

10/12/25
SALT CO.
“Never Alone”

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’”

Genesis 2:18

“Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel”

Isaiah 7:14

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20

Table Talk I

Share your name and what you do, when you are doing it, causes you to lose all track of time.

SALT TALK Growing Our Conversational Relationship with God

Our theme this season is Growing Our Conversational Relationship with God. Using as our resource the book by Dallas Willard titled Hearing God. Recommended, not required. Copies in the Journey Bookstore at the ridiculously cheap price of \$15.00! You can't get your car washed for that.

book Hearing God

Quick review of first two chapters in growing our conversational relationship with God.

-We began with the paradox about hearing God- on the one knowing and believing that God speaks with us, but on the other hand we are very unsure how God does so in ways we personally can know. We are working on that question this season at SALT CO.

-Last time we looked at three guidelines for hearing from God.

1) Love God with all our being because a conversational relationship depends on this (think about the people you know and love and who love you),

2) that mere humans can talk with God- because we tend to “DQ” ourselves, we don’t believe if God really knew us He would listen to us (can we hear how absurd this sounds?) and

3) that hearing God doesn’t make us righteous! This is about our EGO’s, our tendency to use relationships, even our relationship with God!

So what is it like to be in this conversational relationship with God? We come to the next chapter, well entitled,

There is so much loneliness all around us. Lots of research on the problem of loneliness. In the UK they’ve got a Minister of Loneliness.

Years ago, a book out with the title Bowling Alone surveyed the demise of clubs (such as bowling leagues), associations, gatherings. More recently (2021) researcher Noreena Hertz describes in her book The Lonely Century some of the drivers of loneliness in our day:

- Smart phones

- Social media

- large scale migration to cities

- radical reorganization of the workplace

- we just do less with each other (Bowling Alone)

- we have less physical contact. Think about when you go to fill your tank. I worked in a gas station while in seminary to earn Suzanne’s engagement ring. I did windows, checked the oil and tires, I made change and took care of the credit card, wished the person a good day. Now it’s all “self-service”, to me this is an oxymoron. It turns out ‘humans are inefficient’.

- we have become even more competitive and individualistic, which makes for more loneliness.

Growing a conversational relationship with God is all about never being alone because we are in His presence.

Suzanne and I were so grateful for the time we had this summer with her brother Jim in his last days. Anyone who has sat with a loved one on “holy ground” knows what I mean- the strong desire to assure our loved one that we are “here” for them, and at the same time knowing full well that, when all is said and done, we will get up and step away back into our own lives, leaving our loved still... there.

Willard writes

“It is simply not within human capacity to care effectively for others in the depths of their life and being or even to be with them in finality- no matter how much we care for them. If we could only really be with them, that would almost be enough, we think. But we cannot, at least in a way that would satisfy us. For all of us the words of the old song are true: ‘You must go there by yourself’.” (p 58)

He continues,

“That would be the last word on the subject but for God. He is able to penetrate and intertwine himself within the fibers of the human self in such a way that those who are enveloped in his loving companionship will never be alone.” (p. 58)

Listen to the apostle Paul

“Then what can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or hardship? Can persecution, hunger, nakedness, danger, or the sword? ...[I]n spite of it all, overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us. For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life, in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers, in the world as it is or the world as it shall be, in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths- nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:35, 37-39 NEB)

It helped me (!) to talk with Jim, to read God’s promises together, to pray the Shepherd’s Psalm with him. It helped me when I had to go to remember the look in his eyes when he said, “See you later...”

To know that Jesus was with him in ways I can only begin to imagine.

It helps me in my thinking about my own dying. By the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the presence by His Spirit I will not be alone.

If you are like [THIS] neither will you.

Matthew ends his Gospel these words from our risen Lord,

“I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:2

I read these words when a middle school age kid. They struck me deep. What was this? Why was I weeping? Was I carrying an inexpressible feeling of loneliness? [Sometimes it's hard for middle school kids to put this into words...]

Loneliness is often kept out of sight, covered over with all manner of distractions, what neuro theologian Jim Wilder refers to as “Pseudo-joys” that are material substitutes, for healthy relationships. He writes that “When interactions with others seem too painful, unpredictable, or overwhelming to manage” we turn to what he refers to as BEEPS **which stands for behaviors, events, experiences, people, or substances** that “the brain uses to regulate pain, pleasure, and emotion” and “to manage distress instead of utilizing [*glad to be together*] joy in relationships” [which contributes to addiction,]

I think as we age (well) we come to the place in our hearts and minds where we just know that the only durable, robust answer to loneliness is found in the presence of a loving God.

