

Journey Together Nashville Conversation Guide

These conversations about spiritual practices were designed to be easy to lead with the people in which you're already connected. Instead of going to church to have faith conversations, you can bring the faith conversations to your Zoom happy hours, backyard gatherings, or roommate discussions. **Reach out to one of the authors below!** We'd love to hear how you use this resource, what you think, and/or help you get started.



Experiencing God in Meals

Katie Minnis has been part of Journey Together since 2018. She is the Pastoral Fellow at West End United Methodist Church, where she gets to explore spiritual formation, congregational care and programming for all ages. She graduated from Vanderbilt Divinity School in 2020. She has experience in writing faith-based material for youth and young adults, and loves having opportunities to connect people with scripture in new ways. Katie enjoys cooking and finds such joy in sharing meals with others. *Reach out to Katie at kminnis@westendumc.org.*



Experiencing God in Movement

Quint Minnis lives with his wife Katie in Nashville, Tennessee. He is an HR Solutions Expert with Asurion. He is passionate about exercise, volunteering, skateboarding, and music. Let him know if you need to know more about automotive maintenance, communication ethics, or Pokémon. You can find Quint serving as a background coordinator at Journey to The Table. *Reach out to Quint at quint.minnis@gmail.com.*



Experiencing God in Simplicity

Geoff Parker regularly looks at shelves and closets as opportunities to purge his home and his mind of unneeded things. He and his wife, Nancy, have a small home with a big backyard where they enjoy spending time with friends, their dog Lex, and working in the garden. Geoff recently started a new job leading a nonprofit that seeks to end homelessness in their community, filling a special place in his life for working with small nonprofits. *Reach out to Geoff at geoffrson8768@gmail.com.*



Experiencing God in Advocacy

Taylor Davenport has always been passionate about finding solutions for things that seemed wrong-- from sending her allowance to missionaries in Africa as a child to organizing "One Day Without Shoes" as a teenager-- but she didn't know she was an advocate until building genuine relationships with people different than herself. She still has so much to learn. She works as a Volunteer & Communications Manager at a local nonprofit. Taylor enjoys watching college football, driving through Sonic for strawberry limeades, and listening to vinyl records. *Reach out to Taylor at tay.davenport11@gmail.com.*



Experiencing God in Prayer

Nancy Parker is a creative and energetic pastor in the United Methodist Church in Nashville, TN. She frequently breaks into song and laughter and her deepest vocation is bringing people together from different cultures and backgrounds for conversation, music, and/or spiritual practice. Nancy has served as the Methodist Affiliated Chaplain at Vanderbilt and pastor for the student organization Vandy Wesley since 2016. She has also been an associate pastor at West End UMC since 2013. She has a Bachelor of Arts in music from Florida State University and a Masters of Divinity from Vanderbilt Divinity School. *Reach out to Nancy at nparker@westendumc.org.*





BEFORE YOU GATHER:

Watch Video: Quarantine Cooking Proves Fun for the Whole Family
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiKVJIn-lbE>

EXPERIENCING GOD IN MEALS

REFLECTION

In this scripture, Jesus has recently died, and the disciples, being in a situation that is new, scary, and unknown, went back to the basics: they went fishing. It was something they did before their lives turned upside down, after saying “yes” to following Jesus. While they are fishing, someone calls out to them from the shore, asking them if they were having any luck. Upon hearing they had not, the figure on the shore suggests they try casting in a new way. It was still familiar to them but looked a little different. Once they realize it is Jesus, they haul in their overflowing nets and share in a meal with Jesus.

Jesus cooked them breakfast!

There is something so comforting about sharing a meal with those we love, especially when so many other things seem unknown.

And often, it can even be more comforting when someone you care about cooks for you. My grandmother makes a special dish we call “Nannie’s Noodles.” When people are sick in her community, she makes them noodles, and as she makes them, she prays for healing and nourishment for whoever partakes. Fixing this food for others is a sacred practice, full of love.

READ JOHN 21:1-14

Later, Jesus himself appeared again to his disciples at the Sea of Tiberias. This is how it happened: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus^[a]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee’s sons, and two other disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter told them, “I’m going fishing.” They said, “We’ll go with you.” They set out in a boat, but throughout the night they caught nothing. ⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples didn’t realize it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus called to them, “Children, have you caught anything to eat?”

