

JAN JOHNSON

PRAYER AND LISTENING



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CONVERSATION WITH GOD

Genesis 15:1-16; 17:15-22; 18:1-15

If you want a picture of what it looks like to connect with God, you might start by looking at how God interacted with someone God called a friend. One such friend was Abraham (Isaiah 41:8; see also 2 Chronicles 20:7; James 2:23).

Abraham's friendship with God was characterized by ongoing conversations. Recorded in Genesis 12–22 (perhaps many more were not recorded), these conversations are filled with the back-and-forth elements of close communication—questions, guesses, reassertions, incredulity, calculated pauses, statements of fear and doubt, careful restatements of each other's thoughts.

Yet Christians sometimes neglect to learn the art of conversation with God. Perhaps they don't feel they are "good enough" to converse with God. But if goodness were a qualification, Abraham would have been excluded. For example, just after Abraham had a conversation with God laced with miracles and visions, he betrayed a lack of confidence in God. He agreed to Sarah's scheme of conceiving a child with Hagar instead of trusting that God would miraculously provide the promised child through Sarah (Genesis 15–16). But after Abraham's attempt to "adjust" God's will, God continued to converse with Abraham. Righteousness is an outgrowth of conversation with God, not a prerequisite.

Group Discussion. What elements that make for good conversation also make for prayerful conversation with God?

Personal Reflection. What are you most likely to have conversations with God about? (Or if you don't have conversations with God, what would you like to discuss with God?)

The following three passages record a few of the many conversations between God and Abraham. In previous conversations God gave Abram (his earlier name) vast land and promised him offspring (Genesis 13:14-17). In the following conversations Abram asks God questions about these promises. *Read Genesis 15:1-16.*

| 1. How would you describe the interaction between God and Abram?

| 2. What is the first question Abram asked?

| Why do you think Abram felt the freedom to ask the almighty God any question at all, even this question?

| 3. What do you make of God's response—not just saying words but taking Abram outside and giving him a visual metaphor (15:4-5)?

4. What does Abram's question in verse 8 indicate to you about his relationship with God?

5. If you were in a prayer conversation with God, and God said, "Know for certain that . . ." (v. 13), how might God finish the sentence? That is, what do you believe God has been trying to help you "know for certain" lately?

6. Read *Genesis 17:15-22*. What details of the covenant did Abraham question to himself and to God?

7. When has God answered you with “Yes, but . . .” (v. 19) or “I have heard you” (v. 20)?

8. Read Genesis 18:1-15. How did God appear to Abraham?

9. When, if ever, have you had a sense of God confronting you with a penetrating question (such as “Why did . . .” [v. 13])?

10. It’s been said that humans think they are “in charge” of their prayer, relegating certain time and topics. Conversing with God means the Holy Spirit leads you, and you are no longer “in charge” of your prayer. In what ways are you tempted to be “in charge” of your prayers?

11. God's conversations with Abram were full of drama—starry nights, smoking firepots, mysterious visitors (Genesis 15:5, 17; 18:1-2). These were all props God chose for their conversations. How open are you to letting God set terms for prayer conversations with you? What prayer attitudes or activities might help you increase your openness to God?

12. The premier mark of Abraham was his complete confidence in God (faith). How might his conversations with God have developed such a faith?



Sit and reflect for a few moments. Then list a few items you would like to discuss with God, for which you would really like God's input.

NOW OR LATER

Experiment with one or more of the following.

- Take a walk and try to think of all the questions you would like to ask God.
- Pray about the self-talk that goes on in your head. Compare it with the kinds of things God often says (see question 5 above).
- Read the back-and-forth conversation in Genesis 18:20-33 and ponder why God engaged Abraham in conversation this way. Journal about whether you believe God is really interested in your ideas.

- Read Genesis 22:1-18, in which God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (the son he waited twenty-five years for). In a sense God was asking Abraham, “Am I enough?” and Abraham answered affirmatively. Take a walk and consider this question from God: “Am I enough?” Answer as honestly as you can. Consider other questions: How would you be better off if God *were* enough? Are you willing to let God ask you this question for the rest of your life?

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