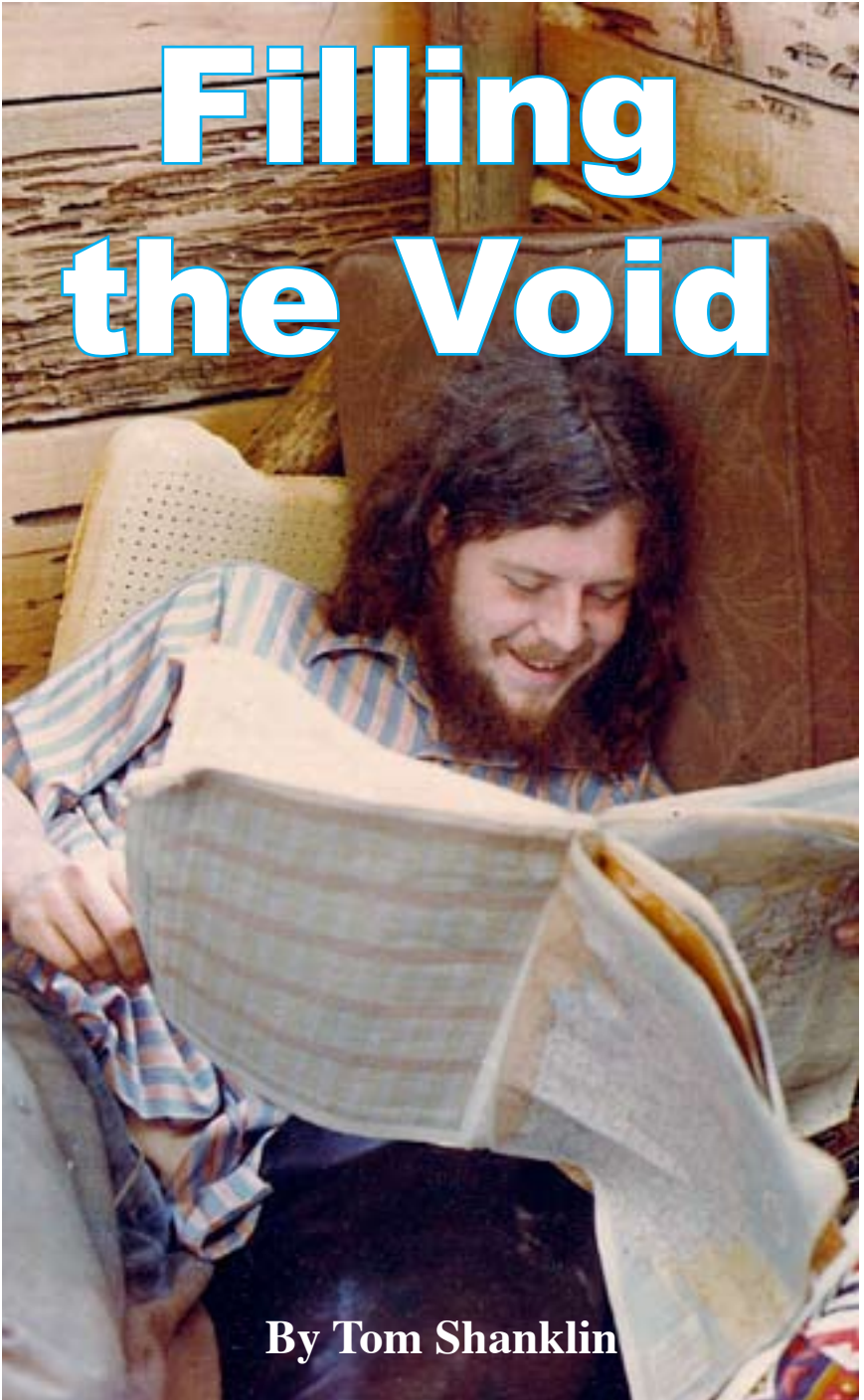


# Filling the Void



By Tom Shanklin

“Filling the Void”

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This book is dedicated to my patient and wonderful companion in life, Susan Shanklin.

