

## **The Plan of Salvation Page**

### **1) Our preference is that the HCSB not include any Plan of Salvation page.**

We are as eager as anyone to have unbelievers come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior. However, we see difficulties in a generic Plan of Salvation page in a Bible translation like the HCSB that intends to be used by Christians from a variety of denominations.

The problem is that each denomination has its own preferred way of introducing Jesus to unbelievers, and there are significant differences. For example, some denominations teach that Jesus died for the sins of all people on earth, whether they believe or not. Other denominations do not. Some denominations like to guide unbelievers into making a decision for Christ through the use of a “sinner’s prayer.” Other denominations do not. Because conversion to faith in Christ lies at the heart of being a Christian, these concerns are more than just a difference of approach. Christians who hold to the Bible as God’s Word will view these differences as important, doctrinal declarations. They will not have a high tolerance for alternatives that, in their view, compromise scriptural truth.

If there is a desire for a Bible translation to be used by Christians from many denominations, it would seem best to offer a straightforward translation with no paratextual material of a doctrinal nature. Then each denomination can present the Christian faith in the way that it would like on the basis of the translation.

In short, we worry that a generic Plan of Salvation page will prove less than satisfactory to everyone. If a Christian group wants to use Bibles for evangelistic purposes, it is our opinion that they should prepare a tract or brochure that would accompany the Bibles, presenting the gospel in the way that they prefer and steering people into a church from that denomination. Or, if the publishers of the HCSB wish to retain some kind of Plan of Salvation page, perhaps Broadman & Holman could offer one specific edition with the page still retained and the Bible labeled as an “Evangelism Bible.”

### **2) We are not comfortable with the Plan of Salvation pages that have been published to this point.**

We are glad that the HCSB no longer features the “Plan of Salvation” page using the acronym FAITH. It had elements that posed very definite doctrinal challenges to us in the WELS. Especially problematic was the sinner’s prayer and the at least implied cooperative human role in conversion. Another issue in the FAITH page was the reference to believer’s baptism.

We view the revised evangelism page (“God’s Plan for Salvation”) as an improvement. It has removed the sinner’s prayer and the reference to believer’s baptism. As such, it is a clearer Gospel testimony to God’s saving deeds in Jesus Christ. However, we still see some shortcomings, especially in the last two sections. The idea of some kind of cooperation in conversion that stems in part from personal spiritual powers seems to persist.

As Lutherans, we are convinced from the Scriptures that God’s Holy Spirit is totally operative (in our circles called “monergism”) in a person’s conversion to the Christian faith. We do not teach that a person has some, however minor, ability to become a believer in Christ (called “synergism”). Consequently, we cannot support any outreach tool that gives the impression that people can come to faith through a decision for Christ made by their own free will.

**3) We would have difficulty using a Bible with a Baptist evangelism call number in it.**

Similar to the above, we can understand the desire behind having an evangelism call number printed in Bibles, and we are sure that the people who are associated with the Evangelism Response Center will say that they intend to offer a biblical presentation of the gospel of salvation through Christ. But once again, there are differences in the way that each denomination would like to direct a person who is searching. The WELS, for example, runs a website for unchurched people called [www.whataboutjesus.com](http://www.whataboutjesus.com). People who come upon this site will have the gospel presented according to Lutheran principles, and they will be steered toward Lutheran churches. Obviously if it were up to us, we would like this website listed rather than the Evangelism Response Center in any Bibles that we would circulate.

When we called the Evangelism Response Center, we learned that the Center is affiliated with the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and that callers will be referred to local SBC congregations. To us it seems out of place that a translation that is intended to appeal to a broad base of Christianity would allow such exclusive access to the ministry of one denomination. We acknowledge the intent by B&H that the HCSB not be viewed as the “Southern Baptist” Bible. However, the inclusion of a call number linking callers to a SBC affiliated ministry can only reinforce the impression that the HCSB is a Baptist Bible, not a Bible intended for general usage.

**4) Some acceptable alternatives.**

You invited us to suggest pages that would be acceptable to WELS. In Appendix B we are attaching the current HCSB “God’s Plan for Salvation” page with changes that we think would better express scriptural truths and so make clearer God’s gracious role in converting the lost sinner. If the proposed changes are made, we would find the evangelism page acceptable.

