

CHAPTER 5

FUNDAMENTAL #3: WHAT EXACTLY IS A CHRISTIAN?

Biblical Lessons for Students, Athletes & More

Individual or Group Experience

FOCAL VERSE

"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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 Corinthians 15:3-4

WISE WORDS

"I've pretty much done all I can here and, you know, God will carry me the rest of the way, so I'm pretty comfortable with that."
Kobe Bryant

Introduction

Immediately following the death of Kobe Bryant, my first thought was, "Was Kobe a Christian?" I googled that very question and when I did, it was apparent that other basketball enthusiasts were asking the same thing. At first glance, the conclusion I came to was, "I *think* so...but I don't know for sure." Had it been Steph Curry, David Robinson, or Jeremy Lin, there would have been no question because they were very public about their faith. I continued my investigation.

NBA Superstar Kobe Bryant's 20-year career with the Los Angeles Lakers made him "No. 1 of all-time" of NBA players who played for a single franchise. Entering the NBA directly from high school, Bryant won five NBA championships with the Lakers, was an 18-time NBA All Star, 2-time gold medalist and became the youngest player in league history to reach 30,000 career points, was the leading scorer in Lakers franchise history, and is widely regarded as one of the greatest players of all time. Most fans know about these accolades, but what many don't know is that he was a man of faith who spent his last moments at church, shortly before boarding the flight which took his life on Sunday, January 26, 2020. (All nine people aboard the helicopter died suddenly and tragically that morning, including Kobe's daughter Gianna, two of her teammates, three team parents, an assistant coach and the pilot).

Early that morning, Kobe and Gianna, attended the family's Newport Beach, CA church, Our Lady Queen of Angels. According to Father Steve Sallot, the Bryants took time to worship there before the 7AM service. On his way out, Kobe discussed with Father Sallot his desire to make a deeper commitment to Christ by becoming confirmed, a sacrament which affirms one's Christian identity. When I read those words, I knew the answer to my question...and I was comforted.

But first...

- Since our last session, did you have an increased awareness of sin or confession?
- Why are confession and repentance so important?

IMPORTANT

This chapter is one of the most significant chapters in the book! It will lay a critical foundation for the reader or listener. It's longer in length, but don't rush through it. If you're leading a group, give yourself plenty of time to prepare.



Photo courtesy of Kevork Djansezian / Getty Images

Introduction & Discussion Questions

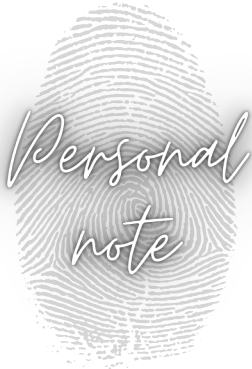
Becoming a Christian and *being* a Christian are two very different things. In this chapter, we will highlight what it means to be a Christian and how you can become one.

As we begin, let's start with an important question: **If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?**

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**OUR FAITH
SHOULD BE
PERSONAL
BUT NOT
PRIVATE.**

”



I am fascinated with shows like Dateline, 48-Hours, and Forensic Files. I try to figure out "whodunnit" before the end of the show. Detectives typically start their investigation with the people closest to the victim. They strategically go through the victim's social media, scour their text messages, interview eyewitnesses, and analyze where the victim would hang out and with whom. Following the evidence and digital fingerprints reveal a great deal about the victim and, in most cases, leads to a conviction of one or more suspects.



- What would an investigation of your life reveal about you? Would your life point people toward Christ or lead them away from Him? Would you be convicted of being a Christian?
- If someone were to ask you, "*What is a Christian?*" would you be prepared to answer with confidence?
- Can you guess how many times the term "Christian" is used in the entire Bible? The answer will be revealed on page 30.

Start reading on page 30

- After the second paragraph, ponder or discuss: **If our salvation is not based on good works or righteous acts, then why is our behavior so important? How are we *supposed* to behave?**

Page 31

- End of paragraph two: **Do you have a nickname? Why was it given to you?**
- **IMPORTANT:** Pause at the end of paragraph 3. Let's firmly establish what the word "saved," or "salvation," means.
 - **What is the definition of "salvation" as you understand it?** Sample explanation: *When we place our trust and faith in Christ, the Bible says we are "saved." The dominant meaning in the New Testament is "deliverance from the consequences of sin and the clutches of death and Satan." The major theme in the New Testament is deliverance from God's wrath. God sent Jesus Christ to rescue (save) us from the consequences of our sin. Salvation is not only being saved from something, it is also being saved to someone. We are saved from sin and brought to God.*

Page 32

- After reading paragraph two, consider why you think it might be difficult for people to believe that we don't have to *do* anything to earn salvation?

Page 33

- Carefully consider the "inside-out" process.
 - How does it relate to you as an athlete?
 - How does it relate to your spiritual life?
 - Do you recall a time in your life when you committed to this *inside-out process* as an athlete? As a Christian?

