

## Now that You Are a Christian

# What is Next?



The Bible compares your Christian life to a hike, a fight, a journey, a race, and a battle. Having received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you are already on the road to Heaven. Your present time on earth is preparatory for this life to come. God's goal is to conform your character into the likeness of Jesus Christ (read Romans 8:29; Colossians 1:28).

When one truly exercises saving faith in Jesus Christ, it is a supernatural event. Although the decision appears human, there is an unseen, divine work behind conversion. The Holy Spirit has brought a soul from death to life. The Apostle Paul writes, *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)."*

The first evidence of salvation is a new desire to follow God. Jesus said the new birth (conversion) is like the wind. You cannot see the wind, but you can see its effects (read John 3:8).

When a baby is born, he does not know how he came to life; he does not know his parents; nor does he know how to speak the language. In the same way, the new Christian has much to learn about God, holy living, and the future God has for him. Paul prays that Christians will come to *"know what is the hope of [Christ's] calling, what are the riches of the glory of [Christ's] inheritance in the saints (Ephesians 1:18)."*

Christians are motivated to live for Jesus Christ not through fear of judgment, but through the knowledge of all the blessings, privileges, and responsibilities they now have as part of God's family. You should live according to your new status in Christ (read Ephesians chapters 1-3).

As a new baby naturally begins to grow, the new Christian will begin to grow spiritually in knowledge, love, and discernment.

*Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation. (1 Peter 2:2)*

*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ... (2 Peter 3:18)*

Spiritual growth does not mean you are any more saved or that your place in heaven is anymore secured. God grants full salvation through your initial faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is not maintained by personal efforts. The new birth is God's permanent gift.

Will this security cause you to be unmotivated in living for God? No. In that a Christian has a new nature, he will naturally pursue holiness and good works. Those who are truly born again will persevere until the end (read Matthew 24:13; Hebrews 3:14, 10:39). This teaching, found throughout the New Testament, is called the Doctrine of Assurance, the Doctrine of Eternal Security, or the Doctrine of the Perseverance and Preservation of the Saints (read John 10:28; Philippians 1:6; Romans 8:28-29).

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)*

The paradox is that you will grow spiritually and bring forth good fruit, and yet God still commands you to do certain things to produce spiritual maturity.

**To help you learn what God would have you do, here are some basic instructions from Scripture:**

## 1. Study the Bible Diligently

God has chosen to communicate to us through the His prophets who penned the Bible. Throughout the centuries, God's people have recognized the voice of God in the unique 66 books of the Bible. It is our manual for living.

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)*

*So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32)*

The most fruitful Christians are dedicated students of the Bible. Time spent reading the Bible is time spent with Jesus Christ; and His character is conveyed to us through the written Word. Just as a child is molded by spending time with his earthly parents, we are transformed by spending quality time with Christ in His Word. The Bible renews our thinking and, thus, changes our whole character.

Do not be discouraged by the amount and depth of the material in the Bible. This is God's book, and the infinite God is not simple. Approach your study of the Bible at a college level. Remember you are preparing to be God's ambassador for all eternity.

- **Read the Bible daily.** By reading three chapters a day you can finish the Bible in one year.

- **Memorize key verses of Scripture.** Almost all Christians can quote familiar passages such as John 3:3, 3:16, 10:28; Romans 10:9-10; and Acts 1:8.

- **Listen regularly to audio sermons and build a library of good Christian books.** God has ordained pastors and teachers to train you in the Scriptures (read Ephesians 4:11-14).

## 2. Pray

Because of our love for God, prayer comes naturally to the Christian. We are to be devoted to prayer (read Romans 12:12; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 1 John 5:14-15). Prayer is walking with God, and it is the only way you can overcome the temptations of the flesh (read Matthew 26:41). Most of the mistakes you make on your journey will happen because you did not seek counsel from the Lord (read Joshua 9:14; James 1:5).

Do not approach prayer as a ritual, but talk with God as one talks with a friend (read Exodus 33:11). Many religious books about prayer tend to turn prayer into a job. You get paid for this job according to the fervency and length of your prayers. This "prayer warrior" mindset emphasizes the power of prayer rather than the power of Christ – as if the practice of prayer is the power. Christ warned us not to be like the hypocrites who *"think they will be heard for their many words (read Matthew 6:5-15)."* Instead, delight in prayer, and spend less time talking and more time listening to God's Word spoken to you in the Bible.

## 3. Faithfully Attend Church

Christians naturally have an affinity for Bible teaching and fellowship with other believers. The first Christians immediately assembled together.

*So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:41-42)*

The apostle John called into doubt the salvation of any who professed the faith, but did not remain in the fellowship.

*They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:19)*

The New Testament teaches that church attendance is a required act of obedience to God.

*Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:25)*

Believers often have difficulty finding the right church. Many churches are either spiritually dead and/or teach false doctrine. Paul foretold that counterfeit churches and ministers would arise. Of the seven churches described in the book of Revelation, only three of the seven were good churches (read Revelation 2-3).

