

# PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

ARCHDIOCESE OF SAINT PAUL AND MINNEAPOLIS

## TALK OUTLINE & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Week #5: Overcoming Obstacles

Below is the outline for Talk 5, titled “Overcoming Obstacles.” As you listen to the teaching video, follow along in this outline. You may print this outline and use the space to the right for notes or use your own journal for notetaking.

Discussion questions for this talk can be found at the end of the outline. If you are participating in this series together with a group, consider selecting some or all of these questions for your group discussion.

### Talk Outline

#### I. Overcoming Spiritual Desolation

- A. One of the great obstacles to our life of prayer is spiritual desolation. Spiritual desolation is heaviness of heart in our relationship with God, which comes from the enemy and prevents us from going forward in our spiritual life.
- B. It is important to remember the connection between natural desolation and spiritual desolation. Natural desolation can lead to spiritual desolation, but it does not have to do so. If there is natural desolation, it can help the spiritual life to make changes at the natural level (for example, if I am exhausted from working too much, then I may need to figure out ways to work less).
- C. In times of spiritual desolation, never change your spiritual proposals.
  - 1. Spiritual proposals are things we do to strengthen and maintain our relationship with God.
  - 2. In desolation, we are tempted to give up on these. But this is the time they are the most important.
  - 3. When struggling, it can be helpful to do something extra in our spiritual life. Little acts can help a lot. Instead of quitting prayer early, do just a little more (add 3-5 minutes!).
- D. When struggling in your spiritual life, be patient with yourself. Struggles are normal and discouragement makes them worse.
  - 1. Look for ways to encourage and be gentle with yourself.

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- 2. It can be helpful to do something extra in our spiritual life. This can be a little thing, such as go to Mass once more each week or go to confession. Share your struggle with a friend who has a strong prayer life.
- 3. Keep practicing ARRR. Acknowledging and relating our struggle with honesty in prayer can make us open to receiving God's way of seeing the struggle. Journaling is helpful. Consider the choice of scriptures for prayer.

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**II. Overcoming Distractions**

- A. Distractions in prayer are normal.
- B. Category 1 – a racing mind and it is hard to calm down and focus.
  - 1. Consider when you pray in the day. Try to find times where it is easier to focus.
  - 2. Try spiritual reading for fifteen minutes before praying.
  - 3. Try to actively use your imagination in prayer.
  - 4. Remember that prayer is a work of the heart, more than the mind. It is possible for the heart to be loving God even while the mind is distracted.
- C. Category 2 – a particular thing is distracting me.
  - 1. Often times this is a problem I don't have a solution to and may be affecting my relationship with God.
  - 2. In this case, bring it to the Lord in ARRR prayer. Acknowledge the distraction. Tell the Lord why it bothers you. By relating, I begin to be open to receiving how God sees this problem.
  - 3. Other ideas include bringing to mind a quote from Scripture to aid in returning to prayer, looking at a spiritual image, or praying in an Adoration chapel.

**III. Regular Spiritual Reading**

- A. Good books help us understand what is happening in our lives of prayer. They can spur our imagination and our desire to grow in prayer. They can help us learn the ways of God.
- B. Some suggested books for learning to pray or growing in prayer are:
  - 1. Fr. Jacques Philippe, *Time for God*,
  - 2. Peter Kreef, *Prayer for Beginners*,
  - 3. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, and
  - 4. Fr. Timothy Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits*.

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## Discussion Questions for Week 5: Overcoming Obstacles

1. One of the great obstacles to prayer is spiritual desolation. What are some ways that you can combat spiritual desolation? (Remember to be patient and gentle with yourself!)
2. St. Ignatius' fifth rule for discernment of spirits says that in time of spiritual desolation never change your spiritual proposals. What are a few of your spiritual proposals which you strive to maintain even when experiencing spiritual desolation?
3. Describe an experience with a friend or small group that encouraged you in your faith. Do you currently have friends who can support you in your spiritual life? If not, how could you go about building a spiritual network?
4. Praying with A-R-R-R is a great tool to break through a spiritual struggle. Describe how you have prayed with these steps over the past few weeks. Where have you struggled? Where have you encountered God? How is he inviting you to persevere?
5. All of us have distractions in prayer and this is a normal thing. Sometimes our minds are racing, and other times we are distracted by something in particular. What are some practices you have found helpful in dealing with these different kinds of distractions?
6. One the most important things throughout our spiritual life is to do regular spiritual reading. What are some of your favorite books and/or saints?
7. Perseverance is an important virtue for growing in our prayer lives and living as authentic disciples. What is a reasonable amount of time that you could commit to pray each day? What are some concrete steps you could take to incorporate this into your daily life?
8. Can you identify times of consolation God has given you during these past few weeks? Recall when you encountered him and his particular love for you. How might reflecting on these experiences be helpful for you in the future?