

Touching base: A simple way to pray through the day

“Pray without ceasing,” Paul says (1 Thessalonian 5:17). Vowed religious live out this advice by praying the Liturgy of the Hours, but what are parents and kids supposed to do? Is it even possible to pray throughout the day amid the craziness of family life?

About four months ago, I decided to figure out a way to work a regular call to prayer—or, at least, an acknowledgment of the presence of God—into my day. My hope was that touching base with God on a regular basis would keep me spiritually grounded whether I was working, interacting with the kids, or catching some down time.

“Touching base” with God is just what I was aiming for; between work and kids, it just isn’t practical for me to stop for extended quiet prayer every three hours. Besides, I figured I really needed to check in with God more frequently than that—there are way too many opportunities to go off the rails in any given three-hour period of my day!

After some experimenting and fiddling, I managed to come up with a practice that works for me. In fact, it has worked out way better than I expected, lifting my mood, improving my interactions with others (including my kids), and boosting my spiritual growth in a noticeable way...all because I’m staying more connected to God throughout the day.

Before I share this approach, let me make the usual disclaimer: What works for me won’t necessarily work for you. A personal relationship with God is at the core of the spiritual life, and God’s relationship with each person is unique. If this simple method is helpful for you, great—but

don't hesitate to adapt it to your own needs.

Touching Base with God

In a nutshell, this “touching base” method involves pausing for a very short prayer or acknowledgment of the presence of God—anywhere from a few seconds to two minutes—very frequently throughout the day, using a smartphone app as my call to prayer.

In my practice, “very frequently” means every fifteen minutes from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. At the top of each hour, I pray a longer act of devotion that can take up to a minute. On the remaining quarter hours, I do a much shorter prayer and acknowledgment of the presence of God.

These moments of prayer have three components:

- A simple acknowledgment that God is present, here and now.
- An act of devotion by which I ask God to work in me and through me.
- An act of gratitude in which I thank God for whatever gifts he is giving me in the moment.

I developed my own prayer formula in order to keep these prayers quick, simple, and to the point, but you could easily substitute your own words or a traditional prayer or aspiration.

Here's the practice in detail.

The call to prayer

Medieval monks had bells to call them to prayer; I use a smartphone app.

Muslims, not surprisingly, have dozens and dozens of “call to prayer” apps to choose from. As far as I can tell, the rest of us don’t have a lot of good options, at least not on iOS.

For a while I used an app called Westminster Chimes that plays the Westminster chimes (you know, the “grandfather clock” chimes) on the quarter hour. It works well, but after a while, I found the chimes grating—especially when they went off in public.

After trying about a half-dozen other apps (all of them glitchy, hard to use, or annoying), I settled on one called “Echo” that has a variety of pleasant, low-key notification sounds. Sadly, it’s not available for Android. Don’t confuse it with the Echo Prayer app, a really cool app that allows you to connect to others in prayer. That app does have a reminder option, but you can’t easily set it to the hour or quarter hour.

On Android, your best bet might be a simple app called Blip. I haven’t tried it, but it has a 4.6 rating from more than 5,000 reviewers and seems to do the trick.

When looking for other apps, try searching under the terms “chimes,” “reminder,” “quarter hour” and “hourly.” If you find an app that works, leave a note in the comments.

I’d love to report that after months of using the app to call me to prayer, I don’t need it anymore. Unfortunately, when I’m away from the phone, I just don’t usually remember to pray regularly. On the upside, if I have a few quiet moments, I will probably realize I haven’t prayed in a while and will take the time to do so then.

The prayers

Here’s what I pray through the day. A few tips:

- **Gently invite family members to join you.** For the most part, this is my own practice; however, occasionally I will invite my kids (or my wife) to join me, if they're available and seem receptive.
- **Let hospitality take priority.** I also follow what I call the "hospitality rule": When I'm in conversation with someone else, or serving someone else, I don't interrupt that interaction to pray, but if possible, I may silently pray a blessing on both of us.
- **Don't expect 100%.** Even with the app, it's hard to do every prayer time every day. Sometimes the app doesn't work; sometimes I'm away from my phone (thankfully); sometimes I miss the notification. All of which is okay, because it has to be. That's just life in the world!

On waking

*Lord, do with me as
you will; bless me as you see fit.
Give me the grace to mean the words I'm praying,
and the sense to recognize your blessings today.*

On the hour

+ Sign of the cross

*Lord, open my heart to
your love
so that I might love others as you do.*

*Open my mind to your
will and wisdom,
and make me sensitive to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.*

*Bless my lips,
that my words might honor and praise you.*

*And bless my hands
to do the good work you set before me,
one thing at a time.*

Act of gratitude: At this point, I make an act of gratitude, thanking God for whatever gifts I perceive at that moment, being as specific as possible.

+ Sign of the cross

On the quarter hours

+ Sign of the cross

*Lord, I honor your
presence.*

Sometimes I substitute these words with another appropriate aspiration ("Lord, help me be patient") or a Scripture verse that caught my attention.

Act of gratitude

+ Sign of the cross

Before going to sleep

Confession: My practice tends to be better in the morning and get sloppier through the day, and I often forget to pray before sleep, but

when I do, I try to do a short examen; or, if I am super tired, a simple aspiration based on 1 Samuel 3:10:

*Here I am, Lord;
speak, for your servant is listening.*

This is a simple invitation for God to speak to me in my sleep.

The many benefits of praying without ceasing

It goes without saying that this practice of very short, frequent prayers doesn't replace longer, more intense prayer, such as adoration or meditation. But I've found that this "touching base" approach has had many benefits.

Acknowledging God's presence helps me keep perspective: whatever I may be doing or dealing with at the moment takes on its proper proportions in God's presence. My work is not nearly as important as I may be tempted to think it is, nor is the latest minor family crisis really the end of the world. The simple act of pausing what I am doing to touch base with God offers a chance to "reset" and re-orient myself.

The act of devotion—asking God to open my heart and mind, and to bless me to serve him—is an act of humility that gives the Holy Spirit "permission" to work in my life. Of course, I have to really mean what I pray! To the extent that I do, I find it easier to be good through the ups and downs of the day.

And offering thanks through the act of gratitude every fifteen minutes has affected me in ways I didn't expect: the more I practice seeing God's blessings in my life, even in every hour, the more blessings I see...and the more positive my outlook becomes.

Whether you decide to take the same approach to "touching base with God" throughout the day, I hope that sharing my experience inspires you to try more frequent prayer throughout your busy day—and that God blesses you with an abundance of graces.