

Communing with God: Through the *Daily Office*

INTRODUCTION

“Do you want to know God and have a sense of His presence in your life?”

Most Christians would instinctively answer “Yes!” to this question but often lack the discernment and/or discipline to lean into it.

Scripture continually presents the vision that true life is found in knowing and communing with God (Ps 42:1; Jer 31:34; Hos 2:20; Jn 17:3; 2 Pet 1:2-3). We were made for and redeemed into fellowship with Him (Acts 17:24-28; 1 Cor 1:9). Therefore Augustine was right when he famously said about God, “You have made us for yourself. Our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you” (*Confessions*, book 1). To rest in God we must come to Him (Matt 11:28-29), and to come to Him we need to seek Him through the regular means of grace He has made available to us. It is through these (not exclusively!) that we daily learn about God, what He has done for us (Jn 6:29), and what He requires of us (Ps 119; 2 Tim 3:14-17). Thereby we abide in Christ and His freedom-producing truth (Jn 8:31-32) so that we might follow Him into fullness of joy (Jn 15:1-11).

An ancient and widely-used practice to these ends is the *Daily Office*. The word “office” comes from the Latin *opus*, which simply means “work”. This practice centers on daily meeting with God through His word and prayer. Those are the means through which we work unto resting in God. Variations of this have been employed by God’s people throughout the ages. The popular devotional “quiet time” is a recent echo of this ancient ritual. This modern adaptation, which has been adopted by numerous Protestants, was popularized in 1945 from a book published by InterVarsity staff titled *Quiet Time*. But this basic rhythm has deep roots, both biblically and in the history of the Church.

PRINCIPLES

1. Foundations in the Bible

Throughout the Psalms there is mention of meeting with the Lord in prayer at intervals throughout the day, particularly reflecting upon and responding to God’s law and invoking His promises. There are many references of this occurring at both morning and evening hours (Ps 5:3; 59:16; 88:13; 92:2; 130:6; 141:2; 143:8; 118:62). At one point the Psalmist refers to a triple daily meeting (Ps 55:17), which is also evidenced in the life of the prophet Daniel (Dan 6:10). At another point the Psalmist mentions meeting with God seven times during one day (Ps 119:164).

The basic rhythm of morning and evening worship was established as early as Exodus 29:38-39 which detailed regulations for the daily sacrifices which were made by the priests. These would occur first in the tabernacle and later the temple, but then during the exile this would be practiced in the synagogues. In these exilic circumstances the animal sacrifices were replaced with readings of the torah, prayers, and singing which together constituted their “sacrifice of praise”.

In the New Testament we see a continuation of the practices of prayer and reading God’s word. Jesus escapes at times to pray (Mt 14:13; Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16), the church in Jerusalem was devoted to daily prayer and the apostles’ teaching (Acts 2:42ff), and scattered throughout the account of Acts we see disciples individually and communally reading, praying, and singing (e.g., Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8; Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10; Paul and Silas in Acts 16).

2. Continuation and Developments in the Early Church

These trends continued and were increasingly codified in the early Church. The earliest known liturgical manual for the Church, the *Didache* (ca. 60 AD), instructs Christians to pray according the Lord’s Prayer three times a day. Pliny the Younger (63-113 AD), though not a Christian, mentions Christian communities meeting at fixed times for daily worship services. Many Church Fathers throughout the first few centuries reference such things: Clement of Rome (end of 1st C.); Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian, Tertullian, Hippolytus all refer to daily times of prayer (all in 2nd/3rd Cs.). By the 4th C. many churches had daily public morning and evening prayers and regular attendance was expected. Ambrose of Milan (339-397 AD) desired for all Christians to attend these services each morning. Benedict of Nursia (ca. 525 AD) codified and institutionalized such practices for his monastic communities in the *Rule*, particularly in the discipline of *lectio divina* (Latin for “divine reading”), which has shaped liturgical communities for centuries.

3. Variations Today

As was mentioned above there is a contemporary version of this in the modern “quiet time”. But there are also many in the Church worldwide, often members of more liturgical traditions, who use something like what is found in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Such traditions have set Scripture readings and prayers for both individuals and groups. Sadly much of Protestant devotional practice, if it is disciplined at all, is radically individualistic.

PRACTICALS

So the challenge is to appropriate this practice both **individually** and **communally**. One suggestion is to meet together once a week with others to practice a version of the daily office (option provided below), or maybe at multiple points throughout the week gather to read a Psalm with others and pray in response. The goal is to hear from God through His word and respond in prayer (which can be written, extemporaneous, spoken, and/or sung). Here are some resources for you to consider using to lean into this practice:

1. Revised Common Lectionary

There are many good apps available if you prefer not to purchase a hard copy. You can use the one included with the ESV app by Crossway, called “Daily Office Lectionary”. The lectionary goes through the Psalms frequently, and includes a reading from the Old Testament, one from a New Testament Epistle, and one from the Gospels.

2. Daily Office

The best app which I have found for free is put together by Mission St. Clare. The *Daily Office* is packed with helpful practices, but I would highlight the Opening Sentence, Versicle and Response, Confession of Sin, the Scripture Readings (from the *Revised Common Lectionary*), the Suffrages, and the Benediction.

3. Personal Bible and Prayer Plan

You can adopt a Bible reading plan (one of the most famous is the one crafted by [Robert Murray M’Cheyne](#)) and combine it with a prayer plan. You could easily use the Confession of Sin and Assurance of Grace from that Sunday’s worship bulletin, and also pray specific prayers informed by the Lord’s Prayer.

Whatever you decide, make a plan and commit to it for a time. Try to do it with others in your community as much as possible. Practice the daily work to rest in God — for your good and joy as God is known and glorified by you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Do I desire to know and commune with God?
- Do I have a plan to do that through the Bible and prayer? If I don’t, why not? Are there reasons I am disinclined to adopt a plan?
- Do I ever practice these things with others in my community? What is the benefit of doing that? Are there avenues provided already through my church for this? Are there some people within my Parish Group with whom I could partner?
- What have I learned in my times of communion with God recently?
- How has this discipline impacted my attitude, perspective, energy, and interactions with others?