

How to Become a Christian: A Letter to Teenagers in Good Churches

Bryan Elliff

To teenagers in good churches,

I want to tell you how to become a Christian.



Like you, I grew up in churches. Not just churches, but *good* churches. There was real Bible study, real community, real thoughtfulness. I also grew up in a Christian family. Not just a Christian family, but a *good* Christian family. My dad was, in fact, a pastor and itinerant teacher. He and my mom were very diligent to raise me well and to teach me about Jesus. On top of that, I was homeschooled.

As I grew older, I ran into a problem. I wanted to become a Christian.

The problem was that I couldn't figure out *how* to become a Christian. Yes, I knew that you had to repent and believe, that the Holy Spirit had to work in you to give you new life, and that you couldn't just pray a prayer to "get saved." But when it came down to the actual logistics of the thing, I was in a bit of a fog. How could I get the Holy Spirit to come work in me? What would it look like for me to decisively repent? I mean, I wasn't doing drugs or even disobeying my parents, at least in big ways. And how could I know that I had "believed" with a genuine faith?

There were many times when I would pray, "Lord, make me a Christian." But, every time, I was never really sure that the transaction had gone through. I wished that I could get some sort of automated email from heaven that would read, "Congratulations, you have officially become a Christian."

The email never came. Thankfully, through a longer process, I did become a Christian. But as I've gone on in my Christian life, I've realized that my problem is one that is common among those of you who are growing up like I did. So, from one raised-in-a-good-church kid to another, here are my thoughts on how to become a Christian.

First, it's simpler than you think. Really, it begins with a decision. It's a decision to follow Jesus. So let's think about how that looks like practically. Let's say that you already have a desire to follow him. So, one day you wake up and say, "Well, I have this desire to follow Jesus, so, you know what, I'm going to!" There you go. The decision could look something like that.

Be careful here. Deciding to get on board with Jesus is a simple decision, but it's also a major decision, with some crazy implications. If you're going to do it, you can't do it halfway. It's all or nothing.

For one, you're going to have to accept, and even like, who he is. He's the Lord, the ruler of everything (Acts 2:34-36). He has the authority to call the shots, he has the power to do what he wants, he has the position to judge people who are alive and people who are dead. But remember that his is a *good* reign. Where he rules, there is love. Where he rules, there is justice. Where he rules, there is peace and happiness.

You're also going to have to start seeking to live out the things that he taught. One of the first things that Jesus said when he came into the world was "repent" (see Matthew 4:17). It means that you should decide to stop doing bad things. Change your mind, stop doing them, and do what is good and right instead. That's what repentance is.

He taught many other things about how to live, such as the importance of love. You should love people, he said, with everything you've got, even people who don't love you back (Matthew 5:43-48). You should seek humility, putting other people above yourself (Luke 14:7-11). You should pursue a righteousness that comes out of your heart. That is, don't be a hypocrite (Matthew 6:1-6). There are many other exciting and challenging teachings.

You won't do these things perfectly, but as you're on the journey, you'll find forgiveness and the help of the Holy Spirit to grow in ways you never would have thought.

Finally, if you decide to follow Jesus, you can expect to go where he did. He experienced death. You'll find that there is much death in following him—death as you let go of sin, death as you are persecuted, and death as you experience the trials and sadness of this life. He himself said that those who would follow him must pick up a cross like his every day (Matthew 16:24).

But it is a *good* death and here's why. Through death comes resurrection. Here we find the soaring hope of Christianity. Jesus came back to life. He was the first one to be lifted out of the decay of this world and be created new. And he, as Lord of everything, has poured out the power of this resurrection into the world so that we can stop doing what is bad and follow him with love and humility (Ephesians 1 and 2). Above all, he has given us hope that one day, he will pour out this power without measure in order to create a brand new world without sin or death (Acts 3:21, 2 Peter 3:13). And if we follow him, we will be resurrected to life in that new world.

So if you would like to become a Christian, just become one! Count the cost, enjoy the journey, and expect a bright, never-ending future.