

COMMUNE: TRAINING GUIDE

Abiding Practices for Missional Communities

Commune: When disciples regularly stop to hear from God through the practices of silence and solitude.

WHY WE COMMUNE

Have you ever been busier than you are right now? The hustle and bustle of this world we live in is at an all time high. And for all the access we have thanks to the mini computers in our pockets, they come with equal access to our lives. Work is no longer tied to a landline at a desk in a building. The desk is in the guestroom, and it's not bound by any wires. We were made for communication—for relationships. But God has more for us.

The God of the universe wants us to slow down and to be with him. This is the Abiding Practice of Commune. And this is not a new practice to the modern reader. The practice of stopping to hear from God through silence and solitude has been around since God created the world. The difference in a fallen world is that the distractions of our world choke out the sound of God's voice to our ears. This once-easy and open line of communication has now become a practice and work to us. As with all things in the Christian life, the pursuit of the supreme pleasure that is Christ will yield a much greater reward than the momentary distractions of this world.

Jesus, as always, was the ultimate example of seeking the Father in silence and solitude.

In [Mark 1](#), we see Jesus healing many and casting out demons. [Verse 33](#) says that “the whole city was gathered together” to experience Jesus. And it's the evening, likely after the sun had set so that they would not break any Rabbinic regulations. So, here is Jesus, interacting with the desperately sick and hopelessly bound people, working late into the night to do his Father's will. But what happens next? [Verses 35-38](#) tell us:

“And rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him searched for him, and they found him and said to him, “Everyone is looking for you.” And he said to them, “Let us go on to the next towns, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.”

Jesus gets up early in the morning and wanders out into a desolate, solitary place to commune with his Father. Jesus, the God-man, leaves behind the disciples and crowds of people clamoring for him so that he might be present with God the Father. The distraction of the crowds must have been great, but it was not too much for Jesus to pause and seek solitude with his Father. You can feel the frustration of the disciples, too. The ministry is beginning and people are drawing near to Jesus in droves. And yet, where is Jesus? He's communing with the Father.

One commentator noted that this is one of three accounts from Mark where Jesus gets alone to pray: here at the beginning of the book, near the middle ([Mark 6:46](#)), and near the end ([Mark 14:32-42](#)). He noted, “All three were occasions when He was faced with the possibility of achieving His messianic mission in a more attractive, less costly way. But in each case He gained strength through prayer.”¹ Jesus knew that his mission could only be sustained through loving union with the Father.

How much more do we need to get away from what's in front of us—even the good things—to enjoy our relationship with our heavenly Father? We need a daily reorientation from the cares and distractions of the world so that we might enjoy our union with the Father and better understand who we are in him.

Embracing our limits as humans, though uncomfortable, is a beautiful thing. It allows us to see ourselves for who we truly are, namely, that we are not God. By embracing silence, the absence of distractions, and engaging in solitude, the seeking of God's presence, we are being honest with our humanity.

“In solitude and silence, once you get past the jitters (from being adrenalized) then you find out who you really are (what you feel and need) and then you can experience the reality of God's presence in your soul.” – [Dallas Willard, SoulShepherding.org](http://DallasWillard.com/SoulShepherding.org)

It is in this place that God meets his people and refreshes their souls. We simply need to set aside the ever-present distractions of our world to sit with the Father. He desires to be with us—he desires to be with you.

COMMUNE IN COMMUNITY

Let's embrace the irony of leaving the crowds to be alone with Jesus while titling this section, "Commune in Community." Should we rename it? Would it be more appropriately titled, "Commune in Isolation"? We think not.

One commonly given synonym for discipleship is the word apprenticeship. The picture of an apprentice is an apt view of being a disciple. In an apprenticeship, the employee seeking to gain a new profession watches closely the master he has chosen to follow. An apprenticeship is the transferring of one's way of "work" to another. Discipleship is a bit more than that; discipleship is the transferring of one's way of "life" to another. So when Jesus takes his morning stroll to be with his Father, he's also providing a practice for them to follow in taking on his way of life. We have the opportunity to model the practice of communing with the Father to our brothers and sisters in the faith, thus we commune in community.

