

Present to God *as his people*



As part of PCI's new 'Present' initiative, **Andrew Dickson** highlights how we can practically take steps to focus on being present to God as his people.

The story of Moses' life is a blockbuster of epic proportions. Think about it for a moment. He was born into slavery yet raised in a palace by an Egyptian princess. As a young man, his anger flared causing him to commit murder, flee Egypt, and go into hiding. But he didn't stay away. Called by God, Moses returned to Egypt, challenged the Pharaoh, and led God's people to freedom. No wonder his life has inspired numerous books, biographies, and movies.

Outside of these staggering events, however, there is another word – another theme – which sums up Moses' life: Present. The book of Exodus is stacked with passages that showcase Moses being present to God.

In Exodus 24–25 we read of how Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights in the cloud on Mount Sinai where God not only continued to speak to him, but also gave him the most incredible instruction: “Then let them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

This sanctuary – or tabernacle as it was more commonly known – was a

place of awe and wonder described often in the Old Testament. From cherubim stitched into towering curtains to pillars overlaid with gold, the size and beauty of the tabernacle would have taken our breath away. Yet inside all of that artistry and engineering was something (or better yet, someone) even more spectacular: God himself.

Let your imagination try to wrap itself around the fact that the infinite God who spoke the stars into being (Isaiah 40:26), chose to dwell in a tent built by finite human hands. Remarkable, isn't it? And yet, this spectacular meeting space was only a shadow of a coming, greater reality of God's presence with his people.

One millennium later, God did more than descend in a cloud. He wrapped himself in human flesh and walked among the people he'd made, inviting them into companionship with him. Through Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension, humankind can now experience fellowship with God free from the restrictions of poles and curtains. We can be present to God.

Present

One of the themes of PCI's 'Present' initiative introduced at this year's General Assembly, encourages us to be present to God as his people, for the sake of his own glory, and for our eternal joy. But make no mistake, this is a call, not from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, but from Jesus himself to abide with him and remain in his love in our everyday lives (John 15:4;9).

But, in today's fast-paced, distraction-filled world in which so many different voices compete for our attention and devotion, just how can we be present to God as his people? Like Moses, how can we block out the noise and make space to be in the company of our heavenly Father? Throughout Scripture, we find three basic practices that we can adopt in order to be with Jesus and become more like him.

...in today's fast-paced, distraction-filled world... how can we be present to God as his people?

Present

Hear his voice (Bible reading)

The Bible is God's living and active Word to us through which his voice audibly speaks



to reveal himself, his will, and his promises. Whether you feel like a beginner or the grizzled old veteran, one of the most important things you can do in your life is to regularly read the Bible.

Sadly, no biblical author gives us an easy formula for how we can go about doing this in our everyday lives. As much as we may want a quick fix, some fast lesson that makes us near-experts in a few short minutes, the best of Bible reading isn't learned overnight, but rather takes time over days, weeks, months, and years, imbibing God's words and allowing them to inform our minds, inspire our hearts, and instruct our lives.

With such a perspective on God's Word in place, countless creative routines may follow. Maybe you will choose to read through the Bible in a year, or memorise passages or whole books, or meditate on single verses or paragraphs, or identify and pursue applications, or listen to sermons and podcasts, or read biblically rich books and online content, or attend a Bible class, or join a small group, and on and on – changing it up from time to time.

The potential practices are limitless, but the principle beneath them is this: don't miss out on being present to God by shaping your days with his life-giving words. And don't miss out on being present Sunday by Sunday to sit under faithful Bible preaching in your church

Have his ear (prayer)

Prayer is one of the deepest joys of the Christian life. What an amazing gift to know that the God whose greatness and glory is beyond our wildest

imagination listens to us every time we pray. He loves to hear our voice. Prayer is also a big deal. As followers of Jesus, prayer is as vital to our everyday existence as eating, drinking, sleeping, and even breathing.

We *know* we need to pray. And yet, for many of us, prayer feels hard. When do we pray? What do we pray? How do we pray?

As a spiritual practice which enables us to be present to God, the Bible helps us to see that prayer is about learning to move through this life in one long extended conversation with the Lord. Throughout our days we can stop and intentionally take time to say "Wow!" as we worship God for who he is and what he is like. We can pause to say "Thank you" for all the things he has done for us. In other moments we can say "Sorry" for the ways we have sinned, or cry "Help" as we ask for God to provide for our needs and establish his kingdom across the earth. Each type of prayer helps us to cultivate a deeper awareness of God's presence and a greater dependence on him.

Incorporating regular times and patterns of prayer into our daily routine is crucial for staying present to God as his child. God isn't looking for polished or perfect prayers. You don't need to try to sound more holy or pure or spiritual than you are.

Just pray as you can, your heavenly Father simply wants to spend time with you.



In this present age we must fight the temptation to...neglect our spiritual communities...

Belong to his body (fellowship)

Important as personal Bible reading and prayer are, we were made for more than private devotions. We were made to be present to Jesus together. We were made for fellowship. God has arranged each one of the parts of the body just as he wanted (1 Corinthians 12:18). It can be easy to want a community that looks, feels, and talks exactly the same way we do. And yet, practising fellowship – particularly by showing up at worship each week – is not about finding the right group of people. It is about committing to a group of people and being devoted together to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:42).



In this present age we must fight the temptation to avoid or neglect our spiritual communities, and instead become men and women who play their part in the body of Christ. Worshipping and praying together, listening to the Word being preached, partaking in the sacraments, and serving others all draw us into God's presence and remind us that we are part of something larger than ourselves, while also fostering spiritual growth and strengthening our sense of belonging, helping us to live out our faith in practical and meaningful ways.

Present to God

Being present to God is not limited to one aspect of our lives; it encompasses our entire being – heart, mind, soul, and strength. Through Bible reading, prayer, and fellowship, we create space in our lives for God's presence to dwell richly within us. In a world that often pulls our attention in many directions, these three basic practices anchor us in God's presence, helping us to live as his people, fully present to him, and engaged in his purposes.