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Life of Prayer: Misconceptions
1 Kings 22:11-23

The last 3 weeks, Wesley has been sharing with us about conversational prayer, which is talking with God, rather than just talking to God. He has shared with us how to begin the conversation, the purpose of praying, and staying connected. If we listen, we discover that God is whispering in our hearts. God communicates with us, when we are listening. It is a wonderful joy to receive the encouragement, support, guidance, insight and even humor that God gives us as we talk with God about things great and small, our daily lives and God's eternal plans for creation. There is a great blessing with God that we experience as we talk together. However, there are some misconceptions about conversational prayer.

Point 1

One of the dark sides is that it is easy to confuse the voice of God with other voices, including our own.

Wesley told me that one of his friends had an interesting situation one Sunday morning. One of his members came up to him and said, "Preacher, God just told me that I should give the sermon this morning." His response was, "That's strange. I've been talking with God all week as I have prepared this sermon, and God never said a word to me about you preaching this Sunday."

The Bible talks about false prophets. These are people who claim to be delivering a message from God that isn't from God. False prophets believe they are speaking God's message. The problem is that they haven't carefully investigated whether this word is from God or someone else.

Sometimes someone may tell us of a revelation they have from prayer. On occasion, Pastor Wesley has shared insights received through serious and earnest prayer. What you may not know is that usually he received those insights many years before he said anything about them in a sermon. He thought about them and compared them to biblical teachings and checked them against the church's teaching. He talked to people about them. All before he was willing to proclaim them as the Word of God.

It is not easy to discern the Word of God. We are confronted with conflicting truth of what we were hoping the answer would be. God's response may be contrary to what we expect or desire. Maybe we even begin to feel a sense of entitlement. We pray as though we are entitled, instead of praying for our needs. We become swayed to the voices of deception.

Point 2

Another misconception is to assume that the little bit we receive from God is the total and absolute truth.

I read this week of a story about a preacher who was getting married. One of the members of that church was saying that most of the congregation was not happy with his decision. When pressed about it, his reply was this: "Well, he was married, and then one day he told us that he had fallen in love with this new woman. He said that he prayed about it, and the greatest sense of peace came over him, so that he knew that it was God's will he leave his wife and marry this woman." Now, we know that it doesn't take long to find several verses from throughout the Bible, including portions of the Sermon on the Mount, that says what he did was wrong. The people of God have agreed over a period of thousands of years that leaving your spouse for another is wrong. Yet, this man let his feeling of peace trump all of that. God may have given him a sense of peace, but he then took that to be the total truth of the answer he was looking for.

God's thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are God's ways our ways. There may be lying spirits. Ahab doesn't understand the nature of God, or what God demands. He has a personal agenda, and he is determined to manipulate the religious establishment to support his questionable goals. Ahab is a model of what we can become when we are not attentive to the will of God.

Prayer is not always answered in the way expected.

Point 3

Another danger is that we may be putting limits on God or trying to create a God of our own design.

Sometimes even concluding that because God talks with us, we are superior to others. God may not fit our pre-conceived ideas of who and what God should be. We have an image of God's goodness, as it fits into our desires. In our Lenten study this year, we looked at the book, *The Shack*. We discovered many new thoughts of who and what God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit may look like. Often times, very different than anything we had thought of before. But what we kept coming back to, time and time again, is that this is God we are talking about. God who is more than our minds can comprehend, and still we try to put limits on God.

Or that idea of superiority in prayer. I hope there is no one here who will make this statement, but if there is, I ask that you prayerfully reconsider saying this: "If you just pray hard enough, it will happen. If you have enough faith, you will be healed." That may be something God can say to us, but not something that we say to each other.

The solution is to never assume that what you have heard in prayer is the total and absolute truth. We are to examine what is revealed to us in prayer with biblical teaching, traditions of the faith, the thoughts and insights of godly and wise people, reality and common sense.

Prayer is not attempting to manipulate God, but a means of giving God thanks and praise, calling upon God for one's daily needs and the needs and cares of others. We ask that his will be done and kingdom come. Prayer is made to God through the Spirit in faith and expectation. The Spirit prompts and guides believers in prayer.

End scripture: Romans 8:26-28