

The Path to God

Imagine you are standing before God, the Creator of all people and things, who reveals himself to us in the Bible.

Then consider these questions:

1. On a scale of 0 to 100%, if you died today, how certain are you that you would spend eternity with God in heaven?
2. If God were to ask you, “Why should I allow you to spend eternity with me?” what would you say?¹
3. How do you enter a personal relationship with God? Or, put differently, how does someone become a Christian?

Pause to answer these questions in the space below. Also consider asking these questions of others.²

1.

2.

3.

¹ I adapted questions one and two above from D. James Kennedy’s diagnostic questions found in his book and training program called *Evangelism Explosion*.

² When I ask people these questions in university or church settings, I then encourage them to ask these questions of others in their networks. It is quite common that they find that the majority of their friends and family members are unsure of the status of their relationship with God. So, for example, if you have children who are old enough to understand questions like these, ask them the questions, stop talking, and then listen closely.

Before we proceed, how can we categorize different answers to the questions from the previous page?

Questions from the Previous Page	Typical Answers from Non-Christians	Ideal Answers from Christians
1. How certain are you of spending eternity with God?	0 to 99%	100%
2. God asks, “Why should I allow you to spend eternity with me?”	Confidence in Self “Look at me and my spiritual résumé (my accomplishments), such as my moral qualities and being kind to others.”	Confidence in Jesus “Look at Jesus and his spiritual résumé (his accomplishments), including his perfect life, sin-atoning death, and victorious resurrection.”
3. How do you enter a relationship with God?	“Through obeying God, such as reading the Bible, praying, and going to church.”	“By turning from my sins (repentance) and trusting in Jesus, not by my good deeds.”

See page 8 for more information about this chart.

If you lack assurance that you are in a right relationship with God and will live with him forever, this lesson will clarify how you can begin a relationship with him. *If you have assurance* of your salvation, this lesson will clarify the proper reasons for assurance of salvation and how you can share these truths with others. Either way, God calls us to understand and embrace the following truths:

1. God is the Creator, Lord, and Provider.

“The God who made the world and everything in it—he is Lord of heaven and earth—does not live in shrines made by hands. Neither is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives everyone life and breath and all things.” (Acts 17:24–25)

As Creator, God made all people and things, and therefore he alone is worthy of our highest love, worship, and commitment (Acts 14:15; 17:24; Rev. 4:11). As Lord, he rules over his creation and commands us to obey his laws, which he reveals to us in the Bible (Ps. 103:19; Acts 17:24; 2 Tim. 3:16–17). And as Provider, he showers us with good things, such as life, food, family, friends, and countless other gifts (Acts 14:17; 17:25; James 1:17). God is perfect in his very being and in all his ways, and we are not (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 11:7; Rev. 4:8).

2. We sin against God. Therefore, we deserve his eternal judgment.

- “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23)
- “For the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23)

All of us have sinned against God, and we are falling short of his glorious perfection (Rom. 3:23; cf. 1:18–32). Put simply, sin is disobeying God’s commandments in our thoughts, words, and actions (Rom. 3:9–20; 1 John 3:4). Sin is also an act of rebellion against God and his authority (Isa. 1:2; Jer. 3:13). But the heart or essence of sin is that we value other people and things more than God himself, which is idolatry (Rom. 1:25; Col. 3:5).

Whether we commit sins such as vanity, greed, or lying, every sin we commit makes us worthy of God’s eternal judgment (Rom. 1:18; Gal. 5:19–21; Col. 3:5–6). A wage is what we earn for work that we perform. In light of our sinful thoughts, words, and actions, the wages we earn from God is death—which includes condemnation both in this life and the next (John 3:18; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:1). Put differently, because God is holy and just, he will give us exactly what we deserve in judgment, unless we seek and receive his forgiveness (Rom. 2:5; Heb. 9:27).

