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## Chapter One

# *Escaping from the City of Destruction*

**A**s I walked through the wilderness of this world, I came to a place where there was a Den [the Bedford jail, where I was imprisoned for twelve years], and there I lay down to sleep. In a dream I saw a man clothed with rags, standing with his face looking away from his own house, with a Book in his hand and a heavy burden on his back (Psalm 38:4). As I looked, he opened the Book and read in it, and as he read, he was crying and trembling. Not being able to contain himself any longer, he began to grieve, saying, “What shall I do?” (Acts 2:37).



*Bunyan introduces us to the story by putting himself in the first person—in other words, the story is about him. He is “Christian”—we find out in chapter eight that his name used to be “Graceless.” But he’s imagining the story about himself in a dream—a dream he had while he was in jail.*



*It is by reading the Book—clearly the Bible—that Christian feels a burden on his back. The burden is that of one who has been introduced to the truth, but doesn't yet quite know what to do with it. This burden on his back will play a significant role in the journey ahead.*

Still in this condition, he turned and went back to his home, trying as best he could to keep his wife and children from seeing his distress. He couldn't be silent long, however, because his troubles seemed to increase. After a while he began to share with his wife and children what was on his mind. "Oh, my dear wife, and you, the children I love, I'm extremely unsettled by this burden that lies so heavily on my back. And more than this, I'm told that our city is going to be burned with fire from heaven, and that both you and I will come to ruin unless some way can be found for us to escape. I haven't found the way yet."

His family was amazed and didn't believe that what he said was true. They thought that some insanity had taken hold of him. Hoping that sleep would settle his mind, they hurried him off to bed. But the night was as troubling to him as the day, and instead of sleeping, he spent the night sighing and weeping.

When the morning came, his family wanted to know how he was. "Worse and worse," he said. He began talking to them again about his burden and his fears, but they wouldn't listen to him. Their hearts were hardening, and they hoped by such

things as harsh words they could jolt this foolishness out of him. Sometimes they would make fun of him, sometimes they would scold him, and sometimes they would neglect him. So he began to spend more time in his room, where he would pray for them and would grieve over his misery. At times he would walk out in the countryside; sometimes he would read, sometimes pray. Days passed.

Then I saw him walking in the fields, reading his Book, as he liked to do, and as he read, he exclaimed, as he had done at the beginning, “What shall I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

He looked in one direction and another, as if he wanted to run; yet he stood still, because (as I understood) he couldn’t tell which way to go. Then I saw a person named Evangelist, who came to him and asked, “Why are you shouting?”



*Evangelist is the first character we meet, outside of the narrator’s family. The word “evangelist” comes from the Greek word meaning “one who brings good news.” Here it has the general sense of the person who first shows Christian the way out of his anguish. It also stands for the Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, who are often referred to in church history as the “Four Evangelists.”*

The man answered, “Sir, I understand by this Book in my hand that I’m condemned to die, and after that to come to judgment (Hebrews 9:27). I find that I’m not willing to die, and I’m not ready to come to judgment.”

Evangelist said, “Why aren’t you willing to die, since this life contains so many evils?”

The man answered, “Because I’m afraid that this burden on my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I’ll fall into the depths of hell. And, sir, if I’m not fit to go to prison, I’m not fit to go to judgment, and from there to be executed; and the thought of these things makes me shout.”

Then Evangelist said, “If this is your condition, why are you standing still?”

“Because I don’t know where to go,” he answered.

Then Evangelist gave him a parchment roll on which were written these words: “Run away from the punishment that is coming” (Matthew 3:7). So the man read it and, looking at Evangelist very carefully, he asked, “In which direction must I run?” Evangelist pointed with his finger over a very wide space and asked, “Do you see that narrow gate in the distance?” (Matthew 7:13-14).

The man said, “No.”

“Do you see that distant shining light?” Evangelist asked (2 Peter 1:19).

“I think I do,” the man replied.

Evangelist continued, “Keep that light in your sight and go directly to it. In this way you will see the gate. When you knock at the gate, you will be told what to do.”

