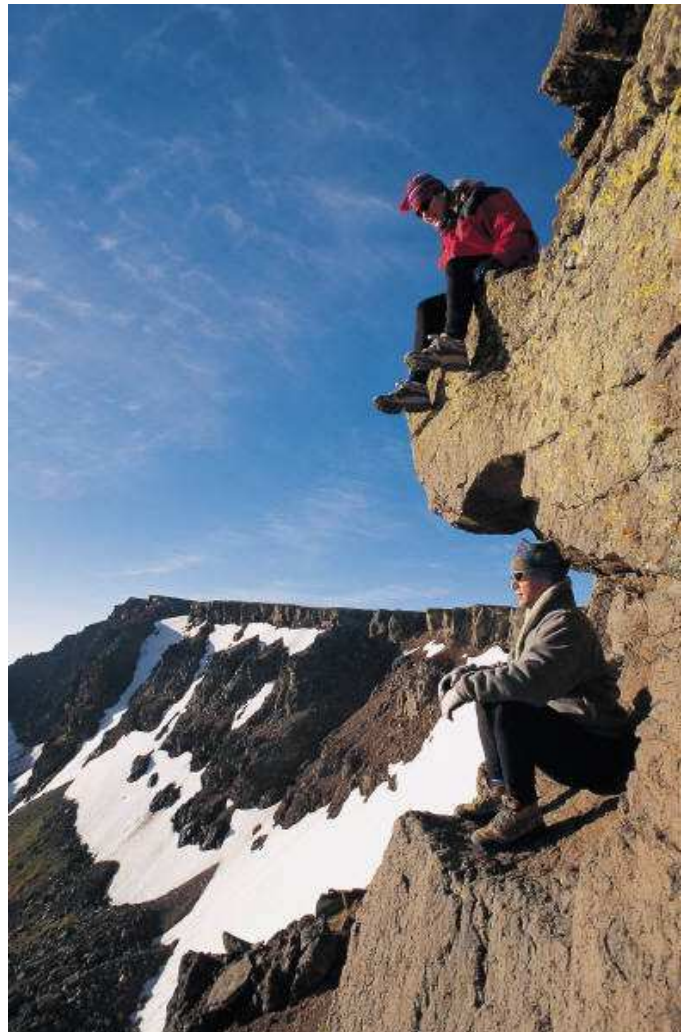




Theophilus' Quest: Discovery Stage Four

Our third stage of discovery with Theo looked at the identity of Jesus. On this fourth stage of discovery, Theo will investigate why God sent His Son to rescue us . . . even though most of us don't even realise we are in trouble and in need of help!
The quest continues ...

I'm OK ... Well, Not Really!





Ignorance is not so blissful!

There are many interesting war-time stories. Some of them are inspiring ... and nearly all of them are tragic. This story comes to us from the Second World War.

The Japanese armies had penetrated much of the Pacific Region before the U.S. Airforce dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The Japanese surrendered soon afterwards and the war was over. But some Japanese soldiers were isolated on small islands and continued to fight long after the war because news of Japan's surrender had not reached them; or because they refused to accept the possibility of defeat, ignoring news of Japan's surrender as an enemy trick. One such soldier was Hiroo Onada.



Onada was “discovered” on a small island in the Philippines in 1973. Onada had continued to hide and fight all this time, terrorising the people of the island and killing 30 farmers between 1945 and 1973.

Soldiering had become the normal, natural way of life for Onada. He had no idea that he was actually disobeying his government and dishonouring his country, being a peace-time criminal murdering innocent civilians. He had no idea that he could have rejoined his family and loved ones many years earlier to share in the post-war prosperity of Japan. Instead, he lived in squalor, fearfully hiding in a jungle for almost thirty years fighting a war that was already lost because he didn't know there was any alternative – he didn't understand the truth about his circumstances.

Onada's experience serves to illustrate the spiritual plight of us all in several ways.



Living in the jungle

Most of us do not *consciously* or *deliberately* rebel against God. Most people refrain from things like murder, robbery and rape. We might even highly value things like honesty and keep our lying and cheating to a minimum. Typically, we feel we are doing the right thing and are not in trouble with God at all. So we live in our jungle doing what seems natural and right to us without realising we are in fact criminals, captives of our own spiritual ignorance. When we hear talk about sin against God and our need for forgiveness ... well, they must be talking about someone else ...

But made for life in paradise ...



The thing is, we were made for peace in paradise, not war in the jungle! We were purposefully created by God in His image to enjoy, honour, and serve Him and one another. That's why Jesus said the foundation of all God's laws is to *love God and to love one another* (Matthew 22:37-40 – Love here is from the Greek word *agape*, and means to will and to do the best for the other, regardless of the other's merit or response). Sin is not *just* a matter of breaking a rule or two set down by God. **Sin is essentially an issue of the heart ... a betrayal of relationships.** It is moral rebellion against our Creator (fuelled by our ingratitude and proud self-centredness) where we fail to honour God and His purposes for us (Genesis 3:1-7). *Every time we behave in a way that is not based upon love for God and others, we fall short of the mark and become less than we are meant to be* (if you don't believe you are a sinner, try lining yourself up against the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17 for an "objective test"). We have all rejected God and alienated ourselves from Him to become fearful, insecure, wounded and defensive survivors in the jungle ... like the prodigal son, we have all taken our inheritance and left home to wander in a hostile wilderness (Genesis 3:8-24)

While most of us live our lives in the jungle thinking we are doing what is right, our view of right has become distorted because of sin (that's why we need direction from God through the Bible and His Son). Soon enough we become accustomed to sin and tend to accept it in our lives (i.e. sinning becomes "natural" or habitual for us, Ephesians 2:1-3), and then we rationalise it and excuse ourselves ("I'm only human – besides, everyone else is doing it") or we even sear our consciences towards sin, encourage it, and begin to call evil good (Romans 1:21-32). **But our guilt remains, despite our ignorance, and we stand justly condemned before our Creator because of our rebellion against Him.**

We can't undo our past ...

