

LESSON 9

ANCHOR 9

Commit to a daily prayer life and grow my relationship with the Father.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

PRAY

Ask God to speak to you as you read His Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you a revelation of God’s truth and love and give you understanding of what you are about to read. Pray that you will have an Encounter with God as you earnestly seek Him. Don’t rush through reading everything and don’t rush through praying. Take some time to stop and listen so you may hear anything God wants to say to you.

After you read the scriptures, ask:

- “God, what are You saying in these scriptures?”
- “God, what are You saying to me in these scriptures?”
- “God, how do You want me to apply this to my life?”

Write in your journal as you spend this time with God.

At Encounter, our prayer is that you will believe and follow God and allow Him to transform you, so you can live a life of freedom and peace. We pray that you will truly encounter and get to know the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in a personal and authentic way. Anchor 9 is all about prayer and how the purpose of prayer is to get to know the God of the universe in a personal way by spending time with Him, waiting to hear from Him, being in His presence and trusting Him. Jesus did all those things. Prayer should help you become more like Jesus in purpose and personality, as you seek the Father.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus spent time praying to His Father. He was purposeful to take the time to get away and to be alone with the Father. He sought to be in God’s presence, to wait on God and hear His voice and to know God’s will. While Jesus was indeed God in the flesh, He became God with us when He became the Son of man in God’s amazing plan to redeem us and send us a Savior. If Jesus the Savior used prayer to be in God’s presence while living on this earth in the flesh, just imagine how much more we should be intentional about seeking God in and through prayer.

If you want to become more like Jesus, your prayer life should shift from selfish motives and gain to asking God how you can act more like Jesus, love more like Jesus, forgive like Jesus, bless people like Jesus and be able to see others through the eyes of Jesus. Becoming more like Jesus does not happen naturally; it happens supernaturally and only when we have a surrendered heart and a changed mindset that seeks God for all truth and wisdom. Prayer is our way to seek God and trust Him for the results.

God's Word is full of examples, instruction and wisdom about prayer. Read the following verses:

Psalm 50:15 – “Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will rescue you.” Who do you call when you are in trouble? Do you go to the throne or do you go to the phone?

James 5:13 – “Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray.” When most of us become desperate, we will learn to desperately seek God for help and answers.

With such clear and beneficial instructions from God's Word about coming to Him in prayer, why is it that humanity doesn't always call upon God when trouble comes? Or why is it that we only call upon God in those times when we are in trouble, but never bother to otherwise spend time with Him just giving Him thanks for who He is and all He has done for us? There could be a variety of reasons, but one reason is simply that we have wrong motives. Our motives have a direct correlation to the effectiveness of our prayers.

James 4:2-3 talks about our struggles and the selfish desires within us. Part of this passage says, “You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures”. That is an indictment against our selfish nature and wrong motives.

Let's explore some biblical and balanced foundations for prayer, so you can learn to come boldly to God with faith and confidence, with right motives, knowing that He hears your prayers and answers them in His good and perfect way, will and timing.

God had you in mind when He created the universe and when He formed you in your mother's womb. He made you because He wants to be in a loving relationship with you. He wants to spend time with you and prayer is the way you and God spend time together. When you quiet your busy and distracted life long enough and often enough to spend time in prayer, you learn to be in God's presence. You begin listening to Him, waiting on Him, trusting in Him, surrendering to Him, believing Him and running after Him with all your heart. Then you get to experience God's best plan for you. When you spend time with God in prayer, you are not so consumed by the things of this world and you become less consumed with selfish desires. Spending time in prayer with God will change you. It will allow you to know God better and will help you follow God and His will for you much more readily. It will cause you to be more concerned about God's *presence* than His *presents*.

When you decide to spend time with God in prayer, He gives you more clarity about both Himself and you. You begin to see that nothing in your life is hidden from Almighty God. He sees all and He knows all. That means that your secrets are not secrets to Him. When you can get honest with Him in any and every area of your life, especially prayer, it creates an atmosphere that is more conducive to peace and healing in your life and relationships – even your relationship with God. His love for you commands His best for you and He is always intent on communicating His mercy and truth to you.

