

STANDARD B: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “IN CHRIST”?

Lesson 7: How Do We Stay Close to Jesus?

Introduction

Several times, Jesus gave His followers instructions about how to stay close to Him. Many people listened to His words. Jesus was concerned that people should also do what He said. One time Jesus told a story about wise and foolish builders. The wise builder dug deep. He laid a foundation for his house on rock. A flood came and struck the house. But it was well built. The flood did not destroy it. Another person built a house that did not have a foundation. When a flood came, it was completely destroyed. (See Luke 6:46-49.)

Jesus wants us to build our lives on a firm foundation. How do we do that? What are some of the foundation stones?

A. We Stay Close to Jesus by Worshiping Him.

Worship is the reverence, honor, and service we show or express to God. Worship of God is a form of ministry or service to Him. It is one way of affirming that God is the Creator and all people are His creation. Worship reminds people they depend totally on God. Worship is a way for people to show their complete faith in God.

Worship of God can happen in private. It also occurs when members of the Church come together to worship God through adoration, prayers, thanksgiving, songs, preaching, and the sacraments. When the members of the Church worship God, He prepares them to serve Him in the world. Other forms of worship include service to God in our homes, in places of employment and recreation, and in our care for needy people.

Worship with God’s people is very important for our growth as Jesus’ disciples. “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,” the writer of the Psalm 100 exclaims. He continues, “Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

Question: What is worship?

1. Worship is enjoying and being aware of the presence of God.

Worship is both awe and joy in the presence of the Holy God. We say, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.” We sense His glory and His holiness. We know He only is God.

We have access to God's holy presence through Jesus. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God has opened His heart to us. Jesus with us enables us to open our hearts to God. We come into His presence with praise and thankfulness. We sense our smallness when we come before Him. We lose ourselves. We become centered in Him. Miraculously, God's presence descends upon His people. Whenever God comes, we are going to be transformed.

This does not happen unless we are ready for the presence of God to come. We enter worship rejoicing. We enter worship expecting His presence. We enter worship inviting Him to speak to us.

Question: How can we be aware of the presence of God as we worship?

2. We worship God through the spoken Word.

In worship, God speaks again. God communicates with us, and we communicate with Him. That is why Scripture reading and preaching are essential to worship. When Jesus was on earth, the Scriptures were always read in the synagogue. Someone then explained what the Scriptures meant. Jesus himself did that. Early in His ministry, He was in the synagogue in Nazareth. He read from Isaiah (61:1-2). Then He declared, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Jesus meant that in himself and in His ministry He would fulfill God's ancient promise to Israel.

Question: How is God's Word used in worship?

3. We worship God through music and song.

Music is another important means for worshiping God. Songs make our heart glad and give us a means for expressing our love for God. The Bible includes many songs of worship. The Book of Psalms contains many of the songs or hymns the Jews used to worship God. The New Testament includes some poetry that may have been early Christian hymns. (See 1 Corinthians 13; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:15-20).

Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have written and sung hymns that express worship of God. Christians have used many kinds of musical instruments, and their songs have taken many forms. Songs of worship will often reflect the culture in which Christians write and sing hymns of worship.

One beautiful hymn of worship the Church sings around the world is: "Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty! / All Thy works shall praise Thy name in earth, and sky, and sea. / Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty! / God in three persons, blessed Trinity!"

Question: What part does music have in the worship of God?

4. We worship God in prayer.

Prayer is talking with God. Prayer includes worship of God and meditation on God. Christians pray when they worship together. They also pray in private. Always, the purpose of prayer is to worship God and to show our love for Him.

Question: Why is prayer important in worship?

5. We worship God through Christian fellowship.

It is important for us to worship God regularly together with other followers. Our fellow followers strengthen us also when we worship. We know that we are not alone. We pray together. We hear the Word together. We sing together. We rejoice together in God's presence. Ever since the Resurrection the followers of Jesus have worshiped on Sunday. Jesus was raised from the dead on Sunday. Every worship time becomes a celebration of His resurrection.

Question: How does Christian fellowship help us to worship?

6. Worship leads to transformation.

Worship is useless unless it leads to a transformed life. We are strengthened by His presence. We are transformed by His presence. The presence of God touches us and heals us inwardly. We are strengthened for service by His touch. More sensitive to His voice, we become more obedient to His will. We have a renewed sense He is with us in this world. Often near the end of worship services, we are given the opportunity to respond.

Question: How does worship transform worshippers?

