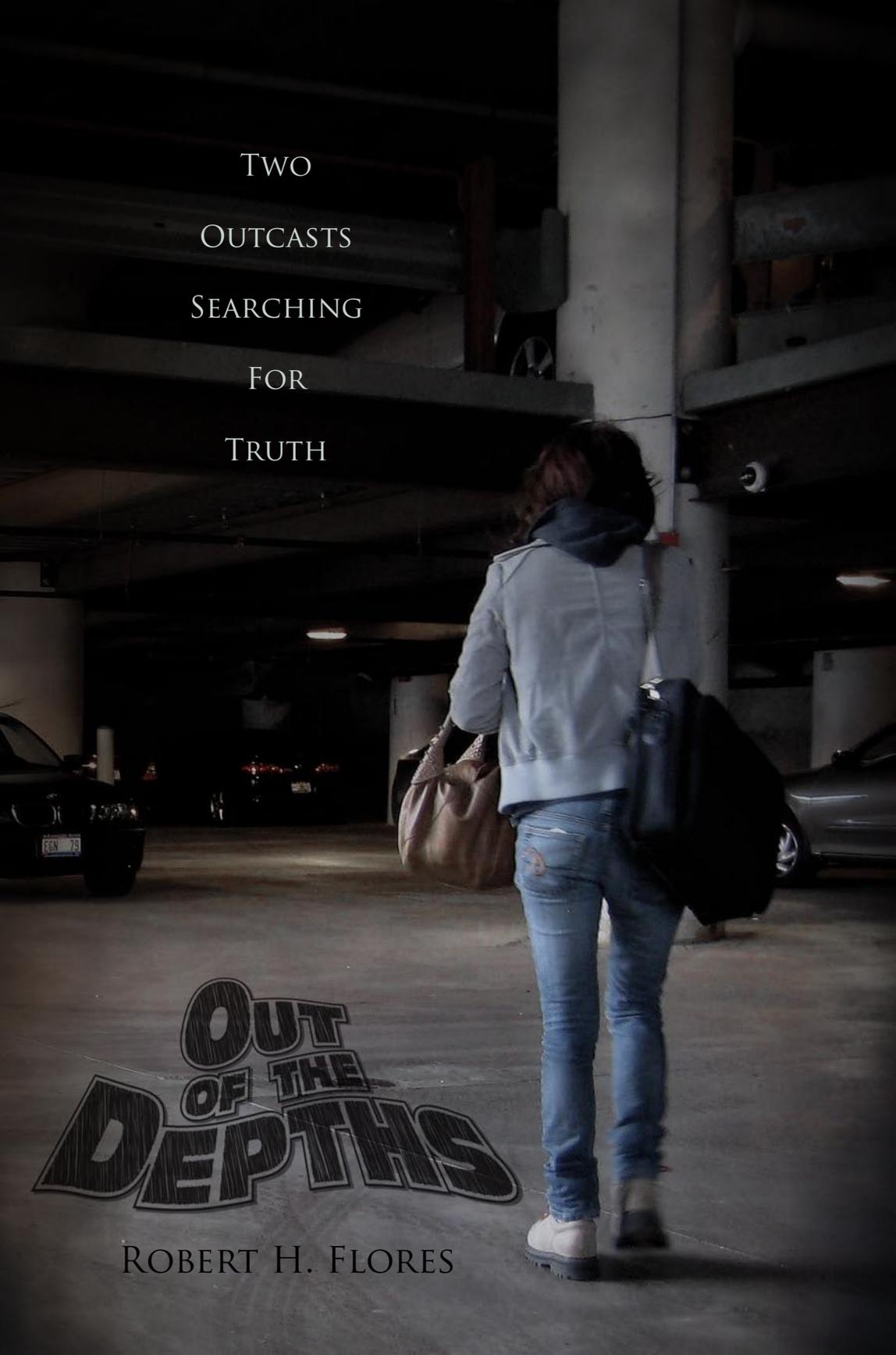


TWO
OUTCASTS
SEARCHING
FOR
TRUTH



OUT
OF THE
DEPTHS

ROBERT H. FLORES

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

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The pitter-patter of rain could be heard inside the massive building. Walking upstairs, and leaving a trail of wet footprints behind, I plopped my briefcase down on the desk. My co-worker, Leon, peeked his head into my cubicle and asked, "Hey, Blake, how's it going?"

