

## LESSON 4

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# Nurturing a Passion for Prayer

A passion for prayer is necessary in developing intimacy with God. At the outset of this teaching, we need to establish that the practice of prayer is for the purpose of drawing close to God more than anything else. Desiring closeness to God is where the word *passion* comes in.

Our passion must be directed towards a relationship with God rather than towards the religious practice of prayer. Passion for prayer is more properly termed passion for intimacy with God. Anything less will eventually be misdirected into prideful boasting of how much we pray.

It is also possible to misinterpret a passion for God with materialism. Some people have a greater passion for things than they do for God. Some hope to use prayer as the means to gain material things. Though prayer certainly does help us gain the things we need, our passion must remain directed towards God. If all we pray for are things, then things will be all we get. If indeed we are praying for closeness to God, then we will get intimacy. An intimate relationship with God far outweighs anything else we may acquire through prayer.

This lesson is about nurturing a passion for prayer. King David once said, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Psalm 42:1–2). That is the kind of heart we need to maintain passion for prayer.

## LESSON OUTLINE

The Necessity of Prayer  
The Need for a Clear Conscience  
Hindrances to Prayer  
Prayer Excuses  
Unrecognized Answers  
Hearing God

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you should be able to:

- 1: *Explain why we should pray.*
- 2: *Discuss the role of confession in developing intimacy with God.*
- 3: *Identify distractions that inhibit prayer.*
- 4: *List common excuses we give for not praying.*
- 5: *Explain how to handle what seems like unanswered prayer.*
- 6: *Discuss the role listening has in prayer.*

### The Necessity of Prayer

#### **Objective 1:**

*Explain why we should pray.*

If our ultimate objective is to nurture a passion for prayer, then obviously we must pray. Often the practice of prayer results in a greater desire to pray. However, there is the danger of prayer becoming a religious exercise if a person is not careful. Even though Paul admonishes us to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17), why we pray is just as important as prayer itself.

If we pray from a legalistic perspective, believing that God will hear us because of how much we pray, then we would not be much different from the Pharisees. Jesus was not impressed with the Pharisees who prayed a lot: "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full" (Matthew 6:5). Therefore, we can conclude that it was not just the act of prayer that Jesus was interested in, but rather that which motivates us to pray.

Prayer is all about our relationship with God. Matthew 6:6 states, "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." Certainly, the public prayer meeting has its place and is necessary. However, the public prayer meeting is different from your personal prayer life. It is in the closet of prayer where we get to know God intimately.

It is impossible to develop a meaningful relationship with someone we rarely spend time with. Our relationship with God is subject to similar time investment. We must communicate with Him actively if our relationship is going to progress. Initially, the practice of prayer can be drudgery. However, once the fruit of our relationship with God begins to develop, prayer becomes enjoyable and productive. Thus, prayer is the means of giving birth through the intimacy it develops between Christ and His bride. The kingdom of God grows through such birth.

If a person is truly interested in the life of God, then he or she must pray. Without life we simply have a religious appearance. Religion has no life, merely an outward form. Prayer is the breath of life we need.

## The Need for a Clear Conscience

### *Objective 2:*

*Discuss the role of confession in developing intimacy with God.*

One of the prerequisites for a healthy prayer life is that of understanding one's position with God. Hebrews 4:16 encourages, "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence." When a person is born again, he or she develops confidence to approach God. This confidence is not borne out of arrogance but out of a clear conscience with God. The clear conscience results from right relationship with God, which begins with confession.

Confession is critical in our developing intimacy with God. King David wrote, "Surely you desire truth in the inner parts" (Psalm 51:6). Our heart is our "inner part," or our "innermost being." Monitoring what enters our heart helps us maintain a clear conscience with God. First Timothy 1:19 further encourages us to cling tightly to our faith in Christ and keep our conscience clear. Unfortunately, some people have shipwrecked their faith by deliberately violating their conscience.

When in prayer, it is not uncommon to first spend time in confession. Innately, we understand the need to clear our conscience with our Lord before we can exercise our faith. Confession is the key to faith and a clear conscience. God clears the conscience.

