

Good morning Haven!! I'm excited to share with you today.

This is my favorite thing in the world! Well it has been in the past – and yet lately I must admit I need to hear this again – newly and freshly – just as much as my heart yearns to share it.

- Let me tell you a story –

A few years back I was in a situation where I had to make a decision – a hard decision. I was in the process of working with a team to open a coffee shop/community center in Worcester, MA. I was really excited – I had written in a journal years before that I wanted to open a coffee shop/community center where kids could learn how to use video equipment and make videos and put together stories – like in the news business where I had worked before.

Also on my team was my boyfriend – this was very exciting too – because my biggest dream in life – has always been to get married – so that was so amazing – things were pretty cool.

Then the boyfriend surprised me – with a breakup-- and not very nicely. I tried to stay on that team but I couldn't. It was too painful to be near him and I was pretty broken up – so I quit. Crazy, right – quit my dream job.

Then I started looking for a new job. Desperately because I had bills to pay and you don't get to collect unemployment when you quit your job –

I had a few interviews and then the mall called to offer me a social media job – I'd be doing social media for events at the mall. Sounded fun and like something that my past media experience would help me with – but I was on a non-profit track and I really wanted to spend my time helping people – not necessarily helping people make money.

So I told them I would call them the next day at a certain time. I thought, I prayed, I talked with friends and it seemed maybe I should take the job just to have something. It didn't offer health insurance which I needed but I could figure that out another way. I was calling to tell the lady that I would accept the position. But it didn't feel good – I didn't feel right – just as I was calling I felt like God said – Don't take this job, Liz, I have something better for you.

In that moment I quickly asked the lady about health insurance again and told her I would call her back.

WHAT did God say – was that God – did I just not want this job. Holy Cow!

I called the lady back and said thanks but no thanks – she was extremely surprised – this was when the economy was not good and jobs were hard to come by.

And then – literally seconds later – the coffee shop/community center called me and said they just didn't feel right opening without me – they would hire me on just to work with the kids in the cafe and they would help me with the ex situation.

WHAT THE?!?!?

That was a big moment!

My journey back to faith was painful – and beautiful – in all those ways that painful things are.

I had moved from West Virginia to North Carolina - with my boyfriend at the time – and for an amazing career opportunity. And then the boyfriend dumped (there is a small theme here) me and the job sucked.

And I HAD NO IDEA WHAT TO DO. Getting out of bed was hard. I was lost, alone and pretty broken.

I had some context for faith, growing up in some churches but backing off in my teen/college years because I was afraid of church. – BUT I never stopped praying.

I ended up finding a Meet-up Bible Study online. And some how I convinced myself to go – for me that was brave. Because Christians scared me. I had a lot of shame I carried around with me – shame I for some reason thought anyone who believed in Jesus could see – the church can hurt us in many different ways –

I went and it was an amazing experience – and it was a big player in my walk back to Jesus –

But the thing is JESUS never left – I only stopped listening. I kept talking – but I didn't listen.

Through a series of events (getting laid off, grandma died, someone needed to take care of my nephew) I moved back to Massachusetts. But I still wanted to keep doing this Jesus thing - and I was scared that there wasn't anywhere to do it the liberal north east.

But I found then I found our sister Blue Ocean church – at that time a vineyard church – It was called - The Woo.

And that's where I learned and practiced a lot of what I'm talking about today – TALKING with God – ALL THE TIME.

As Leah mentioned last week prayer is a two way conversation – often times we think of prayer as a deliberate act – I am going to pray for 10 minutes --- I will pray before I go to bed. I will thank Jesus for this. I will pray for my friend.

But what if we chatted with Jesus throughout the day?

Just kept it going as an on-going conversation – or just checked in throughout the day.

Seemed crazy to me in some ways that God would actually talk back to me – but since I have a very vivid imagination – I had some context for it. It actually reminded me of talking to my imaginary friend. One of which I had – maybe for slightly too long – but that's besides the point.

Anyway this idea of two way prayer really intrigued me. Especially since when making my own decisions in life things seemed to get really messed up. So I wanted guidance.

But what does that look like.

How can we actually do this – let's look to the Bible first for some context.

Back in the day there was a guy who could actually go somewhere and do this – There's this one guy in the Bible who got to hang out with God in this really cool way. This helps me picture this idea of talking with God –

Moses – the guy who God gave those 10 commandments to - was leading his people out of Egypt to the promise land he had God's help and direction. And when he wanted to talk with God he went into this place called “the tent of meeting” - it was like a portable sanctuary – but God was there. This cloud came down and talked to Moses – here's how it describes it in the Bible.

