

# STEPPING STONES TO FAITH

## *ILLUMINATION To Light The Way*

1 Corinthians 2:10

Created by *Dale Ohmart*

Big Idea: *The answer to alienation and being alone is only possible because God chose to make Himself known to us.*

### **Jesus Is The Answer**

By Andre & Sandra Couch

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Jesus is the answer for the world today  
Above Him, there's no other  
Jesus is the way  
(repeat)

If you've got some questions in the corners of your mind  
Traces of discouragement; a peace you cannot find  
Reflections of your past seem to face you every day  
This one thing I do know; Jesus is the way.

(Chorus)

I know you've got mountains that you think you cannot climb  
I know you're skies are dark; you think the sun won't shine  
In case you don't know that the word of God is true  
And everything He's promised, He will do for you

(Chorus)

The Chinese city of Nanjing is the home of what may be the most unique business in the world. The July 31, 2004 edition of *World* magazine told of a bar that consists of a sofa here, a few tables and chairs over there... and lots and lots of tissues. It is know as the "cry bar." Owner Luo Jun began to notice that the customers in his last business were expressing the desire to find a place to cry, but didn't know where to go to do it. So Jun gave them a place, for \$6 per hour. According to the news service report, the place is growing in popularity.

*Citation: Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky; source: "Quick Takes," World magazine (7-31-04)<sup>1</sup>*

I'll bet you know of some people who could use a place like that? Maybe you are one of them. Life is filled with struggles and problems. The result is a lot of pain...a lot of guilt...a sense of isolation. A lot of things

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have changed since Andre & Sandra Crouch wrote their song. But it's all window dressing. Stuff at the heart of our existence is still the same. And the answer is still Jesus.

For the last couple of weeks, we have been talking about how to share that message with the people we know who might go looking for that "cry bar," or some manly version of it. It all starts with the fact that every single one of us has FALLEN...we don't measure up to what we ought to be. The consequences of that can be summed up in a couple of ways. **Romans 6** says that the payoff for sin is death.

### **Romans 6:23**

*For the wages of sin is death...* (NLT)<sup>2</sup>

The Bible does teach that physical death entered into the world because of sin, but what is even more significant was spiritual death. It isn't something that we see with our eyes, but it is very real. It is that sense of being ALONE. That's what happened when Adam & Eve were forced to leave the Garden of Eden. The unrestricted companionship they had with God came to an end. And we feel it now when we sin. Could that be the secret to the popularity of the "cry bar"? But Jesus Christ is the answer to that separation. Jesus Christ came so that we do not have to face eternity alone.

### **John 1:14-13**

*So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. ...to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.* (NLT)

My apologies to the Apostle John for changing the order of his thoughts. But I think I'm being true to the overall idea. Jesus came into this world to restore the connection between God and us. John says,

### **John 1:4**

*Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone.* (NLT)

Everyone? Well, it's available to everyone. But not everyone really believes that Jesus is the answer to their questions. Not everyone believes that Jesus is the light for their darkness.

Ray Charles was one of the most talented musicians who ever lived. And, one of the most careless and self-indulgent. His world consisted of darkness and isolation, and I'm not just talking about the fact that he lost his sight at about age 7. His greatest handicap was his spiritual blindness. Last year, Jamie Foxx starred in a movie that followed Ray's climb to worldwide fame. But in 1965, a critical series of events threatened his career and his family.

In the midst of that crisis, Ray's wife confronted him. She wanted him to understand that God was his only hope. In anger, Ray demanded to know if she understood what it was like to be blind and still be afraid of the dark. "All my life, I've prayed for just a small glimpse of the light." But he felt like his prayers were unanswered. He felt like God had deserted him.

Ray spent most of his life chasing after answers...chasing after the light. And he isn't alone in that pursuit. Nor is he alone in the sense of frustration he feels. Think with me for just a few moments about the different places people look to find answers and illumination.

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<sup>2</sup> Scriptures marked "(NLT)" are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation copyright © 1996 by [Tyndale Charitable Trust](#).  
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## Where do people look for ANSWERS and ILLUMINATION

**SUBSTANCE** – by that, I mean drugs. According to the movie, Ray was introduced to pot when he went to Seattle and started playing in a club there. Not long after, he graduated to heroine. I believe his addictions were driven by a desire to numb the guilt he carried with him for so much of his life...guilt from seeing his brother drown and not trying to do anything about it...guilt over the way he treated long-time friends...guilt over leaving his family behind on the road and not being a part of the special event in the lives of his sons...guilt over the affairs he had while he was on the road.

**SEX** – speaking of affairs, that leads me to another way people try to find answers for their problems. Evidently, Ray had a special way of shaking hands with a young lady. He would reach out with both hands, and while his right hand held the hand of the person he was meeting, his left hand would casually feel for her wrist. That was how he judged if the girl was attractive or not. Like most of the musicians on the road, sex was a very big part of Ray Charles' life. God created every one of us with a hunger for sex. But I don't think that is the hunger that drives a lot of the casual hook-ups that take place. I think that sexuality in our culture is largely driven by loneliness. People feel isolated. They are starved for a sense of connection. Sex makes that feeling go away for a few moments. But it can never be the foundation of a real relationship.

