

by Peter Ward



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Monasticism has been a part of Christian culture since the closing years of the third century. Both those who wished to escape from persecution in the early years of the church, and those who became discontent with the spiritual flabbiness of the church after the Roman Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity, sought a deeper and more radical lifestyle of following Jesus.

From these early beginnings, monastic foundations spread into Europe, where successive monastic foundations of the Celts, the Benedictines, the Cluniacs and the Cistercians entered into 'closed communities' of separation and sacrificial service, out of reverence to the Lord Jesus. Amazing creativity and worship came out of these closed monastic communities. Later, monastic 'open communities' such as the Franciscans, became the major monastic movements, characterised by adherents living out lives of radical service to the poor and needy, a direct reaction against the opulence of the established churches of the time.

Monastic foundations experienced a rough time through the reformation, and, although many of the socio-economic factors that attributed to their success in previous centuries ceased to be, many individuals and groups have sought a re-interpretation of the monastic life¹. There continues to be a rich tapestry of both open and closed foundations, and Boiler Rooms, following a model of radical, open engagement with the culture around them, have been added to this tapestry since 2001.

During the formation of the idea of Boiler Rooms, God was bringing ancient monasticism to the forefront of our thinking. Pete Grieg, leader of the 24-7 prayer movement, of which Boiler Rooms are a part, cast a vision of Generation-X monasteries, turning up the heat of the prayers that were being offered up worldwide as a part of 24-7 prayer rooms². The team of the first Boiler Room in Reading, Berkshire, England, received revelation that the Lord desired the building to be within the grounds of the old Abbey ruins in the town centre, originally seeded by a group of Cluniac monks. All this talk of monasticism and our location prompted Andy Freeman, the "Abbot" of Reading Boiler Room, to come up with six values that he perceived to be at the heart of monasticism - Continuous Prayer, Creativity, Justice, Pilgrimage, Mission and Community. The beginnings of the Boiler Room Rule were born.

In the search for a deeper level of radical Christian lifestyle in a culture that is far from the disciplines of our faith, this document offers a pattern of living based upon the six core values. Previous monastic movements have often called this pattern a 'Rule', the most famous of these being the rules of St Benedict and St Augustine.

The term rule seems restrictive, or perhaps even contrary to a life lived in obedience to the Holy Spirit, to a mind constrained by the individualism that is so inherent in today's western culture. This need not be so. Whilst calling the reader to embrace a disciplined life, requiring commitment and sometimes, hard work, the Boiler Room Rule does not call for legalistic adherence. The pattern of the Rule is intended to be releasing, not a burden, although it does call the adherent to a greater degree of focus and spiritual maturity. Not that this will provide us any greater righteousness in the eyes of our Creator God, but that it will bring us into a greater depth of relationship with Christ our Saviour, and each other. In the same way that God lovingly provides us with boundaries to release life-giving freedom, so a rule, a commitment to a pattern of living, releases rather than restrains, if approached in the right spirit.

To have this releasing effect, a rule cannot be approached lightly. Although the Boiler Room Rule does not require entry into a lifelong vow, as was expected of many recruits to the monasteries, it cannot be effective if it is not considered a serious commitment. Such a commitment is radically counter cultural, and as in the better times of monastic movements throughout history, a life lead in accordance with the Rule will be a radical witness to the life of Jesus Christ.

If, having read the Rule, you consider entering into it, do so with focus and commitment. Meditate on it regularly¹. Let it guide the way that you live your life, and allow God to transform you through it. Enjoy it, and meditate on the positive ways that God has directed you through it when your commitment to it is tested, because tested it will be. And of course, always bring it under the submission of the word and the spirit, because, as St Stephen of Muret rightly said,

"No rule is absolute except that of the Gospel."⁵

¹ After reading the main text of the Rule, the section 'The Boiler Room Rule - A commitment to a pattern of living' is a useful aid in maintaining a daily focus on the six values of the Rule.



poverty, Chastity, Obedience

A consistent thread of the monastic orders through the ages is their emphasis on poverty, chastity and obedience. In seeking a modern day interpretation of the monastic in relation to the Boiler Room, an exploration of these ideas is entirely relevant.

The Boiler Room does not advocate the radical renunciation of property as was and still is a central part of many monastic orders. There are, however, two key areas that are vital to the Boiler Rooms interpretation of poverty.

The first is our need to be aware of our spiritual poverty.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

[1 John 1:8]

We can do nothing but by prayer. All of our frantic activity is useless from a kingdom perspective unless we have committed it to our Father. We need to see what He is doing before we do anything for Him, and the only way that we can do that is by listening to Him, through His Word and His Spirit.

Secondly, we must seek to be sacrificial with our time, our energy, and our finances. We must seek to give of these things when our fleshly nature would rather retain for the self. This is a Boiler Room interpretation of poverty.

On chastity, the Rule does not expect those living out the values to make a lifelong vow of celibacy! There is, however, a commitment to fidelity in relationships, and an equal valuing of both the single and the married.

Obedience is the final thread of the three concepts. Almost all of the monastic orders placed a heavy emphasis on obeying their superiors, whether these superiors had been elected by the brothers, or chosen by another abbot. As the Rule of Saint Benedict states:

The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience, which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all.⁴

This value is worked out in Boiler Rooms by obedience to the Abbot, and through a desire to serve others in their positions of authority both within the Boiler Room team, and in other organisations that the Boiler Room works with. Our nature struggles against this thread of the monastic as it does with the others. It is so rare for this obedience and humility to be seen in our society, and everything that our culture tells us, is that we should be paying more attention to our own needs and aims. In this obedience, we are becoming more like Christ, who completely sacrificed His own will to the will of His Father. As Christ Himself said:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave.