## Hindrances to Prayer

### *Objective 3:*

*Identify distractions that inhibit prayer.*

### Pride

Pride is often the greatest diversion to prayer. King David wrote, "In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God" (Psalm 10:4).

The proud has no time for God and sometimes even looks down on prayer.

Prayer is God-centered, not self-centered. By its very nature of asking, seeking, and knocking, prayer is humbling. When we bow in prayer, we humble ourselves in the presence of God as we seek His help and direction. We also look to Him as the source of life. All of these actions go contrary to human pride. Hence, proud people cannot have intimacy with God until they surrender their wills to Him.

### Impatience

Another hindrance to prayer is impatience while waiting for God to respond. Impatient seekers can perceive prayer as ineffective. Many people who do not understand the power of prayer or the timing of God believe that it is necessary to “do something” if they are going to make a difference. I once heard a preacher ask his congregation to pray about a particular political issue coming up for a vote in congress which could have proved spiritually devastating if it passed. One of his parishioners said to him, “I know you are asking us to pray, but I’m a person of action, I need to actually do something. What else can I do?” He tried to explain to her what God could do if His people prayed sincerely, that even laws could be changed. This woman greatly missed the significance of God’s people bowed in the presence of God and what that can do to change any situation.

Second Chronicles 7:14 states, “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” Praying is one of the most effective things we believers can do. In fact, we cannot do anything else effectively unless we have prayed.

## Prayer Excuses

### *Objective 4:*

*List common excuses we give for not praying.*

Three of the most common excuses people give for not developing intimacy with God through prayer are: they are too tired to pray, are too busy, and do not feel like praying. We shall examine each of these excuses.

### Too tired to pray

Have you ever fallen asleep while praying? It is very common to fall asleep while praying, partially due to the nature of prayer. Prayer is talking to God, and many people like to do that silently. There is absolutely nothing wrong with silent prayer. In fact, Hebrews 4:12 tells us that God knows the thoughts and intents of our heart. Subsequently, God can hear silent prayer as well as vocal prayer. However, when we pray silently, we tend to drift in our thoughts. Wandering thoughts typically end up as dreams.

There are a few things we can do to stay alert in prayer. We can give God the best time of the day. The best time of the day is that segment of the day when we are most effective. Not everybody functions the same way at the same time of the day. Some people are night people, and others are morning people. Typically, the morning people think that praying in the morning is the most spiritual time of the day. However, a person could pray in the afternoon and have an effective spiritual time also. Each person needs to find his or her own best time of the day and use some of that time for prayer.

In Scripture, people prayed at various times of the day and night. Acts 3:1 records that “one day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.” King David prayed often at night: “At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws” (Psalm 119:62). In the book of Proverbs, we read, “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall

find me” (Proverbs 8:17, KJV). Throughout the Scriptures the time of day is less of an issue when it comes to prayer.

Therefore, pray when you can stay focused and alert. If you need to, pray audibly. Some people find it necessary to pace and pray just to stay focused. If you get tired while praying, get a drink of water and then go back to prayer. Any or all of these suggestions will help you have a quality time of seeking God.

### Too busy to pray

Being overwhelmed with life to the point where we feel too busy to do anything extra is not an uncommon feeling. The German church reformer, Martin Luther, was famous for saying that on the days when he absolutely had too much to do, he would spend an extra hour in prayer in order to get it all done. Prayerlessness is the sign that we have come to believe that we—rather than God—are the solution to our problems.

In Matthew 21:13, Jesus said, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers.’” In this statement, Jesus made prayer preeminent. Jesus also made prayer a priority in His life. We should do no less. We will never see the significance of prayer until we prioritize it. The only way to overcome the idea that we are too busy to pray is to see prayer as the only option in our becoming all God wants us to be.

The law of sowing and reaping applies to time also. Often we hear about this principle in regard to our finances. It is not uncommon to hear a teaching on how God will bless and multiply whatever we give to Him. The same is true with time. If we have only ten minutes to spare in our schedule and determine to give that to God in prayer each day, soon we will find that we have twenty, thirty, or forty minutes to give Him. God will increase whatever we give Him.

