



The Capsule

Insights from voyages to the
Moon to boost your spiritual
life on Earth

Walter Hampel

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Restoring The Core

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Bible Versions

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To my grandchildren Ezekiel, Ezra, and all who may follow,
wonderful reminders of why this book was written:

*So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might to another generation,
your power to all those to come.*

Psalm 71:18

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Introduction

When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:5-6 NASB

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United States embarked on Project Apollo. It was created in response to President John Kennedy's challenge to land men on the Moon and return them safely to Earth before the end of the decade of the 1960s.¹ By the end of 1969, two Apollo missions had successfully landed on the Moon and brought their crews safely back to Earth. Four other landing missions followed in 1971 and 1972.

Each Apollo mission had a three-man crew. For the lunar-landing missions, several days after leaving Earth, two tandem spacecraft entered into an orbit around the Moon. Two of the astronauts would descend to the surface of the Moon in their Lunar Excursion Module. The third astronaut would remain in the mother ship (known as the Command Module). The third astronaut's mission was to keep that spacecraft in lunar orbit until his fellow astronauts returned.

What happened with the lone astronaut in the orbiting Apollo capsule has intrigued me. At the time of this writing, seven men in history have had the opportunity to experience isolation on a scale that can be hard for us to imagine. Their

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experience is the basis for a pattern and mindset that can be adapted as an approach to your devotional time with Christ.

Each Apollo mission involved numerous Command Module orbits of the Moon. For about half of each orbit around the Moon (47 minutes on average for Apollo 11)², the Apollo Command Module was behind the Moon in relation to Earth. When that happened, the Moon blocked any radio signals sent between the Command Module and Mission Control on Earth. Even the astronauts on the surface of the Moon would not be able to contact their fellow astronaut in the Command Module during that part of the orbit. The lone astronaut, during that time of the orbit on the far side of the Moon, was the most isolated human being in existence.

As of the early 21st century, the holder of the Guinness World record for the most isolated human ever was Al Worden, the Command Module pilot on the Apollo 15 mission in 1971. The orbit of the Command Module put Worden at the furthest distance that one human has ever been from another. The two closest humans (his fellow astronauts on the surface of the Moon) were, at points, several thousand miles away from Worden. The rest of humanity was over 238,000 miles away back on Earth.

Once the Command Module's orbit took it from behind the Moon, the loss-of-signal ended and communication with Mission Control on Earth was restored. On every orbit, the Command Module pilot experienced what author Cal Newport refers to in his book *Digital Minimalism* as a "cycle of solitude and connection."³ I believe this cycle offers you a pattern for living your life in the presence of Christ for there are times when you not only should, but must, be away from others.

Why do we do what we do?

The Bible repeatedly shows us that our outward actions may be in conflict with our inner motivations. Proverbs 16:2 reminds us that *“all the ways of a man are clean in his own sight, But the LORD weighs the motives.”*

In His time on Earth, the Lord Jesus called out those whose inner motivations and outward actions did not line up. He called them hypocrites. In classical Greek theater, a hypocrite was an actor portraying a role. That actor pretended to be one person but was really someone else. This description fits many of the religious practitioners of first-century Israel.

One example of this can be found in their prayer practices. What was intended to be a time of private prayer became a display of prayer performed in the midst of a crowd. Such a zealous person would ensure that they would be in a crowd during the time of prayer. Albert Barnes, in his commentary on Matthew 6, further explains the matter. Public prayer was not the issue.

The Jews were much in the habit of praying in public places. At certain times of the day they always offered their prayers. Wherever they were, they suspended their employment and paid their devotions . . . It seems, also, that they [the hypocrites] sought publicity, and regarded it as proof of great piety.⁴

The Inner Room

The ultimate goal of public prayer for these hypocrites was to be seen by the crowd as a zealous follower of God. Yet, the Lord Jesus called for His followers to do the exact opposite.

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Rather than being seen by others, Christ's followers were to offer their prayers privately, not for an open and public display. They were to be seen and heard by only one, namely God Himself. What was intended to be private communication with the Lord should be practiced in an inner room, away from the eyes and ears of all but God.

The word which the New American Standard Bible translates as "inner room" is taken from the Greek ταμείον (tameion). A tameion was the innermost room in a house in Israel during the time that Jesus walked the Earth in the first century. It acted as a storeroom for grain, which is consistent in how this same Greek word is translated in Luke 12:24. It was also a windowless room which could also be considered a first-century equivalent of a modern-day "panic room" for protection from hostile intruders.

There is an interesting irony in the Lord Jesus' pointing to the use of the innermost room of a house as a place for prayer. The innermost room of the House of God, the Jerusalem Temple, was the Holy of Holies. Access was granted to that room only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and to only one man, the High Priest (see Leviticus 16). As I mentioned above, the inner room of a typical house in Israel of that time would act as a storeroom. It was the equivalent of a food pantry in homes today. Yet, a room intended for everyday use could serve as a type of "Holy of Holies" which would allow anyone in the house to have access to God. Such is the confidence we are granted by God to enter that inner room to meet with Christ.

There are modern equivalents to the "inner room" of the first century that can serve as a type of "Holy of Holies" for you. Perhaps it is a nearby park. It might be an empty conference

room at work or an empty classroom at school. Perhaps, it is inside our cars as we drive. The 20th century pastor and author A.W. Tozer, in his early years in the faith, cleared out a corner of the basement of his family's house in Akron, Ohio as a place to meet with Christ.⁵ In fulfilling the Lord Jesus' call and pattern to have times of prayer away from the eyes and ears of others, you must seek your own contemporary inner room to commune with the Lord.

