

LEARNING TO PRAY

Today begins our three Sunday winter study on prayer.

Each Sunday, the children's story will focus on prayer, presented by Edna. Today's message is about prayer, the children's Sunday School is about prayer, the actual prayer study will begin after lunch, andwe pray that you will join us for a pizza lunch and stay for the session.

This winter study is a bit different,... in that we, the deacons, believe that all ages will enjoy and benefit from this study. So, please bring the whole family.

In addition, our approach is different too. The three sessions will open with a brief "classroom" type presentation, for only a few minutes, then we'll get into activities,.... which include singing, painting, walking a labyrinth and beating a drum.

The inspiration for this Study is based on a study book by Elsie Hannah Ruth Rempel, called "Prayer Journeys with Children."

And,..... when it comes to prayer..... I think most of us are children..... because much of our prayer life is merely chattering like a toddler or crying from our crib.

We did a study on prayer four years ago, but that approach with the typical, textbook, classroom style. We heard some history and the basic fundamentals, and.... that was that.

We were reminded that there are different types of prayer, such as confessional, intercessory and so forth,.... YET.... in reality, we really don't abide by those groupings. We don't pause, and think, "Ummm, I think I'll do confessional prayer, right now."

The actual, applied categories are varied and different.
Here are some examples of the different types:

There is the "You Who" prayer.

It sounds like this: "YOU who" created the earth....." "You who" forgives all sins,....." "You who"... parted the water for the Hebrews.... ... and so on.

Another is the *Star Wars* prayer..... where God seems like the "force."

It goes like this: "O Holy One"... we worship you.

"O holy one.... we ask that you be with us. "O Holy One"....be merciful and patient.

You get the point.

Then there is the Southern Evangelical "Jesus Just" prayer style. God is never mentioned in this type, and the name of Jesus is stretched out for emphasis.

"JEEEEZZUS..... we "just" come to you this day.

We "Just" prayer to you oh, Jeeezus, to forgive us of our sins.... Just this time, just now,.... Just in case...

I don't mean to be disrespectful of anyone who uses these styles; I'm simply trying to reveal that our styles are mixed and varied.

Many of us have used the “911 Prayer” type, especially when we are in trouble or running late. This type is based on the assumption that God is either a little deaf or... likes to hear us beg.

The 911 prayer sounds like this: Oh God, Oh God, Oh God,... make that light green, and keep it Green; keep it green... please, please, please. Or,.... Oh Lord, God, Jesus, God... I beg, I plea, I ask, I'll do anything, ... just don't let those flashing red lights in my rearview mirror be for me. I'll never, ever, rarely ever, almost never speed again....

I think we all are familiar with that type of prayer.

Nevertheless, we generally mix styles in a single prayer.

I've heard some prayers of grace before a meal that not only give thanks for the food, but also ask for blessings and strength, and include grandma, too.

The point is that it is hard to dissect prayers into select groupings,.... because prayer is a form of communication, but also prayer reflects who we are....what we think and feel, and ...where we are as a person.

Most of us accept that prayer is communication with God; however, it interesting how we learned to pray and the level of importance we put on prayer.

A person who has the opportunity to shoot 15 pucks into a net for a million dollars, will practice for weeks,..... just to get some money. Yet, the value we place on prayer ranks way down on our list.

Most of us learned to pray as childrenwatching adults,.... and.. how often do we adults model praying for our children?

Sure, we pick help some techniques here and there, from the Bible, from church, and so on. Even so, we mostly use what simple tools we have at our disposal, and when it comes to communicating with God,.... and.... we, pretty much, place the burden on God.

We say words, assume God knows English and we hope our message gets through.

This scenario, reminds me of the time I was watching a store clerk trying to communicate with a recent immigrant, who didn't know English. There were some charades and hand gestures, with shrugged shoulders, and then the volume approach was used, ... which assumes that if English is spoken loud enough it will get through.

[loudly} “You NEED to give me [] 50 more cents.”

Language is a tool, and words are good for packaging ideas and thoughts, and even some feelings. But, as email clearing demonstrates, words are not enough. Communication has many levels and nuances. Feelings are better given through body motion and intonation. Moreover, I believe, Prayer is much more than words/ much more than communicating with a language.

Too often, our prayers are **one way thoughts** – packaged as words –request and supplications – to God. I think we greatly limit prayers when we confine them to thoughts and cognitive messages.

When I first went to Europe in 1971, I took my guitar. There many situations where I did not know the local spoken language, and got by as best I could. However, music was understood by everyone I met. Music was ANOTHER WAY of connecting; music is more than communicating.

