

## STEVE'S NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

After saying to God, “Here we go,” I wanted to follow Jesus fully and seek first His kingdom. I knew I needed the encouragement of being with other believers. So I asked God for help. This was the first prayer I remember praying as a new believer, and it was miraculously answered.

First a little background. I had done some chores for my grandmother, and she had paid me despite my protestations. I didn't expect the money or feel like I should keep it, so my prayer was threefold: I asked God to provide fellowship, some Christian literature, and a place to donate the money from my grandmother.

The following Sunday I was in the church I had attended all my life. After the service I saw a girl I had known in high school who I knew was a committed Christian. She was going to a different college and I hadn't seen her for several years except during holidays. After greeting her I took a deep breath and asked if we could get together for some fellowship. I was quite nervous since she was the first person I told about my decision to follow Jesus fully.

She smiled breezily and said she had just heard about a group of young people, many whom I knew, who were meeting that evening, and she would pick me up on the way. So a few hours later I was in a room full of young committed Christians led by the brother of a childhood friend. I don't remember much about that night, but I knew God had led me to fellowship, there was a table of Christian literature, and I felt moved to donate the money from my grandmother for the reading material. All three prayers had been

answered, specifically and quickly.

My new life in Christ was off to a good start. I had one month with these believers and then I was off to the Pocono mountains to work as a camp counselor. There were three other counselors, one of whom was a young man who had grown up in a Christian home and had been a faithful Christian throughout high school and college. At first glance I did not think we would have much in common, but throughout the summer I came to respect him more and more. Whenever we talked about issues he gave godly counsel from the Bible. And his walk matched his talk. For those two significant months when I was a baby believer, he was a consistent, positive influence for God. Once again God had brought another believer into my life to provide encouragement.

As I look back over the years since that first summer, I recognize how important it is to have a relationship with other believers to grow together in our common

faith in Jesus. When I got back to college after two months at the camp in the mountains, I couldn't wait to tell my friends Danny and Susie about my renewed faith. Danny and Susie had grown up in God-fearing families, and neither had swerved from their faith in high school. They were both a light on the campus and had deep Christian convictions. They were the beginning of a long line of wonderful, faithful, godly kindred spirits that God would provide throughout the next thirty-five years.

Godly brothers and sisters in the family of God are necessary for a successful Christian life. So also is spending time in reading and studying God's Word. As a baby believer I needed to develop new habits. I liked to study the Bible in gatherings with other believers, but it took some time and effort before this became a regular part of my life. And even when I did read the Word, I just read familiar sections and favorite verses. I needed to develop a disciplined approach to learning

and understanding the Word of God.

After college I sensed God leading me to attend seminary to prepare for ministry. While in Massachusetts I met a godly pastor and began attending the church where he served. It was the practice of the members of this fellowship to read through the Bible annually. They began in Genesis in January and finished reading Revelation in December. I picked up one of the Bible reading charts and jumped in on September 20, 1976. The reading that day was the three chapters in the book of Joel. With God's help and the example of my fellow parishioners, a habit was formed that continues to this day. It was so helpful being a part of a group of people who were following the same schedule. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). After reading through the Bible twenty to thirty times, I can say it is one of the most profitable habits God has helped to make a part of my daily life. Since Jesus is

the Word made flesh, to know Jesus, you need to know the Bible.

The third pillar of my new life in Christ was, and is, prayer. Cultivating a relationship with God is enriched by communication. When I went back to college, I had some serious personal battles to work through. These struggles led me to my knees. I found myself praying many times a day for strength and guidance. But this was good because it taught me to rely on God in a new way and deepen my relationship with Him. I was encouraged by my brothers and sisters in Christ and I received comfort from reading the Word, but prayer was my lifeline. I found that the sooner I put my problems in God's lap, the better off I would be. "Cast your burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain you: he will never suffer the righteous to be moved" (Psalm 55:22).

I was also learning to pray about everything. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer

and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). I had played basketball since I was twelve but had never prayed before practice or a game. I was about to learn “to pray before you play.” One week I played three times, asked God for protection once, and broke fingers the other two times. I got the message and learned to pray before I play. I later put this reminder on white athletic tape and stuck it to my locker door.

I also began to learn how vital prayer was to maintaining a dynamic relationship with God. At seminary I was surrounded by earnest men and women seeking first the Kingdom of God. We were attending daily chapels, praying before classes, and participating in dormitory devotions. Immersed in this godly atmosphere, I thought I would not need to pray as much as I had in college. But it was just the opposite; I needed to pray more. I didn’t notice the difference right away, but my faith was becoming dry and intellectual. Jesus

was becoming a man who lived two thousand years ago, and the Bible had lost its vitality and turning into just another just book. I needed to get in touch with the living God. Thankfully God is always near, even when He doesn't seem close. When I prayed, Jesus came to life, the Bible was composed of living words, and God was real and near again.

I have touched on the importance of godly friends, daily Bible reading, and consistent prayer. If you would like to learn more about each of these three pillars, go to [www.stevedemme.com](http://www.stevedemme.com) under the section entitled Pillars.