

## 7. HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

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### **Believe that you are loved and accepted by God**

The good news of the Christian faith begins with the recognition that you are loved and accepted by the God who created and sustains the world.

Jesus taught us to call God "Father." While some people may lack the positive experience of a loving parent, most can imagine what the word "father" can mean at its very best. It suggests one who gives life, supplies love, provides care, protects, guides, watches over, enables growth, and gives freedom. This is what God is like. Even when we do not acknowledge God, God cares for us like a mother who cares for her children.

God knows us intimately and loves us totally. Nothing we have done or could do can make God love us less.

### **Admit that you are a sinner**

The Bible plainly teaches that all human beings have sinned, have lost the desire to serve God, and have no ability to save themselves. We see this truth in the realization that human failures, wrong choices, and stubborn self-will leave us guilty and powerless, and that habits can easily become addictions that are almost impossible to break. Not only that, but human sin affects our whole society, creating a world full of injustice, greed, oppression, pornography, pollution, and violence.

Despite this sinfulness, God did not stop loving us or desiring fellowship with us.

As strange as this may seem to us, John 3:16 tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we gain the right to become daughters and sons of God and receive the sure hope that this new life will continue beyond death, bringing us into heaven. That's the good news of the Christian faith!

### **Acknowledge your sins**

It's not enough to admit that you have sinned. You must regret those sins, and then turn away from them.

The New Testament uses several words to describe a genuine response to the gospel message. The first word is "repentance," which in the original Greek literally

means "turn around" or "change of mind." We are told it is a crucial part of responding to the good news of God's grace.

When you hear the word "repentance," you may think immediately of feeling or being sorry. Being sorry is appropriate, but it's not the main sense of the word "repentance" at all. To repent is to "turn around," that is, to change the direction of your life. More than just a change in your emotions, repentance involves a change in your thinking and in your actions.

Your will and your behaviour will also change. True repentance means that you want to please God rather than yourself. You come to love what is good, not what is bad. You experience a life directed outwardly to connect with others, rather than inwardly focused on yourself.

### **Commit your life to Christ**

Faith is another key word the New Testament uses to describe a genuine response to the good news. Accept what God has done by faith and receive salvation as a gift. And in response, commit your life to following Christ, and enter into a relationship with him through prayer, Bible reading, and worship.

We come to know and love God more through the Holy Spirit, who enters our hearts when we commit our lives to Christ. Once we have committed our lives to Christ, the Holy Spirit continues to live and work within us to mold us into daughters and sons of God. "When the Spirit of truth comes," said Jesus in John 16:13-14, "he will guide you into all the truth...he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

It is not important how we come to Christ, but that we come.

### **Live a life of gratitude to God.**

Christian living involves a transformation of our whole lives out of gratitude to God. In Reformed churches, obedience to the law of God in the Ten Commandments is seen as an opportunity to express thanks to God for what God has done. This obedience is not seen as a means of winning approval, but of showing love and appreciation to God. Jesus taught his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

This understanding of life as gratitude has two important consequences.

First, it frees us from continual concern about our performance. We do not need to keep asking "Am I good enough?" because our purpose is simply to let our lives express our joy and gratitude. Second, all of life is now seen as an opportunity to serve God.

One way Christians display gratitude is by worshiping God. We also express our gratitude through the way we treat our family members, perform our jobs, use our leisure time, vote, participate in community action, interact with neighbours, spend money, and bear witness to our faith.

We say thanks to God through all our efforts to share his love and compassion with the world. We say thanks in our efforts to invite people to church, work for justice, provide hospitality, donate blood, tutor a child, welcome a newcomer, or volunteer abroad or in our own community.

As Christians, we show our love for God by the way we relate to others. "Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11); "Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" (1 John 3:18).