



Going Deeper: Prayer

Introduction:

Jesus invites us into a life of prayer. In our times of prayer we talk to God and He talks to us. As we spend time in prayer, our relationship with him is strengthened.

Prayer In The Life of Jesus:

Jesus modeled for us a life that was strengthened in prayer. Here are some of the many examples of Jesus praying:

- Jesus would often withdraw to lonely places to pray (Luke 5.16)
- Jesus spent the night in prayer before selecting the 12 Apostles (Luke 6.12)
- Jesus's miracles were marked by prayer (Matthew 14.23).
- Jesus's prayer life was so vibrant that his disciples, who grew up in a culture of prayer, asked him to teach them the way that Jesus prayed (Luke 11.1).
- Jesus prayed before his crucifixion (John 17).

Jesus calls his disciples into a rich life of prayer:

Following Jesus lead, his disciples were called into a rich life of prayer that included both prayer made up of talking to God, and prayer made up of hearing from God, which we call listening prayer.

Jesus called his disciples to talk to God in prayer:

John 14.13-14 And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Luke 18.1-8 Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up....

Jesus called his disciples to hear from God in prayer:

John 10.2-4 The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

John 14.26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 16.12-15 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you."

Each of these verses highlights that God wants speak, lead, guide and teach his people through His Spirit by his voice. Thus, one important aspect of prayer is learning to discern the voice of God and listening to him. We call this aspect of prayer listening prayer.

Examples From Church History:

George Washington Carver was born in the 1840's in the American South. He was born in an age where many were sharecroppers and were trapped in cycles of generational poverty. The overproduction of cotton had changed the soil, the economy had shifted and social and political structures made it incredibly difficult to make a living as a share cropper.

Carver loved Jesus and was gifted in science. He was so good at science that Thomas Edison (the light bulb inventor) had tried to hire Carver for the equivalent salary of a million dollars a year.

But Carver knew that God had a different calling for him. Carver had a burden to help the sharecroppers develop alternate products that could help them break cycles of poverty. To pursue this calling Carver turned to prayer and hard work. He would regularly have quiet times in the early morning hours roaming through the woods by his house. As he walked, he prayed, "God show me the secrets of the universe, so that I might be able to harvest them and bring them to people that their lives might be changed."

And from that place of prayer, he would go and work hard studying, experimenting and creating.

One day, in his quiet time, he sensed the Holy Spirit speak back to him saying, "You can not handle the secrets of the universe, but I will give you the secrets of the peanut." And from this place of prayer, Carver began to focus on harvesting the power of the peanut. He saw that the peanut could be grown in the soil of the American south, and he began to create products that generated demand for peanuts. He developed approximately 300 products that generated demand for peanuts. Then he equipped the farmers to grow the peanuts so that they could profit from the crop.

And all of this came out of the place of prayer and a word from the Holy Spirit.

Putting It Into Practice:

Here are some ways to go deeper in prayer:

Going Deeper In Prayer Through Talking To God:

Foundations: Praying The Lord's Prayer

Jesus taught his disciples to pray using what we call today the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is found in Matthew 6.9-13. A foundational way to deeper in prayer is by using the Lord's Prayer as a guide to shape your prayers.

A wonderful book to accompany this foundational activity is Pete Grieg's How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People.

Building Upon The Foundation: Praying The Scriptures

The Scriptures record many prayers of God's people that both serve as a model and a map for going deeper in prayer.

Many of these prayers serve as a model in that they are prayers we can follow in prayer and have confidence we are praying in line with God's will. These prayers are commonly referred to as Apostolic Prayers, as they are prayers recorded by the Apostles in Scripture. Here are a list of Apostolic prayers you can use:

- Ephesians 1.17-19
- Ephesians 3.16-19
- Philippians 1.9-11
- Colossians 1.9-12
- Colossians 4.2-4
- 1 Thessalonians 3.11-13
- 1 Thessalonians 5.23-24
- 2 Thessalonians 1.11-12
- 2 Thessalonians 3.1-5

The Psalms have served the church for generations as a map for going deeper in prayer. These Psalms express the real range of life experience of God's people in the midst of depression, grief, despair, injustice, and suffering as well as in times of joy, hope, victory and peace. These can serve as a map to help us articulate our own feelings and experiences to God with depth, rawness and authenticity.

As you use the Scriptures as a model and a map, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leadership, as He guides your prayers. Romans 8.26 reminds us:

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Going Deeper In Prayer Through Hearing From God:

As with all things with the Lord, prayer is part of a relationship with God and takes time to grow and develop. Learning to hear God's voice is a learning process. As you learn and grow, here are some steps for going deeper.

Foundations For Listening Prayer:

A common question that is asked about listening prayer is "How does the Spirit speak to us when we listen?"

Here are a few examples from Scripture of how the Spirit speaks:

- A Scripture will come to mind (John 14.26)
- An image or scene will come to mind (Acts 2.17-18)

- A word, phrase, or sense will come to mind, like a shepherd's voice to His sheep - (John 10, example: Acts 8.29)

A second common question asked about listening prayer is "How do I know if I am really hearing the Lord's voice?" Here are some litmus tests for discerning the voice of the Lord:

- It will build depth of relationship and love for Jesus (Romans 8.14-16)
- It will align with the teachings of Scripture. (John 16.13)
- It will lead us to character that is more like Jesus. (Galatians 5.22)
- It will reflect the wisdom of of heaven (James 3.13-18)
- It will bring conviction over areas of sin and unbelief, but not create condemnation or shame (Romans 8.1)
- It will bring conviction of sin and unbelief, but not create condemnation or shame (Romans 8.1)
- It will be affirmed by godly community. (1 Thessalonians 5.19-22)

To start practicing with Listening Prayer:

Get a journal and something to write with. Pray

Father, I need to hear your voice and I know you want to speak to me. Would you help me to silence the voices of the world, my flesh and the devil and to be sensitive to the voice of the Holy Spirit today.

Then a journal and write one of the question prompts from below:

- Father God, what do you want to speak to me today?
- What kind of relationship do you want to have with me?
- What do I need to hear right now?
- How do you feel about me?
- What should I do about _____?
- Who is someone you want to encourage today?

Then look within for a spontaneous thought, feeling or mental picture that comes to mind and write that down. Don't feel the need to edit, just write what comes up.

Later, you can go back and review what came up and assess what came up using the rules of thumb above.