

# now what

THINGS NEW  
CHRISTIANS  
SHOULD  
KNOW



Christianity is a journey. There's a beginning, but every step of the way is important. Use this short guide to help jump start your journey of following Jesus.

## What should I do now that I've decided to follow Jesus?

You've just made the most important commitment a person can make in life. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, and decided to follow him, you have experienced what the Bible calls a "new birth." And just like you have a physical birthday, you have a spiritual birthday - the day you became a Christian and began your walk with God.

One of your questions may be, "What do I do now?" Here's some information that may jump start your journey.

Now that you are a Christian, your life is different. You may not feel like a Christian every day, but following Jesus is not based on feelings. It's based on the fact that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and that you have a relationship with him.

- 1 John 5:11-13 says that God wants you to be sure of your salvation. Take a moment to look up that verse in your Bible and think about what it means.
- Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." God always keeps His promises and He never goes back on His word.
- A promise is only as good as the person who makes it, and you can trust God. 1 Corinthians 1:9 says, "God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful." God will do what He said He will do. He's reliable and trustworthy. He will not change His mind and kick you out of the family.

- When you became a Christian, God sent His spirit to live in your heart. Ephesians 1:13-14 says that the Spirit is like a seal. In Bible days, an official seal was placed on a contract between people to guarantee that it was legitimate. God puts the seal of His Spirit on your life as proof that He will honor His part of the deal.

Once you truly become a Christian, you cannot lose your salvation, and God will not take it back. You are part of his family, and he will never disown you. Once saved...always saved. You may still sin, because you are not perfect. You may have questions, doubts and concerns, but rest assured that if you have *truly* committed your life to God, then you are a Christian.

If you have questions about Christianity, we're here to help.

The longer I'm a Christian, the more I realize that I don't have all the answers. There's a lot about the Bible that I don't understand. I think Christianity is a journey - it has a definite starting point, but every day is important. If we can help you on your journey in any way, just let us know. That's why we're here. You can call our office at 678.721.2377 or you can send an e-mail to [info@oakleafchurch.com](mailto:info@oakleafchurch.com) and one of our staff members will be in touch. - Michael

## Tell Someone.

People love to tell good news. If you get a new job, have a new baby, or get married, that's probably news that you want to share. People don't keep good news to themselves.

In that same way, becoming a Christian is exciting news, and you should be excited to tell others right away. Your life has been changed by God. Think about how important that is, and think about how many people need to hear about it. God wants to use you to help tell others about Him. In John 1:40-42, a man named Andrew met Jesus. His first reaction was to run and tell his brother. He didn't know a lot about Jesus...he didn't have all the facts or all of the answers, he just told others that his life had been changed.

Right now, you can tell others about Jesus. You don't have to be a pastor or a missionary. In fact, God wants all Christians to be active in sharing their faith. This is called *evangelism* or *witnessing*.

A witness just tells the judge and jury what he heard or saw. A Christian is called to tell others what God has done for their life. You can do this by sharing your testimony. Your testimony is your unique story of how you became a Christian. The apostle Paul shared his testimony with others – you can read about that in Acts 22:3-21.

A testimony has three basic parts:

- Your life before becoming a Christian
- How you became a Christian
- What God has done or is doing in your life now.

Take a moment and think through those three areas. You may even want to take out a sheet of paper or open up a blank document on the computer and write out your story.

One the best ways to tell people about your new faith is to invite them to church. So much of what we do on Sunday morning is designed for guests. We want everyone in our area to know about the grace and forgiveness that comes from God. You can partner with us to lead people from where they are to where God wants them to be by simply inviting them to church.

## Read the Bible.

As a new Christian, probably one of the most important things you can do is to read and study the Bible. The Bible is the inspired, 100% accurate and true Word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God's Word is living and active. It's more than a collection of stories or words on a page... it is the very Word of God for our lives today. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that "All scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living."

- When you read the Bible, God will show you things about Himself.
- When you read the Bible, God will show you things in your life that need to change.
- When you read the Bible, God will teach you what it means to be a Christ-follower.
- When you read the Bible you'll get a better understanding of your purpose in life.

I want to encourage you to spend time each day reading God's Word during some quiet time.

Don't get confused by all the different covers and translations out there – find a Bible that you can read and understand. One of the most popular translations is The New International Version (NIV). At Oak Leaf Church, we use The New Living Translation (NLT) quite a bit. You can find both of these at a bookstore or on the Internet. Biblegateway.com and eBible.com are two great sites where you can search and read God's Word. But remember, the Bible cannot help you if it sits on a table or in the back seat of a car. If you don't have a Bible, let someone at Oak Leaf Church know and we'll get one for you.

If you've never read the Bible before, start reading in the book of John. It's in the New Testament, and is the story of the life of Jesus.