Part of an authentic relationship is listening to the person you are in relationship with and gaining more understanding. Sometimes you can hit a bump in the road, simply because God's ways and truth are so much higher and better than your own. Because God loves you, He will always be consistent with what you need in relationship with Him, not necessarily what you want. Remember, right motives have a great deal to do with how God answers your prayers.

Read **Isaiah 1:15-17** – “When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide My eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right”.

Read **Psalms 66:18** – “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me”!

If you are familiar with the Encounter ministry at all, you have learned that we do not approach God in prayer on our own good merits. We approach Him only by His amazing grace. We cannot approach God in prayer because we, ourselves, are good or have done good works. We can approach Him because of the finished work of Christ that has already been done on our behalf.

So, in essence, the work of Jesus bridges the separation that exists between the sins of humankind and the God who created humankind. When a person recognizes and believes in the finished work of Jesus to deliver them from their sins, those sins no longer have any room in the Christ follower’s life to separate them from their Lord. This means that willful, deliberate and repetitive sin hinders your prayers and hinders your relationship with God.

Should you expect God to hear and answer your prayers faithfully when you are not faithful to believe, follow and honor Him with how you live your life? If you know the nature of God, then you know His grace is an abundant gift, but it shouldn’t be cheapened or taken advantage of. God cannot be mocked. He doesn’t play games, but He waits patiently for you to honestly come to Him. Being honest with God about your sins, turning from and repenting from your sins and asking for God’s forgiveness, will close that gap of separation caused by your sins so that your prayers may be heard by God and answered according to His good and perfect will.

You will learn more about praying the type of prayers that help you fight Satan’s lies and discouragement in Anchor 10. Satan wants to keep you separated from God. He doesn’t want you to be in honest and fulfilling relationship with your Father. He doesn’t want you to have God’s peace and power that you can experience through prayer. He wants to distract you and deceive you, so you won’t have the time to pray or even understand why you should do so. It all goes back to choosing God’s truth and love over Satan’s lies and deceit. But, as mentioned, we will discuss that in Anchor 10.

Read **Hebrews 4:16** – “So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most”.

Read **Jeremiah 33:3** – “Call to Me, and I will answer you; I will tell you wonderful and marvelous things that you know nothing about”.

These are promises of God pertaining to prayer. To get a better understanding of how to pray, it’s important to really understand what prayer is. A good and honest relationship is built on interactive dialogue between two parties in that relationship. Genuine and authentic prayer has all the qualities and characteristics of a deeply meaningful conversation between two people – in the case of prayer, it’s a conversation between you and God, the Father. The end result of intentional dialogue can be wonderful. You see this in many human relationships. You can also experience it when you communicate intentionally with God.

When you are intentional about talking with God, having a dialogue with Him, your relationship

with Him only deepens. You get to know Him better and come to recognize and experience more of His love. That awareness of Him and His love helps give clarity and understanding to His work in your life. It should always make you grateful and hungry to remain in close dialogue and relationship with Him. Simply talking to God is not a dialogue and it doesn't build relationship. Communicating with God, through a two-way dialogue, both by speaking and listening, does build your relationship with Him.

A relationship with God is the most personal and intimate relationship you could ever have. No one could ever know you or love you like God does. No one could ever have your best interest at heart more than God does. He wants you to know Him through prayer. He wants you to know more about yourself, as His beloved child, through prayer. There is no more enriching or exciting experience than encountering that kind of love between the Father and His child.

Because prayer is so personal, it is also very unique – just as you are unique. There is no universal formula to know how to pray correctly. Prayer is to be experienced between you and God. It cannot simply be studied. In study, you can learn how to better communicate with God and understand how to have a better relationship with Him, but you have to put what you learn into practice and experience the fruit of pursuing a relationship with the lover of your soul. You can study the prayers prayed in God's Word, as they are very effective and beneficial to you, but you cannot study them as a means of having them define your prayer life and relationship with God. That is unique and personal between you and God; it is a heart matter. You must seek to encounter Him in your daily communication with Him. In **Jeremiah 29:13**, the Lord says, "You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart". What a promise! Wouldn't it be such a joy to live out the full blessings that could be realized from that promise of God? It is possible, or God wouldn't have included it in His Word.