The Value of Solitude

The Command Module (i.e., Capsule) example offers you a pattern to follow. It recognizes the value of solitude. As you will see, the value of that time away will benefit more than you. By adopting this pattern, you will learn to isolate yourself for the purpose of growing in your life in Christ.

Such times of solitude can provide you with opportunities for prayer, the reading of Scripture, reflection, and a variety of other activities. It can be the opportunity to simply think through who God is calling you to be. Perhaps, it may be a time of prayer for the wisdom to know what you are being called to do during this season of your life. However, the times of connection to re-enter your community must come along with those times of solitude. That is when you need to relate to those around you and to live the life God is calling you to live alongside them.

Such an ongoing cycle of solitude and connection has biblical precedent. In the Gospel accounts of the life of Christ, we find that He took time to isolate Himself for prayer (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35). He also took the time to "re-immense" with others to teach and minister to the crowds. As you will see in Chapter 9, an ongoing practice of times of solitude will

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have what might seem to be a paradoxical effect. It will be of benefit to you. It will also be of benefit to others. When you are refreshed in spirit, body, and mind through times of solitude, you are far better prepared to be of help to family, friends, and the community in which you live.

In the course of reading this book, you will find that the Capsule is not a physical object or place. This book is not new devotional content along the lines of such classics as *Our Daily Bread* or Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening*. Rather, the Capsule is a devotional approach. It is a mindset for finding ways to grow deeper in Christ in times of solitude with Him. This aligns with an observation by writer Richard Foster, "Solitude is more a state of mind and heart than it is a place."⁶

The suggestions you find listed here could be practiced in a solitude which includes physical isolation from others. However, solitude is not simply a matter of physical isolation. It is possible to have a mindset of solitude even while surrounded by others.

The Capsule approach is divided into six modes. These modes are: (1) The Presence Chamber, (2) The Chapter House, (3) Analog/Digital (4) Reading (5) Outdoors (6) Remembrance. Each mode will be explained and discussed in its own chapter. Each finds a foundation in Scripture.

Ultimately, my desire is that your devotional life will be "*transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Romans 12:2). However, before embarking on an exploration of these modes, I need to supply a "field guide" for how you can best access the Capsule, which is the topic of Chapter 1.

Chapter 1

Before Entering the Capsule

To better understand and apply the ideas being presented here, it will be helpful if you are introduced to some ideas about how to best use this book; they have been summarized into three main points.

Remember, the Capsule is a mindset for Christian devotional practice. It is a devotional approach. It is not additional devotional content. It is meant to help you develop a mindset for approaching the content you already use. This book is intended to help you answer the questions of how to use your devotional material and why you use the content you've chosen.

The Lord Jesus instructs “*But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret*” (Matthew 6:6). Note that His instruction does not supply any devotional content. Rather, He supplies you with an approach. The importance of this command is to pray in solitude. History bears out that while the content of your prayers is important, the heart and mind with which they are approached are important as well.

Second, please read this book as a collection of suggestions and recommendations. The end of each chapter will have several takeaways and suggestions. These are meant to not only supply you with a brief summary of the chapter's contents, but are also designed to help encourage you to be creative in developing your own devotional approaches.

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These are suggestions, not commandments. I want to intentionally avoid presenting these ideas in a “you must do this” manner. While I believe that what I present here is useful and *compatible* with the Bible, it is not *commanded* in the Bible. Unfortunately, there are times when even a well-intended believer in Christ will tell a fellow believer “You must do this” regarding practices which the Bible never commands. Those who are teachers of the things of Christ must be very careful to not bind one’s conscience to something which God in Christ never commanded. That is simply another way of saying that good ideas thought up by the best-intended humans cannot be made of equal authority with God’s words found in the Bible.

Third, while I believe that these modes/mindsets provide you with useful boundaries, there will be some overlap of ideas within these modes. For example, the chapters on the Presence Chamber and on reading and using an analog or digital approach overlap when it comes to your intake of Scripture. In times of solitude, should you read the Bible in print or digitally? That is only one example.

Practicing the Capsule

Throughout this book, you will see references to “Capsule practice” or for you to be “practicing the Capsule “; you might wonder what this means. This simply has to do with your way of adapting these modes to your devotional life.

Your time and circumstances might allow you to practice all six modes of the Capsule in the morning before you otherwise start your day. These could possibly be spread out through the day, or even a week, month, or a year. Some practices

don't easily allow for simply checking off the boxes on a "things to do" list. The mode of remembrance, for example, is something that could be practiced daily (by seeing something you purposely set up as a visual reminder). Your practice of remembrance might be spread out to a monthly review of your own notes on your life. It might involve a special memory brought back to mind annually, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, or a birthday. Perhaps it would involve practicing these not only daily but weekly, monthly, and yearly as well.

The intent of Capsule practice is to give you tools to use to supply some added structure to your devotional life. Take these as suggestions, not commands. Please don't let practicing the Capsule become a spiritually legalistic burden. These modes are meant to assist what you're already doing. They might be helpful if you are looking to start or expand your devotional life. Use them as they serve you well. They are not an end in themselves.

Lastly, I offer you these ideas about a devotional approach because I have personally found them helpful. My hope is that you will also find them helpful. This set of ideas is hardly exhaustive. In reading this book, you might develop some approaches of your own. I encourage that. Be creative.

Takeaways:

1. The Capsule is a devotional mindset and approach; it is not devotional content.
2. This book is intended to give you some helpful suggestions. They are points of advice; They are not additional "you must do this" commands.
3. Be willing to think in creative ways about how you can approach times of solitude with God in Christ.