Moses - Exodus 33:9-11 (TNIV)

9 As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. 10 Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped at the entrances to their tents. 11 The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.

OK – so for me that would be amazing – I could just walk to a certain place – talk to God – and then go about my day! How fun! But here it was ONLY Moses who was chatting with God. Not like Harry from tent number 5 could go to the traveling temple and chat it up with God ---

It doesn't help with reaching the masses so to say – unless it was like a twitter page and you could just tweet God – and he tweeted back? Never mind –

Ok – and then Jesus comes –just about 14 hundred years later.

So he's walking around – talking to several people. He has his disciples who get to ask him questions all the time and really live life with him – and lots of people in the crowds and towns he goes to. You get the idea – there was a guy who was somewhat accessible.

And Jesus thinks it's a pretty good idea have this relational time and conversations with God - - often. Jesus talks about this – about hearing from God – about being able to talk to God and ask him things – BUT he says he has to go – and it's actually BETTER. I have trouble wrapping my brain around that –and I'm sure the disciples did too. I am a verbal processor and I love to process out loud and get answers – I suppose with today's population not that many folks would have direct access to just one guy – but the idea of it is pretty neat.

And I think the “idea” **IS** what Jesus is going for – He seems to say that it's good to be connecting with Him often. But to do that he's got to go.

Let's listen in one of Jesus' closest friends shares what Jesus said.

John 16:5-7, 12-15

“But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and none of you has asked me where I am going. 6 Instead, you are very sad. 7 But it is actually best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Counselor won’t come. If I do go away, he will come because I will send him to you...

“Oh, there is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not be presenting his own ideas; he will be telling you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. 14 He will bring me glory by revealing to you whatever he receives from me. 15 All that the Father has is mine; this is what I mean when I say that the Spirit will reveal to you whatever he receives from me.”

Which totally makes sense – because now Harry in tent 5 can talk to God! Not just Moses – :)

Right – so now God has a way of connecting with the masses – so the pitch is we can all talk to him – all the time.

This was super popular after Jesus left.

It all started on this one really significant day – called the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit – that counselor Jesus talks about came and was with the people who believed in Jesus.

Then things got super crazy in the book of Acts in the Bible – people were talking to God and hearing back from God ALL THE TIME –

Peter –The Holy Spirit told Peter to go downstairs because 3 men were looking for him – so he did – and they were – and they brought him to a man named Cornelius who wanted to hear more about Jesus.

Paul – constantly compelled by the spirit to go different place and preach.

Philip – Holy Spirit told him to go walk beside the chariot of an Ethiopian Eunuch. – The Eunuch was reading in the old testament – asked about Jesus – asked to get baptized and then Philip disappeared and ended up in another town. – That's the only space/time travel we see in the Bible – and maybe since – but quite the crazy adventure after responding to the Holy Spirit.

In the last year and a half my prayer life has been slightly unorganized – I had a solid practice of talking with God for extended periods of time at different times throughout the day.

Then I met my now (AMAZING) husband and well, more of my time was taken up on other things. Now that we are settled and married (and not planning a wedding!-- in fact my Bible is filled with color swatches)) I am setting in to more of a routine.

But throughout that time what I did have is constant chats with God – In fact, I think God helped plan our wedding. – it's kind of this practice I've been in – Driving in the car, running, walking, sitting – I just talk to God – ask Him a question – ask Him what I should have for lunch – ask Him for help.

And this is how we can cultivate our relationship with God – learn to trust Him – hear Him – discern his voice.

But it's also a place where WITH everything going on around us – I want to be connecting with God – because when I do – I am better at being nice to the people around me.

A few weeks ago – our guest speaker Lydia said – who are you friends - and that's when I knew it was time to start chatting with God again about what is going on around me – about how I can be a part of what he is doing with and in others. About how I can step outside of my own self and see more.

I think many people have been feeling overwhelmed lately – I know I have – The things that are happening in our world around us – and maybe even to some of us are terrible. Unfair treatment by police – police getting shot – blame – judging – anger – fear. People killing people, people hurting people just because they don't like who they are dating, the color of their skin or their beliefs.

And lately it seems like there is nowhere that is safe. People get shot and killed going to the mall to buy a new sweater.

I don't want to live in fear – I want to be a part of a solution.

I am only me – so what do I do.

I want to help people feel loved, safe and accepted. But where do I start – a protest, a Facebook post, do I storm the capital steps

Nothing seems like enough. And then I dial back.

And ask God – God says talk to me – hang out with me.

