



# SERMON NOTES

From In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley

## THE FIRST STEP

**KEY PASSAGE:** Acts 16:22-40 | **SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES:** Isaiah 59:2 | Ezekiel 18:4 | Matthew 7:22-23  
John 3:16; 14:6 | Romans 3:23; 5:5-11; 6:23 | 2 Corinthians 5:17 | Ephesians 1:13-14; 2:1-5 | Titus 3:3-7  
Hebrews 9:27

### ► SUMMARY

#### First Steps

When a child takes his first step, his parents excitedly call family and friends to announce this awesome accomplishment. However, soon afterwards, as they chase after their inquisitive toddler, they realize it was the start of a challenging phase of parenting. That first step was also the beginning of a new life of greater mobility and maturity for the child.

In the same way, the Christian life begins with a first step—salvation. But many people stumble at this point because of false conceptions. Some folks think being a relatively good person is the key to getting into heaven. Others think believing there is a God is all that's required. However, salvation comes only through a personal relationship with the Father through His Son.

### ► SERMON POINTS

#### What's Next?

When a Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, "What must I do to be saved?" they answered, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:30-31). It's so straightforward that even a child can understand, but we'd do well to examine our redemption more closely to learn and appreciate what the Lord has done for us. Salvation can be defined as the work of God's grace by which He pardons our sins and bestows upon us the gift of eternal life. This means we are not saved by our works but by God's grace, which is His undeserved favor and love.

**To fully appreciate what the Lord has done for us, we must understand our spiritual condition before salvation.**

Ephesians 2:1 says we were dead in our trespasses and sins. There are three different meanings for death in the Scriptures. Physical death is what everyone experiences at the end of earthly life. Spiritual death is alienation from God because of sin. This is the condition of mankind. Eternal death is the final outcome, apart from salvation, and results in everlasting separation from the Lord.

Without Christ, our situation is hopeless because sin separates us from a holy God, and after we die, we will be judged and pay the penalty for our sins, which is eternal death (Heb. 9:27). "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Eph. 2:4-5). Although everyone still dies physically, those who are saved are no longer alienated from God and will never suffer eternal death. Instead, they are given everlasting life.

**God provides our salvation because He loves us and knows there is nothing we can do to save ourselves.**

However, to bring us back into a relationship with Him required the death of His Son (Rom. 5:10). This was the only way the Father could forgive our sins without violating His own law, which requires death as the penalty for anyone who sins (Ezek. 18:4). Since Jesus is both God and man, He's the only person who ever lived a completely righteous life. As He was dying on the cross,

the Father placed all the guilt of our sins upon Him.

- **Jesus' death was sacrificial.** All the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament foreshadowed the perfect Lamb of God who would make the final atonement for sins with His shed blood.
- **Christ's death was substitutional.** We no longer have to pay the penalty for our sins because Jesus bore the punishment for us.
- **His death was sufficient.** Anything we try to do to earn salvation is worthless to God because He is holy, and we are sinful. But since Jesus was perfect, His sacrifice on our behalf proved acceptable to the Father. His blood adequately covers all the sins of mankind.

Jesus is the only way to come to the Father and receive forgiveness and reconciliation (John 14:6). There is no other option for salvation. If we believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God and trust in Him for our rescue, we will be saved.

### The result of Christ's salvation is transformation.

When we receive Jesus as our personal Savior, He comes to live within us through the Holy Spirit. Our old way of life no longer fits our new identity, and the Spirit works within us to make us more like Christ. Second Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, this person is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."

### Salvation is a gift from God, but we must accept it.

When Jesus died, He paid our sin debt in full and opened the door for the world to be saved, but each person must respond.

- **Belief.** Saving faith is trust in Jesus as a living person—the Son of God—for the forgiveness of sins and for

eternal life with God. We must believe that Christ paid for our sins and ask Him to forgive us. At that moment the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and seals us as children of God.

- **Lordship.** When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we are also acknowledging Him as our Lord. This means we give Him the authority to guide and rule our lives according to His will.
- **Repentance.** Turning to Jesus requires turning from our old lifestyle. Repentance is heartfelt sorrow for sin accompanied by a sincere commitment to forsake it and walk in obedience to Christ. This doesn't mean we'll lose our salvation if we sin again. Our weaknesses and the old sinful nature sometimes resurface, but each time we fall, we have the privilege of turning back to God for forgiveness and cleansing. However, if we continue in sin, the Lord, as a loving Father, will discipline us to draw us back to Himself.

### ► RESPONSE

- Has there been a particular point in your life when you recognized your sin and asked Jesus to forgive you and become your Savior? How has your life been transformed since then?
- A new believer doesn't understand all the doctrines of salvation any more than a toddler knows all the mechanics of walking. However, once we are saved, we have a responsibility to learn what God has done for us. Why do you think it's important that we understand what's involved in our salvation? How would this knowledge help you share your faith with others? How would it aid you in overcoming doubts about your own salvation?
- How do you feel about the lordship of Christ? In what ways is submission to Jesus a blessing and protection? If you struggle with letting Him rule in your life, ask the Lord to give you greater understanding of His love so you will find delight in His leadership.

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