

# **How To Live The Christian Life**

**By**

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## **Introduction**

One of the fundamental goals of a Christian is to live the “Christian life”. But for many of us, this goal is elusive and exposes our weaknesses. Trying to live the “Christian life” can be a source of so much frustration that we are “driven to our knees” in prayer in seeking God on how to “do better”. We want to do good, but we seem to keep falling into the same traps. We then begin to feel condemned, guilty, and unworthy to be in His presence.

This lesson defines the “Christian life” and provides a perspective that will take the struggle out of this fundamental goal. It will show how God the Father, through Christ, by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, provided for our every need, including how to live a life that’s pleasing to Him.

## **Scriptures Used In This Lesson**

Colossians 3:1 – 2

Galatians 5:16 – 18

Galatians 5:19 – 21

Colossians 3:5 – 10

Romans 8:5 – 8

Romans 12:1 – 2

Galatians 5:22 – 23

## **Trying Harder But Failing**

Like many Christians, my conversion experience was one of great joy and enthusiasm. When I was first saved, I couldn’t get enough of the Bible; I read it day and night. I felt I could evangelize the whole world given enough time...maybe a week or so. ☺ Some areas of my life changed immediately, and the “Christian life” was great.

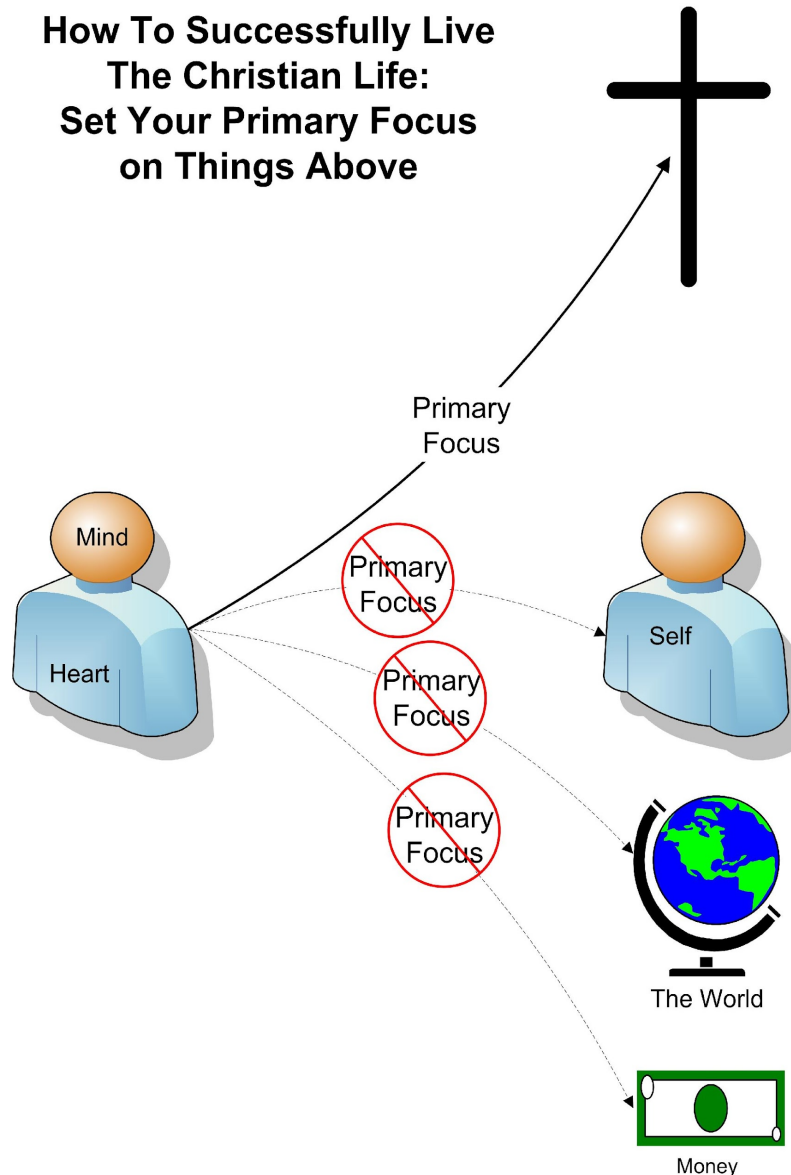
But over time, some of my “bad habits” resurfaced. I found myself changed in some ways, but in other ways my life seemed the same or even worse than before I was saved. So I did as most Christians initially do: I tried harder to do what was “right”. Some habits I conquered, but others seemed to be recurring, repeatedly. And in some cases, I dared not let anyone know what I was truly thinking. I couldn’t – you see I was a Christian, and Christians were supposed to live and think a certain way. Unfortunately, I was failing...in more than one area of my life. The experience that brought me great joy, also exposed my “great weaknesses” and brought “great frustration” because I just couldn’t seem to be what I thought I should be...perfect.

