

What does it mean to be a real Christian?



by Larry Kreider

Introduction

How can I find God?

The famous question was asked a long time ago, “What is truth?” In response to Pilate’s age-old question, the Bible, God’s inspired and true word,¹ is clear that *Jesus is Truth*. To be a Christian means you establish your life on the truth of Jesus. Jesus Himself said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”² The Bible reveals a God who seeks us because he longs for intimacy with us. He wants to have a personal relationship with us and be our closest friend.³ God took the initiative to reveal himself in Jesus Christ.⁴

■ Our problem: separation from God


From the beginning, God created humans to live in unbroken relationship with him, but the first human beings rebelled against God, something we often call *sin*.⁵ From that point onward, mankind’s vibrant relationship with God was broken. Death entered...but God would not leave us to die separated from his presence.⁶ He provided a way to renew the relationship by dealing with the sin issue.



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***You have made
us for yourself,
O God, and our
hearts are restless
until they find
their rest in you.
—Saint Augustine
(354-430)***

■ **God’s solution— Jesus**

God took the initiative to reveal himself and rescue us through his son, Jesus Christ. God loved us so much he didn’t want to see us die in our sin. The Bible says that “...he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”⁷ So, God sent Jesus to the earth 2,000 years ago, and Jesus took on a human body, lived a perfect life, proclaimed to be God and then suffered and died on a cross, taking on himself the consequences of our moral failures. Although we

cannot understand exactly how, God said my sins and your sins were laid upon Jesus when He died on the cross in our place.⁸ He became our substitute, and now God does not count our sins against us. In other words, Jesus traded places with us, standing in our place before God for the moral wrong we have done in our lives. In this way Jesus cleared our way back to God while he took the penalty for sin upon himself. He bore our shame in our place. He paid our debt so we could go free.⁹

■ **Our response**

Everyone comes to God in the same way. We must recognize we are sinners, “For all have sinned; all fall short of God’s glorious standard”¹⁰ and repent of our sins, “...if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”¹¹ When we receive Jesus, by faith, God gives us this promise, “...to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.”¹²

**Solomon said
of God,
“He has also set
eternity in the
hearts of men...”
Ecclesiastes 3:11**

■ **Will you trust Jesus Christ as your Lord, giving him control of your life?**

Do you see God's great love for you? Do you see your need for his forgiveness? All sin separates you from God. No one is good enough to get to heaven on their own. If you yield your life to Jesus Christ by believing in him and turning away from your sins, he will save you from spiritual death. He died and rose from the dead to set you free. God will transform you from the inside out. He wants to be your friend, a real personal presence who will satisfy the deepest hunger of your heart. Jesus said, speaking figuratively, "I am the bread of life. No one who comes to me will ever be hungry again. Those who believe in me will never thirst."¹³ By asking Jesus—God's son—to forgive you, as you decide to follow and obey him, you will discover the purpose for which God created you. There is no other religion, philosophy, or person who can do this but Jesus. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."¹⁴

Pray this prayer to become a Christian

"God, I know my sins have separated me from you. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my wrongdoing toward you. I believe that your son, Jesus Christ died, for my sins, paying the penalty and bearing my shame so I can be truly free. I invite you, Jesus, to become the Lord of my life, to live in my heart from this day forward. Amen."

In a Nutshell...

The problem

We have all sinned, and are separated from God (Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:10-12, 23; Isaiah 64:6).

God's solution

God loved you so much; he didn't want to see you die in your sin. "...he does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent" (2 Peter 3:9).

So God gave his only Son, and through his death on the cross, everyone who believes in him will have eternal life (John 3:16; 2 Corinthians 5:19; Colossians 1:22).

Our response

Confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, and you will be saved (Romans 10:9-10).

Receive Jesus

To all who believe him and accept him, he gives the right to become children of God (John 1:12).



Now what?

What does it mean to be a real Christian?

Congratulations! The decision you have just made is the most important decision you will ever make! If you received Jesus Christ into your life for the first time, welcome to the family of God. If you have made a recommitment of your life to Christ, welcome home!

Here are a few insights that will help you take the next steps in your walk with Jesus.

What has happened?

When you give your life to Christ, you become a new creation in Christ. The Bible says, “What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!”¹⁵ You’ve been born again (received Jesus as Lord), and a miracle has happened inside of you. You became a brand new person. An elephant becoming a butterfly would be no

greater miracle! There is a miracle that happens inside of you as you live by faith in Jesus.

