

Why be a Practicing Christian?

Most people eventually discover that wholehearted pursuit of the pleasures of the world (e.g., fun, fame, fortune) lead, in the end, not to lasting happiness but to pain, sorrow and guilt. It's been said we reach maturity when we realize we have a choice in life: to serve something greater than ourselves or begin to self-destruct.

We eventually find that we live most freely and fully when we live in accord with our God-given conscience and Christian values. We find when we follow the "moral law written in our heart" that we are not burdened by feelings of guilt and shame, and we can become more than a slave to our human needs and passions.

At most, the world's pleasures bring only fleeting happiness, not deep and lasting joy. St. Augustine captured this realization beautifully when, after living his youth in pursuit of worldly pleasures, he wrote 1,500 years ago, "*God, you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.*"

The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit provides Christians with divine power to overcome and not be controlled by our selfish and self-destructive desires. We find that Jesus was indeed right when He said He came so we "might have life and have it more abundantly."

Christians also know that no matter what we've done in the past, we can be free of and not burdened by guilt for past wrongdoings. We know if we are truly sorry and repent we will experience God's forgiveness, and be empowered to forgive those who have hurt us. Christians know no matter how many times we fail that God's love for us is everlasting.

There are other advantages in this life to being a practicing Christian. First, throughout the centuries devout Christians continually testify that faith brings a deeper meaning and joy to life primarily by leading us to more fully serve God and help others, instead of selfishly seeking fun, fame and fortune.

Most people feel we are destined not just to exist, but to make a positive difference in our world. And, we may recognize that if we're not serving we're just existing, because life is meant for ministry. Many have discovered true joy and meaning in using our God-given talents and gifts to serve God and others, and not in serving only our ultimately unfulfilling self-interests and selfish desires.

Second, Christians repeatedly testify to experiencing the help and healing of the Holy Spirit. For instance, faith can enable us to overcome any burdens of inferiority, inadequacy or low self-esteem by helping us realize that we are made in the image and likeness of God. God made us just the way He wants us to be, with the innate strengths and weaknesses He wants us to have. Since "God don't make junk," who are we to question God's handiwork? While Christians constantly strive to become better persons, we are able to accept the self-worth and dignity that comes from being a child of an all-loving and all-knowing Father.

Third, Christians trust that God loves us and even during the hard times of our lives things will work out according to His Will. As it says in Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." This frees Christians from being

consumed by fear and worry, and brings a sense of peace and security, even during hard times.

Fourth, faith brings a higher purpose and meaning to our problems. Adversity can either make us or break us, depending upon our reaction to the situation. Some people become bitter, rather than better, when faced with life's difficulties. Christians accept challenges in life as opportunities for personal and spiritual growth, as opportunities to become more like Christ. We believe the storms we experience on the sea of life are not meant to sink us, but to sanctify us.

Fifth, practicing Christians not only believe, we also belong to a community of faith. We have close friends and companions among our fellow Christian brothers and sisters. Our shared faith makes us co-workers in the "vineyard of the Lord." While Christians are still sinners and because of this may seem like hypocrites to others, we understand that "the church is a hospital for sinners, not a haven for saints." We value and need the support of other Christians in our journey of discipleship.

Last, but certainly not least, Christians believe we are saved to eternal life in heaven by God's grace. We merely need to accept in gratitude the redemption that Jesus won for us on the cross, commit our lives to being a follower of Jesus, and then live accordingly while being guided by the power and presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Then, God gives us the grace we need to go through life faithfully and to enter heaven joyfully when our life on earth is done.