

...FOR THOSE SEEKING THE EMPOWERING PRESENCE OF THE *Holy Spirit*

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The Kind
of People
Who Hear
God's Voice

by Jack Deere



If you study the life of Jesus, who heard the voice of the Father better than anyone else, one of the first things that will impress you is his “unreserved availability for God.” I had been a Christian for only about a year when I first noticed this characteristic of Jesus’ life. I was reading the first chapter of Mark, where Jesus stayed up late into the night healing the sick and the demon possessed (vv. 32-34). After staying up half the night ministering to people, Mark tells us that “very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (v. 35). If anyone ever had an excuse for sleeping in, Jesus certainly had one that morning. But instead he followed his daily habit of seeking solitude with God (see also Luke 4:42; 5:16).

Early in my Christian life I used to use this passage to say that Jesus always *found time* for God. I don’t see it that way at all now. When I look at the life of Jesus, I never really see him “finding time for God.” Rather, I see a Son whose time belongs completely to the Father. Jesus was never in a hurry. He never needed more time. This is because he looked on his time as his Father’s time. Also, he was completely available for his Father’s desires. He only did what he saw his Father doing (John 5:19). And he was always in the right place at the right time in order to fulfill the desires of his heavenly Father.

I am continually amazed at the spontaneity and informality of the ministry of the Lord. Whether he was speaking to an unexpected crowd of over five thousand, as in the Sermon on the Mount, or to just one lost woman at a well in Samaria, he was always prepared and did just the right thing. He was never frantic, like the modern pastor who continually frets about how busy he is and then has to stay up late Saturday night putting together a “message” for Sunday morning. It is comical to imagine Jesus staying up the night before the Sermon on the Mount wondering what he was going to say to all those people. Yes, it is comical to imagine Jesus ever struggling for a sermon. His life is the sermon, and he ministered out of the daily overflow of his communion with his heavenly Father. He was able to do this because he was completely available to God.

**“JESUS OFTEN WITHDREW
to lonely places and prayed.”**

Luke 4:42

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Please don't think I am speaking about having a regular "quiet time." I am speaking about much more than this. I have known people who never missed their 5:30 A.M. quiet time of Bible study, and yet were meaner than junkyard dogs. It is possible to have a quiet time every morning and never be available to God. Unlike people who "find time" for God, who get their quiet time out of the way in the morning so they can go on with their real lives and forget God the rest of the day, people who are truly available to God see God as owning their day. He is free to reorder it at any time he chooses. They are not content simply to have a quiet time and get their "God stuff" out of the way early in the morning. Their satisfaction comes from experiencing his presence throughout the day and knowing they are pleasing to him.

Years ago I was in the process of developing a close friendship with a person who eventually became one of my closest friends. I was going through a difficult time and needed his help. As I was saying good-bye after lunch one day, I asked him how late I could call him that night.



He said I could call him as late as I wanted to. I told him I didn't want to wake him up, so I needed to know what time he planned to go to sleep. Then he said to me, "It doesn't make any difference what time I go to sleep tonight. For you, I am a twenty-four-hour friend, seven days a week. Call me whenever you want. I'll be there." You see, availability is one of the primary characteristics of friendship. Friends are available to their friends.

Differing levels of friendship call for varying degrees of availability. There are some people to whom we will not give our phone number, but we will smile and speak to them if we meet them in a public setting. There are others who have only

our office number. Then there are people who have our private home number. Of the people who have our private home number, only a few of them would feel free to use it any time of the day or night. These are our closest friends, the ones who can come in our back door without an appointment and be genuinely welcomed by us. Our closest friends are the ones who can interrupt our plans without causing us any irritation. The deeper the friendship, the greater the availability.

This is what God really wants with us: a friendship (John 15:15). Many of us try to satisfy God by meeting religious duties and obligations, but in our closest friendships, we go far beyond the sense of duty. We are available to our closest friends because we love them and want to be with them. In true friendship, availability is not a burden or an obligation. Instead, it is a joy and a privilege.

In a real friendship, availability is reciprocal. The people who have unrestricted access to me also give me unrestricted access to them. It works the same way with our heavenly Father. He is most available to those who are most available to him. To many Christians this idea won't sound fair. They like to picture God being equally available to all Christians at all times. It is almost as if they conceive of God as a cosmic bellboy who exists to meet their needs and can be dismissed when they have no conscious need of him. But this is both a misunderstanding of grace and of the nature of personal relationships. God doesn't throw his pearls before swine. The ones who find him are those who seek him with all their heart (Deut. 4:29).

