

How to Commune with God

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[0 : 0 0] Hello, hello. Welcome to the Providence Podcast. My name is Chris Oswald, Senior Pastor at Providence Community Church.

Today we are talking about communion with God, communion with God. And we are joined today by the other pastor at Providence Community Church, Dove Cohen.

Hey, Providence. Dove's going to lead us through this discussion. So we are going to maybe hopefully add some practicalities related to something mentioned in the sermon on Sunday about prayer, but also just we know that with the new year coming, you will no doubt want to double down on your commitment to practicing daily devotions and just enjoying general communion with God.

And so we wanted to not just tell you, you know, hey, do that, but also discuss how to do it, why to do it, and how we do it, and so on and so forth.

Before we jump into that, I did want to start a new habit on the podcast. I want to actually start reading through the Gatsby hymnal, which is an old hymnal that men like Charles Spurgeon relied on heavily, not only for their own devotional life, but also in their preaching.

[1 : 2 6] And so I'm just going to read through the hymnal, one hymn for every podcast, and starting off with number one in the Gatsby hymnal, which is a hymn from Isaac Watts called The Infinity of God.

Great God, how infinite art thou, what worthless worms are we. Let the whole race of creatures bow and pay their praise to thee.

Thy throne eternal ages stood, ere seas or stars were made. Thou art the ever-living God, were all the nations dead. Nature and time quite naked lie to thy immense survey.

From the formation of the sky to the great burning day. Eternity with all its years stands present in thy view. To thee there's nothing old appears.

Great God, there's nothing new. Our lives through various scenes are drawn and vexed with trifling cares. While the eternal thought moves on, thy undisturbed affairs.

[2 : 3 4] Great God, how infinite art thou, what worthless worms are we. Let the whole race of creatures bow and pay their praise to thee.

So that's hymn number one, reminding us of God's infinite view of all time and space. Though our lives through various scenes are drawn and vexed with trifling cares.

While thy eternal thought moves on, thy undisturbed affairs. So, yeah. Sweet. That's good. Yep, sweet hymn. All right, Dov.

Well, let's jump into our conversation about communing with God. And you provided an outline for this conversation. You might be surprised, folks, to find out, but Dov is well prepared for this podcast.

He wrote an outline. And the first thing we want to talk about is just kind of defining some of our terms related to communing with God. Yeah, sure. So, first thing I want to say, Providence, is just how amazingly beneficial and important and vital communing with God can be and how life-changing it can be just to spend some time with God every day.

[3 : 51] And so, if you're doing it, that's great. Praise God. If you're not doing it yet, I think you've got something to look forward to and something to apply from this podcast. So, communing with God, there's various names for the same thing.

You call it devotions. You call it reading the Bible and prayer. You call it spiritual disciplines, personal spiritual disciplines. And I've got a definition. I've got a long version and a short version of the definition of communing with God.

So, I'll give you the long version and the short version. I'll go from there. So, long version would be by the Spirit, through the gospel, being in God's presence for the purpose of hearing from Him through the Word and communicating to Him through prayer for the purpose of fellowship with God and strengthening of soul.

So, that's the long version. The short version is really just spending personal time with the Lord. Spending personal time with the Lord, setting aside time each day or as many days of the week as He can to get some personal time with God.

Great. That's a good definition. And now, we'll just jump into the why. Yeah, sure. So, three basic reasons I see for why we'd want to commune with God and spend time with Him.

[5 : 05] I'm sure there's a million reasons, but three basic reasons. You know, we love God and we enjoy being in His presence. We love God and we enjoy just being in His presence. Second, we love God's Word.

And third, we love prayer. So, in terms of loving God and just enjoying being in His presence, when we're in His presence, the Holy Spirit fills us with peace and joy and conviction and correction and guidance and insight and even holy longings as we commune with Him.

And we'll talk about this later, where, you know, at the end of spending time with the Lord, I think it can be good just to linger in His presence and enjoy the felt sense and experience of being in God's presence and the peace and holy longings and joy that it can bring.

But in short, I think when we love God and we enjoy being in His presence, till we love God's Word, it tells us about God. It reminds us of the Gospel. God's Word reminds us of who we are in Christ.

It reminds us of the danger of sin. It can instruct us on how to live out and walk out the Christian life. It gives us wisdom. Books like Proverbs and Ecclesiastes and Job gives us wisdom.

[6 : 14] It gives us comfort. Books like Psalms. It builds our faith by seeing God work over thousands of years. And it expresses our dependence on and confidence in God. Every time we sit down and we spend time with the Lord, it's saying, God, I need you.

I need your Word. I need your guidance. I need your strength. I need your encouragement. I need your correction. And I'm confident that you want to give it. And we can be confident of that because we know God loves us through Christ.

You know, He did not spare His own Son, but graciously gave us up for us all. How will we not also graciously give us all things? We know that God wants to give us faith and strength and encouragement and correction as we need it.

So we can express our dependence on God and our confidence in God. Yeah, let me break in there and talk a little bit about just a posture. And that's a sort of honor that we have to live with.

When I was a new parent, one of the things that I made a resolution to do is when my kids entered the room, when they were ambulatory, when they were walking, I wanted to always acknowledge their presence.