“Filling the Void” is made available on a free-will offering basis.  
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Cover: Tom studying a road map in 1975, shortly before leaving Oregon to move to Idaho, on his “search.” The cabin in the background is the place where Tom and Susan’s first child, Heidi, was born.

## **Preface**

This little booklet is for anyone who is empty inside and is looking for the answer. It's about how God can fill the void in your life, as you surrender all to Him.

“Filling the Void” is the testimony about how my life was changed by the power of God when I made Jesus Christ the Lord of my life in 1977. I was bound by drugs and alcohol in the hippy movement of the '70s. In a moment of time, Jesus brought change and freedom.

This testimony was originally written in the '80s. As I read it over here in 2008, I find it a bit immature and sometimes a little preachy. The writing style is very conversational and simple.

I reedited it a bit, but mostly I left it alone. It was fresh and alive as it was written. I didn't want to tamper with it too much.

As you read it, you may chuckle as some of the episodes, but my prayer is that it will touch your heart, and help you to see that only Jesus can fill the void in all of our hearts.

God bless you!

Tom Shanklin  
July 2008

## **Jesus is Calling!**

*“Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,  
Calling for you and for me...  
See on portals He’s waiting and watching,  
Watching for you and for me,  
Come home. Come home.  
Ye that are weary come home.  
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling—  
Calling O sinner, come home...”*

The sounds of the old Gospel tune were whirling about my head. Inside, down in my heart, was a burning. I was being drawn to the feet of Jesus.

The preacher had extended the invitation: “Don’t hold back. Jesus is calling you today. Just get out of your seat and come up here and receive Him. Jesus is calling. Won’t you come?”

The presence of the Lord was strong on me. I knew, in reality, Jesus was calling. It wasn’t just the preacher or the music, it was Jesus Christ Himself calling me to come to Him. I was 9 years old that day when I prayed the sinners prayer in that Southern Baptist Church in Illinois and from that day until now, God’s hand was upon my life.

Unfortunately, I was not so faithful. I suppose one could blame it on lack of teaching in the Word of God, or a lack of the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, but soon after my initial experience I began to slip back into the life of sin that is so prevalent in the world today.

Although the experience I had that day was real, I did not fully surrender my life. I was truly drawn by the Holy Spirit. I believed the Gospel, but I did not truly make Jesus the Lord of my life.

## **Following the Crowd**

Like so many young people, I was a crowd follower. When the neighborhood kids started smoking cigarettes, I was right there with them. When I was 15, we began getting hold of six packs of beer and drinking.

By the time I was 17, I had developed a dependence on alcohol and was drinking virtually every night. By this time, I was so rebellious that my parents had just about given up trying to control me. It didn't matter what they said, I just did whatever I wanted.

In my Junior year of high school I missed 35 days of school. Often I'd just go party with my friends or drive around instead of going to school. My grades weren't much, but somehow I managed to get by.

When I remember those days, I often think about how much God-given potential was wasted in my life. It's like taking a brand new car and taking it to a demolition derby. It just doesn't make sense. God has given us bright, shiny new minds, but we have taken them to Satan's demolition track where they are battered and destroyed.

I often think how good it would have been if I had continued to walk with God from the time I went forward in that Baptist church, how much pain and misery could have been avoided, how much more my life could have meant. But thank God, the Lord was merciful and willing to receive me back and teach me the ways of life. Like the prodigal son, who found himself far away from his father, feeding swine and in misery, we, too, can return unto our Heavenly Father and again receive His love and blessing.

Well, finally in 1968, I managed to graduate from high school, to the great relief of my parents. My folks always put a great deal of emphasis on education. They were willing to do nearly anything to see me go to college, so they virtually supported me through my first two years of college, but to little avail.

Most of those two years were spent in the bars or otherwise avoiding the classroom. After two years of attending college, I managed to accumulate about one year's worth of college credits.

