

WHEN WE STRUGGLE IN OUR PRAYER LIVES

Posted by Randy Hain | May 12, 2022

THE BEGINNING

One of the biggest obstacles for me in the early days of my faith journey was the lack of a prayer life. I knew I needed to pray, but I couldn't ever remember sincerely praying about anything. Perhaps part of me was struggling with the typical male challenge of asking for help- especially asking God for help! I rationalized this by thinking, "Who am I to bother Him with my petty problems?"

I went to one of our parish deacons, shared my prayer challenges with him and asked for guidance. He looked at me with a smile and said I was approaching prayer in the wrong way. "Don't worry about asking for help just yet," he said. His counsel was to simply go to the Lord with thanks and be grateful for the blessings in my life. The light bulb went on and I finally got it. Eventually, I learned to ask God for help and guidance. But my prayer life really began when I learned to simply offer thanks to God for the blessings in my life. There have been bumps along the way and dry spells, but my prayer life has continued to unfold and grow with each passing day.

Let's be honest. Praying can be difficult. I don't pretend to be an expert on prayer, but I know my life has been made exponentially better because I do pray. Prayer has enabled me to overcome countless challenges as a husband, father, and businessman that I could not have overcome otherwise. I would like to share with you the steps in my prayer journey as a Catholic, lessons I have learned, and insights into how I pray, in the hope you will find my experiences to be helpful.

THE STEPS

Step One of my prayer life was learning to thank God and be grateful. As I learned from that helpful deacon many years ago, going to Him in prayer and reflecting on the blessings in my life every day is how I learned to appreciate and acknowledge God's role in my life. To this day, I do not begin a prayer without thanking Him.

Step Two was learning to ask for forgiveness. I go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently, but it is still important for me to ask the Lord for His pardon and forgiveness when I commit a sin, which is more frequent than I care to admit. It has become a daily examination of conscience for me to reflect on where I have failed Him, and ask for forgiveness and the grace to avoid committing that sin again.

Step Three was asking for His help and guidance. This is also when I learned to pray for others and their intentions. I think men in general struggle with asking for help, and I am certainly no exception. My growing prayer life and deepening faith has given me the humility to realize that I don't have all the answers and that Jesus absolutely wants to help me. In the early days, I would tentatively ask for help with the big stuff like getting my family into heaven, blessing our priests and deacons, healing a sick friend, and so on. Now, I am very comfortable asking for His help and guidance in every facet of my life.

Step Four was learning to completely unburden myself to the Lord. This has occurred only in the last few years. I am inclined to carry my stress, frustrations, worries, and fears like a hidden weight around my neck. As I got better at going to the Lord for help, I began asking Him to lighten these mental and emotional burdens. I am so grateful that I now can go to Him and give Him my work stress, concerns about my children's future, or anything else that is weighing me down. Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28–29).

Step Five has been a somewhat recent change as I have learned to pray for acceptance. A few years ago one of our parish priests challenged me and my wife not only to pray for the healing and independent future we desire for our older son who has autism, but to pray for acceptance as well. By only asking for healing, he said we were essentially asking God to take back His creation and make him better. This was a profound realization for us and it has spilled over into other areas of my life. I now pray for acceptance of the challenges and difficult moments in my life and ask to learn from them rather than asking God to "fix" them. This new approach has positively affected every aspect of my life and I am grateful.

Step Six has been my increasing prayers for the intercession of our Blessed Mother and the saints. Seeking the intercession of Mary when I pray my Rosary, or in moments when I desperately need her strength has been an incredible blessing. When I face challenges as a husband or father, I go to St. Joseph and seek his help as the incredible example he should be for all men. St. Michael the Archangel, St. Therese of Lisieux, and St. Josemaria Escriva are also among the saints whose help I frequently seek.

Plus, I am hopeful there will be more evolving steps in prayer growth for me if I am humble and committed to deepening my relationship with Christ. St. Teresa of Avila, a doctor of the Church, wrote on the stages of prayer in her book *The Interior Castle*. I sincerely hope to reach the contemplative and mystical prayer life she describes in her works. I pray that Christ will lead me there.

A FEW IMPORTANT REMINDERS

These are some important lessons I have learned (and keep learning!) in my prayer life and would like to share.

- **Just Do It!** If we don't schedule prayer time and stick to it, it will not happen. Put your prayer life on your calendar. Ask yourself if you would be willing to spend only thirty minutes a day with your loved ones. Hopefully the answer is a resounding no! Ok, then why do we struggle to give the Lord at least thirty minutes a day in prayer? How we pray is not nearly as important as the act of praying itself.
- **Prepare our hearts and minds for prayer.** First, we must have the right attitudes of humility and faith that God can and will help us before we start praying. Reading Scripture, the Magnificat, or books such as *In Conversation with God* by Francis Fernandez (Seven Volume Series) every day before prayer will help prepare our heads and hearts to approach Christ in a more intentional and meaningful way.

- Overcoming the “dry patches.” We all experience dryness in our prayers or have trouble focusing. You may feel that God is not listening. Perhaps you fall into the trap of asking God to validate what we want instead of submitting to His will. I am certain that most of us will experience this, but keep at it! St. Teresa of Calcutta’s book revealed decades of dryness and despair in her prayer life and yet she persevered.
- Don’t allow work and our busyness to be an excuse. If we are serious about improving our prayer lives, we will stop making prayer conform to our day and make our day conform to our prayer lives. If we deem it important, it will happen. Also, consider integrating prayer into a workout while running or during your commute to and from work. If you seriously feel as though you don’t have a free minute in your day and that adding prayer would be unduly burdensome, I suggest sitting down and taking an objective inventory of your day to see how and where you are spending your time. The results may be shocking. “Everyone needs thirty minutes of personal prayer time each day, unless they are too busy to pray—in which case, they need an hour!” (St. Francis de Sales).
- Pray more, listen more. I want to listen more in prayer and not ramble on about what I need. I want to let Him speak to me and I need to be still and ready to listen. And yes, I need to avoid asking God to validate decisions I have already made. As I learned a few years ago, prayer is every time you turn your thoughts to God and away from yourself.
- Without prayer, our faith will die. We simply will not grow our relationship with Christ unless we do so through prayer. According to the Catechism (2744): “Prayer is a vital necessity. Proof from the contrary is no less convincing: if we do not allow the Spirit to lead us, we fall back into the slavery of sin [cf. Gal 5:16-25].”

Next week, we’ll look at one more important aspect of my own struggle to pray: making time to do it!

Source: <https://integratedcatholiclife.org>