

“The Guide”

How to Become a Christian and Grow in faith

By Pastor John Custer

This is a simple guide to your entire Christian life, from the moment you become a believer through the moment in which God calls you to heaven. It is a concise summary of the major spiritual steps you'll need to take to be a productive Christian. Use it as a tool for the mentoring of younger Christians. Have a great journey! Here are the steps:

1. Get Saved

This is pretty easy. It's probably already happened if you've ever prayed to God, sought help from Him in any way, been moved to do something good just to please Him, been sorry for your sins and sought forgiveness, etc. Many of us do this when we are little children. God doesn't want anyone to be separated from Him or punished, so He makes getting saved pretty easy.

For example, Abraham just believed what God said when He promised to give him a child and many descendants. God counted this belief (faith) as good enough to make Abraham "righteous" (Genesis 15:6). You don't have to know everything about Jesus to get saved. God reveals Himself to people all over the earth even if they have never been to church or heard a preacher. Primitive peoples can see God in the creation around them and can respond to God through worship, prayer, giving, etc. When you believe in the true God (not Buddha or some other false God) in a simple manner like that, the value of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is applied to your life.

If you are unsure about whether or not you are saved, you can make a simple profession to Jesus right now, like this: "Jesus, I believe in you. Forgive me of my wrongs and take me to heaven when I die."

2. Get Baptized

The next step after getting saved is to make a public profession of your belief in Jesus by being baptized in water. The word "baptize" means to be immersed in water, just as you would if you were dyeing a garment.

Jesus Himself got baptized. We should do it also. (**Acts 2:38**). Any Christian can baptize you. Your branch group leader can arrange a time and place to do so. You just need some water, like a swimming pool, some clothes to get wet in, and someone to baptize you.

3. Receive the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

Nothing in the Bible says that this phenomenon ever stopped happening or was not needed by Christians. This "baptism" is different from water baptism. It refers to an *experience* you have with God, not the act of getting immersed in something. The evidence that this experience has really happened is that you speak in a language which you have not learned. It may be a known language, a language of angels, or an unknown language. This is called "speaking in tongues." You are in control of it, doing it when you want to. It does not happen automatically.

Jesus had a similar experience with the Holy Spirit after He was baptized in water. A dove (representing the Holy Spirit) descended on Him and God spoke to Him audibly from heaven. The Bible doesn't say that Jesus spoke in a tongue, probably because His baptism took place several years before the Holy Spirit was "poured out" on mankind at Pentecost. He did, however, have a special, powerful experience with the Holy Spirit. It was only after that experience

that He began to minister to people. The Apostle Paul showed that, after Pentecost, a similar *experience* was for all believers when he asked some disciples in Ephesus if they had received the Holy Spirit (**Acts 19:2-6**). He laid hands on them right after they were water baptized and they had this experience. The evidence was that they spoke in tongues.

You can receive this by yourself or by having someone pray over you. First ask Jesus to “baptize” you with His Spirit, and second, start speaking, but not in a language you have learned. Enjoy the new sounds and use it often. It is a very effective, powerful way to pray to God.

4. Understand repentance and forgiveness

Now that you’re saved, you will soon notice that you still have some old sinful habits. *This is normal*. Getting saved does not make you perfect instantly. God has, at this point, removed your old record of sins and will never remember it again. Your name has been written in a new book called the “Lamb’s book of life.” You have been “justified” and you are now “righteous.”

It was because God favored you, and not because of anything you did or achieved, which cleared away your old record.

(**Ephesians 2:8-9** “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, that no one should boast.”) Without this “justification” you would have eventually gone to hell, which is a real place of torment and separation from God.

Now, let’s go back to those nagging old habits. What are yours? Smoking? Drinking to excess? Drug abuse? Anger? Fear? Selfishness? Pessimism? Gossip? Sexual impurity? Lying? Stealing? Malicious speech? God will cause you to grow out of those. This won’t just happen automatically, but will require some cooperation on your part. You already have a desire to stop these old behaviors; you now need to put on new behavior approved by Jesus. (**Ephesians 4: 17-32**) If you do fail at times and go back to your old behavior, Jesus will forgive your sin and set you back on track. All you have to do is to confess your sin to God (not to a priest), and ask for forgiveness.

(**1 John 1:9-10** “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”)

These daily sins don’t jeopardize your place in heaven, but they do have an effect on your life here on earth. They offend others, rob you of peace and weaken your ability to hear God clearly. This process of putting aside old sins and learning new Christ-like behavior is called “overcoming.” It is part of a larger process called “sanctification” in which God separates you from the sinful world. If you remain connected to your new friends in the church, you will steadily overcome old, sinful habits.

5. Realize the importance of the Body of Christ

The collection of all the Christians in a given place is called the *Body of Christ*. All the Christians in the world make up the larger Body of Christ. Your local church and branch group are parts of the Body of Christ. God has designed your Christian life to be lived out in an ongoing relationship with this “body” of believers.