### Do not feel like praying

One misconception about prayer is that it should always be a euphoric experience of angels singing and

of us floating on clouds. It would be wonderful if every time we went to the prayer closet we were overwhelmed with the presence of God. But the reality is that most of the prayer life is simple obedience to God and plain hard work. Jesus said it better when He told the disciples, "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matthew 26:41). Jesus had been praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and when He returned to His disciples, He saw them sleeping rather than praying. Their bodies (flesh) were weak; they did not want to pray.

The same is true for us. Therefore, to develop intimacy with God we must discipline ourselves to pray. We are to pray because the Scriptures admonish us to. Jesus addresses this in Luke 18:1: "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up." Jesus is teaching here that prayer is to be an act of the will as much as a response to the prompting of the Spirit.

We cannot wait until we feel like praying before we pray, or we will never pray. The act of prayer is spiritual discipline. Discipline requires effort and determination. We must determine in our hearts to spend time in prayer. Only then will we see the benefits of prayer.

## Unrecognized Answers

### *Objective 5:*

*Explain how to handle what seems like unanswered prayer.*

Have you ever found yourself asking why it is you are praying for the same thing you prayed about many times before? The prophet Habakkuk found himself in the same kind of dilemma. He was the prophet of the day and was God's voice to the people, yet it seemed he could not get an answer to his prayer. In Habakkuk 1:2 he cries, "How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen?"

The apostle Paul also found himself in a situation where he could not get an answer from God. Listen to his



words taken from 2 Corinthians 12:7–9: “There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’” Three different times Paul prayed about the thorn in his flesh without getting an answer. Certainly Paul did not lack faith. He was a great man of faith.

Paul’s experience teaches that our position must always be one of faith. Even when we do not see the answer in the time frame we think we should, we must continue to believe. Too often we think of faith as something that will bring an answer immediately. That is not always the case. It takes faith to continue to believe for the answer in the midst of great opposition. Obviously, God was doing something in Paul’s life that was greater than Paul’s revelation of Him. And God was limited in what He could reveal to Paul. But instead of struggling with not receiving an answer, Paul took the position of humility. The humble person is content with what God knows and with whatever answer God gives.

When we question God about an answer to prayer, we assume that we know all things and that there is absolutely no reason for God not to do our bidding. Obviously, we do not know everything; God knows all things. Therefore, when waiting for an answer to prayer, we simply need to be humble. James 4:6 says, “‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’”

## Hearing God

### *Objective 6:*

*Discuss the role listening has in prayer.*

In every relationship there needs to be give and take. Often our prayer lives represent more taking than giving. We often ask God to answer our prayers and meet our

needs without the slightest thought of what God might be trying to say to us. Listening during our prayer time is more than just giving God a chance to speak. It is balancing out the relationship, which in turn enhances the relationship.

It is critical for us to learn to give the Lord ample opportunities to speak to us while we are in prayer. Some people go to prayer with a list of all the things they want from God. While in prayer, they chatter about their list then end the prayer without taking any time to listen for God to speak to them. Can you imagine being married to a person who never stops talking? What if the only time you heard from your mate was when he or she wanted something? It would not take very long to feel used. Many Christians are also guilty of trying to use God.

Psalm 46:10 gives advice on listening: “Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” The instruction “be still” in this verse can be translated, “cease striving.” There are times when God tells us to slow down and stop trying so hard. We must be still then!

The Pharisees thought that God would hear them by “their many words” (Matthew 6:7). Today, some people also babble and even give God instructions in how to handle problems. Such incessant talking during prayer is often an indication of faithlessness. There are times when we need to cease talking and must simply listen to God. Not until we cease striving can we hear the voice of God. God does speak to us, but it is often through His still small voice.

Elijah the prophet learned this lesson. He had been very zealous for the Lord and felt that he alone had a pursuit for God. God called Elijah and said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” When Elijah did as instructed, the Lord passed by and a great wind destroyed the mountain, and broke it in pieces. But the Lord was not in the wind! After the wind, there was an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake

was fire, and the Lord was not in the fire. However, after the fire, Elijah heard God's still small voice. Then Elijah wrapped his face in his mantle and humbled himself before His God (1 Kings 19:10–13).

