



The
ADVENTURE

*Living Out Your
Relationship with God*
Catholic Edition



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Introduction

Stepping Out of the Boat

Peter could hardly believe his eyes. He saw a ghost-like figure walking on the water in the middle of the lake. “Lord, if it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Peter wanted real adventure, and Jesus gave it to him. “Come,” said Jesus. Peter looked at the water, looked at Jesus, took a deep breath, and stepped out of the boat and onto the water. The adventure had begun.

You’re on an adventure too! That’s what a relationship with Jesus Christ is — an adventure with the Creator of the cosmos, played out in the arena of your life. You didn’t join a club or sign up for a self-improvement course. You didn’t enter into a contract with a set of rules and a guarantee that the sailing

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would be smooth or that all your problems would disappear. (Clubs, courses, contracts, rules, and calm waters sound boring — not the stuff of which adventures are made. If this is how you have viewed your Catholic life, my guess is that you don't even realize you are on an adventure.)

In truth, you began a *real-life adventure* by beginning a relationship with Jesus, who *is* life. Relationship is just the beginning. Jesus wants that relationship to grow into friendship, to the point where you and he are best friends.

Any relationship requires risk, and with risk comes adventure. God calls you to take risks that will draw you closer to him and help you understand yourself in the process. Growing close to God is where the adventure comes in. Think about being friends with an all-loving, all-powerful God whose desire is to deepen your trust in him and shape *your* life to reflect *his* life. Someone like that is liable to ask you to join him on the water! Maybe it is time to step out of the boat!

The purpose of this book is to help you get to know God and see that the risks that come with knowing him are the most important, most rewarding risks you can ever take.

Throughout this book, I share my thoughts on one side of the page and verses from the Holy Bible on the other. My thoughts will help you understand the truth, life, and power contained in the Scripture verses. I have highlighted in bold the words of Scripture that correspond directly with my words.

1

You Began a Relationship

*Did Anything Happen When I Was Baptized?
Where Does the Relationship Part Come In?*

Your relationship with God began at your baptism. When you were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, incredible things happened, *supernaturally*. You became

- a child of God, newly born to live forever
- an adopted brother or sister of Jesus
- a new creation with new life, clean and forgiven

John 1:12 — But to those who did accept him he gave power to become **children of God**, to those who believe in his name.

Galatians 3:26–27 — For **through faith you are all children of God** in Christ Jesus. For **all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ**.

2 Corinthians 5:17 — So whoever is in Christ is a **new creation**: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

1 Peter 3:21 — This prefigured baptism, which saves you now ... not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Acts 2:38 — “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.”

Acts 22:16 — “Now, why delay? Get up and have yourself baptized and your sins washed away, calling upon his name.”

John 3:16 — For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

Matthew 7:21 — “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.”

James 2:17 — So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

This was all a gift from God — what we call “grace.”

That sounds like an exciting deal to me! I like the idea of being forgiven and receiving new life, but I especially like the thought of being one of God’s kids. Being in that relationship makes me feel that I belong.

Faith and baptism go together. If you were baptized as a baby, you entered into your relationship with God based on the faith of your parents. To make this baptismal relationship and faith *your own*, you must *participate* in the relationship. To participate in the relationship, you have to get personal with God. “Getting personal” starts with admitting that you need him for your life and your salvation. Once you know you need God, then faith makes more sense. Faith leads you to the belief that Jesus died for you so that your sins could be forgiven and you could have eternal life.

This “trusting faith” requires two things from you: a commitment to follow Jesus and *actually following him* by participating in the relationship. Jesus was quite clear about this when he said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Mt 7:21).

Part of doing the Father’s will is taking care of others. We can *say* we believe, but our hearts are revealed by our actions and habits. Our attitudes, habits, and actions toward our neighbor — especially those most in need, whom Jesus sometimes called “the least of these” (Mt 25:45, RSV-CE) — are the ultimate proof of whether our belief is a true acceptance of and participation in God’s grace.

Don’t feel pressured by all this talk of “commitment” and “participation,” as if you have to generate faith and works on your own. Both the faith to be-

lieve and the ability to do good works to participate come from God in the first place. It is all due to his grace. You just have to cooperate with that grace and join in the relationship! Besides, it naturally feels good to commit to something worthwhile and to follow through. Trust me — committing to God and living out that commitment, enabled by his grace, will be a great source of joy for you.

You may have expressed a “believing commitment” to Jesus at a specific point — at a camp, at a retreat, at church, or just by yourself. Or you may have come about it gradually. As Catholics, we express this commitment in various ways: when we receive the Eucharist, when we recite the Creed at Mass, and when we renew our baptismal promises at Easter. Just make sure those words and that “amen” come from the heart.

