

Surprising Facts Series 1

03. It's Still There!

Did you ever carve your initials, along with those of your sweetheart, on a tree? If so, it's likely that your message of love is still there, in spite of the passing years. Long ago God carved His own love message on a tree, on the crossbeam of a Roman instrument of torture, planted on a hill called Calvary. Talk about surprising facts! This is the most surprising fact of all. The great God and ruler of the universe loves us, poor, sinful men, women, and children, so much that He gave His Son, Jesus Christ, the God we call the Son. You've undoubtedly heard this before, but do you really understand what it's all about? What does God's greatest gift of love mean to you personally? Has it changed your life and heart? It can, if you will let it! Read on and find out how.

1. Does God really care about me?

This is what He says: **"Thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee." Isaiah 43:4. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Jeremiah 31:3.**

Answer: God's never-ending love for you and me is far beyond our understanding. He loves you as though you were the only lost soul in the universe. He would have given His life for you or me even if there had been no other sinner to redeem. Try never to forget this fact. You are precious in His sight. He loves you. God cares about you personally. What a fantastic cause for rejoicing!

2. How has God demonstrated His love for us?

"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. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:9, 10.

Answer: Because He loved us so deeply, He was willing to see His only Son suffer and die rather than be separated from you and me for eternity. We will not be able to say that God could have done more for us than He did! Never has there been another demonstration of love so great as the cross.

3. How could He love someone like me?

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

Answer: Certainly not because I earned it or deserved it. Not one of us has earned anything except the wages of sin, which is death (Romans 6:23). But God's love is unconditional. He loves the thieves, adulterers, and murderers. He also loves the selfish, the hypocritical, and the profane blasphemer. But, greatest of all, He loves me! And because He knows that my sins can lead only to misery and death, He wants to save me from my sins. That's why He died. No one

has ever lived that Jesus did not love.

4. What does His death do for me?

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." 1 John 3:1. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." John 1:12.

Answer: Christ died to satisfy the death penalty against me. He was born as a man so He could suffer the kind of death I deserve. Then He offered to give me the credit for what He did. In other words, His sinless life is credited to my account so I can be counted as righteous. His death is accepted by God as full payment for all my past wrongs, and by accepting what He did, as a gift, I am taken into God's own family as His child. It staggers the mind!

Ponder these simple facts for a moment:

> Because of my sins, I am sentenced to death.

> I cannot pay that penalty without losing eternal life, because if I died for my sins, I could not resurrect myself. I would be dead forever.

> I owe something I cannot pay! But a friend comes along, in the person of Jesus, and says, "I will pay. I will die in your place and give you credit for it. You will not have to die for your sins."

> I must accept the offer! Simple, isn't it? I openly acknowledge and accept His death for my sins. The moment I do this, I have become a son or daughter of God!

Jesus' death was payment in full for every sin you could ever commit. When you accept this fabulous gift, you become part of Jesus' personal family.

5. How do I receive Him and pass from death to life?

Just admit three things:

1. I am a sinner. **"All have sinned." Romans 3:23.**

2. I am doomed to die. **"The wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23.**

3. I cannot save myself. **"Without me ye can do nothing." John 15:5.**

Then, believe three things:

1. He died for me. **"That he ... should taste death for every man." Hebrews 2:9.**

2. He forgives me. **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." 1 John 1:9.**

3. He saves me. **"He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." John 6:47.**

Answer: By asking for, believing in, and accepting the great gift of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His life to settle the debt you cannot pay.

6. What must I do in order to obtain this gift of salvation?

"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Romans 3:24. "A man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law." Romans 3:28.

Answer: The only thing I can do is to accept it as a pure gift. My works of obedience will not help me one bit in the justification experience. All who ask for salvation in faith will receive it. The worst reprobate sinner will be accepted on the same basis as the most moral do-gooder. The past does not count. Remember, God loves everyone alike, and forgiveness is for the asking. **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, test any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8, 9.**

Are you drowning in sin? Jesus will rescue you at once if you will ask Him. Jesus' power changes a repulsive sinner into a loving saint.

