

HOW TO NURTURE A FAITH-SHARING CULTURE

PRACTICE 1 – ENGAGE WITH GOD

SUMMARY

Developing a daily practice of intentional time to engage with God is foundational for the spiritual life, and often vital for motivating people to share their faith. Invite and resource people to spend 15 minutes with God each day.

EXPLANATION

‘Hold on a minute James,’ you might be thinking, ‘isn’t this book about nurturing an evangelistic culture within our churches?’ Indeed it is. Yet one of the primary struggles at the heart of faith sharing is to do with motivation.

The Pilgrim Course suggests, ‘There is no effective evangelism without authentic spirituality.’ Biblical scholar and church leader John Stott said, ‘Nothing shuts the mouths of Christians quicker than having nothing to say’. Pastor and writer Tim Keller says we develop confidence in faith sharing ‘when we see breakthroughs in our own lives, that the gospel actually makes a difference, that it works’.

Without a lived experience of God, it is hard to see faith sharing as a priority, let alone to do it. Research reveals that the level of discipleship is low within many churches, with, for example, over 60% of people connected with churches saying they never read their Bibles.¹ Church leaders tend to confirm such research through their experience: many within congregations who have no daily or weekly habits of prayer; regular attendance at church increasingly seen as fortnightly at best, monthly more often; few practising some of the basic spiritual disciplines such as giving, fasting, or prayer, let alone some of the more ‘advanced’ disciplines, such as silence, celebration or study; little connection made between what happens in services on a Sunday and how that impacts life Monday to Saturday.

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‘Remain in me as I also remain in you.’

John 15:4

Whilst there are many ways people can nurture faith, throughout the centuries of Church history one of the core spiritual practices has been to spend intentional time with God each day, normally involving prayer and engagement with the Scriptures. In some traditions the emphasis is on this being a personal practice, in others it is a corporate one. It was fascinating during the pandemic lockdown to hear that online daily prayer (be it a daily office or some form of non-liturgical scriptural reflection and prayer) was one of the significant growth points for many churches.

More recently Justin Whitmel Earley has explored what a rule of life might look like in an age of distraction in his book *The Common Rule* (‘common’ because they are done with others). He suggests four daily habits and four weekly ones. Two of his daily habits are ‘kneeling prayer’ and ‘Scripture before phone’. He suggests: ‘As far as habits go, the invisible reality is this: we are all living according to a specific regimen of habits, and those habits shape most of our life.’²

So here is the idea: ask people to spend 15 minutes a day to pray and read the Scriptures. 15 minutes is both doable (there are very few people who can’t make 15 minutes a day), and a stretch (for many 15 minutes each day is beyond their existing practice). It is important that we don’t simply ask people to do this, but resource them with a wide variety of aids and ideas to help them into this daily practice (see the resources section).

Such a practice can play a significant part in changing the spiritual temperature of our congregations. ‘Draw near to God and he will draw near to you,’ (James 4:8) is a wonderful promise. As we draw near to God our outlook shifts, our

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attitudes and assumptions are shaped and our priorities are changed. Formation occurs as we increasingly develop the 'mind of Christ', and love for God and love for neighbour increasingly become priorities for how we live our lives. Without such intentional engagement with God we are building on a weak foundation.

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'Enthusiasm for evangelism doesn't begin with evangelism at all. Enthusiasm for evangelism begins with an enthusiasm for Jesus. My willingness to speak of Jesus arises from my delight in Jesus.'

Tim Chester, church leader

TIPS

- Try to avoid a guilt trip. Gratitude for what God has done tends to be a better motivator for spending time with him than a sense of guilt that we ought to be doing more.
- You may decide in your context that 15 minutes isn't the right length of time. No problem – whether it is 5 or 25 is up to you. But having a goal to aim at is helpful.
- Be careful not to impose your spiritual practices on others. What works for us does not necessarily work for others, but most of us have found that different things work better in different seasons of life. Illustrate possibilities by either sharing a variety of practices, or interviewing a variety of people who can enthuse about their own practices.
- Many resources are available as Apps. These are great for ease of access and portability, but it is good to be thoughtful about them, as one of the problems many people have is an unhealthy relationship with their mobile.³ Trying to engage with God via their phone may simply lead them to be distracted by other things. Sometimes, sticking to paper-based resources is the best way forward.



