

## CONVERSATION 1: A God Who Speaks

Because God is always present with us—sleeping or eating, working or relaxing, worshipping or doing mundane chores--conversation with God is a normal part of life. Jesus invited us: Come to me, learn from me, abide in me. In light of this “we should be surprised if God did *not* speak to us.”<sup>1</sup> We were built to share our life with God, not just to call on God to help us achieve our goal for today (a better parking place, a new job, changing someone we love).

God really does want to be with us and talk with us. We weren't met to live our life on our own wits; the Holy Spirit guides us as a “personal mentor who longs to train us in the art of life in Kingdom”<sup>2</sup> of God today, here and now. And so we come to the Word to dialogue with God. We live our life asking, seeking and knocking on God's door. Then hearing God occurs naturally with those believers who live their life with God daily.

### 1) Opening To God's Message

Find a comfortable, pleasant spot to settle that will not present distractions to you.

First, why are you taking this retreat?

Is there a part of your life that needs attention?

Is there something you need to hear from God about?

Is there some change you need to make?

Is there something God has been inviting you to recently?

Other:

{Insert 5 lines.}

Now set these reasons aside and don't let them consume your attention. By the time you're finished with the retreat, you may find they have been addressed without your trying to do so.

Second, to what degree do you think these statements are true:

False            True

1   2   3   4   5

It hasn't occurred to people that God wants to communicate with them day in and day out and so they don't listen.

Some people dismiss the idea of hearing God because they're so turned off by people who claim to hear God constantly—getting a “message a minute.”

People think that getting answers from God is tricky business.

God is a VIP—and only talks to us when we insist on it.

People view God as a vending machine: they ask God to deliver what they need (prayer requests) and they're unhappy when the answers don't come sliding down the vending machine slot.

If we don't communicate with God in average, everyday circumstances on a regular basis, it will be more difficult to communicate when we're in trouble or trying to make a decision.

God actively pursues a relationship with us: setting up creation to speak to us even if we don't think to listen otherwise.

Dialogue with God is not only possible, it is essential. Ability to hear our Teacher is a necessary part of being one of Jesus' disciples. There is great joy in discovering experientially that God really wants to be with us and talk with us.'—David Takle

## 2) Immersed In God's Message

Before reading the passage, consider these ideas.

**BACKGROUND ABOUT DAVID:** David had an interactive life with God. Perhaps it began when as a young man herding sheep he had to tend them carefully and fight off dangerous animals. In this solitary work, he responded to God in words which became psalms or seeds of later psalms attributed to him. He did this long before the Spirit of the Lord came upon him in power (1 Samuel 16:13).

No one expected David to be anointed by Samuel to be king; it seemed to have surprised his family and probably himself. As the anointed future king, he continued tending sheep and acting as a musician. In our passage below, David has just become king and has just led the Israelites in victory over the Philistines who were their oppressors. Before this, the Philistines had defeated the Israelites under King Saul.

**DAVID'S PRAYERS:** Although few instances of David praying are recorded in Scripture, David's interactive life with God is displayed in more than seventy-five psalms attributed to David. In one of those psalms, God is quoted as saying, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you" (Psalm 32:8). So when David heard from God as described in our passage below, it wasn't a spectacular or unusual occurrence, but a communication from God, his life mentor, whom David was used to conversing with. David's hearing God occurred within a whole life of dialogue with God (of praise and celebration, of thankfulness, of pleading, even of weeping with God).

Before reading, move through this exercise to quiet and focus yourself. (Once you learn it, you can shut your eyes and say it.)

Be still and know that God is God. *Pause.*

Be still and know that God. *Pause.*

Be still and know. *Pause.*

Be still. *Pause.*

Be.

Read this passage aloud slowly.

**When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over all Israel, they went up in full force to search for him, but David heard about it and went out to meet them. Now the Philistines had come and raided the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of God: "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The LORD answered him, "Go, I will hand them over to you."**

**So David and his men went up to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them. He said, "As waters break out, God has broken out against my enemies by my hand." So that place was called Baal Perazim. The Philistines had abandoned their gods there, and David gave orders to burn them in the fire.**

**Once more the Philistines raided the valley; so David inquired of God again, and God answered him, "Do not go straight up, but circle around them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move out to battle, because that will mean God has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army." So David did as God commanded him, and they struck down the Philistine army, all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.**

(1 Chronicles 14:8-16)

Before reading it again, consider the following ideas.

ENTERING INTO THE SCENE: Feel the hurt and anger of the Israelites from the Philistines' repeated raids, which consisted of stealing, burning and killing. As the new king, David probably mourned the harm the Philistines did to his people. He may have even hated them. He could easily have let these feelings interfere with what he *thought* he heard as God's directions. Imagine David smelling the smoke from the fires that burned the Philistines' gods—ridding the earth of what is false, but shortly afterward hearing that the Philistines have again raided the valley.

Consider how the soldiers felt about God's personal, come-along-side method of giving them victory. The soldiers *heard* the sounds of God. Ponder that a minute—when have you heard sounds that you knew for sure were *sounds originated solely by God*? It was as if God marched *with* them but also *out in front of* them as the actual commander of their army. This was a with-God moment that they probably never forgot for the rest of their lives and thought about on their beds when they went to sleep each night.

