

Building a Relationship with Jesus



Christopher News Notes

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

YOU’VE LIKELY SEEN THIS FAMOUS BIBLE QUOTE FROM JOHN 3:16, but to explore its depth, let’s personalize the message: *God so loved **me that He gave His only Son that I may believe in Him and not perish but have eternal life.***

The Good News is that God’s love comes to rescue us in the person of Jesus. In John 14:6, He taught, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.”

Those are pretty credible reasons for wanting a relationship with Jesus. But what truly shapes our belief is to know deep down within ourselves, not only that we believe in God, but that God believes in us. God wants us to know His love.

God Makes the First Move

God initiates our relationship. Indeed, the God of Glory has a vested interest in us. Building a relationship with Jesus means we have to trust this truth. Our belief is a response to God's revelation of Himself and His love.

The attraction of Christianity is not that we are in search of God, but that God is in search of us!

God desires to make us sons and daughters—a family! By faith we respond to Him, offering our intellect and will, our minds and hearts. This is known as “the obedience of faith.”

No matter who we are, from popes to prodigals, all are invited into a loving relationship with Jesus. But we must choose. As it states in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, “Faith is a personal act—the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals Himself.”

Steve Nelson, from Stillwater, Oklahoma, recalls a time during his graduate school years when he started to drift away from the Church. He said, “I became terribly self-centered and started down the road toward a very un-Christian life. One day, in the church parking lot, I encountered a friend of mine who was in his second year of seminary. When he challenged me on my lifestyle and absence from the Church, I remember saying something like, ‘If God exists, He should prove Himself to me.’ My friend would have none of it and told me that I had to at least meet God halfway by putting myself in the pew on Sunday morning. That was the turning point.”

Nelson soon went on to make Christ the priority in his life: “My relationship with Jesus is important because I remember what it is like not having one. [That] chance encounter in a parking lot [was] not exactly a burning bush, but it was a definite message

Ways to Build Your Relationship with Jesus

1. Attend Mass or church services every Sunday and give God your undivided attention for the duration.
2. Make an honest examination of conscience.
3. Pray through Scripture or special prayers like the Divine Mercy Chaplet.
4. Make a retreat or find a Spiritual Director.
5. Memorize the Beatitudes, or Psalm 23.
6. Discover spiritual classics like *Introduction to the Devout Life* by St. Francis de Sales, *Story of a Soul* by St. Thérèse of Lisieux, *Confessions* by St. Augustine, or *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis.
7. Do one charitable deed for the needy anonymously.
8. Practice self-denial. Fast on Fridays from meat, coffee, television, the Internet, or something similar.

by God to look towards Him rather than away.”

We are not alone in the building of this relationship. God strengthens us through grace, which is like jet fuel to launch our faith. The prayer of Jesus' apostles inspires us: “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5).

Knowing Jesus

We may know facts about Jesus from the Bible, history, or theology. Yet a relationship with Him is not about information; it's about transformation. Jesus calls us out of the darkness to bring us into His abundant mercy and light. His death and resurrection provided the graces we need to be changed—transformed that we might live in heaven.

Melanie Rigney, an Arlington, Virginia, author who wrote *Sisterhood of the Saints*, shared: “Any time I wonder about why I believe now, all I have to do is look at a crucifix. [Jesus] loves us THAT much...If He thinks we all are worth THAT, then how can we not follow Him?”

On the night before He died, Jesus prayed, “Father... This is eternal life, that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3).

Pope Benedict XVI, preaching on that prayer, described knowing Jesus in this way: “Knowledge of God becomes eternal life. Clearly ‘knowledge’ here means something more than mere factual knowledge... Knowing, in the language of sacred

Scripture, is an interior becoming one with the other. Knowing God, knowing Christ, always means loving Him, becoming, in a sense, one with Him by virtue of that knowledge and love...And so Jesus' words become a summons: let us become friends of Jesus, let us try to know Him all the more!”

Our relationship with Jesus must be one of continual interior connection. And it affects all our human connections.

Massachusetts wife, mother, and grandmother, Leila Marie Lawler, co-authored *The Little Oratory*, about prayer in families. She confesses: “Without Jesus, I make a mess of everything! My relationships with others are always fraught with my failings...Nevertheless I have peace, knowing that Jesus' goodness will make a good work of even my clumsy efforts. By temperament, I tend to be quite negative, not prone to joy! Although I love mirth, I can't help seeing the bad side of things, including myself. But knowing that God's virtue itself is imparted to me gives me peace. My comfort is knowing that in trusting the ‘today’ He has given me, accomplishing to the best of my abilities its little duties, especially for the persons in my care, I will be doing His will.”

A relationship with Jesus improves many persons' days, bringing peace and guidance. For Anne Marie Dust, from Springfield, Illinois, Jesus is on the job with her all night long. She explained, “Working as a night shift nurse in an Intensive

Care Unit, I see a lot of hard things. Too frequently I feel my own powerlessness to make a person 'all better.' My relationship with Christ helps me to take care of a patient, and then entrust them to Him, so that I can move on to the next one with a smile and full attention."

Growing Closer to Jesus

Here are a few ideas on building your relationship with Jesus:

Invite Jesus into your heart. Jesus already abides in the baptized, yet He desires to come fill us in deeper, more powerful ways. Pray in your own words, or using Scriptural phrases, such as, "Come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20), or "I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Approach confidently: "Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7).

Make a daily appointment with Jesus. Put it on your calendar. Tracy Eisner, a wife and working mother from Port Orange, Florida, says, "I nurture my relationship with Jesus by getting up early each day before the kids...It began as a Lenten devotion years ago and yielded so much fruit it's become a daily habit. I started with 15-30 minutes, now sometimes it's an hour. I read the daily readings and go through my litany of prayers."

Spend time each week with Jesus in the Eucharist. The real miracle at Mass is the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. That's why it is called Holy Communion. It's the most intimate

expression of our relationship with Jesus this side of heaven.

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. It's grace-filled silence. Melanie Rigney describes it this way: "Adoration requires my focus. It requires me to slow down and be present... to receive and listen."

Pray with Scripture. Spend time preparing for Mass by prayerfully reviewing the readings. Learn techniques for *Lectio Divina* ("divine reading") of Scripture. Or use the Divine Office to pray Morning or Evening Prayers. Lisa Hendey, author of *The Grace of Yes*, shares her experience: "To better understand Jesus' teachings, I am trying to immerse myself in the gospels daily. This involves not only reading the bible, but truly digging in to try to 'hear' what Christ taught His followers, and what He still teaches me."

Get personal with Jesus and go to confession. Be yourself when in prayer. Pour your heart out. Share your confusion or your joys. Tell Jesus what's ticking you off and what's breaking your spirit. Then let Jesus do the heavy lifting that needs to be done in you. That includes going to confession. By overcoming sin, Reconciliation's graces will help you grow in virtue.

Give generously, as unto Jesus. Perform the works of mercy within your ability. Do one every week. Serve Jesus in others. "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men" (Colossians 3:23).

Sharing faith in Jesus builds it. As Pope Francis said, "Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus." Find one example of what God has done for you that you are willing to tell. Then pray for an opportunity to share your faith story with someone when appropriate.



"It's better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

A non-profit, founded in 1945 by Father James Keller, M.M., The Christophers encourages people to change the world for the better. Donations are tax-deductible. News Notes are published 10 times a year. Single copies are free.

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Christopher News Note 577

ISBN: 8755-69601

"God wants to be involved in everything we do. He wants us to fellowship with Him, which means communicating with Him throughout our day just like we do with someone who's our close friend or family member." —Joyce Meyer