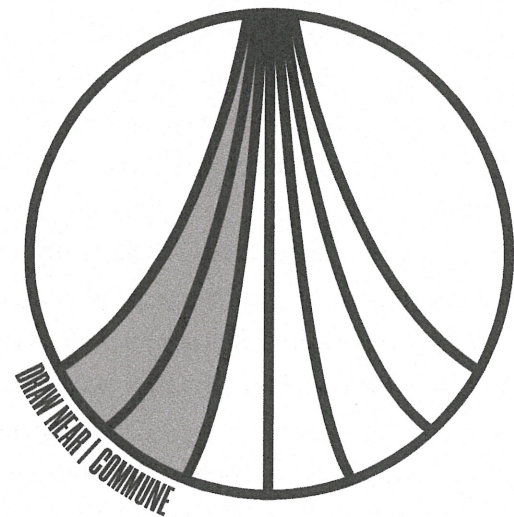


CHAPTER 8 COMMUNE



WHAT IF YOU NEEDED to take a ten-hour road trip? You then discovered that someone in your church needed to go the same city, and the two of you decided to travel together.

On the day of your trip, they picked you up at your home, but for some reason, you did not speak to each other when you got in the car. The silence seemed a little awkward, but you shrugged it off. *Maybe they're just not a morning person*, you thought. But ten hours later, when they stopped the car and you got out, neither of you had said a single word the entire time!

Now, besides the fact that this would be almost impossible, and the strangest trip in history, something else would have happened. Even though you sat two feet from each other for ten long hours, you would not know each other any better at the end of the trip than you did at the beginning.

Why? Because conversation is the capital of a relationship. If you don't talk, you will not come to know someone, and they will not know you. But suppose you had talked non-stop for those ten hours. You would be highly acquainted friends. Maybe even good friends. You would know each other.

With the Father

God has designed you to live and move in His presence, and communication with Him is the means of this relationship. You can't truthfully say that you have a relationship with God if you never talk with Him.

He has given you all the necessary tools to build this communion, and two are non-negotiable: His Word and prayer.

Communing Through the Living Word

If there is a dominant theme in the Bible, it is God's constant admonition to read, study, and meditate on His Word. This is to be more than mundane reading, though. It involves letting God talk to you and letting His Word take up residence in you.

The apostle Paul said you must "let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you."⁵⁸ To "dwell" means to settle down, to be at home. God has given us sixty-six books of His God-breathed words, and He desires for His words to find a deep, permanent home in our hearts. He knows that enjoying His presence depends upon our constant and rich conversations with Him.

All Scripture is inspired [God-exhaled] by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.⁵⁹

If you will listen to Him daily through His Word: "It shows you the path to walk on; that's doctrine. It shows you where you got off the path; that's reproof. It shows you how to get back on the path; that's correction. And it shows you how to stay on the path; that's instruction in righteousness."⁶⁰ He knows what is necessary to perfectly equip you for everything He wants you to do, but you must talk to Him and let

⁵⁸Colossians 3:16

⁵⁹2 Timothy 3:16-17

⁶⁰<https://pastorrick.com/god-wants-you-to-do-not-just-to-hear> Feb. 24, 2022.

Him talk to you. Continual study and meditation on His Word are the means.

Can you imagine the most important person in history addressing you personally? Would you listen to them or ignore them? Would you pay close attention and give heed to what they were saying?

The Bible is God speaking. It is given for specific reasons, but most of all it gives us the opportunity to sit in His presence and hear from Him. Everything we need to know about everything we need to know about is found there. He has things He wants to talk to you about every single day.

The Scripture is not merely a collection of static words on some pages. God reminds us it is dynamic because of its origin and nature.

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.⁶¹

When you sit with the Bible in your lap and have a heart ready to hear, the Spirit will bring it to life. Only God could do this, and He does.

Millions of believers have given testimony of this experience. Humble farmers, brilliant theologians, young students, and uneducated men and women have all experienced God's voice communing with them as they prayerfully read the Bible. This has happened across the world for generations. The Father loves to talk to all of His children.

⁶¹Hebrews 4:12-13

Since the Word is one of His primary means of speaking to us, we must *cooperate*. We must draw near every day to read and study, memorize and meditate on His Word to know Him more and more. As we approach the Scripture, it is not just to gain knowledge but to encounter Him.

I've had this poem on the wall of my study for over thirty years as a reminder. It directs the way I approach the Scripture, for experience has proven it true. The belief that I can find Him on every page of His Word makes my heart soar.