RELATIONSHIP, NOT RULES

At baptism, you were born into a relationship with God, not a set of rules. Even when you mess up, you are still a child of God, just as, in a human family, you are a son or daughter regardless of whether you are on the honor roll or flunking a class. Your identity as your parents’ child is permanent. You may be a good child or you may be a lousy child, but you’re still *their* child.

Likewise, you will always be God’s child, and *no one* but you can separate the two of you. You will be happier if you are doing things that please your heavenly Father.

Thinking of God as a father may resonate with you, or it may be off-putting. Some fathers and mothers are great examples who can help us understand God the Father because their depth of love is a taste of the Father’s love for us. Other parents are not such

Romans 10:9 —
For, if you **confess** with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord** and **believe in your heart** that **God raised him from the dead**, you will be saved.

Mark 16:16 — Whoever **believes and is baptized** will be **saved**; whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Romans 8:35, 38–39 — **What will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 14:25–31 — During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. “It is a ghost,” they said, and they cried out in fear. At once [Jesus] spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” Peter said to him in reply, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” He said, “Come.” Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus.

But when he saw how [strong] the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”

Ephesians 2:8–9 — **For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast.**

great examples. And even the best of parents fall short. Parent wounds can damage our perspective of God the Father because we transfer how we feel about our earthly parents to God. I urge you to understand God the Father as the kind of parent you have always wanted and needed, because that is exactly who he is, and much more.

God’s love and acceptance do not depend on your performance. His life in you, His love for you, and his forgiveness of you are His gifts to you — free of charge! They are part of God’s grace. Look at what happened to Saint Peter when he stepped out of the boat. I can just see him shouting with excitement over the howl of the wind as he walked on the water. Then he looked away from Jesus and at the wind and the waves around him. Big mistake — he should have kept his eyes on Jesus. He started to sink. Fortunately, he had the right reaction: “Lord, save me!” (Mt 14:30). Jesus’ response wasn’t “Sink, sucker! You blew it.” Instead, Jesus immediately reached out his hand, pulled Peter up, and helped him into the boat.

In the same way, Jesus will pick you up when you fall or mess up. He does that through the sacraments (especially reconciliation), through other people, and through prayer (all of which we’ll get to later).

I once talked with a high school friend who believed that God was mad at her most of the time. She would try and try but still kept messing up. She thought she needed to “do good all the time” for God to like her. To help her understand God’s unconditional love for her, I asked, “Do you know anyone with a little child learning how to walk? When the child took her first few steps and then fell down, did her father yell at her for failing? Of course not. He knew she would fall many times in between her steps. But

those wobbly, uncertain steps actually delighted her father,” I continued.

My friend started to smile and cry at the same time as she realized that God the Father was *delighted* in her — failures and all!

God asks you to take the risk of walking in a relationship with him. He knows you will fall a bunch of times. But you are his delight. He loves you (and *likes* you) even when you fall. He loves the fact that you are willing to take the risk! And just as he did for Saint Peter, he will reach out his hand and pull you up each time you cry, “Lord, save me!”

Although God will never walk away from you, you can walk away from him. But why abuse God’s gift by ignoring his plan for your life? That would hurt you and sadden God.

One of the best things about God’s plan is that he *chose* you — personally — even before he created the world. All this time you probably thought you were seeking God when actually he was seeking you.

God didn’t just choose you. He chose you “**to be holy and without blemish** before him.” Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, goes on to say, “In love, he destined us **for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ**” (Eph 1:4–5). Being holy means being cleaned up and set apart for a relationship with God. Holiness means looking more like Jesus — which readies you for your adventure with him!

The command to be holy as God is holy sounds intimidating. The standard seems unattainable. But becoming holy is both the process of God’s shaping you and your destiny as a child of God. You have a part in it all, but God’s part — his grace — is much more important. God’s grace is at work in you. Growing in holiness requires your cooperation with that grace.

Ephesians 1:4–5 — [A]s he chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will.

Leviticus 11:45 — Since I, the LORD, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt that I might be your God, you shall be holy, because I am holy.

1 Peter 1:13–16 — Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, **live soberly**, and set your **hopes completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ**. Like obedient children, do not act in compliance with the desires of your former ignorance **but, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct**, for it is written, “**Be holy because I [am] holy.**”

Ephesians 2:10 — For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them.

Jeremiah 29:11 — For I know well the plans I have in mind for you ... plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope.

Acts 2:38 — Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 3:16 — Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

John 6:63 — It is the spirit that gives life.

Titus 3:4–7 — But when the kindness and generous love / of God our savior appeared, / not because of any righteous deeds we had done / but because of his mercy, / he saved us through the bath of rebirth / and renewal by the holy Spirit, / whom he richly poured out on us / through Jesus Christ our savior, / so that we might be justified by his grace / and become heirs in hope of eternal life.