(**1 Corinthians 12:12-27** – “ For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,” it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an

eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. 19 And if they were all one member, where would the body be? 20 But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those members of the body, which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our unseemly members come to have more abundant seemliness, 24 whereas our seemly members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, 25 that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."

God has a beautiful plan for you and your family, including provisions for your protection, welfare, and healing, which are all rooted in His Body, the church. Many spiritual skills, called Gifts of the Spirit, are resident in your church body. These skills include healing, wisdom, knowledge, miracles, faith, prophecy (encouraging speech which sometimes foretells the future), tongues and its interpretation (special praise given to the Lord via a spontaneous foreign language), and discerning of spirits (the ability to know whether man's spirit, the Spirit of God, or an evil spirit is active in an event).

The church is also like branches attached to a vine. Jesus is the vine. His life flows into us as long as we remain attached to Him. You may be tempted to withdraw from your Christian friends at various times. The Bible teaches that it is critical to gather together with your new Christian friends, even more frequently as time goes on.

(**Hebrews 10:24-25** and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near"). Your new life flows from this vine, not from your old friends or your job. You will not need to immediately ostracize your old group of friends, but as time goes on, you will naturally seek Christians as friends (unless your old ones get saved).

6. Know something about: Who is God? What is He like?

God is the supremely powerful, loving being who made us and the universe in which we live. We could never understand what He is like unless He revealed Himself to us in the form of a man, who was Jesus. God is Spirit. He is One God, but three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Bible says plainly that this is a mystery which we will not understand.

(**1 Tim 3:16** "And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.")

God is not three forms of the same thing, like water, steam, and ice. Neither is He just one Person. There is abundant evidence in the Bible of this three part nature, called the Trinity:

God the Father sits on a throne in heaven, the celestial city, called the New Jerusalem. It is a city 1500 miles long, wide and high. This will be our home after we die. He is the ultimate authority in the universe, having created from nothing all that exists. God always was, is now, and always will be.

God the Son is Jesus, who is God's Only Begotten Son. He was not created, like the devil or mankind, but was begotten. As such, God chose to send Him here so that He could be born into a fleshly body and be raised as a human, suffering all the temptations that we suffer. He was then able to give His life in exchange for ours, because we humans had really gone astray from the time of Adam's fall. Created men were so bad that all of us deserved to be destroyed. Even the best among us was rotten in the core. This death sentence hung over all men, except those who had faith in God. In Noah's time, God gave an illustration of what He could do if He were to carry out this sentence. All people in the world died in a giant flood except for eight (Noah and his family). Evidence of this flood still exists in the mantle of the earth. Jesus took our place, a perfect man giving Himself up to be executed in place of all of us. His life was that valuable in God's eyes. Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. God the Father has turned over all authority to Jesus, to complete His plan for saving fallen mankind and bringing peace into the universe.

God the Spirit is the Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost. He is invisible, but very present with us. He guides and directs the life of each Christian. He will be present through the entire age of the church, bringing the church to maturity in this confusing, deceptive age. It is He who gives us desperately needed wisdom, knowledge, strength, and does miracles in our midst. He was involved in the creation. Every believer should have a personal experience with Him, which is called the *baptism in the Holy Spirit*.

7. Find your role in the Body of Christ

God has a unique, wonderful plan for every believer's life. It includes many of the best things in life which we all hope for: peace, prosperity, a family, health, a wife or husband, a good living, a productive life. The first step to finding this life is to get involved in your branch group and attend the meeting of the entire congregation on Sundays as much as you can.

You have been given one or more of the Gifts of the Spirit mentioned earlier in this lesson. These were meant to be used in the context of the gathered church body. If you attend and get involved, you will see many needs in the lives of the people you meet. Some will be for healing, some for wisdom, some for encouragement, some for food or shelter or money. Find a need, try to help as well as you can, and you will be on the way to discovering your unique place of service in the Lord's Body. You may be selected to be a pastor or a teacher or a prophet or an evangelist or even an apostle. One thing is certain – you do have a gift, perhaps several, waiting to be discovered.

As you grow, your branch group will multiply. You will have a part in helping it to do so, taking part in the happy work of bringing food, leading a discussion, helping with worship, praying for people or baptizing them, or getting a host home ready. Fairly soon, you will be older spiritually than the newest people joining your branch group. You will be able to teach them something, a true form of mentoring. You may want to be an *elder* or a *deacon* eventually, which is a very distinguished position with great authority in the church. If the church leadership agrees, they will "lay hands" on you and "ordain" you into that office. You will have a fulfilling, wonderful life of service which may be terminated by a blessed event called the "rapture." In this event, all believers are taken from the earth to meet the Lord in the air, and from there we are taken to heaven and prepared to return with Him at His Second Coming (**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**). If you pass away naturally before that time, you are escorted by angels to heaven for a glorious individual homecoming anyway, to await the rest of us and our joint return with Christ as a mighty army in His glorious return. It's a great future to look forward to!