

Bucking the rules of prayer

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As a child, I was taught that prayer was talking to God, but because God was God prayer came with a lot of rules.

Rules like

1. Always start with thanksgiving.
2. Always confess your sins after that.
3. Don't be surprised if God doesn't hear your prayers if you have unconfessed sin.
4. The best prayer you can pray is the Lord's Prayer. Learn the words. Say them often even if you don't know what the word "trustpasses" means. (That's what I thought the word was as teen!)
5. Don't treat God like Santa. Consider carefully what you ask for.

I got disillusioned from all this rule keeping when it came to prayer about the time I entered seminary.

I took a break from prayer for many years in my twenties, at least serious prayer that is. I didn't know how to follow all the rules anymore. I didn't know if the rules really mattered. I didn't see the point, especially as I walked through difficult situations and nothing about my situation seemed to change . . . Was God really listening?

But then, a shift happened several years ago. New friends came into my life who seemed to have a whole other relationship with God than I did that had nothing to do with the rules. They loved me more than I'd ever experienced before in my life. And I loved them for it. My baby steps back toward prayer centered on praying for them.

I don't know if you are like me or not, but when I love, I fiercely love. I love my husband. I love my dear kindred-spirit friends. I love dear ones of all kinds who find a way to intersect with my life in unique ways. And for me, sometimes, it is hard to know what to do with that love.

I truly wanted the best for them. I wanted to see them thrive. I wanted life to be as good to them as it possibly could be.

And, so I've learned to pray—love by praying. To ask God, who I believe is the divine parent of us all—to watch over those I know are in need of peace, support or wisdom in their daily lives.

A funny thing happened along the way. I found myself wanting to pray more. It wasn't a chore, but a sweetness.

While many might think it's shallow to just pray for people whom you love, I say, don't judge too quickly. In getting the conversation going again, God came near to me in other ways. I've begun to get back to all the other stuff too like "Oh, God I have fallen short of your best for me in this way" or "Oh, God bless those in need in far-away places" or "God bless so and so who really annoys me."

So, I began to pray out of relationship. I prayed for relationships.

But, now sometimes that doesn't even really work anymore. I don't have that warm and fuzzy feeling about people enough to even get me to pray. So what does prayer look like for me now?

I am learning to pray all over again as I just sit. Sit in silence. Sit to remember. Sit to honor all that I was created to be. Sit and hope for the Divine to show up in a way I can't control or even predict. I am relying on the discipline of sitting and being.

Though my more-evangelical friends might tell me that I am doing it all wrong *again*, it's OK. I'm OK. God is most certainly OK. And I'm going to keep learning about conversing with the Holy for many years to come.

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