

What Are Christians to Do Every Day

What are Christians to do every day? Before answering the question, we need to remember that everyone is different. How we, individually, should act out our Christianity will be different from everyone else. We have liberty, which is discussed at least a dozen times in the New Testament. Of course, we should avoid bad stuff, but what good stuff we should be doing will depend on our situation and our skills, both the ones we learned the regular way and the ones God gave us after we became Christians.

Of course, everyone has a fear of messing up what God wants me to do. Two answers: (1) Jesus already paid for those poor choices. Learn from it and do better. (2) God does not have a specific job for each Christian. If He did, He would have to tell each of us exactly what that special job is. And God would need to update your goal several times a day as you missed off-ramps. You would have that Google Maps warning going off in your head constantly, “Make a legal U-turn.” No, we have liberty. Take what you have and use it in the best way you know how. Obviously, over time you will discover new abilities (both those you learn the regular way and those that God deposits in you) and you will learn how to use those skills in better ways. We are expected to grow.

So, what are Christians to do every day? Here’s one from 1 Thessalonians 4:11 – 12:

“...that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.”

Over the past 2000 years, Christianity has produced quite a number of famous people: the theologian and the preacher, the eloquent and the learned, the motivator and the occasional firebrand. So, people naturally assume that these famous people are the models to which we should aspire as Christians. Does not sound to me like Paul held that opinion.

Have you noticed that those famous people tend to consume assets? Start controversies? Cause division?

In our culture, the wealthy and the powerful are those at the top. Of course, we do not try to emulate those who achieved their fame and fortune through evil. But the nice folks, who also have gained notoriety, are the ones we tend to admire. However, for most people, the focus becomes their wealth and influence rather than their character traits.

So, how does Paul's prescription give of confidence that we will have an impact on others, that we will be those who take a message of peace, hope, and joy to those around us? Well, who are the people who follow every move of the influencers of our time? Mostly, they are people who are looking to be like those influencers. But, we can see easily that such people are usually just a flash in the pan. They have no lasting impact. Or, what they are selling eventually becomes irrelevant or not as great as initially thought. But, people who live quietly, mind their own business, work with their hands are those whom people around them respect. Their influence never makes the news, but people around them look to them as their role models. I suspect that, if we could get a peek at God's influencer statistics, we would find that these people described by Paul are those with the highest batting average.

The New Testament focuses not just on our visible lifestyle, but also on our attitudes. Many passages address this. I have chosen just one that summarizes these essential attitudes succinctly (1 John 3:23):

And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.

Over the last 2000 years, those words, name, believe, and love, have become religion words, hiding their very common meanings from when John wrote them.

The "name" of Jesus is not literally the name we call Him, nor, as became popular when the church became authority driven, His authority. Rather, the "name" of someone was the person's essential quality, closely related to that person's character.

So, the command of God is that we fully understand the essential quality of Jesus and believe (trust) the promises He has made because of that quality of the individual who made them.

The second commandment is to “love” one another. In that day, the word John wrote, *agape*, meant selflessness, to do what is best for another without regard to the effect on me.

So, John says that there are exactly two commandments, and these two are based on our understanding of the nature of Jesus. We trust the promises He has made and act on those promises because of that character. And, we are to be selfless. Easier said than done.

I’ll deal with our fear of failure at the end, because that fear is a reaction to every one of the parts of a Christian life.

So, how do we go about gaining an understanding of the quality of Jesus? Easy. Read the gospels like you would read a short novel. Those fancy English teachers call it a novella. Get the picture of who Jesus on earth was. The gospels are about how godly character works in a broken world

That’s the quality part. Now the trust part: faith. Trusting someone is difficult. We assign different levels of trust to different people. Some people are just untrustworthy. Unless you are watching them every step of the way, they will either ignore your instructions and do it some other way, or they will see an opportunity to take advantage of you. Others are a little higher on the scale; we would trust them with up to maybe \$100, but that is about as much risk as we are willing to take on. You can run your list of semi-trusted people and mentally rank them.

Why do you trust some more than others? Because of their character and their track record. You are likely to entrust them with something important to you, and you are likely to accept what they say as true. That’s how we treat Jesus. Reading the gospels gives us a feel for His character. The history in the Bible reveals that, when God promises something, that is what will happen. The catch is knowing what Jesus promised. For that one, you need to read the whole New Testament and take note of all the promises. Unfortunately, the word, “promise,” is rarely used. So you have to identify His promises by just reading along and taking note of when God describes Christians and the

description is just flat impossible. My list has 883 promises on an Excell spreadsheet. I imagine that there are about 150 different ones. Just to name a few of the promises that are about the faithful, the faithful are promised the ability to be selfless, to overcome themselves, to have an understanding of life, peace, joy, strength of character, wisdom, the ability to be united, and all sufficiency for every good work. When you are reading along in the New Testament and you see something describing the faithful that has not been your experience, that's a promise. And, God specializes in the humanly impossible. If we are able to do something, God expects us to do it ourselves.

But how do we latch on to those promises and actually trust them, actually act on them? Of course, part of it is developing a level of trust in God by knowing His track record and what He actually promised. The New Testament gives two other ways that are so simple that we are likely to read over them. In Luke 11:13, Jesus told a crowd that the way to obtain those promises is to ask. That is straightforward. The other method is in Ephesians 5:18 – 21. Sing. Sing words that are founded upon your thanksgiving for what God has done so far. Put in what you really think rather than hiding behind religious catch-phrases. And then ask for what you think you need.