"Other than the rain, I'm fine. The weather was actually pretty bad coming into work today. I didn't realize it was going to rain."

"Yeah, you'll get used to Cleveland weather." Leon took a sip of his coffee and asked, "So, anyways, did you meet the new receptionist downstairs?"

"Yeah, I met her briefly this morning. Raquel is her name, right?"

"Uh huh."

"Hopefully she'll do a better job than the last receptionist."

"The ladies downstairs already don't like her."

"Gossip *already*? Isn't it too early in the morning to be gossiping? I mean, even for those blabbermouths downstairs?"

"Apparently not. It's already reached both this floor and the 3rd floor."

"I thought they were Christians. I thought they were supposed to be loving to their neighbors. So, tell me, how come they don't like Raquel?"

"Well, they say she's a lesbian," Leon stirred his coffee a bit, waiting to hear how I would respond.

"Really? And they're making this assumption on—?"

"Her baritone voice. . . the way she dresses. . . I don't know."

"Oh, please. They're probably just jealous of her. She's beautiful and they're not. Tell me, why do women have to be like that? The last few women I've dated have been exactly like that—judgmental, hypocritical."

"Aren't all Christians hypocrites?"

I looked up at Leon and gave him the blank stare.

"I'm just kidding, Blake." I turned back around and Leon continued, "Women just get jealous easily, I guess. But, you have to admit, when you met her, didn't her voice seem a bit manly?"

"No, not really. I mean, how much can you gather from a phrase like 'Nice to meet you'?"

"That's just like you, Blake. You're always weighing each side; always being the fair Christian. That's good. I should be more like that, actually."

I smiled.

"Well, I better go," Leon said as he checked his watch. "I've got to finish that spreadsheet before lunch. I'll instant message you later."

"Alright."

About an hour later, having worked on a large report for my manager, I decided to walk over to the water cooler and stretch the ol' legs. Danielle, one of the shipping assistants, happened to be there, too.

"Good morning, Blake. How are you?"

"I'm fine. How are you?"

"I'm good. Hey, have you met the new girl downstairs?"

"Yeah. Why?"

"She's a lesbian. Stay away from her."

"Why do people keep saying that?"

"Because it's true. She's a sinner."

"And, if she is a sinner, why should that matter if she does her work?"

"Well, that's easy for you to say, Blake. What if a gay guy was working here? How would that make you feel?"

"Well, uh, I guess it would make me feel uncomfortable; like he was always checking me out or something."

"Exactly. I don't want to be around women who are *with* other women. That's disgusting."

"It is disgusting. . . if it's true. You don't even know that for sure, though. Have you happened to have any direct contact with her?"

"No. She just handed me copies of a memo and I said, 'Thanks'."

"Does she seem to be a hard worker, Danielle?"

"Well, yeah, but. . . why are you defending her all of a sudden?"

"I'm not defending her lifestyle. . . I'm just saying maybe we should get to know her before we judge her. Everyone here would feel pretty stupid if it turned out that she wasn't a lesbian and we were all just spreading rumors."

"OK, then *you* get to know her, Blake. I don't want anything to do with her. She's on her way to hell if she doesn't change her sinful lifestyle."

With that, she walked away. I finished my water and crushed the cup into a ball. How can people be so judgmental? I mean, the girl just started working here today and already the office politics are against her. The sad thing is that it's the *Christians* who are judging her—the ones who should be the most loving. I mean, I understand where these women are coming from. The Bible states very clearly that homosexuality is wrong. But, rather than pushing her away from God, we should be showing her about God's love for her and the fact that He wants her to get out of her lifestyle. I slowly walked back to my cubicle.

