

## Worship “Face-to-Face” and “Side-by-Side”

### I. Personal worship “face-to-face” with God

- Worship “face-to-face” with God = times set aside only for focused worship
- Biblical examples:
  - Moses (Exod. 33:7-11) and Daniel (Dan. 6:10) devoted regular times to pull away and pray with God in solitude
  - Jews offered prayers every morning and evening during the daily sacrifices at the Temple (Ps. 5:3; 141:2).
  - Jesus regularly went away to pray by himself (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12).
  - The early Christians prayed at fixed hours of the day (Acts 3:1; 10:9) and devoted themselves to regular prayers (Acts 2:42; 3:1; 10:9).
- Historic structures: the daily office

From the early church onward, churches and Christian communities developed some common structures for daily prayer. In some traditions, they called this emerging structure the “daily office” (which comes from a Latin word that means “service”) because this was the official, shared pattern of prayer for the church and one of the most important ways of serving the Lord in dependence upon his grace.

While the details varied across various Christian traditions, there were three important elements common to all:

- (1) Praying from the Bible, especially from the Psalms and other biblical prayers.
- (2) All four major types of prayer: praise/thanks, confession, lament, petition
- (3) Petitions organized to pray for a wide range of needs

In many Christian traditions, the daily office included hymns/songs of praise, a schedule for praying through the entire book of Psalms on a continual basis (over the course of weeks or months), other biblical readings to guide prayer, and petitions guided by carefully composed written prayers.

Like all traditions, we can benefit from these historic patterns by receiving them as wise guidance and counsel from our fathers and mothers in the faith to apply to our own circumstances. Our daily “face-to-face” prayer set aside for God can take many different forms, but learning from God’s work in the history of his people suggests that we need some kind of plan and structure.

- The wisdom of using a daily prayer guide
  - Daily prayer guides are a structured means of praying the Bible. It keeps us focused on the main things: hearing from God’s word, responding in all types of prayers that are guided by God’s word, and learning to enjoy his presence.

- It provides an experience of praying with others, even when we are alone.
  - Freedom from the burden of planning our own content each day.
  - Freedom from the limitations of our own wisdom and habits. It gives us words to stretch us to pray beyond our capacity, to pray more what would have thought to pray for ourselves and to break out of our ruts.
  - Freedom and focus under pressure. Having words and forms of prayer ingrained in us through much repetition provide us with tools ready for use when the moments of crisis come upon us unexpectedly.
  - Training in theological balance and depth. Praying well-crafted prayers prepared by others helps us express our prayer with a theological balance and depth that we might not otherwise achieve on our own.
  - Training in beauty. Praying well-crafted prayers helps us express our prayer with beauty, which follows the pattern of biblical poetry (e.g., Psalms) and glorifies the quality of prayer.
  - Training in humility. We must learn how to pray. Praying well-crafted prayers written by others enables us to submit ourselves to others in humility to learn from them.
  - Repetition is essential for learning and permits a kind of devotional freedom. Repetition deepens the meaning of texts if we attend to them, and each encounter can be fresh because we approach the text every time with new life experiences and perspectives.
- Central Presbyterian daily prayer guide: <https://www.centralpres.com/prayer-guides/>

Central offers a guide for the daily office each week. This daily prayer guide contains orders of worship for morning and evening prayer for every day of the week that feature many of the historic elements of Christian daily offices.

Moreover, Central's guide unites public worship on Sunday to daily prayer so that worship from Sunday echoes and deepens through the week and daily worship prepares us for worship on Sunday. The structure follows the same ancient pattern of worship by which God renews his covenant relationship with us in public worship:

- Opening prayers of praise
- Hymn/song
- Confessing our sin and receiving God's forgiveness
- Hearing God's instruction from his word (with psalms and other readings)
- Praying our petitions for the church and the world
- Being sent with God's blessing

The song and confession of sin come directly from the Sunday liturgy. Other written prayers and the scripture readings correlate with the main themes of the Sunday sermon in order to amplify its impact with further meditation and prayer.

