

SOMEONE FOR EVERYONE? • THE CREATOR'S HANDS • YOUR CONSCIENCE TALKING

magazine insight

December 6, 2003

Battle for Your Buck

Money-smart tips you need—now!

The First Step

God's awesome move to save us!

My Best Boyfriend

Finally I found love.

The First Step

BY L. DAVID HARRIS

In 1996 Allen Iverson was first pick in the NBA draft. He began playing with the Philadelphia 76ers even though he was only a college sophomore.

In one of his rookie season games Al, the braided one, got the ball slightly above the three-point line. The moment he retrieved the pass, he heard Chicago Bulls coach Phil Jackson yell, "Michael!" referring to the tongue-wagging, high-flying defensive specialist. Jackson wanted Jordan to prevent Iverson from scoring.

The commentator captured the scene—the best player ever facing the young pretender on his way to the throne. "Iverson has Michael—the crowd is into it!" the commentator intoned. "Jordan digs in to his defensive stance."

Later, in an interview, while watching the highlights of that game, Iverson broke down how he scored on Jordan during the famous play.

"I gave him a little crossover dribble to see if he'd bite on it," Iverson remembered, wanting to see how close Jordan would play him. "I let him set his feet, and I dribbled back again to set up my move."

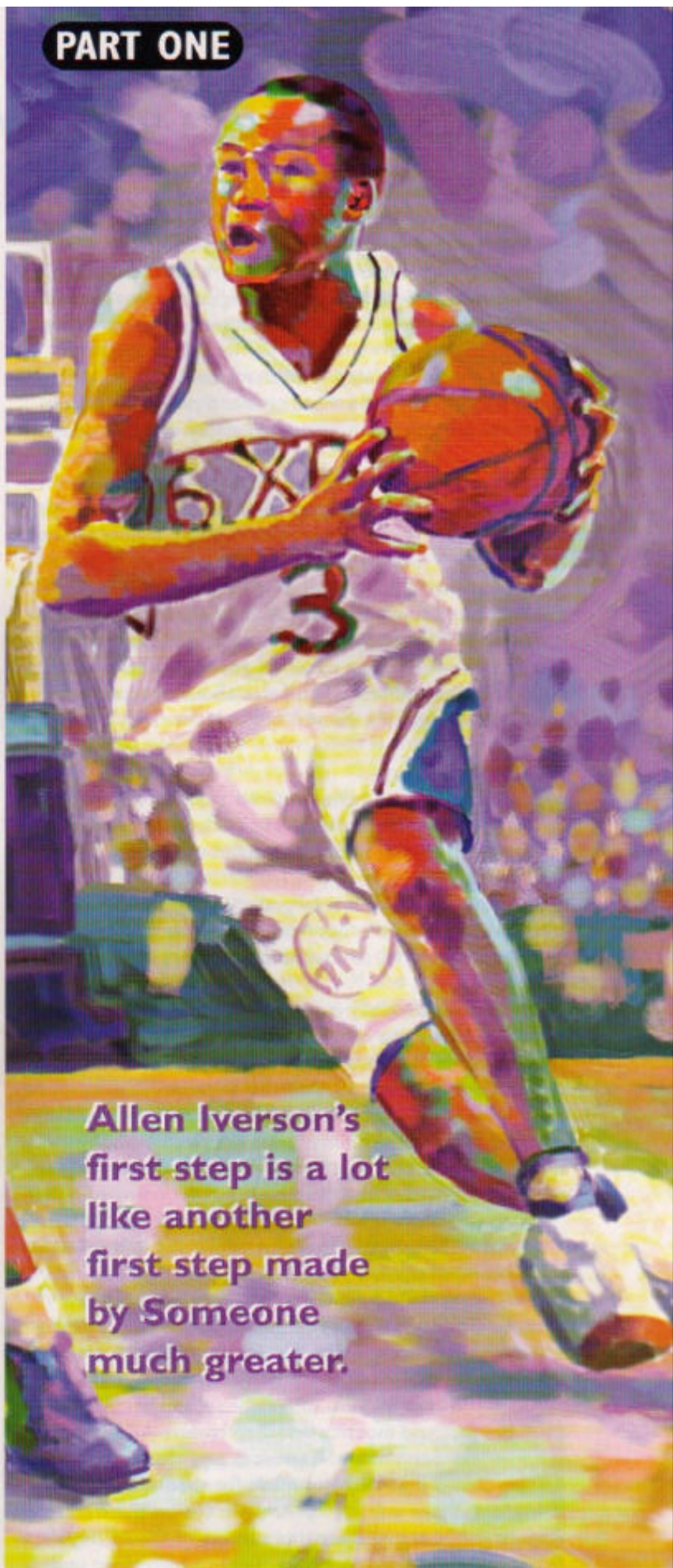
Spectacular is the only way to describe what happened next. Iverson gave Jordan a quick fake, a lightning first step, and then he scored!

