

First Steps 5

What is a Christian?

This lesson seeks to answer the questions: "What is a Christian?", "What are the differences between Christian and non-Christians?", and "How would my life change if I became a Christian?"



Consider: What do you observe Christians to be? What differences do you observe between Christians and non-Christians?

A Christian is someone who has been (1) born again by the **Holy Spirit**, (2) through faith in **Jesus'** death and resurrection follows Jesus as Lord, and (3) rejoicing in God lives for the glory of **God** the Father.

Let's take a deeper look at the three aspects in the summary above.

1. Christians love God, rejoice in God, and live for the glory of God the Father

Love God

Perhaps the most basic characteristic of a Christian is that Christians love God. Jesus taught that the most important commandment is love for God:



Mark 12:29-30

"The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'"

But God's love for us preceded our love for God! Our love for God is a response to his love for us.



1 John 4:19

We love because he first loved us.

In love God adopts us into his family as his very own sons and daughters. It is truly amazing that God, the Almighty Creator, Sovereign King, and Holy Father, would lovingly make sinners his own children, and give us all the privileges of a child. Christians are children of God.



1 John 3:1

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

Rejoice in God

Christians see God's amazing beauty, glory, and worth, and in response rejoice in him. Christians do not love God in order to gain various rewards, such as money, healthy, or long life. Rather the reward is God himself. "Heaven" and "eternal life" are good because we will be with God. Jesus said:



John 17:3

"And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Christians rejoice in God and desire God more than anything else. God is our delight.



Psalms 73:25

Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.



Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Glorify God

God created us and saved us for himself, in order to display and declare his glory. Practically, when you become a Christian your sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ and the purpose of your life changes. Being a Christian through faith in Jesus Christ makes it possible to live a life glorifying to God. You no longer live for yourself but for God. Christians seek to do everything they do for God's glory.

**Isaiah 43:6-7, 21**

God said: "...bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. ... the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise."

**1 Corinthians 10:31**

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Like 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, everything from the daily tasks of eating and drinking and everything else in life—be it studying, working, resting, playing, or socializing, is done to praise, proclaim, display, and declare God's glory.

In the normal course of life a person makes many decisions. Decisions like, "Where should I live?" or "Is this transfer to a different city the best thing for my family?" A Christian does not just consider, "What do I want to do?" or "What would be good for others?" Though these are important things to consider, a Christian first asks, "What is most glorifying to God?" then takes into consideration what is loving toward others.



Consider: When it comes to making decisions, what have typically been the most important factors in you making a decision?

The primary reasons for making decisions and doing things in people's lives can be self-motivated or motivated out of wanting to respect the people around you. Though Christians should certainly love others and are at liberty to have preferences and personal desires, a Christian's life should be God-centered.

2. Christians have faith in Jesus and follow Jesus.

Faith

A Christian is someone who believes in the person and work of Jesus Christ according to the Bible. Jesus is the divine Son of God, is the prophesied Messiah (see First Steps 4), exists eternally—was not created—and is Lord of all. Christians believe these truths about Jesus.

A Christian is someone who believes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are true, historical events. Jesus, the Son of God, became a man, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died, and three days later rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and will one day return to judge the world.

**Romans 10:9**

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

A Christians is someone who trusts Jesus for salvation because he died and rose from the dead for our sins. Christians know that they cannot trust their own good works to qualify them for forgiveness and eternal life.

**Ephesians 2:8-9**

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Believing the gospel—Jesus' death and resurrection for our sins—is not only something we do to become a Christian, but the whole Christian life is lived by faith in Jesus. We are saved by faith, we grow as a Christian by faith, and we are guarded by faith until we receive our inheritance of eternal life with God (1 Peter 1:4-5).

Follow

Christians follow Jesus as their Lord. Jesus invites us to follow him and become his disciple.

**Luke 9:23**

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Following Jesus means we surrender our will, our plans, our priorities, our whole lives to him. Christians submit to Jesus' lead and give him the position of Lord in our life. This is the cost of being Jesus' disciple.

Following Jesus as Lord means that we obey what he commands. We trust that he is a good Lord, and that he will never ask us to do something that is bad for us. But there will be times when we cannot understand why he asks us to do something or even fully understand why things happen to us or our friends around us, yet we obey because we trust. We come to know what he commands by reading the Bible. We do not obey in order to earn or maintain God's love. Rather we obey Jesus as a free response of love because he first loved us. The word "Christian" means "little Christ", which is accurate; we are to become more and more like Jesus as we grow as Christians.



1 John 2:6

... whoever says he abides in [Jesus] ought to walk in the same way in which [Jesus] walked.



Consider: Based upon what you have come to know about Jesus so far, what aspects of Jesus' character and commands would you like to imitate?

3. Christians are born again by the Holy Spirit and bear the fruit of righteousness

Becoming a Christian is not merely a mental change or behavior modification. Becoming a Christian is a supernatural and miraculous work of the Holy Spirit of God in our hearts. Jesus described this supernatural transformation like this:



John 3:3, 6-7

Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. ... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"

A Christian is not merely someone who self-identifies themselves a Christian, marks "Christianity" on a census survey, is born in a Christian family, attends a church, is recorded as a member of a church, or gives offering. A Christian is someone who has been spiritually changed from the inside out by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells inside of every believer. The very presence of God through his Spirit is with Christians at all times helping us to live like Jesus.



Acts 2:38

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

By God's grace the Holy Spirit works in our hearts, giving us both the desire to do good works for God and the ability to do good works (Philippians 2:12-13). Christians, having been truly born again by the Spirit, "bear fruit" of good works and good character.



Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

The fruit of good works and good character does not earn us salvation nor do they maintain our salvation, but they are a certain byproduct of being born again.

Summary

The Christian life is a journey. Being a Christian does not mean someone is perfect, but rather that they are being perfected. Christians don't always have the right desires, but God is continuously at work in their hearts. Christians will sin and make mistakes, but when they do, they confess them to God and are forgiven. God's love never fails and his grace never runs out.

Trinity

Did you notice that this lesson talks about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit? The Bible teaches us that there is one God who exists in three distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. This is called "the Trinity". Perhaps you have wondered about this. Though God's nature is far

beyond our comprehension and mysterious, we can understand the Triune nature of God as each person of the Trinity works to accomplish our salvation.

God the Father made us, loved us, and chose us to be his children. He sent the Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to accomplish our salvation.

God the Son (Jesus Christ) became a man, lived a sinless life, died in our place for our sins, and rose from the dead to save us and is alive today.

God the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father and the Son, makes our dead hearts alive and dwells in every believer.

In "First Steps: Step 3," there were a series of questions to help decide where you were on your journey toward God. Let's consider those questions again to determine where you are now.

Do you believe you are a sinner and that you need Jesus?

Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of the one true God?

Do you believe that Jesus died to pay for your sins and save you?

Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?

Are you ready to profess, in faith, Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

Are you ready to repent, be baptized, and start a new life with Jesus?



Consider: Are you ready to become a Christian?

Note: If you want to follow Jesus and be obedient to him in baptism, ask your facilitator or a pastor about the "Baptism Guide".