

Dialing in to God through Prayer

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It's easy to give up when you can't get through to someone. We have all had that experience. It happens to me on a regular basis while using my expensive and supposedly reliable hands free phone while driving. The first issue I had was the device couldn't even understand my accent. The helpful Verizon technician suggested I switch the voice recognition software to British English! But still, it has a habit of dropping calls or broadcasting garbled speech. I often hear muffled words, "I can't hear you, can you speak louder." I get frustrated and end with a quick "Talk later."

It's hard to stay motivated when communication is on and off. In trying to relate to God, the problem is that sometimes He seems to be able to penetrate our little world and sometimes not, and that is frustrating! It's enough to make you give up because there doesn't seem to be any rhyme or reason behind it. We hit the dreaded dead zones. We lose hope and give up on prayer and justify ourselves murmuring, "I tried, it's not my fault!"

I like John Eldridge's insight into this dilemma from his book *Moving Mountains*. In it he explains,

"The uncomfortable truth is this: we have a very naïve view of prayer, on a level of believing that all a marriage needs is love, or that we should base our foreign policy on belief in our fellow man. That simple view of prayer has crushed many a dear soul, because it ignores crucial facts. There is a way things work."

Prayer doesn't just happen simply because we know it's a good idea! I know a lot of people who feel allergic to even the word prayer. Perhaps they were told one too many times "you should just pray about it."



How does prayer work?

Like all things, prayer gets better with practice, so if you try one time and it doesn't work can you really say you have tried enough? Gladwell talks about how you have to invest 10,000 hours to get really proficient at something. I wondered what 10,000 hours would look like in prayer time. It was shocking to realize that by praying an hour a day, it would take 27 years to become really good at prayer. And how many of us pray for an hour a day? All of a sudden Rev. Moon's suggestion to

make your daily life a prayer made a lot more sense:

"I'm not talking about setting aside a little bit of time each day to pray, but the type of continuous prayer which you do while conducting your daily affairs. I'm talking about one consistent prayer, a lifestyle of prayer. In such case your mind is focused on your prayer even while you are eating; while you are walking or talking with other people, your ultimate desire is your prayer. We all have to experience this kind of prayer. The first step is to rearrange our mind, our thoughts."

It's about setting your intention and allowing that to permeate your life. Through this type of prayer, you could become proficient a lot more quickly! It would take under two years!

Most of us have a mixed bag when it comes to prayer, which leads to the inevitable question of why are some prayers answered and others not, and what can we learn about how to pray? Part of it comes down

to how much we are willing to invest in the communication. Do we unplug when the reception gets a little rough or keep trying?

To keep motivated it helps to understand the bigger picture. If we know the purpose, we have the energy to persevere. Our goal is our spiritual maturity and with that comes the ability to communicate with God.

“.....we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature personhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children.” – Ephesians 4:12-14

God is looking forward to our maturity in the same way you don't want your children to be children forever. Young children are adorable but we don't want to be dressing them and teaching them endlessly. There is great joy in relationship with an adult child because there can be free communication, an intimacy and a depth of understanding that you can't have with your young child.

Redial eight times if necessary

There is a fantastical story about prayer in the Old Testament that pokes its way into the New Testament and into our lives if we want it to.

In a showdown with God, the prophet Elijah prays for rain:

“Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees. “Go and look toward the sea,” he told his servant. And he went up and looked. “There is nothing there,” he said. Seven times Elijah said, “Go back.” The seventh time the servant reported, “A cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea.” – 1 Kings 18:42-43

The question here is how would the story have ended if Elijah had given up after two tries or five tries or even seven tries. While praying once may sometimes work it is not always enough. Think 10,000 hours or at least be willing to give some substantial time for God to respond. Our insecurity, impatience or lack of focus causes us to give up too soon which is why working on our spiritual maturity matters.

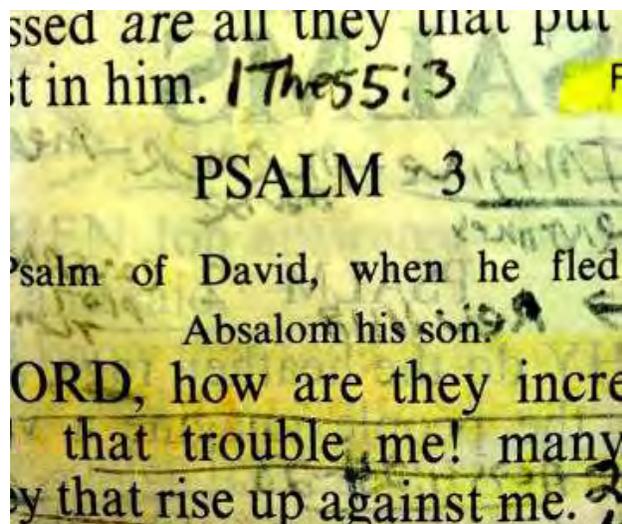
This story pokes it way into the New Testament when James the brother of Jesus references it. His advice was simple:

“Therefore confess your sins to each other (purify yourselves by being honest) and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”

It's really hard for us to hear from God when we are hiding our problems or pretending we don't have them – as in, everything is always everyone else's fault. We have to learn how to reveal ourselves. That's why it's good to find a place to pray where you can be alone and just say it as it is – no pretenses and in all honesty.

