



## Lesson Eight: When you meet with God...be prepared to give as he has given to you.

### Reflection/Discussion

Learning to sense what is on God's heart takes a long time and cannot be done without his help. As Paul writes, *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better"* (Ephesians 1:17). Paul is doing exactly what Jesus said we should do, *"If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him"* (Luke 11:13). So we need to continue asking for God's heart to be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit if we are to draw closer to him. Unfortunately, it is all too easy for us to make mistakes in doing this as we confuse the desires of God's heart with the desires of our own. To make progress we must be prepared to take a risk and act on what we believe God is prompting us to say or do, whilst at the same time always acting in a way that protects ourselves and others from being hurt if we have read the situation wrong. Again, Paul writes, *"But those who prophesy speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort"* (1 Corinthians 14: 3). This is a helpful rule for us to follow when trying to sense God's heart for others. If what we do either strengthens, encourages or comforts others then we cannot go far wrong. But if it undermines, discourages or wounds someone, then we should question whether or not we have sensed God's heart correctly!

### Teaching

Matthew 6: 11 *"Give us today our daily bread."*

Luke 11: 3 *"Give us each day our daily bread."*

### Our prayers reflect our relationship...

I want to begin this teaching section by noting the order of the Lord's Prayer. In the last lesson we looked at, *"your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*, and focussed on God's will being done in our own lives first. There is a reason why this line comes before *"Give us today our daily bread"*, and the reason is that we ask for 'daily bread' in the context of living our lives according to the will of God. If we live disobedient and self-centred lives we cannot ask for our 'daily bread' and expect to get it! Jesus said, *"You are my friends if you do what I command"* (John 15: 14), and it is out of the depth of our friendship with him that we pray for things. Our prayers are a reflection of that

friendship. So we need to remember that God's provision comes in answer to specific requests only as we seek to walk in his will – as we increasingly become united with him in love.

The kingdom of God, of course, is the place where God's will is done in all its fullness. But for now we are in the process of being transformed into kingdom people. The transformation is incomplete. We have one foot in the kingdom and one in this world. We desire the things of God, yet we still wrestle with the desires of this world. Like the Roman god Janus (from which we get the word January), we have a face which looks in two directions. In Matthew 6: 31-33 Jesus says, *"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."* He is telling us in which direction we should be facing when he calls us to *"seek first his kingdom"* and let go of the desires of this world. How can we do that when the things we desire in this world seem so important and yet insecure? Jesus answers this question by promising that if we seek first his kingdom, all the other essentials for life will be provided for us by God. Jesus doesn't deny the needs of this world, and in the Lord's Prayer we are told to ask God to continue to provide us with those things. When we do this we are effectively asking God to demonstrate again his love for us. But as he gives all we need out of his abundance of love for us, so we are expected to give to others out of the abundance of our love for them. Are we doing that?

### [Depending on God...](#)

So as we have seen in Matthew 6: 31-33, Jesus is telling us that we do not need to worry about the practical things of this world, and that was in a time when people were in serious trouble if the crops failed for even one year. For most people at that time there were no reserves of food, no savings in the bank, and definitely no pension for when they became too old or infirm to work. In our society today, it appears that we have tried to arrange our lives in such a way that we will never have to rely on God for the things we need! This is largely subconscious of course. I doubt many people think, "I must sort out a decent pension for myself because God won't look after me when I am old." But in the end, that is what most of us are doing!

Now, I am not saying that there is anything wrong with having savings in the bank or putting money aside for when we retire, but there are two concerns we should have about this sort of mindset. Firstly, there is a danger that we can become fooled into thinking we really can make our lives secure through our careful planning and efforts. Jesus tells the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12: 16-21) who made the 'sensible' choice of storing up great reserves so that he could feel secure and take life easy. However, his wealth had lured him into a false sense of security. He no longer recognised his dependence on God to provide for him because he had already acquired all he needed. He had stopped trusting in God to look after him, but in the end he discovered all his wealth could not save him from the catastrophe awaiting him that night. This idea that we can secure our own future is a mirage. I suspect it affects everyone to some extent or other, but we need to ask God to help us see the reality of just how much we really are dependent on him. I have a little saying to help me try and keep the balance right between making sensible decisions about finance, etc, and trusting in God to look after me – "be intelligent but not clever". There's a

subtle difference. I try to make the best decisions I can with my limited intelligence, but I know that if I try to 'be clever' then I am attempting to rely on myself rather than God. My own life experience has shown me this doesn't work.

The second problem with relying on ourselves to meet our own needs is that it is only as we become dependent on God that we will really see him act in amazing ways in our lives. Some years ago I took a year out of paid employment to study theology at a college in Canada. I believed that this was what God wanted me to do. Before I went it was important for me to sell my car. I needed the money both to clear the loan I had for buying the car and to help cover the costs of a year without any income. The problem was that I needed to use the car right up until I left for Canada. Because of a misunderstanding, I tried but failed to advertise the sale of my car in the local newspaper the week before I was due to leave. I was now clearly dependent on God and I went to him in prayer. I explained the situation to him and put the matter into his hands. The next day (Monday) I had a call from a man I used to work with who had heard I was leaving the country and wondered if I wanted to sell my car. On the Tuesday he came round to test drive the car. On the Wednesday he paid me cash for the car which went straight into my bank account, and on Thursday I flew off to Canada – praising God!

