

# Tell Me More

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## **INTRODUCTION: Who is Jesus Christ, Anyway?**

You've heard His name, no doubt. But maybe you really don't understand who Jesus Christ is and why you need to know Him. I will give you the broken-down, easy to understand low-down on who He is. All the information is available to you in the Bible, which I believe is the Word of God, given to us so we can know the truth about why we are here, how we can have eternal life and who Jesus is.

According to the Bible, Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life – and no one comes to the Father except through Him. That means, in order to get to heaven, there is no other way. None. Not good works, not a good life, not even good intentions. Jesus is God in man-form. As I tell my kids, He's "God with skin on"! Jesus Christ is part of the Trinity - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

Over 2000 years ago, Jesus came to live as a man, perfect in every way and without sin. Because of this, He was acceptable to God as a sacrifice for the sins of all men and women, and even though it was the most difficult thing to do, God allowed Jesus to be a sacrifice for us.

Jesus gave His life so you and I can have a relationship with God through Him. Then He rose again – came back to life – in order to show that death had been defeated! He conquered death, setting us free and taking our punishment on Himself. He asks nothing in return except that you believe (which in the original Greek definition of the term "believe" means *firm conviction, full surrender and a lifestyle that reflects that surrender*).

(scripture references: John 1:1, John 1:29, John 3:16, John 14:6, Romans 3:10, Colossians 2:9)

### **Why would Jesus do such a thing for me?**

Because He loves you so very much! It was never His desire to be separated from us – He created us to be in relationship with Him, but because God is Holy, He cannot have a

relationship with sinful man. Unfortunately, man chose to sin even though God told him that it would *destroy their relationship and ultimately, cause him death.*

In the Old Testament, *God was very clear that in order to approach Him, man was to offer sacrifices for his sinful behavior in order to be acceptable to God. So that's what happened for years and years. You can read about the different sacrifices in the books of Leviticus and Numbers, in the Old Testament.*

However, the Old Testament also showed that *someday, God would provide the Ultimate Sacrifice for our sin – and all of the prophecies found in the Old Testament line up with who Jesus is. He came as a servant, not an earthly king, but a true servant leader who wanted to teach men how to live according to God's ways and then give His life so that man could, again, enjoy a relationship with God and eternal life (God's original design).*

(scripture references: Isaiah chapter 53, John 14:1-6, Romans 5:6-11)

### **What do I do to develop a relationship with Jesus?**

The Bible says we are to *confess our sins and He will be faithful and just and forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness! (1 John 1:9)* In order to develop a relationship with Jesus Christ, all you need to do is pray to Him, right now. It's simple – He says that if we seek Him, we will find Him! (John 7:34) It requires humility, something we have a difficult time with! You must realize that you are a sinner (aren't we all?) and then confess that God.

Just confess you are a sinner and in need of a Savior. Tell Him you want Him in your life – in your heart – and you need Him! Tell Him you are willing to give up the sinful life you are leading and turn to Him – and mean it. Then REPENT of your sin (turn away from it) and turn to Jesus Christ. Repenting is not just saying "I'm sorry", but saying "I'm through"! You need to know this – this is so important – YOU DO NOT NEED TO BE SINLESS OR PERFECT IN ORDER TO COME TO CHRIST! He will help you overcome your sin! You will never, never, never

be in a position to be "good enough" to come to Jesus – He accepts you JUST AS YOU ARE!  
Here is an example of the prayer you can pray to Him:

Dear Heavenly Father,

I confess that I am a sinner. I'm so sorry for all of the wrong, sinful things I've done in my life.

Please forgive me. Thank you for giving your life as a sacrifice for me. Please come into my heart and be the Lord of my life. I accept your sacrifice for my sins and I give my life to you.

Please live your life through me! Help me to make better decisions, to learn more about you each day and send people into my life to help me grow as a Christian. Thank you so much for loving me and providing for me! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Once you have said a prayer from your heart, you must get in the Word of God! You must read the Bible. God talks to His children every single day – but in order to hear what He is saying, we must be in the Word daily because this is how He talks to us. Also, please make sure you are in a Bible based church where you can grow and learn and surround yourself with other believers. This is so important! We all need accountability and encouragement.

These are the basics of salvation, according to the Bible. This book was written to answer some of the deeper questions you might be facing about salvation. I struggled with many of these questions, and as a result, I read the scriptures, consulted pastors and mentors and rounded up some of the questions to provide those answers for you as you begin your journey into faith in Jesus Christ.

May God bless you and may the Holy Spirit give you guidance and direction as you seek Him with all of your heart!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Leslie Hease". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned at the bottom left of the page.

