

THE G3 DISCIPLESHIP CHALLENGE

The Practice of the Presence of God

An Introduction

Around 300 years ago a normal Joe by the name of Brother Lawrence entered a French monastery in Paris in an attempt to “pray without ceasing” as Paul encourages the Thessalonians to do (1 Thes. 5:17). Because of limitations from an injury during military service, he spent most of his time there washing dishes and repairing sandals. It was during this time that Brother Lawrence learned how to give his every moment to God. His many thoughts and strivings can be summed up in his ongoing effort to simply “Practice the Presence of God.”

Offentimes Brother Lawrence began his work with this prayer. “My God, since You are with me and since, by Your will I must occupy myself with external things, please grant me the grace to remain with You, in Your Presence. Work with me, so that my work might be the very best. Receive as an offering of love both my work and all my affections.”

In this theme he continues, “During my work, I would always continue to speak to the Lord as though He were right with me, offering Him my services and thanking Him for His assistance. Also, at the end of my work, I used to examine carefully. If I found good in it, I thanked God. If I noticed faults, I asked His forgiveness without being discouraged, and then went on with my work, still dwelling in Him.”

So often, we live in accordance with what we experience, not necessarily with what we believe. Our hope is that this 4 Week Discipleship experience will help you integrate what you believe with your daily experience. We hope the next 4 weeks will produce a deeper knowledge of God’s presence in your daily routine.

We invite you to enter into a season of intentional discipleship. We have compiled some recent and ancient spiritual disciplines and practices which will guide you into a deeper understanding of God’s presence and work in your life. Some exercises are best practiced daily at a consistent time while others will be weekly. Below is an overview of practices as well as a good plan for incorporating them into your life. A description of each is included in the specific exercise. Please customize this plan and make it your own.

- Breath Prayer*.....Integrated daily into a specific activity
- The Prayer of Examen*.....Practiced daily, morning or evening; 20 minutes
- Scripture for Reflection*.....Daily reflection, one passage per week; 15 minutes
- Journal Reflections*.....Twice weekly, reflection/question-based; 20 minutes
- Times of Sharing Your Experience*....Weekly with a friend or in your Group of Three for as long as is needed

As you enter into this time, allow the unimportant things of life to slide by. Place them at Jesus’ feet with the confidence that he will sort them out. God bless your experience.



Breath Prayer

The purpose of a breath prayer is very simple, as the title suggests. You simply repeat a passage of scripture to yourself, while exhaling a breath. As one obtains a rhythm of prayer and breath, he or she becomes centered around the passage, meditating on its message.

This method of prayer dates back to the 5th century A.D. and the Desert Fathers who lived in the wilderness of Egypt, seeking a life fully devoted to Jesus. They developed what is known today as *The Jesus Prayer* or *The Prayer of the Heart*, referring to Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9-14. This prayer follows as such, "*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me, a sinner,*" and is repeated as a breath prayer. As you repeat this prayer you may wish to focus on different words as their meaning comes to you. For example, while repeating the whole prayer, you may wish to focus on the word "Christ" (i.e. messiah or savior) and the ways Jesus has been a savior to you.

As one continues to practice the breath prayer, it becomes increasingly natural, until it is infused in the mind. We encourage you to integrate a breath prayer into a common daily activity, whether it is while riding the bus to class, before or after eating a meal, during exercise or cool down, while leaving class, or any other routine. We suggest using *The Jesus Prayer* initially, and after you feel comfortable with the exercise, you may wish to find your own passage or prayer¹. In doing this your prayer life will be more fully integrated into your daily grind.

¹ Try using the same Breath Prayer for one week. If, after that, you feel the need to change things up, here are a few others you may like.

From Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd, He restores my soul."

From 2 Cor. 12: 9 "My grace is sufficient for you."

From Matthew 8:2 "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

From Matthew 6: 9 "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

From Psalm 139: 23 "Search me O God, and know my heart."

From Psalm 118: 7 "The Lord is with me; he is my helper."



The Prayer of Examen

(Ignatian Examen)

A Brief History of this Prayer

The *Prayer of Examen* is an ancient reflective exercise originally developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, who lived from 1491 to 1556. He is considered something of the godfather of discernment practices. Many variations on the *Examen* have been adapted over the centuries in different traditions, but they all share a very common base.