They answered him, “No.” ⁶ He said, “Cast your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” So they did, and there were so many fish that they couldn’t haul in the net. ⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard it was the Lord, he wrapped his coat around himself (for he was naked) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they weren’t far from shore, only about one hundred yards.

⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire there, with fish on it, and some bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you’ve just caught.” ¹¹ Simon Peter got up and pulled the net to shore. It was full of large fish, one hundred fifty-three of them. Yet the net hadn’t torn, even with so many fish. ¹² Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples could bring themselves to ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread, and gave it to them. He did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

QUESTIONS

Sharing in a meal together or cooking with those you love is one way to feel connected when everything seems to be upside down.

- Share a special experience with someone(s) you love over a meal one of you made
- Why do you think preparing food for others can be a spiritual practice?
- How can we find meals that are made with us in mind, restorative?
- In what ways have sharing meals made you feel connected during this time of pandemic?
- Christians participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion, which at its core, is sharing a meal in community. How can any meal become holy?
- What things can you do while cooking or sharing a meal with others to be intentionally sacred? (Making food items that remind you of someone special, praying for nourishment or healing? Why do you make things a specific way because of someone’s preference or dietary needs?)

PRACTICE

Make or take food to someone in the next month. As you prepare it, or pick it up, spend time reflecting on beauty that comes with sharing a meal. How is this sacred for you?



BEFORE YOU GATHER:

Watch: Move Like a Boss on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/8Fw405ckfEU>

EXPERIENCING GOD IN MOVEMENT

READ GENESIS 1:26-31

26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." **29** God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. **30** And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. **31** God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning the sixth day

REFLECTION

In Genesis 1, God states that our bodies are made in the image of God. God made us to be active, both in mind and body. And, God gave us the gift of the world to live and move in.

Exercise- It is often a touchy subject. It's something that we don't like to talk about, and many don't like to do but, movement is important. As you saw in the video, regular movement throughout the day not only helps lower the risk of various health concerns it also is a way we can connect with ourselves and God.

Not only did God create your dashing good looks(image), but also all the functions, muscle fibers and the cardiovascular system that keeps your body doing what it needs to do! On a bigger level, God created the world around us for us to explore.

Being healthy is giving yourself space to be yourself by moving throughout the day. It doesn't mean you have to run a marathon or go to the gym and lift a bunch of heavy weights. It can be as simple as getting up throughout the day to take a walk around the house or your neighborhood, or even just stretching your body. You can be healthy and never go to a gym. And if you do go, go for you & your health. Try to not compare yourself to others who are there. We are all on our own, unique fitness journey.

Personally, I find it helps to reduce stress, gives you space to think/ clear your mind, it allows you to focus on a task, and it can give you time to listen to music. Moving your body also shows you what your body needs. It shows you if you need more sleep, more rest, more nourishment. It is a way of having a conversation with your body & God.

QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be healthy?
- What fears and hesitations do you have about exercise?
- How can you move your body in a way that can bring you joy and not discomfort? What does your body tell you?
- What things have caused you issues in the past? Injuries? Bad experiences?
- How can you experience God through exercise?

PRACTICE

Set a timer on your phone to go off each hour to remind you to move your body for at least 5 minutes. This can look like walking around the house, strolling around the block, doing light yoga or stretching. Just move!

Take note of the effects taking these moving breaks have on your mood, health, relationships and energy level. Share what you learn with friends



BEFORE YOU GATHER:

Watch these clips of Sam Harris from a documentary, *Minimalism: A Documentary About the Important Things*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynC96kXC6k4>

EXPERIENCING GOD IN SIMPLICITY

READ TOGETHER

I love Black Friday shopping. I love the way it was back in the *good 'ole days* when people lined up in front of a store in the pre-dawn hours until a store manager unlocked the doors and let everyone come storming in, trying to reach the same few stacks of products. I started Black Friday shopping in my twenties, when I couldn't afford many purchases just for fun. This meant I picked one thing I would get great use from. I went to the store that had a deal on that item, waited for it, and went straight to it when the doors opened, all with a smile on my face. Maybe I picked up a DVD on my way out of the store, after others had picked what they wanted from the discounted shelves. Because I knew I couldn't have everything, it caused me to appreciate the thing I was working for more. It also generated a lot of strange looks from other Black Friday shoppers who were stressed with the process of trying to get everything on their list while I stood in the long checkout lines with only a couple items.

