unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). Whoever tries to hide their sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will receive His mercy (Proverbs 28:13).

Because we have all sinned, we are all guilty. This guilt weighs on us—spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally. But its antidote is the forgiveness God freely offers us through Christ. When we receive Jesus, we truly find "rest for [our] souls" (Matthew 11:29), a clear conscience, and peace of mind. Then we are "free indeed" (John 8:36).

Satan is constantly telling you that you aren't good enough. He wants you to believe that you are too bad for God to save, that God could never love or forgive you, and that your case is hopeless. But these are just more lies from the father of lies. Jesus welcomes us to come to Him just as we are—sinful, helpless, and dependent. We may come with our messed-up lives—all our weakness, foolishness, and sinfulness—and fall at His feet in repentance. He will encircle us in His love, heal our wounded lives, and cleanse us from all our sins. It's true that God hates every sin, but He loves every sinner. He sent Jesus to our world so that whoever accepts His love and forgiveness will experience true peace and freedom from guilt and shame.

So when you're tempted, like Ryan, to think you're not good enough, just remember this: If you were good enough, you wouldn't need a Savior. But Jesus is always good enough. When Satan tries to tell you what a great sinner you are, agree. Then tell him what a great Savior Jesus is and that you "are complete in Him" (Colossians 2:10).

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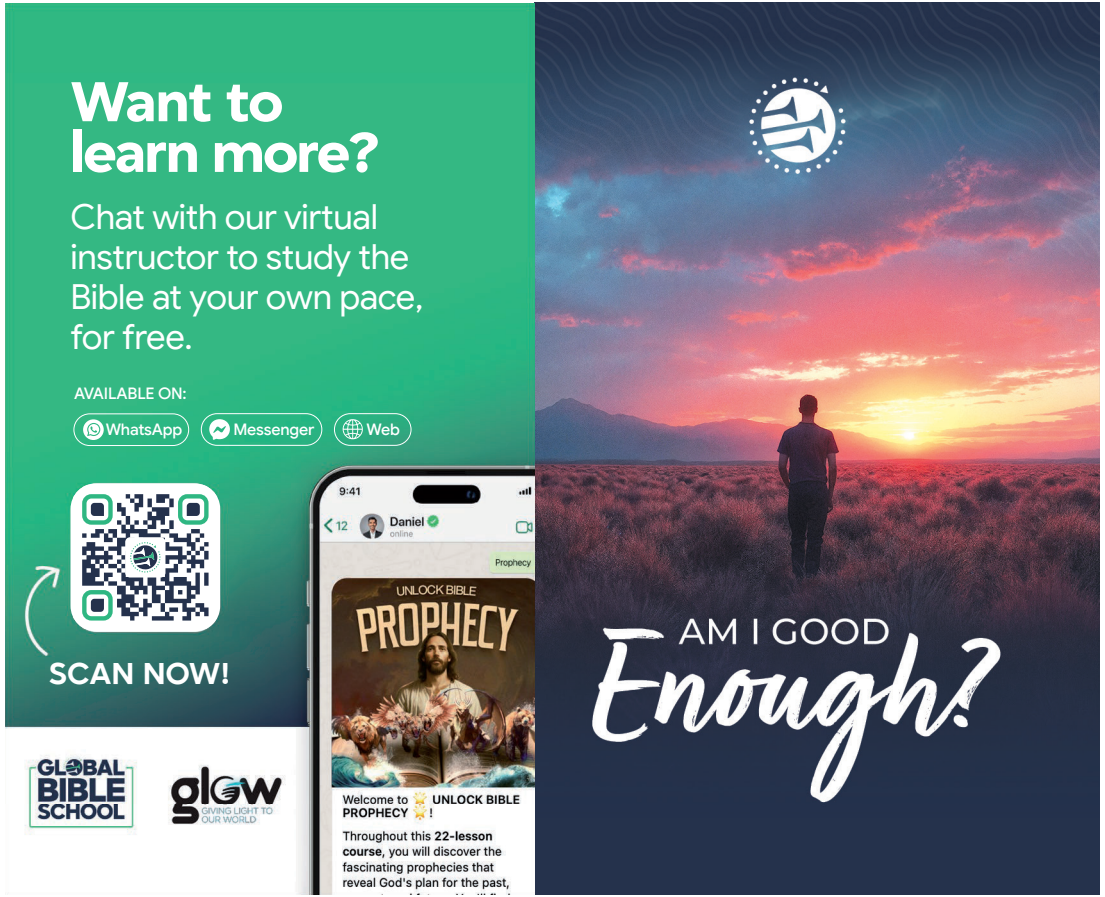

