

The Five Fingers of Prayer
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It was scary. I wasn't quite sure what to do. The year was 1982 and it was my first day as a student chaplain at Scottish Rite Children's Hospital in Atlanta, Georgia. I had just been turned loose in to go visit. No training yet, no teaching yet, -- this was planned to be a journey of discovery for me.

As I walked down the hall trying to work up my courage to start visiting unknown people in a strange place, I noticed a young girl in one of the rooms holding her hand in front of her face slowly raising up one finger after another and quietly moving her lips.

Fascinated, I watched. At first I thought that she was counting, but then I realized that her eyes would close and her head would bow after each finger was raised. She was praying. When she finished, I entered the room and struck up a conversation with her. I found out that she was using her fingers as a guide to help her prayers. In describing the five fingers of prayer, this young girl blessed me with a formula for prayer that I have carried with me ever since. Over the years, I have discovered many different aids people have used to help them in their prayers, but next to the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:19-13, the five fingered prayer guide has always been my favorite. It's based on using the fingers on your hand.

First, hold up your thumb. Your thumb is the closest finger to you. Remember to pray for those closest to you – your spouse, your family, your friends. These are the special people in your life.

The next finger is the pointing finger. Pray for those who point things out to you – your teachers, your minister, your doctor, your colleagues at work. They all need support and wisdom in pointing others in the right direction. Keep them in your prayers.

The third or middle finger is the tallest finger. Pray for those in authority – our community leaders, our bosses, our president. These people shape our lives, our community, and our nation and guide public opinion. They definitely need God's guidance.

The fourth finger is our weakest finger. (Ask a piano teacher!) Pray for those who are weak or sick and those who are in pain or trouble. We cannot pray too much for them.

The final finger is the pinky. It's last, but not least -- a reminder for us to pray for ourselves. We may be last, but we are certainly not least. We need to pray for our own needs and the desires of our hearts.

George Reindrop, in his book No Common Task, shared how a nurse once taught a man to pray using the five finger prayer guide, and in doing so, changed him from being a dull, disgruntled, and dispirited person into a man of joy. It has blessed others as well. I know that it has been a blessing for me.

Of course, prayer needs more than just an outline or a guide to make it powerful. The power in prayer comes not from an outline or saying the right words. The power in prayer comes from our God who hears and answers prayers, especially when we reach out with our hearts to connect with Him.