## CHAPTER ONE: What is a Christian?

You might be surprised to find out that the word "Christian" was originally used by unbelievers in Antioch as a kind of contemptuous nickname to make fun of followers of Jesus Christ. The word actually means "adherent follower of Christ". They used it to poke fun, kind of like some of the people on Survivor used the name "Sister Christian" to make fun of me. The Christians in Antioch wore the name proudly, as I did my "title" on Survivor. (It's funny, when I sign autographs, I always include "Sister Christian" – proudly)!

The problem is, the word "Christian" is now used to describe anyone who attends church or has high moral values and somehow it has lost its true meaning over the years. So there are a lot of Christians who are now calling themselves "Jesus Followers" or "Believers in Jesus Christ" in order to make a distinction that they are not just a religious person trying to be moral.

I do get a lot of grief from a lot of people who, when they find out Who I represent, automatically slap a few stereotypes on me, based not on me or my behavior but on their past experiences in church or religion or what they have been told by others. Wow, there are a lot of ideas of what a Christian is out there.

So, I thought I'd make a list of what a Follower of Jesus Christ is *not*:

***We are not perfect or sinless.*** Quite the contrary, actually. We are quite aware of our imperfectness and sinfulness and that is why we have put our trust in Jesus Christ, *alone*, for our righteousness. He is the only One who ever lived a perfect life and when He gave His life on the cross as a payment for the world's sin debt, He made it possible for us to be made righteous through His sacrifice. We trust in that, therefore we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. But we are still human beings who struggle with sin. The difference is we are not slaves to that sin anymore and we have freedom to choose not to anymore because, as the Bible says, we are now slaves to *righteousness*. ([Romans 6:16-18](#)) He changes us daily into the people He wants us to be - this process will never be complete until

we are face to face with Him and our faith is perfected! Our hearts are changing, our desires are changing and we are slowly becoming more like Jesus Christ each day.

***We are not the Judge.*** Our Heavenly Father is the Judge, but we are not. Imagine if a judge's son or daughter went to the courtroom, put on the judge's robe and sat down to judge a trial! We'd all laugh in his or her face! They have no rights to judge, just because they are the son or daughter of the judge. It is the same with us. As a matter of fact, the Bible says that when we judge others, we are going to be judged in the same manner. No, thank you!  
[\(Matthew 7:1-3\)](#)

***We are not "religious" as the world has come to know religion.*** We are in a relationship with Jesus Christ, not following a religion, but following *Him*. The world views religion as a bunch of rules, rituals and rites you perform that make you right with God. We do not believe that is what is needed to be in relationship with God. It is His grace that saves us, by our faith. Pure religion, according to the bible, is looking after orphans, widows and the poor and keeping ourselves from being polluted by the world. ([James 1:27](#)) This is a direct work of the Holy Spirit living through us, not our own doing or power. The "works" that occur in the life of a Jesus follower after salvation come naturally from a thankful heart that is being changed by Jesus, not in order to prove our salvation or even earn it.

***We are not trying to impose our beliefs on anyone.*** A lot of times, I feel as though folks think that when you are a follower of Jesus and you are sharing your faith with others, you are doing so because you get some sort of "holy commission" by closing a sale or something! I promise you, if you are approached by a Jesus follower who shares with you the gospel of Christ, it is not for any other reason than the fact that the person loves you and cares about you. What we believe to be true from the Bible is a matter of life or death - literally. *We share because we care*, not because we want to recruit you and receive kudos or cash from anyone! You matter to us, that's all.

***We are not going to argue that we are right and you are wrong.*** I've heard some people try to prove that God is real, the Bible is true and Jesus is who He says He is with worldly wisdom,

only to be discouraged and frustrated. Honestly, the point is completely lost if we get into arguments because the Bible is very clear that salvation is through grace by faith ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). We believe it is true because of faith, and faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. ([Hebrews 11:1](#)) The Bible even goes so far as to say that we are not to argue about the Law because it only leads to quarrels. The proof, as Jesus said, is in how we live - not in what we argue. I know that what I believe is true because since I put my faith in Jesus Christ alone, my life has never been the same. He has changed me, my heart, my mind, my passions and my life. But I had to trust Him to do that first.

Call me Christian, Jesus Follower, Believer, Sister Christian or even Jesus Freak - no matter what you call me, I know that the only thing that matters is that HE called me - and I answered that call with a resounding "Yes!".