It was lunch-time before I finally got up from my chair again. I grabbed my coat, my wallet and my keys and headed downstairs. Peeking through the glass doors, I noticed that it had started raining again. I never saw this kind of rain when I lived in Southern California. I seriously did not want to go driving in this weather to get a cheeseburger, so I reluctantly decided to try the cafeteria. I never ate in the cafeteria. Unfortunately, they rarely had any food that I liked. I walked through the double-doors and there were scattered employees throughout. The scent of Cream of Mushroom soup filled the room. After studying the menu for a few minutes, I

finally decided on a turkey sandwich, Fritos and a 7-Up.

I scoped out the cafeteria for a quiet place to sit, and, in the corner, I saw the new receptionist, Raquel, sitting by herself. I decided to walk over and talk to her.

"Hi." I said. "Anyone sitting here?"

"No."

"Do you mind if I do?"

"Go ahead."

I placed my food on the table so I could take my coat off. I blessed my food quietly and started opening my bag of chips. It was time for an ice breaker.

"Nice weather out, *huh?*"

No answer. Just a nod. She started chewing her sandwich faster.

My head was racing through all the options of what I should say.

"So, um, how do you like working here so far?"

"It's alright."

Gosh, her voice was deeper than most women I knew, but that didn't necessarily mean that she was a . . .

"Your name was Blake, right?" she asked.

"Yeah."

"Are you a Christian?"

"Yeah. I've been a Christian six years now."

"If you knew who I was, you wouldn't want to talk to me."

"Uh, why do you say that?"

She smiled and stood up, "It was nice talking with you, Blake. I gotta go."

She grabbed her trash and walked out of the cafeteria.

"That was odd," I mumbled to myself.

I looked around and the other employees were looking up from their food at me. I finished my sandwich and went back to my cubicle.

I checked my Instant Messenger and it had a message waiting for me from Leon:

Leon: Blake, I heard you had lunch with Raquel. What happened? :o)

I paused, wondering what I should say:

Blake: I see the rumor-mill is working overtime these days. Anyways, nothing happened. I just sat down and tried talking with her and she gave me the cold shoulder. She cut our conversation short. It was weird. . .

Leon: So you struck out?

Blake: C'mon Leon, I'm not even interested in her like that. I was only trying to get to know the girl. She seemed perturbed, emotionless.

Leon: You're the only one that has had any meaningful conversation with her. I've heard everyone downstairs is avoiding her like the plague. Uh oh. Phone's ringing. Bye.

I sat back in my chair. I couldn't get my mind off of Raquel. When I looked into her eyes, all I saw was emptiness. What if everyone *is* right? What if she really *is* a lesbian? But, what would it matter if she was? Well, it would matter because it's her lifestyle that is making her so unhappy. I could see it all over her face. But, I can't be the one to tell her that her lifestyle is destroying her life. The women downstairs who work with her should tell her and quit judging her. It's people like Raquel that need Christ— not to be pushed away from Him. Whatever. There's not much I can do about one person's life and there's really no point in me trying to get to know her. She's already given me the cold shoulder; I can take a hint.

For the next few days I would see Raquel and I would say "Hi", but that was about it. She would either nod or smile. If I got a "Hi" out of her, it seemed like a miracle. I wish I didn't have to see her everyday, but, I had to, as her desk was right next to the stairwell. I tried avoiding her as best as I could. But, I had to ask myself *why* was I avoiding her? It didn't make sense to me. I had nothing against her. I didn't even know her! All I knew was that there was something deeply wrong with her and it was sad to see. I decided that I would start praying for her everyday.

A few days later, she walked up the stairs and brought me some mail.

"These came in the mail for you today," she said.

