

# A Strong Relationship with God

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## The Rains and Rivers Teach us about God

Every rainy season the clouds sweep over the horizon and drop their life-giving load of rain. Puddles form, small streams spread and rivers rise gently flooding the rice fields. Life springs up, the countryside grows greener and hope is in the air. Water means food. It also provides a refreshing bath and waterways on which to easily travel to buy and sell and visit family.

Throughout these lessons we have seen another kind of blessings, a spiritual blessing. God's compassion and helpfulness to us is refreshing and life-giving like the rain and the rivers that make our country flourish. He is even more faithful than the rains, always listening to our prayers, always ready to help, providing what we truly need.

Which of His blessings have you especially appreciated? Have His good counsel in the ancient scriptures helped you to have better health, a happier family or a more successful business? Has His power helped you overcome evil spirits, fear of accidents or some bad habit? Truly He is so willing to help us with all our problems!

As you've learned the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, has your heart been comforted to know that there is hope beyond the grave? Have you found peace in your heart because you know Jesus died for your sins and has forgiven you? Are you looking forward to Jesus' second coming and the opportunity to live without any more suffering? Surely God's goodness is like the rains and the rivers, bringing blessings to every part of our lives and eternal life too.

Will you continue to receive these blessings? Will you stay connected to God's power and compassion for you? It is pos-

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sible to begin well and then fall away. Do you remember the story of Judas? He was Jesus' disciple for three years. He saw Jesus' power and heard His teachings, but later let sin pull him away from the Savior. Eventually he betrayed Jesus and then, in his shame, hung himself. None of us wants that to happen. Surely you also want to stay in a close relationship with the living Creator, the Father of Life.

God is working at this very moment to help you stay close to Him. He will help you so that you won't fall away. There are things you can also do to keep your relationship with God strong. The Bible says, "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you" James 4:8a. In this lesson will explore ten ways to do this.

Some people place big barrels under the eave troughs to catch the rain water. Others dig ponds to catch and keep the rain, using it all year long. Governments spend a lot of money to dig canals so that they can have an extra harvest of rice. Others do nothing at all and receive little benefit from all the rain. In the same way, you must choose daily if you will receive more and more blessings from God. May you diligently study and follow these ten principles.

### 1. Study the Bible with other Christians.

The Bible is like a very big treasure box. There is always something more to discover. You have just begun to learn about the eternal God who is everywhere and knows all things. There is much more to discover. Ask those who have been studying with you to teach you more. There are other Bible studies to read through.

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Ask them to show you some of the excellent stories in the Bible and their favorite scriptures.

## 2. Worship with other Christians.

When you cook over a fire, it is important to gather the coals closely together in order to keep them burning strongly. What would happen if you took one coal out and set it by itself? It would soon go out. You are like that burning coal. You have joy and excitement in the wonderful truths you have learned. To keep that strong you need to often meet with other Christians in worship. Join them in their homes or in their churches faithfully. Learn the songs they sing, pray for them and let them pray for you.

## 3. Read the Bible for Yourself

God's Word has the answers for every problem you will face. Read it often. God is like a teacher and wants you to hear what He has to say.

Some very good places to look in the Bible for God's advice are in Proverbs, James, Matthew and Luke.

God also knew you would learn a lot through stories.

You will find some very good stories in Genesis, Exodus, Mark, John and Acts.

If you can't read, ask someone else to read these stories to you and learn them well so you can think about them every day.

Before you read the Bible, ask God to send the Holy Spirit to help you understand. When you read the Bible, think carefully about what it means and what God is saying to you. Ask

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yourself the following questions,

“What does this tell me about God's character?”

“What has God promised to do for me?”

“What does God want me to do?”

## 4. Memorize Scripture

Have you ever grown a vine? Wasn't it beautiful as it climbed, burst into bloom and produced delicious fruit? Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” Jesus wants to make your life full of kindness, joy and peace. If you want that, you must grow closer and closer to Him, by letting God's word come very close to your heart. Jesus also said, “If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you” John 15:7.

If you will memorize scripture, it will help you in many ways. Your mind will be full of God's thoughts. When you face temptation, God's powerful word will be there to help you. When you want to witness to someone, you will have important words in your memory.

Here's how to do memorize. Look for a verse you like. Then write it down on a paper and place it where you can see and read it several times a day until you can say it without looking. Add a new text the next day, but take time to review the texts you already memorized

## 5. Pray for Your Needs

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God is like a parent. He wants you to tell Him what you need. Are you having problems in your home or in your workplace? In prayer you can tell Him about it and ask Him to solve the problem. He may change the circumstance or He may give you wisdom to deal with it. He will always hear you and give you what is best for you. You can ask Him to give you love for an enemy or victory over a bad habit.

Matthew 6:9-15 gives a sample prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray.

You do not need to know an exact prayer with fancy words to speak to God. He is the Lord of the entire universe and so you speak to Him with respect, but He is also your Father who sent Jesus to die for you. Since that is true, you can know He will listen to you with whatever simple words you use.

