window of hope that can never be closed. It was the start of a new beginning, the first step in God’s great plan to make all things new and to prepare for a new heaven and new earth in which there are justice and peace forever.

When Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, the cry, “Why doesn’t God stop all this evil?” will at last be answered. All that is evil and all that cannot be rescued will finally be sent away to everlasting destruction. God’s glorious purposes for his creation will at last be realized.

Jesus offers hope for the future, the hope that comes from being reconnected with God through him, and from receiving the Spirit of God to live in us and make us new from the inside.

**God’s Gifts for You**
These three gifts of forgiveness, purpose and hope are very precious indeed, and you can experience them for yourself. God has done everything necessary for us to be forgiven, to have a purpose for our lives and to live with hope for the future. But we need to accept these things for ourselves, and that can be hard.

To accept forgiveness means I must admit that I have got it wrong and need to be forgiven and to embrace change. To receive God’s purpose and hope for my life means being willing to let go of my plans for my life and seeking his.

This is all very costly, and may well cause people close to you to question what you have done.

But as you count the cost, remember the benefits: being reunited with the God who knows you best and loves you most; having the Spirit of God to guide you through life; and knowing a deep peace in your heart now and nothing to fear when you die. It also means being a part of the worldwide family of the Church. These gifts are available to you, your family and friends, and to all who will receive them.

If you want to know more, find a church and get to know the ministers and people. Ask your questions. And then I hope you will come to the point when you are ready to commit to Jesus Christ in baptism, if you are not already baptized, and ask him to come into your life with a prayer like this:

*Heavenly Father, thank you that you love the world so much that you sent Jesus to bring us full and free forgiveness and a whole new life. Please forgive me all that I have done to offend you. Send your Holy Spirit into my life and lead me in your ways. Let me live in your forgiveness, purpose and hope. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.*
When I was seven years old, my Sunday School teacher explained that Jesus, God’s own Son, was offering to guide me all the way through my life. He would even sweep the dirt and dust out of my life and come and live inside me and be with me all the time, no matter what happened.

I still remember the excitement I felt about that offer. Even then I could see that life would be difficult. How would I cope with school? What job would I do when I grew up? Would I find someone to marry me? Jesus’ offer to be my guide looked very attractive indeed.

That evening, I sat up in bed and prayed that Jesus would sweep out my life and come and live in me and lead me through life.

Many years have passed since then, but as I look back, I see how Jesus has been with me all along. Even when I have ignored him and gone my own way, he has welcomed me back with open arms when I turned to him again. Since that young age, I have had the privilege of knowing forgiveness for the past, purpose for the present, and hope for the future.

So many people are looking for those very things that I discovered in church as I was growing up: forgiveness, purpose and hope. Down the years, I have had the privilege of seeing many people of all ages and backgrounds discover these same gifts through the life of the church.

If you are looking for these things yourself, the best place to start is with the Christian friends you know. But if you were to ask me about them, here is what I’d say.

 Forgiveness for the past
When we do things that upset someone we love, we become distanced from them. We are embarrassed to meet them and feel uncomfortable in their presence. Only if we are ready to say, “I’m sorry,” and they are willing to forgive us can the friendship be restored.

The reason so many of us feel disconnected from God is because we have upset God in so many ways. We have done things we know we should not have done, not done things that we should have done, and lived as if this really didn’t matter. We don’t live up to our own values, let alone God’s standards of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

Jesus came to bring us back to God. As he suffered and died on the cross he took the consequences of what we have done wrong. He died so that we could be forgiven. And he rose from the dead so that we might rise from the dead and live with God forever.

Forgiveness is always costly, and Jesus bore the cost of forgiving the whole world, because he loves us so much. It is now a gift to be received by coming to Jesus and humbly asking him for it.

Purpose for the present
One of the most basic needs every person has is for a sense of purpose. We need to know why we are alive and what we are supposed to be doing.

If the “Big Bang” and evolution completely explain how humans came to exist, as some suggest, it is hard to believe there is any purpose to our lives, other than to reproduce. We are just here by chance. But I don’t think this is the whole story. There is a bigger picture, and it is of God creating people to love and delight in. He wants to be in relationship with us.

There is a purpose for our lives. We have God-given desires and talents that are to be used for the good of society. Discovering what God wants us to do and doing it for him is a source of deep satisfaction.

Hope for the future
Whatever our situation, it makes a great difference to know that there is something to look forward to. When Jesus rose from the dead with a body that would never grow old, never get sick and never die, he opened up a