News
Religious Life



(Unsplash/Joel Muniz)

by The Life Panelists

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

August 25, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Throughout our lives, our relationship with God is constantly evolving — shaped by life's joys and struggles, and moments of clarity and doubt. It is at once deeply personal and universally human, inviting each of us into ongoing encounter and discovery.

This month, our panelists reflect on their current relationship with God by responding to the prompt:

If you had to choose just one word that best describes your current relationship with God, what would it be — and why?



Anne Henson has been a Presentation Sister in the Lismore Congregation in Australia for 74 years. During this time, she has served as a secondary school teacher, adult faith educator, and spiritual carer in a residential aged care facility. Now living in a retirement community, she contributes a monthly column to the community newsletter and remains committed to being an attentive listener to family, friends and neighbors.

"God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). This simple sentence expresses a most profound mystery, that God is the all-powerful creator who brings all things into being by using words!

St. John's Gospel begins: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." (Jn 1) Jesus, in fact, is the Word of God.

Language is one of God's greatest gifts, not only enabling thought and communication but also forgiving and comforting to bring about right relationships through the spoken and written words we humans use.



(Unsplash/Ronda Dorsey)

If I had to choose one word that best describes my current relationship with God, it would be "trust." Trust incorporates faith, hope and love. It encapsulates my faith journey and the story of my life of more than 95 years, 74 of them as a professed religious. It supports me now in this period of transition in religious life.

Faith gives meaning and purpose to my life. It surrounds me in the community of believers. Hope sustains me, especially through the promises of Jesus. Jesus said that he would go ahead to prepare a place for me and when it is ready he will come and take me with Him. I trust firmly in those words of Jesus.

I am keenly aware of God's love as I reflect on my life story. "I am convinced of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work ... will perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6-8).

Looking back now at decisions I have made, responses I have given to calls to step into the unknown in ministry, I have no doubt that God loves me. Why would I not trust God, the ever-loving presence in my life? It is summed up in the words of Deuteronomy addressed to the Israelites in the wilderness: "You saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place" (Deuteronomy 1:31).

I recall times of sickness, physical danger, challenges in ministry when I felt powerless but I trusted God then and I trust God now.

God has carried me all along the road I have traveled and so I celebrate God's faithfulness, continuing my journey with trust in God's loving care.



Deepa Moonjely is a member of the Dominican Sisters of the Presentation, currently residing in Kerala, India. She is preparing to embark on an exciting new mission to Indonesia, where her congregation is establishing new communities. With a strong background in education, she has dedicated much of her life to teaching and nurturing young minds. She has also served in various administrative roles, including as a school principal, provincial councilor, and provincial, gaining valuable leadership and organizational experience in service to God. Her journey has taken her across India and several other countries, broadening her perspective on faith, education and service. Deeply passionate about her vocation, she is

eager to serve those in need as she embarks on this new chapter in Indonesia.

If I had to choose one word to describe my relationship with God, it would be "presence." For me, this means knowing that God is near — faithfully, quietly — with me through every season of life. Not always in ways I can feel or understand, but in a real and sustaining way.



(Unsplash/Dingzeyu Li)

My relationship with God is far from ideal. There are days I struggle to pray — times of dryness, distraction or restlessness. Sometimes I want to sit with Him, but cannot quiet my mind or heart. I long for closeness, yet often feel far from where I hope to be. Still, I return — not because I am faithful, but because I trust that He is.

That sense of trust has carried me through pain and confusion. I've walked through moments that left me shaken — unexpected wounds and deep disappointments. I've felt broken and uncertain how to begin again. Yet even in that inner chaos, I sensed something steady: God's quiet presence. He didn’t fix everything at once. But He stayed. And that gave me the strength to take one step at a time.

When I had a serious accident, I felt physically weak, emotionally vulnerable and afraid. Yet even then, His presence was real. Not loud or dramatic, but steady. I didn't need all the answers. I just needed to know He hadn't left me. And somehow, I did.

> A verse, a kind gesture or the stillness of the morning can all remind me I am not alone.
>
> Tweet this

Some days, I sit before God in silence. Sometimes I praise. Sometimes I can only whisper His name. Other times, I offer short, spontaneous prayers — simple words of need or intercession during the day. These quiet moments — ejaculatory prayers — help me stay connected. They are my way of reaching out, a reminder that He is near.