- [7 : 23] I always wanted to say something to them. I didn't want to allow them to think ever that I didn't notice them. I wanted to essentially extend honor to their presence in the room.
- And so, you know, I didn't get hung up on a legalistic version of that. But the goal was is to give my kids a warm greeting whenever they entered the scene, so to speak.
- And, of course, as a Midwesterner, I'm one of those guys who gets in trouble when I go on the East Coast because when I walk down the street, I always have to make eye contact with everybody and say hi.
- And everybody thinks I'm weird for that. But it's kind of like this, like, I don't know, there's this habit of acknowledgement that is a cultural thing in the Midwest more broadly.
- You know, I wave to my neighbors every morning. They're out at the same time walking their dogs and so on. And, you know, there's this culture of acknowledgement, which is really a culture of honor, where it's like I am in the presence of someone and I want to acknowledge them.
- [8 : 33] And so if you're asking, you know, why do communions? And Dove's got, you know, a bunch of reasons, but one has to do with expressing our dependence on God. And it makes sense to start your day by acknowledging the one and starting in a posture of, God, we're going to do this day together.
- While I was asleep, you are awake. This day is for you. This day is by you and through you. And so if nothing else, it really just makes sense to start your day off acknowledging the presence of God in your life, in your room, in your day, and so on and so forth.
- Yeah. And in the sermon on Sunday, you talked about praying to God throughout the day. You used to call it like arrow prayers or whatever you want to call it, shooting off prayers throughout the day. I feel like when I show that honor to God and when I show that acknowledgement of God by spending some time with him in the morning, I feel like that sets up our souls for acknowledging God even more so throughout the day.
- A hundred percent. And, you know, it doesn't always work every day to have those little nods to the Lord throughout the day. But starting off by just acknowledging that, you know, you didn't have to wake up this morning, you know.
- And while you were asleep, you were utterly vulnerable to thousands of potentials. Meanwhile, God neither slumbers nor sleeps.
- [10 : 05] And so to me, in a sense, there's just this creature creation orientation that is important in the morning. You know, Romans 1 tells us that a big part of our problem is a creature creation confusion.
- We worship and serve the creation over the creator who's forever blessed. We always have that trouble of remembering that we are man, he is God, and so forth.
- And so if nothing else, to simply start out the day, hopefully you glean something from your time with the Lord. We're going to talk about all that. But if nothing else, starting out the day, simply acknowledging God is in heaven and I am here on earth.
- He is the ancient of days. I am but grass. It is this day that will be, this day will work because the Lord wants it to work. It won't work because I want it to work and so forth.
- And you're just getting those basic foundational truths about reality, you know, expressed in a practice, in a discipline. So you're sort of rooting yourself in truth, like fundamental reality truth, because the whole day is going to come.
- [11 : 17] And just from your own sin, from the world and from the devil, that basic arrangement, God is God and I am not, is going to be constantly put to the test. And so starting out our day by just acknowledging, I come to you because I depend on you.

You're in charge. I am your report, you know, so on and so forth. Sure. And being confident that he will walk with us throughout the day. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's good. All right.

And some reasons that we love prayer and that we want to spend some time in prayer. We know that God's listening. The God of the universe, the God who Chris read about in that hymn, you know, rules over the nations and the nations could go away, but God will still be there.

That God is listening to us as we pray. And we know that he loves to answer prayer. Also, we love prayer because we love others. And the best way to bring about progress in another person's life is to pray for them.

Yeah, we want to love them practically. Yeah, we want to give them good counsel and advice. But boy, what can the Holy Spirit do in a 10 second insight in someone's life that we just can't do for people sometimes?

[12 : 25] So really the best way to bring about progress in another person's life can just be to pray for them. Other reasons we love prayer. We're dependent on God, particularly the Holy Spirit for illumination, growth and guidance.

So we want to pray so that he'll open up the scriptures to us, that'll guide us throughout the day, that he'll bring growth in our life and our heart and also to protect us.

So we've got, like Chris just mentioned, we've got enemies. We've got the flesh and the world and the devil. And God loves to answer the prayer protecting us from the evil one. And we want to see, we want to do battle with him and put on that armor of God through prayer.

And then finally, prayer helps to reflect on ourselves for the sake of being better aligned to God's will. So as we pray and we hear ourselves pray, that could be an opportunity for self-reflection. And we're just thinking about what am I praying for?

Who am I praying for? What am I praying about? And am I as in line with God's will as I already want to be? Very good. Very good. Yeah. And I think that this is an old thing that I've heard old pastors, old godly men tell me for decades now.

[13 : 36] You don't remember every meal you've had in the last year. And some of them were amazing. Some of them, many of them were not.

But my lunch today was two handfuls of mixed nuts and two jalapeno sausage things from Quick Trip. Like, it was the most, ugh, lunch ever.

But the point, the only reason I even ate it was I was really hungry and I needed to eat something. Sure. And yet there are other meals that I'll have, you know, maybe even tonight.

I think I'm going somewhere with my wife tonight. That'll be amazing. The point is, is that I don't need every meal to be a 10 out of 10. But I need to eat and I need to have a regular practice of, you know, regular times and a regular practice of eating.

