a new story

Following Jesus

Where Do I Start?

by Ron Hutchcraft

Following Jesus: Where Do I Start?

Relationships define our lives. Even if you lose all your stuff, you still have your relationships. They are the core of our lives and what make us who we are. The most exciting news in the world is that we can have a personal, love-relationship with the God who made us and who made hundreds and billions of galaxies! In fact, we were made for that relationship and it's the most important relationship of all.

Here are Ron Hutchcraft's Five Secrets on how to develop a great relationship with God. No matter where you are in your journey of faith, these will be beneficial for you and those you influence.

Your Definite Beginning

Do you know that you are in God's family? When you begin your relationship with God through His Son, the relationship you were made for begins and you have found the central purpose of your life. If you sincerely prayed a prayer and gave your life to Jesus, you began life's most important relationship! It's not a religion or a belief—it's a forever, personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

In this relationship, you'll find the love, the answers, and the acceptance that you've been looking for. In God's Book, the Bible, it says, "All things were created by Him and for Him" (Colossians 1:16). This means you were made for this relationship. John 1:12 says, "To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

Two anchors strengthen your new relationship with God. The first anchor is the fact that your relationship with God has a *definite beginning*. You know the date you were born into your earthly family. It's also important to know the day you were born into God's family. Acts 3:19 says, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

When you prayed to Jesus, did you sincerely tell Him these two things?

- "I'm sorry for running my own life and doing it my way. I'm ready for You to be in charge because You are my only hope" (turning from your sin), and
- "I'm pinning all my hopes on You, Jesus, because You died and took my death penalty" (which is turning to God).

If you did, then you began a personal relationship with God and you're part of His family! Romans 10:9-10 says, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

If you haven't done so already, we urge you to tell someone about what you prayed. Write in the front of your Bible, or some other place where you'll remember, the date when you told Jesus that He was your only hope and you started life's most important relationship. Then you will always have a record of your definite beginning!

(If you're still not sure you really do have a personal relationship with God, please look again at the Yours For Life online presentation by clicking here.)

Your Relationship Lasts Forever

How long will this relationship last? The second "anchor" in your new relationship with God is that it will ***last forever***. Like a ship tossed about in a storm that is totally beyond its control, we all are in need of an anchor. God is bigger and stronger than the storm that surrounds us. When you commit yourself to Him, the sin wall between you and God comes down, and you have begun the anchor relationship you were made for, and that you've been looking for so long.

You can count on Him in an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable world. The word "anchor" probably doesn't describe most of your relationships today, as they would better be described as superficial and disappointing. You've never had a relationship you could count on as much as this one. It is unloseable!

Hebrews 13:5 states, "God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." What a promise! He will never leave you abandoned or alone. You can trust that promise because of the price God paid to make it, by giving of His only Son for you.

A shepherd knows his sheep, and Jesus knows us the same way! John 10:27-28 says, "My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand." You don't have Him in your hands, these verses promise that God has you in *His* hands—permanently. Your new relationship is safe because He's so good at holding onto you! When you commit yourself to Jesus Christ, you get the only relationship that will never end!

Whatever your situation right now, your anchor address is that you're "in Christ." You can have His peace whatever your surroundings. Do you realize how secure you are no matter what? You're in Christ and you're never moving! Once you know that you have this relationship securely with Jesus, it is important that you understand the five secrets to a great relationship with God!

Talk to God

How do you have a relationship with someone you can't see? Prayer is God's plan for us to communicate with Him, and it is a way that He will also communicate with you (John 10:4). Tell Jesus what is on your mind throughout the day. You won't surprise Him with your honesty and struggles. In fact, the more real you are with God, the more deeply you get to know Him.

The first secret to a great relationship with God is to *talk to Him*. You have to talk with someone to even have any kind of relationship with them. The same is true of God. You can talk to Him. The day you open your heart to Jesus Christ, through prayer, you then have the privilege of walking into the throne room of God. Hebrews 4:16 in the Bible says, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." That's an awesome invitation!

Talk to God about anything:

- **There's nothing too small to talk to God about.** The Bible says He loves you so much that He cares about the little stuff in your life.
- **There's nothing too big to talk to God about.** Sometimes it's easy to be so

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worried about what you're going through that you don't even think to talk to God about it. There's nothing too big for God!

- **There's nothing too bad to talk to God about.** 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." He wants you to bring everything to Him. He already knows what you've done; it's no secret to Him. Get it resolved with the God whose Son paid for the very thing you just did.

When you talk to God, you might include these five things:

- "Lord, I love You for..."
- "Lord, thank You for..."
- "Lord, I'm sorry for..."
- "Lord, please..."
- "Lord, I promise..."

That's what you talk to God about. It's not all that different from any other relationship. Talking to God is an important secret to a great relationship with Him. Philippians 4:6-7 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." In other words, you can trade your worries for His peace.

