



BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

How I came to
believe in Jesus
Christ as Lord and
Saviour

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1. My photo shows me less than a year old. Near to where my life began. This story, though, is about how I began a new, spiritual life.

When I was 15 years old, I wondered a lot about why?

Why am I me?

Why am I English?

Why do I have ginger hair?

... And a lot more besides.

Growing up can be hard. So many changes go on in your body and mind. So many people want to control what you do, say and think! So, the best thing to do is be a rebel! Be awkward, sulky, act thick! Anything to avoid letting "adults" know that they might have a point! I did all that!

You might ask me, "How did you become a Christian, then?"

Well, I started asking questions about life, the universe and everything! My parents were not church-goers but did live up to some religious standards. I didn't ask my parents for answers, I asked my schoolfriends. We would talk about reincarnation and other "spiritual" stuff. This because our science lessons only posed more questions than they answered. I attended a Grammar School, so was supposed to be "clever". Instead, looking back, I was rather stupid! I did and said a lot of things I regret now. But in it all I remained stirred by the stars in the night sky and the beauty of things around me. At the same time, I lived in a kind of fear about where the world was heading. The threat of a nuclear war seemed to crop up regularly. I even had some horrible nightmares about that.



So, what happened?

In the Fourth Form (year 10) a classmate asked me to come to his church youth club. Before this he had got me a paper round (I needed to earn some money). We were both quite good at Art and Crafts and he was making wooden toys in his Dad's garage. I started to help him. Lots of good equipment. His family

were quite well off (at least compared with mine). Then I thought I would go along to his church Youth Group.

A few shocks - no girls! Just a boy's club called "Covenanters". There was table tennis and a billiard table. It was OK. The leaders were different to what I expected. They did not try to control me and were willing to listen and try to answer my questions. I ended up attending the Sunday morning Bible Class and discovered that there were some pretty girls in a Girl's Class! The leader of the Bible Class offered to answer my questions if I came to the Sunday group. My first challenge was, "Who created God?" I had quite a few of these difficult questions up my sleeve.



I can't remember if my questions were answered so that I was convinced. What did happen was that I met with adults and young people who really believed in Jesus! They actually believed what was in the Bible! More than that - they were different. They had some kind of presence that made them kinder, more patient, and they seemed to have time for me! There was something else. Whatever I understood the word "God" to mean, I was experiencing something in my life that was new. I felt uncomfortable about my behaviour and felt drawn to the Man in the Bible called Jesus.

Now, I can see that God's Spirit was involved in my life, helping me towards knowing Him. Things happened to me, little things that are hard to explain but had an impact on me. I am sure, now, that most people have experiences like mine, that are, in fact, God at work helping us to believe.



What happened next?

I found myself getting deeper into what was being taught in the Bible Class. There was this strange feeling that Someone was calling me, speaking to me, challenging me.

Although I got up to all kinds of bad stuff, I was still searching for something better. Perhaps that's it? The search? The desire to know Truth. How could I know what was true among the lies? So, I made friends at the church and got involved but did not make further steps in believing in God or anything like that. The people seemed happy to let me work things out for myself and did not press me or force me into anything until one evening in June 1960.

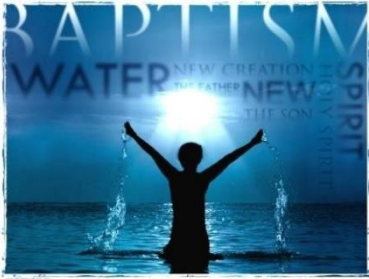
My friend and I were walking over to the cricket pitch in our local park. We were to meet some other lads there for a game. We bumped into a man who belonged to the church. I'd seen him around. He stopped us for a chat and then, out of the blue, he said to me, "Isn't it about time you were baptised?" Well, that hit me as though Jesus had turned up and spoken to me! I told my friend I was going home. He must have wondered what was up. It was a light, sunny evening. Darkness would not fall until 10pm or so. And I was going home!

