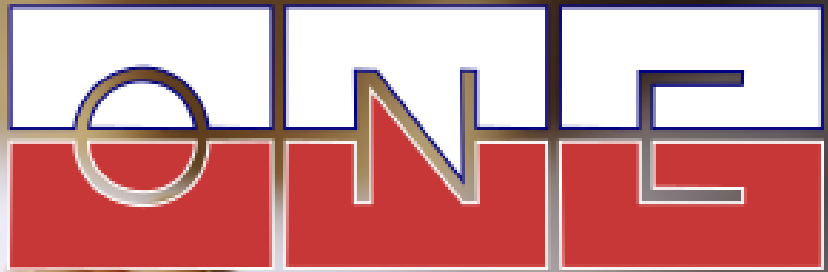


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Prayer Is More Than You Think

Cheryl Glassman

St. Nicholas of Myra Catholic Church

"Thank you, Lord!!"
Three simple words, but so profound when you think about it! Is it prayer? What is prayer? Why do we need to pray? The dictionary defines prayer as "a solemn request for help or expression of thanks to God." The phrase "not have a prayer" is defined as "having no chance at all of succeeding at something." Interesting to think about.

Christians believe that prayer is a direct connection between them and God or Jesus. I have had an agnostic friend ask me, "Why do you pray if God is omnipresent and knows everything?" That's a tough question if you do not believe in the power of a personal connection with God. Prayer. Prayer is something God asks us to do. It's not a duty, but, rather, kind of like the key

that unlocks the door to a true connection with the loving presence of God. Jesus knew that, and shared that message with us many times during His teachings. In Luke's gospel, Jesus says "Seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you...how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Not only did Jesus say this, but his followers did as well. The Apostle John says in 1 John 5:14, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us."

I remember praying as a child. Growing up Catholic, we learned specific prayers such as the Our Father, Glory Be, Angel of God prayer, and the Hail Mary. I remember how cool it felt once I learned these prayers by heart and was

able to recite them on my own as well as with others at church services. I'm not sure when it happened, but one day I realized there was more to prayer. The prayers I prayed, and continue to pray to this day, such as the Our Father, are a wonderful way to pray and express love for and to God; but a personal connection through prayer that originates from the silence of a person's heart create a different prayer moment.

And prayer is not always asking for something. Prayer is a sense of reaching out to God and allowing Him to reach back to you. As Mother Teresa said, "Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts." She also said, "Listening is the beginning of prayer." What a wonderful way to describe what it means to pray!

Prayer Is More Than You Think (Continued)

Music and particularly church music is a way to pray. The old adage, "When you sing, you pray twice," resonates with many people. Some people may not like to sing, but love to hear music sung by soloists or choirs, or listen to instrumental versions of beautiful hymns. Sometimes when I'm at church and a song begins, I close my eyes and breathe in the essence of the music. I can almost sense it being lifted to God

as it surrounds me.

I would like to share some lyrics of a song I wrote. It was an Easter Sunday and the sun was beaming down upon the beautiful Easter décor and the smiling faces, and these words came to me:

"Do you listen to the silence as you sit here in this place? Do you feel God's very presence as you look into each face? The love of God surrounds us if only we would see - His light within each other - His

love in you and me."

Prayer. It may not always be perfect, but in the eyes of God, when we reach out to Him in prayer - THAT is what makes it perfect. I would like to end with a quote from James 5: 13-18, "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him in the name of Lord." Prayer. What a gift. THANK YOU LORD!!

The Undisciplined Disciple

Reverend Shay Craig

St. Michael's Episcopal Church

I would love to be able to say that I am the type who spends hours on her knees, reciting from memory the ancient prayers of contemplation, petition, and gratitude that sparkle in my prayer book like jewels in a tiara.

I would like to be able to report on the deeply pious and disciplined habits of prayer that I have adopted for decades in my life of faith.

But to be truthful, when I have devoted myself to learning and repeating the traditional prayers from my prayer book, most of my time has been spent trying not to fall asleep, or, failing that, trying to hide the imprint of the pages on my sleep puffy cheeks.

And while I have many times resolved to adopt a personal regimen of prayer, it always ends in my having forgotten, for weeks and sometimes months on end, what I was supposed

to do or where I put the rosary/candle/journal/finger labyrinth.