- How to begin the practice of personal worship “face-to-face”
  - Find a place where you can be alone on a regular basis.
  - Select one or more times to set aside to worship God “face-to-face” where you just focus on being with him to listen to him through his word and to respond to him in prayer.
  - Set achievable goals. If this practice is new for you, start with just a few minutes at a time.
  - Start by quieting your mind, heart, and body in silence. Ask the Lord to enable you to worship him with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, giving him your full focus. Ask the Lord to enable you to listen and to hear him speak to you through his word and to enable you to respond to him with faith, hope, and love.
  - Consider using Central’s daily prayer guide or some other worship guide to give you a pattern to follow. You could even use just a portion of such a guide, e.g., just sing or listen to a song, read the Scripture reading(s) and pray from those Scriptures using the techniques of praying from the Bible (see the lesson on that technique).
  - When (not if) you get distracted or miss some scheduled times, don’t be discouraged or feel enormous guilt or shame. Simply return to the Lord, confess your need for him, ask for his help, and move on. He is always delighted to forgive and receive us in love when we turn to him in worship.

## II. Personal worship “side-by-side” with God

- Worship “side-by-side” with God = continual prayer woven through all of our daily life as an ongoing dialogue with God, sometimes called “practicing the presence of God”
- Biblical examples:
  - 1 Thessalonians 5:17: “pray without ceasing”
  - Ephesians 6:18: “praying at all times in the Spirit with all prayer and supplication.”
  - Psalm 16:8: “I set the Lord always before me...”
  - Philippians 4:4, 7: “Rejoice in the Lord always; . . . in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

We have constant access in Christ to the King of kings, and he invites us to walk with him and bring every joy and sorrow and need to him as we walk through life with him. This requires cultivating a continual, ongoing conversation and communion with God, a practice that Christians have called the “practice of the presence of God.”

Here are some practical suggestions about how to build a greater awareness of God’s presence by seeing daily routines and experiences as opportunities for encountering God and speaking with God.

- If you are weary and unfocused, start with praying about that.
- If your mind wanders, follow it, and pray about what preoccupies you (rather than just dwelling on it/stewing over it).

- When you wake up, make your first thought a prayer to walk through the day with an awareness of God’s presence. (This will be easier if you make a habit of removing smartphones, tablets, and computers from your bedroom and refusing to open them before turning to God in Bible-based prayer each morning.)
- Set an alarm or notification that alerts you to pray 1-2 minutes each hour. (You might consider combining this practice with a single Scripture text selected for the day to memorize and use as a means of repeatedly re-focusing one’s mind and heart on God.)
- When you are lying in bed going to sleep, make your final thoughts of the day prayers of thanks for God’s blessings that day, confession of any sin he brings to mind, and rest in his mercy and care (see Psalm 3:5).
- Pray quickly before beginning a task.
- Pray short prayers while doing a task: “Lord, have mercy.” “Lord, help me,” etc.
- Pray when completing a task. Give thanks and pray for fruit from your labor.
- Build margins of time between tasks and appointments as much as possible to pause and take a breath to re-focus on the Lord and to pray for what comes next.
- When thinking of a person, pray for that person: “Lord, thank you for this person (praise/thanks). Is this person/conversation showing me I need to change (confession)? Turn this person’s heart to you (petition).”
- Before, during, or after talking with (or emailing, or texting...) a person, pray for that person: “Lord, show me this person’s heart. What is your purpose for them and for this conversation? Help me listen well. Help me forgive them. Remind me what you have taught me. Bring forth what you have put in me to serve this person.”
- Before, during, or after a time at church or another public gathering, pray for what is happening: “Lord, show me my mission in this event. Who at this gathering do you want me to talk to? to listen to? to laugh with? to reach with my words?”
- When going places, watching TV, or reading/viewing on the internet, focus prayers on what is in front of you at the moment. For example, at the art museum, pray for artists and the world of art. When seeing big issues addressed (e.g., politics, education, art/music, business/finance, science/technology), pray about those things and for people you know involved in them. How can the same experience lead to different kinds of prayers, i.e., something for which to give praise/thanks, something exposed in me that needs confession, suffering that needs lament, and/or something that needs my petitions for God’s work? Example: visiting a friend in the hospital; new neighbor moves in next door.

#### What NOT to do:

- Do not strain. Prayer “side-by-side” with God is not straining to achieve but more like awakening to the God who is already present and acting, more like opening up our minds and hearts with a greater awareness of God’s constant presence.
- Do not think it means always talking, still less always talking out loud. The goal is turning one’s mind and heart continually to the Lord. This involves meditative listening as much as speaking.
- Do not be discouraged. It is a habit that takes time to learn. If you are discouraged and anxious about your failures. Remember the grace of the gospel! Simply confess, thank God for his understanding and constant forgiveness, and move on.