For me, Black Friday shopping was a way to appreciate simplicity. I learned to value the thing I purchased, without being concerned about all the other things in the store. Being freed from that concern allowed me to enjoy the experience of getting the thing I valued. We have also seen that Black Friday shopping can become dangerous. When desires to acquire things go to an extreme, people get hurt.

DISCUSS SCRIPTURE

Matthew, chapter 6 is favorite for those of us who value a mentality and a practice of simplicity. Split the chapter into these sections and have someone read and then discuss each section, briefly.

Matthew 6, verses: 1-4; 5-15; 16-18; 19-24; 25-34

What themes arise from each section?

QUESTIONS

- What things distract you from things you would prefer to give your attention?
- Is it okay to own pricey possessions?
- Whether it's a rowboat or a yacht, how do you decide what to purchase? What people, thoughts, or spiritual practices influence your decision?
- How have you tried to free yourself from distractions, or what have you seen others try? What were the results?
- Living more simply gives you more freedom: more time, more focus, or more energy. How would you choose to use that time, focus, or energy?
- How do the activities you choose reflect God's love for you? (Check out Micah 6:8 or Matthew 22: 36-29 for ideas.)

REFLECTION

God calls us to put our energy, our time, our thoughts, and our passion into what matters most. In the video, Sam Harris talks about how we often move from one stimulus to the next- things we might have previously considered distractions, that we now think of as required for everyday life.

Simplicity is the mentality and regular practice of freeing our mind, our time, our energy, and anything else we may be devoting to these less-important things. When we consider how we might spend that time, energy, and thought in a way that connects us with God it can also be a spiritual practice. How we do that is as unique and creative as the people who start a practice of simplicity. Some enjoy a more extreme version of getting rid of things like the minimalists in the documentary. Some start a practice of meditation to focus their mind as Sam Harris introduces in the video. I have incrementally gotten rid of many things over several years, and continue a regular practice of getting rid of things by giving them to friends who need them, donating them locally, or repurposing items I no longer value. In exchange, I've been able to prioritize time with family and friends, quiet time for myself, and have cultivated a more open attitude for giving. You get to choose how you may cultivate simplicity in your life, and what you do with the energy you set free.

PRACTICE

Take time to consider a few items you own or will be acquiring. What influences contributed to acquiring it? to keeping it? Are those influences the things you want to prioritize? As you think about each item, does it distract you from your priorities, or free you for them? Do you still want to keep it/ purchase it?

Make a few decisions to purchase or not purchase an item, or to keep or give away an item with these things in mind. Take note of how it feels during the decision and afterwards. You might want to record these thoughts in a journal or discuss them with a friend.



BEFORE YOU GATHER:

Listen to this TEDTalk by Dr. Nita Mosby Tyler: https://www.ted.com/talks/nita_mosby_tyler_want_a_more_just_world_be_an_unlikely_ally/transcript#t-35848

EXPERIENCING GOD IN ADVOCACY

READ TOGETHER

Read this passage from Ibram X. Kendi's book *How to Be an Antiracist*. In this section, Kendi describes the Gospel proclaimed by Tom Skinner, a young evangelist of Black liberation theology.

Jesus wasn't in the Rotary Club and he wasn't a policeman. Jesus was a "radical revolutionary, with hair on his chest and dirt under his fingernails." [This] idea of Jesus was born of and committed to a new reading of the gospel. "Any gospel that does not...speak to the issue of enslavement" and "injustice" and "inequality—any gospel that does not want to go where people are hungry and poverty-stricken and set them free in the name of Jesus Christ—is not the gospel." Back in the days of Jesus, "there was a system working just like today. But Jesus was dangerous. He was dangerous because he was changing the system."

READ ROMANS 12:9-10, 15

"Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ... Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."