What a special, incredible honor we have because of Jesus, to talk to God. On that you can build an incredible love relationship.

Read What He's Written to You

How do you find out how God wants you to live? *The Bible is God's love letter to us* and is full of daily wisdom and knowledge that we all need to become faithful and productive followers of Jesus.

Chances are, you began to understand the love letter thing at a young age. When you can't be with that special person who wrote you a love letter, the next best thing to being with them is to read what they wrote to you.

God has written a love letter to you, the Bible, which is the world's best-selling book. It helps more people with their lives than any book in the history of the planet and is much more than a religious book. It's the only book God ever wrote, and He wrote it for His children.

2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness." The Bible is how we find out what God wants. If you're going to have a great relationship with God, you need to plan each new day to *read* something of *what He wrote to you* in the Bible.

I encourage new believers to begin reading the Gospel of John or the book of James. While the Gospel of John gives you great insight into the person of Jesus, the book of James gives excellent daily wisdom to help you live out your faith. I recommend reading a section or a chapter a day from one of these two books, and read that book in its entirety before moving on to another one.

Here are some practical steps to help get you started:

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- **Set a time.** When is your time with Jesus going to be?
- **Set a place.** Where are you going to meet with Him?
- **Choose a starting place in the Bible.** Consider beginning with a book in the New Testament like John, James, 1 John, Philippians, or the book of Proverbs in the Old Testament.

To locate a specific verse in the Bible:

- Look up the name of the book in the Table of Contents section in the front of your Bible.
- Find the page number where that book begins, then turn to that page.
- Once you've found the location of the book, look at the number following the book name. This is the chapter you should look for.
- The second number is the verse you are looking for.

Here are some words from God you can build your life on: Revelation 3:20, Acts 3:19, Romans 10:9-10, John 10:27-28, Joshua 1:8, James 1:2-4, and 2 Corinthians 5:17.

Start by reading a few verses of the Bible. Read it about three times, and then ask yourself these two questions:

- "What is God trying to say here?"
- "What am I going to do differently today because of what God said?"

As you begin to ask yourself these questions, get a notebook and title it my "Jesus Journal." Begin writing down each day the scriptures you have read and try putting it in your own words. Then write down what God is saying to you specifically, and what God is telling you to do as a result of what He says.

Whatever you do, don't miss your time with the One who loves you most. He gave His life so you and He could have that kind of love relationship. Read what He's written to you.

Be With His Friends

Where do you find God's family? All over this planet, there are millions of people who, at some point in their life, opened their heart to Jesus just like you have done. You now have a spiritual family! *You need His friends and His family* to really have an awesome relationship with God.

You and I were not made to "do life" on our own, and we especially were not made to live the Christian life on our own. We need other people within the Body of Christ to support us, encourage us, re-direct us, and influence us. Simple truth about influence: We become like those we are around the most. Who are you spending your time with?

You need to be around people who have followed Jesus Christ longer than you have and who've had different experiences with Him. As you hear their experiences, you will find out more about your relationship with Him. You don't have to learn it all the hard way.

Hebrews 10:24-25 says, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more

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as you see the day approaching." These verses are talking about the day when Jesus comes back, which is getting closer and closer. Until then, it says we need to get together to motivate each other to do good deeds and to encourage one another. Let's keep meeting together. There are no lone ranger Christians. It's a family affair and a team effort.

One of the first things you need to be doing, if you haven't done it already, is connect yourself regularly to a family of believers and start to be with some of Jesus' friends on a regular basis. You can find them in places where people are studying the Bible together, where people are praying together, and most of all, you find them in His church.

Not every building that has a steeple on it is necessarily what God would call a church. The definition of church in the Bible is a group of people who come together to study the Bible and learn to develop a deeper love for Jesus. A real church is a place where they talk about how to begin that relationship with Christ and how to grow in it.

When you go to church, you should be looking for Him there. Don't go in like you're going to a concert or some entertainment event and say "Entertain me!" The audience at church is Jesus and He wants you to worship Him by singing and praying to Him. When we talk to each other and try to connect with each other in fellowship, it's in front of Him. We're doing it for Him while at the same time trying to learn more about Him. Keep looking and listening for Him. Go expecting to come away with more of God than you brought in with you.

It's so important to not try and do it alone, but instead to connect with His friends. You need them and they need you. You need what's being taught and you can discover new things about God with people who are on the same journey.

Do What Makes Him Happy

What makes God happy? When you began your relationship with God, it's probably because you wanted your life to change. If you wanted it to stay the same, you wouldn't have given your life to Him. Now that you have a personal relationship with your Creator, how do you get the life He intended for you? The fourth secret to a great relationship with God is you *do what makes Him happy*.

