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# Becoming a Christian

A Practical Guide  
to the Why and the How



A DARE BOOKLET

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# Becoming a Christian

A Practical Guide  
to the Why and the How

**People think about** becoming Christians for many reasons. In the pages that follow, we will explore some of those reasons.

Each section describes circumstances which make people curious about the Christian faith. One, or maybe more than one, of these sections may describe you.

You are welcome to read this whole booklet—of course!—but my hope is that you will find one section which connects with your thoughts and feelings about Christianity better than the others.

For each set of circumstances, I will try to explain what it would mean for you to become a Christian.

## **To begin at the beginning**

The beginning of Christian faith is God. God in Christian understanding is all-powerful and all-loving. God is the One who created you. God loves you, desires the very best for you, and longs for a relationship with you.

Christians believe that Jesus is the key to coming to God. Through understanding Jesus we can get in touch with our Creator.

People come to God through Jesus for many different reasons. Why you come does not matter. The important thing is to come. But you do have to know *how* to come. And how you come depends on where you are coming from.

Here are some of the factors which most often cause people to consider Christian faith as a serious option. If one seems to describe you more than another, then begin to read there.

- Some people begin to think about Christianity because they want to know the Creator of the world. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 4.*
- Some people begin to think about Christianity because they have a sense of emptiness in their lives, and they are looking for something to fill it. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 7.*
- Some people begin to think about Christianity because they are concerned to know and follow truth. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 10.*
- Some people begin to think about Christianity because they are intrigued to find the reality at the heart of religion. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 13.*

- Some people begin to think about Christianity because they are afraid of death. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 16.*
- Some people begin to think about Christianity because they feel guilty. Not just about specific things, but somehow about everything. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 19.*
- Some people begin to think about Christianity because of the pain they feel. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 22.*
- None of these categories really describes you, but you are curious about Christianity anyway. *If you think this describes you, turn to page 25.*

## ***Some people begin to think about Christianity because they want to know the Creator of this world***

If you believe in God, you are not alone. The vast majority of people in the world believe in a Supreme Being of some description.

Some people, however, want to know more than the fact of God's existence. Maybe they are moved by the majesty and beauty of creation. Others experience strange occurrences in their lives—answers to prayer, amazing coincidences, or an awareness of the supernatural—which make them realize God must be a reality.

A beautiful view of the mountains, however, may say to me that there is a Creator, but it doesn't tell me a great deal about the Creator. Powerful, yes. But interested in me? Or indifferent to my existence? Or even malevolent? I can't tell.

Strange occurrences in my life may be no more than that. Even if there is a supernatural Power behind them, what is that Force like? Can I manipulate it? Do I need to do something religious in relation to it? Or what?

### **The key Christianity offers:**

*Jesus brings into focus the character of the Power behind the universe.*

Many people love *Calvin and Hobbes* cartoons. Imagine Calvin and Hobbes discussing whether they came into existence by chance, or were created by a Supreme Cartoonist. Imagine, too, the cartoonist, Bill Watterson, listening to the conversation. How can he communicate to Calvin and Hobbes that he did in fact create them, and, what's more, he loves them and wants them to relate to him?

He has to communicate in a medium they will understand. So he creates a new cartoon character, Bill Watterson, who speaks and acts towards Calvin and Hobbes in a way that shows how the 'real' Bill Watterson feels towards his creations.

This is a very limited analogy, but it gives a clue as to how Christians understand Jesus. Once, when Jesus' friends asked him to show them God, he replied,

*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*<sup>1</sup>

He taught that what people saw in him—his compassion, his anger at injustice, his forgiveness, his capacity for suffering, his power over sickness and death—was in fact the character of the Creator, demonstrated on a human scale so that we could relate to it.

