

SALT CO 10/26/25

“Our Communicating Cosmos”

“In Him we live, and move, and have our being.”

Acts 17:28

“He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Colossians 1:17

TABLE TALK I

Share your name, and your favorite place to be outside (mine is in my yard, where this morning the owls were having quite a conversation.

SLIDE SALT TALK Growing a Conversational Relationship with God

Our theme is Growing a Conversational Relationship with God. We’re using as our resource the book Hearing God written by Dallas Willard.

We have copies on each table for you to flip through. Many are reading along. This is not required but recommended. You can pick up a copy at the bookstore.

By the way you can go back to our website at seasonedadults.com and click the yellow button for past SALT CO’s and there is also an ARCHIVE of the notes from all the SALT CO’s.

How does God communicate with us? How do we imagine this happens? This is a very important question we’re going into this morning.

Willard tells the story of Peter Marshall, a pastor who went on to serve as Chaplain in the U.S. Senate. One foggy, pitch-black Northumberland night, Marshall was taking a shortcut across the moors in an area where there was a deep, deserted limestone quarry. As he walked blindly along, a voice called out, “*Peter!*” He stopped and answered, “Yes? *Who is it? What do you want?*” He heard no response. Thinking he was

mistaken he took a few more steps. The voice came again even more urgently, “*Peter!*” He stopped again, and trying to peer into the darkness, he fell down onto his knees. He put his hand out to brace himself and found nothing there. He discovered he was on the very brink of the abandoned quarry. One more step and he could have been killed.

We love these kinds of stories when we read them or hear someone tell one like this. That was God speaking, for sure!

But here’s the thing. Maybe we tell ourselves that we need to have an experience like that too. *Then* we could really trust God!

While I was an undergraduate studying in Bordeaux, France I helped to host a bible stand outside one of the busiest student restaurants in the city. We handed out little Gospels of “Jean” to any who would take them. One student who took a Gospel tract, had some thoughts for me. He said, “*I’ll believe in God when he strikes me on the head with a bolt of lightning*”. Not a great plan. I later met a guy who had been struck twice. Not sure what good it did him... I spent some time with this student at his place. He had all manner of arguments for the nonexistence of God.

Jesus faced this kind of thinking too. He refused to do religious stunts, or signs. Because the problem with signs (and wonders), is that we have pre-existing ideas, our own criteria, and we will be the judges of what makes for a “sign” or a “wonder”. In other words, we’re in charge of how God must show up for us!

Willard says

“Our beliefs and opinions cannot therefore be changed by stories and miraculous events alone, since they prevent a correct perception of those very stories and events.” (p. 86)

We must have a right understanding of God and His ways. Otherwise, what can and does happen is that when I believe the word has been given to me, that word is actually spoken by me!

We all know how this goes,

- “I have leading from the Lord to... (fill in our own desires)”

As the Proverb says,

“Delight in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart.”

Proverbs 37:4

What’s needed is our growing in maturity and discernment. We get help. God is always trying, in many ways, to teach us about Himself.

Today we consider some basic questions.

What kind of world do we live in?

How does God relate to us?

Willard calls this a “spiritual hardhat area” of our faith. We call it “cultivating the life of the mind”, the first of our Four Tires of Re-tirement!

We’re getting at the *real possibility* of really being in a conversational relationship with God. Willard writes, *“If you find that you don’t have real confidence that God would or could speak to you and guide you, this is for you!”*

There are four responses people might have to the idea that God desires to interact with people in a conversational relationship.

1. That God *would not* communicate with run-of-the-mill human beings by surrounding them with his presence and speaking to them
2. That he *does not* communicate with them in that way
3. That he *cannot* do so
4. That God *should not* communicate with individuals. What if He did? Wouldn’t that make for chaos?

Willard proposes Four Truths, one for each of these responses.

In response to the idea that God would not communicate with run of the mill human beings,

TRUTH 1: GOD WOULD

We must not think about God as a high-powered person who is very busy and too high up to want to communicate with us.

Willard writes,

“How hard it is for us to come to an adequate conception of the lowliness of God.” (p. 90)

-We’re heading toward Advent and Christmas (already!) God with us, beginning with us in feed trough surrounded by farm animals, and no count shepherds and an unremarkable little family.

All for God to say to all humanity living under all manners of power politics and social controls, *“the humanly unimportant ones are important to God.”*

=the lost, forgotten, the hidden, the ones with little or no voice, those who can’t get to church, so we find ways to bring church to them! It’s the whole purpose of our Homebound Bridge Ministry you’ll hear more about in a bit.

In fact, we should be surprised if God does NOT speak to the likes of us!

To the response that says God does not communicate in a conversational relationship with us the second truth says...

TRUTH 2: GOD DOES

There are two lines of thinking behind this truth,

A. Are we in “tune”?

There is after all a difference between our not hearing and His not speaking. I have this experience with Suzanne on a regular basis. We call this “attuning”. This takes practice and experience in all our relationships, including with God.

Some of Jesus’ deepest teachings are about hearing. You know how He put it, **“If anyone has ears...”** (Mark 4::23-24).

Much more on this as we continue...

The second line asks,

B. Are we ready vessels?

Willard observes,

“It may also be that they could not make good use of a word from God because of how they are living.... (p. 91)

Because here’s the thing, when God speaks it is always to accomplish his good purposes in our lives and through his creation. Last winter here at SALT CO we took Jesus up on His offer of a tour through His House of Prayer to see what He sees through Seven Windows. At the heart of His prayer is for His kingdom to come, His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Are we ready to be in business with God?

[An enterprise from which there is No retirement!! We put on FOUR NEW TIRES.

[Are we on board with God?]

