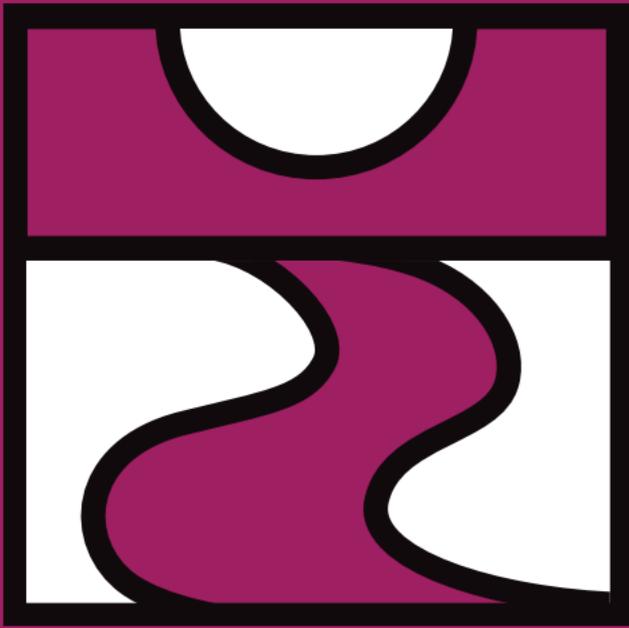


IX 9Marks

**What Should
I Do Now That
I'm a Christian?**



**Sam
Emadi**

Church Questions

Endorsements for the Church Questions Series

“Christians are pressed by very real questions. How does Scripture structure a church, order worship, organize ministry, and define biblical leadership? Those are just examples of the questions that are answered clearly, carefully, and winsomely in this new series from 9Marks. I am so thankful for this ministry and for its incredibly healthy and hopeful influence in so many faithful churches. I eagerly commend this series.”

R. Albert Mohler Jr., President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Sincere questions deserve thoughtful answers. If you’re not sure where to start in answering these questions, let this series serve as a diving board into the pool. These mini-books are winsomely to-the-point and great to read together with one friend or one hundred friends.”

Gloria Furman, author, *Missional Motherhood* and *The Pastor’s Wife*

“As a pastor, I get asked lots of questions. I’m approached by unbelievers seeking to understand the gospel, new believers unsure about next steps, and maturing believers wanting help answering questions from their Christian family, friends, neighbors, or coworkers. It’s in these moments that I wish I had a book to give them that was brief, answered their questions, and pointed them in the right direction for further study. Church Questions is a series that provides just that. Each booklet tackles one question in a biblical, brief, and practical manner. The series may be called Church Questions, but it could be called ‘Church Answers.’ I intend to pick these up by the dozens and give them away regularly. You should too.”

Juan R. Sanchez, Senior Pastor, High Pointe Baptist Church, Austin, Texas

What Should
I Do Now That
I'm a Christian?

Church Questions

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Why Should I Join a Church?, Mark Dever

What Should I Do Now That I'm a Christian?

Sam Emadi

 **CROSSWAY**[®]
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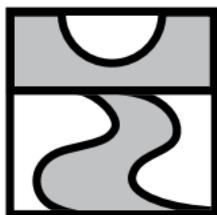
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But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9–10



Born with a painful and debilitating disability, my friend Derek spent much of his early life in constant pain and barely able to walk. In his late teens, he turned to drugs as a way of coping with the pressures of his disability and as a way of gaining influence and approval among his friends.

Derek sold and used drugs for years. Whatever money he made selling drugs, he used to buy more, and he even stole from his family to fund his addiction. And yet, amid all of this, Derek maintained that he was a good person. After all, he was loyal to his friends and didn't do what he considered "the worst" drugs.

But Derek's life unalterably changed when he began visiting church with a friend. He heard the gospel for the first time, and he realized that he was a sinner under God's just condemnation. Listening to sermon after sermon, Derek discovered that God sent his Son, Jesus, to rescue sinners from his own wrath. And one day it all clicked: Derek knew he needed forgiveness. He knew he needed what only Jesus's cross and resurrection could provide. So he repented of his sin, believed in Jesus, and committed to following Christ as his Lord.

