

THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory
Prayer And Fasting*

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ISSUE 1

WAITING ON GOD

We live in an age when people are constantly on the go. Our lives are filled with a variety of activities. There seems to be more to do than we have hours in a day. We are continually rushing from one appointment to another. There is seemingly an unceasing pressure to be somewhere at a particular time.

If you want a vivid illustration of this, go to an office supply store and look at the variety of planners and organizers that are available. You can schedule your life daily, weekly, or monthly. The variety of planners and organizers is staggering. Yet, this points to the fact that we live hectic and stressful lives. We often schedule more for our lives than we have the time or energy.

Even if you do not use a planner or organizer, your life can still be fast-paced and filled with activities. From the president of a corporation

to a housewife, our lifestyles can be summed up in one word: **busy**. Unfortunately, this attitude of busyness finds its way into our prayer lives. Our "quiet times" are not quiet at all. Our prayers are often rushed and filled with all kinds of requests. We want God to speak to us. Yet, our attitude is, "You've got four minutes, God. Tell me everything You want me to know."

Believers need to cultivate the discipline of silence before God. Waiting on the Lord in silence is an art that believers need to make a part of their prayer lives. O. Hallesby writes on the need for times of silence in your prayer life, "There is activity in prayer, of course, and it includes speaking with God. But that should not be all. In the quiet and holy hour of prayer we should also be still and permit ourselves to be examined by the Physician of our souls." Charles Spurgeon adds this word about silence before God, "We too often rush into the presence of God without fore-thought or humility. Let not our prayers and praises be the flashes of a hot and hasty brain, but the steady burning of a well-kindled fire."

This issue of *The Prayer Closet* will focus on the discipline of silence. In order to develop a strong and effective prayer life, a believer needs to develop the ability to be silent before the Lord. There needs to be times in your prayer life when the believer is silent before the Lord and waits on Him. This silence may last only for a few minutes or for days.

ISSUE 1 - HIGHLIGHTS

Waiting on God

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**Practicing the Presence of God
Prayer and Your Personal Evangelism**

**WEB SITE UP AND GOING
www.prayerclosetministries.org**

Dr. Kevin Meador, 595 Stratton Road, Decatur, MS 39327 (601) 635-2180

EMAIL: prayercloset_1998@yahoo.com WEB PAGE - www.prayerclosetministries.org

I realize that being silent before God is a radical concept for modern believers. We are conditioned to be comfortable with noise and crowds. We are uncomfortable with silence. We do not feel that we have the time to be silent before God. In *Finding Focus in a Whirlwind World*, Jean Fleming wrote, "We live in a noisy, busy world. Silence and solitude are not twentieth-century words. They fit the era of Victorian lace, high-button shoes, and kerosene lamps better than our age of television, video arcades, and joggers wired with earphones. We have become a people with an aversion to quiet and an uneasiness with being alone (p.73)."

In spite of the busyness of our age, we need to develop the ability to wait silently on the Lord. There needs to be times when the believer gets alone with God and silently waits on Him. It is my hope and prayer that this issue of *The Prayer Closet* will create within you a hunger to silently wait on the Lord.

The Biblical Basis Of Waiting On God

Waiting on the Lord in silence is a biblical concept. **It can be described as the silent surrendering of the soul to God.** The Word of God states in **Psalm 130:5-6**, "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His Word I do hope. My soul waits for the LORD more than those who watch for the morning--yes, more than those who watch for the morning." The psalmist declares that his "soul" waits on the Lord. This waiting is an act of the soul or of the innermost being. The psalmist is still and silent before the Lord. His focus is on the Lord. He is focusing on the Lord in silence. This can be described as "wordless worship."

Waiting on the Lord in silence is a part of prayer when the believer is still and silent before the Lord. During this time of silence, the believer's focus is God. All other distractions are driven away. The silence can be outward. The believer does not speak but carries on an internal dialogue with God or with self. This silence can also be

inward. The believer does not speak and does not carry on any internal dialogue with God or self, but silently waits and listens to God.

Waiting on the Lord in silence has a close relationship to praise for God. In fact, these two aspects of prayer often overlap. Praise can be described as a vocal focus on the character and actions of God. Waiting in silence can be described as a silent focus on the character and actions of God.

These aspects of prayer can be illustrated through the relationship of a husband and wife. A husband can say to his wife, "I love you," "I need you," "I care for you," and "I appreciate you." Through his words, he is adoring her. Yet, that same husband can take his wife into his arms and simply hold her. He does not have to say anything. He can hold her and look into her eyes. This is a silent adoration.

