What Do Our Prayers Sound Like to God?

It's often said that faith is about a relationship.

That is, it's not about religion or rituals. It's not about belief or membership.

It's about a *personal* relationship, it's often said.

So if faith is about a personal relationship, then that means prayer is a conversation.

Prayer is more than an internal monologue. Prayer is not a spiritual soliloquy.

Prayer is a conversation.

And that got me to thinking: if prayer is a conversation, then what does prayer sound like on God's end of the conversation?

We know what prayer sounds like on our end of the conversation. We pray here every Sunday, and there's at least 2 or 3 of you who actually do it some other time during the week.

So we know what prayer sounds like on our end of the conversation, but lately I've been wondering what the conversation must sound like on the other end.

I think it might sound something like this...

I want you to imagine that I'm God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit standing before you. For some of you that will require a greater leap of imagination than it does for me.

(Picking up the phone)

Hello? Speaking.

This isn't a State Dinner, no need for the fancy titles. Just call me *Abba*. No, not like the band. Yes, 'Dancing Queen' is a catchy song.

(To the Son and Holy Spirit)
He's getting distracted already.

What's that you say? Please. Give. You. Something. *Anything*. ***To say***.
(Listening)
Hmmm, well, did you even read the text? A little bit. While you ate your *Lucky Charms*, I see.

So when do you need this by? Today? That kind of puts the 3 of us behind the 8 ball up here. What time today? 8:30?! But that's in 5 minutes.

Alright, we'll see what we can do for you, but listen Reverend Perry you can't keep coming to us at the last minute like this. We appreciate the promise, but that's what you said last Sunday.

No, there's no need for a stack of bibles, Dennis. It's just if we keep bailing you out at the last minute like this, people will think you always shoot from the hip.
'Having the time of your life...?' I'm sorry, I don't follow Dennis.
Well, I can dance and jive, but I don't know what that has to do with your sermon.
(To the Son and Holy Spirit)
He's getting distracted again.

Oh, the ushers are calling for you? Okay, Dennis. After a while crocodile to you too.

Yeah, man upstairs here. Talk to me.

You what? Congratulations! Good for you!

Really, on 4th and goal? Perfect spiral, leaping catch? Home-opener? Wow, that's really something. I bet they were all on their feet.

Look, that's just great kid, and I think I speak for all 3 of us when I say I appreciate the thought.

But I didn't do that.

Nope...nuh, uh, nope.

Nope, it was all you, and maybe a little of lady luck. Yep, okay then. Bye.

(To the Son and Holy Spirit)

I hate football season. What? Well, that's true. It is better now that Tebow's not playing. Thank goodness we got him off the field.

Yes Margaret, I'm here.

You were just wondering again? No problem. Anytime then. Bye-bye.

This is your Father in Heaven. Well actually it's with an -a. I don't mean to quibble but it sort of has the opposite meaning with an -o.

Yeah, -a, h-a-l-l-o-w-e-d.

Anyway, what were you saying?

Hold on, just a sec. Wait, wait, wait- I think what you mean to say is '*Thy* Kingdom come.'

No, not '*my* Kingdom come.'

No, it's *thy* Kingdom as in *my* Kingdom not, you know, *thy* Kingdom.

Well, you're supposed to say *thy* Kingdom because it's *my* Kingdom you're talking about.

If it was *thy* Kingdom then you'd say *my* Kingdom.

Look, put it this way: you're not getting a kingdom.

(Listening)

I don't think that makes me an 'Indian giver.' Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you.

Why don't you just continue.

'My will be done...?'

See, again, I think what you meant to say...oh, don't worry about it. Look though, you've got to slow down.

Yeah, you're talking way too fast- I may be omnipotent but I didn't catch anything after 'daily bread.'

(To the Son and Holy Spirit)

This is your fault you know. Did you have to teach this to them?

What were you supposed to do?

They asked you how, huh?

Okay, but I'm telling you- every time- they just race through it like Stepford wives on speed.

(Listening)

Uh, huh...'and the power and the glory...'

And forever is exactly what it feels like.

(Hangs up)

Amen.

'Oh God?' Other than the Renaissance Fair, no one's addressed me like that in centuries.

Yeah, I heard you, 'oh God.' There's no need to keep repeating yourself. And why are you panting? Sounds creepy.