*Name some things that you think describes the “Christian Life”. Do you know anyone who has lived a life that fits that description? If so, how did they do it? If not, why not? Should a Christian strive to be “perfect”? Why or Why not? With respect to the “Christian life”, define “perfect”.*

## Christian Living: What’s The Key?

Over time I began to wonder, “How can I get right with God? What was the Christian life all about? Struggles? Trying to be perfect?” Since I sincerely wanted to be all that God wanted me to be, I got on my knees and prayed and sought the Scriptures for answers.

### How To Successfully Live The Christian Life: Set Your Primary Focus on Things Above



There are many perceptions about “the Christian Life” that we develop before we are saved and carry with us after we come into a relationship with Christ. Not all of those perceptions reflect the biblical reality expressed in the Scriptures.

The key to living the “Christian Life” is found in Colossians 3:1 – 2. According to the NIV, we are to set our hearts and minds on things above.

*What does it mean to set our “hearts” on things above? What does it mean to set our “minds” on things above? Notice that “hearts” and “mind” are distinct; they are not the same.*

In verse 1, the King James Version (KJV) states that we are to “seek” those things which are above. The word “seek” comes from the word “zeteo” which means to:

- to seek [in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to enquire into
- to seek after, seek for, aim at, strive after

In verse 2, the KJV states that we are to “set our affection” on things above. To “set our affection” comes from the word “phroneo”, which means:

- to have understanding
- to feel, to think
- *to direct one's mind to a thing, to seek, to strive for*

So according to the Scriptures, we are to strive for godly things, as a goal, desire or aim of our hearts. We are also to think, have an understanding, and direct our minds towards godly things. There should be a heartfelt desire to please our Heavenly Father. In order for that to be more than a “mental exercise” there has to be a growing personal relationship between us and our Father.

An example of this comes to mind: A mother has a close relationship with her little child and is sensitive to his/her emotions. When they sense their child feels sad, they feel sad. When they see that their child is happy, the mother feels better. If faced with a situation that would result in the child's sadness, the mother will tend to “protect” the child and change the situation to result in their child avoiding those feelings. There is an affinity for that child, a love, a heartfelt desire to “make them happy. They “zeteo” or have an aim for the child's happiness. The parent will even “direct their mind” towards pleasing their child by planning a birthday party with their favorite kind of cake and best friends.

In the same way, we should have a heartfelt desire for our Father and should plan our activities to please Him. We should direct the activities of our lives so that they are in line with His precepts, commands and principles. This occurs increasingly as we grow in our personal relationship with Him.

*Why don't Christians “zeteo” or seek things above? Why don't Christians “set our affections” or “phroneo” on things above? What are some of the obstacles we face? What can be done about it? What can you do about it?*

*Is your desire for God more heartfelt or mental? Why?*

Once we develop a passion for godly things, as opposed to earthly things, living the Christian life will become easier. It will become more “natural” for us; a normal part of our conduct.

We must be on guard against “sin”, .i.e., those thoughts, attitudes, and actions which are contrary to God's precepts, commands and principles. Sin will “short circuit” our relationship with our Father and keep us from getting closer. Picture this example:

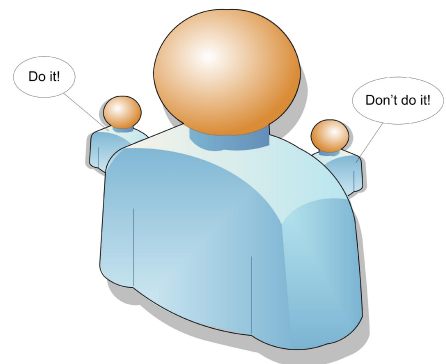
A teenager tells their parents, with whom they are close, that they are going to spend the night at a friend's house after seeing a movie. The teenager then goes to the apartment of a “friend of a friend” and stays all night partying. The next day, the teenager goes home and has a hard time looking the parent in the face. The parent “senses” the

distance between them and begins to wonder, “What’s wrong? What happened last night?”

The relationship experiences “distance” because of the “sin” of the teenager. The same thing happens when we sin against God. Our relationship with him suffers and it is hard to “get close” to Him. As a result, living the Christian life is more difficult. We need to “repent” of our sins to restore what has been damaged.

