

A 4-WEEK TEACHING SERIES

ORDINARY PEOPLE //

EXTRAORDINARY GOD

BY BRIAN ALARID
WITH ANDREW MARTIN

Dick Eastman says it well, “We can’t possibly know all there is to know about prayer, but we all have heard stories of God-on-the-move as He responds to the prayers of His people. *When People Pray* is an account of what happens when people *actually* pray.”

Over the course of this 4-WEEK TEACHING SERIES, we are going to go on journey guided by the Holy Spirit partnered with Brian Alarid and his new book *When People Pray*.

Join us as we discover together that “prayer is more about the object of prayer, Jesus, than it is about the outcome of prayer.”

Before we begin together, consider these questions from Brian Alarid:

“So, *what happens when people pray?* What happens when a man, woman, youth, or child pauses to pray to the God of Heaven? What happens when couples and families pray together? What happens when a city or state unities in prayer? What happens when business owners seek God for creative ideas to generate wealth and impact others? What happens when a nation cries out to God? What could happen when every country and people group on the planet are covered in day and night prayer?”

Let’s find out together.

WEEK 1: TRUSTING ENOUGH TO KILL YOUR OXEN

In September 1853, a small three-masted ship quietly slipped out of the harbor in Liverpool with a wide-eyed 21-year-old aboard. The ship and its crew set their course for a foreign land that was just coming into the Christian West’s awareness. At the time, there were only a handful of missionaries who dared to venture to the far away land where difficulty was promised, food was strange, and the language and culture had proven to be more than challenging.

Just twenty years before there had had been a young Methodist couple, James and Amelia Taylor, who were so passionate about the advancement of the Kingdom of God to the unknown Far East that they had regularly prayed that their newborn son might be raised up for that purpose. They had often been heard praying, “Grant that he may work for you (God) in China.”

Years later, the teenage Hudson Taylor experienced God in such a powerful way that the only words he could muster to describe his calling during his intense time of prayer was, “before Him with unspeakable awe and unspeakable joy.” Following this ‘unspeakable’ experience, Hudson submitted himself to preparation learning medicine, studying Mandarin, and immersing himself deeper and deeper into the Bible and prayer.

When the 21-year-old Hudson arrived in Shanghai, he immediately made a decision to dress in Chinese clothes and grow a traditional Chinese pigtail, it was a decision that went against the grain of most Protestant missionaries of the day. But Hudson was constantly remembering his ‘unspeakable’ experience. He was driven by his time of daily prayer to push forward, trusting in God’s plan, and believing that his work for the advancement of the Kingdom mattered more than the approval of his Protestant colleagues.

In 1857, he became seriously ill (probably hepatitis) and he was forced to return to England to recover. His passion never wavered as he continued to work on translating the Bible into Chinese. As his recovery continued, Hudson was also inspired to begin a special organization (China Inland Mission) whose vision would be to evangelize the interior of China. While he recruited missionaries to join him, he was often overcome with worry and doubt for their future safety in the unprotected interior of the vast Far East. Even still, within a year they returned to China. Hudson and his wife with their four children along with CIM’s 24 new missionaries increased the total number of China missionaries by 25 percent.

The work did not become easier, but Hudson continued to answer the call he had received so many years before in his teenage moment of outstretched prayer. Ministry was rigorous but under his leadership, CIM continued to grow its force, by 1876 there were 52 missionaries and then in November 1876 he announced that 102 more recruits would be added to the CIM team. In the midst of all of his speaking engagements and ministry opportunities, he battled depression and he was riddled with stress. Hudson is known for saying, even in the darkest times, **“When I cannot read, when I cannot think, when I cannot even pray, I can trust.”**

Read 1 Kings 19:19-21

“So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant.”

1. There is NO Power in Prayer

Consider this: Can you drive your car keys? (Think about how you can expand this example by talking about your car more extensively).

Just like there is absolutely no power in your car keys, there is NO Power in Prayer.

Too often we misplace the power source of prayer. It is not the WORDS that we say, it is the WORD to whom we are speaking. It's not the Bible, but the author.

“Prayer is powerless on its own, but it gives you access to Jesus, who is the power of God. Put your faith in Jesus, not in prayer.” - Brian Alarid

“Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father...” - Romans 8:34

“Jesus is the peace necessary to calm the storm...” - Mark 4:39

“Jesus is the power of God...” - 1 Corinthians 1:24

“Jesus is the all the authority in heaven & on earth...” - Matthew 28:18

“Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life...” - John 14:6

“Jesus is the Kingdom of God proclaimed...” - Matthew 4:17

“Jesus is worthy...” - Revelation 5:8

Even still, knowing all these things about Jesus, we sometimes struggle to believe. Why?

