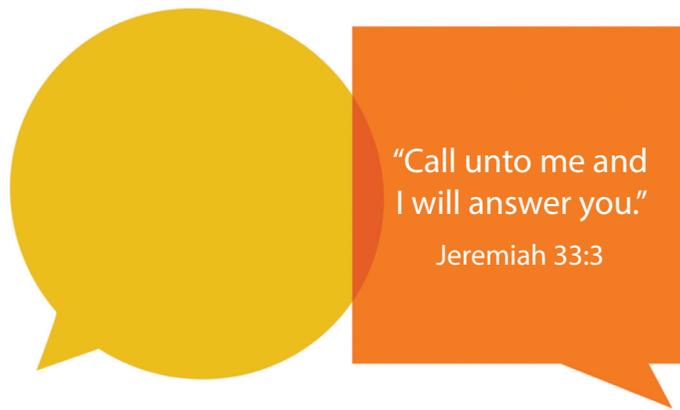


Conversation with God shares spiritual insights and provides a clear path for all people to experience a deeper relationship with God through prayer.

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In this book, Pastor Sutton does not present warmed-over clichés regarding prayer, but probes deeply into the biblical definition of prayer, with special emphasis on how Jesus taught his disciples that prayer was more than an event—it was entering a conversation with God.

—Lamar Vest
*Former President and CEO
of American Bible Society*



CONVERSATION WITH GOD

A DISCIPLE'S PRIORITY AND PRIVILEGE

I. Introduction: "Where are you?"

Imagine that you're a parent of a small child. You're in a busy shopping mall during the holidays. Hundreds of people are crowding the aisles, hustling to get to the next store, elbowing their way through the halls, and shoving to keep their place in line. Your preschooler is intrigued and distracted by everything in sight. And then it happens. You're focused on a conversation with the salesperson, you look around and your child is gone. You panic. You retrace your steps. Over and over, you're thinking to yourself, "Where are you?"

Consider the emotions flooding your heart. You may be irritated at your child's impulsiveness and scared about the dangers of being separated, but underneath all that is your heart of compassion. Your irritation is no match for the compassion you feel as you imagine your child alone and afraid. The question, "Where are you?" is motivated by love. Now imagine the relief you feel after being reunited with your child; the joy you would feel when the relationship and security are restored.

"Where are you Adam?" In Genesis, we read about the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had committed a sin—they had eaten the forbidden fruit—and now their eyes were open. The imagery the Word of God painted here is that in the cool of the day, God comes walking through the garden, seeking to talk with them. Can you imagine what that would look like? In the garden of Eden, in the cool of the day, maybe in the afternoon, God comes walking along. Why is he taking a walk in the garden? He's looking for Adam and Eve so he can have a conversation with them.

As God walks, he asks, "Where are you?" God, who is omnipresent (everywhere at every time) and omniscient (all-knowing) asks Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" He knew where they were, obviously, but they were hiding. They were avoiding this conversation with their Creator. Their sin had led them to avoid God; their disobedience had brought separation. In our lives, sin also separates us from God. Nonetheless, the powerful question God asks them still remains for us to answer, "Where are you?"

Do you think God didn't know where Adam and Eve were? Do you think God didn't know the exact pinpoint location, without a GPS, where Adam and Eve were hiding?

So many times, God walks into our lives in the cool of the day, and even though he knows exactly where we are, he asks, "Where are you?" Maybe the question God was asking Adam and Eve was not for him. Maybe it was for them.

A. Where are you? An Encounter with Jesus

Consider this question: What was going on in the heart of God when he asked the question, "Where are you?" Was his intention to find Adam and then wipe him off the face of the planet? Did God ask the question because he planned to give Adam the silent treatment and never speak to him again? Or was God's heart and divine intention to ask the question that ultimately revealed his plan for redemption and restoration?

There were certainly consequences to Adam's disobedience, but the heart of God was filled with compassion and love. We know this because God's plan is revealed throughout Scripture where he is always reaching out to humanity.

Don't miss this: How we view God's heart toward us determines our pursuit of intimacy with him. Listen as he asks the same question of you, "Where are you?" And remember, his heart's intention isn't to harm you or never speak to you again. Who would want to pursue closeness with that kind of "god"?



L-3 Experiencing God as He really is through deepened intimacy with Him

Though God never has and never will lose sight of us, perhaps we may fail to see him at times. Reflect again on your view of God, just in case you've seen God in another way. This is the real God. This is the God who is longing to love you and to intimately relate with you. This kind of God prompts our pursuit of him.

"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!" (Isaiah 30:18).

Pause quietly to meditate on the Lord. Use your imagination to picture Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand. You have been the lost child, anxious and uncertain. And now he sees you with joy and excitement. He arises with compassion in his heart to embrace you. Allow your heart to celebrate this kind of Jesus!

Colossians 3:16 Moment: "Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . ." (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher:

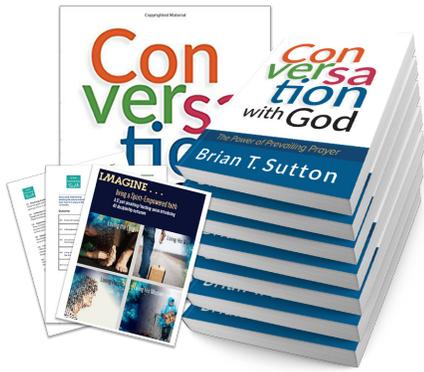
Share your reflections on a Jesus who arises to show you compassion.

