

The Way of Love

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CHAPTER NINE

Prayer and Stillness

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In the midst of an intense ministry — crowds seeking him, sick people to heal, disciples to teach — Jesus did something that many would consider unproductive: he withdrew to solitary places to pray. *"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."* If the Son of God needed those moments of stillness with the Father, how much more do we?

Prayer is not primarily a list of requests we present to God. It is relationship. It is conversation. It is being with the one who loves us. Jesus taught his disciples to pray saying "Our Father" — not "Distant Lord" or "Fearsome Judge," but Father. Prayer is the child talking to his dad, with the confidence of one who knows he is loved.

David wrote: *"Be still, and know that I am God."* There is something that can only be learned in stillness. The constant noise of modern life — the screens, the notifications, the thousand voices competing for our attention — drowns out the gentle voice of the Spirit. To hear it, sometimes we simply need to be quiet.

No elaborate technique or special posture is required. What is required is willingness. *"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret,"* said Jesus. A quiet place. A few uninterrupted minutes. An open heart. That is enough to begin.

Sometimes prayer is words — praise, confession, petition, intercession. Sometimes it is simply being present, without words, resting in God's presence like a child in his father's arms. *"I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother,"* wrote the psalmist. There are prayers that need no words.

Paul exhorted us to pray without ceasing. He did not mean that we should go around muttering prayers twenty-four hours a day. He meant that we should maintain an attitude of constant connection — a continuous conversation that sometimes uses words and sometimes is simply awareness of the presence. Working while praying. Walking while praying. Living in permanent dialogue with the Father.

In prayer we also listen. Not always as an audible voice — though God can speak however he chooses — but as inner clarity, as unexpected peace, as direction we did not know we needed. "*My sheep hear my voice,*" said Jesus. The Shepherd's voice is recognized. But the ear must be cultivated. Listening must be practiced.

Scripture is also God's voice. When we read the Bible not in academic study mode but in listening mode — asking "Lord, what are you saying to me today?" — the ancient words come alive anew. The Spirit who inspired the Scriptures is the same one who dwells in us, and he connects both.

Stillness is not escape from the world but preparation to serve it better. Jesus came out of his times of prayer with renewed clarity, with power to heal and teach, with compassion for the crowds. Stillness with God does not make us less active but more effective. It fills us with what we can then pour out on others.

Find your desolate place. It might be early in the morning, before the house awakes. It might be in a park during lunch. It might be at night when everything quiets down. The place matters less than the intention. Your Father awaits you in secret, and he wants to reward you openly with a transformed life.