"Thanks."

She looked around my cubicle, "So, is this is where you work?"

"Yeah. I do try to keep it organized, but you know how that goes. . ."

She looked at the documents on my wall. She stared at the inspirational artwork I had hanging up. It was a picture of a landscape with the text of Psalm 130 written in the sky. I pointed at the picture, "That's my favorite Psalm, by the way. It was the first one I read after I became a Christian."

She nodded and finished reading it.

I grabbed the bowl of licorice under my desk and offered some to her, "Would you like some licorice?"

"Uh, sure. Thanks. Well, I better get back downstairs before they wonder what happened to me."

"Yeah, they keep a tight ship around here. Thanks for the mail."

She half-smiled and walked back downstairs.

Leon peeked his head around the corner, "What did *she* want?"

"Nothing. She just handed me some mail."

"I heard you were putting the moves on her by offering her some of your prized licorice," He laughed.

"Cut it out, Leon, I was just trying to be nice. She just seems so. . . well, so dead inside, but I don't know what to do about it."

"Well, if people want to destroy their lives living in sin, that's their problem."

"I know. God has given each of us a free will and it's up to us how we use that free will."

More gossip followed in the weeks to come: "She has rainbow stickers on her truck", "She visits lesbian dance clubs", "She meets her girlfriend after work", "She has photos of several different women on her desk", etc. I was so sick of the gossip. I asked God to not let the gossip affect how I treated her. I continued to smile and say "Hello" to her every morning. I even brought in a box of donuts for her and the girls downstairs, but all of this was to no avail. She continued to give me the cold shoulder.

Another rainy day came and I was forced to eat in the cafeteria again. There she was, in the same corner again, alone. I pretended not to notice her and started heading for the opposite wall with my food, but something inside me made me stop.

I turned around, walked across the room and sat down at the far end of her table. I blessed my food and started eating without saying a word. I just ignored her and went about eating; I didn't want to scare her away and I was hoping she would start talking to me first.

A few minutes went by and she leaned over and whispered, "Look, I know that you're a Christian and all, but you don't have to keep being nice to me if you don't want to. Seriously, I'm used to people not liking me, especially Christians."

I squinted at her and just chewed my sandwich, thinking of how I should respond to such a weird statement.

"It seems like you're judging me, when, in reality, you don't even know me. That's not really fair."

She looked down.

I continued, "Give me one good reason why I wouldn't like you—I mean besides your judgmental attitude towards me?"

"Oh, come on, certainly you've heard by now that I'm a lesbian."

I continued to chew, showing no emotion.

"Well, it's true," she shrugged. "I am a lesbian. I've been one for as long as you've been a Christian—six years. I've hopped from one relationship to another and I've

made my life exactly how I have wanted to. I don't have to answer to anyone. My psychiatrist says I was born this way, so what other choice do I have?"

She leaned back in her chair, quite pleased with herself, and continued, "So, now do you see why you can't be nice to me? All the other Christians here hate me. They all talk behind my back. Why do you have to be any different? So, really, you can just cut it out."

I stopped chewing, took a deep breath and said, "You're right. I don't have to. . ."

Her face turned puzzled.

"... but I *want* to. That's the difference. All these other people you've encountered. . . they're not following the words of Christ. He didn't tell us to 'hate thy neighbor'. He told us to 'love thy neighbor'."

"Why?," she asked incredulously.

"Because He's a God of love. That's why."

"I'm beginning to wonder if love even exists," she whispered as she looked down at her bowl of soup.

"Jesus is love, whether you want to believe that or not, Raquel."

"You know, I do find that hard to believe, Blake. I've called out to him so many times in my life—he's never helped me. When I needed him most, he wasn't there for me. I don't need a God like that."

"If that's who you think God is—uncaring, unloving, unforgiving—that's fine. But the God I serve is a God of mercy and he has called me to love other people—regardless of their sinful lifestyles."

