

GROWING *Together*

12th Series

'TEACH US TO PRAY...'

'Teach us to pray...!' Is that something you'd like to ask someone? What if somebody asked you to teach them to pray?

When the disciples asked Jesus, he knew how to reply. Prayer was an important part of his daily life. In the synagogue, in the temple, on the hills, by the sea, beneath the trees, Jesus prayed. Once he prayed so earnestly, his sweat fell like drops of blood (Luke 22:44). Jesus prayed that hard. And even that prayer in some ways was not answered: he was crucified. So, how do people pray?

Sometimes it helps to think of prayer as three basic postures.

TALKING TO...

Maybe there are many things on our mind, in our heart. Ideas we're struggling with. Decisions we must make. Things we don't understand. Events or people frightening us. Or joy so-o-o big inside, we can't hold it in! Talk to God about it! In your own words. With your own feelings. Speak out loud or whisper softly or just think the words in your head. Like you're talking with a friend you trust. Maybe writing the words in a diary, journal, or letter to the friend makes the 'talking' easier for you. Another way of talking to God is to read the Bible. Any part of the Bible. And while you're reading it, imagine God seated beside you, listening lovingly to you. As we read the Bible or write or talk things over, clarity and peace come.

Whether you do it out loud or silently, this prayer posture is good when you are kneeling beside your bed, or seated somewhere - anywhere! Or when you're running on the trail or scrubbing the floor.

SITTING WITH...

All of us experience times when words just don't come. Perhaps too much is going on within us; it's hard to know where to begin. Maybe something so upsetting has happened that we feel empty, with no word to speak. Or perhaps all is well and we simply want to be in touch with God without anything specific to talk about.

That's when it's good to know a number of prayers by heart, learned perhaps long ago. Prayers like the Lord's Prayer (Our Father who art in heaven...), or the Serenity Prayer (Lord grant me the serenity...). It may be hymns you know by heart (How great thou art), melodic words speaking deeply for you (On a hill far away...). Or possibly it's simple Taizé chants (Oh Lord, hear my prayer...) or passages from the Bible like the 23rd Psalm (The Lord is my shepherd...). Simply repeating or singing these words is a way of sitting with God, letting God's presence touch you, strengthen you or rejoice within you.

This prayer posture is good when you're beginning a meeting; when you're alone, waiting for important news; when you're in heated conflict; or, standing in line to pay for groceries.

RESTING IN...

Meister Eckhart once said, "Nothing in all creation is so like God as stillness." Some call it contemplation. For many, this form of prayer is the most difficult. For others, it comes naturally. Just as our tongue can be stilled, so can our mind. Just as our feet can stop wandering, so can our heart. Just as our muscles can fully relax, so can our spirit. We drink in God's magnificent presence by relaxing in it. Resting with God takes practice. Relax all your muscles. Maybe close your eyes. Imagine setting all thoughts and worries on a shelf for a while. Then repeat over and over again a single word or brief phrase like 'Jesus' or 'God loves me' until you are lifted slowly into that love, peace and quiet joy. Feel and see God all around and deep within...

This prayer posture works well when you're resting by a campfire or out on the sunny open prairie or locked away in a jail cell... One day, hopefully, it becomes the posture of all our living and will be the posture we eagerly assume at the moment of our death.

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ's faithful.



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