God is relational.

So with this upcoming talk – I have been talking to God even more consistently than before. And sometimes there's this idea to ask God questions – about what is going on around you – like – should I talk to that person – do you have something encouraging for this person – this is not my favorite thing to do but I did do a faith experiment with it once.

Karaoke –

Faith experiment – bigger picture – we did a faith experiment back at The Woo and we would go to happy hours around the city and ask God what he was doing – and see if we could connect with people – we didn't get much but made a few friends.

Then we started going to Karaoke – at a vegan asian restaurant – we talked with a few folks, but there were no miracles that we knew of.

In that moment when we asked people about themselves though, I'm guessing they felt cared for, loved, someone was interested in them – more of that in this world couldn't be bad – and God will do the rest – is what we thought when it was over.

I tried that a little this week knowing this talk is coming up – and I failed – way too far outside of my comfort zone.

I was driving – home from work as I do every day. There is this one spot where there is almost always someone asking for money.

This day was no different. Someone was standing there. Asking for help.

I'm always torn in this space so I asked God. God, should I give this person something – and I felt like God said yes. And I was like ok – but I want to talk to her too. So I vowed to go home, put my sneakers on and go talk to her - - she was young and timid. Her sign said she was trying to get home – was that true – either way, I wanted to hear her story --- or at least what she would share – but I didn't go – I got busy – too much to do. I'll do it tomorrow I said.

Tomorrow came – she was there-- I didn't go back.

I failed twice.

But God isn't mad. And I can keep trying. And God will keep offering.

And that's only one way to team up with God and connect with people. But not the only way.

What helps me most is more of a connected conversation throughout the day – and through that the extension of my life seems to be better. And I seem to be nicer to people.

And one way this has been clear these past few weeks is my driving!

I don't know if you drive around here at all – but it is an OFFENSIVE sport and you are a team of ONE.

NO one is your friend and people who are walking are only in your way so other cars can honk at you.

This week it has all been different. I LET someone get in front of me on the highway. I stopped so someone could cross the street. AND I WASN'T MAD. My attitude and perspective completely changed. I just wanted the people around me to feel loved. I wanted to help them not be mad. Because I was talking to God I thought that their day might not be going well or they might be in a rush – instead of just thinking they were trying to WIN this game on the road.

Again – I want to stress – It's not just about doing – it's about living life with God.

One of Jesus' other friends talks about that in the bible – lets see what He has to say about this process of talking with God.

James 1:5-8

If you need wisdom – if you want to know what God wants you to do – ask him, and he will gladly tell you. He will not resent your asking. But when you ask him, be sure that you really expect him to answer, for a doubtful mind is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. People like that should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. They can't make up their minds. They waver back and forth in everything they do.

So it seems like hearing God is on the table for everybody...

Qualifier – NOT DOUBTING – which on the surface would rule out anyone ever getting God's guidance.

Who in their right mind would not doubt that this voice that sounds like their **own thoughts**, is actually God.

100% of people think they are “just not good at it”,
and everyone thinks that they are the only one...

So how does this work then:

I had pastor at another church – here is the example – he uses –

If someone walks into the room and I ask – what is your name

WHAT IS YOUR NAME? if she said “Peewee Hermon”, I would probably doubt it, and rightfully so, I could be wrong but heck, that would be out there.

But regardless of the answer, I didn't doubt that she would speak.

And maybe that's what James is saying that we shouldn't be doubting

That we would approach prayer in a more conversational, or chatty, way... “How are you doing God?” GOOD! HOW ABOUT YOU!

We Could doubt God is doing good, but who knows, maybe he is.

SO it's that if we ask we can maybe expect God to say something – whatever we hear – maybe it's God – maybe it's not – But maybe just giving into the idea that it's possible.

Sometimes God even just says to me he loves me, or he is here with me. And even though it's not a direct answer or a solution or action to take – it's peace – it's not anxiety.

How do we get there – just start talking and expect God to say something – that is ONE way for sure. And I believe he will.

I will end with some tips and a process you can follow if you'd like.

First

1. Believe that God is always good to me.

As Leah mentioned last week – sort of fact check what you're hearing with the Bible – there's this spot in the Bible where it describes what kinds of things the Spirit does – let's take a look.

Galatians 5:22-23 New International Version (NIV)

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **23** gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

If God is saying something to you might line up with one or more of these things.

Here's a basic system you can use – to try it out – while you're walking/driving – whenever.