3. God sent Jesus into the world to die as an atoning sacrifice for sins, and God raised Jesus from the dead.

- “If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He himself is the atoning sacrifice [the one who took the penalty] for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1–2)
- “For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” (1 Cor. 15:3–4)

Either we will stand alone before God to give an account for our sins, bearing the penalty ourselves (Matt. 10:33; John 3:36). Or we will stand before God with Jesus as our advocate, the one who represents us before God (1 John 2:1). Jesus died on a cross as an atoning sacrifice for sins, bearing the penalty that we deserve, and satisfying God’s justice and wrath (Rom. 3:25–26; 1 John 2:2). After three days, God raised Jesus from the dead to declare him innocent and victorious over death, exalting him to his right hand as Lord, Christ, and Savior (Acts 2:24, 36; 5:31; 1 Cor. 15:3–4).

In answer to question #2 on page 1, Jesus and his saving work (his perfect life, sin-atoning death, and victorious resurrection) is the only bridge to God the Father, not our good works.

4. We must repent (turn from our sins) and trust in Jesus to enter a personal, reconciled relationship with God.

- “Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out.” (Acts 3:19)
- “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—not from works, so that no one can boast.” (Eph. 2:8–9)

God offers forgiveness freely to all, but this free gift must be received in order to be applied to our lives (John 1:12; Rom. 6:23).

First, we repent (turn from our sins) by renouncing the ways we value people and things more than God (Acts 3:19; 1 Thess. 1:9). While we should feel sad because of our sins against God, feeling remorse or a sense of regret is not enough. We must proactively turn from sins such as self-centeredness, pride, sexual immorality (e.g., pornography and sex outside of marriage), drunkenness, vanity, greed, and lying.

Second, we trust in Jesus as opposed to trusting in ourselves (John 3:16; Rom. 3:22, 26; Gal. 2:16). Simply acknowledging (or agreeing) in your head that Jesus died and rose from the dead is not enough, for even demons believe those truths. We must trust in Jesus as a person and what he accomplished at the cross. At the same time, we stop trusting in our own good works for salvation, which we can never earn. We are saved by grace (God’s unmerited favor) through faith (Eph. 2:8–9).

Turning from our sins and trusting in Jesus (taken together) is the way we enter a relationship with God, the way we receive God’s grace (Acts 20:21).

In answer to question #3 on page 1, repentance and trust in Jesus is how we cross the bridge to God the Father—a bridge created by Jesus alone.

5. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- “Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)
- “But to all who did receive him [Jesus], he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name.” (John 1:12)

At the moment we turn from our sins and trust in Jesus, God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:14–17). God also forgives us for our sins, adopts us into his family, and sets us apart for himself and his purposes (John 1:12; 1 Cor. 6:11; Eph. 1:7). These blessings come to us instantaneously, though growing into the likeness of Jesus takes a lifetime (Rom. 8:29; 1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 12:1–2).

6. With the strength God provides, we seek to obey him in every area of our lives, including getting baptized and actively participating in a local church.

- “Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4)
- “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day [of the Lord’s return] approaching.” (Heb. 10:24–25)

After we become Christians through repentance and trust in Jesus, we publicly testify to our new faith through baptism, which symbolizes that we have died to sin and have been raised to a new life with Jesus (Acts 2:38, 41; Rom. 6:3–4). God empowers us to grow in our faith, particularly as we participate in a local church. Together we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, study the Bible, pray to God, minister to others, and sing to God (Acts 2:42–47; 1 Cor. 11:17–34; Col. 3:16; Titus 2:1–15; Heb. 10:24–25; 1 Pet. 4:10–11).

For Reflection and Discussion

Use this page to respond to the following questions and/or to prepare to process this information with others.

1. Prior to reading this summary of how to begin a relationship with God, how did you answer the questions at the top of page 1?
2. Now that you have read the summary, would you answer the three questions in the same way or differently? Explain.
3. Do you think Jesus is the only way to God the Father? Why or why not?
4. What does it mean *to repent* (as an act of both the mind and the will)? What does it mean *to trust in Jesus*? Viewed together, have you come to God in this way? If not, what obstacles stand in the way?