I read Thy word, O Lord, each passing day,
And in thy sacred page find glad employ.
But this I pray: save from the killing letter.
Teach my heart, set free from human forms
The holy art of reading Thee in every line;
In precept, prophecy, and sign.
Till all my vision filled with Thee,
Thy likeness shall reflect in me.
Not knowledge, but Thyself my joy,
For this I pray.⁶²

A Presence Centered Missionary

As I was writing this book, a wonderful missionary in our church spoke to me.

"I think I'm supposed to tell you something, but I've hesitated."

"Why?" I asked.

⁶²J.C. Macaulay, "Thyself"

"Well, I didn't want to seem proud or that I have everything all together, because I certainly don't. But the more you speak of abiding in God's presence, the more I feel compelled to tell you this story.

"When my husband and I first went to our missionary assignment (an Asian country), I was homeschooling my three children, trying to learn a difficult language, and acclimating to a new culture. I wanted to be there, but I was a mess. I wasn't doing well.

"This became very clear to me when a veteran missionary came up and asked me one probing question.

"'Colette,' he said, 'How are you learning to practice the presence of God every day?'

"That's all he said, but it went like a knife through my heart. I knew he must be noticing how frustrated and distracted I was. So, I began to ask the Lord to help me practice His presence. I had no idea how to begin.

"We were helping our children memorize Scripture every day and I was learning the verses with them. The next morning as I looked at the verses, the Lord spoke to my heart. I realized He just wanted me to concentrate on the first line of the verses we were learning.

"'Lord, I can memorize the whole passage,' I said to Him.

"'No,' I felt Him saying. 'You don't understand. I want you to slow down and listen to what I want to say to you through the first line.'

"The Lord kept me on that first line for two months! Like a prism turning in the light, I began to see more and more in that one verse. I couldn't think about anything else. Whenever my mind was in neutral, it would run to that line as I meditated on its truth and the Father and I discussed it together.

"And then one day," she said with tears in her eyes, "The Lord brought a dear native woman to me. She needed every single thing the

Father had shown me in those two months as He and I had discussed that one line! And I shared it all with her, and it helped her greatly.

"And then I heard the Lord say, 'Now, Colette, let's go to the second line!'"

Then this precious missionary who had been so powerfully used by God in so many lives said to me. "I've been doing this now for 25 years. It's how I stay in His presence all day long."

Communing. This was how she was abiding in Christ, sitting at His feet, listening to Him continually, remaining in His presence. She was letting the Word of Christ richly dwell within her and aggressively looking for her next assignment to share it with others.

Communing Through Unceasing Prayer

I attended college during the Jesus Movement in the early 1970s. It was an unusual season of God's presence. It touched our campus, and it touched me. I was aggressively pursuing God and enjoying His presence, but there was one verse that really bothered me because it was not my experience. In fact, I questioned whether it was possible, but I knew it must be because it was from the inerrant word of God. So, I began to ask the Lord to help me experience this verse. And I have prayed about it continually ever since. The verse is simple:

Pray without ceasing.⁶³

Without ceasing? All the time? I knew God could not ask me to do something that I couldn't do by His grace. There was no demand made upon my life that was not made upon the Christ who lived within me, but as I tried to pray continually throughout the day, I found it very

⁶³1 Thessalonians 5:17

difficult because of the distractions. Like a kid in a candy shop, I found that I was often lured away and would forget to pray.

It has taken years, but more and more (and certainly not perfectly) I have learned that unceasing prayer is not only possible, it is one of the primary keys to a Presence-centered life. God has given us several types of prayer to help us enjoy unbroken communion with Him.

Morning and Evening Prayer

God told the children of Israel to build a portable Tabernacle as they traveled to the Promised Land. This was to be in the center of their camp as a continual place of His presence. Every component of that Tabernacle showed them how to receive the cleansing necessary to enter God's presence by faith.

Outside the Holy of Holies was a small altar where incense—a symbol for prayer—was burned. Listen to its purpose.

"You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you. Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations."⁶⁴

Morning and evening incense ... morning and evening prayer.

There is something about beginning and ending your day in prayer that frames the day. If you read the biographies of well-known Christian

⁶⁴Exodus 30:6-8

men and women, you will discover that almost all of them began their day with a deliberate, disciplined time with God in His Word and prayer and ended the day in thanksgiving.

The apostle John reminded us of the value of those times of communion, not just to us, but to heaven.

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.⁶⁵

Morning, Word-driven prayers set the day with God and equip you for what you will face. It will provide you with what someone you will encounter later in the day desperately needs. George Mueller would read His Bible and pray until he got his soul “happy in the Lord,” reasoning that he was not ready to meet others until he had met with God.

I once asked Henry Blackaby, a mentor to me as to thousands of others, about his morning devotions. He told me that he would get up an hour early. But soon, realizing that was not enough, he got up an hour earlier ... and then another.

