



Part 1

God Centred

Introduction

These first four lessons explore the foundations of living as a follower of Christ – or of being a Christian.

Today the word ‘Christian’ means different things to different people. For example in many cultures it simply describes someone who is not a Muslim, and has even become part of the name of political parties across the world. These broad generalisations are unhelpful and for that reason we often refer to ourselves as being ‘a follower of Christ’ to indicate that when we say we are ‘a Christian’ we are talking about our personal relationship with God.

Christ is the centre of Christianity. It starts, continues and ends with him. It is all about Jesus and your relationship with him... and Jesus is God, something we will explore further on in the course. So when we say these first four lessons are about being ‘God Centred’ we also mean Christ Centred! It’s the same thing.

The key to getting a strong start to your life of following Christ is to be totally God Centred. So read on...

Session 1 – A Brand New Start

Session 2 – Start As You Mean To Go On

Session 3 – Getting To Know God

Session 4 – Getting To Know God More



Session 1

A Brand New start

Congratulations!

Becoming a Christian – a follower of Christ – is the best thing you could ever have done. It is the beginning of a whole new life. It gives you a brand new start! The Bible puts it this way:

'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!'
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

Understanding this is really important otherwise you may see your new-found faith as something you simply bolt on to your old life, the bulk of which remains the same. But it is much more than that.

If Christianity is simply an 'add-on' to your life, you will treat God and your spiritual life as just one compartment of your life – and that leads to all kind of wrong conclusions about the Christian life. Instead you must see your Christianity as a complete new start, one that affects everything about you! It will influence the way you think, act, speak, relate to people, do your work... and more.

Of course, this will not happen all at once, but the seeds of a fundamental life change were sown the moment you put your faith in Christ and became a Christian.

Salvation in Pictures

To show you what I mean have a look at the following pictures used in the Bible to describe the process of becoming a Christian:

- **From old to new:**

*'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; **the old has gone, the new has come!**'*
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

- **From lost to found:**

*'For the Son of Man [Jesus] came to seek and **to save what was lost.**'*

(Luke 19:10)

*'I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ... I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ'
(Philippians 3:8)*

○ **From darkness to light:**

*'For once **you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord.** So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true'.
(Ephesians 5:8-9 NLT)*

*'This is the message we heard from Jesus and now declare to you: God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. So we are lying if we say we have fellowship with God but go on living in spiritual darkness; we are not practicing the truth. But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin'.
(1 John 1:5-7 NLT)*

○ **From death to life:**

*Once **you were dead** because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature ... But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, **that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life** when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!).
(Ephesians 2:1-5)*

○ **From being blind to seeing:**

*'I [Jesus] have come into this world, so that the **blind will see.**'
(John 9:39)*

Your Story

Everyone who becomes a follower of Christ has a story to tell.

If you are reading this with a friend or in a small group, take a few minutes to tell your story! You could include:

- How did you become a Christian?
- What events led you to the point of decision?
- How did you feel?
- What changes have you already noticed in your life?

Swap stories in your group and encourage one another by pointing out the changes you see in each other since putting your faith in Christ.

If you are reading this alone, then write your story down as a personal encouragement.

Just what happened?

All the pictures we looked at above describe what has happened to us! We do indeed have a brand new start in life as a Christian. But HOW did it happen? It is important you understand this because the principles which were at work in the process of you becoming a Christian, will continue to work in your life as you grow as a Christian. The two most important ones are explained next.

The Bible uses two words to describe the process of becoming a Christian that you need to understand. They are *repentance* and *faith*.

o **The Basics of Repentance:**

To repent simply means to *change your mind*, to turn 180 degrees. It is a turning *from* one way of thinking, living and acting, and a turning *towards* God's way of thinking living and acting.

One of the best examples of repentance was given to us by Jesus, who told a story we call the parable of the Prodigal Son. You can read it in *Luke 15:11-20*.

In this story we see that true repentance involves three steps:

1. **Recognition of sin** – the son had to reach a place of recognising that in his Father's eyes (a picture of God) he had done wrong.
2. **Remorse for wrong doing** – he then expressed genuine sorrow for the wrong he had done.
3. **Redirection of life** – finally he took responsibility for his actions and made a decision to change the direction of his life.

You will never need to repent again in this initial sense. You are now saved, you have turned to God and are with him forever!

However, you may need to apply the principle of repentance again if you sin. God says that if as a Christian we sin – which will be largely unintentional because we genuinely want to live a godly life now – we must confess our sin and he will forgive us (*1 John 1:9*). We do this because we feel genuine sorrow, a sorrow that leads us to true repentance, change and freedom from any lingering guilt (*see 2 Corinthians 7:9-11*). In this sense, we lay a foundation of repentance in our lives, always being quick to turn back to God's way if we stray from it.

People who continue to sin habitually after claiming to be Christians are probably not genuinely saved (*see 1 John 2:3-6, 3:6*). In fact Jesus said that the ultimate test of

whether a person is a follower of Christ is that they obey his teaching and the fruit of that is seen in their lives (*see John 14:21-24, Matthew 7:16-20*).

- **The Basics of Faith:**

Everyone has faith in something or someone. It is where they turn when the ‘chips are down’ and things go wrong in life. It is where they look for the answers to life’s ultimate questions. We all choose to believe someone, even if it is simply in our own personal judgement.

The Christian has put their faith in God. They believe that what God says is the ultimate truth about everything: people, life, death, the universe, etc.

So, faith is simply ***believing what God says***. That belief becomes a felt reality, and it is that deep conviction we call faith. What God says in the Bible becomes our guiding conviction even when we cannot fully explain or understand things with our human mind. For example, we believe God created the world simply because he claims to have (*Hebrews 11:3*). And in the same way, we believe Jesus died to give us a brand new life we did not deserve or could ever have earned. Faith is the essence of the Christian life and right at the core of living it successfully. In fact the Bible says we ‘live by faith’ (*Romans 1:17*).

Faith is so ‘certain’ for one good reason: it is rooted in what God says. Our faith is in the one speaking the truth we believe. God is unchanging, all-knowing, all-powerful and cannot lie. He is the absolute source of all life and truth. That is what makes faith so certain (*Hebrews 11:1*).

So, faith is ***believing what God says***, and is certain because of ***who God is***. This also teaches you where faith comes from: it ***comes from hearing God’s word***. That is why it is so important for Christians to read the Bible (God’s written word) and be with other Christians in Church where they can discuss and apply that word to life together.

Conclusion

Being a Christian is the best possible way to live. It has put us back into relationship with the God who created this world and everything in it – including us!

Take some time to pray and thank God for saving you, for giving you a brand new start. Thank him for the people who introduced you to Jesus and determine in your heart to continue to grow a strong Christian life.