[Matt 20:25-27]



Prayer, Study, Work and Rest

"The man who fears God will avoid all extremes."

[Ecclesiastes 7:18]

From the beginning of the Reading Boiler Room, we felt called to a balanced lifestyle that reflected the pattern of the monastic day. The Rule of Saint Benedict recognised the need for balance within the daily pattern of lives lived out for Jesus, and many subsequent monastic movements sought to return to this pattern when the pre-eminent monastic foundations of the day became too focussed on one area of activity at the expense of the others. Within St. Benedict's Rule, specific time during different seasons was given over to work, rest and study. A balance was sought between the practicalities of daily living and the advancement of the soul into greater holiness⁵.

When they live by the labour of their hands, as our fathers and the apostles did, then they are really monks⁶.

The Boiler Room Rule encourages a balance between the elements of prayer, study, work and rest. These are not core values in their own right, but they flow through each of the values and are an important part of how they can be worked out in individual lives.

Too much time spent in prayer would result in no time for creativity, mission or justice, and therefore in the Holy Spirit not being given the opportunity to answer prayer through individuals themselves. Too much study would result in a great knowledge of many things, but in an individual who gave little time to the wider Boiler Room community.

The Boiler Room Rule values a balanced outworking of each of the values. We suggest for every six hours spent in prayer, at least one hour should be spent in seeking to be an answer to prayer, through the activities associated with mission, justice or community.



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Continuous Prayer

We live in times where God is calling His people to pray in a way that has not been seen for generations. 24-7 Prayer, and in turn, Boiler Rooms, have arisen through this worldwide move of the Spirit at this time.

In all things prayer must be at the centre. This is our distinctive. All decisions made by the Boiler Room community should be in its context, brought under its scrutiny, and when God tells us to go out and do something, this should never be at the expense of bringing ourselves before him again in prayer. Without this, it is extremely unlikely that God would have driven us forward with the amazing power that he has done.

If there is any doubt about this area of our calling, we need only to look at the testimonies of 24-7, and the Boiler Rooms⁷. As we cry out to Him, God is answering our prayers. And after a period of phenomenal expansion, still the movement grows. First and foremost, it's all about our relationship with Him. All things stem from this. As the Abbess of the Manchester Boiler Room, Oria Dale wrote in May 2003,

"Intimacy has to come first... and it has to come from God alone. Nothing else is as pure or runs as deep. It can't come from a relationship or a marriage or a friendship... but only from the one who created it Himself and longs to share it with us in a way that only a few ever really dream about and ask for... but all are made for."⁸

As in each of the six values, Christ is our model. He always sought the inspiration of His Father. Fasting and praying in the wilderness (Matthew 4), removing himself to quiet places to pray (Matthew 14:23), and always doing only what He saw the Father doing (John 5:19), are all examples of how Jesus' life was infused in prayer.

We also see the importance the early apostles placed on prayer. Many times in the New Testament we are urged to have this at the forefront of our minds:

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

[Eph 6:18]

A part of prayer that will become quickly apparent in any place trying to achieve 24-hour prayer will be sacrifice. We are called to this sacrifice, if we are serious about God's purposes being achieved in the things we are praying for.

*I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem;
they will never be silent day or night.
You who call on the LORD,
give yourselves no rest,
and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem
and makes her the praise of the earth.*

[Isaiah 62:6-7]

God loves to see us getting really serious about the things that we're asking Him for. He eagerly desires to answer bold, persistent prayer. Jesus himself told us to pray this way in the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18). The early church placed a high emphasis on prayer, and the results were miracles, salvation and a church fellowship with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2).

The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we become like him, and the more we move in His power. This doesn't mean that we should spend all of our time praying and doing nothing else. There needs to be balance. In the busy-ness of modern daily living though, we are more prone to being too busy to be any heavenly use, rather than being too prayerful to be any earthly use.

Many people will question the need to come to a Boiler Room to pray at all. Of course, there is no need, but there is a benefit. How easily do we get distracted with the everyday clutter of our lives when we try to pray in our homes? An hour or more in a Boiler Room helps to establish space for our union with the triune God, and often we find that prayer in the home is less easily sidetracked when we have undergone the mental and physical training of prayer in a Boiler Room. We are called to a level of sacrifice that means that we need to pray when we would rather be doing something else. Boiler Rooms can give us a level of focus on prayer which is unusual in the world of today, and God is ready and waiting to astound us in the way that He will respond to our time with Him.

As well as cultivating the habit of coming to a Boiler Room to have a focussed time of prayer, also get into the habit of infusing every moment of your life in the power of prayer to Jesus.

As Richard Foster comments in 'Streams of Living Water', we would do well to learn from Frank C. Laubach, who knew the desire to pray so strongly that he was constantly experimenting with it. He prayed

'flash prayers' as experiments to see what God would do with brief and immediate intercession for situations going on around him, and devised what he called his "Game of Minutes" to see if he could form the habit of having God in mind each waking minute⁹.

There are also many historical examples of life infused with prayer. Celtic spirituality is littered with prayers for kindling the fire, the family meal, and many other aspects of everyday living. Prayer was to the Celts something that flowed naturally in every area of their activity.

So how does all this work in the Boiler Room setting? Prayer for a Boiler Room isn't just about kneeling in silence before God - although that is a part of the equation.

