

V Struggling with prayer

I struggle with prayer. I find it fairly easy to say thank you and relatively easy to say sorry and even to offer prayers for other people. The words may not be the right words, whatever they are, but words usually come. The kind of prayer I struggle with is being silent in the presence of God. There are too many distractions. Not only are there the external ones – baby crying, television, traffic outside, even a clock ticking – but the internal ones. Every time I try to concentrate and focus on God, thoughts come flooding into my mind and the elusive moment disappears. The following are some suggestions for staying in the present moment although, at the end of the day, prayer is not about some esoteric technique but about deepening our relationship with God.

My personal preference is to concentrate on my breathing, that is, breathing quite normally but whenever I wander off and think of something else I return to concentrate on my breathing. This is also a good way of falling asleep!

At other times I lose my head by going into my senses. I become aware of the seat I am sitting on, the floor on which my feet rest, any aches and pains in my body and so on. Concentrating on an ache is a wonderful way of coming into the present moment! All else is forgotten. Some people start with their feet, squeezing and relaxing various muscles until they finish somewhere round their head and shoulders.

Other people find it helpful to give their brain something to do whilst engaged in silent prayer. Repeating a phrase over and over again, for example, ‘Lord have mercy’, or ‘come Lord Jesus’. It doesn’t really matter what the phrase is. Another suggestion is to use a focus – a candle, a picture, an icon.

These are only suggestions. You have to pray as you can, not as you can’t. There is nothing prescriptive but it sometimes helps to have a change, especially if your prayer life has become very dry.

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