



I WANT  
TO *Believe,*  
BUT...

ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS ON  
**Family traditions, Christian behaviour**

# I WANT TO BELIEVE, *BUT...*

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ANSWERING YOUR  
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**Family traditions,  
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**A**fter hearing the gospel and talking about it with some Christian friends, Michael is willing to believe that God sent his son Jesus to die for mankind's sins, and that people can be forgiven if they turn to Jesus. He has even started going to church every Sunday to learn more about being a Christian. Nevertheless, he has yet to make the decision to follow Jesus. He has no personal objections to Christianity . . . but his parents do.

As followers of traditional religions, they feel that if Michael were to become a Christian, he would be abandoning their culture for a "Western" faith. As their eldest son, he has the duty of carrying on the family tradition, which includes performing rites and practices that they consider an integral part of their culture and community. Michael fears that if he were to acknowledge Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, he

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would divide his family and disrupt its harmony. His parents would be most upset, and might even disown him as their son for being unfilial and ungrateful. “You would be a traitor to our race and culture,” they had once said.

These words keep ringing in Michael’s mind every time he attends a church service. How could he do that to his parents? How could he break their hearts by becoming a Christian?

Huijie, like Michael, has concerns of her own. She

too is ready to accept that God is the Creator, and that Jesus is his son. But she is highly sceptical about Christianity as a faith. If God is a good God, as she has been told, then why aren’t Christians good? Some of Huijie’s Christian colleagues, it would seem, are the worst people she has ever worked with. How can they profess to follow Jesus when they behave so badly? “I just can’t see any value in becoming a Christian,” she tells her friends. “Aren’t Christians supposed to be better people? What does their hypocrisy say about their beliefs?”

**Have these questions and doubts stopped you from making the decision to follow Jesus?** Like Michael and Huijie, many people have asked these same questions, and they are perfectly justified in doing so. Dealing with opposition from your family is a very real challenge, especially in many parts of Asia, and so is trying to make sense of the doubts and questions you or your family may have about Christianity. We’re glad that these issues have not stopped you from considering becoming a Christian, and we urge you to keep asking such questions.

In this booklet, we would like to address some of these questions and practical concerns about becoming a Christian. You may not agree with all our answers and explanations, but we hope that we can offer you an alternative perspective to consider as you continue to reflect on the issue.

# DEALING WITH DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

## 1. DO I HAVE TO GIVE UP MY CULTURE AND TRADITIONS WHEN I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

**Becoming a Christian involves giving up our “former” lives of disobedience to God.** It means turning away from sinful behaviour and seeking to live according to God’s standards. But many people fear that they will also have to abandon their culture and traditions. Would my “former” life, they ask, include all the values, practices, and ways of life that I have been brought up to respect and follow? Does it mean I cannot celebrate traditional holidays and follow cultural observances that my family does?

This is a big challenge in some cultures and nations. When our practices and ways of life seem to differ from the “Christian” ones seen in Western society, we, like Michael, may feel pressured to forgo our ethnic or cultural heritage when we want to become a Christian.

This, however, is not a choice that God is asking us to make. Following Jesus does not mean turning our backs on our ethnic and cultural heritage. After all, it was God himself who created all the different races and ethnicities, and gave us unique communities and cultures. In fact, we are encouraged to appreciate, honour, and respect our own culture and traditions, as this will show our families that becoming a Christian does not separate us from them.

▶ **FOLLOWING JESUS DOES NOT MEAN TURNING OUR BACKS ON OUR ETHNIC AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.**



## 2. CAN I CONTINUE WITH ALL THE TRADITIONS THAT I HAVE BEEN BROUGHT UP WITH?

While God is not asking you to choose between him and your own culture and traditions, some aspects of what you used to believe in and pursue may involve issues of faith and belief. Some of the practices and rituals you used to follow may involve the worship of other gods or contradict God's desires. As you grow closer to God, you will need to identify and discontinue those practices and rituals that contradict God's commands to follow and obey him. This is not easy, of course. It will require deep study of the Bible and much prayer to God for wisdom in order to determine which traditions are appropriate to continue, and which are not. We need to look to the Bible for answers—and not to any culture, Eastern or Western.

## 3. ISN'T CHRISTIANITY A "WESTERN" FAITH?

While many Christian "traditions" appear to originate from Western societies, it might help to remember that Christianity came from the Middle East! The Bible was written in the Middle East, and Jesus himself was born and raised in this region. Christianity has come to be more closely associated with the West only because it flourished in Europe later.

▶ LOOK TO THE BIBLE FOR ANSWERS—NOT ANY CULTURE.



#### 4. WHAT IF MY FAMILY DISAPPROVES OF ME BECOMING A CHRISTIAN?

**While your decision to follow Jesus Christ is a personal one,** your family can have a major influence on your life and growth as a Christian. They may object to your new faith because they do not want you to break family, cultural, and religious traditions, or are concerned that your decision will affect your family's unity and harmony.

How can you deal with such objections? One way is to show them that becoming a Christian doesn't mean rejecting your cultural heritage, and that you can still respect and observe traditions that do not conflict with your Christian faith. Where possible, you can clear up any misconceptions or misunderstandings they may have about Christianity. Another way is to show them that God is changing you for the better, and that your new faith is teaching you to love and care for your family members in a deeper way. If you live in accordance with God's ways, your actions, words, and attitude can help reassure your family and change their perception of Christianity.

God understands the challenges that you face. If you find it hard to share your decision to become a Christian with your

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family right now, pray to God for wisdom and guidance. Ask him to show you the right time to let your family know, and how to do this in a sensitive, respectful manner. You can also seek advice from fellow believers, and ask them to support you in prayer.

