

Advent Lutheran Church

Prayer: Just Do It

Matthew 6:5-13

July 14, 2024

Introduction

I wonder how you came to be a person of prayer. Did you start at a young age perhaps even before you can remember? Or did you find your way to being a person of prayer later in life?

Personally, I cannot remember a time before I knew about prayer. As a child – long before learning to read – I recall saying a number of prayers again and again. I imagine you know many of them.

Let me test this out with a meal time favorite . . .

God is great, good is good

Let us thank him _____ (for our food).

By His hands we all are fed

Give us Lord our _____ (daily bread).

Very good. Now a bed time classic . . .

Now I lay me down to sleep,

I pray the Lord my soul _____ (to keep.)

If I should die before I wake

I pray the Lord my soul _____ (to take.)

Or, for those who are visual learners, we can try the popular five finger prayer

- Thumb – closest finger to you – an invitation to pray for those closest to you, including family and friends
- Pointer – the index or pointer finger is what we often use to point – serves as an invitation to pray for those who point the way, including teachers, pastors, and counselors
- Tallest – the middle finger is our tallest finger – it reminds us to pray for those who stand tall as leaders in our world, including our elected officials and business leaders
- Ring – this is our weakest finger – a call to pray for those who are fragile or in need of strength, including the sick and those living without the most basic needs
- Pinky – our final finger is the smallest – it's a reminder to pray for ourselves and for the happenings in our lives.

Jesus Priorities

This summer we are exploring the eight habits that shaped Jesus' earthly ministry with the understanding they should shape our lives as followers of the Way of Jesus. The series was inspired by a book by Christopher Maricle. In the chapter on prayer, Maricle suggests that there are a few ways we can be people of prayer.

First, we should pray simply.

Second, we should pray persistently.

Third & finally, we should pray alone and with others.¹

Simply

What does it mean to pray simply?

This is the good news that prayers need not be complicated or fancy. They should be authentic and simple.

Anne Lamot begins her insightful book on prayer, with these words:

I do not know much about God and prayer, but I have come to believe over the past 25 years, that there's something to be said about keeping prayer simple.²

For her, and for us, sometimes the best prayers are very short and very honest. She provides three types of prayers we can pray: help, thanks, and wow.

- Help. When life is hard or a given situation seems beyond us, simply call out to God with a prayer of "help!"
- Thanks. When life is good or something happens that is wonderful, connect with God using a prayer of "thanks!"
- Wow. When you are amazed or when something takes your breath away, turn to God with a prayer of "wow!"

Simple prayers of help, thanks, or wow can be a few words or a few sentences. As life happens, these words provide you with a simple way to talk to God that we call prayer.

¹ "Jesus Priority 3: Pray" in *The Jesus Priorities: 8 Essential Habits* by Christopher Maricle (Upper Room Books, 2007), p.49-60.

² *Help. Thanks. Wow. Three Essential Prayers* by Anne Lamott (Riverhead Books, 2012), p.1.

Another option for praying simply is to rely on a memorized or standardized prayer.

- The Lord's Prayer is the best known and most prayed option.
- And then there are many prayers that are designed for children but wonderful for people of all ages, including the examples I shared.
- Plus, there are thousands of ancient and modern prayers available in any number of prayer books or online sites.

There is no wrong way to pray a simple prayer, except perhaps by making it unnecessarily complex.

Persistently

As you get in the habit of praying simple prayers, you'll be on your way to praying persistently.

This is more of an invitation to regularity than a prescription for an exact frequency. For different people and for all of us in different season of life, persistent prayer will not look the same.

Throughout the day call to mind God's presence and nurture your relationship. And, if the idea of praying often is intimidating replace the word with talking. Prayer is the name we give to your personal communication with God.

Alone and With Others

If you are praying simply and persistently then it is likely that you are praying both alone and with others.

As a way of practicing, I will invite you to a time of silent personal prayer. Take a moment now and pick whether you'll try a help prayer, a thanks prayer, or a wow prayer.

Have you chosen one? Now, in the next 30 seconds or less, offer a prayer to God that begins with the word help, thanks, or wow.

(PAUSE) Amen.

Having prayed on your own, I invite you now to practice praying together using what may be a new-to-you version of the Lord's Prayer:

Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:

The hallowing of your name echo through the universe.
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world.
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings.
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope
and come on earth.

With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and forever. Amen.

Just Do It

I've reminded you of prayers you likely know, taught you about different ways to pray, and suggested that prayer is an important habit to develop and nurture.

Hopefully you recognize that you don't need additional education in prayer. Instead, you and I both need the same thing: we need to just do it.

Siblings in Christ, it is my hope that

- you will be a person of prayer,
- that I will be a person of prayer,
- and that together, Advent Lutheran Church will be a Christian community devoted to prayer.

Amen.