My church is full of people with stories just like Derek's. James enslaved himself to pornography for nearly a decade until a friend invited him to church where he believed the gospel. Parker grew up in a Christian home and trusted Christ at age twelve after studying the Bible with his dad. Ann thought God loved her because she was "a good kid," until she attended a Bible conference where she realized that in light of God's holiness, her righteousness was like "a polluted garment" (Isa. 64:6). Brittany felt adrift and

purposeless in life until she became a Christian at a work Bible study.

If you're reading this book, I assume that you identify with these stories of grace. At some point—perhaps even recently—you recognized your need to be forgiven of sin and freed from sin's reign over your life. You turned to the crucified and resurrected Christ for salvation, and you desire to follow him.

But what now?

What does it *mean* to follow Jesus? What do you need to know so you can follow Jesus *for the rest of your life*?

No two Christians are exactly alike. We differ from one another in age, ethnicity, income, marital status, vocation, and a variety of other ways. Thankfully, no matter where you've been and no matter what you're doing now, the Bible gives you, me, and everyone the blueprint for how to thrive as a disciple of Jesus.

Setting Our Expectations

One of the most important parts of any journey is having the right expectations. I once set out on

a road trip that I expected to take three hours. After six hours in the car, my road rage took a turn for the worse. Of course, I'd happily taken road trips much longer than six hours in the past. But the problem this time was that I hadn't *expected* to be in the car for so long. Having the right expectations informs how we respond to our circumstances.

As we think about the Christian life, it's also important to have the right expectations. As a friend of mine often puts it, we must always remember that following Jesus is costly, but it's also worth it. Jesus himself warned that we must count the cost of being his disciple (Luke 14:25–33). Being a Christian requires denying ourselves, taking up our crosses, and following Christ—wherever he may lead (Luke 9:23). Paul warned that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Peter taught that we should “not be surprised” by the “fiery trials” we will encounter in this life (1 Pet. 4:12). The gospel promises us salvation from God's wrath and freedom from sin; it doesn't ever promise an easy life.

In this life we'll continue to sin, we'll stumble, and we'll fall. Often unintentionally, we'll hurt those we love. Even as we see victory over sin and growth in personal holiness, our lives will be characterized by repentance—a constant turning from sin to the grace of God found in Jesus Christ. Following Jesus is costly.

But following Jesus is also worth it. Yes, the cost of discipleship is high, but those costs pale in comparison to the joy of knowing God and being forgiven of all our sins. Paul said, “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison” (2 Cor. 4:17). As we follow Christ, we should expect to grow in holiness. We should expect God's grace to make us more like Jesus (Rom. 8:28–29; Gal. 5:16–17). We'll face trials, sin, and temptation, but we'll also learn to confess to God and say along with the psalmist: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11).

What Should I Do Now That I'm a Christian?

With that foundation in place, let's lay out some specific things you should do now that you're a Christian. No matter your circumstances, this roadmap will help you thrive as a disciple of Jesus. These spiritually healthy practices aren't what make you (or keep you) a Christian, but they are practices that God has given us to help us grow in following our Lord with joy.

1) Get Baptized

If you've recently become a Christian, the first thing you should do is get baptized. Why? Because baptism is how Jesus commanded Christians to publicly profess their faith in him. When Jesus commissioned the church to make disciples, he told them to mark out those disciples with the act of baptism (Matt. 28:19). Jesus's instructions are quite clear: believe the gospel; get baptized.

The book of Acts gives us many examples of people coming to faith in Jesus and then publicly

declaring that faith in baptism. Consider this account in Acts 2. We'll pick up the story just after Peter finished preaching an evangelistic sermon to a crowd of unbelievers.

Now when [the crowd] heard [Peter's sermon] they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" 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. . . . So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:37-38, 41)

"Repent and be baptized." In Scripture, the latter always follows the former.

When we repent of our sins, we turn to Christ and give him control over our lives. He calls the shots and sets the agenda. We submit to his instructions and follow him as Lord. Baptism manifests this commitment. When we're

baptized, we make a public profession of our faith in Christ. We're saying to the world, "I belong to Jesus." As a friend of mine says, when we're baptized, we put on the "Team Jesus" jersey.¹ We belong to him.

