

TOOL: Obstacles to Prayer

Prayerful reflection three times a day • Daily



Introduction

Prayer seems to be one of the most obvious and “easiest” practices of following Jesus. We can do it from anywhere. We can do it anytime. We don’t need energy or resources to pray. We don’t need the right stationary or a ton of alone time.

So, why is it so challenging?

Throughout this toolbox you have tools to help practice praying and hopefully form new habits. Over time, our habits reshape our values. By practicing prayer throughout our day we reclaim our hearts and our minds from the distractions of the world and remind ourselves of who we are and who God is.

And, at the same time, sometimes there are obstacles that are shaped not by our habits but that shape our habits. Sometimes the habit is hard because there is a mental or emotional block.

Paul Miller says, “It is easier on our faith not to pray.” We don’t have to be in this world long to notice that prayers go unanswered. And our brains have to figure out how to make sense of that. Does that happen because God isn’t real? Because God doesn’t care? Because prayer doesn’t work? Because we’re praying incorrectly? Because we don’t have enough faith?

In this tool we’ll explore some of the obstacles and experiences that might have generated resistance to the habit of prayer.

Practice

STEP ONE: Each day this week:

- As you wake up, pray a simple prayer: "God, show me the truth about prayer."
- In the middle of the day - set an alarm to remind you - and offer up a simple prayer: "God how do I feel about prayer?" Notice what comes up.
- As you go to bed, pray a simple prayer: "God, help me to pray."

STEP TWO: Spend five minutes circling the statements around prayer below that you resonate with.

EMOTIONAL OBSTACLES: Finish this sentence: Praying is hard because I don't want to...

Feel disappointed

Be angry with God if God doesn't show up

Feel foolish for thinking God would do this thing

Feel like I'm praying wrong

Feel stupid for wanting this thing

Put a rift in my relationship with God

INTELLECTUAL OBSTACLES: *God's system of prayer seems...*

Unfair

Illogical

Confusing

Evil

Cruel

Inconsistent

Broken

Dumb

Useless

STEP THREE: Find a window of 15-30 minutes to complete the following exercise.

"Unanswered" prayers that have shaped you:

<p>Make a list of things that you have wanted or prayed for in your life, or that you have seen others pray for. Insert these in the rows below.</p>	<p>At the time, how do you think your brain made sense of the pain that God didn't answer these prayers as you'd hoped? (e.g. Maybe God's not good. Maybe God's not real. Maybe I didn't pray hard enough...)</p>	<p>What did this feel like? How did it impact your trust in prayer, or trust in God?</p>

STEP FOUR: What did you notice while processing through the chart above? What obstacles and experiences have made you resistant to prayer? Spend some time grieving with God, sharing any pain or disappointment with your Father who loves you.

Read through Matthew 26:36-56. You do not have a great high priest who is unable to sympathize with the experience of unanswered prayers. Jesus knows what that feels like. Bring your obstacles to God in prayer.

Debrief your experience

After practicing with this tool, debrief your experience with your Praxis Group. Below are some questions to process together:

- Check in on life. (Where are you experiencing Christ's presence this week? What burdens are you carrying?)
- What did you learn from this practice?
- Describe your experience with this practice. (What feelings came up, what went well, what got in the way? How has it impacted your relationship with God?)
- What is the next step for you?