

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY--GOD'S FAMILY!

1. HOW CAN YOU BE SURE THAT YOU'RE IN THE FAMILY?
 - A. Have you received Jesus Christ into your life (John 1:12)? If so, God, in love (1 John 3:1), has given you the privilege of becoming "family." Jesus won't reject you, if you come to Him (John 6:37). God does not play favorites in his family--you are fully accepted, whoever you are (Acts 10:34-36).
 - (1. We receive Jesus by faith in who He is. He is Lord. God proved it by raising Him from the dead (Matthew 12:39-40; Acts 17:30-31). If we really believe this, we are saved (Romans 10:9-10). We aren't saved by what we do, but by what we truly believe about Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-9; John 3:14-16 [Numbers 21:9]; 1 John 4:15; 5:1; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). God's mercy, not any personal goodness, saves us (Titus 3:5). However, true faith will result in many good deeds (James 2:14-26), and in obedience to God's commands (1 John 1:6; 2:3-4). God expects us to die to sin and live for righteousness (1 Peter 2:24).
 - B. You know you're in the family when the Holy Spirit lives in you, leading you to do what is right (1 John 4:13; Romans 8:14). The Spirit is a Person, not simply our "conscience." He teaches you the truth (1 John 2:20, 27). Sin becomes the exception, because you are a new creation of God, and sinful patterns are put to death (1 John 3:9; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 8:13).
 - C. The Spirit gives us the confidence that we're children of God (Romans 8:16).
 - D. You'll know that you're a child of God by the evidence of love toward others, particularly toward Christians ("family," John 13:35; 1 John 4:7).
2. GOD THE FATHER IS COMMITTED TO HIS CHILDREN.
 - A. Just as a parent tries to build character into the child, God wants us to become like Jesus Christ, who is our example (Ephesians 4:13; 1 Peter 2:21). The Holy Spirit works in us to form Jesus' godliness (Romans 8:13; 2 Corinthians 3:18). Jesus learned obedience by suffering (Hebrews 5:7-9). Growth comes by trials (Romans 5:3-5).
 - B. God promises you that you never have to sin again, but that a way of escape will be made every time (1 Corinthians 10:13). If you fail to take the escape, He will forgive your sin, as it is confessed (1 John 1:9), but we are not to tempt God by taking sin lightly (Romans 6:1-7). We should consider ourselves dead to sin (dead people don't sin).
 - C. God the Father will provide all your needs--for food, clothing, and every other physical need (see Psalm 103), as well as provide for your emotional and spiritual needs (Psalm 23, Philippians 4:13). He requires that we focus our life upon Him, and put Him first, although we do not do this perfectly (Matthew 6:33). He usually provides through opportunities to work (2 Thessalonians 3:10), which the lazy avoid (Proverbs 6:6-11; 15:19). God cares especially for strangers, widows and the fatherless (Psalm 146:9).
3. HOW CAN YOU GROW INTO A MATURE CHILD OF GOD?

- A. First, we need to take a public stand and identify with Jesus (Romans 10:9; Matthew 10:32). This is usually first done through being baptized (Romans 6:3-5; Acts 2:38). Telling people what Christ has done for us (witnessing) is another way (Mark 5:19).
 - B. We need to join a church where the Bible is taught, love is easily seen, where God is truly worshipped, where truth is upheld by discipline, and where sending the message of salvation through Christ around the world is a priority. Going to church is a command, not a choice (Hebrews 10:24-25), because it is the garden that God has provided for your spiritual growth. Other Christians will encourage you there, and you can serve each other with your spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:7). The pastor is there for your spiritual development, training and joy (Ephesians 4:11-12; Philippians 1:25).
 - C. We need to stay close to Christ, which Jesus called "abiding" (John 15). We abide as we obey Jesus (John 15:10). We know what He commands as we read, memorize and meditate upon the Bible. By God's Word, He will equip you to do all that He plans through you (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:10). The Scriptures are our spiritual nourishment (1 Peter 2:2).
 - (1. Try reading the Gospel of John first. You can learn to pray by reading the Psalms, and how to live wisely by reading the chapters of Proverbs, one per day.
 - (2. Reading through the Bible is a great adventure. Ask God to show you tremendous things (Psalm 119:18).
 - (3. Count on the promises given to Christians (2 Peter 1:3-4).
 - D. Another way to come closer to God is to pray (Matthew 6:6-13 gives a model prayer).
 - (1. Try to find another Christian to agree with you, before God, about specific requests, which gives greater power (Matthew 18:18-20). Turn every problem into a prayer, because worry is a sin of unbelief (Philippians 4:6). We are to pray all the time, in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18), which means in part to ask the Spirit to guide our prayers, as we talk with God throughout the day. We must ask in faith (Mark 11:23-25), believing God, or else ask for faith as we pray. Thanking God in advance demonstrates faith (1 Philippians 4:6; Thessalonians 5:16-18).
 - (2. Jesus often got alone to pray for hours (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 9:28).
 - E. Still another way to stay close to God is by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us (Galatians 5:16-25). God wants us to be continually filled with the Spirit (not to get drunk on alcohol, Ephesians 5:18). Then we will have joy, love and peace (Galatians 5:22-23).
4. HOW CAN I AVOID BEING DEFEATED?
- A. A Christian has been taken out of the Devil's kingdom and delivered into God's (Colossians 1:13; Acts 26:18). But the battle isn't over. We must daily put on special weapons to fight Satan, who wants us destroyed (Ephesians 6:13-18; Luke 8:26-30; Revelation 9:11). Satan is very powerful, but already defeated by God (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10). God assures us that He, being in us, is

- stronger than Satan (1 John 4:4). God will always provide a way to escape sin (1 Corinthians 10:13). Resist the Devil, and he'll run (James 4:7).
- B. Satan uses discouragement, temptation, lies, and trickery against Christians. Refuse to accept evil thoughts, but instead concentrate upon pure thoughts (Philippians 4:8; Proverbs 4:23; 17:20). Satan will make drunkenness and immorality, for example, look great, even though they carry the sting of death (Proverbs 23:29-35; Proverbs 7).
- (1. Reading the Bible and listening to Christian radio (particularly sound teaching and good music) are a great help to our attitude.
 - (2. Praising God is an effective way to escape temptation. These verses may help: Revelation 4:8-11; 5:9-13; 7:12; Psalm 103.
 - (3. Singing praises is a way to avoid depression (Psalm 105:33).
- C. We are not to make it easy for ourselves to sin by what we buy, or through the wrong "friends," or by what we watch (Romans 6:11-14; 13:14; Psalm 1:1-3).
- D. Don't be surprised if you're attacked for your faith (1 John 3:13). Family members may oppose us (Matthew 10:34-39). We should not expect better treatment than Jesus received, and He was perfect (Matthew 10:24-33; 1 Peter 2:22). Carrying our cross each day may mean doing things we dislike, if it will bring praise to God (Matthew 16:24-27; 1 Corinthians 10:31). Our identity is as God's child. We don't need to worry about our reputation or our life, as we serve God (Galatians 2:20; Philippians 1:21; 2:5-9; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Isaiah 53:2-3; Matthew 10:28).
- E. Finally, rejoice in God (Philippians 4:4)! He will complete what He has started in you (Philippians 1:6). And He has such great power that He causes everything to turn out for the benefit of the one who loves Him (Romans 8:28). This is the loving, powerful, and intimate God who has called us out of darkness into His glorious light (1 Peter 2:9).

Jim Sutherland, PhD

Reconciliation Ministries Network, Inc.

If you have questions as you study this, please call: 423-822-1091

www.RMNI.org

WecomeToTheFamily.doc 5/29/01