And, of course, if I want my food to be not trash, today was kind of semi-trash, to be honest. I have to plan. I have to plan my meals enough to have, at the very least, basic ingredients on hand to eat good things when I do get hungry.

[14 : 49] And so that's really what we're going to talk about in many respects is we're not, we want to, first of all, detach you from the sense that every devotional moment has to be amazing. But secondly, it does help if you assemble a series of ingredients that, you know, can be reconfigured according to the need and the time and even appetite.

But we want you to have a pantry stocked full of practices so that you can have a meal with the Lord every day and that that meal will be generally nourishing.

So let's talk about that. How do we actually have this morning, you know, spiritual meal with the Lord? Yeah, sure. So I really see four parts basically to communing with God.

And, yeah, you can mix and match and you can sort it out. But I think first just taking a short prayer beforehand. You know, God, please help me to know you better through this time. God, please help me to understand and apply your word.

God, show me wonderful things from your word. Even God, just please bless this time. It's something, something short, something simple, just to express our dependence again and confidence in God for the time of communing with him.

[16 : 02] So and then my suggestion is after you've prayed, just a short prayer, just open up the word. Open up the word and get into the word in some way. So you can do this.

You can do five minutes of word, five minutes of prayer. If you if you're short on time, you can do like a 15 minute read and then a longer time of prayer. Or if you've got extended time, we could talk about, you know, a half hour kind of devotional practice.

But what I'd say is just open up the word and and at least read something, some kind of some chapter in the Bible. So I want to give you kind of my current practice.

And Chris, you want to give your your current practice and go from there. But what I'm doing right now, I have a little bit of extended time right now in the morning. So I'm going Old Testament, New Testament, a psalm.

Then I'll pray and then I'll go through a chapter in Proverbs just to give me guidance for the day and wisdom for the day. So that's that's what I'm doing right now. And as I read, I really encourage anyone to read with a pen, to read the Bible with a pen and be on the lookout for verses to underline.

[17 : 10] That helps me a ton. So what what's revealing God to me, what's resonating with me, what's applicable, what's strengthening, what's encouraging. I think reading with a pen can open up your eyes to the scriptures and then taking another step.

You can even use the pen to write down an observation or a summary statement as you go. So if you read, you know, a psalm or if you read a chapter in the Old Testament, the New Testament, write down like a one sentence summary or a short phrase summary of what you just read.

That can help you to remember what you know, what you read or just to digest what you read. Even if you forget it five, 10 minutes after you've read it, at least you've digested what you've read and you've gotten into your into your mind, into your soul that may come up later.

Yeah. And then love to pray through verses that hit and resonate with me. And if I see a specific application to me in some way through a verse, I will pray through that verse where I'll just thank God for it.

I'll ask him to to help me to apply it. So really, it's reading. I think it's reading with a pen. If you have the ability to just write down an observation or summary statement as you go and then praying as you go can be something that can be very helpful.

[18 : 19] Yeah. And one of the things that I would throw in here is that as I'm thinking of some people in our church, different people with different kinds of personalities and so forth.

But one of the things that you need to understand is that if this is the only personal time you devote to understanding the Bible and learning about the Bible and learning about God, learning theology and so forth, you're trying to do too much with a devotional.

I would rather you read the sections of Scripture that are easy to understand repeatedly during your devotional than to be working through a passage in 2 Kings, trying to understand it and also trying to commune with God.

The truth is, is that you're in a local church that serves up the Word in all sorts of different ways. And while I would love for all of you to read Christian books on your own and as a separate thing, and we can talk about that someday maybe when we talk about how to spend a Sabbath, because I think there's a place for that just once a week where you could just read a little bit from a Christian book.

But I will tell you, you do need to understand the Bible, you do need to understand doctrine and so forth, but that is really something you need to let take place in another time consistently.

[20 : 03] What I see a lot of people doing is they're trying to have a devotional time in Leviticus. And it's like, you know, not all of the Bible is intended for devotional times. That's the other thing.

We have particular passages that are given to us that are devotionally oriented, the Psalms in particular. And then we have particular scriptures that are wisdom oriented, Proverbs.

And, you know, what you're doing is, you know, and it's a little different for you in part because you're also trying to build a teaching ministry. Sure.

And so you're trying to do a lot and you have the time right now. But what I don't want people... I would rather folks read through the Psalms multiple times in a year than to get, you know, sandbarred in Leviticus in January or something and think that that's...

Because what you're... The reason why people want to read through the Bible in a year is because they want to understand the story of the Bible. I completely appreciate that. I genuinely do. I would recommend you put the Bible on audio and you list it out on the drive and you absorb the story that way. Because what's going on in your devotional is explicitly to commune with God. And so I would just say that a lot of people are so stingy with the amount of time they devote to Christian growth in general, that they try to cram everything they're supposed to accomplish into their devotionals. Like, no, just take time to be with God. If you read the same sections repeatedly, there's nothing wrong with that. For probably five years, I only read the Psalms every morning and I would read, essentially read through the Psalms every month. And I did that for like five years. It was fine. It was helpful. So anyway, that's one thing I would want to encourage people is to don't try to do too much. This is just about you spending time with the Lord, praising Him, praying to Him, asking Him for wisdom, asking Him for help, praying for others, and so forth. Yeah. One question that can be helpful as you're reading a passage is what can you learn about God from this passage? If you read a Psalm, what can you learn about God from this Psalm?