During that time, I met my future wife. After my second year of college, Susan and I were married. And for a while it seemed like I was going to straighten out, at least as far as my education was concerned.

I began attending classes, studying, and applying myself to school. I became interested in journalism and began feverishly taking classes in that field. Rather than being the old flunky of the past, I found myself on the dean's list, excelling in most of my classes.

### **Enter Marijuana**

It was about that time I began to come under another influence — marijuana. Although I had by no means given up drinking at this point in my life, my alcohol use was under control somewhat . . . at least to the point where I could function effectively.

But one thing I've found out about the devil: if he can't get you one way, he'll get you another. Although the actual physical effects of marijuana use are less than alcohol use, it is a very subtle seductive drug, one which will lure you into hell, and at the same time make you think you want to go there.

By the time I had finished my fourth year of school (with three years' of credits), I decided I had enough. I took a job on a small town weekly newspaper. During that time, my wife and I bought a secluded farm near the town where I worked.

It seemed the more the marijuana was allowed to influence me, the more I tended to withdraw from society. It is a mood-altering drug, influencing a person's innermost thought patterns. I began to dwell on the evils of society, and began to think that the only way a

person could find true happiness was by escaping society and living way off in the wilderness somewhere, far away from the world's troubles.

It wasn't long and my rebellious attitude and desire for seclusion and isolation led me to resign my reporter's job. More and more, I was turning inward, spending hours smoking pot and meditating in the woods on our farm. I thought I was achieving some type of God-consciousness and inner peace from the exercise, but in reality I was still missing what I needed the most. . . the true peace that only comes from walking in the presence of the Lord.

### **To the Wilderness**

Without any income, we couldn't keep the farm. Besides, by this time, we decided we were going off to live in the wilderness, where we could truly escape the evils of society, and lead peaceful and happy lives.

As I look back on my life now, I can see that all the activities I was involved in were attempts to find satisfaction and happiness. When I discovered marijuana, I thought I had found the answer. It was, I thought, something that could give me the peace and joy which I was longing for so desperately.

I was searching. The only problem was I was always looking for happiness in the wrong place. Man has all sorts of substitute happiness packages. Some come in bottle or a pill or a joint, some come in bank accounts or material goods. But the truth is, "Only God satisfies." Only He can fill the void with His love through Jesus Christ.

Marijuana took me out of my problems. It made me feel "heavenly." It was the devil's substitute—heaven in a smoke. The problem is, it didn't last. The more I smoked, the less the effect would be, until finally, I came to the point where I needed to smoke almost constantly just to feel halfway decent. Of course, this constant stoning

made me withdraw more and more, just wanting to be alone with my pipe, getting high.

After a little over a year, we sold the farm, deciding to travel around for a while and see the country. My wife and I moved to West Virginia to live near some of our long-haired, dope-smoking friends. From there we took a long hitchhiking trip out West, much to the dismay of both Susan's parents and my parents.

### **Plans to Move West**

We returned to Illinois with a desire to move out West, with an ultimate goal of moving into the wilderness of British Columbia. We built a makeshift camper on our pickup, put a small wood stove in it. and headed out for parts unknown. By this time, Susan was pregnant with our first child.

Looking back at this period in our life, I recognize that God was with us, in spite of the error of our way. Many times our lives were miraculously preserved. Jesus said He would never leave us nor forsake us and He never did. Even though I was, in my outward life, living for the devil, God's hand was on me, drawing me gently to Himself. I remember my wife as a person of faith in those days. . . . fervent in prayer. . . . especially in times of desperate need. . . . crying out to Jesus to help us. Sometimes, when we thought we were in danger of being busted for drugs, we would pray.

We would read our Bibles, especially in those desperate times, but we had little conception of the type of life which the Lord was calling us to, or the power which was available to those who would consecrate themselves in His service.

