

# CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

"I write these things to you who believe in the name of God's Son so that you can know that you have eternal life. This is the confidence that we have in our relationship with God: If we ask for anything in agreement with his will, he listens to us.

*- 1 John 5:13-14*

While prayer is one of the fundamental practices of faith, we often have lots of questions. What is prayer? What does it do? How should I pray? How do I know what God wants me to do? How do I know if the voice I hear in my life is God's voice, the Holy Spirit, or my own? Prayer is a powerful force in the lives of followers of Jesus, so let's examine these questions.

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**JUNE 5**

**WHAT IS PRAYER?**

**Luke 11:1-4**

What is prayer? Julian of Norwich, a nun in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, wrote “prayer oneth the soul to God”. Saint Teresa of Avila, a mystic and nun living a century later, wrote “For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.” In Luke’s Gospel, the disciples want a way of connecting with God that they see in Jesus, so they ask him how to pray. His answer helps reveal what prayer is.

**Prayer is developing a relationship with God.**

**JUNE 6-11**

Monday	Read 1 John 5:13-15. What is prayer?
Tuesday	Read Luke 11:1-4. How can prayer help you to be more honest, more intimate, or more real in your relationship with God?
Wednesday	Read Luke 11:5-8. What is the difference between bold prayer and timid prayer? Why do you think Jesus invites bold prayer?
Thursday	Read Luke 11:9-13. Why do you think Jesus encourages followers to be persistent in their prayer life?
Friday	Read Acts 4:23-31. When has prayer helped you know the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life?
Saturday	Read Colossians 1:9-14. What does prayer do? What can’t prayer do?

***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Share a time of prayer that has had great meaning or impact in your life.
2. In the message, Pastor Brian said that prayer is less about getting things from God and more about deepening one’s relationship with God. What does this mean for you, in your prayer life?
3. What is the difference between prayer that invites the Holy Spirit into one’s life (“Please God”) and prayer that is centered on self (“Please, God”)?
4. What do you need to do to form a deep and strong relationship with a best friend? What do you need to do to strengthen your relationship with Jesus?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Schedule 5-10 minutes in your calendar each morning and each evening for time with God. In the morning, offer a “Please God” prayer. Pray through each part of the coming day and ask the Spirit to guide you. In the evening, pray a “Please, God” prayer. Offer thanks for what God has done in your day and share your concerns and requests with God, then rest knowing God holds your prayer and concerns.

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JUNE 12

HOW SHOULD I PRAY?

Psalm 63:1-8

If prayer is developing a relationship with God, then the answer to the question of how to pray is to engage regularly in anything that deepens that relationship. Breath prayers, rote prayers, centering prayers, intercessory prayers, praying with music, thanksgiving prayers, motion prayers, praying the Scriptures, journaling, listening in silence – all of these are great ways to pray. If you're wondering where to start, try this pattern from the writings of Julian of Norwich: Await, Allow, Accept, Attend.

**Let prayer make you aware of God in every aspect of your life.**

JUNE 13-18

Monday	Read Proverbs 2:1-5. How can you make room for listening in your prayer life, "turning your ear to wisdom" (NIV)?
Tuesday	Read Psalm 37:1-7. What do you think it means to "wait" (NIV) for the LORD in prayer? Why can "waiting on the LORD be difficult?
Wednesday	Read Psalm 16:5-11. How can prayer help you to allow a sense of God's presence to enter and guide your life?
Thursday	Read Psalm 46. What makes it hard to accept or know God's presence in the difficult times? How can prayer help?
Friday	Read Psalm 146. How does prayer call us or stir us to action in our daily lives?
Saturday	Read Psalm 63:1-8. What types of prayer help you to be aware of God's love in every aspect of your life?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. What kinds or types of prayer are meaningful for you in your prayer life? What kinds of prayers are strange or unhelpful for you?
2. Do you think there is a "right" way to pray? Why or why not?
3. In the message, Pastor Brian introduced the Hebrew word "avodah". How might your prayer practices weave together work, worship, and service in your life? What would be different if you were more aware of God in every aspect of your life?
4. Pastor Brian shared a variety of ways that we can pray. Which of them would you like to try as a regular prayer practice?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Download a prayer photo to your phone and set it as your wallpaper. (Everyone on the Clay email list will receive a photo and instructions.) Each time you look at your phone during the day, pray the prayer.