The Purpose of this Prayer

The intention of the *Prayer of Examen* is to develop a deeper understanding of God's presence in our lives by reflecting on the details of each day. As we search out God's workings in our normal routines, we begin to see the ways God enters into and affects them. In doing this we also develop our ability to discern God's call in our lives at times of major decision.

How it Works

The *Examen* has a variety of methods, and ours contains five steps. The prayer begins by developing a grateful heart for all God's done for you. Then, enter into an attitude of humility, seeking to know in what ways your actions have pulled you from God's heart. Review your day, literally thinking through each hour, processing how you responded or reacted to various situations. Now that your actions and attitudes are before, ask for God's pardon of sin and praise him for the ways in which you saw his presence at work. Finally, affirm to your need for God's aid in difficult situations and your desire to follow his ways. The steps are written below in a simple format, allowing you to eventually memorize or perhaps copy them into your Bible.

The Five Basic Steps

1. Give thanks to God for the benefits I've received
2. Ask for the grace to know my sins and be rid of them
3. Ask for an account of my soul for the entire day, hour by hour
4. Ask for pardon of God for my shortcomings
5. Resolve, with God's grace, to amend them in future situations

--The process should take from 15-25 minutes, but it may seem difficult to get the flow at first, but your consistency will be rewarded. Practice this daily, either before going to bed for the night, or first thing in the morning, depending on what time you are most alert.



Scripture Reflection

Hebrews 4:12 tells the reader that the “word of God is living and active.” Words on a page in a book, living and active –kind of a strange idea. I think the author is making a statement that through the Scriptures, God brings ongoing revelation and understanding of himself, ourselves and the world around us. As we spend time reading and reflecting on biblical stories and accounts, we grow in our ability to pursue God and live out the Gospel to those around us. It is along this line that these passages have been selected for reading and reflection. Each presents a different approach to our experience of God’s presence, each adding to our ability to worship Him in new ways.

Spend some time the first day of each week writing down the passage in your journal or on a blank piece of paper. (For the longer passages, you may wish to simply write the portion you connected most deeply with) Also copy the key verse down (*italicized*) on two 3x5 cards, carrying one with you in your back pocket or purse, and place the other one in a well-visited location (i.e. your car seat after you arrive at a location, your desk, your bathroom mirror, . . .). Use these cards as promptings to recite the verse in your mind, even memorizing it.

As well, set aside 15 minutes each day, in which you will be able to read and reflect on the passage for the week. If your weekends are hectic, feel free to do this Monday through Friday. On the first day, simply read through the passage several times, enough to become familiar with the whole text. On the following days re-read the text and look for ideas or words which stand out to you and reflect on them. What can you learn about God, yourself or this world through the text? What does this mean to your life? You may also wish to pray through a verse or ask God about questions that arise. If a passage becomes tired, ask God for new insight and understanding, but stick with it.

Again, the purpose of this exercise is one of opening ourselves up to God’s presence in our lives and in the situations around us. Bank on the promise that God speaks through the Scriptures.

Scripture Reading for Week 1- Luke 10:38-42 (Jerusalem Bible)

--key verse is italicized

“In the course of their journey He came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord’s feet and listened to him speaking. Now Martha who was distracted with all the serving said, ‘Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.’ *But the Lord answered: ‘Martha, Martha,’ he said, ‘you worry and fret about so many things, and yet few are needed, indeed only one.* It is Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her.”



Scripture Reading for Week 2- John 15:1-17 (The Message)

1-3 "I am the Real Vine and my Father is the Farmer. He cuts off every branch of me that doesn't bear grapes. And every branch that is grape-bearing he prunes back so it will bear even more. You are already pruned back by the message I have spoken.

4 *"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. (-you may choose to write this down in another translation)*

5-8 "I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.

9-10 "I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love. That's what I've done—kept my Father's commands and made myself at home in his love.

11-15 "I've told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends. You are my friends when you do the things I command you. I'm no longer calling you servants because servants don't understand what their master is thinking and planning. No, I've named you friends because I've let you in on everything I've heard from the Father.

16 "You didn't choose me, remember; I chose you, and put you in the world to bear fruit, fruit that won't spoil. As fruit bearers, whatever you ask the Father in relation to me, he gives you.

17 "But remember the root command: Love one another.



Scripture Reading for Week 3- Psalm 119 (New Living Translation)

O LORD, you have examined my heart
and know everything about me.