God has made us to be creative, and we should use that creativeness in pouring out our hearts to Him. We believe that it is valid to express our desires to God through pictures, through poetry, through prose. A silent prayer is heard only by God. A spoken prayer may be heard by a few others and used by God to encourage or build faith. Written prayers can encourage others through the generations!

We want to be real with God too. Sometimes its good to pray in silence. But at other times, it may be appropriate to speak out prayer, or possibly even to shout, if that is our hearts cry to our Father. Sit, stand, kneel, dance - its all part of our prayer if our hearts are focussed on interacting with Him. Its great to use different languages too. One of the wonderful privileges of being part of an international movement is hearing heartfelt prayer in English, Swedish, Spanish and German mixing with prayers in each nations native tongue. Our God is Lord of all tongues!

Think about fasting too. Firstly, we must recognise that we are not commanded to fast. We are, however, free to fast as part of a disciplined lifestyle. There are many Biblical and historical examples of world changing events based upon the sacrificial outpouring of prayer and fasting. Several times in the Old Testament disaster was averted for the people of Israel, through prayer and fasting. There have also been many examples of prayer changing the course of history since the times of the Gospels¹⁰. If you are serious about seeing situations change, and your usual prayers do not seem to have effect, it may be time to fast. With disciplines such as fasting, we must always seek to discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to us at any given time. Sometimes you may feel called to fast purely to show your total reliance on God, and out of a desire to be closer to Him.

As with all other areas of Boiler Room life, the practice of fasting must never turn into legalism. Nor must it be a tool to try to manipulate the Lord into doing what we want. It is, however, often a tool that complements our prayer.

Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish. [Ester 4:16]

There is a good resource for those interested in the theology and practicalities of fasting on the Call England website".

We can only guess the effect of pouring out prayer to our Heavenly Father, 24-7. To try to do so is a lofty aim. Many will have the scars of trying to fill a 24-7 prayer rota for one or two weeks, let alone for a whole year.

Over our time running a Boiler Room, God has called us to be sacrificial in the amount of time we spend before Him in prayer. But we can only fulfil what we are resourced by Him to do. He knows our hearts. When we hear stories such as the amazing 24-7 prayer movement started by Zinzendorf with just 48 people, we can easily become disillusioned about our inability to fill prayer slots with many more people on our list of prayers. We live in different times, however, and it is not so easy to get busy 21st Century Christians to make such a commitment. The desire behind a Boiler Room is to cover as many slots in every 24 hour period as possible, but not to make ourselves ill, or to neglect jobs or friends or family as a result of spending too much time in the prayer room. We need to call on Jesus for the people He wants to come to pray to be released to do so, and not feel guilty about slots that remain unfilled when we have tried our best to fill them.

Boiler Rooms are places that enable us to train our minds and hearts into these patterns of prayer.



creativity

God is our creator. God made us in His image and likeness. Therefore we are creators...the joy of creativeness should be ours¹².

As with all 24-7 Prayer rooms, Boiler Rooms encourage a creative outpouring of our petitions to Him. The Holy Spirit is intensely creative, and it is our desire to see Him within us releasing our heart cries through art, poetry, prose, song, and silent meditation.

Our Father calls us to be creative in our worship of Him. The first person to be described as 'filled with the spirit of God' was specifically given this gift for the purpose of making a place fit for the worship of Him.

Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts- to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. [Exodus 31:1-5]

Boiler Rooms are places where we can experiment in prayer. It may be that we come from a lively church where we are familiar with speaking out our prayers whilst moving around the room. Be still, and know that He is God. We may be familiar with a more contemplative or meditative approach. Speak or sing out your praise to the one you know as Saviour and King.

Try something new. Jesus may surprise you!

When you find you are in a time where it is difficult to pray, try writing down or drawing your prayer. See how God speaks to you as you pour your petition out to Him in this way. You may find that God is giving you a particular word or phrase over and over. Write it on a wall or on a piece of paper where other people can see it. You never know how the Spirit will use it another person's life, or perhaps even your own, when your eyes catch sight of it again a few days or weeks later.

Be sensitive to those around you, and the surroundings that the Boiler Room provides. Boiler Rooms invite prayers from all denominational backgrounds, and your freedom in the Spirit may become a burden to someone of a more contemplative nature. See how God ministers to you, as you prefer the needs of others.



Justice

With all of our prayer, we will be spurred into action as Christ calls us to be the answer to many of our own petitions. It is important that this does not become our primary driver, as we will be worn out by the cares of this world if we do not keep coming back to Him - our action must be birthed through our prayers.

We must follow Christ in the rhythm of His own life, the rhythm of prayer and action. What is needed in our days is to retire to solitude and silence, to hear the voice of God, to glorify Him and pray to Him, and then return to a world that desperately needs to see Him. Tragically the West keeps pushing this aside and saying, 'Yes, this is basically true - but lets get down to action!'¹³

The Boiler Room Rule calls us to a balanced lifestyle of prayer and action. We seek not to distil this into a common rule for all, but encourage individuals to seek the correct balance for themselves. Only the Holy Spirit can convict each of us of an appropriate direction for us personally. Pray regularly that God would give you His heart for the situations that you are interceding for, and be open to the fact that you may be the answer to your own prayer.