Ryan grew up in a religious home. He attended church regularly. He worked hard to be faithful and obedient. He tried to meet all the expectations of his parents, teachers, employers, and friends. Because of his high ideals, he strove to be the best at everything he did. Unfortunately, nothing he did ever seemed good enough.

Then one day, he just got tired of trying. He began making poor choices. One thing led to another until finally, he was caught and arrested for stealing cars, then convicted and sentenced to five years in prison. After his release, he was never quite the same. He often reflected on his religious home and upbringing, and on many occasions, he considered returning to God. But a voice seemed to whisper in his ear, "You're not good enough. God would never take you back."

Have you ever felt that you weren't good enough? That you could never please your parents? Or that your grades were always mediocre? Maybe your boss was always critical of your work. Or perhaps it was just your own sense of your shortcomings and failures. Somehow you couldn't meet the expectations of the important people in your life—people whose love and respect mattered most to you. And if you weren't good enough for *them*, how could you ever hope to be good enough for *God?*

Climbing Your Way to God

A man named Martin Luther felt that way, too. The beliefs and superstitions of his religion had led him to think of God as a stern, unyielding tyrant. He constantly feared that he would upset or offend God and experience His wrath. The harder he tried to do good, the more he seemed to mess up. The more he reflected on his sins, the deeper his guilt became. No matter how much he tried, he couldn't seem to find pardon and peace—only deepening guilt and despair.

Finally, when everything seemed hopeless, a friend shared with him a picture of God that was completely different from anything he had ever seen before. His friend portrayed God as merciful and compassionate rather than tyrannical. His friend told him to stop focusing on his sins and weaknesses and look to Jesus, who pardons and saves. "Instead of torturing yourself on account of your sins," he said, "throw yourself into the Redeemer's arms. Trust in Him."

While visiting Rome, Luther decided to climb Pilate's staircase (the Holy Stairs) on his knees, hoping to find the forgiveness he sought. According to tradition, Christ had descended this tall stone staircase when leaving the judgment hall. By a recent decree, the pope had promised an indulgence to anyone who climbed it on their knees. As he climbed, however, Luther was struck by the words, "The just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17), and knew it was God speaking to his heart. In that moment, he realized that salvation is not something he could ever earn or deserve or be good enough for; it is the gift of a loving and merciful God.

The belief that we can save ourselves by our good works is one of the most deceptive and destructive ideas in religion. God loves us and wants to save us. He doesn't require us to appease Him to gain His acceptance and approval. Instead, the Bible tells us that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He doesn't love us because of how good we are, but because of how good *He is*. And He loves us even when we're unlovable! The Bible teaches that God "imputes righteousness apart from works" (Romans 4:6). This righteousness is given to the one who "believes on Him who justifies the ungodly" (verse 5). Those who receive God's gift of righteousness are "blessed" because their "lawless deeds are forgiven" and their "sins are covered" (verse 7).

Every effort to live a righteous, holy life apart from God is doomed to failure. This is because, as the Bible says, there is *no one* who is righteous—not even one. *All* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10, 23). Does that mean your case is hopeless? Absolutely not!

Hope for Sinners

Jesus "came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). There is no way we could save ourselves. He came to "take away our sins" (1 John 3:5). Confess your sins to Him, and He will be "faithful and just to forgive" all your sins and cleanse you from all your