## CHAPTER TWO: What Does it Mean to Believe?

Acts 16:31 says if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we will be saved. But do we understand this word, really? I used to think that scripture meant all I had to do was believe Jesus is who He said He is. I thought that since I believed Jesus was the Son of God and that He died for me, I was set. I continued to live a life of sin, but thought Jesus had to live up to His word to save me since I believed He was who He said He was. But nothing was changing and I did not have assurance of my salvation. I believed in my head, but my heart was not changed at all.

The original Greek definition in the New Testament for the word, believe, is pretty intense. It actually means "**a firm conviction, a full surrender and a lifestyle that reflects that surrender**". My life did not used to reflect my beliefs at all.

It's kind of like saying "Yeah, I believe that if I brush my teeth it will help prevent cavities" but then I never brush my teeth. Sure, I believe it can help me, but if I don't actually do anything about my belief, it is just that – a belief in something. There's no action involved, no life change. So even though you believe it can help you avoid cavities, it doesn't change anything. That's kind of like how it was with me for way too many years with my "belief" in Christ. I believed He was the Son of God and that He died for my sins but it never changed the way I lived, it never changed my life. True belief changes the way you live. It is not an effort to change, but an effort to trust Him to change you. It's the coolest.

Here's a poem I as I reflected on my salvation and what led to it:

Believing...

I once believed my walk with God depended all on me  
I worked real hard at pleasing Him, hoping one day to be free  
  
I read the Bible, prayed sometimes and occasionally went to church  
But my heart was always restless as I continued on my search

I fooled my friends and family into thinking I was good  
But behind their backs I partied hard and drank whenever I could

I figured since the Bible said "believe and you'll be saved"  
That all I had to do was say I believed in Jesus' name

And when I did, He had to save me – no matter how I'd act  
I could sin and He'd forgive me – He'd never break a pact

I felt so smug and in control – I'd live my life my way!  
Forgetting all He did for me at Calvary on that day.

As soon as I'd feel conviction, I'd drink to numb the pain  
I began drinking more and more – but continued to feel shame

When I'd wake the next morning, I always seemed to know  
My choices didn't reflect my faith – the lying had to go

I knew my life was not reflecting a relationship with God  
But I felt that I was hopeless – so I kept up the façade

Until one day I realized that I had been deceived  
I learned that there was so much more to the word "believe"

Believing is an action and it requires *firm conviction*  
Lives do change because of it – no more contradiction!

A believing heart will change because of what it comes to know  
A firm and true conviction that your life will begin to show

I did not have the power in me to change my wayward life  
So I trusted in Christ to change me now – His beautiful sacrifice!

No more living a double life, no more lies and fear  
He's changing me each day I live and making my way clear.

Now my life has changed so much – and I haven't done a thing  
Except give the reigns to Jesus Christ – and to Him tightly cling.

If you say you're saved but you're still living like before  
Please get on your knees today with God – make absolutely sure

You cannot help but change when you experience true grace  
Your grateful heart will change when true salvation you embrace

I was raised in the church. I led Bible studies. I talked a lot about God for many years, but I can honestly say I never believed the way I do now. I never had assurance of my salvation, down deep in my heart. I knew there was something missing, but I didn't know what it was! I know now – and that is why I'm writing this book. As I share my story with people, I realize that this is epidemic in the church. Many of us believe in our heads, but we do not truly believe to the point where it changes our lives. Jesus is not being acknowledged as Lord of our lives – we are still trying to control our lives ourselves. And we are a disaster as a result.

I heard a teaching once that rocked my world. The Pastor said “You know, it's not a matter of ‘making Jesus your Lord’ because He already IS your Lord! It's a matter of you bowing your knee to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in your life.” I love that. It's so true – He is Lord of your life, whether you realize it or not. The Bible says in Philippians 2:10 that one day “every

knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

The problems come when we don't humble ourselves enough to admit that He is Lord, and as a result, we are not experiencing the freedom of truly, abundant life. We must surrender our lives to Him – and that means we need to allow Him to control our lives. Jesus didn't die just to be a part of our lives, He wants to *be our lives*. And I can tell you, from experience, He's MUCH better at it than we are!

The verse that really got through to me was James 2:19: “*You believe that there is one God? Good! Even the demons believe that and they shudder.*” See, the demons believe Jesus is the Son of God. They believe that He died for the sins of the world. They believe He is exactly who He says He is. Satan believes it too!

So, if that's true, then that means there has to be more to my belief than just “believing” in my head that Jesus is who He says He is if I am to become a child of God! It means the belief must be something that is so real to me, that it changes my life. It is something that is necessary to me; something that I would give my life for. ***A firm conviction, a full surrender, and a lifestyle that reflects that surrender.***

## CHAPTER THREE: What is Repentance?

Remember back in the show Happy Days when Fonzie was trying to admit he was wrong about something and he just couldn't get the words out? I always thought that was so funny. Until I realized I was doing the same thing in my life. Admitting we are wrong takes guts - and humility. And admitting we are wrong is the first step to true repentance.