Jesus only did what he saw His Father doing¹⁴. For each of us, the outworking of the Father's desire for His justice through us will be very different. We may follow the path of Anthony of Egypt, who cast aside all earthly concerns to wrestle with both God, and the Devil, in desert solitude for twenty years, before God propelled Him into an amazing ministry¹⁵, or the path of John Woolman, who from a young age was a radical activist against racism, consumerism and militarism¹⁶. Boiler Rooms welcome both of these walks, radical contemplative or radical activist, with no judgement, recognising them both as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Although intimacy with our Father through prayer must always be our starting point, action is at times a substitute for prayer itself. St Cuthbert, Bishop of Lindisfarne in the 7th Century, was obviously familiar with this concept, holding that

"To give the weak brethren help and advice was a fit substitute for prayer, for he knew that He who said, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God', also said 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour'."¹⁷

Our home towns and villages are filled with opportunities to engage in social justice. Ask the Lord to show you what He would have you put your hands to. It may be something as simple as making time to talk with your lonely next-door neighbour. You may feel challenged to get involved with those who are materially poor, or those who live their lives outside the cultural 'norm'. It may be that God would have you put your gifts to bear with organisations such as Speak¹⁸ or Amnesty International¹⁹, raising the profile of injustices locally and internationally. The vital thing is to seek Him for the way forward. Bear in mind your passions in this area - they are very often God given!

Although there is no common amount of time that each of us should spend on this area of the rule, the Boiler Room Rule does call us to a balance. Try as a minimum to consciously put aside one hour in every seven that you would sign up for a prayer slot, for getting involved in bringing kingdom justice to the situations around you.



Community

As part of a Boiler Room way of life, we are called to sacrificial relationships, growing together in Christ through the community of prayer. We are called to intentional community²⁰.

This level of relationship is costly. It will involve sacrificial ‘bearing with each other’²¹. It will involve maintaining relationships when you would rather give up. Where our culture calls us to make and break friendships as is convenient to us, we are to prefer each other out of reverence to Christ.

To confess our commitment to community means to confess our commitment to mutual subordination²².

The Boiler Room Rule calls us to move in unity. To come into a Boiler Room just to pray once a week is not to engage with the wider flow of people that God is bringing through, not to see and hear what He is doing in the lives of others – both the good stories and the tales of sorrow.

To see just a microscopic amount of what Jesus is doing in and through a Boiler Room, spend time talking with those who are not engaged in prayer. Understand different points of view and share your own. Agree to disagree, and be open to challenge.

There may be people living on the site of the Boiler Room you go to. Spend time sharing testimony of what Jesus is doing in your life and the lives of those around you. There will likely be people for whom the Boiler Room provides an extended family. Get to know those from other churches, other denominations, and those who come into the Boiler Room who are not Christians. Share your time with those around you in the context of a house of prayer, and see what God will build²³.



Pilgrimage

"I am going to my Father's; and though with great difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. My sword I give to him that shall succeed me in my pilgrimage; and my courage and skill to him that can get it. My marks and scars I carry with me, to be a witness for me that I have fought his battles who now will be my Rewarder."²⁴

We are all on pilgrimage to a greater or lesser extent, whether we are aware of it or not. Our very life in following our saviour Jesus Christ, involves a journey with Him that we will not complete until we see Him in glory. And even this results in another journey with Him through eternity.

Most definitions of pilgrimage centre on the concept of a journey to a place of religious significance. The Boiler Room Rule places the definition wider than that. To be on pilgrimage is to set aside time to search for God through journeying to a place where we are going specifically to seek Him. It is not only in the destination that we find God's own agenda for our journeying, but also in the journey itself - through the places we see, the people we meet, and through the simple fact that we are on a journey.

There are many ways in which we can experience both the joy and the challenge of pilgrimage for ourselves. It is good to start in small ways, and to increase our journeying with God in this way as we progress.

As we journey with Christ, we yearn for a greater knowledge of our saviour. Paradoxically, as this yearning grows, we desire even more, and this desire often leads us to pilgrimage. It is often on pilgrimage that we encounter those whose perspective on Jesus challenges ours, it is often on pilgrimage that we encounter 'thin-places' where heaven and earth seem to be so close that we can hardly distinguish the difference, it is often on pilgrimage where we can experience the nurture of those that God puts in our way, just when we most need it.

The Boiler Room Rule encourages the seeking of these experiences by setting time aside to go on pilgrimage at least once a year.

Pilgrimage can take many forms. It might be a journey to a place that has special personal significance (e.g. where we grew up), a place of historical importance (e.g. Iona or Lindisfarne, centres of the early church in the UK, Herrnhutt, the centre of Count Zinzendorf's Moravian Community, or even the Holy Land), a church or cathedral, or perhaps just visiting friends (with the focus of particularly seeking the Lord during your time with them).

*"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."²⁵*

As well as being called to pilgrimage ourselves, we are called to serve those on pilgrimage. As our understanding develops of both the cost and the elation of the pilgrims walk in our own lives, we seek to benefit other pilgrims through that understanding.

Boiler Rooms are places where Pilgrims are welcome. Places where people can come and see what God is doing in a particular location, and to hear Him speaking through that. Places where pilgrims can join with the Holy Spirit and the local Boiler Room team in releasing the kingdom there. A place where we meet Him in the familiar, and in the very unfamiliar. A place to get away from the concerns of our everyday lives, and to seek Him in quietness, or in the hustle and bustle of a different set of broken and hurting people made in His image.

The Boiler Room Rule calls us to welcome pilgrims in sacrificial service. As the rule of Saint Benedict states, adopting an earlier principle not unfamiliar to the Desert Fathers²⁶:

All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matthew 25:35). Proper honour must be shown to all, especially those who share our faith (Galatians 6:10) and to pilgrims²⁷.



ission

It is almost impossible to be praying 24hrs a day and not discover some of God's heart for the lost. Boiler Rooms are places that are welcoming to those who do not yet know Jesus. It might be people coming in off the streets that are just curious, or possibly even people who come into the Boiler Room regularly because they find it a place of peace and rest - they may even sense 'a presence' that they do not attribute to the Lord our God, but that they know is different.

