

## Prayer as a Routine

### The Path of Least Resistance

Something that has helped me a lot in life — both in my spiritual life and in life in general — is thinking about the *path of least resistance*. Why spend more effort in doing something if you can do it with less?

We see this in nature. Rivers don't rush in a straight line; they meander, always searching for the easiest way downhill.

It's similar in our spiritual lives. If prayer always feels like hard work, we'll find excuses not to do it. That's why routine is so important. Last week I spoke about prayer as a relationship, not a ritual. We get another "R" today: routine. And if you want a fourth "R," you could add rhythm.

Routine removes the resistance. When something becomes part of the rhythm of our day, we don't have to fight with ourselves each time — it simply becomes what we do. Like brushing our teeth or locking the front door, prayer becomes second nature.

### Why Routine Matters in Life

Think about the areas of life that matter most. Work follows routine. So does school. Athletes and musicians practice daily. Our health depends on rhythms of eating, exercise, and sleep. Neglect the routine, and we feel it.

The same is true spiritually. I once did a funeral for a man who called his brother every single day at 2 p.m. Without that daily rhythm, the relationship would have weakened. Routine didn't make it forced or mechanical; it made it possible.

Our relationship with God is no different. If prayer is left to whenever it's "convenient," it will soon fade. But if it becomes part of the pattern of the day, it begins to shape everything else.

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### Jesus' Example

If you think routine might make prayer dull, look at Jesus Himself. The Gospels tell us He rose early, while it was still

dark, and went to deserted places to pray. Other times He withdrew into the hills. Before major decisions — like choosing the Twelve — He prayed all night. Even when the crowds pressed in, He stepped aside to speak with His Father.

The early Church followed the same habit. Acts says Peter and John went up to the Temple “*at the hour of prayer.*” They didn’t leave it to chance.

And think of the prayer Jesus taught us: “*Give us this day our daily bread.*” Not weekly bread. Not monthly. Daily. In other words, God calls us back each day for the nourishment only He can give.

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## The Slow Power of Routine

Routine matters because it shapes us slowly. We live in a culture of instant answers and quick fixes. But real change is slow. Athletes and musicians practice daily. Students study daily — or should! Prayer works the same way.

Each day may feel small, but over months and years God transforms us through that steady rhythm. I’ve mentioned before that sometimes during my daily prayer, I look at the clock often and time seems to pass very slowly; I wonder if I shouldn’t be doing something else. But when I look back at weeks or months of prayer, I see how it has made a difference in my life.

Routine also matters because it protects us. Prayer routines are the tracks that keep us moving steadily toward God. A saint said, “*If you preserve order, order will preserve you.*” Routine makes sure that we keep doing what we know we should do, even in moments when we don’t feel like doing it.

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## Habits for Good or Ill

We all know how habits shape us — for good or ill. Even neutral habits. This next story is embarrassing, but I’ll share it for Jesus. I once returned from Tesco, walked back into the parish house, and then panicked because I couldn’t find my

car. Ten minutes later, I realised it was still in the Tesco car park! Because I usually walk there, I had simply fallen into my usual routine, forgetting I had driven that time.

But the same power works for good. When you develop one, the path of least resistance actually works in our favour. In Scunthorpe, there was a woman who, month after month, came to confession on the last Saturday, always bringing her children. No debates, no excuses. That rhythm helped her family's faith.

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### **Building a Prayer Routine**

So how do we make prayer part of our daily rhythm? One helpful idea is called *habit stacking*: attach a new habit to one you already have. We pray before meals, for example. Or if you commute, pray in the car.

Because I drive so much, I often pray in the car. Sometimes I arrive 20 minutes early and sit there to pray before going in. Even in winter, the car stays warm enough for around 30 minutes. At other times, I'll pray the Rosary as I drive. Once,

I realised I'd been driving in silence for ten minutes because I'd switched off the radio during the adverts and never turned it back on.

Another anchor is time itself. Morning and evening prayer are popular because they attach prayer to the bookends of the day. At first, it takes effort. But over time, resistance flips: skipping prayer feels harder than doing it.

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### **Conclusion**

We all have a next step we can take in our prayer lives. This week, choose one small step to make prayer part of your daily rhythm. Maybe it's setting aside five minutes when you wake up, or turning off the radio in the car to pray a decade of the Rosary.

We could always keep waiting for a perfect moment to pray — but every day there are simple things we could do. And over time, those small choices shape a life that is rooted in God, our Father.