Ezekiel 36:26–27 — I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them.

Think of God as a master craftsman. You are his “workmanship” — his handiwork — not just to be placed on the mantel but to be put into action. He has an individual plan for your life. That’s exciting! God isn’t just saving you from hell. He has mapped out an adventure for the two of you to take *together*. He has plans for you — you have purpose.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

It gets even better. God did more for you than give you a set of rules to follow and plan an adventure for the two of you. He gave you more than a map — he gave you a Guide! When you were baptized, God the Father gave you himself in the Person of his own Spirit (sometimes called the Holy Spirit), *to live in your heart forever*. Incredible!

The Holy Spirit

- gives you life
- cleans you up spiritually
- gives you a new heart
- marks you as his (puts his seal upon you)
- guides you on your adventure
- allows you to call Jesus “Lord” and the Father “Dad”
- empowers you
- shapes your character to look like Jesus’ character

Understand that the Holy Spirit is God just as much as Jesus and the Father are God. The Spirit living inside you unites you with God the Father and God the Son. When the Holy Spirit lives in us, so do Jesus and his Father.

Don’t ask me to explain the Trinity (that is, that

God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one God). I don't completely understand how God can be one God and three distinct Persons at the same time. But God's word, handed to us as Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition and his Church (which interprets and hands down Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition), say that all three Persons are one God. The Trinity is a deep mystery, and that's OK. Any great adventure has plenty of mystery! The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, quoting Saint Augustine, puts it this way: "Even when he reveals himself, God remains a mystery beyond words. 'If you understood him, it would not be God'" (230).

The Trinity is the example of the *perfect relationship of love*. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are never in conflict and are always on the same wavelength. Getting to know all three persons of the Godhead — who they are and how they love one another — is important if you want your relationship with God to grow. Experiencing the creative love of the Father, the saving love of the Son, and the empowering love of the Holy Spirit will be a great part of your adventure.

Through the Spirit, you have the *presence* of God and the *power* of God. You can walk with him, laugh with him, cry with him, grieve with him, and be filled with him (more on that later). For now, just understand that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force, and that he is just as important as God the Father and God the Son. He is God's presence with you today. It is important to know him.

I have faced several hard things since I started my relationship with Christ. Hard things are part of any adventure. I am so glad I faced those trials with more than a map and a set of instructions. The Holy Spirit went through every one of those trials with me be-

2 Corinthians 1:21–22
— But the one who gives us security with you in Christ and who anointed us is God; he has also **put his seal upon us and given the Spirit in our hearts as a first installment.**

John 16:13 — But when he comes, the **Spirit** of truth, **he will guide you** to all truth.

1 Corinthians 12:3 — **No one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the holy Spirit.**

Romans 8:9, 15 — You are in the spirit, if **only the Spirit of God dwells in you. . . .**

You received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "*Abba*, Father!"

Acts 1:8 — **But you will receive power when the holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses** in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

1 Corinthians 2:11–12
— Among human beings, who knows what pertains to a person except the spirit of the person that is within? Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God. **We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the things freely given us by God.**

cause he was (and is) *in* me. Sometimes he guided me, and sometimes he carried me. His active presence in my life makes the trials and risks worthwhile.

A missionary friend of mine named Rodney told me that at one time Communist China had a policy regarding which subjects the state-sanctioned churches could discuss. They could talk about any portion of the Bible except the return (Second Coming) of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit! In other words, the Communist government, which opposes the growth of Christianity, recognized the profound effect God's promised return (in Christ) and his abiding presence (in the Holy Spirit) can have on people.

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU THINK AND UNDERSTAND

1. Are you a follower of Jesus? If your answer is "yes," write down, to the best of your knowledge, when you committed yourself to a relationship with him. (If it was gradually, that's fine. If you know the specific date, that's fine too.)

If your answer is "no" or "I'm not sure," you'll want to talk with a friend who has a relationship with Christ or perhaps a youth minister, a Young Life leader, a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) leader, or a priest. This person will help you sort out any issues you may have about that decision. *(By the way, this book is written as if you have begun following Jesus. If you haven't, go ahead and read the book anyway. It will give you an idea of the adventure in store for you if you do.)*

2. Does God's unconditional love for you make you want to do everything you can to please him or

make you want to do whatever wrong things you feel like doing because you know he will forgive you? Why?

3. How does it make you feel to know that the Creator of the universe makes his home inside you?
4. Is living in a relationship with God easier or harder than living according to a set of rules? Why do you say that?
5. What questions come to your mind after reading this chapter? Write them out on this page, along with any other thoughts that excite or trouble you. See if I answer these questions in this book. If I don't, find a Christian friend who can help you with them.