The writer of the book of Hebrews gives us a window into the lives of the faithful. See Hebrews 11:33-40.

Notice that for some it seems that with faith you always win, while for others it seems that there is no victory in site.

Remember Brian's words, ***“Prayer is more about the object of prayer - Jesus - than it is about the outcome of prayer.”***

There is a powerful moment of transition that happens in our lives, when we come to the understanding that we can be saved when we believe in JESUS. But our believing does not and cannot stop at salvation. TRUST goes well beyond the threshold. A life surrendered to Jesus will push us far past the door and propel us forward into a POWERFUL partnership with the King of Glory.

2. Your Breakthrough is in your Praise...

Prayer is no picnic... Prayer is Warfare.

But we are not now, nor have we ever been on defense. ***“Prayer is your first line of offense against the enemy, not your last line of defense.” - Brian Hill***

Life is Hard sometimes, isn't it? Name a time where you felt that way...

Prayer is the way that we interact with the only true source of POWER. Whether we know it or not or are willing to acknowledge it or not... we are in the midst of a battle between two kingdoms.

Surrender is not for sissies or for the faint of heart... Surrender is required for all who submit themselves under the Mantle of Jesus.

“Sometimes we don't feel like praying, just like a soldier doesn't always feel like training or going into combat. But what matters is that you show up for duty. It's the same with prayer. Showing up for prayer is half the battle.” - Brian Alarid

Just like Elisha, Jesus comes to us in the middle of our comfortable position (with our 12 yoke of oxen or our salaried job) and then He lays an opportunity that will require us to GIVE everything in order to GAIN everything.

- Like the man who received the gospel of the Kingdom of God and his whole world fell apart and then in the next breath it was put back together like it was designed to be from the beginning.
- Like the single mom who believed so much in the word of God that she wasted all her oil only to receive more oil than she could have possibly imagined.
- Like the daughter who died and gave her last breath, but through prayer she received resurrection.
- Like the son who gave up everything so that we could in turn gain everything.

Acts 16:25 tells the story of Paul & Silas in prison. Their story teaches us that ultimately **GIVEing our Everything** isn't about **GAINing Anything**.

“Your breakthrough is in your Praise...” Let that resound in your heart.

What if we turned every complaint into PRAISE? What if in every bleak situation, we turned to PRAISE? What if in every uncertainty and every sorrow, we stopped to PRAISE?

(Consider the sharing the story of Jim & Elizabeth Elliot.)

“I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.” - Elizabeth Elliot

PRAYER IS SURRENDER.

Be honest. Have you ever thought: *if prayer doesn't change the outcome, then why do we even bother to pray?*

When Jesus retreated to the Garden of Gethsemane, did He pray the wrong prayer? There is no doubt, his first petition was not answered. Then neither was His second. But you know the story... Jesus leads the way, when in His third prayer, He changes his request. ***“Father, let your will be done, not mine.”***

What if your prayer is less about getting the answer you want and more about the need to surrender?

“Prayer is an act of surrendering your will to God's will.” - Brian Alarid
Your Breakthrough is in your Praise.

3. Taking the Position of Trust

Surrender & Trust go hand-in-hand. A life of Surrender will produce the habit of Trust, and habitual Trust will yield a life of Surrender.

Isaiah 43:2 says, ***“When you cross deep rivers, I will be with you, and you won't drown. When you walk through the fire, you won't be burned or scorched by the flames.”***

Trusting God's plan has the power to flip the script on the enemy's plan. What he intends to ruin you and bring you the most pain will actually become the place where you can reign with Jesus over the enemy's plan.

Still there are times when you experience EPIC battles with fear, doubt, anger, frustration, and disillusionment with God. But in those moments, recall Hudson Taylor's words, ***“When I cannot read, when I cannot think, when I cannot even pray, I can trust.”***

The moment the prophet Elijah laid his coat on Elisha the farmer, everyone who watched knew exactly what was happening. It was Elisha's call into an EPIC Battle. It was his opportunity... his moment in history to choose.

Isaiah 54:17 does not promise that there won't be any weapon formed against you, or that there won't be any call on your life too difficult or too impossible. What it does promise is that the 'weapons' that ARE formed against you won't win.

- Sometimes when people pray, things still can go from bad to worse. Sometimes, you pray and trust God, only to feel as if you've been let down.
- You pray, but your marriage still ends in divorce.

