

**Bring on the Rain: Strategies for Spiritual Drought  
Theology on Tap  
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Call to mind what a drought is like:  
There is lack of rain, the crops dry up, and everything looks dead.  
Without water, life cannot be sustained.

Now call to mind your experience of spiritual drought:  
Your prayer feels shallow, stale, empty.  
It seems like nothing is happening in your prayer life.  
You need a boost of life.

Tonight I will address two main questions about spiritual drought:  
A. Where is it coming from?  
B. What can we do about it?

**A. Where is it coming from?**

It could be coming from any of these sources:

**1. Influence of our Environment:**

Your dryness in prayer could be aggravated by the environment in which you live. This includes:

- Frenetic over-activity of our busy, workaholic society
- Our materialistic society that tends to ignore spiritual realities
- Lack of opportunities for silence

**2. Depression:**

Clinical depression can sometimes hinder you from actively pursuing your prayer life, as well as other important pursuits.

This is illness, not a sin at all.

It needs the help of a professional counselor.

There is never a good spiritual reason to let an illness go untreated.

**3. Not Including All 5 Kinds of Prayer:**

The dryness of your prayer could be caused by the fact that you are restricting the ways you pray.

Don't expect healthy nutrition if you're not including all the basic food groups.

A healthy, balanced diet of prayer includes all five of the following:

Praise of God

Contrition (sorrow for sins)

Petition (for ourselves and for others)  
 Thanksgiving  
 Union with God (just being there with God)

#### **4. Separating Prayer Too Much from Work and Daily Life:**

Dryness in prayer can also come from separating your prayer from your work and daily life.

Remember that, as an active, working young adult, you are not living in a monastery.

Therefore, your prayer life does not need to follow a monastic model.

You can be a very prayerful person who is also very active in the secular world.

Bring your work to prayer, and bring your prayer to work.

Your work provides material for your prayer, and your prayer nourishes you for your work.

#### **5. Dark Night of the Soul:**

This is a spiritual phenomenon, described by St. John of the Cross, and St. Teresa of Avila.

It is also explained by Dr. Gerald G. May, M.D., in his recent book, *The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*.

According to Dr. May, This can happen to anyone, and it is a profoundly good thing.

It involves the loss of a habitual feeling of God's presence.

You don't lose God, but you lose your palpable feeling of God.

Through the dark night of the soul, we are liberated from attachments and compulsions.

God doesn't intend for us to suffer, but is with us in all the experiences of life.

The purpose of the dark night of the soul is for a deepening of the love that you have for God.

When you are facing the dark night of the soul, you should remain faithful in these times. Abide in faith. Stick to your deep inner desire to love God.

God is "weaning you" from old, comfortable habits, to make room for a fresh openness to love.

The point of the spiritual life is not to get nice feelings. It is to be faithful to a relationship.

Life includes some exhilarating mountain-top experiences, and some dark valleys, and plenty of uneventful, flat plains. This is normal. We should not expect our prayer life to be all mountain-top experiences.

Remember St. Peter's wish at the event of Christ's Transfiguration. He wanted to stay up there on that mountain top, but Jesus said it was time to move back down the mountain.

## **6. You're Not Doing Your Part in Your Relationship with God:**

### **Our own sloth/ spiritual apathy/ acedia:**

Another possible source of spiritual drought is spiritual apathy, also known as sloth or acedia.

This is actually one of the Seven Deadly Sins (capital sins).

Acedia comes from the Greek "akedia", which means "absence of caring".

It is not caring about spiritual matters.

It is apathy and inactivity in prayer or in the practice of the virtues.

This is putting off what God asks you to do, or not doing it, or not doing anything at all.

This is our own personal sin, and we need to repent of it and seek a counter-strategy.

## **B. What Can We Do About It?**

Now that we have explored possible sources of our spiritual drought, we will explore some tried and true strategies for dealing with it:

### **1. Spiritual Direction:**

The Diocese of Austin maintains a list of approved Catholic spiritual directors. Usually it is free of charge.

You usually meet about once per month.

The spiritual directors are not all priests or sisters. They are also deacons and lay men and women.

**2. Annual Retreat:** (ACTS, Cursillo, Christ Renews His Parish, retreat centers like Cedarbrake, Individually directed retreats like at Montserrat in Dallas, or Grand Couteau in Louisiana)

I recommend that you attend a retreat at least one time per year, throughout your life, to keep your spiritual life vibrant.

### **3. Choices in your Entertainment:**

You choose what you will use for movies, music, Internet, video games, etc.

Example: You rent a movie on the weekend. Instead of the typical action or romantic movie, you can choose to get one that will stimulate a livelier relationship with God.

