3.1

PRAYER

SPIRITUAL BREATHING

Optional *Lectio Divina* Prayer

1. Read John 15:5–11.
2. Meditate on the words.
3. Speak to Christ about this passage.
4. Rest and listen in God's presence.
5. Discuss together.

"If you are too busy to pray, you are too busy!"[1]

Notes

This was St. Mother Teresa's response to people who told her about the overwhelming amount of work in their lives. There were likely many moments when her sisters, the Missionaries of Charity, felt overwhelmed as they poured out their lives to care for the poorest of the poor around the world. But in 1973, Mother Teresa made a radical decision about how the sisters would use the little time they had each day in a new and extraordinary way.

If our life is without prayer, it is like a house without a foundation.

— St. Mother Teresa

The sisters were already very committed to prayer. As part of their regular routine, they stopped for prayer many times throughout the day: Morning Prayer, Mass, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer and various devotions. But in 1973, Mother Teresa introduced into their daily schedule a "Holy Hour" — one hour of prayer in Eucharistic adoration, modeled after Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

From a practical perspective, such a move seems counterintuitive. These sisters are doing some of the hardest work in the world, caring for the poorest of the poor around the globe. With so much need, so much work to be accomplished, why spend an extra hour in prayer each day?

To that concern, Mother Teresa replied, "If we don't take time to pray, we could not do this work."[2] She also described the effects of that time of prayer on her community: "This hour of intimacy with Jesus is something very beautiful. I have seen a great change in our congregation from the day we started having adoration every day. Our love for Jesus is more intimate. Our love for each other is more understanding. Our love for the poor is more compassionate."[3]

St. Mother Teresa clearly had a supernatural outlook on her life. She knew that her work depended not primarily on her own talent, ability, planning, and effort, but on allowing God to work through her. She knew how much she needed God, and that's one reason

Notes

why she committed herself to prayer each day. She was convinced that, on her own, she could accomplish very little, for Jesus himself says, "apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

DISCUSS

What stands out to you about St. Mother Teresa's commitment to prayer? Have you ever tried to make prayer a daily part of your busy schedule? How did it go?

SPIRITUAL BREATHING

We need time to pray each day if we want to grow spiritually. The soul needs prayer like the body needs oxygen. To be filled more with Christ's life, we need to take in what Pope Francis has called "the deep breath of prayer."[4]

But what exactly is prayer? The great saint of prayer, St. Teresa of Avila, said, "Mental prayer is nothing else, in my opinion, but being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with him who we know loves us."[5] Prayer is not a complicated formula or a series of rigid steps; it is our very relationship with God! According to the *Catechism*, "prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father" (CCC 2565).

Notes

When we make daily prayer a priority, our lives are better. We are reminded of our identity as children of a good Father in heaven, and all that we do — our work, relationships, responsibilities — is enriched with Christ's Spirit. Rather than relying on our own abilities, efforts, and plans, it will be Christ radiating through us, filling us with the grace to live life in ways that are much more fulfilling than we could gain on our own.

Most of all, prayer is not about what we do so much as it is something God initiates as he puts a desire for him on our hearts. He put that desire for prayer in us because he longs for our time, our attention, and our love. "Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God's desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him" (CCC 2560).

Taking the leap to start a daily prayer life can be intimidating. But these three principles can help you get started.

Consistent

First, we must be *consistent*. Most great things in life all come about through a routine and consistent effort. Think of athletes training for competition. They practice the same actions repeatedly, every day, to master the habits of their sport. They have a consistent training regimen that allows them to succeed. Without consistency, they struggle to be successful.

We need to have something similar in mind for our life of prayer. When you are getting started, don't worry too much about all the details of prayer. To begin, simply make sure you have a consistent prayer time and routine each day. Even if you can pray for only ten minutes, find a way to do it every day so that you build up the habit, and through the habit build your relationship with God.

As you seek to build a habit of prayer, your consistency will be tested by busy schedules, competing priorities, or even

Notes

feelings of boredom or frustration. In these times, you will need perseverance to continue in the daily life of relationship with God.

Quiet

Second, we need *quiet* in our hearts. When we talk to friends, we want to have their full attention. The same is true in the great conversation of prayer. God wants our full attention. He wants to hear what is on our heart — what we're going through, our hopes, our dreams, our fears, our hurts, our needs. He also wants to speak to us through his words in Scripture or the saints or other devotional books we might use in prayer. He wants to encourage us, comfort us, and prompt us.

But if we don't have enough silence in our souls, we won't be able to speak to him and we won't be able to listen to what he has to say to us. Find a quiet place — for example, in your room, in a chapel, outdoors — where you're less likely to be distracted. Put down your phone or even turn it off so you don't have the distractions of incessant notifications.

Apart from me you can do nothing.

— John 15:5

Simple

Third, we need a plan for prayer that's *simple*.

