

N.T. Wright poses a question that strikes at the heart of Christian living: "What do I do after I believe?"

Christians rightly believe that, once they've accepted Jesus, they stand in God's grace, and will go to heaven when they die. But, what now, "after we believe, but before we die"?

Wright's answer, in *After You Believe*, takes the reader on a tour of the New Testament, against the backdrop of the ancient understandings of virtue, particularly that of Aristotle.

Where Aristotle, and many since in the West, envisioned the goal of character development as "human flourishing", the new Testament suggests that Christian character has, as its goal, the kind of life that fits the future kingdom that Christ has already inaugurated at the cross, the kingdom he will bring to fruition upon his return in glory.

Where Aristotle defines the classic virtues of courage, temperance, prudence, and justice, Wright argues that Jesus and Paul present a new way of living, which appropriates the classic virtues and adds to them qualities the ancient world, and our own, rarely think of as virtues: humility, patience, chastity, and love.

And, where Aristotle saw the heroic character as standing above and apart from his community, Jesus and Paul demonstrate that Christian character can only be developed and practiced within the community of faith, that is, the church.

Wright is quick to point out that Christian living is not just a matter of living by different, albeit better, rules. Neither is it simply living spontaneously, "being true to oneself". Contrary to both of these contemporary ways of thinking about discipleship, Wright suggests that virtue is akin to learning a new language, or learning to play a musical instrument. It takes effort and work, but the point is to move beyond "beginner's rules" to a place where speaking the language, or

playing the instrument, becomes "second nature".

That, ultimately, is Wright's answer to the question, "What do I do after I believe?" You strive to open yourself to God's Spirit, and develop a heart that tends to do the right thing, the loving thing, because it's in its nature, its "second nature", to do so.

*After You Believe* is the third volume of a set, the first two being *Simply Christian* and *Surprised By Hope*.

For the Christian interested in a book that will challenge both the mind and the heart,

*After You Believe*

is a great read.