### Set free to give...

In the previous set of notes I wrote about George Müller who made the decision to live his life as an experiment in trusting God to provide him with all he needed. If you were to read a biography on him you would see that, at first, the situation for him and his wife was very difficult. They would not tell others of their needs but would take them only to God in prayer. For a while this left them hungry and materially poverty stricken! But in time the situation started to change and, as I wrote in the previous notes, Müller not only had his own needs met, but he ended up establishing and providing for large orphanages simply through prayer. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians *"And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9: 8). In our journey to become like God, we need to become generous like him. Müller let go of all he had so that God could place his gifts into 'empty hands', which Müller then passed on to others. When we are prepared to take the 'risk' of trusting God as our provider, we will learn that God is faithful in providing all we need, freeing us to become a means by which God is able to provide for others. But we shall also learn that if we want to do God's service, if we want to live the life that God has called us to, we will have to let go of many things we would rather hold on to, and we will have to live lives which are more dependent on God. As the Psalmist says (Psalm 127:1), *"Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain."*

### Exercise

To become a kingdom person requires us to become hungry for the things of God and his kingdom, whilst at the same time losing our appetite for the things of this world. This is inevitably going to be a life long struggle. Paul writes in Romans 7: 21-25 *"So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of*

*death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin."*

We either engage in this spiritual battle or we don't. I guess for most of us there will be times when we battle with our desire to pursue the things of this world and times when we just give in to those desires. Since this is an issue we face every day, we need to incorporate this into our regular quiet time. Just as we can pray for a greater heart of love whilst doing things which help our heart to grow, so we can pray for God to change our wrong desires whilst at the same time make decisions which redirect our desires towards God. It is for this reason that monks and nuns give up all worldly possessions - in order to pray well they need to do all they can to control their desire for the things of this world.

Once we have settled ourselves and quietened our minds, as we have done before, we are then going to start talking with God. In lesson 5 we formulated a prayer where we asked God to increase our capacity to love him above all else, then ourselves and our neighbour. In lesson 7 we asked God to place the burdens of his heart onto ours. In this lesson we are going to approach God with our hands open and ask him to give us anything that he desires to give us, whilst at the same time asking him to help us be willing to give up/away anything he wants us to let go of.

To end with a personal story, I came to a point in my forties when I sensed God wanted me to let go of any possessions I genuinely didn't need. I was open to this idea and began asking God to show me what I should get rid of and who I should give my belongings to. In all, the process took about a year and a half, because each time I thought I had given up all I could, God would turn my attention to something else in my house and say, "Do you really need that?" I journeyed in faith, not knowing where this was all heading, but shortly after I had completed this task I met the woman who six months later became my wife. When I got married I had to move to a new city with all my possessions. That was a great deal easier having given away so much of what I didn't really need!

#### Exercise in brief:

- 1) Pray – give God this time you have set aside for him.
- 2) Sit still and spend a moment becoming attentive to God.
- 3) Ask God to help you become a person who loves him, yourself and others more.
- 4) Ask God to place on your heart the burdens he has on his heart for you to bear.
- 5) *Ask God to help you empty your hands so that you can receive whatever he wants to give you.*
- 6) Close the exercise with a prayer of thanks.

#### Encouragement

*Chris writes...*

My wife and I had just taken on our first mortgage which, to many people, seemed like a bad decision because I was on a low wage and my wife was suffering from a long-term illness which meant she could not work. We were stretched to the limit financially but were happy and confident that we would be provided for by the Lord. The house we had moved into was exactly 'our cup of tea'. We had first made an offer on another house, but then my wife had decided to look at this property advertised at the same price. I can remember getting an excited phone call

from her telling me that we had to drop our offer- *'wait until you see this house!'* It was decorated as if we had chosen the decor ourselves and the things we really needed but could not afford (cupboards, sofa and chair) were being left by the previous owners.

After we moved into the house I began to wonder if I should be doing the job that I was in. It was a physical job and I was struggling with a lot of joint pain which eventually got so bad that I could not go into work. At first I thought that a good rest would sort things out, but during my time off I did a lot of praying and I became increasingly anxious about the situation - its a shame, but sometimes I need to get into that state of mind before I start to truly pray! I did not want to inflict any more damage on my body or put myself through the pain, but I felt I had no choice other than to stay in the job. Then one night I dreamt of God telling me that I could give up my job and everything would be ok. Having not seen this as an option, I suddenly felt that not only was it an option, it was now something I really had to do. It was during this period in my life that I realised the difficulties involved in listening to God. Obviously there were those who thought this was another bad decision. A sick wife and a mortgage 'are you mad?' My blessing was that most people close to me chose to believe my conviction. Within a few days of handing in my notice, my dream job appeared - a job I am still in today. My wife was better within a month and any loss of earnings was made up for by a cheque being posted through our letter box. Someone had written a note with the cheque saying *'we were praying the other day and we feel like God asked us to give you this money'*. We still live in our house - God is good!

### **Sayings of the Desert Fathers/Mothers**

Abba Mius of Belos *"Obedience responds to obedience. When someone obeys God, God obeys his request."*