



Enter into thy closet, and
when thou hast shut thy
door, pray to thy Father
which is in secret.

—Matthew 6:6



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Bible Lens

Sacrament

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Sacrament

from the Responsive Reading

Matthew 6:11

Give us this day our daily bread.

Daily is translated from the Greek word *epiousios*, a term used only here and in Luke 11:3. It is interpreted variously as “for the coming day,” “for the next day,” or “for all time.” One source writes, “The bread, as a whole, is appointed us for all our days; but the ‘giving’ of it is distributed ... so as to take place each day.”

Bread, according to another researcher, implies “all things needful for ... the maintenance of the whole man, both body and soul; for each of these have their proper sustenance.” Jesus’ simple petition makes clear God’s willingness and ability to supply all needs—and the demand on us to trust that provision.

from Section 1

1 | I Peter 3:12

The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.

Peter’s direct citing of Psalms 34:15 is one of many hundreds of examples of early Christians’ love for and familiarity with Hebrew Scripture. These writings—their Bible—were fundamental to their understanding of God and His creation.

By this time, records of the life and teachings of Christ Jesus were being gathered. Although Jesus used the phrase “new testament” during the last supper (Mark 14:24),

it is believed to have been first applied as the title of this compilation in the second century AD. Over time, “Old Testament” became the Christian designation for the Hebrew Bible.

from Section 2

5 | Matthew 5:1

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him.

Mountains are significant sites in the Bible as places of refuge and communion with God (see examples in Genesis 14:10, Exodus 34:1–28, Matthew 14:23 and 24:16). Christ Jesus’ transfiguration and ascension both take place on mountains (see Mark 9:2 and Luke 19:29, 24:50).

Scholars compare Christ Jesus’ teaching on this mountainside to Moses’ delivery of the law from Mount Horeb. One refers to this hill as “the Sinai of the New Testament.”

6 | Matthew 6:6

When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.

Jesus’ mandate isn’t literal. Most ancient Galilean homes only had one room, though some had a small inner storage area closed off by a door. And his metaphor for the place of prayer doesn’t dismiss community worship, but emphasizes a God-centered separation from daily concerns—and from the wish to impress others.

An exploration of Bible citations from the *Christian Science Quarterly*® Bible Lessons

“... a lesson on which the prosperity of Christian Science largely depends.” —Mary Baker Eddy

from Section 4

9 | I Timothy 1:15

This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

The introductory words here appear several times in the pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus to signal important church doctrine—in this case, the Christly mission of salvation. Later, the Revelator employs similar phrasing in the charge, “Write: for these words are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:5).

from Section 5

12 | Matthew 26:41

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

The charge “watch and pray” was characteristic of Christ Jesus’ teachings, and became a motto of the early disciples. One commentary elaborates, “Watchfulness sees temptation coming; prayer gives strength to withstand it.”

Jesus recognizes the spirit of eagerness expressed in his followers’ earlier declaration of loyalty (see v. 35) but foresees testing times that will require strong spiritual resolve and commitment to prayer.

from Section 6

13 | Acts 6:4

We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

In the midst of controversy about the Christians’ treatment of destitute widows, the disciples reaffirm their commitment to prayer. They explain, “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” Then they appoint a team of seven men—including Stephen and Philip the Evangelist—to see to the widows’ needs (see vv. 2–6).

The Greek word rendered *continually* (*proskarterō*) appears repeatedly in the New Testament to describe steadfast prayer (see other examples in Acts 1:14, Romans 12:12, and Colossians 4:2).

from Section 7

16 | Luke 14:15

Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

Spoken by a fellow guest at a meal Jesus attended, these words elicit a parable from the Master. He tells of invitees to a banquet, all of whom give excuses for not attending. Jesus concludes, “None of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (see vv. 16–24). Only those who sincerely accept God’s invitation, no matter how inconvenient it may seem, will enter the kingdom.

Resources quoted in this issue

RR: Benson, Joseph. *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*. New York: T. Carlton & J. Porter, 1857; Bengel, Johann Albrecht. *Gnomon of the New Testament*. 3rd ed. 5 vols. Translated by Andrew R. Fausset, James Bryce, and William Fletcher. Revised and edited by Andrew R. Fausset. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1857–60. Both also available at biblehub.com/commentaries.

Cit. 5: Vincent, Marvin R. *Word Studies in the New Testament*. 4 vols. New York: Scribner, 1887. Also available at biblehub.com/commentaries;

Cit. 12: Spence-Jones, Henry Donald Maurice, Joseph S. Exell, and Edward Mark Deems, eds. *The Pulpit Commentary*. London, 1880–1909. Also available at biblehub.com/commentaries.

Hearing God's messages

By Marian C. English

From the July 15, 1996, issue of the *Christian Science Sentinel*

My small hiking companions were listening, but not hearing anything. The children were so familiar with city noises that at first they could not distinguish the small sounds of nature on that peaceful mountain trail. But as they became very still, they realized that the surroundings, while tranquil, were certainly not silent. First they noticed the tiny buzz of busy insects, then a raven cawing as he played in mountain air currents. They even heard wind pushing softly through thick needles of a blue spruce.

The children were learning lessons about nature. But I was discovering something valuable about prayer. As a new student of Christian Science, I had begun to grasp the fact that because man is God's expression, God was not far off but as close as my thought, speaking to me through the spiritual ideas He imparts. But listening for those spiritual messages and actually *hearing* them are two different things. I was certain that His healing messages could be heard more consistently.

Learning to listen is the first step. The quietness achieved through prayer is not a mental blank but a focus on the certainty of God's allness and peaceful presence. It is a state of receptivity in which we give ourselves the opportunity to hear divine messages. Just as one would not speak to a friend, then offer him no chance to respond, prayer does not ask God's help and then fail to listen for His answer. Faith that establishes in consciousness man's inseparable spiritual unity with God, *expects* to hear His healing ideas.

The next vital step is carefully to exclude from thought anything unlike God. Sometimes we become so accustomed to the din of pain, stress, and worry that our best

efforts to listen prayerfully do not bring the healing results we yearn for. Like the children who had to adjust their listening skills from the familiar sounds of television, telephones, and traffic to those gentle sounds of nature, we must learn to turn our attention away from the clamor of the material senses to the spiritual sense of God and His Christ. The Christian Science textbook declares, "Spirit, God, is heard when the senses are silent" (*Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, p. 89). We must empty our thought of such things as discouragement, fear, and self-concern and replace them with spiritual qualities—love, patience, peace, and fearless faith.

Christ Jesus taught his followers to pray by going into one's "closet" and closing the door. Prayer that acknowledges divine Love's allness and firmly closes thought to any element foreign to Love finds the refuge of spiritual stillness in which uplifting, healing messages can be perceived. God, being Spirit, utters spiritual messages. So our thinking must conform to the simplicity of God's language—unselfish love, goodness, and spiritual peace. Such thought transcends the material senses and reaches a Christlike awareness that stills the storms of bewildered, fruitless, matter-based thinking.

Such stillness always takes precedence over the commotion of materialism. It pierces the darkest night with refreshing, healing ideas and confirms what the Master said: "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matthew 13:16).

To read the entire article, which has been shortened to fit this page, go to jsh.christianscience.com/hearing-god-s-messages.