

On Prayer and Healing

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Before you can pray we must know God. We must know God loves us and cares for us. We must know God forgives us. We must know God wants to listen to us. We must feel confident coming to God. Without a sense of belonging to God, prayer is quite difficult and only done out of fear. But if you know you belong to God, then prayer builds an amazing relationship or connection to God. It becomes the breathing of your soul.

So, first I want to reassure you that you are a child of God.
That God does love you...even if you are a real stinker!
That you matter to God...and God cherishes you, even you!
That there is nothing you have done that is so bad that you and God can't work out.
God is the God of new beginnings, second, third and fourth chances.

Now, you know you belong to God, now I can tell you about the wonder and responsibilities of prayer.
(As I see it.)

What I am about to describe to you now has been called "**The Five Finger Rosary**":

1. Approaching God,
2. Confession,
3. Thanksgiving,
4. Prayer for others,
5. Prayer for yourself.

(1) ("Adoration"), **Approaching**; being with God:

Before you start blabbing away to God, just BE with God for a while.

Before you start your litany of woes and worries, just BE still with God for a while.

One day my daughter who was then in about grade 3 came home from school all upset. She had been the brunt of the teasing and name calling at school that day. And it hurt and she was very upset. When she came in the door I could see she was upset, so I sat down in the big ol' comfortable Lazy Boy chair and had her sit on my lap. At first we just sat there, very quiet, and I hugged her and we just sat there. Gradually her breathing went back to normal and she sighed a few times. Then she told me about her day, who said what, who did what, and on and on. When she had it all out I reassured her that she was very much loved by her family no matter what anyone else said or did. Then we sat there just being close. Then she sighed again only more contented and relieved now. She diddled with the buttons on my shirt for a while, then she announced she wanted to go outside to play and jumped down and was off. Things were better now.

When we approach God for prayer the first thing to do is NOTHING, be still and shut up. Just sit there, imagine you are sitting on God's lap and just be close to God, just be held by God, just be hugged by God.

Prayer is first and foremost connecting with God and being with God. Secondly it is about talking to God and asking for help.

(2) Confession: getting things right with God:

Now the next thing when coming to God in prayer is to get things straight between you and God. If you have done wrong, admit it. If you have gone astray, admit it. If you have sinned confess it. Yes God already knows, but it is important for us to acknowledge our wrongs and ask God to forgive us. Just like we do before we take communion.

And remember God does forgive us, that is the whole thing about Jesus Christ. He does love us, He does forgive us, He has made it possible for us to come back to Him. Remember the words of the Apostle Paul: "I do the things I should not do, and I do not do the things that I should do and there is no health in me. Oh who will deliver me from this body of sin?" And then he says: "Thank God for Jesus Christ".

We are like children playing, sometimes we play fair, sometimes we share, but sometimes we are stinking little evil brats. Yet like a good parent, God still loves us, disappointed in us, peeved and annoyed maybe, but he loves us and asks us to make up with each other and come back to Him.

(3) Thanksgiving:

We are not a particularly thankful people. We need to learn the art of being GRATEFUL. Tonight at the Celebrate Life Service Bonnie Monteith is going to talk about Gratitude. I have known Bonnie and her husband for a long time. I am sure her talk will be well worth hearing.

After I had surgery for Colon Cancer, I had months and months and months of really slow recovery with multiple trips back to the hospital. Oh how I missed the everyday things. How I grew to hate the smells and noises associated with a hospital. Oh how I missed the tiny daily things. I became ever so much more grateful and thankful for the minutia of life. The sad thing is that as I got healthier I began to forget. I can remember, not too long ago grouching to myself about some mundane, boring, daily task I was doing, and then recalling that there was a time I was very, very grateful to be alive to be able to do such a thing. And I thanked God for my boring little task.

So when approaching God, remember, before you start whining to God, be thankful for all your blessings. And no matter who you are or how your life is going you have a lot to be thankful for.

(4) (“Petition”)-Prayer for others:

Prayer for others is where we get into the heavy duty stuff of prayer. Prayer for others is serious business for the church and many of you are called to it and given a gift of prayer.

At a baptism the Godparents and sponsors and the church all make promises about the Christian upbringing of the child. And a lot of that involves the responsibility of praying for that child on a daily basis. It is important.

At a wedding I have always felt that there were one or two people that God was calling to pray for that couple for the rest of their (or your) lives. It is very important.

Each week the Prayer and Share group meets in this church to pray for the church and each of its members in need and our mission efforts and whatever else is needful. It is very important.

Each Sunday before church service time there is a prayer group that meets to pray for our service, our leaders, and each person that comes. It is very important.