1. Say something to God. Start simple – How are you today? do you love me God? Are you there?

2. Listen – Maybe it's you - -maybe it's God.

3. Interpret it – sometimes things can come in metaphors/pictures or thoughts that aren't perfectly clear right away - discern – ask friend – Bible – – ((Jesus probably wouldn't tell you to cheat on taxes))
Or ask God again.

4. Try it - if it's an action – try it – talk to the guy on the street – encourage your co-worker – ask the waitress if she likes her job.

Again – and especially around here – ACTION- has been hard for me. I don't want it to be and I want to step outside of my comfort zone more and make more friends who aren't like me. I want to talk with people. Maybe make a new friend. Sometimes it feels overwhelming here – there are many homeless, hurting people that you can clearly see – how could I possibly love them all – and sometimes I'm a little uncomfortable – so my first thing is be safe – feel safe – it's ok to feel outside of your comfort zone – a little social awkward – I'm not worried about that – but make sure you feel safe.

I think I could have talked to the girl on the street safely – but it was too far out of my comfort zone in that moment.

2. Take it seriously, hold it lightly – ((flush out more))

So this might be God talking to you – right – that's kinda cool – but if you try something and it doesn't work out perfectly or as you expect or the person doesn't receive it. Don't worry so much. Maybe it was God this time and it will effect that person later – maybe it wasn't God and it will effect that person later.

Either way it seems to say in the Bible that God is everywhere – all the time.

John 5:17

Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.

And that just makes me feel safe trying things – because no matter what – I guess God is there – and even in my messy imperfectness – maybe he can do something.

If you think like this could be something helpful/fun in your life – START SMALL – really small

– try talking to God once a day – maybe at regular time.

Your commute – in the shower – while brushing your teeth – something you do everyday.

It seems like when people try to do a lot all at once – it quickly falls apart.

If this grows after a while! That is amazing!

I think even just one convo a day will significantly change your life.

AND if it's something you are already doing – try stepping outside of your comfort zone – is there a coworker you could encourage – or a waitress or store clerk – ask God – he might give you some ideas.

ALSO – feel free to start with small stuff – “how are you doing God?”, “what should I do for lunch?”, “what shirt should I wear?”

My friend Lucas has an amazing story along these lines.
He was my pastor back in Worcester, MA.

He was in college and was on this talking to God all the time journey. One day before he was planning to go to the cafeteria to eat he asked God what shirt to wear. And he felt like God said “your Bob Marley shirt,” and Lucas was like – no – I don't want to wear that shirt. And he felt like God said “wear that shirt,”. So he did.

But it fought it at first.

Anyway, he went to the caf, with his Bob Marley T-shirt. And while he was walking to go sit down, this girl who he had noticed before said – hey I like your shirt – Bob Marley has some good tunes.

And that sparked a friendship that led to marriage!

SO what if he didn't wear that shirt – would he have missed out on meeting his wife – I don't know. Maybe not – i'm not sure we can screw up our life like that so easily – I think God is more

loving that that – but it sure is pretty cool that God helped bring them together.

If we try to start big – like “what should I do with the rest of my life?”

which can work, but runs against the grain of the relational universe.

most relationships **take some time** to develop before you have trust built up to accept advice about big things

I love to ask for advice from strangers, especially waitstaff, “what’s good to **eat**?”

but I don’t ask strangers “who should I **marry**?”

If this is completely new for you – to start building that relationship.

Maybe for a reference point – for you to have and keep – I suggest that everyone tries the exercise of writing a letter from God to you,

seriously, sit down, and say, “ok God, speak to me”, and write down what comes to mind –

I have done this with two different colored pens – I would write something then switch colors and write what I felt like God was saying back to me. What a cool experience – and then looking back on it – amazing – I took pictures of a few to share with you.

This one I think says –

You can also try other things like setting up two chairs facing each other, sit in one and imagine God is sitting in the other, and talk

some people like to use there phone to pretend they are talking to God, feel free to try things and see what works for you

I tend to be blown away with the wonderful things that I feel like God is saying.

obviously you take it with a grain of salt, your probably not writing the next Bible, and if its a super crazy, you don’t want to make any rash decisions based on it – but it can help have some context for how God talks to you.

I feel like God offered this to me to share with our community now because of all that's going on – because it feels too big – I can't imagine what God thinks when he looks down and sees what has happened – but we can team up with God – each person counts.

Maybe it's not talking to someone on the street – maybe a coworker, sending an email to someone – at a restaurant –

Maybe we won't figure out world peace – maybe we won't put and end to the violence and bad things that keep happen – but we can bring more peace, joy, love and happiness – and who knows what could happen with that.

OR we'll all just become nicer drivers.