- You pray, but your company still goes bankrupt.
- You pray, but your ministry still closes.
- You pray, but your dreams still crash and burn.
- You pray, but your twelve-year-old daughter still spends every day crying in pain.

What if prayer is less about victory and more about learning to surrender & trust in God in the midst of your process?

PRAYER IS TRANSFORMATIONAL

Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, ***“For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had the veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord - who is the Spirit - makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into his glorious image.”***

The word translated ‘*changed*’ in verse 18 is the same word used to describe Jesus when He was transfigured. The power of the Spirit as you submit yourself in relationship to Him, can change the very figure of who you are.

“Prayer is less about changing people and circumstances and more about transforming you in the image of Christ.” - Brian Alarid

Consider Hebrews 11:1, ***“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for (trusted for), the evidence of things not seen.”***

Trust is a position that we take when we find ourselves in the line of fire AND when we are experiencing the full measure of God’s blessing. Trust is directly connected to the faith that we walk in. Prayer is rooted in TRUST. Most importantly, prayer aligns our hearts and minds with God’s heart & mind.

Having experienced the call of Elijah, Elisha’s first reaction is go back before trusting enough to move forward. But ultimately he had to make the decision to Surrender & Trust... even if meant killing his oxen. Functionally, Elisha eliminated his entire connection with home by offering his livelihood as a sacrifice to God. His only choice then was TRUST and move forward.

“Prayer is not about your ability to make things happen, but your willingness to trust God to make it happen.” - Brian Alarid

WEEK 2: PRAYER THAT BIRTHS AWAKENING & PRODUCES REVIVAL

In 1809, a powerful movement was birthed that would not be fully known or seen for 48 more years. It began in the heart of man but just like all men, it began as a baby.

The baby was named Jeremiah Lanphier. He grew up in upstate New York, and started learning to be tailor when he was 16, apprenticing in Albany. After his apprenticeship ended, he became a regular, ordinary businessman.

Forty-eight years later, his life shifted completely when he was offered a new position. He took it without hesitation. He left his business and moved from his home into a small room in a small dying church on the corner of Fulton & Williams Streets.

Most people had moved from downtown to better areas. Other churches had left as well, and many thought that the Old Dutch Church should throw in the towel. Against the popular opinion, the trustees were determined to make a last stand.

They picked Lanphier, hiring him as a lay missionary, because they were convinced he was the right man for the job. He was a merchant who had no experience whatsoever in church visitation work. He accepted the position for a salary of less than \$1,000 a year, and in a short time proved the trustees correct, as he was burdened for the people in the area.

It was slow going at first, a few families came, but often Lanphier returned to his room in the church weary and discouraged. At one point after a discouraging day of ministry, it occurred to him that a mid-day prayer time might be something businessmen may be interested in.

On September 23, 1857, at exactly 12 noon, the tall, middle-aged former businessman climbed the creaking stairs to the third story of the Old Dutch church building in the heart of lower New York City. He entered an empty room, pulled out his pocket watch and sat down to wait. The sign outside read: *"Prayer Meeting from 12 to 1 o'clock - Stop 5, 10, or 20 minutes, or the whole hour, as your time admits."* As the minutes ticked by Lanphier was completely alone and wondered if it were all a mistake. He waited ten minutes, then ten more. The minute hand of his watch pointed to 12:30 when at last he heard the sound of feet coming up the stairs. One man came in, then another and another until there were six. After a few minutes of prayer the meeting was dismissed with the corporate decision to meet again the following Wednesday.

Twenty men came to the second noon-hour prayer meeting. Then the Wednesday after that, forty. Lanphier then decided that the meetings would be held on a daily basis.

Wednesday, October 14th, the nation was shocked by the worst financial crisis in its history. Banks closed, many were let go from their work, families were hurting in their unknown future,

and many were even going hungry. Lanphier never even flinched, the meetings continued without fail, and they began to grow more and more.

In a short time, what had become known as the Fulton Street meeting had taken over the whole building with crowds of more than 3,000. Lawyers and physicians, merchants and clerks, bankers and brokers, manufacturers and mechanics, porters and messenger boys - all came.

Within six months, 10,000 businessmen (out of a population of 800,000) were gathering daily for prayer in New York City. There were also prayer meetings being held in Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, and many other cities and states throughout the country. The revival was in evidence from coast to coast and there were tens of thousands of converts. By March of 1858, the movement had reached such heights that the news of its impact had traveled across the Atlantic.

The awakening came first like a baby birthed from the womb of prayer, but the fruit of labor produced a powerful revival.