When I say that word, repent, does it make you think of the crazy-haired guy on the street corner with a wild eyes yelling at everyone to "Repent!" while he carried a sign on him that says "THE END IS NEAR!?" Yeah, I used to think that, too. I didn't really understand what the word really meant much, but I knew it seemed "overused" and "exaggerated" in the fire and brimstone preaching that Hollywood exploited in movies and entertainment. But not anymore.

That was what was missing in my "Counterfeit Christianity" - true repentance. I believed Jesus was who He said He was, I knew He died on the cross and I even acknowledged I was a sinner, but never really understood that repentance was such a big deal. It took twenty years of my life to realize that I was missing this important and crucial element, and once I finally repented from my sin, I was finally able to embrace a true relationship with Christ as Lord and Savior of my life. Believing in Jesus was simply not enough - I had to believe in Him enough that my life was surrendered to Him and His Lordship.

I am shocked at how often the gospel is presented without a true presentation of what repentance is, because without it, there is no salvation.

I read a book by John MacArthur called "The Gospel According to Jesus". There is a chapter on repentance and what it means, and what it doesn't mean. I literally put the book down after marking up just about the entire chapter and yelled out "AMEN!!!" when I finished it! Here are some of the quotes from the book that shook me to the core:

page 179 - *Repentance is not merely shame or sorrow for sin, although genuine repentance always involves an element of remorse. It is a redirection of the human will, a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead.*

*The call to repentance is not a command to make sin right before turning to Christ in faith. Rather it is a command to recognize one's lawlessness and hate it, to turn one's back on it and flee to Christ, embracing Him with wholehearted devotion.*

*The word repentance comes from the Greek word metanoia - which means "the change of mind of those who have begun to abhor their errors and misdeeds, and have determined to enter upon a better course of life, so that it embraces both a recognition of sin and sorrow for it and hearty amendment, the tokens and effects of which are good deeds."*

Page 180 - *Repentance begins with recognition of sin - the understanding that we are sinners, that our sin is an affront to a holy God, and more precisely, that we are personally responsible for our own guilt. The repentance that leads to salvation must also include recognition of who Christ is along with some understanding of His right to govern people's lives.*

I could go on and on, but I'll let you read the book for yourself! But I do want to say that I see clearly why we hate the word "repent" so much. Because it goes against our human will to be "right" and it requires great humility, something rare and difficult in these days of "I'm right, you're wrong" and "It's not MY fault!". It requires surrender of our lives to Christ's Lordship - something that also takes great humility and trust. In today's world, it almost seems ridiculous that anyone would ever do any of this:

-admit wrongdoing by assuming personal responsibility for our sin

-take entire blame without passing it on to someone else

-surrender to someone else's way of life besides our own

-give up trying to control our own destiny

-trust ANYONE wholeheartedly

-obey anyone else - I mean, we are the boss, right? Who knows better than us how to live??

I remember thinking "If God didn't want me to drink alcohol, why would He make me this way?" and so I would continue to drink - excessively. I was not taking personal responsibility. I was blaming GOD for my sin, by accusing Him of making me a sinner! But when I realized He did NOT make me a sinner, but that I was born into a sinful world that was corrupt, I realized that He made me to be anything BUT a sinner - and that He had provided a way for me to live the life He intended for me - through Jesus Christ. But I had to get over myself - my pride - my lack of personal responsibility and repent of my waywardness.

So, you see, that is why we hate the word repent. But you know what? Jesus said "REPENT" many times in the Bible - and He meant it. I think it is the true test. The place where Jesus looks us in the eyes and says "Are you in?" and we are then faced with a decision that may seem impossible on the surface, but once we turn our backs and walk toward Christ and away from our sin, He empowers us to live righteously - not perfectly - but righteously because He can then be our righteousness for us - something we are incapable of being without Him.

Please know this – repentance is *not a work*. Works do not get us to heaven, not at all. Repentance is just a turning away from sin and toward the Savior, letting Him do the work for us because we are completely incapable of doing it ourselves. We get no credit out of this at all. All the credit goes to Him! 2 Corinthians 7:9 reminds us that even repentance is something that God initiates in us – read this carefully. . . .” . . .now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

Those verses reiterate that God is the One who initiates repentance in a person. Godly sorrow is genuine sorrow that leads to repentance. It makes us realize we are wrong and we

are in need of a Savior. Worldly repentance makes us sad and sorry, but not for the sin...for being caught! Godly sorrow takes humility.