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**JUNE 19**

**WHOSE VOICE IS IT ANYWAY?**

**Genesis 3:1-13**

The story of the temptation in the garden of Eden raises all kinds of questions. How can a snake talk? God says they will die if they eat of the wrong tree, but they don't. Why would God want to keep humanity from knowing good and evil? Diving into these questions can help us answer another question we often ask of our faith: How do I know God's will for me? How do I know if the voice that is guiding me is the Holy Spirit or just my own desires? **You will discover God's voice by letting the Word of God direct the desires of the Spirit within you.**

**JUNE 20-25**

Monday	Read Genesis 3:1-13. What is it like to wrestle between your own desire and what you know God wants for you?
Tuesday	Read 1 Kings 3:5-15. What is a "discerning heart" (NIV)?
Wednesday	Read Matthew 6:9-13. What does it mean to you when you pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done"?
Thursday	Read Ephesians 5:15-20. What can help us know God's will?
Friday	Read Romans 12:2. How do you "test and approve" (NIV) what God's will is for you?
Saturday	Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. What role does prayer play in helping you to discern God's will in your life?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. What temptations are hardest for you to resist?
2. How are our *desires* gifts from God? How can our desires lead us to sinfulness or pull us away from God's will in our lives? What makes it difficult to discern between what God wants for our lives and what we want for ourselves?
3. Have you ever had an experience of discovering God's will for your life, or knowing what God wanted you to do in a situation? How did it happen? Describe the experience.
4. Pastor Brian shared 4 questions to use to help discern between God's voice and the voice of our own desires (*found in the FaithFit challenge below*). How could you use these questions in your life?

## ***FaithFit Challenge:***

Intentionally use these four questions in a decision you are making this week. 1) Is this consistent with what the Bible teaches? 2) Does this serve God's purposes, or does it serve me? 3) What would spiritual friends or guides say about this action, decision, or thought? 4) Does this action, desire, or thought expand God's love?

# Conversations with God

**JUNE 26**

**GOD, WHERE ARE YOU?**

**Job 9:11-19**

Have you ever prayed and felt like you didn't get an answer? Have you ever wondered if God was present when things were difficult? You are not alone. We live in a world where we're used to having control and having our needs met quickly. We're used to instant responses via text, instant meals via fast food or the microwave, next day delivery of anything we want. So does not getting what we want, or not getting an immediate answer, mean God isn't present? Or do we need a better understanding of prayer? A look at the book of Job can help us find an answer.

**Prayer awakens us to God's presence even in the tumultuous times.**

**JUNE 27 – JULY 2**

Monday	Read Job 9:11-19. When are times in your life when you felt God was absent or not answering your prayers?
Tuesday	Read Mark 15:33-34. How does it feel to know Jesus, like us, lamented in prayer that God seemed to be absent?
Wednesday	Read Lamentations 3:19-24. After describing an incredibly difficult time and blaming God, what does the author of Lamentations say?
Thursday	Read Lamentations 3:25-33. God doesn't promise our lives will be easy or free of suffering. What does God promise?
Friday	Read Job 37:19-24. Elihu tells Job we can't present our case, that God is beyond our reach. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
Saturday	Read Job 42:1-6. How can prayer remind you that God is present even when things are difficult?

## ***CIRCLE Study Questions:***

1. Share a time in your life when it felt like God was absent.
2. What makes it hard to know that God is present in the suffering or when life is filled with challenges and difficulties?
3. What lessons about life and faith can we learn from the story of Job?
4. Pastor Brian emphasized that God doesn't promise a life free of suffering. God promises to be present and faithful. What does that mean to you? How can prayer help us know God is faithful and present even when suffering or struggle continues?

***FaithFit Challenge:*** Read the Book of Job this week. As you read, make note of the arguments of the friends that sound like things we hear today in the midst of struggles. Also make note of what Job says and how he says it. Finally, pay attention to when and how God reveals Godself to Job in the story.