It’s not a matter of “turning over a new leaf” or changing some of your old ways of doing things. You are spiritually different because God has changed your spirit inside.

You have God’s Spirit living within you

Starting today, you are embarking on a brand new life! You will never be the same. Jesus calls it being “born again.” He said, “I assure you, unless you are born again, you can never see the kingdom of God...the truth is, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.”¹⁶

When you were born physically, you were encased in water in your mother’s womb. But when you are born the second time (of the Spirit), you begin as a baby Christian to live a new life. Everything will begin to look different. Now, Christ actually lives in you, according to Galatians 2:20,

I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.



As a new Christian, you are a spiritual baby who needs to “eat” God’s word so you can grow spiritually.

Why is this so important? Because when you realize that Christ lives in you through the Holy Spirit, you begin to see life from a different perspective.

The same Holy Spirit that dwelt in Jesus two thousand years ago, that gave him the power to live a supernatural life, is also in you enabling you to live a supernatural life.

You are a child of God

As you walk the path of this new life, you will get to know Jesus better every day. You will begin to understand his purposes for your life.

You are one of his own children:

I am writing to you, my dear children, because your sins have been forgiven because of Jesus.¹⁷ See how very much our heavenly Father loves us, for he allows us to be called his children, and we really are...¹⁸

Think about it. You are one of God’s own kids! He accepts you as you are, and your past is no longer an issue with him. Nothing stands between you and God. You have opened your heart, and he welcomes you as his own child.

You may or may not feel different immediately. You may have an emotional release of guilt or you may sense that something is different. On the other hand, you may feel nothing at all, but that is okay because it takes time to establish a relationship. God doesn’t want you to just *feel* better, he wants you *get* better! He wants you to grow into a healthy child?

How can you be sure you grow? We must do four things: eat, breathe, exercise, and stay warm. Here are four simple truths that have helped me.

1. You need to eat

God's word is spiritual food

What is his *word*? The *word* or *The Bible* is the very words of God, “Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way.”¹⁹

The Bible is God’s message to you. As a new Christian, you are a spiritual baby who needs to “eat” God’s word so you can grow spiritually. “As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow...”²⁰ Your mind is renewed as you read and meditate on the word of God each day. You start to think like God thinks, instead of the way you have thought in the past. What does it mean to meditate on the word of God? The Bible tells us in Joshua 1:8,

...Ponder and meditate on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you’ll get where you’re going; then you’ll succeed.

To meditate simply means to roll something around over and over again in our minds. Cows have multiple stomachs. They will fill their stomachs with grass, and then spend the rest of the day under a shade tree

“chewing their cud.” Food is passed from one stomach to the other in stages. We could liken this process to meditating on the word of God. We need to read the Bible, and then write portions of it down and bring it back various times throughout the day to memorize it and meditate on it (chew on it).

When I gave my life to Christ, I wrote down a verse of scripture that seemed to have special significance to me on an index card. Throughout the day, I pulled it out to memorize it and meditate on its meaning until it became a part of me. I memorized hundreds of verses this way. By aligning my mind with the word of God daily, I was beginning to see myself from the Lord’s perspective instead of from mine. In some ways, we are all products of our past. We learned to think a certain way (man’s way) about the issues of life. The Bible renews (cleans) our minds to see life from God’s perspective and reap the benefits that come with divine wisdom.

You will find that what the Bible calls your *soul* (mind, will and emotions) begins to catch up with what happened in your spirit when you received Jesus as your Lord. Gradually you begin to think according to the guidelines revealed in God’s word instead of your past way of thinking. As you continue to fill your mind with

the truth of the word of God, you will not be sidetracked by the philosophies of the world system around you that are completely against the truth of Jesus Christ.

God's word is a book of promises. It is his love letter to you, his child. When I travel, my wife often

leaves me notes in my luggage. I love to read her notes! When the Bible tells me he loves me or commands me to do something, it's the same as Jesus speaking me. Christians have chosen to live their lives in obedience to the Bible, "...the very words I have spoken to you are spirit and life."²¹ God's word helps to keep you living the way God meant for you to live. Does that mean you will not make mistakes? No! But when

you make a mistake, you ask God to forgive you, and he will give you a fresh start.

