

Symbols and Actions in Prayer
Praying with Pebbles
Some Starting Points For Reflection And Prayer

How old is your stone : Think about your stone – how old is it ? Hundreds of year ? Thousands of years ? Millions of years ? Think how much it must have changed over that time, how much it must have been eroded, weathered, damaged. Did it start off as a boulder ? A hill ? A mountain ? However old your stone is – God is older – God was there long before your stone existed – God made whatever it was originally ! And long after your stone becomes grains of dust, and all we know has gone the same way, God will still be there – constant, unchanging, unending – no beginning, no end. God, the only constant in the universe, the world, our lives. God is forever, is reliable, is unchanging. Let this lead you into worship and prayer.

How much does God love you : Think about your stone, where it has been, the story it could tell of all that happened to it before it came into your hand today. Did God create it so that you might pick it up today ? Has God been watching over it ever since ? We don't know the answer to that - but it is possible ! God loves you so much that it's not impossible that he would spend thousands of years planning, and making, something just for you, something that might help you in worship and prayer. Let this lead you into worship and prayer.

God knows you : Think about yourself - even compared to your stone, our brief span of life is tiny – but compared to God, we are the merest blip – here and then gone again – and yet God cares about you, loves you more than you can ever imagine or understand, cares about you so much that he even knows how many hairs are in your head. God knows you better than you know yourself, and wants to spend eternity with you. Do you ever think you have no one to talk to who will understand what you are going through ? God knows ! God understands ! God wants to be involved ! Is there a part of your life that you keep separate from God, something that you haven't shared with him ? Don't ever be tempted to think that something is too small for you to talk to God about. God longs for you to talk to him about everything. God wants you to involve him in every aspect of your life. Is there something that you should be sharing with God ? Let this lead you into prayer.

Damage and wear and tear : Look at your stone – it probably isn't perfect. It probably shows signs of damage, wear and tear, it may have flaws and

imperfections – but you still chose it ! Is it beautiful despite its imperfections ? None of us are perfect, we are all damaged, and flawed - but God chooses us anyway ! We don't have to be perfect for God to love us, or to use us in his service. Sometimes the very things about us that are hurt or damaged, are what God needs us to use in his service. These things can be what help us to relate to other people, to help us to understand what they are going through. Ask God to show you how your experiences of life, might be used to serve him, and to help others.

Rough edges and sharp corners : Your stone is probably smooth and rounded to the touch, with no rough edges or sharp corners, but it wasn't always like that. It used to have rough edges, sharp corners, things that could hurt someone who tried to pick it up, or who tried to hold it in their hand. Do you have rough edges or sharp corners ? Do you sometimes say or do things that hurt others ? Ask God to show you any areas in your life that are like this, and ask God to help you to smooth them out.

Smooth to the touch : Look at your stone – is it smooth to the touch ? It probably hasn't always been like that – over time, rough edges have been smoothed, sharp corners rounded, until what you hold is something unique, shaped and polished into something interesting and beautiful, something you can safely hold. We all have parts of our lives, or aspects of ourselves, that are not the way that God wants us to be. If we will let him, God can smooth our rough edges, and shape us into someone beautiful and unique for him, something he delights to hold in his hand, someone useful for his service, someone who doesn't hurt others. What is God doing in your life at the moment ? Are you letting God work in your life, or fighting against his smoothing, shaping, touch ? Are you working with him to become the person he wants you to be – or fighting him every step of the way ? Let this lead you into prayer.

Are you stony ground : The parable of the sower (Luke 8: 5-15), tells us the seed couldn't grow properly in stony ground. Even though parts of your life may be 'good soil', there may also be other parts which are 'stony ground' (this may change over time !) But stony ground doesn't have to stay that way, the stones can be removed. It may take hard work, it may take a lot of work, but with God's help, it is not impossible. Ask God to show you if there is a part of your life that is 'stony ground' at the moment, some area that needs particular attention, something that needs some work. Ask God to help you to work in this.