To have a well-balanced prayer life, we must take time during each prayer time to allow God to speak to our hearts. There is certainly nothing wrong with bringing our petitions and supplications before the Lord. There is also nothing wrong with quieting our hearts during prayer. Often I will open God's Word and read it during my prayer time. God speaks through His Word. His still small voice makes a giant impact in our lives.

## Conclusion

Nurturing a passion for prayer should be one of the priorities of our lives. Nothing is more critical to our relationship with God than the ability to communicate with Him. However, we must be intentional in developing a healthy prayer life. There are three vital steps in the advancement of a personal life of prayer: setting a time goal, establishing a set time for prayer, and prioritizing prayer.

### A Time Goal

To develop the discipline of prayer it is important to determine the minimum amount of time you want to spend praying. Goals give us something to reach towards. Without a time goal, it is common to quit praying after a very short time.

### A Set Time

Failure to establish a set time for prayer can easily allow other issues in our lives to keep us from praying. Prayer should be scheduled in the same way we schedule all other critical activities.

### A Priority of Prayer

If prayer is not a priority in our lives, we will never establish it as a deep habit. We must give preeminence to our time with God. Jesus taught us that prayer should

be over and above all other things in the house of God (Matthew 21:13).

### **Suggested Scripture Verses to Memorize**

Psalm 10:4

Psalm 42:1–2

Psalm 46:10

Matthew 6:6

Matthew 21:13

Matthew 26:41

Hebrews 4:16

## SELF-TEST

After studying the lesson, please read each study question carefully and circle the correct response. There is only one correct response for each question.

- A passion for prayer is more properly termed a passion*
  - to gain material wealth.*
  - for intimacy with God.*
  - to work for God.*
- Prayer is all about our \_\_\_\_\_ with God.*
  - relationship*
  - standing*
  - submission*
- When we are careful to watch over what enters our heart, we maintain a clear conscience with God by allowing Him to*
  - remove our sin so we never err again.*
  - inspect our hearts with frequency.*
  - remove His hedge of protection from us.*
- Confidence to approach God*
  - is the product of human arrogance.*
  - is an impossible goal.*
  - comes when a person is born-again.*
- The relationship between pride and prayer is such that*
  - pride is a great aid in prayer.*
  - proud people enjoy praying.*
  - pride is a great diversion to prayer.*
- People who do not understand the power of prayer or the timing of God believe*
  - it is necessary to do something if they are going to make a difference.*
  - there is no use for prayer because whatever will be will be.*
  - they must become emotional and weep before God will answer.*

7. *The most common excuses for not developing intimacy with God through prayer are*
  - a) *exhaustion, busyness, and not feeling like praying.*
  - b) *laziness, busyness, and not feeling led to pray.*
  - c) *tiredness, sickness, and lack of desire.*
  
8. *When we constantly quibble with God about an answer to prayer, we*
  - a) *make Him happy.*
  - b) *assume that we know all things.*
  - c) *exercise our authority in prayer.*
  
9. *In waiting for an answer to prayer, we must take the position of*
  - a) *panic.*
  - b) *arrogance.*
  - c) *humility.*
  
10. *Listening during our prayer time is more than just giving God a chance to speak. It is*
  - a) *balancing out the relationship.*
  - b) *forcing God to hear our hearts.*
  - c) *understanding our will for Him.*

## ANSWERS TO SELF-TEST

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Note: If you answered a study question incorrectly, you can find the objective it was drawn from by looking at the reference in parentheses.

1. *b* (4.1)
2. *a* (4.1)
3. *b* (4.2)
4. *c* (4.2)
5. *c* (4.3)
6. *a* (4.3)
7. *a* (4.4)
8. *b* (4.5)
9. *c* (4.5)
10. *a* (4.6)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS LESSON

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Since 1999, Ron Auch has served as Senior Pastor of Prayer House Assembly of God in Kenosha, Wisconsin, a church he planted. Prior to that he traveled nationally and internationally with Pray-Tell Ministries, a ministry he founded in 1981. Ron is the author of numerous books on prayer as well as a conference speaker.

