
Move Your Hand



IN 2001 24-year-old diver Martin Stepanek set an astonishing world record. At the surface, without diving, he held his breath for 8 minutes, 6 seconds. Deep-sea divers can stay down almost indefinitely, as long as they remain hooked into their oxygen line. On the other hand, everyone knows that if we're cut off from a source of air, we will die in minutes.

Look around you today. You and everyone you know struggle with burdens and problems—loneliness, fear, guilt, emptiness, and all the other struggles of life. You try to find happiness, but it slips through your fingers.

Friend, what has happened is that we've all become disconnected from the Source of everything we need. We've been in trouble on this earth ever since our line to the Source of all happiness, peace, and joy was cut. How did it happen, and how can we be reconnected?

Thoughts to Remember:

♦ Imagine a time on Earth when no one was ever sick and no one ever died or felt sad. No one ever felt fear or depression or frustration. Today, every person who is ever born eventually gets sick and dies. Everyone who lives on this earth experiences grief, anxiety, guilt, and emptiness. How can we have a life of peace and joy, a life without having to say goodbye to friends and loved ones in death?

♦ When Adam and Eve chose Satan over God in the Garden of Eden, they experienced fear, anxiety, insecurity, guilt, emptiness, and loneliness. Now we live on a planet in rebellion against God, and we all experience these terrible feelings. **"But your iniquities [sins] have separated you from your God"** (Isaiah 59:2).

♦ Some people try to eliminate the emotional consequences of sin with alcohol, drugs, premarital sex, love of money, and other things. This only makes our feelings and our situation worse. Since the problem of sin and its results is within us, we need help from above.

♦ While Satan constantly tries to win people and put them under his control, God promised to send a Messiah—and He kept His word. Jesus came to live with us to show us the love of the Father and to be our example, and then He died for us so that our connection to the Source—God—could be restored. God's plan is to eliminate condemnation, to bridge the gap caused by sin, to take away our loneliness by restoring our relationship with Him.

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• To bring understanding, God gave Israel the symbol of a lamb. When an Israelite sinned, he was to bring a lamb to the sanctuary and sacrifice it. In this way, he was reminded that Jesus in His mercy would one day die on the cross so people's sins could be forgiven and their relationship with God restored. Each time he sacrificed a lamb for his sin, he was reminded of Jesus' sacrifice for him. "Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29).

• Jesus Christ invites, "...Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). Christ never sinned, but He accepted the guilt of our sins. The salvation He offers us is all because of what He did for us on the cross. It's not based on our worthiness or our works. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). But if salvation is given to us by grace, through faith, then what is it we're supposed to do?

■ **Accept** our condition as a sinner.
 ■ **Believe** in Christ as the Son of God, and in His death for us. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).
 ■ **Confess** our sins to God. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (John 1:9).
 ■ **Decide** to follow Him. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and dine with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20). "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19).
 • Jesus clearly wants to restore a loving relationship with us and to free us from sin, pain, and death. What a prospect!

• As a priest, Martin Luther endured penances over and over in a desperate effort to rid himself of terrible feelings of guilt and hopelessness over his sinful condition. One day he began to study the Bible, and he discovered Romans. He read: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Peace finally flooded his soul. But Satan did not leave him alone. One night Satan appeared to Luther in a dream and unrolled a scroll of all Luther's sins. Satan said, "Are these your sins?" Luther replied, "Yes." Satan asked, "Is death the wages of sin?" Luther answered, "Yes." The devil said, "You must die." Luther noticed that Satan's hand was covering some words on the scroll. He said, "Move your hand." Satan refused. Luther persisted, "In the name of Christ...move your hand." Satan fled from the name of Christ, and where his hand had been, Luther read on the scroll: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses Martin Luther from all his sins."

• The blood of Christ can cleanse you right now. Maybe you've accepted Christ, but only on the surface. You don't have the assurance of salvation and you long for peace. But Jesus endured torture and abuse and separation from His Father on your behalf. Can you turn from such love?

The "take-home" message for you . . .

Just between you . . . and God:

• Now is the time to give God your heart. Do you want to hang onto your anxiety, your heavy burdens, your sadness and loneliness—or are you ready to turn your life over to Christ and receive peace instead of worry, joy instead of sorrow, forgiveness instead of condemnation, and love instead of loneliness? Let Him do this for you. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

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