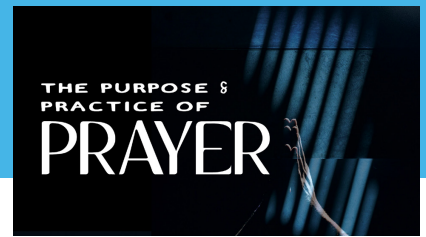


# Discussion Questions

September 10, 2023



## Prayer: Practicing the Presence of God - Part 1

1. Read the following passage from John Ortberg's book, Soul Keeping.

- "I had a whole day to spend with Dallas Willard. I told him that I felt frustrated because the people at the church I served were not changing more. I asked him what I needed to do to help our church experience greater levels of spiritual growth. Long pause . . . **"You must arrange your days so that you are experiencing deep contentment, joy, and confidence in your everyday life with God."** Huh? "No," I corrected him. "I wasn't asking about me. I was asking about other people. I was wondering what I need to make the church do. I was thinking about a book everyone should read, or a program everyone should go through, or a prayer system everyone should commit to." "Yes, Brother John," he said with great patience and care. "I know you were thinking of those things. But that's not what they need most. The main thing you will give your congregation — just like the main thing you will give to God — is the person you become. If your soul is unhealthy, you can't help anybody. You don't send a doctor with pneumonia to care for patients with immune disorders. You, and nobody else, are responsible for the well-being of your own soul." "I'm trying," I said. "I learned long ago about the importance of having a quiet time when I read the Bible and do daily devotions; I do my best to start each day that way."

"I didn't say anything about having a quiet time," he gently corrected again. **"People in churches—including pastors — have been crushed with guilt over their failure at having a regular quiet time or daily devotions. And then, even when they do, they find it does not actually lead to a healthy soul. Your problem is not the first fifteen minutes of the day. It's the next twenty-three hours and forty-five minutes.** You must arrange your days so that you are experiencing total contentment, joy, and confidence in your everyday life with God."

"But how can I have total contentment, joy, and confidence?" I responded. "My work isn't going nearly well enough. Lots of people are not happy with me. I am inadequate as a pastor, husband, and father. Every week I carry the burden of delivering a sermon and knowing I'll have to feel the pain if it doesn't go well."

**"I didn't say you should experience total contentment, joy, and confidence in the remarkable adequacy of your competence or the amazingly successful circumstances of your life. It's total contentment, joy, and confidence in your everyday experience of God.** This alone is what makes a soul healthy. This is not your wife's job. It's not your elder's job. It's not your children's job. It's not your friend's job. It's your job."

- Discuss:

A. In what ways can you relate to or not to his statement that people have been crushed with guilt with daily devotions and it often doesn't lead to a healthy soul. That "the problem is not the first fifteen minutes of the day. It's the next twenty-three hours and 45 minutes?"

B. Discuss what the difference is in the final paragraph. That it is not about finding contentment or joy in our adequacy, competence or success, but in our "everyday experience with God."

2. Read John 15:4-9

A. How many times does Jesus tell us to remain in Him in that passage?

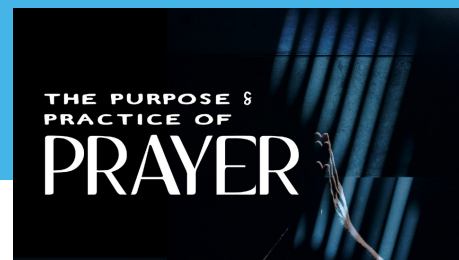
B. What does it mean to "remain in Christ?" How do we cultivate this as a way of life?

C. What do you think Jesus meant by saying, "apart from me you can do nothing?" In what ways by our actions do we reject that teaching?

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# Discussion Questions

## (continued)



3. Read Romans 12:12. How are the first two commands completely dependent upon the third command of a "constant life of prayer?"
4. James mentioned that practicing God's presence can transform our reactions in everyday difficulties, temptations, mundane situations, pretty much everything.
  - A. How can "practicing the presence of God" or becoming more attentive to God change the way we deal with mundane aspects of life, like sitting in traffic, listening to someone drone on in a conversation or making a meal for a family, working at your desk, etc.
  - B. Can you share an example from your life where consciously dwelling with God altered your response to a difficult circumstance?
5. Reflect on your current habits of spending time with God. Are they more like "filling up" or "dwelling with" God? How can you shift your approach to cultivate a deeper awareness of God's presence throughout the day?

**John 15:4–8 (NIV)**

4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

**Dallas Willard - Soul Keeping**

"Arrange your days so you are living in deep contentment and joy and confidence in your everyday life with God"

**Dallas Willard - Soul Keeping**

"I didn't say you should experience total contentment, joy, and confidence in the remarkable adequacy of your competence or the amazingly successful circumstances of your life. It's total contentment, joy, and confidence in your everyday experience of God. This alone is what makes a soul healthy. This is not your wife's job. It's not your elder's job. It's not your children's job. It's not your friend's job. It's your job."

**1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (NASB 2020)**

15 "If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

**John 14:27 (NIV)**

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you...

**Romans 12:12 (ESV)**

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

**John 15:1 (NIV)**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

**John 15:4 (NIV)**

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

Remain = ménō; To Remain, abide, dwell, live

**John 15:5–8 (NIV)**

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

**John 15:5 (NIV)**

*"apart from me you can do nothing"*

**John 15:8 (NIV)**

*This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

**Brother Lawrence - Practicing the presence of God**

*the time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clutter of my kitchen, while the several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament."*

**Brother Lawrence - Practicing the presence of God**

*"a simple attentiveness and a general loving awareness of God"*

**Dallas Willard - The Great Omission**

*"The first and most basic thing we can and must do is to keep God before our minds... This is the fundamental secret of caring for our souls. Our part in thus practicing the presence of God is to direct and redirect our minds constantly to Him. In the early time of our 'practicing' we may well be challenged by our burdensome habits of dwelling on things less than God. But these are habits—not the law of gravity—and can be broken. A new, grace-filled habit will replace the former ones as we take intentional steps toward keeping God before us. Soon our minds will return to God as the needle of a compass constantly returns to the north. If God is the great longing of our souls, He will become the pole star of our inward beings."*