



MISSION CONNECTIONS

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April 2021



Finding a Way to Pray

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Dear friends,

I have been thinking a lot about prayer these days. Do we pray silently or aloud? How often do we pray? Where do we pray? Who is prayer meant for? What do we pray for?

My home church here in the States is focusing on prayer right now, and I am thankful for this. God's timing is always right, and for me, the timing of this topic is just what I needed. I have always wondered about praying "unceasingly" or "pray once and forget it." Do I wear God down with my constant prayers, or do I pray once and trust that God hears my prayer and will answer in God's timing and in God's way?

Do prayers have to be long and wordy, or can they be short and to the point? Do we always have to have words, or can we just feel the prayer?

I have been thinking of all the different ways I have seen prayer in different countries. Some pray very loud and with great enthusiasm, and others pray in large groups. Some pray on the streets while others pray quietly in their homes. Some pray as they talk (this would be me!), while others pray using "religious" language. Some are gifted at praying to touch peoples' hearts, while others are gifted at praying for the hearts of people. I think how we pray is influenced by what we have experienced in our lives. For people who have had to hide their worship, the very act of being able to

pray in public is a cause for celebration. They want to shout it from the mountain top because they understand the gift of religious freedom. Some in this same scenario find that praying in public or in the open is a scary thing. Prayer for them has become a very personal thing, and they find praying in private, behind closed doors, is what brings them closer to God.

Do you pray out loud or in silence? I can remember as a child watching people pray. Some pray with eyes tightly closed, hands folded, lips closed. Others pray with eyes open, mouths moving silently, hands moving as they pray. This confused me as a child – what was the "proper" way to pray? Do I have to kneel, be in a separate room, fold my hands, look to heaven, or look down?

I grew up in Africa and saw many different ways to pray but still had so many questions. I always wanted to do things the "right" way, and that included prayer. I figured if I knew the formula for prayer, then I would be able to do it right. Going back to Africa as an adult, I saw all those same ways of praying but was now able to fully appreciate each one of them for what they mean to each one of us.

While I may not be as comfortable with some forms of prayer, I do fully appreciate that each form of prayer still talks to God, and that is what it is really all about. I need to be pushed out of my comfort zone with prayer so that I can learn to pray with those around me. I need to learn to listen to prayers in languages I do not understand so that I can concentrate simply on prayer. We do not have to understand the prayer to join in the prayer.

I have sat in chapel at Bible schools in different countries and have listened to students pray in halting English. I have sat in big church meetings with pastors who have all kinds of degrees, who

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prayed fluently in two or three languages. I have wondered why we often feel the “educated” person can pray better or has better access to God? Prayer should be a matter of the heart, so no matter if the prayer is not grammatically correct or has a bunch of big, trendy words in it or gets a lot of “amens” from those listening if it expresses what the person needs to say that is all that matters. God hears what the intention is behind the prayer.

So, how do I pray now? I pray silently and out loud, in public and in private, in English because I do not know any other language. I pray daily and often in the day. I am not an expert on prayer, but I do know that it brings me comfort to talk with God and to be silent before Him in prayer. For me,

Romans 8:26 means that even if I do not have the words to express what is on my heart, God hears the words of my heart.

I know that I have been blessed to have people pray for me and to let me know they are praying for me. I want to let you know that I pray for you. Even if I do not know all of your names, I pray for those who are supporting me in the work that I am so blessed to be doing. I thank you for the prayers you say for the people in the Horn of Africa and for me.

Find a way to pray.

Sharon

Thank you for reading my letter!

Please consider supporting Presbyterian Mission through my ministry. I am grateful for your prayers, personal communication and financial support.

Gifts may be sent to:

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
P.O. Box 643700
Pittsburgh, PA 15264-3700

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