



Christian Life: A User Manual

“I ask you to reply to my questions: Should I, as a beginner (I have tried to live as a Christian for three months), practice the Jesus Prayer and other means of the unceasing remembrance of God? Or does one first need to weaken the force of the passions and only then proceed? Or do them in parallel? The Holy Fathers don’t agree. If I get the blessing of a priest for this, will it not be a sin if I inadvertently forget prayer for a short time and live without the memory of God, but then remember and repent and continue to pray? (For two weeks I’ve tried but often forget about prayer during the day due to extraneous thoughts.) How can I combine study and mental prayer, if the mind is focused on mastering the material? There is a kind of dichotomy as a result (I cannot learn knowledge, and I don’t manage to remember the Lord Jesus Christ while reading secular books). Do I need a prayer rope?”



This is a very distressing, simply tragic letter. Explaining this to those who don’t understand is pointless. This is a frightful, murderous hodgepodge of consciousness.

“But,” you say, “the person is trying to live in a Christian manner for only the third month...!”

That’s why no one blames the young author of the letter, but only feels pity for him. The beginning of anything is always connected with some measure of hodgepodge of consciousness, but this is a matter of life and death, so that mistakes are not just annoying, but deadly.

By analogy, someone decides to build a barn: without a plan, without skills, without knowledge of the tools, without boards and nails, he sits down and smokes. The thing isn’t moving forward. Annoying. But



his neighbor, with the same level of skill and awareness, builds a gas station: he brings gasoline, pours it on the troughs, splashes it around – and also sits down and smokes.

The blame can to some extent be laid on the availability of information about Christianity and on the specifics of the Internet.

Without leaving one's chair (or even one's cell phone), by slightly lifting a finger the curious "user" gazes distractedly at the monastic teachings of the Holy Fathers of the first millennium and a half, in a sectarian trap labeled as Orthodox, or in a theological treatise on some "forum for discussion" with the active participation of everyone with who has nothing to do, or in the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament (the last option is extremely rare)...

This miserable hodgepodge is filled with previously unthinkable ease and energy.

But one must somehow reply to the author of the given question... I'd answer like this:

- Do not look for a user manual. Do not look for rules of internal regulation, job descriptions, and instructions for execution. Do not go looking for obedience.
- Do not look for sergeants and officers. Do not look for wardens and guards. Do not look for Kindergarten teachers. Otherwise you'll find a sect. Even if not on the outside, then certainly on the inside.
- Seek Christ in His Holy Church, in its voice, its life, and its Mysteries.

And I'll add an answer to another similar, consonant, but briefer and more clearly formulated question:

"I have seventy-six simple instructions for all of life occasions. Help me to clarify them."

Instructions cannot be written for the Christian life: the devil will always be able to create situations unforeseen by even the most "perfect" instructions.

Nonetheless, your seventy-six instructions are easy to refine.

Take a sheet of paper and write on it in large letters: "I love the Lord, I love my neighbor," and hang it above your desk.

It's best to hide all other instructions until better times.

Translated from the [Russian](#).