

Caring for One Another

Holding One Another in Prayer



Opening Questions (select 1 or 2 questions)

- What was one of your favorite games as a child?
- What are your memories of being taught to pray—either as a child or when you were older? What ideas or practices for prayer have you found helpful?

What Does the Bible Say?

Romans 8:26-28 NRSV (Translation)

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:26-28 THE MESSAGE (Paraphrase)

Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. [God's Spirit] does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. [The Spirit] knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good.

Think About... (optional, depending on time)

- What words or phrases from the reading stood out to you? Which version speaks to you? In what way?

What Do Others Say?

I love words. I always have. I was a kid who hid under the covers with a flashlight so I could keep reading after my mom called "Lights out!" I appreciate an artful turn of phrase and quick-witted humor. I enjoy crossword puzzles and will get more than a little competitive playing word games like Boggle or Scrabble. As an introvert, I tend to think carefully about my words before I speak;

which means I am sometimes slow to get an idea out and I can get a little tongue-tied when I try too hard to get the words just right. But, all in all, words are a comforting companion and friend.

For a long time, I assumed that prayer was words. Imagine my surprise when words failed me. Looking back, this first happened during a difficult season in college. My prayers grew silent. I don't mean silent prayer. I mean my prayers stopped for a time because I didn't have words. I didn't have words to express how lost, lonely and uncertain I felt—or maybe I was afraid it wasn't okay to say those words to God—so, I was silent.

Holding one another in prayer is one of the gifts of being connected as a faith-filled community. Whether in our one-to-one relationships, or in small groups, praying for one another draws us together and builds connections between us. Holding one another in prayer is a tangible way of caring for one another through our joys and sorrows and all that the years bring.

There are seasons when words are our friends, when it is easy to name feelings, hopes and desires before God, either for ourselves or for others. Then there are seasons when words fail. When someone I care about loses a loved one or is facing a difficult diagnosis or situation in their life, words often seem inadequate to express what I feel on their behalf or the comfort I want to provide.

How do we hold someone in prayer using words? There is no one right way to do this. You can start with a simple question: *How would you like me to pray for you today? Or How would you like me to pray for you this week?* Giving space for people to name their own needs and desires and worries, is an important part of how we connect in prayer. Adding the time limiter of "today" or "this week" does not mean we won't continue to pray beyond that time; but narrowing the focus makes it easier for the person to name what desires are most present in that moment.

Sometimes, in difficult situations, we don't even know what to ask for in prayer. In those times, we might use words to name before God any or all of the following:

- Our uncertainty ("Jesus, I don't know what to ask...")
- how we feel
- what we're worried about
- what gives us hope
- our trust in God's presence and willingness to act
- our fear that God is not present
- our lament that God is not acting in the way we want or as quickly as we want
- our confidence in God's healing power
- our confidence in God's love for us, no matter what

- for Jesus to make his presence known
- for comfort
- for peace
- for the Holy Spirit to strengthen and sustain us in the face of what we are experiencing.

How do we hold one another in prayer when words fail completely? I think of Jesus' words, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28)." Maybe resting in Jesus' love is a form of prayer. I think of how our 4-year-old comes and curls up in my lap and lets me wrap my arms around her because she just needs to feel safe, that she belongs, that she is loved. It is an act of pure trust. Words fail but presence and safe space speak volumes.

When words fail, or even when they don't, we can entrust one another and the situations we face to Jesus' by practicing visualization. This form of prayer can be done individually or with another person. Here are some easy steps:

1. **Quiet your mind and your heart** - Settle into a comfortable position. Close your eyes, take a few deep breaths and exhale slowly.
2. **Remember Jesus' love for you** - Bring to mind an image that speaks to you of Jesus' love. You might picture warm light or gentle hands cupped to receive and hold what is placed in them or something else entirely.
3. **Entrust all to God's love** – Without using words, picture a person or situation being wrapped or held in God's love. Breathe in and out slowly as you entrust them to Jesus' loving care. You can focus on one person or situation or do several in sequence.
4. **Return to Jesus' love for you** – Before you end your prayer time, be sure to hold yourself in Jesus' love with tenderness and grace.
5. **Close your prayer time** – Close with a simple prayer of gratitude or by praying the Lord's Prayer.

Ultimately, whether we use words or not, prayer is an act of entrusting someone or something to God's loving care and wisdom. Even in that, thankfully, we cannot fail, for God's Spirit "does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs (Romans 8:26, MSG)."

—Reflection written by Jeanne Hartfield

Think About... *(select one or more questions)*

- Has there been a time when you were aware that someone was praying for you? What was that like for you?
- How have your ideas about prayer or ways of practicing prayer changed over time?
- Share one of your prayer practices or a way you would like to try to pray.

- If you've had a time when words failed you, what was helpful in moving through that time? When you offer to pray for someone, what helps you to remember to hold them in prayer?
- How do corporate prayers (those said together) impact our life as a faith community? How do our individual prayers for the faith community make a difference? What is your prayer for our community?

St. Patrick's Prayer for the Faithful

May the strength of God pilot us, may the power of God preserve us, may the wisdom of God instruct us, may the hand of God protect us, may the way of God direct us, may the shield of God defend us, may the host of God guard us against the snares of evil and the temptations of the world. Amen.

Connecting Faith with Daily Life...

(for individual reflection & action)

- Think of someone you would like to hold in prayer this week.
- Select one of the starting phrases from the bullet list and use those words in your prayers for a week.
- Try the visualization prayer, focusing on another person, a situation or using the time to imagine yourself wrapped in God's love.
- Exchange names with one another in the group and hold each other in prayer. You don't need pray for anything specific, just say a general prayer for one another.
- Try the Centering Prayer group at Incarnation. Find out more at www.incarnationmn.org/connect-grow/prayer/

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