The initial meeting that took place September of 1857 was not extraordinary, just six ordinary men gathering to pray in small room on the the corner of Fulton and Williams Street. There was no evidence of a supernatural move of God beginning to take place in those quiet moments of united prayer. Lanphier had no way of knowing that it was the beginning of a great national revival which would result in an estimated one million persons coming into the Kingdom of God.

Read Acts 1:1-3, 8-9, & 14

“In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit. During the forty days after he suffered and died, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God.”

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him.”

“They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus.”

1. Intimacy Unites

Jesus set such an incredible example for us. He stewarded a level of Intimacy with His Father that brought unity that stretched across all distances.

Think about the longest distance friend that you have. How are you able to continue your friendship even separated by miles? How are you able to remain connected?

Consider Pete Greg's words: ***"The greatest person who ever lived was preeminently a man of prayer. Before launching out in public ministry, HE fasted for more than a month in the wilderness. Before choosing His twelve disciples, He prayed all night."***

Intimacy is a word that is often inseparable from the relations between a husband and wife. However it is too often not a word that we think of to be the connection between a parent and a child. For this reason, some have difficulty attributing INTIMACY to the relationship we are invited into with our Father in Heaven.

Prayer is not just a invitation into a conversation with the God of the universe, which is amazing.

"Prayer is Intimacy with God." - Brian Alarid

Jesus came and laid a foundation - ***"all that Jesus began to do and teach..." (Acts 1:1) -***

THINK ABOUT THIS: All He began to **DO**: How He acted, how He related, how He lived... He gave us a window into true, pure Intimacy.

Intimacy Unites...

Manhattan pastor Timothy Keller once said, ***"The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00am for a glass of water is a child (a son or a daughter). We have that kind of access."***

God is beautifully impartial. He loves all His children uniquely. Jesus as King, is seated at the right hand of the Father, ready and willing to *wake up at 3AM* if that's what it takes to remind you how much He desires an Intimate relationship with you.

"God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God." Matthew 5:9

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." Romans 8:14

"... to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12

"For you are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26

"For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed." Romans 8:19

"See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" 1 John 3:1

Listen closely to the question that Brian Alarid asks, ***"Why settle for a superficial relationship with Jesus when you can have an intimate, face-to-face friendship with Him?"***

Just like Intimacy between a husband and wife develops a deeper connection and creates beautiful children. Intimacy with Jesus develops communion, births awakening, and produces revival.

2. Awake & Alive

J. Edwin Orr once said, ***“No great spiritual awakening has begun anywhere in the world apart from united prayer.”***

To be Awake is defined as the opposite of Asleep.

To be Revived is defined as the opposite of Dead.

The Kingdom of Light operates in those who are Awake & Alive. As sons and daughters of the most High God, we are carriers of Light.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:14, ***“You are the Light of the world - like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden..”***

So we as the adopted children of our Father in Heaven, we are called to not only BE THE LIGHT but to CARRY THE LIGHT.

We have become Awake & Alive.

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere...” Acts 1:8

Like DNA that genetically connects us to our earthly parents, there is likewise a connection so deep within us (**the Holy Spirit**) that divinely connects to our FATHER. After all, we were created in His image and made after His likeness.

Our Father has a heart for people everywhere... so we as His children, being united in Him and with each other through Jesus, can through prayer develop a heart for people.

Like Father like son... Like Father like daughter...

Prayer is the connection that cultivates the relationship.

“Jesus’ devotion to prayer was His special connection to the Father that released supernatural power on His ministry.” - Brian Alarid

Think about when the disciples went to Jesus and asked Him to teach them to pray. Too often we repeat words but do not understand or contemplate meanings.

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” Matthew 6:9-13

Even if we only think through the first few words... (consider processing the entire passage phrase by phrase to see the deep prayerful connection that releases supernatural power on Jesus' ministry & yours also).

“Our”

- Wait, what? “Our”?
- Yes, that is what Jesus said! **“Our”**. Consider that Hebrews 2:11 says, ***“So now Jesus and the ones He makes holy have the same Father.”***

We could just stop there with the word **“Our”** and be satisfied with a divine connection that we are invited into with the God who created everything!

“Father”

- Excuse me? You mean, God isn't some far away being waiting to smite me if I mess up?
- No, He isn't. He is not an angry dad. God is a good, good **“Father”**.

A life of prayer with **“Our Father”** is possible. Allow the Holy Spirit to teach you how to cultivate His presence in everything you do, big and small.

Start to pray constantly. Practice daily, not always in solitude but in step with the rest of your life.

