

WHEN YOU

BELIEVE

**A SHORT GUIDE FOR
NEW CHRISTIANS**

INTRODUCTION

CONGRATULATIONS! You have taken the first step in the most important journey of your life. You were made to have a relationship with the God who created you.

Jesus says this about all who place their trust in him: **“I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance.” (John 10:10b)**

Today, Jesus is welcoming you into that abundant life. Your entire life has led to this moment.

Rick Warren wrote in *The Purpose Driven Life*, “You were made by God and for God—and until you understand that, life will never make sense.”

Although the decision to follow Jesus is simple to make, it’ll take a lifetime (and beyond) to truly grasp.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

Have you ever wondered, “What is a Christian?” If you asked five people on the street, you’d likely get five different answers. Maybe they’d respond like this:

- A Christian is someone who goes to church.
- A Christian is someone who believes the Bible.
- A Christian is someone who had Christian parents.
- A Christian is someone from America.
- A Christian is someone who tries to be a good person.

The truth is, you could check all those boxes and still not be a Christian.

BECOMING A CHRISTIAN ISN'T ABOUT WHAT YOU DO. IT IS ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE FOR YOU.

So, what is a Christian?

It's pretty simple. The term originally meant “someone of the party of Jesus” or “a Jesus-follower.” Becoming a Christian means choosing to be Jesus’ disciple.

When Jesus wanted to describe a disciple, he didn’t point to the person who knew the most Bible verses. He didn’t point to the most influential leader.

Instead, Jesus pointed to a child.

“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘So who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child and had him stand among them. ‘Truly I tell you,’ he said, ‘unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’” (Matthew 18:1-3)

Childlike faith is simple yet profound. In fact, it’s as easy to become a Christian as A-B-C.

Admit you’re a sinner.

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

Believe Jesus’ death paid the penalty for your sin.

“For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

Confess that Jesus is the CEO of your life.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)

So when you take that step to admit, believe, and confess, what happens next?

#1

YOU ARE FORGIVEN

YOU HAVE REGRETS. WE ALL DO. We've failed God. We've disappointed people. We've walked away from the One who made us. Many of us carry that baggage around like a stack of bricks.

That's why there is no better news in the world than this: **God forgives you—for everything you've done wrong.** God welcomes you, as you are, with open arms into his life-giving presence.

Jesus tells a story about a dad and his two sons in Luke 15. One of the sons had a penchant for the wild life. He asked his father for his portion of his inheritance. The younger son took that inheritance and wasted it on "foolish living." When a famine came and he had nothing left, the son went to feed pigs for a living. He was so hungry that the Bible says "he longed to eat" the pig food. He then decided to go home and see if his dad would give him a job as a hired hand.

What happened next is one of the most powerful scenes in the Bible. You'd expect the father to be upset and disappointed in his son. Instead, the Bible tells us, the father came running to meet his son. He wraps his arms around him and throws him a party because he returned.

It's a picture of how God responds to our sin when we confess it to him. He doesn't scold us. He doesn't punish us. He wraps his arms around us in acceptance—and then he throws a party in our honor.

But it's important to note that this forgiveness comes with a cost—and it's steep. The Bible tells us, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Thanks to Jesus, we don't need to pay that cost. That truth is at the heart of the gospel, which literally means "good news."

J.D. Greear writes, "**The gospel is the announcement that God has reconciled us to Himself by sending His Son Jesus to die as a substitute for our sins, and that all who repent and believe have eternal life in Him.**"

None of us deserves God's gift of forgiveness in Christ. God doesn't treat us fairly, but that's good news!

God's forgiveness isn't an excuse to do whatever we want. It's a call to live in a way that honors the gift we've been given.

GOD DOESN'T TREAT US FAIRLY,

BUT THAT'S GOOD NEWS!

#2

YOU BECOME A FOLLOWER

WHEN JESUS CALLED HIS FIRST DISCIPLES, he didn't give them a code of ethics. He didn't give them a theology book. He said, "Follow me."

Following Jesus is the essence of what it means to be a Christian.

This isn't the same as what we do when we follow a person or brand on social media. We follow and unfollow, like and unlike, based upon whims of the day. Jesus' call is something far different.

Becoming a "Jesus-follower" is a lifetime commitment to emulate Jesus and to be his disciple. In the days when Jesus walked the earth, disciples were people who followed a particular teacher or religious school. They committed themselves to learn and pass along their leader's teachings.

When we make the decision to follow Jesus, he is calling us to do the same as those early disciples. We're called to learn more about Jesus through the Bible, to commit ourselves to studying His ways, and to share His message of hope and forgiveness with people in our community and around the world.

You can't do that with a click of a button.

Following Jesus is a way of life that progressively requires more of us.

At first, he told the early disciples to "come and see" (John 1:39). After that, Jesus kept turning up the heat on what it means to be a disciple. Throughout his ministry, he told his disciples that to follow him they'd need to "obey his word," "love each other," and "bear fruit." Eventually, Jesus said that a disciple must "carry their cross" (Luke 14:27), which literally means they must be willing to surrender their lives to his work.

Your first step toward Jesus was a step toward giving him everything.

