



EDITORS:

Chia Poh Fang, Amos Khan, Khan Hui Neon, Leslie Koh

DESIGN & LAYOUT: Felix Xu

COVER & CONTENT PHOTOS:

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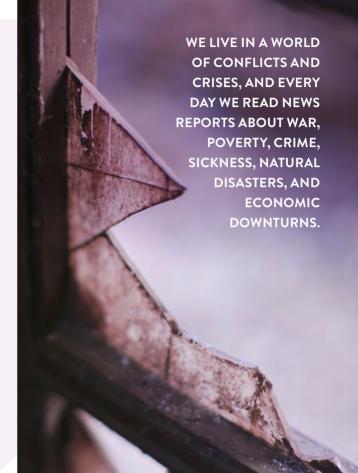
IF ONLY

If only the world was perfect. If only there were no evil, no disease, and no natural calamities. If only we could all live in peace, free from conflict in our families and communities. If only we didn't have to worry about food, clothing, and shelter, or about losing our jobs and ability to provide for our families.

Unfortunately, the world is far from perfect.

There is so much that is wrong around us. Some problems are natural, others very much manmade. We live in a world of conflicts and crises, and every day we read news reports about war, poverty, crime, sickness, natural disasters, and economic downturns.

Many of us face trouble in our personal lives, too. Some of us struggle with broken relationships, illness, or addictions. Or we may be weighed down by practical worries, heavy



responsibilities, and burdensome commitments. That's when we wonder: What's wrong with the world? Why is life so difficult? Why can't my life be easier?

And yet we know it can be better. We see glimpses of perfection and goodness around us. We read of peaceful times and hear of people leading happy, trouble-free lives, or we ourselves may have experienced such bliss before. That makes it even more frustrating, doesn't it? Knowing that things can be better, yet seeing that they aren't.

Perhaps that's why you have picked up this booklet. At the end of the day, what all of us need is hope: hope that there is a way out of our troubles, hope for a solution to our problems, and hope of a better life to come.

FINDING HOPE

Can we share with you something that has

helped us answer some of these questions—and which has also given us hope? You don't have to accept everything we say—we just ask you to give us a few minutes of your time, to read and consider what we have to share, and to think about it. Ultimately, only you can decide if what

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we're sharing makes sense to you, although we honestly believe that it can make a big difference in your life.

Earlier, we asked ourselves what's wrong with the world.

Many people believe that decay is a natural process—all things inevitably degenerate and fall apart over time. This is in line with the concept that the universe was created as the result of a natural occurrence called the Big Bang, and that human beings came about from evolution, a natural process. Others believe that while the world may have been created by a divine power

or supernatural being, it has been left to its own devices, free to determine its own course.

The Bible, on which the Christian faith is based, offers a different explanation. It tells us that there is only one God, and that this God formed the universe, the earth, all living creatures, and human beings. But that's not the end of the Bible's story of creation. This Creator God also seeks a relationship with mankind: after creating human beings, he continued to relate to them and take care of them. He placed the first man and woman-Adam and Eve-in a beautiful garden filled with many good things that they could eat, allowed them to roam freely, and often met and spoke with them.

Why? Because God created us to have a loving relationship with him. Like parents who have a child because they seek to enjoy the child's companionship, God is pleased when we live in his presence. That's why he created



human beings with feelings and emotions, and the desire and ability to love and be loved—characteristics that reflect his own attributes. For us to love truly, we need to act rightly. Hence, God also created men and women with an instinct to do what is morally and ethically right, reflecting his own nature as a good, holy, and just God.

Because God is good, the world he made was good. Mankind had a good relationship with God and with each other, and did not have to worry about growing sick or dying.

Then it all went wrong.

INTRODUCING SIN

A good parent would want his child to love him back voluntarily, not out of duty or because the child is forced to. The ideal parent-child relationship has both sides choosing to love each other. They express their love, however, in different ways: the parent shows his love for the child by nurturing, protecting, and taking care of the child, while the child loves him back by obeying him and doing things that please the parent.

God wanted them to love him out of their own free will. That's the kind of relationship God wants with us. When he created Adam and Eve, he put in them a natural instinct to be good, but more importantly, he gave them the freedom to

decide whether they wanted to love him or not. He wanted them to love him out of their own free will. In the garden where they lived, this option came in the form of a tree. Adam and Eve were expressly told that they could eat from any other tree except this one; it gave them the option to obey or defy God.