James goes on to say:

“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”



James is reminding the people he was talking to that their prayers could be heard. They were no different from Elijah. It's easy to point to someone who appears larger than life and feel that while they can succeed, I may not be able to. It's a no-brainer that the Pope, Joel Osteen or Oprah Winfrey might get an answer but do I really believe I can? The key is persistence. We owe it to God not to hang-up mid conversation but keep trying.

The importance of being real

The second prayer principle I want to speak to is the importance of being real. A problem for God is that He is always put on a pedestal. If God is believed in at all, it is assumed that he is far beyond

human understanding. God is therefore tragically alone. No-one thinks about this, or how this might feel for God.

When you meet someone important you are usually formal and polite, but that in itself limits the conversation. Everything becomes about appearances. What matters most can easily become lost.

I was intrigued by how a really good friend of mine found her relationship with God. When we think of people finding God, we might assume they read the New Testament or Divine Principle and had an ah-ha moment where they were awakened to “truth.”

But this was not the case for my friend. She was nursing a broken heart and had been struggling for a long time with depression. A devastating experience had robbed her of her sense of self-worth. She had long given up on God. I forget the exact circumstances, but she happened upon the Book of Psalms and in that crazy, roller coaster of a book she found hope!

It grabbed her heart because she found her own emotions reflected in the pages. It felt viscerally real. It paralleled her questions and longings. It opened the door to prayer for her because the author of Psalms, David, is brutally honest! There’s no effort to clean up his emotions in the presence of the Almighty. We can learn a thing or two from him.

The following passages reveal what I mean:

*“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?” – Psalm 13:1-2*

It’s the “Why do the 1% continue to prosper?” kind of a prayer.

I think the whole spectrum of human emotion is contained within the various psalms. They are a study in the human experience. What it teaches us is the value of pouring out our heart to God. David wasn’t the all-around good guy. He had every flavor of fallen nature going for him. But the Psalms encourage us to:

*“Trust in Him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.” – Psalm 62:8*

Permission to feel

What Psalms does is give us permission to have an emotional life. It’s not sanitized religion as usual. The Book’s very existence invites us to bring our feelings to God. He or She can handle our emotions. It’s nothing that God has not seen before. Our Heavenly Parent is waiting for your cry of the heart and honesty without religious formalities. God knows that our lives are hard and wants to help.

Rev. Moon taught:

“In the original world of creation, we wouldn’t have had to restore anything; we would have just lived as we were designed to live. But because of the fall there is a tremendous gap, [what seems like] an insurmountable wall between us and the ideal. We have to go over that wall. When we pray, we shouldn’t pray vaguely or ambiguously. We must pray, ‘Heavenly Father, I know the original ideal of creation, but I am not that way, nor is the rest of humanity. I need to be restored to the original place and be in relationship to You. You have to help me!’ We can have a really powerful prayer this way. God cannot deny it because this is the Principle.”



To make it over a wall you have to be desperate. God wants to help us because He feels responsible for that wall. That is the nature of true parental heart. Parents feel responsible and are only concerned with reconciliation. They can never forget, night or day, their child. That is God’s heart for you.

A lonely heart

Yesterday, my husband visited a friend. They were fixing a piece of machinery together and the friend shared that his son hasn’t spoken to him in five years. He is heartbroken. He doesn’t even know where his son is. All he can do is wait and hope his son will call. That is God’s suffering heart in a nutshell. Although both parties bear responsibility, a true parent’s heart burns with self-recrimination.

Perhaps this explains the story of the prodigal son. The son, no doubt, experienced some temporary happiness in the big city but it wasn't a true or lasting happiness. Once the son had spent his inheritance and suffered through pain and regret all he wanted to do was return home. The trouble is he didn't know how his father would react so he rehearsed a speech. It was full of self-recrimination and repentance. He came to that desperate place where he could give up his ego and just be honest – put it all out there. It was a prayer none the less, whether spoken or just thought. It was a plea for help.

The father's actions are described in Luke:

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”

Maybe we haven't run off with the inheritance or spent ourselves down to our last penny but the best way to climb over the wall and find God is to be honest in our need. Don't be too afraid to ask, or too busy to ask, or perhaps simply too skeptical to ask.

Set your life on re-dial

I hope that this week you can think about redialing eight times or even eighty! It's worth it. That 10,000 hours of living prayer is at least two years so keep at it and remember it's not until you are ready to be real and raw that you can connect with God our Heavenly Parent. This week you might just want to dare yourself to dial in and try again, because God is waiting for your call.