

A Guide to Prayer for Youth

"If the only prayer you ever say in your whole life is 'thank you,' that would suffice." –Meister Eckhart

During my first call, I often asked youth to offer prayers during meetings, meals, and to close our time together. The young people would often ask, "What do we say as a prayer? How do we pray? What are the right words?" My response was, "Say what's on your heart. There are no right or wrong words for talking to God." One of these youth took this to heart and would offer this prayer before meals, "If you love God, raise your hand." Naturally, everyone would raise their hand, to which he replied, "Amen." Simple, Powerful, and such an authentic way to offer thanks to our God who has a sense of humor.

Prayer is our time with God to share our joys, concerns, and everything that is within us. Prayer is an acknowledgment of God's power and one's love and gratitude for our Creator. Prayer is not doing, but being; it is not the words, but the presence of something greater than oneself. It is an invitation to recognize and acknowledge holiness, while uttering, "Holy, Holy, Holy" in response. The best "how to pray" I know is from Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God."

Through the prayers included here, take time to offer God glory and gratitude and you stand in awe. It is my hope that these prayers will offer a jumping off point for you to discover your own prayer style and language for God. May these ideas and prayers help you as you spend time with the God of our lives.

Imagine

Close your eyes for a few minutes and imagine the world as God would have it to be-not as it is now. What do you see? How is that world different from the one we live in today? Now imagine yourself as part of that new vision, helping to make it all become a reality. What are you doing? What are you feeling? How is God calling you to be part of bringing that vision to reality in your own little corner of the world? What difference can you make? What difference do you already make?

The Examen

This is an ancient form of prayer that asks you to think back over the last week or month of your life. Let your mind wander through the following questions as you pray: Thinking back over the recent past, focus on the moments when you were most grateful and the moments you were least grateful. What were they? Which moments did you give and receive God's love the most? When did you give and receive love the least? When were you paying the most attention to the love of God in the world? When were you paying the least attention? Close by thanking God for the gift of today and ask for guidance in being more open to God's presence in your daily life.

Be Quiet

If prayer is a conversation, then we also need to listen in silence. Simply sit in silence, perhaps close your eyes, and listen to what God speaks to you.

Just Say the Name

When a person, friend or enemy, suddenly comes to mind, take it as a sign to lift them up in prayer. Saying their name aloud to God is a prayer in itself, because God knows their needs even if we do not.

Pray Scripture

Pick up a Bible and start reading. Select a verse such as, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me,” (Matthew 25:40) and turn it into a prayer. “God help me to reach out to the least of these in the world and treat them as your beloved children.” Or, select a psalm as an inspiration for prayer. Another idea is to take the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13) and write your own translation in a way that reflects your life and needs.

Give Thanks

Using paper or a journal, make a word list of all the things in your life or in the world for which you are grateful. If you are feeling more creative, draw, color, or paint images of people and things you are thankful for today.

Repetition

Chanting or repeating a word or phrase over and over can focus your thoughts for a prayer. Choose a word to say slowly and repeatedly to yourself such as love, peace, life, or perhaps the name of someone or something important to you. You could also choose a phrase such as, “God, be with me,” “God so loves the world,” or “Clear my mind and open my heart.”

Ask Questions

What are the big questions of life that you’d like answered today? Why is there pain and suffering in the world? Why do people get cancer? Why is there hunger? Why are there bullies and gangs? Whatever your questions may be, spend some time asking God those questions, either out loud or by writing them down.

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