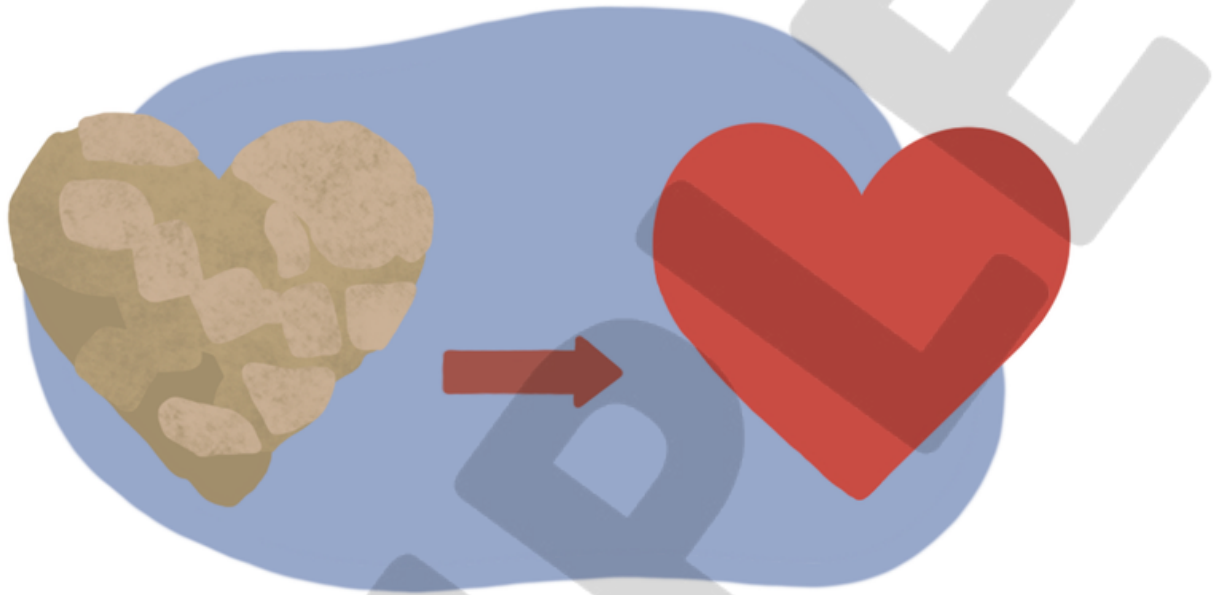


Living for Christ

Christ Changes Your Life



Dirk Willems followed the law of love. In the early days of the Mennonite Church, members were persecuted and put to death for their faith and obedience to Jesus Christ. In 1569 Dirk Willems, a Dutch Mennonite, was fleeing for his life. He successfully crossed a frozen body of water, but the person chasing him broke through the ice. Seeing his enemy in danger of death, Dirk quickly returned and helped him out of the water, saving his life. This loving act led to Dirk's death, for after being in prison and then tried, he was burned at the stake for his faith.

A. Christ Saves from Sin's Power

When God's Son was about to be born into the world, an angel appeared to Joseph, who was engaged to the Virgin Mary. The angel told him that the name of the child was to be Jesus, a name which has the idea of "savior." The angel said,

"and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." - Matthew 1:21

Many hundreds of years before, God's prophet Isaiah had promised that God would provide a man to take the place of guilty people and heal them of their sins [Isaiah 53:4-6]. It was "our infirmities" and "our sorrows" that the Savior was to bear.

"But he was pierced for our transgressions... And with his wounds we are healed."

Confessing human sin and guilt the prophet cried:

**"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**

2 This beautiful prophecy was fulfilled when Jesus died for the sins of the world. God became human in order to die for the sins of the human race. This act is called "redemption." Through His death on the cross, Jesus paid the price that was needed for God to redeem (buy back) those who had been His in the first place. Jesus Himself said that He came into the world

"to give His life as a ransom for many." - Matthew 20:28

The Apostle Paul wrote,

*"...we were reconciled (brought back into relationship)
to God by the death of His Son." - Romans 5:10*

In the Bible the blood of Christ refers to Jesus' death. He "shed His blood" as He gave His life on the cross. But Jesus was more than a martyr; He actually died in our place. Human sins (our sins) put Him there. He died for us, so we could become God's forgiven sons and daughters. By His wounds (His suffering) we are healed of our sinfulness [**1 Peter 2:24**]. Through Christ's blood our sins are pardoned [**Matthew 26:28**]. Through His death for us, we may enjoy "the forgiveness of our trespasses" [**Ephesians 1:7**].