Page 34 (Summary)

- Bullet points one and two suggest "You must believe, *in faith*, that there is only one true God, and that Jesus is the Son of God." Faith has *everything* to do with salvation!

Personal note

During summer youth camp, I was having a deep conversation with one of my students about her faith-walk and religious beliefs. She asked a very significant question: "What is faith anyway?" "Great question!" I said. "The Bible answers that very question in Hebrews 1:1."

- You might be curious about faith too! If someone asked you to define faith, what would you say? According to Hebrews 1:1, faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not yet see. Faith is complete trust or confidence in Jesus...not in ourselves!
- Last bullet point on page 34: "You are called to set yourself apart to be holy..."
 - Look up 1 Peter 2:9. In what ways has God set you apart? "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."
 - Take a moment to look up Romans 12:2 in 2-3 different versions. Make notes or discuss how this verse is calling Christ-followers to be set apart. I've include The Passion Translation (TPT) below:
 - "Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God's will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes."

Page 35

Page 35 poses a significant question: *Have you ever made a deliberate decision to set yourself apart from the rest of the world by accepting Jesus as the Lord of your life?*



Before beginning the "Personal Training" section, go back and reread that question again slowly. (GROUP LEADER: Ask your group to seriously consider if Jesus is *truly* Lord over their life; not necessarily, "Are you saved?" but, "Is Jesus the center and Lord of your life?" "If you have committed your life to Christ in the past, have you stood by that commitment?" (No need to answer out loud yet).

Page 36

Personal Training Session

- If you consider yourself to be a Christian, do you believe you have reflected Christianity well? If not, what can you do to make a change? (For self-examination only; not for group discussion).
- Look up 1 Peter 2:9-10 on being set apart. What has God called you *out of*?

Post Game Prayer

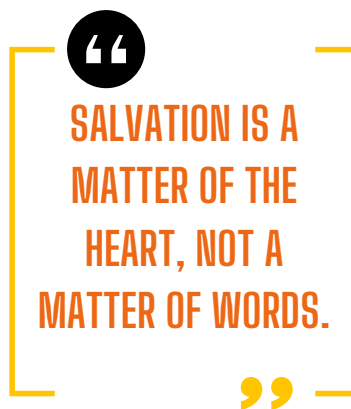
End with the Post Game Prayer on page 36, or have a volunteer pray. Ask God to help believers everywhere, to set themselves apart for God's use and glory.

Optional:

- Read "Three Old Hunting Dogs," by Jerry Fine (page 5)

Before closing, review the assignment for Session 6:

- Prior to the next session, read chapter six on your own.
- After completing the chapter, email your leader and let him/her know if you have made a decision to follow Jesus Christ for the first time, *or* if you've made a decision to recommit your life to Christ by allowing Him to be the boss of your life. (If you are doing this study on your own, please share your decision with you parents, a youth pastor, or someone who can encourage you in your faith journey).
- If you have already committed your life to Christ, would you be willing to briefly share your salvation experience with your leader through email? How old were you? Who led you to Christ? How has Christ made a difference in your life? Keep it simple.
- **LEADER: Follow-up with the class members about this assignment prior to the next session.**



Three Old Hunting Dogs

How They Represent Some Attitudes of Christians Today
(Jerry Fine, *One on One with God*)

The Apostle Paul's determined purpose was to know Jesus. What is our attitude about knowing Jesus today? When I think about this, it brings to mind three old hunting dogs. They were very different. To me, they represent three of the many different attitudes that Christians have today about knowing Jesus, growing spiritually, and serving Him.

One of the dogs was a pointer who always watched me from a distance. We didn't enjoy a close fellowship because he wasn't interested in having fellowship with me, his master. He had his own agenda, and it didn't include me unless I took him hunting, which was something *he* wanted to do. Does this sound like some Christians you know?

The second dog was a German shorthaired pointer, and she liked brief encounters with me, but spent most of her time just out of my reach. I could pat her once or twice and she was gone. She was not interested in anything more than a "bump and run" type of fellowship. Even in the backyard where there was time for us to get to know each other, she was not really interested. So our fellowship was very shallow and not very meaningful. Does this sound like some Christians?

The third dog was a little English setter, and she was a pure delight to us. She brought us much joy because she not only wanted to serve me with a willing heart as we hunted together, but she constantly showed her love to me and the rest of the family. She stood at the door just watching for me, and when she saw me, she got so excited she could not stand still. She lived for our time together, and we had great fellowship. I am happy to say that our lives have been touched by some Christians who modeled this type of love and devotion to Christ.

God loves us and desires our fellowship but He will not force that fellowship on us. It's time to pursue that fellowship.

Optional discussion question:

- Which hunting dog best describes you?
- One of my fellow-disciples cleverly admitted to being a "mixed breed."