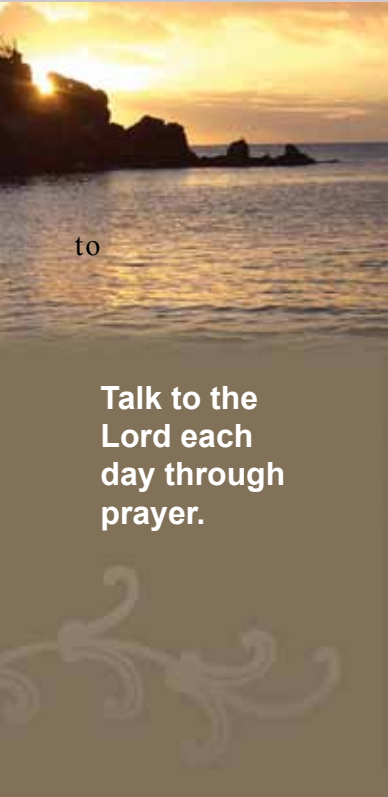
2. You need to breathe

Talk to God

Every Christian needs to breathe spiritually through prayer. The scriptures tell us to "keep on praying."²² God wants you to talk to him just like you would talk to a friend. He wants to hear how you feel and be your closest friend. It's important to talk to the Lord each day through prayer. As natural breathing provides oxygen for our lungs, spiritual breathing keeps you alive and healthy spiritually. You could say that when you confess your sins to the Lord, you are exhaling, and when you wait quietly before the Lord and He speaks to you in his "still, small voice," you are inhaling. The Bible says,

*Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere.*²³

Prayer is your communication line with your God. During war, if a battalion loses contact with headquarters, the soldiers are in serious trouble, becoming much more vulnerable to the enemy. It often works the same



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Talk to the Lord each day through prayer.

way in our Christian lives. We are in a spiritual war. The enemy of God, the devil, is constantly trying to break down our communication line with God. If he does, we will find ourselves in trouble.

Prayer is only as complicated as you make it. God has not asked you to pray fancy prayers. Prayer is simply communication with God. It is talking, sharing your heart and listening to God.

Sometimes I write down my prayers and then I can thank God when I see these prayers answered. When we know that God is answering prayer, it builds our faith.

The word of God and prayer go hand in hand. Often, we can pray the promises we read in his word. A few months after I came to Christ, I awoke one day feeling like I wasn't a Christian. I could not feel God's presence in my life. Immediately, I turned to 1 John 5:13 in my Bible,

*I write this to you who believe in the Son of God,
so that you may know you have eternal life.*

Faith rose up in my heart. I knew that I had chosen to believe in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. And his word said that I can know I have eternal life. That settled it for me.

3. You need to exercise

Tell others

You need to exercise—to share your faith with others. The Bible says, “you must never be ashamed to tell others about our Lord....”²⁴ If you do not exercise, you become weak. The more you exercise the stronger your muscles become.

The scriptures encourage us, “Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has saved you....”²⁵ There is spiritual power released when we testify to others about what the Lord has done in our lives.

Every Christian has a personal story to tell of how he or she came to know Jesus as Lord. Here's my story:

When I was growing up, my family went to church every Sunday in our community. When I was 11 years old, we went to an evangelistic meeting, and God convicted me of my sin. The preacher talked about eternal life and the importance of living for God and not spending eternity in hell. I remember thinking that night that I did not want to go to hell. So, I gave my life to God. I was baptized and became a church member.

I wanted to live for the Lord, but in reality the commitment I made lasted only a few months. It wasn't long before I was living a counterfeit Christian life.



**Share your
story with
others.**

When I was with my Christian friends, I acted like a Christian. When I was with my non-Christian friends, I acted like them.

Seven years later, a friend confronted me with the question, “If you were to die tonight, are you sure you would go to heaven?”

I didn’t know.

I responded, “Nobody knows that!”

My friend said, “Well, *I* know.”

I was uncomfortable that night because I was confronted with the truth. You see, I could talk about God and the Bible, but I couldn’t talk about Je-

sus because I did not know Him personally. I imagined that if I did good things, somehow God would accept me. I went home and opened my Bible.

