

## Praying when God seems far away - desolation / distraction

“Man comes in the profoundest sense to himself not through what he does but through what he accepts. He must wait for the gift of love, and love can only be received as a gift. And one cannot become *wholly* man in any other way than by being loved, by letting oneself be loved. For his “salvation” man is meant to rely on receiving. If he declines to let himself be presented with the gift, then he destroys himself.” - Pope Benedict XVI

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### What is non-spiritual desolation?

Non-spiritual desolation may be exhaustion, sadness, disappointment in a relationship, trouble with family or at work, loneliness. These are valid, delicate, and important experiences, and God desires to hear from you and be with you in everything. Relating all things to Him is a healing exercise. Depression and anxiety are also included here; receiving professional help can be necessary and immensely helpful.

Caring for our bodies (physically, emotionally, mentally) disposes us for more consistent and honest prayer. Sleep, diet, exercise, time for silence, friendships etc. are surely worthy of our attention and care.

**Time for silence:** Do I have time simply to unwind and think? On a drive, in the shower, or early in the morning? Ample time for silence helps make silence fruitful in prayer.

**Time for rest:** Do I fall asleep when I pray? Am I getting enough sleep? Fatigue can easily foster discouragement and distraction, and we may just need more sleep.

**A place of ease:** When I pray, is the seat comfortable? Is it quiet? Is it bright? Am I cold or hot? Is the space private?

**Time for health:** Have I been able to go on a walk or exercise as I like? Do the foods and drink I consume help me be focused and alert? Do I have an illness or a condition that should be graciously considered in prayer?

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### What is spiritual desolation?

Spiritual desolation is discouragement, loss of hope, sadness *particularly in your relationship with God*. St. Ignatius of Loyola defines it as “darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to low and earthly things, disquiet from various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without hope, without love, finding oneself totally slothful, tepid, sad, and, as if separated from one’s Creator and Lord.”

#### 1. **Spiritual desolation is always the work of the enemy.**

- a. While God may permit desolation, *God never causes desolation*. It is the *enemy* who moves to darken, isolate, confuse, dishearten, and make us think we are nothing.
- b. God “IS” - the enemy moves to make us think we are *nothing*, the opposite of “being”, but *God is reality*, and living with Him, we are most *real*.

**2. The counsel whispered by the enemy is not to be trusted.**

- a. “Because, as in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us more, so in desolation the bad spirit, with whose counsel we cannot find the way to a right decision.” (St. Ignatius)
- b. Though you may *feel* or *think* you are in darkness, alone, totally at a loss, separated from God, these thoughts and feelings are received in desolation, and they are not to be trusted. They are to be resisted.

**3. We grow not from being *in* spiritual desolation, but from *resisting* it.**

## How do we resist desolation?

*The only true measures of prayer are honesty and consistency.*

- 1) “*Pray where you are*” Resist the isolation of desolation by sharing with God. Tell Him all about what’s going on, even if you can’t sense His presence. If you’re angry, confused, tired, sad, despairing, lonely - tell Him about it. He’s not afraid to love a wounded person.
- 2) “*Claim the truth*” Jesus knows how to navigate resistance. Jesus knows how to be with you here. There is no shame in desolation. The accusations accompanying desolation are lies. While “*spiritual desolation claims power over the past into the future*” (Gallagher, Discernment of Spirits), remember that consolation will return, and God labors to love you at all times. Reviewing times of consolation, reading scripture, remembering truths of the faith, though it can be a challenge, may be helpful.
- 3) “*In times of spiritual desolation, never make a change.*” (St. Ignatius, Rule 5) If you planned to pray, go to mass, attend a bible study, go to confession, or attend a retreat but no longer want to because of spiritual desolation, honor your commitment, thus resisting the desolation. (Reminder: we are speaking of *spiritual* desolation. In non-spiritual desolation, it may be urgent and necessary to make changes, especially if a situation or relationship is harmful.)
- 4) “*Resist the springboards of desolation*” If we notice desolation comes after we spend time on the internet, or go to bed late, changing these habits would be wise. The enemy preys on our weakness and vulnerability. If we realize a habit or sin often leads to desolation, making changes here is a good way to resist the desolation.

“A stream was welling up out of the earth and watering all the surface of the ground— then the LORD God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” - Genesis 2:6-7

“**And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.**” - Matthew 28:20