We are aware that an alternative has been suggested to the evangelism page in its current form by the two Lutheran members of the HCSB Oversight Committee (Das and Steinmann). We are somewhat comfortable with that version, but we would also be very pleased if a few changes were made (Appendix C). If given a choice between the current page with the revisions we propose and the Das/Steinmann proposal with revisions, we could live with either one. But if any Plan of Salvation page is included, we strongly suggest not including the phone number to the Evangelism Response Center (for the reasons listed in #3 above).

If we may be so bold, we also offer one additional proposal, authored by a member of our Translation Liaison Committee. “Bad News—Good News” is a simple presentation of Law and Gospel that should be comprehensible to people who come into contact with the HCSB but have no knowledge of Christ as the Savior of all sinners (Appendix D). Like you, we want such people, for whom Christ died, to come to grips with their own sin and believe the lovely Gospel message: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15).

## **Appendix A – Current HCSB Plan of Salvation Page**

### **God's Plan for Salvation**

"How can I find meaning and purpose in life?" is a common question and worth considering. So what is life all about—and how does this relate to God, me, and eternity?

#### **It's about how we got here.**

People on this planet didn't get here by some cosmic accident. At creation, God said, "Let Us make man in Our image" (Genesis 1:26). God created men and women and placed us here on the earth.

#### **It's about why God put us here.**

God loved what He created and created us to truly know and enjoy Him. He loved us and wanted to live in fellowship with us. In the beginning, we lived in harmony and happiness with God and one another (Genesis 1:31).

#### **It's about how we responded.**

In our early history the first humans turned away from God and went their own way—and fellowship with God was broken. Now, all people are born with a sinful nature, and without exception all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23). The consequence of this is that we are separated from God and deserve punishment for our sins.

#### **It's about how God rescues us.**

Out of His deep love for us, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to rescue us from our dilemma by dying on the cross (John 3:16). By sacrificing His life on behalf of sinners He took the punishment we deserve in order to provide salvation. Then God raised Jesus from the dead, confirming the work of Jesus on the cross and establishing His power over death.

#### **It's about our response.**

Jesus has sufficiently paid the debt for all of our wrong-doing, and we are called to turn from our sin, rebellion, and isolation and trust what Jesus has done on our behalf.

God makes very clear the conditions by which the salvation Jesus offers can be ours. In Mark 1:15 Jesus said, "Repent and believe in the good news!"

First, God says we must repent. The word "repent" means a change of direction. This means when we turn to God, we are turning away from sin and giving up on the attempt to make ourselves right before God.

Second, God says we must believe. The word "believe" as it is used in the Bible means trust. The object of our trust is the One who paid the price for our wrong-doing. We must trust Jesus to remove our guilt and the penalty of all the wrongs we have done. The Bible says when we put our faith in Jesus, God takes our sins away and gives us the gift of eternal life.

#### **How will you respond?**

The Bible says that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord" will be rescued (Romans 10:13). If you've not trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior, why not stop right now, turn from your sin, and believe in Him who alone can save you and give you new and eternal life?

#### **Evangelism Response Center**

If you would like to talk to someone about Jesus, call toll free anytime 888-537-8720

## **Appendix B – Current HCSB Page with WELS Revisions (WELS revisions are shaded)**

### **What is Life Really All About? Or Jesus is the Meaning and Purpose of Life**

"How can I find meaning and purpose in life?" is a common question and worth considering. So what is life all about—and how does this relate to God, me, and eternity?

#### **It's about how we got here.**

People on this planet didn't get here by some cosmic accident. At creation, God said, "Let Us make man in Our image" (Genesis 1:26). God created men and women and placed us here on the earth.

#### **It's about why God put us here.**

God loved what He created and created us to truly know and enjoy Him. He loved us and wanted to live in fellowship with us. In the beginning, we lived in harmony and happiness with God and one another (Genesis 1:31).

#### **It's about how we responded.**

In our early history the first humans turned away from God and went their own way—and fellowship with God was broken. Now, all people are born with a sinful nature, and without exception all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23). The consequence of this is that we are separated from God and deserve punishment for our sins.

