

# Prayer is impossible!

Three thoughts to start with:

1. God made you, an act of love.
2. You are not alone; everyone has ups and downs in their prayer life.
3. You're not guilty (and even if you are, there's a way out, and it starts with prayer!)



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Here are two things that may be happening:

1. Life has become overloaded with things you want/ need to do; demands come and it's hard to schedule anything, let alone something that 'can wait' (like prayer). See '[Chaos theory](#)'.
2. The joy has gone out of prayer. "It feels like a chore, and I'm not sure it does any good anyway". See '[God's gone](#)'.

## Chaos theory



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Don't beat yourself up. You might have some prayer 'rules' that you feel you've broken, but God doesn't have rules like that; God just wants you as you are, and doesn't mind mess.

In fact, what if God is *in* the mess! Just look (when you get 30 seconds); ask God to show you and leave the rest to God. No need to tidy up, or go to a special room with silence and scented candles!

No need to schedule the time; just take it when it comes.

### Things to do with 1 minute's peace:

- Look at what's in front of you and say 'I'm looking for you, God'
- Pay attention to each part of your body. Tell God what hurts. Notice the strength in you – God's power at work within you.
- Read aloud the words in the box<sup>1</sup>

I am the Lord; I am, beyond time;  
I am with you now.  
With me, 1000 years are like a single day  
A few moments – a taste of eternity  
Let go of busy thoughts and let me love you  
Now  
As I love you in and through all time.

<sup>1</sup> From Angela Ashwin's helpful book 'for parents and all busy people': Patterns not padlocks

### The Jesus Prayer

The prayer comes from scripture (e.g. see Luke 18: 13 and 38). It has been used for centuries in the Orthodox church. It goes:  
*'Lord Jesus Christ,  
Son of God,  
have mercy on me.'*

➤ Say the Jesus Prayer (see box) over and over for the time you have. Just for that time, the words of the prayer take the place of the endless mental list of things to do. Jesus knows how to answer the prayer and doesn't need further instruction. As you repeat the prayer over time, it sinks into you and goes on inside you as you get on with other things, emerging again when there's a moment of quiet.

➤ Say one line of the Lord's Prayer and ask what it means for you today. The next line can wait till tomorrow.

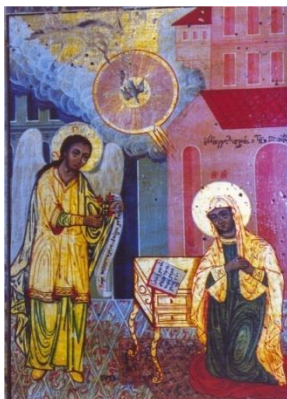
### If you have a little longer:

You may need an active form of prayer, just to engage the bit of you that has been relentlessly focussed on getting things done. Examples include:

❖ Going for a walk, asking God to help you see (poem by Elizabeth Barrett-Browning).

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God.  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

❖ Read a few verses from a gospel (e.g. Mark or Luke). Picture the scene as vividly as you can (the aim is not historical or theological accuracy); what picture do these words paint in your imagination? If you were there, what would you say to the others? To Jesus? When you're interrupted, leave it quietly, noting where you got to; then next time pick up where you left off. No 'daily quota' to get through.



❖ look at a picture, maybe with the people you share your busy life with. Talk about what it could mean, what you like and don't like.

Depending who you're with, you may be able to say to something aloud to God about the picture. Or maybe you'll do that on your own later.

### And remember:

It doesn't all depend on you. Tell others – they may be honoured to pray for you, listen to you, suggest things at this busy time for you. And maybe you'll be able to return the favour one day.

If you're missing God, then God's Spirit is at work in you. If that weren't so, you wouldn't be missing him!

# God's gone

I remember when I was teaching my children to swim, I would stand quite near to start with, inviting them to swim to me; then as they swam I'd draw back a bit and they'd swim further than they thought they could, they'd get to me and we'd have a hug.

Maybe the idea that the sense of God's absence is just his way of 'stretching' us seems trite. But when there is no sweetness in prayer it does beg the question 'what was I seeking (and getting) when prayer was good?' Could it be that I was seeking the sweetness and this experience is teaching me that my desire for God goes on, even when the sweetness is gone?

It is this great absence  
that is like a presence, that compels  
me to address it without hope  
of a reply. ...  
My equations fail  
as my words do. What resources have I  
other than the emptiness without him of my whole  
being, a vacuum he may not abhor?  
*From RS Thomas: 'The Absence'*

This ache for God, is it not, itself, evidence of God in me?

Another bit of poem – for when you feel like 'striking against God's love':

... As the storm still seeks its end in peace  
when it strikes against peace with all its might,  
even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love  
and still its cry is — 'I want thee, only thee'.

*From Rabindranath Tagore: 'Only Thee'.*

Even our rebellion is a  
kind of 'wanting God'.

The question remains,  
though: what to do  
about it?

It is common in this state, to think that God has withdrawn because of disapproval. Often that is not the case at all, but there is nothing our enemy would like more than for us to feel that, and avoid God and avoid telling others about it. Act against that avoidance: tell God and others! If there is truly something that needs changing in your life, then this dis-ease is your own acknowledgement that you are ready for the change, and God and your friends will help you.

But God and your friends might tell you something else: *This is not your fault, nor is there need to fear*. If you have told God you want God, then there is nothing else you can do but look for God.

### **‘Praying’ by Mary Oliver**

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.

The holy thing here is your experience, not this ‘advice’, which can only give a few hints for your thinking and conversation. If it’s not helpful to you, bin it and keep looking for the thing you need! Even if it is, the next step is likely to be to talk it over with a trusted friend or Spiritual Companion<sup>2</sup>.



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Charles Ruxton  
Trinity Churches  
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<sup>2</sup> e.g see [What is Spiritual Direction - Diocese of Lichfield \(anglican.org\)](https://www.anglican.org/what-is-spiritual-direction/)