

When the Church Isn't Gathered: Staying Connected to the Father

No doubt this pandemic has been disruptive for all. And for some it has been disruptive to our spiritual practices. Our schedules have been rearranged. Space and time to connect with God has become different or harder. And then there is all the stress! On top of all of this, not gathering for worship has had a negative effect on us. And because of this, for some our spiritual tanks are empty or at least trending that way. And so the question we want to consider is how do we stay connected to the Father when the church isn't gathered? How can we stay connected to the source of life in such disruptive times? A good place to start is by looking at Jesus' model.

Opening Question: How is your spiritual tank? Full? Empty? Which way is it trending?

Read Mark 1:32-35; Luke 5:15-16

1. How would you describe the scene in each passage?
2. What are the demands on Jesus?
3. In terms of spiritual practices, what does Jesus model for us in these passages?

Read Mark 6:31-47

4. Quickly survey all of chapter 6. What kinds of things was Jesus experiencing during this season of ministry?
5. How does Jesus respond to the crowd that comes (v. 34)? What insight does this give you about Jesus?
6. How would you summarize Jesus' spiritual practices in these and other passages?

Brian said:

Take some time to evaluate and plan, and as you do **think about how you can follow Jesus' model** of staying connected with the Father. What must you do to keep your spiritual tank full? Think about the "when", the "where", and the "what" of how you will seek God. **When** can you make space to focus on God? Do you need to get up a little earlier? Or maybe stay up a little later. Maybe you will decide that what you need to do is to go to bed earlier so you can get up earlier and have some time before that first Zoom meeting or class. **Where** can you go? Jesus went out to desolate places. He went up the mountain. Where can you go that would help you find quietness and the ability to focus on God? And then **what** will you actually do in this time? Reading God's Word and prayer are so vital in connecting to God. Make a plan for these things. In addition to these two core disciplines are there any other spiritual disciplines like fasting or serving or something else that would be helpful for you in this season? Here's a great question to ask as you think about what you will do: *What one thing, if done regularly, would make a world of difference in my relationship with God?*

7. When was the last time you set aside some intentional time to evaluate and plan for how you can stay connected to the Father?

8. As you think about your current situation, what might be a good approach to the when, where and what of staying connected to the Father?

9. How would you answer the question, "What one thing, if done regularly, would make a world of difference in my relationship with God?"

10. Attached to this week's study guide are some resources and ideas for connecting with God. Are there any of these that you think might be helpful to you at this time? Is so what?

RESOURCES FOR CONNECTING WITH GOD

Ideas for Personal Bible Reading, Study, Reflection

- Read one Psalm and one chapter of Proverbs each day
- Read a one chapter from one of the Gospels each day
- Read one Old Testament chapter and one New Testament chapter each day
- Read Scripture with your spouse or a friend
- We will be returning to the book of James sermon series starting on May 10. Read and reflect on the weekly passage as we teach through it.
- Download the weekly sermon study guide that is prepared for Life Groups each week. You can access it here: <https://www.faithmanhattan.org/listen>. Use that to go deeper in the passage that was preached.

Ideas to help you reflect and meditate on Scripture:

- Pray the Scriptures (e.g. the Lord's Prayer)
- Memorize Scripture
- Read out loud
- Read slowly
- Read over and over, emphasizing a different word each time (e.g. **THE** Lord is my shepherd; The **LORD** is my shepherd; The Lord **IS** my shepherd; etc.)
- Spend half of your Bible reading time in meditation
- Journal your thoughts
- Ask questions of the passage you are reading:
 - What do I learn about God/Jesus?
 - What do I learn about me/mankind?
 - Is there something to believe, confess, do, etc?
 - With whom can I share this?

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines are things that a believer can do to help open his or her life up to God's transforming work. We do not do any of these to earn God's favor for we can never merit any favor on our own. These are simply ways that we cooperate with God's Spirit in growing in Christ.

The follow categorization is from Dallas Willard's book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*.

Disciplines of Abstinence - These are ways of denying ourselves something we want or need in order to make space to focus on and connect with God. They tend to counteract our sins of commission.

- **Solitude** - Withdrawing for a time from interacting with other people in order to be alone with God.
- **Silence** - Withdrawing from conversation, media, technology, etc. and entering into a quiet place in order to quiet our minds and whole self and attend to God's presence.
- **Fasting** - Going without food (or something else) for a period of time that we might focus more intently on God in prayer.
- **Frugality** - Refraining from using money or goods that are available to us in ways that merely gratify our desires for status or luxury.
- **Sabbath** - Doing no work to rest in God's person and provision; praying and playing with God and others.
- **Secrecy** - Not making our good deeds or qualities known to let God or others receive attention and to find our sufficiency in God alone.

Disciplines of Engagement - These are ways of engaging in certain activities to interact with God and others. They tend to counteract our sins of omission.