### **4. Theological Stimulus:**

Learning more theology has the potential to enrich your spiritual life.

It stimulates deeper reflection on God and God's ways.

Consider the Masters in Theology classes through the Diocese of Austin and St. Mary's University, or the weekend program at the University of Dallas.

Also, your book discussion groups in Austin have a similar effect.

### **5. Corporal Works of Mercy:**

Corporal works of mercy are those that tend to bodily needs. The [Parable of the Sheep and the Goats](#) ([Matthew](#) 25:31-46) enumerates such acts -- though not this precise list -- as the reason for the salvation of the saved, and the omission of them as the reason for damnation.

Your outreach toward those in need will stimulate your spiritual life. Of course, we don't do these works of mercy in order to improve our spiritual life. We do them because Christ commands us to do them. But a side result of doing them is that they are spiritually stimulating.

1. Feed the hungry
2. Give drink to the thirsty
3. Clothe the naked
4. Shelter the Homeless
5. Visit the imprisoned
6. Visit the sick
7. Bury the dead

### **6. Spiritual Reading:**

I recommend the Catholic spiritual classics, like these:

St. Augustine: Confessions

Thomas a Kempis: The Imitation of Christ

St. Francis de Sales: Introduction to the Devout Life

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection: The Practice of the Presence of God

St. Therese of Lisieux: The Story of a Soul

Jean-Pierre de Caussade: Abandonment to Divine Providence

From a request made during the talk, I am attaching here a fuller list of some helpful spiritual reading:

### **Recommended Reading for Spiritual Growth**

#### **Catholic Church Teachings and Practices**

Catechism of the Catholic Church, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. second edition, distributed by United States Catholic Conference, 2000. ISBN 1574551094

The Teachings of Christ, Donald Wuerl, Ronald Lawler and Thomas C. Lawler. Our Sunday Visitor, 1995. ISBN 0879736658

The New Question Box: Catholic Life in a New Century, John J. Dietzen. Guildhall Publishers, 1997. ISBN 0940518082

#### **Spirituality and Prayer**

The Practice of the Presence of God, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. Edited by Donald E. Demaray. Alba House, 1997. ISBN 0818907703

- The Sacrament of the Present Moment (originally entitled Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence). Jean-Pierre de Caussade. Translated by Kitty Muggeridge. Harper San Francisco, 1982. ISBN 0060618116
- The Saints' Guide to Happiness. Robert Ellsberg. North Point Press, 2003. ISBN 0374253536
- Darkness in the Marketplace: The Christian at Prayer in the World. Thomas H. Greene, S.J. Ave Maria Press, 1981. ISBN 0877932301 0877932298
- Opening to God: A Guide to Prayer. Thomas H. Greene, S.J. Ave Maria Press, 1977. ISBN 0877931356, 0877931364
- Prayer and Common Sense. Thomas H. Greene, S.J. Ave Maria Press, 1995. ISBN 0877935513
- When the Well Runs Dry: Prayer Beyond the Beginnings. Thomas H. Greene, S.J. Ave Maria Press, 1979. ISBN 087793181X, 0877931828
- Muestrame Tu Rostro (Spanish). Ignacio Larranaga. Ediciones Paulinas – Cefepal, Santiago, Chile
- Sensing Your Hidden Presence: Toward Intimacy with God. Ignacio Larranaga. Editions Paulines, 1992. ISBN 2890395243
- New Seeds of Contemplation. Thomas Merton, New Directions, New York, 1961. ISBN: 978-0-8112-1724-8
- The Ascent to Truth. Thomas Merton, Harvest Books-Harcourt, New York, 1951. ISBN: 0-15-602772-0
- Poverty of Spirit. Johannes Baptist Metz. Paulist Press, 1968. ISBN 0809119242
- Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith. Henri Nouwen, HarperOne, 2006. ISBN 978-0-06-075473-0
- The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Meditation on Fathers, Brothers, and Sons. Henri Nouwen, Doubleday, 1992. ISBN 0385418671
- The Wounded Healer. Henri Nouwen, Doubleday, 1972. ISBN 0385028563
- The Holy Longing: The Search for Christian Spirituality. Ronald Rolheiser. Doubleday, 1999. ISBN 0385494181
- Befriending Our Desires. Philip Sheldrake, Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002. ISBN 0232524467
- Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer. Mark E. Thibodeaux, S.J. St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001. ISBN 0867164301
- The Fire Within: St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel, on Prayer. Ignatius Press, 1989. ISBN 0898702631
- Virginité: A Positive Approach to Celibacy for the Sake of the Kingdom of Heaven. Raniero Cantalamessa. trans. by Charles Serignat, Alba, 1995. ISBN 0818907452
- Courage to Be Chaste. Benedict Groeschel. 1985. ISBN 0809127059