If we want a deep friendship with God, it is important to cultivate a state of mind where we view all of our time as God's time, a state of mind where we are totally available to him. It is necessary to do this because God speaks to us at the most inconvenient times. Sometimes he

**"... I HAVE CALLED YOU FRIENDS,
for everything that I learned
from my Father I have made
known to you."**

John 15:15

even lets his favorite servants spend time, energy, and money in organizing a mission journey. Then he waits until they get in the middle of that journey and forbids them to engage in ministry. Paul and his friends made plans to minister in Asia, but God wanted them in Europe (Acts 16:6-10). He let them “waste” time, money, and energy before he redirected them there.

It seems to me God almost delights in speaking to us at the most inconvenient times in order to test our availability. One of my most frequent prayers is that God would grant to me a warning before I say a critical word that he has not ordained to come forth from my lips or before I say a self-exalting word. I have great confidence in praying this prayer because it is one of the tasks of the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin (John 16:8). God frequently convicts me in regard to my speech. He lets me get to the point of no return in one of my self-exalting stories, then he gives me the warning that I am about to use my speech in order to make myself look better than I really am. When he does this I am suddenly caught between two alternatives: finding a new and awkward ending to the story so that I do not exalt myself, or disobeying God and finishing the story.

Only slightly less inconvenient is God’s habit of waking you up at 3:00 in the morning. Sometimes he does this with a dream. You know it is important, and you know that if you don’t write it down you won’t remember it, but you are sleepy. Remember, if you are available to him, he will be available to you. Or it may not be a dream that disturbs you at night. It may be his Spirit that settles on you with a sort of nighttime clarity which makes sleep impossible. He will speak to you then if you will turn to him instead of to books or to magazines.

When Jesus first called his apostles, he made it clear to them that their first task was not ministry for him, but rather availability to him. Before Jesus chose his twelve apostles, he went up on a mountain and spent the night in prayer (Luke 6:12). In the Bible, mountains were considered the place of revelation. Moses went up on a mountain in order to receive the Ten Commandments from God. Jesus went to a place of revelation and spent the night in prayer in order to hear the names of the twelve apostles from his Father. Here is Mark’s account of the calling of the twelve apostles:

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:13-15).

God chose the apostles for three purposes. First, *“that they might be with him.”* Second, *“that he might send them out to preach.”* And third, *“to have authority to drive out demons”* (Mark 3:14-15). Before they were ever to have the privilege or the power of preaching and ministering in the name of Jesus, they were to be with him. Availability to God, intimacy with Jesus, is the practical foundation for all of ministry. Preaching and witnessing only have power when they are an overflow of our intimacy with God. Availability to God is the first priority in ministry and the first requirement for hearing his voice.

Availability to God carries with it an expectation that he will speak to us. Habakkuk 2:1 says, *“I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.”* The attitude of the person available to the Lord is, *“Speak, for your servant is listening”* (1 Sam. 3:10). If we make ourselves available to God, he will make himself available to us (James 4:8).



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Dr. Jack Deere has served as a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and as a church planter and pastor. He is currently the senior pastor of Wellspring Church in Colley, TX. His three books are international bestsellers. Jack and his wife Leesa have two grown children.

[Jack Deere will be speaking at the 2008 Holy Spirit Conference and the pre-conference Pastors’ Day.](#)



Discovering the **Power** of Intercession

by Larry Christenson

My purpose in writing *The Mantle of Esther* was to show the marvelous promise and power that God attaches to the ministry of intercession. The intercessor stands between two realms, the natural and the spiritual. Intercessory prayer brings the power of heaven down to earth.



Enlarge Our Expectations

If you asked a random group of people to define *intercessory prayer*, you might get back phrases like, "Saying prayers for someone...presenting petitions to God...praying for someone else."

Commonsense phrases like these are not inaccurate, but they pale beside the promises of Scripture. God attaches breathtaking promises to the ministry of intercession. Scripture portrays God in "wonderment" when He finds a lack of intercession: "*It displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor*" (Isaiah 59:15-17, NKJV).

A Biblical Illustration of Effective Intercession

The story of Esther in the Old Testament is a remarkable illustration of the ministry of intercessory prayer. In 483 B.C., as a young queen in Persia, she intervened in a dangerous situation. Her people, the Jews, were threatened with a powerful enemy bent on their destruction. Esther ventured to intercede with the king who alone could change the ominous situation. Her intercession led to deliverance and victory for her people.

