

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 unifies 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 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.

1. 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.