King David wrote many psalms that were prayers to God. He could be up and he could be down. He could be filled with gratitude and praise, yet he could lament his sorrows. But in it all, he was himself and he was honest before God. He spoke, he listened and he heard from God. They had a real relationship that was unique to just the two of them. That is how your prayer and relationship with God is intended to be – honest, real and personal between you and your Father in heaven.

Again, the main purpose of prayer is to get to know the God of the universe better and grow in relationship with Him. Nothing will build your relationship with Jesus Christ like a committed prayer life. The more you pray, the more you talk to God. The more you talk to God, the more time you are spending with Him and building your relationship. Prayer builds intimacy with God. It is the life breath of communication with Him. Effective prayer is when your motives are aligned with God's will and you learn to pray accordingly.

What a privilege it is to have a connection to heaven and know that heaven has a connection to you. That is why the lines of communication should always be open. Part of the beauty of prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance to answer your prayers; it is grabbing ahold of God's willingness to answer your prayers. God simply wants you to abide in Him, to know Him and be in agreement with Him so you can touch heaven and heaven can, in turn, touch you.

Prayer is as essential to knowing God and growing spiritually as breathing is to living. It's how we give our battles over to God and allow Him to contend and fight for us. Prayer is how we lay our burdens and the burdens of our family and friends at the foot of the cross. Prayer gives you proper perspective. It can be the means of telling your problems how big your God is instead of telling God how big your problems are. Prayer reminds us that our God has great power and that

we are powerless without Him.

While prayer is a personal means of communicating with God and being in relationship with Him, it should not be taken for granted. You will never impress Him with fancy religious words and He can see right through prayers that are not sincere. True prayer gives God the reverence He deserves. He is God, after all. Treating Him like just another “buddy” may be a little naïve. There is a balance of faith, boldness and awe that comes with being in a prayer relationship with the God that created you and the entire universe. It may be a play on words, but it’s worth repeating a little differently this time – One of God’s greatest presents to you is allowing you to be in His presence.

Since prayer is personal and intimate, it may be helpful to think of it as a way to come affectionately to God each day with a *KISS*:

- **Kneel** before God. Prayer is a great opportunity to express your gratitude to God. You can thank Him, praise Him and worship Him for who He is. These are often the best dialogues between you and God. As you acknowledge God’s greatness, His love washes over you. You can kneel physically before Him or you can bow your heart and will before Him. Your posture is not as important as your motive. Whether you lie prostrate on the floor because His holiness overwhelms you, or you look up to the sky because you earnestly raise your eyes to heaven to acknowledge Him, the position of your heart is the thing that touches the heart of God. He will hear the prayers of one that has a pure heart and has motives that are surrendered to His will.
- **Invite** God into your day. When you wake up in the morning, have a dialogue with your Lord. Invite Him into your day and acknowledge His mercy towards you for giving you another day of life. A good prayer to pray is, “I invite You and give you full permission to be Lord over my life, my day, my goals, my plans, my dreams, my problems, my concerns, my meetings....my everything!
- **Self-evaluation** can also be an important part of prayer as you start and end your day. God will speak to you and convict your heart, when you really value His truth. He will direct His Holy Spirit to guide you into truth and comfort you as you navigate through that truth with His help. You can pray, “Lord, this is my situation. This is how I’m doing. I did some good things. Here they are. And I fell short in some areas. This is how I messed up. Here is what I should have done. Here is what I want to do. This is the result of my actions. Please forgive me, Lord. Thank You for your grace, your power and your forgiveness that gives me the strength to start and end each day with a clean slate”.
- **Supplication** is a biblical term for taking your needs to the Lord in prayer. Don’t be afraid to talk to God about your needs or the needs of friends and loved ones. When you have needs and concerns for your life, it is important to ask for God’s help. More importantly, you can intercede to God on behalf of others. All this means is that you are intervening or pleading with God for the needs of someone else. Praying for others is a great blessing. It strengthens your relationship with God as He grows your compassion and love for others. We may never truly know, until we get to heaven, how our prayers for others moved the hand of God and brought blessings to the lives of those for which we pray. It is compassionate and sacrificial to spend your time talking to God about others and asking Him to move on their behalf. God not only tells us to come to Him when we are in need, but He also calls us to pray for others. It brings us closer to Him and blesses us in the process of praying for them to be blessed.

