

How to Embrace Distractions when you Pray

Jon Scott - 15 May 2018

As a person with a short-attention span, I've never felt like a good intercessor.

Praying can be difficult when the world is rife with exciting thoughts, talky people, interesting objects, and other things that - in the moment - are more exciting than taking time to be with God.

I tend to try and pray on my commute to work every morning. It's a 45 minute walking journey where visual stimulation is present, but when you see the same buildings, trees and faces every day for over a year, it can get repetitive.

The distractions I usually face in any prayer time, whether it's intentional, spontaneous, or routine, are my tangential thoughts and inner-mind musings. Thoughts like: "I'm starving - how long until lunch?" and: "I wonder if Terry minded when I took the last teabag 3 weeks ago", and: "who would win in a fight out of King Kong and Godzilla?".

It really fascinates me how church leaders and other public intercessors put together prayers seemingly formed on the spot that flow so well, with perfect words and admirable intent.

I've been told that it's a mixture of practice and clarity of mind, but how do we go about starting to pray without being distracted? If, like me, you find distraction a challenge, how do we go about focusing our minds?

I seem to have found a few ways around this distraction issue – none of them are perfect but I'm realizing that God loves my more-than-momentarily-meandering-mind and the way I forget what I was praying for a mere 3 milliseconds into the first word. God simply loves it when I communicate with Him and is willing to help me when I ask.

So as I begin my commute, I begin my prayers simply: "Dear Lord, I'm walking to work and would love to have a chat – help me stay focused on the important things." From then on, I catch any random thought processes that are thrown to me by my neural pathways, and hold onto them as subjects of prayer.

The Holy Spirit guides our minds when we ask for help. And so in my morning prayer times, God uses my thoughts to prompt me - to be appreciative of my meals; to pray for Terry's issues at home; and to dream big and hard, exercising my imagination in order to get ready for any vision or calling He is preparing me for.

We all connect with God in different ways; so if your prayer routine isn't working, try something different.

Move somewhere quiet (or noisy!) where you've heard God before; draw or write your prayers in a journal; go on a prayer walk with some friends. Read Psalm 139 – God knows what we're thinking before we think it, so He's not surprised by the avenues of thought you might find yourself in.

Fortunately for those of us, like me, who struggle with losing words before they've been prayed, God doesn't rely on the quality of the words we say or how 'good' our prayers may seem to other people (or ourselves!). He looks at our heart attitude towards Him.

When we want to spend time with God, He will never turn us away, even if we're distracted by last night's sports scores or if our mental thesaurus doesn't materialize on cue.

So if you find your focus wandering in prayer, set aside some time to think how you can connect with God in a potentially new and practical way.

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