



Troubleshooting and FAQ

I can't concentrate

A very common issue when we pray. Try doing something active that interests and engages you as a prayer activity. If your mind is still too busy, why not turn those distractions into prayers? They're clearly the things that are on your mind, tell God about them all until you've run out of things to say, then listen and see what God says back.



My phone/iPad/book/tv distracts me

Whenever we try something that requires a bit of self-discipline, we're bound to come up against a bit of back-lash from all the things that suddenly seem much more appealing or are just habits that we didn't notice until we tried to do something different. Try putting the device or object in a different room, in a drawer or maybe in or under a 'Be Still' mug (St Tees member-approved, tried and tested method!). Put it on silent and set a timer for the amount of time you want to put it aside.

I just fall asleep

So many people say they have this 'problem' - "I sat down to pray but I just fell asleep" What does that tell you? When you gave time and space to listen to yourself and to God, you were able to show feelings of tiredness that you usually have to mask and you were able to take a real rest - could God speak to you any clearer than that? Next time you fall asleep while praying, imagine God saying "My child, you're tired, you need rest" and see where that takes you.



I'm too busy to pray

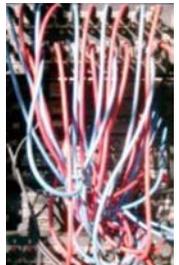
Sometimes life is really busy, God knows that, and we know that. We often spend our lives holding out for that elusive future time when things are going to become less busy, we'll be less tired and life will be less stressful, then we'll find the time to pray and do all the other things we want to do but don't have the time for. But that time never comes, it's a false hope. The only time we have is now, and doing something is better than doing nothing. Maybe just start by telling God how busy you are right now. Prayer is about connection; it doesn't matter how we connect, or where, or when. Take a look at some of the sanctifying prayers in this booklet and see if one of those could work for you by incorporating it into your daily routines. Prayer might feel like just an extra thing to fit in, but it will make all the difference to your day.



Want a good read on this topic? Try *Real God, Real Life* by Jo Saxton or *Too Busy not to Pray* by Bill Hybels (if you have time to read! Maybe it would be better to just pray and meet with God instead of reading a book about prayer...)

How do I know God is speaking to me?

Prayer is a partnership between us and God, so if you're asking is it God or is it just me then the answer is probably 'yes' to both! It won't be solely God, because God chooses to work in partnership with us, so there is a human element and there's always a chance that we've got a bit tangled up, but the more often we tune into God and what he's doing, the more aligned we become to the fruits of the spirit and the better we get at working out when God is speaking to us.



Things to look out for - What thoughts and feelings come to mind while you're engaging with times of prayer and worship? Which ones won't go away? Are they consistent with what the bible says?

For more on this, look at *Tuning in to the God who Speaks* by Brad Jersak

I think God is speaking to me and I think I need to share it with other people - how do I do that?

We need a balance between humility (the grace to know that we could have got things wrong) and courage to share things that we believe are relevant. Talk to someone who you know and trust first to get advice. Please always share things factually e.g. 'When I was praying, this thought came to mind...' Or 'While I was praying I felt...' and leave it to the other person to decide if God is speaking to them through it - remember God will also be working in partnership with them so the way they interpret it may be different to the way you interpreted it, that's ok and it may still be very meaningful to them and doesn't mean you 'got it wrong'. If you want to share something with the church, please speak to a member of the leadership team.

I don't know where to start

There's a lot of information here and loads of ideas in this pack - we wanted to include as much as possible so hopefully there's something for everyone, but it doesn't mean you have to try everything. You don't have to try anything new if you already feel you are connecting well with God. This pack is designed to share ideas with those who want them.

We suggest you start by choosing one idea from the 'sacred spaces' and one idea from the 'sanctified spaces' section to try this week. Take a look at the quick reference key and see which of the things you might be looking for - something active or something armchair-friendly? Do you prefer creative things or do you like structure? Do you like being outdoors? This should help you find things that are more suitable for your interests and circumstances.

At its core, prayer is about connecting with God and it's as diverse as we are. These things are here as a guide, take what's useful and feel free to adapt them to suit your needs. If there's nothing here that appeals to you but something has worked well for you in the past, why not start it again?



I don't like praying on my own

Then don't! Find people with similar interests and pray together. Explore different ways until you find something that works for you. But also remember that praying isn't just about sitting down and talking to God, it's about connecting with the creator of the universe, the one who loves us more than we could ever know. You probably do that more than you realise. If you want to pray with other people, look out for the blue 'sociable' symbol in the quick reference guide for things that are designed to be done with other people. Many of the other things in this pack can also be done with others, even if they don't have the symbol next to them.





