

LORD,
*Help Me
Grow
Spiritually
Strong*
IN 28 DAYS

KAY ARTHUR
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PRECEPT MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL



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Is Anyone Up There?

DAVID

Is it really possible to talk to God?

Some people seem to think that's a very strange idea—as though you were slightly unbalanced for even trying. Other people speak casually about long, word-for-word conversations with Him (“and then He said, and then I said...”)—as though they had been talking to a friend in the produce aisle of the local grocery store or chatting with a neighbor over the back fence.

I think I've always *wanted* to talk to God—almost as far back as I can remember. But was I doing it right? Saying it correctly? And was He actually listening? Or did He even care about the prayers of a little boy?

Somewhere along the line, I got the idea that I had to start every prayer with a complete confession of every sin I could think of or remember and then beg for forgiveness. I pictured a God who was always just a little angry and more than a little disgusted with me, and I somehow thought He wouldn't pay attention to me at all unless and until I first uttered the words, “God, please forgive all my sins.” That, I believed, was the magical phrase that would open the doors of heaven and (finally) get God's attention.

Looking back now on my prayers as a young boy and then as a teenager, they seem more like superstition than a vital part of a relationship with God. Can you relate to such feelings? Does talking to God require a password? If so, what is it? What do I have to say or do to get Him to answer me and help me with my needs? And why

does it seem that when I dial His number, He puts me on hold—or doesn't even pick up the phone?

Is He there? Is He listening? Does He actually care about me, my problems, my dreams, my anxieties, and my heartaches?

A DAY OF CHANGE

I can remember worrying about these things—and the sad, empty, almost lonely feeling that came over me as I wondered about God and whether He loved me.

I also remember the day everything changed.

I was at teen Boot Camp, on the campus of Precept Ministries International in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Of course, this was home ground for me. As the son of Jack and Kay Arthur, I'd grown up on that campus and knew every inch of its 32 acres. This particular camp was pretty typical, as far as Precept teen summer camps went. The days were filled with studying the Bible, playing softball and volleyball, singing around the campfire...and Brother Al.

Brother Al, I recall, had been teaching on heaven and hell. It was good stuff, but it wasn't the teaching that bowled me over. And even though I learned some new things in the Bible about what happens after we die, that wasn't what rocked my world. What stunned me that summer was Brother Al's prayers. It was the way he talked to God.

Of course I'd been around innumerable people who prayed out loud through my growing-up years. But for whatever reason, the *reality* of this man's prayers cut through the fog of familiarity and sameness and I've-heard-all-this-before to shake me into alertness. He wasn't just filling the air with churchy sounding words, He was literally *talking to God*.

There could be no doubt. Suddenly, I realized that this man was in live conversation with the Creator of the universe. He had picked up the phone, and *God* was on the line! Of course I'd heard Brother Al pray before. Many times. It wasn't that *he* was doing anything different, it was something happening in *me*. Something supernatural.

It was as if a hood was being lifted from my head—a hood of blindness, suffocation, and deceit.

Now I could see. Really see.

Two things happened to me in very quick order. First, I got it. God is real. Everything I had learned about Him from my parents, school, and church was legitimate. He is alive! Not a superstition or a system of beliefs or a bunch of syrupy, feel-good clichés that no one really believes. God is for real. Immediately after that thought, this next realization hit me—and the impact was like a punch in the stomach.

I really don't know this person Brother Al is talking to. I don't know God.

I'd had enough biblical teaching to know I was in big trouble. If I had walked off campus that night and been hit by a truck out on Noah Reid Road, I was doomed, destined to spend eternity in the lake of fire—in hell with the devil. Images of burning flesh filled my mind, deeply frightening me.

But more than being scared, I now felt guilt. Truckloads of it. Mountains of it. Disgust and nausea took over, and I started to cry. Not a “tear up and bow my head” cry, but an open-mouthed, painful cry. I needed help.

People around me noticed my dilemma. Several thought something was wrong with me and called my parents, who lived on the property. The next several minutes were life-changing. It seemed as though a backpack filled with a heavy load of pretending—faking the Christian life, playing the game—suddenly fell off my back. Just that quickly, the heavy burden was gone. I can't begin to describe to you how free I felt!

A quarter-mile long road loops around the campus at Precept Ministries, and that clear summer night I started to run. But this time I wasn't running from God. I wasn't running from shame or guilt. With a genuine smile on my face, I was running because God had set my heart free!

Later on I found the verse that expressed what I experienced in my conversion: “I run in the path of your commands, for you [God] have set my heart free” (Psalm 119:32 NIV).

FREE AT LAST!

I’m still running. I’m still free!

How about you? Are you free? When you talk to God, does He listen? Does He answer? Or is there so much background noise in your mind that it keeps you from tuning in to what God is saying? Do you feel as though you can’t stop moving long enough to really listen for God’s voice?

Or maybe your past was so messed up you think that God can’t look at you because of evil things you’ve done or said. If this is your struggle, you won’t want to miss what my mother, Kay Arthur, says later in the book about her own story.

I don’t know where you are in your life as you read these words, or what you might have experienced as you’ve thought about God or perhaps tried to talk to Him or get closer to Him. One thing I know—you wouldn’t be reading a book with a title like this unless you truly did feel such a desire and hunger in your heart. Something is stirring. Something within you is reaching out for change, for hope, for new strength and understanding.

So let me encourage you with some good news. That stirring you feel in your heart is from God Himself! He is the one who caused this book to be in your hands at this particular season in your life. It’s true. And He wants you to draw near to Him more than you ever thought of wanting to draw near to Him. I can tell you, with confidence, that this book and this study will be an important step in that journey.

Not only is God real, alive, and on the throne of heaven and earth, but He desires to be in a tight, authentic, consistent relationship with you. Amazing? You’d better believe it. And if it’s really true that God desires to talk and walk with us through everyday life—traffic jams, family fights, addictive temptations, huge disappointments—*then*

we have a good opportunity to take hold of life that is truly life (1 Timothy 6:19).

Take some time to reflect on where you are with God. Perhaps start a journal and begin by writing out your own story. Something special occurs when we write out our thoughts and experiences.

In doing research for this book, I asked our Precept leaders to share the most significant lessons they learned in the first 90 days after they became a Christian. To be honest, I was a little surprised by the response I got from that request. The Internet forum was flooded with testimonies. These leaders told of forgiveness, freedom, and excitement about how the Bible began to open up to them and speak to them in deeply personal ways. Many of them described the blessing they received by the simple exercise of writing down their story and sending it to us.

TAKE AWAY

In every day of this 28-day study, we will give you a “take away,” a practical exercise to help make the main point of each day’s lesson stick.

So for today, write out your story. Write down how you came to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Be sure to capture how you were drawn to God and what happened when you came to know Him for who He really is. Include the changes that followed in your life. Since God’s Word is “living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12), be sure to pack your testimony with relevant Scriptures.

Now with your story written, ask God to show you who He wants you to tell your story to. Be ready—the opportunity could come very soon.