

## **Conversational Prayer**

by Peter Roennfeldt

Conversational prayer is one of the most enjoyable ways to experience fellowship with God and friends. Christians who are hesitant about praying in a group find conversational prayer meaningful – and it is an easy, natural way to pray with those who have never experienced prayer.

This is one of the ways Jesus prayed. When the 72 returned, he turned their report of the Spirit's presence into a conversation that moved back and forth between the people, the Father, the disciples and himself. (Luke 10:17-24) Of course, the daily conversations of Jesus, his disciples and those they met, was conversational prayer, for prayer is talking with God – and, Jesus is God.

### **Conversations**

Imagine you are with five or six friends at a restaurant. Before conversation begins, the topics or issues to be discussed are determined, perhaps listed on a whiteboard or on paper napkins. Then each person makes a speech, moving around the circle – each speaking to all listed issues and closing off quite formally. That would be a pretty strange conversation with 'friends'! Most of us would avoid being caught in that situation – I mean, ever!

In some 'prayer meetings' much of the allotted time is taken making lists of what and who needs prayer – with little time left for praying. And, have you ever been caught with prayers coming around the circle towards you, with no escape? Those before you are covering all bases – and much more eloquently than you could. Then, having thought of something different to say, Sharon (beside and before you) prays what you were going to say! You fumble incoherently, and then while the prayers move away from you (around the circle) you wonder why you said what you said!

Of course once prayer time is over, normal conversations can start again – you have your eyes open, the language is non-religious, you can be yourselves; but you wonder how Matt (a guest who is not a Christian) feels about being caught in a 'circle of prayer'. If you found it difficult, what about the silence that encircled him as those beside him waited to see if he was going to pray? Would he avoid being caught like this again – I mean, ever?

### **Including God**

Now imagine you are with five or six friends at a restaurant where conversation is normal – informal, bouncing back and forth, exploring a range of themes and issues of interest and importance. There are times of laughter, times of quiet reflection – support and encouragement. No one person dominates the conversation. Different ones make numerous contributions. No one is trying to work out what they will say next. The conversation does not move around the circle. Andy has more to say than others. That's Andy! Heidi sits quiet this evening – enjoying the conversation, but she is tired and just loving being with

her friends! Most of us value these experiences and want to do it again – I mean, very soon!

Now, what if we included God in these conversations? He is always with us (wherever we go) – in fact, more than that, he is in us! The reality of the presence of God in believers is one of the most distinct and prevalent insights of the New Testament. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit the Father and Jesus live within us. (John 14:23)

Conversational prayer can happen around a restaurant meal, in a home, around a boardroom table, walking in the forest or on a beach, in a hospital room, at a café in a busy mall – anywhere there are two or three!

### **Conversing with God – some ideas!**

1. There is no need to take time to discuss prayer requests before the group starts to pray. These naturally arise in the conversation of prayer.
2. Conversations do not go ‘around the circle’. Doing this in prayer puts people on the spot – and makes those who have not prayed publicly very uncomfortable.
3. Meaningful conversation is not a series of disjointed comments – but involves listening and response. This is how conversational prayer works – listening and responding, affirming and sharing.
4. Often one or two persons tend to lead conversations – and such a leader can take the initiative to include God. If the group lapses into structured ways of praying or going around the circle, this leader-type can refocus the conversation.
5. Conversational prayer includes dialogue with each other – as well as discussion directly with God. There is no religious language. Each person can pray briefly and often – or choose to remain silent and just enjoy being with friends and God.
6. **Enjoy silence.** In quiet places, it is great to just enjoy being with God and friends. It doesn’t hurt to listen to God! In homes and outdoors you can also sing prayer songs that express the thoughts and emotions of the moment.

### **Enjoy conversations with open eyes!**

Much in conversation is unspoken – the nod of the head, a frown, smile, movement of the eyebrow, etc. We affirm with laughter, a slap on the back, or a touch. The appropriate response is cultural. And whether we close our eyes or pray with eyes open is also cultural. Many find a new freshness in prayer conversation when they pray with open eyes.

While it may take a few moments to get used to – and there will be times when you close your eyes; having your eyes open allows you to see and affirm those you are praying with and for, observing the activity of the Spirit in their eyes and faces.

If the group is comfortable praying with open eyes you will find that you can pray together anywhere at anytime. Conversations with each other simply expand to include God! Friends who are not familiar with prayer will listen, and the time will come when they want to also say something to 'your God'.

Don't make prayer complicated. This is talking with God.