So I saw in my dream that the man began to run. Now, he hadn’t run far from his own door when his wife and children, becoming aware that he was

leaving, began to call out to him to return. But the man put his fingers in his ears and kept running, shouting, “Life! Life! Eternal life!”

So he didn’t look behind him, but ran toward the middle of the plain (Genesis 19:17).

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## Chapter Two

# *Christian and Pliable*

**T**he neighbors also came out to see the man run, and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened, and some called after him to return.

Among those who came out, two were resolved to bring him back, by force if necessary. The name of one was Obstinate, and the name of the other, Pliable.



*Here we are introduced to Christian's first two companions on the journey, Obstinate and Pliable. These two would make a good comedy team. The former has a heart as hard as stone and will not be persuaded by Christian's scriptural quotes, while the latter twists whichever way the wind blows.*

By this time, the man had gotten a good distance ahead of them. As they pursued him, however, they soon overtook him, and he turned to them asking, "Neighbors, why are you coming after me?"

"To persuade you to come back with us," they answered.

The man replied, "There is no way that that can happen. You live in the City of Destruction, the

place where I, also, was born. I see now that it is indeed the City of Destruction, and dying there, sooner or later, you will sink lower than the grave into a place that burns with fire and brimstone. So, good neighbors, be content and go along with me.”

“What!” said Obstinate, “and leave our friends and comforts behind us?”

“Yes,” said Christian (for that was his name), “because everything you give up isn’t worthy to be compared with a little of what I’m seeking to enjoy. If you would like to go along with me and stick to it, you will have the same destiny as I will. For where I’m going there’s enough, and to spare. Come then, and test whether my words are true (2 Corinthians 4:18).”

“What are the things you’re looking for, since you’re leaving everything in the world behind?” asked Obstinate.

“I’m looking,” said Christian, “for an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, one that is kept in heaven and is safe there, to be given at the time appointed to those who persevere in seeking it. Read about it, if you will, in my Book (1 Peter 1:4).”

“Not at all!” said Obstinate. “Away with your Book. Will you go back with us or not?”

“No, I won’t,” said the other, “because I’ve put my hand to the plow (Luke 9:62).”

Obstinate turned to Pliable and said, “Come then, neighbor Pliable. Let’s turn back and go

home without him. There are quite a few of these crazy-headed fools who are wiser in their own eyes than seven people who can reason with them.”

Pliable said, “Don’t speak insults. If what this good Christian says is true, the things he looks for are better than what we have. My heart is inclined to go with my neighbor.”

“What? More fools still?” snorted Obstinate. “Listen to me and go back. Who knows where such a mentally confused person as this will lead you? Go back, go back and be wise!”

Christian then exclaimed, “No! Come with me, Pliable! The things that I spoke of are there to be had, and many more glorious ones besides. If you can’t believe me, here, read it in this Book. The truth of what is written in it is all confirmed by the Blood of the One who made it (Hebrews 9:17–21).”

“Well, neighbor Obstinate,” said Pliable, “I’m starting to come to a decision. I’m going along with this good man. But, my good companion, do you know the way to this enjoyable place?”

“I’m directed by a person named Evangelist,” replied Christian, “to go quickly to a little narrow gate that lies ahead of us, where we will receive instructions about the Way.”

“Come then, good neighbor,” answered Pliable, “let’s be on our way.”

So they both went along together.

“And I’ll go back to my place,” shouted Obstinate over his shoulder. “I won’t be the companion of such misled, fanatical people.”

I saw in my dream that when Obstinate left, Christian and Pliable went walking over the plain, talking together as they went.

“Come, neighbor Pliable, how are you doing? I’m glad you were persuaded to go along with me. If only Obstinate himself had felt what I’ve felt of the powers and terrors of what can’t be seen yet, he wouldn’t have turned his back on us so lightly!”

Pliable replied, “My good neighbor, since there are only the two of us here, tell me more now about the wonderful things where we’re going.”

“I can conceive them in my mind better than I can put them into words,” answered his companion. “But, since you want to know, I’ll read about them in my Book (1 Corinthians 2:9).”

“And do you think that the words of your Book are certainly true?” asked Pliable.

“Yes, truly,” Christian avowed. “This Book was made by the One who cannot lie (Titus 1:2).”

