



## **UNIT 6: Spiritual Growth and Development**

### **LESSON 18: Prayer and Spiritual Discernment**

#### **Lesson Objective:**

1. Understand the importance of strategic and intercessory prayer.
2. Learn how to discern between divine, human, and demonic influences.
3. Recognize the power of fasting in strengthening spiritual authority and intimacy with God.
4. Develop personal disciplines that cultivate spiritual sensitivity.

#### **Key Scriptures**

- Ephesians 6:18 (NIV) – “And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people.”
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV) – “Pray without ceasing.”
- 1 John 4:1 (NIV) – “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God...”
- Mark 9:29 (NKJV) – “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”
- Romans 8:26–27 (NIV) – “The Spirit helps us in our weakness... the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.”

#### **I. Introduction**

Every believer is called not only to pray, but to pray effectively; with understanding, authority, and discernment. Prayer is our lifeline to God, the communication that connects heaven’s power to earth’s needs. Yet, effective prayer requires spiritual sensitivity; the ability to hear, perceive, and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

We are living in a time when discernment is essential. The enemy’s tactics are subtle, and without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can mistake the voice of the flesh or even the influence of the enemy for the voice of God. This study focuses on developing a lifestyle of prayer and discernment that empowers believers to intercede strategically, discern accurately, and walk in spiritual authority.

## II. Strategic and Intercessory Prayer: Warring in Prayer

### Definition

**Strategic prayer** is focused, Spirit-led prayer that targets specific needs, people, or regions according to God's will. Intercessory prayer stands in the gap on behalf of others, inviting heaven's intervention on earth.

**Ezekiel 22:30.** *"I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land..."*

### Key Points:

- Intercessory prayer is an act of spiritual warfare. When you intercede, you are \_\_\_\_\_ with God to push back \_\_\_\_\_ and establish His kingdom.
- Strategic prayer involves \_\_\_\_\_ first, asking the Holy Spirit what to pray and how to pray. (Romans 8:26–27)  
**Romans 8:26–27.** The Holy Spirit helps us pray when we don't know what to say, interceding for us according to God's will.
- Jesus modeled intercession. He prayed for Peter's faith (Luke 22:31–32) and continues to intercede for \_\_\_\_\_ (Hebrews 7:25).  
**Luke 22:31–32.** Jesus tells Peter that Satan wanted to test him, but He prayed for Peter's faith not to fail.  
**Hebrews 7:25.** Jesus continually lives to intercede for those who come to God through Him.

### Practical Example:

Daniel's prayer in Daniel 10 was not casual. He fasted and prayed for 21 days, and his prayer released angelic movement in the heavenly realms. Strategic intercession shifts atmospheres and breaks demonic resistance.

## III. Discerning Spirits: Understanding Spiritual Influences

### Definition

**Spiritual discernment** is the ability, given by the Holy Spirit, to perceive what is spiritually true, distinguishing between the voice of God, human reasoning, and demonic deception.

**Hebrews 5:14.** *"But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."*

### Key Points:

- Discernment \_\_\_\_\_ believers from deception, manipulation, and distraction.

- There are three primary spiritual influences:
  1. **Divine:** The Holy Spirit's guidance, peace, and alignment with God's Word.
    - Divine discernment comes from the \_\_\_\_\_, who always leads in truth and peace.
    - Direction given by the Holy Spirit will never \_\_\_\_\_ Scripture. For example, if you feel prompted to forgive someone who hurt you deeply, even when your emotions resist, that urging aligns with God's Word and reflects His Spirit's guidance.
    - The result of divine influence is clarity, peace, and fruit that \_\_\_\_\_ God.
  2. **Human:** Fleshly motives, emotions, and logic.
    - Human discernment relies on \_\_\_\_\_ feelings or \_\_\_\_\_ rather than God's revelation.
    - Human discernment may seem logical or emotionally satisfying but can still miss God's will. For instance, someone might choose a job purely for financial gain without praying about it, only to find it drains their peace and spiritual focus.
    - Natural thinking, though not always \_\_\_\_\_, can cloud spiritual discernment when not \_\_\_\_\_ to God.
  3. **Demonic:** Lies, confusion, accusation, fear, and counterfeit signs.
    - Demonic influence seeks to deceive, divide, and distort God's \_\_\_\_\_.
    - The enemy often \_\_\_\_\_ spiritual experiences to lead believers astray or fill them with fear. For example, a person may hear an internal voice saying, "You'll never be good enough for God," or experience confusion after stepping out in faith. These are tactics of the enemy meant to discourage and derail.
    - True discernment recognizes demonic voices as \_\_\_\_\_ to the character of God.
    - True discernment enables us to resist demonic lies with the \_\_\_\_\_.
- A discerning spirit is developed through intimacy with God and \_\_\_\_\_ to His Word.

### **Practical Example:**

Paul discerned a spirit of divination in the slave girl who followed him (Acts 16:16–18). Though her words seemed correct, the spirit behind them was not from God. Discernment sees beyond the surface.

### **III. Strengthening Spiritual Authority: The Power of Fasting and Prayer**

#### **Definition:**

**Fasting** is voluntarily abstaining from food or other things to focus on seeking God. When combined with prayer, fasting sharpens spiritual focus, breaks bondage, and increases sensitivity to the Holy Spirit.

**Isaiah 58:6.** *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke?"*

## Key Points:

- Fasting weakens the \_\_\_\_\_ and strengthens the \_\_\_\_\_. It creates space for divine revelation.
- Jesus fasted before His public ministry (Matthew 4:1–11). Fasting prepares us for spiritual \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
**Matthew 4:1–11** tells how Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He fasted for forty days and overcame the devil's temptations with the Word of God.
- Through fasting, we gain clarity, humility, and empowerment.

## Practical Example:

In Acts 13:2–3, the early church fasted and prayed, and the Holy Spirit gave direction to set apart Paul and Barnabas. Fasting activates divine guidance and supernatural release.

## Action Steps

1. **Personal Practice:**
  - Spend consistent quiet time in God's presence, through prayer, worship, and reflection on Scripture, to train your spirit to recognize His voice above all others.
  - Keep a prayer journal to record impressions, Scriptures, and answered prayers.
2. **Intercession:**
  - Identify one person, family, or situation to intercede for over the next seven days. Ask God for specific Scriptures to pray over them.
3. **Discernment Exercise:**
  - Before making a decision, pause and ask: "Is this the voice of God, my emotions, or the enemy?" Test it against Scripture and the peace of the Spirit.
4. **Fasting Commitment:**
  - Choose one day or one meal to fast this week. Use that time to seek clarity and direction from God.

## Conclusion

Prayer and discernment are not occasional activities; they are spiritual disciplines that sustain our victory and deepen our relationship with God. Through prayer, we align with heaven; through discernment, we recognize heaven's voice; through fasting, we prepare our hearts for divine intervention.

When believers grow in these areas, they become watchmen on the wall: spiritually alert, empowered, and ready to stand in the gap for their families, churches, and communities.

***The more time you spend in God's presence, the clearer His voice becomes, and the weaker the enemy's influence grows.***