So, lead a quiet life, tend to your own business, work with your hands, trust and act upon God's promises because of His track record and character, and be selfless toward people in general. Next, we have a very specific job description. I will read just 2 Corinthians 4:13 and 5:20 [chapters 4 and 5 are all about evangelism]:

(4:13) And since we [the faithful] have the same spirit of faith [as the Old Testament faithful], as it is written [in Psalm 116:10], "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak.

(5:20) Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

God has assigned faithful humans the job of being His ambassadors. Seriously? Don't you think He could have gotten a more reliable effort from a few million of the faithful angels? Couldn't He have just rained Bibles, already in the language of the ethnic group of that area. Couldn't He just have a Bible in every hotel-room nightstand? No, He entrusted that job to faithful humans. If you are classified as faithful, you are an ambassador. And these are not the only such passages. There are lots, all the way back to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:16, *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven."*

That's a frightening prospect – but only because we have been led to believe that evangelism is done by specialists: special training, special faith. But that is not true. First, being an ambassador is not as complex a job as made out to be in the movies and on TV. Ambassadors just deliver messages. They do not try to explain the messages or make up their own messages.

The message is already printed. I suggest using a translation that makes sense to the reader, but beyond that, it really doesn't matter. There are just three topics in the New Testament: evidence, the gospels, and the letters.

For the evidence part, get a simple book on the subject. I recommend "Evidence that Demands a Verdict" by Josh McDowell. You can get a used one from Abebooks.com for \$5 to \$6 including shipping. Read it together with someone who does not think the Bible is anything special. It is an easy read with lots of footnotes to tell you where an artifact is on display. Each chapter originally was about an hour lecture. Reading is a lot faster.

For the Jesus part, read a gospel together. Luke is best for the novice because it has all the parables and is sequential and straightforward. John is better for someone with a little background because it is more philosophical. Just read a few paragraphs or a chapter together then ask, "What did you think?" You are just directing traffic, not teaching. The book does the teaching for you.

The letters are a series of messages to Christians in different places, each place having different problems. In every place and in every era, new Christians tend to drag their cultures with them into the church. The letters are explanations from inspired writers about why that messes up the message. It is not rules, but logic. If you really think that Christians should be taking on the character of Jesus, then certain behaviors that are common in our society are just not appropriate any more. And each author tells you why. The letters are more information-dense than the gospels, more ideas per page. If you stop every sentence or two to try to explain something, it will be really messy and confusing. As I tell people who get bogged down in Romans, “Read faster. Paul will summarize on the next page.” The books of the New Testament were made to be read out loud (they did not have printing presses), and the hearers were expected to be able to pick up what was important.

And finally, the fourth thing that Christians are to do every day is to be part of the family of faithful spirits, the church, the kingdom of God. Here are three passages among many about that:

John 17: 20, *“I do not pray for these [apostles] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory [parade of godly character traits] which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect [consistent] in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”*

Hebrews 10:24 – 25. *“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”*

Hebrews 3:13, *“but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”*

Jesus prayed that the unity and consistency of Christians down through the centuries would be a proof to the outside world that Jesus was who He said He was. Of course, the history of the church is a bit shabby. As an historical institution, we have fallen well short of the mark. But, we have done remarkably well when compared to other human institutions. Governments rarely last more than a century or two. Countries grow, shrink, and fall apart. The basic premise of the church, that Jesus was God come to earth for the purpose of paying our unpayable debt to justice, and to model how godly behavior works in this broken world, has continued. The fights are generally among those who seem incapable of having a civil discussion or who want control of the money. We can just ignore those divisive folks, keep it simple, and meet Jesus' objective.

In the Hebrews 10:24 – 25 passage, we need to stir up one another. We can do that only by getting together. As a group of average, unremarkable people, we have a tendency to get off track. When we get together, some will have had success in their job of ambassador, others, not so much. Some have an abundance of encouragement, others are running on empty. We gather together to build everyone up so they can overcome the discouragement of this world and get back to the task at hand. Although in-person works better, our electronic age has made it possible to connect with people electronically every day. Of course, over the centuries, the church has done its best to make church meetings deadly dull. So, it falls to each of us to come up with ideas on how to make it more time-effective. We have that liberty. The New Testament contains no formula for exactly how things must be done. We have the liberty to adjust to the needs of the moment so that the whole family is encouraged.

And the third passage in Hebrews 3:13 contains the only time-valued statement about how often we should get together: daily. The weekly meeting has become the industry standard, but we need more than that. I remember a statement by one of Sharon's cousins at the funeral of his father, who died in his 80's: "I think I have talked to my dad every day of my life." They were farmers, so their pick-ups passed at some point as they went about their chores. They stopped to talk.

Family was a big thing for them, so they got together often. And the author's point? Left to ourselves, even the faithful get stuck in their own bad choices. We deceive ourselves into thinking that that choice was really OK. The group will burst that self-deception bubble and let you know that it was just dumb, and to get over it.

That's what Christians do every day: lead a quiet life, tend to their own business, work with their hands, trust the promises of God because of the physical evidence and because of His demonstrated character, set about to be ambassadors for Christ, and participate in the maintenance of the family of believers. But what if we mess it up? Two things to remember: (1) Jesus already paid our collective debts to justice, so there is no penalty left to pay, and (2) God provides, in real time, while we are stumbling through our Christian lives, the indwelling Spirit who, among other things, is responsible for installing selflessness in our characters and for granting each of us the ability to overcome ourselves, not to mention peace, joy, kindness, patience, self-control, wisdom, and understanding. The Spirit does not do it all at once, but in stages. We call it growth. It's a process. If we truly trust God, we are joyful about how far we have come, not depressed over the many situations in which we performed poorly. We have the unquenchable optimism that the better version of me is just a wake-up away, because He who promised is faithful.