

new start

Starting again with God usually begins not with a sense of God, but with a sense of need.

The first thing the Holy Spirit tells us is that *there's something missing* in our lives.

He does this to sharpen our appetites for the things that really matter.

Just as we don't want to eat until we feel hungry, so the Holy Spirit makes us *hungry* for God.

It can happen in many different ways. Perhaps, despite all our achievements and fulfilled ambitions, we still feel that we haven't *arrived* as and where we thought we would – or through personal suffering and loss as our world *falls apart*.

Many people have to feel some disappointment with life or themselves first before they will admit that they need God. Then for others there's a feeling of insignificance in a big and violent universe. Nothing they do, say or think seems to have any impression on the crazy world around them. Often (secretly) they're afraid of life and living – and more than afraid, because tied in with all this for many is the unwelcome fact that we have failed. Whatever ideals we had have either been ditched or seriously modified in the rough and tumble of everyday life. And left in their place there's a nagging sense of guilt. We know we're not what we ought to be – not even what we want to be – but there seems to be no way out.

Strange as it may seem, that's exactly the place where the Holy Spirit wants to bring us!

As long as we feel alright, that we're making it ourselves, that we don't need God to interfere in our lives, we will never realise all that Jesus Christ can do for us. But when we hit the bottom and honestly confess our spiritual poverty – that we can't live this life without help – then God can begin to do something. The Holy Spirit allows us to go behind the bars of our own anxiety, fear and guilt, so that he can let us out and set us free!

People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick.

Jesus

The trouble with our questioning and searching is that too often we look in the wrong places and ask the wrong questions: 'What am I here for?' 'How can I be happy and fulfilled in life?' 'How can I attain my ambitions?' These may seem to be the right sort of things to ask, but they miss the real issue like arrows that fly off the target. The real problem is put quite simply. God made us for himself. Like everyone, we have sinned, and our sin has cut us off from God. We need to get right with God and to live for him.

At the heart of the problem lies our sin. We have gone our own way. We have lived without God. Because of this we are guilty before God, cut off from him like friends who have argued. And there's nothing we can do about it ourselves.

This is where Jesus comes in because he wasn't only perfectly qualified to represent us as an advocate speaking on our behalf, he actually died for our sinfulness, taking the penalty on himself.

This is more than forgiveness! God is prepared to wipe the slate clean, and regard us as innocent people, even though we've made an utter mess of our lives. He's ready to give us a **new start** in life.

When that happens we are put to rights with God, and everything else begins to fall into place.

We begin to see *why we're alive and what life's all about*. We begin to get things into God's perspective, and the *threatening* world takes on its proper proportions. We begin to know just how much God loves us, and our love affair with him spills over into all our relationships with other people. Life is worth living because we know Jesus Christ.

***When anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being,
the old is gone, the new has come.
All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies
into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also.***
Paul

free – not cheap!

There's nothing – absolutely nothing – that we can do to earn or buy or deserve the new life God wants for us. Many people try to please God – but under their own steam.

Surrounded by:

**a wicked world, they attempt to keep their morals intact
an irreligious world, they spend time, energy and money on services, prayers and
rituals in the hope that God will see and accept them**

The Bible tells us that these things are all good, but they don't mend our broken relationship with God. Only he can do that. The Father has to do it all for us – and he has! We talk about God's grace, which means his love for the undeserving which can never be bought or bargained for in any human deal. We have to accept it like a vastly expensive present which we could never, ever pay for. But although his love is free, its not cheap. Jesus paid the tremendous price of suffering and death for our new life with God.

turn round!

Becoming a Christian involves many changes. As God makes us his friends, the first change we notice is a change of heart about him, and about the way we live our everyday lives. We begin to want to do the things that please him. It means facing up to the fact that sin is sin – and turning away from it. Scripture calls this inner change '**repentance**'. But its not simply an inner change – just being sorry for our failures. Real sorrow for sin leads us to break with our sins, to turn our backs on them completely.

Unfortunately we've been reared in a kind of 'can't help it' generation. We've been told that what we are is the result of our genes and our circumstances, which makes the excuse that we can't change. But God can change us. If we mean business, he gives us the grace and the strength not only to face up to our failures, but also to finish with the things he hates.

God will start to show us where our lives need changing. He may put his finger on one particular sin which has dogged us for a long time. It might be our explosive temper or mistreating people who work for us, or fiddling our tax return, or an illicit relationship, or neglecting our partners and children. This is where we begin. It's not where we will end, because a life lived for years without God is going to take some sorting out. But as God spotlights the wrong areas in our lives, he also gives us the strength and the desire to put them right.

submit!

Becoming a Christian means to give your life to Jesus. If he is going to do what he wants to do with you, he must have everything, no holds barred. Jesus is Lord - that means he's the boss now, and that your life is under new management. That's the heart of what is meant by faith.

Faith is a rather elastic word which can stand for things other than real trust in Jesus. Some people will say that they are okay 'because I have my beliefs'. But what we believe in is even more important than belief. It's important that we start to believe in Jesus. Other people are quite happy to say that they believe in God and in Christ, but they are not prepared to act on it. It stays in their heads. They believe about Jesus rather than trusting in him. The Bible hints that even the Devil believes in this way!

Real Christian believing involves nothing less than wholehearted commitment to Jesus. It involves loving him and obeying him. It involves putting him first in our lives before anything and everything else.

Becoming a Christian is not just turning over a new leaf or brushing up an old life. It's an absolutely new experience, and the New Testament authors never tire of telling us that.

brand new life

New birth.

Jesus spoke about becoming a Christian as 'new birth' We start life all over again. But God, like a good parent, doesn't abandon us. He gives us strength for this new life. Think of the potential wrapped up in that little bundle we call a baby-potential for living and growing, for breathing, feeding, moving, for feeling, thinking and loving. Everything that makes up living is already there. God gives us all that we need for the Christian life.

New creation.

God called all the detail and the beauty, all the power and resources, and the rich variety of creation into being. And he does the same sort of thing for us. The person who sent the stars on their way and put the moon in orbit - the person who built the mystery of atomic structures into the fine detail of the universe- is the one who now takes our lives in hand. He remakes, reshapes, rebuilds, recreates. He takes the original designs he had for us, and turns us into the kind of people he always had planned.

New life.

God raised Jesus from the dead, and so, too, he gives us new life. The same resurrection power comes to bear on us. We were cut off from God because of our sins. The Bible takes this situation so seriously that it describes us as being 'dead'. The Holy Spirit breathes spiritual life, health and energy into our personalities, giving us a quality of living we never knew before. In fact, we find that we've never really lived at all until we meet Jesus.

All this means that Christian living is something which only God can do for us and in us. It's nothing less than a miracle which can change ordinary, drab, purposeless human lives beyond all recognition.

so – come on in: take the plunge!

Learning how to swim is all a question of trust. You have to learn that the water will hold you up and not let you down. You might watch others swimming around, thoroughly enjoying themselves - but you're not doing it yourself. Nothing will happen until the day you get into the water and launch out. Everyone has to prove swimming for themselves.

If you're still teetering on the edge of faith, wondering whether or not Christ will do what he's promised, those of us already afloat can only say one thing 'Come on in! It's marvellous!'