II. Prayer doesn't change things—and it's more than a spiritual tool.

"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know" (Jeremiah 33:3).

These are powerful words indeed—a promise from God. Why then would we not pray?

Prayer and the life of prayer are spiritual practices that cannot be explained to you; rather, they must be experienced. We have all seen a myriad of T-shirts and bumper stickers that say, "Prayer changes things." But prayer does not change things. Prayer has no power whatsoever in and of itself.



Conversation With God Kit includes:

- 8 copies of the book, *Conversation With God*
- The Spirit-empowered Faith Set:
 - The list of 40 Indicators of what a Spirit-Empowered disciple of Christ might look like
 - A self-assessment tool to help measure these 40 outcomes in your own life. This assessment helps you see how you are doing at embodying these 40 biblical principles
 - Teaching notes in the form of sermon notes. These notes are broken down into 12 sections and could be used as small group leader notes, 12-part sermon series, or simply continued study and growth

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What if prayer is not the vehicle that brings us to our destination? Rather, what if it is the destination?

Our discipleship is primarily and ultimately about a person—the God-man, Jesus!

If simply being enthusiastic about prayer as a powerful vehicle were enough, we could pray to anything and receive an answer. No, prayer doesn't change things; it is *God* who changes things! It is not prayer or even a life of prayer that brings us power; it is the God to whom we pray who has all power.

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14).

A. Prayer is a conversation.

Prayer is a conversation with the one who is always there. It allows us access through Jesus Christ into a conversation with God. The Father is always seeking a conversation with us; he greatly desires to communicate with us.

We might as well admit it: We often use prayer in our lives and in the church as a tool from a tool bag. When we need God to do something for us, when we need something in ministry, when we desire to have something accomplished, we go to the spiritual tool bag because we know that prayer is what we should use. We pick up prayer, we pray the prayer, and then we put prayer back in the bag until we need it again. But prayer is intended to be so much more than this!

What if prayer was not simply a vehicle to take us somewhere? What if prayer was not just a tool to get God to move when we wanted him to? What if we could participate in prayer in a completely different—and much more valuable—manner?

So often we use prayer as a vehicle to get us to a desired destination. We need provision, so we pray. We need anointing, so we pray. We need healing or deliverance, or cleansing, so we pray. But what if prayer is not the vehicle that brings us to our destination? Rather, what if it is the destination?

Prayer is not simply a step of the journey; prayer is the journey. When we realize this, we will understand prayer as a continual conversation with God.

III. Prayer is a disciple's priority and privilege.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment" (Matthew 22:37–38).

Our discipleship is primarily and ultimately about a person—the God-man, Jesus! One of the significant descriptions of the first century disciples was that they could be found "ministering to the Lord" (Acts 13:2 NASB). Consider also the extravagant love ministered by the grateful sinner in the home of Simon the Pharisee. Having washed the Master's feet with her tears, anointed them with perfume, and dried them with her hair, her extravagant love was received by the Savior, and He responded, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace...her sins, which are many have been forgiven, for she loved much" (Luke 7:36–50).

As we make ministering to the Lord a priority in our own life, we will experience a much-needed restoration of "loving the Lord." Both our personal lives and our ministries will see significant change as we prioritize the One who gave, served, and ministered grace. Imagine the wonder of both personally and corporately loving Jesus and yielding our hearts as we serve the One who loves us so!



L-1 Practicing thanksgiving in all things

If God needed things done, he could enlist angels for perfect execution, without complaining.

Colossians 3:16 Moment: "Let the Word of Christ dwell deeply in you . . ." (Col. 3:16).

Pastor/Teacher: Vulnerably share your response of thanksgiving.

A. Prayer is loving the Lord through thanksgiving.

"Serve the Lord with gladness" (Psalm 100:2).

Since the greatest of all the commandments is to "love God," pause to consider the question: "How is it that we really "love God"? Sadly, too often our response might be that we are to do things for God. All the while he is longing for us to RELATE to him! If God needed things done, he could enlist angels for perfect execution, without complaining. We, as his created, have the privilege of intimacy with him, and our journey with him in thanksgiving provides this unique opportunity. So as we approach him in love, where do we start?

As you serve Him, bring your gift of laughter

And be glad as you worship Him!

Sing your way into His presence with joy!

Come right into His presence with thanksgiving!

You can pass through His open gates,

With the password of praise!

(Psalm 100:2, THE PASSION TRANSLATION)

As a parent, imagine one of your teens or adult children initiating this conversation: "Mom/Dad, I'd like to take this time to share with you the gratefulness I have in my heart for all the ways that you have loved me well!" After you have awakened from passing out at such a miracle, you, no doubt, will agree that such heart-felt expressions of gratitude communicate LOVE! You and I express our love to the Lord in many relational ways, and one of the most important is through giving thanks in all things!

Pause now to enter with thanksgiving; serve Him with a glad heart:

"Father as I reflect on the countless ways you have loved me well, my heart overflows with thanksgiving.

*I especially am grateful for how you have blessed me with _____
and you have sustained me through _____*

I praise you for your generosity and grace.

*Receive my thanksgiving and praise as a small expression of my deep love.
Amen."*

Prayer needs to become more than an event, more than just a hammer in a tool bag that we grab when we need it. When prayer becomes a constant, ongoing conversation with God, we will begin to recognize the countless times we have ignored him.

When prayer becomes conversation, God will ask us, "Where are you?" so we can answer, "I am right here."