



PRAYER

SCRIPTURE VERSES (NIV)

Luke 18:9-14

⁹ To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: ¹⁰ “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ ¹³ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ ¹⁴ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Romans 8:26

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

James 5:16

¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

1 John 5:14-15

¹⁴ This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.

Psalms 5:3

³ In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.

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SOMETIMES GOD SPEAKS BY SAYING NOTHING

Rick Warren — March 3, 2015

“If God is silent, what’s that to you? If he turns his face away, what can you do about it? But whether silent or hidden, he’s there, ruling.” (Job 34:29 MSG)

Sometimes God speaks by saying nothing. This is extremely frustrating to us! But God has his reasons when he’s silent. You have to just wait and trust him. If you run ahead of God saying, “I haven’t heard anything from God, so I’m just going to go ahead and do this” and you don’t trust him, you’re going to have all kinds of problems and be filled with regret.

There are many examples of this in the Bible. One of them was King Saul, the first king of Israel. He was getting ready to go to battle, and he went to God and said, “God, what do you want me to do in this battle?” But Saul hadn’t been right with God for a long time. The Bible says in 1 Samuel 28:6, “*Saul prayed to GOD, but GOD didn’t answer — neither by dream nor by sign nor by prophet*” (MSG). Saul tried to find an answer three different ways, and he still didn’t get it. So he got impatient. He got desperate, and he turned to the occult — something he had outlawed in the country. He said, “Go find a spiritual advisor. Find me a medium, a psychic, a witch, somebody who can conjure up spirits or do a séance.” He knew it was wrong, and he did it anyway because he got desperate. And you know what happened? He lost everything. He lost the battle. He lost his reputation. He lost his life. He didn’t wait to hear from God, and he suffered great consequences.

So what do you do when God is silent?

First, you remember that God is in control. Job 34:29 says, “*If God is silent, what’s that to you? If he turns his face away, what can you do about it? But whether silent or hidden, he’s there, ruling.*” God may not share his plan with you, but it doesn’t mean he doesn’t have one. He has a plan and purpose for your life. He loves you. He’s a good God. And he’ll take care of you if you’ll just wait on him.

Second, you trust God. The Bible says in Psalm 50:14, “*I want you to trust me in your times of trouble, so I can rescue you and you can give me glory*” (TLB). God is asking you today, “Will you trust me? Will you trust me with that dream? Will you trust me with that ache in your heart? Will you trust me with that stress? Will you trust me with that loneliness? Will you trust me with that desire to get married? Will you trust me with that health issue? Will you trust me with your dreams and ambitions? Will you trust me?”

Pray this prayer aloud or in your heart:

“Dear God, I don’t want to go through life without hearing from you. I want to learn to listen. Thank you for the Bible. Help me to read it. Thank you for gifted teachers. Help me to act on what they teach. Help me to make some godly friends that I can trust and listen to. I want to be open to the ideas that you place in my mind. When I’m in pain, help me to learn from it, not run from it. Most of all, help me to trust you and your plan when you’re silent. Jesus Christ, I want to get to know you and love you like you love me. In your name I pray. Amen.”

HURRY IS A BARRIER TO HEARING GOD

Rick Warren — February 26, 2015

“The seeds on the rocky soil represent those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.” (Luke 8:13 NLT)

To cultivate an open mind so that you can hear from God, you’ve got to allocate time to listen. That means you’ve got to slow down. You’ve got to be quiet. You’ve got to put it in your schedule so you have time to hear God speak. When we live hurried lives, God gets shuffled to the sidelines. We say, “God, I want to hear from you. But hurry up! I’ve only got five minutes!”

God wants more than your leftovers and your spare moments. He wants to be the center of your life. The way that you prove he’s the center of your life is by allocating time to listen. Jesus says in Luke 8:6, *“Other seed fell among rocks. It began to grow, but the plant soon wilted and died for lack of moisture”* (NLT). Israel is not a very fertile country; most of it is a thin layer of topsoil over bedrock of limestone. If you plant something on this rocky soil, the seed will sprout — but it can’t get deep roots, so it withers and dies.