## **How can Jesus put me in touch with the Creator?**

Jesus frequently invited people to get involved with him. He would say, *Come to me*, or *Follow me*. And as people got involved with Jesus, observing his lifestyle and learning his ways, they came to the conclusion that, as one Christian writer put it, 'Everything of God gets expressed in him, so you can see and hear him clearly.'<sup>2</sup>

For us too we will get to know the Creator in a personal way as we choose to get involved with Jesus. We too have to 'come to' him and begin to 'follow' him.

This coming and following has both a negative and a positive side.

The *negative* is this: in Christian understanding, the reason we are out of touch with the Creator in the first place is because we have attempted to live by our own values and standards rather than the Creator's.

So in order to move towards Jesus we will have to be prepared to move away from those things which might hinder this new relationship, any lifestyle choices which run counter to the Creator's blueprint for human life.

The positive side of coming and following is that we begin to read the biographies of Jesus with a view not only to knowing what Jesus was like (though that is important), but in order to base our lifestyle on his teaching.

We also begin to hang out with others who are trying to know and follow Jesus. We need the company of fellow-travellers.

If you want to come to Jesus and follow him, you can speak to him as though he were standing in front of you, and say something like this:

*God, I want to know you, not just as the Creator of everything, not just as the Supreme Force in the Universe, but on a personal level, as my Ruler, my Friend and my Mentor.*

*I understand now that Jesus came to make this a possibility.*

*Jesus, I want now to come to you and to begin following you. I am willing to leave behind everything I know to be wrong, and to give myself wholeheartedly to being your follower.*

*Give me courage to be faithful to you every day of my life. And please grant that as I get to know you I may understand more and more that I am getting to know God.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to God, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.



***Some people begin to think about Christianity because they have a sense of emptiness in their lives, and they are looking for something to fill it***

Maybe you are overwhelmed with the futility of life. What is life anyway? 70 or 80 years if we are lucky, and then oblivion. So what's the point? Is that all there is? Is it worth anything?

Often students think about these questions as they begin to live their lives independently of their parents and background. Frequently their studies prompt them to think about questions of ultimate meaning and value.

Some are becoming aware of the fact that they have a spiritual nature which demands satisfaction. They have worked hard to satisfy the material needs of their lives, the emotional needs, the relational needs, and in large measure have succeeded. Yet there is a whole side of their character—their spirituality—which remains hungry.

Others are people approaching middle age, having done well in their careers. They begin to think: There must be more to life than this. Or they have children, and want to know what to teach their children about the big questions of life, including questions of right and wrong, life and death.

**The key Christianity offers:**

*Meaning in life comes from relating to the Creator.*

Meaning does not come written on a piece of paper. For all of us, relationships are what gives meaning to life; so it should not surprise us to know that on the big scale, where we lack Ultimate Meaning, what we lack is the most precious relationship of all.

Over a thousand years ago, in his Confessions, St Augustine prayed to God:

*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.*

In the biography of Jesus a conversation is recorded between Jesus and a woman who was trying to quench her thirst for meaning in life through a series of empty sexual relationships.

To her, Jesus says that finding meaning is like finding water when you are thirsty:

*Anyone who drinks the water I give will never thirst—not ever. The water I give will be an artesian spring within, gushing fountains of endless life.<sup>3</sup>*

To this woman he says that she should simply ask him for this ‘living water’ and he will give it. A relationship with God is the only thing which will quench our thirst for meaning and fulfilment.

## **So how can I relate to the Creator?**

You need to give up on all those things to which you have looked for fulfilment—whether money, relationships, status, sex, or anything else. Not to abandon them necessarily (these things have a God-given place, after all), but to stop looking to them for satisfaction they can never give.

Then you have to yield to that relationship with God to which God invites you—to yield everything you know of yourself to everything you know of Jesus.

If God is really there, then God is present with you now, and you can speak to God as simply and as readily as to someone you can see.

Here is the sort of thing you can say to God. It does not need to be fancy or even especially religious.

