

Free Yourself of These Inhibiting Prayer Fears

For some time now, it has felt as though our family has been in a period of convalescence. Convalescence, meaning “the gradual recovery of strength or health after an illness,” applies to so much in our lives over the past two or three years. Most recently, I have been recovering from back surgery. When the surgeon told me I wouldn’t be able to bend, lift, push, pull or twist my body for up to two months, I couldn’t wrap my head around how that would work with an active 6-year-old, twin 4-year-olds and a dog to take care of at home.

Astonishingly, there has been an unexpected quietness to our home of late. Our children have adapted to our temporarily muted rhythm of life, bringing me pictures and presents as I lay in bed or lying beside me quietly reading picture books. The sweetness and deep rest of these moments have allowed my body to convalesce as my spirit has fought to do the same.

God must have known I would need a refuge from which to wage the battle going on inside of me. He knew I’d need a safe place from which to ask questions and pray prayers that don’t always feel safe. It has felt like I’ve been swimming upstream in my faith for longer now than ever before. Things I used to take for granted, things I equated with God’s favor (health, job security, finances) have all been challenged in their own way during this season. A deep knowing remains in my spirit, reminding me that this unstable ground I’m walking on is firmer than it appears, that I will eventually emerge from this season and realize nothing has been taken from me. But in the meantime, my prayers are not very peaceful, nor are they very sweet. They are point-blank, impertinent, often pouty and fearful. If my prayers were written, you wouldn’t read them and post them in pretty script on Pinterest. Lately I’ve been

one of the angry psalmists, contributing to those awkward verses we read with a cringe. But the lines of communication between God and me remain open.

I'm continually thankful for my parents. As I've guiltily told my dad how angry I am at God sometimes, he has assured me God can handle my anger. My mom recently checked in to make sure I was laying everything before the Lord in prayer. She cautioned me to not hold back my real feelings in fear of being a bad daughter. So I continue to pray often, and I hold nothing back. If I'm honest, this comes a bit too easily for me. I tend to err on the side of too much communication with those I feel most comfortable with. It's one of the first things my husband noticed about me when we were dating, how openly my family and I dealt with conflict. When he told me how impressed he was by the way our family honestly confronted and expressed our hurts, I remember being surprised by the compliment. I didn't know any other way to be with my family. How could I hope to heal and have an authentic relationship with my siblings and parents if I didn't let them know when I'd been hurt and vice versa?

I wish I could say I am as confident at dealing with conflict in relationships outside of my family. With most other relationships, I avoid conflict like I avoid head lice because I don't have the assurance of safety and acceptance with other people that I do with my family. Maybe it's that same sense of safety and acceptance that has me laying myself bare before God these days. Perhaps the real test of intimacy with God isn't whether I always have good feelings toward Him but whether I'm honest with Him when I don't. As I examine the state of my always-honest and sometimes-ugly prayers lately, I'm leaning into the comforting truth that God is family.

God is the best kind of father, which means He is safe to be ugly with. He's shown Himself faithful to listen patiently to the complaints, fear and fury of Job, David and several other angry psalmists in the Bible. Prayers that ask "Why?" or "How

could you?!" or prayers that flat out say "I'm not sure I can believe You are good today" can feel really scary, but I'm beginning to believe they are some of the safest prayers to pray. Even these angry prayers can honor God, because they show Him we believe He's still there. They demonstrate that we believe He's worth talking to and our relationship with Him is worth fighting for. When we continue to speak to Him, we show Him we trust His grace and love for us are big enough to cover us and pull us through. We show Him we can trust Him with our truest selves in our darkest moments.

I think God would rather hear from us when we're angry than not hear from us at all. I've found it hurts worse and feels scarier to stop talking to God than it does to yell and scream at Him. I'm not His first accuser, and I won't be His last. He's not surprised or shocked by me. I suspect that when God made the deal to trade all of Him for all of me, He knew what He was getting into, and astoundingly, He seems to like all of me, even the raw and unfinished parts. He's more than able to humble me when I'm certain His way is stupid and to make peace where there's still no understanding.

Of course when making peace with God, only one person will ever need to ask forgiveness, and it won't be Him. I'm actually okay with that. You would think it would be maddening to have a Father who's right all the time, but in fact, it is hugely comforting, even in the moments when I'm most upset. In God's infinite rightness, He knew I'd need a safe, quiet place to work through my anger, and He has provided the most unlikely of places in my own home. Why shouldn't I believe He'll make peace in the other most unlikely of places – my own heart?

Once again. He's made me lie down in green pastures so He can restore my soul. Convalescence continues, and healing is on its way.

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