

Getting our relationship with God right is the most critical issue we need resolve before getting any of our other relationships right. This week we will focus on the most important part of any relationship – communication! So, first things first – let's communicate with God...everyday!

Monday, January 8. For Jesus, prayer was always an encounter with Father. It was during this communion where Jesus gradually learned more fully the meaning of his own identity and God's plan of salvation. Jesus prayed at the beginning of his public ministry when he was baptized (Luke 3:21-22), and it was in prayer at the end of his earthly life that Jesus fully yielded his will to the Father's will (Luke 22:41-42). And in between, he prayed: Luke 4:42, 6:12, Matthew 11:25-26, Luke 9:28-29, Mark 15:34, and Luke 23:46. Just as prayer was at the core of Jesus' life and ministry, so it is for us as his followers. Our prayer should be marked by the same qualities as his: trust in God, intimacy, sincerity, honesty, integrity and gratitude. Look over the above passages to get a sense of when and how Jesus prayed.

Tuesday, January 9. Read 1 Samuel 3:1-14. This is a story about the boy Samuel and how Eli helps him recognize and respond to the voice of the Lord. During this time in Israel, it was rare to hear from God. There were no prophets speaking any messages from God. At the root of this was the attitude of the people – they either refused to listen to God or allowed greed to get in the way of any communication from God. What are your earliest experiences of prayer? What was your understanding of prayer as a child, and how has it changed? Who or what helped you recognize and respond to the presence of God in your life? Devote at least five minutes of time to becoming present to God – the God who is with you now – and to focusing on God's love for you. Do so in whatever way helps you and seems authentic for you.

Wednesday, January 10. Read Luke 11:1-4. One of Jesus' disciples asks him to teach them to pray. What do you feel this disciple really wanted? Put yourself in the place of the disciple and personalize this request. What would you actually want? What would be the end result of "knowing" how pray? Notice the key components that Luke gives us – Praise, Promise, Forgiveness, Presence. As you spend time praying, make sure you include these when you call out to God. Also, something we normally forget when we pray – take time to be quiet. It's hard to listen when we are always talking, so take as much time listening as you do praying.

Thursday, January 11. Read Psalm 18:1-2. This is a psalm of adoration and praise to the Lord. Notice how in two verses the psalmist employs more than 8 images to praise God and name who God is! Are these adequate images for your expression of praise and adoration for God? **Read 2 Samuel 22-23:1-7.** Taken in context and chronological order, it appears these words of praise were spoken (or repeated from an earlier time) at the end of David's life. With all that David had endured and all the mistakes he had made, he knew God was with him through it all. As we seek to put first things first, never forget, our God is with us!

Friday, January 12. Read Mark 9:2-9. In this story, Jesus leads his disciples “up a high mountain apart, by themselves” to experience him and themselves in God’s transforming presence. Peter interrupts the experience with ideas about how to improve it, preserve it, or do something useful with it. What often interrupts your being present with God? **Read Matthew 11:28.** Now just listen deeply to God. Leave your prayer time in God’s hands. Do not work too hard. Read Matthew 11:28 again. Rest in the Lord and release your heaviness to God. At the end of your time of silence, write down any thoughts or insights you have.