*God, I am thirsty for meaning in my life.*

*I realize that nothing in life can totally satisfy me, especially my spiritual nature, and I apologize for having wasted my time on things that could not satisfy.*

*Thank you for Jesus' offer to quench this thirst.*

*Thank you for your willingness to have a relationship with me.*

*Now I want to stop putting secondary things in the place which is rightfully yours.*

*I want to commit myself to a relationship with you, for better, for worse.*

*Please accept me as your child into your family. Please begin to fill those empty places within me.*

*Help me now to follow you and obey you in everything, all of my days.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to God, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.

***Some people begin to think about Christianity because they are concerned to know and follow truth***

You have become aware that the human mind and spirit are sustained and nurtured by truth. You enjoy discussion and reading and study. You love the feeling of pursuing truth and finding it.

You are drawn to Christianity because you have learned of its claims to truth. You have seen how it claims to be a worldview which gives a coherent framework for understanding the world.

You have glimpsed something of what Jesus meant when he said, 'I am the Truth.' At the same time, you understand that to be a Christian does not mean claiming to know all the answers. But you rightly sense that to be a Christian would give you a coherent framework within which to explore life and to discover yet more truth.

You see that Jesus, in his teaching and the way he lives, has his finger on the pulse of truth.

People who think this way are generally young. Questions of truth seem less urgent as one gets older and more immediate practical matters press in.

Yet these basic questions are important for people of all ages. The way we answer them colours and directs the whole way we think and live. Indeed our answers shape the people we are and become.

**The key Christianity offers:**

*There is truth in Christianity for the heart as well as for the mind. It is a truth which finds its fulfilment in relating to Jesus who calls himself the Truth.*

There is intellectual truth in Christianity—a way of understanding the world that is whole and satisfying. But the Christian understanding of truth is that it is not only for the mind: truth is for the whole person.

We need to respond to the truth of God in Jesus with our whole selves. We will never fully understand any truth while we only look at it from the outside. Jesus is the door into the inside of God's truth.

### **How do I respond to this person who is called the Truth?**

Jesus once said,

*Are you tired? worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.<sup>4</sup>*

Jesus offers himself to us as a Teacher. To follow him is a learning experience: he leads us into more and more truth—truth to satisfy our minds, to stretch our wills, and to mature our whole being. He says he is a gentle and humble teacher, not overbearing or impatient.

To learn from him we have to share his yoke. The picture is of a young ox and an older ox pulling the plough together. As they do so, the more experienced animal teaches the younger one how to do the work. Jesus is the older ox: he knows how to live and work, how to learn and mature, with God and in God's service. If we are to learn from him, we need to accept the discipline of being yoked to him.

When Jesus first made this statement, presumably some came to him and said, 'I think I would like to do that—to be

your disciple and to learn from you.’ And he probably responded with a warm smile and outstretched hand, and said, ‘Welcome!’

Jesus has not changed in two thousand years. His invitation to ‘Come’ still stands. Here are some words you could use in order to respond:

*Jesus, for some time, I have been concerned to discover truth.*

*Now I understand that in some unique and mysterious way all truth focuses in you.*

*I want to learn from you about the world you made, and about how to live in it with honesty and integrity and joy.*

*I want to turn from all untruth—thinking dishonestly, speaking less than the truth, acting towards others untruthfully. Please forgive me for those times I have compromised the truth.*

*I willingly yield to you as my Teacher. I gladly accept the yoke you offer and which you yourself bear. Teach me in all aspects of my life to embrace your truth and to turn away from untruth.*

*Give me strength to be faithful to your teaching, with my mind, my heart and my will, all of my life.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to Jesus, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.

***Some people begin to think about Christianity because they are intrigued to find the reality in religion***

Maybe you were brought up in a religious home, and as a child accepted the practices and the beliefs of your home without thinking.

But then, maybe in early adulthood, you began to struggle against external rituals which increasingly meant nothing. You began to ask awkward questions:

Is there anything in this? Do I want this for myself or do I reject it? What about the religious hypocrisy I see? Surely a God of integrity would be more pleased with my honest doubting than with that!

