

8_14_25 SALT CO
Growing a Conversational Relationship with God

“A Paradox About Hearing God”

“Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.” Exodus 33:11

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” John 15:15

SLIDE **WELCOME TO THE SALT CO!**

SOOOO good to be back together for this season of SALT CO! We are glad you are here!

Welcome those who are joining us online.

SLIDE for on-liners,

Let us know you're here! Email us at seasonedadults@calvarywestlake.org

Welcome those here for the very first time! Let your Table Guide know any questions.

SALT CO is the HUB of Seasoned Adult Ministry.

For anyone new...by SEASONED ADULTS we mean:

SLIDE **SEASONED AS IN...**

Chronologically-- we've lived a lot of seasons of life

BUT more importantly-

Spiritually--- ...like when sodium and chlorine combined are transformed through a visible **reaction** to make a NEW chemical compound called: SALT... by the grace of God's Holy Spirit in us, when we receive Christ into our lives, we become like THIS [gesture: one hand—two hands—joined together].

“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away, see everything has become new”! (II Cor. 5:17)

And **this begins a lifelong transformational process** toward spiritual maturity *for the rest of our days*.

SLIDE

JESUS CALLS US THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

And this is the SALT CO:

This is (where we pull off the road to gather, AND share stories about how to faithfully navigate the ever-changing terrain on Route 60+ (Notice our new view of the road! Like it?))

So how was the terrain you were navigating this summer? Did it go the way you had envisioned? Me neither!

TABLE TALK I (10 minutes)

1. Share your name and a share what we call around our family dinner table a high, low, or...a “buffalo” [which we translate: something unexpected/good or bad/weird or otherwise] from your summer.

I suspect we're all thinking on what happened this last week in Utah. Trying to wrap our heads around the craziness, find a way for our hearts through anger, fear, ache for Charlie Kirk's young family. We can feel it in the deep pit of our gut. No matter where anyone finds themselves on the political spectrum, what happened has no place in the kind of society God has in mind for all of us. We are all painfully reminded of the work we have to do as Christ's people to learn to practice the art of conversational relationships! What we're doing here is important. Let's take a moment now to come be with our Lord.

SALT TALK Growing a Conversational Relationship with God.

The theme for SALT CO this fall and winter is *Growing in our Conversational Relationship with God.*

Let's think about this a moment.

What qualifies as a conversation?

Not this!

SLIDE (OF MAN YELLING ON PHONE)

<https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/nerdy-office-worker-with-vintage-telephone-gm157564724-12020970?searchscope=image,film>

...and the kind of conversation we're going to talk about certainly wouldn't look like this:

SLIDE (of people not connecting)

So what makes for a good conversation? Shout out some thoughts.

Here's an AI generated definition I shared with our Table Guides last week:

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“A conversation is an interactive, informal talk where two or more people exchange thoughts, feelings, or ideas, typically with a balance of speaking and listening, and a goal of understanding rather than just conveying information. Key components include a mutual interest or shared understanding, a respectful and cooperative tone, and the ability to adjust the topic to maintain engagement.”

What is a conversational relationship with God called?

Prayer!

But when it comes to God what if I honestly really prefer to keep God at a distance, at “arm’s length”, polite, religious, short and sweet? I give God my asks and then have some “room to run” my life.

Thing is, this plays less well as we age. We’ve had time now to see, as Dr. Phil liked to ask, “How that’s been working for us”. The more time we spend in the Third Third of life, our lives seasoned out under the hot sun out on Route 60+, the questions we have about our purpose, our worth, about who really cares, about things left undone, realizing that we don’t “got this”, coming to terms with pain, suffering, aching for our struggling loved ones, for ourselves, for our hurting confused world, growing a conversational relationship with God starts to sound.... Interesting, needed, maybe even essential.

BTW, for us in Seasoned Adults Ministry we see a difference between getting older, a biological process, [it happens no matter what] and “aging” which for us is a spiritual growth process and requires effort on our part. We can age well or not so well.

