

Gathering Question:

When you first became a Christian, what were some of the activities for Christian growth that you decided to involve yourself in? What was your attitude? How has it changed over the years since you first became a Christian?

Intimacy: Deepening Our Lives With Jesus

Christians should be about the business of cultivating relationships with God every day. In the process we find ourselves becoming more like Christ because the Holy Spirit continues to do his work in our lives. Intimacy with Christ comes by way of spiritual disciplines which open us up to deeper relationships with God. The disciplines are only tools that allow us to intentionally grow closer to God. Spiritual disciplines help strengthen the foundations of our lives and help us withstand the storms of life. They are not a magic formula that delivers what we want immediately, but practiced over the long term they can open the door to the intimacy with God we seek.

Just like in a good marriage, certain disciplined actions must be a part of the partners lives. They must intentionally communicate, intentionally appreciate, intentionally sacrifice, etc. The same is true of our relationship with Christ. Intentionality is the key. Spiritual disciplines are a means to an end, not the end itself! Prayer, meditation, study, confession, fasting, etc., all help facilitate our relationship with our Creator.

We live in a world that is bent on distracting us from our first love. Noise, clutter, busyness, and affluence all woo us away from a faithful relationship with Jesus. Jesus expects nothing less than complete devotion in our relationship with him, but we oftentimes give him the leftovers. To make matters worse, sometimes church causes us to become even more devoted to busyness. After a while we become desperately tired and instead of the lush paradise that once described our Christian lives, our spiritual lives seem more like a desert.

So we will just ask the question. Have you lost your first love? Can you tell that there is a difference in your life now than when you first came to Christ? Remember the days when your heart was filled with zeal and you could never just remain quiet about your relationship with Jesus? Remember when reading your Bible was exciting and thrilling? What happened?

Read and Reflect:

Matthew 22:37-40; I John 4:7-8; Revelation 2:1-7; Ephesians 2:15-16; 3:17-19; 4:14-16; 6:23-24

1. What does God say in the Matthew 22 and I John 4 passages about the importance of love? Why is it so important for Christians? Is it possible to be a Christian without love?
2. What did the church in Ephesus put in place of their first love (Revelation 2)? What kinds of things might displace our passionate love for Christ at Meadowlark?
3. Paul wrote the letter of Ephesians about 35 years before John wrote Revelation. Read the Ephesian passages and note the differences between the church described there and the one described by Revelation.
4. How would you describe yourself? Are you Paul's Ephesus or John's?