

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The new Christian is faced with many challenges immediately after they come to Christ. They need to learn a whole new way of living and thinking. They are faced with new priorities, new friends, new values and a new reality. Much care and nurture is required for the new Christian to mature and become healthy. They also need much assurance of God's love and forgiveness.

Renewing the Mind

One of the main goals is to get the new Christian reading their Bible. The Word of God is powerful and is necessary for the renewal of the mind (*Romans 12: 1-4*). God's ways are not like our ways (*Is 55:8*) and there is much learning for the new Christian to absorb. But it is more than just reading scripture; they need solid teaching and instruction. Initially they are only able to drink milk (*I Cor 3:2*) being unable to handle solid food (much like a nursing infant); eventually they need to graduate to the "meat" of the Word.

You must also remember the enemy, Satan, wants to bring doubt, confusion and promote unbelief in the new Christian. Satan will plant seeds of doubt about everything they have heard, make them question their salvation and even wonder if God truly loves them. Don't be surprised if you see the new Christian become discouraged. Satan is the master at dumping guilt, bringing up the past and piling on condemnation. New believers need a great deal of encouragement. They will stumble, they will fall, they will be inconsistent but that does not disqualify them from God's redemption, love and forgiveness. It is the Word of God that brings the sword of truth against the lies of the evil one.

Much Healing

All of us have been wounded, bruised, hurt and broken by sin. Many new Christians are deeply aware of their past and can feel extremely unworthy of God's love. Some have been through a divorce, have been in jail, and have had abortions while others struggle with addictions; many have been immoral and have had moral and ethical failures. In many cases, the pain originated at home with abuse, dysfunction, abandonment and poverty.

Basically every new Christian needs healing from God for their heart, their emotions and their body. New Christians need to know the healing power of God to forgive themselves, to forgive others, to forgive even God. They need to release the transgressors to the Lord and invite Jesus to come into the pain of their past and bring His healing balm.

In working with the new Christian you need to be aware and sensitive to the brokenness that they bring with them. Coming to faith in Jesus for salvation is only the first step. The process of being restored in Christ is normally a much longer process.

Change Behavior

Every new Christian will be confronted with this reality. As followers of Christ we are to model our lives in conformity to His. For all new Christians this means drastic change. There are literally hundreds of scriptures that speak directly to this. We are to change our language, our attitudes, our priorities, our spending, our entertainment, our appetites and in some cases even our friends and acquaintances. For many new Christians this will be a radical departure from what was “normal” before they came to faith in Christ. In biblical terms we “die to sin” and “crucify the flesh”. And as we all know, the flesh does not like to be silenced.

Put On Christ

Simply dying to sin is only part of the challenge. We are to put on Christ and allow Him to live in us. This area has to do with our obedience to His Word and His will. Loving Jesus is ultimately reflected in behavior. It is not enough to acknowledge that He is Lord; we must train new Christians to obey His commandments. The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible. Sin is not only actions it is also the motivations of the heart. We are to radically “cut off” the sin in our lives, to turn the other cheek, to love enemies, to bless those who curse us, to seek first the Kingdom of God, to abandon self interest and become earnest followers of Christ.

Live for Eternity

The new Christian has a steep learning curve about the meaning of life and the goal of life. Before coming to faith in Jesus they were largely “temporal, carnal, and worldly” and pursuing all there is to gain in this life. Money, possessions, power, prestige, position and success all govern the unbeliever. Now the new believer learns, “you can’t take it with you.”

One of the staggering truths they must deal with is simply this: we are pilgrims on this planet and only passing through. Our real home is in heaven and we are to store up treasures in heaven. We are to work for that which never perishes. Eternity is our home and all that we do for HIM will be rewarded when we get there. Instead of being rich on earth we want to be rich in eternity. It may take some time and a great deal of patience to see the new Christian make this adjustment. Mammon is huge, seductive and very attractive. It is hard for all of us to be free of mammon’s tentacles.

New Life in the Spirit

Another major adjustment will be in the devotional life of the new believer. Most have little or no prayer life; have been weak in worship, and insensitive to the Holy Spirit. These ancient Christian disciplines need to be learned and developed if the new Christian is to grow. Learning to pray is absolutely essential for the new believer. They will need instruction on how to have a quiet time, how to hear God's voice, and how to discern the leading and direction of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit can not be minimized. The Holy Spirit is the power of God resident within the new believer to teach them the truth, convict them of sin, to guide them and teach them about the Kingdom of God. The new Christian will need much instruction in this arena to successfully live the Christian life.

The Body of Christ

The new believer now has a new family; the family of God. It is typically expressed in a community of faith called the church. As a member of the family, the new Christian has family responsibilities and expectations. Members are to worship, pray, give, minister, fellowship, study and bear witness to others. They are to contribute their time, talent and treasure to the extension of the Kingdom of God. They are to get along with others, seek peace, avoid strife, come under authority, cooperate, and do their part to make the church healthy, vibrant and attractive to the world. All new Christians need to know the expectations for the family of God and the responsibilities of being a member of the Body of Christ.

Witness to Others

Every new believer will have a story to tell. It breaks into three parts: what my life was like before I came to Christ; how I came to Christ; and what my life is like now. The ability to tell this story is called "witnessing". This is a privilege and should be a joy for all believers. New believers should be trained and encouraged to bear witness to their faith, but not just with words. Sometimes their lifestyle, their behavior and their actions speak so much louder of Jesus than their words.