This is the terrain we’ll cover in SALT CO this fall and winter. We’ll use as our guide the book penned by Dallas Willard many years ago entitled “Hearing God”.

SLIDE OF BOOK Hearing God

Last year, here in SALT CO many of you were part of our journey together through the highlights of Willard's book: Life Without Lack based on the 23rd Psalm.

For those who have not heard of Dallas Willard you can see a bio about his life and ministry on your table talk sheet: suffice it to say he was a philosopher, professor, pastor who spoke and wrote extensively on matters of Christian spiritual formation who continues to help Christians all over the world live and love like Jesus.

Let's meet him. Here is a short video clip when he was _____ age; in _____ context:

VIDEO

<https://dwillard.org/about-dallas>

Hearing God is not "required", but "recommended" reading. There are copies on your tables for you to flip through. They're available while they last in the Journey Bookstore. You can easily pick them up from Amazon. We'll tap into key insights from each of the nine chapters so reading ahead will make your time here even richer. If you've read anything by Willard you know he puts a lot of thought into every sentence, and in my experience, I often must re-read a paragraph. This, it turns out, is very good for my aging brain! I encourage you to stretch your mind!

Here's a sample:

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*"It is very important to remember and to always keep before your mind this fact: **You are an unceasing spiritual being, created for an intimate and transforming friendship with the creative Community that is the Trinity.** Learning to hear God is much more about becoming comfortable in a continuing conversation and learning to constantly lean on the goodness and love of God, than it is about turning God into an ATM for advice, or treating the Bible as a crystal ball."*

Hearing God, p. 10

We were CREATED FOR a conversational relationship with God!

In fact, as Willard reminds us: “We stand in the community of the SPOKEN TO!”

God is witnessed to throughout our Bibles from Adam and Eve, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Job, David (read the psalms), the prophets (Isaiah 6!), I think of the conversation on the Mount of Transfiguration God speaking to the Peter, James and John. Read the Book of Acts and you find this conversational relationship throughout. Jesus continues to invite us into this kind of relational back and forth through the work and presence of the Holy Spirit.

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” John 15:15

So anyone who doubts they can have conversational relationship with God...be assured...you were created for this!

We might be surprised to find out how many Christians, even non-Christians can tell specific times when they were sure God had “spoken to” “communicated in some way” with them. Most people rarely talk about this. People might dismiss them or think they are naïve or weird...

Willard remembered Lily Tomlin’s question, *“Why is it, that when we speak to God we are praying but when God speaks to us we are said to be schizophrenic?”* (p. 22)

This summer, we went to the Bay Area a few times, to visit Suzanne’s brother in the late stage of his struggle with cancer. After his diagnosis we had more conversations about the Lord, the Bible and life with God after death than we’d had in the 48 years prior. In fact, just a few months before his passing, he called to share a vivid experience of God giving him a peek behind the veil while in a PET/CT scan procedure. He said he hadn’t shared it with anyone yet but thought as a Pastor I might have heard stories like what he experienced. He felt the risk of being dismissed or thought to be weird.

The first chapter of Hearing God is entitled “A Paradox About Hearing God.” Here’s the paradox:

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On the one hand, we have massive testimony to and widespread faith in God’s personal, guiding communication with us.

-this lies at the heart of our sense of God’s leading in our church, in our worship, in our individual lives. Authority in spiritual leadership comes from a life in the Spirit, out of the leader’s personal ongoing relationship with God.

On the other hand, we also find a pervasive and often painful uncertainty about how hearing God’s voice actually works today and what its place is in the church and in the Christian’s life.

Hearing God, p. 30

-Even if we were to ask God for a “word”, for guidance, we may have so little clarity about what that would be like to receive it, or deal with it. We all can tell stories of painful confusion by people who make bad decisions based on what they grab onto as a “sign from God”.

- “I saw the shape of a car in the clouds. It was a sign to go buy that Lamborghini...”