**SILVER** – Ray grew up in a very poor environment. His mom worked hard to provide. Prospects weren't good for a black man in the south, but a blind black man...well, you can imagine. Ray learned very quickly how to negotiate and the results were contracts that included unprecedented amounts of money. His family lived in a lavish home...he stayed in the best places when he was on the road. And he ultimately started to use money as a relational device. One day, Ray comes home to find his wife and son waiting with some exciting news. Junior has been chosen to play on the all-star team. They have a game scheduled for later in the week. Ray's response was to apologize to his son because he had a trip already planned. But he promised to buy new uniforms for the team, and he doesn't care how much they cost. Somehow, that is supposed to make up for not being there. Of course, it doesn't.

**STATUS** – now, that's a real attractive thing, isn't it. Who wouldn't want to be famous, known around the world as the best at what you do. At one point in the movie, Ray sits down with an old friend from his days in Seattle. The friend's name is Quincy Jones. They talk about music, and what they have been doing lately...Ray talks about a tour he has planned for the southern states. Quincy frowns, and declares that he will never play in the south again, as long as they hold onto their racism. Ray just kind of shrugs it off. To him, the idea of playing in the south and being admired by all those white people has an attractive appeal. But status is all gift-wrapping. It doesn't have substance. It can never replace a sense of purpose in your life.

Those are just a few of the pathways people follow in their search for answers and illumination. Actually, calling them pathways is kind. It would be more accurate to call them dead-ends. That's what they are. You and I know that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. But how do we know that? And how can we help the people in our world discover that?

### God REVEALS Himself To People

#### 1 Corinthians 2:10

*<sup>10</sup>But we know these things because God has revealed them to us by his Spirit, and his Spirit searches out everything and shows us even God's deep secrets. (NLT)*

God created us with an immense capacity to learn and discover. Consider the fact that when He evicted Adam & Eve from the Garden, they had to make their own way...figure out where to live and how to feed themselves.

Evidently, they did all right. From those lowly beginnings has grown the sophisticated technology that produces food, builds houses, propels jet airliners through the sky and even has put men on the moon.

But no matter how sophisticated our technology becomes, it will never help us discover and discern spiritual truth.

### **1 Corinthians 2:14**

*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them... (NASB<sup>3</sup>)*

This is one reason why I believe prayer is such an indispensable part of our efforts to reach out to people. We need to pray that God will open their eyes to spiritual truth...that He will help them see the dead end of the pathway they have chosen.

Let's pause for a moment and pray right now for God to open the eyes of the people we know so that they will be able to see spiritual truth.

*Loving Father, we first want to thank you for opening our eyes to the truth. You have helped us to see the best way to live. We ask now that you do the same for others. In our minds and in our hearts today, we carry the images of people we care about...people who are still on the wrong pathways of life. Please open their eyes, Lord. We don't know what it will take or how long it will be before that happens. We simply plead for your Holy Spirit to move in their hearts.*

I don't know what ever happened between Ray Charles and God, but eventually Ray realized that the drugs, the promiscuity, the fame and the fortune would never satisfy the hunger of his soul. And I can't help but think that his wife played an important part in that process. There she stood, trying to prevent him from running away to his drug-induced hideout...finally threatening to walk away and leave his life for good. For years, she persistently reached out to draw him back from the brink of destruction.

### **Jude 1:22-23**

*And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire... (NASB)*

I have always been intrigued by that phrase...*snatching them out of the fire*. The image it suggests in my mind is magnetic. I want to be the type of person who will take whatever risks necessary to save people from judgment. And I think most of us would do something heroic like that in a moment of opportunity.

But most of the time, reaching a person for Christ isn't done in a moment. Reaching a person for Christ more often takes perseverance. Sometimes it takes years. And it's easy along the way to forget. After all, they don't look like they are in danger. And we have so much to do, with responsibilities at work and projects to do around the house and activities to go to with the family.

The beauty of how God works is that in the midst of all that, He can use us to light the way for the people around us.

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<sup>3</sup> Scriptures marked "(NASB)" are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

**Matthew 5:14, 16**

*You are like light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden... Make your light shine, so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven. (CEV<sup>4</sup>)*

The song I used to sing as a kid said, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." Will you let Christ shine through you this week? Will you let Him use you to help the people in your world see that the pathway they are following is a dead end? It may take a very long time for that realization to sink home. But in the end, by the way you live, they will see that the satisfaction of our existence is only available in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

*PRAYER – Lord, the power of your wisdom and your ways flows through the pages of Scripture, transforming our hearts and moving us to act on our faith. Here and now, we offer you our lives. May the power of your wisdom and your ways flow through us...touching and attracting our family, our friends, our co-workers, and even our casual acquaintances to consider you. Shine through us so that all may see our good works and give glory and honor to you...*

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<sup>4</sup> Scriptures marked as "(CEV)" are taken from the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.