Other people come at the question of religion from the other end—not so much increasing skepticism as an increasing suspicion that something real is here.

Maybe you know people who are committed Christians, and find that there is something about those people's lives which is impressive and attractive.

It's not that they are perfect or pretend to be. Yet they have an air of confidence and purpose that is enviable—and sometimes infuriating. Clearly there is something about their religion that is real. It is not just a formality. What is at the heart of the faith? How could you get it? Do you really want it anyway?

**The key Christianity offers:**

*Religion is a means to an end. The end is what is truly important. And the end to which religion points is knowing God.*

The means without the end is futile. Those who have grasped the heart of Christianity know that religion is like an oyster shell—not always attractive, but valuable for the pearl which may be found inside it.

Jesus himself is the pearl. If you have only the shell of religiosity, your instinct to discard it is healthy and God-given. But a better response would be to search for the pearl for which the shell was made.

### **How do I find the God who is the pearl in the shell of religion?**

Jesus once put it like this to some people who were merely religious and who had lost (or never found) the pearl:

*Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.*<sup>5</sup>

The door is a symbol for the way into our hearts and lives. Jesus is more interested in finding us than we are in finding him, and he has taken the initiative to knock and ask for admission into our lives. Although our lives are rightly his because he made us and he died for us, he is still gracious enough to wait outside until we respond. His knocking is heard in many ways. For you it may be that your curiosity to separate the wheat from the chaff in religion has been because Jesus was prompting you. (Many people never even ask that kind of question.)

Often, Jesus' knocking is heard through the laughter and enthusiasm of friends who have found the reality at the heart of religion. It is as though he knocks and says, 'You can have what they have found.'

Jesus speaks of his eating with us. Eating together is a symbol of friendship and trust. A 'companion' is literally 'one with



whom I eat bread.' Jesus hopes that we will open the door to him, so that that kind of relationship can begin.

Of course, a friendship with Jesus is not a friendship between equals: this is a friendship with the Creator of the universe! This means that when Jesus comes into the house which he has made, it is not only as a friend but also as the landlord who has definite views on how the house is to be cared for.

So an invitation to Jesus is also an open invitation to change, maybe radical change, as he sees it to be necessary.

When someone knocks at the door of our home, we answer it, and if the person is welcome, we say, 'Come in.' That is exactly how we open the door to Jesus. You could say something like this:

*Jesus, I realize that my interest in you is because you are interested in me. Thank you for helping me understand that you are knocking at the door of my life.*

*I realize that the house of my life belongs to you because you made me and you died for me, and I am aware that I have treated this house as though it were my own property.*

*Please forgive me and show me those things in my life which are not worthy of you. Give me strength to put them aside, and to replace them with what is appropriate in your house.*

*I want now to open the door. Please come into my life. You are welcome as my honoured guest. I pray that you will feel at home in my life, and that our friendship will grow for the rest of my life.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to Jesus, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.

## *Some people begin to think about Christianity because they are afraid of death*

At any age, serious thoughts of death may catch people off guard. Maybe a friend, a contemporary, dies—perhaps very young, perhaps suddenly and violently. Maybe a family member dies. You may have discovered that you yourself are sick, with a disease which could be fatal. Or you have a close brush with death.

These things have made you realize: *I'm going to die*. There is absolutely nothing I can do to avoid death. And I have no idea when it is going to catch up with me.

Again, as middle age approaches, we become aware of our own mortality. Our bodies don't function as well as they used to. They don't recover as fast or as completely as they did when we were younger. And the reality dawns on us in a new way: *we are going to die*. When we were younger, it was easy enough to avoid the thought, even to deceive ourselves: death is something that happens to other people. But not now.

So how can I take the reality of death into my thinking? Can I ever learn to live easily with the fact of death? Surely this is where religion is supposed to be helpful? But I'm afraid that the religious hope of life after death is just wishful thinking.