-the open the bible and point to get “guidance”. First point: “*Judas went out and hanged himself...*” Second point: “*Go thou and do likewise...*”

-To NOT grow in our conversational relationship with God makes us and others around us vulnerable to the deceit of the evil one and those under his influence. This is how groups can become vulnerable to religious dictators.

Willard lays out three general problems that we’ll be dealing with in this series:

SLIDE (building three problems)

1. We need to understand that God's communications come to us in many forms.
 - a. We see demonstrated in Scripture. We should not be surprised based on the complexity of human personality and cultural history. We'll explore this as we continue.
2. We may have the wrong motives for seeking to hear from God.
 - a. We all live to some extent in the future. We want to be prepared for what is to come. We don't like surprises. So we look for ways to know about the future. This can make us vulnerable to those who say they can tell us about "God's will".
 - b. So the motive for seeking to hear from God becomes a means for assuring our own safety, comfort, and status.
 - c. Willard takes this one more step,

SLIDE

"Closely aligned to wanting to hear God only to know the future, some people want to have God's distinct instructions so they will not have to be responsible for their actions. But responsibility and initiative are at the heart of our relationship with God. We are not robots, and he does not work with robots." (p. 34)

3. Misconceiving the nature of our heavenly Father and of his intent for us creates a truly overwhelming problem.
 - a. Because then we misinterpret, confuse, even block our understanding of God's communication with us as his redeemed sons and daughters whom he calls friends.
 - b. Willard quotes E. Stanley Jones

SLIDE

"Obviously God must guide us in a way that will develop spontaneity in us. The development of character, rather than direction in this, that and the other matter, must be the primary purpose of the Father. He will guide us, but he won't override us."

Hearing God, p..34

Lots to think with talk about. Let's get started.

TABLE TALK (30 minutes)

1. Have you or someone you know had a strong sense of "hearing God" in some form that you'd be willing to share?

2. Willard cites the fact that when we pray to God for guidance in order to live an error free life or avoid responsibility for making choices we end up "*turning God into an ATM for advice or treating the Bible as a crystal ball.*" What do you think might be the motive(s) for this approach to prayer?

3. Do you discount yourself as a person who could be in a conversational relationship with God? Why?

4. What is your favorite biblical story about God/human conversation?

WRAP UP

God, your Maker and Creator of all things, of LIFE itself, wants to have a conversational relationship with you and me.

Why?

- a. Because, as we are reminded in I John, God is love. And, again, God *intensely* loves you. Meaning God wants to show us, share with us Himself and His joy. Read Jesus' prayer in John 17. Read Paul's prayers in Ephesians 1 and 3.
- b. Because we have purpose, we are God's agents- if you will, His Special Op's in creation- this is our "work" that Pastor Brian has been talking about. Read Ephesians 2:10, set within Ephesians 1:10, and 3:10! Start with Genesis 1:26-28.
- c. Because, therefore, we need to "keep our earpieces in" and our hidden mic's positioned. Another image that conveys this for me is in Psalm 23, "your rod and staff they comfort

me...” Protection and Guidance come through
“conversation” “for his name’s sake”.

- i. Norita’s example for us invites a conversation,
*“Lord what are you doing in this space? Help me
see what you are up to here...”*
- d. This is His good pleasure. God wants us in conversation
with HIM.

NEXT STEPS

1. HBB new ministry with our homebound brothers and sisters. Weekly connection, encouragement, rediscovering purpose through conversation and prayer. Want to find out more? Just give us your name and phone on the back of the clip board and we’ll reach out to you.
2. Car Show Party! Keep the date. 10/18. Help us with hospitality and décor. HOLD UP CLIPBOARD
3. Next SALT CO: “Guidelines for Hearing from God” pp. 37-55.

BLESSING

“Your eternal destiny is not cosmic retirement; it is to be part of a tremendously creative project, under unimaginably splendid leadership, on an inconceivably vast scale, with ever-increasing cycles of fruitfulness and enjoyment—that is the prophetic vision which eye has not seen and ear not heard.”

— Dallas Willard, Soul Keeping, pg 22

Go in peace and serve the Lord!