### Good Nature – Bad Nature

The scriptures teach that there are two natures at war within us, one led by the flesh and one led by the Spirit. Read Galatians 5:16 – 18. The passage says that the two natures are in conflict with one another and encourages us to “live by the Spirit”. The end result of living by the flesh is given in Galatians 5:19 – 21. Also read Colossians 3:5 – 10, and Romans 8:5 – 8. In case you missed it all, below is a list of the result of living by the flesh:



### The “Flesh” List

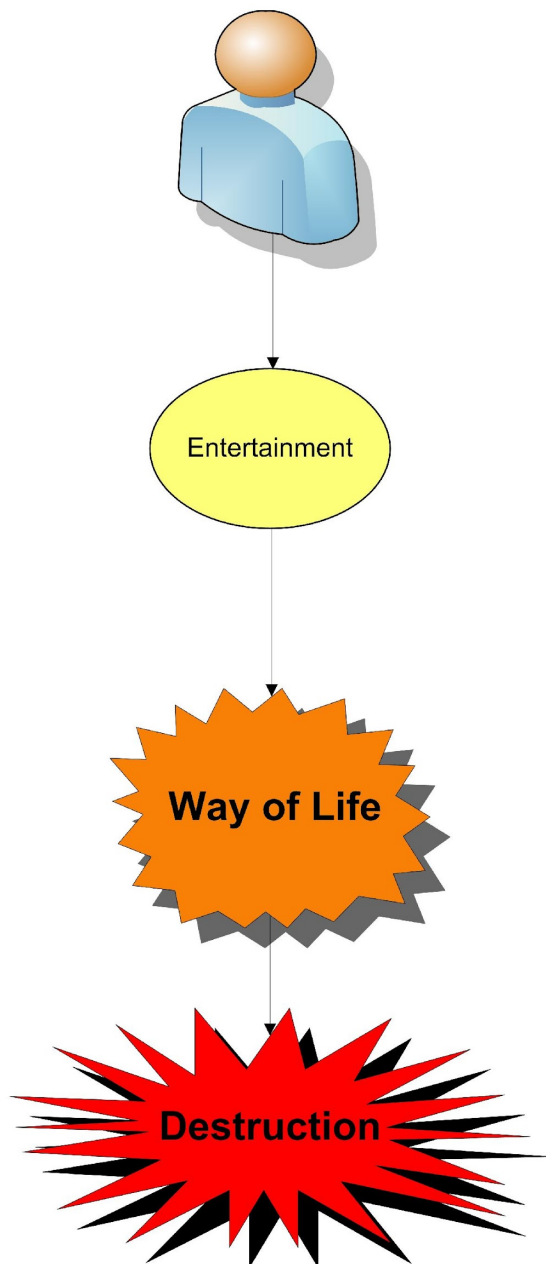
- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| • sexual immorality (adultery)                      | • impurity (fornication) |
| • debauchery (unbridled lust, excess)               | • idolatry               |
| • witchcraft  | • hatred                 |
| • discord   | • jealousy               |
| • fits of rage                                      | • selfish ambition       |
| • dissensions (partisan and contentious quarreling) | • factions               |
| • envy  | • drunkenness            |
| • orgies  | • evil desires           |
| • greed   | • lust                   |
| • anger   | • malice                 |
| • slander   | • filthy language        |
| • lying   |                          |

The “Flesh List” is really the foundation upon which our secular society operates. As a matter of fact, the above list is so embedded in our culture that it has become the basis for almost every form of entertainment. We entertain ourselves by watching TV shows that involve one or more aspects of the “List”. TV shows and movies which don’t contain an item on the “List” would be considered by many as “boring”.

*Name some popular TV shows or movies in which the story line was built on one or more items above.*

The result of having the “Flesh List” embedded in our culture is plainly evident in the world today. All we have to do is watch the evening news. In our country we have established social programs designed to help people who are either victims of the “Flesh List” or its perpetrators.

## The “Living By The Flesh” Progression



*Take a few moments and discuss some situations where you or people you know have been victims of the “Flesh List”. Also discuss situations where you or people you know have harmed others because of living by the “List”.*

We thrive on being entertained by the “Flesh List” but suffer greatly by living by it. It’s like playing with fire and getting burned, except we do it over and over again.

**Key Point:** Living by the flesh ends in destruction.

*If living by the flesh ends in destruction, why do we continue to do so? What can be done about it?*

Fortunately, God has provided an alternative. Read Galatians 5:16 – 17. The Lord instructs us to “live by the Spirit”. The KJV instructs us to “walk” in the Spirit. The word “walk” comes from the word “peripateo” which means:

- to make one's way, progress; to make due use of opportunities
- to regulate one's life
- to conduct oneself

So, to “live by the Spirit” or to “walk in the Spirit” means to conduct your life guided by the Spirit of God Who dwells in you. We are to take advantage of opportunities that God places before us to minister to others or display His character in us.