### **The key Christianity offers:**

*Jesus has conquered death, and those who trust him may share his victory.*

In spite of all the near-death experiences we hear about, Jesus is the only person who remained dead for over thirty-six

hours. More, he is the only one who returned from death, not just for a few more years in the same limited body, but in an indestructible form, more real and alive than ever.

The first followers of Jesus were transformed by the reality of their risen Lord, and were even willing to give their lives for their belief, because they knew now that Jesus awaited them on the other side of death.

This is not religious wishful thinking. The evidence for both Jesus' death and Jesus' return to life is overwhelming. Many who have come to the evidence skeptical have been surprised to find themselves convinced, often joyfully so.

For example, evidence for *his death*: the Roman soldiers who killed Jesus were experienced, professional executioners. If they had carelessly allowed a prisoner to live, their own lives would have been forfeit.

Or again, *his return to life*: when Jesus' followers claimed that he was alive, no-one was able to produce the body to prove that it was not so. And it is hard to account for the dramatic and rapid spread of Christianity unless Jesus actually had been resurrected.

Because of the reality of his unique resurrection, Jesus is the only one in whose hands we can face death with confidence.

Christian believers for two thousand years have faced death with confidence and solid hope because they trust the same Jesus who is still alive today.

## **How do I entrust myself into his hands?**

*Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'*<sup>6</sup>

Jesus refers to two kinds of death. There is physical death, beyond which his followers will live. And there is spiritual death—eternal separation from God—which is the conse-

quence of our spiritual independence and which believers never have to face.

The clue, which Jesus mentions twice, is belief. To Jesus, belief does not mean wishful thinking ('I would like to think this is true') or mere intellectual assent ('Yes, I believe the world is round'). For him, true belief leads to action (more like, 'I believe it's going to rain, so I'm taking my umbrella').

To believe Jesus is not simply to say, 'Sure, I think he's the Son of God.' Rather, it is to say, 'I believe there is good evidence that Jesus is the conqueror of death, therefore it makes good sense to commit my whole life into his hands.' I believe with my mind but also as a commitment of the will.

Death has come into the world because humankind has turned its back on God. The only way to overcome death is to turn back to God with commitment and loyalty.

Here are some words you can use if you think you want to make that commitment of the will:

*Lord, to be honest, I am very frightened at the prospect of death. I see little clear hope beyond the grave except what you have to offer.*

*I understand that you died and that you conquered death, and that you are still alive today. That is amazing and wonderful.*

*I commit my life into your hands for this life and the next. Give me strength to follow you faithfully for the remainder of my time in this world, however long that may be.*

*And then I ask that you will carry me through death to live with you forever.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to God, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.

## *Some people begin to think about Christianity because they feel guilty*

This is not simply the guilt produced by doing things we believe to be wrong, though that may be involved, but somehow guilt about everything.

None of the usual reassurances seem to work: 'Nobody's perfect;' 'God is very accepting;' 'That's just the way I am.' They all sound hollow, and suspiciously like excuses.

You know you have done wrong. You know many times you have chosen the wrong, deliberately and knowingly. It makes you uncomfortable, even depressed. Sometimes you apologize to someone and ask forgiveness, and that brings some relief.

But the problem is not just that you do things wrong. The problem is that you seem unable to change yourself. You are troubled not just by what you do, but by who you are. As Victor Hugo put it, 'the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart.' Who can offer you forgiveness for that warp in human nature which affects everything you do?

Christianity explains this kind of global guilt feeling by saying, 'We have all chosen to live our lives without serious reference to God. We live in a world which belongs to God but most of the time we are not interested in God's way of living our lives. Our whole lives are out of sync with the Creator.'

This means that our feeling of uneasiness has a rational basis. We are right to feel guilt for who we are. We are rebels against the rightful master of the universe: God.

Jesus warned too that one day he will return as judge of all people, and that those who persist in their rebellion will then

have their wish, and be excluded from his new world. Our feelings of guilt serve as an early warning to us to change course while we have the opportunity.