We realize, very quickly, that repentance seems a lot harder to do before we actually take the step - and that once we do, it's truly the best decision we could have ever made for our lives - and He makes it worth every single moment.

And you know, some days I wonder if those crazy guys with the wild eyes and the signs on the street corners yelling at us to "REPENT!" might be a little like Ezekiel or Jeremiah from the Bible - they seemed incredibly NUTS to everyone, but they had a message from God and they carried it forth - so you and I could know the truth about who God is and how we can have a relationship with Him. Sure, they used some strange tactics (God told them to and they were just being obedient! - seriously, you have to read in Ezekiel what God had this man do for Hlm!), but people paid attention, didn't they?

Maybe these guys aren't so crazy after all? I suppose if we all realized the importance of this "r" word - REPENT- the life and death implications, we'd all be yelling it out on the street corners, too.

*Scriptures for further study on repentance: Matthew 4:17; Luke 13:3 & 5; Luke 24:47; 2 Timothy 2:25; Matthew 3:8; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:17; Ezekiel 33:18-19; 2 Chronicles 7:14; Jonah 3:10*

## CHAPTER FOUR: Just How Narrow is the Way?

Jesus' words in Luke 13:24 always make me shudder "*Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*" Just how narrow is the door? Why does He say that?



I read something once about the narrow way being kind of like a turnstile. You can only enter one at a time - not in groups. Salvation is a personal decision, one that is made by an individual and just because the ones around you have chosen to follow Jesus that doesn't make you a Jesus follower, too. Also, when you go through a turnstile, you have to leave your things behind. No room to carry baggage with you going through one of those things!

Same as going through the narrow door to salvation - we must leave everything that seems to matter behind to follow Jesus.

Why is the road to salvation so narrow anyway? I decided to go on a treasure hunt and look for some answers, so I went to Strong's Concordance. A really good way to figure out the meaning of words in the Bible is to go to their original Hebrew or Greek meaning and context. So I looked up the word "Narrow" in Luke 13:24. The Greek word that was originally used in that sentence is "thlibo" and it is used many other times in the New Testament, too.

What I realized today was that the word "thlibo" is the same word used for tribulation, trouble, affliction and distress! It was the word that was used to describe the persecution the disciples and apostles experienced and even the word "throng" which was used to describe what the angry crowds wanted to do to Jesus Christ as He went around preaching, teaching and performing miracles!

No wonder few are able to enter the "narrow" door. It promises to be door that opens a life to tribulation, trouble, affliction and distress! Who in their "right mind" would want to enter a door like that? I tell you something, **only a right mind would!** We are so sure that comfort and a life free of any tribulation is the best way. God says that's not true.

God does say the way is tough, filled with tribulation and trials and all that stuff we try to avoid - but He also says "I will never leave you or forsake you" and He says it will produce in us endurance and build our faith (James 1). That is why He gives us JOY in abundance - joy is contentment IN SPITE OF circumstances. Happiness is contentment as a result of circumstances. Happiness doesn't elude the Follower of Jesus Christ, but it doesn't define us, either.

The Lord promises peace, joy, love, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control (Galatians 5) when we enter the narrow door and into a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. Those are some SERIOUS benefits! I'd say they far outweigh any persecution or tribulation that could come our way.

Yes, the way is narrow. Yes, it will have tribulation. Yes, it will be hard. But hear these words of Jesus Christ, words He says to you: "**These things I have spoken to you, so that IN ME you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.**"

It might seem crazy to the world to enter through a narrow door that seems to be leading to a life of troubles and tribulation. The thing we miss in all of this is that the tribulation and troubles that are on this side of the turnstile also exist on the other side of it! But they are going to be experienced without the joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, self-control, faithfulness, love, and kindness that God provides to those who drop their baggage and slip through the turnstile into His loving arms!

## CHAPTER FIVE: What Happens When I Become a Believer?

I used to live a life that was far away from God. I loved to party. I loved drinking and hanging out all the time until all hours of the night. I was a smoker. My language left much to be desired. It was a very empty life for me. But something strange happened when I would get pregnant with my children. I would quit drinking. I'd quit smoking. I'd eat better. I even went to church and began to study the Bible more. I cared so much more for my body because it wasn't about me anymore. The only thing that mattered to me was that my children would be healthy. I took such good care of myself for their benefit.

But the moment I would give birth, the temptations would come back and I would succumb. I felt completely defeated! I remember being so frustrated about that, but not really feeling like I could control myself. Oh, those were some dark days. I remember drinking and thinking that I wanted more for my life, but I couldn't seem to get out of the strongholds that held me captive. I was desperate for a Savior!