Willard puts it like this,

“When our lives are devoted to the will of God, He has reason to speak to us.” (p. 92)

The third response says that God cannot have a conversational relationship with us. This part of chapter 4 is one of the most challenging “hard hat” areas yet—but it’s also packed with helpful insights and inspired guidance.

We can only scratch the surface by noting two key themes:

- 1) One of the barriers to believing God CAN have a conversational relationship is the powerful influence of a university system that Willard worked in for over 46 years... that he notes “currently throws its weight behind a picture of reality without God, a picture in which human beings are entirely on their own.” It’s believed that we live in a

material world. That it is “unscientific” to believe that God could speak to us or guide us.

2) A second barrier related to this worldview Willard identifies is how

“Our faith may easily fall victim to our mind’s tendency to spatialize everything. If we think of God as being literally outside the physical realm, then it will seem as if he is utterly out of reach for us and we out of reach for him. The edge of the known universe is now thought to be something like forty-six to forty-seven billion light years away. Beyond that even light waves traveling at the speed of 186,284 miles per second, can never reach us! How then can we reach God or he us if he is out there?” (p. 97)

“Does the entire realm of organic and inorganic matter stand between us and God?”

-“How does God relate to us if he is far off from us?”

The Third Truth is

TRUTH 3: GOD CERTAINLY CAN

He writes,

“God does not have to go through physical intermediaries of any sort to reach us---though on occasions he obviously chooses to do so. The material world in which we are placed by God permits him to be nearer to us even than our own eyes, ears and brains are near.” (p. 97)

Jesus explained to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) who was concerned about “where” to worship God, in Mt. Gerizim, or Mt. Zion. Jesus answered, worship God “***in spirit and truth***”.

“Spirit” is unbound by space, distance or matter. You don’t need a holy place...”. “Places are holy because God is there.” Just the way God is *here*...

The apostle Paul met with the philosophers and city leaders at Athens at the Areopagus, Mars Hill. You know this story. He saw there a statue to the Unknown God- acknowledging the suspicion that there was more, someone “further back” than all the gods they had names for.

Paul told them about the One “furthest back”, **Who has so arranged our world**

“so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him- though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being;” (Acts 17:27-28)

Read Hebrews 1:3, ***“He sustains all things by His powerful word.”***

Current thinking in physics seems to acknowledge that, (are you ready for this, hold onto your hard hat),

“THE STRUCTURE OF MATTER MAY NOT BE INDEPENDENT OF CONSCIOUSNESS”

Willard quotes author James Jean,

“Today there is a wide measure of agreement, which on the side of Physics approaches almost unanimity, that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter.” (p. 99)

“[Christ Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; and in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Colossians 1:15-17

The crucial point is

“The crucial point in all this is that there is no reason in the established truths of science to suppose that God cannot reach us and be with us in order to guide and communicate with us.” (p. 100)

This is the *kind of universe* you and I live in! We can’t only study with telescopes and microscopes what is there, and on our own understand how God can communicate with us. What this universe is, who we really are can only be learned with the help of our communicating God.

As Willard says,

“To the degree that you come to understand that the whole of reality is something penetrated through and through by God, you can begin to open yourself up to the possibility of receiving a direct communication from him.” Page 101

God is close. God is with you. Like the breath you just breathed into your lungs.

The fourth idea That God *should not* communicate with individuals is met with Truth 4,

TRUTH 4: AND GOD SHOULD

The concern here is that if everyone lived in a conversational relationship with God wouldn’t there be chaos in the church? Wouldn’t there be constant challenges to leadership? After all, at last count there are over 45,000 denominations.

So how does the community of the redeemed exercise leadership and authority? This is a big and involved question, and I recommend you read Willard’s thoughts on this.

Suffice to say there is a big difference between he draws between leading like a sheepdog and a shepherd.

Leaders in churches need to be carefully, unhurriedly discerned for how they live, how they are with their own families, for how they’ve served Christ over a *long time*. Healthy leaders are vitally important for the health

of Christ's Church. In my experience it's less about the kind of organization, the rules, the polity and more about the maturity and health of the leaders.

A lot more to say about this.

But it's time for some Table Talk

TABLE TALK II

1. How would you answer that student who said he would trust God when God struck him on the head with a bolt of lightning? What has helped you to learn to trust God?
2. What helps you to "tune in" to God? What gets in your way of tuning in to God?
3. Do you personally think that science makes the idea of hearing God questionable? How would you try to explain this to someone who says this?
4. How does this teaching encourage you in growing a conversational relationship with God?

WRAP UP

Someone said to me, "Communication is a miracle". This is the message of Psalm 19. As we say this psalm together notice how our Creator and Loving God speaks to us,

Psalm 19

***The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice^[b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.***

*It rises at one end of the heavens
 and makes its circuit to the other;
 nothing is deprived of its warmth.
 The law of the Lord is perfect,
 refreshing the soul.
 The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy,
 making wise the simple.
 The precepts of the Lord are right,
 giving joy to the heart.
 The commands of the Lord are radiant,
 giving light to the eyes.
 The fear of the Lord is pure,
 enduring forever.
 The decrees of the Lord are firm,
 and all of them are righteous.
 They are more precious than gold,
 than much pure gold;
 they are sweeter than honey,
 than honey from the honeycomb.
 By them your servant is warned;
 in keeping them there is great reward.
 But who can discern their own errors?
 Forgive my hidden faults.
 Keep your servant also from willful sins;
 may they not rule over me.
 Then I will be blameless,
 innocent of great transgression.
 May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
 be pleasing in your sight,
 Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

He is speaking. All the time. Let those who have ears, hear.

BLESSING