

Prayer 04

Being with God



Weston Brooks

INTRODUCTION

As a general rule, you can gauge the intimacy in a relationship by how comfortable you are being alone together in the silence. Early on, relationships are full of words and activity. As you grow closer over time, there are still words and activity, but you also come to deeply enjoy just being with each other.

- John Mark Comer

Human analogies eventually become inadequate as we grow in our relationship with God. However, the metaphor most often used in the Scriptures to describe a maturing relationship with God is marriage. This most intimate of human relationships can truly result in the intertwining and union of two lives in a profound experience of love and knowledge. The relationship goes beyond words to communion.

This is what Jesus focused on with His disciples the night before He was crucified. The Gospel of John chapters 13-17 contain some of the most profound teachings of Jesus. He describes His own intimate relationship with the Father and promises to give this as a gift to them by the giving of the Holy Spirit.

In other words, the triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is inviting you to sit at their table and enjoy the same relationship, the same communion, the same love that they enjoy for one another.

This week we are going to focus on practices that help you experience a deeper communion with the triune God. Every christian I have known or read confesses that this aspect of prayer is the most difficult to learn. It requires patience, consistency and perseverance. But they all also confess that this aspect of prayer is also the most rewarding.

The practices this week are designed to help you learn how to quiet your mind and focus on the presence of God without having to use words. If you find your mind wandering a lot, don't worry. It does not mean you are bad at contemplative prayer, it means you are human. When you realize your mind has wandered, do not be hard on yourself or spend energy analyzing why. Simply and gently return your mind to focus on Jesus.

MONDAY

Reading

Read Luke 10:38-42 slowly and meditatively.

DISTRACTION INVENTORY

Fill out the Distraction Inventory Worksheet in the Appendix. This is a simple way to help you notice whether your life is moving towards or away from contemplative spirituality. In the left column are words that describe a restful state of being and in the right column are words describe a life in opposition to contemplative spirituality.

Look at the two words in each row. Which one better describes your life? Think big picture and don't get caught up in too much detail. If it's the word in the left column, mark it with +1. If it's the word in the right column, mark it -1. If you feel you are somewhere in between, mark it with 0. Then total your score.

Reflect

Do you lean more towards Martha or Mary? Based on your distraction inventory score, what might be some adjustments you need to make to increase being with God?

TUESDAY

Reading

Read Psalm 46 with particular attention to v10.

PRACTICE

Today is an introduction to contemplative prayer. Try the following:

- Commit 3 to 5 minutes to being quiet.
- Set a timer.
- Bring a notepad and pen so you can write down things that come to mind that you have to remember later.
- Your only goal today is to quiet your thoughts and focus on the presence of Jesus. Don't worry if it seems hard. Just practice bringing your focus back to Him.

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on your experience. Where was it hard? Where did you feel God's nearness?

WEDNESDAY

Reading

Read Philippians 4:4-9

PRACTICE

Today's practice involves getting rid of a distraction for the day and taking advantage of small opportunities to be quiet and present in the moment - your phone! Place your phone somewhere out of arm's reach and resist the temptation to be constantly checking it. Only use it when absolutely necessary. If you are home, put it in a room that you are not in. Same at the office. If you are driving, put your phone in the glove compartment or somewhere out of reach. If you go to the store, leave your phone in your locked car. Then do the following today:

- refuse to pull out your phone when standing in line or waiting at a traffic light
- do not make or take any phone calls while driving (call them back later)
- resist the temptation to randomly check your phone, email or text
- Instead, take time to notice the life happening around you
- ask God how you can pray for what you see before your eyes
- drive with silence as a practice to be with God
- When you are with others, do not look at your screen at any point during the conversation. Enjoy the person without distraction.

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on your experience. Was it hard? Did you feel more present?

THURSDAY

Reading

Read Psalm 62

PRACTICE

"Let your memory of Jesus combine with your breath - then you will know the profit of silence." - St. John Climacus

Today you will try the ancient christian practice of breathe prayer. In Hebrew the word for spirit and the word for breathe are the same word - for breathe represents life - and so the Spirit of God is like the breathe of God giving life. Since the 3rd century, christians have used the God-ordained process of breathing to attune themselves to God's Spirit and presence. Modern science has caught up and shown that deep, slow breathing calms your nervous system and helps center your mind. Try the following:

- Find a quiet place to pray and sit in an attentive, but comfortable posture
- Set a timer for 3 to 5 minutes
- Breathe deep and slowly (at least 5 seconds inhale / 5 seconds exhale)
- Relax, become present in the moment and then open your mind to God
- Combine a word or phrase with your breathing, repeating it as you breath. Or focus on a mental action with each breathe cycle. For example:
 - "Lord Jesus Christ" (inhale); "have mercy on me" (exhale)
 - "The Lord is my Shepherd" (inhale); "I shall not want" (exhale)
 - "In Christ alone" (inhale); "my soul finds rest" (exhale)
 - Breathe in the peace of Christ... Breathe out worry, fear, anger, guilt, or shame.
 - Breathe in Christ's love... Breathe out his love for another person

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on your experience.

FRIDAY

Reading

Read Matthew 17:1-8

PRACTICE

Today, go a little deeper into contemplative prayer. Dennis and Jennifer Clark coined the term “drop down” to describe an ancient practice of prayer designed to help you connect with the Spirit of God who dwells within you.

- Imagine an elevator going from your head, through your neck down into your heart or your belly. Put all your thoughts and emotions in that elevator and let them descend to your innermost being.
- As you “drop down” to your innermost being, open yourself to the triune God. Picture a door in your belly that opens up and offers God every part of you - good and bad. No part of you is hidden.
- Ask God to reveal His love for you and receive it from Him
- Sit with God with no agenda for at least a few minutes
- When finished, take a moment to thank God for being present with you.

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on your experience.

SATURDAY

Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength. - Isaiah 30:15

PRACTICE

Set a timer for 7 to 10 minutes. Choose breathe prayer or the drop down method (see previous days).

Reflect

Take a moment to reflect on your experience.

APPENDIX

DISTRACTION INVENTORY WORKSHEET

(created by A.J. Sherrill)

RESTFUL		RESTLESS	
(+1)	(0)	(-1)	Score
Availability		Busyness	___
Rhythm		Hurry	___
Quiet		Noise	___
Community		Isolation	___
Solitude		Crowds	___
Delight		Distraction	___
Wonder		Cynicism	___
Clarity		Confusion	___
Gratitude		Greed	___
Contentment		Envy	___
Trust		Worry	___
Love		Angst	___
Total:			___

RESOURCES

Live Free by Dennis and Jennifer Clark

Being with God by AJ Sherrill

Beholding by Strahan Coleman

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