I used to think that the skies would open, the birds would sing and maybe a dove would come and sit down on my shoulder to confirm my belief in Christ when I surrendered my life to His Lordship. Honestly, that wasn't my experience. I realize some people experience some super-natural events when they receive Christ, so I'm not saying that can't happen, but in my experience, it was not a big sky-opening, trumpets blaring kind of thing!

It's been more gradual for me. A day by day change that is happening before my very eyes! You see, there is a very important promise that is fulfilled the moment you receive Christ as your Lord and Savior. Here's what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 *"Now it is God who makes both of us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."*

That means, when we receive Christ, we also receive a special gift from God - a "deposit" from Him - called the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was promised by Jesus Christ. Here's what He said in John 14:15-17 *"If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the*

*Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept Him because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. But you know Him, for He lives with you and will be in you.” He went on to say, in verse 26, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you”.*

The Holy Spirit is the promise of God to the believer and follower of Jesus Christ. We would not be able to live the Christian life without Him! He gives us wisdom, helps us to understand the Word of God, gives us discernment, convicts us when we sin, and brings with Him the fruits of the Holy Spirit that are provided to help us become more like Jesus in our lives. Galatians 5:22 says *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”* I don’t know about you, but I’m all about getting those kinds of benefits!

What happens to you when you become a believer in Jesus Christ? The Holy Spirit comes to live inside of you. He helps equip you, gives you encouragement, teaches you, and helps you to grow in your knowledge of God. He’s a Person, not a feeling. He’s a real-life helper. I didn’t “feel” any different when He began to live inside of me and I didn’t do strange things. But I can tell you – He is there. He’s leading me each day and I can tell by the way my passions have changed, the way my desires have changed and by how much I love this Bible that used to discourage me because I couldn’t understand it before! Now I can’t get enough of God’s Word and I learn something new every single day I open it up. It’s truly a miracle!

Just like when I was pregnant with my children and I was able to change my sinful behavior because I wanted to make sure I took care of the blessings growing inside of my womb, I now feel the same way about the Holy Spirit inside of me. He is not in my womb, but in my heart. He is with me all the time – and I want to take care of my body for Him now. I carry Him with me, just as I did my infants. It’s not about me anymore, for sure. It’s all about Him. He’s changing me and the more I allow Him to do that, the more joy and peace fill my days.

I wrote a poem about Mary, the mother of Jesus, one Christmas after I realized this truth about the Holy Spirit. I hope you will read this and thank God that He has given us this incredible gift of His Holy Spirit!

*Mary had a guest on that evening so bright*

*An Angel whose presence gave her quite a fright.*

*He came to her with a message of hope and of cheer*

*The Savior was coming – the time was drawing near.*

*The message was more personal, as she would soon see*

*As the Angel unfolded just what God's plan would be.*

*He told her she would be mother to the Savior of All*

*And with that to her knees sweet, young Mary did fall*

*But how could this be? She was not even wed!*

*She questioned the Angel and that's when he said:*

*"Sweet Child, God the Father has chosen you to be*

*A vessel that will carry Him supernaturally...*

*He's sending His Spirit to give you His Seed*

*So you and your people will finally be freed!"*

*She thought for a moment and said with such strength,*

*“If this is God’s will, then I’ll go to any length.”*

*She carried our Savior through long, lonely days*

*Where people would give her a judgmental gaze.*

*They’d point and they’d stare and they’d whisper her name*

*While she walked down the streets without any shame.*

*And when the day came for her to give birth*

*The heavens declared His invaluable worth.*

*Jesus was born and the plan would unfold*

*That for thousands of years was prophetically foretold.*

*He came to live among us, to show us how to live*

*Then He laid down His life, so our sins He could forgive.*

*But it didn’t end there – no He rose from the grave!*

*So all men could trust Him and their lives He could save.*

*And save me, He did! But first I had to admit*

That I couldn't do it alone, to Him I had to submit.

Just like Mary did on that bright, clear night  
When she submitted to God's plan and did not put up a fight!

And once she agreed that God's plan was the best,  
His Spirit came upon her and gave her sweet rest.

He did the same for me -though I can't explain how -  
His Spirit came upon me and He lives in *me* now!

Just like sweet Mary, I carry Him around  
Not in the womb, but in my heart He'll be found.

