

How do I help someone.....get closer to God?

Helping a friend get closer to God is a most worthwhile way of serving our Heavenly Father through serving our friend, or our spiritual brother or sister. Such help demonstrates our compassion and love, and our willingness to help someone along their life journey. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our example for this.

However, it starts with our own closeness to God. We have to be some way along our own journey before we can be effective in our efforts to help another. This does not mean that we do not attempt to help another until we have got it 'right' for ourselves, but we do have to be aware of what being closer to God means for ourself. We will not have complete closeness to God this side of the Kingdom, but we should be somewhere along the path if we are trying to help others.

Getting closer to God ourselves?

Where are we in our personal journey? Do we feel close to God ourselves? And what does being close to God actually mean? Associated with this essay are some stories of what some brothers and sisters of various ages believe is at least one way they have become closer to God.

What the stories show is that getting close to God is **highly individual**. Each person has different experiences, and these will reflect that person's personality. God respects this individuality. David in Psalm 134 (verses 1-4) shows he realises that God recognises individuals. He wrote

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. (Psalm 139:1-4)

There are other verses with assurances. Just before Jesus' ascension into heaven after his resurrection, he told his disciples

And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

Our Heavenly Father, through His Son, is always with us, sometimes collectively and always as individuals. He looks after us. He is always the constant in our life. Our getting closer to Him is our responsibility. Our desire is to get closer to Him, which He encourages.

What is closeness to God?

In many articles on the Adelphicare web site we have stressed that it is our **connection** with God that is vital to our closeness. And we know this in many aspects of our life. All our relationships involve connection. If we have good friends and family we relate to them, we confide in them, we have frequent association with them. One person has described connection with God as a "deep, intimate relationship." We know that our most worthwhile life associations centre around deep, intimate relationships. Such a connection with God is the same thing. We know that God is always willing for connection and closeness. It is up to us to develop this closeness from our end.

The Apostle James summed it up this way:

"Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." (James 4:8)



And Jesus himself said

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. (John 15:4)

How do we develop a personal connection with God?

There are many ways we can get closer to God and strengthen our connection to Him.

A Prayerful Life - personal and communal

"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)

We always acknowledge the value of individual prayer, and we engage in ecclesial (church) prayer as well, But I wonder if we always recognise the Scriptural basis for communal prayer? There are many examples of this in the Scriptures. Here are just three...

Solomon prayed on behalf of the assembled people of Israel and the dedication of Temple. "Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive." (1Kings 8:30) Do you notice that this was an ecclesial prayer for forgiveness as well?

Both **Ezra** (9:5-15) and **Nehemiah** (9:5-37) prayed with the people to worship God and seek His forgiveness.

And Jesus... When we say what is commonly known as the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) do we fully recognise that this is not just a personal prayer but a **communal prayer**? Jesus constantly says "Our" – not "My". "When you pray, say, Our Father... give us... forgive us..." The value of communal prayer when we are together should not be underestimated, especially when we ask God to help us to become closer to Him.

Meditation

King David said "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long." (Psalm 119:97). And this, of course, was not just formal law. Strong's Concordance suggests that one of the meanings of the Hebrew word is 'Teachings'. We meditate on the whole of God's teachings found in His word.

Working in community projects together in God's service

There are many occasions in the Scriptures when God's people worked together in worship and communal projects. There are examples in the Old Testament where the people were involved in **building the Ark** (although in this case it was just one family – Noah's). **People built the Tabernacle, and the Temple**. One of the really telling examples is in the New Testament when the Apostle Paul motivated many of the ecclesias (often with Gentile converts) to collect financial assistance for the ecclesia in Jerusalem. (2 Corinthians 8-9) There is a beautiful verse in chapter 9 (v.2). In speaking to the Corinthians Paul said, "For I know your eagerness to help, and I have been boasting about it to the Macedonians, telling them that since last year "you in Achaia were ready to give; and your enthusiasm has stirred most of them to action." This is a wonderful example of collective support to help other brothers and sisters. This inevitably brought them closer to God because they were demonstrating Christlike behaviour as a group.

Communal worship and working together is certainly encouraged in the Scriptures.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another —and all the more as you see the Day approaching.(Hebrews 10:24-25)

There is no doubt that collective service and working together will help stimulate each other in our getting closer to God.

