

**Theme:** Prayer and Spirituality

**Question:** How do you pray? How do you share your spirituality with others?

Teens and parents in conversation

# HomeWord

Volume 7, Number 10

## Young Adult Talk

by Stephanie Richter

How do you pray? What may come to mind is a physical position—kneeling, standing, sitting cross-legged, and so on—or a location such as a church, your bedroom, or a special quiet place. Perhaps you picture a child praying before he goes to bed or a family gathered around a dinner table. The question, “How do you pray?” invites me to look at the mechanics of my prayer. How I pray depends on why I pray.

In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians, we are told to “rejoice always, pray without ceasing” (5:17–18). The rejoicing part is easy, but I have never quite mastered praying without ceasing.

I pray daily. These prayers tend to be loose and unstructured, never lasting longer than a few thoughts. Most, I admit, are rather selfish. I’ve prayed to get to work on time: “Please God, don’t let me be late again.” I’ve made deals with God: “If you make my headache go away, I promise to never swear again.”

These prayers are not serious petitions to God but are my way of reminding myself that God is a part of

my daily life, that God knows who I am and what I feel at any given moment. My more serious prayers are still unstructured as I prefer sharing my deepest thoughts in conversations with God rather than sticking to a formula.

I pray in church with others. Usually, these are formulated prayers such as the Our Father, the Apostles’ Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or a prayer for forgiveness.

As I look around at the others in the pew, it sometimes seems as if no one is paying attention to what they are saying.

Having prayed these prayers since a very young age, most of us seldom think about the words anymore.

Have these prayers lost their value? Not for me. When the words are said, everyone is together at that moment, and I feel like I am part of the community. When I feel alone or distanced from my parish, these common prayers bring me back.

I pray for others. Saint Francis urged all believers to share the Gospel, using words only when necessary. Saint Francis wanted

## Parent Talk by Ralph Stewart

How do you pray? That is a difficult question that challenges me to stop and contemplate. It is sort of like asking, How do you breathe? I believe we do both without even thinking about it.

If prayer is communication with God, and that God is everywhere and in everything, then it would follow that no matter what I do, I am communicating with God. I am always praying. How

aware I am of praying is a whole other matter. I think a

better question would be, How aware am I of my prayer?

As I become more aware of my interaction with God, and as I work to improve that communication with God, I become more in tune with my prayer. And through this awareness, I improve my life.

As I said, praying is like breathing; it is something we all do, all the time, as long as we are alive. Even when we don’t think about it, we still continue to do it. Just as becoming aware of our breathing has many

practical benefits, becoming aware of praying does too.

In childbirth, mothers learn to focus on breathing as a means to alleviate pain and to control the urge to push. Consciously changing one’s breathing patterns can be an effective technique in anger management, and through biofeedback breathing control techniques have helped control high blood pressure.

Similarly, there are practical benefits to becoming more aware of our communication with God. Perhaps the most

obvious benefit is hearing what God wants to tell us. I know, that is easier said than done. It takes work to become aware of our prayer, to hear what God has to say. In some ways, we have to want it badly enough.

Anthony De Mello, a Jesuit storyteller and retreat leader, told a story about a man who went to his teacher in quest to know God better. The man complained that even though he meditated and prayed constantly he just wasn’t getting closer to God. His teacher told him

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## Young Adult Talk *continued*

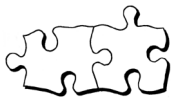
our actions to speak louder than our words. What better way to share what Jesus has taught us than to pray for another person? “I will pray for you” is one of the most powerful things anyone can say to another person.

As a member of a prayer chain for our church, I have never met most of the people I have prayed for. The person could be an ill friend of a friend or a parish member who needs strength to make a decision. I rarely get to learn the outcome, but I find

that it is just as fulfilling to know that I have tried to help another person through prayer.

Prayer brings us closer to God and to our community. How we physically behave when we pray is not as important as why we pray. When we pray for others, I believe we share our spirituality in the most effective way.

*Stephanie Richter is wife to Jonathan and mother to two-year old Rebecca. She lives in Muskego, Wisconsin.*



Have you ever felt so close to heaven and God that all you can do is cry—not out of sadness or loneliness, but out of pure and simple joy? I was blessed to experience this at a youth conference I attended. As a pastor was preaching, he would spontaneously break into simple but moving songs. One that he sang, along with everyone in the stadium, contained the words, “Answer Me!” I had been fighting many internal battles and had been preoccupied with several situations in my life, but the moment this little prayer was being sung to God, tears welled up in my eyes and an internal peace consumed my whole being. I felt the Lord’s presence surround and settle within me. I was overwhelmed with the joy and grace that only can be received from Jesus. The comfort and relief that God’s presence gave me was so entrancing. I stayed as still as I possibly could, not wanting this magnificent feeling to leave me. I could not say a word; I only could shed tears of joy!

Naomi Dudek, age 16, in *Listen for a Whisper*, edited by Janet Claussen and Marilyn Kielbasa (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2001), page 11.

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Write to *HomeWord*, Saint Mary’s Press, 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320  
E-mail: [lkehrwald@smp.org](mailto:lkehrwald@smp.org); phone: 800-533-8095

## Parent Talk *continued*

that he did not want it badly enough. The man insisted that he did. The teacher took the man into the river and held his head under water. The man began to struggle frantically trying to get up. After several minutes he became free and, gasping for breath, asked what on earth the teacher was doing. The teacher replied that when his desire to be close to God equaled his desire for air while he was under water, then he would become closer to God. (Adapted from *One Minute Wisdom*, by Anthony De Mello [New York: Image Books, 1988], page 43.)

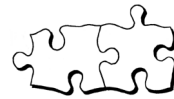
I don’t know if my desire has reached that point, but it certainly is

a goal to strive for. I must constantly remind myself to become more aware of my prayer life. The task becomes easier when I pray with others.

How we live is the most visible way we pray. When we live better, we pray better, and people are drawn to us. Look at the life of Jesus. The crowds wanted to hang out with him, to go where he went. They were drawn to this man who prayed continually to do the will of his father.

I hope we can all become more aware of our prayer.

*Ralph Stewart is the director of East Side Child and Youth Ministry in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he lives with his wife, Lisa.*



I pray to God when I feel bad.  
I pray to God whenever I’m mad.  
I pray to God to help me out.  
When making a decision, when I’m in doubt.  
I always pray for others, too.  
My mom, my dad, and my sister, too.  
I pray to God every day.  
I pray to God when the skies are gray.  
I pray when I am on the bus.  
I pray to God, I just must!  
I pray before I eat,  
Or even when I’m in cold sleet.  
I just pray whenever I can  
When I have time—a lot! Amen.

Brian Rivette in *Life Can Be a Wild Ride*, edited by Marilyn Kielbasa (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2001), page 110.