Psalms 1:1 encourages us to meditate on the Bible. In fact, that verse teaches that you life will be blessed if you meditate on God's Word. Don't let that word *meditate* confuse you. David Nasser says that meditating on the Bible is like marinating. Just like we let a steak or a chicken breast soak in a great marinade, we think

on God's Word and let it soak into our lives.

As you read the Bible, underline words or phrases that stick out. Think about what it really means. Write questions down and seek answers. Memorize key verses, and think about God's Word as you go throughout the day.

Most importantly, start reading. If you've got time to read this, you've got time to read God's Word.

## Talk to God.

If you want to get to know someone, you could read about them. But you might also want to talk to them. God wants to have a relationship with you – one that is real and one that is personal. The Bible is full of invitations for you to talk to God. You don't have to pick up a phone, or send an e-mail...you can talk to the very creator of the universe right now where you are.

Prayer is simply talking to God. You don't have to use big words or flowery language. You don't have to know fancy terms. You can talk to God just like you would talk to any friend. In fact, as a Christian, God is your Father and your Friend!

In Mark 1:35, we read about Jesus himself praying to the Father. Imagine that! If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we need to talk to God? So, how do you do it?

Prayer is just talking to God. It's a two-way, direct-connect, with no long distance charges. It's a child talking to a father, and the ultimate phone-a-friend. Read the sidebar on the right side of the next page to guide you.

## Get connected.

Just like a football player needs a team, a Christian needs a church. In Matthew 16:17, Jesus said that he would build the church. The church was important to Jesus. The church was important to the first Christians who risked everything to meet together. Right now, in some places in the world, it is against the law to attend church...so Christians meet secretly, with the threat of punishment or death hanging over their heads. The church is important.

You need to connect yourself to the body of Christ (a Biblical term for the church).

The church is like the body and each person serves an important part. We need all of the parts to function correctly.

The church is not made up of perfect people, or good people, or religious people...it's made up of people who have decided to follow Jesus – people like you.

So, why be involved with church?

- **You'll grow in your Christian faith.** That football player needs practice and coaching. God has placed spiritual leaders in the church who will help you grow closer to God. You'll hear God's Word explained, and you'll have a chance to worship God alongside other Christians. You'll be part of that team, all working together. The church will provide you opportunities to learn more about Jesus and grow in your faith.
- **God made you a relational person.** It's healthy to do things with other people – to have friends. In the Christian life, it is no different. You need to develop relationships with people who are going through the same things as you. The church can do that. You'll get to know others who will encourage you and not tear you down. You'll share life experiences in a small group. In fact, Hebrews 10:26 teaches us that we ought never to miss out on meeting with other Christians. This is the reason that we have a small group ministry on Sunday mornings. You'll connect with others like you and share life experiences, discuss God's word and pray for each other. We all need these relationships in our lives.
- **You need to serve.** The church is not just a place where you come and sit... it's a place where you can come to serve. The church is a great place to serve God. You have gifts and abilities that can help the body. In Matthew 28:19, Jesus said that the mission of the church was to "go and make disciples." You can get involved with that mission right here. Find a place where you can use your specific gifts, talents and abilities to make a difference. When we serve others, we realize that it's not all about us. What specific area needs you?

There are two great ways to get connected at Oak Leaf Church. The first is a Journey Group. This is a group of people that meet together during the week in somebody's home to talk about God's Word and pray for each other. The whole church is pretty large, and it's not

possible to know everyone, but if you get connected to a Journey Group, you'll find some people that will become your spiritual family.

Another great place to connect is with one of the Volunteer teams. Every Sunday morning, hundreds of people come together to set up for church, work with children, help people feel welcome, park cars, or work with students. These groups of people serve along side each other and in the process of leading people from where they are to where God wants them to be, they are getting to know each other better.

### **Be different.**

Statistics tell us that there isn't any practical difference between Christians and non-Christians. Today, Christians are getting divorced just as fast as unbelievers. Most Christians live lives just like everybody else. So, here's the big question...

If you have given your life to Christ, and you are now a Christ-follower, is there something different about your life? Or are you really just like everyone else, with the minor exception of going to church every now and then. As a Christian, our lives ought to be radically different! We are not in charge of our lives – Jesus is.

The Bible says that Jesus ought to be Savior and Lord. Nearly everyone wants a savior. If you're drowning – you certainly want someone to save you. Most people would be interested in getting all they can from Jesus. But there's a huge difference between making him Savior and making him Lord.

Philippians 2:12 says that one day "every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Surrendering to the Lordship of Jesus means that you willingly make him the boss of your life. He's not riding in the car with you...he's driving the car. He's not the co-pilot, he's the pilot. He is large and in charge.