In Luke 8:13 Jesus explains that this kind of soil represents *“those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they believe for a while, then they fall away when they face temptation.”* The shallow soil represents a superficial mind. Sometimes we react superficially to God’s Word. We get excited. We get emotional. We’re moved impulsively. But we don’t let God’s Word sink into the bedrock of our personality, so there’s no real change. How do you grow beyond superficiality? How do you develop spiritual roots? There are two very practical ways.

First, schedule a daily quiet time with God. It can be 10 or 15 minutes. You sit, be quiet, listen to God, and ask him, “Is there anything you want to say to me through your Word?” Nothing will build spiritual roots faster than a daily quiet time with God.

Second, join a weekly small group. That’s where God can speak to you through other people as you discuss and interact and learn from each other. Hebrews 10:25 says, *“Let us not give up the habit of meeting together Instead, let us encourage one another”* (TEV).

Both of these habits require you to be intentional with your time. When you allocate part of your day for a quiet time and part of your week for small group, you are showing God that you want him at the center of your life and that you want to hear from him.

Talk It Over

- ◆ How will you be more intentional with your time this week so that you can hear from God?
- ◆ Why do you think fellowship is so important to our ability to grow as individuals?

YOU'LL HEAR GOD WHEN YOU WANT TO

Rick Warren

“You will search again for the LORD your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him.” (Deuteronomy 4:29 NLT)

You're not going to hear God unless you really, really want it. I'm not saying it's an option. I'm not saying it would be nice. It is a necessity!

God doesn't tell his dream for your life if you want to debate it. God doesn't tell his vision for your life if you want to discuss it. God doesn't tell you what he put you on Earth to do just so you can say, "Let me think about it."

No! It's got to be a necessity. You have to say, "I've got to know why I'm here. I've got to know what you want me to do with my life. I've got to hear your voice. I've got to have your vision."

King David wrote in the book of Psalms, *“My God, I want to do what you want”* and *“What I want most of all and at all times is to honor your laws”* (Psalm 40:8 NCV, Psalm 199:20 CEV).

David was passionate in his declaration that what he wanted most of all was to honor God. Being obedient and following God were not options for him. It was the only thing David wanted to do. He used words for seeking God like, "I long for it," "I crave it," "I hunger for it," and "I'm like a deer panting for water."

When you get that desperate, you're going to hear from God.

A lot of people talk to God, but they never hear from God. For them, prayer is a monologue. But you can't have a relationship with a monologue. What if I married my wife and talk to her, but she never talks to me? That's not a relationship. You've got to have a conversation. Just as important as talking to God in prayer is listening to God and letting him talk to you. How does that happen? First, you've got to want it more than anything else.

Deuteronomy 4:29 says, *“You will search again for the LORD your God. And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him”* (NLT). Guaranteed!

Talk It Over

- ◆ What is the thing you want most in life? How does your life reflect that longing?
- ◆ Would you say that you are passionate for Christ? How can you cultivate passion for God in your life?
- ◆ With what attitude do you usually ask God for direction? Are you prepared to respond in obedience?

YOUR APPOINTMENT WITH GOD

Rick Warren

“Find a quiet, secluded place so you won’t be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.” (Matthew 6:6 MSG)

God isn’t going to speak to you if there’s a bunch of noise going on in your life. You’ve got to get alone, and you’ve got to get quiet. We call this a quiet time.

The key to hearing God speak and getting his vision for your life is this: God wants to meet with you.

You need to realize you’re not waiting on God; he’s waiting on you. God made you to have a relationship with him. He wants you to spend time with him on a daily basis. He wants you to schedule a date with him every day. **God is waiting.**

Getting alone in a quiet place is pretty difficult today. I don’t know if you realize how much noise there is in your life. There’s very little time in your life that’s absolutely quiet.

If you’ve got kids at home, it’s even more difficult! But let me give you some hope. Susanna Wesley, one of the great women of history, had 18 children. One of her sons, John, founded the Methodist church and spread Christianity across the western part of America with Methodist revival preachers, and another, Charles, wrote more than 6,000 hymns.

How do you find time alone when you have 18 children? In her biography, it says that Susanna Wesley would go and sit in her favorite rocker every afternoon, and she would throw her apron over her head for an hour. Her kids knew that Mom with apron over her head means, “No child bothers Mom or you die!”

