



Saying Grace Alone

*Seven short prayers for the minute before
the meal*

NAN ELLISON

They're short because the minute is short.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

The food is on the table. Somebody has already reached for the salt.

If you're the only one at your table who prays, this may be where it shows most. Not on Sunday — here, at the start of an ordinary meal, where there's a small decision nobody else at the table has to make: out loud or silently, eyes closed or open, before he picks up his fork or after.

A grace said out loud is also the one prayer he always hears. A few of these are about that.

They're short because the minute is short. Say one silently. Say half of one. Say it after the first bite, if that's how tonight goes. He doesn't have to bow his head for any of it to count, and you don't have to explain it to him afterward.

For the plate he has already started	ONE
For his hand in yours	TWO
For a booth, with the ketchup between you	THREE
For his family's table	FOUR
For supper on the couch	FIVE
For the first meal after an argument	SIX
For the nights you skip it	SEVEN

One

PRAYER 1 OF 7

For the plate he has already started

He's two bites in by the time you sit down. He didn't wait. He hardly ever does, and you've stopped expecting him to.

God, he's already eating, and I'm thanking You anyway — a little late, eyes open, so it doesn't turn into a scene. Thank You for this food, and for the man across from me enjoying it. I don't need him to put his fork down for this to reach You.

Amen.

Two

PRAYER 2 OF 7

For his hand in yours

Perhaps you still reach for his hand before you pray. He takes it. He holds it through every word, looking at the bread, and lets go when you say amen.

As far as you can tell, he isn't praying. He's holding your hand while you do.

God, his hand is warm, and I don't think he's praying. I don't know what this minute means to him. Tonight I don't need to. He's keeping me company while I talk to You. Thank You for the company. Thank You for the bread.

Amen.

Three

PRAYER 3 OF 7

For a booth, with the ketchup between you

The server sets down the plates and asks if you need anything else. You wait until she's gone. Across the table he waits too, his fork still on his napkin, while you bow your head for as long as one sentence takes.

God, I'm praying in a booth with the ketchup between us and a server who could be back any second. Thank You for this meal, and for a night out with him. I won't stretch this out so anyone notices, and I won't skip it so nobody does.

Amen.

Four

PRAYER 4 OF 7

For his family's table

His family doesn't pray before meals. At his mother's table on a holiday, someone says, kindly enough, "Did you want to say something first?" The gravy boat stops halfway down the table.

You'll hear your own voice, and nobody else's. You may want to rush it, or apologize for it, or turn it into a little speech about gratitude that won't make anyone uncomfortable.

God, everyone is waiting and the gravy is getting cold. Help me pray the way I would if the room were empty, only shorter. Let it sound like me, not like a sermon. Thank You for this table and for everyone at it, including the ones who are only waiting for me to finish.

Amen.

Five

PRAYER 5 OF 7

For supper on the couch

Friday. Noodles out of the carton, the game on, nobody at the table because nobody set one. It doesn't feel like the kind of meal that gets a blessing.

God, it's takeout on the couch and he's watching the second half. I'm thanking You quietly, with the chopsticks already in my hand. Nothing about tonight is formal, and I don't think You mind.

Amen.

Six

PRAYER 6 OF 7

For the first meal after an argument

The argument stopped an hour ago. Nothing about it is settled, and now there's dinner.

If you say grace out loud tonight, he'll hear every word. This is the night a blessing can turn into a message — *Lord, help us be kinder to each other* — said over the rice and meat for him.

God, I'm angry, and I'm about to thank You for green beans. Don't let me use this grace to have the last word. Not even gently, not even in words he couldn't object to. Thank You for the food. I'll tell You the rest later, on my own.

Amen.

A WORD OF CARE

This is for an ordinary argument between two people who are safe with each other. If praying at your own table brings ridicule meant to shame you, or punishment, or threats, or if you are afraid of him, that is not a difference of belief. Tell a domestic-violence advocate or another qualified person where you live, privately. If you're in danger right now, call emergency services.

Seven

PRAYER 7 OF 7

For the nights you skip it

Some nights you don't pray at all. The pasta needed draining, the phone rang, and by the time you sat down, a blessing would have meant stopping everyone. Other nights you skip it on purpose, because you didn't want him to feel watched while he ate.

God, I didn't thank You tonight, and it wasn't forgetting. I didn't want to make the table any quieter than it already was. So I'm thanking You now, with the plates cleared: for the food, for the hands that made it, for the man who ate it. I don't want to get so good at not bothering him that I stop talking to You.

Amen.



Nan Ellison writes the quiet hours that do not look like a problem from the street. The books are short on purpose.

IF THESE HELPED, READ NEXT

When You Pray Alone

For the woman whose husband doesn't share her faith.

Prayers for a Lonely Marriage

For the woman who is married, and lonely, in a house that runs just fine.

NANELLISONBOOKS.COM