### **The key Christianity offers:**

*Because of the death of Jesus, God completely forgives anyone who is truly sorry, and begins to make us into new people.*

The claim of Jesus which got him into most trouble with the religious authorities was that he could forgive sins. He announced a time of amnesty from God for all those who would lay down their weapons and surrender to God.

Millions of people down the centuries who felt as you feel have taken up Jesus' offer and found the peace of being reconciled to their Creator. They have found too that God has given them the help of the Holy Spirit to turn from what is wrong in their lives and to live in God's world in God's way.

### **How can I know that forgiveness for myself?**

Jesus' closest friend, John, once wrote:

*If we claim that we're free of sin, we're only fooling ourselves. A claim like that is errant nonsense. On the other hand, if we admit our sins—make a clean breast of them—he won't let us down; he'll be true to himself. He'll forgive our sins and purge us of all wrongdoing.<sup>7</sup>*

Forgiveness is as close as asking for it: 'confessing' that forgiveness is what we need and want. You say, 'It can't be as simple as that.'

But many important things are simple. The words 'I do' can commit you to fifty years of marriage! Those simple words are powerful because of the significance you (and everyone listening) put into them. With those simple words your status is changed forever.

Similarly, simple words, if they come from our hearts, can put us in touch with God's forgiveness, can change our status from rebel to servant. That is God's promise.

We also feel it shouldn't be simple because surely we have to make up for what we have done. But we could never pay the price ourselves: Jesus' death by crucifixion in the year AD33 was how God paid the price for us. No further payment is either necessary or possible. That is why it is in one sense so simple for us.

Here are words you may like to use if you know you need to ask for God's forgiveness:

*God, I have done and said many things that I know have not pleased you.*

*But most importantly, I have not given you the place you deserve at the centre of my life. After all, you made me and you made the world in which I live.*

*So now I am aware of the need to ask your forgiveness for all of these things: for specific things [you may want to name some] but fundamentally for being in rebellion against you. I am sincerely sorry.*

*Thank you for making forgiveness available to me through the death of Jesus. Please forgive me for Jesus' sake, as you have promised to do, and receive me back into your company. Please give me the help of your Spirit so that I may learn how to live the rest of my life in obedience to you.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to God, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.

## ***Some people begin to think about Christianity because of the pain they feel***

Where was God when it was God that you needed? You had heard that God was into love and protection. But for you, it seems, God made an exception.

Your pain may stem from abuse or prejudice, rejection, failure or loss. It maybe a dull, nagging pain that only surfaces occasionally, when you drop your guard. Or it may be a constant, conscious reality that sears your every waking moment.

Your feelings toward God may be very ambivalent. Part of you is angry and resentful: why did God allow this hurt to come into your life? You may use language about God and towards God which you would normally use on your worst enemy. Some will find it impossible to think of God as a loving Father. It would be easier not to believe in God, but for some reason that's not an option.

Another part of you wants God. If Jesus is really that loving, you want to cry on his shoulder, you want him to soothe the pain with his touch, you want him to show you a way out, you want to know his love that has no strings attached. Isn't that the way Jesus was when he was on earth?

### **The key Christianity offers:**

*The love of a God who suffers.*

Jesus does want to comfort you. He is alive and present and able to do that. He wants you to know that he has suffered too. He wants you to understand that when you suffered he was there suffering alongside you. He weeps with you, and feels your pain.



What is more, his love can bring a measure of healing—whether it's through prayer, through loving Christian friends who show you the love of Jesus in tangible ways, or simply through a sense of his loving presence with you.

Jesus also has a knack, practiced over thousands of years, of bringing good out of evil. You probably do not know right now what that will mean in your life, but God is able to make something out of your past experience which will surprise you by its goodness.