B. We Stay Close to Jesus Through the Word.

When we read or hear the Scriptures, we should do so carefully and with a sense of worship. The Scriptures teach us about God. We ask the Holy Spirit to teach us from them. From the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit teaches us what we should be, what we should know, and what we should do.

Followers of Jesus have found it helpful to have a time each day to read (or hear) the Bible. The Bible gives balance to our lives. We should come to the Bible prayerfully, asking God to speak to us through His Word. We ask for correction and rebuke when it is needed. At other times, we ask for comfort or guidance. Many times the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts through the Bible. The Bible is a balanced whole. It is good to read all sections of the Bible. Many followers of Jesus have found it helpful to memorize verses or sections of the Bible.

The Bible is what tells us about Jesus. Even the Old Testament helps us understand the life and meaning of Jesus more clearly. When we read the Bible, we sense that we are reentering Jesus' world. It may help to use our imagination when we read the Bible.

Perhaps we can imagine what it would have been like to see and hear Jesus. Using the stories of the Bible, we can use our imagination to see, touch, and hear Jesus again.

Question: How does reading the Bible help us stay close to Jesus?

C. We Stay Close to Jesus Through Prayer.

Prayer is talking with God. It includes worship of God and meditation on God. Prayer often includes a request that God would help someone who is in need. Christians pray in the name of Christ. They pray with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is a Christian right and duty.

Jesus prayed often (Mark 6:46; 14:32; John 17:1-26). His disciples saw how important prayer was for Jesus. So, they asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:2-4). He taught them to pray the prayer that follows. We call the prayer “The Lord’s Prayer.” In the prayer we learn what prayer should include.

“Our Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.”

Jesus’ prayer begins with “Our Father.” When we pray publicly with others we say “our.” We are including others. We are representing their prayers and not just our own. It is not the time or place for our personal prayer. Like Jesus did, we say “Father.” We are not praying only to Jesus or to the Holy Spirit. “Father” represents the whole fatherhood or person of God.

The prayer contains two petitions: Let your name be hallowed, and let your kingdom come. “Hallowed” means holy. We pray this, as Jesus intended, because of the importance of the Name of God. The Hebrews had blasphemed that Name through their sins. Today, we pray for God to act in us to save His name from the shame we have caused. (See Ezekiel 36:20-29.) This will be accomplished only when His Kingdom comes and His will is done.

We pray that God’s Kingdom will come on earth. We know it will not completely come until Christ returns. We also know His Kingdom will never come without our obedience to His will.

We pray for our daily necessities, our “daily bread.”

We pray that God will forgive us, knowing that we still have much for which to be forgiven. We promise God that we also will forgive other people who sin against us, just as He has forgiven us.

Finally, we pray that we will not be tempted.

The Lord's Prayer is not the only way for us to pray. It is a model prayer because it teaches us the elements of prayer. Many other prayers have been written that are still used today in the Church. In times of prayer, Christians create their own prayers. They may be praying to God when not actually speaking. They may just be thinking intensely of their love for God. Or they may cry out to God in times of distress or temptation. A prayer may be simply giving thanks to God, or even a word of joy directed to God.

Daily prayer is important for the followers of Jesus. It provides a means of our communicating to God and God to us.

Question: What is prayer?

Question: Why is praying each day so important for Jesus' disciples?

D. We Stay Close to Jesus by Living Obediently.

Blessed are "those who hear the word of God and obey it," Jesus said. Jesus himself was obedient to the Father. We harm, and may even lose, our fellowship with Jesus when we disobey Him. People who have faith prove it by obeying Jesus. Peter, one of the disciples, later preached boldly. He said, "We must obey God rather than men!" He also said that God has given the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:29, 32).

Living obediently is the way in which we retain the grace we have received. Christ's resurrection provides victory over sin. When we disobey, we are living short of what Christ enables. As we continue to obey, the presence of God draws closer and we become stronger.

Question: What happens when we *disobey* God?

Question: What happens when we *obey* God?

Conclusion

Jesus wants all of His disciples to succeed by staying close to Him. So, He gives them all the help they will need to grow and become stronger. But Jesus' disciples must take advantage of His rich resources. Growing as a disciple includes the Christian disciplines of worshiping God, receiving the sacraments, praying, studying the Bible, and living obediently. All Jesus' disciples can trust the Holy Spirit to guide them and give them power.

Activity: Sing a song of worship to God.

Activity: Tell someone your favorite Bible verse or your favorite part of the *JESUS* film. Explain why it is your favorite part.

Activity: Tell one person how you can live in obedience to God this week. Think about how you help other people to do the same.

Activity: Decide on one way you will try to stay close to God this week. Share that way with someone in your discipleship group.