

I think I'm a Christian...

So Now What?

A Guide To  
Christianity

# Now What?

Dear Friend,

I met Jesus on a beach at a summer camp when I was thirteen years old. Little did I know it at the time, but the questions that I asked that night--ones like, "God, are you out there? Are you listening?"-- and the answers I found would forever change my world. In that moment, the decision to follow Jesus was as simple as breathing out and surrendering. During the days that followed, however, I found myself asking a new question: *So now what?*

We all come to God from different walks of life. Maybe you have a story like mine, and He captured your heart when you finally took the time to sit back and listen. Maybe you found God's love at the end of your rope. Maybe He spoke through a family member, maybe you stumbled upon Him at a church service, or maybe you opened a Bible and found yourself drawn to the story you found in it. No matter how, God rejoices when we turn to Him. I believe it's true, though, that we don't always know where to go after we take that first step. I think I'm a Christian, God. Now what?

Are  
you out  
there? Are you  
listening?



The beach.

This letter is my attempt to wrestle through that question with you. I'm not going to pretend that I have all the answers. I don't. But I do know one thing: as you let Him, God will mess up your life in beautiful and wonderful ways. Don't be afraid. The journey is well worth it.

# NOW I... Pray

I had a conversation with my younger brother once when I was sick. Coughs were racking my body so often that I could hardly string two sentences together, so in a slightly joking tone I asked him to pray for me. I distinctly remember him looking at me and saying, “Kenzie, I think Jesus has bigger things on His mind than your cold.”

Too often we root our hearts within this mindset. We think that it’s too hard to pray because the problems in our lives don’t matter that much when God has to worry about AIDS in Africa, persecuted Christians in Asia, and starving children in third world countries. We think that we can’t possibly pray because we’re not eloquent, don’t know the right phrases to put in at key moments, and have a small vocabulary. We get so strung up with trying to impress God that we forget to just talk to Him.

Prayer  
doesn't  
have to be  
fancy.

Prayer doesn’t have to be fancy. You don’t need to put on airs, change your entire way of talking, or watch your language. You don’t need to kneel, bow your head, or close your eyes. It can happen while on a walk, while driving to work, sitting alone in your room before bed or surrounded by a group of people. You can pray aloud, silently, or even without words. Prayer can be a painting, a song, a dance,



or an entry in a journal. The stereotypical image of bowed heads and folded hands isn't the rule; it's just a method.

In the end, all you have to do is talk to your Father the same way that you would talk to a parent or friend. Like the good daddy He is, He cares what's going on in your life. He cares about work, the bills, problems with friends, the state of your marriage, how your kids are being raised, school, and your happiness. Just talk.

If you get stuck (everyone does), try praying the Psalms. Each poem is an outcry to God that can do marvels with your prayer life. Like all prayers, some psalms are thankful, others are joyful, some are angry and others are mournful. God hears each of them.

I once heard someone compare prayer to set of binoculars. When you look through them, the far away item becomes larger and easier to view. Jesus is always with us, but sometimes we have problems seeing Him. Prayer brings Him up close and personal.

(For examples of Jesus praying, see: Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16, Luke 10:21, Luke 22:44, Matt 26:36-46. For additional comments Jesus made on prayer, see: Matt 6:5, Matt 6:9-13, Mark 11:24)



# Now I... Read

## Choose Your Translation:

### **\*King James Version:**

The KJV was translated in the early 1600, and as such uses very formal speech.

### **\*English Standard Version:**

The ESV is a very literal translation of the Bible, like the KJV. However, the language is much more modern. The ESV is very good to use with Bible study because the translation very close to the original text.

### **\*Contemporary English Version:**

The CEV uses very modern phrasing and vocabulary.

I am a meticulous person by nature. I like each and every thing to have its place. I don't jay-walk. I shower before I get in swimming pools. When I drive, I am consistently two miles per hour *under* the speed limit. And, by golly, I read things in order!

