

# What's Next?

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As a follower of Jesus, I believe His sacrifice provides the only path to reunion with the Creator. As a believer, I am seen by the Father through the lens of the Son – right now, not just when I die, and mercifully because of Jesus, I have been found acceptable to the Father.

This acceptance is not a function of how I manage the gifts I was given, what good works I've done, nor (thankfully!) what sins I've committed. However, with the help of the Holy Spirit I find a yearning to use my life in a way that would be pleasing to God. To give back a small bit of what I've been given.

I can't give back directly to God, because He already has everything. But I can give back to God's creations. So, what's next? Our eternal life has already started albeit within the bounds of this spectacularly designed but deeply flawed body and in a world that is a mere shadow of the original perfect creation. So, what are we to do with the time, talents, and treasure we have here, in this body, on this planet, in this existence?

On the one hand, as believers we are already viewed by the Father as justified and have eternal life. Do we have to do anything? Since we know we can't influence the decision of the judge to find us innocent, we can't be good enough, or do enough good things no matter how many times or how hard we try, what is the point of doing any good?

Since Jesus was the one responsible for giving us a path to eternal life, I think it is wise to study His teachings about how to live this life. He not only died for me, but He lived for me. He could have come to earth fully formed and went straight to the cross, but He lived a life so as to provide a model for me.

Selecting a source to learn of His instructions for living, one can refer to interpretations of His commandments (like my opinions written here) or turn to a favorite author, priest, or pastor. The caution must be to always compare what you read or hear against the original record, the Bible.

In the original record, by some counts Jesus provided nearly fifty commands during His ministry time on earth. He modeled how to live and articulated what He expects from his followers. The Bible also includes writings from His direct followers who provide even more guidance and direction.

As a place to start, I chose to look first to those "red letter" commands, before moving on to any more. So, what did Jesus directly command? Repent, follow, rejoice, reconcile, love, judge not, choose, beware, pray, deny, forgive, honor, render, await, be perfect. (Wait, what was that last one?)

Like His original followers, I went looking for a more digestible list. They tried to get Jesus to summarize or narrow down the list to just the "most important" commandment.

When I am trying to find a place to start, I assert the most important commands might be those Jesus gave as His time with His apostles grew short. Among those were:

- “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15).
- “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12)
- “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37)
- “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 29:19)

I love Jesus, so according to John 14:15 “If you love me, keep my commands”. Reading more about this command I see it is followed by an “And” statement in verse 16 “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth.”

The advocate, the Holy Spirit, was promised to teach us all things and remind us of everything Jesus said. Conferring with this companion is the only possible hope we have to even begin to live a life approaching the one Jesus lived.

One down, forty-some to go. I next select from John in chapter 15, verse 10-12, where he records an “if this, then that” to Jesus’ followers, valid then and into the future. “IF you keep my commands, (THEN) you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.”

Shared at the last supper, to me this is a powerful command. If I’m going to attempt to live my life according to the teachings of the Author of life, it seems obvious to choose one where the return on my investment is “Jesus’ joy in me” and ends with “that my joy may be complete”.

Good. I’ve selected the next command to follow. What’s next? Well, just as quickly as I select it, I discover that complying with this command is way hard. I fail often and fail completely at loving others the way Christ loved me.

Let me select another, perhaps the one about “be perfect,” Perfect? There has to be something lost in translation. Looking for a loophole so I can still feel good about myself, I discover the Greek word for “perfect” in Matthew 5:48, “teleios,” can also be translated into “mature” or “full grown.” So, Jesus expects my behavior to be appropriate for my maturity level. That I can do. Anyone who knows me knows I’m immature. While I know I will fall short of Jesus’ perfection, with each passing day I can mature and conduct myself more in line with the life lived by Christ.

The saving grace of all this striving and failing is that it drives home the absolute need I have for a savior. I do not wallow in my failure nor do I quit trying. I continue my journey, moving on to learning the other commands. Then after that, I’ll delve into the inspired scriptural guidance from the apostles, then perhaps the classic writings of the early church fathers, then explore gifted modern commentators. In doing so, my spiritual maturity will continue to improve and I’ll move a step (a very small step) closer to perfection each day.

Seems there is no end to “what’s next” in the life of a follower of Jesus. Together with the Holy Spirit I’ll continue to learn what is expected, continue to suffer the failings as a human, all the while confidently knowing the divine already welcomes me, just as I am.