Imagine the soldiers waiting to move out, knowing that the sound that would signal them to attack would be the God of universe marching in the tops of trees next to them. (This is one of the oddest—yet also one of the sweetest of God's interventions.) These Israelite soldiers—possibly very young and very old, but all likely tired of defending their land from the Philistines and watching friends and relatives die—agree to follow behind and under an unseen sound of marching that comes from a not-human origin.

Pause for a moment:

What do you think the marching they heard sounded like? (Try to imitate the sound.)

How would you (as a soldier) have felt when you heard it?

How would you (as a soldier) have felt days later when you tried to explain this to your village, your spouse, your children or grandchildren?

As you read the passage again, consider what word or phrase stands out to you or a moment in the account that stands out to you (perhaps as David or a soldier or even a Philistine soldier).

Cautions:

- Waiting for a word to stand out is not a spooky or magical thing. This is a natural thing that probably already happens to you when you read the Bible—you think: *How come I never saw that word or phrase or idea before?* Actually, you did see the word or phrase before, but now you see it in a new and different way. It now stands out to you.
- Don't feel pressured to make something up. If nothing stands out, quiet yourself, read the quieting exercise ("Be still and know that I am God; Be still and know . . .") and read the passage again.
- Don't use self-directed effort to try to *apply* the passage to yourself. When you attempt to apply a passage, you try to figure out what you should do to implement what you read. At this point, simply *let God bring to you* what you need to know. Let it be God's effort, not your own.
- Be open to let God speak to you. Expect to be surprised.

Reread the passage again slowly (either aloud or to yourself). Don't *choose* what stands out to you. Let it come to you as you become open to being in the passage.

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**them. Now the Philistines had come and raided the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of God: "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The LORD answered him, "Go, I will hand them over to you."**

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**Once more the Philistines raided the valley; so David inquired of God again, and God answered him, "Do not go straight up, but circle around them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move out to battle, because that will mean God has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army." So David did as God commanded him, and they struck down the Philistine army, all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.**

(1 Chronicles 14:8-16)

Write down the word or phrase or idea that stands out to you.

{Insert 3 lines.}

What thoughts or impressions come to you? What connections do you make? What questions or perhaps objections do you have? Does anything surprise you?

{Insert 3 lines.}

What might God be saying to you through what has stood out in this passage? Is there a place in your life where you really need to know what comes to you from the passage? (Again, don't try to make something up or try to apply it to yourself. Let it come to you.) Take a few

minutes to do this. If your mind begins to drift, come back to the word or phrase that stood out to you.

{Insert 10 lines.}

### **3) Responding To God's Message**

Read the passage again to yourself and consider how it leads you to dialogue with God.

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Write below your prayer response or say it aloud. This will make it more concrete and relational. Be open to having a dialogue with God, to being gently led by the Holy Spirit. You

may want to begin with “Dear God” or “Dear Jesus.” Never feel pressed to write pages and pages. One sentence might really be enough, or you may need to write more.

If you’re not sure, here are some possibilities:

- Begin with, “I’m so glad that you said . . .” or “I really needed to hear that you . . .”
- Write what you would have wanted to pray if you had been an Israelite soldier (or David) in this passage.
- Ask God questions and mark them because you may find them answered by the end of today or tomorrow.
- Feel free to say things that don’t sound spiritual (such as, “I envy David . . . for getting such a specific answer from you, . . . for knowing you so well.”). Then move on with more you need to say.
- Use words or ideas from this psalm that describes the sort of life David lived that made it possible for him to hear God so well (Psalm 139:1-6):

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

{Insert 10 lines.}

#### **4) Resting In God in the Message**

If you wish, read the passage again to yourself one more time and rest in what you experienced.

As you've read the passage several times, how have you experienced God? What was God like? Reflect on how God seemed to you. Did you have a sense that you're only talking to yourself or that God was present? Did God seem distant or attentive? Caring or frustrated Demanding or inviting? Talk to God about this.

{Insert 3 lines.}

Allow yourself time to soak in what has come to you—questions, new ideas or clarifications about God or yourself, to let it sink all the way down to where you really live. Sit for a few moments and ponder what has transpired. You may wish to:

- Sit and just “be” with God (Be still, and know that God is God).
- Appreciate or celebrate what you believe God said in your conversation and *who God was* in it.
- Worship God in some way (even dancing, singing a favorite song, or drawing).
- Rest in the idea that God wants to communicate with you and is always reaching out to engage you.

Close this interaction with God with a prayer you particularly like or this prayer (from John Baillie's *A Diary of Private Prayer*):

Give me an *open ear*, O God, that I may hear Thy voice calling me to high endeavour.

Too often have I been deaf to the appeals Thou hast addressed to me, but now give me courage to answer, *Here am I, send me*.

Give me an *open mind*, O God, a mind ready to receive and to welcome such new light of knowledge as it is Thy will to reveal to me.<sup>3</sup>

Move into a time of enjoying the life and breath God gave you. You may want to:

- take a nap

- take a walk or a hike or swim or do relaxing exercises;
- try “porch sitting,” watching birds and trees or sitting in a Jacuzzi;
- do a creative activity (using art materials, woodworking, needlework, beadwork), but don’t try to accomplish anything;
- light, meditative reading (not a detective novel or something that will engage you wholly).

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard *Hearing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 65.

Quote in textbox below: Takle, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> David Takle *The Truth about Lies and the Lies about Truth* (Pasadena, CA: Shepherd’s House, 2008), 160.

<sup>3</sup> John Baillie *A Diary of Private Prayer* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1949) 63.