People do point now, they stare and whisper my name  
They think I've lost my mind, *though I'm perfectly sane.*

But all the while I know that I'm free and forgiven  
So I tell others now about the life that I'm livin'

The words that the angel told Mary were true!  
And He's telling the same thing to me and to you:

*"Sweet Child, God the Father has chosen you to be*

*A vessel that will carry Him supernaturally...*

*He's sending His Spirit to give you His Seed,*

*So you and your people will finally be freed!"*

## CHAPTER SIX: What Now?

If you have received Christ as your Lord and Savior, you may be wondering what you should do next. Well, hopefully this chapter will help you to know what steps you can take to grow in your faith and be able to be equipped to be used by God for His service.

### **#1: Get Baptized**

***Acts 2:38 Peter replied, "Each of you must repent of your sins and turn to God, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."***

Baptism beliefs differ in different denominations in the church. I believe the scriptures show that baptism is the first act of obedience for a true believer in Jesus Christ. It is an outward response to an inward regeneration that occurs in a believer. When a believer is baptized, they identify with Jesus Christ by being immersed in water and then raised up out of the water which symbolizes His death, burial and resurrection. Baptism does not save you, but it is an act of obedience and God is pleased when we do this.

Ephesians 2:8-9 is clear: *"God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this. It is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."* Baptism is an act of obedience but not a work that is required for salvation. The grateful believer is happy to be baptized because their heart has been changed and they desire to be obedient to the Lord in their new life.

Personally, when I was baptized, I was blessed beyond words! I had some friends come and watch and when I symbolically identified with Christ by being immersed in the water, I was very moved to come out of the water and walk out of it into my new life with those I love there to witness my outward expression of my desire to follow Jesus Christ in my new life as a believer!

Speak with your pastor to find out more about baptism in your church. For more information on Christian Baptism, please click this link and you will find many resources, scriptures and issues discussed from a Biblical perspective:

<http://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-baptism.html>

## **#2: Get into the Word of God**

***The Bible has been misunderstood as a book of rules designed to prevent people from having fun. It is just the opposite. The Bible protects people from death."***

I read this quote in a Bible study called "When God Speaks" by Henry and Richard Blackaby. (Great study, by the way). But that particular quote really got me. I remember thinking that about the Bible! I used to try to read it but it just didn't make much sense to me and I thought it was all a bunch of old stories about old people who I couldn't relate to. That couldn't have been further from the truth!

Here's what another paragraph had to say in the study - I think you will find it extremely insightful...

*If you found yourself in a war-torn country and had to pass through a minefield to return to safety, your life would be in enormous peril! One wrong step would have disastrous consequences. If a soldier approached you while you stood in the middle of the minefield and handed you a map marking the location of the mines, those instructions would immediately become the most important information in your life. The rules you had to follow would not discourage you. So God's Word, when followed and implemented, brings you out of death into full and abundant life.*

Wow! Talk about a cool analogy. It's so true - God is not a kill-joy. He is the creator of Joy! He is truly not trying to make us miserable by giving us rules and regulations, but He's trying to save us from death. He knows better. He's just trying to help us make our way through this minefield called life!

I can kind of relate as a parent when I give rules to my kids and they think I'm just trying to make their lives miserable. Truth is, I just know the heartache, first hand, that wrong choices can bring to them - and I'm trying to help them avoid those pitfalls. I didn't listen. I hope they will. Someone once said that the wise person learns from someone else's mistakes, not their own. That's what the Bible is, really. It's story after story of how people made mistakes (and also right choices) so we can learn from them, and not have to go on the field trip ourselves. True stories, not fairy tales. It is instructions and love notes from God directly to us - to help us to live a life of godliness.

When we sit down to read the Bible, it is important that we prepare our hearts first, though. Always start with a prayer asking God to reveal any sin in your life that needs dealing with and confess it, asking forgiveness for it. Then ask God to have His Spirit fill you up so you can discern what you read. The Bible says in James 1:5 *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."*

God's word is chock-full of important information that we all need in order to live the Christian life. It is of utmost importance that we spend time in the Word of God each day. The first thing God told Joshua when He called him into service was this advice right here: *This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Joshua 1:8*

### **#3- Get into a Bible-Teaching Church**

We were not meant to walk the Christian walk by ourselves. God's plan for us is to walk in unity with other believers. We all have gifts and abilities that He has given to each of us and you need others' gifts in your life just like they need yours! Here's what Romans 12:4-8 says *"Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if*

*it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.”*

God's plan for believers is to be the Body of Christ. Kind of like Jesus' hands and feet in the world today! The church is there to equip us, to disciple us, to serve the community and to do mission work for the Lord. We are a family!

Just like most families, we are a loving, generous and caring family. But you will also see some dysfunction, too. There is no such thing as a perfect church. Churches are made up of imperfect people. We serve a perfect God – but we are not perfect yet!

