

I'm a New Christian...What Next?

Where does one get started in the Christian life?

By Barbara Francis

I became a Christian my freshman year at the University of Oregon. On a scale of 1 to 10 of what I knew about God and the Bible (1 being "not a darn thing" and 10 being "I was raised in a monastery"), I was a minus 30. I never attended church growing up and had lived a pretty wild life before I knew the Lord.

I had tried once to read the Bible, but, silly me, I began in the beginning (who knew there were two sections?) and got about 20 chapters into the Book of Genesis before giving up. Years later I discovered that there was also a New Testament and that's where I could learn about Jesus...and boy, did I have a lot to learn.

So, where does one get started in the Christian life? How can we grow and get to know God better? These were some of the very first questions I asked myself as I began my relationship with God. Maybe they're similar to the ones you've been deliberating. I knew so little about the things of God that I had a hard time even articulating some of my musings. But thankfully I had an older Christian in my life who introduced me to four simple ways to get on the growth path. I still remember them, still use them even though I've walked with Jesus for over 30 years. My prayer is that they would be a helpful boost as you discover what's next in this life called Christian.

Listen to God

The Bible is the very word and will of God, preserved for us so we can get to know who He is and what He wants for our lives. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." That is why we need to spend time reading the Bible every day. If you don't have a Bible that's easy to understand, make the trip to a local Christian bookstore and purchase one. If that is not possible, many libraries have them available to be checked out. Some suggested translations are The New Living, The New International Version or The Message. Begin with the Gospel of John in the New Testament. (This Book, sometimes referred to simply as "John", is the fourth book in the New Testament, near the beginning, not to be confused with 1 John, 2 John and 3 John, found at the end of the New Testament.) I like using a journal or pad of paper to write down inquiries and observations. Answer these two questions for each chapter: What do I learn about God or Jesus? Are there things discussed that I should begin practicing or avoid altogether? This will help you to see that the Bible is very practical to your life today. After you finish John, just keep going all the way to Revelation.

When we read the Bible we learn how loved we are by God. "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1). We learn that we are entirely new people because we've

invited Jesus to be our Savior and Lord. Read Ephesians 1:3-14 and spend a moment listing all the things that are true of you as a Christian. Amazing, isn't it?

Talk to God

Prayer is such a vital aspect to a healthy walk with God. It is perhaps my favorite part of my relationship with the Father. Think of it, we can talk with GOD! Anytime, anywhere, any mood, any season of temptation or joy. Hebrews 13:5 tells us that God will never leave or forsake us. That's good news for some of us who have never known that kind of love and commitment. Well, we do now...because God does not lie or change his mind (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). And because He is always with us we can always converse with Him. Prayer is simply talking to God. No religious tones or words necessary. Psalm 62:8 tells us to "pour out your hearts to God."

There is an acronym, ACTS, which was most helpful as I began to pray. Now, remember I started at minus 30, so I knew NOTHING. In my home we did not pray, we wished – wished on birthday cakes before the candles were blown out or on the first star I saw at night. I'd never prayed, so it felt a bit awkward to begin, but using the ACTS process helped me greatly.

ACTS:

Adoration...is where we praise God for who He is: loving, good, kind, understanding, gracious, etc. As you read the Bible and write down the things you are learning about God, you will have more and more to praise Him for. Also, begin to read a Psalm a day – takes about 3 to 5 minutes – and praise God for how each Psalm reveals new dimensions of His character and ways.

Confession...is a key component to growth. Sin clogs up our fellowship with God. We'll feel guilty and distant if we have attitudes and actions in our lives that the Bible says are wrong. That's where confession comes in. Look up 1 John 1:9. Then read Psalm 32:3-5 about the consequences of unconfessed sin and how to deal with it.

Thanksgiving...is when we just say thanks to God for all He has done. Again, the Psalms are a great place to head to be reminded of all He has done for us. Use the psalmists' words as your own. It's a good way to learn to just talk with God.

Supplication...is where we pray both for ourselves and for others in our lives. I like keeping a prayer list with the date I started asking on my behalf or the behalf of another and the date the prayer was answered. Pray specifically, expectantly and faithfully. 1 John 5:14-15 tells us that if we pray according to God's will, He will hear and answer. But, you ask, "How do I know God's will?" That takes us back to where we began...to reading His word.

Talk to Others Who Know God

This is simply called fellowship, hanging out with other people who love Jesus. It can be at church, in a Bible study or in a small group. It is for purposes of growing together (Acts 2:46-47). Many of us will need to make new friendships and learn

how to have fun in different sorts of ways. By spending time with believers, our behaviors begin to change and we learn what older believers look and act like.

Talk to Others About God

This is called witnessing. I like what the devoted apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God." I just had to tell my friends about my new relationship with Christ! Because He'd changed my life, forgiven me and loved me in a way I never knew was possible, I wanted others to have what I did. Sure, not everyone was as excited about the whole thing as I was, but my desire was so strong. I made a list of the top ten people I wanted to talk to about the Lord and then just waited for Him to open up the opportunities to do so. Happily, many know Christ now, too. Cool, huh?

My sincere prayer is that these few thoughts will serve you as stepping stones toward a more intimate walk with our sweet Savior, Jesus.