Traced hand prayer practice

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Introduction

One of my struggles with small harms is that it is often not advisable—or even possible—to address them with the people involved. If I make a thoughtless, hurtful comment to an acquaintance, any repair work beyond a quick apology will most likely cause greater harm and discomfort. If a stranger drives their car through a puddle and splashes me with muddy water while I'm walking along the side of the road, I really don't want them to turn their car around and come back with a towel. That would be weird and potentially frightening.

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Such unaddressed small harms, whether we are perpetrators or victims, can fester and accumulate until they feel like a big spiritual burden. So I invite you into this prayer practice not as a way of avoiding repair work that needs to happen with other people, but as a way of seeking discernment about any repair work that might be possible and finding peace with small harms that you cannot repair.

What you will need:

- Sheet of paper
- Pen or pencil
- Blue, red, and yellow colored pencils (Crayons or watercolors will also work.)

Opening prayer

God of elephants and ants,
God of oceans and creeks,
God of eternity and of this moment:
nothing is bigger than your power;
nothing is too small for your care.
I lay before you now these small harms,
when others have hurt me
and when I have hurt them.

Through your Holy Spirit
who covers the vastness of creation
and lives in each precious breath
guide the meditations of my heart
in this small moment and beyond
and beyond.
Amen.

Traced hand prayer practice

- Trace your hand on a piece of paper.
- Write a separate small harm in each finger (including your thumb).
    - These can be harms you have caused or harms against you. Simply write down the first ones the Spirit brings to your mind, no matter how long ago they took place or how you feel about them in the present moment.
- Next, take your colored pencils.
- For each finger, color it red if it was a harm against you. Color it yellow if it was a harm you caused. If it was a situation where you both caused and received harm, color it both red and yellow.
- Prayerfully consider each yellow finger—the harms you have caused.
    - If it is a harm you can take steps to repair, consider when and how you might take the first step. Pray for the Spirit's guidance and support.
    - If it is a harm you cannot repair, color over the yellow with blue as you pray for God to help you release that harm and find peace.
- Prayerfully consider each red finger—the harms against you.
    - If it is a harm you believe would be helpful to address with the perpetrator, consider when and how you might address it. Pray for the Spirit's guidance and support.
    - If it is a harm that, for whatever reason, you believe would not be helpful to address with the perpetrator, color over the red with the blue as you pray for God to help you release that harm and find peace.
- In the palm of the hand, write any reflections you have on the harms you have considered—perhaps how you hope to address them or what it feels like to release them to God.

I invite you into this prayer practice as a way of seeking discernment about any repair work that might be possible and finding peace with small harms that you cannot repair.

- Color the palm in with whatever colors you choose as you listen for the Spirit's response to your reflections.
- Around the outside of the hand, write a passage of scripture that encourages you in finding peace with these small harms. Some suggestions are below. You can simply write the passage out once, or you can repeat it several times, filling up the page around your hand.
  - I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother. (Ps 131:2, NRSVue)
  - For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. (Eccl 3:1)
  - From Christ's fullness we have all received grace upon grace. (John 1:16)
  - The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5:22–23)
  - God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. (1 John 4:16)
- Finally, place your hand inside its outline on the paper. Breathe deeply as you welcome God's comfort and healing.

Closing prayer

God of whales and minnows,
God of stars and fireflies,
God of eternity and of this moment:
I give thanks that nothing is bigger than your power,
and nothing is too small for your care.
Receive all that I have offered in this sacred time.
Through your Holy Spirit
who covers the vastness of creation
and lives in each precious breath
lead me forward in kindness
and give me peace.
Amen.

About the author

Rev. Joanna Harader serves as co-pastor of Bethel College Mennonite Church in North Newton, KS. She is the author of *Expecting Emmanuel* (2022) and *Prone to Wander* (2025), devotionals published by Herald Press.