Bible study

We sometimes shy away from the need to study the Scripture and often cite the idea that we need to be practising Christians rather than 'academic' Christians. But there is a fallacy with such a limiting Christlike experience. Jesus himself said: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me." (John 5:39) The original Greek word suggests 'search'. So, we continually search the Scriptures because they will give us, with God's assistance, what is necessary for eternal salvation. And the Scriptures include directions on how we can serve God. So, our daily life becomes a matter of searching the Scriptures and applying what we discover in our lives.

Worship

The worship of God is vital in our connection with Him. Again, the Psalmist said: "Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song." (Psalm 95:1-2) This honours God. And, if

we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. This is active service. Participating in communal worship and private devotion helps us to honour and glorify God.

In Matthew 18:20 Jesus declares, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." This assurance underscores the spiritual presence and power that accompany collective worship.

The early Christian church exemplified this principle through regular communal meetings. Acts 2:42 describes the practices of the early believers: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." These gatherings were essential for teaching, fellowship, and mutual development and creating a strong sense of community among believers.

It is important for us to connect with God in all of these ways. If we connect on a daily basis in as many ways as we can, our closeness to Him will become even closer and our life will become richer and more peaceful. God has promised peace:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:6-7)

A more Christlike life

Our attempt to be more Christlike in our life through the various activities outlined above will certainly help us get closer to God. Serving others in love, following Christ's example of selflessness and compassion will decidedly contribute.

But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. (1 Samuel 12:24)

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

Faith and trust

Getting closer to God also involves faith and trust. Engaging in the activities listed above will foster this connection. In faith we believe that God will always be with us and guide us. In trust we realise that God will guide us in the most appropriate ways. We need to have faith in God and believe that He will always be with us because we are trying to get closer to Him.

Recognition of the way God has already worked in our lives through our life experiences can also help us to get closer to Him because we can see His intervention. This can involve us realising that God guides our paths – in work, home, family; in illness – helping us through a very severe and testing health time. God guides us even though we may not recognise this at the time. For example, an unplanned event in our life may demonstrate years later that this helped us in a way we did not think possible. It became absolutely certain that God was guiding our life. And sometimes we can see it in the lives of others – our family and close friends.

Obedience, errors and forgiveness

Another way of getting closer to God is to be obedient to Him. He made it clear in the Old Testament that He will reward obedience.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine. (Exodus 19:5)

And in the New Testament we know that we get closer to Him by loving Him and keeping His commandments.

We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. (1 John 2:3-6)

Being disobedient separates us from God but repentance leads to forgiveness.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. (Micah 7:18-19)

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32)

Repentance

We all sin, and we become extremely remorseful about our sin. Yet, we have God's assurance that if we repent God will freely pardon us.

Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (Isaiah 55:7)

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Worthiness

Sometimes we feel unworthy of God's love and care, and we must remind ourselves that feeling unworthy of God's love is from a human perspective, and it's not reality. As we are his disciples, He loves us, even though we are all sinners. We are all recipients of love and forgiveness. We need to assure ourselves, and our friend, God will provide His grace and love to us and nothing will ever change that. We and they are precious in God's eyes, as it says in Luke 12:7, that we are told:

Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

God's creation

Our lives these days are busy and fast-paced, we need to recognise the importance of slowing down and enjoying the little things in life. God's beauty surrounds us every day, we just must take the time to see it and appreciate it. Nature is a stark reminder to us that God cares about us and intends to satisfy our every need. When we reflect on, or engage with nature, we are getting a first-hand account of the mind, capability, and heart of God. Nature is God's creativity on display and has the power to give us a sense of appreciation for life; it draws us closer to God.

Total dependency on our Loving God

We may engage in all of the above activities but, try as we might, we may not be able to fully carry out our desire to complete a task we have set, or have been set. This can tend, if we are not careful, to reduce our closeness to God. Ultimately, in these circumstances where we have done our utmost to overcome a problem, we have not been successful. The way we can get closer to God is to very humbly pray to Him and confess that we have been unsuccessful and place our total trust in Him. Sometimes, God wants us to learn that we cannot complete a task in front of us – a personal goal, for example, and that the only way we can achieve this is to place total reliance on Him. This is the ultimate closeness to God. The task might involve anything in our life – a new job, a family difficulty, overcoming a personal sin, illness or a host of other aspects of our life that demand a solution. We have recognised that only He can help. We cannot do it ourselves. The result of this when success in our task has been reached because God has provided the complete solution, is a direct closeness because He has succeeded where our efforts have failed. We then place our absolute gratitude to Him and resolve to serve Him more fully. Prayers of thanks and gratitude are a vital element in acknowledging and maintaining our closeness.