The commentator erupted with the crowd's excitement. "Allen shakes . . . gets two . . . Mike said no! Allen said yes! The bucket . . . the crowd loves it!"

That year in the league Allen Iverson finished sixth in scoring, broke a 37-year-old record set by Wilt Chamberlain, and received the NBA Schick Rookie of the Year award. Al, nicknamed The Answer, showed he had numerous answers to his competition's challenges.

What's the first step?

In basketball terms the phrase "first step" is a hallowed one. It relates to a player's ability to swiftly execute a move



Allen Iverson's first step is a lot like another first step made by Someone much greater.

Jesus scored a victory for all humanity.

and “blow” a defender before the defender can react. When it’s executed properly, the player violently moves on with the ball, leaving the defender planted on the floor.

The first-step move is Allen Iverson’s signature play, and the one that allowed him to score against a great defender such as Michael Jordan. At times it’s made Iverson virtually unstoppable.

Although the first step is a killer move, it doesn’t guarantee a score. Only the most agile and proficient player combines a quick first step and an ability to score consistently.

Imagine if a mediocre player faced off with Michael Jordan, the best overall player the NBA has seen thus far. Do you think they could beat him “off the dribble”—beat him with their first step?

I could down a huge bowl of Wheaties, guzzle a bottle of Gatorade, and watch every AI highlight video ever produced, and I’d never be able to beat MJ off the dribble. Even if by some strange miracle I got by him, he’d probably come from behind just when I was about to score, and swat my shot into the stands.

Perfect execution

Your salvation and mine required a talented Someone’s lightning-quick first step. With His perfect execution Jesus scored a victory for all of humanity in the face of a determined defender, Satan.

The Bible says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2: 8, 9).

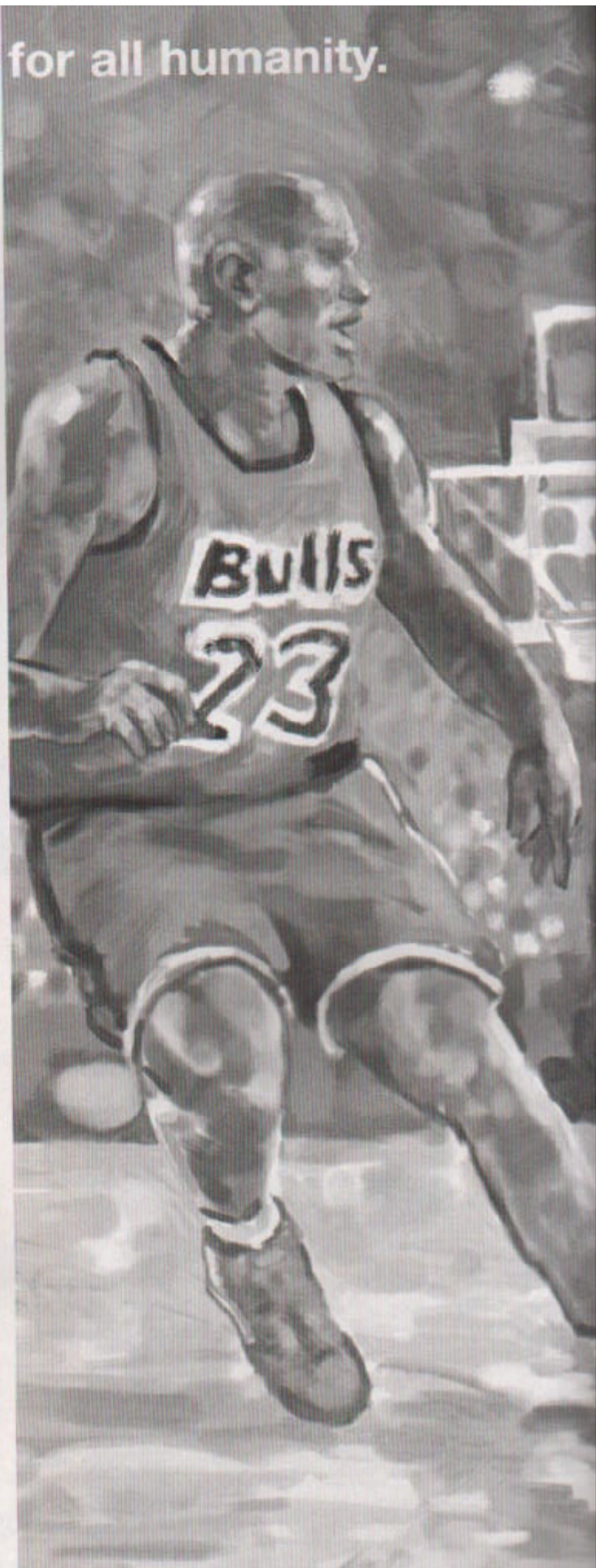
But is salvation really free? Doesn’t God require something? Because if He requires, say, obedience, how can salvation be free? That’s what we’re going to talk about in this three-part series.