Throughout the weeks that followed my desire to love Jesus, I decided to try and read the Bible. Since I was committed to do it *properly*, I started at Genesis and pushed through. I managed to get to Leviticus before I gave up. *Really*, I thought, *this book is just not for me. It's highly doubtful that I'll ever need to know how to cleanse someone from infectious skin diseases* (and yes, it's in there. Check Leviticus 14 if you don't believe me). *Why does any of it matter?*

Thankfully, I was soon given the following pieces of wisdom that helped me understand it better.

Christians believe that the Bible is God's Word *given* to humanity. It's made up of 66 different books divided into two different sections. The first section, the Old Testament, contains books that were written before Jesus came to the Earth; the New Testament contains books that were written after. There are books of history, poetry, advice, prophesy, and letters, in a wide variety of writing styles and genres.

For many people, Genesis isn't necessarily the most helpful starting point. If you're new to this whole Christianity thing, or if you're just trying to figure out what it means, the Gospels are a *great* place to start. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are accounts of Jesus from people who lived in His lifetime. Each presents a separate view of His life and teachings and helps you get to the heart of the message of the gospel. If you're looking for them, they're the first books listed in the New Testament, about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the way through the

**\*New International**

**Version:** The NIV is one of the most widely used versions of the Bible. It uses more modern language, but still translates the passages using traditional Bible vocabulary. A revised version of the NIV, the **Today's New International Version**, uses pronouns that include both men and women when the author meant to do that.

**\*The Message Paraphrase:**

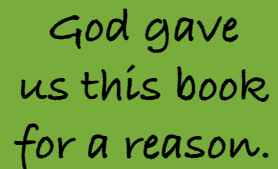
The Message is a paraphrase of the Bible completed by Eugene Peterson. It takes groups of passages in scripture as a whole, rather than word by word, and communicates the ideas.

Bible. Psalms, in the Old Testament, is another fantastic place to start. You can find it about halfway through whatever Bible you have.

The Bible was originally written in other languages, so everything we read is translated. Many English translations exist. The NIV, ESV or CEV are all excellent ones, but there are many others! The NIV is one of the most common and a fairly easy version to read, though others, like the Message paraphrase, put the ideas into very modern equivalents. Choose a translation that makes the most sense to you- in the end, you're still reading God's word. It can be good to read from several translations when you're dealing with hard to understand passages. Reading how different translators render the same idea can help the concept make more sense. To help find your best fit, we've included a "Choose Your Translation" guide on the previous page.

Most translations divide the books into chapters and verses to help you find the passages more easily. Sometimes you'll see people referring to Scripture passages in a kind of "shorthand," listing the first letters of the book's name followed by the chapter and verse number. For example, (Matt 3:5) would mean Book of Matthew, chapter 3, verse 5.

Eventually I made it all the way through the Bible- infectious skin diseases included. I'm so thankful that I did, for it sparked a deeper love for God and Jesus. God gave us this book for a reason. While you might not have a "wow" moment every time you crack its spine (just like in any relationship, experiences vary), there is truth in its pages that you can't find anywhere else.



God gave  
us this book  
for a reason.

# Now I... Connect

At a very young age my mother became worried about the state of my mental health. After I had a panic attack due to discovering a huge physical defect- I found a freckle on my thumb- she brought her then 4-year-old child to the doctor to test for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Despite common jabs at my personality, I didn't have OCD then and I don't have it now. I have, however, retained some of those tendencies. I like to be in control. A lot. I like to think I can do it all on my own.

At nine, my parents divorced, and my tendency to remain independent and not trust anyone amplified. I already knew that I couldn't rely on my dad; how, then, could I rely on anyone else?

The truth is that I do need others, and you do, too. This life is just too hard to live on our own. Think about it-even Superman had a Lois Lane. Christianity is

## You're Invited

Christians love to gather together! This is oftentimes referred to as "fellowship." Honestly, fellowship happens whenever followers of Jesus hang out. To help you get started, here are some activity ideas:

\*Anything with food.  
Everyone loves to eat.

\*Play together. Games, sports, and music are all great.

\*Go on hikes, bike/ motorcycle rides, or camping trips.

