

"TEACH THEM TO PRAY"
Mike Noll
Elkton United Methodist Church
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James 5 13-20

Luke 11:1-13

Back in 1986, I was invited to a friend's birthday party. But this was no ordinary birthday party. And quite frankly it was no ordinary friend. He asked his parents for a zombie movie theme party where we would sit around all day and watch all of the zombie movies that had come out by that time. There was even the then classic *Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead*, *Day of the Dead* and maybe more, but I didn't make it through the third one. When it started I had finally mustered enough courage to ask my friend's mom if I could use the house phone to call my parents. After the call I walked back into the living room, said my good-byes to my friends, endured some razing from them, and waited fifteen to twenty long minutes outside to see my father coming down Cedar Street in his ice crystal blue Dodge Diplomat. What a sight it was.....I could see that grill in the distance.....inching closer, closer, closer. When my father pulled up, it was like the cavalry had arrived! "Everything alright, son?" he asked. "I...I just want to come home, dad."

That night I woke up from a nightmare screaming. In a matter of seconds it seemed, my father was there in my room to comfort me. That was the first night of many nights to come for it seemed that these nightmares went on for a year. But every time I needed him, he was there.....no matter the time, no matter the day of the week.....he was there to comfort me. He would lay his hand on my head, bow his, and pray. I never knew what he said, but at the time I didn't need to know. His mighty hand protected me. Sometimes he had holy water or holy oil, but always that hand.....on my head. It was like a shield covering me....protecting me throughout the rest of the night. I was not six, seven, eight, nine or even ten years old. I thought I was too old for my father to be coming into my room for this. But I was very glad that when he heard me, he came. This reminds me about my not-so-earthly father.

In the January-February 2013 issue of *The Interpreter*, The Rev. Tom Albin, dean of The Upper Room Ministries and ecumenical relations, answered the question, "What is Prayer?" by saying "Simply stated, prayer is communication with God. It is two-way communication – speaking and listening. Prayer can involve spoken words, inward thoughts or sighs too deep for words. It is an act of love that draws us closer to God."

Albin reminds us that John Wesley, our founder, “defined prayer as ‘lifting the heart to God.’ He taught that everyone could pray because a sincere desire is an authentic prayer. And, he went so far as to assert, God does nothing apart from believing prayer.”

So if prayer is so powerful, yet so simple that a child can do it, why is it that we have trouble praying? Take heart, folks because we are not the only ones who have trouble praying. As we see in the Gospel lesson today, the disciples, who were with Jesus every day, watching, learning and following, asked him to teach them how to pray.

God seeks relationship with us as we seek relationship with him. And I’ll let you in on a few little secrets.....he knows our hearts, our strengths, and our desires. With that, you should know that there is no right or wrong way to pray. As a matter of fact, my desire today through this sermon, is to share with you that there are a number of ways that you can learn to pray. I bet you are doing some of them already. The most important thing is to illustrate for those around us that we as Christians, desire to be in prayer, in relationship, with God. Albin also notes so powerfully in the article that I noted, that “the Holy Spirit will teach you to pray in your own unique, personal way. When you pray in the way God gives you to pray, you will find freedom and joy.”

Most, if not all of us, are familiar with the Gospel lesson this morning. I mean who doesn’t know The Lord’s Prayer, right? This brings me to my first way to pray and that is with learned or already written prayer.

Being raised Catholic; we had a prayer for everything...The Lord’s Prayer, The Hail Mary, Glory Be to the Father, Sign of the Cross, An Act of Charity, An Act of Contrition, An Act of Faith, An Act of Hope, The Apostles Creed, Grace Before Meals, Grace After Meals, Come Holy Spirit, Hail Holy Queen, The Angelus and I could go on and on. But in those rough patches of life, in the time of need when thoughts are scattered or focus doesn’t come easy, why not use what you know? Use the words of others to pray. More than one of us in this congregation has been laying on a hospital bed or standing next to one, pre- and post-surgery searching for the words to speak to God. Perhaps the words that came to your mind were from the prayer that Jesus Himself gave us.

One night I was putting my two oldest boys to bed and the thought of my earthly father praying over me came to mind again. I reached over to Andrew, laid my hand on his head, silently said a prayer, and kissed him goodnight. I then repeated the same thing with Joshua. Now that Noah has come along I do the same thing with him too. Though it started out with just a little prayer off the cuff, it has turned into a nightly ritual for all three of them. And I must say the prayer out loud. And do I hear it from my oldest if I miss a word or two!

The prayer that I say is.... Dear Jesus, protect (add in kid's name here). Keep him safe as he sleeps and I sleep. Mary, mother of God, come down and keep your hand on him and protect him throughout the night. Amen.

Lately though, Joshua has asked me to call in additional air support.....yep.....I now have Mary, Jesus, Joseph, and Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael sitting on the edge of Joshua's bed to keep him safe from what he calls "the outside dark" throughout the night. Now that I think about it, he may be confused between the Archangels and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles who have similar names.

Andrew does not like me adding that last part on to his prayer though. Which illustrates the second way to pray.....find your unique, personal way and let the Holy Spirit guide you. You see for Andrew, hearing the words are the most important, which is probably why he corrects me if I miss one or two or while we are singing a song he'll say, "No dad, the words are....." For Joshua, the touch of my hand on his head and my physical presence is more important. Noah.....he just wants to give kissies.

