

Contemplative Prayer:

The Key to Experiencing the Manifest Presence of God

*"He who has My Commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.
And he who loves Me will be Loved by My Father,
and I will love him and MANIFEST Myself to him."*

John 14:21

What is Contemplative Prayer?

Definition of Contemplate:

A. to look at, thoughtfully for a long time. B. to think about., C. to think profoundly and at length; meditate.

This is a form of prayer in which we do not participate in talking to God or asking Him for things. Rather, we discipline ourselves to quiet our minds and be very still before Him. We ponder God Himself and His Word. We wait on God and position ourselves to hear Him in case He speaks. Sometimes we will enjoy His manifest presence. Sometimes we may feel as though nothing really "happened." Whether we "feel" anything or not, we must learn to allow God to delight in us.

According to **John 14:21**, God has made us a promise; that if we love Him and obey His commands, He will manifest Himself to us. What does it look or feel like when He "manifests" Himself to us? Some people think that if they didn't "feel" anything in prayer, then God did not manifest. But this is not true.

Ways God can Manifest:

1. Miracle Healing:
 - a. Mind, Body, Soul and/or Spirit
2. Miracle Provision:
 - a. Money
 - b. Things we didn't pay for
 - c. Cancellation of debt
3. Miracle Revelation:
 - a. Supernatural understanding
 - b. Divine insight into His Word
 - c. His plans, His ways
4. Miracle Experiences:
 - a. Dreams and Visions
 - b. Heavenly Visitations from Angels and Jesus
 - c. The weight and Glory of His presence
 - d. Other manifestations of the Holy Spirit
5. Miracle Fruit in us; the Character of Christ:
 - a. Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-Control

I have noticed that if I go even a day or two not doing Contemplative Prayer, I begin to see a lack of the fruit of the Spirit in my life. My righteousness is but filthy rags. Nothing good lives in me; only Jesus in me is good. When I disconnect from the source, His character does not manifest in me as easily. **John 15** says we must abide in Jesus. He is the vine and we are the branches.

Reflecting on **John 14:21**, How do we obey His commands? What has He commanded us to do? How can we measure our love for Him?

Love and Obey

"³⁶ Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Matthew 22:36-40

In James 2:14-26, the Apostle Paul wrote that faith without works is dead. When we love someone, the strongest way to show them is by our actions. In some relationships, a person may use words to say "I love you," but their actions may be hurtful or abusive. In many cases, Words don't mean much; but actions do. When we enter into any kind of earthly relationship, there are 3 main actions that will be expected of us, which we also expect in return:

1. Spending Time Together
2. Talking to them
3. Listening to them

If we don't do these 3 things, there will be no real or lasting relationship of any kind. Best friends talk and spend time together. Spouses do the same. When too much time goes by without these 3 things, the relationship weakens, and sometimes ends. Many people leave marriages because they are no longer getting what they want out of it. The same can be true when we don't get what we want from God. It can be tempting to get offended and turn away from God when things begin to fall apart in our lives.

If you truly love God with "*all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind*" then you will continue your relationship with Him even when devastation strikes and you feel that your prayers are not being answered. Life is full of disappointments and loss. Spending time in the presence of God is the best way to get you through it. In the midst of suffering, it is easy to feel as if God has abandoned us, but He is so close during those times.

It is so important to learn how to quiet ourselves to hear His voice and connect with His presence. When we know how to connect with God, we will not be tossed about with the waves of life. We will be secure and steadfast in Him. This will be even more important as we near the end of this age and the return of Jesus. If we can't endure the current storms, how will we endure the greatest storm in the history of mankind?

God doesn't usually communicate in a loud boisterous way. He usually speaks in a whisper: a still small voice (*1 Kings 19:11-13*). Many times, we fill our prayer time with requests or even complaints. If we manage to find the time in our busy lives to be with God, we then struggle in getting our minds to slow down and be still enough to actually hear God speak.

You may ask yourself these questions:

How can I connect with God?

How do I learn how to hear His voice or feel His presence in my prayer time?

Why is it so hard to quiet my mind?

Am I the only one who has so much trouble praying?

Why don't I feel like my prayer time is effective or meaningful?

Let me start by saying this. Everyone struggles with these same questions and feelings. Especially when they first begin their contemplative Prayer Journey. Let's discuss a few things that restrict us from connecting with God and a few key scriptures that will unlock this mystery.

5 Things that Restrict us from God's Manifest Presence:

1. A wrong View of who God is
2. A wrong view of ourselves
3. We don't know what the Word says about it
4. We don't believe what the Word of God says about it
5. Sin. If you have asked God if you have sinned, and don't get an answer, it's not the problem. You will know if you are sinning or not!

Correcting These Misconceptions:

1. God is for you, not against you. He does not condemn you. He delights in you!
2. You have been made holy and God sees you as beautiful! He sees Jesus when He looks at you! He delights in you, even when you make mistakes!
3. Study the Word of God! Daily time in the Word.
4. Believe what the Word says! Command doubt and fear to GO! Decide to believe it!
5. Make good choices. Repent when you make mistakes. Move on!

