

**Please Pray for:** Laura Beth Amtower, Dena & Jason Albright, Walter & Jennifer Aumuller, Jay Bailey, Julian M. Barajas, Amy Barrett, Grayson Bishop, Nathan Blubaugh, Barbara & Greg Bonat, Kara Breedlove, Darlene Bridges, Mary Kay Britt, Vicky Brown, Denise Cameron, Cathy Case, Bob & Carla Clark, Krista Howard-Clarke, Donnie Clark, Julia Codire, Marsha Combs, Melissa Dahlheimer, Robert Dayton, Nick Dearcangelis, Vera Demeduk, Richard Delaney, Amy Driver, Logan Duncan, Jenny Emerick, John & Eileen Engel, Jan Evans, Father Bob, Jamie Fazzalore, Lily Fletcher, Patricia Folk, Leia Gallen, Aaron Glinke, Dawn Green, Dale & Tina Hankinson, Roy Harsh, Lucy Haywood, Janet Jack, Marc Jedlowski, Kenneth Jenkins, Lisa Jones, Annia Kirk, Michael Knotts, Stacy Kobe, Liz & Roger Lantz, Ernest Lease, Bob Lewis, Audrey Liller, Annie Light, Ed Lindner, Luke Lindner, Ty Linthicum, Catherine & Kierstin Lippold, Maggie Luzier, Jim Martin, Janice McBride, Lilly McCormick, Charlotte McCullough, Greyson McCullough, Marty Medovic, Maddox Mervinsky, Joey & Heather Miltenberger, Mike Miltenberger, Adrienne Monroe, Hogan Moody, Steve Morgan, Robin Patch, Colleen Patton, Marilyn Paul, Steve Pelaez, Bonnie Price, Ronnie & Linda Proud, Mary Lou Quin, Kira Robey, Bertha Romine, Malea Rugg, Cody & Jenny Saville, Debbie Seward, Shank Family, Shawnee Simmons, Luke Sites, Destinee Smith, Barry Steed, Harper Struntz, Donna Struntz, Lu & Lois Thibault, Jimmy Twigg, Linda & Ronnie Ward, Adam Watts, Carl Welch, Mark Wilbourne, Joe & Dolly Wolfe, Judy Wolfe and Family, Harlow Wooton

**What to do when Lent starts feeling tough** Maybe you started strong on Ash Wednesday, and somewhere in the past couple of weeks, life happened. Maybe you've tried to settle into a daily Lenten practice but haven't quite found your rhythm yet. It's not too late. You're not called to enter in to prove anything, but to be transformed by someone. It's not about perfection. It's about returning. Jesus is waiting to draw close to you, to refine you, and to gently transform your heart in these days leading up to Easter.

Maybe Lent has felt fruitful and peaceful, but lately things feel especially burdensome or challenging. If your initial motivation has faded or the warmth you once felt in prayer feels distant, these moments are not signs that something is wrong. Often, they are invitations. God frequently works most deeply in the difficult and hidden moments of the spiritual life. If you feel this way, you're not alone. The ideas below might help you navigate moments just like these and rediscover the grace God is offering even in the midst of them.

People speak about their prayer life, "I did not feel God's presence," "nothing seems to move me closer to him," "praying is hard and sometimes I do not see the point." These exemplify spiritual dryness, when prayer, despite doing what has helped a person grow in faith and love of God, now does nothing. It feels like work or going through the motions, or even pointless. It doesn't bring forth peace or comfort; God seems far away. Being honest with ourselves, we may be grading our prayers in terms of the return we receive. We may have become accustomed to feelings of warmth or a sense we have done a good thing by praying and we would like a little reward, a small sign of God moving, of seeing him in everyday life.

Consider your prayer life as similar to a human relationship; with an ebb and a flow to both of them, depending on circumstances. When we first get to know someone, there is joy in learning new things about them, discovering their likes and dislikes, and simply spending time together. Prayer is the same. Beginning a daily habit of prayer, at first, we love it — each day excited to be with the Lord, eager to learn more about him. God, because he loves us, gives us many graces and builds in us a desire to continue. After settling into the habit, God steps back a bit to help us learn to rely less on our feelings and more on the awareness that he is with us, even when we are not sensing him. This does not mean God is not with us. Without him we would cease to be. The Holy Spirit, since our Baptism, is present within us, guiding us in sometimes imperceptible ways. Persevere in prayer; tell God you love him, no matter what.

**Keep to your schedule or plan.** Whatever your daily prayer habit looks like, stay with it. What you can change is how or what you are praying.

The **rosary** is a beautiful way to go to our Mother Mary and ask for her intercession to comfort us in times of trouble. If you struggle with concentrating on the rosary, pray a scriptural rosary or walk outside while praying; pray for a specific person on each bead or for the person who gave you the rosary. Shifting focus helps you pay more attention to what you are praying.

If you struggle to pay attention at **Mass**, ask the Holy Spirit to help you focus on the Gospel and what you are to learn from it. Pray for the people around you. Keep your eyes on the cross or the tabernacle. Maybe change where you sit if you habitually sit in the same pew at every Mass. That shifts your visual perspective and can help your internal focus as well.

If **meditation** is difficult, rather than being still, write out your thoughts and prayers. If your prayer space is causing you distraction, go to an Adoration chapel, a quiet spot in nature or a library where you sit alone. God will show up!

Another thought is to **change the time you pray**. Switch from morning to evening or the middle of the day. Try praying for longer periods of time or more often.

**Pick up a not-so-often-used devotional or prayer book.** Something to help you see things in a new and different way.

If you are at your lowest, go to confession. Not because you are a terrible sinner, but because we need forgiveness and grace to move forward and know we are loved.

There is a simple form of prayer that can help us to notice the movement of the Holy Spirit with God constantly active in our lives, revealing his will through a presence more intimate than we are to ourselves: *The Daily Examen*. It is a form of prayer that can be adapted and practiced in several ways, depending on the needs of the person or the situation. In the book of the *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius himself proposes two forms: a “particular or daily examen” and a “general examen”. Traditionally, this form of the Examen is practiced for fifteen minutes twice a day: once after the midday meal and then again after supper. Nevertheless, it can be lengthened or shortened as needed, or the timing can be adjusted.

The first step is a “*confession of praise*,” marked by thanksgiving for God’s gifts. Call to mind the concrete blessings God has given this day, so that you can “ponder with deep affection how much God our Lord has done for you, and how much he has given you of what he possesses, and consequently how he, the same Lord, desires to give you even his very self, in accordance with his divine design.” This gracious self-gift of God is made concrete in the events of your life: a kind word from a friend, a child’s smile, the beauty of a sunrise, and so on.

Next is the “*confession of life*,” which is the central part of the Examen. A helpful question is, “Where has my heart been this day?” Remember our Lord’s saying that “where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Matt 6:21). Recognize whether your treasure is God or an idol you created. Recognize whether the heart has been fixed in anger, jealousy, despair, or any vice or anything that takes you away from God, or if it has been fixed in peace, joy, love, hope, or something that moves you toward God.

Finally, is the “*confession of faith*,” recognizing that I do not save myself; God alone saves me from sin and death. If helpful, pray a Psalm (e.g., Psalm 51 or 121). The confession of faith consists of contrition and resolution. In contrition, you might ask forgiveness of God for a particular sinful act, for letting your heart go astray in some matter, or for not responding to an invitation of grace that you noticed. In resolution, ask God to help you respond to Spirit’s promptings toward the good—be they impulses to prayer, to acts of charity, or to anything else. Most important, however, is that your resolution be concrete and specific.