Really, just have fun!

no different. To fully grow in Christ, we both need the help of the believers around us. Healthy Christians lean on each other and build each other up. So find some friends who love the Lord, too. Walk through life and faith with them. My prayer is that one day when you run into a problem at 2 a.m., you'll have someone to call without feeling the need to apologize. And that, my friend, is a beautiful reality.

*To fully grow in  
Christ, make  
some Christian  
friends!*

(For examples and teachings about connection in the Bible, see 1 Cor 1:9, Acts 2:42, Acts 2:46, 1 John 1:3, Matt 18:20, or Eph 2:19-22)

# Now I... Serve

I *hate* doing the dishes. Growing up, our family didn't have a dishwasher, so we had to do them by hand. Every. Single. Day. You can imagine that since I hate chocolate milk rings, salad dressing flakes, and dried ketchup, I didn't leap at the opportunities to immerse my hands in the frothy suds.

Honestly, being a pretty selfish person, I didn't help as much as I wish I had. My poor mother was often stuck night after night doing the same grueling job. The only motivation I had to help was that I loved my mom and I wanted to make things easier for her. Well... that and I didn't want her to yell at me.

Service tends to happen for one of those two reasons-- love or fear. We're afraid we won't have enough volunteer hours to impress that employer or college, so we serve. We're afraid that people will think we're heartless, so we serve. We're afraid that we're not good enough to get into heaven, so we serve.



*Jesus saves us from that fear, though.* By coming to the planet and taking away the sins of humanity, He erased any need to “buy” our way into heaven. His love negates the world’s demand to impress the people around us. With His selfless act absorbing the necessity for the first motivator, we’re left with the other: love.

*We serve because Jesus first served us.* As a mortal man, Jesus healed people from skin conditions (Mark 1:40-45), blindness (Matt 20:29-34), and death (John 11:1-44); He fed thousands of hungry listeners with a couple of loaves of bread and some fish (Luke 5:10-17); He washed the feet of disciples (John 13:1-17). Jesus died for us (John 3:16). The love He felt for us poured out into His actions; shouldn’t we return this love in kind?

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because  
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Service is a way of thanking God for his selflessness and grace and expressing our love to Him. As we serve, we grow closer to Him, as well as help those around us see His love (2 Cor 9:12-13).

God creates each and every person with a part to play in the body of His church. Right now, as you’re reading this, God has a very specific way that He’s calling *you* to serve. It could be in children’s ministry, leading worship, praying for people, setting up chairs, mopping floors, taking care of the homeless, or millions of other possibilities. Find an area that you’re passionate about and that the Lord is leading you to serve in, and go for it! You’ll be amazed to see how God can use you and the world around you for His Kingdom.

(For examples of or teachings on service in the Bible, see 1 Peter 4:10, 1 Cor 12:1-31, Luke 10:25-37, Matt 25:14-30)

# Now I... Believe

There is something about airplanes that inspire interesting conversations. Early in my Christianity and en route to Boston, I found myself talking to the lady next to me about my church. “What denomination is it?” she asked. I’m sure I spat out some fancy sounding answer (I’m a slowly recovering know-it-all). The truth of the matter was, though, I had absolutely no idea despite being a regular worshipper for a over a year.


There are many differences between churches, just as there are in any other type of organization, from grocery stores to dentists to schools. Some churches have pews and others have folding chairs, some baptize in pools and others in rivers, some have priests in robes and others have pastors in jeans. It can be very confusing to figure out which bits of theology are Biblical truth and what else is just personal preference.

The foundation of Christianity is built on the belief that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord, and that the Bible is God’s Word

and truth. These are absolute truths. Other beliefs can be found in the Bible. Some of these concepts and beliefs are difficult to comprehend and require study. A few of the other basics beliefs are listed on the next page to aid you in your quest for truth.

Jesus  
Christ is  
Savior  
and Lord.

The Bible  
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We believe that Christ died to take away the sins of the world and rose again on the third day. He alone forgives us for our sins. No amount of work we do can ever atone for our mistakes and wrongdoings; yet, by inviting Him into our lives, He washes us clean (Eph 2:8-9).


We believe that God creates every one of us to love and serve Him, and that He has a unique plan for each of our lives (Jer 29:11).

