

In the book *Altars in the World*, Barbara Brown Taylor says: *'I would rather show someone my checkbook stubs than talk about my prayer life. I would rather confess that I am a rotten godmother, that I struggle with my weight, that I fear I am overly fond of Bombay Sapphire gin martinis than confess I am a prayer-weakling. To say I love God but I do not pray much is like saying I love life but I do not breathe much.'* (p. 176)

It got to be a running joke at my last church that I hate praying extemporaneously. I love to read prayers that I've picked out for the occasion, I love the prayers in the prayer book, I even like writing my own prayers—but I am filled with panic when someone looks at me and smiles and says: Lisa, would you like to say a prayer?

I don't want to be rude and say, "NO!" even though that's what I'm thinking. So I smile back—try not to give them the eye, and then I smile, while I try and clear my mind to pray.

See, that's always been one of my problems with prayer. I'm thinking of way too many things to be able to focus on reaching out to touch God in the silence. And that's not a good thing.

But what is prayer? Does it have to be fancy? Or well written – well, if you're an Episcopalian it definitely does—am I right?

But seriously. Our Anglican catechism-- which is in the BCP-- says prayer is responding to God, by thought and deeds—with or without words.

So – when I'm asked to pray – extemporaneously—I would be perfectly justified in just going around and hugging everyone in the room—after all that would be my response to God—manifested in Deed.

Absolutely.

The Catechism also lists 7 types of prayer: adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition.

Adoration comes to me naturally when I see an amazing moon hanging in the sky, with breathtaking clouds around it. I can't help but say, "I adore your world God. It quite takes my breath away."

Thanksgiving is also easy. "Thank you, God for the crisp clear air this morning. Thank you God for my beloved daughter, for my family, and my community."

I'm pretty good at intercession, because I seem to be praying for people all day long. I've noticed many of you do too.

Penitence. Oh yes. I've only met one or two people who tell me that they've never done anything wrong. And they're sitting in this room.

Petition. Asking God for things. I'm not good at this. Maybe I should take it up.

Praise? Every time I sing. Every time I hear music.

Oblation. That means offering. My name kind of says it all. Not sure my parents realized it when they named me. Lisa is a derivative of Elisabeth, so my name Lisa Dawn would mean "Light consecrated- or offered-- to God." I like that.

These are all wonderful ways to pray. All prayer is –is a conversation with God. Sometimes we talk. Sometimes we listen. Just like human conversation. We talk to connect with others. That's all prayer is. Connecting to our Source.

But there are other ways to pray, too. One can be connected to God and God's creation, and God's creatures every moment. We can make each moment a prayer by being present in that moment.

What does that look like?

Barbara Brown Taylor again : *“Start with anything you like. Even a stick lying on the ground will do. The first thing to do is to pay attention to it. Did you make the stick? No, you did not. The stick has its own story. If you have the time to figure out what kind of tree it came from, that would be a start to showing the stick some respect. It is only “a stick” in the same way that you are “a human,” after all. There is more to both of you than that. Is it on the ground because it is old or because it suffered mishap? Has it been lying there for a long time or did it just land? Is it fat enough for you to see its growth rings?”*

See? It’s more than just a stick. He’s more than ‘just a guy’, and she’s more than ‘just a woman’. God’s creation is wonderfully and intricately made.

No one is “just” anything. Each person is unique. Each person has a history, a life, experiences, people that love them, and people they love. Just like that stick has a story and a history, so do we.

This world is getting so big, with so little time for really seeing, or talking with another human being, that it’s no wonder we feel disconnected and alone.

But all of these things take time and intention. Families take time and intention or they are soon in trouble. Relationships and friendships, ditto. And our relationship with God takes time and intention too.

So take some time this week to talk to God. Take some time to listen. Take some time to really notice the world around you and the life that bursts out as you walk to work or the store or with the dogs. And give thanks. And adore. And offer. And intercede. And sing a song about how amazing life is.

Take time to pray. Amen.