Read **Psalm 46:10** – “Be still and know that I am God”. After you come to God with your daily KISS,

it's important not to just abruptly end your time with Him after telling Him about your needs and the needs of others. Take the time to wait and listen to God's side of the dialogue. You may say, "Lord, is there anything You want to talk to me about? Is there anything you want me to change? Is there anything you want me to stop doing? Is there a person you want me to pray for or bless in some way?". Take the time to be still and know that God is God. The bible says that His sheep hear His voice. It may not be audible, but it will be unmistakable.

You may not be used to spending time with God. It may be awkward for you, but don't dismiss it because it makes you uncomfortable. Satan will make every effort to make you uncomfortable in your effort to have a relationship with God. Don't listen to him and don't let him trick you into being afraid to spend time in prayer. You don't need to be in a hurry. Just ask God to help you quiet your mind and ask Him to let His voice be the only voice you hear.

Starting your day and ending your day in prayer is a way of activating God's peace and power in your life. Without talking to God in prayer, you are running on your own power. That's called willpower. It can't sustain you. God's power can sustain you and help you navigate your day with His peace and direction and lay your head on your pillow at night with His peace.

Are you always in a hurry to get out of the house? Do you hit the snooze button and give yourself little time with God or anything else before running out to start your day? We've all been guilty in some way or at some level of allowing distractions to keep us from praying. But God gives new mercies every day. Today or tomorrow can be your day to deepen and strengthen your relationship with God by spending time with Him in prayer. Charles Spurgeon once said, "If your faith in Christ doesn't lead you to pray, have nothing to do with it, get rid of it, and ask God to help you begin again". Maybe it's time to ask God to help you begin again.

Prayer not only grows your relationship with God, it also teaches you how to weather the storms of life – storms we all experience. If you are not being taught how to pray to overcome life's adversities and have the peace of God in and through those storms, then you are missing out on God's best plan for your life. His best plan for your life can be found in relationship with Him. That relationship only grows by spending time with Him in prayer. Many of you come to a ministry like Encounter because you know you are broken and you are looking for a way to make your life better. Learning to pray to God is a big component of how He helps you cope with those adversities in life so you can get better.

The bible talks more about prayer than most any other subject. Each and every prayer reference or actual prayer recorded in the bible can teach you something about the heart of God and His desire to have you know Him and be in relationship with Him.

Jesus once said, "The Scriptures declare, My temple will be called a house of prayer, but you have turned it into a den of thieves" – see **Matthew 21:13**. He was talking about the church and how they were doing things in the church for which it was never intended. Instead of praying to God, they were preying on people. How many churches do you know of that are actually houses of prayer today? We have houses of worship, houses of teaching, houses that promote social justice and claim to know "what Jesus would do". But do we have houses of prayer? We can know what Jesus would do – Jesus would pray! The number of churches today that could be considered houses of prayer are very few when we see how many churches there are in this country and in the world. That must sadden the heart of God, since He knows the purpose and benefits of prayer, especially in relation to His church.

Read 1 John 5:14-15 – “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of Him”. This is one of the most powerful passages in the bible. Think about the impact of what it says. It says we can ask God for anything and have confidence that He hears us and that we have what we ask for. That is an amazing promise, but it is only true under the stipulated condition – if we ask anything *according to His will*. Treating God like a Santa Clause in the sky or a magic genie is useless. That kind of confidence is placed in false perceptions of who God is. He is your heavenly Father, the Giver of every good gift, but He is more interested in developing your character than satisfying your every whim.

