

Dear Reader's,

It seems like the question on church was a good one. Here is another response from Michael Leskowitz.

Church

by Michael Leskowitz

The question that you asked, "What is church?", is thought provoking. To me church is: a group of bible believing believers (Christians); a weekly commitment that keeps oneself and others accountable to God and each other; a group of people that follow God and keep me on track following God; a group that encourages me in my faith in God, and that I, in turn, greet and encourage; a group that does not just get together once a week, but a group that is there for each other 24/7; a group that is not without leadership, but has a godly leader and wise elders.

Pennsylvania

by Matthew Day

A month ago I told you that I was going to Pennsylvania. Well, now I am back and I want to tell you about it.

Our first vacation stop was by Niagara Falls in Canada. When we crossed the border we had our car searched for the first time. That was a once in a lifetime experience (we hope).

Niagara Falls was amazing. We only stayed one night, but it happened to be Memorial Day and they shot fireworks over the falls.

Our next stop was the main reason we came. It was the First Fruits of Zion (FFOZ) Pray in the Spirit conference. Where should I begin in my description of it?

The conference was at a camp in the Pocono mountains. Some people stayed in tents, some in a nearby hotel. We chose the middle ground and stayed in a cabin. Probably the closest thing I can think of to compare this to is church camp, but much better.

The food was not what you would expect at a camp. We had hamburgers and hot dogs only once during the week. Most of the food was new to me, so I can't remember the names of them very well. But, the point is the food was very good and all kosher.

The main subject of the conference was prayer. One thing that they emphasized a lot is that there are set times of prayer, but this does not mean spontaneous prayer is not important. No, they are both important. You should already know what spontaneous prayer is. It is those prayers you pray whenever about whatever and usually you pray them alone. Set time prayer is prayer at a specific time every day.

I am sure everyone agrees that spontaneous prayer is good, but I have no idea what you think of the set time prayer idea. So, here are some scriptures they offered to support it: Acts 3:1; Genesis 19:27; Psalm 5:3; Genesis 24:63; Acts 10:1-3; Ezra 9:5. They taught that there were two set times of prayer, in the morning (about the third hour after sunrise), and in the afternoon (about the ninth hour).

They said that the most important thing in set time prayer is to stop and acknowledge God. In fact, this was what they emphasized the most, so I am going to write it again. Set a time to STOP, take a PAUSE in life, and TALK to God. Whether it is for thirty seconds or three hours is not important. Just stop and pray.

Another thing they taught, but did not emphasize was liturgical prayer. They gave out some basic praybooks (siddur) designed specifically Shavuot (Pentecost), which we used that week. The prayers were made mostly of scripture. Of course, when they brought this in, almost everybody had the same question. What about Matthew 6:7, which says not to pray in vain repetition? The answer was quite simple: in order for something to be vain repetition, it must be repetition AND vain. Repetition alone does not make something vain or meaningless. It is true that repetition can lead to meaningless prayer, if you let it. But it can also have the opposite effect. When you read a passage in the Bible again does it become less or more meaningful to you? If repetition always implied vain, then that would mean that saying thanks at every meal was vain and songs would become vain.

What is the purpose of liturgical prayer. Since it is mostly scripture, everyone can be in agreement with it. It is also more formal than spontaneous prayer. We have two relationships with God that seem to contradict each

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other. He is our Father and he is our King. It seems like most people have the father relationship down. But there are times when we should come before Him as our King. One more purpose of it is that it deals with the big picture.

We also celebrated Shabbat (Sabbath). At the end of Shabbat we had what is called a havdalah service. We said an evening prayer, and then we all sang praises with a Messianic band named Arba Minim. That was amazing.

We went on a bogg hike with a man who called himself Nature Joe. He knew a lot. If he heard a bird, he would get his bird book out, flip to the right page, and point to the bird we heard. We got to try a birch twig which tasted like root beer and see several animals.

One Jewish tradition is to stay up all night before Shavuot (Pentecost). The reason is because of a story that says Israel almost missed Shavuot because of sleep. So, they stay up all night so that they won't have to worry about waking up. During the night they would study the Bible. FFOZ decided to let those who wished to do so do so. They had someone teach on the book of Deuteronomy, stopping every so often for questions and comments. I don't know if they made all the way through because we left about midnight.

Our next stop was my uncle's house. I got to see cousins that I had not seen in five years. They took us to Valley Forge and the ruins of an Hopewell furnace.

On the way home we stopped by the Hershey factory. Then my parents decided to drive through the night instead of stopping at a hotel. After a twenty-seven hour drive we finally made it home.

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