“Well said! What wonderful things are they?”

“There’s an endless kingdom to live in, and everlasting life to be given us, so that we may live in that kingdom forever.”

“Well said! And what else?”

“There are crowns of glory to be given us, and clothes that will make us shine like the sun in the heavens (2 Timothy 4:8).”

“This is very pleasant,” continued Pliable. “And what else?”

“There will be no more crying, and no sorrow, for the One who is the Owner of the place will

wipe away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 22:4).”

“And what company will we have there?” asked Pliable.

“There we will be with angels—seraphim and cherubim (Isaiah 6:2, Revelation 5:11),” answered Christian, “creatures that will dazzle your eyes to look at them. There also you will meet with thousands and tens of thousands who have gone before us to that place. None of them is hurtful, but all are loving and holy; everyone is walking in the sight of God, standing in His presence forever. In a word, we will see the elders with their golden crowns (Revelation 4:4); there we will see the holy virgins with their golden harps (Revelation 14:1–5); there we will see persons who were cut in pieces by the world, burned in flames, eaten by beasts, drowned in the seas—all for the love they bear for the Lord of that place (John 12:25). They will all be well and will be clothed with immortality as with a garment (2 Corinthians 5:2).”

“Hearing this is enough to delight a person’s heart!” exclaimed Pliable. “But are these things to be enjoyed? How will we get to share in them?”

“The Lord, the Governor of that country, has recorded all that in this Book,” Christian went on. “The substance of it is this: If we are truly willing to have it, He will freely bestow it upon us (Isaiah 55:1).”

“Well, my good companion, I’m glad to hear of these things. Come on, let’s increase our pace!”

Christian replied sadly, “I can’t go as fast as I would like to because of this burden on my back.”

I saw in my dream that just as they ended this talk, they came to a very muddy, slimy swamp in the middle of the plain. Not noticing it, they both fell suddenly into it. It is called the Slough of Despond, meaning “the hollow filled with deep mud and symbolizing discouragement.” Here they wallowed for a time, and were seriously covered with dirt and mud. Christian, because of the burden on his back, began to sink into the slimy mud.

Then Pliable called out, “Ah! neighbor Christian, where are you now?”

“To tell you the truth,” said Christian, “I don’t know.”

At this Pliable became offended, and angrily said to his companion, “Is this the happiness you told me of all the way here? If we have such trouble at the beginning of our journey, what can we expect between this and our journey’s end? If I get out of this mud alive, you will possess the brave country alone for me.”



*The slightest bit of trouble sends Pliable packing—while Christian plows through the quicksand of discouragement, Pliable climbs back out and shouts sarcastically that Christian can get to the Promised Land alone.*

And with that, he gave a desperate struggle or two, and got out of the mud on the side of the swamp that was nearest his own house. Away he went, and Christian saw no more of him.

Christian, then, was left to tumble in the Slough of Despond alone. He kept endeavoring to struggle to the side of the Slough farthest from his own house, toward the narrow gate. Yet he couldn't get out of the mud because of the great burden on his back.

But I saw in my dream that a person came to him whose name was Help, and asked him what he was doing there.

"Sir," said Christian, "I was told to go this way by a person called Evangelist, who directed me to that gate over there, so that I might escape the divine punishment that is coming. As I was going, I fell in here."

"But why didn't you look for the steps?" asked the other.

"Fear was following me so closely," said Christian, "that I ran without paying attention, and fell in."

Then Help said, "Give me your hand." So Christian gave Help his hand, and Help pulled Christian out and set him on solid ground and told him to go on his way (Psalm 40:2).

I then approached the one who had pulled Christian out and asked him, "Sir, since this is the route from the City of Destruction to that gate over there, why is it that this area isn't

repaired, so that poor travelers might go over it more safely?”

He replied, “This muddy hollow is the type of place that can’t be repaired. It’s the descent where the scum and filth that accompany the conviction of sin continually run, and therefore it’s called the Slough of Despond. For still, as the sinner wakes up and realizes his lost condition, many fears and doubts and discouraging apprehensions arise in his soul. All of them get together and settle in this place. This is the reason for the badness of the ground.