7. When I join His family through faith, what change does Jesus make in my life ?

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Answer: As Christ is received into my heart, He destroys the old sinful self and actually changes me into a new spiritual creation. The old life of sin now becomes repulsive and undesirable. Joyfully I begin to experience, for the first time, glorious freedom from guilt and condemnation. I begin to see how empty my life has been without Christ. Rather than feeding on husks under the table, I now feast at the banquet of the King. One minute with God provides more happiness than does a lifetime of serving the devil. What an exchange! Why did I wait so long to accept it?

The most valuable gift parents can give their children is to become Christians. No joy on earth can compare to the happiness and joy of a Christian home.

Answer: Many feel that the Christian life will not be a happy one because of restrictions and self-denial. The exact opposite is true. When you accept the love of Jesus, a fantastic exuberance springs up from within. Unbelievable peace and joy permeate your life. Talk about excitement! There is no comparison to the old life of selfishness and failure. Like a bad dream, the painful past fades away, and you experience life "more abundantly," the way God intended it should be.

8. Will this changed life really be happier than the pleasures of 'the old life'?

Jesus said: **"These things have I spoken unto you ... that your joy might be full." John 15:11.**
"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." John 8:36. **"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." John 10:10.**

9. But can I make myself do all the things a Christian should do?

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Galatians 2:20. **"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13.**

Answer: Here is where the greatest miracle of the Christian life is revealed. There is no forcing yourself to be good! What you do as a Christian is the spontaneous outflowing of another Person's life within you. Obedience is the natural response of love in your life. Being born of God, as a new creature, you want to obey Him because His life has become a part of your life. To please someone you love is not a burden, but a delight. **"I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." Psalm 40:8.**

When Jesus enters your life, His miraculous power transforms obedience from a burden to a supreme joy.

10. Do you mean that even the Ten Commandments would not be hard to obey?

"If ye love me, keep my commandments." John 14:15. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." 1 John 5:3. "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected." 1 John 2:5.

Answer: The Bible always ties obedience to a love relationship. It is not hard to phase someone you truly love. Born-again Christians find it no wearying struggle to keep the Ten Commandments. With all past sins covered by His atoning death, my present and future obedience is rooted in His victorious life within me. In fact, because I love Him so deeply for changing my life, I go beyond the requirements of the Ten Commandments. Daily I search the Bible for indications of His will, trying to find more little ways of expressing my love to Him. **"And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." 1 John 3:22.**

Keeping the Ten Commandments in an attempt to earn salvation will result only in sorrow and despair. But the person who has experienced the gift of salvation delights in walking the path of obedience to God's laws.

11. How can I be certain that the commandment-keeping mentioned of God's people in the Bible is not legalism?

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Revelation 14:12. "And they [the saints] overcame him [Satan] by the blood of the lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death." Revelation 12:11.

Answer: Do not mistake obedience for legalism. Legalism is trying to earn salvation by good works. The saints are identified in the Bible as having four characteristics: (1) keeping the commandments, (2) trusting the blood the Lamb, (3) sharing their faith with other and (4) choosing to die rather than to sin. These are the true marks of the person who love with Christ and who has made a life commitment to follow Him.

12. What significant act seals the love relationship with Christ, and what does it symbolize?

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." "That the body of sin might be destroyed." Romans 6:4, 6.

Answer: Baptism symbolizes significant events in the life of the true believer: We are baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three great, infinite Powers are unitedly pledged to work in our behalf if we will co-operate with them. We are buried with Christ in baptism as an emblem of his death. We are raised from the water as an emblem of his resurrection. We are to live as new-born souls, that we may be raised at the last great day. You are to live in newness of life; for you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. **"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and**

your life is hid with Christ in God." Colossians 3:1-3.

If the Christian ceases to love Christ supremely, his religion exists only as restrictive compliance to a set of rules.

13. How can I be certain that the faith and love of my new life in Christ will continue to increase?

"Search the scriptures." John 5:39. "Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17. "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." Colossians 2:6. "I die daily." 1 Corinthians 15:31.

Answer: Prayer and Bible study are absolutely essential to keep our spiritual life growing. His Word constitutes His promises and guidance that I must read daily to nourish the spiritual life. Conversing with Him in prayer opens my mind to a more thrilling and deeper knowledge of His will for me. Daily I am amazed to discover more about His incredible provisions for my growth and happiness.

God has promised never to forsake me; **"Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."** Psalm 55:22; **"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."** Matthew 28:20; **"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."** Hebrews 13:5, 6. to take care of me in health or sickness. **"The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."** Psalm 41:3. and to provide for every need that could possibly develop in my life. **"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."** Matthew 6:31-34.