"You probably think that fire and brimstone are going to rain down on me like Sodom and Gomorrah or something. You probably think I'm headed to hell because of my sins, don't you?"

"I was headed to hell because of *my* sins. But God pulled me up out of the depths. He can do that for anyone—including you."

"Well, I'll tell you one thing: God wouldn't want someone like me. You have no idea what sins I've. . ."

She stopped talking and glared at me with those empty, blue eyes. For a brief second, I saw the real Raquel that was buried deep inside her shell. She quietly stood up and walked out of the cafeteria.

I let out a big sigh. My heart was pumping. I looked around and other people were staring at me.

A few days went by and I didn't see Raquel in the office. Her manager told everyone that Raquel had called in sick. It seemed that most of the ladies were quite joyful that she was gone, even if it was for a few days. I didn't think I would ever see her again. I thought she probably just quit. Nonetheless, I continued to pray for her. I asked that God would open up her eyes to see how graceful He truly is.

Friday came and I was happy that the week was over. I was so looking forward

to the weekend. At closing time, I said my goodbyes to everyone and walked down to the parking structure. I had my keys in my hand when I heard someone whisper my name behind me: “Blake”.

I turned around and it was Raquel, standing in the shadows. She was wearing a hooded sweater and looked soaking wet.

“Oh. Hi, Raquel. How are you? What are you doing here? I thought you were sick.”

“Well, I was sick—of myself. A lot has been going on. . .”

As she walked closer to me, I could see that she had a black eye and there were several bruises on her neck.

“Oh my gosh! What happened to you? Are you OK?”

“I’m better now. . . my girlfriend, or, I should say, *ex-girlfriend* beat me up. It’s over with.”

I gathered my thoughts, “I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Look, um, I know this is kinda weird, but I came here to ask you about Jesus Christ—you know, like how you came to know Him and stuff.”

“Really?”

“Yes, Blake, I need Him. I’ve completely destroyed my life. Seriously, I need God. I need His forgiveness because I can’t forgive myself. You have no idea what I’ve done and, well, He’s my last hope.”

“He can and will forgive you, Raquel. His blood paid for your sins.”

“You mean He can wipe my slate clean? It’s not just a rumor?”

“It’s not a rumor. His forgiveness is completely true and real.”

I paused as I looked right into her eyes and said, “Come to think of it, His grace is a rumor that I don’t mind spreading.”

She cracked a smile.

“Well, um,” I looked down at my car keys, “Do you want to get some coffee so we could talk?”