(To the Son and the Holy Spirit)

What's that? You don't think they're praying?

'Not exactly.' What does that mean?

Uh huh...I see. You learned a lot while you were down there, in-car-nate. We'll just leave this one alone. Five's a crowd.

This is God.

(Listening)

Uh, huh. Okay. Well, did you read the contract? Yeah, the contract. This whole 'blessing' thing it comes with fine print. No, trust me, it's all there.

Hmm, hmm- the one on the mount. No, it's the next page.

Yeah, we know you guys don't actually read it. That's why we practically numbered it for you like the old one.

Listen, as I was saying, this blessing thing- if you're serious about it you're going to have sign on to take care of the poor for starters and make peace

obviously and...eventually work your way down hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

(Listening)

What's that?

Those don't poll well in the battlegrounds.

I see. Alright, well you called on me. What do you want to do?

Like I said, I'd love to bless America, but that comes with the contract.

(Listening)

What's that? Your campaign manager says to put the contract off until after the election.

The second term, did you say?

Alright but why are you asking me to bless America now?

It makes the people feel good. I guess it always did.

What's that? Yes, as a matter of fact, I did see your campaign ad. Well, the optics were impressive, but to be honest, I thought the part where you said 'All *true* believers approve this message' was a little heavy handed.

Well, I know the other guy's always saying I'm on his side, but can't you just see how everything would be better if you all stopped saying I'm against the other?

What's that? You feel like you're just being used for people's pet agendas?

Well, if it makes you feel better, I know the feeling, Mr President.

The teleprompter's ready for you? Okay, good luck in November. Look, it's not that I don't appreciate you asking, but, no thank you, I'm not registered.

Heavenly Father? This is he.
Oh hi, it's you again.

(To the Son and Holy Spirit)
It's dear old Mrs Smith from the ladies prayer group.

Sorry Mrs Smith. No, I'm listening.
What's that? You pray for the poor? Well, good. I mean, that's a no-brainer for us.

Yes, world peace? Excellent thing to pray for Mrs Smith, the Son's all about peace.

(Listening)
Uh, huh. I think Mike Huckabee looks like a nice man too, Mrs. Smith.
Come again? The. starving. children. in. Africa- you never forget them do you Mrs Smith?

What's that you say?
'That all people might know the Love and Mercy of Christ.' Well, that's nice, Mrs Smith. I'll let him know you were thinking of him.

(Listening)
What was that? 'Except...' *which* people...did you say Mrs Smith?

Well, yes, some of them are bad drivers, Mrs Smith, but surely not all of them. Okay, settle down, Mrs Smith. Why don't we leave the love and mercy up to him okay?

Oh, you want to come to know me better? Well, that sounds wonderful, but what about you Mrs Smith?

What's going on with you?

You know you never share anything about yourself.

Mrs Smith? Mrs Smith? Hello? Mrs. Smith?

You still there?

(To the Son and Holy Spirit)

She fell asleep. I don't understand.

It always just talk, talk, talk and then they hang up before we can answer them, or they just tell us what they think we want to hear and who wouldn't drift off.

Gracious God? The one and only. How can we take your order?

Just kidding.

Oh well, you're welcome. Food's the least I can do.

Uh huh, lemme pretend I'm not all-knowing...and 'the hands that have prepared it.' Sign. Yep, got it. Consider it done.

(Hangs up)

(To the Son and Holy Spirit)

You know this is about half our call volume per day.

I know, they just say it by rote! Like machine.

(Listening)

Push it to voicemail? That might be good idea.

From whom all blessings flow? You got the One.

What's that?

Those new Cadillacs are nice, aren't they?

Uh huh, I see. So, how much is your salary right now? Wow, sounds like you robbed Peter and Paul both. Really? That was all book sales.

(To the Son)

Yeah, I think he did say 'ask and you will receive' but you know, it's like real estate, context is everything.

Well, sure, I can't argue with that- a nice smile and great teeth do help make a good impression but...that's not really...well, of course, I want you to be a better you but...

Look...Mr...? Osteen is it?

Look, Mr Osteen- oh, I can call you Joel?- look, Joel, you sound like a nice guy and I wish you all the best, but I think you've got the wrong number. No, I don't think he's interested in endorsing your new book.