## 5. WHY DO SOME CHRISTIANS BEHAVE SO BADLY?

**Like Huijie, you might ask:** If becoming a Christian is supposed to make people better, then why do some Christians behave so badly? What does it say about the Christian faith? Your family's objections may have even arisen from previous bad experiences with Christians.

Perhaps you can look at the matter this way. While the term "Christian" is often used as an official label, it really is a description of someone who follows God and who seeks to obey him and become like his son Jesus in behaviour and character. God knows who his true followers are.

When a person becomes a Christian, it doesn't mean that he or she will suddenly stop sinning. Even after turning to God, we won't reach perfection immediately. As long as we live in a world affected by sin, we will still be tempted to do wrong, and we will still stumble and make mistakes throughout our lives. While we are saved from the consequences of sin (separation from God) and its power over us, we will still suffer from its presence in our lives. That's why you will sometimes see Christians behaving badly.



However, you can rest assured that God is working in each of us to make us more like his son Jesus in character and behaviour. We are all “works in progress”. Over time, as we follow Jesus obediently, we will learn to please God with our words, actions, and attitudes.

Also, you might want to consider this: it can be hard to assess people’s behaviour without knowing more about what is going on in their lives. We don’t know what they have gone through or are currently facing, and what effect it has on their behaviour. Or perhaps they have already changed significantly, compared with before. That’s why the Bible reminds us to focus on our own journey of faith, and not to measure others by our own standards.

And you can take comfort in the fact that the presence of imperfect Christians doesn’t mean that God is powerless to change them. There are many positive examples of people who have mended their ways after turning to God. It shows that God is at work in all believers. It’s a lifelong process.

A narrow wooden suspension bridge with a single plank path leading into a dense forest. The bridge is made of light-colored wooden planks and is suspended by dark ropes. The path is surrounded by lush green trees and foliage, creating a sense of being deep in a forest. The bridge appears to be a narrow, single-lane path, possibly for a small boat or a person walking.

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## SEEKING GOD'S HELP

**To be sure, some of the issues we have talked about above are difficult to resolve.** Your own situation may be even more challenging than Michael's, or your scepticism stronger than Huijie's. Don't be disheartened, God understands. He rejoices to see people turning to him. If you keep seeking God, he is more than ready to give you the wisdom and guidance to deal with these issues in time. Indeed, some of these issues can take a while to sort out.

However, you may find that not all of your questions and doubts need to be resolved before you take the wonderful step of accepting Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. It's perfectly okay to come to God still asking questions; he understands your struggles, doubts, and questions, and will be delighted by your step of faith. When we accept Jesus, God will send his Spirit to live in our hearts and guide us on our journey of faith. "I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you," he tells us, "... the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:18, 26).

If you feel touched or moved by what you have heard about Jesus, why not pray to him? Talk to God and ask him to reveal the truth to you. You can also talk to a believer who can help you think through some of these issues. God will respond because he loves you; he wants you to know him so that you can receive his gift of salvation, which he offers to us through Jesus.





▶ **IF YOU FEEL  
READY TO  
FOLLOW  
JESUS, WE  
ENCOURAGE  
YOU TO MAKE  
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RIGHT NOW!**

## MAKING A DECISION

If you feel ready to follow Jesus, you can make the decision right now! Tell God personally that you believe in his son Jesus, that he died for you on the cross and rose to life, and that you are ready to accept him as your Lord and Saviour. God is always listening, so all you have to do is to speak to him as if he was in front of you. If possible, find a Christian friend to pray with you and be a witness.

Here's a quick recap of the basic truths of the gospel. Becoming a Christian means accepting and believing the following things:

- God created us to have a **loving relationship with him**.
- But all of us have **turned against him** by living life according to our own standards and rejecting his authority.
- This makes us **sinful**, for which the penalty is **death**.
- But God provided a **way out** for us by sending **his son, Jesus Christ, to die for us**.

- Jesus died, but **rose to life** three days later, showing that God accepted his sacrifice on our behalf.
- **This is God's gift of salvation**—we don't deserve his forgiveness, nor can we earn it by any means; it is only through his grace that we can be forgiven and saved.

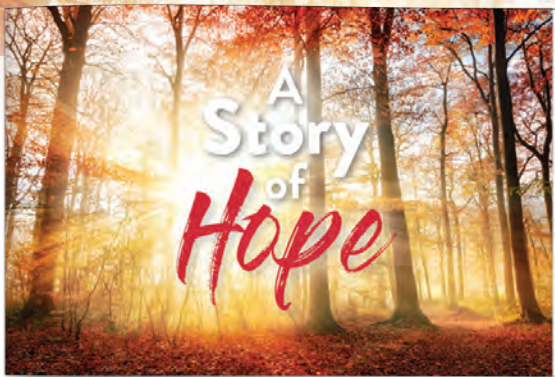
You will find what is commonly called the “Sinner’s Prayer” below, which takes you through the main points. The words are only a guide; what is important is the sincerity of your prayer, for that is all that matters to God.

*God, I know I have sinned against you. I believe that Jesus is your Son, that he died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sins, and that he rose from the dead as proof. Now I accept your offer of full forgiveness and eternal life. I accept Jesus as your gift for my salvation.*

If you want to find out more, we have materials that you might find useful.

Use the attached form to request more resources, or go to

**[www.ourdailybread.org/locations](http://www.ourdailybread.org/locations)**



**Do you want to find out more about Jesus?** *A Story of Hope* is a booklet that can tell you more about who Jesus is and what He has done and will do for you.



**Scan the QR Code** to read it online, or contact us if you would like to receive a print copy.

We invite you to also check out **odb.org** to view our other printed and digital resources.