Suddenly, everything I read spoke directly to me. I read where Jesus spoke to the religious people of his day, “You hypocrites!” I was a hypocrite. I knew that even though I was the life of the party, when I went home, I was lonely. I was afraid I would die without God. That night I said, “Jesus, I give You my life. If you can use this rotten, mixed-up life, I’ll serve You the rest of my life.”

God took me at my word. I was born again and became a new creation in Christ! My attitudes changed. My desires changed. The way I thought changed.

You, too, have a story to tell. Share it with others. People want to hear that you have experienced the same needs they have and that Jesus Christ has met these needs in your life. In your story, often called your *testimony*, you should be sure to include not only the outward sins that bound you, but the inward needs that drove you. Your personal testimony may consist of:

- Describing the circumstance of your conversion—how you became a Christian (where, when and what happened)

- Mentioning what the need was in your life, prior to your salvation, that brought you to Christ
- Relating how your need has now been met after receiving Jesus.

There is spiritual power released against the powers of darkness when you tell how the Lord has changed and is changing your life. Start today!

4. You need to stay warm

Find a spiritual family

Baby Christians need to stay warm. You stay warm by becoming a part of a “spiritual family.” When you receive Jesus as your Lord, you join God’s family, consisting of millions of Christians throughout the world. Ephesians 3:14-15 describes this family,

...I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

However, you stay warm by being committed to other believers in a smaller group in a local church and having regular fellowship with them. Every believer should be committed to other believers in a local church. This local spiritual family (church) will give us a place

to grow and learn from other believers how to live our Christian lives.

I once read the story of a young man who had given his life to God; but after a time of disappointment and disillusionment, he began to withdraw from other Christians. His pastor stopped in for a visit one winter evening and with the wind howling outside, they sat and talked. After awhile, the wise pastor walked over to the fireplace and with a pair of prongs, picked up a hot coal from the fire, placing it on the bricks in front of the fireplace. He continued talking. Then glancing at the ember on the bricks, he said, “Do you see that piece of coal? While it was in the fireplace it burned brightly, but now that it’s alone, the ember has almost gone out.”

The pastor walked over, and with the prongs, picked up the ember and placed it inside the fireplace. Within minutes the dying ember was again burning brightly.

It dawned on the young man what the pastor was telling him. When we move away from the warmth and encouraging fires of fellow believers in the body of Christ, we will eventually cool down spiritually. Joining with others as a community of believers in a local church helps keep our fires glowing and also keeps us



**God takes you
and me and
places us in
his body in
strategic places.**

from sin, according to the Bible.

You must warn each other every day, as long as it is called “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.²⁶

It is extremely difficult to live the Christian life alone. Believers need to fellowship together and encourage each other daily because it is easy to become tolerant of sin in our lives otherwise.

You are not alone!

A friend of mine once said, “Lone Rangers often get shot out of the saddle.”

He was referring to the U.S. television show in the 1950s called “The Lone Ranger,” where a lone lawman rode to rid the west of outlaws and was often vulnerable to attack. If we try to live our Christian lives alone, without the support of other believers, the devil can easily destroy us spiritually. The Bible tells us we need each other!

Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together...²⁷

We are not alone in the temptations we face. The Lord’s plan is to use other believers and spiritual leaders in the local church to protect us, help us grow, and equip us to be all that we can be in Jesus Christ.

“Church” is “people”

The term “church” simply means “called-out ones”—those who are called out from the world’s system to be a part of God’s kingdom. To be a believer in Jesus is to live counterculture to the world’s system of selfishness. We live a new life in a new way, obeying the Word of God.

The church is not a building, nor is it a meeting; it is people. To say it simply, the church is the people

who go to Christian meetings. Jesus Christ lives in his church, which means he lives in his people, his *called-out ones*. God uses the analogy of a human body to explain how Christians function together:

*Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*²⁸

You need to be in relationship with your brothers and sisters (other Christians) to supply what you need to grow spiritually. Aren't you grateful that your hand is attached to your arm? If your hand was attached to your ear, it would cause a lot of problems for your body! That's why it is so important to be placed in a local church where you fit in the body of Christ.

Imagine a builder taking bricks, throwing them on a big pile and calling that a building? Ridiculous! In order to build a building, a master planner needs to take bricks and strategically place one upon another, mortaring them together.

The mortar that God uses to build his kingdom is relationships. God, the master planner, takes you and

me and places us in his body in strategic places so we can fulfill the Lord's purposes.

