

help, and we show our desire to please him.

Music is part of worship, because music helps express our emotions in a way that simple words cannot. Paul described a first-century worship service in these words: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God” (Colossians 3:16).

Worship includes much more than music — it includes our entire lives. Scripture urges us “to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). When we pray, we are involved in an act of worship. It shows how much he is worth to us.

Every time we study the Bible, desiring to learn more about God, we are worshiping him. Every time we obey, every time we change our behavior in response to what he says, we are worshiping God. Every time we tell someone else about his love and goodness, we are involved in worship.

Throughout the week, we worship God. So it is natural for us to worship when we gather as a congregation of believers! Part of our “job description” as a Christian is to praise God (Hebrews 13:15; 1 Peter 2:9). We sing songs of praise to declare how good he is.

God wants us to worship him — and he does this for *our* good, not his own. He does not need flattery or ego stroking. Rather, he wants us to praise and worship him for our good. This is one of the ways that we are strengthened in the faith, that we are reassured of his love, that we are realigned with the wonderful destiny he has prepared for us.

5. Ministry

As mentioned above, God has called us together to serve one another. Since God has

given us certain abilities “for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:7), we are supposed to *use* them to serve others. That is why he has given them and what we are supposed to do with them.

As always, God tells us this for *our* good. We grow spiritually by doing this. We become more mature, more like Jesus Christ.

Every Christian is a priest — a person who serves God and people (1 Peter 2:5). Every Christian offers spiritual sacrifices and worships with praise and prayers. Similarly, every Christian is a minister, because the word “minister” simply means “servant.” Pastors serve in the way that God enables them, singers serve in the way that God enables them, teachers serve in the way that God enables them. The point is that everyone serves. Everyone helps in one way or another, and by doing so, we are all strengthened in the faith.

“Everyone should use whatever gift they have received to serve others.... If they speak, they should do it as people speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

If you want more information about how to grow as a Christian, please contact us. That’s why God has put us here. We want to help.

Growing in Christ

After you become a Christian, what do you
do?

The Bible tells us that Christians normally do certain things to help them grow closer to Christ. These are called spiritual disciplines — habits that help us become more mature. Let’s look at five basic avenues to spiritual growth.

Habits that help us grow closer to Christ

In the Bible, in church history, and in the experience of millions of Christians, certain habits help us grow in faith, help us enjoy Christianity more, and help us become more helpful to others.

1. Prayer

“Teach us to pray,” the disciples asked Jesus, and Jesus responded by teaching them a simple prayer (Luke 11:1-4). Prayer does not need to have special words or fancy phrases — all we need to do is to talk to God. In prayer, we tell him what we think, what we like, what we fear, and what we want — and we can be sure that God hears us.

Jesus assured his disciples that God hears and answers our prayers (verses 5-13). Ask, and you will receive! James wrote that sometimes we don’t have what we want “because you do not ask God” (James 4:2). So, if you want something, ask God.

As Creator, God has all the power of the universe. As Father, he is filled with love. We can be sure that he is able and he is willing to answer our prayers.

But he is also wise enough *not* to grant everything we ask as soon as we ask. As James explained in the next verse, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” God doesn’t give us things that aren’t good for us. He doesn’t want to hurt us, or to make us selfish brats.

There is much more that could be said about how to pray, but the main thing is to *keep praying*. The Lord’s prayer asks for “our daily bread” — we look each day to God to supply our needs. That means we pray each day. We look to God each day. It becomes a habit in our Christian lives. It builds a relationship with God.

The apostle Paul wrote, “In *everything*, by

prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6).

2. Bible study

Another habit that Christians have found helpful is Bible study — reading and thinking about the words that God has inspired. This is a way that God can speak to us.

The words came through human beings, but the message came from God. “Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). As a result, these writings “are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

But again, the key is to keep at it. The Bible is a big book, with ideas that touch on a wide range of life. Although the main message is simple, it is also filled with profound insights. There is a lot to think about, again and again, each time we read it.

“My thoughts are not your thoughts,” said God through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

But in the Bible, God reveals his thoughts to us, and he invites us to think them, too. These are things that he wants us to know — so we do our part to try to understand them. These are the writings that tell us what God is like, what he has done, what he will do. These writings tell us what Jesus is like, and what he wants us to be like.

Some compare it to a love letter from a Father to his children. It’s worth reading again and again, so make time for it.

3. Fellowship

God doesn’t just call people — he calls them *together*. He’s not creating “only children” — he is creating brothers and sisters. The Bible tells us

that people who believe in Jesus Christ are part of a family, a community, a people who interact with one another.

The early Christians were a tight-knit community, meeting together, eating together, discussing the faith together (Acts 2:42).

The apostle Paul described believers as “the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Not that each person is the body of Christ, but together we are the body — and “the body is not made up of one part but of many” (verse 14).

We each have different strengths and abilities, given to us by God to help one another (verses 4-7). No one has *all* the ability, so everyone needs to stick together so that we can benefit from one another.

In some areas of life, we are able to help others; in different areas, we *need* help from others. We are working together, learning to care for one another. That is why God has brought us together and given us different abilities.

“Love one another,” he tells us. “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” “Serve one another in love” (Romans 12:10; 13:8; Galatians 5:13). To do that, it is essential that we know one another and meet with one another on a regular basis. This is a habit that helps us grow spiritually.

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:25).

4. Worship

When Christians get together, they not only speak to one another, they also gather to worship God. “Worship” comes from words meaning “to have worth.” When we worship God, we express how much he is worth to us. We praise him for his greatness and goodness, we humble ourselves before him, we thank him for what he gives, we look to him for