Many people pray every morning, kneeling inside their house to show Him respect. Others like to walk in nature, talking to God out loud. A man by the name of Brother Lawrence wrote a book about prayer after he spent many years praying while doing his job of washing dishes. Another man prayed for his neighbors while plowing his fields. Many of them became followers of God. Some people like to write their requests in a book.

As you can see there are many ways to pray. The most important thing is that you take time to pray often. The Father of Life delights to hear His children talk to Him about all their needs.

## 6. Thank God and Praise Him.

Parents feed and clothe their children. They work hard to give them a good education. If their son goes off to the city

and becomes a successful businessman, are they happy? Of course they are. If that son never returns home to bring gifts or thank his parents, how do they feel? They are extremely sad and disappointed. We all know that true respect shows thankfulness.

God is like our parent. If He has given us everything, does He not deserve our gratitude and honor? God does not need your food or your money. He already has everything. However, He created you to have a relationship with Him and so He is pleased and honored when you take time to thank Him and praise Him. The Bible tells us the importance of this in Hebrews 13:15. "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name"

Why does God want you to praise Him? He knows you will be unhappy if you only think of your needs and what you can ask from Him. He knows you will be happiest if you often say thank you and praise Him with your words and songs.

Whether at church or at home, sing songs to God often. Before you eat, you can thank Him for your food. When you walk through nature, thank Him for everything beautiful He has created. Every time something good happens, take time to thank Him. Even in troubles, you can thank Him for being beside you and for the strength He gives. This is the path to greater joy.

The book of Psalms has many wonderful prayers, songs and poems to help you worship and praise.

## 7. Pray for Others.

God cares about all the people around you. He wants you to pray for them. When you are worried about your children's

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future, you can pray for them. God cares about them too. When you are angry because a neighbor has been unkind or unfair, you can pray for him. God can change his heart, solve the problem, or bring justice some day. When you want your friends and family to know God and receive salvation, you can pray for them.

A Christian family was living very close to a soldier. The soldier built a toilet with the sewer dropping beneath the Christian's house. The smell was terrible and the situation was unhealthy. The Christian father, Chay Ya, dared not say anything because the soldier had a gun and an ugly temper. There was nothing they could do but pray for him.

Soon Chay Ya's brother-in-law visited. He had not come in many months. He noticed the smell and learned about the problem. As he walked out the door, the soldier stepped out of his house. He was very surprised to see his boss at Chay Ya's house. The very next day the soldier fixed the sewer problem.

God answers prayers for other people. Be patient. One wife prayed for her husband to become a Christian for sixty years. Right before he died, he surrendered his life to Jesus.

## 8. Obey God's Commandments

Jesus said in John 14:15, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Many people, like Judas, listen to God's word, go to church and pray, but they do not obey God. They do what they want and ignore His counsel. Judas could not be close to Jesus by doing that and neither can you.

Choose each day to follow whatever you know is right. Memorize these words of Job and make them true for you through God's strength. "I have not departed from the command-

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ment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."

## 9. Serve Others

Many people are happy to serve the rich and the influential. They hope to gain some favor in return. Jesus, on the other hand, said to serve the poor, the sick and the imprisoned. Read Matthew 25:31-46 to see how important this is for the Christian. Jesus taught that when you help "the least of these" you are serving Jesus Himself. It will really help you stay in a close relationship with God if you take care of those in need.

## 10. Share the Good News with Others

Right now you are excited about what God has done for you. You should tell others how He has helped you. This will help them so much. It will also help you. Every time you speak about God's goodness it encourages your heart. As you teach other people the truth, it will make the truth stronger in you. This is God's way of blessing you and keeping you close to Him. Don't be afraid to tell others how God has helped you. There is nothing more important for them to know. He will give you courage and the words to say.

## A Relationship with God is Essential

If there is no water, everything and everyone dies. If the branch is cut off the vine, it dies and there is no fruit. If we do not stay in a relationship with God, we also will lose many blessings and even eternal life. How important that we keep this connection with God. It is like you are hanging over a cliff with a rope tied to you. If you cut that rope, you would fall to your death. God is also holding on to us. He wants to keep us safe and to have us with Him in heaven forever. Let

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us not do anything that will break our relationship with Him.

Everything in this world will pass away—nice houses, fancy motorcycles, television programs, even friends and family. Only God and those who depend on Him will live forever. Why then would we allow any of these things to take us away from spending time with God? Commit yourself to the ten areas above. Take time every day in God's word, prayer and praise. Meet often with other Christians. God will keep you strong and bless you richly.

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to God.

3. Write below some things you will do to strengthen your relationship with God.

## Questions

1. Check all the correct answers. God's relationship with us is like:

Rain, rivers and the land.

Two equal business partners.

A vine and its branches.

Parents and their children.

2. Answer true or false.

It is possible to lose your salvation by turning away from a relationship with God.

God wants you to pray only for yourself.

To thank and obey God gives Him the honor He deserves.

Memorizing scripture is a waste of time.

Spending time with other Christians can keep you close