- Beware of worldly churches that add the deeds of the flesh to worship. Remember the most exciting, well-attended worship service recorded in the Bible was Israel's idolatrous worship of the golden calf. Although the name of God was used, the people were worshipping a false god (read Exodus 32).
- Beware of theologically liberal churches that no longer teach the doctrines of the Christian faith (read 2 Corinthians 11:13-15; 2 Timothy 4:1-4).
- Beware of false churches that replace true spirituality with emotionalism and fake miracles (read Ezekiel 13:1-3; 1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

With so many impostors, how can you know which church is right? False teachers – and even spiritually immature, untaught teachers – are easily identified if you compare all their teachings to Scripture. In addition, the Holy Spirit will give you extraordinary discernment (read 1 John 2:20-21).

#### 4. Strive to Live a Holy Life

The most repeated command in the Bible for the Christian is to live a holy life. This is something the believer naturally desires to do; however, the old flesh battles against the new spirit (read Galatians 5:16-24; Romans 13:12-14; Matthew 26:41).

It takes some time before the Christian learns which attitudes and actions are sinful. Once sin is realized, then comes the never-ending battle to overcome the sinful patterns so deeply imbedded in our minds.

Christians are told to “*love not the world* (read 1 John 2:15-17).” Christians are also told “*be not conformed to this world* (Romans 12:1-2).” The “world” is the whole of mankind in rebellion to God. Specifically, the believer is to be aware of, and turn away from, the sinful motivations of the world – “*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life* (1 John 2:16).”

In addition to putting off sin, the Christian must put on “*compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience* (Colossians 3:12).”

The battle against sin can be a source of frustration and discouragement. You may wonder, “How can I be saved if I am still tempted to do such awful things?” The Apostle Paul himself struggled with this question (read Romans 7:15-25).

Paul taught that even though the Christian has a new nature, he still lives in what the Bible calls the “flesh.” The “flesh” can be defined as our old natural sensual desires and ignorance. The key to Christian victory is to “*walk according to the Spirit, so you will not fulfill the desires of the flesh* (Galatians 5:16).” The Christian soon learns to discern when he has drifted out of communion with Christ and is, instead, walking in the flesh. To walk in the Spirit, you must confess sin and return to obeying Jesus Christ.

There is a mystery in the means God uses to purify your life. You must do your part by (1) utilizing the means of grace (prayer, Bible reading, church, Christian friends, service, and obedience) and (2) by avoiding the temptations of the flesh. However, God is actually working behind the scenes giving you the needed motivation.

*...work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)*

Determine to never quit in your battle for holiness. If you fall, get up and keep fighting. God is testing your resolve. In God's time He will give you the victory (read Proverbs 24:16).

Be careful of religious teachers who promise you victory over sin through some technique, special principle, extra-biblical legalistic standards, or second-blessing of the Holy Spirit. It is only through Christ that we can have the power to live a pure life. Abide in Him for victory (read Colossians 3:19-23).

#### 5. Evangelize

Before Jesus ascended to Heaven, He left us instructions to evangelize others.

*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)*

The will of God for Noah was to build the ark. The will of God for Moses was to lead Israel out of Egypt. The will of God for the New Testament Christian is to evangelize the world. Jesus said, “*The Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come* (Matthew 24:14).” We must be as faithful to our calling as the Old Testament Saints were to theirs.

Our primary mission is to be communicators for Christ. Therefore, the Christian should use all of his education, talents, and material blessings to further the spread of the Gospel.

Teaching people to observe all that Jesus commanded includes much more than simply sharing God's plan of salvation. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) also includes doing good works, supporting the local church, and teaching God's people the entire Bible. As Jesus said to Peter, “*If you love me, feed my sheep* (John 21:15).”

#### 6. Endure Trials and Suffering with Joy

Not all people will receive the Gospel. Jesus taught that “*narrow is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it* (Matthew 7:13-14).” For this reason the world will oppose you, even as it opposed Jesus Christ (read Matthew 5:10-12; 1 Peter 4:1-5).

*If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “A slave is not greater than his master.” If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. (John 15:19-20)*

The Christian life is a life of blessing and protection (read Luke 18:29-30); but due to our faith in Jesus, we will experience persecution on earth (read Philippians 1:29). Under the Old Covenant, God blessed Israel's obedience with earthly wealth (read Deuteronomy 28). But under the New Covenant, the blessings are primarily Heavenly (read Ephesians 1:3). Be ready to experience loneliness along with economic and social persecution. Don't succumb to false guilt, but rejoice in Christ (read 1 Peter 4).

A story is told of a tribal native who once gave a beautiful conch shell to a missionary. The missionary was surprised since the tribe lived hundreds of miles from the ocean. After the missionary pointed this out, the native replied, “The long journey is part of the gift.”

You will find renewed inspiration for your journey if you always remember that your Christian walk is your gift to Jesus.

B.E. Winship

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