

So You Want To Follow Jesus?

Maybe you've been thinking you want to follow Jesus and become a Christian, but just aren't sure how to take that step. You *think* you might know what it means *to follow Jesus*, but it'd be good to get some clarity and direction – *what's next?*

Or maybe you've never thought about following Jesus...until now. But something has got you interested, you don't know what exactly, but you want to know – who is this Jesus person your Christian friends at school or uni call 'Lord and Christ'? What does *that* – *Lord and Christ* – even mean?

separated by sin

In my previous article '[A guide for LGBTQ Christian teens](#)', I talked about how much God loves each one of us. He loved the world so much that 'while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us' ([Romans 5:8](#)). You could be thinking, '*sure, that's nice, but what does it mean 'sinners'? I haven't done anything wrong*'.

Sin is not necessarily a hot button topic in our world today. You're more likely to be encouraged to '*live your truth*' than told '*you are a sinner in need of forgiveness*'. If we do stop to think about sin, we probably tend to view it as *really bad things*, like *murder* or *hating on someone* or *lying*. Most of us would probably think of ourselves as *pretty good people*, but the truth is, when compared alongside a completely holy God, we all fall far short of His standard of 'good'.

Sin is not just about specific actions; it also refers to a broken relationship with God and a tendency to stray from His holiness. The reality is that you are separated from God because of your sin, no matter how small or insignificant it might seem.

The Bible describes our situation as being like slaves.

Although humans were created to rule over this world and all the creatures that live in it wisely and well, as God's image-bearers, we gave that up in the Garden of Eden to give our allegiance to someone other than God. We allowed ourselves to be mastered by sin and so became its slaves (2 Peter 2:19).

No doubt this resonates with your own life experiences. Even when you've wanted to do the right thing or tell the truth, we often don't make the right choice in the moment. You've probably done things or made decisions that you now regret but it seemed impossible at the time to choose differently.

But the good news is that God didn't want to leave humanity in a state of brokenness and separation from him. He wanted to fix up the issue of sin, to make a way for us to be forgiven for our mistakes, and to show us the way to live in right relationship with Him.

He sent Jesus to save us, to redirect our lives towards His good and abundant way of living, and to help us see that our true reality, who we *really are*, is *one beloved of God*, intended for glory and greatness.

Lord + Christ

God sent His Son Jesus into the world "not to condemn its people but to save them! Everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die." (John 3:16-17, CEV).

Being saved involves *having faith* in Jesus. So the logical next question is, *who is Jesus?* Who *is* this person that I would put my faith in him? What does it even mean to *put my faith in Jesus?* Great questions!

The best place to start* to learn about who Jesus was is in the New Testament with the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The gospels provide an account of the life, teachings, death,

and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and are foundational texts for understanding His ministry and message. In them, you'll read many amazing stories of what Jesus did, the miracles he performed, who he said he was, the reason why he came, and, finally, the almost unbelievable account of his resurrection from the dead, which validated Jesus' divine identity and his claim to be the Son of God.

The gospel of John comments that *"these [things about Jesus] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."*

(If you haven't read the gospels for yourself, why not take some time over the next few weeks to read through what they say about Jesus...)

The book of Romans, written by the Apostle Paul, says that "this is the very message about faith we preach: If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

He's telling us that *having faith in Jesus* means believing that Jesus is the one that God sent to save us from our sins (*Christ* or *Messiah*, means 'anointed one' (Isaiah 61:1), that Jesus is Lord and therefore has rightful authority over our life, and that he really is the Son of God, as proven by his resurrection from the dead.

The gospels therefore offer both an invitation and a challenge. Do you accept that you need forgiveness, that you are separated from being in right relationship with God? Do you believe Jesus is the one sent into the world to offer that forgiveness and restore you to God? Do you believe that his claim to be the Son of God is true and that he really did rise again from the dead? Do you believe he is Lord of all, just as capable now, as then, of commanding the winds and waves, and will you trust him with the direction of your life?

If the answer is yes to all of these, then *this* is what it means to follow Jesus! This is what it means to be a Christian.

disciples not decisions

Every Christian's life starts at a certain point, with a decision, but that one decision alone is not enough. Following Jesus is a life marked by *discipleship*, which is really just the process of learning to be like Jesus more and more each day. That's a topic I intend to talk more about in a later article.

But following Jesus *does* start with *having faith*: confessing that Jesus is Lord, and believing that God raised him from the dead.

So if this is you, if you find yourself fully convinced about who Jesus is and what he came to do, and that he truly was the Son of God, whom God raised to life again, the Bible says that as soon as you realise this, you should declare your faith publicly by being *baptised* – fully immersed in water.

Baptism is God's arrangement for a person to gain a clean conscience based *on their faith* in the work of Jesus Christ. I'll be talking a bit more about that in my next article in this series (Letters To My Kids) so look out for that soon, but if you'd like to chat about baptism in the meantime, I'd love to hear from you!

Let me know your thoughts on this topic (you can message me publicly or privately here or on my socials), or any questions you'd like answers to on this topic (or anything else) in upcoming articles!

“And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptised, and wash your sins away, calling on his name.” – Acts 22:16

* the gospels aren't the only place we read about Jesus. Both the Old Testament and New Testament have a great deal to say about Jesus and who he was! In fact, the promise of Jesus is found in the very first book of the Bible, Genesis. [Here are 55 Old Testament prophecies](#) about Jesus, covering his birth, ministry, death and resurrection, and role in the church.

Keep Your Eyes On Jesus

We're [called to a radical life](#).