I remember once we were picking apples in Illinois during that period of our lives and we met a fellow named Marvin. Marvin was the best "apple knocker" I've ever seen. We used to call him "Angel." Every time I'd see him, he'd say, "Hello Brother Tom!" and

then share a verse of scripture or some godly wisdom with me along with the love of God. We didn't know it, but he was sowing the seeds of righteousness that would later grow and bring forth fruit. "Angel" called himself a Pentecostal-Lutheran.

We traveled all over, picking fruit, getting by any way we could, even going on welfare for a time. We lived in California, Oregon, and finally Idaho.

While living in the mountains of Oregon, our first child, Heidi, was born. Like all of our children, she was born at home. Susan labored for 19 hours. We used a swiss army knife, sterilized over a kerosene lamp, to cut the umbilical cord. We didn't know it at the time, but her birth was the beginning of the end of our wild, foot-loose-and-fancy-free lifestyle. Before her birth, we could live almost anywhere, under any circumstances, but the responsibilities of parenthood began to weigh on us after her birth.

We had given up our dream of British Columbia after discovering the nature of the coastal climate of Oregon, which was very similar to that of Canada's west coast. One wet clammy winter living in a tepee in Oregon convinced us that British Columbia was not the place for us.

### **Heart of Gold Mining Claim**

Some friends of ours were living in Idaho, so we decided to pull up stakes and head out there. Perhaps there we would find our dream—a place to settle down. We didn't have any money, so we decided to file a mining claim on government land in Idaho and live there.

We filed the "Heart of Gold" mining claim in 1974. We never did much mining, aside from a few feeble attempts at panning gold, but we were really in a silver area and the mining was the type done with a pick and shovel.

The plot of land was located in a high mountain valley in southern Idaho. It was a beautiful grassy valley, with steep mountains ascending on either side. We thought we would build a makeshift shelter and spend the winter up there, until an old timer told us: "You'll never come out alive." He said the valley was very prone to avalanches, which would bury us and our newborn little baby with tons of snow.

By this time we were very nearly starving. We had a few dry goods and we'd forage for whatever else we could find. One of our common meals was "Nettles and Noodles." Stinging nettle steamed is really not too bad, until you've had it for three or four weeks straight.

### **Land. . . Our New Goal**

We were beginning to recognize the need for a change. Finally, we decided to travel back to my parents' home in Collinsville, Illinois, get a job, and save money to buy some land.

"Land" . . . that was my meditation for the next two years. All I could think about, all I was working for, was to get some land where we could settle down. I spent a year and a half working for a chain of weekly newspapers. I didn't make much, but Susan worked too, and we managed to save all my checks towards our beloved goal—land. During that time, we lived in the kitchen of an old dilapidated farm house where someone allowed us to stay rent free, so we could put every penny toward our beloved goal.

It seemed at that time *land* was all that mattered. If we just had some land, everything would be all right. Little did we know it was just another empty shell placebo attempting to fulfill the real need in our lives—a relationship with the Lord Jesus.

And there were those who encouraged us along our empty-shell path which we walked upon with rose-colored glasses. I remember one supposed Bible teacher and spiritual leader, who sat with us,

drinking whiskey, telling us how we were really on the right track trying to get away from it all where we could truly find peace with God.

But now I realize that peace with God is not something you find in a certain place, or life-style, or drug, or anything else, except through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those two years of striving for our goal were some of the hardest of my life. I hated my job and everything it represented. The rebellion would rise up within me. Coming under the authority of my boss, cutting my hair, dressing according to specifications, all warred at me constantly. But, I was willing to suffer it all for my beloved goal.

“Land. . . land. . . land. . .” I would think, and somehow I made it through.

### **A Minnesota Winter**

Susan and I and little Heidi moved to Southern Minnesota in October of 1976. We had enough money for a down payment on a small parcel of land, and I had decided I couldn't stand another Winter in the city. After making the down payment, we had about \$500 to build our home.

Purchasing rough-sawn and used lumber, we managed to get a structure up by the middle of November. It was built on poles in the ground, with no insulation or inner walls. The green lumber which we used to sheet the structure shrunk, leaving large gaps, so that a thin layer of plastic was all that separated us from the -30 degree temperatures outside.