Our prayer lives need to contain both praise and waiting on God in silence. We do need to adore God with our words. The Word of God says in **Hebrews 13:15**, "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." The believer should offer the sacrifice of praise through lips--his words. Yet, there should be times when the believer silently waits on the Lord. Through the eyes of faith, we should gaze on the character and actions of God. Through the silence, we should allow God to embrace us in His love, feeling the depth and the power of that love for us.

There are other passages that speak of the believer waiting on God in silence:

Psalm 25:5: "Lead me in Your truth and teach me, for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day."

Psalm 27:14: "Wait on the LORD; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD."

Psalm 37:7: "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the wicked man who brings his wicked schemes to pass."

Psalm 40:1: "I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined to me and heard my cry."

Psalm 62:5: "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him."

Psalm 69:3: "I am weary with my crying; my throat is dry; my eyes fail while I wait for God."

Isaiah 40:31: "But those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

When the Bible speaks of "waiting" on God, this does include patient endurance, faithful service, and clinging to the promises of God. Yet, at its core, waiting on God is the silent surrender of oneself to God. It is spending time with God in silence, beholding His greatness and listening to His voice. It is taking time to be still before our God and our Father. In **Psalm 46:10**, we are challenged not only to be still but also to know that He is God, "Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

Why Should A Believer Develop The Discipline of Waiting on God In Silence?

Being still and silent before the Lord needs to be an important part of your prayer life. We do need to praise God, confess our sins to Him, give thanks to Him, and make requests of Him. We also need to make intercession to God in behalf of others. Yet, there needs to be times of waiting on God in silence. In order to have a healthy, growing prayer life, you need balance between intensely seeking the Lord and silently waiting before Him. This silent waiting on God has many benefits for your relationship with God.

By silently waiting on God, you will be following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. The

Bible teaches that Jesus Christ practiced the discipline of silence in prayer. The following are some verses that reveal this:

(1) **Matthew 4:1:** "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." The Holy Spirit led Jesus into a period of silence and prayer before the Father.

(2) **Matthew 14:23:** "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone." Jesus sent His disciples and the crowd away so that He could be alone with the Father.

(3) **Mark 1:35:** "Now in the morning, haven risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed." The previous verse reveals that the entire town had gathered to hear Jesus and to have Him heal their sick. Jesus knew that the only place that He could have time alone with God was to rise early and find a quiet place where He could be alone with God.

(4) **Luke 4:42:** "Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them." This verse reveals that Jesus was surrounded by overwhelming needs. Yet, in the midst of all this, He disciplined Himself to pull away from the crowd and spend time alone with the Father.

In order to become like Jesus Christ, we must discipline ourselves to get alone and spend time with our Father. The Lord Jesus Christ has set the example of spending time in silence with the Father.

By silently waiting on the Lord, it will enable you to hear His voice more clearly. Prayer is not a one-way conversation. It is a living and

loving relationship between God and the believer. We speak to God and He speaks to us. If we are going to hear from Him, we must be willing to silently wait before Him in prayer. There are biblical examples for this:

- ◆ Elijah going to Mount Carmel where he heard the gentle whisper of God's voice (**1 Kings 19:11-13**);
- ◆ Habakkuk standing on the guard post and keeping watch to see what God would say to him (**Habakkuk 2:1**);
- ◆ The apostle Paul going away to Arabia after his conversion so he could be alone with God (**Galatians 1:17**).

It isn't absolutely necessary for a believer to get alone with God and silently wait for Him in order to hear His voice. If this were true, we could never hear His promptings in the every day course of life and in worship services when we are surrounded by people. Yet, there does come a time when we need to eliminate the voices of the world in order to listen more closely for God's voice.

We need to develop this ability to silently wait on the Lord because of our addiction to noise. It is one thing to listen to the television, the tape player, or the radio while carrying out our household responsibilities or while we are doing some other task. Yet, it is quiet another to habitually turn one of these things on just to have noise. Very few of us go anywhere without the presence of noise. This is the most noise-polluted generation ever. As a result, we are less frequently alone with our own thoughts and God's voice. Because of this, it is important to get alone and wait silently before the Lord. If we are going to hear God's voice, we must learn to silently wait before Him.