Unfortunately, they chose to disobey their Creator. They did the one thing that God told

them not to do—eat the fruit of that very tree. (It's popularly thought to be an apple, but the Bible doesn't actually say that!) God had warned them that if they ate the fruit, they would die. But they disobeyed him anyway. As a result, Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world.

Sin means "missing the mark"—missing God's perfect standard. When Adam and Eve

remained obedient to God, it pleases him. But when they decided to disobey him by eating the fruit, they were essentially rejecting God's authority. Worse still, this decision affected not only them, but succeeding generations of mankind as

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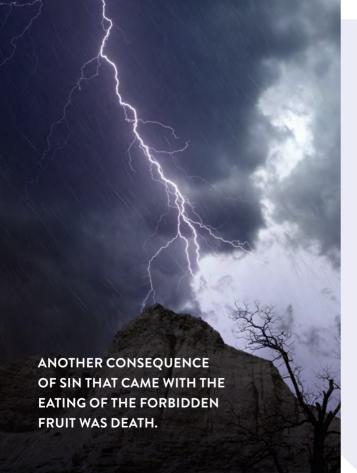
well. The couple's children took on their parents' attitude of rebellion, doing whatever they wanted—and not according to God's standard.

Mankind began doing what was morally and ethically wrong, as they didn't feel they needed to answer to God for their actions.

As a result, like a disobedient child who keeps rebelling and distances himself from his parents, human beings destroyed the perfect relationship they had with God, and with each other. They grew further from God. Even though he continued to love them, they refused to draw close.

Today, we see evidence of this in the broken relationships we have with God and each other. Instead of love, security, and trust, we experience fear, anger, hatred, and bitterness. We see people struggling against God and other forms of leadership and authority, and people hating and ill-treating one another.

Another consequence of sin that came with the eating of the forbidden fruit was death. God had warned Adam and Eve that if they ate from the



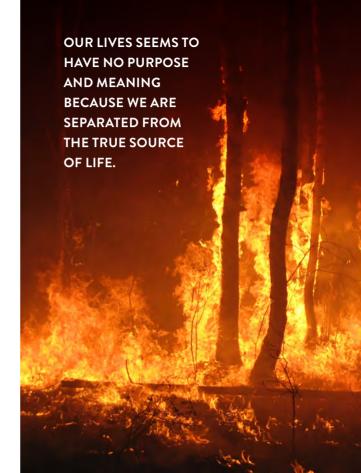
tree, they would die. Why? Because he knew that when they decided to rebel against him, they would destroy their perfect communion with him, and separate themselves from God, the source of eternal life. It was as if they had pulled the plug of an electric device out of the power socket—without connection to the source of electricity, they had lost power.

This death would be both physical and spiritual. Because we are physical beings affected by sin, our bodies are imperfect and will eventually break down and die. But because we are also spiritual beings, we have a soul—and this soul will be separated eternally from God. Being rebellious and sinful, we cannot return to the presence of a holy, just, and righteous God. Just as God held Adam and Eve accountable for their decision to disobey him in the garden, we too will be held accountable for our own sins. These are the rules, or law, that he laid down for mankind.

The breakdown of the relationship also affects our present lives. Like someone who is lost, we feel purposeless and helpless. Many of us go through life with a sense of hopelessness. While we may not be fully aware of the reason for our despair, deep down we feel a loss—a result of being estranged from God. Our lives seem to have no purpose and meaning because we are separated from the true source of life.

This is what's wrong with the world today. God made it perfect, but Adam and Eve chose to sin, and as a result, they were separated from God and held accountable for their actions and attitude. We do the same today, rejecting God and disregarding his perfect standards, and will also face the consequences of our actions.

The Bible puts this in simple terms. "For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard", it observes, so "the wages of sin is [eternal] death" (Romans 3:23; 6:23).



Does this mean we are doomed? Is there anything we can do?

FIXING THE PROBLEM

Since mankind first broke away from God, we have been trying to fix the problem of sin and its effects. We try to prevent disease and delay death with science and medicine. We try to keep society morally upright by enforcing the rule of law, and teaching people ethical behaviour. We try to prevent conflict and war, and to foster peace and unity between neighbours, communities, and nations. And we try to assuage our guilt and win favour with the divine by doing good deeds and observing religious codes.

