

Lesson Title: Discovering God's Will through Prayer

Key Scriptures: Jeremiah 29:11-14; Matthew 7:7-11

Key Idea: Prayer is built on relationship that is grounded in communication. It is only as we learn to listen to God that we discover His will for our lives.

Lesson Goals:

- To understand the importance of ongoing communication in any relationship
- To learn the significance of listening in prayer

Communication is the Key!

The physical barriers of language and culture can make communication very difficult. When I spent a year teaching as a volunteer missionary in Swaziland, Africa I experienced these barriers firsthand. Though the majority of the people I interacted with spoke English, it was still a second language and the way I spoke it was different from what they were used to and difficult for them to understand. It was especially hard for the Mozambiquen students who had come to study in Swaziland and for whom English was either a third or fourth language. To add to the communication barrier, my job was to teach these students New Testament Greek. It was difficult but we struggled through it.

These physical communication barriers can be difficult but at least we know the reason and they are within our powers to overcome. More exasperating is the physical barriers that we erect ourselves. These include distractions, presumptions, misunderstandings, biases, apathy, anger, agendas, and poor listening. These barriers inevitably lead to fights, hate-crimes, divorce, and war.

The ability to communicate effectively, or lack thereof, will ultimately make or break any relationship; communication is the key! This same truth must be applied to our relationship with God. If we are not regularly communicating with God then this relationship will certainly fall apart. The one positive to communication with God is that there are no language barriers (Romans 8:26) and in fact there are no physical barriers at all on His part. If there are any obstacles it is on our part and we must ask God to help us break them down.

Prayer: A Two-Way Road

Prayer is the vehicle by which we communicate with God; it is the way in which we build our relationship with Him. Throughout scripture we see that those who were closest to God and walked in His ways did so because of the strong relationship they had with Him. Isaac, Moses, David, Samuel, Solomon, Job, Ester, Mary, Peter, Paul, and the list goes on. They were men and women who prayed day and night and because of this God was faithful to answer their prayers and to reveal His will to them.

The most perfect example of a prayer relationship with God the Father is Jesus Christ. Jesus knew that his relationship with the Father was integral to his mission. He began his public ministry in prayer (Luke 3:21) and ended it in prayer (Matthew 26:36-44). As well, the major turning points of his ministry were marked by prayer (Mark 1:35, Luke 5:16; 6:12; 9:18). It is fair and accurate to say that Jesus would not have been able to complete his mission if he had not been in constant communication with the Father; he would not have had the strength or the follow-through.

How much more do we need to be in constant prayer with the Father (1 Thessalonians 5:17)? As we learned in the first lesson, it is God's will that we come to know Him, to be redeemed and transformed. This knowledge of God is not possible without intimate daily prayer. Thus, it is God's will that we pray. When we are faithful to pray then He is faithful to reveal Himself to us and also to reveal His desired next step for us.

One of the biggest problems with most Christians is not that they do not pray but rather that in prayer all they do is talk. We need to become better listeners. What would happen in a relationship with a friend if you did 100 percent of the talking and zero percent of the listening? I will promise you that this relationship would not last very long. The same is true with God. Prayer is a two-way road. We can come to God in each and every circumstance, both good and bad, but we must also take time to listen to what He is trying to tell us. He is our creator and He knows us intimately and desires the best for us (Psalm 139). If we are not taking advantage of this resource than we are missing out!

Another aspect of prayer is our commitment to Him. In Jeremiah 29:12-13 we learn that we will find God and be found by God when we seek Him with our whole heart. We cannot go into this relationship half-heartedly. God does not desire part of us but all of us. It is all or nothing when it comes to God. It is only when we are fully devoted to Him and wholly committed to prayer that God is able to direct us.

Prayer is also one of the most misunderstood practices. Scriptures such as Matthew 7:7-11 are often read out of context and misinterpreted. For many people, prayer is just a means to receive gifts. As a youth pastor, I have heard prayer requests for many materialistic items. From video games and cars to good grades, it is as if prayer were a free ticket to be a slacker or to indulge our own desires. It is true that scripture encourages us to pray for our daily bread (Matthew 6:11) and that God wants to provide us with everything we need. Yet, these prayers must be made with pure motives out of a longing to better know and serve God. Jesus says that whatever we ask in *his name* will be given us (John 16:24) and this assumes that we are asking through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. If this is indeed the case then we would be unable to ask for anything out of selfish ambitions.

Relationship First

Always remember that prayer is first and foremost a gift of God's grace provide to believers for communication with God and the building of relationship with Him. What a thought, that the creator of the universe would have the time and the desire to listen to each one of us and to spend time with us. When we start to see prayer in this light then God's will will be plain to us!

Reflective Questions

- Do you find it easy or hard to pray? Why do you think this is?
- How is communicating with a friend or family member similar to prayer? How is it different?
- What percentage of your prayer time do you spend talking? Listening?
- Has God ever revealed His will to you in your prayer time? If no, why do you think this might be? If yes, what did you do that made this prayer time unique?

Reflective Activities

- Invite a friend or family member out for coffee or tea. Bring a set of questions you want to ask this friend/family member about their life, things you don't already know. Spend time listening more than talking. When you are done, reflect on what you learned and what this might teach you about prayer.
- Practice silence as part of your prayer time. Focus on listening for God's voice. This may be hard at first so start off with 5 minutes at a time and then expand as it becomes more natural. As you sit in silence, try to block out the many distractions and even some of the thoughts running through your mind. However, remember that God can often speak to you through these thoughts, so keep an open mind. Reflect on how this time of listening has impacted your relationship with God.