

All the Prayers of God's People

Welcome! We are beginning a mid-week teaching on prayer and our scriptural call to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 6:16-18), based on the request of a few of our members. Some of us are "old pros" at prayer and others are still finding a comfort level in our prayer lives, maybe only sporadically praying, if at all. We teach in Sunday School from an early age that prayer is the way we speak with God, the basis of our relationship with God and without prayer, this relationship flounders. Our Bible is full of reminders of God's people praying, but for some, the process of praying can be intimidating. How do we pray? Why do we pray? What do we pray for? During the next couple of weeks, I will describe ways of praying and will help us practice praying during this unprecedented time.

Let's begin with one version of the very basics of prayer, the 5 fingered prayer. Essentially when we look at our hand, each finger stands for something significant which needs our prayer.

The thumb (which is closest to you) invites us to talk to God about our family and those closest to our lives. When we pray, we are invited to either tell God what we know our loved ones need (for instance healing or strength) but we also may simply remember them and allow God to discern what it is our friends and family need the most (Isaiah 65:24). Oftentimes this prayer lasts the longest (think of a child on their knees at night, listing the entire family to God). God cares about each one and wants to hear our love and concern. Another important aspect to the thumb prayer is praying for those who are our enemies or those with whom we disagree (Matt. 5:44). By lifting these folks up in prayer, we are asking God to be at work in both of our lives, altering our hearts to be about God instead of our emotions and hurts.

The pointer finger (second finger) reminds us to pray for those who point us in the right direction (teachers, doctors, ministers, etc.). We might pray for patience, wisdom and love but also are advised to pray that their lives reflect God, for God is in the midst of teaching us through others (Psalm 32:8). Similarly, when you pray for your pastors, one way is to pray that your pastors clearly hear and see God's direction for the church (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The Index (or tallest) finger invites us to remember and pray for those who lead us (government and military), asking for wisdom, safety, guidance and discernment in their decisions (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Our prayers often ask God to help them faithfully discern the needs of the areas they serve in peace and humility, embodying God in their leadership, that this kingdom may more closely resemble God's kingdom here on earth.

The Ring finger (also the weakest finger) is a reminder to pray for those that are weak, in trouble, and in need (Isaiah 35:3). We might pray for someone we encounter daily or pray for those systemic situations we know need to be righted in our communities (homelessness for instance). Often these are prayers that 'we have eyes to see and hands to help' when someone cannot help themselves. God then hears our prayers and acts through us as our eyes are opened. Similarly, we may pray through our actions following Acts 20:35, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'. Presbyterians across the world have long since lived into the calling and

prayers of others by meeting the immediate needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. In part, this prayer is for God's church to see and act on those needs as the hands and feet of Christ.

And finally, the pinky (smallest finger) is a reminder to pray for ourselves and our own needs. Often when we enter into prayer our tendency is to focus on our own needs. The familiar verse of Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" is a reminder that God hears our asking and then shows us the way. It may or may not be the way we thought our prayers will be answered, but this prayer is that God will reveal and answer our truest needs.

There is no doubt in my mind that this season of quarantine is also a call to prayer. Each day this week at a particular time you designate, you are invited to practice spending time praying this particular 5 fingered prayer. For beginners, keep it simple. For long time pray-ers, look up the associated scriptures and offer those to God as well.

In the coming weeks we will look at a different 5 fingered prayer that reminds us of the reasons behind our prayers, the Lord's Prayer, why we both pray in secret and in groups, specific Biblical Prayers of Praise and Deliverance and finally ,we will conclude our prayer series in praying for our world at this time.

If you would like to join the prayer team, please send an email or call the church office and we will contact you shortly. SOPC@SOPC.net or 803-772-1761.

A simple prayer for today from PCUSA resources:

We Belong to Each Other. We Belong to You.

The Bible says, "where two or three are gathered."

And many, in this moment, will gather no closer than six feet. The Bible says, "they were all gathered together in one place." And we do not know when we will be together next.

Triune God, you exist in eternal relationship. You are One and yet are three.

In a time of isolation, draw us closer to this mystery. May it remind us of your truth:

even in physical isolation, we are never truly alone. Your love links us together, making us a people. For the Bible also says: We belong to each other. We belong to you. Even now.

Especially now. **Amen.**

— *Bryce Wiebe, Director of Special Offerings*