3 The Bible teaches clearly that God offers salvation (deliverance) from sin, which includes freedom from sin's power. This is a free gift to everyone who believes in Jesus. [Study **Romans 1:16**]. The "gospel of Christ" is the good news that there is forgiveness and salvation through faith in Christ.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus..." [Acts 16:31]

is the New Testament formula for salvation.

B. Christ Changes Hearts

1 The Bible often uses the word "heart" to describe a person's innermost nature. A stubborn sinner has a "stony heart" [**Ezekiel 11:19**]. The sinner must allow God to give him/her a new heart...and a new spirit [**Ezekiel 36:26**]. The Bible uses the phrase, "new birth," to describe the definite spiritual change that sinful people need. [Read **John 3:1-16a**]. Jesus told the Jewish leader Nicodemus that everyone needs to be "born again." All people need new spiritual life which can come only in a new relationship to God through Christ.

2 In the Acts of the Apostles, the fifth book of the New Testament, we read about a woman named Lydia who heard Paul teaching about Christ. Paul explained to her the need of a deep inner change of character. He told her that she had to be willing to turn away from sin. He promised salvation through faith in Christ. He invited Lydia to take Christ as her Savior and Lord. The Bible says that the Lord opened Lydia's heart [**Acts 16:14**]. In other words, Christ enabled Lydia to respond to Paul's message with her whole heart. Christ will do the same for anyone else who is willing to turn away from sin.

C. Christ Changes Lives

In the second chapter of Ephesians the Apostle Paul described the lives of the people at Ephesians before they became believers in Christ. Before their "new birth," (Paul wrote), they were "dead." They lived in all kinds of sins. They brought God's anger upon themselves by the way they lived. God was not pleased because they chose sin instead of obedience to Him. **Ephesians 2:4-5** explains how these people became believers:

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—"

And in **Ephesians 2:8-9** Paul explains:

"For 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 works, so that no one may boast."

Later Paul explains what it means to have a person's life changed [**Ephesians 4:25-31**]. There are things the new disciple of Christ must "put off" or get rid of. These include lying, losing your temper, stealing, dirty speech, bitterness, insulting words, and a hateful attitude toward others. The new believer must stop "hanging around" with the "old gang," those who still enjoy the very same sins he or she now wants to get rid of [**2 Corinthians 6:14-18**]. With Christ's help the new disciple must be kind, compassionate and forgiving,

"forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." - Ephesians 4:32

By faith, the Christian finds freedom from sin's power, because Christ has died in our place. By faith the Christian has power to live a new, wholesome life, as Christ gives strength. [Read **Romans 6:1-14**].

D. Christ Fills with Love

Jesus taught that love was a basic rule of living for His followers. Christians will only want to do good to other people; never harm or injure them. In **Matthew 5:38-48** read what Jesus said about the law of love. Then read how Paul [**Romans 12:18-21**] and Peter [**1 Peter 2:21-23**] taught the same thing. Daily, Christians should be willing to suffer injustice patiently and refuse to fight back, or retaliate. Maybe you are thinking, "How is it possible to follow this law of love? It is not easy for me to act this way toward others." Read **Romans 5:5**. When we give ourselves to Christ, God pours out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Then it becomes possible for us to follow the law of love.

Lesson Questions

1. What does the name "Jesus" mean? _____
2. Why did the Son of Man come into this world, according to His own words? [**Matthew 20:28**]

3. Who receives salvation? [**John 3:16**] _____
4. What did Jesus tell Nicodemus that everyone needs? [**John 3:1-8**]

5. What did the Lord do for Lydia? [**Acts 16:14**] _____

6. Is salvation something which a person earns, or is it a gift? [**Ephesians 2:8-9**] _____

7. When a person becomes a disciple of Christ, what action will he or she have to take toward the "old gang"? [**2 Corinthians 6:14-17**] _____

8. By faith in Jesus Christ we may experience two things. They are:

A. _____

B. _____

9. How can we who are Christians have love in our hearts, so we can treat others who are unkind to us with love? [**Romans 5:5**] _____

10. According to the Apostle Peter, what does it mean to follow in the footsteps of Christ? [**1 Peter 2:21-23**] _____

11. Which principle will I follow in my life:

1. Loving everyone, even enemies?

2. Allowing myself to be involved in strife, violence, and warfare?

What is something you can do this week to work towards this goal?