Wesley said it was the prayers of his mom that shaped his life. You can find time alone if you are that desperate. Make time to be quiet and meet with the Lord.

Talk It Over

- ◆ How much of your day is spent in silence?
- ◆ What do you need to help those around you understand so that they can support you in and not distract from your quiet time?
- ◆ What effect will your consistent quiet time have not only on you but on others as well?

WHAT DOES A DAILY QUIET TIME LOOK LIKE?

Rick Warren

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.” (Proverbs 21:5 ESV)

Having a quiet time is like many other activities you might do in life — in at least one respect. To be successful, it helps to have a plan. The Bible says, *“The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty”* (Proverbs 21:5 ESV).

If you’ve never had a quiet time before, you may not have a good, simple plan for doing one. Simplicity is important with any plan you develop. If you make it complicated, you’re more likely to get off track. All you really need for an effective quiet time is a Bible, notebook, and maybe a hymnal or songbook.

So what does a daily quiet time look like?

First, be quiet before the Lord. The Bible calls it waiting on God. You start by simply sitting down and shutting up.

Second, pray briefly. Start off with a short opening prayer. Ask God to open your mind and guide you. Ask him to cleanse your mind.

Read a portion of Scripture slowly. This is where your conversation with God begins. He starts speaking to you through his Word, and then you speak back to him through prayer. Read the Bible slowly. Don’t try to read too quickly or too much. The more slowly you read Scripture, the more you’re forced to think about what you’re reading.

Meditate on the Word. Spend some time chewing on what God is saying. Chew on the Word like cows chew on cud. Ponder and wrestle with it in your mind. There are lots of great methods for meditating on the Word. You can find specific ideas on how to meditate on the Bible in my book, *“Rick Warren’s Bible Study Methods.”*

Write down what you discover. When God speaks to you through his Word, care enough about what he is saying to write it down. Writing enables us to remember what God has said to us and record our discoveries.

Pray again. Be quiet. Ask God to show you his Word. Talk to God about what he has said to you. Tell him what you’re thinking about what he is saying. Talk to him about anything else that’s on your mind.

There’s not just one way to have a quiet time, but following a plan similar to this can get you started on a rewarding devotional journey.

Talk It Over

- ◆ Have you ever thought about your quiet time as an intimate conversation with God? Why or why not?
- ◆ What distractions do you need to eliminate in order to “be quiet”?

WHO'S VOICE IS IT? WORRY.

Rick Warren — March 12, 2015

A lot of Christians go through life living under condemnation and guilt, thinking it's the voice of God. But it's not. That's the devil!

Conviction comes from God. Condemnation comes from the devil. The purpose of conviction is to correct something that's out of whack in your life. The purpose of condemnation is just to put you down and make you feel miserable and guilty and ashamed. The motivation behind conviction is that God loves you and wants to help you be better. The motivation behind condemnation is that Satan hates you and wants to make you miserable. When God speaks to you about an area in your life for conviction, he's very specific. Condemnation is general.

God will give you a specific area of your life where something is out of whack. Then, he gives you the solution. You confess it to God, and the feeling of conviction leaves instantly. Condemnation, on the other hand, goes on and on and on.

Romans 8:1 says, *"There is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus"* (NLT). God will never attack your value. If you hear a voice that says, "You're hopeless! You're worthless! You're unlovable!" you can know that is not the voice of God.

Finally, you need to ask about your idea or impression, "Do I sense God's peace about it?"

If you get an impression and it makes you feel pressured, overwhelmed, or confused, you need to question whether that impression is from God. Because God doesn't want us to live under pressure. He wants us to sense his peace. Satan wants to drive us compulsively. But God desires to draw us compassionately. Peter Lord used to say, "Ninety percent of what God says to us is encouragement." Have you sensed God saying anything encouraging to you lately? Or is it all about pressure? God has some encouraging things to say to us.

There is a word for the pressure that comes into our lives that drives us away from God's peace: worry. But Philippians 4:6-7 says, *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."*

These verses tell us that worry is never from God. It only creates pressure in our lives. Those verses also give us this incredible promise: Take your worry to God, and leave it there. Listen to his voice. It will bring peace if you only obey it.