There is nothing we can do to make amends to God for our rebellion, no matter how sorry we are. We cannot undo the past any more than Onada could restore the lives of those innocent farmers. Even if Onada devoted the rest of his life to helping people on that Island, he could not make amends for those past murders (and no amount of doing good or religious service can cancel out our debt to God)

Even if we could begin from scratch, relying on our own performance would sooner or later see us failing to measure up and we would be right back where we started – guilty sinners. It is simply not possible to keep any standard or law perfectly. To be justified on the basis of law alone requires **flawless** obedience – *one slip and you're undone!* Far from giving us a right standing with God, law only highlights our failure to honour and obey God (Galatians 3:10-13)

We need God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness, not more rules to break and further demonstrate our failure! The Christian's trust and submission (i.e. faith) towards God and His word – *where God is the object of our trust, not ourselves* – is not "law-keeping in order to be right with God" ... It is simply trying to live life in the only way that is consistent with being God's beloved child ... following in the footsteps of Jesus and *living God's truth* – the really real – rather than playing along with and conforming to the world's *lies* of manipulation and illusion.

We cannot do it ourselves. We must rely on God to rescue us from our predicament.

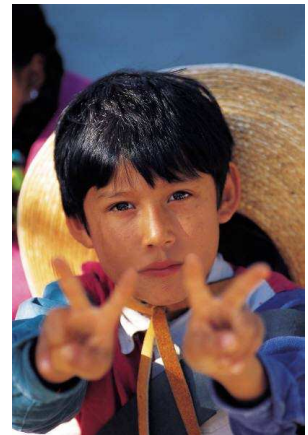


When Onada's presence in the Philippines became known to the Japanese, they negotiated terms for his pardon and arranged for a helicopter to fly over the dense jungle broadcasting this message in Japanese:

Onada, surrender without your weapons. The people in the search party will not shoot you. They will take you back to Japan and protect you. Japan has been defeated. The war is over. You must surrender now!

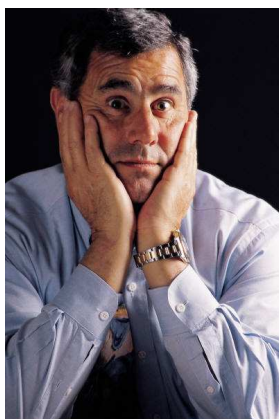
Despite his ignorance, as long as Onada refused the call to surrender (thus rejecting the gracious pardon extended to him) he remained guilty and punishable for his crimes. As it turned out, Onada did surrender and went home to a hero's welcome.

In similar fashion, God sent His Son, Jesus, to call us out of the jungle of sin and to invite us to follow Him and return to God. God promises us forgiveness and acceptance no matter what we have done in the past (wilfully or in ignorance) if we surrender ourselves to Him. Peace and reconciliation with our Father. It's an invitation to return home as a hero ... "my child was dead, and is alive again ... let's celebrate!"



In the past God overlooked [our] ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31)

But frankly, many seem to prefer living in the jungle:



It has been reported that one of the founders of the American Society for Atheism said he was an atheist, not because it is so hard to believe in God, but because he would not accept the moral consequences for his life if it were admitted that God existed – **It takes humility to admit our sinfulness and it takes courage to leave our familiar jungle behind to accept God's offer of forgiveness and to follow Jesus on the unfamiliar road back to our Father.**

Then again, some do not accept God's offer of forgiveness because they think they are good enough anyway:

"I have not sinned that much. The good stuff I've done outweighs the bad. I am generally a good moral person compared with others and God should accept me as I am". **But to be right with God on the basis of our own performance (law keeping – regardless of who makes the 'rules') requires a *perfect scorecard* – and no one has one of those!**



Others think God's offer of forgiveness is too good to be true:



"My sins are too bad and too many for God to forgive me. I'm a nobody, a failure, unworthy, unlovable". **But God promises that no matter how deep the stain of our sins, He will remove it. He can make us as clean as freshly fallen snow ... If we will only submit to Him and let Him help us (Isaiah 1:18-19)**

"I cannot become a Christian yet because I am not good enough yet". **But a person can *never* be "good enough". That's the point! God is willing to forgive us *despite the fact that we don't deserve it* (Romans 5:6-8) – it's a matter of God's grace, not our merit. *Forgiveness is a gift from God, not something we can earn!***



We really aren't OK. No one is. Everyone has chosen to rebel against God in order to run our lives 'our way'. And we are all in a mess because of it. Once we are ready to admit this, we are ready to appreciate and accept God's offer of help and forgiveness through His Son. We have faced the 'bad news' about ourselves, and now we are ready to hear the "good news"!