I've also come to experience His presence in many ways — in the Word of God, in people who reflect His compassion and in nature itself. A verse, a kind gesture or the stillness of the morning can all remind me I am not alone.

Like every real relationship, this one requires time. Not every moment feels holy. Some days are full of longing; others are simply quiet. But God is just as present in the silence as in the joy. He is patient with me, gentle in my struggle and faithful even when I falter.

I do not pretend to be strong. I offer God what I have: my need, my honesty and my desire to be near. That, I believe, is enough. His mercy — not my effort — is the ground I stand on.

This is what presence means to me: not perfection, but love that stays. Not always clarity, but never abandonment.

God is present. And even in my brokenness, so am I.

Advertisement



Nuala Doherty, a member of the Franciscan Missionaries of St. Joseph from the U.K., has spent the past 17 years serving as a parish sister in Ecuador, South America. Her ministry includes preparing catechists, leading eucharistic services and prayer groups, visiting the sick, and offering informal English lessons. Prior to her work in Ecuador, she served as a parish sister in the U.K. for two years and taught primary and secondary education in Kenya for three years. Through her diverse roles, she is dedicated to fostering faith and community wherever she is called.

After some reflection the word that came bubbling to the surface was "tenderness."



This painting, "Ternura" ("Tenderness") by Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamin, hangs in Nuala Doherty's room. (Nuala Doherty)

When I am deep in prayer, my imagination runs away with me, and I sometimes have a picture of myself dancing intimately with Jesus to the song, "You are mine, I am yours, you are in me and I am in you" ("The Father's Song," Emmaus), the two of us tenderly entwined in each other's arms. I hear him whisper into my ears, "Nuala, I am in love with you," to which I reply, "Me, too." I am a romantic at heart.

I have a painting in my room called "Ternura" ("Tendedrness") by the Ecuadorian artist Oswaldo Guayasamin. In contemplating that image I am drawn into the

tender love of God. I see myself being held in God's loving embrace; or at times Mary's; and then other times, myself tenderly and compassionately embracing my inner child.



Tree in Manta, Ecuador (Nuala Doherty)

I love being out in nature and it is very easy to see the face of God in a glorious sunset (on the Manta beach), or in the stunning rugged Welsh coast (where I have recently been on retreat), or a glistening green hummingbird hovering over the honey pot, or to feel His caress in the soft warm sea breeze. The French philosopher

Simone Weil says beauty is the smile of God rippling through creation. I have a close relationship with trees and can be captured by their presence for quite some time. There is a particularly intriguing one that grabs my attention on my retreats in Manta, Ecuador, where I see the roots representing my tender wounds, out of which I trust that fruit will burst forth.

One method of prayer I use is centering prayer. I just sit with God in silence, no need for words. He is in me and I am in him. I am so grateful for the Father's blazing, unchangeable, tender, deep love for me, knowing that he loves me infinitely in my wholeness and in my brokenness.

Being a somewhat delicate and fragile individual, I need to be handled with tender, loving care and my God does just that. When I do crumble, He gently puts me back together again. My prayer is that I will be able to handle others with that same TLC.

I will finish with the words of an Elvis Presley song, "Love me tender, love me sweet, never let me go …," knowing that they could be the words of our loving Father for each and every one of us.



Pat Farrell, a native of Iowa and Franciscan Sister of Dubuque, holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's in social work. Her early ministry included religious education and teaching in rural Iowa, followed by pastoral work and community organizing with the Hispanic community in San Antonio, Texas. Twenty-eight years in Latin America — first in Chile during the dictatorship, then in El Salvador's civil war, and later in Honduras — ignited her lifelong commitment to peacemaking, human rights and trauma healing. She also provided psychotherapy to immigrant and refugee groups in Chicago and in Omaha, Nebraska. She served as president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious from 2011 to 2013, a critical period during its Vatican assessment. Currently, she lives in Okolona, Mississippi, where she serves as spiritual director and does volunteer work.