### **How do I get in touch with Jesus?**

Jesus announced the beginning of his life's work in these words:

*God's Spirit is on me;  
he's chosen me to preach  
the Message of good news to the poor,  
Sent me to announce  
pardon to prisoners  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set the burdened and battered free,  
to announce, 'This is God's year to act!'<sup>8</sup>*

Jesus' whole life was one of caring for the hurting—those who were hurt emotionally, physically or spiritually. Hurting people flocked to him, asking him to touch them, to speak to them. They longed to be near him and to stay with him.

He hurt in many ways as they did: he was born in an occupied territory, was a refugee for the first years of his life, suffered rejection and misunderstanding throughout his life, particularly from those who might have been expected to understand him. And then, betrayed by the kiss of a friend, deserted by his followers, jeered at by his enemies, he died by one of the most excruciating and humiliating deaths ever devised. Jesus knew what it was to suffer.

Because Jesus is still active in this world in the form of his Holy Spirit, it is still possible to relate to Jesus today. You can begin to connect with his love by saying something like this:

*Jesus, you know what I have been through, and you know how it still hurts.*

*You know I have been angry with you for letting these things happen, and I'm grateful that you have accepted my anger without being angry back.*

*I never realized that you suffer when we suffer, and that even now you share the hurts I feel. Thank you for that.*

*I find it hard to trust anyone, even you. But I have heard that you are very loving and that you care about people, and I want to believe that.*

*If things have to be tough, I would prefer to go through them with your friendship rather than without it.*

*In so far as I am able, I open my heart to you. Please make your love real to me.*

*Please help me to be faithful and obedient to you, now and always.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to Jesus, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.

***None of these categories really describes me, but I am curious about Christianity anyway***

You have no deep conviction about the truth of Christianity. You have no serious sense of need, whether for truth or forgiveness. You do not think about death very often. Yet there is something about Christianity which intrigues you and sometimes attracts you. Each person is different. The cases described here are simply some of the most common causes people become interested in Christianity. And even then, of course, the categories have been described pretty broadly.

You know what it is that made you interested in Christian faith. God certainly knows. God has been interested in you since long before you became interested in God.

It may be that the way forward for you is to get to know some who are already followers of Jesus. Try to figure out what is real in their faith.

Maybe you should pray to Jesus over a period of time and see what happens. You will be careful to be on guard against self-deception, of course. If you see no effect to your praying, that will weigh against Christianity.

Or maybe you should read the biographies of Jesus, or other books written to help people know the truth of Christianity.

You should know too how you may become a Christian. Inevitably, the description will not be as focused as the ones above. But it may help anyway.

**The key Christianity offers:**

*Jesus once said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.<sup>9</sup>*

Jesus claims to be The Way: the guide to our journey through this world. He claims also that he is The Truth: the true explanation at the heart of all life's questions and problems. He says he is The Life: the secret of authentic living, living life to the full, which everyone would like to find. Jesus is saying that by following him as our Way and by believing him as our Truth, we experience real Life. And the heart of that Life is a relationship with God, whom Jesus teaches us to call Father.

Conversely, he makes clear that to reject him is to reject God and to experience the negative effects of being separated from God in this world and—even more devastatingly—in the next.

### **So how do I become a follower of Jesus?**

You have to understand that Jesus demands your exclusive allegiance, that he must take priority in your life over other relationships and commitments.

You need to be willing to turn from anything that will hold you back from seriously following Jesus. And you have to commit as much as you know of yourself to as much as you know of him.

Then you simply have to ask to become his follower. Anyone who sincerely makes that request is welcome. Jesus is committed to us far more wholeheartedly than we will ever be to him.

Let me give you an example of how you can approach Jesus if you want that kind of relationship. You can say something like this:

*Jesus, I understand something of what you meant when you said you are the Way, the Truth and the Life.*

*I want to follow your Way in my life. I want to know your Truth. And I want to share your Life.*

*I am willing to put behind me anything that may get in the way of a relationship with you, to put you first in everything.*

*Please forgive me all that is past, and accept me as your follower, from this moment on and for always.*

*Amen.*

If you have said something of that sort to God, then turn to page 28 to know what to do next.