“It is not the pleasure of the King that this place should remain so bad,” he went on (Isaiah 35:3). “For about sixteen hundred years His laborers also have, by the direction of His Majesty’s surveyors, been employed about this patch of ground, in case it might be able to be repaired. Yes, and to my knowledge,” he said, “at least twenty thousand cartloads have been swallowed up here—yes, millions of wholesome instructions that have at all seasons been brought from all kinds of places in the King’s dominions (and those who can tell say they are the best materials to make good ground out of the place)—in hopes that it might have been repaired. But it’s still the Slough of Despond, and it will continue to be so when they’ve done all they can.



*Bunyan uses Help to make an important theological point. This Slough of Despond is not on the path because*

*of God's desire, but because of our condition as human beings. Regardless of the greatness of God and God's salvation, humans on the path to God inevitably struggle with doubt and despondence, and the only way to survive it is to push on through—with God's "Help."*

“It’s true,” he went on, “that there are, by the direction of the Lawgiver, certain good, substantial steps, placed through the very middle of this slough. But at the times when this place spews out its filth, as it does on any change of weather, those steps are hard to see. And even if they are, people, through the dizziness of their heads, miss them and fall into the mud, even though the steps are there. But the ground is good when they’ve gotten in at the gate (1 Samuel 12:23).”

Now, I saw in my dream that by this time Pliable had arrived back at his home. His neighbors came to visit him, and some of them called him wise for coming back, while others called him a fool for endangering himself with Christian in the first place. Others made fun of his cowardliness, saying, “Surely since you set out on an adventure, I wouldn’t have been so selfish and mean-spirited as to quit because of a few difficulties.” So Pliable sat shamefacedly among them. But after a while he regained his confidence, and then they all began to ridicule poor Christian behind his back. So much for Pliable.

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## Chapter Three

### *A Dangerous Encounter*

**A**s Christian was walking along by himself, he caught sight of someone far off, coming across the field to meet him. It happened that they met just as their paths crossed one another. The gentleman's name was Mr. Worldly Wiseman, and he lived in the town of Worldly Policy, a very great town not far from the one from which Christian came. Christian's leaving the City of Destruction had been widely talked about, so that Mr. Worldly Wiseman had heard of him and his journey. Observing Christian's laborious efforts, and hearing his sighs and groans, he spoke to him in this manner:



*Enter stage left: Mr. Worldly Wiseman, one of the more colorful characters in the story. A smooth-talking, used-car-salesman type, he takes Christian on a detour by convincing him that he has to get rid of his burden immediately. Still a little gullible this early in his journey, Christian goes along with Mr. WW—of course, he will find that there is no shortcut for relief from his heavy load.*

“Well now, my good man! Where are you going in this burdened manner?”

“A burdened manner indeed, as ever I think any poor creature had,” was Christian’s response. “And since you ask me where I’m going, I tell you, sir, I’m going to that narrow gate in the distance, where, I’ve been informed, I’ll be enabled to get rid of my heavy burden.”

“Do you have a wife and children?” asked the other.

“Yes,” said Christian. “But I’m so weighed down with this burden that I can’t take pleasure in them as I formerly did. I think I am as though I had no family (1 Corinthians 7:29).”

Mr. Worldly Wiseman looked at him shrewdly, saying, “Will you listen to me if I give you counsel?”

“If it’s good, I will,” said Christian. “For I’m certainly in need of good counsel.”

“I would advise you, then, with all speed to rid yourself of this burden. You will never be settled in your mind until then. Nor can you enjoy the blessings God has bestowed on you till then.”

Christian answered, “That’s what I’m looking for, namely to be rid of this heavy burden, but I can’t get it off myself, nor is there anyone in our country who can take it off my shoulders. I’m going this way, as I told you, in order to get rid of my burden.”

“Who told you to go this way to get rid of your burden?” asked the other.

“A person who appeared to me to be a very great and honorable person. His name, as I remember, is Evangelist.”