This value is a very important part of the Boiler Room Rule, but possibly one of the hardest. How do you mix a prayer room with those who do not necessarily respect that that is what a Boiler Room is primarily about? This is not an easy calling, but one that is crucial to the Boiler Room distinctive.

Prayer in a Boiler Room serves many purposes, but one item is very high on the list of priorities - to see the kingdom of God extended here on earth. One of the most radical ways that this can happen is when passionate, costly prayer is fuelled and necessitated due to relationship with those who are in the most desperate need of the love of our God and Saviour. Those filled with the passion and fire of the Holy Spirit meet those who can only be truly loved through the radically transformed body of Jesus Christ.

We cannot and must not ignore Jesus' great commission:

*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
[Matthew 28:18-20]*

Lets face it; there will be few of us who will ever have the power of one of the great evangelists. But so many of us use that as an excuse not to bother. We need to know that we are the bearers of the greatest gift that has ever been given to humankind. We need to understand what it means for people to die without the

knowledge of Jesus Christ. We need to passionately and humbly share the good news that Jesus Christ is alive and wanting us to live life in Him to the full.

We often don't take Jesus' great commission seriously. But there are serious consequences.

*If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.
[Luke 9:26]*

This sounds incredibly intimidating. But it is often not as scary as it sounds. So many people long to hear something concrete in a world that has lost respect for truth. So many people long for something more than the seemingly meaningless lives they lead. We can share our faith naturally, in the pub, out clubbing, on the train, everywhere.

This does not mean that sharing our faith will not be costly. Some are called to pay the ultimate price, sacrificing their lives for the faith. For most of us, however, that will not be the case, but we may well face ridicule and exclusion. Jesus knows exactly what we are feeling in these situations - He was subjected to all these things on the way to the cross, and He endured them for the sake of reconciling us to the Father. We must maintain our focus on eternity, and bring everything else under its subordination.

Boiler Rooms are places where we have opportunities to share our faith. For some reason, people who do not know Jesus, even those who know absolutely nothing about Him, are drawn into a place that has been infused with prayer. The effect is often dramatic. Many times words are not needed due to the 'thickness' of the presence of God in the place of prayer, bringing those who do not yet know Him to their knees.

But sometimes people enter the Boiler Room who are just searching, or just seeking a place of peace in the midst of a chaotic life. In serving this need, we can all play a part in the missionary activity of the Boiler Room. Many such visitors just want someone to talk to about the deep things of life. Someone to be honest with them about where they are at in their faith, saying that they don't know the answers to questions they don't know the answer to, rather than being given some bland, rehearsed answer. An island of truth in a sea of post-modernity.

Mission within the confines of the Boiler Room building is not the only aim of this value. Immersion in the other values should also lead

to a thirst to share the love of God with our friends, family, and our school or work colleagues. Thinking further a field, individuals may be called to pray and to work with particular people groups or nations. Boiler Rooms are places where our desire for these people can be shared and offered up in prayer, and where groups can come together to pray for Jesus to reveal himself to a particular individual or group.

All of this having been said, it's not enough just to talk about Jesus. We have to live like Him, we need to bleed his light into any and every situation. We cannot do this in our own strength, but thankfully, by His grace and the Holy Spirit, we can be what God wants us to be, wherever He positions us. We can truly lead lives in tune with the resonant frequency of the universe.

The Boiler Room Rule

A commitment to pattern of living

Continuous Prayer

Consciously dedicate yourself to this activity, knowing that it must underpin all of the other values in the rule. Be persistent and disciplined, using Christ and the Apostles as your model.

- ❖ Decide how many hours you want to specifically dedicate to prayer each week.
- ❖ Spend at least one hour just listening to God, coming with no other agenda than to spend time with your Father.
- ❖ Spend at least one hour praying for the issues that you desperately want to see Jesus break through in.
- ❖ Think about getting into a pattern of fasting. If the Holy Spirit is leading you this way, make the sacrifices that you need to make sure you do it.

Creativity

Express prayer and worship to the Lord in creativity. The Lord has made each of us creative in different ways as a reflection of His character. Even if you do not think you are creative, explore your God given gifts and see where the Holy Spirit takes them. Set aside time each month in which you will praise God in this way.

Pilgrimage

Go on a journey of Pilgrimage at least once a year, looking to meet the Living Christ in the journey and the destination. Make every effort to host pilgrims if you are in a situation to be able to. Live a life of constant journeying with Jesus, and expect Him to meet you as you move about His world.

Community

Find ways to serve the community of people who are involved with the Boiler Room in one way or another. Commit yourself to the community in good times and bad, not walking away from relationships when they become difficult. Be sacrificial with your time. Challenge yourself about how you use your time. Give it to others without thought of reward. Share your life with others, and give them time to share theirs with you. Set aside some time each month for this aspect of the rule.

Justice

Involve yourself with the issues that God places on your heart for your neighbour, be it someone in your street, your town, or in another country. Resolve to commit yourself to an amount of time each month that you will engage with the Holy Spirit in bringing justice into a situation that needs Jesus touch.

Mission

Share your faith with those around you. You don't need to be a great evangelist to share the Good News with your friends when you're meeting with them. Ask Jesus for opportunities to talk with people, and step out in faith when they arrive. Pray about involvement in mission teams. Consider mission from the perspective of Jesus returning to this world tomorrow.