Keep that in mind, when we study Prayer. In some ways, prayer is like music, yet... much more.

Some have labelled prayer as “rays of love” / energy of love ... that connects with the source of love and can radiate out to others, etc...

Prayer is much more than speaking to God with words.

I believe learning to pray is learning to do something very different.

Learning to pray is somewhat like learning to swimming—it is in a different world.

Learning to swim requires we control what we take for granted as essential – breathing. Swimming often requires us to completely refrain from this life sustaining process. Plus, while in the water we have to develop a new way for motion, and completely new way.

I think praying is engaging in another domain – the Spiritual domain.

Our thoughts may come into play; we may communicate with words, yet there is MUCH more to prayer than a mere conversation.

Consider who we are connecting with – – GOD!.

Okay, it is difficult to consider God.

God is huge, God well... God. God is way beyond our level / way beyond our ability to comprehend, yet we think we can chat with God.... without much practice or discipline. because..... ??? God is so powerful, God can even understand us.... and wants to???

Contemplating God can be rather intimidating, and I suppose that is why some chose to pray to Mary or Jesus.

The believe the reason is that Mary and Jesus were human once, so perhaps, they would better relate to us.

If we pause to analyse this concept, thenwell it breaks down. Jesus was once human, but....well.... things get fuzzy, so Let’s focus on connecting with God. And, in respect to the divine, let’s take prayer real seriously, even though our prayers can be what ever.....

To begin, we can use words,... but also... let us strive to move beyond words.

If God is truly God, then we really don’t have much new information to give to God / to inform God.. that God does NOT already know.

Even so, words are a nice place to begin.... and.... as humans we need words in order to make leaps into the spiritual domain.

The hope is to connect with our soul, and not just our mind.

Prayer is more than words. Prayer is shifting into a different realm / the spiritual realm.
And, that is just the beginning.

Henri Nouwen describes the process as being similar to opening up clenched fists.

Listen to his words:

“Praying is no easy matter. It demands a relationship in which you allow someone other than yourself to enter into the very centre of your person, to see there what you would rather leave in darkness, and to touch there what you would rather leave untouched. Why would you really want to do that?”

[With Open Hands; Henri Nouwen]

He continues by calling the resistance to praying to be like fighting to open a tightly clenched fist that is holding your last coin. Praying is overcoming that fear / need for self preservation... and trusting God, ... and that isn't easy..... Yet, that is what we long for.
Opening up is what our soul is crying for.... as it reaches out to God.

Hear again the Psalm 63 passage, and this time... hear the soul message.

“O God,..... You are MY God. I seek you!

My soul thirsts for you; [my all] my flesh faints for you as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

Because.... your steadfast Love is better than life, my lips [with words] will praise you.

So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my Hands and call on your name.”

In this poem,..... we can feel the hand opening up.

The message is clear and it is NOT asking for anything in particle, except to connect with God.

Praying is connecting with God.

It is not overlaying our conditions or terms on a concept.

It is Not cashing in on a benefactor.

It is not calling on superman to make things better.

It is not expecting the Master chef to remake the meal..... or turn red lights to green.

Praying is connecting with God.

Praying is a bit like being with someone you dearly love and who dearly loves you. much like a good visit with a loving parent.

So, there is no need to impress people in public with lofty words.
In fact, we need not waste our time with fluff or with begging or grand, hollow promises to God.
We only need to present OUR truth..... our selves.

And, we need not repeat a certain prayer,.... but if... it helps in the connection, then go for it.

We can use as a template the prayer Jesus presented, known as the Lord's prayer.

In different words:

My loving parent who is way beyond me, yet so holy as to be present here with me.
I surrender my will; I open my fist/ my soul to you. Your will be done.... everywhere, all the time....
I have no needs but to be with you, really.
I already know that I will be fine.
Moreover, your grace inspires and enables me to be gracious. I am in honest / open handed relationships with others. I don't clench my fist.

I trust your guidance / your wisdom / your way.
As I seek to follow Christ, I will not wander into destructive and unloving patterns.
Christ way prevails. Love and grace prevails.

Always and forever, and right now. Amen.....let's do it again.

We are invited to listen to our soul / to listen to God.

We are invited to learn and grow; to realize that prayer is NOT about ourselves – the ME.

Pray is connecting with God. It is spiritual. It is beyond words.
Pray is NOW, and it is eternal.
And, I have a feeling..... that developing our prayer life will come in handy..... in more ways than we can understand,.... in this life.