

Confused about Christianity?



The sign on the piano says,
“Press any key.”

The poor fellow in this picture doesn't know what to do. He never learned to play piano, and the sign on the piano states, “Press any key.” He is totally confused as to which one to press. Even if he presses one key he wouldn't know where to go for the next key. While pressing one key will produce the tone of the piano key selected, it is not enough to play a whole song. He could risk hitting two or more keys together and may luck out with an acceptable sound, but then again he may make a horrible noise that offers nothing to the audience, or himself. Poor guy! What to do, what to do. How about he takes lessons. Then instead of pressing any key he learns which keys produce which sounds. Then he will need to practice scales, learn music theory, and harmony and eventually with enough practice some day, he and the those that listen to him, would be able make sense out of his playing the piano.

Many of you know that I used to teach guitar to children and adults many years ago. Many students came because playing a guitar was very popular and a cool thing to do. But they soon found out that learning to play any instrument takes more than just looks and being cool. It took time, energy and practice in order to achieve any level of proficiency. Some had more natural talent than others but all had to pay the price of practicing over and over again until their finger tips were sore and eventually developed calluses that made pressing the strings down to the frets and playing chords less painful than when they first began.

The first thing a new student wanted to do was to play a song. Well when you are learning to read music, the technique of picking with your right hand and fingering the notes with your left hand on steel strings, and understanding reading music, you first have to learn about three notes per string. The first week was three notes on one string. The beginner music book had notated less than melodic or rhythmic sounding songs, since it is very hard to make a song with three notes. In order to help them feel better about those little three notes I would accompany with what we call power chords and added some differing rhythms. Their faces would light up, and they would get all excited, until they got home and there was no one to back them up, and the three little notes didn't sound so great. But those who really wanted to learn the guitar, went through the learning process and eventually became accomplished guitarist or at least could entertain themselves and family.

Some of my students went on to become exceptional artist in their own right, and others even decided to major in music in College. I still see some of them occasionally when I am out and about shopping, and I can still see the little girl or boy sitting in the small lesson room at Nash Music all excited about learning to play guitar. Week after week they came to learn and week after week they practiced until they got it right. I am very grateful to God that I started teaching guitar at the age of 15 while I was in school. I loved to see the students learn and become accomplished musicians. Both student and teacher have changed a great deal since then but we always recognize each other when we happen to run into to each other, and even though some of them have surpassed me in skill, they still show respect to me as their teacher.

It is a very moving thing for me to hear the kind words and memories that they share about those lessons and how much they still appreciate me for guiding them in their musical journey.

Christianity became very popular in the 60's and 70's and has become the thing to be today. Many people want to look like, act like and say that they are Christians, but they have not applied the same tenacity as those young kids and even adults applied when learning to play the guitar in years gone by that I described above. The first sign of pain and they are gone. They want to do right but just do not have the time to learn, practice their faith, and continue in their Christian education, which just like learning to play any instrument takes time, dedication, and practice. Some Christians aren't playing God's music because they never learned it!

Some people do not even get passed the first lesson, Church Service, because they think it is not what they thought it would be and if it is going to take time they soon lose interest. We talk about the drop out numbers of young people from school, but look at the drop out numbers of Christians from their faith and Church Services. There is a connection.

While we come to Church to honor God and continue our education of God, our practicing needs to be done at home, at work and in the market place. Those who are not willing to practice their faith after Church are students of Christ that are not going to accomplish anything for God, themselves, or their brothers or sisters. It takes hard work to be a Christian even with the amazing life of God in us. If we do not work at our faith then we become like our friend at the piano and are unable to play even one song correctly. We may look really good sitting at a piano and let people think we can really play but when push comes to shove nothing of any value is ever produced. We are to produce what the Bible calls the good fruit as a result of our Christianity.

When do I stop learning? Never. The most accomplished musicians still practice for hours and they usually play the scales and work on basic technique to keep their skills sharpened.

I remember once that Albert King called me to see if he could use my Fender Jazz Master for a concert he had coming up. Albert King, B.B King, Ike Turner, and other guitar players were my hero's back then. I said sure Albert I will get it you. I asked Albert what is the secret to learning songs off a record. His answer was typical Albert, “just keep listening and trying it over and over again and you will get it right.” My answer Ok Thanks! So that what I did and I discovered Albert was right.

I encourage you not to get weary of Church services, prayer, Bible study, and practicing your faith at all times, because that's what Disciples of Jesus Christ are supposed to do. If you dropped out, pick that wonderful instrument of faith back up and begin to practice again. Practice your faith over and over again and you will get it right!

Pastor Vince