

## Effective Prayer Strategies Bible Study Series “Getting into the Presence of God”

“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” –Jer 29:13

When we think of prayer, so often we envision an act of sending a prayer request before the throne of heaven believing that it will be soon followed by an act of Godly response and/or reaction that will be favorable to our plea. However, prayer is much more than that. It is designed to be a space of holy fellowship and relationship that both deepens and broadens our understanding of God and ourselves as we seek to fulfill His will on earth as it is in heaven. This study is to teach us how to prepare ourselves to encounter the presence of God in the prayer space so that we experience the holy fellowship of prayer.

What is prayer?

Though there are numerous definitions of prayer, one of the simplest definitions is given by James Earl Massey in his book *Spiritual Disciplines* when he states, “the essence of prayer is communion.”<sup>1</sup> Prayer is a moment of meeting God how we are and where we are. As Massey also states, “...it is not finally at the level of our words that God gives His attention. Rather, it is at the level of our will and need...God answers our state rather than our statements.”<sup>2</sup> The prayer moment is meant to be an encounter with God that not only alters your situation, but also your heart, mind and actions. It is the space that God uses for deposits and directives, encouragement and enlightenment, and renovating our lives while resolving our issues. Prayer is a holy meeting.

When we understand prayer as communion, then we will refuse to be the only one showing up for the meeting. So the question is asked, “How to we position ourselves to have a holy encounter with God in prayer?” If we are to encounter the presence of God in prayer, we must approach prayer with a proper understanding. The right perspectives on prayer are needed:

Perspective 1: *Practice prayerfulness not just a prayer.* Many of us enter the moment of prayer viewing it as a formal single petition or series of petitions or prayers. Instead, we should view the moment through a lens of “prayerfulness.” This means that we view the moment as one of openness to the atmosphere of meeting God at any and every level of ourselves. We must open our heart to experience prayerfulness not just a series of prayers.

Perspective 2: *We are part of the priesthood.* Just like that priests in the Old Testament, we have been given access by Jesus Christ to have a personal encounter with God. Through His grace and work on the cross, we can fulfill every law needed to enter the presence of God for ourselves. We have full ability to be legally (according to the law for priests) prepared to encounter God through the work of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:8-9).

Perspective 3: *Seek the Lord with Total Surrender.* An encounter with God requires that we commit our lives to a place of fully giving ourselves to God, not just our requests. According to Myles Munroe in his book *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Prayer*, this means that we will encounter the Lord when we come to him with a heart that is filled with a desire to “enter into the very mind and heart of God, in order to become one with Him and His purposes.”<sup>3</sup> This act of surrender includes approaching God:

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<sup>1</sup> Massey, James Earl. *Spiritual Disciplines: A Believer's Openings to the Grace of God.* (Warner Press; Anderson, IN) 42.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>3</sup> Munroe, Myles. *Understanding the Purpose and Power of Prayer: Earthly License for Heavenly Interference.* (Whitaker House: New Kensington, PA). 66.

- a. In Holiness (Hebrews 12:14) – We must cleanse our hearts and minds if we are to encounter the presence of the Lord. As Jesus states in Matthew 5:8, only the “pure in heart” shall see God.
- b. With Absolute Love for God (Matthew 10:37; 22:37) – The Lordship of Christ must be the primary object of our love. Our desires should be centered on our commitment to loving the Lord with no other allegiances residing in our hearts.
- c. Integrity (Jeremiah 29:13) – There must be a oneness in our approach to God. We can’t come into the presence of God with conflict in our hearts, minds, and/or mouths. We must approach God without heart hypocrisy. We should enter prayer based on who we are, how we are, where we are.

As we understand how to view the prayer moment, we must also posture ourselves to understand what is to take place in the prayer moment. Prayer is not to be viewed as a monologue, but a dialogue. Therefore, according to Henri Nouwen in *Spiritual Direction*, we have to embrace two realities of prayer:

- a. The Comprehensive Conversation of Prayer (Psalm 119:58) – In order for prayer to be a dynamic encounter, we must “think, speak and live in the presence of God...turn all of our thoughts into conversation.”<sup>4</sup> Prayer is to be a conversation with God that includes every facet of our lives. In prayer we give ourselves permission to allow every part of who we are into the conversation with God.
- b. The Contemplation of Prayer – Instead of rushing through the prayer moment, we must understand prayer as a space that requires talking and patient listening and opening of the heart to receive the fullness of the “meeting with God.” As Nouwen states, “To pray also means to be quiet and listen, whether or not we feel God is speaking to us. More than anything, prayer is primarily listening and waiting.”<sup>5</sup> True communication in prayer requires a willingness to be open to sitting in patient holy dialogue.

Now that we understand the perspectives and posture with which we are to approach the prayer space, we must consider the process that we are to adopt to get into the presence of the Lord. To do this let us consider how the Lord instructed the priests of the Old Testament to enter into His presence in Leviticus the sixteenth chapter.

1. Confess and repent (v.3) – We confess and repent of any sins and appropriate the grace of the cross to them (Hebrews 9:22; Romans 5:8-11; 1 John 1:8-9).
2. Put on righteousness (v.4) - We clothe ourselves with the righteousness that we attain through Christ, not earthly methods of trying to earn righteousness (Ephesians 4:24).
3. Put on truth and honesty (v.4) – We approach the presence of God with truth and honesty about our lives (Psalm 51:6; 24:3-4).
4. Allow the Word to cleanse you (v.4) – We spend the space of prayer reading, absorbing, and obeying the Word of God (John 15:3, 17:7; Ephesians 5:25-26; Psalm 119:9-11)
5. Worship and Praise God (vv.12-13) – We take time in prayer to worship and praise God (Hebrews 13:15)
6. Separate Yourself (v.17) – Isolate yourself physically, but also remove all other allegiances from your heart and mind (trusting that the Lord will take care of them) while you are in the space of prayer (Matthew 14:22-23).
7. Be fully Available God – Remove any walls of your prayer space and allow the Lord to engage your heart, mind and soul with unblocked dialogue and directives (Jeremiah 24:7)

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<sup>4</sup> Nouwen, Henri. *Spiritual Direction*. (HarperOne: New York, NY) 61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 63.