- **Study** - Focusing the mind upon the written and spoken Word of God.
- **Prayer** - Conversing and communicating with God.
- **Worship** - Dwelling upon and praising God's greatness, goodness, and beauty in words and music.
- **Celebration** - Intentionally enjoying the blessings of food, drink, art, friendship, etc. that we might be reminded of God's greatness and goodness to us.
- **Service** - Actively using our goods and strength to lovingly serve others.
- **Fellowship** - Engaging in the common activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, service, etc. with other followers of Christ.
- **Confession** - Letting trusted others (maybe one friend or a group) know our deepest weaknesses and failures.

Books

Devotionals/Daily Office

- *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*, Sarah Young
- *Daily Office: Remembering God's Presence throughout the Day*, Peter Scazzero
- *The Divine Hours: A Manual for Prayer*, Phyllis Tickel
- *A Diary of Private Prayer*, John Baillie

Books about the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

- *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard
- *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster
- *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg
- *When the Soul Listens: Finding Rest and Direction in Contemplative Prayer*, Jan Johnson
- *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, Robert Mulholland
- *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*, Ruth Haley Barton
- *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, Dallas Willard
- *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer*, Richard Foster

Poetry

- *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle*, Ted Loder

Others

- *Gratitude Journals* (<https://promptlyjournals.com/>)
- *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, Peter Scazzero
- *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*, Timothy Keller
- *Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Path to Joy*, Larry Crabb
- *The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery*, Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile

Apps

- **You Version Bible App** (<https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/>)

Read or listen to Scripture. Loaded with devotionals and Bible reading plans on many topics.

- **One Minute Pause** (<https://www.pauseapp.com/>)

Reminders throughout the day to pause and connect with Jesus. Each pause has a guided meditation.

- **PrayerMate** (<https://www.prayermate.net/>)

Organize your prayer life. Simulates prayer cards. Also, comes with many devotional guides. Even has one on how to pray during COVID-19.

Media

- **The Bible Project** (<https://bibleproject.com/>)

BibleProject is a nonprofit animation studio that produces short-form, fully animated [Bible videos](#) and other [Bible resources](#) to make the biblical story accessible to everyone, everywhere. They create 100% [free Bible videos](#), [podcasts](#), and [Bible resources](#) to help people experience the story of the Bible.

Poetry

We all have different ways we connect with God. Some people find that reading good poetry helps them reflect on what is going on in their heart. Here are a couple of examples.

The Guest House

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the
malice.
meet them at the door laughing and
invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

~ by Coleman Barks

Guide Me into an Unclenched Moment

*Gentle me,
Holy One,
Into an unclenched moment,
a deep breath,
a letting go
of heavy expectancies,
of shriveling anxieties,
of dead certainties,
that, softened by the silence,
surrounded by the light,
and open to the mystery,
I may be found by wholeness,
upheld by the unfathomable,
entranced by the simple,
and filled with the joy
that is you.*

~ Ted Loder, *Guerrillas of Grace*

Ideas Shared by our NextGen Team for High Schoolers (good ideas for all!)

Connecting with God and Self:

- Spend one whole day without complaining . . . maybe make it everyday
- Go for a walk in nature
- Create something purely for God. Ideas: Painting, writing, dancing, sculpting, crocheting, baking, drawing, etc.
- Make a list of your passions. If you are not currently volunteering, figure out where you could plug in your passion to make a difference. It could have to wait until after COVID-19.
- Go to your favorite spot outdoors.
- Stay off your phone for one day.
- Pray specifically for one of our pastors: Steve, Brian, Sam, Chris, or Logan
- Write down 5 things you are thankful for.
- Pray directly related to COVID (these suggestions were given by Pastor Steve):
 - Decision-makers who affect large numbers of people
 - Pray for a vaccine and effective treatments
 - Pray for healthcare workers who are caring for infected people.
 - Pray for protection from the virus
 - Financial issues of people in your world
 - The supply chain, etc.

Connect with Others:

- Call a friend and pray for them for their specific needs over the phone
- Call or text someone one thing God has done for you or is doing for you
- Call/FaceTime/Skype an older relative. Ask them something about their life that you know makes them smile and then let them talk.
- Spend time with a sibling doing what they want to do. If they are unwilling, do something nice for them.
- Tell a joke and make someone laugh. You could do this via video as well.
- Write thoughtful sticky notes all over your house.
- Go on a walk with one of your family members
- Hug your parent/caregiver at least twice today
- Ask an older person you know about their past. Senior citizens have a lifetime of experience to reflect on. Listen and learn.
- Make a list of people you know in your family, in the church, in your workplace, in your neighborhood who might be struggling due to the coronavirus.
- Reach out by call to text to someone without many friends.
- Text/email someone who has helped you out, lifted you up, or inspired you
- Tell your parents your favorite childhood memories.

Encourage others:

- Pray for your friend and type it out in a text. Send it to them.
- Text one your small group leaders something encouraging
- Tweet at our public servants: fire fighters, police, doctors
- Text someone good morning or good night.
- Send a friend a video of what you actually think about them and how much you love them.
- Text someone their best qualities
- Text all your friends an encouraging scripture. If you need a suggestion 1 Peter 5:7 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
- Reach out to a doctor, nurse or other health professional. Let them know you are thinking about them and praying for them, even if it is just shooting them a text.
- Email an encouraging note or prayer to a missionary.