



Wondering in Prayer A 10- 15 Minute Discussion

This session has been adapted from the 2016 Practice Discipleship Curriculum on *Wonder*. The full session can be downloaded at www.nemnsynod.org/Discipleship or www.practicediscipleship.org

SESSION DESCRIPTION

We teach children the Lord's Prayer and prayers for meals and bedtimes, and we often teach children how to pray for friends and family. And this is, of course, right and good. Unfortunately, however, we often stop there, assuming that older children, youth, and adults now "know" how to pray. But we are called to worship God with all of heart and soul and mind. So, in this session we will explore a prayer form that engages the senses and the imagination, opening a space for us both to dwell and to wonder in God.

BIBLICAL FOCUS

Romans 8:26-27: Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

DISCUSSION PLAN

Read the following script for Wondering Prayerfully, or play the video found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-obmJ3-elRQ>, and then use the Lectio Divina exercise for praying using scripture.

Wondering Prayerfully (Video Script by Mindy Makant)

"Alice laughed: "There's no use trying," she said; "one can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Through the Looking Glass

The Christian faith asks - even demands - us to believe many things that are, quite frankly, impossible. In fact, the Christian faith is predicated upon belief in the impossible, on mystery. A For example, we all know - beyond a shadow of a doubt - that dead folks stay dead. Period. Unless they don't.

Another impossible thing Christians believe is that God wants to be in relationship with us. In fact, God wants to be intimate with us. St. Thomas Aquinas (one of the “fathers of the church”) teaches that part of what it means to be created in the image of God means that we are created for friendship with God. And, of course, this means children too.

Friendship is a complicated thing. To be friends with someone is to know them with a much greater degree of intimacy than we know most of the people we see every day. But no matter how well we know another person there is always much that is unknown. The other person always remains somewhat of a mystery to us. And this is a good thing! In this place of mystery I can not only *be* myself, but I can discover myself. Friendship is not something we can control. Instead it is - as theologian Paul Waddell says - an adventure we enter into. An adventure that will likely shape the very essence of who we are.

How do we become friends with someone?

Time. Some of this time is active time spent *doing* something - playing games, talking, hiking, eating, etc. But sometimes friends are folks we do life with, often by simply *being* together. So, how do we become friends with God? How do we enter into a life-transforming adventure with the Lord of the universe?

Again the answer is time. And this time includes worship, Bible study, serving others, and - of course - prayer.

When we think of teaching children to pray I think, overall, we do a pretty good job at teaching them intercessory prayer, table and bedtime prayers, and liturgical prayer. In other words, we do a pretty good job at teaching little ones how to talk to God - how to *do* prayer - but friendship can't be all about one person talking and the other listening. We also need to teach children how to simply be present *with* God and to listen *for* and *to* God.

Why don't we teach children how to be with God and listen to God?

I think we, as adults, are uncomfortable with silence and, often, we are uncomfortable with God. We often don't know how to be with one another, let alone with God, without filling up the space with noise.

The mystery, the impossible reality, that God chooses to befriend us, to become incarnate and live among us, is beyond comprehension. We cannot reason our way into understanding the mystery of God. We can, however, wonder prayerfully in the mystery of God. And the imagination is the vehicle of wonder. Albert Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.” Imaginative prayer – wondering prayerfully – can allow us to fill up that space with wonder instead of noise. In using the language of imaginative, I need to make a careful distinction between “imaginative” and “imaginary”.

“Imaginary,” of course, means something that is not real, not there. Something that is made up. And of course, the creation of the imaginary is an act of the imagination. But the imagination helps us do much, much more than make things up. It is the imagination which makes it possible for us to “see” what is real even if/when it is not that which is most apparent. In fact, it is the imagination that makes believing impossible things possible. *Not* because they are not true, but because they cannot be easily seen.

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By using our imaginations in prayer we open ourselves up to the mystery that is God and make possible the seemingly impossible reality of friendship with God.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a holy reading of Scripture with four primary parts or movements.

To begin, choose a short passage of Scripture. (you may use Romans 8:26-27 or another of your choosing) Remind participants that this is a way of praying the Scriptures; call to mind that you are in the presence of God. Have participants focus on their breathing.

Lectio: Read the passage aloud slowly and deliberately. Ask participants to think about the meaning of the passage. What does it say? This can be done silently/individually or participants can be invited to share.

Meditatio: Read the passage a second time. Ask participants to meditate on the passage. What does this passage say *to me*? Again, this can be done silently/individually or shared.

Oratio: Read the passage a third time. Invite participants to respond to God in prayer.

Contemplatio: Read the passage a fourth time. Maintain a brief period of silence. Ask participants to listen for God’s word in this time. What do you hear God calling you to in response to this passage? Offer participants the opportunity to share if they would like.



This curriculum was developed for the Practice Discipleship Initiative and modified by the Northeastern MN Synod Practice Discipleship team. Practice Discipleship is a ministry of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network in close partnership with the ELCA and its synods. It is funded by the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA as an extension of the ministry of the ELCA Youth Gathering. Permission is given to use these resources in your local context, so long as no organization or individual profits from the use of these materials. For more information please visit www.practicediscipleship.org.