**Key Point:** Living by the Spirit means to conduct your life guided by the Spirit of God Who dwells in you.

Well, how do you live by the Spirit? Read Romans 12:1 – 2. Verse 2 instructs us to not be “conformed” to this world. The word “conformed” comes from the Greek word “suschematizo”, which means:

- to conform oneself (i.e. one's mind and character) to another's pattern, (fashion one's self according to)

So, we are not to pattern our mind and character after the world, which operates after the “Flesh List”. But instead, we are to be “transformed” by the “renewing of our minds”. The word “transformed” comes from the word “metamorphoo”, which means:

- to change into another form, to transform, to transfigure

Our minds are to be “changed into another form” by the “renewing” of our minds. The word “renewing” comes from the Greek word “anakainosis” which means:

- a renewal, renovation, complete change for the better

Putting this all together, we are not to pattern our minds, character and values after the world, but we are to be changed by a renovation of our minds, which will result in a complete change for the better.

Notice where the battlefield is – the mind. So to live by the Spirit, we must first “change our minds”, or how we think. That may require decisions on our part as to the television shows we watch, the music we listen to, the books we read, the people with whom we associate. And no better way to renew our minds than by the daily reading and meditation of God’s Word. To try to renew your mind without reading the Bible is like trying to learn a new language without ever hearing it spoken. Hearing the correct pronunciation of the words gets those sounds in your mind and gives you the capacity to reproduce what you’ve heard. Reading the Word of God gets His ideas and principles in your mind and gives you the capacity to “reproduce” the fruit of the Spirit.

**Key Point:** The key to renewing your mind is the regular reading and meditation of God’s Word.

*Why don’t we regularly read God’s Word? Why don’t we meditate on God’s Word?  
What can be done about each of the reasons you mentioned?*

## **The “Better”**

Now we said that renewing your mind involves a “complete change for the better”. How much “better” did you say? Well, I’m glad you asked. The “Better” is defined in Galatians 5:22 – 23. Out of the Amplified Bible, the scripture reads this way:

But the fruit of the [Holy] Spirit [the work which His presence within accomplishes] is love, joy (gladness), peace, patience (an even temper, forbearance), kindness, goodness (benevolence), faithfulness, gentleness (meekness, humility), self-control (self-restraint, continence). Against such things there is no law [that can bring a charge].

As we “peripateo” or walk by the Spirit, all the above will become increasingly more evident in our lives, automatically, without frustration on our parts. Why? Because the attributes above are natural for the Spirit. They are the “fruit” of the Spirit. So, as you conduct your life being led by the Spirit, you will “naturally” live the “Christian Life”.

**Key Point:** As we walk by the Spirit, the Christian life will become increasingly more evident in our lives, automatically, without frustration on our parts.

**Key Point:** The “Christian Life” is a life that can be described by the fruit of the Spirit.

### **You Can’t Do What You Don’t Practice**

One of the keys to successfully “walk in the Spirit” has to do with “practice”. What do I mean by this? Here’s an illustration: About a year ago, my wife bought me an acoustic guitar. When I first got it, I practiced it routinely. I got to the point where I could play several patterns of chords. I began to think of simple songs I could play. I even started to build calluses on my fingers. Then I got “busy”. Over several weeks my skills diminished back to the day I first picked up the guitar. And I’ve been busy ever since. If someone heard me play today, they would think I just got the guitar yesterday, not a year ago. I sound like a rookie, because of lack of practice.

Our Christian life is similar. We can’t expect the life of Christ to flow through us if we don’t “practice” our relationship with Christ, i.e., spend time with Him daily, without interruptions. Our “practice” needs to be regular, at a set time, each day, with a heartfelt desire to know Him better. Our minds need to be set on our mission, to know Him better. That mission needs to be the under current that leads us in a direction toward Him. The result of our practice will be more of the fruit of the Spirit. Just as routine practice will allow us to play beautiful songs on a guitar, routine “practice” in our relationship with Christ will allow us to live more completely and *effortlessly* the Christian life.

### **Summary**

The Christian Life was not intended to be a struggle. God meant for it to naturally flow from our lives as we yield to the direction of the Holy Spirit. Yielding to Him involves a change...a change of mind...for the better. A change of mind involves decisions about what we put in our minds. We have a choice to make; we can either feed our minds “food from the List” or “food from the Book”. One will lead to destruction; the other will lead to Life. We don’t have to struggle. Choose the better “fruit”.