

An Invitation to Christ

by Rev. Wesley Nelson

When I think about how to become a Christian, I am reminded of a runaway farm horse that came racing down the road toward me. When he saw me, he dashed off the road and got tangled in a huge bundle of old rusty wire. The more he struggled to free himself, the more tightly he became tangled. Finally he lay helpless, with wires all around him, breathing heavily and snorting with frustration.

Several people tried to untangle him, but as soon as anyone came close, the horse resumed his struggling. Then a man who loved and understood horses arrived on the scene. For a long time he talked quietly to the horse from a distance. Slowly, as he talked he came nearer. When he got close enough he began to pat the horse gently. Soon the horse grew calm enough to permit the man to begin cutting away the wire with a pair of pliers.

As long as the horse trusted the man and lay quietly, all went well. But whenever he struggled to help free himself, he only made things worse. Finally the horse gave up and let the man cut away the wires until he was free again. Not only was he free - he was also calm enough to let the man lead him back to his owner.

Life, like this runaway horse, is out of control. Here we are with everything imaginable to entertain us - to make life a paradise.

Yet these things never seem to bring us peace. The world is full of trouble, and most of the trouble is caused by people. Many of us would like to separate ourselves from those who cause the trouble and think of ourselves as being exceptions, but we can't do this. None of us is perfectly good, and probably no one is all bad. It is impossible to draw a sharp line between the good and the bad. We are all tangled up with this troubled world because we are part of it.

As the Bible says, *There is no difference, for all have sinned* (Romans 3:22-23). God has included all of us among the sinners so he can save us from our entanglement and set us free.

Jesus said, *If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed* (John 8:36). We Christians are people who are continually being set free, free to live a satisfying and useful life, free from a troubled conscience, free to be what God intended us to be. Jesus offers us a purpose for living, and he assures us of the freedom to fulfill that purpose. Just like the horse, we must give up the struggle to free ourselves. We must trust Jesus to save us from our entanglement and set us free.

The Bible tells us: It is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Since salvation is a gift from God, it is available to all people on the same basis. It makes no difference what you have done, why you did it, or how bad it was. If you will trust Jesus, he will come to you as the man came to the horse, set you free, forget your past, and lead you back to God. Then he will help you start to live a new, free life.

God has done everything necessary.

God has sent his Son, Jesus, who died for sins and rose again. This is the most important truth about the Christian faith. The Apostle Paul explained it this way: *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures* (I Corinthians 15:3-4).

God has done everything necessary for us to be saved from our entanglement. He did it for us because he knew we were so deeply entangled that we could never save ourselves. We can only trust him and accept by faith what he has done for us. This is what the Bible calls "the good news."

What if we can't believe in God and in Jesus?

In these days it is particularly hard to have faith in God because there are so many things all around us to trust in. God seems unreal. Because he knew how hard it would be, he sent his Holy Spirit to convince us how much we need him and to encourage us to turn to him. If we do not have enough faith, God's Holy Spirit will give us faith. The Holy Spirit gently assures us that God cares, just as the man gently assured the tangled horse that he cared. The Holy Spirit invites us to trust Jesus, just as the man invited the horse to trust him. All we can do is stop struggling and give God a chance.

What does faith in Jesus mean?

Faith in Jesus means to depend on what Jesus has done. We do this by accepting him as our Savior. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God offers us the forgiveness of our sins and new life. He asks us to depend on what Jesus has done rather than on what we can do. He asks us to trust in Jesus rather than in ourselves.

Faith in Jesus means to trust Jesus enough to repent. We do this by turning to God and confessing that we have sinned by trying to live our own lives without him, and asking him to forgive us.

The good news from the Bible is: Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord (Acts 3:19); If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (I John 1:9).

3) Faith in Jesus means to confess Jesus as Lord. We do this by inviting Jesus to take control of our lives and confessing that we recognize him as Lord over all.

We may not fully understand what it will mean to follow him, but we will trust him to show us the way as we go along. Even though we may fail often, God will forgive our failures. He will help us to overcome our temptations and to live useful and satisfying lives.

This is the promise from the Bible: 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).

To believe "in your heart" means that you want to believe that Jesus is risen from the dead even though you may not be able to do so. If you will tell God how hard it is to believe, he will accept you and help you to trust in him.

To put it simply, we become Christians by believing in Jesus.

This means that:

We choose to accept him as our Savior and depend on him rather than on ourselves.

We repent of our sins and ask God to forgive us.

We turn ourselves over to Jesus, confess him as Lord of all, and invite him to take control over us. Then he helps us to believe that he arose from the dead and is able to lead us through our lives.

The Spirit of God helps us make this choice and even helps us to believe and to obey Jesus. He also gives us God's gift of salvation.

Your response to God

One way to respond to God is to pray to him, either in your own words or in the words of the following prayer:

God, I put my faith in what you have done for me through Jesus' death and resurrection. I confess how hard it is for me to believe, but I am trusting you to give me faith.

I confess that I am a sinner, and I repent and ask your forgiveness. I depend on Jesus to save me from my sins and to give me eternal life.

I want to obey Jesus as the Lord of my life. I don't know all that this means, but I will depend on him to show me as I go along. I know I cannot earn the right to be a Christian. I accept this right as a free gift. Thank you that you have forgiven my sins, that you are my heavenly Father, and that you have accepted me as your child. Help me to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. Amen.

If you have just made this decision, welcome to God's family! God has called you and given you the faith to believe in him, and you have responded to his call. Now you are beginning a new life, a life that you have received as a gift from God. You belong to God and he will give you the strength to live this new life by faith. A good promise to remember is: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Romans 10:13).

Since you now belong to God's family, it will be important for you to become acquainted with other members of this family. Find a pastor and some Christian people who will help you begin your new life as a Christian.

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