THE PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is error, the truth;
Where there is doubt, the faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled, as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

*One night I had a dream.
I dreamed I was walking along the beach
with the Lord.*

*Across the sky flashed scenes from my life..
For each scene, I noticed two sets of
footprints in the sand,
one belonging to me, and the other to the Lord..
When the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that many times along the path of my life
there was only one set of footprints.
I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest
and saddest times in my life.
This really bothered me
and I questioned the Lord about it:
“Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
you’d walk with me all the way.
But I have noticed that during the most
troublesome times in my life
there is only one set of footprints.
I don’t understand why
when I need you most you would leave me.”
The Lord replied:
“My precious child, I love you and would
never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints, it was then
that I carried you.”*

by Mary Stevenson

ONE BARRIER TO HEARING GOD SPEAK IS RESISTANCE

Rick Warren — February 27, 2015

If you want to hear God speak, you must first cultivate an open mind.

What does that mean? It means you've got to be receptive. You've got to be willing. You've got to be open. You've got to be eager. You've got to be ready.

The number one barrier to hearing God speak is resistance. So many people are closed to the possibility that God might speak to them. If you don't think God can or will speak to you, guess what? He won't.

Jesus talked about this kind of soil — the footpath soil — in Luke 8:5: *“A farmer went out to plant his seed. As he scattered it across his field, some seed some fell on a footpath, where it was stepped on, and the birds ate it”* (NLT).

As workers walk down the path between each row of a field, it becomes trampled down. The soil becomes compact and gets really hard. If seed happens to land on the footpath, there's no way it's going to sprout. It's not going to take root. It just lays on the surface until a bird comes along and eats it.

Jesus goes on to explain in verse 12 that “the seeds that fell on the footpath represent those who hear the message, only to have the devil come and take it away from their hearts and prevent them from believing and being saved.”

There are two characteristics of a footpath: It's hardened, and it's narrow. Do you know any minds like that? I know a lot of people who have a closed mind, a hard heart, and a narrow view of life. They don't even give God a chance. Their minds are made up; they're unwilling to listen.

The tragedy of a closed mind and a hard heart is that it's barren. Nothing can grow there. Nothing can live there. Even if a little seed does happen to fall on a closed mind or a hardened heart, it can't take root. People who have a closed mind are not really living; they just exist. But a bitter life is a wasted life. It just perpetuates the pain!

So how should you respond instead? The Bible says, *“Get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls”* (James 1:21 NLT). The opposite of a closed mind is an open mind. You need to say to God, “I can't do it on my own. The ways I've tried haven't worked. So I'm going to listen to you and open my heart and mind to your possibilities. God, I believe in you and want to hear from you!”

THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS GOD'S TRUTH TO MIND

Rick Warren — March 2, 2015

“The Holy Spirit ... will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you.” (John 14:26 Phillips)

God speaks through ideas from the Holy Spirit. He gives you thoughts. He gives you suggestions. He puts impressions or notions in your mind. When the devil talks to you, that is temptation. But when God talks to you in your mind, we call that inspiration.

Jesus says in John 14:26, *“The Holy Spirit ... will be your teacher and will bring to your minds all that I have said to you”* (Phillips).

The Holy Spirit is our teacher and counselor. He's like a personal coach! I know people who spend tens of thousands of dollars on a life coach.

Notice it says, “bring to your minds.” The Holy Spirit speaks directly to your mind. He doesn't speak in an audible voice. I have never in my life heard God speak in an audible voice. Why would he need to? He doesn't need to go through my ears. He goes directly to my mind. *“His Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we really are God's children”* (Romans 8:16 NLT).

If the Holy Spirit brings God's truth to mind, that means there's got to be something in there to bring out. That's why you need to get into the Bible. When you read, study, and fill your mind with God's Word, you are storing the truth in your mind, and then the Holy Spirit can bring it to mind at just the right time.

