

Spending time with God

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Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. Luke 5:16

After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. When evening came, He was there alone, Matthew 14:23

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. Luke 6:12

Jesus needed to draw aside and spend time with the Father.
So do we!



The invitation to come into God's presence is always there. We just have to respond; take time out of our busy lives, draw aside and spend some quality time with God.

When we draw aside and spend time with God:

- **He will meet with us in a special way.**

Come near to God and He will come near to you. James 4:8

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with Me. Revelation 3:20

- **We will come into a new place of worship and relationship with God.**

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. Matthew 6:6

Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour. Psalm 24:3,4.

- **We will find rest.**

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. Psalm 91:1

Come to Me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

When we draw aside and come into the presence of the Lord on our own we can be totally honest with God. There's no-one else there to distract or impress. This is where our deepest level of worship takes place. We can focus on fellowshiping with Him; giving Him pleasure; loving Him; learning from Him and developing our relationship with Him.

It's not a legalistic thing (eg. "I must have a quiet time"); it's a heart thing. It's all about love; all about Him!

And the amazing thing is that the more time we spend in His presence the more we enjoy it; the more like Him we become; the more we change!

But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

Time spent with God is well spent.

Let's explore this based on Psalm 100

Psalm 100 describes

- steps we can take as we draw close to God
- some of the things we can do as we spend time with God.

¹ Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. ² Worship the LORD with gladness; come before Him with joyful songs.

When you come into the presence of the Lord you don't have to be quiet! You can shout for joy, worship Him with gladness, and sing joyful songs. All of these help you to start by focusing on God. You recognise His goodness; His greatness; His love; His power. You acknowledge this and praise Him for who He is. You stand in awe of Him. He is truly worthy of your love.

Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol Him who rides on the clouds - His name is the LORD - and rejoice before Him. Psalm 68:4

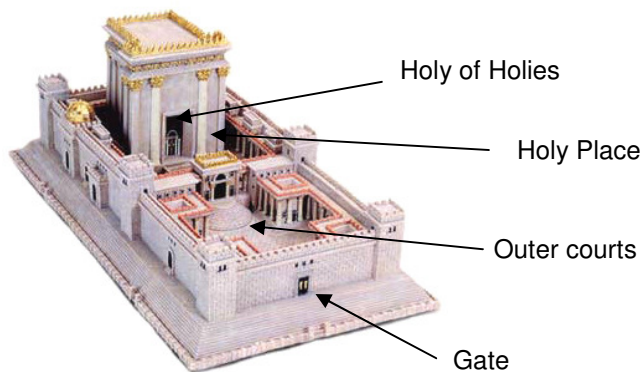
³ Know that the LORD is God. It is He who made us, and we are His; we are His people, the sheep of His pasture.

The purpose of spending time with God is to know God, worship Him, love Him and hear from Him. It is much more than just saying prayers or singing songs. As you come into the presence you recognize who He is; and who you are. And in being with Him you get to know Him more and become more like Him.

⁴ Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name.

This verse describes two important steps you can take as you draw closer to God: thanksgiving, and praise.

These match the steps that were taken to come into God's presence in the Temple in Jerusalem.



- **Thanksgiving** - enter through the gate with thanksgiving.

When you give thanks you name the things that God has done and express your gratitude for them. Once you start doing this you will be amazed at how much God has done and your heart will be full of gratitude!

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; His love endures forever. Psalm 107:1

- **Praise** - enter His courts with praise.

Praise is an acknowledgement of who God is. It is fully focused on Him (not on you!) and recognizes His attributes of love, power and greatness. When you praise Him you are filled with wonder at His nature and His creativity. You rejoice in Him just for who He is and lift Him up in your heart, acknowledging that He is your Lord.

I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise. Psalm 18:3. *It is good to praise the LORD.* Psalm 92:1

Psalms 150 shows that there are lots of different ways to praise the Lord, and also lots of different reasons for praising Him:

- ¹ Praise the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary; praise Him in His mighty heavens.
- ² Praise Him for His acts of power; praise Him for His surpassing greatness.
- ³ Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet; praise Him with the harp and lyre,
- ⁴ praise Him with tambourine and dancing; praise Him with the strings and flute,
- ⁵ praise Him with the clash of cymbals, praise Him with resounding cymbals.
- ⁶ Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD. Psalm 150

God is
worthy of
your
praise!

- **Bless His Name**

Your love, praise and thanksgiving actually bless God! He enjoys them and gets pleasure from them.

Psalms 138:2 says that God has exalted above all things His name and His word. When you praise Him you are aligning yourself with what He holds as most important and give Him pleasure. What a privilege to bless His name! (and what a contrast to so many of our prayers which are 'bless me!').