Additionally, baptism symbolizes your new life in Christ. Going under the water depicts your dying with Christ. Emerging from the water depicts your resurrection from spiritual death, your new life in Christ (Rom. 6:3–4; Col. 2:11–12).

Finally, baptism is how a church affirms your profession of faith and receives you into membership. We'll think more about the importance of the local church in the following sections. For now, let's simply notice that Jesus gave the ordinance of baptism to the church (Matt. 28:18–20). The Bible records that the early church brought people into membership by baptizing them after they'd shown evidence of genuine repentance (Acts 2:41). When we follow Christ in baptism, we're declaring our allegiance to Jesus, and at the same time the church is affirming that our allegiance is

genuine—giving their stamp of approval to our understanding of the gospel.

What should you do now that you're a Christian? Find a faithful, gospel-preaching, Bible-loving church—and pursue baptism.

2) Join a Local Church

In Christ, God has forgiven us of our sins and received us as sons and daughters. He's not only acquitted us in his courtroom, he's invited us to his family dinner table. Through Christ, we know God as our Father—we have a personal relationship with God.

But we shouldn't confuse a *personal* relationship with a *private* relationship. Yes, through Christ we know God personally, but God never intended for us to follow him on our own, privately, as lone ranger Christians. God saves us *into* a community, and he designed our relationship with him to include fellow brothers and sisters who are walking the same path of obedience. Being reconciled to God means being reconciled to his people (Eph. 2:11–12; 1 Pet. 2:10).

The New Testament is filled with “one another” passages precisely because God intends for us to be in community with other Christians. Consider how frequently Scripture commands us to serve and love other believers.

- A new commandment I give to you, that you love *one another*: just as I have loved you, you also are to love *one another*. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for *one another*. (John 13:34–35)
- Love *one another* with brotherly affection. Outdo *one another* in showing honor. . . . Live in harmony with *one another*. (Rom. 12:10, 16)
- Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve *one another*. (Gal. 5:13)
- Be kind to *one another*, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph. 4:32)
- Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with *one another* and, if one has a complaint against

another, forgiving *each other*; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing *one another* in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:12–13, 16)

- Therefore encourage *one another* and build *one another* up, just as you are doing. (1 Thess. 5:11)
- And let us consider how to stir up *one another* to love and good works. (Heb. 10:24)

That's only a fraction of Scripture's "one another" passages.

The Christian life isn't a call to isolated devotion, like a monk in a cave. Instead, the heart of Christian obedience is a life of love for other believers in a local church fueled by faith in Christ—or as Paul writes, "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6).

By joining a church, you commit yourself to doing the type of "one another" work mentioned in the list above. By joining a church,

you're essentially saying, "I want to follow Jesus's commands, and I'm committing to do that with *these* people."

It's quite easy to get excited about the *idea* of loving and serving others, but *actually* loving others is something altogether more challenging. After all, our brothers and sisters in Christ, like you and I, are sinners. They will step on our toes. They will hurt us, intentionally and unintentionally. Fellow church members will frustrate us, even wound us—and we will do the same to them.

Nevertheless, the Bible doesn't qualify its commands: "Love your neighbor . . . when it's easy." No, Scripture continually points us back to the local church as the place where we can grow into Christlikeness. In a local church, we learn to forgive others (Eph. 4:32), to carry others' burdens (Gal. 6:2), and to bear with one another in love (Eph. 4:2). As we obey Christ's command to love others as he has loved us, the local church showcases to the world the love of Christ and the glory of the gospel (John 13:34–35).

When you became a Christian, you recognized your need to be forgiven of sin and freed from sin's reign over your life. As a result, your life has been changed forever—you are now a follower of Jesus. But what does the Bible say it means to follow Jesus? Sam Emadi offers eight simple steps you should take once you become a Christian, as you set out in newness of life to thrive as a disciple of Jesus.

Church Questions is a series that seeks to provide ordinary Christians with sound and accessible biblical teaching by answering common questions they have about church life. Each volume offers biblical answers and practical applications with the goal of nurturing healthy church practice and commitment.

Sam Emadi (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as senior editor at 9Marks, where he writes, edits, and manages special publishing projects.

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