## **W***hat now?*

If you have approached God with the understanding and in the spirit that has been described here, God has promised to receive you and make you his forever.

Jesus said, for instance,

*'Anyone who comes to me I will NEVER drive away.'*<sup>10</sup>

According to Jesus, the angels in heaven are having a party because you have decided to trust him.<sup>11</sup>

But that is just the beginning of a lifetime of relating to God—in this world and the next. The most important thing for you to do right now is to strengthen your new relationship with God.

### ***First, you need to find a group of people who are also learning to trust and follow Jesus.***

Tell them in your own words about your new commitment.

Ask to join them. They are part of your new family.

If they have been on the Christian road for some time they will know how to help you.

Above all, they will love you and make God's welcome tangible to you.

(If you find it difficult to find such a group, write to the address on the back cover, and we will try to put you in touch with someone.)

***Second, you need to pray.***

You have already spoken with God when you used the words suggested above. That is at the very heart of prayer: communicating with God.

So practice speaking to God, at any time and any place. Tell God what you're thinking and feeling. Tell God what you need. Thank God for things you appreciate. Apologize when you know you've messed up. Ask God for the strength of the Holy Spirit to do what is right.

At first, it will seem strange, talking to the air, or to the walls. But hang in there. God loves to hear you. Gradually, it will become more natural and meaningful. You will see evidence that God really is listening.

***Third, you need to make the acquaintance of the Bible, if you haven't done so already.***

The Bible is the map for your journey, the Maker's instruction manual for the created world. It is one of the ways that we learn more about what God is like and how we can relate to God. It is also one of the ways God communicates to us. That is why the Bible is quoted so often in these pages.

Start by reading one of the biographies of Jesus in the New Testament: the books called Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

Imagine you were there. Ask Jesus what he wants you to learn from each story you read. Talk to him about it. Maybe he will show you things to do, or things to be thankful for, or things to apologize for. Be open to whatever he wants to teach you.

***Fourth, begin to shape your life to what Jesus asks of you.***

For instance, if you read his words, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' try to think who is the neighbour God has given you to care for. If he says, 'Give to whoever asks you,' be on the lookout for someone who asks for your help.

The greatest human error is to think we can live our lives our own way, without reference to God. In fact, obeying Jesus is a freeing, humanizing experience. It enables us to grow into the people God always intended us to be.



## ***I**n conclusion...*

You have entered upon the greatest adventure that could ever befall a human being.

It is an adventure that will challenge you beyond your wildest dreams, that will stretch you beyond what you believed to be your limitations, that will lead you through ecstasy and through agony you would not have known otherwise.

This is the supreme adventure, the adventure of a human being walking through a dangerous and beautiful world hand in hand with the Creator of the universe.

May it bring you joy.

## Sources of quotations from the Bible

1. John 14:9 (*New Revised Standard Version*).
2. Colossians 2:9 (*The Message*, a contemporary translation by Eugene H Peterson).
3. John 4:14 (*The Message*).
4. Matthew 11:28-30 (*The Message*).
5. Revelation 3:20 (*NRSV*).
6. John 11:25-26 (*NRSV*).
7. 1 John 1:8-9 (*The Message*).
8. Luke 4:18-19 (*The Message*).
9. John 14:6 (*NRSV*).
10. John 6:37 (*NRSV*).
11. Luke 15:7 (*NRSV*).

## For further reading

On the general truth of Christianity:

***Mere Christianity***. C S Lewis. London: Fontana.

On suffering:

***Making Sense out of Suffering***. Peter Kreeft. Ann Arbor: Servant.

On the Christian life:

***The Fight***. John White. Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press.

***The School of Jesus. A beginner's guide to living as a Christian***.  
John Bowen. (Another Dare booklet in this series.)

*Please feel free to write to the address on the back cover with questions or for more information. Copies of the Bible and of the books mentioned above are also available.*

