The Essence of Prayer
Inquiring /Abiding / Listening

"And Samuel replied, 'Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening.'" 1 Samuel 3:10 NLT

Inquiring of someone most often means that you need information or you are searching for answers. In reading the many accounts when King David inquired of the Lord, you get a real sense that David had ready, ongoing conversations with God. In the prophet Samuel's case, God reached out to him as a means to speak to the Hebrew nation. Prayer is and should be, a means of two-way communication more than an avenue to make requests. The point here is that abiding and listening are often the most productive times in our conversations with God.

Andrew Murray says it this way, *"His listening will depend on my listening; the depth His words find with me, will be the measure of the power of my words with Him. What God's words are to me, is the test of what He Himself is to me, and so of the uprightness of my desire after Him in prayer."*

Just as in any rational conversation, it only makes sense to *allow* God to speak to us. The problem is that we often get too wrapped up in ourselves, become shortsighted and in a hurry. God said to King David, *"Be still and know that I am God."* As with King David, He wants to have an ongoing conversation throughout the day and not just in times of trouble. We must take time to hear God's heart.

When we are in panic mode, and prayer is our last resort, we often don't think about being still and listening to what God has to say. Instead, the thought is, "Just fix this!" Miracles are awesome but it is also possible that God wants to take us through our difficulties so we can grow in our relationship with Him, giving us opportunities to become mature in our faith. Please consider that the outcome of *being still and knowing God* just might result in fewer times of panic; something to think about.

God always wants to nurture His relationship with His children. So, in our conversations with Him, He walks us through the maturing process, *if we allow Him*. In other words, if we will abide and listen, and allow Him to work in our lives, we can later look back and see how His wisdom and goodness brought us through our times of distress or even prevented them. We will appreciate how His overarching plan unfolded for our ultimate benefit, and He will get the glory.

God invites and draws us to His promises given to us in the Bible. God delights in providing for us and giving us His abundant life, but if we treat God as a "Cosmic Bellhop," we are missing out on His best plans and purposes for us. God is a good Father who offers us His wisdom, peace, joy, security, abiding rest, affirmation and His love.

> *"For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."* Matthew 6:32-34

We often think of prayer as the power to draw down good gifts from heaven. But please know that as we seek God's gifts, He wants to give us Himself first. Please consider that we seek Him above all else rather than what He can do for us.

Abiding (Psalms 91) and being still (Psalms 46:10) are just as important as voicing your concerns. God will fight your battles if you rest in Him and abide with Him in an ongoing hour-by-hour relationship. One of my favorite verses says, *"...He is not far from each one of us; for in Him (Jesus) we live and move and have our being..."* Acts 17:28 NKJV

When we set aside the time to abide with God, we create the opportunity for our conversation to become intimate and personal. Abiding means mostly listening; no heart-wrenching requests, no personal dilemmas to voice—*our personal desires give way to His.* Our needs are still there, yet God already knows about them. So, in the calmness of quiet abiding, the conversation is more about holding our concerns and issues up to the Light—*are they valid in His sight?*

Consider also that waiting in prayer gives an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to sift our thinking to show us whether we are asking the right thing and in the right spirit. Our heavenly Father knows what is best and our abiding gives us comfort in the fact that we can trust Him. Abiding gives us sweet peace that cannot be obtained in any other way.

We make important decisions nearly every day so we need God's guidance. Going to Him in prayer and making a point to just listen can have a great impact on your future. We know this by looking back on the choices we have made. Many of the choices seemed innocuous at the time but then proved to be life-altering, changing the entire course of our life. Isaiah 30:21 speaks to this,

> *"Your own ears will hear Him. Right behind you a voice will say, 'This is the way you should go,' whether to the right or to the left."* NLT

In Summary: as we just read, listening gives us an opportunity to hear God's direction for our lives. When we inquire, like King David, God will give solutions, knowledge, wisdom and direction when we seek Him. This means we should listen for His voice just as much as we speak, maybe more. Remember that God knows everything about everything, so listening to His counsel may be just what you need.

> *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."* Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV

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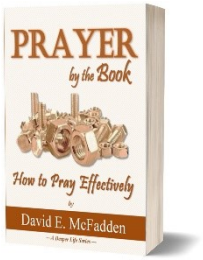

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