

Tasting Heaven  
February 23, 2014

I like to spend time with my wife. We enjoy doing most anything together. We even enjoy cleaning house or working in the yard, if we are doing it together. We like window shopping, walking around the neighborhood, working the current jigsaw puzzle, sitting and reading, or watching TV... together. We like traveling, driving and seeing new places... together.

At supper we tell each other about our day. We share the funny things that happened to us, or that someone said. We pray for you, for your family. We talk about what different family members are doing. We sometimes share frustrations, or things we learned that day, new insights from the Bible, or plans for upcoming church events.

We laugh, cry, listen, vent, and dialogue together. All of these things and more, we like to do together. We enjoy our time together. We look forward to our time together.

Some of you have such a relationship now with someone else. It may be a spouse. It may be a best friend. It may be a sibling. It may be your parent or your child. You too know the joys of a close relationship.

Or maybe you had such a relationship in the past. In either case, you have some experience with what I'm talking about.

I believe that Adam and Eve, the first two people, had this kind of relationship with God in the beginning of human history. I believe you can experience a relationship with God similar to this. And that is the subject for this morning.

Look with me at the experience of Adam and Eve.

**Genesis 3:8 (NIV)** Then the man and his wife heard the sound of Yahweh, God, as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day...

They knew the sound they heard was God. This was not the first time they had heard this sound. God made this sound whenever He visited them in the garden of Eden.

Now you may be thinking something like the following. "Wait a minute. God is spirit. Spirit's don't make sounds when they walk. In fact, do they walk?"

There are instances in the Old Testament part of the Bible where it appears that God made Himself visible in some kind of human form. He did this so as not to scare the people He was talking to. Sometimes it is plain that God spoke through an angel who appeared in human form. But other times it appears as if it is God Himself who appears. So don't get bothered with the idea that God often appeared in some form to Adam and Eve, and they heard the sound of Him in the garden.

Imagine the scene with me when God would visit them in the garden. Adam and Eve were like two children waiting for the arrival of dad, or mom, home from work. They would run to greet Him. They had so much to share with Him. They wanted to tell Him of all the things they did that day. They wanted to tell Him the things they learned that

day. They wanted to tell Him of the animals they named and what names they came up with. They want to describe the sunrise, or an interesting beetle. They wanted to ask God questions about this new world they were a part of.

They laughed with God and talked with God. They asked questions and listened to answers. God asks them leading questions to teach them how to think, how to observe closely the world in which they lived, how to draw conclusions and make guesses. They are like children, learning about their world and life. And they SO much enjoy being with God.

There is no sin, no stress, no pressure, nothing to confess or feel guilty or embarrassed about. They are naked, and don't really know that they are naked, not in any shameful sense. They have not been introduced to evil or sin or punishment or death. What a glorious time it was for them. They SO enjoyed being with God.

Most of you know what happened. One day, Satan, the devil, in the form of a snake, one of the animals they were familiar with, speaks to them about God. He plants the idea in their minds that God is lying to them. He tells them that if they eat of the tree God told them not to eat of, they would become like God.

They believed this lie and ate the forbidden fruit. Suddenly their eyes were opened and they saw everything in a new way. They saw themselves more clearly. They saw themselves as sinners. Shame, guilt, embarrassment, sorrow, and grief were new emotions they were feeling. They felt these feelings in each other's presence. They felt naked and ashamed before each other and covered themselves with leaves.

And then God came.

**Genesis 3:8 (NIV)** Then the man and his wife heard the sound of Yahweh, God, as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from ... God, among the trees of the garden.

They hid from God because of their sin, because they felt guilt and shame. History tells us that God banished them from the garden and they started a new life. This new life was empty of the kind of relationship with God that they had had before they sinned. Gone was the closeness. Gone was the joy.

They had children and grandchildren, and great grandchildren. And they told them all of what they had lost. They tried to describe what their relationship with God had been at one time.

They and their children wanted a close and joyous relationship with God. They knew they needed that. They knew it was what they were created for. So this is how they responded to the situation.

**Genesis 4:26** At that time men began to call on the name of Yahweh.

This was the beginning of prayer. Prayer started in human experience at this point in history. They sought the best kind of relationship they could then have with God. They called out to God in prayer.

The kind of relationship Adam and Eve first had with God I believe was a lot like the kind of relationship Christians will have with God in heaven. We have something great and wonderful to look forward to. We will spend eternity learning new things about God, His creation, and ourselves. We will know the joys of living in God's presence.