The greatest intercessor in history was Jesus. Becoming like Him is synonymous with becoming a person of prayer. Its no wonder the disciples asked Him to explain how to they could pray... they had seen Him live a life of prayerful connection with the Father that produced real fruit!

“When you commune with God through prayer, He gives you His heart for the lost.” - Brian Alarid

Consider the work of Count Zinzendorf, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, John & Charles Wesley, Jeremiah Lanphier, Evan Roberts, Sydney Evans, Frank Bartleman, Jim Cymbala, Andrew Murray, Lottie Moon, or countless others. All of these **ordinary people** had so stewarded an Intimate Prayer relationship with an **extraordinary God**, that the only natural response was for Awakening & Revival to be seen as fruit in their lives.

Revivals often begin with one or two people who have been given a burden for a people & who have united themselves in prayer to a God who cares.

Dr. A. T. Pierson said, ***“There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer.”***

“They all met together and were constantly united in prayer...” Acts 1:14

What would it look like if you are the next person that God uses to spark an awakening and bring revival in your business, school, college, church, city, or nation?

What would it look like if we laid down our differences and united together in prayer?

Are you willing to pray for revival and unite with other believers even if they hold different political or theological views? If YES, why not start now?

WEEK 3: EARS TO HEAR & A HEART TO RESPOND, ‘HERE I AM’

Once upon a time in a faraway land, there was a beautiful woman married to a wonderful man. They loved the God of their fathers before them and they served Him faithfully. What’s more they believed that they could pray to Him (talk to Him) and He would actually listen.

Our story finds them in what must have been a most difficult time. Just like every husband and wife in their day, they wanted nothing more than to provide an heir for their family, but they couldn’t. They tried and tried again, but to no avail. The doctors must have weighed in with ideas of what might be wrong. It was discovered that the beautiful woman was unable to have children. To some, those words would carry such finality... but she must not have believed them.

Soon after, the time of year came where people would travel from all over their known geography to a certain location where people gathered as followers of their God. The beautiful woman knew that if she could just be heard by her God that He would help them to have a child.

The moment came where she found herself alone and began to pray. She crouched in an almost fetal position before the God of Heaven and lifted her words to Him. She believed that He would come through for her, knew that He had a plan for her, and trusted that His will was perfect for her. At first her words could be heard by those passing by but as she continued her voice began to grow faint until there was almost no sound at all.

The priest of that day walked in on her prayer time and thought at first that possibly this woman might have had too much of the sacramental wine. He even spoke, interrupting her prayer to ask her if she was drunk... Startled she looked up with tears streaming down her cheeks and assured the priest that she was not drunk but fervently praying to her God concerning her heart’s greatest desire - a child. Without a single hesitation, the priest responded that God would indeed grant her petition.

Shortly after, the time came for them to leave the gathering and return home. It’s not known how much time passed between their arriving and their announcement. But soon enough the beautiful woman and the wonderful man found that they were pregnant. Oh what joy ensued.

Nine months and eight years later, they found themselves again at that gathering place where prayer had connected the beautiful woman, who was ordinary and normal and completely untrained, with her most extraordinary God. You see, God had come through for them. The beautiful woman and the wonderful man were no longer a family of two. This time they had come to the gathering place not to get a child but to give a child. As strange as it may sound today, they came this time to drop off their beautiful, wonderful eight-year-old boy.

His sheer existence hinged on the prayers of his mother and the faithfulness of his father to believe in the provision of their God. The beautiful woman and the wonderful man again returned home, this time leaving their powerful boy to learn all he could from the priest as he served him and as they served God together.

There is not an exact account that tells us if it happened on the first night or possibly the second, but soon after the boy was settled into his new bed and his new home he had a powerful experience that would change his life forever. His room was pitch-black, completely without light save the faint glow of the stars. He laid in his bed and his eyes began to close as he drifted into sleep, and that's when he heard it. Someone was calling his name, he heard it once, twice ... his first thought was that the priest was calling from down the hallway. He sprang to his feet, slipped on his sandals, and quickly walked to the room where the priest was sleeping. He didn't bother to knock, but walked straight in and said aloud, 'Here I am'. The priest was frightened and as he gained his wits about him, he promised the boy that he had not called him and instructed him to return to his bed.

Confused the boy did as he was told. But no sooner had he laid his head on the pillow that he heard his name again... once and then twice. Again he jumped to his feet, slipped on his shoes, and scurried down the hallway to answer the call of his aged mentor who must have needed him for something. The boy walked straight into the priest's bedroom and without hesitation he exclaimed out loud, 'Here I am'. Yet again the priest had not called him, so he responded that the boy should go back again to bed.

