

Five Practical Ways to Kickstart your Prayer Life

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[0 : 00] There is a genuine sense in which to pray is the easiest, simplest and most natural thing anyone can ever do.

And yet there can be times when getting started in prayer is not quite so straightforward. For all kinds of reasons, we can find ourselves getting a bit stuck.

Sometimes we just dry up. Sometimes we find it hard to get motivated. It's as though the inspiration just isn't there. Now, as I say, the reasons for this are many and they can be quite complex.

But it's important that we remember that it's very, very common. In fact, I think I'd go so far as to say is I think it's universal. At some point, sooner or later, all of us can find prayer, something that ought to be straightforward, actually rather difficult.

So this morning, I'm going to share with you one, two, three, four, five practical things that I have found helpful when I found myself, well, stuck.

[1 : 13] I'm going to share with you five ways which we can give our prayer life a bit of a kickstart. Now, let me mix up the metaphor a bit here.

I'm not a biker, so I don't really have much experience of kickstarting. But I do enjoy cycling. You know, it was well over 40 years ago that I learned to ride a bike, but I still vividly remember the first time I went without the stabilizers.

I recall the sense of vulnerability involved in pushing those pedals ever so slowly, not quite sure about the whole balancing thing. And then the thrill of discovering that once you start moving forwards, well, then you're off.

I think prayer can be a bit like that. Once you get the pedals going and you start moving, well, you're away. But getting started can be the hard bit.

So here are five things you might want to try. The first is try engaging a wider range of your senses.

[2 : 24] For example, you could light a candle. Now, that's something that you can see and you can smell. Or you could burn some incense.

Or you could hold a wooden cross. Or play some background music. Or if you do that already, try silence instead of music. It's important to remember that none of those things are about trying to engage God more.

Lighting a candle does not make God sit up and pay more attention to your prayers. But by being more multi-sensory in our approach, it can help engage our hearts and minds a bit more.

It's just one way of kick-starting ourselves out of a sense of spiritual inertia. The second thing you might like to try is putting a structure into your prayer.

Or if you already have a structure, try a different one. Now, the thing with structures, or indeed lack of them, is that they can become routines.

[3 : 38] And routines can become, well, boring. So by introducing a new structure to the way you pray, you can help break yourself out of what might have become a bit boring for you.

Again, let me stress, it's not God who's bored with your prayers. But you might be bored with your prayers. So think about how you might try a slightly different structure when you pray.

Now, here's just one example of a really simple structure. It's an idea that's been around for years. You may have heard of it before. I've seen it used by all ages.

But it's a simple and an easy one to remember. Teaspoons. Now, by that, I don't mean you try lighting it like a candle or waving it over your head in some kind of weird ritual.

I simply mean the letters used to abbreviate it. Teaspoon. T-S-P. The T stands for thanks. So you could start by focusing your prayers specifically on being thankful.

[4 : 49] Think for a few moments about all the stuff you have in your life to be thankful for. I'm thinking about the really, really ordinary, mundane stuff.

Food. A roof over your head. The clothes on your back. Someone you love. Something that made you laugh or smile. Anything.

You could even write it down if you want. That's the T. The letter S stands for sorry. So when you're ready, take a few moments to say sorry to God.

Bringing before him the areas of your life where you've messed up. Things that you've said. Things that you've done. Things you've thought. Things you've left undone. And in your own time, lay before God the things that you struggle with.

And by the way, there's no one on earth who doesn't struggle. So we've got T. We've got S. And we've got P. And the P stands for please. Reach out to God.

[5 : 54] And ask him to meet your needs. And the needs of others. Pray for our community. Pray for our country. Pray for our world. So you've got T.

S. P. Thanks. Sorry. And please. That's just one example of a structure that you might want to introduce. Remember, a structure is not a formula.

It's just a way of switching things around a bit. To try praying a bit differently. Here's a third idea.

If you're finding your own prayers boring or repetitive, or you're finding it hard to think of what to pray, why not try praying something that someone else has written?

Get hold of a book of written prayers. Or you could try using one of the church daily liturgies for morning or evening prayer.

[6 : 50] Or try using one of the countless daily devotional guides that are available in printed form or online. Remember, a lot of these you can get as an app on your phone.

There's Lectio 365. There's Every Day with Jesus. There's Crosswalk. There's an absolute ton of stuff out there. A lot of it's free. Now, maybe you already use one of these things, but you're still finding yourself in a bit of a rut.

Well, maybe it's time to try a different one for a while. Remember, it's not about a formula. It's just about trying new things.

Idea number four is as simple as it gets. Go for a walk. You know, there's something about being outside and moving that can really help us to refocus.

Now, of course, going outside for a walk might not be the most practical option for absolutely everyone right now. But if that's your situation, why not just try praying in a different room?

[8 : 01] Sometimes simply changing the environment, even ever so slightly, can be a really helpful way of introducing some difference to your prayer life. My last suggestion for kick-starting your prayer life is this.

Why don't you try out one of the many classic approaches to contemplation? You see, there's nothing at all new about struggling to pray.

And Christianity has a 2,000-year history of finding different ways of responding to that struggle, from Julian of Norwich to Lectio Divina.

The approach I find particularly helpful is something called centering prayer. Now, I'm someone who finds it difficult to concentrate sometimes, basically because I'm easily distracted.

Centering prayer is a very simple but effective method of intentionally letting go of your thoughts. And in the process of doing so, making yourself more present to experience the reality of God.

[9 : 10] If you're interested in finding out a bit more about that, then go to the website contemplativeoutreach.org. There's even an app there that can help you with it.

Ours is not the first generation to have found that sometimes we need to find some practical ways of engaging ourselves with the God who is already there, ready and waiting for us.

Even the writers of the New Testament itself knew this. I love the way Eugene Peterson paraphrased 1 Peter 1, verse 13 in the message.

He wrote, So roll up your sleeves. Put your mind in gear. Be totally ready to receive the gift that's coming when Jesus arrives.

Teaspoon. You know, I think that sounds like a good excuse for another cup of tea.