

Life of Prayer:
Staying Connected
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

We are talking about conversational prayer this month. Conversational prayer is when we talk with God and not just talk to God. Last week I said that the purpose of conversational prayer is to be connected to God. As we talk with God about our lives, God helps us to gain a greater clarity about what is happening and what we should be doing. God gives us the assurance that as we get about the business of taking care of business, God will be with us. And that gives us the strength to do what needs to be done.

Today, I want to talk about staying connected with God.

I think I may have shared with you before that the old Cokesbury hymn, "In the Garden" is one I enjoy with great fondness. It's a sentimental description of conversational prayer. It starts out with "I go to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses. And the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. And he walks with me and he talks with me. And he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known."

The writer, Austin Miles, is talking about the joy of starting each day early in the morning with a time of conversational prayer in a rose garden. I'm sure he really didn't think that no one else has ever known the joy of deep fellowship with Christ in prayer. But it does rhyme.

What really bothers me is the last verse, "I'd stay in the garden with him, though the night around me be falling, but he bids me go, with a voice of woe his voice to me is calling." It seems that Mr. Miles thought that Jesus was trapped in that rose garden, and that, sadly, sooner or later he has to leave Jesus behind to go out into the world.

If I could have talked with Mr. Miles, I would have said to him, "I've got good news for you: When you leave the garden, Jesus can go with you."

It is a wonderful thing to have times of quiet solitude, when we can talk with God without distractions. We need those times and places. Some people have their morning devotional time. Me--I do it the way God originally intended for it to be done. In the third chapter of Genesis it says that God came down to take a walk in the garden of Eden in the cool of the evening. I've always imagined that God came down every evening to take a walk with Adam and Eve. So, that's what I do. I have a walk with God in the evening. That's our quiet time. Everyone needs a quiet time with God.

But anyone who thinks that when they leave that quiet time, they are leaving God behind is sadly mistaken.

Paul tells us to pray without ceasing. He was not telling us to spend the rest of our lives in a rose garden, or a prayer closet, or walking the streets. He was telling us that when we get on with the business of daily living, in the midst of the hustle and bustle and noise of living, be aware that God is with you, and be listening for the still, small voice of God.

Reconnect with God in the quiet times. But stay connected with God at all times.

As you go through your day, talk to God about it. When you see something that makes you smile, thank God for it. When somebody does something to irritate you, talking to God about it is even better than counting to ten. When you find yourself getting worried or stressed about something, take it to God.

Whatever is going on, say a word to God about it. When you are in a place where you can, listen to what God has to say about what's going on in your day.

Now, that's not always possible. Sometimes we are like short-order cooks at lunch time. When you are working fast and furiously, there's not a lot of time to talk.

But even then, God has ways of communicating with us. You know how when you are really in tune with someone, you don't even have to say anything to communicate.

Becky and I went out to eat with a couple some time ago. I had gotten into my preacher mode and was pontificating about something. I started into a sentence and suddenly I got this vibe from Becky. That's all I can call it. She didn't say anything to me. She didn't really look at me. She didn't touch me. As best as I can remember, there was just a slight stiffening of her body that nobody else would have noticed except me. Whatever it was, it made me stop in the middle of the sentence. Then I thought about what I was about to say and realized that because of special circumstances in this couple's life, what I was about to say would have been very offensive to them.

After thirty-eight years of marriage, I am so in tune with Becky that that slight little bit of body language was as effective as someone else screaming, "Stop! You're about to say something you will regret for a very long time."

That's the way it is with God. Sometimes you just get a feeling.

Now, I know that some people would call it intuition. And I wouldn't argue with that. Intuition is when you pick up information at a subconscious level and put things together without thinking about it consciously. Intuition is real. I'm not arguing that these feelings are not intuition. All I'm saying is that when I am in close connection with God, these intuitions are much stronger than they are when I haven't spent as much time talking with God.

I believe the Spirit of God is constantly communicating with us at a sub-conscious level. Another way of putting that is, the Spirit of God is constantly talking with our spirits. When we enter into conversational prayers, we are simply listening with our heads to the things we have been hearing in our hearts.

And the more we listen, the better we get at hearing what the Spirit is saying in our hearts. So that the time comes when we were are so sensitized to the Spirit that even in the midst of the hustle and bustle and noise of our very busy lives, the Spirit can pull together signals from what is going on around us and put them together in a meaningful way. Then there is something like that little beep you get when you get a text message. And when you get it, you learn to stop and check your spiritual text box, because it's usually an important message.

Matthew tells us that the last thing Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended was the Great Commission, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

While we are doing God's work, Jesus is with us. So, enjoy his companionship.

One time a man in the church I was serving at the time called me up and said, "I've found some furniture for the mission." That town had a wonderful mission. We had dormitories for the homeless. We had just bought a small apartment complex to house homeless families. But it didn't have furniture. This fellow had located a business in Dallas that had just replaced all its furniture. They wanted to give the old furniture to a worthy cause. It was used furniture, but still in good shape. The man said, I can rent a U-Haul, but I need a truck. I said, "I've got a pick-up. I'll drive up there with you." He said, "That's a plan." I had never really spent any time with the

guy before. But we spent most of a day driving up there and back. We had plenty of time to talk. And we did. He was a wonderfully unique guy with his own twist on life. As we talked, we laughed we lot, we cried a little, and we learned a lot from each other.

The amazing thing is that we would never have had that experience if we hadn't been working on a project together. It was the work that brought us together. Jesus is a joyous companion. But it is the tasks he calls us to that bring us together. He turns what could be overwhelming and onerous tasks into joyful and uplifting experiences.

When we spend our days working for Jesus, Jesus walks with us. When you go out into the world to do his work, don't leave Jesus back there in the rose garden. He's right there with us, to the very end. Live your life in the presence of God. Stay connected. Keep the conversation going, all day, every day.

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