YOUR FIRST STEP TOWARD JESUS

WAS A STEP TOWARD GIVING HIM

EVERYTHING

#3

YOU JOIN GOD'S FAMILY

YOU DON'T NEED TO FOLLOW JESUS ALONE. Jesus' invitation to become a disciple is an invitation to be adopted into a family. The Bible calls this fellowship.

Fellowship is more than just gathering once a week to worship (although that's critically important). It's about investing your life into the lives of others.

The early church showed us the radical level of their commitment to one another in Acts 2:41-47, where the Christians "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." They also, "held all things in common."

The early church functioned as a family would. You were designed to be in that kind of intimate relationship with other believers. It's no accident that Jesus summed up all of God's commandments with two—love God and love others (Matthew 22:37-38). They're intrinsically connected. One of the principle ways we love God is by loving others. To do that, we must be in relationship with others.

The New Testament repeatedly uses the phrase "one another" to describe ways we're to display love and care toward other Jesus-followers.

For example, the Bible tells us to:

- Love one another. (John 13:34)
- Honor one another. (Romans 12:10)
- Build up one another. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)
- Serve one another. (Galatians 5:13)
- Be patient with one another. (Ephesians 4:2)
- Teach one another. (Colossians 3:16)
- Comfort one another. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)
- Confess your faults to one another. (James 5:16)
- Pray for one another. (James 5:16)

You'll need a spiritual family to live out these truths.

To become the Christ-follower God has called you to be, commit yourself to a local church and purposely invest in the lives of others.

**"OUR LOVE
TO GOD IS
MEASURED BY
OUR EVERYDAY
FELLOWSHIP
WITH OTHERS
AND THE LOVE
IT DISPLAYS.**

**—ANDREW
MURRAY**

#4

YOU'RE PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER

WHEN YOU DECIDE TO FOLLOW JESUS, YOU BECOME A PART OF GOD'S FAMILY.

But this family has a purpose and a mission, and your life is now an important part in this collective purpose.

The heart of the gospel is that we can be reconciled to God through Jesus. Despite our sin and separation from God, Jesus paid the price and offered salvation.

This is the "good news" of the gospel.

But as a Christian, you now have a responsibility to share that good news with others.

Throughout history, Christians have talked about "spreading the gospel." That's the collective mission of the church.

Matthew 28:19-20 describes some of the final words of Jesus to his disciples. He told them to "go into all the world and make disciples." Acts 1:8 describes how the followers of Christ should spread out from their home-base in Jerusalem and take the gospel to the world.

This message and this mission continues today.

Like churches are tasked with spreading the gospel in their communities, Christians are tasked with sharing the gospel with their neighbors.

You're not alone in your mission; it's something that is important for all of us. As you share your faith, we share our faith, and the gospel advances around the world.

GO INTO ALL THE WORLD

&

MAKE DISCIPLES

WHAT'S NEXT?

THE WRITER OF THE NEW TESTAMENT BOOK OF HEBREWS calls Christians “foreigners and temporary residents” on our way to our heavenly home (Hebrews 11:13). Your decision to follow Jesus is the first step in your Christian journey. It’s only the beginning though.

1. Expect struggles. Just because you have a relationship with God doesn’t automatically make life easier. In fact, in some ways, becoming a Christian will make your life harder. Jesus faced criticism, suffering, and eventually death because of his devotion to His Father. The Bible says we can expect the same response to us (John 15:20). Expect the troubles, but know that God will walk with you no matter what is ahead.

2. Talk to God. You have a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week connection to the Creator of the universe. Use it. Prayer is simply talking to God. You don’t need any special training or to use any unique words. Develop a habit of talking with God, both during a regular time alone with him and throughout the day as you need his guidance and his strength.

Proof

3. Develop a habit of reading the Bible. The Bible is God’s trustworthy guide to understanding his character. It also helps you understand how to live the Christian life. Start by reading through the Gospel of John. It’ll help you discover who Jesus is and how he engaged the world around him. God uses the Bible to teach us, correct us and to train us to live in a godly way, so we’re prepared to complete the work He has for us (2 Timothy 3:16).

Here are a few specific passages to look at as you begin your Christian journey:

- Creation & The Impact of Sin: Genesis 1-3
- Peace During Life’s Storms: Psalm 23
- What It Means to Be Born Again: John 3:1-21
- The Uniqueness of Jesus: John 14:1-7
- The Resurrection of Jesus: John 20:1-10
- The Birth of the Early Church: Acts 2
- A Christian’s Life Mission: 2 Corinthians 5:17-20
- The Fruits of the Spirit: Galatians 5:22-23
- Confronting Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians 6:10-17
- The Destiny of Heaven & Earth: Revelation 21-22

4. Connect with a community. We weren’t designed to live the Christian life on our own. The support and care of a church family is critical in your growth as a Jesus-follower. Commit yourself to a church and begin building relationships within it and serving. Your greatest growth experiences likely won’t happen in your time alone with God but as you give yourself sacrificially to others in fellowship and ministry.

A DECISION FOLLOWED BY A JOURNEY

The decision to become a Christian happens instantly.

But following Jesus is a lifetime pursuit, filled with opportunities to learn more, love more, and share your faith with others.

Following Jesus is always worth it.

When you have questions, fears, hopes, and dreams, your faith will give you fresh clarity on every next step.

God will be with you every step of the way on your journey.



WELCOME TO THE FAMILY.