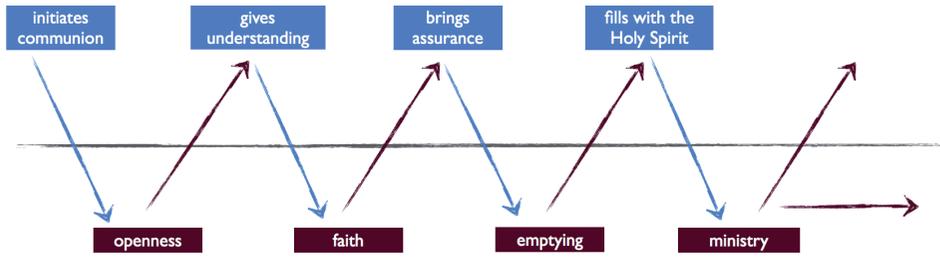


UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU



connect to reflect

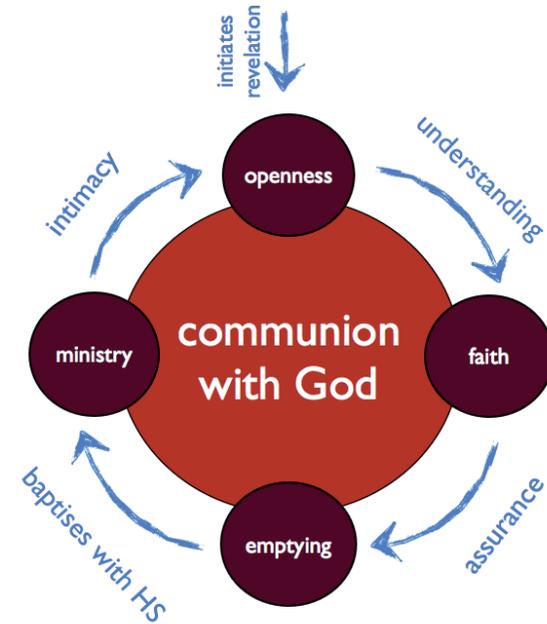
UNDERSTANDING COMMUNION

overview

understanding the process underlying our communion with God

The blue arrows explain what God does—he initiates communion with us, gives us understanding, assures us we are his children, baptises us with his Spirit and draws us into ever deeper intimacy.

The four circles explain what we do, and how our response of openness, faith, emptying and ministry, determines how God is able, or not, to draw us into communion with him, that our hearts may be re-formed in his image.



As you can see, this diagram explains a continuous state of being. But it is also a sequential process. On the cover of the lesson, this process has been drawn along a continuum. Understanding this process will also help us to identify why we find ourselves spiritually stuck, see what is preventing our hearts from changing, and what we can do about it.

Don't worry if this looks a little complicated right now. The following lessons will clearly explain how this works.

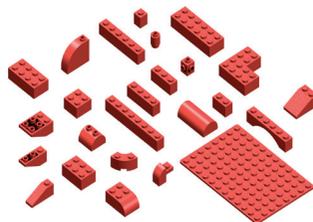


In the previous lessons, we saw that the moment sin came into Eden, our communion with God was broken. As a result, the image of God in us became deformed. We saw that this issue of reflecting Jesus, and having the image of God re-formed in us is at the heart of cosmic battle between God and Satan, and

is thus at the heart of our individual lives. Consequently, the primary work of the remnant—those people who are preparing the world for the return of Jesus—is to call everyone into communion with God, that the image of God may be re-formed in their lives. The restoration of the image of God in our lives always leads to joy, and for this reason, God will continue to develop his image in us throughout all of eternity. As we continually grow in communion and in his image, we will experience ever greater joy. Finally, we saw that this great endeavour of reflecting Jesus is not designed to be done alone, but in the community of the church.

The big question is how? Later on, we will look at the practical things we can do to create an environment communion. But before we go there, we need to understand how communion with God actually works.

Do you ever feel as though your spiritual life is like a box of Lego—all the parts are there, but it's a little confusing how the pieces fit together? We can try and make our own design, but the do-it-yourself approach can be frustrating and even discouraging. I know, because I've tried! But God did not design our spiritual lives to be built randomly.



We are going to look at a process God has designed to re-form our hearts to reflect the character of Jesus. You will see that there is a divine order to spiritual growth. Just as we cannot put windows into a house before the walls are built, so there is a natural order for nurturing communion with God. Unless we understand this, we'll end up being frustrated and worn out by doing the spiritual life back to front and wondering why it doesn't seem to work properly.

This spiritual process is based on the daily service of consecration that God taught the Israelites when he gave them the sanctuary. Although we no longer follow the sanctuary rituals, they reveal the principles of how God takes deformed hearts, and re-forms them into his image.



the sanctuary was made for communion

It is helpful to keep in mind that the main purpose of the sanctuary sprang from God's desire to re-establish communion with his people that was lost in Eden, "I want the people of Israel to build me a sacred residence where I can live among them." (Exodus 25:8, NLT). While sacrifices and offerings were regularly made, the purpose of the sanctuary was not only for God's people to have their sins forgiven, but to enable them to live in God's presence—in unbroken communion with him.

God never wanted his people to forget that his presence was with them at all times, and as a physical reminder of this, literal glory shone brightly from within the sanctuary (Exodus 40:34-35). And what would be the result of Israel's communion with God and their obedience to him? The people's lives would increasingly reflect the image of God. One Bible scholar explains,

God declared that Israel had been selected to become His holy people; but this declaration was hardly sufficient to make Israel holy. In order to achieve a holiness of the kind associated with God and His acts, Israel would have to observe His laws and commandments. The way to holiness, in other words, was for the Israelites, individually and collectively, to emulate God's attributes. In theological terms this principle is known as imitatio dei, 'the imitation of God'. (Baruch Levine, Leviticus, 256.)



God's call to us is a call to imitate him

The principles from the Israelite sanctuary are important for Christians today, because the New Testament writers understood that the tabernacle is a symbol for the human heart. Let me explain.

When the tabernacle was consecrated, "the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Exodus 40:34). Just as God's glory radiated out from the tabernacle and temple, so the glory (character) of God is to radiate out of our lives. The apostle Paul wrote, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Ellen White comments,

From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator. Because of sin, humanity ceased to be a temple for God. Darkened and defiled by evil, the heart of man no longer revealed the glory of the divine One. But by the incarnation of the Son of God, the purpose of heaven is fulfilled. God dwells in humanity, and through saving grace the heart of man becomes again his temple. (RH, December 31, 1908.)

If we understand how God designed the tabernacle as a place of communion, we can learn how we may also have communion with God with the result that our broken hearts become re-formed in his image. We will begin to see that any change in our hearts is a direct consequence of communion with the God. We will examine a blueprint for communion with God that is intended to be a continuous state of being. This state of communion with God is illustrated in the cycle below.