

You Were Created for Intimate Friendship with God  
Hearing God, Small Group Study - Session 1  
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1. Introduction

What if you were made, not to be lonely, but to be a friend of God?

What if friendship with God is the secret behind the deep peace and joy of Jesus?

The great invitation of life is to live in intimate \_\_\_\_\_ with God – to never again be alone.

2. God is available for conversation and friendship.

a. Spiritual transformation into Christ's likeness comes through a \_\_\_\_\_, and that process is one of living in relationship to God.

- *Hearing God* is simply a short way of talking about a \_\_\_\_\_ with God.
- It is very touching to observe how God approaches us: *"They [Adam and Eve] heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze...."* Genesis 3:8a
  - What do the early chapters of Genesis tell you about God?
    - He was enjoying his creation.
    - He was coming to visit.
    - He was chatty. God is interested in our lives, but He gives us \_\_\_\_\_. He gives us opportunity to work and be on our own.

b. When we come to think about the basic relationship of intimate fellowship – friendship with God – we want to understand that it is one where God is available, but gives us the option of \_\_\_\_\_.

- God comes. He walks in our midst. Jesus said, *"The kingdom of God is in your midst"* Luke 17:21. The Kingdom of God is just God acting.
- God is everywhere. You don't always see Him, and, yet, He does show up.

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3. You can participate in continual conversation with God.

- a. God made you for his presence and He seeks \_\_\_\_\_ with you. That comes from his nature as loving community. The Trinity is a picture of the living reality of God and the community of God.

What is our response?

*When You said, "Seek My face,"  
My heart said to You, "Your face, Lord, I will seek."  
(Psalm 27:8 NKJV)*

*The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make his face to shine  
upon you and be gracious to you;  
the Lord lift up his countenance upon  
you and give you peace.*

Numbers 6:24-26

- b. Our relationship to God is not a consumerist relationship. We are \_\_\_\_\_.

- We are not spectators; we are *in* the game. The game is producing the greatest creative goodness possible under the power and character of God in which we share. God creates creators.
- We were meant to live in a fellowship (conversational relationship) with God.

*"There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful, than that of a continual conversation with God; those only can comprehend it who practice and experience it; yet I do not advise you to do it from that motive; it is not pleasure which we ought to seek in this exercise; but let us do it from a principle of love, and because God would have us."*

— Brother Lawrence

What is our response?

Our response is to speak to God and to listen to God in a conversational relationship. We \_\_\_\_\_ his face – not just to look at it. We seek God's face to \_\_\_\_\_, and that interaction is primarily one of speaking and of hearing.

*If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land. (2 Chronicles 7:14)*

To humble ourselves means to see ourselves realistically before God – as dependent upon his goodness and as an expression of his goodness.

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- We start from a position of alienation – that’s the natural condition of humankind – but we are invited to live before the shining face of God and, in that place, to live out a conversation where we speak and we hear. That is the place of the friend.
- The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.”

*Why?*

Because God is \_\_\_\_\_.

That with-God is the key to understanding who we are and why we are here and that nature of our relationship with God.

- c. Our interactive relationship with God is one of \_\_\_\_\_.
- John 15:14: Jesus says, “*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*”
- Jesus calls us friends if we simply do what He commands, but it isn’t slavishly. It is doing it as one who understands what’s going on. (See John 15:14-15.)
- The intimate relationship with Christ that we live in is one where we know what He’s doing. We are his friends by cooperative activity – not just because we get something that blots out our personality or pushes away our wants and desires, but, rather, we live in that relationship where \_\_\_\_\_ desires are as important to God as \_\_\_\_\_ desires are important to us.
- You’re living in a relationship where God not only answers your prayers, but is working around you to help you \_\_\_\_\_ the right things. It isn’t just that He gives you what you desire; He gives you the desires of your heart as you live in the conversational relationship with God.

God’s intent for you is that you should grow to the point where you will want what He wants.

God’s intent for each of us is that we should \_\_\_\_\_ to the point to where He can empower us to do what we want. There’s a lot of work on our “want-er” before we get there. That’s what goes on in the relationship as we walk with God, listening and hearing, moment by moment and day by day as we grow.

