

Starting a discipline of prayer

Prayer is responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with and without words.

*It helps to have structure when you're beginning a discipline of prayer. It also helps to start small – 10, 15 or 20 minutes a day. The website www.prayworshipserve.com has resources for the daily office, and centering prayer.

*Sometimes the biggest initial challenge to prayer is just being still. Many people find "breath prayer" a useful gateway to prayer. Breath prayer is a type of centering prayer that calms the body, focuses you on God ... and also can be carried through the day. A great resource on breath prayer is <http://www.thefellowship.info/Pray/Prayer-Practices/Breath-Prayer>

*You can also use a brief prayer service in the Book of Common Prayer, "daily devotions for individuals and families" – BCP, p. 136

*The de la Salle brothers have a website with many links to prayer resources - <http://www.prayingeachday.org/prayersites.html>

*It might help to set a timer (with a gentle, non-jarring alarm) so that, particularly as you're getting started, you're not anxious about how much time has (or hasn't) passed. Prayer time is outside of clock time, so the more you can let a device worry about the clock time, the better!

*Some people find burning incense or using essential oils are helpful in putting you in a prayerful state. Our sense of smell is often our most powerful sense. Particularly a smell that you associate with the sacred can be a real aid to entering prayer.

*Let others know that you will need to be uninterrupted and unreachable for this time. Turn your phone off. Just like you show someone you care about them when you don't let a phone or text interrupt you when you're talking with them, we show God we love God when we do the same thing.

*If you can't find a space at home or interruptions are too much, try inside a church. Many churches (like the Cathedral) are open every day, and they have been prayed in a lot, so it is often easier to "get in the mood."

*Know your own body rhythms. Don't make your prayer time when you are sleepy. Pick a time when you are alert, so you can bring that attentiveness to your prayer.

*Cut yourself some slack. Just like going to the gym, this is about slow and steady wins the race. Most people have trouble focusing or sticking to it at the beginning. If you find your mind wandering, don't chastise yourself, just gently lead it back to the loving presence of God, knowing that, like the prodigal son, God welcomes your attention back with open arms!