

Christian Basics

Session 6: Spiritual Growth

Introduction

This is the last session of the 'Christian Basics' program. Throughout the last five sessions we have discovered Jesus and His death for our sins and subsequent resurrection is the answer to the problem of sin that separates all humans from God. Jesus has enabled us to receive forgiveness for our sins and to be welcomed into God's eternal presence. Jesus also gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to live in every believer, empowering and enabling them to live for Him and share Him with those who don't yet know Him. The Holy Spirit also helps us to grow in intimacy in our relationship with God and to become more like Jesus. Our own role in our spiritual growth is to pursue and prioritise the activities and structures that God has made available for us to develop in our faith and relationship with Him.

1. God's gift not our works

It is very important to keep remembering that we are completely dependent on Jesus' death on the cross alone for our salvation.

Read: Ephesians 2:8-9

(See also: John 1:12; 3:16; Romans 5:15, 6:23, 10:13; 2 Cor 9:15; Titus 2:11)

The natural outflow of putting our trust in Jesus and having the Holy Spirit live in us, is that we will naturally want to do good to others, because God is good. However, we can fall into the trap of thinking that we can earn God's love by our good deeds which is not true. No good work can earn God's love for us. God loves us because He loves us and sent His Son Jesus to die for us. Our good works should flow from thankfulness for what God has done for us and love for Him. As we allow God to do good in and through us, we grow in our relationship with Him and others.

2. Speaking to God

The best way to grow a relationship with someone else is to communicate regularly with them. To grow in your relationship with God, it is important to spend time speaking with Him daily. Speaking to God is commonly known as praying. The Psalms show us that you can speak to God about anything and everything – your highs and lows, your ups and downs.

When Jesus walked the earth, His disciples asked him to teach them to pray and He gave them a model of prayer which is commonly referred to as the Lord's prayer.

Read: Matthew 6:9-13

(See also: Luke 11:1-4)

Rather than saying the above prayer by rote, it is best to use it as model, speaking first to God about the things of God's kingdom, then asking for daily needs, forgiveness and protection from the evil one. Praying the words written in the book of Psalms and making them personal to you is also a helpful way to learn to speak to God authentically.

As we learned in an earlier session, our sin separates us from God. When we come to faith in Jesus, we don't automatically stop sinning. The Holy Spirit living in us makes us aware of our sin and helps us to turn from our sin, but it is a journey that takes time. Therefore, when we pray, we are to confess our sins to God and ask for help to avoid them in future.

Read: 1 John 1:8-9

3. Listening to God

As well as speaking with God, it is important also to listen to Him. God may speak to you through your thoughts, through other people, by drawing your attention to signs etc. The most profound way in which God speaks to us though, is through His word contained in the Holy Bible. Therefore, it is very important to regularly read and reflect on the words contained in the Bible.

Read: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

(See also: Psalm 119:105; Matthew 4:4; Romans 15:4; Hebrews 4:12)

If you are wondering whether what you may hear in your thought life or from others is from God or not, it is best to test it against what the Bible says. For example, if you think God might be telling you to steal something, you can be assured that is not the voice of God, as the Bible explicitly teaches that stealing is breaking God's commandment (Exodus 20:15).

4. Regularly connecting with other believers

Jesus never intended people to live out their faith in Him in isolation from others. When following Jesus, it is important to meet regularly with other believers to worship God, learn from His word, pray together, love one another, build one another up in the faith, and to help grow the kingdom of God together.

Jesus had twelve close disciples and He told them that others would identify them as His disciples by one key trait.

Read: John 13:35

We can only learn to love other believers if we are in regular, connected relationship with them which is referred to as 'fellowship'. Perhaps that is why the author of the letter to the Hebrews encourages the believers not to give up on meeting together.

Read: Hebrews 10:24-25

You can regularly meet with other believers by joining a church, a small group, or even connecting one-on-one with another person.

5. Serving and sharing

As you progress in your faith journey, you will notice that that you increasingly desire to be more like Jesus in every way. Jesus has the heart and posture of a servant and is also very generous.

Read: Matthew 20:25-28

(See also: Mark 10:45; John 13:1-17; Acts 20:35)

As we learned in Session 5 on the Holy Spirit, God gives every believer at least one gift to be able to serve others and help grow His kingdom.

Read: 1 Peter 4:10

Jesus is also very generous and encouraged His first disciples to share their earthly possessions with others. It is perhaps for this reason, that the writers of the New Testament encourage all believers in Jesus to share their God-given possessions with those in need.

Read: 1 John 3:16-18

(See also: 2 Cor 9:6-8; Hebrews 13:16; 1 Timothy 6:17-19)

Being aware of the battle

When we come to faith in Jesus, His enemy and ours often goes into battle to discourage us from continuing to follow and remain in relationship with Jesus. The early church leaders, Peter and Paul remind the believers that the battle with the devil and his demons is real.

Read: 1 Peter 5:8, Ephesians 6:12

The good news is that Jesus has all power and authority over the devil and the forces of darkness because He defeated them through His death and resurrection (Col 2:13-15; 1 John 3:8). Jesus gives believers His authority and spiritual tools to be able to overcome the power of the devil and his demons.

Read: Ephesians 6:13-18

(See also: Matthew 6:13; 2 Corinthians 2:11; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9)

What's Next?

This brings us to the end of the of the Christian Basics Program. You may wish to take one or more the following next steps in your faith journey:

- do the Baptism training and get baptised
- do the 7-week First Steps program for new believers
- regularly meet with another believer to read the Bible
- join a Christian growth group
- join a serving team.

Prayer to Make Jesus Lord of Your Life

If you have not done so yet, you can say the following prayer today, to put your trust in Jesus and make Him the Lord of your life:

Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died on the cross to rescue me from sin and eternal separation from God.

I ask for Your forgiveness for all of my sins and I choose to turn from them and make You the Lord of my life.

I receive Your forgiveness and ask You to come and live in me and help me to love in the same way that you do.

Thank-You for the free gift of salvation and for making me a child of God.

Thank-You that You will never leave or forsake me and that I can be assured of spending all eternity in heaven with You, only because of what You did on the cross for me.

May Your will be done in my life.

Amen.

Prayer to be Filled with the Holy Spirit

When we place our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live within us. While the Holy lives within us, we can always ask to be filled with more of His presence and power. In Luke 11:13, Jesus teaches that the Father will always give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. You can pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit every day by saying the following prayer:

Dear God,

Thank-You that the Holy Spirit already lives in me.

Please fill me now to overflowing with more of the Holy Spirit to be empowered in following Jesus and helping others to know Him.

Amen