(Unsplash/Micah Tindell)

The word that best describes my relationship with God is "mystery." On the one hand, I have experienced over and over again a subtle luring, a hunger, a desire to know and experience the fullness of God. All the while, I also sense that those movements in me spring from God's very presence. The commonly mentioned expression of that is the fish searching for the sea. The One I seek is inseparable from my deepest self, always present. The mystery of my relationship with God encompasses darkness and light, longing and fullness, restlessness and deep peace. I hear my own inner experience in the words of the poet Rainer Maria Rilke:

> I love you, gentlest of Ways,
> who ripened us as we wrestled with you.
>
> You, the great homesickness we could never shake off.
> You the forest that always surrounded us.

you, the song we sang in every silence,
you, dark net threading through us …

The interior experience Rilke captures here is also continually bumping into life just as it happens. There are always people, events, encounters that stir something in me. A thing of beauty, a tragedy, an unanticipated love, a vulnerable person or my own vulnerability, the evening news, a blatant injustice, moments of loneliness or joy — whatever lingers or haunts me in some way alerts me to the divine presence within. It is as if a string of my being has been set to vibrate. I've learned to pay attention to that. The noticing sometimes turns out to be a call to action, or to personal transformation, conversion, deepening freedom. Usually, it's not readily decipherable and all I can do is notice. It nonetheless makes me aware of the mystery of God's presence at work in my life.

A song that often arises and sings itself in me is "Mystery" from Paul Winter's "Missa Gaia/Earth Mass":

Oh Mystery, you are alive, I feel you all around. You are the fire in my heart. You are the holy sound. You're all of life, and it is to you that I sing. Grant that I may feel you, always, in everything. Oh grant that I may feel you, always, in everything. Oh Mystery!



(Unsplash/Viktoriia Filipchenko)



Born in Myanmar, Stella Mary is a member of the Servite Congregation, which is committed to prayer and service. She was missioned to Australia to focus on supporting her home country financially and spiritually. Currently, she teaches science, math and religious education at a secondary school, shaping both the academic and spiritual lives of her students. Additionally, she serves as a support worker at a refuge for women affected by domestic violence, providing guidance and a safe space for rebuilding their lives. She also offers counseling services in prison ministry and the wider community, helping individuals navigate personal challenges and find healing through her diverse ministry.

If I had to choose just one word that best describes my current relationship with God, without hesitation I would say "surrender."

I was born into a Catholic family, and although my mother passed away when I was only 8 years old — leaving me with faint memories — my father raised me with love, discipline and strong faith. Every night before bed, we said our individual night prayers. They were short and simple, but deeply personal. That quiet practice became the foundation of how I related to God: with trust, simplicity and reverence.

As I grew, my elder brother introduced me to daily Mass and encouraged me to spend silent time before and after. That sacred silence became a place of inner strength. I brought all things — big and small — to God in prayer, trusting that He would choose the right path for me. That quiet inner dialogue became a way of life, rooted in surrender.

Even my call to religious life came unexpectedly, without planning or evident signs. Once again, I quietly laid it before God, trusting He would open the right door. And He did. I entered not with certainty, but with surrender — and peace followed.

One of the most profound moments in my life was the loss of my father, my hero and visible image of God. His death shattered me. Yet instead of turning away from God, I drew even closer. That's when surrender became not just a practice, but a lifeline.

Since then, life has brought many changes — times of joy, hardship and solitude. But even in my most alone moments, I have never felt lonely. Surrender taught me that God is there in the waiting, the wondering and the walking.

For many years, my spiritual director has patiently and wisely guided me back to this trust whenever I struggled. I often call my spiritual director my guide and guru, because their insight continually points me to God's presence in every part of my life.

Nature, too, draws me into surrender. Whether walking or riding my bike, I feel God's closeness in the stillness, the beauty, the vast sky. I don't need words — just a willingness to be held in the moment.

Surrender is not about giving up — it's about giving over. It's not weakness, but a choice to trust deeply. It's letting God lead, even when I don't understand the way.

So yes, the word that best describes my relationship with God today is surrender — shaped by love, guided by others and strengthened through silence. It is not passive. It is holy confidence. And in every step, I walk hand in hand with the One who has always walked with me.

This story appears in the **The Life** feature series. View the full series.