Remember when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)? Who made the first step in their salvation? Did Adam say, “Oh, Lord, I’ve sinned; please forgive me”?

Of course that’s not the way it happened. The Bible says God was walking in the cool part of the day and called out, “Adam, where are you?”

It wasn’t as if God didn’t know where Adam was, because God knows everything. But God was wondering whether Adam knew where he was or where his sin had taken him.

Adam was lost because of his decision to sin. And God took the first and most critical step to save Adam and Eve from eternal punishment. Genesis 3 says that God took off the aprons that they had made for themselves—their attempt to make a first step. And He put on them coats of skins representing the righteousness of Christ (Isaiah 61:10). He used skins to clothe them to help them under-





stand that an innocent life had to be lost to atone for their sins.

What do you have to offer?

Have you ever heard the cliché “You take one step, and God will take two”? How about “You do your best, and God will do the rest”? I suppose these clichés have a little truth in them, just not enough. At the center of them is the idea that sinful humans have something of value to offer God in exchange for their salvation.

You see, in order for salvation to be free, God must supply everything. Some might say, “But my pastor and parents say I have to do my part.”

What are the things God requires in order to save us? Faith? Repentance? Love? Perfect obedience 100 percent of the time?

No.

Do you realize that even the faith we need is a gift from God? Not only is it a gift, but God gives us all a certain amount to empower us to do what’s right (Ephesians 2:8, 9; Hebrews 12:2; Romans 12:3).

In Romans 2:4 and Acts 5:30-32 the Bible says that God also gives us repentance, which is the ability to be truly sorry for our sins and to desire to turn away from them. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15). Even obedience is a gift from God.

Love too is God’s gift. The Bible says that we love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). If I paraphrased this text, I’d say the reason we can love God is because He first loved us. And He gives us the ability to love Him in return.

It’s true that we need to work out our own salvation as far as choosing to do what’s right. But did you know that it’s God who works in us both to will and to inspire us to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:12, 13)?

Plus, God gives us the choice to do right or wrong, and He empowers us to choose what is right. Though we’re not saved because we’re obedient to God, we can’t be saved if we’re not obedient to God. The Bible says that Jesus condemned sin while living as a human being so the righteous requirements of the law could be perfectly fulfilled in us when we live in the Spirit (Romans 8:3, 4).

In order for God to require so much of us and at the same time make salvation a free gift, He had to first supply us with what He requires, then give us help to act on it.

In part two you’ll see that while God made an Iveson-like first step, by itself it wasn’t complete. And you’ll see how Jesus, the true answer, not only meets your need for salvation but has also freed you. ■

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ORIGINAL UNEDITED VERSION

Complete & Free Pt. 1

Off the Dribble

In 1996 Allen Iverson was the first pick in the NBA draft and began playing with the Philadelphia 76ers even though he was only a college sophomore. In one of the games of his rookie season, AI, got the ball and he heard Phil Jackson, the Chicago Bulls coach say, "Michael!" The commentator said, "Iverson has Michael, the crowd is in to it!" AI said in an interview while watching the highlights of that game, "I gave him a little cross to see would he bite on it. I let him set his feet and I stepped it back again..." The commentator said, "Allen shakes...gets two...Mike said NO! Allen said YES! The bucket...the crowd loves it!" That year AI finished sixth in the league in scoring, broke a thirty-seven year old record set by Wilt Chamberland, and received the NBA, Schick Rookie of the Year award. AI is also known as "The Answer."

