

THE FIRST 15

Thursday, July 18, 2024

Today is Thursday, July 18 and we are learning what the Bible says about holiness.

OPENING PRAYER

In the morning, I seek the God who loves me. I quiet my mind, calm my breath and focus on the goodness of my Lord and Shepherd. He brings me to green pastures, leads me to still waters and guides me in paths of righteousness. He shows me the way of holiness and strengthens my steps to walk in the way that leads to life. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete. This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 1 John 1:3-7

REFLECTION

The author of First John describes the Christian life as a journey, a walk. We are to walk in the light, not the darkness. We are to walk in truth, not lies. We are to walk together, not alone. We are to walk alongside other believers as the Good Shepherd leads us in paths of righteousness. Over time, through the work of the Holy Spirit, faithful disciples mature in holiness and grow in love. One of the ways this is accomplished is through fellowship with other Christians. Our faith is not formed in isolation. The pursuit of holiness is a communal endeavor. Sometimes cultural Christianity promotes individualism and suggests that basic tenets of the faith can be embraced or ignored as one chooses. The result is an absence of common beliefs and practices to strengthen individual believers and bind the community together. Walking with the Shepherd alongside others is a primary means of growing in holiness.

Being a part of a faith-filled Christian community of believers is an essential ingredient to my spiritual growth. As I enjoy fellowship with others, we join together to support, encourage and hold one another accountable to live a life of faith. I learn how to walk in the way that leads to life and encourage others to do so as well. I rejoice in the knowledge that the blood of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit works to purify me and my friends in the faith from sin.

I have an important place in the fellowship of Christian believers. I contemplate the Christians I know (or have known) who I consider mature in the faith. I name them and give God thanks for them. I reflect on what it is (or was) about them that indicated their spiritual maturity. Who are the Christians with whom I currently share fellowship? Who is my community? How do we walk together - in truth and light or in lies and darkness? Are we traveling paths of righteousness together, led by our Good Shepherd? Are we striving for holiness together and growing in grace? Perhaps God wants to reveal something to me about my current faith friends and church

community. Maybe God wants me to join in fellowship with other Christians or strengthen my relationships with particular believers.

Ask: What is my current experience of Christian community? How might God want me to foster or renew deep, authentic relationships with faithful followers of Jesus?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Holy and loving God, thank you for inviting me into fellowship with you and a community of people who believe in your Son Jesus. Fill me with the joy of your presence and reveal your message of truth to my heart. I want to walk in the light with you and others. I reject darkness, falsehood and lies. I seek to live for truth, enjoy fellowship with the faithful and pursue purification through the Holy Spirit. I invite you to labor within me and mold the state of my soul. Call me into relationships with other believers and teach me what it means to have authentic Christian friendships where we grow together in strength and love. Reveal the people with whom I can mature in the faith and bless our journey with your abiding presence. Amen.