[22 : 17] Yeah. And like I said, the local church is your friend in this because you can do all these other things in other contexts, whether they're community group or Sunday school. The Sunday school that we do is pretty exceptional, really. John's really good at it. And if you want the story of the Bible, go to Sunday school, you'll get it. And then the average sermon at Providence probably contains a dozen scriptures or more. So if you just do the basic things at Providence, you're going to absorb a lot of scripture. You don't need to take your devotional time to try to accomplish that particular piece. Yeah. Agreed. So what are you doing currently?

Well, and it's kind of related to that. I have different things that I do. Again, for me, it's sort of like the meal idea where what I don't want to do in the morning is to decide, is to invent a plan every morning. But for me, me being a little squirrely in the head, I also want options too. I don't necessarily need to have just one thing. So what I do is I stack a bunch of devotionals in my space where I do my devotional, my quiet time. So I have a couple books there. I have For the Love of God by D.A. Carson, which is a devotional, morning and evening. I like the devotionals that have the dates on them because I may not read the same thing every day. I flitter around from flower to flower with my bee brain. So that's one thing I do is for me, it's more like ingredients. I just know if I've got this little stack of content,

I can't go wrong. I can assemble it however I want to and go from there. So let me go through the whole thing. I wrote it down so I could kind of remember. First thing for me is I pray before I get out of bed. And that's just a devoting the day to the Lord kind of prayer. Just establishing that conversation with him again after I've slept through the night. And then I go to this spot that I have that has like different resources and some of them will be on my iPad and so on and so forth.

Now, here I'm going to mention also that around this time, for me, I will start having like intrusive thoughts about don't forget this, don't forget that, oh, this is today, and so on and so forth. So one of the things that I've learned to do is I do, well, I will ask the Lord, will you remind me of that when I'm done? And I won't always, as much as I can, I won't like, I won't let those thoughts take over my time. I just ask the Lord, he's with me, he's directing my day, you know, remind me to do this or that. And we need to do a productivity podcast at some point, because I think we both have similar but different methods on some of this. But anyway, so I start to have intrusive thoughts about plans and so on and so forth, forgetting things and so forth. And it always happens whenever I'm reading or something, and I'll just ask the Lord, okay, if it's important, remind me, remind me in a minute. Yeah.

So I'll read something, whether it's a book like a devotional book, but also sometimes throughout the year, I just do topical Bible studies for myself. I basically do biblical counseling on myself.

[26 : 07] So if there's an issue that I'm struggling with, or something that I just feel like I need to grow in, my reading for that morning, maybe for, you know, a couple weeks will just be about like, let me read another verse about self-control, or let me read another verse about speech or something.

So I will typically do that a few times a year where there's just something that's going on, and I just let that direct my devotional times. Let's say I'm being slandered or something like that, and it's kind of dominating my life at that moment. I turn my devotional to the biggest problem.

If there's a big problem, I actually just turn my devotional to the biggest problem. If I'm worried, if whatever, and I'll just start looking up verses for that thing.

It's helpful to know the Bible really well, obviously, to do that. But there are many books out there. There's a scriptural index for biblical counseling, I think is what it's called, you know, where there's just a spiral-bound book that has, you know, topical references.

There's a book that a friend of mine wrote called Take Words With You, and it's the same kind of deal. So I would rather, to some degree, commune with God over some particular, and I get that from the Psalms, because that's what David's doing a lot of the time. There are some, you know, more generic Psalms, of course, but a lot of the Psalms are him interacting with a particular circumstance in his life. So if something's nagging at you that's like a bigger thing, like you are trying to deal with sinful anger, or you're trying to grow in self-control, or sexual purity, or so forth, there are tons of scriptures that you could read for that. I have a lot of that already done, so if you wanted a scripture list on sexual purity, for instance, I could give you, you know, two, three pages worth of scriptures about sexual purity. And I would just use that as my reading for the day. I'll go through those verses, and again, it doesn't bother me to read the same verses multiple times. But anyway, so that's, a lot of my devotional is like left up for how my life is going at the time. If it's kind of just a normal season, I'll just read whatever, you know, a devotional of some sort, or just read through, you know, the Psalms or through a gospel. But if there's something that I'm dealing with, I take that time then to deal with it. That's good. Yeah, I love the doing biblical counseling on yourself.

[28 : 56] Yeah. You'll just counsel yourself with the scripture, find nourishment, find correction, find help from specific scriptures that apply to what's going on in your life at the moment. For me, most of the big sanctification moments in my life have come from this practice, where I was able to see marked improvement in some character flaw or some sin. A lot of it has come through just this, you know, maybe a couple weeks worth of just meditating on 15 scriptures or something. So that, to me, that's kind of how I do the Bible part. I have a bunch of different possibilities and I just sort of decide then and there what to read. What I don't do, just so we're clear, is that's still a plan because the plan is a stack of books. I'm going to give myself some options, but I'm not creating an action that morning. And I think that's important. People don't just grab your Bible and open it up randomly and so on and so forth. You don't have to have one exact plan, but you need to have like a plan with three or four contingencies that you can use.

