

5 Steps

For Persevering Through Spiritual Dry Spells

Have you ever lived through a spiritually dry season?

Chances are, if you've been a believer in Jesus Christ for very long, you know just what I'm talking about. You read the Bible, pray, and go to church, but your heart really isn't in it. You're going through the motions but can't seem to engage with the things that used to (and should) encourage and uplift you. No matter what you do, your heart feels cold to all things spiritual and you have trouble stirring up any affection for Jesus.



Let me tell you, I know **just** how you feel! I've lived through several spiritual dry spells in my life, one in particular that lasted for a few years. I've learned since then that there are some things you can do and keep in mind that will aid in your perseverance. I understand what it's like to want to give up on drawing near to the Lord when your heart feels like a big chunk of ice in your chest. I'm a big feeler, so when my emotions are slow to catch up, I know it's time to inform them of what's true (NOT the other way around!).

1. Pray.

Prayer may feel like a wooden exercise right now, but it's important to keep the lines of conversation open with the Lord when you're struggling to hear Him. It's not that He's not present; He absolutely is. But sometimes our minds get jumbled up and we need to practice sitting quietly without distraction. Begin by thanking Him for what He's done for you by sending Jesus to save you. Remember the gospel and how lost you would be without Jesus' work on the cross. Even if there are no feelings attached to your prayers, say what you need to say to the Lord. It's because of the cross that we have bold access to the Father. If all you can muster is plea for Him to draw near to you, then by all means--tell Him.

Another helpful tool for practicing prayer when your heart feels cold is to pray through a list. Now, I know that seems a bit wooden in and of itself, but here's where doing the work of prayer can eventually meld into sweet conversation. It's the practice of prayer that leads to a deep delight in talking regularly with the Lord. So make a list. Who are the people you need to pray for regularly? Put their names down on paper. What things in your own life do you need to talk to the Father about every day? Write them down. Pray for your spouse and kids, your church and pastors, your neighbors, your unbelieving friends and family members, the chronically ill, your work, the missionaries and church planters you know, the persecuted church around the world. This is just a jumping off point. Get specific with your list and assign certain days to certain categories or people so that you make it through your whole list each week. Praying with intent and praying for others will help to move your eyes off your own internal struggles. It will teach you to yield every area of your life to the Father who loves you.

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2. *Read Your Bible. (Every day.)*

I know that one of the last things you want to do when you're spiritually dry is to open your Bible, but opening your cold heart to the truth of Scriptures is incredibly important when everything feels stale. You can absorb the Word even when you're unaware that you're doing so. Maybe you feel like you are wasting your time, but the Lord doesn't waste anything. He can still faithfully change you from the inside out.

The most helpful approach to Scripture I've ever taken is to shift my focus away from myself and toward the Lord. During dry spells specifically, when you do actually muster up the strength to read the Word, often it's to find a cure for your dry, dead-feeling heart, right? Let me make you a promise: **if you go to the Word looking for what it teaches you about God, it will change your life.** For so long I studied the Scripture for what I could get out of it for my life. This isn't a wrong premise in and of itself, but it's the wrong one to begin with. Recognize that the Bible is a book primarily about God. We can't understand who we are and what we need unless we have first gazed long and hard on Almighty God who made us. So, open your Bible to a book and read it straight through with a pen and a notebook and jot down all the things you learn about the character of God. **I promise you, He will begin to wake up the affections in your heart when you fix your gaze on Him every morning.**

One of the biggest mistakes we make in Bible study is to think the Bible is a prescriptive book about us. We treat it like a medical dictionary, looking for a cure for whatever our current ailment might be. But the truth is, we need to read God's book and learn about this One we claim to love so much. He will help us to see who we are correctly after we've first considered Him deeply.

To know Him is to love Him, absolutely, but first--we must know Him. And we do this by digging deep into the Words He spoke to us for this very purpose.

3. *Stir Those Affections.*

Practically speaking, there are a few things I like to do either during dry spells or when I'm just having an "off" day. While these aren't super-spiritual things, they are rhythms I work into my day to make sure I'm stepping back from whatever it is that's sapping my heart of its affections for the Lord. These are the things I do to stir up my affections for Jesus.

Take a walk.

I don't mean exercise. I mean to walk for no purpose other than to focus on Christ. Leave your phone at home unless you're going to listen to music. Turn off notifications or put it in airplane mode. Promise yourself you're not going to scroll. Just turn on the music, stick the phone in your pocket, and walk. Look around you. Think about Jesus. I've put together a playlist on Spotify for you to take with you on your walks. **Click here to listen.**

Write.

Not a book or a blog post, if you're someone who writes publicly. No, I mean journaling or stream of conscious writing on paper with an actual pen. Expressing yourself in longhand (not typing!) forces you to slow down your thoughts and to be mindful of what you're communicating. If you have trouble getting started, begin with a statement or question: "My heart feels _____ because..." or "What could God be teaching me while I'm struggling to draw near to Him?" Write for ten minutes and see if you can unearth any issues that might be the underpinning of your dry spell. Perhaps there's doubt or fear or anger. Maybe there's a relationship that needs to be mended. Maybe you're uncertain about the future. Maybe it's loneliness or unchanged circumstances. Or maybe it's nothing you can pin down, but you just feel restless. Writing may help to pull some of those things out, and then you can circle back to prayer and talk to the Lord about those things.

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Create some mental white space in your life.

Sometimes I find that feeling spiritually sluggish has a direct correlation to the amounts of Netflix or Facebook I've allowed into my life. There's no space in my head for thinking about the Lord or examining my own heart when I'm opening up all the channels inward to so much input. Take a break from all the input, especially the kind that might be crowding out the true, lovely, praiseworthy things. Make some space in your head and heart to think about what is **good** for your head and heart. Make an agreement with yourself or a friend that you won't touch your phone until you've met with the Lord in the mornings. Put your phone away or turn off all media for an hour before bed. Read, write, pray, rest. These are good practices to help still your thoughts, to hear yourself think, to listen for the still, small voice that we tend to obliterate with noise that doesn't matter all that much.

4. Confess and Connect.

One of the biggest temptations during a difficult spiritual season is to find solace in solitude. Let me assure you, this impulse to wall oneself off from the world is not of God. As a Christian, you need to be connected to the Body of Christ. Go to church. Every Sunday. And especially on the weeks you don't feel like it. Don't let your flesh win. Connect yourself to your spiritual family and tell someone that you're having a hard time. Let them pray for you. Let the one who isn't in a dry spell help carry you through yours. Then, someday you'll do the same for them. You were never meant to follow Jesus in isolation. The Church is His Bride, and He gave us to one another as gifts.

5. Keep a Long View.

Here's what you need to remember about dry seasons: they're seasons, and seasons change. It might feel long (and it might actually **be** long), but seasons don't last forever. Pray that the Lord would move you from apathy to deep, abiding joy. He will honor your prayers, even if you can't muster the proper affection. He values humility and brokenness more than we can imagine.

The other thing I want you to remember about spiritual dry spells is this: they have purpose. I believe that the Lord uses seasons like this to teach us perseverance. It's the daily plodding and slogging when you don't feel like it that produces the fruit of perseverance in your life. Perseverance isn't learned when life is easy. It's learned when everything in your soul cries out against the determination to keep pressing on. For me, my longest dry spell preceded the most difficult year of my life. I'm not sure I would have known how to persevere through suffering if the Lord hadn't taught me to persevere through the years of apathy. Look at your dry spell as an opportunity to learn and cultivate the fruit of perseverance. Someday you might look back at this season and find yourself grateful for what the Lord taught you through it.

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