“I curse him for his counsel!” exclaimed Worldly Wiseman. “There is no more dangerous and troublesome way in the world than the one to which he has directed you! You will find this to be the case if you follow his advice! I notice that you have already encountered some difficulty, for I see the dirt of the Slough of Despond is on you. But that slough is only the beginning of sorrows that accompany those who go on in that way. Listen to me! for I am older and wiser than you. In this way you’re on, you’re likely to meet with weariness, pain, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and, in a word—death and such things! These things are certainly true, and have been confirmed by many testimonies. Why should a person so carelessly throw himself away by paying attention to a stranger?”

“Why sir,” replied Christian, “this burden on my back is more terrible to me than all those things you’ve mentioned. No! I think I don’t care what I encounter on the Way, if only I can also encounter deliverance from my burden.”

“How did you come by the burden in the first place?” asked the other.

“By reading this Book in my hand,” said Christian.

“I thought so!” retorted Worldly Wiseman. “And it’s happened to you just as it has to other

weak persons who meddle in things too high for them. They suddenly fall into the same distractions as you have—distractions that not only take away people’s courage, but lead them into desperate ventures to obtain something that they know nothing about!”



*Ironically, Mr. WW warns Christian to avoid distractions, even as he himself is being a distraction!*

“I know what I want to obtain,” Christian replied. “I want to obtain relief from my heavy burden!”

“But why will you seek for relief this way, seeing that so many dangers accompany it? Especially since I could direct you to get what you desire without these dangers that you’re going to meet if you continue in this way, if only you had patience to listen to me. Besides,” Worldly Wiseman continued, “I’ll add that, instead of those dangers, you’ll meet with much safety, friendship, and contentment.”

“Sir,” said Christian hopefully, “I beg you, reveal this secret to me.”

Worldly Wiseman proceeded: “In that village over there, called Morality, there lives a gentleman whose name is Legality—a very judicious person, a person of very good reputation. He has skill to help people get rid of such burdens as yours. To my knowledge, he’s done a great deal of good in this way. Yes, and besides, he has skill to cure

those who are somewhat crazed in their wits with their burdens. As I said, you may go to him and be helped very quickly. His house is not quite a mile from here, and if he isn't at home, he has a son named Civility who can help you quite as well as the old gentleman himself. There you may be relieved of your burden, and if you don't feel like going back to your former home (as indeed I wouldn't want you to do), you may send for your wife and children and find a home in this village at a reasonable rate. Supplies there are cheap and good. What will make your own life even happier is that in this village you're sure to be living among honest neighbors, in credit and good fashion."



*The temptation that Worldly Wiseman lays before Christian is to get rid of his burden by means of law (Legality) and right living (Civility) in the town of Morality. But, of course, a person cannot be saved by the law or by living a good life, and Christian finds the hills to Morality too steep to climb.*

Christian was confused by this speech. Soon he concluded, "If what this gentleman has said is true, my wisest course is to take his advice." With that he said, "Sir, which is the way to this honest person's house?"

"Do you see that high hill over there?"

"Yes, very well."

"You must go by that hill," said Worldly Wiseman. "And the first house you come to is his."

So Christian turned out of his way to go to Mr. Legality's house for help. But when he was very close to the hill, it seemed so high, and the side next to him seemed to hang over the road in such a dangerous way, that Christian was afraid to venture farther, for fear that the hill would fall on his head. So he stood still, not knowing what to do. His burden, too, seemed even heavier than before. There also came flashes of lightning out of the hill, so that Christian was afraid he would be burned, and he began to sweat and tremble with fear.

He was sorry now that he had listened to Mr. Worldly Wiseman's advice. While he stood there, not knowing what to do, he saw Evangelist coming toward him. At the sight of him, Christian blushed for shame. Coming up to him, Evangelist looked at him with a severe and dreadful expression, and began to talk with Christian. "What are you doing here, Christian?" he said. Christian didn't know how to answer, so he stood there speechless before him. Evangelist went on, "Aren't you the person that I found shouting outside the City of Destruction?"



*Evangelist returns to the scene, finding Christian at the bottom of Morality cliff. But Evangelist is not lighthearted here—he is stern and dour, scolding Christian for listening to the voice of Worldly Wiseman. Evangelist goes on to use Scripture to show Christian the difference between worldly ways and God's ways.*