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Make yourself accountable to someone who knows the commitment you have made to the Boiler Room Rule. Having made decisions prayerfully about how you are going to live out each of the six values, work out how you are going to stick to them. Regularly discuss how you're getting on with your friend.

Spend at least one hour engaged in activities associated with the values of Community, Justice and Mission, for every six hours of Prayer and Creativity.



ustomary

Monastic institutions have, in past times, found it useful to add a 'customary' to their rule. The purpose of a customary is to document the practical details of how a particular monastic institution is run. This concept is helpful here in distinguishing some of the experiences of running a Boiler Room from the core values. The values may be worked out in many different ways, and the information provided here in the customary is intended to provide suggestions or frameworks for running a Boiler Room, in addition to the fundamental core values that are central to any Boiler Room, which are included within the rule itself.

This customary is by no means exhaustive, and will almost certainly develop through time, as God leads us on in understanding His vision for Boiler Rooms.



Layout

There are so many ways that it is possible to live out the vision of a Boiler Room, and almost as many ways that a Boiler Room can be physically laid out. The diagram used for expressing the components of the Boiler Room, with continuous prayer as the hub, is a good place to start a discussion of what a Boiler Room might look like if one was to be built from scratch.

As prayer is at the centre of what Boiler Rooms stand for, so it must be the central focus of the Boiler Room building. The other five values extend out from this hub, and each Boiler Room building should be configured such that it mirrors the heart of the Boiler Room Rule. Such a building gives priority to the space allocated for prayer, and provides areas for all of the other activities as appropriate. The figure below sets out one way in which a purpose-built Boiler Room might be physically laid out. This is included here to provide a focus for a discussion on the practical issues associated with each area of the Boiler Rooms purpose. Although such a building has not been built to date, each Boiler Room team needs to consider the points that follow, to fully enable each aspect of the rule to flourish in a given location.

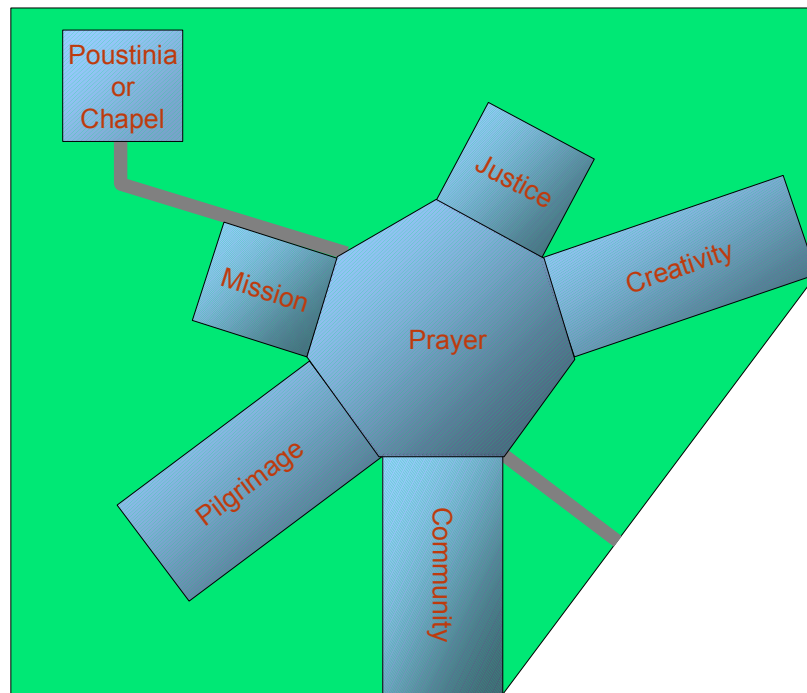


Figure 1 - The ideal Boiler Room?

The location of the main prayer area at the centre of the building is very deliberate. Every aspect of Boiler Room life is constantly confronted with the main reason for its existence - communion with God. Many may find that they are uncomfortable with the idea of others moving between sections of the building through the prayer area, whilst they are praying. This confrontation of activity with the spiritual is, however, a direct aim of the design of the Boiler Room. Christians and non-Christians alike are constantly reminded of the presence of their creator in every aspect of life. The prayer matures in love, patience and humility as others move around them. The person on their way through the room is challenged by the sanctity of a room dedicated to the desire to come closer into the presence of God. There are, of course, practical considerations here. Concerted efforts must be undertaken by those running the Boiler Room, to ensure that the prayer room is respected by those moving through it. If any music is being played, those praying should choose it, and there must be a degree of sound insulation between the community area and the main prayer area.

There will also be times when individuals need to be alone with their Father. For this reason, an area should be set aside for quiet reflection; hence the 'poustinia'²⁸ or chapel, set-aside from the rest of the building in Figure 1. In any Boiler Room location, if it is not practical for such a space to be physically separate from the rest of the building, the chapel should be in a part of the building that is subject to as little disturbance as possible. The purpose of this

place is reflected in a sparse or simple décor, to enhance the pray-er's focus on nothing but placing themselves before the Lord.

The area for creativity should be an area with plenty of light, and lots of space to enable Boiler Room visitors to worship God through artistic expression. Whilst this area is primarily associated with paintings, collages and possibly even sculpture, the creative area should also be a place where a writer would be at home. Much of the creative outpouring of Boiler Room prayer will come through written prayer and prose.