So what does a person with no personal discipline, ADD and a complete lack of will-power do about prayer?



The Undisciplined Disciple (Continued)

Well, instead of trying to mash the square peg of my personality into the round hole of traditional prayer, I have adapted prayer to fit my life.

This, I believe, is the secret to all successful prayer. To make engagement with the Divine, not "another thing to do," but to weave it into the tapestry of our existing lives.

God is present, after all, in everything we do, in every breath we take. Prayer should not require us to step out of those blessed behaviors, but to become aware of God within those existing patterns.

I am a chronic doodler. I can't sit anywhere without a pen and paper, and I can't have a pen and paper around me without drawing little figures, decorative letters, or lines that fill up spaces. When I am doodling, I am not 'not paying attention,' on the contrary I pay attention more closely when my hands are engaged. But

when I am doodling, I'm also paying attention with some subconscious part of my being, someplace in me where my spirit resides. And that is why I think of these doodles as prayers.

When I am asked to pray for someone, I will write their name on a piece of paper and think of them, ask the Divine to intercede for them and thank the Divine for the blessing of them.

In that moment, I am offering up prayers to God in the same way that you would take a plant out of a shady part of a room and move it to the windowsill for a little while to get extra light. I lift up these people and issues about which I am praying and draw God's attention to them for just a few minutes, using the habits that come easily to me, by God, perhaps for just that purpose.

I'm not suggesting that everyone begin doodling or take up art as a means of praying. Rather, I am suggesting that we look at our lives the way we live

them now. We look at who we are, created in God's image, perfect in God's eyes, and ask, "where, in the way I am now, where, in the life I live now, where, in the spaces of my existing world can I take a moment to engage with God, to speak and to hear, to love and to be loved?"

God loves us and yearns to be in relationship with us. And God made us in such a way that we would yearn to be in relationship with God. I have to believe that a God who wants so deeply to be engaged with us has already placed in our paths the ideal way to do that.

I invite you to look around for the breadcrumbs that God has left for you in your life, and follow them to a prayer discipline that is satisfying, not too difficult, and leaves you feeling as though you have been, for however brief a time, in the presence of the God who loves you unconditionally.

Praying With Children

Becky Rogowski

First Presbyterian Church

Adults sometimes find it tough to pray. It can be difficult to know exactly what to say. Not all people are as eloquent with language as ministers. People fear saying the "wrong" thing. People fear being selfish, greedy, arrogant, forgetful, sloppy, etc. There are many reasons for this that could be a completely separate article! Perhaps if many of us (myself included) had learned to be more efficient at praying as children, we would be more comfortable with it today.

Prayer is simply a conversation with God. God is our Father. Prayer should be seen as having a little "chat" with a parent. I wish someone had said these words to me when I was much younger. In teaching our youngest to pray, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Let them see YOU do it! Set a good example for your children or the children around you. Let

them know you are praying and how you pray and WHY you pray. We teach children many other things by talking through the process - prayer should be no different. Praying doesn't have to be done only in church or only in Sunday School. Children need to see that prayer is ok at home, in the car, walking the dog, at Grandma and Grandpa's house, etc.

More than likely, when you pray, you do not always kneel, fold your hands, and close your eyes. This is what most people typically think of as "praying posture" when they think of praying. The purpose to all of those is to shut out distractions. One cannot deny that closing out distractions is important when talking to God. It is good to focus on this important discussion time. When teaching children to pray, it is good to focus on the posture, but not as a strict requirement. They need to feel as if they can pray anytime, anywhere, any way. The important

part is focusing on God and shutting out distractions.

When first teaching children to pray, consider the timing. Perhaps start with mealtime. There are many simple prayers that could be said. Once your family is comfortable with mealtime blessings, move on to bedtime. Praying when your child is experiencing difficulty or struggling is also important.

Simple prayers are good for children. Letting them say the familiar "Amen" at the end is a good way to start! Finding the familiar words and repeating what they recognize will help them become more comfortable with praying. "May it be so" and moving on to addressing God with "Dear God" or "Dear Father" or "Father God" are also important steps.

There are lots of ways to pray and none are "better" than any other. The important thing is to keep the conversation open with God, our Father. Starting young is helpful, but starting period is what matters.