I went to my bedroom, which I shared with my little brother (he was only 9 then). He was still out playing so I had the room to myself. I got on my knees and talked with God. It was as though all the things I had learned about the "Gospel" flooded in to my mind. There I was, saying sorry for the bad stuff in my life and asking Jesus to come in. It was all very real and there was some kind of experience that involved feelings and light and knowledge of Someone who had been looking for me.



So, was that it?

That was the beginning. I don't remember what I did next. I probably went to bed! Later, I told the Covenanter leader what happened. My friend told me that is what you are meant to do. I do remember that my mouth was under a discipline from somewhere. I stopped swearing! I do remember that the Bible became an open book. I even went to the Christian Book Shop and bought a Bible! I remember reading the Gospels first and weeping as I read that Jesus was willing to touch and heal a man with leprosy. Things progressed and I got more involved in church.



Perhaps I should mention that my appearance was rather different to the other young people. I had long sideburns and lots of hair. I wore a leather jacket and was given a second-hand motorbike that summer. This was because my Grandfather had died and left me some of his money - it wasn't much and the motorbike wasn't much either! None of this

seemed to matter to the church people. A year or so later I was baptised. There were other boys that followed me in this. Baptism is how we show that we have believed in Jesus and started a new life.

From my baptism a spiritual journey began. I saw the commands of God as relevant – and needed His help to be holy, to be filled with the Spirit and to serve Him. It was a rocky road through girlfriends, love, finding what God wanted me to do, getting married, becoming an Art teacher and so on and on. All that is another story.

What did you know when you believed?



When I was about 18, I attended a Billy Graham meeting. A local church broadcast the meeting which was held in Scotland somewhere. I was in North London! The challenge of the preaching was to make a commitment to Jesus. Not merely believing but serving. Billy Graham challenged people

who were already "saved" to come out and show that they believed. God's Spirit seemed to be urging me to do this so I walked out to the front. I was asked to wait after the meeting and talk with one of the "counsellors". While waiting, the same man who had challenged me in the park two years before, came by and said to me, "Well, what do you know?" I puzzled over this and, when I next met him, asked him what he meant. He showed me the first letter by John (the apostle).

This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Dear friends, if our hearts

*do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And **this is how we know** that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us. 1 John 3:19-24*

Well, that really helped me to understand what God had done in me. There were lots of things I needed to learn about the Gospel (Good News) of God. It was not knowing everything that brought me to Jesus Christ; it was knowing that God was calling me to repent and believe in Him through Jesus. It is one thing to know the Bible and its teaching: it is another thing to know the One that the teachings are about. If we believe in Jesus,



we start a journey of getting to know Him and the Truth about Him. We should also be working out how to live for Him while we are growing in our faith.

The apostle Peter wrote:

... grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. 2Peter 3:18

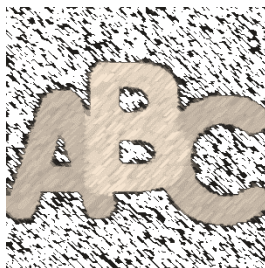
Being a Christian is wrapped up in a relationship with God the Father through His Son Jesus. God enables this through the work of His Spirit in us. The apostle John puts it like this:

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 1John 1:3

Fellowship means relationship in a community. We are not saved for an individual, lonely existence. We are added to a world-wide family of people who share the same beliefs. So we ought to demonstrate this by belonging to a local company of Christians. Also, the experiences of people in the Bible give us guidance and wisdom that we can share and learn from.



- People called Jesus, "Lord" and "Rabbi"
- The woman at the well in Samaria told others, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?" No doubt, in this, she was talking about His grace to accept her and give her a new opportunity even though he knew all about her sinful life.
- The apostle Peter recognised who Jesus was (is):
- *Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:16*



These responses come from a changed attitude and understanding that the Holy Spirit brings to people who are looking for answers and turn towards God. Good things, like studying

Greek, or keeping rules, cannot achieve this. First, we need to follow a simple process, like a child ...

A - accept the truth of the Bible, especially what it says about our need of forgiveness.

B - believe that God will keep His word about accepting us through what Jesus did by living as a human being, dying for us and rising from the dead.

C - confess our sin and need of forgiveness and confess openly that we have done this and received God's Holy Spirit as evidence and guarantee of eternal life