The people in the area said we'd never make it through the Winter, and we almost didn't. But fortunately, as soon as the house was framed in and roofed, I got a job at a local saw mill. It didn't pay much, but one of the benefits was free access to a huge pile of

railroad tie ends, which made excellent fuel for the wood stove.

The little tin stove in our house was kept firing to the “max” all winter long in an attempt to warm the cold winds seeping in the house from every direction. Most of our evenings were spent huddled next to the stove, bundled up with many layers of clothes.

That Winter was the greatest physical struggle and the most frustrating time of my life. I felt as though I was enduring the chastening hand of the Lord. About midway through the Winter, my pickup broke down and I had to walk about a mile out to the road to catch a ride to the sawmill in the mornings. It was one of the most depressing times of our lives. Such was the fulfillment of our “dream.”

### **Finding Jesus**

Chuck, a fellow I worked with at the sawmill, started telling me about a group of “Spirit-filled” Christians meeting in the area. “How do you know they’re Spirit-filled?” I asked him somewhat cynically. I didn’t really understand what he was talking about, but he had stirred my curiosity at least.

On July 4th, 1977, shortly after our second child, Nathan, was born, this man and his wife had asked us to attend a meeting of these “Spirit-filled” Christians. An evangelist from Michigan was going to preach. The couple were quite enthusiastic about this preacher from Michigan and strongly encouraged us to attend. For some reason we did.

That meeting must have been the strangest thing I had ever experienced. I guess that ever since my days back in the Baptist church in Illinois I had always seen church people as sort of hypocritical and phony. There didn’t seem to be a reality to their existence. There seemed to me to be little correlation between what was said in church and what was done in their lives.

In my hippy days it was similar. All the ideas which we pre-

tended to stand for were just a shallow reality. And it always seemed so difficult to find a sincere or truthful person.

But right away, I sensed a sincerity among these people. They loved the Lord and were willing to express that love outwardly. I didn't know if I could express that same kind of love, but I recognized in them a reality in their relationship with Christ. In my heart, something seemed to say, "This is what you've been looking for!"

And as I got to know the people, I began to sense a real sincere love towards me. Many of them came from a hippy background like Susan and me. They showed a genuine concern for us. I didn't know it at the time, but that was the love of Jesus shining through them. As the meeting went on, I was in awe with the teaching of the evangelist from Michigan. I remember he taught on the two olive trees of Zechariah 4. I don't think I understood much of what I heard.

After the preaching, people began coming up for prayer, Chuck, my friend from the sawmill, went up front. Suddenly he started shouting at the top of his voice, "Hallelujah!" Chuck is normally sort of a quiet fellow, but his voice that night showed no trace of inhibition.

Afterwards, he testified that God had healed his heart. He had been suffering with a heart problem, caused by a Rheumatic fever. Because one of the valves in his heart remained open, his blood pressure could not be properly maintained. It was a serious problem, and the doctors were recommending open heart surgery.

The next day, I saw Chuck right after he had left the doctor's office. They had checked his blood pressure, and it had been returned to normal. I was awe struck. Once again, something within me seemed to say: "This is what you've been looking for!"

As I began to recognize the power of God, I began to go after it. I wanted all that God had. I wanted to be filled with the Holy Ghost

power like Jesus talked about in Acts 1:8. “And ye shall receive power after the Holy Ghost is come upon you...”

I began to recognize that the drugs and alcohol I was using were a hindrance to me in my relationship with God. I continued drinking and using drugs, but I attended every meeting, read my Bible constantly, began to pray and seek God.

I was still struggling with the old habits. I couldn't let go of my addictions. While I was finding more peace than I had for as long as I could remember, from time to time it seemed, I'd be attacked by anxiety and have to get some beer or smoke some marijuana. I wasn't really set free.

I remember late in August, I began to sense that God wanted me to be water baptized. I don't know how to explain it. It wasn't that He spoke to me directly, the way He later did, it was just as if I knew in my heart that the Lord wanted me to.