Willard asks, “*Is it possible to make clear what a life with God is like? A life in which one is never alone?*”

The Bible offers us some concrete ways to understand what the with God life is like. As an example, Willard reminds us of two teachings, one from the Old and one from the New Testaments:

“You shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”
(Exodus 19:6)

And

“To him who loved us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever.” (Revelation 1:5-6)

There are many other passages like these that show us how he sees us, who he sees us becoming, what we are saved FOR, what our freedom is FOR, what His Son's death on the cross opened the door FOR. What spins His bowtie. That we become...

ROYAL PRIESTS

Check out this short video,

VIDEO from Bible Project on Royal Priests,

[Bible Project on Royal Priests](#)

God call us into a direct, interactively personal and conversational relationship with Him in which we share responsibility with him as royals (kings and queens) exercising real authority. PRIESTS, and I would add GARDENERS.

This does conversational relationship grows with time and experience.

Willard describes four forms or phases that may be involved as we grow in our conversational relationship with Him

BLIND FAITH

-In blind faith we believe by conviction, or at least we are willing to believe.

-We believe He is close, but we are not aware of his presence.

-Thing is abstract reasoning from the doctrine of God's "omnipresence", while good, is not sufficient. Nor is having faith in others' faith or relying on past memories and experiences of God.

-Folks having "blind faith" need to be encouraged that there is much, much more for them to know and receive.

The next step beyond blind faith is

SENSING GOD'S PRESENCE

-This is having the feeling and impression of His presence through personal experience.

-This can often take place in community, in worship, we can feel His presence as we sing, in a word spoken that seems to land on all our hearts.

-This feeling and impression also happen in purely secular spaces, think about the Dodgers World Series Freddy Freeman Grand Slam moment. Indelibly etched in my memory. This is a common occurrence.

- Willard tells the story of his brother struggling with a decision about his call to ministry- it's 2 a.m. when the room "*lit up with the glory of God. I saw a figure. I did not see a face, but I recognized it to be the person of Christ. I felt a hand on my shoulder, and I heard a voice that said, 'Feed my sheep.'*" (p. 64)

Sensing God's presence is sometimes accompanied by amazing things that happen. So the third form or phase is seeing

THE GOD WHO ACTS

-Things happen that are not easily explainable in purely, merely human terms. Not easily attributable to "natural causes". $2+2=5$

-God acts with our acts to change our situation.

-“We’re not that smart”. Bethlehem Experience. Haiti Project (now thousands of Haitians benefiting!) You say “yes” to one “little” proposal and then you take next right steps, and after a while you look around in awe.

-Direct healings.

-The Bible is full of these stories. Jesus tells them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat and they get a catch that almost sinks the boat! Read what happens as the Christian movement expands in the Book of Acts. Paul has the vision of the Macedonian Man. Jesus feeding thousands with five loaves and two fish. Raising Lazarus... etc., etc. etc.

-Think about how this church came to be... began in a restaurant!

-God acts when we do little things with great love.

These three might seem to some to be sufficient for one's relationship with God. But how can we be friends with God if this all there is? There is more...

CONVERSATIONAL RELATIONSHIP

-If God is personal, would He not also talk with us?

-Romans 8:14 says, "***all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.***" (8:14) The Spirit does not lead us around like robots, nor are we left to interpret vague impressions and signs.

There are two types of guidance. One we could call mechanical guidance, the kind we use to direct our cars, or fly a model airplane, how we steer the Web telescope. This is not how God guides us.

God guides the second way, personally. People have minds of their own. They, we, are unique individuals. So guidance takes the form of "communication". Willard writes,

"This is the only means by which God can have an impact on you and yet still leave you with the mental and spiritual space to retain integrity as a free personality. You can live as God's friend yet also govern your own life." (p. 69)

This personal communication may happen in one of two ways.

I. COMMUNICATING WITH WORDS

- a. Through what we recognize as a voice or words addressed to, or even through, us. The primary way God speaks to us is through and by His Word.
 - i. So the example of Ananias in Acts 9:10-16, direct, non-theoretical, not just an impression. Described in many places in scripture
 - ii. Happens in community, in the body, check I Corinthians 14. "Prophecy" is a word for the community. 14:26.

II. COMMUNICATING THROUGH SHARED ACTIVITY

- a. We grow to understand what God wants us to understand through immersion with Him in His work.