The benefits of small groups

The early church met from house to house and also together in the temple, receiving teaching from the word of God and worshiping the Lord together. Often within the local church, you will find small groups that meet together in homes, office buildings, or other venues in order to encourage and serve each other. In a small group, you can more easily open up and share your problems and victories.

Whether God calls you to a community church, a small house church, or a large mega church, ask him for a small group of believers to help you grow. It takes more than church meetings to help you grow, it takes real people with whom you are in relationship with.


Where is God placing you?

Maybe you are saying, "How do I really know where God has placed me?" First of all, you need to pray and ask God. Who are the Christian believers with whom you have a relationship? Remember, the Lord places his people in relationships so they can serve him.

The Bible also tells us “the peace that comes from Christ will rule our hearts.”²⁹ In other words, you will have a peace about it as you pray and continue to take steps of faith. Trust God to lead you to spiritual leaders who are open and transparent with their own lives.

Ask the Lord to lead you to a small community of

believers who can help you to grow in your new walk with Christ. He will be faithful to lead you to believers who will be willing to pray with you and help you to discover where the Lord is placing you in his body. God’s will is for every believer to be connected to a local church where he or she can be trained,



Ask the Lord to lead you to a community of believers who can help you to grow in your new walk with Christ.

protected, and serve others.

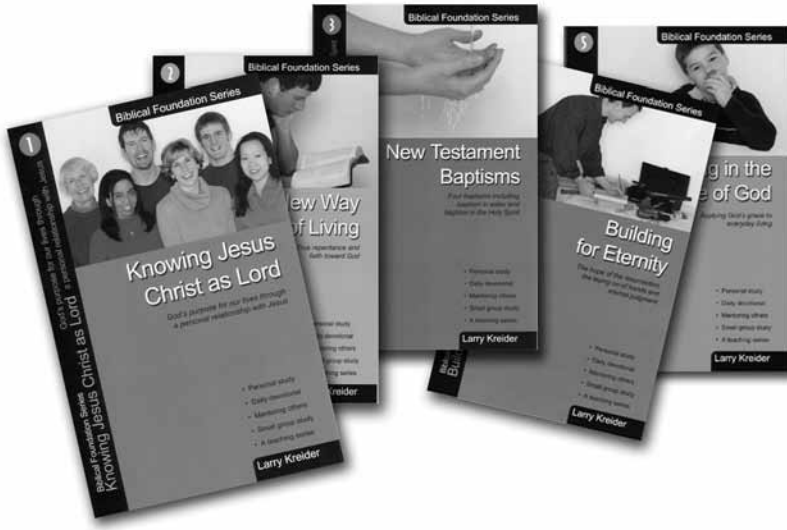
Remember, new babies need to eat, to breathe, to exercise and to stay warm so they can grow healthy and strong. Spiritually, you need to do the same. God bless you as you continue to walk with Jesus. He has good plans for your life!

Footnotes

- | | | | |
|----|--------------------|----|----------------------|
| 1 | 2 Timothy 3:16 | 15 | 2 Corinthians 5:17 |
| 2 | John 14:6 | 16 | John 3:3,5 |
| 3 | 1 John 4:9 | 17 | 1 John 2:12 |
| 4 | 1 John 4:10 | 18 | 1 John 3:1,2 |
| 5 | Romans 3:23 | 19 | 2 Timothy 3:16-17 |
| 6 | 2 Peter 3:9 | 20 | 1 Peter 2:2 |
| 7 | John 3:16 | 21 | John 6:63 |
| 8 | 2 Corinthians 5:19 | 22 | 1 Thessalonians 5:17 |
| 9 | 1 Peter 3:18 | 23 | Ephesians 6:18 |
| 10 | Romans 3:23 | 24 | 2 Timothy 1:8 |
| 11 | 1 John 1:9 | 25 | Psalms 107:2 |
| 12 | John 1:12 | 26 | Hebrews 3:13 |
| 13 | John 6:35 | 27 | Hebrews 10:24-25 |
| 14 | John 14:6 | 28 | Ephesians 4:16 |
| | | 29 | Colossians 3:15 |

Resources to help you

Here are some additional easy-to-read books that I've written to help you learn the basic truths of Christianity as you build a firm spiritual foundation.



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