One thing to keep in mind is that our focus can never be on anyone or anything other than Christ if we don't want to be disappointed. Once our faith or trust is put into a church, a person, or anything else for that matter, we will be disappointed and disillusioned. It is inevitable. Only Christ is perfect and only Christ can live up to those expectations. I heard it said once that “If there is a such thing as a perfect church, it became imperfect the moment I stepped into it”. We aren't perfect and neither are others.

I find most disappointments that people face in church are usually because the person put unrealistic expectations on someone else and the person did not live up to it. I only say this because this seems to be a very big focus of Satan in the lives of new believers. Once they find disappointment in church or other believers, they then think that the faith is a farce and turn their backs on Christ. Please do not fall for this trap! Sometimes, Christians misrepresent Him, but He is always faithful and He offers grace and mercy to us when we do not represent Him well. I do grieve over the damage this has done to the Body of Christ, though. I know it grieves the Lord, too. Maybe that is why Jesus prayed in John 17 right before He was crucified that we would be one as He and the Father were one. He repeatedly prayed for our unity!

I love the encouragement and support that I receive from my church. It is invaluable – especially as you begin your new life in Jesus Christ! Please pray and ask the Lord to help you find the right place for you to grow, learn, serve and be a part of His Body!

#### **#4: Find Some Accountability**

If you haven't done it yet, please make sure you let another believer know about your decision to follow Christ! You need support, encouragement and prayer as you begin this new life. I would also recommend you begin praying that God will give you a mentor. A mentor is someone who can walk beside you, who is more spiritually mature, and who can help you as you learn more about Christ and His plan for your life.

Immediately after I received Christ, I approached a woman named Linda who was mature in faith, in the Word of God often and who I saw living a life that reflected Christ. She has been beside me, helping me, praying for me, confronting sin in my life (in a loving way!) and encouraging me since 2003. She and I were friends prior to my salvation – she had been praying for me for years. I went to church with her, went to Bible studies with her and when I finally surrendered my life to the Lord, she noticed the changes in my life almost immediately. God has really used her to help me grow and to equip me for the calling He has placed on my life.

I now have someone in my life that I am mentoring now! She is a 25 year old woman who just got married and is growing in her faith, too. It's wonderful to be able to give back to someone else what has been given to me!

This is God's plan, too. You will notice throughout the Bible that there are many examples of mentoring. For instance, Paul was Timothy's mentor. You can read some letters Paul wrote to Timothy in the New Testament (1 and 2 Timothy). They are great letters that represent the kind of advice a mentor can give to you.

Another great idea would be to join a small-group Bible study in your church. This is a great way to get to know more about the Bible and how it applies to your life in a non-threatening environment. It also builds relationships and can give you neat perspectives from different people in the Body of Christ.

If you have any more questions about where to go from here, I highly recommend you contact your pastor or someone in the faith who you respect and let them know where you are. God has chosen you for a purpose – and He has amazing plans for your life! Jeremiah 29:11 says “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you, not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

## About the Author...



Leslie Nease speaks from life experience and the Word of God to encourage people in their walk with the Lord. Her passion and transparency are relatable and real. She spent over four years on the radio in Charlotte, NC as a host of a Christian mid-day show at **New Life 91.9**, where she shared her faith, encouragement and real life experiences with thousands of listeners daily while also encouraging people in her speaking and writing ministry part time. In May of 2008, God called her into full time speaking and writing and she is happily pursuing this call.

During the summer of 2007, Leslie Nease was a contestant on the hit reality show, **Survivor China**. She was called "*Sister Christian*" by other cast mates, as she made some bold stands for her faith throughout the show.

During the first five minutes of the very first episode, she was told to bow down to a statue of Buddha in a temple in remote China as part of a "welcoming ceremony". Leslie refused to bow down and respectfully walked out of the temple. When Jeff Probst, the show's host, publically confronted her about her decision to walk out, she confidently said "*I'm not religious, but I have a relationship with Jesus Christ and I'm only going to put my face on the floor for Him*".

A quote from Leslie about her experience on **Survivor**:

*"God taught me so much through this adventure. I learned never to give up on a God-given dream no matter how impossible it seems and that stepping out of my 'Christian Bubble' is difficult but He gives me strength to do it. I learned to stand up for Him, no matter how difficult. But the biggest lesson I learned was that God means more to me than anything else in the world. And that is worth way more than a million bucks!"*

Leslie's message is to help others find the courageous faith that God offers to all followers of Jesus Christ! She also has a big heart to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people who may not know who He is and teach them why they need to know Him. Find out more at [www.leslienease.com](http://www.leslienease.com).