

## Dear God... Talking to God as Spiritual Practice

April 24, 2020

How do we pray? Is there a right way? Is there a wrong way? How do we start? Is anyone listening?

Questions about prayers and the power of prayers is one of the most common topics that come up when I work 1:1 with students. And as any good chaplain, I tailor my responses to those questions to the situation and the students. But if I'm being super super honest, my faith in prayer ebbs and flows just like anyone else. Some days I am 100% sure that God is listening and acting, other days I feel like I'm talking to nothing, and wonder if there is even a point. "Why would God listen to me? I'm not as important as someone in a war zone, or someone who's starving, or a soldier, or even an airplane pilot!" But when my calm rational mind kicks in, at the bare minimum, praying doesn't hurt anyone, and at the maximum the triune God, who created the universe, loves me and is listening. Just like any good parents we don't always get what we want, we don't always get our requests on our time schedule, but I do believe that God is listening, loves us, and has our best interest at heart. We don't always understand the delays, or lack of answers, and I don't think we're supposed to, but that doesn't mean our prayers are in vain.

Many of the spiritual practices we've explored this year have really been, at their core, various forms of praying. This year we've looked at the Psalms, as prayerful inspiration (I swear every emotion you can think of shows up somewhere in the book of Psalms if you read closely enough). We've even combined the [Psalms with Yoga](#), done some regular yoga and sun salutations, and looked at other embodied ways of praying. We've gone through the physical motions, if not the arabic, of [Muslim prayer](#). We had a workshop on TaiChi, we've meditated, we've colored, we've made lists of things we are grateful for, and we've just sat breathing, listening for God. All of these things are forms of prayer, strategies and practices to connect with the divine, to give thanks, offer praise, and petition a higher power.

Sometimes praying can be hard to start. It can feel like we need a formal greeting, or way to get God's attention, when I'm exacerbated, or short on time I'm a fan of just calling out "Hey God! Could you please \_\_\_\_\_? Ok, Thanks! Bye" (I've literally done this while driving, on speaker phone with my best friend and asked God if she could please have her baby on a very specific date so it wouldn't mess up her seminary class schedule ... it worked... perfectly... we've both now scared of my "Hey God!" prayers.) In a formal worship setting when there is a gap in the prayers and those present are encouraged to share prayers out loud I freeze. Every. Single. Time. Unless I'm leading worship, have a

topic in mind, and have thought about it in advance, praying in public scares me sooooo much. I will politely avoid it as much as possible. My college Chaplains would leave this gap in every service they led, and I would be willing to bet in four years of attending worship with them I only shared a prayer five or six times. But Rev. Kathleen would always wrap up the prayers of the people saying “ We lift up all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, knowing that we need not say a prayer aloud for you to hear them.” I found so so much comfort in this, her words were so certain that they left no doubt that God had heard me even if I was too afraid to say something outloud.

So friends, our spiritual practice this week is yet another form(s) of prayer. If we were gathered together in person I would give you two options, and a “take home idea.” So here we go:

### Option 1- Silent Prayers

Sit somewhere quiet, and comfortable, and have a mental chat with the Divine. Just start talking in your head. Ask questions, listen, share what’s going on, just start and see what happens.

- If you need an “end time” feel free to set a timer. If you’ve never meditated or done this before I suggest 5 minutes. If you have a lot on your plate right now, go for 10!
- You’re allowed to be upset with God, you’re allowed to disagree, you're allowed to push back, you’re allowed to question. I promise you’re not the first person to do it, and God doesn’t stop loving you just because you have opinions.

### Option 2- Writing to God

Grab a pen and paper, or your laptop and write God a letter. Don’t think too hard about this just start writing. Stream of consciousness works beautifully, don’t worry about spelling, or grammer, just let it out, see where it goes.

- Similarly to the silent prayers, you can set a timer, but I’d prefer if you use it as a minimum timer rather than a cut off point.
- Remember that all your feelings, questions, challenges, fears, joys, and hopes are on the table, and you don’t have to have this be a coherent document. If God knows what your silent prayers are God can make sense of your written ones too.

### Option 3/Take Home - “Hey God!”

This is a challenge I would have sent you home with, but ... you're already home... so do it whenever. When something comes to mind that you'd like to pray for just start out loud with "Hey God!" and then a short petition for whatever is on your mind. This is informal, somewhat entertaining, and a great way to just hand off something that's worrying you or weighing you down. It can be as short as "Hey God, I need help! Amen." Try it out, see how it feels, feel free to explain to that family member giving you a weird look that "Julia told me to try it!"

*One last thought...*

*We haven't been able to sing this together in Chapel since everyone left so if you're wondering about where you fit in God's big plan, remember that you are a beloved [Child of God](#) so if you're praying out loud, trying singing out loud too.*