

Hearing from God in Prayer

(Acts 12:13 NIV) 12:1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them.

2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

3 When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also. This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. 4 After arresting him, he put him in prison, handing him over to be guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. Herod intended to bring him out for public trial after the Passover. 5 So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. 6 The night before Herod was to bring him to trial, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries stood guard at the entrance. 7 Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists. 8 Then the angel said to him, "Put on your clothes and sandals." And Peter did so. "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me," the angel told him. 9 Peter followed him out of the prison, but he had no idea that what the angel was doing was really happening; he thought he was seeing a vision. 10 They passed the first and second guards and came to the iron gate leading to the city. It opened for them by itself, and they went through it. When they had walked the length of one street, suddenly the angel left him. 11 Then Peter came to himself and said, "Now I know without a doubt that the Lord sent his angel and rescued me from Herod's clutches and from everything the Jewish people were anticipating." 12 When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. 13 Peter knocked at the outer entrance, and a servant girl named Rhoda came to answer the door. 14 When she recognized Peter's voice, she was so overjoyed she ran back without opening it and exclaimed, "Peter is at the door!" 15 "You're out of your mind," they told her. When she kept insisting that it was so, they said, "It must be his angel." 16 But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. 17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. "Tell James and the brothers about this," he said, and then he left for another place.

Do we expect God to answer our prayers?

Do we expect to hear from God in our prayers?

Can you relate to this story?

As Bill Powell would say, you just can't make this stuff up. It rings so true. It reflects human nature. And we all can relate to it.

Consider what was taking place: King Herod **had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.** James, one of the inner circle of the disciples is beheaded (about 44 AD, about a dozen years after Jesus' resurrection). This is a really big deal.

Then Peter is arrested, and the church prays: **“The church was earnestly praying to God for Peter,” “Many people had gathered and were praying in the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark.”**

God hears. God answers by sending an angel to let Peter out of prison.

Peter goes to the home where they are praying and... They don't believe he has been released.

We love to talk about the early church and the faith they had. But let me tell you, they are people just like you and me. They had their doubts, they had their inconsistencies, they had their problems.

Do we expect God to answer our prayers?

Do we expect to hear from God in our prayers?

What is prayer? Prayer very simply is conversation with God.

The Greek words the Bible uses for prayer are proseuchomai, (pros-yoo'-khom-ahee) which means “to pray to God, i.e. supplicate, worship: and is translated pray (X earnestly, for), make prayer.”

And proseuche, (pros-yoo-khay) which means prayer (worship); by impl. an oratory (chapel): and is translated: to pray earnestly, prayer.

You married guys probably have conversations with your wives.

It probably goes like this hey honey could you...

Put another log on the fire

Cook me up some bacon and some beans

Go out to the car and change the tire

Wash my socks and sew my old blue jeans

You can fill my pipe and then go fetch my slippers

Then boil me up another pot of tea

Then put another log on the fire

And come and tell me why your leaving me.

What is wrong with that communication?

But how different is,

Oh Lord ...

Bless me at work today

Make me a better Christian

Touch Mary with your healing hand

Amen

What is the problem?

There is no opportunity for God to speak back to us. I have been to prayer meetings before where there is a lot of talk and very little opportunity for listening. In fact many times it sounds like we are telling God what to do.

What is real conversation like? We expect feedback. In fact doesn't your wife like it when she is talking to you for you to answer back every so often. Why not so when we pray to God?

In the book of Psalms, which contains songs and prayers to God, there is a wonderful term used that no one really knows what it is all about. The term is Selah, and it is used 74 times in the Bible in the books of Psalms and Habakkuk, It means "pause." I wonder if the term "Selah" means an interruption in a psalm to listen for God's response.

There are numerous examples of God speaking to people in their prayers.

Moses

(Exodus 14:15-16 NIV) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground."

Elijah

(Rom 11:2-4 NIV) God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"? And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

Peter

(Acts 10:9-13 NIV) About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat."

Paul

(2 Cor 12:8-9 NIV) 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." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

Can we expect God to speak to us as we pray?

Yes we can. My wife who understands communication infinitely more than I do keeps me honest in this. So when we pray together, the first thing she says to me when we are finished is “Did you get anything”

That forces me to listen to God.

How does God speak to us in prayer?

The Bible doesn't usually specify, it just says “God said.” The Bible says a voice spoke to Peter but it doesn't say if it was audible or not. At another point the scripture says “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...” (Acts 15:28 NIV). The Bible doesn't say if that was a prophetic utterance, or what.

I know in my life it comes in a variety of ways. One time, when I was in college, I was walking home, after setting up a display on campus. And it was distance of about two miles and I was tired and complaining to God. And he spoke on top of my thoughts, just like a special bulletin line at the bottom of your screen when your watching TV. The words were: “you just walked past your ride.” So I turned around and a guy was getting into his car so I asked him if he could give me a lift downtown, and he said: “Get in.”

For me, more often than not it is just a thought that comes into my mind, that didn't come from my own thinking. For example, when Loretta Wisse was alive, she had during one church service lost her keys. Now if finding lost items were a spiritual gift, my daughter Bethany has it. So I got Bethany and said “Lets pray and find out where Loretta's keys are.” Well, Bethany was maybe 13 and she kind of resisted because I was putting a lot of pressure on her. But I said, I would pray and she could just agree with me.

So I prayed and suddenly the thought “Check her person” came into my mind. That was it. I thanked Bethany and went over to Loretta and said “I know you have already checked your pockets, but for me, would you check them one more time.” She pulled her hands back and said “I already checked them” and at the same time she touched her vest pockets, and low and behold, there they were.

Another time, My wife, Kathy, and I were praying about something, and when we got done she asked me, “Did you get anything?” Well, I didn't get anything about what we were praying about but I got a whole sermon downloaded into my head, like in a split second. Actually that same thing happened here the last time Bill spoke at our church, while we were in worship, God just downloaded a message for me.

Do I always get something when I pray? No. Sometimes I just flow with what the Spirit seems to be leading me in prayer. Sometimes I don't expect God to speak to me. Sometimes I just don't listen. And I am ashamed to say how little I actually really listen to God in my prayers.

But the reason I am sharing this with you is for you and I to pursue hearing from God in prayer. If prayer is conversation with God it must be two way, and that means listening to him as He speaks to us.

Amen