Many people in this church have a gift for prayer and exercise it both in the various prayer groups and individually in their homes. And the powerful results of those prayers are guiding this church today and into the future. There is something very special going on here, there is a great Presence of the Spirit, there is great love and joy. (Not that we don't disagree at times, all families do!). All this has been brought about and is maintained by those of you who pray constantly.

We who are seniors have a calling and responsibility to protect, guide and empower our church and its leaders. This is something we can do. We have faith, we have time and we have a heart of love for our church. I ask you, to be a part of the protection and source of empowerment in this church.

God doesn't usually work in a vacuum with His people. The hands of prayer move the hands of God.

When LilyJean and I started in the ministry we had a large group of people praying for us. There was our mothers, our grandmothers, there was John Gordon who was a kind of Spiritual Godparent to me, our Aunts, LilyJean's cousin Jeannie. Then there was Mrs. Dilts and Mrs. Wilson; two retired “church ladies” who knew how to pray. They took it as their responsibility to pray us into the ministry and on to successful work in the church. We called them our Dynamic Duo. So in touch were they with God in prayer and so fervent was their prayer that it was not uncommon for them to know when we were having a hard time. Often we would get a phone call from one or the other that went like this:

“Stewart, you had a difficult time yesterday afternoon, now tell us what we need to pray about.” I am sure you all have moments like that, don't let them pass without dealing with them.

Now as these prayer warriors of ours graduated to heaven LJ and I found it harder and harder. One day we realized that the major part of our back up team was gone now and we were often as not, on our own and not doing well.

Many of you have a calling to pray for your church, seek it out. If you are called you will be equipped. It doesn't require any travel and meetings are optional!

(5) “Supplication”-Prayers for ourselves:

Now the last section is prayer for ourselves. And so it should be. We can't just run into God's presence and yell gimme, gimme, gimme. What kind of spoiled brats would that be? But yes we need to pray for ourselves and our needs but after we are silent with God, and clear our accounts with God, and are grateful to God, and remember others before God. Then we can talk about our stuff.

The biggest thing is to be honest with God and tell it like it is. Talk to God with your heart wide open, don't try to hide anything. Just as an honest open hearted child pleases its parents; so too our frankness is pleasing to God. And be confident, God does care for you, God does love you, God rejoices to have you draw near to Him.

So there you have the “Five Finger Rosary”: Approaching, Confession, Thanksgiving, Prayer for Others, and Prayer for Yourself.

The Dilemma: And then there is the dilemma of unanswered prayer. Sometimes God says yes, sometimes God says no (and no is an answer), sometimes God says wait. And sometimes it tears us all apart, when we pray for another's healing or life and God is silent.

For sure no is an answer, and I get that, especially when God says no to my prayers for a stretch limousine or to winning the Lotto 64/9. Or when I was a kid and I prayed for an F-18 fighter aircraft!

When I had Colo-rectal cancer I was healed, between God and the work of modern medical science. I was healed. But I have lived for 14 years now with all manner of intestinal problems that medicine has no cure for and my prayers have not been answered. If I had my full health and energy oh the things I could do...but then I remember the Apostle Paul when he prayed about his physical infirmity. He prayed 3 times and God said no, He would not heal Paul. Paul was told by God: "In your weakness is my strength made perfect". Okay then, I am learning to accept that and God has indeed done things in me because I have been so unwell that he never could have accomplished otherwise.

Then there is my granddaughter Ella. The doctors told my daughter and son-in-law that there was no hope for their unborn child and if she was born she would be severely damaged in many ways and may be missing body parts. Well they found another medical center and we all prayed fervently and today that child is 2 ½ years old and as healthy and beautiful and intelligent as a little girl could be. What an answer to prayer.

Then there is Dawna Sands. If ever there was someone that deserved to live, for herself and for her husband and three little boys, this was the woman. And oh we prayed for her. We prayed that the therapies would do their job. We prayed for her return to health. I was so sure up until very near the end that God was going to heal her. But he didn't and I don't understand. Oh I have some understanding and it revolves around the whole thing of free will and the ramifications of that but it doesn't really help.

I don't understand. I am pretty close to God. I draw daily strength from God. I could not live without the Presence of God in my life. I put myself in God's hands and trust Him absolutely. I need Him too much to let this come between us. Like a child asking impossible-to-understand (for his age) questions of his parents. I will accept that "someday you will understand, but not now". So I leave it to God to explain things in God's good time. And in the mean time I stick close to the God who is to me:

my Light in the darkness,
my Presence in the emptiness,
my Peace in the anguish,
my Warmth in the bitter cold,
my Direction in the confusion.

In these and all things I know the comfort of God,
And God's closeness in my prayers. Amen.