

Links Players

OLD DOGS-NEW TRICKS

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:8, ESV).

As culturally literate Americans, we typically converse in figurative language. Cultural idioms permeate our daily discourse. One familiar word picture is this: “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” Of course, when we say this, we are intimating that older people can’t learn new skills. I beg to differ.

Granting that this is true of certain personality types, I hesitate to apply it across the board to older people. While it might be true that some who are “long in the tooth” hesitate to develop new patterns of behavior, it would be a mistake to assert this as a universal truism.

We could easily multiply counterexamples to this well-worn idiom. Here are two, one obvious and another personal. It is no surprise when we see players on the Champions Tour learning new skills. It’s inspiring watching one “old dog” teaching another “old dog” a new technique. Personally, I had a life-long love affair with hitting a draw. As an older man, I eventually learned to fade the ball. I can’t “bend it like Beckham,” but I can move it left to right. But what about weightier matters?

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I am not even implying that I am that good at prayer. But, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, I finally got it. In truth, now, I cannot imagine life without prayer.

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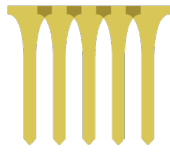
It’s embarrassing to admit, but I didn’t learn to pray until I was sixty years old. As a man who was “hit or miss” with prayer for the better part of forty years, I finally learned to pray consistently, fervently, and biblically. This “old dog” learned a new “trick.”

I am not suggesting it was easy. I am not even implying that I am that good at prayer. But, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, I finally got it. In truth, now, I cannot imagine life without prayer.

Each day, I begin by asking the Lord to “teach me to pray.” As his first disciples asked him to “teach us to pray,” I thought I would do the same. Who better to teach me?

Looking back over the previous five years of pressing into the throne of grace, I am amazed at how many and in what ways he has answered my prayers.

Perhaps, you are wondering how I overcame my failure to pray. One day, a friend mentioned how he worshipped while he ran on the treadmill. I don’t know how to explain it, but right there, the Spirit of God energized my will to pray. Another major contributing factor was my adult son’s chronic illness. He had been sick for many years. It finally dawned on me; I had to pray. Some of us are “slow on the uptake.”



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From a human perspective, I was the least likely candidate for prayer. Easily distracted, impatient, and fidgety doesn't begin to describe my lack of qualifications. So, the first thing the Lord taught me was to walk and pray. Rain, sleet, sunshine, or snow, I walk three or four miles every day and pray.

Something about staying in motion just helps me pray. By the way, Jesus miraculously healed our son in year four.

Of course, there are many days that my will to pray is non-existent. I simply pray, "Lord, empower my will to pray." As the old Puritans would say, "pray until you pray." What they meant by that was simple—when you don't want to pray, pray anyway. As you do, you will find yourself really praying. That's happened to me a million times.

Dennis Darville

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