#### **It's about how God has rescued us.**

Out of His deep love for us, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to rescue us from our terrible predicament by dying on the cross (John 3:16). By sacrificing His life on behalf of sinners He took the punishment we deserve in order to save us from our sins. Then God raised Jesus from the dead, confirming the work of Jesus on the cross and establishing His power over death. **Jesus is the real meaning and purpose of life.**

#### **It's about how God's gifts come to each one of us.**

Jesus has sufficiently paid the debt for all of our wrong-doing. **We can add nothing to what He accomplished for every sinner. What He did for every sinner becomes our own simply through believing in Christ. The word "believe" as it is used in the Bible means trust. The object of our trust is the One who paid the price for our wrong-doing and gave us righteousness from God through faith in Him (Romans 3:21-24).**

"What must I do to be saved?" One of the greatest missionaries, the apostle Paul, was asked this question by a man who sensed he was in deep trouble before God. Paul simply told him, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). We cannot make ourselves into believers in Christ. God himself does that work. He gives this promise to you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

## **Appendix C – Current HCSB Page with Das/Steinmann Revisions (WELS revisions are shaded)**

### **God’s Plan for Salvation**

How can I have a relationship with God, and what does that mean for me now and for eternity?

#### **God started His relationship with us at creation.**

People didn't get here by some cosmic accident. At creation, God said, "Let Us make man in Our image" (Genesis 1:26). God created men and women and placed us here on the earth.

#### **God put us here to have a relationship with Him.**

God loved what He created and wanted to live in fellowship with us. In the beginning, we lived in harmony and happiness with God and one another (Genesis 1:31).

#### **Humanity turned away from God.**

In our early history the first humans turned away from God and went their own way—and fellowship with God was broken. Now, all people are born in sin, and without exception all of us have sinned (Romans 3:23). The consequence of this is that we are separated from God and deserve punishment for our sins.

#### **God rescued us in order to bring us back into a relationship with Him.**

Out of His deep love for us, God sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to rescue us from our dilemma by dying on the cross (John 3:16). By sacrificing His life on behalf of sinners He took the punishment we deserve in order to provide salvation. Then God raised Jesus from the dead, confirming the work of Jesus on the cross and establishing His power over death.

#### **Jesus invites us into this new relationship with God.**

Jesus has sufficiently paid the debt for all of our wrong-doing, and, through His Word, He calls us from our sin, rebellion, and isolation to trust what He has done on our behalf. In Mark 1:15 Jesus said, "Repent and believe in the good news!" The word "repent" means a change of heart. Repentance is a turning away from sin and giving up on the attempt to make ourselves right before God. The object of our trust is Jesus—the One who paid the price for our wrong-doing.

#### **~~How will you enter into this new relationship?~~**

#### **This new relationship is ours through faith in Jesus.**

God’s Word has power and stirs our hearts (Romans 10:8). “Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the message about Christ” (Romans 10:17). The Bible says that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord” will be rescued from the eternal consequences of sin (Romans 10:13). This relationship with God through Jesus Christ is His gift to you. As Savior of all people, He ~~offers~~ gives you the power of His Holy Spirit to turn from your sin and believe in Him (1 Corinthians 12:3). ~~If you receive His gift by faith, He will save you from sin and death, and give you eternal life to enjoy now and forever.~~ Through his apostle, God gives this promise to you, “Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

## **Appendix D – New Suggestion from WELS**

### **In the Bible God tells us “Bad News” and “Good News.”**

#### **The “Bad News” is all about our spiritual problem before God.**

**1. God has his expectations for how each person should live.**

- Leviticus 19:2 – Be holy because I, Yahweh your God, am holy.
- Matthew 5:48 – Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

*Be holy, just like God!*

**2. No one meets the holy God’s expectations.**

- Romans 3:12 – All have turned away; all alike have become useless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.
- Romans 6:23a – The wages of sin is death.

*God threatens to punish sinners with eternal death.*

#### **The “Good News” is all about how God has solved our spiritual problem.**

**3. Because of his great love for sinners, God the Father has solved our problem with sin.**

- John 3:16a – For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son.
- 2 Corinthians 5:19,21 – in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them. ... He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

*God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to live, die, and rise again for the eternal good of sinners.*

**4. The spiritual rescue won by Jesus comes to the individual sinner through faith in Christ.**

- John 3:16b – Everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.
- Romans 6:23b – The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*All who believe in Jesus will have eternal life.*

- Ephesians 2:8,9 – For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.

*God has saved by grace, not because of what we do. Believe the Good News!*