Sometimes you may read the Bible and say, “I didn't get anything out of it today.” You don't have to get something out of the Bible every time you read it. What you're doing is storing the truth in your mind. Your mind's filled with everything else you've seen — every billboard, every commercial, every bad joke, every movie. It's all in there. You need to balance it with the truth. Then the Holy Spirit can bring God's truth to mind and show you the way you should go.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What are some of the ways God speaks to you through the Holy Spirit? Have you ever sensed his direction through a dream or vision?
- ◆ How does your current quiet time habit help you bank God's truth in your mind or keep you from it?
- ◆ Why do you think people are afraid of the Holy Spirit? Do you want to hear from God in this way? Why or why not?

WAITING FOR AN ANSWER

Rick Warren— November 29, 2016

“Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act” (Psalm 37:7a NLT, second edition).

What does God want you to do while you’re waiting on an answer to your prayer?

Have you noticed that we don’t mind waiting as long as we can grumble while we wait? We don’t mind waiting in the DMV line as long as we can gripe and complain about how lousy and unorganized the government is.

But God says, “Be still.”

Like little 2-year-olds, we get the spiritual wiggles while we’re waiting for God to answer a prayer. We get nervous and restless. We want to jump up and do something. But God says, “Wait patiently. Be still. Watch me act. Don’t get restless, don’t get nervous, and don’t try to take matters into your own hands.”

And, don’t ever make Abraham’s mistake in the Old Testament of trying to be the answer to your own prayer. It will cause all kinds of problems! One day God told Abraham that he was going to make him the father of a great nation. There were only two problems: Abraham was 99 years old, and he was childless. Abraham looked at his own body and said, “No way, José!” And he looked at his wife Sarah, who was infertile, and said, “Double no way! It ain’t gonna happen.”

So Abraham took matters into his own hands and had a baby with his wife’s maid, Hagar. Abraham said, “Here’s my answer to prayer! I’ve got a son at 99. His name is Ishmael.” God said, “No, no. You missed the point. That’s not my answer to prayer. That’s *your* answer to prayer. I’ve got a miracle boy who’s coming, and Sarah’s going to be the mom. You’re going to name him Isaac.” Isaac means “laughter.” When Sarah was told that she was going to be pregnant, the Bible says she laughed because she didn’t believe God.

But God had the last laugh. Isaac was born, and it started an intense rivalry between him and Ishmael that we’re still paying for today. The tense relationship between Jews and Arabs all began because Abraham tried to answer his own prayer request.

Whenever you try to answer your own prayer, you’re asking for trouble. Instead, wait patiently, and watch God act.

Talk It Over

- ◆ What can you do to help you focus on God while you’re patiently waiting?
- ◆ What are your tendencies when you are waiting on God to act? What do you do after you request something of him in prayer?
- ◆ How have you grown spiritually during a time when you had to wait on God?

DO YOU KNOW JESUS?

**I don't mean do you know "of" Jesus.
Do you know HIM?
Does He know you?**

What kind of relationship do you have with Him? Is he a vending machine God that you put in your request and out pops a blessing? If no blessing is immediate then He isn't working or something is faulty with your input?

As I read through Paul's letters of encouragement I have the feeling that Jesus cares and comforts me and is with me but as I read just the red letter scripture in the Gospels, there's a different image that comes forth. As I re-read the entire gospel of Matthew, I get another sense of Jesus. I wonder if you get the same. Do you?

What sort of man would volunteer for this mission: Go into enemy territory, save mankind, teach the truth and die an incredibly painful humiliating death to save as many as you can. Now Go!

Yes, Jesus is compassionate and caring, but don't you get a sense of his rock solid commitment; military discipline and strict obeying? How about speaking the truth even if it is hard to swallow. He IS the King of Kings and will return with a legion/a battalion of Angel Armies in Full Power. (Matt 13:41-42; Matt 24:30-31) What Jesus says is sometimes scary and threatening but HIS mission is to save as many as he can – as many who will listen and obey.

Are you one of them?

What kind of relationship do you have with Jesus? When he returns do you want to hear him say "But I don't know you."? (*Matt 7:21-23, Matt 25:10-12, Luke 13:22-27*)

Won't you – TODAY- right now commit yourself to grow Your relationship with Your Lord?

Open the door. Let Him in. Spend time with Him. Listen to His Word.

It means all eternity to you.

-Ms. Debbie, Founder "An Encouraging Word Ministry"