

What it means to be a Christian

Sue Phelps, 18 May 2008

This is the sort of essay topic I would have avoided at school, opting for something more concrete, such as a book review or character analysis.

I am not, naturally, a speaker – more of a ‘thinker’ or ‘listener’ – at least, outside my family. A few years ago, I would not have agreed to do this – I’d have run a mile, and made up excuses. But perhaps that’s it: our church family feels more like a real family. Or perhaps, it’s just all the practice I’ve had lately with the children’s talks.

In any case, to be a Christian certainly means to be part of a much bigger family.

So: ‘Me as a Christian’ – what does that mean? The short answer is ‘A lot of work and time spent.’ I’ve always believed that being a Christian means to be as ‘Christ-like’ as possible, to follow His example. Especially, to love others, as Jesus did, all the time. I doubt if I could carry this through to the ultimate sacrifice, but I do my best to follow the ‘Golden Rule’ – ‘Do unto others....’

What is more difficult than this is to think before I speak – not to judge hastily, or put people in little boxes with various labels. To try instead to ‘walk a mile in their shoes.’

I don’t tend to lose my temper too often – fortunately – but here’s where God has to take control, and he usually does. There have been times when I have been fuming, going over and over how I will tell someone off. But God has made it impossible for me to do so, giving me time to cool off, and the moment passes – just as well! This is not to say I don’t get annoyed and complain – and then I’m sorry later when I speak out of turn.

I think I always knew that my role in life would be as a mother, which would give me a great opportunity to serve. Sure enough, God blessed me over and over – there was a time when I wondered if I’d ever stop.

The babies did stop coming, but the mothering does not – and this is a blessing in itself. Being a mother also involves teaching, the other role God had planned for me. Teaching, I was never sure about, as I lacked confidence

and I was always a bit of a loner and never liked mixing much. But God has tried to prepare me for that too.

I must say, I was very happy, when the birth of my second child took me out of the classroom. But four children later, God seemed to be calling me to teach for Him. This I was not prepared for – I was not confident that I had either the knowledge or skills necessary. I had always admired the way Diana and Ian seemed to live their faith, 24/7. I was no so good at this, and while I tried to live by example, and give my own kids every opportunity to know Jesus, it never seemed very successful. Also I love the way some younger Christians are so 'full of the Spirit' and excited to tell others about Jesus. This was not what I was like – not spontaneous at all.

But God still seemed keen for me to serve Him in this way, not just with Sunday School here at St John's but with CRE (Christian Religious Education) too.

My lack of confidence was always a problem — but of course God had the answer. I didn't realise it at the time, but that was to work in our Bakery. I hated the idea, I still had two little ones at home – surely that is where I should be!

That's something else I've learned – try to avoid God's leading and you only get stress, dead-ends and insecurity. But let him lead, and he'll clear the path for you. Things may not be great, but there will be peace of mind and support along the way.

I think I recognised God's control in my life from a very early age, but that doesn't mean I always recognised his leading, or that I wanted to comply with it!

So finally I found that working in the shop made me talk to people, and that gave me the confidence I needed to help with teaching. I still sometimes doubt that I am the best person for the job, never sure I have the right qualifications, or if my faith is strong enough. After all, I had been a science teacher. That's getting back to the concrete. A scientist needs proof before he accepts an hypothesis as fact. People will say 'there is no proof for God.'

I recently read 'Love is not one big thing, it is a million small things.' So it is with knowing God I think. I can't tell you he is there, because I've never seen him, or heard him speak. And it's so long since Jesus died and rose again,

how can we be sure those eye-witness accounts aren't a bit bent out of shape by now? But, that said, I have felt God with me many times, and seen his unmistakable hand in events, and in the way situations unfold.

For some people it is easy to forget God, to think we are in control, but for me, leaving God out just doesn't work. Prayer is the key. And I thank Him continually for his many blessings, for calling me, and for being patient with me.