Who else is stony ground : The parable of the sower (Luke 8: 5-15), tells us the seed couldn't grow properly in stony ground. Is there a person, or people you know, in need of some help clearing the 'stony ground' in their life at the moment ? Ask God to show you if there is someone you could be helping, and what you can do for them.

Cornerstone/living stones of the church : Jesus is called the cornerstone, or the foundation stone, of the church, and each of us make up the living stones of his church in the world. Is the church as focussed as it should be on Jesus its foundation and cornerstone ? Do we fully play our part as its living stones ? As the church in the world ? In Edinburgh ? Here in this place ? As individuals ? Let this lead you into prayer.

Stumbling block : Jesus is called a stumbling block, a stone that others trip over, that causes people difficulties – because of his message of unconditional love, of sacrificial service to others, of suffering, of humility. Is any of this a stumbling block for you ? . . .or for others that you know ? Let this lead you into prayer

Our firm foundation : Jesus is the called the foundation rock on which we should build our lives. Is he yours ? Is your whole life built with Jesus as your foundation, or are there things that you try and do by yourself ? Ask God to show you any areas of your life that do not have Jesus as their foundation.

Holding your stone tightly : Take notice of how you are holding your stone. Are you holding it very tightly ? Could there be anything else your life that you are holding on to too tightly or controllingly ? Something you need to let go of, or put down? Something on which you need to loosen your hold ? Something you need to give to God ? Ask God to show you anything you need to put down, or let go of, and to help you do so.

Holding it loosely : Take notice of how you are holding your stone. Are you holding it very loosely ? Is there something in your life that you are holding on to too loosely or carelessly ? Something you need to take more care of, or grip more firmly ? Something you need to pick up, or to accept from God ? Ask God to show you anything you need to take more care of, or to hold on to more firmly, and to help you do so.

Hands full : Take notice of how you are holding your stone. Is it filling your hands, so that you can't hold anything else ? Is there something in your life that is filling your hands? Something that is preventing you from coming

before God with empty hands, ready and willing to accept his blessings, or gifts, or whatever it is that he wants to give to you ? Let this lead you into prayer.

Carrying a burden : Feel the weight of your stone, how heavy it is for its small size. Are you struggling to carry a heavy burden – some worry or anxiety, guilt or pain that is wearing you down ? Something too heavy for you to bear alone ? Jesus wants to carry our burdens for us, but first we have to hand them over to him. Pray about this, ask God to help you with your burden, to help you to hand it over to him. Put down your stone, as a symbol of handing over your burden to God

Farming in stony ground : Think of people who try to carve out a space where they can grow food for themselves and their family, where the ground really is full of stones, dry and parched. Perhaps they are trying to feed animals in a land that is more stones than grass. Think of their daily struggle for survival, and pray for them.

Stoned to death : Think of people, usually women, in countries around the world, who still risk being stoned by those who do not approve of their behaviour. Think of those who are killed by their families in what are termed "honour killings", usually because their family do not agree with their behaviour. Pray for them and for those who are passing judgement on them.

The earth our home : Think about how we treat this beautiful planet that God created as our home. Think about how land is ravaged by strip mining. How forests are destroyed for financial gain. How deforestation creates space to grow the crops that we want buy. All that remains is desolation as rock is laid bare. Nothing can grow any more. Plants and animals lose their natural habitat, and have nowhere left to go - all because of our greed. God put us here as stewards, to look after the beautiful world that he created for us. Pray for our world. Pray about the part we play in damaging it, because of the choices we make. Ask God to show you what you can do to help make a difference.

Temperature : Take notice of the temperature of your stone. When you picked it up, it felt cold, now that you have been holding it for a while, it probably feels warm, and it may even feel warmer than your hands. God's love in our lives, warms and melts our hard hearts, making them tender and responsive to him, and to those around us. Let this lead you into prayer.