TALKING WITH GOD

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WHEN I was a small boy growing up in Winchester, Tennessee, Sunday school was an important part of my life. It was there that I began to sense the magical power of spiritual conversation. I learned that when God talks to us, His means of communication is the Bible. The great lessons of Jesus are narrated for our edification and, from Genesis to Revelation, light is shed on the mysteries of spiritual existence.

It was in Sunday school that I was introduced to the Golden Rule. People of all faiths have been inspired and uplifted by its message, which is repeated in the scriptures of the nine major religions. It was in Sunday school also that I first read the Sermon on the Mount, which is at the very heart of the Christian gospel and should be studied and memorized by every Sunday school student. Both the Golden Rule and the Sermon on the Mount are included in this section. As an adult, I taught Sunday school in the Presbyterian church in Englewood, New Jersey. I helped all of my students memorize Luke 6:27–38, where God speaks to us of the most profound matters.

When we talk to God we reach Him through prayer. We tell Him of our hopes and fears; we express our desire to help others and to become better human beings. In the Bible
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passages and prayers that follow, we can explore and experience the vital dialogue that takes place constantly between God and humans.

Because I find that some Bible translations express their ancient meanings in words I like better than others, I have drawn on three versions: the *King James Version* (KJV), the *Revised Standard Version* (RSV), and the *New English Bible* (NEB).
God Speaks to Us

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

John 1:1-5, RSV

"But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well. Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again. And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do that to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what
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credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."


But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.

Galatians 5:22–23, RSV

"My heart exults in the Lord;
my strength is exalted in the Lord.
My mouth derides my enemies,
because I rejoice in thy salvation.
There is none holy like the Lord,
there is none besides thee;
there is no rock like our God."
Talk no more so very proudly,
let not arrogance come from your mouth;
for the Lord is a God of knowledge,
and by him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty are broken,
but the feeble gird on strength.
Those who were full have hired
themselves out for bread,
but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.
The barren has borne seven,
but she who has many children is forlorn.
The Lord kills and brings to life;
he brings down to Sheol and raises up.
The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.
He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes and
inherit a seat of honor.
For the pillars of the earth are the Lord’s,
and on them he has set the world.
He will guard the feet of his faithful ones;
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might shall a man prevail.
The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed.”

1 Samuel 2:1–10, RSV
The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the path of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; the rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23, KJV

I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills; from whence cometh my help?
My help cometh even from the Lord: who hath made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: and he that keepeth thee will not sleep.
The Lord himself is thy keeper: the Lord is thy defence upon thy right hand.
So the sun shall not burn thee by day: neither the moon by night.
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The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: yea, it is even he that shall keep thy soul.
The Lord shall preserve thy going out, and thy coming in: from this time forth for evermore.

Psalm 121, KJV

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;
who brings princes to nought,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.
To whom then will you compare me,
that I should be like him? says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these?
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He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name;
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.

Isaiah 40:21–26, RSV

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

John 14:1–7, RSV

When the poor and needy seek water,
and there is none,
and their tongue is parched with thirst,
I the Lord will answer them,
I the God of Israel will not forsake them.
I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.
I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;
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I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together; that men may see and know, may consider and understand together that the hand of the Lord has done this, the Holy One of Israel has created it.

*Isaiah 41:17–20, RSV*

Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot. Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

*Micah 7:18–19, RSV*

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side."
"So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

*Luke 10:29–37, RSV*

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."