

## What does it mean to be a Christian?

You might hear lots of different answers to such a question. You might hear from some people that it means “accepting Jesus Christ as your lord and saviour.” You might hear from others that it means going to church regularly and really working hard to be a good person. You might hear from even others that it means believing a certain set of statements, like “Jesus died for your sins”.

You might hear all sorts of answers to this question, many of which describe a state of being, or name a particular group of beliefs about things like God and Jesus, heaven and hell, sin and salvation, among others. Too often these kinds of answers are about taking a certain position on things. They understand being a Christian as a fixed thing – a noun.

My own answer to such a question is that being a Christian is more a verb than a noun. It’s less about a state of being than it is about a way of living. “Being a Christian”, then, is an unfortunate turn of phrase that might better be stated as, “Living as a Christian”. However, I’ll continue using the phrase because it’s what we hear in conversation.

Being a Christian means actually following the model of living a human life that we know from Jesus in his own life and ministry. If the “Christ” in Christian is to have any impact, we need to take seriously the challenges and the unsettling and upsetting vision for life that Jesus portrays. Being a Christian means taking seriously and deeply-to-heart the task of being a disciple – a learner – of his ways.

If being a Christian means modelling our lives on that of Jesus, then our actions need to show the qualities that his actions show. Such qualities include: a loving welcome to any and all (even those who are hard to love), radical openness to everyone just as they are, resistance and challenge to anything that places some in power over others, solidarity with the least powerful people around us, celebration of all that builds life and wellness, and sureness that God’s vision for creation includes us – and all people – as both blessed and blessing.

I could continue to name and describe in ever-greater detail those qualities of living that I see in the way of Jesus, but what I’ve just listed is a pretty good start. It gives each of us much that we might use for a lifetime of maturing in discipleship. The point is not to overwhelm ourselves with a goal of perfection we can never achieve, but to create for ourselves a sense of direction and purpose that will help with the myriad of day-to-day decisions – big and small – that we each face.

I haven’t mentioned anything about religion here. I haven’t named anything about church or faith or that sort of thing. Those are left off my list of the qualities of a life of discipleship because they are not really qualities of a Christian life, but rather are supports to such a life. They feed the life of a disciple, so they are indeed important. However, for most of us they’re not primarily results of, or products of, that way of living.

In the end, being a Christian is mostly about doing, more than being. A catchy question of a few years ago was “What would Jesus do?”, sometimes turned into a kind of acronym: WWJD. It’s not a bad question, but doesn’t necessarily touch our own lives and decision-making very directly. For we who seek to name ourselves Christians, a better question might be, “As a disciple of Jesus, what would I do?”

Brian