So that's, to me, I value creativity and want those options and unapologetic about that, just how I roll. So if that serves you. And then in terms of prayer, I actually have like a sheet that I do and it's just a prayer journal sheet and I just print out a bunch of them and I can post this on base camp where I put the date at the top. And then for me, the first thing I have on the prayer list is my household. So I go through all the kids and in-laws and all that stuff. The next thing for me is I pray for one team, one person, one family at Providence who is leading something, you know, a leadership team, worship, whatever. And then I'd have a spot for three families at church and I pray for three different families at the church each day. And then I have a slot for one pastor that I'm connected with somehow. So it's household, one leadership person, three families in the church, one pastor that I know. And then I have five promises that I read. The first one from, from first Timothy, Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

That's the first promise I read. Second promise is Romans eight one. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The next one from second Corinthians, my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches and glory. The, the promise four from second Corinthians 10, God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will provide a way of escape that you'd be able to endure it. Um, finally from Proverbs three, trust in the Lord with all your heart, lay not on your understanding and all your ways submit to him and he will make your path straight. So that takes, what was that? Two minutes, something like that. Yeah. And the, the idea would be ultimately that those are memorized, you know, accidentally.

I'm just reading them every day. Uh, and then from there I go to Thanksgiving and I really want to do the gospel stuff first because Thanksgiving is really not possible when you think you deserve stuff.

Um, there's this author, um, Theodore Daly-Rimple who wrote a book that is just devastating. It's called Life at the Bottom. Anyway, he's a sociologist and he has really explored the coarsening of society, especially in, in Europe, in London, England rather. And the quote that he has is when every benefit received is a right, there is no place for good manners, let alone for gratitude. And so one of his kind of fundamental thesis on like the coarsening of society in general is, is that we've moved a bunch of things over that are gifts and privileges into the category of rights. Yeah. And so no one is full of gratitude anymore. And gratitude is sort of connected to in society manners and politeness and so forth.

[33 : 27] So, uh, making that a vertical idea, I have to remember that I, I don't deserve God. I don't deserve salvation. Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost. You know, the only reason I'm not under condemnation is because I'm in Christ. So I, I, to get to the place where I have a heart of Thanksgiving, I have to retrace just fundamental gospel truths.

And then that's what I do. I go through those, those, uh, those promises. And then I go to the back of the sheet and write some other prayers, things like that, including Thanksgiving. I have a little section at this point now where I will, I've gone through my before bed prayer or before I get out of bed prayer, I've read something, I've gone through these prayers. And then that's when I'll allow myself to think about plans for the day. Cause I want to pray for those things. So on my sheet, I actually have a section just for like plans for the day. I won't write like everything out, but just things that I know I should be praying about. It's really good. So forth. Yeah. And then, um, that's, I'm getting almost done. And then at the end, uh, I say out loud from Jude now unto him that is, uh, that is able to keep you from falling and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy to the wise God, our savior be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen. And I believe that saying, uh, that out loud is important. I'm,

I'm a spiritual warfare guy with some of this stuff. And, uh, so I, yeah, that's how I ended. I have a benediction for my devotionals. It's always the same one from Jude. So that's what I do. I, I pray for my family. I pray for somebody, a leader of the church, pray for three families, the church, pray for one pastor, read five promises that are all like a sentence long, um, write some thanksgivings and some other prayers down. If there's anything real quick, organize my thoughts for the day, plans for the day, and then benedict myself. That's pretty amazing. That's, that's quite a structure right there. It's a structure that has a lot of flexibility.

Oh, sure. That's for me and key. Yeah. Cause in the past, when I was younger, uh, I didn't know how to, I didn't know how to be myself and be Christ-like if that makes sense. Like those two things didn't seem to fit for me. Yeah. I thought I had to be somebody else to be Christ-like and I finally realized like, no, God, God wants me to be me. He made me. Yeah. And you know, there are things that need to be refined and, and so forth and repented of of course, but I have to have a structure that has enough plasticity, uh, flexibility for me and, um, taking the time to develop this. It's like, you're hearing something that is 40 years down the road of being a Christian.

Like, you know, what I would recommend is you steal my thing or steal Dove's thing and, and just do it long enough until you start seeing why I would tweak this or I would do something different or so forth. And I, you know, not everybody needs to tweak any, you could just take it and just use it as it is. But yeah. Yeah. Anyway, this is great. Yeah. Um, now what if you had, let's just talk to someone who's got like five, 10 minutes, what, what, how would you structure your prayers? What would you do, Chris, if you had like five minutes to pray in the morning? Um, you know, I, I would, are we talking five minutes total or do I get another five minutes to read? Um, let's see. It's five minutes to read five minutes to pray. That's all I got right now. What do I do? I would, if, if, especially if you're just starting out, what I would probably do is I'd probably just use this sheet or something like it and just use those promises as you're reading and just get those promises in your head and your heart. You know, these are, these are all verses that most people at Providence probably have, what do you think? Like half memorized already? Sure. You know, like, like they, they have, they have several of the words in each one of these promises already there.