Just as I received Him by faith and found His promises all-sufficient, I keep on trusting Him for every future need, and He never lets me down. My love for Jesus deepens as I share it with others.

14. Would you like to invite Jesus into your life and experience the new birth? Your Answer:

Your Thought Questions Answered:

1. How could one Man's death pay the penalty for the sins of all mankind? I have lived a terrible life of sin. I am afraid God would have to do something very special to atone for someone so evil.

ANSWER: Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned." Because "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23) and since "all have sinned," therefore "something special" is required for every

person who has been born. Only One whose life is equal to all mankind could die for the sins of the race. Because Jesus is the Creator and Author of all life, the life He laid down was equivalent to the lives of all people who would ever live. Not only did atonement have to be made by One whose life could stand for all other created beings, but the One who died the atoning death had to be able to rise from that death. Why? In order to administer the benefits of the atonement to all who would ask for it in faith. **"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Hebrews 7:25.**

2. If I accept Christ and His forgiveness and then fall again, will He forgive me again?

ANSWER: We can trust God to forgive us again if we are sorry for our sin and confess it. **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." 1 John 1:9.**

3. How can I approach God in my sinful condition? Wouldn't it be better for me to have a priest or minister pray for me?

ANSWER: Since Jesus Christ lived in the flesh and was **"tempted like as we are" Hebrews 4:15**, we have a God who can understand and who desires to be merciful to us. Hebrews 4:16 tells us we can **"come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy."** We may approach God directly through Jesus Christ, without an intermediary; and trusting in His mercy, we may "boldly" come to Him in Jesus name, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." John 14:14. 1 Timothy 2:5 reads: **"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."**

4. Is there anything I can do to help God save me?

ANSWER: No. His plan is wholly of grace, **"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:" Romans 3:24; "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." 4:5;** it is **"the gift of God."** Ephesians 2:8. It is true that as God grants us grace through faith, He also gives us the desire and strength to obey Him. This results in compliance with His laws. So, even this obedience results from God's free grace. Obedience, the service and allegiance of love, is the true test of discipleship and a natural fruit of faith in Jesus Christ.

5. If God forgives my sin and restores me to His family, will that eliminate any future punishment for my sins, or will I still be required to do some kind of penance?

ANSWER: The Scriptures say, **"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1.** Christ paid the full penalty for our transgressions, and those who accept Him in faith owe no works of penance for cleansing, but are already considered "washed" in the blood of the Lamb! Isaiah 43:25 contains a beautiful promise of forgiveness: **"I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."** Micah 7:18, 19 shows the beautiful attitude of the Redeemer-God toward His people: **"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou**

wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

Summary: Place a check by the correct answers.

1. God poured out all heaven in what great gift to man?

- The Bible.
- His church.
- Jesus Christ.
- The law.

2. The greatest demonstration of love the world has ever seen was:

- The loaves and fishes.
- Jesus' death on the cross.
- Pentecost.
- Peter's confession.

3. Christ's sacrifice upon the cross was for:

- Everyone.
- Only the righteous.
- Only the evil.
- Those predestined for salvation.

4. What kind of person does God love the most?

- Church members.
- Prostitutes and thieves.
- Everybody alike.
- Born-again Christians.

5. Christ was born into the human family in order to:

- Pay the penalty for sin.
- Know how weak we are.
- Become a good carpenter.

6. In order to obtain salvation, a person must:

- Take a Bible course.
- Belong to the church.
- Speak in tongues.
- Accept it as a gift.

7. We are saved by:

Good works.

Grace.

Desire.

8. Forgiveness and acceptance lead us to feel:

That we can begin to sin again.

Regret for pleasures denied.

Joy and peace.

Assurance of eternal life.

9. Obedience should be based upon:

Fear of hell.

Desire for approval of friends.

Love for Jesus.

10. Christian conduct, or keeping the commandments, is:

Legalism.

One of the fruits of true conversion.

Unimportant.

11. The two greatest ways to stay close to Christ are:

Daily Bible study.

Giving a liberal offering.

Abstaining from pork.

Constant attitude of prayer.

12. It is my desire to accept Jesus into my life and experience the new birth.

Yes. No.