

Bible Study



Special Section: A Prayer Pilgrimage

Honest to God

This Bible study originally appeared with a *Discipleship Journal* special section titled "A Prayer Pilgrimage: Deepening Your Conversation with God" (Sep/Oct 2003, Issue 137).

1. Generally, how honest are you in prayer? Place a mark on the line below:

If I'm thinking or
feeling it, I say it.

I tend to pray what
I think I should.

2. To see examples of truth-telling in prayer, let's look at the book of Jonah. Start by reading Jonah with a pencil in hand and underline all the prayers. (You can print a fresh copy of Jonah from www.biblegateway.com.)

Lament

3. One form of honest prayer is lament. When we lament, we tell the truth about the broken world we live in. How did Joel instruct the Israelites to lament in Joel 1:8-11?

4. How is lamenting different from complaining? (See Hos. 7:14, Joel 2:13.)

5. What laments do you see in the prayers in Jonah?

6. What is the benefit of lamenting?

Confession

7. Confession acknowledges the truth about our condition before God. In Jonah, who confesses?

8. Who doesn't confess?

9. Jonah acknowledges God's rescue but not his own disobedience. If you're holding back from confessing the truth about an attitude or action, what might be preventing such honesty with God?

- I'm not sure I want to hear what God might say in return.
- I've already confessed this, and nothing has changed.
- I don't have a very transparent relationship with God.
- Other: _____

Immediacy

10. Immediate prayer tells the truth, as one person has said, by praying "from where we are, not from where we think we ought to be." After the Ninevites repent, Jonah tells God exactly what he thinks (4:13). If you'd heard Jonah complain about God's mercy, what might your reaction have been?

- I love that gut-level honesty.
- Lightning's going to strike at any moment!
- I've thought stuff like that but can't imagine saying it.
- Other: _____

11. What other examples of immediate prayers do you see in the book of Jonah?

12. Describe a time when you prayed from "where you were" rather than praying what you thought God (or others) wanted to hear.

13. How did that affect your conversation with God?

Recalling

14. Another way we can pray honestly is to tell the truth about God. Read Lam. 3:19-23. What does Jeremiah deliberately do (v. 21)?

15. What would be the danger of prayers of lament, confession, or immediacy that didn't also tell the truth about God's character and ways?

16. Why does honesty about God's character often lead to praise?

17. Recalling the truth about God doesn't guarantee praise, however. In Jon. 4:2, Jonah accurately recounts truth, but what is his attitude as he does so?

18. How could you avoid Jonah's pitfall?

Honesty's Risk

19. What risks might you encounter if you're honest in prayer? Check off any that apply.

- God won't respond as I want Him to.
- God won't respond at all.
- I'll cross the line into despair or complaining.
- I'll have to acknowledge stuff I'd rather not deal with.
- I have so much to be honest about that I'll be overwhelmed.
- Other: _____

20. Go back through Jonah. This time, circle all the things God said or did (whether directly, through nature, through people, or through other means).

Have you seen God work in similar ways? If so, describe what happened.

21. How has seeing God respond to your prayers affected your desire to be honest with Him?

22. Try praying through a prayer item in the following four ways. Here's an example to get you started.

Immediacy: God, I'm tired of praying for John to become a Christian. I'm ready to wash my hands of the whole thing!

Lament: It's terrible that our world turns its back on You. Why won't people listen? And why won't You act in John's life?

Confession: I confess that I'm tired of asking You for this; I've become "weary in doing good."

Recall: God, You care about John more than I ever could. I know You're committed to reconciling the world to Yourself. Not only that, but You've done it and continue to do it. Thank you for Your grace in working on our behalf! .