If you want to have a good relationship with someone, you're going to start doing what makes them happy and you're going to stop doing things that make them unhappy. John 14:15 says, "If you love Me, you will obey what I command." Jesus makes it clear that our love for Him is measured by our obedience to Him (John 14:21, 23). This means not letting things come between you and Him, but if something does come between you, make it right with Him as soon as you become aware of it. Simply agree with God that you messed up and ask Him for the grace to change what needs changing.

Many people have a messed up idea of what sin really is. They are wrong in thinking that sin is breaking some religion's rules. The big deal about sin is that you're breaking God's heart. God's only Son, Jesus, carried your sins to the cross to pay your death penalty for sin and to give you an opportunity to live a righteous life. When He was hanging on that cross, He wasn't picturing you continuing to live your life the same old self-centered way—dirty, selfish, angry, explosive, hurting other people. That

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wasn't what He had in mind. He died so you could have the power to change.

As you read what He wrote to you, as you talk to Him, and as you spend time with His friends, don't just take in information; ask God what He wants you to change. When you find out something that is making Him unhappy, the Bible says you should repent. Repentance means that you decide to change how you've been living your life and that you won't do it anymore because you know it's hurting Him. You begin to burn the bridges to the thoughts and actions that hurt Him, so you won't do those things again. Acts 3:19 says, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord."

When you start to do what Jesus wants you to do and obey what He has taught about how you're supposed to live your life, you will begin to live like you were created to live. This isn't just to make God happy, but it's to make you happy as well. When you do what He says, you're showing you love Him and you are on the fast track to a great relationship with God.

Talk About Him

When I was a child about the age of six or seven, my family went on vacation to Padre Island. One afternoon while playing in the shallow end of the hotel swimming pool, I noticed that my raft drifted toward the deep end just out of my reach. I began to tip-toe toward it hoping I could reach it, when suddenly I took one too many steps and before I could blink, I was under water. My mother was sitting in a chair just a few feet from me and I could hear her saying, "Just come up for air, son." She didn't realize that I was unable to hoist myself up out of the water. I was drowning and fast.

Thankfully, there was a man also sitting nearby who saw what was happening, and jumped in the water and saved my life. I remember that incident like it just happened today. That is what Jesus did for you and me. While we were still running our own life (and drowning), Christ died for us and rescued us from a life of sin and eternal hell. We should make our "rescue story" a part of our conversations as often as possible, especially with the people who haven't been spiritually rescued yet and are sinking fast.

Are you telling others about Him? You talk about someone you love. There's nothing wrong with that, but there's something wrong with not doing it. The last secret to a great relationship with God is you *talk about Him to other people*. That's how it is in a love relationship.

The reason you now belong to God is because somewhere along the way someone told you about Him. It's important to know you're talking about a person. Acts 1:8 says, "You will be my witnesses." A witness tells what they've seen and heard. Be one who tells people about Jesus—what you've seen about Him, what you've heard about Him, and what you've come to discover about Him.

You're telling about a person, but you're also telling about a relationship. This is all about life's most important relationship. Everyone is looking for something or someone to fill a void in their life and you can lead them to Him! They were created by Him and for Him, and you get to be the messenger of that news.

Colossians 4:3-4 says, "Pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we

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may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should." Before you talk to someone about God, pray these three things:

- **"God, open a door."** Ask God for a natural opportunity for you to talk about the difference Jesus is making in your life. It might be something going on in their life, something going on in your life and the way you're handling it, or it might be something going on in the world around you.
- **"God, open their heart."** Ask God to get them ready to hear what you have to say before you ever talk to them.
- **"God, open my mouth."** Ask God for the courage, the words, and the approach to use.

You are someone's chance at a personal relationship with God through His Son, Jesus, and someone's chance at heaven. You have a chance to do the most important thing you could ever do in your life by helping someone else be in heaven with you forever.

Simple Secrets

Remember that your relationship with God has a definite beginning and it lasts forever. Talk to Him, read what He's written to you, be with His friends, do what makes Him happy, and talk about Him on your journey to a great relationship with God!

These are simple secrets, and yet I have found that each one is foundational to my faith. Perhaps you can use them to share with others who need some practical help getting started in their walk with Jesus.

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About Ron Hutchcraft

Ron Hutchcraft is committed to communicating the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost in their language, and to motivating and equipping believers to communicate Christ to the lost in their world.

In all he does, he seeks to reach the lost and the young with the life-changing message of Jesus Christ. As President of Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, Ron and his team specialize in developing authentic, relevant, and creative tools to reach people with the message of Jesus.

A veteran of over 43 years of youth and family work, Rev. Hutchcraft has presented the Gospel across North America and around the world. Mr. Hutchcraft is also involved in work with Native Americans, and is founder of the On Eagles' Wings® Native leadership program. He has also spoken at many NFL and Major League Baseball chapels.

Ron frequently speaks in partnership with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. He was honored as Moody Bible Institute's Alumnus of the Year for 1997.

For more information about Ron Hutchcraft Ministries, visit www.Hutchcraft.com.

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