

So, you're too busy to pray?

For years, it was one of the most persistent questions I heard: "When are you going to write a book?"



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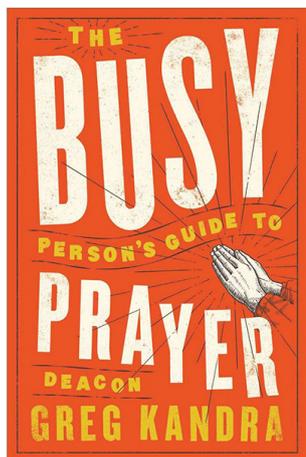
I heard it from friends, colleagues, priests and editors. I even got some emails from publishers who wanted to talk to me, asking if I ever had a book idea. I always had the same answer: "Thanks, but I don't have time. I'm too busy." Between my job at CBS News and later with Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), my parish ministry, a blog, speaking commitments at retreats and parish missions, and freelance work for places like Give Us This Day, my life was crammed. I couldn't imagine writing a book with, you know, chapters, footnotes and thousands of words. "Sorry, no. I'm too busy," became my mantra.

But then I got a call from Beth McNamara, an editor at Word Among Us Press. I'd never heard of her. I'd never spoken or corresponded with her. But she wanted to talk to me about a specific book idea that she thought would be perfect for me. "OK," I sighed over the phone. "What is it?"

"It's something a lot of our readers have been asking for," she explained. "I think you'd be perfect for it. The working title is 'The Busy Person's Guide to Prayer.' What do you think?"

My jaw dropped. Angels sang. Beams of light broke through the clouds. “Tell me more,” I said. And she did. Ten minutes later, I was hooked. I agreed to write my first book.

A simple guidebook



[“The Busy Person’s Guide to Prayer”](#) was published in March, and I know what you, busy reader, may be thinking: “I’m too busy to read a book about being busy.” I get that. Really. Our lives are far more complicated than we would like. We’re working longer hours and taking shorter vacations. When we try to schedule anything, even a short period for prayer – or reading a book about prayer – it seems just impossible. We are all plate-spinners or jugglers now. In the circus of life, we simply have too much to do.

In the world of social media – one, I confess, I know too well – the most popular abbreviation for some of us is “TL; DR,” meaning “Too long, didn’t read.”

But my little book on prayer offers us busy people another way. A simpler way. A less complicated way to think about one of the most important tasks we undertake: prayer. So, knowing how busy you are, here are three quick takeaways from the book that will offer some guidance and hope – and, yes, maybe even encourage you to read the whole book!

Prayer is more simple than we think

First, we need to set aside the notion that prayer is something laborious and hard. In the popular Catholic imagination, it’s work. It’s novenas. It’s Rosaries. It’s an hour on your knees before the Blessed Sacrament, whispering prayers from a well-worn book while chanting psalms, singing hymns and inhaling too much incense.

Yes, prayer is all of that. But it's also something immediate and accessible.

Prayer, as St. Teresa of Ávila put it, is a conversation with a friend. It is intimate, informal and direct. It is, in the purest sense, simple. God talks and we listen; we talk and God listens. It doesn't need to follow a formula, though rubrics and formalities can be helpful. It should be, first and foremost, a communication with a father, a brother and a friend. We shouldn't complicate it.

Prayer is more than the spoken word

Second, we need to realize that prayer is more than just saying words. Prayer is also something lived. It is an action. Any gesture, job or mundane task – if done with the proper intention and lifted up as an offering to God – is, in fact, a prayer. In my book, I tell the story of Brother Lawrence, whose spiritual classic “The Practice of the Presence of God” describes how he turned the simple monastic chore of washing dishes into a sacrificial act of love: a prayer in which God was present.

We need to seek out these opportunities to recognize God's presence in our lives and turn those daily routines into living novenas: acts of faith, hope and love.

As I write in the book: “Any work, offered with love to the Lord, can be a prayer if we intend it to be. Really. Answering the phone, tending the garden, typing a term paper, balancing a checkbook, changing a diaper, bandaging a wound – all this and more is part of God's infinitely wondrous and imperfect world. We don't have to just do them. We can pray them.”

Prayer is developed over time

Finally, we need to start small, with baby steps. Begin with two minutes a day. Carve out that time in the morning, on the

bus to work or while sitting at a diner waiting for your lunch. Give that time to God. Check in with him. Let him know you're there, you're thinking of him and that you want to connect.

For starters, try making a habit of saying grace before meals. If you don't know a grace by heart – or if you've conveniently forgotten the one you learned while growing up – don't sweat it. This is a great opportunity to hone your conversational skills with God. Thank him for what you are about to receive and for the people who prepared it. Let him know why you're grateful.

In time, you may find that two minutes becomes four, and four minutes eventually becomes an hour. Soon, you'll wonder where the time went.

But start small. Make prayer a gesture of humility and of hope. God knows you're doing your best. That is all he asks. Begin where you are, and aim to be more. Maybe, one day, you will become an actual prayer warrior! Understand that it isn't always easy, and it's never perfect. And that's OK, too. We are creatures of clay, constantly being formed, shaped, sculpted and refined. Do your part and let God do his. You will be amazed at what happens.

Prayer looks different for all of us

One of the themes I try to underscore in the book is that we all have our own way to pray, and that's fine, too. The great Jean Vanier said, "Prayer is like a secret garden made up of silence and rest and inwardness. But there are a thousand and one doors into this garden, and we all have to find our own." So, what works for one eager person may not work for another. The faithful soul who adores fingering the beads and saying the Rosary may find it hard to sit and meditate before the Blessed Sacrament. Or the fellow who likes to dive into reading holy Scripture might find the Rosary a chore. And that

is fine, too.

Know this: we are all wonderfully made (cf. Ps 139:14), and God makes himself accessible to each of us in our own way if we are open to his promptings and sincere in our searching. Even when we are busy. Especially when we are busy.

The single most important quality necessary for prayer is, first and foremost, the desire to do it. If you have that, you've already won the biggest battle. Afterwards, it's a matter of patience, persistence and the enduring gift of faith. With time, you may find yourself doing what you never thought possible – praying unceasingly (cf. 1 Thes 5:17) – because you will find your whole life somehow has been transformed into a prayer. Let us think of this exercise as a way of living and a way of life with God as our companion on the journey.

Go ahead. Give it a shot. Let us pray!

Deacon Greg Kandra is the creator of the popular blog [The Deacon's Bench](#) at [Patheos.com](#). He serves as a deacon in the Diocese of Brooklyn, New York.

Wisdom from the Catechism

Prayer – the ability to speak with and be in communion with the living God of the universe – is a complete self-gift from him. In prayer, we must understand who we truly are in comparison to him: creatures who are needy of an infinitely loving and merciful God. Additionally, we must recognize that promptings of prayer never arrive on our own accord; Christ is a gentleman to his beloved bride, the Church, and he always makes the first move. To explain this further, paragraphs 2559-2560 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church state:

“‘Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God.’ But when we pray, do we speak from the height of our pride and will, or ‘out of the depths’ of a humble and contrite heart? He who humbles himself will be exalted; humility is the foundation of prayer. Only when we humbly acknowledge that ‘we do not know how to pray as we ought,’ are we ready to receive freely the gift of prayer. ‘Man is a beggar before God.’

“‘If you knew the gift of God!’ The wonder of prayer is revealed beside the well where we come seeking water: there, Christ comes to meet every human being. It is he who first seeks us and asks us for a drink. Jesus thirsts; his asking arises from the depths of God’s desire for us. Whether we realize it or not, prayer is the encounter of God’s thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him.”