QUESTIONS

- How much should we speak out for others? How much should we create spaces where people experiencing marginalization can speak out for themselves?
- In what ways do you need an ally? In what ways can you be an ally to others?
- Do you think we need to be in close relationship with others to truly be an advocate for and with them?
- What injustices do you feel deep in your heart? What injustices do you need to learn more about or have more empathy for?
- Should people who are passionate about certain issues take on fighting for them? Or do we all have a responsibly to advocate for justice in every way we can?
- Which type of advocacy is most aligned with your gifts? (Talking with friends and family members, using social media, attending a march/rally, making a phone call to your congress person, writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper, hosting a fundraiser, face-to-face meetings with people in power, etc.)
- How is being an ally different than being a political person?
- Nita Mosby Tyler said, "We have to fight injustice with a consciousness of grace." What does that mean to you? How can/does advocacy connect us with The Divine?

REFLECT ON TOGETHER

Revisit this quote from the TEDTalk titled [Want a more just world? Be an unlikely ally](https://www.ted.com/talks/nita_mosby_tyler_want_a_more_just_world_be_an_unlikely_ally) by Dr. Nita Mosby Tyler.

You know, we can stand up for issues, weigh in and advocate even when it seems like the issue has nothing to do with us. And actually, those are the issues that are most compelling. And sure, people will have no idea why you are there, but that's why those of us facing injustice must be willing to accept the help. You know, we have to fight injustice with a consciousness of grace. When white guys stand up to fight for the liberation of Black and Brown people, Black and Brown people will have to be willing to accept their help. And I know that's complicated, but this is collective work and it requires everyone to be all in.

PRACTICE

Listen to your neighbors. If you're already connected with a nonprofit or advocacy organization, reach out and ask what more you can do. If not, Nashville Organized for Action and Hope (NOAH) is a great place to start. They have task forces on Affordable Housing, Education, and Economic Equity



BEFORE YOU GATHER:

Watch these clips of Fr. James Martin talking about our desire to pray and the prayer of the examine: <https://youtu.be/N5q8X3LgL7M>

EXPERIENCING GOD IN PRAYER

READ TOGETHER

Read the following excerpt from Richard Foster's chapter on Prayer in Celebration of Discipline:

Perhaps the most astonishing characteristic of Jesus' praying is that when he prayed for others he never concluded by saying "If it be thy will. " Nor did the apostles or prophets when they were praying for others.... Their praying was so positive that it often took the form of a direct, authoritative command: "Walk," "Be well," "Stand up." I saw that when praying for others there was evidently no room for indecisive, tentative, half-hoping, "If it be thy will" prayers.

There is, of course, a proper time and place to pray, "If it be thy will." First, in the prayer of guidance it is the great yearning of our hearts to know the will of God. "What is your will?" "What would please you?" "What would advance your kingdom upon the earth?" This is the kind of searching prayer that should permeate our entire life experience. And then in the prayer of relinquishment, we are committed to letting go of our will whenever it conflicts with the will and way of God.... At such times we must follow the lead of our Master who in the garden prayed, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). (Foster, p. 37)

REFLECTION/ QUESTIONS

In the book, *Primary Speech*, Ann and Barry Ulanov write:

"Everyone prays. People pray whether or not they call it prayer. We pray every time we ask for help, understanding, or strength, in or out of religion."

Assuming this is true, how do you pray?

Take a moment and write on your phone or paper why you pray. Think about the different ways you pray. Discuss them out loud.

Are there some reasons and ways named more than once? Are there patterns? Is there a noticeable preference in the group for a particular way of prayer?

How do you relate to "if it be thy will" in your prayer life? How do you relate to the disciples' direct prayers?

Would you be willing to share an experience that comes to mind about a time when you prayed directly or a time you prayed "if it be thy will"?

PRACTICE

Let's take a moment to practice intercessory prayer. Intercession is "the action of intervening on behalf of another." Intercessory prayer is simply bringing the prayers and concerns of another to God. It can take great courage to simply share your prayers aloud to a group. Yet, in order for people to grow in trust with one another, it is important to be vulnerable and open yourself up to the group. Your group might already feel comfortable with one another in sharing those concerns, yet it can still be difficult to truly share what is going on in our lives. Invite the group members to share with these open questions:

- What is something in your life right now that you need God's transformation or healing presence?
- Is there something at work or life that you need a little support?
- Do you have a life transition or challenge you'd like God's help navigating? For the spiritual practice section, have one person write down the request.

After everyone is done sharing. Have each person in the group pray for the person to their right by name, specifically for their need.