⁵ For the LORD is good and His love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.

As you draw close to God you will know that He is good. You will experience a greater sense of His love and you will recognise how faithful He has been to you and to past generations.

What are some other activities that can take place as you spend time with God?

Spending time with God is primarily for His benefit – to worship, thank, praise, honour and glorify Him! He enjoys that! The more you focus on God the more your heart will be open and warm towards Him so you will be less likely to lose concentration; have wandering thoughts; focus on your own needs and situations (which is pretty selfish!); drift off to sleep; get bored... Most Christians struggle with these areas!

But there are lots of other things you can do when you are in God's presence.

- **Supplication - prayer for others, for yourself or for specific situations**

Here you ask God to intervene in situations and bring His will to pass. When you are praying like this it is not helpful to tell God what to do. (*Lord, do this and that ...*). Much more fruitful is to ask Him. (*Lord, please would you ...*). He is the Lord, not you!

When you are praying for situations it is always best to seek to know God's will in the situation and pray accordingly. *Thy will be done; Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.* Matthew 6:10. After all you are supposed to be doing His will, not Him doing your will!

Psalms 143 is an example of a prayer of supplication. Notice how David, the Psalmist, consistently seeks to align himself with God's will, and asks God to work on his behalf in accordance with that will.



- ¹ O LORD, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in Your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.
- ² Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before You.
- ³ The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in darkness like those long dead.
- ⁴ So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed.
- ⁵ I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all Your works and consider what Your hands have done.
- ⁶ I spread out my hands to You; my soul thirsts for You like a parched land. Selah
- ⁷ Answer me quickly, O LORD; my spirit fails. Do not hide Your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. ⁸ Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I lift up my soul. ⁹ Rescue me from my enemies, O LORD, for I hide myself in You.
- ¹⁰ Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God; may Your good Spirit lead me on level ground.
- ¹¹ For Your name's sake, O LORD, preserve my life; in Your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.
- ¹² In Your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am Your servant. Psalm 143.

- **Intercession - standing in the gap between God and others or a situation**

Intercession is a form of spiritual warfare in which you stand in the gap between God and others or between God and a particular situation. You call on God to move in His power so that His will is done. (Jesus is interceding for us right now (Romans 8:34, Hebrews 7:25) and the Holy Spirit within us also intercedes for us when we don't know how to pray).



In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. Romans 8:26-27

We are to especially intercede for our leaders. When we do so we may not ever see the results of our prayers but they are vital for God to move in our nation and for His standards to be acknowledged and maintained.

I urge, then, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 1 Timothy 2:1,2.

- **Listening to God**

One of the best aspects of spending time with God is simply being still in His presence and listening. As you wait on God He refreshes and renews you, and reveals His heart to you. In these times it's best not to say anything! Stay open to the Holy Spirit and let His love wash over you. Listen for His still small voice deep in your spirit.

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth. Psalm 46:10

They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and be faint. Isaiah 40:31.

- **Meditation on God or on his Word**

Meditation on God or on His Word is easy to do. The word *meditate* literally means to *go over and over*, or to *chew the cud over*. You take a small part of God's Word or some aspect of His character and you think about it. You go over and over it in your mind; discussing it with the Holy Spirit. As you do this He speaks to you and you gain spiritual revelation and understanding. The Bible says you will prosper if you meditate on God's Word. That's because you will be hearing from God (which is always helpful and enriching).



Blessed are those who do not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but who delight in the law of the LORD, and meditate on His law day and night. They are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers. Psalm 1:1-2

What we've been sharing about are spiritual disciplines. They require stickability, determination and commitment, because there are always lots of other things that make demands on our time. But time spent with God is time well spent! It brings great reward – to Him; to others; to the world around, and to you!

For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength. Ephesians 1:15-19

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7-8.

Discussion questions

Why is time spent with God so valuable?

What are some things you can do as you spend time with God? Analyze each of these activities in terms of their benefit to God; to others, and to you.

Why are we so easily distracted from spending time with God? What does this tell us about our relationship with God; our priorities, and the Lordship of Jesus over our lives?

How do you spend time with God? Are you satisfied with this? If not, how can you improve it?

Read through the Psalms. (Yes, all of them!) Identify Psalms that are focused on worship, thanksgiving, praise, intercession, meditation, or supplication. What do you learn about each of these spiritual disciplines from the Psalms?

Choose one Psalm. e.g. Psalm 32. Use this Psalm as the basis for carrying out each of the spiritual disciplines of worship, thanksgiving, praise, intercession, meditation and supplication. What did you learn about God from this? What did you learn about yourself?

How will you prioritise your life in future so that you spend quality time with God?