Finally, he simply resolved to rise whenever God awakened him. I was with him on many occasions when I noticed his notes as he headed to the pulpit to preach. It might be a few lines written on a scratch pad from the hotel, the summary of what God had shown him that very morning. God was giving His servant daily bread to deliver to thousands of hungry people.

Any man or woman who pays the price to commune with God will be used by God. God will see to that. Here is a simple pattern for morning prayer.

⁶⁵Revelation 5:8

1. **Draw near to God.** Spend time entering into His presence as Jesus instructs in Matthew 6:6. Walk into the throne room and shut the door on every distraction. Then turn and face the throne and “pray to your Father.” Stay in these moments of worship until you know you have become consciously aware of His presence. Reading the psalms, singing, or listening to worship music is often helpful. Most importantly, turn your attention to Him.

Spend time in humble consecration, admitting your sins and acknowledging your need, just as the priests did as they approached the presence of God in the “ark of the LORD God of Israel.”⁶⁶

2. **Read the Word *experientially*.** Go to the Scripture readings for the day with a prayer that God will open your eyes and help you see wonderful things from His Word.⁶⁷ Read the Bible with a notebook in hand to record all that God says to you. Meditate on what God is communicating. Make application to your own life and commit to respond in whatever ways God directs. Make your goal to hear from God, not just get through a passage.
3. **Pray the Scripture *in*.** Remember, you are there to have a conversation with the Father, to enjoy His presence, and learn from Him. He *will* speak, and as He does, you want to retain what He communicates. The best ways to retain are to write it down and pray it in! (The helpful book, *Praying the Bible*, by Donald

⁶⁶1 Chronicles 15:12-15

⁶⁷Psalms 119:18

Whitney can help with this.⁶⁸) Spend extended time in prayer for whatever God prompts you. Using prayer lists or cards can be helpful to remember needs.

4. **Memorize a scripture** that God has made precious to you. Meditate on it throughout the day. Write it on a card and place it where you can see it daily. Let it “richly dwell within you.”
5. **Be ready to join God in sharing truth.** Ask the Lord to bring someone across your path who might need what He shows you, and ask Him to open your mouth boldly to share with them. Realize that it was for this purpose that He has given you this understanding—not only for your good but also for others.

My missionary friend, Collette, asks God every day who He has on the agenda to share His truth with. It is amazing, but not surprising, how many spiritual conversations she has almost every week. Her life is a constant adventure. She often says to us, “God just must love me best to give me such an exciting life!” But her Presence-centered life is available to anyone.

Evening prayer brings your heart back to the Father, giving thanks for all He has done. Rehearse the blessings of the day and pray for His protection through the night hours. Often these evening prayers are a wonderful way to join as a family in prayer.

Everything Prayer

Another way to pray without ceasing and to abide in His presence is to do what a favorite scripture in Philippians commands.

⁶⁸ Donald Whitney, *Praying the Bible*, Donald Whitney, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2015

Be anxious for nothing, but in *everything* by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.⁶⁹

Did you worry about anything last week? Yesterday? Were you worried, bothered, anxious, upset? These are all signs that you were not practicing “everything prayer.” There is only one possible way to be “anxious for nothing,” and that is to “pray about everything!” You may think the word “everything” is an exaggeration, but it is not. It is the Word of God to us that comes straight from the One who knows us best and loves us most.

It can be done and must be done if we’re going to live a Presence-centered life. In fact, it may be the single most important secret to such unceasing intimacy. What if every conversation you had today, every meeting, every decision, every relaxed moment, or season of hard work was laced with prayer? What if you were thanking God for *everything*, as Paul directs?

The secret to David’s intimacy with Christ was this continual prayer, as he mentioned in Psalm 16, writing about the value of God’s presence: “I have set the LORD *continually* before me.”⁷⁰

His fellow psalmist, Asaph, reminds us of this practice when he tells of bringing the ark of God back into Jerusalem: “Seek the Lord and His strength. Seek His face *continually*.”⁷¹

Children understand this. When they are afraid, hungry, hurting, or simply need the warmth of intimacy, what do they do? They seek

⁶⁹ Philippians 4:6–7 (*emphasis mine*)

⁷⁰ Psalm 16:8 (*emphasis mine*)

⁷¹ 1 Chronicles 16:11 (*emphasis mine*)

the face of their mom or dad. Nothing else will substitute for the joy and comfort that comes from a parent's face.

If you want to be continually aware of God's intimate presence, carry on a continuous conversation with Him. Enter His presence, draw near, and seek His face continually. You will discover that the smallest details of your life are important to Him, for it is the details and your willingness to bring them to Him that usher you into His presence. And, His presence is our greatest need and our presence is His great desire.

