reveals himself to us through his word by the Holy Spirit. "*Let the teaching of Christ live in you richly*" (Colossians 3:16, NCV).

Belonging to a church reinforces your faith. A Christian without a church is like a baseball player without a team or a soldier without an army. You aren't strong enough to survive alone. "*You should not stay away from the church meetings, as some are doing, but you should meet together and encourage each other*" (Hebrews 10:25, NCV).

These three steps—baptism, Bible reading, and belonging to a church—are essential steps in your faith.

I pray that you'll accept this great gift of salvation. Believe me, this is not only the most important decision you'll ever make, it's also the greatest decision you'll ever make. There's no higher treasure than God's gift of salvation.