# **Listening in Prayer**

Romans chapter twelve, verse two, talks about being “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” But how do our minds get renewed? In his book Celebration of Discipline, Richard Foster says, “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us.” John Calvin, the great reformer, stated it this way: “To help us in our weakness, God gives the Spirit to be our guide in prayer… to dictate what is right, and to regulate our affections.” Scripture affirms the notion that the Holy Spirit leads us into all truth.

*“But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.” (John 16:13-15)*

Kingdom-minded believers must cultivate a lifestyle of prayer and intimacy with Jesus. First and foremost, we need to be in His Word. Regularly reading, meditating on, and memorizing His Word is critical to being conformed to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). The written Word is how we understand God’s will in the broad sense. That said, we need His Holy Spirit to take what we’re reading and make it alive to us personally. We can do this by intentionally engaging with the Holy Spirit through prayer as we read scripture.

***Exercise: Prayerfully Read Colossians 3:1-7***

Prayer comes in various forms: intercession, petition/supplication, confession, worship, and thanksgiving, to name a few. For today’s lesson, we focus on listening when in prayer. That is, asking God a simple and direct question and giving him space to respond.

American Christians have tended to speak at God or focus on requesting things from God, making Him out to be a genie in the bottle. This isn’t God’s heart for His children. That mindset won’t lead to intimacy. Instead, prayer can become conversational with God, like a conversation with a friend over coffee. God desires to speak into every area of our lives. We can begin to practice conversational prayer (listening prayer) by making space for God to speak into situations and circumstances.

Exercise Review:

What did God impress upon you from the scripture reading?

How did He communicate to you?

How certain were you that it was God speaking?

Think back to our early sessions. Man has a body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess 5:23). Our new spirit is where we deeply connect to God (John 4:24). Our soul is being renewed (Rom 12:2), and our current body is being sustained by His Spirit (Romans 8:11). Ultimately, we’ll get a new body and completely renewed soul that in heaven. Yah! Until then, we’re learning how to live from the inside-out, our new spirit-man in fellowship with His Spirit.

Tips for Listening in Prayer

* Ask concise questions followed by listening for an answer.
* Take notes. Write down both your question and the responses that come to mind. That way, you can always go back and test them according to God’s Word. This will also help you learn the difference between your thoughts, the enemy’s suggestions, and what the Lord says.
* Ask open-ended questions instead of yes/no questions.
* Dedicate the space before getting too deep in prayer and ask God to remove distractions.

Example:

*“Father, I ask that you remove any distractions or disruptions from me as I pray. Please, bring my mind to rest and my heart to peace. Help me to hear what you have to say above all other voices. Speak to me, Lord; your servant is listening. Amen”*

* Practice listening in prayer ***before*** the storms of life instead of when you’re in them. It is easier to hear the Lord in the stillness of the morning or when you want to spend time with Him “just because” instead of when your life is falling apart. Just like a soldier doesn’t learn how to shoot his rifle on the battlefield, he trains ahead of time. So you, too, should practice listening in prayer ***before*** you desperately need it. Today is the best day to start practicing!

Why Listen in Prayer?

We all believe lies. How can I say this? Because there are still areas in our lives that do not reflect the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It’s not because we don’t have the Holy Spirit, it’s because our flesh and our carnal thinking block the fruits of the Spirit manifesting in our lives (Galatians 5). Therefore, we need to replace the lies with the truth of God’s Word (both spoken and written.)

While Biblical counseling and other scientific techniques can be helpful, there is only one “teacher” and “counselor” that God himself provided: The Holy Spirit. In fact, Jesus told the early apostles not to begin ministry until the Holy Spirit came upon them (Luke 24:49, Acts 1:4). If Jesus said it was good for Him to go away so we would receive the Spirit, we can rest assured that we desperately need the Spirit’s guidance in our lives (John 16:7-15)!

The Holy Spirit conforms us to Christ’s image (2 Cor 3:18, Rom 8:29, Col 3:10). By giving Him space to speak to us in each moment, we submit to the Lordship of Christ in our lives. In these moments of listening, He reveals the truth, and that truth sets us free of the lies we have believed (John 8:32).