Have you ever prayed with someone who was going through something so difficult, something that you had no experience with? Maybe there were NO words that you could of used to comfort them. So maybe a learned prayer would have come in handy or perhaps maybe no words were needed. Perhaps just your presence or hug or your hand on their head, shoulder, or wherever is what they needed.

I'll pause here for a moment to say that it is important to not only think about the various ways to pray, but also to know what your preferred method is and if you are praying with someone else, what their preferred method is too.

Now back to some other ways to pray.....

I have the pleasure of knowing two people who can do what I call praying on the fly really well. If I was teaching Public Speaking again, I would tell my students that this is called speaking extemporaneously. My wife, Jen, and our very own Carlos, have this ability it seems to channel the Holy Spirit. I like to sit next to them when they pray out loud because I hope to catch the flaps of the wings of the Holy Spirit as the prayer passes through them. Their ability to capture the moment, summarize, and honor the Lord is powerful. If you don't have the ability to pray on the fly, that is OK. Some of us are just more comfortable with just speaking a prayer in public. Others would rather memorize a prayer, would prefer to pray in private, are gifted to use the power of touch, or to utilize our next way to pray.

Another way to pray is to get into The Bible. That's right, get into the word and memorize some scripture. There are notes in the back of the good book that tell you where to go for scriptures about healing, death of a loved one, financial issues, how to deal with stress, etc.

And then there is an often overlooked way to pray and that is through song. I remember sitting in church at a much younger age when I realized that many of the songs we sing in church are actually verses of scripture. I don't know about you, but I love a number of both traditional and contemporary songs. I also love "singing" in my car.....on the ride to and from work.....alone.....where no one else has to listen to me "making a joyful noise."

Maybe you feel like your prayer life is in need of a jump start. Well, you are in luck because our denomination has some resources for you at www.umc.org/pray. I printed out a few copies of some of these resources. Stop up after the service and take a copy or check out the website for yourself. *[Resource available on last page]*

When and where do you pray? Do you pray alone, pray with others, pray with and for your kids and grandkids, pray with and for family, friends, coworkers, our church, community, state, nation, and world? Pray often. Join the Prayer Warriors. Join the new ministry of Prayer Leaders. Ask me for more details or look for additional information in an upcoming bulletin and newsletter near you.

Listen to what Rev. Tom Albin says about what happens when we pray for others because it really brings to life the reading from James that we just read. "Praying for other people is an act of love. We pray for others because we care and we know that God cares. This form of prayer, called *intercession*, is a healthy, normal part of Christian faith and practice. It is always right to pray; and, God always answers these prayers. Sometimes the answer is "yes," and there is immediate change. Sometimes the answer is "no," and it may be years before we can understand why. And sometimes, the answer is "wait." No matter what the answer or result, we know that God hears our prayer and that we are not alone in the situation — and neither are those we lift to God in prayer. Something real and spiritual happens to us and to those for whom we pray."

(On screen: Introduce pictures of the kids at the grave; Andrew learning to pray, Andrew teaching Joshua, and Andrew and Joshua teaching Noah)

No matter your age.....you are being watched by someone...maybe they are older, maybe they are younger, maybe they are strong in their faith, maybe they are new to their faith, maybe they are so broken down, physically, mentally, emotionally or all of the above.

Maybe your spoken prayer or prayer alone with Christ is what they need. Maybe it is your hand on their head or shoulder. Maybe it is a hug or kissie. Teach others how to pray from your example just like Christ did so many times in the

Gospels. And when you pray in the way God gives you to pray, you will find freedom and joy.” Amen

Reference

Albin, Tom R. (2013, January-February). Teach Us to Pray, *Vol 57, No. 1*, 8-10.

About prayer and learning to pray

Each issue of *Interpreter* this year will include books and other resources produced by The Upper Room (www.upperroom.org/bookstore) related to the prayer practice featured. Additional resources will be included at the "Teach Us to Pray" website, www.umc.org/pray.

Learning to Pray – Part 1: Baby Steps, online course led by the Rev. Tom Albin, Jan. 14-Feb. 15, www.upperroom.org/ministry-areas/e-learning.

The [Guide to Prayer](#) series offers a pattern for daily prayer and Scripture reading along with themed "Readings for Reflection" and outlines for personal retreats.

- *A Guide to Prayer for All God's People*, Bishop Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck.
- *A Guide to Prayer for Ministers and Other Servants*, Job and Shawchuck.
- *A Guide to Prayer for All Who Seek God*, Job and Shawchuck

[Children and Prayer: A Shared Pilgrimage](#), Betty Shannon Cloyd: Help for parents who want to develop a life of prayer and spiritual awareness in their homes.

[Creating a Life with God](#), Daniel Wolpert.

[Dimensions of Prayer: Cultivating a Relationship with God](#), Douglas V. Steere.

[Lord Teach Us to Pray: A Study of Personal Prayer](#), Margie Burger.

[Prayers for Life's Ordinary and Extraordinary Moments](#), compiled and edited by Mary Lou Redding: Prayers written by staff members of The Upper Room, the General Board of Discipleship and Africa Upper Room.

[Praying in the Messiness of Life: 7 Ways to Renew Your Relationship with God](#), Linda Douty: Incorporate prayer in your daily life as it is, rather than trying to find more time to pray.

[Talking in the Dark: Praying When Life Doesn't Make Sense](#), Steve Harper: Confront your problems with prayer.

[Teach Me to Pray](#), W. E. Sangster.