Justice and Mission are two of the Boiler Room values that can be run in little or no space, but to give them equal priority to the other areas of activity, it is ideal if space can be allocated to them to provide the necessary focus on these values. Displays and collages on Justice and Mission themes, together with the usual space for people to express their prayers through creative means, help to raise the profile of Justice and Mission issues amongst all those who visit the Boiler Room. These areas also provide a focal point for those people coming to the Boiler Room who have a particular passion or burden to pray for Justice or Mission related topics.

The presence of a community of praying people will often result in those who do not yet know Jesus being drawn to the building, and a strong desire to reach out to the community within which the Boiler Room is located. Again, whilst this does not necessitate allocation of space set aside for the activity of Mission, it is wonderful to be able to do so, such that the other activities of Boiler Room life can continue unhindered. This may result in prayer for mission happening in the area of the Boiler Room allocated for that purpose, for example, in a Nations prayer room or area. Non-Christians coming into the building being welcomed into the community area, or possibly the prayer area, depending on the activity concerned.

Community is fostered through meeting together and sharing with each other. A Boiler Room needs to set aside space for this as a priority. The ability to provide hospitality through the simple acts of providing a drink and a friendly person to talk to, are key to the Boiler Rooms aspiration to be Jesus to those visiting, Christian and non-Christian alike. A relaxing environment with plenty of comfortable seating is obviously helpful. This is the area within the building where people are able to talk freely, not worrying too much about whether or not they are disturbing someone who is praying. Also, if there are any events run by the Boiler Room, this can be an ideal place. If connection to the internet is also perceived as worthwhile, internet terminals can be placed here, for prayer research, checking e-mail, or just surfing the web.

Pilgrimage is another Boiler Room value that requires space. The ideal is for persons visiting the Boiler Room to be a part of the community while they are staying. To this end, the Boiler Room should ideally have separate sleeping and kitchen areas for pilgrim usage. If possible, there should also be space for pilgrims to have their own communal area, separate from the main Boiler Room area, so that they can relax away from the day-to-day bustle of the building.

This section of the rule has so far focussed on a Boiler Room building. Finding the resources to set up and run such a location may not be what God is calling you to in your particular area. There are many other ways that people who share the values of the Boiler Room can follow a pattern of life around prayer, creativity, justice, mission, community and pilgrimage.

The key to a more 'virtual' Boiler Room, based around the six values but not centred on a particular building, is prayer. A group of people committed to meeting together to pray for themselves, their friends, their communities and the world are able to form the core at the centre of a community living out the Boiler Room Rule. This could be done with or without a central place to meet, although this would obviously be a good focus for the group. The other areas of the rule could then be worked out in many different ways. The group could welcome pilgrims into their homes or the homes of friends nearby. Creativity could occur through the times of group prayer, through worship together, or through individual acts of creativity before God, consciously done as a part of the commitment to this element of the Rule. Lives focussed on living out the justice and mission values, again through individual acts or through activities organised by the group, could outwork this area of the Boiler Room values without having to have a building dedicated to these activities. Finally, a commitment to each other completes the list with the final value, community. Why is this different to any other Christian community? As a commentator on the Rule of Saint Benedict states, "a rule regulates the lives of those who obey it." Any community living the Boiler Room rule will be committed to living lives under the authority of scripture, and lives regulated by adherence to the rule. This works for a community based around a physical Boiler Room, or a virtual one.



Practicalities of the Prayer Room

If any Boiler Room is established in a building where the community area and the prayer area are in close proximity, there will be issues of noise. Each Boiler Room team will, therefore, have to come up with a way of balancing the desire for intimate prayer with the desire to be as welcoming as possible to those who might not appreciate that some people find it very difficult to pray in noisy environments. As the Boiler Room Rule states, mixing prayer and the other values, particularly mission, is a hard calling, but an essential part of the Boiler Room distinctive.

There are several ways that this issue can be dealt with. Firstly, one of the easiest ways is to have days when the Boiler Room is open only to those coming in to pray. If the team is really serious about the call to prayer, at least one day should be set aside like this. The pattern of opening needs to be very well publicised, both to those who use the Boiler Room for prayer, and those who like to just drop into the building, Christian or not.

Another way to manage the issue, that also helps with the day to day management of the building and the amount of people required to do this, is to have specific times in which people can just drop in. A pattern of daily opening from 10:00 - 17:00 became the pattern at the Reading Boiler Room to begin with; although due to a desire to set more time aside for focussed prayer, the opening hours were reduced to 12:00 - 17:00.

A particularly positive way of handling the issue, that can be used in addition to the other two options mentioned above, is to have times during the day where specific activities effect all who are using the building at that time. For example, there may be a desire to have one or more daily offices (e.g. Evening Prayer) during the day²⁹. At pre-defined times, the expectation can be set that the whole building is to be silent, except for those involved in the office itself. There are many advantages to this. For those working at the Boiler Room, the focus of laying down whatever work was being done at that point, however busy the individual might be, to make time to be before God, has a deep effect on the individuals perspective. Suddenly everything that previously seemed so important pales into insignificance compared to the joy of spending time with Jesus and letting Him set the pace. There is also a distinct advantage of this practice for the wider Boiler Room community. Others who are

available at that time during the day may wish to join in with the offices whenever they can. As for the non-Christians who may frequent the Boiler Room, they see the Christians in the building making time to focus single-mindedly on God, and can join in with the office if they like. If not, as they sit in silence whilst the building is quiet, they can hear those involved in the office praising and praying, and this can have a profound effect, especially if the Holy Spirit gets involved!



rganisation

A Boiler Room takes a considerable amount of time and effort to run. To enable it to work effectively, a management team should be formed. The team will consist of people committed to the vision (although not necessarily living to the Boiler Room Rule), and with a mix of different skills and passions. Representation from different church streams is also helpful; the Boiler Room should be welcoming to people from different spiritual heritages, and for this truly to be the case, the team should model interdenominationalism.

