

3 Helpful Tips When You Feel You Can't Pray

Maybe you *can* pray, but it *feels* like you can't.

This is not an uncommon experience for Christian leaders.

Do any of these emotions sound familiar?

- Overwhelmed
- Discouraged
- Numb
- Exhausted
- Defeated
- Fill in the blank

Ever been there?

Take heart, you are not alone with any of these feelings.

It may be a personal family difficulty, a health issue, a tough staffing situation, a financial pressure or a board member turns on you.

Anyone of these, especially for a short time, is doable. It's when several begin to pile up and the length of time is extended. That's when it can all just seem like too much.

When pastors talk with me sometimes it's as straightforward as "Dan, I'm doing everything I know how, and it's just not working." Followed by, "Sometimes I just can't even pray."

It's not that they've lost faith, but they've lost the motivation to act on their faith.

It's not that they don't want to pray; it just all feels empty in the moment.

This may not be your experience now, but perhaps a friend

could use this post.

You may want to read on to be prepared and help you stay in front of this all too common experience.

I read a book a long time ago by Bill Hybels, titled *Too Busy (Not) To Pray*. That's not the idea in this post. It's more a sense of too *overloaded* to pray. If you've experienced anything like this, you know exactly what it means.

It's not the doer who won't slow down, it's the devoted who can't see their way.

3 Helps When You Can't Pray:

1) Don't take a break from God.

This is a great temptation. Just take a break. God will understand, right? Of course, He understands. But that's not the answer.

The problem is that we can make prayer work rather than a relationship. That's when we have it backward.

That's it. It's not about work. It's about His love, grace and mercy. It's about your gratitude, worship and dependence.

The second priority of prayer is the mission. You and God's purpose.

God's mission, the message of salvation is our purpose and our work. And our prayers are based around His will and heaven's agenda.

We tend to get those reversed in order of priority, and then prayer becomes difficult because it seems like another thing to do rather than a relationship to enjoy.

This process can cause you to feel like you just can't pray. But you can pray if you return first to the relationship. Let's unpack what that means.

2) Don't make prayer merely a disciplined duty.

In my younger years of leadership, I would have described myself as a "dutiful soldier." I was on a mission for God! I would work, check things off, and work more all to advance His kingdom.

Noble motives, but unwise practices.

The problem was that prayer was at times part of a checklist. OK, got that done! And when I consider any relationship I cherish, they are never part of a checklist. I want to spend time with that person and usually can't get enough. It's natural, not mechanical.

That's a picture of you and God in prayer. When that relationship is flourishing, then your kingdom work and intercession for the mission of the church is a healthy and natural result. It doesn't exhaust you more; it fills you more.

I know He's with me. I may read a psalm, but not much more. I sit in His presence. He meets me there. I don't have to "do" anything.

3) Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray.

However, when you are refueled to intercede for the people you love and lead, and for your work in the church, it's best not to jump too quickly back into your lists.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you pray.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27).

God has an incredible way of helping us to pray when we feel like we can't.

Here's what God has said to me about prayer:

- First, let me be with you.
- Second, don't make it work.
- Third, I've sent my Spirit to help you.

This will work for you too, and Jesus said to all of us:

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me. For I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30). {eo}

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