[37 : 42] So why not just get those down and, you know, let those be your reading. You, you can always, um, you know, you can always add more later or you can take in more content throughout the day and so forth. Right. But this is really just about communing with God. And, uh, so yeah, I would say, um, I wouldn't want to take off. Here's what I wouldn't want to lose. I wouldn't want to lose the promises. I wouldn't want to lose praying for my household. Um, by the way, when you pray for people, it's okay to pray the same thing for 10 people. Yeah. Uh, you don't need to worry about being creative. God's like very unimpressed with the human language in general. Like it's not, you know, you're not, uh, you and Shakespeare are not that different in God's eyes. You know, you're both kind of losers. Uh, so you, what, but what I think is, is that there needs to be a touching base with fundamental reality in terms of obligations and we have spheres of obligations.

And so I'm supposed to love members of my household in a unique way and I'm responsible to them in a unique way. And so they come first. And I, I want to acknowledge that the day that I'm about to live is lived really under the Lord, but for them, you know, so I wouldn't want to lose that. I'd pray for them. I wouldn't want to lose, um, praying for some other people in the church. And, um, by the way, when it comes to that one, I usually just use like base camp or something just so I remember who's, who's who's the list. But sometimes I don't like we had a baby born today and you know, that, that was just an easy one to like, I wasn't going to go look to a list. I was just like, okay, there's a baby today and I pray for that. So sometimes the needs are kind of obvious.

Right. Right. I guess what I would say is, is that, you know, I think that you could do this whole thing in five minutes if you are comfortable, which there's no reason not to be with just CS Lewis, who is also, you know, kind of a B brain, he, he would put people's faces in his head. Like he would just picture them and you know, what he would say over them is what he would say over everybody, bless them, Lord, care for them, protect them. Right. Right. But he would just kind of Rolodex in his head images of people. And that's how he prayed. It, it, it, I think that it's really more about identifying the people you love, lifting them up to the Lord with rather unimpressive, unoriginal language. Right. And yeah. Anyway, so I don't know. I, I think that, um, I think I could do this sheet in five minutes. Okay. Very efficient. Um, well, if I can offer one more, one way to go through the Rolodex in your mind. Yeah. Um, so I don't know, maybe six months ago, Chris, you mentioned to me about making cards up for people. Um, so that's been really helpful for me. Um, is I'll just, I just got, I have index cards where half the card on the left is things I'm thankful for, for the person things on the right or things that I'm praying for the person. Yeah. And half my cards say somewhat of the same thing for everyone. Right. Uh, but just then having specific names of people and things I'm thankful for, for them and things that I'm praying for them. Um, just, you know, what a three by five index card can be very, very helpful. And just make a collection to them and flip through them and pray for them. Yeah. I think another thing to mention here is just that, you know, Ange and I get up at the same time in the morning, um, and she's getting ready. I'm getting ready. We don't do anything together in the morning.

But one of the things I'd say to couples is just normalize doing your devotional around the other person and, and praying around the other person and not including them. Like she's getting ready and I'm sitting somewhere doing, I'm praying. It's not going to be weird. It, there is a feeling that people have that like, I need to be completely alone and so forth. But if you're married and, you know, you're in a bedroom on the morning, probably what's going to have to happen is, is that, you know, one of you may be busy with the kids and the other one's sitting and doing their devotional or something. So let it be kind of normal that the person that's closest to you just sees you praying. And it's just, it's, it is what it is. Like, it doesn't have to feel weird or something.

That's good. All right. So open up, you've asked God for help. Please bless this time in Lord. Uh, you, you've read some of the word, um, a Psalm or something specific to what you're going through or that you're anticipating for the day, uh, or some kind of passage that will, that will nourish your soul and strengthen your soul. You've prayed for your household and for others. Um, and the last thing is I would, I just encourage you to linger for a moment, to not be so quick to close the book, to get up, but just to take a moment and just to pause when you're done and, and just sense and just by faith, know that God is with you. Uh, and if, if you have any peace or comfort from the Lord through the time, just take a moment and experience that and linger before the presence of God, uh, before you get up and head off to the day.

[42 : 58] Yeah. And you know, you've got, you've got a list of things that you pray for immediate family, church, extended family, coworkers, elected officials, Jewish people, so forth. Yeah. The, you've got the ACTS acronym here, adoration, confession, thanks supplication. Yep. That's another piece of structure that people can use that saints have used forever and is very helpful.

Yeah. I, I love the ACTS, adoration, confession, thanks supplication format. I think adoration, when I just praise God, it just gets me off of myself and helps me digest who is God and what is he like. And that gives me faith. Um, especially to then confess sin, uh, and to thank him for gospel promises and to thank him for common grace, blessings in my life. And then to go on to supplication for things that I know, um, he's working on in my life and then, and then for others.

One of the things you've got though, is I think it's good. We've talked about this before is you're thanking God for other people. And this is like really key for the people that you're called to love and lead and so forth is what you want is you want like a natural, you know, sort of stream of affirmations to come from you to those people, right? Sure. Throughout the day through whatever. Yeah. And if it's forced, it's still better than not doing it at all, but it will, it will feel forced. Right. But if you, if you spend time thanking God for people, it just comes out later. Yeah. They're going to hear that. Yeah. It's also just going to make you a better person to be around when you're actually thankful for the people in your life. So, you know, take a moment and, um, you know, do this for your kids too. If you, if you've got a kid that's being a little bit worse than the others, you know, definitely put them on the top of your prayer list, but also take a moment to just thank God that, you know, for them and for some of the issues they're having will wind up being sanctified into strengths and so forth and start just developing a hopeful imagination for the people in your lives. And that, that comes through thanking God for them.