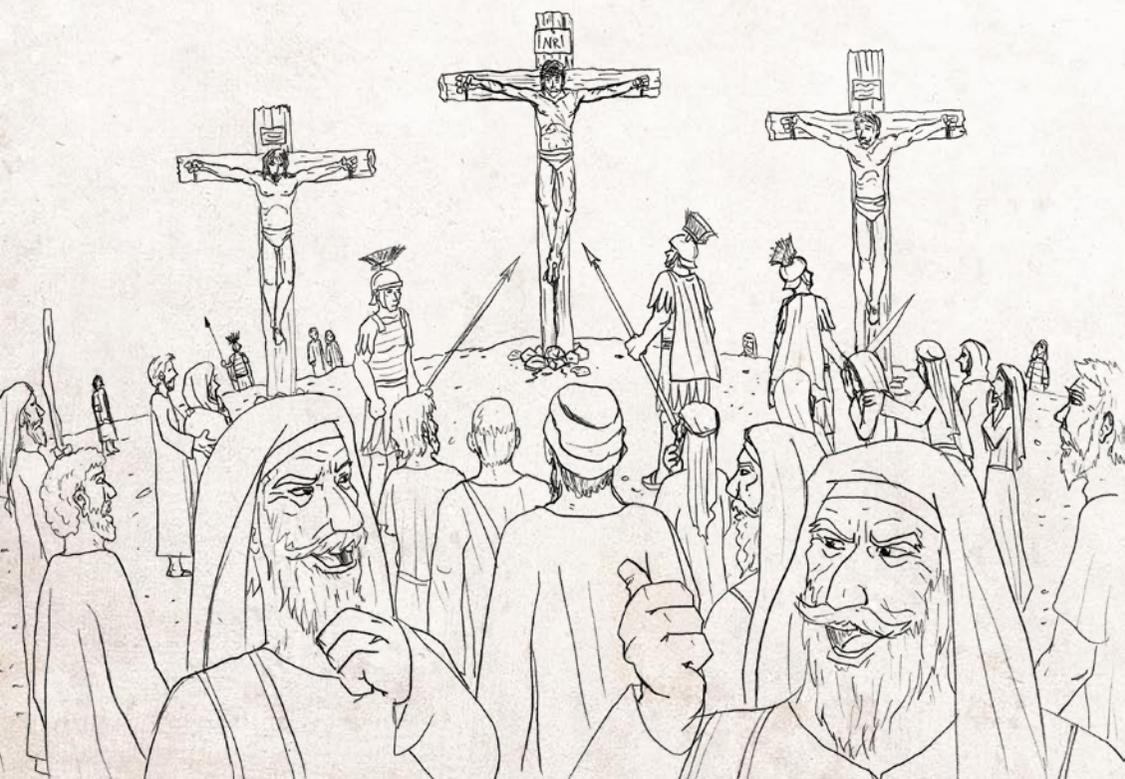
“Yeah, that would be great. Thank you.”

I opened up the door for her and we drove to the coffee shop around the corner.

“Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: I say, more than they that watch for the morning. Let Israel hope in the LORD: for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” — Psalm 130

“The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” — James 5:16b

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST



What is the Gospel?

The gospel is the undeserved salvation of all mankind from sin and eternal death, accomplished only by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ of which is made real to an individual's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the gospel is God's plan to rescue us, sustain us and grow us up in Him for all eternity. The famous passage John 3:16 explains the gospel:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

The gospel's foundation is only based upon what Jesus has done; not what we have done. It is God's free gift to us. Heaven is for those who have trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior. People think that getting to heaven is some long, drawn-out process in which you have to try and follow the Ten Commandments or be a do-gooder or go to church or something. But it's really not complicated at all. See, salvation isn't about getting to God on our own terms or pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, it's about God reaching down to us and offering us salvation free of charge.

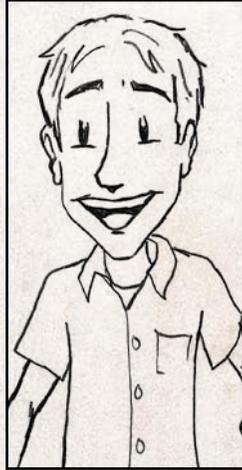
Paul says in Ephesians, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)"* —Ephesians 2:4-5

Our sins won't allow us to get to heaven on our own terms; it is only God's rich mercy that He has made a way for us. God demands no less than perfection, and only perfect people get to go to heaven. Based on works, none of us would make it; only Jesus would. But, God has provided a way to give perfection to us through Jesus. Jesus is the exclusive, one-way to the Father. He says this in John 14:6:

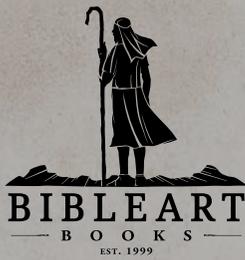
"I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

Either that statement is true or it is not. Every Christian knows that it is absolutely and irrevocably true. Ask Christ to reveal himself to you today. It's your choice.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Robert H. Flores has been telling stories since early childhood. He is a graduate of Riverside Community College and has worked as a graphic designer for almost 20 years. He enjoys writing stories and sharing the gospel in creative ways. He is the author several books, booklets and tracts. He lives in Southern California with his wife, Jennifer, and three children.



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