



Drawing Near to God

Isn't it amazing to think that the God of heaven wants to have a relationship with you? He wants to be close to you. And He wants you to be close to Him! James 5:8 records this amazing promise: "Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you." You can be as close to God as you want to be!

If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, you already know how much God loves you (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). He has united you to His Son—and you can't get any closer than that! Your relationship to God as His child can never be broken. Ever. No matter what happens to you or how you feel (1 John 3:1-2).

But just as with any relationship, in order for it to go beyond the surface level, there are certain things that you need to do to grow that relationship. A close relationship with God doesn't happen by accident. So, how do you "draw near to God?" Let's explore this topic!

Growing in Christ

Have you ever tried to grow a plant? What do you need in order to be successful? You'll need good soil, fertilizer, and plenty of sunshine and water. And you will also need to give time and energy to weeding, pruning, and caring for the plant—especially if something dangerous threatens it (like hungry rabbits or caterpillars looking for an easy meal). That all sounds like work, doesn't it?! You will have to work hard to help a plant grow. But the truth is, only God can make a plant actually grow. So who is working? You or God? Both! God uses your efforts to make a plant grow. It is how He designed it to work.

God grows believers in similar ways. Just like you want your blueberry bush to produce lots of yummy blueberries, God wants His children to produce lots of beautiful fruit that looks like Jesus Christ. He wants you to be a growing, useful servant in His kingdom. What do you need to grow as a Christian? You'll need good soil (a tender heart to receive God's Word) and plenty of sunshine and water (spending time in God's Word). And you'll have to give time and energy to weeding sin out of your life (confession and repentance), and protecting your heart from dangerous threats (saying "no" to sin). You will have to work hard if you want to grow in your relationship with God! But just like with plants, God is the only one who can actually make you grow. So who is doing the work? You or God? Both! Philippians 2:13-14 teaches us that God uses our efforts to help us grow to become more like Jesus. This is how He designed it to work.

Relationships are built on **trust** and **communication**. We won't really trust someone we don't know. So, getting to know God by listening to and believing what He tells you about Himself in His Word is very important. Your relationship with God cannot grow without communication with God. Communication is just a fancy word for talking with someone. It works two ways: we *listen* and we *talk*.

Listening to God

God wants to talk to you. He talks to you through His Word—the Bible. We listen to God when we read, study, memorize, and think deeply about His Word. God is so good that He tells us everything we need to know about Him in His Word. There is nothing else we need in order to know how to live in a way that is pleasing to Him (2 Peter 1:3-4). God's Word shows us what is right, what is wrong, how to fix what is wrong in our lives, and how to keep doing what is right (2 Timothy 3:15-16). God's Word is an amazing, wonderful, supernatural Book (Psalm 19:7-11). God promises that when we listen to Him in His Word, He will change us (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Learning to listen to God is as simple as:

- Getting out your Bible
- Finding a quiet place
- Praying for God to help you understand His Word
- Opening your Bible to a specific passage of Scripture
- Reading it
- Applying what you read to your own life
- Thanking God for what you learned about Him, and asking Him to help you grow to be more like Him

If you've never had a personal *God & I Time*, please talk to an adult who loves God and ask them to help you create a simple plan that will help you listen to God every day.

Don't forget to apply God's Word to your life. This is hard work, but necessary if you are to grow. This is like the important work of weeding and pruning to help a plant grow. It isn't the most exciting part of gardening, but it is needed.

In Israel, there is a famous place called the Dead Sea. This sea is "dead" because it takes water in, but doesn't have anywhere for water to go out. This makes the water very salty and no fish can live in it. If you don't use the truth you are learning about God, you will become like the Dead Sea. Ask God to help you take action. Respond to God's Word by **doing** what you **hear** (James 1:22-25). God promises that if you do this, your life will be blessed!

Just like spending time with a friend strengthens your relationship, if you are going to grow closer to God you must spend time with Him—listening to what He says!

But there is more...God also wants *you* to talk to *Him*.

Talking to God

We talk to God when we pray. Prayer simply means "talking to God." God doesn't want our conversation with Him to be one-sided—only us talking to Him, but not listening; or only Him talking to us, and us not responding. Prayer is one of the most important ways that we grow in our relationship with God.

Think about all the different types of things you talk about with your close friends. You share things that are important to you, things that make you laugh and cry, things that make you afraid. When we are talking to a close friend, we can tell them anything. Talking to God should be the same way. You are talking to the Person who loves you best and is 100% trustworthy. So you have nothing to fear in telling Him anything and everything.

God wants us to praise Him for Who He is and thank Him for what He has done. God wants us to ask Him for help; to tell Him how much we need Him. God wants us to confess our sin to Him and seek His forgiveness and cleansing. God wants us to talk to Him about our fears and sorrows. He wants us to talk to Him about the things we love and enjoy. He wants us to tell Him what we need. God has given His children an amazing promise: He will listen to us when we talk to Him!