We believe that we are called to serve a Kingdom that is greater than this world and this life, and that we need to reach out to the people we see all around us (Matt 28:16-20).

We believe in remembering Jesus' love for us through Communion. This is also called "The Lord's Supper," "The Eucharist," or "Mass." In it, bread and cup recall Christ's body and blood, reminding us of His body broken and His blood shed on the cross so our sins could be forgiven (Matt 26:26-29).

We believe in the practice of baptism. The act of baptism is a public testimony to your belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord and a commitment to walk with Him through life. In it, water symbolizes Christ washing your sins clean (1 Peter 3:21-22).

We believe, too, that baptism is also a confirmation that you have a unique part in the body of Christ. Not only do you believe, but you *belong*. There's a whole, huge family waiting for you on the other side of the water. Besides your initial acceptance of Jesus, few moments in life can be as significant or life changing as baptism.



We believe church is a place in which to deepen this area of belonging. As Christians who realize that we can not live life on our own, church provides a place to find these fellow believers with whom to walk. Hopefully it's a place where you are challenged to grow and a situation of worship where you can reconnect to God. The denomination doesn't matter provided it follows Christ's teachings, the building doesn't matter, the size doesn't matter. Just go and worship.

We believe that God is a Trinity- three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, living as One. Yeah, it's a hard idea to get your head around, but at the core is this beautiful truth: *God's very nature is a relationship*. Honestly, I don't fully understand it myself, and I'm struggling to find the right way to communicate this idea with you. Here are

some images that can help - even if they're not exact. Three strands are woven together make one rope. Shamrocks have three leaves as part of one plant.



Yolk, shell, and white make one egg. God is a bit like that. One God, experienced three ways - as the Father, as the Son, and as the Holy Spirit.

I encourage you to seek out this knowledge for yourself. Dive deeply, drink fully. When you make your faith your own, you grow closer to Christ.

# NOW I... GROW

No one wakes up in the morning thinking, “Huh. I would love to live my life today stuck in a mental rut.” God doesn’t want that for you, either. He longs for His children to grow spiritually and get to know him better and better over time. This process of growth is often called discipleship.

Like any other task in life, growth takes practice and effort. It’s not going to be handed down on a golden platter; we have to work for it. There are three main habits that make up the foundation for discipleship.

Worship is the first of these habits. Spend time with your Father. Read your Bible. Attend church. Pray.

Worship

Obviously we can’t do this every waking moment, and sometimes it’s easy to make other things in life a priority. However, to truly follow Christ, we must lay down our lives for Him. It’s a daunting idea, yes, but so much discipleship happens as a result.

Connection

Connection is another practice. Jesus calls us to live in community with one another. Finding a group of Christians whom you can confide in and walk through life with helps all of us dig deeper into Christ and find support.



Service reaches past our own needs. By serving those around us in Christ's name, it allows us to grow closer to Him and each other.

Service

There is *always* room to grow.

We'll never reach perfection in these areas. However, as we ingrain these habits into our daily life, our discipleship will deepen.



# NOW

My hope is that you make choices today to follow Christ, not because you want to live up to the world's expectations or because you think it will help *you*, but rather because you want to love Jesus and get to know Him better. It's okay to have questions and it's perfectly normal to feel doubts. Those of us who have followed Jesus for *years* still have fears and questions and things we're not sure of.

Life won't be perfect. You'll still have struggles and heartache. People in your life will get sick and others will die. You might not receive everything your heart desires. And honestly, the world will look at you differently because you profess to love someone and something bigger than yourself. *The quest to know Christ, however, is the most life changing task you'll ever undertake.* There's nothing quite like knowing that no matter what you're going through, the most powerful being in the universe hears your heart and wants to help. So go out there. Pray. Read. Connect. Serve. Believe. Grow. You won't be sorry.

It's possible that we'll never meet, or I could be shaking your hand at church on Sunday. I don't know where God's

road is leading you. I do know, though, that Proverbs 3:5-6 says that if you trust in the Lord and acknowledge Him, He will make your path straight.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. (Prov. 3:5-6 NIV)

I'm praying, friend, that you will trust the One who directs your path.

- Mackenzie