



I don't seem to have a personal relationship with God

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Written by Layton Friesen, PhD

One of my spiritual heroes growing up was my neighbour, the late Cornie B. Friesen. Cornie had a beautiful, personal way of conversing with God. He would relate conversations of prayer in detail: "I said to God, and then God said to me...." In envy I once asked him whether he could teach others to have this kind of personal interaction. "No," he replied, "This is a unique gift that God has given me. It's not for everybody."

God and I just don't seem to be waxing and waning. Each day, my connection with God seems about the same as the last.

How thankful I am for Cornie's wisdom at that moment! I have never had those to-and-fro dialogues with God, and Cornie invited me to see my faith as something I could be content with as a gift from God.

I sometimes hear people testifying to times they felt God was near and times they felt God was distant: "Today I feel close to God." "Last summer I felt God was distant." I can rarely say either. God and I just don't seem to be waxing and waning. Each day, my connection with God seems about the same as the last.

I am rarely guided by God in decisions the way others report being directed. God never told me to become a pastor, marry my spouse, or go to school. God certainly never told me to live in Winnipeg. God is rarely my spiritual GPS.

I know that God does speak directly to some people, especially prophets. Moses, Ezekiel, Mary, Paul and Cornie had personal conversations with God or his angels. The psalmists talk about feeling far from God and feeling near. And the church has always had mystics who testified to ecstatic experiences of desolation or consolation from God.

But none of this seems to happen to me.

So, if you are like me, confident that you are God's child but not experiencing him as personally as others do, may I share what I have learned over the years?

1. God never promises that all his children will have the same experience of him. God gives to each their relationship with him. That's fine.

2. God does not expect you to take courses or read books to learn to hear him in this personal way. Cornie was right: God does speak that way to some people, but not because they mastered some technique or spiritual skill.

3. You can harm yourself spiritually by constantly straining your inner ear to detect some divine voice amid all your thoughts and then being disappointed. If you love God and he speaks to you like to Moses, you will know.

4. Until then, relax and read your Bible. That you know is God speaking to you in a personal way. By the time Cornie died a few years ago, he could recite the New Testament. He spent a lifetime on his tractor memorizing the Bible.

5. You can have the gift of divine wisdom without God speaking to you in this direct way. The Spirit gives wisdom through a life marinating in Scripture and loving those around you till it hurts.

6. If you don't seem to have that personal relationship, don't be dismissive of those who do. It's not because you are some kind of sophisticated intellectual. That's just arrogance.

The question is not, "How can I achieve someone else's relation to God?" but rather, "How can I faithfully make myself available to God within the relationship he does grant me?"