

Prayer, Monolog or Dialog?

by Chuck Smith

Prayer is not just talking to God, but also listening to Him, and developing a listening ear is key to effective prayer.

Duration: 29:30

Scripture: Psalm 143:1-7, Jeremiah 15:1

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Moses and his encounter with God at the burning bush. Moses had fled to the desert after killing an Egyptian and spent 40 years there, learning to hear the voice of God. One day, he was drawn to a burning bush and heard God's voice instructing him to deliver the Israelites from bondage. However, Moses initially tried to accomplish this task in his own strength and failed. The sermon emphasizes the importance of training our ears to hear God's voice and seeking His guidance in all we do.

Transcript

Now let's turn our Bibles to Psalm 143 for our Scripture reading. I'll read the first, the outnumbered verses. Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the reading of the even numbered verses as we stand to read God's Word.

Hear my prayer, O Lord. Give ear to my supplications. In thy faithfulness answer me, and in thy righteousness.

And enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified. For the enemy hath persecuted my soul. He hath smitten my life down to the ground.

He hath made me to dwell in darkness as those that have been long dead. Therefore is my spirit overwhelmed within me. My heart within me is desolate.

I remember the days of old. I meditate on all thy works. I muse on the works of thy hands.

I stretch forth my hands unto thee. My soul thirsteth after thee as a thirsty lamb. Hear me speedily, O Lord.

My spirit faileth. Hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit. Cause me to hear thy loving kindness in the morning, for in thee do I trust.

Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk, for I lift up my soul unto thee. Deliver me, O Lord, from mine enemies. I flee unto thee to hide me.

Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God. Thy spirit is good. Lead me into the land of uprightness.

And quicken me, O Lord, for thy name's sake. For thy righteousness' sake, bring my soul out of trouble. And of thy mercy, cut off my enemies and destroy all them that afflict my soul.

For I am thy servant. Let's pray. Lord, as David opens this psalm asking that you would hear him, we find ourselves so often asking, Lord, hear us when we pray.

Lord, hear us speedily. But we ask, Lord, that today you will help us to hear you. Give us an ear to hear what you would say to us, Lord.

How you would guide and direct our lives. We ask, Father, that you would help us to hear and know your voice. In Jesus' name, Amen.

This morning we'd like you to take a look at the first verse of chapter 15 of Jeremiah. Jeremiah said, Then said the Lord unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people. Cast them out of my sight and let them go forth.

As you remember, last week, we studied how that the Lord said to Jeremiah, don't pray anymore for their good. We talked about going over that line for which there is no hope, no return. And how Judah had gone over the line and they crossed over now and could only face the judgment of God.

And so God is saying to Jeremiah, don't pray anymore for their good. God speaks to Jeremiah about two other men who had prayed for these people. And it's interesting when the Lord speaks of men of prayer to Jeremiah, he speaks of Moses and Samuel.

And he sort of sets them apart as special men who interceded for the people. James in the New Testament, when he wants to talk to us about a man of prayer, he speaks to us about Elijah. He tries to help us to understand that Elijah was no super saint.

He didn't have a cape with a big S on his chest to stand for super saint. But he was a man, common man, just as we are common. And yet this man prayed and it didn't rain for three years.

He prayed again and it did rain. As we look at these men that are held up as classic examples of men of prayer, one thing that we note about all three is that they were men who had a listening ear. These were men who heard the voice of God.

And I do believe that that is an important part to prayer. I fear lest most people think of prayer as a monologue. My talking to God about what I want God to do for me.

Prayer, they seem to think, is a marvelous device created by God, whereby I can enlist the help of God in getting my will done here on the earth. It's as though God is sort of a genie let out of the bottle, ready to grant our three wishes. And so much of our prayer is just pure petition.

But I believe that prayer is more than just petition, and it's more than just talking to God. I think that prayer is also listening to God. It's a dialogue.

It's learning to hear the voice of God, as these men who were men of prayer, were men who heard the voice of God speaking to them. It's important for us to train our ears that we might hear the voice of God speaking to us. You remember Pastor Romaine used to say, God gave you two ears, but only one mouth.

That should tell you something. What God has to say to you is more important than what you have to say to God. And yet, we so rarely stop to really hear the voice of God.

David, in the psalm we read this morning, there in the first verse, asks the Lord to hear him when he prayed. But then in verse eight, David said, help me Lord to hear your loving kindness. Yes, when we pray, we want God to hear us, but more important, that we hear from God in our prayers.

Moses is the first of these three that have been mentioned as men of prayer. Moses somehow, very early on, recognized that he was a man of destiny. That God had supernaturally placed him in that position in Egypt, where God could use him.

And he had this sense of divine mission. God has put me here to deliver the children of Israel out of their bondage here in Egypt. And he seemed to understand that.