Each Boiler Room should have a leader, the 'Obbot', who is elected by the management team. They will be a mature Christian, proven in leadership, and will be expected to live according to the Boiler Room Rule. Their main tasks will be to oversee the running of the Boiler Room, to ensure adherence to the six values, and to serve both the management team and visitors to the Boiler Room diligently and faithfully. As with all Christian leaders, they should display, and will be called to, a high level of personal holiness.

The overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. [1 Timothy 3:2-7]

The management team must serve the Abbot in obedience and humility. As a group they will be committed to each other, seeking to serve rather than to be served. They will be a support to each other in any delegated responsibility that they are given by the Abbot, seeking to increase the display of the kingdom of God through the tasks that are allocated to them on the team. The management team will meet regularly to discuss the running of the Boiler Room and to make decisions on direction, as well as sharing what God is doing in all areas of the Boiler Room's activity. The management team will also meet regularly to pray as a group.

The Abbot of the Boiler Room will be responsible for the link with 24-7prayer, and will come under their authority. The Abbot will also be responsible for setting up a local Steering Group, separate to the management team, made up of respected senior members of the Christian Community, including representation from 24-7prayer as appropriate. The Steering group's role is to oversee Boiler Room activity in the context of the community in which it operates, and to ensure unity with the wider church.

Each Boiler Room contributes a tithe of its income to 24-7prayer.



Pilgrimage

There are, of course, many practical considerations to bear in mind when welcoming pilgrims to a Boiler Room. A Boiler Room should provide pilgrims with:

- ❖ Hospitality in every way it can
- ❖ A place to pray, relax, recharge, and experience the presence of God
- ❖ Chance to join in with the activities of the team whilst they are there

In return, there are a number of expectations that should be set with would-be pilgrims before they arrive:

- ❖ That they are under the authority of Boiler Room staff whilst on the premises
- ❖ That they should have an attitude of serving the vision of the Boiler Room, not pushing personal ministries or objectives

- ❖ That they should not minister or counsel others whilst in the Boiler Room, or externally to the Boiler Room through contacts made whilst staying there. All ministry or counselling issues should be raised to the Boiler Room staff to deal with as required

These expectations are important to maintain the smooth running of any Boiler Room welcoming pilgrims.

Endnotes

¹ The following links are useful for those exploring the ideas within the Boiler Room Rule:

The Northumbria Community	www.northumbriacommunity.org
Community of Aidan and Hilda	www.aidan.org.uk
The Lindisfarne Community	people.clarityconnect.com/webpages/icm
Vineyard Community Houses	www.vineyardusa.org/publications/newsletters/cutting_edge/2001_fall/community_house.htm

² For more information on 24-7prayer, see www.24-7prayer.com.

³ St. Stephen of Muret, quoted in CH Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (3rd Ed.), Longman p293

⁴ Escher de Waal, *A Life Giving Way: A Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict*, Mowbray, Chapter 5.

⁵ *The Rule of St Benedict*. Chapter 48.

⁶ *The Rule of St Benedict*. 48:8. See also Acts 20:34.

⁷ www.24-7prayer.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=testimony&file=index.

⁸ www.boiler-rooms.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=news&file=newspop&arearef=ALL&id=81

⁹ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, Chapter 2 - The Contemplative Tradition, Seeking a Contemporary Paradigm

¹⁰ Shaping world history through prayer and fasting,

¹¹ www.thecallengland.com/prayer-fasting.html

¹² Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, Chapter 5 - The Social Justice Tradition, Seeking a Contemporary Paradigm, quoting Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness*, p. 227

¹³ Inspired by and adapted from Northumbria Community, *Celtic Daily Prayer*, Finian Reading for Dec 26th, quoting Catherine de Hueck Doherty, 'Poustinia'

¹⁴ The Bible, John 5:19

¹⁵ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, Chapter 2 - The Contemplative Tradition, Seeking a Historical Paradigm

¹⁶ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, Chapter 5 - The Social Justice Tradition, Seeking a Historical Paradigm

¹⁷ Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Oxford, Chapter 28, p227

¹⁸ www.speak.org.uk

¹⁹ www.amnesty.org

²⁰ An intentional community is a group of people who have chosen to live together (in a locality) with a common purpose, working cooperatively to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared core values. See www.ic.org/pnp/cdir/1995/Ilkozeny.html, and www.plowcreek.org/brochure.htm for examples.

²¹ The Bible, Ephesians 4:1-3

²² Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Hodder & Stoughton, Chapter 8, *The Discipline of Submission*, page 155.

²³ For further reading on Community, I highly recommend Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Darton, Longman and Todd.

²⁴ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrims Progress*, Part II, Eighth Stage, *Through the River One by One*.

www.whatsaiththescripture.com/Stories/Bunyan.Pilgrims.Progress.html

²⁵ T. S. Eliot, from *Four Quartets*, final section

²⁶ CH Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* (3rd Ed.), Longman, Chapter 1, particularly pp 7-10.

²⁷ Escher de Waal, *A Life Giving Way: A Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict*, Mowbray, Chapter 53, page 153.

²⁸ Catherine Ooherty, *Madonna House Publications, Poustinia - Encountering God in Silence, Solitude and Prayer*.

²⁹ At the Reading Boiler Room we have used *Celtic Daily Prayer, The Northumbria Community*, Harper Collins.

If you find this resource useful, and wish to use it regularly, please make a donation.

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Thank You