God doesn't answer my prayers

The pain and disappointment of unanswered prayer is very real and can have a major effect on our prayer life. We live in the 'now and not yet' of God's kingdom - sometimes we see glimpses of it in all its fullness, more often we have to keep living in the in-between, waiting and wondering and not seeing the things we hope for. Use this as the starting point for your prayers. It's ok to get angry with God. We don't have to pretend that things are ok when they're not. God wants to connect with us in everything that life brings, but sometimes we need to find new ways of connecting

when life has been unfair, unkind and unpredictable.

Pete Greig's book *God on Mute* explores the pain of unanswered prayer in more detail for anyone who is interested in finding out more. (Pete Greig founded the 24/7 prayer movement so he knows a bit about prayer. He also lives with some difficult life circumstances and is very real about some of the difficulties about praying in real life situations)

Does prayer work?

Yes and no! It depends what we mean by 'prayer'. If we take prayer to mean 'connecting with God' then yes, prayer works, we can always connect with God. If we take prayer to mean 'God doing whatever I want him to' then no, unfortunately that sort of prayer doesn't work, however much we might like it to; God is not a vending machine where we can put in our requests and get out exactly what we ordered at the end of it. But things do happen when we pray: we change and situations change, not always in the ways or the timescales that we hoped or expected but we can start to see God at work when we pray, especially when we focus our prayers on tuning into God rather than just bringing our requests to him.

Prayer is a partnership between us and God, sometimes we can be so focused on the thing we want that we miss the thing God is trying to give us. The more we spend time with God, getting to know him and finding his perspective, the more we realise that God is constantly working and is inviting us to get involved in what he is doing. It's only through prayer that we can find out what he is doing and how he wants us to get involved.



So yes, prayer does work - it connects us with God, it changes us, it changes other people and it changes situations; spending time with God helps us to understand more of his perspective and enables us to work in partnership with him. But we don't always get what we want, when we want, how we want. The challenge is to stay connected to God and other people when we experience the pain and disappointment of unanswered prayer and to understand the real meaning and purpose of prayer - to connect with God and to live and work in partnership together.

Are answers to prayer just coincidences?

We can spend ages hoping for an answer to prayer, then when we do get an answer to prayer we shrug it off as a coincidence. It seems we're more likely to be discouraged by one unanswered prayer than we are to be encouraged by many answered prayers, perhaps because we tell ourselves we'll never know 100% if something was an answer to prayer or not. Maybe it was just coincidence? Archbishop William Temple said this: "When I pray, coincidences happen. When I don't, they don't" The more we pray, the more things happen. We can't explain why or how, but they do. Prayer is a partnership between ourselves and God: when we pray, God is working in us in a new way; he's also working in the situation we prayed about in a way that he wasn't before. It might just be coincidence, but we tend to see far more 'coincidences' when we pray than when we don't.



For a really comprehensive and accessible look at prayer have a read of *Prayer - Does it Make any Difference?* by Philip Yancey

God feels distant

We all go through times in life where God feels distant. If that's where you're at right now then this week of prayer is probably the last thing you want to be doing and there was maybe even an inward groan at just the thought of it. We've all been there. But you're reading this, and that shows you haven't given up, and God hasn't given up on you either. Often God feeling distant comes during tough times, or after tough times. Sometimes it's because we've unintentionally disconnected from God and from ourselves in order to get through the tough things - we've gone into survival mode and we need to reconnect. Sometimes it's because we've experienced pain and disappointment and we're angry at God and at life but we've not expressed it. Sometimes it's because we're tired and weary and running on empty and we need to be refreshed but don't know how. Sometimes there's no reason at all. It's really difficult to pray when God feels distant, but God is still present, even when it doesn't feel that way.

The Lord is near to all who call on him

Psalm 145:18



Explore a fresh way of connecting with God that you've not tried before (look out for the grey 'God feels distant' symbol in this guide for ideas) Start by telling God how distant he feels and what that is like for you, use that as your starting point. Maybe try doing it on a walk in a favourite place, or writing it in a letter to God, or drawing a

picture of how it feels when God is distant. Tell God what you are experiencing, then listen and look for what he says back. If you wrote a letter, ask God what he would write back to you and write that letter; if you drew, ask God to show you how he sees the situation and draw that; if you went for a walk, ask God to point something out to you and speak to you through it. God knows what we need even when we don't; the best thing we can do is give him time and space to work, even though that often feels like the last thing we want to do because he feels distant. He is near and he will show up, we just need to find the right way for us to connect at this point in our lives.

I don't know what to pray/there are no words

Sometimes we want to pray but we have no words to express what's going on inside, either it's too big, too painful, too muddled or we're too numb. The good news is we don't need words to pray, all we need to do is invite God to be with us. He knows us better than we know ourselves, we don't have to put on a show. We can shout, scream, cry, sit in silence, write, paint, draw, run, listen to music, hold a cross, ask someone to pray or just to sit with us, whatever helps us connect with God.



"If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans." Romans 8:26