

## Staying Closer than Close

**‘Staying Close’** – “How can I walk with God throughout the week? Sometimes I may be surrounded by opposition or simply on my own for long periods of time. How can I deal with temptation?”

Have you been a believer for several years without really knowing how to live in Christ? If you are asking this sort of question, it certainly seems so. Sadly, you are by no means alone! There seem to be many who have started out with new life in Jesus but have not been shown how to live. Instead, we are bombarded with ‘systems’ for living the Christian life and, like many Christians, you have probably tried a few of them.

Once you have tried more than one or two, you have probably started on one of two ways. Either you are becoming someone who is always looking for the latest Christian bandwagon (so that you can jump on it), or you are becoming disillusioned and starting to give up on anything more than just the daily routine.

If you are a ‘bandwagon-jumper’, your friends are probably exhausted by your apparent capacity to find **yet another** cause to champion or project to join. If you stopped long enough to consider it, you might discover that under all the enthusiastic activity, you too are exhausted and there is very little of which you are really certain.

If you are a routine person, you have probably found that the reality of your conversion experience is not matched by the level of reality offered by any of these ‘systems’, nor can you find it anywhere else. You may have found yourself on the verge of giving up faith altogether, for the same reason.

Either way, to be honest you would have to admit to **emptiness** in your life. Is there any alternative? YES!

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The first step is to **get back to the facts**. Not just any old facts, but the facts that became real to you when you first came to faith in Christ. Add to these any more facts that God may have made real to you since then. Don’t worry if there seems to be very little here – at least it’s all real, and these are the first steps, so more will soon be added. Maybe there really is *nothing* that God has ever made real to you, although you would like there to be. In that case, may I suggest that you talk about it with a real Christian whom you can trust?

It is a great relief to get back to what **you** really know to be true, rather than having to try to believe what other people tell you, or feeling that no-one can really be sure of anything. In things relating to our relationship with God

through the Lord Jesus, God's plan is that each believer should **know**. This is a vital part of the Holy Spirit's work, as we can see in **John 14:16-20, John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 2:12, Ephesians 1:18** and **Ephesians 3:16-19**.

Clearly there is a process here:–

- 1) God shows us things by his Holy Spirit.
- 2) We come to know that they are true, in reality for us.
- 3) We start to take our stand on these revealed facts.

Going back to thinking about the things that became real to you when you first came to Christ . . . For example, perhaps the thing that really hit you was that God loves you just as you are, without you having to sort your life out first. Deep down, you know that it's true, because the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes to it. So how can you 'take your stand' on it? One simple way to start is to give Father some feedback: *"Thank you, Father, for loving me just as I am, without setting any conditions."*

It's a short step from there to saying, *"Please show me more!"* One of the prayers that our Father really loves to hear! . . . and answer!

This sort of revelation is normal for the Christian life. It is for this reason that you need to talk it through with someone if you have *never* had it happen to you. It is possible to be around other Christians and even believe lots of good Christian doctrine, and yet never to find this light of the Holy Spirit illuminating your life. A typical response to God's revelation like this is that we find ourselves 'seeing' things clearly and freshly. It may be sudden, or gradual over a period of time, but we come the point where we say, 'Oh, I see!', where what may have been just doctrine before has started to be vital living truth, able to make a difference in our lives, first of all by making a difference in how we think about ourselves in relation to God.

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Perhaps you may think that we have wandered a little from looking at how to live when faced with opposition, loneliness and temptation? On the contrary. Instead of giving us some sort of system to follow, the Lord wants us to be able to face these and other difficulties in the **reality** of our relationship with him. So what revelation does he want to give us which will enable us to 'stay close' and face opposition and temptation without failing every time?

First of all, let's deal with this idea of 'staying close'. Immediately we tend to ask, 'How close is close enough?' Or perhaps we say of someone, 'They are really close to God', when we can see that the Lord is at work in their lives. Of course we know what we mean when we talk like this, but our Father has a better plan; he has planned for us to be **not just close, but united with Jesus**, sharing his life. The New Testament calls it being 'in

Christ' and Jesus tells his followers to make their home ('abide') in him (**John 15**).

This all sounds pretty impossible, doesn't it? As if we didn't find it hard enough to 'stay close', now we are being asked to 'stay united'! I know my faith is not up to that, and I guess yours may not be either. But here is a devastatingly simple little piece of revelation that makes all the difference:— **God says that he has put me in Jesus.** Yes, OK, he needed me to respond to the gospel in faith before he could do it, but it is the Father who put me in Jesus, not my faith. Have a look at **1 Corinthians 1:26-30** and **Ephesians 2:8-10**.

Now that I know that the Father has placed me in Christ, Jesus' command to 'abide in me' seems a lot more possible! It's as if we had been given a new house and been moved in to live there, all at someone else's expense. 'It's all yours, just live here!' GREAT!

When we thought that we had to have enough faith to somehow move ourselves in to this new house, it seemed impossible. Now that we know that we have been moved in by our Father and just encouraged to get on with living here, it becomes rather more exciting – and relevant to daily living

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Now we know that our Father has placed us in Jesus, we don't have the worry about 'staying close' – he has done that already. But what about opposition and temptation? Time for a little more revelation of what Father has already done for us!

We have this idea that we are supposed to stand strong against temptation, and certainly there are passages that encourage us to 'resist the devil'. But in practice, most of us find that our strength is not enough to resist. Even if we manage not to actually **do** the thing we know is wrong, sometimes we still find ourselves wanting to do it, and then we condemn ourselves because we know that is just as bad as doing it!

Have a look at **1 Corinthians 10:13**. We often hear this quoted to prove that the temptations we face are never too big for us. In other words, we think it says we should be able to resist them every time and win. More self-condemnation when we fail!

But what does it actually say? Yes, the temptations will not be beyond 'what we are able', but it actually says beyond what we are able to **escape**, not what we are able to **resist**. That's a bit different, isn't it? So Father is looking for me to escape from temptation, but how?

**Proverbs 18:10** says that the name of the Lord is a strong tower, and the righteous run into it and are safe. We used to sing it a few years ago,

and we may have thought it was about coming to Jesus for salvation and to be born again. When might we need a strong tower to run into? When we are under attack, surely! So when we face temptation and opposition, instead of trying to resist we can run and hide in the 'strong tower' of the name of Jesus. How is that possible? Simply because we know that we have already been placed in him. How can we know that? Because of the Holy Spirit's revelation that has made it real to us

This is no man-made system. You can't take these principles and make them work without the Holy Spirit. We need to see truth before we can believe it. On the other hand, once the Holy Spirit has removed your blindfolds, you can't easily 'unsee' what he has made real to you.

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We shall certainly fail from time to time. Instead of living securely in the 'house' that our Father has moved us into, we may try camping somewhere else. When we realise what we have been missing and come back to find his forgiveness, we also find that he still wants us to go on making our home ('abiding') in Christ.

When you move into a new house, you usually already know something about it, because you probably looked at several before you chose this one. You don't need a system called 'How to Live in This House', but you do want as much information about it as you can find. Once you know how the central heating works and how big the kitchen cupboards are (and all the other relevant information), you just get on with using what is provided. And then, of course, you want to find out more that this house has to offer, so that you can make use of it in practical and pleasing ways.

Once we begin to settle into our new home in Christ, surely it would be surprising if there were no urge to explore and find out what else our Father has provided for us? Further revelations to show us more of what he has already given us in Jesus, more keys to take us into previously unknown aspects of life in Christ . . .

*"Now we have received, not the spirit of the world,  
but the Spirit who is from God,  
so that we may know the things freely given to us by God."*

**(1 Corinthians 2:12)**

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