Wouldn't it be great to be able to taste some of that future right now? Wouldn't it be great to live each day with a sense of God's presence with you? Wouldn't it be great to know that you lived in the pleasure of God? Wouldn't it be great to be as comfortable with God as you are with your best friend? Wouldn't it be great to be able to laugh and cry with God?

That is the goal of prayer. That is the goal of prayer. I know that many of you are not familiar with prayer in that way. But as your pastor, I want that for you.

For many of you prayer is mostly about asking God for things. Prayer can include asking for things. Prayer can include praise and thanksgiving. Prayer can include desperate calls for help, for information, for wisdom. Prayer can include times of confession and recommitment. These are all appropriate to prayer and necessary at times.

But the greatest times of prayer are those where you are not desperate for anything except God. The greatest times of prayer are when you have nothing left to confess, but are feeling fully accepted in Jesus Christ. The best prayer experiences are when you simply enjoy being with God.

This is a taste of heaven. This is a taste of what awaits us in the future. And I encourage you to pursue this kind of relationship with God. I encourage you to set your hearts and minds on this kind of prayer life with God. I urge you to believe in and seek this kind of enjoyment of God in Jesus Christ.

Don't settle for wherever you are right now in your prayer experiences. Desire more out your relationship with God. God wants that too. I want you to see where you can go in prayer. See what is possible for you. See the kind of joy you can experience with God.

So let me give you some practical steps toward growing in prayer, from wherever you are now. These are steps toward a taste of heaven. Don't make them ends in themselves. But if you are not yet doing these, they can grow your prayer life.

### **What can you do to grow in prayer?**

**Make it a habit.**

**Luke 5:16 (NIV)** ...Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

We would do well to follow His example.

Turn down the sound. Turn off the TV, the radio, the music. Turn off the phone if it is constantly ringing and texting and beeping that you have messages, that someone is demanding your time and attention. Turn it off.

Get by yourself. It may be that the only way to get by yourself in quiet is to get up 15-30 minutes earlier than everyone else in the house. Or it may be that you stay up later than everyone else does. Or use your lunch break.

Establish a time to be alone with God. I recommend you do it everyday. That may not work at all for you. But schedule your times with God. Make time for it.

Isn't it true that your "To Do List" is never done, yet you find time to relax? You find time to eat. You find time to spend with people you enjoy. Carve out time for you and God. You have just as much time as anyone else does. Carve out time for you and God to spend together.

### **Pray the promises of God.** (1 Chronicles 17)

The foundation for a relationship with God is the promises He has made to you. So use these to draw you into God. In 1 Chronicles 17, God makes a promise to King David. And then David responds in prayer to God. David urges God to do what He promised so that David would be able to give credit to God. David's testimony of God's faithfulness would draw other people to God.

You can do the same. As you learn the promises of God in the Bible, use them in your prayers. Learn from David's example. The promises of God will cement your relationship with Him as He is faithful to keep them.

### **Pray the truths of God.** (Ephesians 6:10-17)

In Genesis, chapter three, the devil told a lie to Adam and Eve. And they believed it. In Ephesians 6, Paul says the devil is still working that con. He wants to convince you that you aren't saved. He wants to convince you that God can't be trusted. And Paul says to guard yourself against such attacks by standing firm on the truth of what God says. You do this by affirming to God, in prayer, that you believe everything He has said about your salvation.

Tell God you believe that all your sins have been forgiven. Affirm that in prayer. Then when the devil suggests that you aren't saved, affirm your belief to the devil too. Don't fall for his lies. Start the day reaffirming what you believe.

### **Pray your To Do List into His hands.**

Now I gave you a picture of what prayer can become, beyond asking for things. And this one might sound like you are just asking for things, but it isn't. The motivation for this one is to live all your responsibilities to the glory of God.

**Colossians 3:17 (NIV)** And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus...

You want to live all your to do list in the name of Jesus today. So pray that. Pray your way through each item. Talk with God about what you need to do, what stands in your way, and dedicate each task to Him. Tell Him how you'd like to do it, with courage, and faith, and joy, and persistence. Ask for the Holy Spirit's assistance to do just that.

Prayer can be so much more than most people ever realize. Prayer can be a taste of heaven. I desire that for you. Do you want it? Then pursue it.

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God so wants this kind of relationship with you that He sent His Son to the cross. Jesus died so that you can enjoy this kind of close relationship to God for all eternity. Won't you put your faith in Jesus today? Won't you receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord?