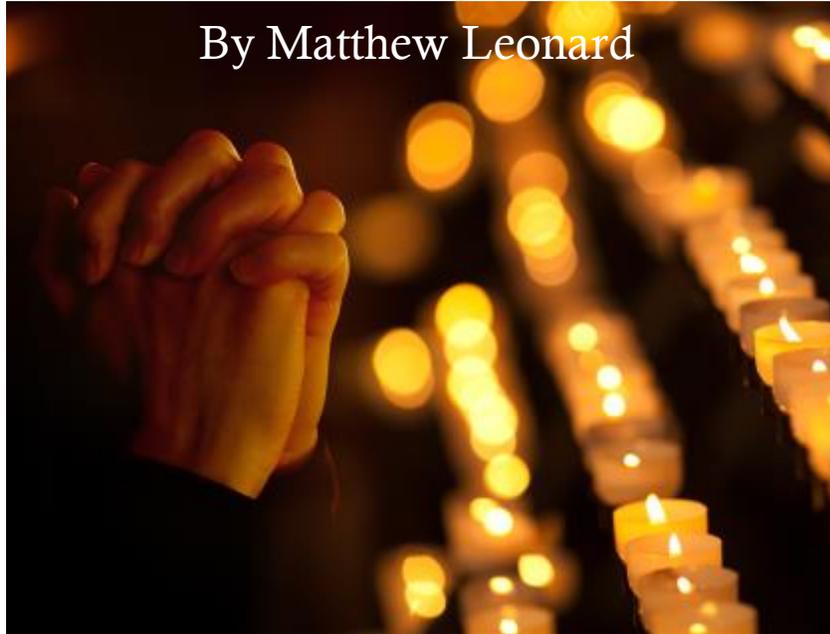


8 Ways To Jump-Start Your Prayer Life

By Matthew Leonard



Prayer isn't optional. It's the way we relate to God. We are created to be in union with Him for all eternity, but that union doesn't start later. It starts now through prayer and the sacraments.

Even so, relating to God isn't always easy. Whether it's inexperience or simply a dry spot, we all are in need of a "jump start" every now and then. So I've created a list of eight ways to get you back on track and moving closer to God.

No. 1 Make Prayer A Non-Negotiable

One thing is for certain, if you don't make prayer a priority it will be the first thing crossed off of your "to do" list when things get busy. This means you have to make it part of your daily schedule.

Because we're so busy, we often feel like there's no time to pray. I've been there. But I've learned that if you make time for God, He'll make time for you. He'll multiply your time so that you can get everything finished that He wants you to get finished. In fact, the busier I get, the more I know I need to pray.

No. 2 Set The Stage

When entering the presence of God, environment is key. That means trying to pray at a bar during Happy Hour or during a bridal shower isn't going to cut it.

Given all the roadblocks that Original Sin already throws up when we try to pray, it's crazy to allow more distraction to compete for our attention.

Most people pray best in the morning, because it's when we're most fresh. It doesn't do any good to try to enter into God's presence when we're falling over tired. That doesn't mean I don't...(cont.)

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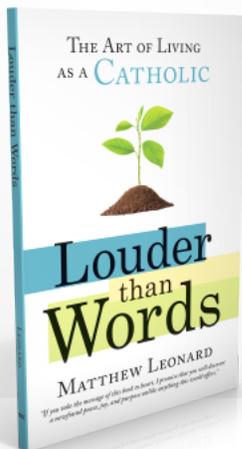
MATTHEW LEONARD



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—Mark Hart, Executive Vice
President of Life Teen International



No. 2 Continued...

pray at night. I enjoy ending the evening praying Night Prayer with my wife. But I'm most alert after being awake for an hour or so in the morning.

Setting the stage also involves getting rid of noise, which brings us to Number 3...

No. 3 Silence

In today's world, we're constantly assaulted by images and sound. You can't even pump gas anymore without a speaker polluting the air with ads or "music." Since we're all a little spiritually ADD to begin with, silencing the world is a must when it's time to pray. We need quiet.

I think the absolute best place to pray is an adoration chapel. But there are plenty of other quiet places to pray.

Even so, sometimes it's really hard to quiet my minds even when I've achieved exterior silence. One "trick" I use to help calm things down is repeating the name of "Jesus" over and over. Repetition is a great tool to help our minds slow down and focus. Another option is to read a Gospel passage about Our Lord's Passion.

No. 4 Quality Not Quantity

The spiritual life isn't a sprint. It's a marathon. Regardless of the manner in which we're praying, quality is always better than quantity.

What's the point of racing? Imagine if we tried to converse with our spouse or friends by racing through the conversation without even thinking about what we're saying? Not only would they not appreciate it very much, but our relationship with them wouldn't deepen. It's the same with God. Don't rush through your prayers.

St. Francis de Sales said that one fervent Our Father or Hail Mary is worth more than hundreds you say without focus. The goal isn't to finish. The goal is God.

No. 5 Don't Be Afraid of Change

One reason we often get into a prayer rut is because we keep doing the same things over and over. If you find yourself having trouble making progress, change things up.

Remember that prayer is a movement of the heart toward God. The tools we use to help that movement are simply that – tools. Take a break from your normal routine. Oftentimes this will help you "jump start" a conversation with the Lord. 2

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No. 6 - Resolve to Act

At the end of the day, prayer is meant to bring about change. There are no plateaus in the spiritual life. We're either moving toward God, or away from Him.

This means that movement must be the end result of praying. Resolve to act on whatever it is the Lord is telling you, so as to draw closer to Him.

No. 7 Practice Ejaculatory Prayer

Simply thanking or praising God as we go about the day is one of the most powerful weapons in our prayer arsenal. It keeps us in the presence of God. As St. Phillip Neri says, "It is an old custom of the saints of God to have some little prayers ready and to be frequently darting them up to heaven during the day... He who adopts this plan will obtain great fruits with little pain."

This kind of simple prayer is one of the key ways we can follow the admonition of St. Paul to "pray always" (1 Thes 5:17).

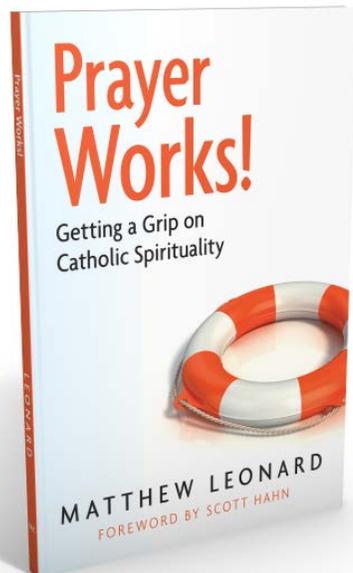
No. 8 Ask For Prayer!

One of the first things we do when we're in trouble is to ask others to pray for us. Why not when we're having trouble praying?

Of course, we don't only ask people alive on earth. We're Catholic! We're part of the Communion of Saints. Anyone and everyone who is in Christ – no matter in what epoch – is available to help.

Revelation 5:8 says our family members in heaven are interceding for us by offering up "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."

So instead of being cut off, they're actively engaged in helping us grow closer to our family in heaven. You could say that one of their jobs is to pray for us. The saints "constantly care for those whom they have left on earth," says the Catechism (n. 2683). Your brothers and sisters *want* to help you. Let them!



"Maybe you've read stories about millionaires who travel to Tibet to learn how to meditate. Maybe you know someone who visited a monastery for a month to learn how to pray. Maybe you don't have that kind of money or spare time, but you still want to learn to pray. The good news is prayer isn't something exotic or esoteric...not when Matthew Leonard talks about it. He makes the methods manageable."

"Everybody needs help to grow spiritually...Matt Leonard shows us the way." Dr. Scott Hahn