

Prayers That Connect:

by
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Aldrich



Early in my widowhood, as I prayed with my son and daughter about a possible move, I ended the prayer with “Thank you, God, that you’ll show us what to do.”

As I stood up, my then twelve-year-old daughter, Holly, said, “Mom, you didn’t say, ‘Amen.’”

I nodded. “That’s because the Lord and I are going to talk about this all day long.”

We did, too—while I was driving, washing dishes and waiting in the dentist’s office. Eventually my children and I made a cross-country move that opened a new career for me. But, more importantly, I’d begun a new adventure in connecting with God.

Here’s what I’ve learned about prayer along the way.

1. We do not pray to air. In Colorado Springs, where I live, majestic Pike’s Peak rises above the city. On those rare days when clouds obscure the Peak, we don’t wander around saying, “I knew it was too good to last. The Peak is gone!” We know that the Peak is there, even though we can’t see it. It’s the same with God. He’s working even when we can’t see his hand.

2. Jump right in. Reading all kinds of books on prayer means nothing if we don’t start talking to God ourselves. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we can talk to our heavenly Father just as we talk to a good friend.

Jana (not her real name) remembers her grandparents’ prayers filled with sacred sounding “thees” and “thous” that made her feel uncomfortable about approaching God. She says her attitude changed only when she tried to start a stubborn lawnmower and sighed a simple “Lord, I really need your help.” The resulting catch of the engine thrust her into a new awareness of his presence.

3. There’s no “right” way to pray. Perhaps you’ve heard the five *Ps*: Be in the same *place* for prayer each day, during the same *period* of time; use the same *posture*; select a Scripture *passage*; then *pray*. Those are good suggestions, but it’s important to concentrate on the privilege of prayer rather than on the process.

Years ago, as I explained a workplace dilemma to a friend, he leaned back in his chair, put his hands behind his head, and said, “Let’s give this to the Lord right now.” Then he proceeded, with eyes wide open, to pray.

Startled, I put my head down, folded my hands and squeezed my eyes closed. Still, I knew my friend continued gazing out the window, talking to the One who’d created all that beauty. Amazed by his physical boldness and spiritual humility, I thought about prayer in a new way. Today, I readily pray with my eyes open—on walks with a friend or on the telephone as I encourage a troubled caller.

4. Pray as you’d talk to a friend. My Kentucky grandmother, Mama Farley, talked to God so naturally that often I’d meander into our kitchen expecting to see a neighbor, but discover it was just Mama and the Lord discussing the day.

“Now, Lord,” I heard Mama say one day, “you’re going to have to do something about the well. You know we need water. And you’ve said all we have to do is ask, so thank you for the way you’ll guide us in solving this. Meanwhile, keep the men strong and safe as they dig.”

My grandfather and uncles reached a good water table the next morning.

5. Let your emotions show. When my son, Jay, was a toddler, he’d often exclaim, “Hey, take-a-see!” What if we offered that same joyful call to our heavenly Father as we thank him for a beautiful sunrise? Similarly, what if we were truthful in our pain? As a single parent, many of my prayers have begun with “Lord, you know I hate days like this,” as I’ve faced another crisis. When the Lord said, “Come unto me,” he didn’t add, “as long as there’s a smile on your face.” He just said, “Come!”

6. Pray when you don’t feel like it. Especially then. One of my single-mom friends, Debi, heard her then nine-year-old son, Shane, screaming as he charged into the house one summer morning. He was clutching his left hand

with his right—and blood oozed out between his fingers.

“Shane! What happened? Let me see!” The child backed up. “No! You’ll hurt me!” She pleaded with him again to no avail.

Finally, Debi wrestled him to the floor and carefully opened his fingers, expecting to see exposed bone and tendon. But the cut was just a scrape, the kind that bleeds a lot. After tending to the wound, Debi sent Shane back to his ball game.

Putting away the first aid kit, she marveled at her son’s dramatics. Then she realized she’d done the same to God. After her husband walked out, she felt so hurt she wouldn’t pray. God was saying, “Let me help,” while Debi stood with fists clenched, saying, “No, you’ll hurt me.”

Right there in the kitchen, Debi sobbed out her pain, telling the Lord what he already knew, but what she needed to hear herself saying. Her own healing had begun.

7. Give the crisis to God.

When we are up to our necks in a mess and we can’t pull ourselves out, that’s when God can show his power.

I’ve taken weeks to work through some dilemmas, but especially in the midst of a crisis, all I had time for was a panicked “Lord!” That’s all I could do in Pennsylvania when a speeding car spun out of control and began heading for us. The car barely missed us.

On another rainy afternoon near our home, a car did hit us, even as I yelped the same prayer. I don’t know why God sometimes intervenes and other times he does not. I do know he is with us even in bad times. The morning before my husband died, he told me, “Just remember, San. The Lord never promised us an easy road, but he did promise always to be with us on that road.”

8. Pray even when you’re powerless. Aunt Adah was paralyzed for the last five years of her life and unable to speak for the last two years. My mother cared for her totally—bathing her, turning her,

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feeding her. She also challenged Aunt Adah to accept a special prayer ministry.

Each day, as Mother received word of a particular need, she’d pass it along to Aunt Adah and wait for the coded eye blinks that assured her my aunt understood. She often prayed for my children and me—especially when we flew in for a visit. Once we’d arrive at my parents’ home, we’d go to Aunt Adah’s bed in the living room, kiss her forehead, and thank her for praying. How Aunt Adah’s eyes would shine.

Since Aunt Adah died last year, I’ve often thought how her prayers surrounded us, and I’ve often wondered how they affected her. In the midst of pain, she possessed a graciousness and peace I wouldn’t have expected. Surely she was wrapped in God’s grace during her constant prayerfulness.

9. Trust God’s sovereignty as you pray. After my husband Don’s brain cancer went into unexpected remission, I asked him if he thought all the prayers on his behalf had changed God’s mind. He shook his head. “Then why do we pray if our prayers can’t change God’s mind?” I asked.

He gave me one of his gentle, patient looks and said, “To show our submission to the Master.”

I still remember that scene twenty-four years after his death, and I am reminded we don’t have to know the future when we pray. All we have to do is trust the One who does.

Even in loss, find something for which you can be thankful. After Don’s death, I was determined that although ten-year-old Jay and eight-year-old Holly had lost their dad physically, they wouldn’t lose me emotionally. So, every night as I tucked them into bed, I asked if they wanted to talk before we prayed together.

Sometimes Jay shared a special memory of his dad or asked a ques-

tion about the funeral. But not Holly. Even after two weeks, she hadn’t cried and kept all her questions inside. I began to ask my friends to pray for her to open up.

Soon after, as I tucked her in one night, she said, “I do wonder one thing. When we prayed, didn’t God listen?”

With that question, she’d uttered the universal heart’s cry. I said a quick mental prayer and then began the hardest explanation I’ve ever given.

I reminded Holly of my Grandpa Ted, who’d died after his leg was severed in a Kentucky coal mine. He was twenty-two years old and left three children under the age of four. Then I said that God had given us sixteen extra months with Daddy, after the doctors said he would die within weeks. And Daddy could have died after his first battle with cancer, when she had been three years old.

Then, I asked Holly if she felt like praying. She nodded, then began, “Thank you, God, that Daddy died now instead of when I was little.” Since that night, I’ve often pondered why God doesn’t always respond the way I’ve asked. I don’t have an answer. All I know is that God cares and wants us to keep talking to him. □

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