In basketball there is a term used that when executed properly, violently hurls both the player with the ball and the defender off balance, while the one with the ball "blows" passed the defender, recovering his or her own balance and executing a shot to score for their team. This term is "first step" and is also known as beating someone "off the dribble." AI has an incredible ability to execute this move effectively in games at will. Although the so-called quick first step is a killer move, it does not guarantee the score. Only the most agile and proficient player combines a quick first step and also scores consistently.

Imagine if a mediocre player faced off with Michael Jordan who is arguably the best overall player the NBA has seen thus far. Do you think they could beat him off the dribble? I know for a fact that I could have a huge bowl of Wheaties, a bottle of

Gatorade, and watch every AI highlight video ever produced and I would never be able to beat MJ off the dribble. Even if by some strange miracle I got by him, he would probably come from behind just when I was about to score and bat my shot into the stands.

Our Salvation

The Bible says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2:8,9. Is salvation really free? I mean, doesn't God require something from me? If He requires, let's say, obedience, how then can it be free? In this three part series we will discuss this briefly.

Remember in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned? You can find this story in Genesis chapter three. From what you read, who made the "first step" in their salvation? Did Adam say, "Oh my...I have sinned. I shall seek the Lord and He shall forgive me"? Of course that's not the way it happened. The Bible says that God was walking in the cool part of the day after they sinned and called out saying, "Adam...where are you?" God knew where he was, but Adam could only say that he was naked and ashamed so he hid himself. Adam needed to know where he was. Adam was lost because of his poor decision to sin. God is the one who made the first and most critical step so Adam and Eve could be saved. The Bible says that God took the aprons they made for themselves off of them (that was their attempt to make a first step) and put on them coats of skins. These coats of skins represent the righteousness of Christ (Isaiah 61:10).

Have you ever heard the cliché, "You take one step and God will take two"? How about, "You do your best and God will do the rest"? I suppose these clichés have a

little truth in them, just not enough. At the center of them is sinful me having something valuable to offer God in my salvation. You see, in order for salvation to be free, God must supply everything. I can hear it now, "But my pastor and parents say that I have to do my part." To close us out, we will look briefly at this singular question, "How can God require so much, yet say the salvation is free?"

What are some of the things God requires in order for me to be saved? Faith, repentance, love, me to exert my will to do right since God doesn't force anybody, and perfect obedience one hundred percent of the time are the most essential elements of our responsibility. I think these are sufficient to make the point. Do you realize that even the faith we need is a gift from God? Not only is it a gift, but God gives a measure to everyone on which to act (Ephesians 2:8,9; Hebrews 12:2 Romans 12:3). I remember reading in Acts 2:36-39 that Peter said in answer to the question, "Brothers, what shall we do?" repent every one of you! In Romans 2:4 and Acts 5:30-32 the Bible says the God gives us repentance, which is the ability to be truly sorry for my sin and turn away from it. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." John 14:15. Love is also a gift that God gives. Doesn't the Bible say that we love Him because He first loved us (I John 4:19)? If I were to paraphrase this text I would say the reason we can love God is because He first loved us and with His love comes the ability to love Him back. Everyone needs to work out their own salvation and exert their decision-making abilities to do choose to do right. Did you know that it is God that works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12,13)? So, God gives us the choice to do right or wrong and empowers us to choose right. Though we are not saved because we are obedient to God, we cannot be saved if we are not obedient. The Bible says that Jesus

condemned sin while living as a human being so the righteous requirements of the law could be perfectly fulfilled in us when we live in the Spirit (Romans 8:3,4). In order for God to require so much of us and at the same time make salvation a free gift, He must first supply us what He requires and then expect us to act on it. It's like buying something from someone with they give you. Jesus paid it all and now says buy from Him without money and without price (Isaiah 55).

In the next issue, we will discuss the fact that the first step is great, but incomplete. We will see how Jesus, the true *Answer* not only beats our need for salvation "off the dribble," but He also scores valuable points so we can be free from sin under the title, *Still in My Sins*. Remember, God loves you.

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