Responding to This Summary of the Christian Faith

Now that you have read and reflected on this summary of the core teachings of the Christian faith, which one of the following categories describes you?

1. You are already a Christian, for you have repented and trusted in Jesus. If so, hopefully this summary strengthened your faith in Jesus, clarified how you can faithfully share these truths with others, and gave you additional reasons to rejoice in your salvation (Hab. 3:18; Philem. 6; 1 John 5:13).
2. You are not a Christian, and *you are not ready* to repent and trust in Jesus. If so, know that the offer of eternal life with God still stands, but no one is guaranteed life tomorrow (1 Tim. 2:3–4; James 4:13–16; 2 Pet. 3:9).
3. You are not a Christian, but *you are ready* to enter a right relationship with God and live with him forever. If so, today is the day of your salvation (Rom. 10:9; 2 Cor. 6:2)! Consider praying a prayer like this:

“Dear God, I confess you as my Creator, Lord, and Provider. I have sinned against you in my thoughts, words, and deeds. I therefore deserve nothing but judgment from you. Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection is my only hope for entering a relationship with you. I accept the gift of eternal life by turning away from my sins and trusting in Jesus. Please forgive me of my sins and give me the gift of your Holy Spirit to lead me forever. Jesus is the Lord of my life from now on. I pray this in Jesus’s name. Amen.”

Additional Information: Clarifying Your Own (and Others') Responses to the Three Diagnostic Questions

At the beginning of this lesson, you were asked these three questions:

1. On a scale of 0 to 100%, if you died today, how certain are you that you would spend eternity with God in heaven?
2. If God were to ask you, “Why should I allow you to spend eternity with me?” what would you say?
3. How do you enter a personal relationship with God? Or, put differently, how does someone become a Christian?

From God’s perspective, as revealed in the Bible, *you should be concerned* if you answered the three questions in one or more of the following ways:

- Your answer to question #1 fell between 0 and 99%, particularly if you are merely thinking about your own moral shortcomings and/or your perceived moral goodness before God. The Bible is clear: We have all sinned against God (in our thoughts, words, and actions) and are falling short of his will for our lives (Rom. 1:25; 3:23). We cannot earn salvation based on our good works (Eph. 2:8–9; Titus 3:5). It is therefore troubling when people say they are “70% sure” or “85% sure” they will spend eternity with God based on their behavior. In their words, they “still have room for improvement” in their behavior before they can earn (or merit) eternal salvation—which no sinful person can do.³
- Your answer to question #2 outlined your spiritual résumé (your list of moral qualifications) that you would present to God, such as your church attendance, Bible reading, or care for the poor. This also reveals a works-based view of salvation—a view that ignores (or attempts to add to) Jesus Christ and his saving work. Only Jesus and his death and resurrection serve as the basis by which anyone can be reconciled to God and live with him forever (Rom. 3:21–26; 1 Cor. 15:1–4; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 2:1–2).
- Your answer to question #3 failed to include both (1) repentance (turning from your sins) and (2) trust in Jesus (as opposed to trusting in yourself to gain access to God). Repentance and trust in Jesus Christ—taken together—is the means by which we enter a relationship with God (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21; Gal. 2:16). It is the way we accept the gift of eternal life, the way we become Christians. Then, by God’s grace, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who helps us to grow into the likeness of Jesus (Acts 2:38; Rom. 8:29; Gal. 5:16–26).

The heart
of the matter
is whether or not
you have turned
from your sins
and trusted in
Jesus Christ alone.

³ It is also troubling when people say they are “100% sure” but their answers to question #2 reveal that their ultimate confidence before God is in their good works, not in Jesus Christ. For all who trust in their good works to obtain salvation, they should have no such confidence (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10).