## **Discernment**

- Discovering Your Personal Vocation: The Search For Meaning the Spiritual Exercises. Herbert Alphonso. Paulist Press, 2001. ISBN 0809140446

- Paying Attention to God: Discernment in Prayer. William A. Barry, S.J. Ave Maria Press, 1990. ISBN 0877934134
- Authenticity: A Biblical Theology of Discernment. Thomas Dubay. Ignatius Press, 1997. ISBN 089870619X
- Seeking Jesus in Contemplation and Discernment. Robert Faricy. Michael Glazier Books, 1987. ISBN 0870611429
- The Discernment of Spirits: The Ignatian Guide for Everyday Life. Timothy M. Gallagher, O.M.V. Crossroad Publishing Co., 2005. ISBN 0824522915
- Spiritual Consolation: An Ignatian Guide for the Greater Discernment of Spirits. Timothy M. Gallagher, O.M.V. Crossroad Publishing Co., 2007. ISBN 0824524292
- Weeds Among the Wheat: Discernment, Where Prayer & Action Meet. Thomas Green. Ave Maria Press, 1984. ISBN 0877933189 0877933197
- Silent Presence: Discernment as Process and Problem. Ernest E. Larkin, O.Carm. Dimension Books, 1981, expanded 2001 ISBN 0871931729
- Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation. Parker J. Palmer. Jossey-Bass, 2000. ISBN 078947350
- Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well. Pierre Wolff. Triumph Books, Ligouri Publications, 1993 (2003 revised edition). ISBN 076480989X

### **Discernment of Priesthood and Religious Life**

- Vocations Anonymous: A Handbook for Adults Discerning Priesthood and Religious Life. Sr. Kathleen Bryant, RSC. National Coalition for Church Vocations, 1997. (312) 663-5453 or (800) 671-NCCV
- Could You Ever Become a Catholic Priest? Christopher J. Duquin and Lorene Hanley Duquin. 1998. ISBN 0818908165
- Priests for the Third Millennium, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan. Our Sunday Visitor, 2000. ISBN 0879733195
- Diary of a Country Priest, Georges Bernanos. Carrol & Graf, 2002. ISBN 0786709618

### **7. Scripture:**

The Word of God will stimulate your prayer life.

Read it, study it, apply it to your life.

Allow God to console you and also challenge you.

I also highly recommend that you consider joining a Bible Study group here in Austin.

### **8. The Setting of Your Prayer:**

If your prayer is important to you, then you will choose a setting that will be more conducive to effective prayer.

Time: choose a time of day when your bio-rhythms are up, not down.

Space: choose a place where you will not be interrupted.

Posture: choose a posture where you can be relaxed, yet attentive.

**9. Dealing with Distractions:**

Imagine a house with windows on two ends, and you are sitting in a chair in the middle of this large, empty room.

A leaf blows in on the breeze through one of the windows.

Just let it pass on through the house and out the other window.

Don't grab onto the leaf, don't crush it. Simply let it go.

Do the same thing with your distractions in prayer. Don't freak out because you have become distracted. It happens to the best of us.

Just say to yourself, "I have been distracted from my prayer; now I choose to return to my prayer." That choice is, in itself, an expression of your love for God.

**10. Eucharist:**

Both in the Mass and in Eucharistic Adoration

**11. Confession:**

Jesus gave us this sacrament because it is good for us.

To ignore it is to deny his gift to us.

It will free you from the burden of your sins, which could be blocking your spiritual progress. It is not a substitute for counseling or spiritual direction.

For most people, a good frequency is about 3 or 4 times per year, but you may need to go more frequently.

Not only does confession free you from your sins, but it also fills you with sanctifying grace.

It brings refreshing grace to the dryness of your spiritual drought.

**12. Daily Consciousness Examen:**

You do this at the end of each day, reviewing the day with God.

It takes about 10 minutes.

**Five-step Method:**

1. Ask God for **inspiration and guidance**:  
 "Help me to be aware and to concentrate."  
 "Inspire me with your Holy Spirit."
2. **Thanksgiving** to God:  
 "All is from you, O Lord."  
 Thank God for all the gifts of this day.
3. Review how God has been **active and present** in the events of this day.  
 "Lord, how have you called me to CONVERSION today?"  
 "What has been my RESPONSE to you?"
4. **Forgiveness and Healing**:  
 "Lord, I am sorry."
5. Look to the **Future**:  
 "I entrust myself to your guidance and your strength in the future."