Yeah. I think also it's, uh, it's an opportunity to tune your eyes to look for evidence of grace. Yes. Yes. And people to look for where is God at work? What is God doing? Where are they strong?

Um, how are they a blessing to you? Yeah. That, that helps tune me, tune my eyes to look for that when I'm interacting with people. Yeah. Yeah. And so the card system is one way. Um, I sometimes have a, I have a notebook full of people and they just, each, each sheet of the notebook is just a name, a family name usually. And then I just write out kind of stuff that's going on in that family or so forth and, and pray for them in that respect as well. That's great. That's great. All right. So moving on with some practical tips. One last thing on the prayer thing is, uh, uh, you can put people's names on your calendar throughout the day. So you can just put dove, you know, 1 30 PM to 1 35 PM or something. And then it just comes up and there's like, Oh yeah, I wanted to pray for, for him today.

[46 : 08] So you can, you can actually just use your calendar too. Yeah. And there's an app for that too. Um, hello, it's called, um, it's called pray minder. Okay. So I get five notifications throughout the day to pray for people and just show it just shows my phone, pray minder, pray for Chris and, or pray for whomever. Um, so it's another useful tool. By the way, if you want to pray for me, if, if you pick a time, 2 PM is when I'm done. I need, I need extra grace at 2 PM every day.

We're starting to get there. So, well, I'm better now we're doing something, but two just feels like it's lagging because I usually have full evenings planned and then, but I've been up this point, you know, by five or whatever, five 30. And, uh, two is like actually the end of my work. It feels like the end of my work day. Sure. But anyway, got it. So pause at the end of that. I think that almost the way to think of that is just like, Lord, anything you want to say to me, anything going on. Um, yeah, just a stillness for just a few moments. Yeah. Be still to know that he is God for take five, 10 seconds and just sit there and just be in God's presence. So, all right. So practical tips, um, with communion with God, I do want to say we need this more than we know.

Um, Jesus says, you know, abide in him will bear much fruit apart from him. We can do nothing. Uh, we need to abide in him, uh, more than we know. So we need, we, we need to feed our spirit with the word, with, with God's spirit in, in prayer, through prayer. So we need this more than we know. Um, second, come through the gospel, you know, God's your father. As Chris was talking about with the promises, there's no condemnation for Christ. We're not doing this to be acceptable to God. We're doing this because we already are acceptable to God in Christ. And so we can approach him as our father. He wants to meet with us. He's provided the means to do so through the Bible, through prayer, through devotional books. Um, there's no condemnation. If you, if you're like, well, I haven't done this for years or haven't done this for a month or a week, just start, just dive right in. God wants to meet with us more than we want to meet with him. Uh, he wants to meet with us. Uh, and if you miss it, just get back up and get back into it. Um, but I think, I think coming through the gospel through the fact that, um, you know, we're already acceptable to God in Christ and, uh, and we're coming because we are accepted in Christ and we, we want to approach God and spend time with him.

This is, this is key. You're, you're going to find just how works righteousness-y you are when you try to do devotions. Yeah. Because what you're going to find yourself doing is you're going to constantly be looking at your self and whether you're feel sincere or whether you're distracted or whether you missed several days, uh, or whether you sinned in a spectacular way the night before, uh, you're going to find just how much you actually believe the gospel when you get up in the morning and do a devotion that you don't feel like doing so on.

But you, that's the great benefit of constantly every day knocking on the door, you know, boldly entering the throne of grace through the gospel. The great benefit of that is, is you basically have to spend gospel currency to, you know, to pray, to spend time with God. Yeah. And, and you have to believe what it says. And so this is a great way of people, people often don't do these things because they, they think they don't do these things because they lack assurance.

[49 : 44] It's like, no, it's, it's actually, you lack assurance because you don't do these things. Right. You have to keep doing this over and over and over again and see God answer your prayers and see, see God meet with you time and time again when you're an unworthy sinner. That's actually how you start to realize that what Jesus says, you know, uh, you'll be in his, my hand and no one will ever be able to snatch you out. That sense of assurance and confidence in God actually comes by constantly approaching the throne over and over and over again and find, you know, you, you have to just put the gospel promises into action. Yeah. Yeah. And if you're coming to God and you're feeling like, God, like, how can I even approach you this morning? Like I don't feel worthy. Admit it. Yeah. Right.

Like I'm a sinner. Yeah. And I come before you in Christ's righteousness. He died for me. His blood washed me clean. Now I can approach you and now I can spend time with you. And you can, you can say, for instance, if you've, if you're just aware of some spectacular sin or something, you can say, I, I see it. I know it's wrong. I don't know if I'm sorry. I don't know if I'm repentant. I, I might be, I might not be. I don't know. I do know that the only way I'm ever going to get there is if you, you must give me through your spirit, whatever I need in order for me to feel what I'm supposed to feel and so forth. And so you can actually just tell him like, I, I, you're not closing the tab.

