

*I woke up in a Soho doorway
A policeman knew my name
He said "You can go sleep at home tonight
If you can get up and walk away"ⁱⁱ*

Luckily for musician Pete Townsend of *The Who*,

he could get up and walk away—

the cop who found Townsend nearly passed out in

the subway recognized him and

gave him a chance to escape the

consequences of breaking the law.ⁱⁱ

Others, unknown to the police, have not been so fortunate.

For Joyce Ann Brown, a case of

of mistaken identity proved devastating

*“Joyce Ann Brown only learned
she was a murder suspect when she read about it in the paper...”
[subsequently] she was found guilty and sentence to
25 years to life in prison where she remained
for nine years until proven innocent and released.ⁱⁱⁱ*

Sometimes, when we pray,

We indulge in prayers of mistaken identity—

mistaking God for a critical or impassive listener only—

and not a benign

arbitrator or umpire of our circumstances.

Bear with me as I read ya'll a medieval prayer to

illustrate this misperception:

Jesu Lord, blyssed thou be,
For all this nyght thou hast me kepe
From the fend and his poste,
Whether I wake or that I slepe.

In grete deses and dedly synne,
Many one this nyght fallyn has,
That I my selve schuld have fallyn in,
Hadyst thou not kepyd me with thi grace.

Lord, gyffe me grace to thi worschype,
This dey to spend in thi plesanse;
And kepe me fro wyked felyschipe,
And from the fendys comberance.^{iv}

If you felt bored or lost during this prayer,

just imagine how tolerant God must be to listen

to our sometimes one-sided diatribes

we call prayer.

If we want to know God and

to understand that God's law is not too hard for us to obey
or far away--

Then we need

to get to know God through conversational prayer,
not only the five formulas for prayer we've been taught—
the ones we can click off with the fingers of our hands

Intercession
Petition
Confession
Thanksgiving
Worship and Praise

We've all heard

Prayer is talking to God.

More true is,

Prayer is conversing with God.

The afore mentioned five types of prayer

are actually the fruit of conversational prayer—
resulting from a trusting relationship
with God.

In conversation, we not only speak but also listen;

we make the effort and take the time

required to get to know someone.

The same is true with God.

God is not harsh or far away—

God is manifested in the person of Jesus,

so we know what God is like.

The prayers of Jesus recorded in scripture

are intimate and conversational.

These prayers require knowing the person to

whom they are addressed.

As in any relationship, trust precedes friendship.

The five kinds of prayers imply trust—

trusting that they will be received by our friend and creator

and be given thoughtful responses in dialogue –

just like the kind of communication we want

from friends and family we know and trust.

God's responses to Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane

to be spared the cross

are not recorded in scripture,

but Jesus must have heard them because

he rose from his knees and pleas

to walk the long road to Calvary

and resurrection.

Trust is built over time.

We might think that trust follows immediately

on the heels of believing

not realizing that mature faith is a journey.

of relationship and

trust its companion along the way.

Obedying the law is not too hard when you know

the giver is compassionate,

one who has your interests at heart

like the police officer who sent Pete Townsend home

because he recognized the musician, and
unlike the police who did not know

Joyce Ann Brown,

arrested her, and took her to jail.

Conversation with God leads to love.

Jesus is not vague when he says all the law is summarized in

love – he gives us the example of himself who kindly

enters into dialogue with the lawyer

despite knowing the

that the lawyer intends to trick him—

Jesus' dialogue with the lawyer

results in the lawyers' deeper understanding of the law of God—

the law of Love and Friendship.

How do we enter into a relationship with God in Christ

that is comfortable and trusting?

Psychologist Marcia Reynolds recommends five practices

for friendship building that apply nicely

to conversational prayer:

1. Become comfortable with yourself.

We are to love ourselves as beloved members of God's household,
knowing God to be forgiving and just like Jesus.

2. Discover the greater purpose for your relationship.

Do we always have the “gi'me”s as my Daddy used to say
when I wanted, wanted, wanted....

3. Don't just listen when you are together, relax into receiving.

In prayer, we are not having a running conversation with ourselves—
we are sharing – friendship is reciprocal.

4. Examine your expectations.

Are we getting to know someone—the person who is God?

What preconceived ideas do we have about God
that might undone by our prayerful
relationship with God?

Finally,

5. Lighten up.^v

God who created aardvarks, cactus, and human beings—

must have a benign sense of humor—

we can laugh at ourselves sometimes

we can take life's ups and downs with

a grain of salt when we trust our Creator.

As St. Paul says,

Nothing has befallen us that isn't common to humankind.

Be honest with your Creator,

– You can't alienate God.

Amen

ⁱ *Who Are You.* The Who, Pete Townsend, lyricist

ⁱⁱ <https://genius.com/The-who-who-are-you-lyrics>

^{iv} *A Medieval Morning Prayer*, The Clerk of Oxford

^v Marcia Reynolds Psy.D., Wander Woman, How to Make A New, Meaningful Friendship
5 Steps for Creating Strong Personal Connections; Posted Sep 19, 2015