2 You know when I sit down or stand up.
You know my thoughts even when I'm far away.

3 You see me when I travel
and when I rest at home.
You know everything I do.

4 You know what I am going to say
even before I say it, LORD.

5 You go before me and follow me.
You place your hand of blessing on my head.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too great for me to understand!

7 I can never escape from your Spirit!
I can never get away from your presence!

8 If I go up to heaven, you are there;
if I go down to the grave, you are there.

9 If I ride the wings of the morning,
if I dwell by the farthest oceans,
10 even there your hand will guide me,
and your strength will support me.

11 I could ask the darkness to hide me
and the light around me to become night—
12 but even in darkness I cannot hide from you.
To you the night shines as bright as day.
Darkness and light are the same to you.

13 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.

15 You watched me as I was being formed in utter
seclusion,
as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.

16 You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed.

17 How precious are your thoughts about me, O God.
They cannot be numbered!

18 I can't even count them;
they outnumber the grains of sand!
And when I wake up,
you are still with me!

19 O God, if only you would destroy the wicked!
Get out of my life, you murderers!

20 They blaspheme you;
your enemies misuse your name.

21 O LORD, shouldn't I hate those who hate you?
Shouldn't I despise those who oppose you?

22 Yes, I hate them with total hatred,
for your enemies are my enemies.

23 *Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

24 *Point out anything in me that offends you,
and lead me along the path of everlasting life.*



Scripture Reading for Week 4- Joshua 1:1-9 (English Standard Version)

After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, 2 "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. 3 Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. 4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. 5 No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. 6 Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 *Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*"



Questions for Journal Reflection

“Journals have existed in many forms down through the ages. In all likelihood, the earliest journals were oral, not written. A tribe would appoint someone to “remember” its history, and on special occasions, this storyteller would recount the events that made the tribe a unique people. This was true of the Hebrews. They told their story over and over again, recording it in what is to day the Old Testament. Their stories described how God sent their father, Abraham, on a long pilgrimage, how Moses led them out of Egypt through the Red Sea, how they entered the Promised Land, How they came to have a king. In these stories, the Jews found their identity as a special people. “This was true for the earliest followers of Christ as well. The accounts in the four Gospels are simply written versions of oral stories that had been circulating for years within the believing community. The Gospels are then, a journal of the early church, recounting what Jesus taught, how he died to atone for the sins of the world, and how he changed the lives of the earliest believers.”¹”

In the same way, the spiritual discipline of journaling allows us to process and review our daily or weekly activities. In doing so, we are more easily able to recognize God’s work in our lives. As a result we have in a sense, our own “Gospel according to *me*,” a history of Jesus’ pursuit of us.

You may already journal on a regular or semi-regular basis, or not at all, but during the 4 week period, we ask that you take a few minutes, twice a week to reflect on the following questions.

Week 1

Wednesday: How do you relate to the scripture passage? Do you see yourself as a specific character or notice a similar theme in your life?

Friday: Is God showing himself to you in new ways? Which practice has been the most beneficial to you? (why do you think that is?)

Week 2

Wednesday: Are any of Jesus’ words resonating in your heart? Is there a particular theme or idea in the passage that brings life to you?

Friday: From your experiences this week, what does it mean to “make your home in” Jesus?

Week 3

Wednesday: Is a specific exercise/practice helping you, above the others, to feel God’s presence? What can you learn about yourself in light of this?

Friday: In Ps. 139 David found comfort in knowing that God is always near, and always knew what was in his heart. What emotions come when you think about God’s presence in your life?

Week 4

Wednesday: At what points in your life do you find it difficult to believe that God “*is* with you wherever you go”?

Friday: How have the last 4 weeks developed your sensitivity to God’s Presence? How can you continue to grow in this area?

¹ *Spiritual Journaling –Recording Your Journey Toward God*, by Richard Peace

Blessed to Be a Blessing

Sharing Your Experience

A final component of this Discipleship Challenge is to give it away. From the beginnings of God's relationship with Abraham (Genesis 12) through the end of the Old Testament, God blessed Israel so that it would, in return, be a blessing to those around. God poured himself into Israel so that the nations around would know Him, and in the same way Jesus calls us to give ourselves away.

As you begin this 4 week period, find someone with whom you can share your experience. Try to meet with them toward the end of each week; it doesn't have to take up the afternoon, but give enough time to share from your heart. It might be in a G3, but we encourage you to take some extra time and really describe the ways in which God is revealing himself to you. In this way you may also be a blessing to those around you.

