

# The Find of a Lifetime

**1 John 5:11-13**  
**January 2, 2005**  
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Some wise Christians disagree with my perspective, but I think my life argues for infant baptism. As long as I can remember, I've been devoted to Jesus. He has been my priority. My missionary mother and my pastor-dad shared the gospel with me. I'd hear them pray for me early in the morning; and I hungered to please Jesus and walk with him. At 4 years old, I preached to my 3-year-old cousin and invited him to receive Jesus. Jesus was my all in all. When are God's children old enough to have a relationship with Jesus? At what age can children have a meaningful relationship with their parents: 12, 5, infancy, in the womb? Do you see what I mean? That doesn't mean problems don't occur.

As I grew older, I became sensitive to right and wrong. I developed a sensibility to sins and their presence in my life. I found myself dogged by guilt and condemnation. I went from trust to fear. I feared judgment. I feared death; and with death, I feared hell.

For some "hell" is an antiquated idea; but I believed in it then, and today I can't make sense of the cross without it. How could God sacrifice his child unless our circumstance was desperate? How could Christ's crucifixion be love if the alternative to his sacrifice wasn't something utterly intolerable like hell? This past week we've witnessed the worst natural disaster of our lifetime. If its pictures, don't convince you that hell is plausible, what would?

Although I lived in fear, God's Spirit worked in me. Continually, I sought God's forgiveness. I responded to evangelistic calls to receive Jesus. I sought to serve Jesus and please

him, and I read the Scriptures. Some Scriptures were comforting; but others terrified me. The book of 1 John was especially unsettling.

It was comforting to read that God actually wanted us to know that we have eternal life, that, as in the diagram, “these things” were written so that I would know. It was simple. If I have the Son, Jesus, I have eternal life. If I don’t have him, I don’t have eternal life. It doesn’t get much simpler. I had one question: who has the Son? How do you know? That’s when the Bible became scary. Listen to the verses I read:

***We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.***  
(1 John 4:13, NIV)

Who has the son? Whoever is given the Spirit! But I had no conversion experience. I just loved and hungered to please Jesus. I asked Jesus into my life. I surrendered control of my life. I asked Jesus to forgive me and live through me, but nothing much changed. Did I have the Spirit? I read more:

***Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*** (1 John 3:24, NIV)

Did I obey Jesus’ commands? Not consistently! Not completely! I would procrastinate, speak intemperately, and not fulfill all my promises. Did I have the Spirit? Did I have Jesus? I read in Romans:

***The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*** (Romans 8:16, NIV)

What was God’s Spirit saying to me? Was the inner voice of condemnation God’s Spirit? As I read more of 1 John, I became more alarmed.

***Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God.***  
(1 John 3:21, NIV)

But my heart condemned me. I saw my sin. I had no confidence.

***Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. (1 John 3:18-20, NIV)***

Many of my actions were self-serving. Much of my life focused on my fulfillment despite my love for Jesus. My love did not measure up to him; and it certainly didn't show that I belonged to the truth, or set my heart at rest.

***Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin. No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him. (1 John 3:4-6, NIV)***

***No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. (1 John 3:9, NIV)***

***This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother. (1 John 3:10, NIV)***

***We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. (1 John 5:18, NIV)***

I loved Jesus, but continued to sin. I prayed the sinners' prayer, but continued to sin. I confessed my sins to others and received prayer from others, but continued to stumble with sin. Was I born of God? Would God forgive me? Would God accept me? Would God release me from my condemnation? Was my destination hell?

This spiritual struggle began when I was nine or so and lasted into the spring of my ninth grade school year. When I was in sixth grade, I pondered the return of Christ; and I dreaded it. I feared his judgment. I heard interpretations of Christ's return where believers would be raptured and unbelievers left behind. I feared that when the saints rose to be with Jesus, I would be left behind. One night when my parents had not returned home from church, I fretted and stewed

that the rapture had come. I feared they were gone. I knew of one saintly woman from the church. I figured if she answered the phone I was alright. When she answered the phone, I didn't know what to say; but a tremendous weight was gone.

I lived with this nightmarish fear for three more years. I would later learn that many carry this fear a lifetime. John Wesley carried it into adulthood and into his work as a minister. A recent poll suggests that 50 percent of us Americans worry that God won't accept us when we die.

As a high school freshman, I attended Campus Crusade's *Lay Institute for Evangelism* (LIFE) where we learned to share our faith. During the training I saw a graphic of a train. The engine was the *Fact* of what Jesus did for us and promised. The coal car was the *Faith* that calls on him and looks for him to accomplish what he promises. The caboose was our *Feelings* that come and go. The train would move ahead with *Fact* and *Faith* regardless of *Feeling*.

Fact, Jesus promised:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes** in him **shall not perish but have eternal life**. (John 3:16, NIV)

Fact, the Bible says:

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**. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-**the same Lord** is Lord of all and **richly blesses all who call on him**, for, "**Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved**." (Rom 10:9-13, NIV)

Fact, to the very question "what must I do to be saved," the apostles declared:

**Believe** in the Lord Jesus, **and you will be saved**-you and your household. (Acts 16:31, NIV)

Fact, Jesus declared to a people he was about to judge:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, **I will come in** and eat with him, and he with me. (Rev 3:20, NIV)

That is a metaphor of intimate fellowship and friendship. That is a picture of life with Jesus, and Jesus doesn't say he might come in. When we open the door, he says "**I will come in.**" He doesn't even say "later." In a parable Jesus shows that God is a broken-hearted father rushing to reclaim us lost and rebellious children.

If it were any other way, would these words ring true?

For 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. (Eph 2:8-9, NIV)

Peace flooded my soul when I realized I didn't have to feel saved. My heart was free when I realized that those promises were for me, that love encompassed me despite my sins and forgiveness was extended to me because of my sins. There was more assurance:

**He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done**, but because of his mercy. He saved us **through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit**. (Titus 3:5, NIV)

I began to realize that God's Spirit had already grabbed my heart. Paul writes:

No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3, NIV)

God's Spirit had convicted me of sin and enabled me to call on Jesus; I just needed to trust his promises to me.

Perhaps, you've never felt the judgment of your sins. Sins destroy. They must be destroyed in us. In the words of *Amazing Grace*, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved." If you fear judgment, hear this: The Spirit spoke great promise and he appeals to you now. Embrace the promise of salvation. Act on it and trust it. The peace of God and joy of salvation are for you!