Many people ask, what am I supposed to do in prayer? While there are many different approaches and techniques to prayer, when you're first starting out, you want to keep it simple. After you quiet yourself down and recognize God's presence, take some time to read: perhaps a few verses from the Bible, a few lines from a saint, passages from a devotional book like *In Conversation with God* or *The Imitation of Christ* or meditations found in publications like *Magnificat*. Then, have a simple conversation with God about what is going on in the passage and how it relates to your life. Tell the Lord something that struck you about what you read. Ask him a question about it. Reflect on how it might apply to your life right now. Talk to God about it and take time in quiet to listen as well. Finally, take

Notes

> what you've learned in prayer and make a resolution for how you want to live better.

DISCUSS

How have you prayed in the past? What was helpful as you tried to have a conversation with God?

LECTIO DIVINA

One simple and powerful way you can begin to pray is with a method known as *Lectio Divina*, which means "divine reading." It is a traditional Christian way of praying with sacred Scripture. Pope Benedict XVI once said, "If [*lectio divina*] is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church — I am convinced of it — a new spiritual springtime."[6]

Lectio Divina consists of four stages:

1. ***Lectio* (Reading)**. As you begin, choose a short passage and read the passage slowly and prayerfully. Pay attention to a word or phrase that sticks out to you or catches your attention.
2. ***Meditatio* (Meditation)**. Read the passage again and, this time, pause to reflect on that part that stuck out to you. Prayerfully consider the meaning of the word or phrase and why this might have grabbed your attention.
3. ***Oratio* (Prayer)**. Read the passage a third time, and then turn to the Lord and speak to him about the passage. Ask him what he wants you to learn and how he might be inviting you change or draw closer to him.
4. ***Contemplatio* (Contemplation)**. In this final stage, rest in God's presence and in whatever graces, insights, encouragements, or challenges you received from God during this time of prayer. Thank him for the ways he spoke to you and resolve to remain close to him.

Notes

This model of prayer, when practiced regularly, will help you learn to hear God's voice, encounter him more deeply in the Scriptures and conform your life more to Christ. As the *Catechism* explains, "Seek in reading and you will find in meditating; knock in mental prayer and it will be opened to you by contemplation" (CCC 2654).

TAKE ACTION

Take a moment to practice praying *Lectio Divina* according to the steps above. Consider using the optional passage given at the beginning of this article.

Next, set a goal and plan how to incorporate some time of daily prayer into your life. Start simple and choose something attainable that you can do each day. One great way to build the habit of prayer is to pray at the same time and place as someone who already prays each day. It will add instant accountability for sticking to your commitment. For the first few times, this person might even share how they pray so that you can continue to learn.

At the end of this article, you will find FOCUS' Prayer Challenge. The goal is simple: to pray every day for 30 days with a passage from Scripture. Typically, habits can be formed by doing something consistently for one month; by completing the Prayer Challenge, you will have a much better chance of making prayer, and a deeper friendship with God, a foundational part of your life. If you would

like to embrace this challenge, make a plan and get started, possibly with a friend for added accountability!

Notes

KEY CONCEPTS

Spiritual Breathing: We must take in "the deep breath of prayer" each day. The soul needs prayer like the body needs oxygen.

Relationship: Prayer is relationship with God (CCC 2558).

3 Principles for Daily Prayer: Consistent, Quiet, Simple

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Time for God by Fr. Jacques Philippe

WRAP Yourself in Scripture by Karen L. Dwyer

Meditation and Contemplation by Timothy M. Gallagher, O.M.V.

Pocket Guide to Adoration by Fr. Josh Johnson

CCC 2560–2865: "Christian Prayer"

Notes

[1] Jim Towey, "It All Begins with Prayer," *Columbia* (July 2010): 13, https://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/mother-teresa/columbia-excerpts072010.pdf.

[2] Joyce Coronel, "Too Busy to Pray? Finding Time for God Brings Peace," *Catholicsun.org* (May 14, 2012): https://www. catholicsun.org/2012/05/14/too-busy-to-pray-finding-time-for-god-brings-peace/.

[3] Mother Teresa, *No Greater Love* (California: New World Library, 1995), 154.

[4] Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium,* accessed February 25, 2020, Vatican.va, 262.

[5] St. Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000).

[6] Benedict XVI, "Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the International Congress Organized to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation 'Dei Verbum,'" accessed February 25, 2020, Vatican.va.

Notes

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCE

3.1 PRAYER: SPIRITUAL BREATHING

30-DAY PRAYER CHALLENGE

Part 1: Jesus' Early Life

Luke 1:26–35
Luke 1:36–45
Luke 1:46–56
Luke 2:1–20
Luke 3:15–23
Luke 4:1–15
Luke 5:1–11

Part 2: Jesus' Ministry

Luke 6:12–26
Luke 6:27–38
Luke 6:43–49
Luke 7:36–50
Luke 8:4–15
Luke 8:22–25
Luke 9:18–27

Part 3: Jesus on the Road to Jerusalem

Luke 9:51–62
Luke 10:38–42
Luke 11:1–13
Luke 11:37–44
Luke 12:22–31
Luke 15:1–2; 11–26
Luke 18:1–8

Part 4: Jesus' Death

Luke 22:14–23
Luke 22:39–46
Luke 22:54–62
Luke 23:13–25
Luke 23:32–43
Luke 23:44–56

Part 5: Jesus' Resurrection

Luke 24:1–12
Luke 24:13–35
Luke 24:36–53

Notes