

## **Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.**

**Sunday August 1, 2021. "Dear God: Honest Prayers to a God Who Listens. The search begins with personal honesty."**

### **I Intro.**

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We're halfway through 2021 and fully committed to gathering in person. A growing group of familiar and new faces join us each Sunday. Our children's, youth areas and coffee spot have been fully open also and we're seeing a good response. We're so encouraged by your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions, please pass them our way. We know the future is still uncertain, but we are committed to making our virtual congregation as central to NCC as our in person group.

### **II Sunday.**

We began a really interesting new series Sunday based on the book, "***Dear God: Honest Prayers to a God Who Listens***". This book was written by a person who grew up in a religious home, married outside her religion, lost her faith, and then through a series of brutally honest personal prayers she found her faith again. And those letters were gathered into a book to chronicle this spiritual journey. And we are using the author's journey in and out of faith as a guide for our own spiritual journey. This will be an interesting series and we hope you join us for it.

So, some questions to kick off this series.

**What has your spiritual journey been like? What have been the high and low spots on it?  
How would you describe your relationship with God now?**

Even though scripture is full of people's personal struggles with belief, and the pain and isolation of doubt and questions, we landed on one very small account to talk about what doubt and this journey to find God looks like. Read **Matthew 28:16-17** and reflect on it.

**What jumped out to you about this account?**

**And the big question. How could some people who saw and experienced Jesus worship, while others doubted?**

So, it's apparent from this passage even people who had been with Jesus, most likely had seen him perform miracles and definitely had heard the power of his teaching, AND SAW HIM IN PERSON AFTER HE HAD BEEN CRUCIFIED, still doubted. This is a profound realization that even people who had experienced all they did were still struggling to make sense of it. And figure out what it looked like in their daily life. This should give us permission and grace in our spiritual journey that no matter what upbringing we've had, what we've experienced, there will be moments that cause us to

question and feel uncertainty in our own relationship with God and what our faith looks like. The Message translation of this passage describes that feeling of doubt as “*holding back*”. Which is our natural stance when we face uncertainty.

Kal said there were some things that this passage can show us about our understanding of our relationship with God, and how to seek God while we’re “*holding back*”.

**1. Presence/experience doesn’t guarantee certainty or even confidence.**

Everyone saw...some worshipped, and some doubted. **How does that happen?** Being where others experience God doesn’t mean you’ll have all of your questions answered or you’ll even experience the same thing. Be comfortable with not getting it. Don’t fake certainty if you don’t feel it.

**How have you ‘held back’ because you were at a place where others were experiencing God, but you weren’t feeling it like they were?**

**2. Do NOT compare your faith journey to others.** It would have been super easy to fake believing so you wouldn’t feel weird or left out. This is the danger of copycat insincere agreement, just following others. We do it because of the crowd, not because we’ve thought it through ourselves. Each of those people saw the same thing, maybe even together, but they were at different places spiritually in life, trying to figure out what it looks like actually lived out. We’re saying; **be you...ALL you...**not someone else...and be okay with that.

**Are there times you wish you had the faith others seem to have? What do you do with that?**

**3. The faith journey is a continuous lifelong process.** Some of you grew up in a church where it was all about that one conversion decision. Say the prayer, ask Jesus into your heart. To be honest, churches were, and still are, really bad at overemphasizing this. The big heavy lean to close the deal. And once you made that decision then the big part was finished...because you’re in. Truth is, our faith journey is a continual series of spurts, stops, and slides, and not just one pivotal moment and then a steady journey after that. Jesus said “*make disciples*” not “*make converts*”.

**Looking back over your faith journey, how would you describe the peak and valley moments? How would you explain those times to someone else?**

**III Challenge.**

Our first Sunday in this book, and on this journey, reminds us the first step of this journey to find God is being honest about where we are. Our religious culture can be unforgiving when it comes to doubts and struggles, and not give us a safe place to admit there are some things we just don’t get. But all through scripture we see people who know God cry out; “*Where are you God?*” “*How long must I wait to see you again?*” and more, and God always honors that. That desire to find God, especially when he feels far away, seems to be honored more than a rote going along with the crowd faith.

The author Bunmi Laditan, (watch the message to learn how to pronounce this), shares her journey from a religious upbringing, losing her faith, and then struggling to rediscover her faith and rekindle her passion for God. And she gives us full permission to be brave enough to take that same journey. So, final question. **What first steps could you take to strengthen your faith in God?**