And he had this sense of destiny. God wants me to deliver the children of Israel from this bondage. And we read that he was walking one day out among the people and he saw an Egyptian who was beating an Israeli slave.

And so he looked around, didn't see anybody, and he killed the Egyptian, buried his body there in the sand. The next day, as he was out again, walking among the people, he saw two Israelis who were fighting together. He broke up the fight and he said, you shouldn't be fighting each other, you are brothers.

And they said, are you going to kill us like you killed the Egyptian yesterday? Suddenly Moses realized that his deed was well known. It had become public knowledge. Only a matter of time until the Pharaoh would hear that he had killed the Egyptian.

And so Moses fled for his life. He spent the next 40 years out in the solitude of the desert, far away from the noises of Egypt, from the noise of the palace. A great place in that solitude of the desert to learn to hear the voice of God.

Other voices silenced. Great to hear the voice of God. And one day he was attracted to a burning bush.

And as he approached it, he heard the voice of God saying, take your sandals off, you're standing on holy ground. And the Lord began to talk to Moses about the mission of delivering the children of Israel from their bondage. Moses, like so many people, had that sense that God wanted him to do a special work.

But like so many of us, he made the mistake of trying to do the work of God in the ability and the power of his own flesh. And he was a failure. God wanted him to deliver the children of Israel, but Moses' timing was off and his method was off.

It wasn't that the task was off. He had that right. But his timing, his method, trying to do the work of God in the energy of our flesh or the ability of our flesh can be one of the most frustrating things in the whole world.

Interesting with Moses, with the ability of his own flesh, he was not able to bury successfully one Egyptian. Later on, as he was following the directions of the Lord, he buried the whole army of Egypt in the Red Sea.

Oh, God has a work for us to do, but God has a way by which he wants it done.

And we have to listen to the voice of God to get the instructions, not just as to the task that we're to fulfill, but how we are to fulfill it and when we are to fulfill that task. With Samuel, that trained ear came much earlier in his life. He was just a small child when his mother, in keeping with her vow to God, brought him to be raised there in the tabernacle with Eli, the high priest.

And he became more or less a altar boy, a little servant serving the priesthood there. And one night, the candle was going out in the tabernacle. And the voice of the Lord came to him and said, Samuel, Samuel.

He got up and he ran into the room of Eli and he said, you called? And he said, no, I didn't call you, go back to bed. So Samuel went back to bed. He heard again, the voice calling Samuel, Samuel.

He went running in again to Eli and said, you called? And he said, no, go back to bed. The third time Eli thought, maybe God is speaking to this young boy. And so he said, if you hear the voice again, answer, speak Lord, your servant is listening.

And so he went back to bed and he heard Samuel, Samuel, and he said, speak Lord, your servant is hearing. And God began to speak to Samuel. God began to tell Samuel of the future, things that were going to happen with Eli and with the nation.

And he began to hear and to listen to the voice of God. We find that throughout his life, God was speaking to Samuel and he had that trained ear to hear God's voice. With Elijah.

When we think about Elijah, we usually think about that contest with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Israel was ruled by a very wicked king who, with his wife, Jezebel, had introduced and led the people in the worship of Baal, that false god. And Elijah appeared to Ahab and said, it will not rain again until my word.

And then Elijah went off and he hid for three years. During this three years, there was no rain in Israel. As a result, no crops, as a result, a great famine.

And as a result, Ahab was searching for Elijah, wanting to kill him because of this drought. Elijah appeared to a man by the name of Obadiah and he said to him, after three years, go tell Ahab to come and meet with me. Obadiah said, please have mercy on me.

If I go tell Ahab to come and meet you here, and the Lord takes you away someplace, he said, he'll kill me. I've been a good man. I've actually helped some of the prophets and all that, you know, don't do this to me.

And Elijah said, I'll be here. Tell him I want to meet him. So Ahab came and Elijah challenged Ahab to gather together his prophets and his priest of Baal, meet him on the top of Mount Carmel.

And they would have a contest of the gods to prove who was the true God. They would build altars. The prophets of Baal would build the altar for Baal, whereas Elijah will build the altar to Jehovah.

They would place the sacrifices upon the altar, only they would not kindle the fire. And they would pray and ask their gods to kindle the fire. And let the God who answers by fire be acknowledged as the true God.

So the prophets of Baal accepted the challenge. And they came with the people of Israel to the top of Mount Carmel. And there they built the altars.

And there the prophets of Baal prayed that Baal would send the fire, consume the sacrifice. And after praying all morning with nothing happening, you remember the story, Elijah started to make fun of them and said, I've got it. Your God's asleep.

You got to pray louder. You know, get into it guys. Really begin to shout, you know.

Or maybe he's away. You know, cry louder. And so they began to scream and cut themselves and go through all kinds of religious antics and nothing happened.

And then Elijah said, okay. And of course, just in your face kind of a thing. Take and pour some water on my altar.