But, as you can see, we haven't really succeeded, have we? We haven't managed to prevent disease and death, nor stop people from committing crimes and going to war. Many of us

still struggle to find meaning in life. We are like lost people looking for love and security.

Why? Because, at the end of the day, our hearts are flawed. We have lost the ability to do

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the right thing consistently and perfectly, even though we try very hard to. Even when we want to be good, we seem to gravitate naturally towards the opposite. We find it easier to be angry and vengeful than to be forgiving and compassionate. We find

it more natural to follow our own desires and put our own interests first, rather than those of others.

How did this happen? Well, the controlling power of sin is a bit like that of drug addiction. It dominates us and forces us to keep doing wrong, even when we don't want to. Sin influences our decisions and actions, and makes it much harder to do right and easier to do wrong. It becomes more natural to rebel against God than to obey him.

So how can we change our hearts? How can we be put right again with God when sin prevents us from doing right consistently? We can't do it on our own. But God can.

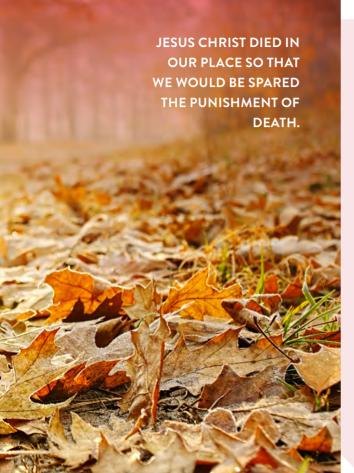
He can because he is the Creator and is in control of everything. God is the only one who can wipe our slates clean and remove all traces of sin, so that we can be reconciled to him and live in full harmony with him. He is the only one who can restore our hearts, so that we are no longer under the control of sin and death. Although he can, but would he?

And here's the amazing part: God wants to put us right with him. Yes, even though mankind was the one who disobeyed him and continues to do so, God wants to reconcile humanity with

himself. Remember our comparison of God to a loving, caring parent? Well, he is like a parent who has never stopped loving his dearest child, even though this child has run away and no longer acknowledges him as father. Because he is a merciful God, he wants to forgive and welcome us back into his arms.

But there's a slight problem. You see, God, being righteous and holy, can't just close a blind eye to our sin and say, "Forget it, it is okay." He cannot excuse our sin and pretend it didn't happen. If God were to simply gloss over our sin, it would betray his very nature as a good and holy God.

So this is the dilemma: God wants to rescue us from the controlling power of sin, but being a righteous, holy God, he cannot simply spare us the punishment we deserve for our actions and attitude. He has, however, provided a way out for us.



SPARED FROM DEATH

Think of the punishment we face as a debt that we owe to God because of our sin. (It's a lot more than that, of course, but this description helps explain how it works.) Because we are naturally sinful, this debt is too big for us to pay by ourselves.

But God provided a way. While his law requires man to pay the debt for his sin, it also allows for someone else to pay this debt on our behalf. This person, however, cannot have a debt of his own; it has to be someone who has no sin to account for.

This is exactly what happened. God sent his own son, Jesus Christ, to pay this debt. He died in our place so that we would be spared the punishment of death. About 2,000 years ago, Jesus came to earth in the form of a human being. He was crucified on a cross—a sentence for condemned criminals—and buried in a tomb after he died.

The sacrifice was possible because Jesus was both divine and human. As God's son, he was good and perfect, and therefore didn't have to account for any sin of his own. At the same time, because he died as man, he represented us fully in taking the punishment. The Bible says this about Jesus: "But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing" (Galatians 3:13).

Since Jesus died, it would seem that he did not escape the consequence of sin, which is death. So how did he rescue us from the curse, or punishment, of the law?

Three days after he died, Jesus rose to life, appearing to hundreds of witnesses before he was taken back up to heaven. His resurrection shows that he had effectively reversed the impact of sin: sin brought death to man, but now, Jesus had conquered death. This showed

that his death on our behalf was accepted by God.

"So how does that help me?" you may ask. The Bible tells us that if we accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness by believing that he died on our behalf, we will be pardoned of our sin so that we can be reconciled with God. Because we will no longer be guilty, we will be able to enjoy a perfect relationship with God—just as he had intended from the beginning.

What's more, this relationship will last forever. Nothing will separate us from God—not even death.

This is the hope that we can have if we believe that Jesus came to earth, died, and rose to life, and if we follow and acknowledge him as our Lord and Saviour. The Bible says: "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).