It happened again a third time, just as it had the first two times. The boy was nearly asleep and he heard his name being called. He went to the priest's bedroom and said, 'Here I am'. However, this time the priest knew what was happening. Sitting up in his bed with his eyes locked on his young apprentice, he gave very specific instructions. The boy listened and then went back to his bed.

Upon laying his head down, he heard his name being called a fourth time. This time the boy knew just what to do. He sat up in bed, looked into the dark of his room all around him, and just as the priest had instructed he responded to the voice of God. 'Here I am', he said again. It was there in the quiet of his room that a relationship between the boy and God began. A relationship that would challenge and empower the boy to accomplish amazing and incredible things. All because the boy had *Ears to Hear & A Heart to Respond, 'Here I am'*.

See the Full Story by Reading: 1 Samuel 1:1-17 & 3:1-10

1. Prayer is a Two-Way Conversation

Imagine a little boy or girl with a brand new set of never before used walkie-talkies.

Let's pretend that both walkie-talkies have batteries and they're fully charged. Both are fully functional and they are even on the same channel.

No doubt there are so many variables of things that could be wrong to one degree or another that would cause a conversation to be 'un-hearable'. But in this case, let's say that everything is in order, everything except one thing.

Both children are ready and have found separate sides of the house or yard or playground to begin their conversation. The first one to speak, pushes the button just like they should and begins to tell funny secrets or the plan for the covert operation to take over the big kid's bedroom. However, the second one begins talking but never pushes the button. Thus, so begins the one-sided conversation.

This is by no means a perfect analogy, but more Christians than you might imagine are asking this question: "How do you hear the voice of God?"

Maybe you've wondered that for yourself at one time or another???

In John 10:27, Jesus gives us such a beautiful perspective to consider, ***"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me."***

God has been speaking since the beginning. It was the sound of His voice that initiated creation. "In the beginning...", God spoke and everything around Him listened and responded.

"The Bible is the primary way God speaks to His children, but it's not the only way." - Brian Alarid

Prayer is a Two-Way Conversation.

Listen in to the well-known authors Henry Blackaby and Claude King, ***"If anything is clear from a reading of the Bible, this fact is clear: God speaks to His people. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. He spoke to Abraham and the other patriarchs. God spoke to the judges, kings, and prophets. God was in Christ Jesus speaking to the disciples. God spoke to the early church, and God spoke to John on the Isle of Patmos in Revelation. God does speak to His people, and you can anticipate that He will be speaking to you also."***

The nature of a conversation is that people (two or more) take turns talking and listening. A good conversation feeds the depth of a relationship.

When a husband and wife don't communicate, when they don't have two-way conversations... their relationship suffers. The same is true in our relationship with God.

God's original design for prayer is a dialogue, not a monologue.

"He who has ears, let him hear..." Revelation 2:7

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” John 15:4

The ‘abiding’ that Jesus is exhorting us to participate in from the gospel of John, is not unlike a the conversation that He is encouraging the churches of Revelation to reciprocate.

2. Four Ways To Cultivate a Conversation

If we are going to be a people that fluidly relate with our Father in Heaven, in a ‘Two-Way’ prayer relationship we must cultivate conversations.

God has a track record of speaking in so many different ways at different times that we must learn how to quiet our spirits and tune out all the external & internal noise so we can hear God’s voice.

Here are Four Ways to hear God’s voice from Isaiah the prophet: ***“The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious; I have not turned away.” Isaiah 50:4-5***

1. Pray Every Morning

In the same way that a king would sit down with his counselors to discuss whether or not his army of 10,000 could defeat an enemy with 20,000 (see Luke 14:31), shouldn’t we sit down with the Wonderful Counselor to discuss our day, our goals, our problems, our victories, our everything??

May God awaken your ear every morning... as He did Isaiah’s.

How can you integrate the importance of a ‘Two-Way Conversation’ into your morning?

Could it be that while you’re at the gym, in the midst of your commute, on your way to school, or while you’re getting ready for work that you could begin a conversation?

Creating space in your life to begin your day with God will have a massive impact on the rest of your day living for God.

2. Expect God to Speak to You

“Your expectations frame your experience.” - Brian Alarid

In other words, your expectations of God to speak and your own ability to hear will likely prove true.

God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He has been speaking for generations, why would He stop with you? The answer is He wouldn't.