Pour more water. And they soaked the altar and they built a trench around it. The water is filling the trench.

And then Elijah prayed and God sent the fire, consumed the sacrifice, consumed the altar, consumed the water, licked up the water in the trenches. The people all fell down and said, Jehovah, he is God. And then Elijah said to Ahab, prepare for rain.

It's going to rain. And so Elijah, you remember, prayed and he sent his servant to look out towards the Mediterranean Sea. Servant came back and said, clear blue skies.

He prayed again. He said, go again. Servant came back, said, skies are still blue, beautiful.

He prayed again. He said, go again. And seven times.

And the seventh time the servant came back and said, there's a cloud that seems to be rising out of the sea. It's small. Elijah said, let's get out of here.

It's going to pour. And soon there was this heavy downpour and the prayer was answered. You think, well, how did he have the nerve to challenge the prophets of Baal? How did he have the nerve to say it's going to be raining? Get ready for a real downpour.

Well, go back to the first verse of chapter 18, there in first Kings. And there we read in verse one, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah after many days in the third year of the drought, saying, go show yourself unto Ahab and I will send rain upon the earth. You see, he had the word of the Lord, the listening ear.

God said, go show yourself to Ahab, I will send rain. So his prayer was based upon what he had heard the Lord say to his heart. The listening side of prayer.

John tells us that we know that if we ask according to his will, he hears us. And if he hears us, then we have received those petitions that we have desired from him. So important to know the will of God.

How do we know that? By hearing the voice of God. And then we have that confidence in prayer. But how can we train our ear to hear the voice of God? First of all, I think that it's important to get a quiet and comfortable place as free from distractions as possible.

Usually you have to get away from the house. I have found that walking walking is great for just meditating and listening for the voice of God to speak to my heart. As free from distractions as possible.

Quietness. Seek to free your mind from the problems of the day, or those things that are causing you worry and concern. And then start meditating on God, his greatness, his power, his love for you, his goodness, his son that he sent to die for our sins.

And then ask God to speak to you. If there are issues that you're concerned about, things that you are praying about, ask the Lord about them. And then stop to listen for the answers.

I think that so many times we we pray and then we just get up and we rush off. And we never stop to listen to what God might be wanting to say to us in regards to the situation that we've just brought before him in prayer. I have found that one of the best ways of training your ear to hear the voice of God is by reading the word of God.

Have you had the experience of reading a passage of scripture? And all of a sudden there is an enlightenment, there is illumination. All of a sudden you see a truth that you've never seen before. That suddenly the scripture comes alive to you and you think, I've read that, you know, a dozen times.

I've never seen that before. That's God speaking to you. God speaks to us through his word.

You see, the word of God is what God has spoken to other people. And God will speak to you through his word. And it's a great place for you to train yourself to hear the voice of God when he speaks to you through the word, when he opens up a passage of scripture to your heart.

I experience this all the time. And it's a thrill whenever God speaks to me in a passage of scripture and just begins to open my understanding and my heart to the word. George Mueller was known as a man of faith.

And people would ask George Mueller, how many chapters of the Bible do you read every day? You see, there are always those people that are looking for formulas. If I read so many chapters of the Bible a day, if I will pray so many minutes or whatever, and you know, they're looking for success formulas. How many chapters must I read? How long must I pray in order to, you know, have the kind of results and all that you have, George? And George gave them an answer that wasn't really satisfactory to those who are looking for formulas.

He said, I read until the Lord speaks to me. And the moment the Lord speaks to me, he said, I stop and I just meditate and let the Lord continue to just open up the passage of scripture to my heart. He said, it may be the very first scripture that I read in the morning that God will begin to speak to me.

He said, it may be that I will have read 15 chapters before the Lord speaks to me. But the whole idea was reading until God speaks to you. Not trying to read broad passages and say, well, I've got to get my 10 chapters in, but read, seeking to understand, seeking to devour it.

The old word of ruminates, just going over it and over it, seeking to sort of just let it soak into your heart and let God speak to you that way. In sermon preparation, it's wonderful how God speaks to my heart. And as Paul the apostle said, that which I have received from the Lord, I also deliver unto you.

The listening ear, how valuable and how important that is. It's easy to pray with real faith when I know that my prayer is based upon what the Lord has spoken to my heart. Develop the listening ear.

Develop prayer as a dialogue. Sit down and dialogue with God. Listen and then speak.

Ask and then listen for the answers. And your prayer life will take on a totally whole new dimension as you learn to listen to what God has to say to you. Over and over, Jesus said, he that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the church.

God, give us listening ears. Father, Father, thank you for speaking to us. Give us ears, Lord, to hear.

A listening ear to understand and enhance, Lord, our communication with you. May it never be just a monologue, but may we take time, Lord, to dialogue with you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

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