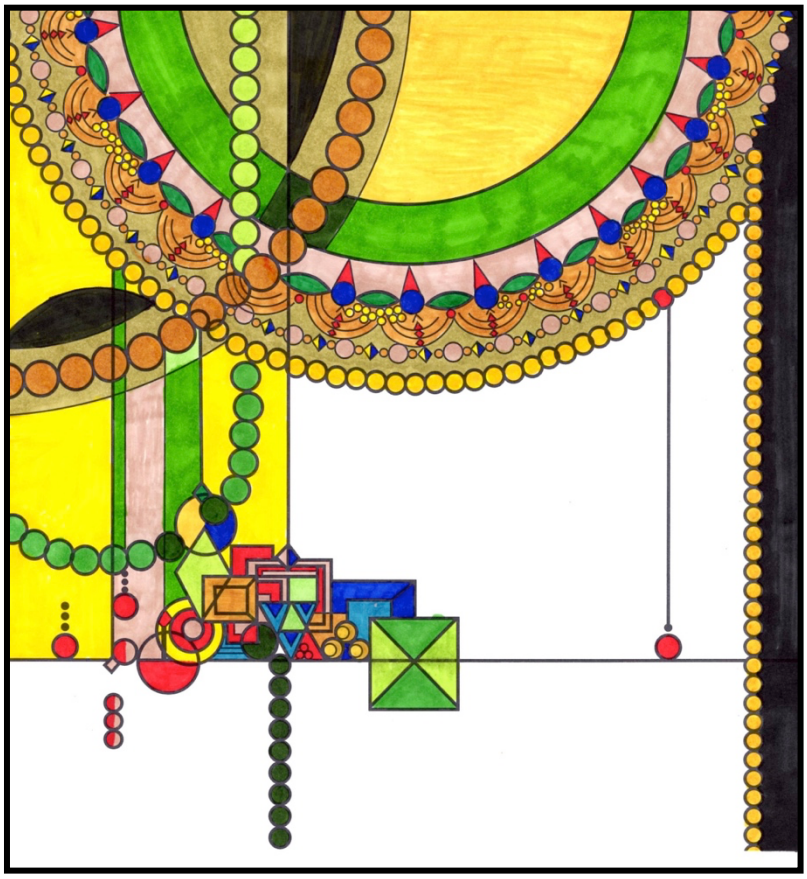
# DANGLING CONVERSATION

## *A Commentary on Prayer that Seems to Go Nowhere*

**Suspension –** Left hanging by a thread.
**Adaptation of Frank Lloyd Wright "Liberty" Magazine Cover, Jewelry Shop Window 1927**

*"And I can only kiss your shadow, I cannot feel your hand,*
*You're a stranger now unto me,*
*Lost in the dangling conversation.*
*And the superficial sighs, In the borders of our lives."*
*–Simon & Garfunkel*



In baseball, batting a thousand (1.000) is a perfect batting average. This means that a baseball player is successful at advancing to at least first base in every attempt at bat. Even the player who has the highest batting average in Major League Baseball History, Ty Cobb, only batted .366 during the 24 seasons he played. I know I'm far from that when it comes to stepping up to the plate to pray and being able to do so successfully without my mind wandering mind or falling asleep. I speculate I'm about a .250 or lower. This means that out of four attempts to pray, I only finish my prayer one time. And after thinking about it, my average is probably much lower. Not impressive considering the years of practice I've had.

My intent never wavers. I feel the need to talk to God, to draw closer in my relationship with him through prayer. After all, I know that prayer is a vital avenue of communication for my faith life. I am concerned. I am lonely. I am grateful. I have a request. It's time to pray. The conversation starts appropriately enough, "Heavenly Father, I come to you…" Things go well for the first two to three minutes – at the most. Then it starts. As the minutes accumulate, so do the distractions. The tete-a-tete ends and our conversation is left unfinished and dangling. My mind is lost. I can picture God fading into the shadows as I start to disconnect.

What frustrates me the most in times like this is the insignificance and pettiness of the thoughts that infiltrate my mind. What should I cook for dinner? Did I turn off the faucet? When does that sale end? Here I am, in what's supposed to be an intimate conversation with the Creator of the universe, and I'm thinking about the low price of chickens at the supermarket. Connection is now lost. I've hung up completely.

Then there are the times I vow to thank God for all my blessings as I lie down to go to sleep. Different reason…same result: I fall asleep. The next morning I wake up feeling guilty that I couldn't stay awake. The connection grew faint as sleep overpowered me. The line went dead. It's just another dangling conversation.

*Dangling Conversation* was one of four singles released from the *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary & Thyme* album recorded by Simon & Garfunkel. Written by Paul Simon, it's a haunting picture of two people who have lost the ability to communicate and their relationship is suffering. They vaguely see shadows of each other as their connection grows faint. So close but yet so far.

I try not to be so hard on myself about striking out at prayer attempts. I don't think God is impressed by the amount of time spent in prayer. What's most important is the desire I feel to speak to him. I certainly don't want my efforts to be rote or superficial. Not something I have to do – something I want to do because the desire is overwhelming.

Another tactic is to resort to comparison to ease my guilt and shame. Why should I feel badly about not praying? Even the disciples fell asleep when Jesus asked them to watch and pray:

> *Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me. "Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. "Watch and pray*

> *so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done. "When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. (Matthew 26:39-43 NIV)*

Well, if the disciples did it, it's okay for me to do it, too, isn't it? Sure, they were tired and under intense pressure and scrutiny. Following Jesus can be a difficult and daunting journey. After all, tension was mounting as time was drawing nearer to Judas' betrayal and Jesus' crucifixion. What is ironic to me is that prior to this night in Gethsemane, Simon (Peter) had vehemently voiced his intention to do great things, even go to prison and death with Jesus. Now, all Jesus tells him is to watch and pray and he falls asleep. Many dangling conversations that night I presume.

Picture this: A group of bedraggled men huddled under a tree. The Son of God says watch and pray. He comes back on three separate occasions and finds them sleeping – not praying. Did Jesus shake his head in frustration? Was he saddened by their inability to do what he asked of them? I can imagine a dismayed tone in his voice, "Are you *still* sleeping and resting? Could you men not keep watch with me for *one* hour?" Scripture doesn't give us a clue how Jesus felt. What Scripture does tell us is that when Jesus walked this earth, he dealt with disappointment. Even his own family and people did not accept him as the Son of God. I think he was disappointed in his friends.

I believe God is pleased when we pray rather than disappointed with our dangling conversations. He created us and knows full well that sometimes the prayer connection is cut short. He understands us better than we could ever understand ourselves. We should, however, persevere in this faith discipline.

So, transform your thoughts into prayers and live in the awareness that God is with you. He hears the prayers of the righteous and yes, he forgives those dangling conversations.