So, what about the prayers you have prayed that God hasn't answered, yet you think they are definitely in the will of God? Did you give up and stop asking? Many of us have. But the will of God and the timing of God often looks different than you expect it to look. Sometimes God isn't saying “No” to our prayers. Sometimes He is saying, “Not yet”. Those “not yet” prayer answers are difficult to wait on. Our patience grows thin and our doubts make us wonder why God didn't answer.

There are many reasons that God may not answer our prayers as we think He should. Here are just a few among many:

- We are asking something that really is NOT in the will of God.
- God has a better or different answer than that for which we are asking.
- God wants to change us or our situation for our own good before He answers our prayer. We may lack spiritual discernment or maturity and God may be trying to build our faith so we can be ready for the answer He gives when it comes. He may want to develop qualities in us like discipline, trust, compassion and submission.
- It may be in the will of God, but it may involve a person or people who have their own free will and they oppose the will of God. God doesn't force Himself or His will upon people. He gives each of us our own free will to choose Him and His ways.
- This is a fallen world and the consequences of a sinful world and sinful people can have an adverse effect on innocent people. We have to trust that, even in situations where we prayed for God to move and He didn't, that He will still work it out for the good. This doesn't mean that any bad thing that happened was good, but that we can trust God to bring the good out of it, even if we never witness here on earth what that good could be. He is God and He is faithful. His ways are not our ways.

There are times when God does answer prayers and we are shocked that He did so. We cannot predict God's miracles, but we shouldn't shrink back from asking for God to move heaven and earth to answer our prayers, especially if we are confident that He hears our prayers and we know that we are in His will. Expecting God to answer our prayers should be a given. Being at peace with whatever and however God answers those prayers is a sign that we trust God with the outcome.

To repeat what Dr. Charles Stanley likes to say, “Obey God and leave the results to Him”. That also holds true in your prayer dialogue and relationship with God. If you are spending enough time with Him to know Him and His character, you are going to be confident that you can trust Him to answer in the right way and at the right time, according to His good and perfect will. That seems hardly natural, humanly speaking. That is because it is truly supernatural. If you are speaking and

hearing God's heavenly language, you can trust God and you can trust His answers.

Many people don't develop a prayer life until they are faced with trials, tribulations or storms in life. Those same situations that stretch you and make you see your need for God are the very things that catapult you into true relationship with God. When you cry out to Him, He meets you where you are and He loves and carries you through the storm. If you stop praying after He bails you out, you will truly miss all the benefits He has for you. You will miss the peace He gives you, the power He gives you and the sweet intimacy you can have from being in constant dialogue with Him.

God can answer your prayers, but He can also be your most important relationship. As a matter of fact, ***your relationship with God should be your most important relationship***. Prayer can make that a reality. With that in mind, consider the key verses for Anchor 9 and commit them to memory. They will serve you well as you grow your relationship with the Father:

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 – "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

When you spend daily time in prayer, getting to know your Father in heaven, joy and gratitude become natural byproducts of that precious time you spend with Him. It would be impossible to spend time with your Father every day in prayer and not be joyful and thankful as a result. It is God's will for you to be joyful always, to pray continually, and to give thanks in all circumstances. And there is only one way to find this out for yourself – you have to be purposeful about spending time with your Father.

QUESTIONS FOR YOU:

1. How often do I pray and what are my motives? How would taking the time to have a dialogue with God in prayer and waiting to hear from Him benefit my relationship with Him?
2. What obstacles keep me from praying and getting to know my Father in heaven better? What intentional things will I do to improve my prayer life and my relationship with my Father in heaven?
3. How is God changing me when I pray? What is God saying to me when I pray?
4. Write a personal K.I.S.S. prayer to God. Make it intimate and personal, as if God was standing right in front of you. Share your prayer with your group.