3 Keys to Experiencing God's Manifest Presence in Prayer:

1. Expectation
2. Invitation
3. Location

1. Expectation: Know what the Word says

We must encourage ourselves with the written Word, reminding ourselves of the promises God has made to us.

- a. **John 14:21** says if we love him and obey Him, He will manifest Himself to us.
- b. **James 4:8** says to draw near to God and He will draw near to you.
- c. **Hebrews 10:19-23** says we have boldness to enter the Holy of Holies by the blood of Jesus, and the veil that is His flesh that was torn at Calvary.
- d. **Jeremiah 29:13** says “you will seek me and find Me if you seek Me with your whole heart.”
- e. **Psalms 139:7** says “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?”

2. Invitation: Position Ourselves

- a. We must position ourselves for God to manifest. Choosing to carve out time in our day, no matter how big or how small, says to God, “I want to be connected to You,” and He will honor that.
- b. **Psalms 22:3** says that the Lord “inhabits the praise of His people.”
- c. **MODEL PRAYER:** Matt 6:9-13 – Starts and Ends with Praise!
 1. PRAISE! (*Our Father in Heaven, Holy is Your name...*)
 2. Prophecy and Declaration! (*Let Your Kingdom come to Earth, as it is in Heaven*)
 3. REVELATION! (*Daily Bread: the written Word, made real to us. The living Word, Jesus reveals it to us*)
 4. Forgiveness! (*Ask forgiveness and enjoy the reassurance that you are forgiven*)
 5. Protection! (*Lead me not into temptation*)
 6. More PRAISE!!! (*Yours is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory*)
- d. Scripture Meditation: We can use scripture as a tool to enter God’s presence.
- e. Think, “**QUALITY over QUANTITY.**” Meditating on one scripture or phrase can be more beneficial than reading entire chapters at a time.
 Spending only 60 seconds in the presence of God can do a lot of good. The goal may be to eventually pray for an hour, but when you first begin, just a few minutes a day can change your life! Even in the lives of those who have prayed for 8 hours at a time, there can be seasons where we only get a few minutes. But a few quality minutes in the presence of God changes everything.

4. Location: The Secret Place

- a. Seclusion: If you want to have a personal experience with Jesus, you need to be alone (**Matt. 6:5-8**): “... go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place...”
- b. There are many forms of prayer: Praise, Intercession, Praying the Word, Confession, Personal Petition, Thanksgiving. None of these are like Contemplative Prayer.

- c. We can feel God's presence corporately, but it's not the same as the Secret Place. Contemplative prayer must be done alone. You cannot rely on corporate meetings to fulfill your spiritual needs.
- d. You cannot access the Secret Place on the Run. You have to STOP ABSOLUTELY EVERYTHING! Turn off your phone. Many other types of prayer can be done on the go, but for contemplative prayer, you can't be cleaning or working while you quiet yourself. Even 60 seconds a day will change your life!

Not Enough Time!

Do NOT be pressured to pray the same as everyone else. Do not be intimidated by those who pray for a long time. Do not let your busy schedule make you feel like you don't have enough time to pray. Whether its 60 seconds, 3 minutes, 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 30 minutes, 1 hour, or many hours, it all counts!

If you have gotten burned out in ministry and no longer feel the passion or zeal you once had before, you may have never figured out how to truly quiet yourself. Or, maybe you did once before, but you got out of the habit of doing so. We may have victory in this area for a season, or victory through a particular circumstance. Then, a new circumstance comes along that knocks us off our feet, and we feel like a baby Christian; starting over, learning how to pray again. It is only after many battles that we come to a place where our circumstances do not shake us or cause us to falter. This is true maturity in the Lord Jesus.

How To do Contemplative Prayer

1. Announce to your friends and family that you are going somewhere for some quiet time, and ask not to be disturbed.
2. Go somewhere secluded. "Shut the door." In some cases, its best to just hide in a bathroom or closet where they will not interrupt you. Or when you pull up somewhere in your vehicle, just take a few extra minutes to quiet yourself before you go inside. Get creative! Find a way to be alone with God. No one can say they can't give Him 60 seconds or a few minutes! No excuses!
3. Before you begin, take authority in Jesus' name. Command distraction, and any other evil influence to be removed. (IF needed).
4. **Prayer:**
(see next page for prayer)

Lord,

You live on the inside of me. I don't have to look for you outside of myself. I believe Your Word is true. I am seated with You in Heavenly places, and the Spirit of the Living God lives inside of me. I have shut my door, and I believe You are here with me. You said if I love You and obey Your commands, You will manifest Yourself to me.

I make a sacrifice of my time. I carve out this small piece of my day and I give it to You. Whether I feel anything or hear anything or not, I choose to give You this time out of my day. I will be disciplined to quiet myself every day, even if its only for a few minutes. Its not about what I can get from You. Its about what I can give to You.

Lord you paid the price when You died on the cross and rose from the grave. You paid that price so You could have me. You paid that price so You can enjoy me.

Come into my garden and take delight in me.

I love you Lord!

5. Then you just sit there and wait on God.
6. If you get distracted, take authority over it, and refocus on Jesus.
7. Remember, any amount of time is better than not doing it at all. Do it every day!