My wife had been baptized a few weeks before, after a miraculous conversion experience, but I hadn't been ready at the time. I battled within myself for several weeks over this prompting to be water baptized.

### **A Day of Destiny**

One day, when I had an exceptionally frustrating day at work, I headed home, planning to stop at the store for some beer. But something within me seemed to restrain me, and somehow, I made it home sober, but very frustrated.

After arguing and bickering with my wife for a while, we decided to take a ride and cool off a bit. It was a hot September day. In the back of my mind I was thinking about getting some beer and trying to relax a bit. That was always the way I'd relax when I got uptight... peace in a bottle. Jesus said; "My peace I give unto you,

not as the world giveth.” The world has its peace, but it’s not the real thing.

But when I drove past the store where I had thought to buy the beer, something inside me seemed to restrain me. Instead, Susan and I decided to go see one of the ministers in the area, Danny Bohan. Brother Danny had been an encouragement to us and it was from him we first heard the teaching on the baptism of the Holy Ghost and the foundation that God wants to lay in every believer’s life. He had done a lot to encourage me in my quest for the things of the Spirit.

As I talked with Danny, I started sharing how I was finding more peace in my life since I had begun coming to the meetings, reading my Bible and seeking God, but that there were times that tremendous frustration would come upon me. I was excited about going to church, but I really didn’t fit in.

Danny listened patiently and counseled with me. Then he prayed that the peace of God would come upon me. As he prayed and laid hands on me, I sensed the power of God come through his hands and a supernatural peace just came upon me.

Danny and I talked a while longer and then he turned to me and said, “You know, brother, you need to be baptized.” I just bowed my head there and thought about it for a few moments. Finally, I looked up at him and said: “Okay, let’s go.” So Susan, Danny and I went down to the Beaver Creek and I was baptized.

At the time of my baptism, I was standing upon the promise in Acts 2:38, where the Apostle Peter had said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” I was seeking the gift of the Holy Ghost and I knew it was God’s Word that He would give to me as I obeyed Him in water baptism.

So after the baptism, Susan and I drove home in the pickup.

Arriving home, I just sat in the truck, with Susan beside me, seeking the in-filling of God's Spirit. As I was praying and seeking God, I began to think about my old habits, wondering what life would be like without those things. I thought, "Things will be different now. I'll only do those things once in a while, just to be sociable."

Just then, it was as if someone turned on a radio inside of me, and the Lord spoke to me. He said emphatically, "Turn from the things of the world!"

Awestruck and steeped in gratitude over this heavenly communication, immediately, I said, "Yes Lord!" At that moment I knew I was making a commitment to lay down my drugs and alcohol and follow Jesus with all my heart. As I said those words from my heart, I was filled from the top of my head to the tip of my toes with the power of God.

Some have described their experience in this manner as like "liquid love". It was like that, but I remember at the time thinking it was like a high power charge of electric energy. It was indescribably beautiful. And it was real!

I had asked God, that when He filled me with His Spirit that it would be so powerful, that it would leave no doubt in my mind as to its authenticity. He answered that prayer . . . and then some.

After the initial waves of the Spirit passed through my being, I was given some supernatural utterance in an unknown tongue. I remember speaking these few syllables out and rejoicing over what God had given me.

Then I again began to hear once again from that radio inside. God began to speak things to me, and impressed me to speak them forth. "Precious is the blood of the Lamb," He said, "which was shed for you."

“I give you a new life, free from the bonds of iniquity,” I heard Him say, and then I spoke it out. The Lord then began to minister to me concerning holiness and the need to follow Him and not to go back into the old way of life. Then I heard Him say a curious thing, “Israel is here!” At the time I didn’t understand this, but a few weeks later I heard someone sharing about how we, as Christians, are Israel (God’s chosen people) and that we’ve been grafted in and made part of the commonwealth of Israel supernaturally. (Eph. 2:12) As it says in Romans 2:29: “He is a Jew, which is one inwardly . . .”

