

CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

by Glenn Newton



21ST CENTURY
CHRISTIAN

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Introduction

Life is hard. Incredibly hard! And honestly, being a Christian doesn't make it that much easier. Don't misunderstand, the love of Jesus certainly helps comfort and settle us during times of affliction, but it doesn't always keep the affliction from coming. So what do we do when life is hard? Our immediate answer is to pray, and that is certainly the right answer. But in seasons of affliction, what does our prayer life sound like? Do we paint on a smile and pretend like everything's okay, or do we cry out to God in our pain? Are we even allowed to do that? Is there a limit to our tears? Is there ever a time to have a raw and real conversation with God?

The Bible appears to teach that there is. Throughout Scripture, we read of people arguing with God, bargaining with God, shouting at God, and even wrestling with God. God wants us to wrestle with Him from time to time because it is through these seasons of frustration that He brings us closer to His throne room. Habakkuk took his frustration with God to the mountaintop, and God showed him His plan. Moses took his questions to Sinai, and God showed him His law. Isaiah took his sadness to the temple, and God showed him His glory. Jeremiah poured out his heart with tears, and God showed him His steadfast love.

As you learn how to have conversations with God, what will He show you?

About the Author

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Lesson 1

Longing for Conversation

Psalm 42

Key Verse:

**As the deer pants for the water brooks,
so my soul pants for You, O God.
(Psalm 42:1, NKJV)**



WARM UP

When I was preaching in Washington State, I was blessed to live two doors down from one of our elders and his wife, Floyd and Ann Brazile. Floyd and Ann were generous, godly Christians who my children viewed as grandparent figures. I recall sitting down for coffee with Ann a few months after Floyd's passing. As she was emotionally recalling the many things she missed about her husband, she said, "What I miss most is the conversation."

Although I do not know what it is like to lose a spouse, I do know that when Regina and I are apart for an extended period of time, what I miss most is talking with her. When I travel for a speaking engagement, my first few hours back home are typically spent in conversation. I love talking to my wife! And when I haven't talked to her in a while, I long for conversation.

Is there a longing in your Christian life that you have been unable

to figure out? Has there been an empty spot in your prayer life that you haven't been able to fill? Maybe you're like the man who came by my office one day and asked, "What do you do when you've been a Christian your whole life and prayer doesn't feel real?" This man was longing for conversation with God; he just didn't know it. Prayer is more than a list of "pleases" and "thank-yous;" it is a deep conversation with God.



WORK OUT

Thirsty for God

The writer of Psalm 42 expresses a longing for God that he compares to a deer that has been running from a predator and is thirstily panting for water. There is nothing more miserable than being thirsty. Anyone who has had surgery knows the feeling of waking up in the recovery room with your tongue sticking to the roof of your mouth. The ice chips they offer you at first barely affect your thirst. Finally, the nurse walks in with that beautiful Styrofoam cup with a bendy straw sticking out from the top. You long for that first drink of water. The psalmist says that his longing for God is like that type of desperate thirst.

We do not know why, but the psalmist found himself separated from his people and from the worship of his God. Verse 4 says, *"I remember," "I used to go," "I went with them," "[I] kept a pilgrim feast..."* All of these phrases are written in the past tense. Like a spouse separated from her husband, he is desperate for the fellowship of his God.

Not only does he feel separated, he feels abandoned. In verse 9 he says, *"I will say to God my Rock, 'Why have You forgotten me?'"* He describes the pain that many of us experience when life just seems to

knock us down continually. Yet the psalmist isn't giving us permission to give up; he is giving us the prescription for victory.

Longing for God

The psalmist had an intense longing to be in the holy presence of the Father, and he compared this longing to that of a deer panting for water. Deer experts say that when a parched deer finally finds water, he will stick his whole face into the cool stream forgetting everything else around him. This is unusual because deer are normally alert and cautious. But when they're thirsting for water, they'll do almost anything to quench that thirst. Many of you have already made the connection...

Within every human soul, there is a hole that only God can fill. Jesus spoke of this filling when He said, *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled"* (Matthew 5:6). But someone will say, "I have tried the whole God and church thing and there was nothing there for me." Not everyone who comes to Him will have that thirst quenched, and it's not that God is unwilling. It's because many will come to church looking for fulfillment, but not really looking for God. Many people want God to be their supplier, their source of all things good and perfect, but few really long for Him to be their God. As a result, they lend their desires to some other source of worldly fulfillment, never obtaining what they could have had in God.

Experiencing God

Throughout this psalm, the writer asks a series of questions that he is able to answer based on his past experience with God. In verse 3, he said his tears had been his food day and night, indicating that his intense grief and sorrow had taken the place of his appetite. But even though he was in this state of grief and depression, he never lost sight of what was real and what was the most important. For

every question he asked, his answer was the same: “Hope in God!”

He was able to respond this way because of his own experience, is seen clearly when he declares in verse 8, *“The LORD will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life.”* Although his current situation left him feeling abandoned, his experience led him to the conclusion that his God had not abandoned him.

Many of us understand the dilemma the psalmist faced. We believe in God, but wonder if He’s left us to fend for ourselves. Yet for many, that is where the similarity with this psalmist ends. We question God’s presence in our lives, but we don’t long for Him. We don’t pant for Him. We don’t thirst for Him. We just want Him to fix our boo-boos. We subconsciously echo the words of Wilbur Rees:

“I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please.

Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep,
but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk
or a snooze in the sunshine.

I want ecstasy, not transformation.

I want warmth of the womb, not a new birth.

I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack.

I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please.”¹

When was the last time you had a thought like Psalm 63:1? “O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water...” or Psalm 143:6? “I spread out my hands to You; My soul longs for You like a thirsty land...” or Psalm 42:2? “My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?” That’s not typically how we talk to God, is it? It doesn’t seem dignified, does it? Maybe a better question is this: Why do our conversations with God need to

1. Wilbur Rees, *“\$3.00 Worth of God,”* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1971).

be dignified? Perhaps prayers filled with longing, desperation, and complete dependence are more to His liking.



COOL DOWN

A young man who was seeking God went to a wise older mentor for help. "How can I find God?" he asked the old man. The old man took him to a nearby river. Out they waded into the deep water. As soon as the water was deep enough, the old man grabbed the young man by the neck and pushed him under the water. He held the young man down until the young man was flailing the water in desperation. Another minute and he may well have drowned. When the young man stopped coughing and gasping for air, he asked his mentor indignantly, "What did that have to do with my finding God? Are you crazy?"

The old man asked him quietly, "While you were under the water, what did you want more than anything else?" The young man thought for a minute and then answered, "I wanted air!" The old man replied, "When you want God as much as you wanted air, you will find Him."

How desperately do you want God? Are you longing for Him? Are you thirsty for Him? Are you crying out to Him? Or, are you satisfied with \$3.00 worth?

Discussion Questions

1. Can you relate with the man who asked, "What do you do when prayer doesn't feel real?"
2. Describe a time in your life you felt forgotten by God. What hurt and what helped?
3. The psalmist asked several questions. What were they? And what was the answer?

4. Can you think of other times in Scripture that people were desperate for God?
5. What emotions did you feel after reading “\$3.00 Worth of God”?
6. How can we learn to want more of God?

* This lesson was inspired by the sermon “Thirsty for God,” by Chris Moran, minister for the Mars Hill Church of Christ in Florence, Alabama.