In the mid-1960s, there was a man who went hunting in the wilderness of the Pacific Northwest. He was so confident in his ability to go in, camp for a couple of days, and get back out to his vehicle that he did not take a map or a compass. When the days of his trip had come to a completion, he began to make the trek back to his car. He walked and walked for hours on end. It was only when he found his own tracks that he realized that he was walking in circles.

He was a man of God, a husband, a father of five, a pastor and a denominational leader for nearly 50 years; but in that moment a fear rose up in him that caused him to cry out to God into the trees. "Oh God, I need your help. I have to get home... I have a beautiful wife, five wonderful children, and a growing church."

Following his cry for help into the thickness of the forrest all around him, he heard a voice come out of the trees. The voice called him by name and answered assertively, "You wouldn't believe me, even if I told you."

Hearing the response may have started him slightly, but it didn't deter him or keep him from continuing the conversation.

He had felt God's voice before, experienced the power of God's voice through the Scripture, but never heard God audibly. That is until that day. Before the moment passed, he responded. "Yes God, I will believe you."

God quickly spoke one more time, "Go 50 paces that way, and turn left."

But before God could even finish, the man interrupted, "I've already been that way a hundred times already..."

Realizing the error of his way, he quickly relented & repented... then he turned his steps toward the way God had indicated that he take them. Then he began to move. 50 paces and he turned left, as soon as he did so he broke through the clearing and there was sign directly in front of him. It said, 'Logging Road Exit That Way'. He had parked his vehicle at the exit of the same logging road.

When we expect God to speak to us, our experience will be God speaking to us.

3. Listen to God's Voice and be Ready to be Taught

You have heard the saying, 'you are what you eat'. When you expect God to speak to you, then the natural progression is that you would become what He talks about.

The way we accomplish this is not by religious duty but in our love relationship with Him, we listen & we are always ready to be taught.

Isaiah said, ***"He wakens my ear to listen like one being taught."***

Have you ever gotten the fortune cookie, 'When the student is ready, the teacher will appear'?

Understand that Hearing & Listening are not the same.

Isaiah 55:3 says, ***"Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David."***

Submit yourself to be a student. Ready to learn and willing to apply all that your Father desires to teach you & show you.

The noise from work, the media, and our own negative self-talk can make the airwaves between you and God like static.

It's time to silence the noise. Then let's choose to listen and learn from the God who so desperately desires to lead you in all of His ways.

4. When You Hear God Speak, Obey Him

According to Ephesians 5:1, as children of our God we ought to imitate Him. The highest form of worship is imitation. We ought, as children of God, desire to be like God as we were created to be.

A son or daughter can never be the mirror image of their parent, in fact they weren't made to be exactly the same. They are individually unique and their giftedness is needed as such. But they can become "LIKE" them.

In the same way, we were not created to be God, but to become LIKE Him.

James 1:23-25 says, ***"For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully in the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it."***

Listen to the powerful truth from Brian Alarid, ***“If you are unable to hear God’s voice right now, ask yourself if you have obeyed the last word God gave you. Obey the last message God gave you, and He will start speaking to you again.”***

God speaks in a way that you can hear Him. Be encouraged, there is no ‘right way or wrong way’ to hear His voice. ***“In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.” Hebrews 1:1***

Trying to limit a limitless God is futile. God can speak to whomever, however He desires at any one moment. Our job as children of God and followers of Jesus, filled by the Holy Spirit, is not to explain God into a box that can be understood but to know Him, to talk with Him, to listen to Him, and to obey Him.

WEEK 4: PRAYER & MISSION

In the early 2000's, there was a lovely, mature, kind, hilarious, eighteen-year-old young lady named Grace who said goodbye to her parents. She knew the moment that she left would be the last time that she would ever see her mother or father. No one forced her to go, but she made the decision on her own. She traveled nearly halfway across her country to a place that cannot be named or known.

Why did she go? She went because in a secret place of worship, she had an encounter with a most gracious and loving God. She went because the more she grew in her faith, the more prayerful encounters she experienced, the more she wanted to take what she was learning to tell people who had not heard yet.

Specifically, Grace left home because in the far away city to which she went there was a secret school, in a secret house, that was a secret church. It would be there where she would spend a focused amount of time learning all that she could so that she would be even more prepared for the city to which she was called.

She learned how to pray, how to listen to God's voice, how to interact with Him in honor and obedience. She learned how to study the scripture and to teach others to do the same. She learned about the mission - the task in front of her would be extremely challenging, but she was undaunted.

Read Jeremiah 29:7

"Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you will prosper too."

