

4. I need to change course: God's direction, not mine



This is a decision to trust God. The Bible word for this is "faith" – but it's not "blind faith". It's a decision made when you reach the place where the weight of the evidence leads you to accept the offer of new life in Jesus.

Part of the evidence may be rational, and part may be in your feelings – but it's a serious and life-changing decision. For many people, looking carefully at the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus confirms that He was (and is) who He claimed to be.



BUT

- you don't have to promise to be perfect from now on – simply to do your best (with the help that God will give) to live His way.



- nor do you have to have deep emotional feelings of regret. While for many people the decision is emotional; and we may well regret the mistakes of the past; we're all different!



- you don't have to make your decision publicly after an "appeal" – but it often helps to tell a trusted Christian friend afterwards, if this was a private moment.

What next?



Sometimes people ask what they have to do after they've made a decision to follow Jesus. It's not really like that – when your relationship with God is healed, He will help you to re-shape your life in the ways that are most helpful for you. As He does this, you'll probably find that there are things that you want to do:

- God gives followers of Jesus His Holy Spirit to live in them. If you're unsure of what to do, ask Him (the Holy Spirit) – if you're unsure how to "hear" when He speaks to you, ask Christian friends to guide you.



- the story of everything that God has done for us is in the Bible. Reading this (in a modern version) can be a great help and encouragement. Start with the "Gospels" – the stories about Jesus by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.



- the first followers of Jesus "went public" by being baptised. Ask your Christian friends to help you to explore this.

- following Jesus is hard to do "solo". If you're not already part of a local church, find one where you feel at home.

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What do I have to believe to be a follower of Jesus?



If you're intrigued by spiritual questions, you may have had discussions with Christian friends who – with the best of intentions – tell you all sorts of "extra" things that you must accept to be a follower of Jesus. Here are some thoughts to help you sort out what is essential, and what is optional – as you weigh the evidence for God, and for deciding to be a follower of Jesus.



1. There is a God, who loves me



We know about the nature and



character of God from Jesus, who shows us God's heart living in human form; and from the Holy Spirit, who speaks to our inner being or conscience. The main

source for this is the Bible (which, we'll see, may be understood in a range of ways); but we also learn from Christians around us, and their stories of how God has helped them.

BUT

- You don't have to believe that the Bible is literally true. There is a whole range of ways in which Christians hold the Bible to be reliable - but perhaps with truth sometimes being expressed poetically, or needing unpacking because of its context.



- You don't have to reject science – many scientists are believers – so you can follow Jesus, and also accept what science tells us about the origins of the universe or evolution.



- You don't have to understand all about the Trinity, or have perfect answers to questions like the problem of suffering. These may often be more helpfully explored from within faith.



2. I've been off course following my direction, not God's



The choices I've made haven't been what is God's best for me. I feel that I could be so much more than I've achieved – but I've also proved that I can't make the changes I need to make on my own.



(You may have heard Christians talk about "sin" – that simply means falling short of God's hopes and purposes for us. The tricky thing is this – sometimes we've chosen to do what we know is wrong ...)



God your Father loves you as you are, but wants better for you!

BUT

- this doesn't mean you're wholly bad – you can feel proud of good things you've achieved.
- if you choose to follow Jesus, you may well feel regret for the poor choices in the past, and want to tell God you're sorry – but this will come from your heart, not from reading a script.
- God loves you – He's not an angry judge, but the perfect Father. The Bible pictures God as waiting with open arms for those who admit their mistakes to come home¹.



3. God took the initiative in the death and resurrection of Jesus, to rescue me



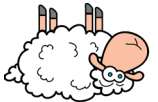
At the heart of it all is the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's hard to understand exactly how it "works" – but the "Good News" Christians love to talk about is that the death and resurrection of Jesus is the way God has chosen to help us back into His family.



We don't have to be "good enough" to be able to reach Him – He reaches to us in the middle of our mess, and helps us.

BUT

- understanding the beauty of what God has done for us in Jesus does not mean we have to take literally the Bible pictures of this (sacrifice, victory, Jesus taking our place). It's more important to grasp what God has done than to be able to explain it.
- although the Bible tells us that Jesus died "in our place", this doesn't mean that you have to think that your wrongs deserved the death penalty – so that God had to execute someone or something.
- nor do you have to think that God has to punish sin, but that Jesus offered God another way out. In fact, this idea creates problems – because God and Jesus both want the same for us.



¹ In Luke's record of Jesus, chapter 15, verse 11