The disciples once asked the Lord, "Teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). That is a great question for you to ask a spiritual adult. You can make a plan to have a set time every day when you talk to God. Some people like using a word or phrase to help them remember how to talk to God.

Like **CPR**:

- Confess—ask God for forgiveness for specific sin
- Praise—praise God for Who He is
- Request—ask God for what you need

Or **PRAY**:

- Praise—praise God for Who He is
- Repent—ask God for forgiveness for specific sin
- Ask—ask God for what you need
- Yield—commit to follow God today

Or you can create your own word! Choose something that helps you remember the kinds of things you should talk to God about.

God also tells us *how* to talk to Him. He is our Savior and our Friend (John 15:13). But He is also the God of the Universe and our King. Remember that the only reason you can “come boldly” to the “throne of grace” is because Jesus Christ opened the way through His death and resurrection (Hebrews 4:16). We must talk to our King with a humble and respectful attitude, not in a proud and demanding way.

There are times when we don’t feel like talking to God. Maybe we are feeling ashamed of a sinful choice we made. Or maybe we are feeling sad or disappointed. Maybe it feels like God is far away or unaware of the hard things we are facing. But these are the times when it is most important for you to talk to God. Many of the Psalms were written for times just like this. When we sin, we can borrow these prayers to talk to God about our need for cleansing and forgiveness (like Psalm 32 and 51). When we are hurting, we can borrow these prayers to talk to God about our suffering (like Psalm 13, 46, and 91). Don’t stop talking to God. Ever.

Prayer is such an important part of growing in your relationship with God that He says we should *always* be praying. Without stopping (1 Thessalonians 5:14). God’s Word and prayer: these two parts of communication are vital for your spiritual life!

Hopefully you see how important it is to spend time with God every day. Like water and sunshine, God uses His Word and prayer to grow His children. But there is something else you need to know. God has another wonderful gift He uses to help us become more like Jesus.

Growing in Christ Together

Did you ever sing this song when you were younger?

*Read your Bible,
pray every day,
and you’ll grow, grow, grow.*

There’s a lot of truth to that song. But we should add one more action to make it even better:

*Read your Bible,
pray every day... with God’s people...
and you’ll grow, grow, grow.*

God wants us to grow in a relationship with other people who are also in a relationship with Him. We need to listen to God...together. We need to talk to God...together. Think of our garden illustration again. Have you ever found a garden with just one plant in it? Did you know that a blueberry bush will

not produce fruit unless another blueberry bush is planted nearby? Blueberry bushes need each other. In the same way, God's children also need other believers in order to grow. Think about your life. What other believers are you planted close to? Do you have parents, siblings, or friends who also know and love God? God designed us to grow with other believers in a church family. Read your Bible and pray every day *with another believer* and you will be amazed at how much you grow!

Use the suggestions below to create your own personal plan for getting to know God. By God's grace, you can purpose to be in God's Word each and every day!

My Plan for Listening to God:

- **Set Time:**

Set a regular, consistent time to read, study, and think about God's Word. Purpose in your heart to seek God *daily*.

Time I will be in God's Word each day: _____

- **Set Place:**

Like Jesus did, find a place without distractions to meet alone with God.

Place I will be in God's Word each day: _____

- **Set Study:**

The Bible is all about God! Wherever you turn in your Bible, you can learn about Him. But rather than randomly opening your Bible and reading a few verses from that page, it is far better to plan ahead so you have a set study you can do every day. As you plan out what you want to study next, it may help you to ask these two questions: *Where will you read? What will you look for while you read?* Remember that every page of Scripture reveals God, so always be looking for *Him* as you read!

For ideas about specific Bible studies, see *Keys to Your Own God & I Time* (lifelineforteens.com/resources/keys). Or ask a godly adult. Choose a study that interests you. Write it down on your plan.

Where I will read in God's Word: _____

What I will look for in God's Word: _____

My Plan for Talking to God:

It is best to attach your prayer time to your Bible time, so that it is one big "God & I Time." That way, you enjoy a complete conversation with God every day: *listening* to God and *talking* to God.

Use 3 x 5 cards (one for each day of the week) or a notebook (a different page for each day of the week), to plan out what you would like to pray for each day. Here is an example for you to follow:

Sunday:

P—God is Great (Ps. 145:3)

R—confess any sin God has shown me in my life

A—ask God to help me grow closer to Him

Y—commit to live for God instead of self today

Monday:

P—God is Good (Ps. 34:8)

R—confess any sin God has shown me in my life

A—ask God to help me love and serve my siblings

Y—commit to obey what God has shown me in His Word

Tuesday:

P—God is Holy (Ps. 103:1)

R—confess any sin God has shown me in my life

A—ask God to help me share Christ with my friends

Y—commit to love what God loves and hate what God hates

Why don't you take the time to write out your own weekly prayer journal now? And then begin to use it!