In John 13:13, Jesus asked a very important question..."why do you call me teacher and Lord and NOT DO WHAT I SAY?" He created you...He saved you...He gives you all sorts of blessings...He has earned the right to be your Lord. How can we be considered a faithful follower of Jesus, yet be disobedient when it comes to areas of our lives. Does Jesus have control of your life, or are you playing Christian?

## Prayer is Talking

**Talk** to God about your needs. Matthew 7:7 says that we should always ask God about our needs. John 15:7 and Philippians 4:6-7 talk about bringing your needs to God. If He can take care of the birds, He can take care of our needs.

**Ask** Him for forgiveness. 1 John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, God will forgive our sins. In your prayer time, ask God to forgive you where you messed up. Ask Him for strength. Even though you are a Christian, you will probably still sin. You need to confess sin to God.

**Listen** for His response. Nobody likes a one-way conversation. In fact, one person talking is not a conversation. When you talk to God, give Him a chance to answer you. He may not speak with an audible voice or write letters on your wall, but He will answer you if you are listening and walking with Him.

**Keep** it going. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says to pray all the time. You don't have to be in church with your eyes closed to pray. You can pray in your heart to God wherever you are.

**Invest** some time in other people. God is not Santa Claus! If all you ever do is give God a shopping list of your needs, then you are being selfish in your prayers. Pray for others. Pray for your church. Pray for those who don't know God. Pray for your family.

**Never** quit being thankful. Thanksgiving is expressing gratitude to God for specific things. When God answers a prayer, thank Him. Thank Him for spiritual blessings, people, gifts, etc. You can thank God not only for what He has done, but for who He is.

**Get** alone somewhere. Part of your daily time with God should be reading His Word and talking to Him. You probably can't do that with too many distractions, so get alone somewhere and begin spending time with God.

- **Is He Lord of your thoughts?**  
Or do you think about your job, yard, your finances, etc. and never have time to think on Him?
- **Is He Lord of your time?** Do you give God time each day, or are you too busy for God?
- **Is He Lord of your tongue?** Do you tell others about Him, or are you ashamed? Do the things you say sound like things a Christian should say?
- **Is He Lord of your talents?**  
You've got talents...are you using them to bring attention to yourself or to Jesus?
- **Is He Lord of your treasures?**  
Do you spend all of your time accumulating possessions or buying things you want, or is God in control of your finances?
- **Is He Lord of your tasks?** Do you allow God a say in the things you do, or do you make up your mind and plan your schedule, and only consult God for major decisions?

And here is the best part. When Jesus is Lord, you'll have unexplainable peace from God. You'll rest in the fact that He is in charge. You won't worry as much. You won't be as restless because you know that the very creator of the universe is in the driver's seat...and He knows the way.

The sidebar on the left asks some tough questions. God is a jealous God, who does not want only part of you. He does not delight in leftovers. He wants and deserves your best and your all. He wants to be Lord of your whole life.

### When I Sin

Now that you are a Christian, your life is different. You become a Christian instantly, but it takes time to grow. You will still sin, and the Holy Spirit will show you areas in your life where you need to change. You may have already experienced some changes. When you sin, you will know in your heart that it wasn't right, and you can ask God to forgive you again. You don't become a Christian again, you just make the relationship right.

For Christians, your sin won't eternally separate you from God, but it will be a wall that hurts your relationship. It will keep you from knowing Him better and experiencing the kind of life that He wants you to have.

Remember that God views all sin the same way – there are not different degrees of sinning. All sin hurts the heart of God. So, when you sin, what do you do?

You need to ask God for forgiveness. I John 1:9 says, "if you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness." Ask God to forgive you for your sins. And be specific. *God, I ask you to forgive me for gossiping about Katy today.* When you ask God for forgiveness, He will keep his promise and wipe the slate clean. The Bible says that God forgives and forgets. As humans, we may be able to forgive someone...but we usually remember it and hold it over their heads. Not God! He forgives and wipes it out of His mind. The Bible says...*as far as the east is from the west* (that's forever).

Secondly, when you sin, you need to repent. Forgiveness and repentance are closely related but dramatically different. Forgiveness is something that God does for you. Repentance is something you do. No one can make you repent. You have to willingly choose to do it. It's not enough to feel bad about what you did. It's not enough to say you are sorry. It's godly sorrow that leads to repentance, and repentance is the key. Repentance is doing a 180 degree turnaround. It means that you stop the sin and go the opposite direction. God will forgive you, but you need to repent. You must stop what you are doing and go the other way.

In the book of Acts, when Peter told the crowd what they had to do...he said "repent." Jesus himself said, "Repent...for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

Even though you are a Christian, you still have two natures. You have the old nature, which wants to sin, and you have a new nature that wants to please God. These natures are constantly fighting one another, and whichever one you feed will become the strongest. Are you feeding your new nature by spending time with God and praying to Him? Are you taking care of the new nature by asking God for forgiveness and repenting of your sin?