No, I won't tell anyone.

Okay then.

You keep on the sunny side too.

Yes? Father, Son and Spirit? All present and accounted for.
Can you repeat that, ma'am?

(Listening)
He thinks he's brilliant, hilarious and sexy?
He calls it his 'Holy Trinity,' does he? I should think so he's full of himself.

You want me to...? Humble him?
And how did you think we might accomplish that ma'am? Well, gosh, ma'am, that sounds awfully painful. Besides, ma'am, it would violate at least several commandments.

Alright, well we'll see what we can do.

Not at all.
Thanks for calling on us, Mrs Micheli.

Hello?
Yeah, I'm here. No really, I'm here.
Don't worry, I'm not a huge fan of the ones who do have me on speed dial.

Yeah, it has been a long time. No, don't worry, no hard feelings. No seriously, I'm not keeping track or anything like that.

Well, the important thing is you're here now. So, let's talk.

(Listening)

Absolutely he's a great kid, couldn't agree more.

Now hold on...no...it's not your fault.

If you'd only been there...? No, you can't blame yourself. Things happen, good and bad, that's the way the world works.

What?!

Of course not! Where'd you get an idea like that? That's not who I am. I don't work like that!

I would never do that to him to punish you for that thing you did back then. I can't believe you're still holding on to that. I forgave you for that as soon as you did it, and your son- like I said- he's a great kid. If you can believe it, I love him as much as you do.

Yeah...yeah, I know he's in the hospital. In fact, we were just there. You must've missed us. Yeah, we heard what the doctor said. Of course we'll be there with him.

Now, there you go blaming yourself again.

No, it's never too late to call...it's just, he's such a great kid. I just would've liked it if you'd told me about him earlier.

Hey, yeah, I'm here.

Of course I understand why you're angry. I'd be angry too if I were you.

You're right it's not fair. It's horrible.

Go ahead...no, I'd rather you just be honest and real with me. No, you're not going to hurt my feelings. I've been called worse. No, I have. Just last night on *Bill Maher*.

Say whatever you want, be angry- that's okay.

But listen, Sarah: I haven't done this to you.
No, never, not in a million years.

(Listening)

'Testing your faith' in me? No, of course not! What kind of sick person would I be if I gave this to you just to...? Where'd you get a twisted idea like that?

Well, church people say lots of things, Sarah. They don't mean any harm. It's just...they don't know what to say to someone with cancer.

(Listening)

Well, take *my* word for it. I didn't do this to you. No, I'd die for you.

Then why is this happening to you?
I mean, I don't think now is really the time for explanations.

Someday you will be, I promise.

What was that?
Far away from you? No!

No, I haven't turned my back on you! What are you talking about? I couldn't be more present.

Think of all your friends who've rallied to support you. Yeah, and that nurse who takes the time to talk with you and your doctor. She's great right? Just because they don't have wings doesn't mean it's not all *me*, right there with you.

It's fine- you can be angry.

No, I'm not going anywhere.

This is me.

We're here.

Yeah, we heard. I'm so sorry.

It's okay, take your time.

Wait, back up, 'need him in heaven?'

No, no, no- look, I know it might make you feel better right now, but it definitely won't later. Thinking like that will make you hate me later, and you'd be right to hate me.

Besides, it's just not true. I love you and him. Why would you think I'd ever do that to you?

(Listening)

What? 'If it be my will'?

No, you're not hearing me. I want what you want. Your wants come from my wants- especially for him.

Yeah, I understand.

No, I know everyone says they understand when they don't have a clue.

But I do.

Understand.

Yeah.

Well, I lost a child too.

(Listening)

I see.

Well, if you ever change your mind and do want to talk to me again, I'll always be here.

You still there?

Hello?

How about you just start and wherever you begin will be the beginning?

What's that?

You don't know how to pray? Well, no need to beat yourself up about it. Of course you don't how to pray as you ought. You're just a kid. Fifth grade, right?

Besides, take it from me, kid, no one does.

No, no one.

Nope, I'm telling you no one knows how to pray as they ought.

They pray for things they don't really want but they think I want to hear. They pray for superficial things or they phone their prayers in without thinking or they try to manipulate me like prayer is a magic genie lamp.

I can't even begin to tell you how many people come to me with some really messed up ideas of who I am.