RESOURCES

There are loads of resources available to help people with a pattern of daily prayer. Choose those that will work in your tradition and context. Be sure to resource children and young people as well as adults. Here are a few suggestions.

- Invite people to join you for a daily time of prayer and Scripture reading online (morning, or evening prayer, compline, or some other form). Online makes it more accessible to people than onsite.
- Use social media to prompt young people to read a verse and pray at the same time each day.
- If they are spending 15 minutes engaging with God on their own, provide some suggestions for how to structure that time, for example:
 - Identify a regular time and place where Monday to Saturday you can spend 15 minutes with God. It could be a particular chair in your lounge, on the train as you commute to work, with a coffee having just dropped the kids off to school, as you walk the dog, a quiet space in your lunch break at work, when you return from school at the end of the day, and so on. A regular time and space generally help with forming a habit, a rhythm.
 - Start your time with a short prayer asking God to help you meet with him.
 - Read or listen to a passage from the Bible (see below).
 - Reflect on it (write or journal if that helps) using a few questions: What does this passage help me understand about God? What encouragement does it offer me? What does it ask me to do? How might I apply that today?
 - Pray in the light of your reflections, and then pray for your five, for the next 24 hours, for the concerns of the world and those you know.

Resources to help people engage with the Bible

- Bible reading notes for all ages:
 - From the [Bible Reading Fellowship](#).
 - From [Scripture Union](#).
 - From the [Good Book Company](#).
- The [You Version Bible App](#) offers a variety of reading plans and daily passages.
- The [Bible Explore App](#).
- The [Bible in One Year](#) (read or listen), links to App and daily emails.
- [Redeeming Time](#) is a new App that allows you to say how much time you have to read the Scriptures at any point in the day, and then offers you a selection of possible readings for that length of time. Alternatively you can select a daily amount and it will give you options of which books to read.
- Free online [daily Bible study](#) guide.

- Blackburn Diocese have produced an overview of [further resources](#) .
- Sam Corley has done an incredible job of introducing every book in the Bible in short [YouTube videos](#) in an accessible way. Great for people who want to know a bit more about a book before they read them.
- Alternatively the [Bible Project](#) has a series of animated videos to introduce books and themes of the Bible, and the [Visual Unit](#) offers diagrams that layout biblical books or themes on a single page.
- For those who are partially sighted the [Torch Trust](#) has free [audio Bibles](#) they give away. They also offer [Bible reading notes](#) and other materials. The Bible in One Year and Lectio 365 also have audio functions.
- [Inner Room App](#) from 24-7 Prayer.
- [Centering Prayer App](#) encourages a daily practice of still, centred prayer through its App.
- [Lectio 365 App](#) focuses around praying the Scriptures each morning and evening.
- [Pause App](#) encourages you to take a one-, three- or five-minute pause in the middle of your day with an image and verse to reflect on.
- [Pray as you go App](#) is based on Ignatian spirituality, and includes music, Bible reading, suggested lines of engagement, and space for prayer.
- Many people find using a journal a helpful way to pray, often writing their prayers. For a brief guide to journaling, www.cpas.org.uk/77.
- The Examen is a way of praying used by many since the 16th century. For a guide on a variety of ways to do it, including for families, children and young people, www.cpas.org.uk/77.
- At [Home with God](#) is a website with free resources to help families pray together.
- You can find other resources to help with family prayers and prayer with children on this [Padlet board](#) in the column 'Mobilising: ideas for sharing faith in families'.

Resources to help with prayer

- [Daily Prayer Apps](#) from the Church of England, .
- [Sacred Space](#), either online or as an App, is an Ignatian guide to daily prayer.
- [PrayerMate App](#) is a way of ordering your intercessory prayer, enabling you to link to many organisations' and charities' prayer requests, .
- [Northumbria Community](#) daily prayer.



1. ComRes 2017.
2. The Common Rule, Justin Whitmel Earley (IVP) p.7.
3. For more on this see 12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You, Tony Reinke (Crossway Books), The Tech-wise Family, Andy Crouch (Baker), and How to Break Up with Your Phone, Catherine Price (Trapeze).