



SING, WRESTLE, SPIN

Prayers for Active Kids

JENNIFER GRANT



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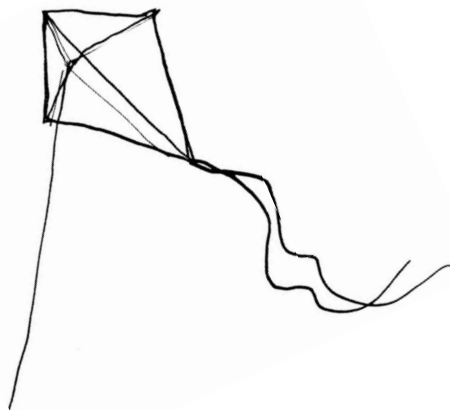
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May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where
you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities
that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received,
and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be content knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones,
and allow your soul the freedom
to sing, dance, praise, and love.
It is there for each and every one of us.

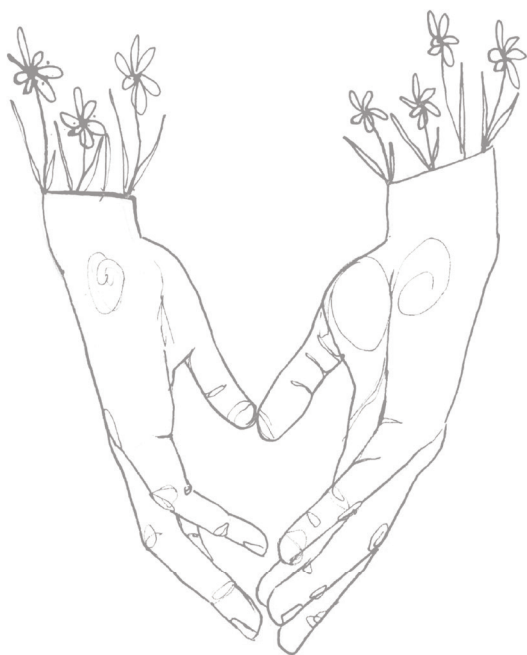
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Introduction



A few days ago, my dog, Scarlett, and I met a dog named Ruby at the dog park. She and Scarlett started sniffing and circling each other, deciding whether they should become best friends. When Scarlett is at the dog park, it's like she's at her own birthday party, it's time to open a big stack of presents, and she can't decide which one to open first. Except in her case, it's choosing which dog to race around the park with her. We've met dozens of dogs over the years, but I won't forget Ruby. She has the most amazing eyes: one is brown, and one is a bright, icy blue.

What color are *your* eyes? Brown? Black? Green? Gray? Blue? Hazel? Are they two different colors, like Ruby's? Did you know that every person's iris, that colored part of the eye, is *completely unique*? No two people on earth have identical irises; our eyes are as unique as our fingerprints! And, like eyes and fingerprints, no two people in the world have the same voice—no one in the world sounds just like you do.

No one's eyes, fingerprints, or voice is just like yours . . . and no one prays exactly like you do either. Or feels the way you feel when you pray. Sometimes praying feels comfortable and easy, like taking a bath or petting a cat. Other times, it can feel clumsy and awkward, like when you trip on an uneven crack on the sidewalk. Praying can also feel as ordinary as filling up a glass with water.

More than a thousand years ago, a monk described prayer as the "raising of one's mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God."* Every person does

* *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019), paragraph 2590.

this in their own way. Some people are perfectly motionless when they pray. Some sit in church on hard wooden benches. Others kneel. Some people close their eyes and fold their hands. Some people pray all by themselves; others pray in a roomful of other praying people. Often people use words to pray, either by reading what someone else has written or by saying whatever pops into their minds, like when you're talking with a friend. But we don't just *think* our prayers; we can move our bodies in prayer by dancing, walking, or even spinning in a chair.

Some count along with their prayers, using beads on a string. Some sing their prayers, and some paint them. Some people just look at the clouds and let their thoughts and feelings float up into the sky. Others write down their prayers and slip them into a box or bowl. These are only a few of the ways people open their minds and hearts to God's presence.

monk: A monk is a member of a religious community of men who promise to obey God, live simply, and not get married.

That's another way to describe prayer: it's *being open to God*, as strange as that may sound. Part of this "being open" is knowing that God is a mystery, and that people have always used different names to describe God and different ways to talk to God.

Each chapter in this book includes a short prayer that uses names for God that we find in the Bible. You might have heard God called "Holy One" or "Creator" and you may pray to Jesus, but did you know that God is also called "Fount of Justice," "She Who Speaks Life," "Majesty of the Heavens," "Mother of Mountains," and "Wisdom" in the scriptures? This book will introduce new names to you that you can use when you are opening yourself to God, and it also describes

many different ways to pray. As you read it, notice what ideas or names grab your attention. Try them out when you pray.

There are many ways to start prayers, but how can we *end* them? Many of us say “Amen.” That word just means something like “So be it” or “This is what I really think.” You can say “Amen” when you’re done praying or you can just nod your head or shrug or say, “Okay, that’s what I really feel” or “Over and out for now” or “Talk to you later!” You can choose to end your prayers in your own way.

Throughout the Bible, people always prayed in their own individual ways. Hagar and Hannah prayed with tears. Jesus drew prayers in the dust. David danced, Jacob wrestled, Samuel listened, and Habakkuk raged. People prayed in their homes, outside, alone, or in groups, and in places of worship. They prayed all through the day or night, whenever they had something to say. There’s no right or wrong way to pray or right or wrong place to pray. There’s no wrong way to start or end our prayers. Prayer is for everyone, and you can’t make a mistake as you raise your mind and heart to the God who made you and who loves you for the wonderfully unique person you are.

