

Invitation for Seniors

Set in our ways.

We older folks tend to be “set in our ways.” We like the motto, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it!” How often do we use that as an excuse for not trying something new? For not wanting even to think about making a change that would take us out of our comfort zone?

It would be foolish to sit and relax in my old, comfortable chair while my house burns down around me — to tell myself, “If I just ignore those annoying cries of ‘Fire!’ and tune them out, I’m sure I’ll be okay.” Or to be like the man who falls off a cliff and, halfway down, says to himself, “I’m okay so far.” Optimism cannot cancel the fact of a fire or the law of gravity. Wishful thinking doesn’t cut it.

Today, for all of us, there is both bad news and good news. First, the bad news:

God, our Creator, has established rules for human behavior — not suggestions, but requirements. The Ten Commandments are some of those laws. When we disobey God’s laws, we sin.

When you study God’s word, the Bible, you find these truths taught there:

- Everyone is a sinner. That includes you and me. *As it is written: “There is no one who is righteous, not even one...” (Romans 3:10)*
- Sin is punishable by death. *For the wages of sin is death ... (Romans 6:23a)* Not just physical death, but spiritual death, forever. The name for that punishment is “Hell.”

So the bad news is that sinners, including you and I, deserve the punishment of Hell. And we cannot avoid it by being “good enough.”

Now for the good news:

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

Which will it be — Heaven or Hell? Keep reading.

God loves you. He created you in order to love you, and to give you the joy of loving Him. The destiny He planned for you, long before you were born, is to live with Him forever in Heaven.

Hell exists. It isn’t a place; it is simply being without God, separated from His love, forever. God does not send anyone to Hell; those who reject Him thereby choose Hell for themselves.

“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’” This is written twice in the Bible’s book of Psalms. Another fool is the person who “believes in God” but chooses to think that God is not important.

Please believe this: **The man or woman who chooses to live without God will very likely die without God.** And dying without God is tragic, foolish, and totally unnecessary.

You are invited. God urges you to join Him and His family in Heaven for a wonderful, forever celebration of Peace, Love, and Beauty, better than any party you could ever imagine.

Yes, it’s true. God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — invites you, when you come to the end of your life on earth, to join Him in His home in Heaven. He wants you to join His family, to be His own adopted child, and to live joyfully with Him and His other children forever. He invites you to enter into that relationship now, with all of its blessings.

For many years, when I was young, I was afraid of dying, because I knew I would go to Hell. I had lied, stolen, broken other laws, disobeyed my parents, and done quite a number of wrong things. I believed sinners go to Hell, and I knew I was damned. Mostly I avoided thinking about it — after all, I still had many years ahead of me.

For years I lived with this burden of guilt and fear, until one day I learned the truth, in a class where God’s word was being taught: God does not want me to go to Hell. My sins deserve punishment, but Jesus took my punishment for me. He suffered and died on the cross to pay for all of my sins — also for yours, and for everyone’s. I am forgiven! And you are forgiven. Hallelujah!

Who says so? God’s word, the Holy Bible, says so, in several places, like this:

God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:4)

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn

the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17)

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

By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of [doing good] works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

What did I have to do so that my sins would be forgiven? What do you have to do for your sins (many or few) to be forgiven? Nothing. Jesus did it all, for both of us.

God is saying to me, and also to you, “Please say you want to live with me forever in Heaven. I love you. I want you to be with me. That is the special destiny I have always planned for you. That’s what I created you for. Please say ‘Yes.’”

Is that it? Is that all there is to it? Just tell God, ‘Yes,’ and then go on with our lives as we have been? Well, no, not if we really mean it. Our “Yes” has to be “Yes!” — not “Yes, but ... “

We can’t come into God’s family on our terms — it has to be on God’s terms. If that sounds like there’s a “catch” to it somewhere — there is.

If you had a four-year-old child, and you loved that child, would you want your child to stay that age forever? Or would you rather have him or her grow up to become an amazing adult? Similarly, God loves you just as you are, but He also wants you to become more than you are today; to grow and mature into the beautiful human being He created you to be. This is true, no matter how old you are.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross “justifies” us and makes us eligible to enter God’s Heaven. Saying “Yes” to God’s invitation is the beginning of a process by which He prepares us for our new life there. Preparation is necessary, because without it, we couldn’t enjoy the party.

God will prepare you and me for Heaven. He will clean us up — help us stop sinning, little by little, making us more and more like Jesus. And He will give us a new outfit to wear to the party — “the righteousness of Christ.” That seems like a lot to sign up for, but relax — God’s Holy Spirit will do

the hard work. We just have to show up, and keep following His lead.

You do need to do something to get the process going. Try this: say a short prayer (and mean it), asking for God’s help. Maybe something like, “Lord, help me get started in the right direction.”

You also need to be in church. If you don’t have a church, ask your spouse or a friend where to go. If you’re in a church that doesn’t teach the Bible is God’s word, find a different one. In a good church, two important things will happen: you’ll hear God’s word preached and taught, and you’ll experience the beauty and encouragement of God’s love being shared in a loving church family. I know, I’ve been there. I’m still there.

I promise you, if you accept God’s invitation and start going God’s way, guided by His word and the Holy Spirit, rather than your own way, you will know after a while that you did the right thing.

This, from Proverbs, is pure, practical wisdom: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)*

Our merely human understanding is often faulty. The following proverbial warning is given twice: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. (Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25)*

And Jesus promised: *“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)*

There is no better way to go through life than to be “yoked” in tandem with Jesus. He knows what to do, and He will pull most of the weight.

And God’s word, written by Paul, also promises: *I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 1:6)*

I am praying that one day, according to God’s timing, you and I will celebrate together in the place He has prepared for us, with Him, forever. Amen.