

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required,²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰ I have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

³³ Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

³⁶ Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷ Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four.^[e] She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. ³⁸ She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem. Luke 2:25-38 NLT

It was eight days after the birth of Jesus when his parents took him to the temple for the Jewish ceremony of circumcision. While there they had two very unexpected encounters with two elderly people.

It is from these two patient people – Simeon and Anna that we take our lesson from today. The Christmas story is more than just an evening in a manger or stable. There are other players and characters from which we can learn so much. Both of these godly saints recognized Jesus' identity as the Messiah.

There are some reasons they knew Him.

As you interact with people at various stages of life today, think about the development of your relationship with God. When talking to a younger person, ask yourself; "How was God involved in my life at that age?" When noticing someone older ask: "How do I want my relationship with God to mature by that point in my life?"

What is your relationship with Jesus Christ?

Here are four things you can learn from these two people who are a part of Christ's story about knowing and recognizing Christ in your life.

They are very simple:

1. They loved God

What does it mean to love God? We toss that phrase around a lot but what does it really mean to love God in practical ways?

Picture slides

If somebody asked you to describe the Christian life in a few words, what would you say? If somebody asked you, “What does God want from us more than anything else?” What would you say? If you said moral devotion, if you said ethical behavior, if you said religious ritual you’d be wrong. The essence of the Christian life can be summed up in one word “relationship”. God wants a relationship with us.

The Bible says that you were created as an object of God’s love. God made you to love you. He made you to be an object of His love. He wants to have a relationship with you. That means that you are created for the purpose of having a relationship and, as a result, the most important thing you can know in life is that God loves you. And the most important thing that you can do in life is to love Him back. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 22:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.”

Nothing is more important. If you do this you will fulfill your primary purpose in life. If you learn to love God and you let God love you, your life has fulfilled its meaning, its purpose. If you miss this part of your life, your life is a failure. Because you’ve missed the very reason that God created you and put you on earth – to love and be loved.

There’s a term in the Bible for expressing love to God. That term is called “worship”. We think of worship as a ritual or routine or something you do in a church. No. Worship simply means expressing our love to God. Any time you’re expressing love to God, you’re worshipping whether you’re by yourself, in a small group, in a large crowd or wherever. When you express love to God in any way you are worshipping.

You can love God by:

Singing to Him

Talking to Him

Listening to Him

By giving to Him.

By being committed to Him

We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? 1 John 3:16-17 NLT

¹⁸ *Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.* 1 John 3:18 NLT

³ *Loving God means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.* 1 John 5:3 NLT

⁵ *"If you love me, obey my commandments.* John 14:3 NLT

When we love God it will be demonstrated in the way we live our lives. The choices we make. The relationships we cherish. The priorities we make.

Both Simeon and Anna loved God and lived their lives in a way that left no room for doubt about it.

2. They lived for Him

He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel.

¹ *She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer*

You can tell a legitimate widow by the way she has put all her hope in God, praying to him constantly for the needs of others as well as her own. But a widow who exploits people's emotions and pocketbooks—well, there's nothing to her. 1 Timothy 5:5 The Message

Loving God will affect your lifestyle. It will affect what you do and how you do it. We can choose to live our lives however we want but the Creator of the universe and everything in it left us a manual on how to live our lives. You either live by it or ignore it.

When you purchase a piece of electronics it comes with a manual. I know that sometimes they can be intimidating and annoying at the same time. But if you are going to know how to operate it you need to read it and study it and figure it out.

If you and I are going to live for Him we need to be reading the word of God every day. Maybe you think you already know it so you don't need to pick it up but the fact is you can never exhaust how God will speak into your life even through the same verses you think you know.

Someone wrote the following: I wanted to buy a dust mop head for our new church facility, but I didn't have a measuring tool to figure out what size I needed. So, I used my shoes and hand to measure. The dust mop head was two of my shoes and four fingers. When I went to the world wide web to order, I couldn't find a dust mop two shoes and four fingers long. Surprise surprise, no one uses that form of measurement.

How would you like to get to the end of your life, stand before God and realize that you used the wrong measuring tool to measure your love for Him?

3. They were led by Him daily

Being led by Jesus Christ daily is both challenging and intimidating unless you love Him above everything else. To be led daily means that we prioritize our lives and loves around His will and His ways. You have to be hungry for Him to be in your life.

When we want something bad enough we will go to all kinds of lengths to get it. When we want some particular kind of food we will drive miles or to another town to get it.

Eugene Peterson in *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* writes, "It is not difficult in our world to get a person interested in the message of the Gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier Christians called holiness."

Do you hunger for God?

The weakness of our hunger for God is not because he is unsavoury, but because we "keep ourselves stuffed with other things"

4. They lifted Him up so that others could know Him

"This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. ³⁵ As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

, . . . and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem

Our greatest achievement on this earth is to lift up Jesus Christ so that the world will see Him and come to know Him. We do this by making good choices with our loves, our lives and allowing Him to lead us morning noon and night.

The following was written by Dianne Matthews:

"I was enjoying 1st grade to the fullest until one day in December when the little girl behind me set "it" on her desk. It was the tiniest Christmas present imaginable, less than an inch on each side with white glossy paper tied up with a sliver of red cellophane. Immediately I was captivated. I had never seen anything so exquisite. Day after day the tiny gift caught my eye, and my active imagination tried to guess what miniature treasure might be inside. It had to be something wondrous beyond description.

I longed for that object with all the power a 5-year-old can muster. Finally, I became convinced that it should be mine. I deserved it because I desired it. Since I rode an early bus to school, it was a simple matter to slip into the empty classroom one morning. My hands eagerly tore open the tiny present. Inside I found - nothing.

Staring at the destruction in my hand, anticipation dissolved into disappointment and confusion. Gradually my stunned mind grasped the fact that the little package had been nothing more than a hollow decoration. I sat at my desk with the empty paper and an empty feeling, sickened by the knowledge of my guilt.

Little did I know that morning that this scene would repeat itself many times in my life. As I grew up the world enticed me with all sorts of shiny, gaily wrapped "presents" that caught my eye and promised happiness. Too often, when I accepted what the world was offering and tore away the wrappings, my excited expectations were replaced by feelings of emptiness.

There is only one gift that will bring you joy and that is the first gift of Christmas that came in the form of a little baby.

He came to give us love

He came to help us live

He came to lead us

He came to give us the opportunity to lift Him up to the world around us every day.