ACCEPTING GOD'S OFFER

The Father of Jesus is not only a good, loving God, but also a God of grace. This means that there are no conditions or requirements to receive the gift of his son and the pardon for your sin. You don't have to be "good", nor do you have to earn salvation with your own effort; you just have to rely on God to save you. All you have to do is to admit to God that you have sinned and need his forgiveness; believe that Jesus came to die in your place so that you can be put right with God; and follow him as your Lord and Saviour. It's as simple as that!

If it helps, think of God's salvation as a gift: it's offered to you with no conditions, but you need to acknowledge the giver and take a deliberate step to accept it.

The Bible says: "If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9).

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Before deciding whether you want to accept God's gift of salvation, you might be asking: what happens after?

When you turn to Jesus, several wonderful things happen.

First, you will receive God's forgiveness for your sin. By paying your debt, Jesus reconciles you to God, so that you can be fully accepted by him. What's more, he promises to make you his own son or daughter and now you can enter confidently into his presence, like Adam and Eve once did in the garden. Like a child who has the full assurance of a parent's loving acceptance, you can live secure in the knowledge that God loves you for who you are, no matter what you have done in the past or how imperfect you may be because Jesus' death has paid for all your sins.



At the same time, he will also help you change your ways and learn to live according to his holy standard.

This relationship will go on forever—even after we die. This means that you will no longer need

What all this means is that you will have hope. Life will no longer be aimless and meaningless. to fear death. You can live with the assurance that physical death will bring you directly into God's presence—a place of perfection.

The Bible also tells us that Jesus will return one day. When that happens, our

physical bodies will also be resurrected, like he was, and they will be made perfect by God. He has promised to save our whole being, not just our souls.

In fact, this relationship starts now, even in this life.

Becoming a Christian does not necessarily mean that all your problems will disappear immediately. You will still have to deal with the challenges of daily life and other struggles that arise from living in a broken, sinful world. But there is a difference now: you can face all these challenges with God, who has promised to stay with you by living in your heart. You will be able to go to him for help anytime, anywhere, and he will be walking alongside you on life's journey, encouraging, strengthening, reminding, and helping you to become the person he wants you to be. You can now lean on God who created the world and remains in full control of events.

What all this means is that you will have hope. Life will no longer be aimless and meaningless; instead, you will live with assurance, purpose, and the promise of eternal life after physical death.



Are you ready to follow Jesus?

If you are, find a quiet place where you can tell God personally that you accept his offer of forgiveness by believing in his son Jesus, that he died for you on the cross and rose to life, and that you are ready to accept him as your Lord and Saviour. God is always listening, so all you have to do is to speak to him as if he was in front of you. If it is possible, find a Christian friend to pray with you and be a witness.

You will find a prayer below which takes you through the main points. The words are only a guide; what is important is your heart—how sincere you are—for that is all that matters to God.

God, I know I have sinned against you. I believe that Jesus is your Son, that he died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins, and that he rose from the dead to prove it.

Now I accept your offer of full forgiveness and eternal life. I accept Jesus as your gift for my salvation, and I want to follow him.



After you have said the prayer, the next thing you can do is to start living your new life with God, growing in your relationship with him. Allow us to suggest the following:

Or, if you're still thinking about whether you want to believe in Jesus, don't worry. We encourage you to find out more about God and Jesus, so that you can make a decision that you are comfortable with. You can still do the things below, which will help you discover more about God.



Start praying. As God's child, you can talk to him anytime. He's always listening, and he loves to converse with you. You can tell him about your troubles, fears, and needs, and share your worries and your joys. Spend time talking to God every day, and you will find yourself growing closer to him.



Start reading the Bible. The Bible is God's message to the world; it contains everything that God wants us to know, including his plan of salvation and how he wants us to live as his forgiven children. However, you may require some help in reading and understanding God's Word. Ask a Christian friend or local church on how to start.



Start attending a church. Becoming a Christian means you can join a community of believers who share the same faith and hope in Jesus, allowing you to draw encouragement from others and encourage them in turn as you worship God and learn more about him. All of us are forgiven sinners, walking together on the same journey of faith with Jesus. Therefore, if possible, try joining a church. Ask a Christian friend to take you to one.

For information on our resources, please write to the office nearest you from the list below, or go to **ourdailybread.org/locations** for the complete list of offices.

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