This is a life in which we're called to follow someone we've never seen. We've heard about him but we've never seen him with our own eyes. We've 'believed the report', the good message about who Jesus is and why he came, and our hearts have been convicted to follow him. And even though we haven't seen him, we love him.

"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory" | 1 Peter 1:8, ESV

The Redemptive Power Of His Sacrifice

We have come to realise that, without Jesus, we are nothing more than 'dead men walking'.

We're reminded of the story of the serpent placed on the pole during Israel's wilderness wanderings (Numbers 21). Their criticism of God and His way brought a plague of poisonous snakes throughout the camp. Moses was told to place a copper snake on a pole for all to see and anyone who fixed their gaze on that serpent on the pole would be healed and live.

A snake on a pole has come to represent medicinal healing

throughout the medical world today and we can, of course, see the redemptive symbol in this story for our Christian lives. The bronze serpent is the clearest type of the saving work of Jesus. Jesus himself used this symbol to appeal to the people in his day (John 3:14). Like the serpent, Jesus was to be raised on a stake for all to see, and all those who looked to his redemptive sacrifice would live.

We fix our gaze on Jesus, crucified, believing in the power contained in his name, and though we are dying, yet we live! Death no longer has the final say.

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.”
| 1 Corinthians 15:-20-23, NIV

Believing And Becoming In Jesus

Our Christian life starts the moment we turn our eyes to Jesus and [acknowledge him](#) as Lord of our heart and our life. But our gaze must never leave him.

The Christian life is one of transformation; of more than just believing, but of becoming, where the impossible is possible. We are able to become more than conquerors through him who loved us.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” | Romans 8:31-32, 37, ESV

We are learning to follow where Jesus has gone already and we are learning, day by day, to trust him as our good shepherd.

A Leap Of Faith

Living the Christian life is often stepping out into the unknown. It's often an exercise in surrender, trust, and faith.

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” | Hebrews 11:1-3, ESV

We look around us and see how things presently are, in this life, **and yet we believe that there is more** and that **we can be more**. This belief is underpinned by the [evidence of the risen Christ](#). Resurrection, the most unbelievable, incredible event to have possibly happened **has** happened. When Christians gather together for communion, we celebrate and witness to this remarkable event. The ramification for us as believers is not a small thing: the [same power](#) that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us!

“I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.” | Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT

“And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.” | Romans 8:11, BSB

Jesus promised his followers that he would be with them, even to the end of the world. This is his promise to us. Sometimes he will lead us through fire and across water, through deep valleys and up high mountains. There is no promise that the Christian life will always be easy but he promises he will never leave us or forsake us.

Some of you may be feeling the heat of those flames. Or perhaps you feel like your feet are sinking and you're going to drown. Raise your eyes and fix them on Jesus! He goes before us, he stands beside us, every day of this Christian life.

Faith Is Learning From History

We learn a lot from the story of Israel and their exodus from Egypt. When the children of Israel were delivered out of slavery, that moment only signaled the beginning of a journey of faith. And almost immediately, they were brought to the edge of the ocean, with churning water ahead of them and the enemy hard at their heels. There was no way forward and no way back. And then, suddenly, a miracle was performed and God parted the ocean before them – a way out – seemingly impossible but clearly visible. They had to make a decision of faith – to step into that path cut through the ocean and cross through to the other side. Moses, their leader, spoke boldly at this moment:

“Don't be afraid, stand firm and watch God do His work for you.”

Some of us may be in that moment right now, afraid of what is behind us and unable to see a path ahead of us. Sometimes, the step of faith involves standing still and watching God go to work for us. Sometimes, faith asks us to step out into the unknown.

We have the story in Matthew 14:24-31 of Peter being called by

Jesus to step out of the boat and onto the churning water. And we realise from reading this story that sometimes faith asks us to step out of the boat, out of the place where it feels comfortable and relatively safe and into the dark and churning ocean. In those moments, too, we must not lower our gaze. Faith will keep us afloat, fear will sink us.

We must look for Jesus and keep looking for Jesus. He is the good shepherd, who laid his life down for the sheep, and, like the Psalmist, we can confidently say,

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” | Psalm 23:4

Keeping Our Eyes On Jesus

How do we keep our eyes on Jesus? How do we ‘follow him’ and keep him front and foremost in our minds, day by day?

We need to make him real! We need to learn about him, discover what kind of leader he is, read about his character, his personality, his emotions. We need to talk to him, tell him our struggles and our fears. We need to ask for his courage to be ours. We need to invest in **relationship** with him; deep and personal and transformational.

We need to be reminded and convicted in our hearts that he is not just our personal saviour and friend, but [the resurrected King](#), in whom all power rests and with whom all things are possible!

When we come together as church, we are reminded that the church was born from the sacrifice of a man who, while we were yet sinners, died for us. Who, for the joy that was before him, endured the cross. And whose resurrection assures us that the best is still yet to come.

“The word that saves is right here, as near as the tongue in your mouth, as close as the heart in your chest. It’s the word of faith that welcomes God to go to work and set things right for us. This is the core of our preaching. Say the welcoming word to God – “Jesus is my Master” -embracing, body and soul, God’s work of doing in us what He did in raising Jesus from the dead. That’s it. You’re not “doing” anything; you’re simply calling out to God, trusting Him to do it for you. That’s salvation. With your whole being you embrace God setting things right, and then you say it, right out loud: “God has set everything right between Him and me!” Scripture reassures us, “No one who trusts God like this – heart and soul – will ever regret it.” | Romans 10-10-13, MSG

The Christian life isn’t always easy and the next step isn’t always clear. Sometimes we need courage to make that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.