Helping others

If we recognise for ourselves that the above ways lead us to get closer to God, then we are in a better position to help others. Firstly, we need to:

Listen Actively. Active listening shows that we respect and genuinely care about the spiritual well-being of others. Ask open-ended questions and give them space to share their thoughts and feelings without interruption. An open-ended question provides an opportunity for a person to explain their feelings. (A closed question simply enables a 'Yes' or 'No' answer without the need to expand.)

Avoid Assumptions. Everyone's spiritual journey is unique. We should not assume we know what others believe, and we should not impose our own views. Instead, we should seek to understand their perspective and help them build on that.

We can share our own spiritual experiences. Sharing our spiritual journey can inspire and encourage others. We can talk about our experiences, challenges, and how our faith has shaped our life. Personal stories can create a deeper connection and provide relatable insights. At the same time, we should avoid too much self-disclosure. This can lead towards appearing to be self-righteous and can bring on despondency in the person with whom we are conversing.

Be honest. Honesty is key when sharing our experiences. If we are honest about our own struggles and triumphs, we can show how our own faith – and life with its ups and downs (physically, emotionally and/or spiritually), has influenced our personal growth.

Highlight the positive. It's essential to acknowledge challenges but also focus on the positive aspects of our spiritual journey. We can share moments of joy, peace, and fulfilment that have come from our relationship with God.

Encourage prayer and meditation. We have seen how important this is in our own life so we should pass that feeling of importance to our friend. One way for us to help in this is to offer to pray with them. If they are feeling despondent, you might (with God's help) provide the words that will assist them considerably, words they may not have been able to find for themselves.

Encourage consistency. Consistent application of the things we have identified earlier can help our friend. The more we encourage them in this, and the more we apply this in our own lives, the more effective will be our striving for closeness. Setting aside the same time(s) each day for various spiritual activities can help immensely.

Lead by Example. Our actions and behaviour can be a powerful witness to the strength of our faith. We should lead by example in our daily life by showing kindness, compassion, empathy and honesty, and as many of Jesus' other characteristics as we can.

Listen to hymns and music of worship. We can encourage others to listen to hymns as music is a powerful method of connecting more deeply with God, and it can draw us into a deeper relationship with Him. Music can be a form of communication with God and can express signs of love and gratitude which can resonate with our own spiritual yearnings and give us a desire to draw closer to God.

Gratitude. We can suggest to others to make a gratitude list. This can help them to show gratitude to God through trials and sufferings, as when we make a gratitude list it helps to recognise the good things in our life, which are gifts from God. This can be done by keeping a notebook and writing down three things each day that bring them joy. They may find some of the smallest blessings can bring them the biggest joy. When we start to look for gratitude each day, we will feel closer to God and be more uplifted in our attitude, it can also help to develop a more positive outlook on life. We need to count our blessings, both big and small by naming them one by one, to see and acknowledge the gifts God has bestowed upon us.

Journaling. Sometimes journaling can be helpful and will bring people closer to God, as it helps them to remember, ponder, meditate, and worship God. Journaling is a powerful way to see God's goodness and glory. It can be as simple as writing out encouraging verses or favourite verse from the bible, this helps them concentrate and see the words more clearly, which gives them a fresh perspective. Journaling can also help to ease our mind when we are feeling overwhelmed, as it allows us to think on the words we are writing rather than own thoughts. It also forces us to slow down and notice.

Conclusion

Helping a friend get closer to God is a meaningful and rewarding journey that requires compassion, patience, and dedication. By understanding their unique path, sharing experiences, and providing support, we can guide them towards a deeper and more fulfilling connection with God. The most important aspect is to be a source of love and encouragement, allowing their faith to grow naturally and meaningfully.

As we become closer to God, we will find more peace, happiness, and meaning in our lives, even in a world of chaos. We all need to strive to build and strengthen our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

We need to remember that we are not alone as God is always with us (Isaiah 41:10). He is our comforter (2 Corinthians 1:4), and He will give us peace and carry our burdens (John 14:27, Matthew 11:28), as He is close to the broken hearted (Psalm 34:18).

We should strive as much as we can to help our friend to reflect the love of God in the way it was shown by our Lord Jesus.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
(Romans 8:38-39).

Laurence Lepherd and Kylee Mingham