- b. We can say, with time and experience, that we begin to develop a “gut” for His good pleasure, to have “his mind”.
 - i. Suzanne and I tend to order the same things on the menu. People on well-trained teams tend to know one another well without needing explanation. Attuning takes time.
 - ii. Psalm 119 designed, by its length to help shape our “gut” for God. Listen to Psalm 119 in one sitting, with a Venti coffee, let it pour over your mind and down into your heart, then out through your hands and feet....
- c. How friendships are. You know each other well enough to have a pretty good idea of what might help in a time of need...just know what you need to do to help.
- d. This puts new light on what Jesus means when he says, John 15:14, “**You are my friends if you do what I command you.**” In the doing, the shared activity, we grow to understand His heart, His friendship with the Father, becomes our friendship too.
- e. Our “wanter” is being transformed. Many who work at Fresh Market will tell you how they love doing it. They want to do it! Wild horses couldn’t pull them away from doing it. They might say that while they are doing Fresh Market they lose all track of time.
- f. How’s your “wanter” doing these days?

Willard describes what is going on in us like this,

“Saints who have been drawn into this friendship and single focused service (slavery) become something no one has ever seen before. They become true individuals, who are unique because God has shaped their hearts and wills (Proverbs 3:5-6). Their desires match up with God’s desires, and they are empowered to do what they and God want.” (p. 74)

This conversational relationship with God goes on while we are deeply engaged as his friends and co-laborers in the business of his kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.

The with-God life, banishes our aloneness. It makes for a life of true rich and full meaning and purpose.

-Our SAM+ “mantra” goes like this:

Where I contribute, I belong.

Where I contribute and belong, I have purpose.

Where I contribute and belong and have purpose, I have hope.

Table Talk II

1. What are some of the causes of loneliness that you see?
2. Share an experience of someone coming alongside you at “just the right time”. What did you take from that experience?
3. Describe an experience where you are sure God acted with you.
4. Is there a passage from God’s word that, when you read or heard it read to you, you sensed His presence with you?
5. How does becoming involved in Christ’s work help to address loneliness?

WRAP UP

Three mistaken views of how God speaks to us.

Mistaken Views of How Speaks to Us (building three points underlined)

A MESSAGE A MINUTE

- That God will direct our every motion. “*Now do this. Now do that*”.
- No one in Scripture evidences this. Not even Jesus.
- God will meet us where we are, yet God’s working through His Holy Spirit is not to keep us constantly under his dictation (p. 77).

-Again, we are not robots but growing into mature people who are learning how to live together, how to be His RPG's. We are created to be "deciders".

IT'S ALL IN THE BIBLE

-It's not!

-The Bible as the word of God is our "only infallible rule of faith and practice", guiding us with principles for a good, rich, full, joyful, hope filled, encouraging and bold life. It will not tell you what shirt to put on today, or what song to sing in worship, or which route to take going home, or where to go on your next vacation.

-The Bible does not take away our responsibility of learning and growing in our conversational relationship with God!

-Bible "roulette" not recommended. But then again you never know... (me and Ps. 40).

-We have problems when we try to force God to tell us something. Good conversations are never forced.

WHATEVER COMES IS GOD'S WILL

-This is tempting because it offers us freedom from struggle.

-But at the same time, it also gives up any possibility of conscious interchange between God and His children.

-Does this mean that whatever you do next will be God's will???

-Note the conversation Moses and God have in Exodus 32:14. Moses argues with God and God "***changed His mind about the disaster that He planned to bring on His people***

[Here is one problem with philosophical/systematic theology where God is *omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent*. What is there left for those created in God's image? God's world is "an arena in which we have an indispensable role to play. The issue is not simply what God wants, but also what we want." What God gets out of your life and mine is the person you and I become.]

-New Creation thinking= what we choose to do when we're not being told what to do reveals who we are truly are and becoming...ready for when all things are made new.

Isaiah's vision looks like this:

***“Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am***

***“The Lord will guide you continually,
and satisfy your needs in parched places,
and make your bones strong;
And you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water
whose waters never fail.”***

Isaiah 58:9,11

BLESSING

NOTES

It is what we all really want and need, His *presence*. [SPELL “PRESENCE”]

Not just His presents! [SPELL “PRESENTS”]

Willard observes how in many religions the favor of the gods is sought for personal advantage. For gain, or status, or control of circumstances. The presence of God does not mean we will never encounter evil. It means that “*whatever happens*” we are beyond real harm because He is with us, all the way. (cf. Ps. 91 for example)