You're just like, I, I don't know what I should feel about this. I don't know if I'm, if I'm, if my heart is right here, right. You, you Lord are Lord of my heart. You, you get me there and I'll keep coming and I'll keep asking. And one day you'll do it. Yep. That's great. Um, I already mentioned that. Oh, well, um, I already mentioned this, but I think reading with a pen can be very helpful for underlying things, for writing down things, uh, for jotting down prayers. I'd really encourage you to try reading with a pen. Um, I think setting a regular time and place to do devotions can be helpful. Um, so if, if possible, quiet and undistracted, but if, if you're sitting down with, and your spouse is in the room, watching the kids, I know that's going to be tough, but, but I do think it can be helpful for developing the habit to set a regular time and place to do it.

Um, and if possible to a place where you can be open and bear before the Lord. Yeah. So, um, probably there a mix would be fine. If, if you're a mom, for instance, this is not right. Um, probably, probably what I'd say there is you need to ask your husband to make it possible for you to have a couple of these a week where it's like, you know, or at least one a week where you're getting a longer period of time and it's quiet because, you know, sometimes we need to cry some, you know what I mean? And, and so you might not get that every day, but you probably need to have some sense of, you need to have it sometimes. Yeah. Yeah. Agreed. Um, all right.

Any other practicals, Chris, you got, I'm dubious on the use of technology for all this. Um, uh, not saying don't, but I'm just saying the op you're, you're creating an opportunity for massive increase in a potential distractions when you're trying to read the Bible on your phone.

[53 : 13] Yep. Sure. And, you know, maybe you're using your phone for your journal app or something like that. You just, you're just creating, you're increasing the complexity of the task. Whereas if you just have a couple books and some paper, you know, nothing, there's no notifications that are going to pop up, no temptation to check this or that thing and so forth. So I think practically this needs to be an analog habit most of the time. Yeah, that's good. All right. So in summary, um, Hosea 6, 3, let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. Uh, Jeremiah 9, 23 to 24, you know, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but him who boasts, boasts in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things, I delight declares the Lord. Spending time with the Lord is an opportunity to, to get to know him better, to understand him better, to know him, know him more, to press on to know the Lord. Uh, and then Philippians 3, 8, you know, indeed, I count everything as lost because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. Um, we just, we want to know God. We love God. We love Jesus and spending time with him in the word and in prayer is, is a great way to get to know him better.

Uh, it's a means of grace. It's not a way to earn grace because we can't earn grace, but it's a way to just tap in, uh, to the grace that he has for us, uh, to position ourselves to honor and glorify him as much as possible and just enjoy the fellowship that Jesus bought for us, uh, when he died for us, he opened the way so we could spend time at a throne of mercy and grace.

Um, so let's, let's take advantage of that. And then, uh, and again, the gospel connection, you know, we don't commune with God to be accepted by him, but commune with God because in Christ, we are accepted by him and we want to know him better and see him move in our lives.

So I would just encourage you as you're thinking through what you're going to do in 2025, or just what you're going to do tomorrow morning, um, spend time with the Lord. Pray, ask him to bless some time, spend a little time in the word, spend a little time in prayer, linger in his presence. Uh, and, and I think you'll be, I think you'll be edified.

Awesome. Yeah. Well, friends, uh, I think the fundamental piece of this, after all these years of pastoring folks who struggle with this is what Dove said at the end there, we don't commune with God to be accepted by him. We don't commune with God to be accepted by him.

[55 : 45] We commune with God because we are accepted by God in Christ. And that's just such a key. What keeps so many people from restarting after they've stopped is, is a nagging sense of guilt for having failed. Um, a sense of like, I, I, it's the strangest thing, but it's in every area, addiction, food, whatever. It's always like this. We tend to calculate our worth based on our streak.

And we're like, Oh, I, you know, I, I'm doing great right now. And I've, uh, you know, it's been 130 days since the last accident, you know, like in the plants, but it's like, no, no, like that's not what's going on here. What's going on here is, is that an incredible price was paid for you to be able to call the creator of the universe, your father, an incredible price was paid for you to have this privilege. And it is a privilege and you should use that privilege. And you should just understand every single time you do it, whether you're aware of the sin or not, you are a worm, uh, in and of yourself. Um, like the Valley of vision says, even our tears of repentance must be washed with the blood of Christ. There's nothing good in us. So you, you go through seasons where you think there might be, and then seasons where you think there were definitely isn't, that is irrelevant. Uh, the truth is, is that when God looks upon you, if you're in Christ, he sees Christ, he sees Christ's faithfulness. And that is the only reason you have any business talking to God. Uh, and, and that doesn't change based on how you performed over the last

X number of days. So, uh, the big thing to the, the, the big takeaway for me is, is you need this, you desperately need this. You won't realize how badly you need it until you do it for a while.

And you begin to see how God used, is using it for your spiritual health, for your joy and so forth. It's good. Cool. All right. Well guys, please, uh, don't be hearers of the word only, but also doers and you don't need to wait until January 1st to start having a devotional. That is true.

You can do that now. All right, guys, be well, may God richly bless you as you draw near to him. God bless.