Intensive Prayer

There are also moments that call for a dramatic increase in prayer. Jesus said that there are some things that don't happen but by prayer and fasting.⁷² Jesus would often pull away and spend an entire night in prayer. Greater demands call for greater prayer. You will find that intensive times of prayer (which may be hard but are essential) actually make your schedule easier because more is accomplished in such times than through any other means.

If you serve with a team, gather weekly for unhindered prayer and schedule a day of prayer each month. You will be astounded at what will happen and how much is accomplished in the presence of God. God is waiting for you there and such days of prayer will build the unity of your team in ways that nothing else can do.

Presence-Centered Prayer

Aren't all times of prayer Presence-centered? Not necessarily. Prayer can become routine and perfunctory, and it's possible to go through a

⁷²Matthew 17:21

time of prayer completely unaware of God's presence.

Much of so-called prayer, both public and private, is not unto God. In order that prayer be really unto God, there must be a definite and conscious approach to God when we pray. In much of our prayer, there is little thought of God. Our mind is taken up with the thought of what we need and is not occupied with the thought of the mighty and loving Father from whom we are seeking these gifts.

If then, we would pray aright, the first thing that we should do is to see ... that we really get into His very presence. Before a word of petition is offered, we should have the definite and vivid consciousness that we are talking to God and should believe that He is listening to our petition and is going to grant the thing that we ask of Him. This is only possible by the Holy Spirit's power, so we should look to the Holy Spirit to really lead us into the presence of God and should not be hasty in words until he has actually brought us there.⁷³

When Christ taught us to pray in the Sermon on the Mount, He spoke sixty words about what to say in God's presence ("Our Father who is in heaven ..."). But amazingly, He gave us 120 words about *how* to enter God's presence, beginning with the words "When you pray."⁷⁴ At the heart of this explanation is a beautiful picture designed to help us know how to enter His presence.

⁷³R.A. Torrey, *How to Pray*, Moody, Chicago, IL, 2007.

⁷⁴Matthew 6:5-10

“But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.”⁷⁵

The great pastor, Martyn Lloyd-Jones said that when he began to understand and practice this verse, he discovered he could pray by himself or lead prayer in a crowd of thousands and enjoy deep intimacy in God’s presence.

Look at the picture Jesus gives us. See a door before you as a doorway into the foyer of heaven. Enter through the door and then turn around and shut the door. Why is this necessary? The world, flesh, and devil will throw everything at you to distract you, to pull you away from the presence of God. So shut the door on yesterday, on tomorrow, on everything that would pull you away from the throne room.

Realize you are about to have a conversation with the Father, Son, and Spirit. Then, consciously, look at the throne and worship the Father. What do you see as you look at Him? Meditate on Him in thanksgiving and praise.

What do you notice as you look at the Son, seated at His right hand? Think of all He has done for you and give thanks. And then realize that God’s Spirit is present there also. We rarely speak of Him, but realize the role the Spirit plays in your life—convicting, teaching, helping, comforting. Spend time worshiping Him.

If Satan tries to accuse you and tell you that you cannot enter into God’s presence, remind him of Paul’s beautiful words.

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with [literally, *facing*] God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

⁷⁵Matthew 6:6

through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. ⁷⁶

Jesus has given us an introduction. We come trusting in Him and what He’s done, and we now stand in grace. Christ provided the way for us to be here, and the Father wants us here. We are allowed to enter, not because of our good works, but His.

Utilize this image, given by Christ, to practically enter His presence, to draw near. By faith we know that He will fulfill His agreement, for He promised that if we would draw near to Him, He would draw near to us.⁷⁷

During a particular moment in Israel’s history, they recognized this value and made these choices. Wouldn’t it be beautiful if this were God’s testimony of our lives?

“Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways ... They ask Me for just decisions. They delight in the nearness of God.”⁷⁸

⁷⁶Romans 5:1–2

⁷⁷James 4:8

⁷⁸Isaiah 58:2

The NEXT STEP...

1. What adjustments do you need to make to begin or enhance morning and evening prayer? Morning prayer often begins the night before with proper preparation and rest. Start tomorrow morning!
2. Memorize one verse that sticks out to you in your morning devotions. Throughout the week, meditate constantly on that one verse, asking God to make it real to you. Ask Him to give you an opportunity to share those truths with someone in need.
3. Ask the Lord to help you practice “Everything Prayers” throughout this week. It may sound mechanical, but to help develop this habit, make a note of each time you pray throughout the day—not to make you proud but to make you aware.
4. Find a friend with whom you can set aside time to pray with each week. Read “Simply Prayer” if you need help in knowing how to pray.
<https://billeliff.org/products/simply-prayer>.
5. If you need help with fasting and prayer, read our small booklet on fasting.
<https://billeliff.org/products/the-power-and-joy-of-biblical-fasting>

CHAPTER 9
REPENT