Silently waiting on the Lord enables us to express faith in God. The believer can demonstrate faith in God by coming to Him in silent trust as opposed to coming to Him with a lot of words and worry. David displays this kind of faith in **Psalm 62**. David is facing a crisis. Rather than coming to God with a long petition and worry, he comes with silence and trust. In **verses 1-2**, "Truly my soul waits silently for God; from Him comes my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be greatly moved." He reaffirms this in **verses 5-6**, "My soul, wait silently for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. He

only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved." David's silence before the Lord was an expression of His faith in the power of God to deliver him. When the believer is quiet before the Lord, without words and without anxiety, it is a powerful expression of his or her trust in the sovereign control of God.

Silently waiting before the Lord is a way to express worship to God. The worship of God does not always require words, sounds, or actions. Worship can take place in a God-focused stillness and silence. The Word of God states in **Habakkuk 2:20**, "But the Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." The Word of God also says in **Zephaniah 1:7**, "Be silent in the presence of the Lord". In these verses, it is not simply silence which is required. It is silence "before the Lord." There are times to speak to God and offer the praise of our lips. At the same time, there are times when one should be silent before the Lord and adore Him for who He is. There is always a place for wordless worship before the Lord.

Regaining a spiritual perspective is another benefit on waiting before the Lord in silence. Sometimes this can enable you to step back and get God's perspective of circumstances. An example of this is found in **Luke 1**. In this chapter, we read that the angel Gabriel tells Zechariah the priest and his elderly wife that they are miraculously going to have a son. Zechariah's response is to doubt. In response to his doubt, the angel Gabriel declares, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time (**Luke 1:19-20**)." Because of his unbelief, Zechariah would not be able to speak until the son was born. What did this time of silent waiting before the Lord do for Zechariah? When the baby was born, the Bible describes his response this way, "And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, 'His name is John.' So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God." His time of silent waiting had moved him from doubting God to trusting God. Silent waiting before the Lord

can enable you to forsake a worldly perspective and see God's perspective in a fresh and new way.

A believer can be restored physically or spiritually through silent waiting before the Lord. Each person has a need for restoring the resources of both the outward and inward person. This was true of even those who lived the most closely to Jesus Christ. After spending themselves on physical and spiritual work, Jesus prescribes the following for His disciples, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while (**Mark 6:31**). Believers need to pull away from the stresses of routine and silently wait on the Lord. Even if it is only for a few minutes, this can be powerfully used of God to restore the believer physically and spiritually.

Silent waiting on the Lord can enable a believer to seek the will of God. This is one of the most common reasons that believers have times of silent waiting before the Lord. This is the method that Jesus used when He chose His twelve disciples, "Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself (**Luke 6:12-13**). God often makes His will known to us in public. An example of this is during a worship service. Yet, there are times when He is going to reveal His will only when we are silently waiting before Him.

A final benefit of silent waiting before the Lord is that it can enable us to learn how to control our tongue. In order to please God with our words, we must learn to control our tongue. If we are going to be like Christ we must learn to control our tongue. **James 1:26** declares that the religion of the person with no tongue control is useless. **Proverbs 17:27-28** reveal a connection between wisdom and the ability to control one's tongue, "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive." In **Ecclesiastes**, we are told that there is "a time to keep silence and a time to speak (**Ecclesiastes 3:7**)."

How can silent waiting before the Lord enable you to control your tongue? It will teach you that many of the things that you do say are

unnecessary. When a person observes a fast for a long period of time, the person realizes that much of the food that he or she normally eats is really unnecessary. When you discipline yourself to be silent before the Lord, the same thing happens. You begin to realize that you don't need to say many things that you think you need to say. In silence before Him, you learn to trust God's sovereign control in the situations in which you think that you need to say something. You come to understand that God can handle situations where you feel that you need to say something.

Practical Suggestions For Waiting on God In Silence

The following are some practical suggestions on how to practice silent waiting before the Lord. I cannot provide suggestions for every person's circumstances. We all have different circumstances and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to suggest how you should practice this. Yet, these are some suggestions that may help you in developing a strategy for doing this.

(1) *Make a conscious commitment to the Lord to develop this discipline.* You may feel that it is impossible for you to spend time alone with God, silently waiting before Him. But, it is possible. You may have to find creative ways to do this, but, it is possible through the power of Jesus Christ (**Philippians 4:13**). Ask the Holy Spirit to help you find the time and the place to do this. Confess your addiction to noise and plead with Him to break this from your life. And, keep in mind the benefits of silent waiting before the Lord. In *The Still Hour*, Austin Phelps sums up the benefits of silence before the Lord by writing, "It has been said that no great work in literature or in science was ever wrought by a man who did not love solitude. We may lay it down as an elemental principle of religion, that no large growth in holiness was ever gained by one who did not take time to be often long alone with God (p.64)."