Family Gatherings

The Family Gathering is a great opportunity to begin modeling this practice of communing with the Father. Remember, it's not just about solitude. A great way to transition your time of feasting and laughing loudly together is to call the group to a two-minute time of silence. If this is your first time, expect it to be awkward. (Not as awkward as last week's conversation from Ephesians on circumcision, but a close second.) This is a great time for people to submit the craziness of their days and weeks to the Father as they remind themselves that they aren't in control and remember why they are here. That is one of the great reminders of the Abiding Practice of Commune—who has control? God.

DNA Groups

DNA Groups are also a wonderful place to grow in communing with the Father. You can open or close your time together with a similar two-to-three minutes of silence. But also remember, solitude hasn't historically been about a single person. It was never the "Desert Father" or, "hey, look there's a monk who built that whole monastery by himself!"; but rather, groups of men and women who sought God in solitude. Your DNA Group could be a great way to do an overnight camping—or glamping—trip to seek God in silence and solitude. In fact, we would recommend that your first shot at this not be alone. Take the upper hand on the enemy as you retreat into solitude with the prayer warriors closest to you.

Neighborhoods to Nations

The neighborhoods to nations offer two distinct invitations into communing with the Father. First, when we think of a world where some 3.4 billion people are going to hell because the gospel is not going forth, we might become paralyzed by guilt and shame for not "fixing" that. In the Abiding Practice of Commune, the Father is inviting us into his story of redemption, pointing us to the truth that he is in control. He will be glorified by every people, tribe and tongue. You are not in control and it's not your fault.

Second, we are invited close to the beating heart of the Father for all of the earth to receive the joy that only he can give. It's in these moments of silence and solitude that we grow in our joy and we make space to ask ourselves, "God, are you calling me to go?" There, in the silence of the moment, we just might hear clearly how we can join the rhythm of his heartbeat to advance his kingdom from our neighborhoods to the nations for his good glory and worthwhile worship.

SAMPLE COMMITMENT

Below is a sample commitment that you can use as an example for planning your time together. Spend some time in silence and solitude as you prayerfully consider how to engage the Abiding Practice of Commune.

COMMUNE COMMITMENT

Missional Community Leaders: The Comers and The Gschwends

Date of Commitment: February 2024

Date to Reevaluate Commitment: February 2025

Commitment

Our Missional Community is committed to spend more time communing with the Father through silence and solitude.

Family Gatherings

After we eat dinner and we move to the living room, we will spend two minutes in silence as a group. We will then ask if anyone has encouragement or struggles to share from their time of silence. If you're ready to take it up a notch, you could even have a "silent meal" where everyone sits at the same table or in the same room without saying a word to each other. Simply pay attention to your thoughts and feelings and what the Father might be trying to tell you when you finally give him a chance.

DNA Groups

Our women's DNA Groups will plan an overnight trip to Sacred Heart Monastery to spend 24 hours in intentional practices of solitude. The men's DNA Groups will plan an overnight trip to the cabins at Monte Sano Park, following a similar schedule.

Neighborhoods To Nations

On the fifth week of the month in this quarter we will take a hike through Monte Sano Park, stopping in silence to remind ourselves of the trekking required to advance the gospel from village-to-village throughout the world. We will include guided times of prayer to remind ourselves that God is in control and also have guided times to ask the Spirit how he has gifted us to join the fight, sitting in silence to hear from him.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that this is one of the more difficult and awkward Abiding Practices God is inviting us into. We pray that you press through the difficulties and awkwardness to see just how freeing it can be to simply sit with God—no agenda, and no plans. One of the greatest glories to God is when his creatures stop grasping for control and start sitting at his feet in stillness and silence, recognizing that he is the Creator and that they are not. This will lead us to a whole new wealth of serving from a right heart and motivation that propels the kingdom of God to the ends of the earth. Simply email us at mc@summitcrossing.org if you'd like more resources or help living out this Abiding Practice.

COMMUNE RESOURCES

We would encourage you to engage with the following resources as you discuss how to implement the Abiding Practice of Commune.

Recommended Sermons/Video Resources

[Commune/Sabbath - Life in the Vine: Practices for Abiding in Jesus](#) - Paul Whaley

[The Solitude Practice](#) - John Mark Comer

Recommended Books

[Invitation to Solitude and Silence](#) - Ruth Haley Barton

[The Way of the Heart](#) - Henri Nouwen

Recommended Digital Resources

Tether: Discipleship & Prayer - App - ([Apple](#)) ([Android](#))

One Minute Pause - App - ([Apple](#)) ([Android](#))

1. John D. Grassmick, "Mark," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 110.

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