

TRAINING Disciples to Train

Session 15: Prayer (7)

Offered by Ron Lively, M.Div., M.A. – BiblicalMentoring.org (Studies)

Step 1: Opening prayer

Step 2: Each person quotes the memory verse: VERSE: **Ephesians 3:11-12**

11 "This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him."

Step 3: Read and discuss all or part of the Bible Chapter – **Ephesians 3**

Step 4: Questions for Personal Applications and/or Group Discussions:

1. Prayer, the 4th distinctive of a disciple, is his or her communication with God and is how we develop character.
2. *We will learn the four guidelines to improve our prayers to God.*
3. *Why do all relationships require us to be an active listener?*
4. *Do you realize that consistency is essential in everything we aspire to do well? Phillips says that "consistent communication enables us to think alike, act alike and be confident in each other".*
5. *Why is absolute honesty important for all relationship including in marriage and with God? The author writes that "prayer is both the proof and unquestioned priority of one who pursues God".*

Step 5: Read and discuss the Content from the book:

Chapter 7 per the author – Keith Phillips:

Prayer

Prayer is the fourth distinctive of a disciple. Through prayer a Christian encounters the living God. "...In Christ Jesus our Lord...we have boldness and confident access..." to the Father (Ephesians 3:11,12). A believer's character is fashioned by his communication with God.

Communication is the secret to every healthy relationship. It did not take long for my wife, Katie, and me to realize that our union would rise or fall according to the quality of our communication; the more deeply we shared with each other, the faster we would become one. This is not surprising, since my relationship with Katie is modeled after Christ's relationship with me (Ephesians 5:23-25). Good communication transforms acquaintances into friends and superficiality into intimacy.

The quality of my communication with Katie is enhanced if I observe four guidelines. These same principles apply to a believer's prayer life.

Compliment First

Nothing facilitates a healthy relationship more than an honest compliment. A positive, building comment is a gesture of respect and admiration.

When I come home my first words set the tempo for the entire evening. And once the direction is established, it is hard to reverse. If I greet my wife with, "Can't you ever lock the gate? Don't you realize how dangerous it is with our boys outside?" you can predict the consequences. What a difference it makes when I say, "Baby, you look like a million bucks."

Katie knows that my words are an extension of my heart. There is no elixir more likely to keep the exhilaration of courtship in a marriage than praise. When I am wise enough to compliment first, our communication is healthy and building.

David realized this when he advised us how to approach God: "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Psalms 100:4 KJV).

Prayer is primarily an avenue for the disciple to worship and honor his God. Anticipate with excitement the opportunity of being in the presence of the King of kings. Let gratitude flow from your lips and let your very being express your awe of the Almighty. You have good reason to declare your love for God: "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalms 100:5 KJV).

Be an Active Listener

When we first got married, Katie was telling me about an alarming news story in Washington. Halfway through her description I interrupted and finished the story for her. Nothing frustrated Katie more. Although she never directly said it, I quickly realized that either that habit or her husband had to go. God used my patient wife to teach me a valuable lesson: communication is much more than talking. It is active listening, giving one's undivided attention.

Failure to listen is an insult. When Katie tells me about conversations with her friends, places she has been and things she has learned, I love her enough to become involved in her life by concentrating on what she says.

I would feel shortchanged if after I poured out my heart to God, there was no response. But the Lord promises to answer (Psalms 91:15). God desires perfect communication with His children. He speaks to me through His Word, brings Scripture to my memory, and fills my mind with His beauty, encouragement and will. I need only to heed His advice: "Cease striving and know that I am God..." (Psalms 46:10).

I have discovered that with God, as with Katie, our most meaningful communication occurs when we are alone. I listen best when there are no distractions—no radio, no phone, no other people. I am sure that this is what Jesus had in mind when He said to His disciples, "...Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while" (Mark 6:31).

Be Consistent

It is all too easy for me to come home after a long day, utter a few oft-repeated niceties, flop into a chair and read the mail—practically ignoring my dear wife. It takes real discipline to get past the trivialities and openly share new ideas, exciting plans or unusual events. It is even harder to be honest about hurts, concerns and trials with which I am struggling.

Sometimes I feel that after being bombarded with people, problems and needs all day, it is pure agony to rehearse these incidents one more time. How foolish! Katie is my greatest supporter. She wants to help carry my burdens and share my joys. Consistent communication enables us to think alike, act alike and be confident in each other. Sharing with Katie and seeking her advice affirm that I value who she is. If I fail to communicate, I exclude her from who I am, and our marriage covenant is reduced to a piece of paper.

All too often the same temptation to laziness creeps into my prayer life. I can rationalize, "God knows anyway. I'm too tired. I haven't got the time. I'll tell Him tomorrow." As with Katie, it is easy to put off. Nobody knows. No one holds me accountable. But it is a fallacy to think that consistent communication with God is optional. If my communication is sporadic, our relationship deteriorates. First, my partner and I know. Then others. Then everyone.

Consistency in a disciple's prayer life is like endurance in a long-distance runner. There are no shortcuts to its development. It is built up over an extended period of daily practice. But unless you use it, you lose it. When you stop for a while you cannot begin again where you left off.

Intimacy with God demands regular communication. If you have not talked with Him for a long time and a crisis strikes, you feel awkward and insecure in His presence. Without consistent communication, the believer faces life on very shaky footing. Regular communication with God makes your heart, your motives, your thoughts and even your instincts coincide with His. That's why 1 Thessalonians 5:17 instructs us to "pray without ceasing." Your faithfulness makes you welcome in God's presence: "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Hebrews 4:16 NIV).

Be Completely Honest

At the outset of our relationship, Katie and I made a commitment to be absolutely honest with each other. We knew that our marriage would grow strong if the only surprises in it were pleasant. A relationship built on half-truths or misleading distortions is like a house of cards: it crumbles with the slightest pressure.

We discuss our finances together, budget what we can spend, agree on what we cannot afford. We concur on our social engagements and ministry activities before we make commitments.

There is never a time when Katie does not know where I am. I leave a detailed itinerary when I travel: flight numbers, arrival times, hotels, contact people, speaking engagements and appointments. She can always reach me. I phone every day when I am gone.

Our commitment to active openness not only enables us to share our needs, hurts and questions before they become frustrations, but also prevents suspicion or distrust.

Many Christians have the audacity to try to deceive their all-knowing God. They rationalize their motives, balk at confessing some of their sins or refuse to yield certain areas of their lives. David was like this. He tried to hide his sins of murder and adultery until God finally confronted him through Nathan (2 Samuel 12). But David learned his lesson. He became completely "up-front" with God: "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psalms 51:3 KJV).

God will not listen to your prayers if you try to hide your sins (Psalms 66:18). Isaiah 59:2 says, "...your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hid His face from you, so that He does not hear." Without listening there is no communication; without communication, no relationship; without relationship, no discipleship. Absolute honesty with God is essential for the disciple.

Prayer is the disciple's most intimate channel of communication with his God. The quality of his communication determines the strength of his relationship. Prayer is both the proof and the unquestioned priority of one who pursues God (Luke 18:1).

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Disciple's Checklist - Prayer
<i>My prayer life is characterized by:</i>
☐ <i>Complimenting God first.</i>
☐ <i>Actively listening.</i>
☐ <i>Consistency.</i>
☐ <i>Complete honesty.</i>

Step 6: *Share personal prayer requests then each person prays for the other's requests.*

Source: *The Making of a Disciple* by Dr. Keith Philips. Pub. by Fleming H. Revell Company, 1981. ISBN 0-8007-1181-5. Introduction by Robert E. Coleman. Content (except study questions) is taken from the book without revisions.

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