The power of evil intrudes also in our lives. We find ourselves up against things we cannot handle or control. Under its many guises — scheming, betrayal, sickness, addiction — the power of evil seeks to trouble, harass, kill and destroy. The mantle of Esther portrays a strategy for confronting the power of evil. Esther knew from the beginning she was no match for the hateful power poised against her and her people. Step by step the unfolding story recounts how Esther enters upon a strategy to pit the power of the king against the plot of an evil enemy. In utter dependence she presents herself before the king, and there discovers the awesome power of effective intercession.



A Biblical 'Type'

The idea of reading Esther as a “type” of intercessory prayer came to me more than 40 years ago. I taught it to a small group in the congregation where I was serving as pastor. A short way into the study a member of the group, Helen Gates, said, “This is not a usual Bible Study. Where did you get this?” Her question caught me off guard. I had not found this approach to Esther in any book or commentary I had read. Her question forced me to say openly, “I believe it is something the Lord gave me.”

In the years since I have had the opportunity to teach the book of Esther in this way at conferences, congregations and Bible schools. One of the first times I presented it to a large group was in the morning Bible Study at the Holy Spirit Conference in Minneapolis in 1973.

This way of approaching Scripture is found in the Bible itself. The marriage of Hosea and Gomer is presented as a parable of God’s “marriage” to Israel (see Hosea 1:2-3). The apostle Paul interpreted the Old Testament story of Israel’s passage through the Red Sea as a type or prefiguring of baptism (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-4). Jesus frequently couched His teaching in stories or parables.

The purpose of typology is to illustrate truth, not define it. Jesus knew the truth about the future coming of God’s Kingdom. He taught the truth by injecting it into stories or parables that memorably illustrate the truth:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matthew 5:31-32).



Across the centuries, her (Esther’s) story speaks strong encouragement to those who feel called into the presence of the Lord to plead a holy cause.

By itself, the parable did not define truth about the Kingdom. In Jesus’ day, a woman may have watched her husband separate sheep from goats year after year and thought nothing of it. But when Jesus used that event to illustrate divine truth, a common experience became uncommonly meaningful.

Like a many-faceted diamond, the story of Esther illustrates truth about intercessory prayer. The truth itself finds its source in the whole of Scripture.

The Mantle of Esther is written essentially as a story, following the biblical account — more to be read like a novel than a textbook. Yet it can profoundly deepen an understanding of intercessory prayer. With single-minded determination Esther takes to heart the plight of her people, risking everything, even life itself, to intercede before the king. Across



the centuries, her story speaks strong encouragement to those who feel called into the presence of the Lord to plead a holy cause.

The Ground of Intercession: Relationship With the King

When Esther comes to the royal palace, she is put in custody of Mordecai, who is typological of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit trains intercessors for ministry that goes far beyond merely “saying prayers” or “reciting petitions.” He prepares them to please the Lord, something for which the natural person has no inborn talent. What first of all pleases the Holy Spirit and finds favor with Him are believers who are teachable. They want to live so as to please God, but do not presume to know how. He takes them under his wing and begins to impart to them a new way of thinking and living —



“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.... Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds....put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” (Ephesians 4:17-18, 22-24)

This touches on the central thesis of *The Mantle of Esther*: the training of the Holy Spirit is no mere schooling in techniques of prayer. The Holy Spirit imparts a whole new way of life into which the intercessor is adopted, the life of the Holy Trinity.

“...put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Ephesians 4:24

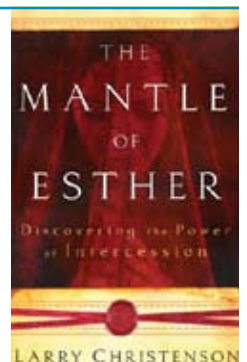
When Esther’s mantle settles upon a person, it is principally an encouragement to draw close to the King and there to discover His unimaginable love, favor, wisdom and power. Esther’s mantle is not foundationally a description of something the intercessor “does” or “causes,” but something that happens when the intercessor draws close to the Lord. Esther’s life, and the life of the people for whom she interceded, was transformed.

The eyes of the Lord go to and fro throughout the earth today, looking for those who will intercede in particular situations that concern His Kingdom. When you draw close to Him bearing one of these petitions, prepared to present it to Him despite every uncertainty and fear, you enter into that place of quiet power where His Kingdom is being formed. That is the legacy that attaches to the mantle of Esther.



Rev. Larry Christenson has been in pastoral ministry for over fifty years. He served as a parish pastor for many years before becoming the first Director of Lutheran Renewal. His books have sold millions of copies. He and his wife Nordis recently moved back to his childhood town of Northfield, MN.

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is faithful”

Heb. 10:23

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