

HOW TO HAVE A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. CONFESS YOUR SINS -The first thing we can do to have a closer relationship with God is to make a daily habit of confessing our sin to Him. If sin is the barrier in our relationship with God, then confession removes that barrier. When we confess our sins before God, He promises to forgive us (1 John 1:9), and forgiveness is what restores a relationship that has been strained. We must keep in mind that confession is more than simply saying, "I'm sorry for my sin, God." It is the heartfelt contrition of those who recognize that their sin is an offense to a holy God. It is the confession of one who realizes that his sin is what nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. It is the cry of the publican in Luke 18 who said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" As King David wrote, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:17).

2. LISTEN TO GOD - The second thing we can do to have a closer relationship with God is to listen when God speaks. Many today are chasing a supernatural experience of hearing God's voice, but the apostle Peter tells us that we "have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). That "more sure prophetic word" is the Bible. In the Bible, we "hear" God's voice to us. It is through the "God-breathed" Scriptures that we become "thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). So if we want to grow closer to God, we should read His Word regularly. In reading His Word, we are "listening" to God speak through it by his Spirit who illuminates the Word to us.

3. PRAY - The third thing we can do to have a closer relationship with God is to speak to Him through prayer. If reading the Bible is listening to God speak to us, speaking to God is accomplished through prayer. The Gospels often record Jesus secreting Himself away to commune with His Father in prayer. Prayer is much more than simply a way to ask God for things we need or want. Consider the model prayer that Jesus gives His disciples in Matthew 6:9-13. The first three petitions in that prayer are directed toward God (may His name be hallowed, may His kingdom come, may His will be done). The last three petitions are requests we make of God after we've taken care of the first three (give us our daily bread, forgive us our debts, lead us not into temptation). Another thing we can do to revive our prayer lives is to read the Psalms. Many of the Psalms are heartfelt cries to God for various things. In the Psalms we see adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and supplication modeled in a divinely inspired way.

4. JOIN A CHURCH - The fourth thing we can do to have a closer relationship with God is to find a body of believers with whom we can regularly worship. This is such a vital component of spiritual growth. Too often, we approach church with a "what can I get out of it?" mentality. We seldom take the time to prepare our hearts and minds for worship. Again, the Psalms show us many calls from God to His people to come and worship the Lord (for example, Psalm 95:1-2). God invites us, commands us, to come into His presence for worship. How can we, His people, fail to respond? Not only does regular church attendance give us an opportunity to come before the Lord's presence in worship, but it also gives us an opportunity to fellowship with the Lord's people. As we come into the house of the Lord in worship and fellowship with His people, we can't help but grow closer to the Lord as a result.

5. LIVE IN OBEDIENCE - Finally, a closer relationship with God is built upon a life of obedience. Jesus told His disciples in the upper room, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:23). James tells us that as we submit ourselves to God through obedience, resist the devil, and draw near to God, He will draw near to us (James 4:7-8). Paul tells us in Romans that our obedience is our "living sacrifice" of thanksgiving to God (Romans 12:1). We must keep in mind that all biblical exhortations to obedience are presented as our response to the grace of God we receive in salvation. We don't earn salvation through our obedience; rather, it is the way we show our love and gratitude toward God.

So, through confession, Bible study, prayer, regular church attendance, and obedience, we can develop a closer relationship with God. It seems rather simple, if not simplistic. But consider this: how do we develop a closer relationship with other human beings? We spend time with them in conversation, opening our hearts to them and listening to them at the same time. We acknowledge when we've done wrong and seek forgiveness. We seek to treat them well and sacrifice our own needs to fulfill theirs. It's not really that different with our relationship to our Heavenly Father.