CHAPTER 1

Sing



What was your favorite song when you were a little kid? “Baby Shark”? “Baby Bumblebee”? “The Wheels on the Bus”? (Maybe you still love those songs!) How do you feel when you hear the first few notes of one of your favorite songs? What song do you love best now? What do you like about it? The words? The beat? The melody? The way it rhymes? Maybe a song is your favorite because it reminds you of a happy time in your life or the person who first sang it to you.

Singing is fun, and it not only makes you feel good but actually keeps your brain and the rest of your body healthy! It’s easier to memorize things when we sing them—chances are, you learned your ABCs by singing the alphabet song. Scientists say that our brains are made to remember patterns in music much better than when we just hear words spoken. They’ve also done lots of research that shows other positive effects of singing.

Gross as it might sound, our saliva—otherwise known as “spit”—reveals that, after a person sings, they are more relaxed. Singing also helps to keep people from getting sick by boosting the immune system.* When you sing with other people, your body releases chemicals called “endorphins” that lift your mood. Here’s a funny fact too: researchers say that people who sing are less likely to have snoring problems!

* G. Kreutz, S. Bongard, S. Rohrmann, V. Hodapp, and D. Grebe, “Effects of Choir Singing or Listening on Secretory Immunoglobulin A, Cortisol, and Emotional State,” *Journal of Behavioral Medicine* 27, no. 6 (December 2004): 623–35, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/15669447/>.

Those are just a few good reasons to let loose and SING!

(Baby shark, doo doo doo doo doo doo . . . !)

The word “sing” appears hundreds of times in the Bible, and people are told or *commanded* to sing many times too. “Sing to the LORD a new song!” says Psalm 96:1; “Sing praises to our King!” says Psalm 47:6. Ephesians 5:19 (NIV): “Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord!” And Colossians 3:16 says we should sing to God with “gratitude in [our] hearts.”



Why do you think God likes singing so much?

Maybe it's because God knows singing is good for us and makes us happy.

Maybe it's because God is a singer too. We read in the Hebrew Bible that God sings over God's people (Zephaniah 3:17).

It was the apostle Paul who wrote the words above, about singing with gratitude and from our hearts. And he practiced what he preached. Paul sang not only when he was happy but also on his very worst days. Even when he was put in prison! Once, Paul and his friend Silas, who were traveling and telling people about God's love, got into trouble. People said they were “disturbing the peace.” Paul and Silas were beaten by the police and then locked away in prison.

That same night, around midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God when there was a strong earthquake. It was so fierce that the foundation of the building shifted and the doors to all the prison cells were knocked

open. The earthquake woke the prison guard up, and when he saw that all the doors were open, he thought the prisoners had escaped. He thought he would lose his job—or worse—when his bosses found out what had happened. He felt desperate! But Paul shouted, “It’s okay, we’re all here!”

That night, the guard brought Paul and Silas home to his own house, got them cleaned up, bandaged their wounds, and gave them dinner. After that dramatic and unexpected night, the guard himself came to know that God loved him. He and his whole family came to know God.

I wonder if the prison scared Paul and Silas, and if singing made them feel braver in that place.

I wonder what songs Paul and Silas were singing?

I wonder whether the songs they sang that night became favorites of the guard, their new friend.



TRY IT!

1. Put on your favorite song and sing it with your full voice. Let your song be a prayer of praise to our music-loving God.
2. The word “psalm” means “song,” and the psalms we find in the Bible are poems that were written to be sung. In the book of Psalms, there are songs about anger, thankfulness, being lonely, joy . . . and many

other things. No matter what you might be feeling, there is a psalm that can help you express yourself.

Read Psalm 104:33 (NIV):

I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

“Praise” means to celebrate or worship or honor something or someone.

Make a list of five things or people you are thankful for.

You could pray,

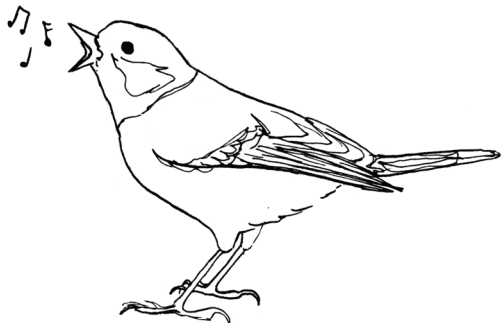
I praise you, Almighty God, for:

_____ (something in nature)

_____ (someone you love)

_____ (your favorite song)

Amen.



3. Spirituals are songs that were created by African Americans from the time they were forced into slavery. They expressed their sadness and sang about the hardships they endured. They sang about stories of freedom and hope in the Bible, and they found courage and strength by singing these songs.

Read these lines from a famous African American spiritual "Ev'ry Time I Feel the Spirit":

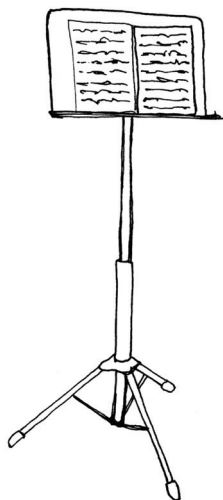
Ev'ry time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart
I will pray.

Ev'ry time I feel the Spirit moving in my heart
I will pray.

What does God's spirit feel like when it's moving in your heart?

What songs might you sing when you are lonely or hurting?

What songs make you feel brave?



One Who Is,
Singing God,
Thank you for the gift
of music.
Amen.