

How important is a personal relationship with Jesus?

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How important is a personal relationship with Jesus? Some of my evangelical friends define Christianity as a personal relationship with Jesus. Everything else is adiaphora, except maybe the worship leading praise band. Even some of my Episcopalian colleagues argue that a personal relationship with Jesus should be the aim of growth in Christian faith. My problem is that I don't know what a personal relationship with Jesus is.

Apparently it has a substantial, perhaps essential, emotional content, but that's not much to go on. I have a personal relationship with my wife, children, grandchildren, friends, acquaintances, and, if emotions count, even with writers of silly letters to the editor. Each of them has an emotional content, but each is not just different, each is unique. With that in mind, is there a standard for what a personal relationship with Jesus is suppose to look or feel like? I am unaware of one.

When asked if I have a personal relationship with Jesus, I demur. I am, I say, a follower of Jesus whom I believe to be the Christ, the Word of God made flesh. I am a disciple, although not a very good one. It's a journey of one step at a time. I'm in frequent conversation with God, sometimes in formal prayer, and sometimes in more informal give and take, but I don't spend a lot of time worrying about which person of the Trinity is in on the call. From time to time God feels very close to me. At others I realize that knowing that God is present does not require feeling it. God can feel very absent, but I know that God is there just the same.

I think it is a disservice to nascent Christians to require of them a manufactured personal relationship with Jesus in order to meet the requirements of membership in the club. My guess is that some who say they have one are just parroting a formula to avoid controversy while feeling guilt at having lied about it. And I wonder if some who do claim a personal relationship with Jesus have sentimentalized him into a personal fairy godfather who bears little similarity to the Jesus of the gospel records. A few others seem to claim ownership, as in this is my Jesus, not your Jesus, but I might share him with you if you are worthy. I expect there is real authenticity among

yet others. Good for them.

For my part, I want people to know Jesus, to follow Jesus, and to worship God in Christ Jesus, but having a personal relationship with Jesus is just not that important. What's your take?

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