God ministered a number of other things to me supernaturally that night which He later confirmed to me by His Word. They were things that I had not yet seen in the Scripture, but by His Spirit He showed them to me, thus confirming the move of the Spirit in my life and also confirming to me personally the authenticity and integrity of His Word.

I’m just thankful for what the Lord has done for me and my family and so many others. It’s such a tremendous blessing to experience His boundless love.

Since that night, I never again had a problem with the old habits that had bound me for so long. I have truly been given a “new life, free from the bonds of iniquity.” And the life which He’s given me by His Spirit and through His Word is without comparison to anything else in the world. God also has blessed me with a wonderful family. Our third child, Ruth, was born in 1980.

In 1983, the Lord called me into full-time ministry. Since that time I have been sharing the news of God’s great love and power through Jesus Christ. As a result, we have seen God’s mighty power in action in many lives. Jesus Christ continues to do what He does best, miracles and changed lives.

## **Your life can change!**

No matter what your situation today, your life can change. God has the power to transform you, heal you and restore you through the Gospel of His Son, Jesus. You may not have the same background as the long-haired hippy that you read about in this little booklet. Your circumstance may be completely different, but the God that moved so miraculously in my life is the God who will also help you.

Not everyone who comes to the Lord is so instantly delivered from addictions or other problems, but yet the principles remain the same. If you call upon the name of the Lord and turn your life over to Him, deliverance will come, whether it be overnight or in a process of time.

God has done His part. Because He loves you, He sent His Son Jesus to die for your sins. Without Him, we are all sunk. We have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory and His standard. But through Christ's death on the cross, we can receive forgiveness. And because of His resurrection, we receive a new life.

Every one of us need reconciliation to God. As the Apostle Paul states, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." 1 Timothy 1:15, NKJV. Paul's qualification to preach the Gospel is that he was a chief sinner who had been forgiven. Therefore, he knew the power of forgiveness and could share it with others. Likewise, I am coming to you not with some pious spiritual elitism, but with the simple knowledge that God forgave and changed me, and He will do the same for you.

God has done His part, now you must do yours. You say, "What must I do? How can I be saved? How can I be changed?" The simple teaching from the Bible is that we must do two things: "Repent and believe the Gospel." (Mark 1:15)

To repent means to turn away from sin and to turn to God. It means to reorientate your life in obedience to God. To believe means to trust in the message of the Gospel for your salvation. It means to believe that Jesus died for you personally, not as an abstract religious concept, but for you. Yes, Jesus died for YOU!

When I came forward and prayed in that Baptist church at the age of nine, I believed the Gospel. I heard the message and accepted it for myself. It certainly was an important step toward God. However, I left there still under the control of Satan, and my life for the next 18 years reflected Satan's lordship over my life. It went from bad to worse, until finally, at the age of 27, I turned from the things of the world and gave my life to Jesus Christ.

What God began at age 9, He completed at age 27. But all the time, He was with me, drawing me, calling me, and no doubt weeping over me. Today He is calling you. He says, "Come to Me. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. Put your life in My hand and surrender, and you will have the peace you have been looking for all along." Pray this prayer from your heart:

*Dear Father, I've been looking for You all the time. I've been looking for Your peace and all You have for me. And I thank You for sending Your Son to die for me personally. I accept Your gift of salvation. And now Father, I turn my life over to You. I say "Yes Lord, I will follow You." I confess Jesus as Lord of my life, and I believe You raised Him from the dead. Thank you, Father, I will never be the same. I will ever follow You and do Your will, in Jesus name. Amen.*

Please write us and let us know about your decision to receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. We will send you some material to help you in your walk with Him. Meanwhile, begin to talk to Him every day, read the Holy Bible, get involved in a good Bible-preaching church and share with others what God has done in your life. God bless you in your new life!



**Tom Shanklin** travels in the United States as well as internationally preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ and encouraging people in their walk with God. Because of the strong work of grace in his own life, he is greatly used to help people overcome their own personal difficulties in life and to find peace with God.

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