1. Houses of Prayer

Rick Warren once said, ***"You judge a church's health not by its seating capacity, but by its sending capacity."***

The disciples were gathered in unified prayer waiting the Holy Spirit's arrival and the church was born. But please take note, the power to the Spirit was not contained by the room in which they prayed. Prayer initiated it, but Mission sustained it.

Brian Alarid says it so well, ***"Real prayer always moved us to mission, and mission drives us to prayer."***

What is at the core of this Jesus movement?

Mark 11:17 gives us the answer, ***“My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.”*** The word translated as house from the Greek work oikos means: family, house, or household. So Jesus is literally saying *‘My family shall be called a family of prayer for all nations.’*

Prayer has never been an add-on option for believers, it is the marker of our family.

Think about that. Think about your life. Is prayer so important that it identifies you to others as a follower of Jesus?

What would happen if God’s people became a house of prayer?

“Jesus is call every believer, every family, every church, every ministry, and every Christian-owned business to become houses of prayer. The Holy Spirit is raising up houses of prayer everywhere.” - Brian Alarid

What would happen if every believer prayed consistently and confidently?

This movement is not a call for ministry leaders or church only, it is just as much about people in the marketplace.

Author Os Hillman said, ***“Consider that in the New Testament, of Jesus’ 132 public appearances, 122 were in the marketplace. Of the 52 parables Jesus told, 45 had a workplace context. Of 40 miracles recorded in the book of Acts, 39 occurred in the marketplace.”***

You have the ability to be a house of prayer no matter what your profession or calling.

Doctors and nurses, engineers and architects, teachers and principals, chefs and dishwashers, CEOs and janitors, attorneys and clerks, managers and hourly workers, farmers and real estate moguls, developers and carpenters, electricians and plumbers, movie stars and stay-at-home moms, pastors and children’s workers... all of us are being called out to be houses of prayer and bring the Kingdom of Heaven to our circles of influence.

We are called to live transformational lives.

We were made to impact culture through our faith, prayers, and obedience to God.

We are an ordinary people connected with an extraordinary God.

2. Transforming Cities

In 2017, New Mexico was ranked No. 1 in property crime, burglary and robbery, and No. 2 in violent crime and auto theft. January of that same year, marked the launch of America Prays. The Lord gave America Prays the vision to unite and equip 40,000 churches in 24/7 prayer for a national spiritual awakening.

The more Brian & Mercy and their team prayed, the more the Lord expanded their vision. It was about prayer and mission, the two would be completely inseparable.

If we as believers profess to take all that Jesus taught seriously, then we have to be focused of 'Transforming Cities'. The work of the church has never been aimed at the church.

Take for instance the Greek word *ekklesia*, it is fairly well know that it is the word translated *church*. *Ekklesia* literally means 'called out ones'. Notice it does not mean called IN ones. So then from it's origin the church was made to go outside of itself.

Did you know that the word *Ekklesia* was a word used within the Roman government? It described a group of ordinary men who would gather to listen to the Emperor/king and then they were responsible to see that his vision, & rule was carried out everywhere within the kingdom.

The Holy Spirit is so smart! He inspired the writers of the New Testament to use that word *ekklesia* on purpose for a purpose. What is trying to tell us?

We were made to gather and listen to our King (in prayer & study) and then responsible to see that his vision, & rule are carried out everywhere (the mission) within the KINGDOM. We were designed to be instruments carrying His heart so powerfully that we would constantly be about Transforming Cities.

As America Prays & New Mexico Prays partnered with New Mexico, they gradually began to gain momentum. They partnered with governmental officials, churches, businesses, organizations, and individuals to cover the state in 24/7 prayer. God was listening and their unceasing prayers were making a difference. According the FBI database, the city of Albuquerque experienced a significant decrease in crime.

Listen to Brian Alarid, "***When God's people pray, God hears from heaven, and things change.***"

Former New Mexico Lt. Governor John Sanchez explained it this way, "***I like to call them parallels of truth. What works in the spiritual world works in the political world. And I think that America Prays will be that means to bridge that gap.***"

Transforming Cities is not optional, but in order to really accomplish this task we as believers must unite. The apostle Paul said it well, "***There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, on God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.***" (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Prayer Unites Us.

Prayer Transforms Us.

Prayer Moves Us.

Prayer Empowers Us.

When people pray, God does more than they could ask, think, or imagine.

When people pray, their prayers affect generations to come.

When people pray, they discover their God-given purpose and acquire the faith to fulfill it.

When people pray, God sets their priorities straight, families thrive, and businesses flourish.

When people pray, God changes them and the world around them.

What will happen when you pray?

The world is waiting to find out!