

“Teach Us to Pray” – Stephanie Wing, 7.25.10

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Presbyterian Anne LaMott writes that she really only has two basic prayers: "Thank you, thank you!" and "Help me, help me, help me!" I imagine that many of us can relate to that. How many people feel the guilt of coming to God only when everything seems to be falling apart, and when we feel the greatest need for divine intervention? Sometimes it is life's hardships that really teach us to pray, calling to God for help. But sometimes, when we are in the deepest pits of despair, we have a hard time even coming to God to ask for help. Or perhaps we get discouraged because we feel like our prayers haven't been answered, or haven't

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The message here is persistence, but this word can also be translated as "shamelessness." Not only are we to be persistent in our prayer, but we are to pray absolutely shamelessly. Sometimes we have a hard time admitting our needs, admitting our shortcomings and faults, and admitting that we are totally dependent on God. But God calls for us to drop our pride and constantly, persistently, and shamelessly approach God in our time of need. *Ask. Seek. Knock.* Be persistent in coming to God, even when we feel like we're getting nowhere. Even if it means risking embarrassment, standing on the street in the middle of the night, banging on God's door and asking for help.

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Our reading from Colossians reminds us that we need to be rooted in Christ, and established in the faith. As we wait for God's kingdom, we are still planted

here in this world, and we are called to grow and bloom where we are planted. But we must be planted in the rich soil of Christ, deeply rooted not in the rocky terrain of our world, but established in such a way that our roots will be fed with the life-giving sustenance that only Christ can give. As we are planted, so we also must be tended, and prayer is as essential to growing rooted in Christ as water is to any other plant growing on earth.

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So how are we to pray? Constantly. Though there are guidelines for prayer out there, there is really no "wrong" way to pray. Some people are able to spend long periods of time praying in silence. Some find that keeping a prayer journal helps. Still others of us might pray best when our hands are busy. I know of a potter who prays constantly as she works in the clay. We can pray simple prayers while doing ordinary household chores, such as washing dishes. Some prayers are spoken. Some are sung. Some are written in poetry or prose, or perhaps even painted on a canvas. Some prayers are private, but we are also called to pray together with others. Have you heard the saying, "The family that prays together stays together"? There is truth in that.

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The message here is persistence, but this word can also be translated as "shamelessness." Not only are we to be persistent in our prayer, but we are to pray absolutely shamelessly. Sometimes we have a hard time admitting our needs, admitting our shortcomings and faults, and admitting that we are totally dependent on God. But God calls for us to drop our pride and constantly, persistently, and shamelessly approach God in our time of need. *Ask. Seek. Knock.* Be persistent in coming to God, even when we feel like we're getting nowhere. Even if it means risking embarrassment, standing on the street in the middle of the night, banging on God's door and asking for help.

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So how are we to pray? Constantly. Though there are guidelines for prayer out there, there is really no "wrong" way to pray. Some people are able to spend long periods of time praying in silence. Some find that keeping a prayer journal helps. Still others of us might pray best when our hands are busy. I know of a potter who prays constantly as she works in the clay. We can pray simple prayers while doing ordinary household chores, such as washing dishes. Some prayers are spoken. Some are sung. Some are written in poetry or prose, or perhaps even painted on a canvas. Some prayers are private, but we are also called to pray together with others. Have you heard the saying, "The family that prays together stays together"? There is truth in that.

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“Teach Us to Pray” – Stephanie Wing, 7.25.10

A movie that came out last year brought back to the screen the character of Madea, an older, straight-shooting woman who always has something to say. A young and troubled teenage girl goes to her for help, and Madea says, “You remind me of Peter – you know - Peter Pan in the Bible. He was one of the 12 disciplines, and they were all out on a ship, when they saw something out on the water walking towards them. They got scared, but Jesus told them not to be afraid, and so Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water. Everything was ok until he looked down, and he started to sink. He got distracted because Jonah came riding up under him on his whale. But thankfully, Noah came blowing over in the ark, and pulled Peter to safety.” Madea tells this girl, “You need to pray!” She asks Madea to teach her how to pray, and you can imagine how that goes. “Dear God of Abraham... Lincoln..., God of Shadrach, Meshach, and that billy goat...” Thankfully, later in the movie this young girl is pointed in the right direction – towards a Bible and into a church, where she and her family begin to follow Jesus.

Who taught you to pray? Maybe you learned from a parent or grandparent. Perhaps you learned in church or Sunday school. Maybe prayer just came naturally to you, something that needed no instruction. Or perhaps you are still asking, along with the disciples in the passage today, "Lord, teach us to pray."

The disciples would have been taught how to pray in their homes and growing up in the synagogues. But something about Jesus' prayer life was different. They could see that. Have you ever noticed how often the gospel writers talk about Jesus praying? Jesus prayed while he was being baptized (Luke 3:21); he would withdraw to deserted places to pray (Luke 5:16), he went to the mountain to pray, and spent nights in prayer (Luke 6:12). He prayed alone, and he prayed with others. It was while he was praying that the transfiguration occurred. Prayer was a daily practice that strengthened Jesus for all that was to come. Prayer was also very important for the early church. The early Christians were constantly devoting themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14), praying together in worship (Acts 2:42), as the gathered community (Acts 12:12), and in preparation for the ministry to which they were called (Acts 13:3).

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