So trust me, kid, you're not the only one. No one knows how to pray as they ought.

(Listening)

Well, it's because I'm God and you guys are not. Let's face it, you guys can barely scratch the surface when you try to talk *about* me much less when you try to talk *to* me.

No one can really know how to speak to me except me. So no one knows how to pray as they ought. And you want to know what, kid? None of that matters.

How can it not matter?

Well, because...

Uh, huh...well, you shouldn't get too hung up on those words kid. Sure, it's about a personal relationship. Absolutely, it's a conversation.

But everyone always forgets the relationship you're really talking about is my relationship. What you guys call Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So, yeah, it's like a conversation, but it's our conversation with each other. It's not a conversation you initiate. It's a conversation you're invited into.

What's that?

Well, of course it seems silly to to think of me 'as a distant Power up there' who can give you some magical help if you're lucky enough to get my attention and get me on your side.

First thing you gotta do, kid, is scrap all those pictures in your head of a man upstairs that you can sometimes get through to in order to get something you need.

What's the problem with it?

Well, the problem's that it's not really prayer at all. It's like those guys who tried to build that tower to me.

(Listening)
Well, you should read it- it's toward the beginning.
But as I was saying, that's not really prayer.

Prayer isn't putting pressure on me or persuading me.
Prayer isn't getting my attention or calling on someone far away from you.
Prayer isn't flattering me or changing my mood towards you- my mood never changes toward you.
(Listening)
Well, because I never change.
Look, here's the thing: prayer isn't *you* speaking *to me*.

(Listening)

Yeah, I realize lots of people think that, but listen up, kid, this is important. Write this down if it helps. If I was going to preach a sermon this would be the main point:

Prayer is God speaking to God.

Now repeat it back to me so I know you got it right:

Prayer is God speaking to God. Good.

(Listening)

What do you mean that doesn't make any sense?

Whenever you pray- sincerely pray- it's me praying in you.

(Listening)

Exactly, I make the prayer.

Everyone thinks of me as the One who either does or doesn't answer prayer, but really it's more important to realize that I'm the One who authors prayer.

That's why it doesn't matter that no one knows how to pray as they ought and why everyone should go ahead and pray anyway- because whenever you do it's me praying in you.

Even your worst, most awkward prayer turns you into Holy Ground.

What's that?

Well, I didn't mean to make your head hurt.

Look, the point is prayer isn't a human activity at all. It's the work of me in you.

What?

It's possible because I'm not 'up there.' There are no upstairs and- don't tell any Baptists- but I'm not even a man.

No, no I'm closer to you than you are to yourself. When you pray- however you pray- it's not that you pray *to* me. It's that <u>you're prayed in</u>, *by* me.

(Listening)
You still don't understand?
Alright, well, let's get back to the reason you were calling in the first place.

(Listening)
You heard your parents fighting last night?
Well, sure, that would be scary for anyone your age.
You had to ask your teacher what 'divorce' meant, huh?
I'm sorry kid. No...no, you're not too old to cry.

You see, what I was saying before, kid...the way this works is that you wanting your parents' marriage to heal? Yeah, that comes from me wanting your parents' marriage to heal.

Your desire for them to be happy, I gave that to you. I want what you want.
Or, I guess it makes more sense to say you want it because it's what I want.

Even now, kid, you think you're praying to me, but it's really me praying in you. Praying so deeply you probably can't even hear it can you?

What was that?

Well, no, me praying in you doesn't guarantee they'll stay together.

(Listening)

Well, because it's not magic.

Your Mom and your Dad- they were free to find each other and they're free to...if that's what they choose to do.

I know, I know- but then it wouldn't be the kind of world where you're free to love each other or free to love me.

Like I love.

(Listening)

What good is prayer then? If you might not get what you want?

Well, Jason- it's Jason right?

Well Jason, I guess that's something you have to decide for yourself.

But if, when you pray, you remember it's me praying *in* you then you never have to worry that I'm against you, or that I'm ignoring you, or that I'm punishing you.

(Listening)

No, never.

And when you pray, if it's me praying in you, then that means no matter what it might seem like, no matter what's going on- you're never alone.

I'm with you.

Well, I know maybe that doesn't sound like much to you.

But trust me, it's all you need.