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4. How Frank Laubach began to live his life as a friend of God: Key points from a conversation between Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, and John Ortberg

- We're talking about this phrase that's simple, but remarkable: *We could be a friend of God.*
- Frank Laubach was a Methodist educator and missionary in the Philippines who found out that he was supposed to be doing God's work, but didn't know what it meant to be a friend of God.
  - It is poignant to think of somebody who is seeking to serve God, and yet there's a distance estrangement. In this midst of Laubach's pain was a desperate desire to want that life [conversational relationship] with God more than he wanted anything else.
  - The thought came to him that God could speak to him. The way Laubach experienced prayer is he would talk to God and then he would say back what he understood God to be saying to him.
- Laubach went to Signal Hill to pray almost every day. Here is a passage he wrote about his experience one evening:

*But just at this moment you must hear more of this sacred evening. The day had been rich but strenuous, so I climbed "Signal Hill" back of my house talking and listening to God all the way up, all the way back, all the lovely half hour on the top. And God talked back! I let my tongue go loose and from it there flowed poetry far more beautiful than any I ever composed. It flowed without pausing and without ever a failing syllable for a half hour. I listened astonished and full of joy and gratitude. I wanted a Dictaphone for I knew that I should not be able to remember it - and now I cannot. "Why," someone may ask, "did God waste his poetry on you alone, when you could not carry it home?" You will have to ask God that question. I only know He did and I am happy in the memory.*

From Letters by a Modern Mystic: Excerpts from Letters Written to his Father (Frank C. Laubach)

- Laubach learned a presence of God with him. His great work came in the area of language, which tied into the issue of communication and intimacy that comes through the conversational relationship that he was walking into with God.
- Laubach's definition of a mystic was somebody who believes that when you talk to God, God talks back.

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- People may be put off by the abuse of "God told me" language. Paul said, "Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good." (See I Thessalonians 5:20-21.)
- Communication is simply guiding somebody's thoughts. We're finite. We have to use finite means – sounds, written images. Because I'm making these sounds, you're having thoughts you would not otherwise have. Because God is infinite, He can guide our thoughts without needing to have any finite means in between. That means it becomes very possible that I could be having this thought because God is guiding it.

5. Bonus Session: HEARING GOD IS MORE THAN GUIDANCE

- a. You are an unceasing spiritual being created to live in friendship with God forever. That helps us understand the intimate relationship with God.
  - Don't lose the main point about friendship: Communicating with God is not always, or primarily, a matter of being told what to do. Many people cannot \_\_\_\_\_ in their relationship with God because they're just thinking in terms of being told what to do. Being in the will of God requires that you \_\_\_\_\_ that.

*"And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and sit down to eat'? But will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me till I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" (Luke 17:7-10)*

If you only do what you are told to do, say, "We are unprofitable servants."

Who is a profitable servant?

A profitable servant is someone who knows what needs to be done and does it \_\_\_\_\_ being told.

This fits with Jesus' statement about "You are my friends" because you [as friends] understand what's going on. That's the picture of a coworker, not of a servant who stands around waiting to be told what to do.

*You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

John 15:14-15

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- b. Your wants and desires are important in God's plan for you.

In general, in human relations, things are beginning to be what they ought to be if you have people who don't \_\_\_\_\_ to be \_\_\_\_\_. For example, small children who are playing in their yard are in the will of their parents, even though the parents are not telling them what to do. That's crucial in coming to understand the nature of our friendship and intimate relationship with God.

We talk and listen to God. There are times when we are told what to do. That's a good thing, and we should expect it when it's appropriate. God will provide it.

But we are \_\_\_\_\_ in the relationship of a master and a slave.

⇒ When Paul and some of the other apostles refer to themselves as slaves of Jesus Christ, that slavery is on the other side of friendship. They have gone through friendship to get to that kind of relationship. That is the kind of service that makes God's will and his purposes – what Christ is doing in the world – primary. It is not something that you're driven to; it is something you are \_\_\_\_\_ to by the goodness and beauty of all that is in God, in his creation, and in his world. In that relationship, we experience complete service as \_\_\_\_\_ people, under someone who **respects our wants and our wills** and **refines them** and **helps us become the individuals** He wants us to be.

The only real individuals are saints. There are no two alike.

Sinners are boringly similar. There's nothing unique in what they're living for:

- They're living for themselves.
- They're living for their wants without reverence to God.
- They're \_\_\_\_\_ to their desires.
- The world has a hold of them and is pressing them into a mold.

*But the saints are unique because God has shaped their wants and their wills.*

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*Delight yourself also in  
the Lord,  
And He shall give you  
the desires of  
your heart.*

Psalm 37:4

→ He gives you the desires  
of your heart. He shapes  
your impulses, what  
you're ready to do, what  
you want so that they  
match up with his.

c. God is developing us.

His intent for us is that we come to the place where He can empower us to do what we want, and then He works on the other side, the object of the desire, and gives us the desires of our heart – *because He's already given us the desire for what we desire*. That is a unique combination that makes every individual who is living in conversation with God to be something no one else has ever seen.

*Additional Reading* Frank C. Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic*, ed. and comp. Constance E. Padwick (Syracuse, N.Y.: New Readers Press, 1955).