

100 Ways to Take The Yawn Out of Your Relationship with God

What would your relationship with God be like if you tried to experience Him in as many ways as possible?

The little girl recited her new Bible verse: "... that whosoever believeth in him should have everlaughing life." Her Sunday school teacher didn't correct her. "I liked the idea of everlaughing life," she explained, "and I suspect God did, too." The old familiar verse was suddenly revitalized for the teacher.

Sameness anesthetizes our spiritual lives. It's so easy to get into a rut—read two chapters followed by a quick prayer. No thought necessary (yawn), and it's done.

What we need from time to time are rut levelers, ideas that energize our relationship with God and open us again to the wonder of His resurrection gift. Coming up—100 ways to keep you from ever having to stifle a yawn in the presence of God.

- 1 Telephone a prayer partner daily and talk to God together for five minutes.
- 2 Do a study of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. How are they similar? How are they different? Why did God give us three books that have many of the same stories in them?
- 3 With a friend, visit three churches where Christians worship in very different ways. Talk about the experience. How was God honored? How did He speak to you?
- 4 Teach a preschooler to sing a motion song that says something special about Jesus.
- 5 Write a letter to God praising Him for how you are made—your mind, your body, and your skills.
- 6 Buy ten cards and send them to people who need to know they are loved by God and remembered by you. William Law, 1686-1761, in *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, wrote: "Isn't it strange that people place so much emphasis upon going to church where there is not one command from Jesus to do so, and yet neglect the basic duties of our ordinary life which are commanded in every page of the Gospels?"
- 7 Plan a hospitality event in your home. Invite people from your church who need a party, not the people you know and enjoy most.
- 8 Pray aloud in a group.
- 9 Give God a tithe of your time—teach Sunday school, visit the sick, baby-sit for a young mother, fix an elderly person's car.
- 10 Every day for a week, list the times during that day when you suspect you disappointed Jesus. Consciously try to shorten the list as the days progress.
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- 12 Read a biography of a faithful missionary or preacher.
- 13 Bake your church's Communion bread. Pray for church members as you bake.

14 Get to church ten minutes early. Spend time praying that God's presence will be felt throughout the service.

15 Take a walk alone in a park or field, and pray aloud to God.

16 Read a novel written by a Christian. Talk with a friend about what the author was trying to accomplish. Was God glorified through this art form?

17 Each evening put all your pennies into a penny pot. At the end of the year, give the money to a Christian organization. Encourage your children to participate.

18 With a trusted friend, share a temptation that often traps you. Make yourself accountable to this friend as you work to overcome the temptation.

19 Study a book of the Bible until you "own" it.

20 Plan a family meal time discussion around the topic of what Jesus has done for each person.

21 Tape record the testimonies of elderly relatives. Encourage them to tell stories of how they met Jesus and how He guided at key points in their lives.

22 Visit a museum and study several paintings with biblical themes. What do they suggest about the nature of God? What insights do they provide?

23 Listen to an audio tape of Scripture being read. If you are a visual learner, close your eyes and allow your mind to paint pictures of what you're hearing. If you are a kinesthetic learner who enjoys moving while you learn, allow your body to express what you are hearing.

24 Sing a hymn to God; pay close attention to the words.

25 Each Sunday look for someone who has done something special to make the service work: preacher, person who made the coffee, usher. Let that person know that his or her gift of time and abilities was noticed.

26 Write a special prayer for each of the children who touch your life. Give them a copy of your prayer, perhaps on their birthdays.

27 Do a Bible study of a character you admire but don't know much about.

28 Visit a church that has traditional stained glass windows. Study them until you understand both pictures and symbols.

29 Write personal definitions for Christian words. Start with God, salvation, Heaven, Satan, grace, resurrection.

30 Learn to play a favorite hymn on the piano. Even if you only pick it out with one finger, make a joyful noise.

31 Converse with a friend who has a slightly different theological perspective from your own. Listen—really listen—to why he or she believes that way.

32 Keep a spiritual diary. Include daily paragraphs on what God is saying to you and what spiritual disciplines you are practicing.

33 Write a thank-you note to three people who mentored you in your Christian walk when you were a young Christian.

34 Take a Bible class for credit at a Bible college or by correspondence.

35 Memorize a chapter in the Bible.

36 Take notes during the sermon. On Sunday afternoon go over them and ask yourself, "What did God want me to hear this morning? How does He want me to respond?"

37 Praise God by writing an acrostic around one of His names. In an acrostic, the first letter of a word starts the first sentence; the second letter, the second sentence. For example:

GOD—Great and wonderful You are.

Oh, how my heart praises You.

Dear Savior, You are worthy of all my love.

38 Buy picture postcards of the places you visit on business. Send them to people who need mail. Even fifty words of encouragement can mean a great deal to a lonely person.

39 Study a portion of Scripture. Using symbols, words, and doodles, draw what the section is saying to you. Compare your drawing with another Christian's who is using the same study method.

40 Play the "God Hunt" game developed by David and Karen Mains of the Chapel of the Air. Each day look for God in the ordinary things that happen to you. Each evening share with your family where you saw God at work. For example: "I spied God at work today when I was able to avoid that drunk driver."

41 Allow yourself some daydreaming time to think about what you could do for God if you had no time or money limitations.

42 Read a devotional book written by a Christian who lived at least one hundred years ago. One source for readings by our spiritual forefathers and mothers is Renovaré, P.O. Box 879, Wichita, KS 67201-0879.

43 Attend a Quaker meeting. Use the quiet time to pray. J. Patrick Dobel in Commonweal said, "Silence is integral to learning... an opening to God's presence and part of sacramental worship."

44 Figure the difference it would make to you—and to God's work—if you gave God a pre-tax tithe rather than a post-tax tithe. Remember to figure in the return on tax-deductible gifts.

45 In an effort to build friendship and trust, teach a teen some skill you'd like to pass along—tuning an engine, baking a cake from scratch. Fit God naturally into your conversation.

46 Do a word study throughout the Bible. Start with a word like faith, family, or love.

47 Pray daily for someone you don't like. Pray for that person, not just your relationship with him or her.

48 Participate in a short-term missionary experience. Pay your own expenses. For example, serve for a day at a soup kitchen or sign up for nine months as a house parent for missionary children at boarding school.

49 Invite Christian friends to watch and discuss a movie with you. The Mission and Babette's Feast are two excellent discussion starters.

50 Take a walking tour of your neighborhood. As you walk by each house, pray for the people who live there.

51 Read Scripture aloud to yourself. Pause frequently to think about what the words mean.

52 Write a "letter to the editor" explaining a Christian viewpoint on an issue being debated. Be reasoned, articulate. How would someone who doesn't love Jesus interpret your letter?

53 Welcome the children of your church every Sunday morning. Learn their names and enough about them to hold short conversations.

54 Study a book that explains the errors in cults' beliefs. Explain to an imaginary cult member why he or she is missing the real joy of knowing God. Tape-record yourself and evaluate how well you did. Did you show Christ's love through your words and tone?

55 Buy a painting with a Christian message and hang it in a prominent spot. Talk about the painting with your children. Or, check out a different painting every month from your library.

56 Start a telephone prayer chain. Whenever someone has a prayer request, he or she can activate the chain.

57 Write your own words to go with the music of a hymn. Sing your message to God.

58 Memorize a Christian poem, for example: "On His Blindness" by John Milton.

59 Read through a book of the Bible without stopping. Think about what you learn from this overview that you would miss reading chapter by chapter.

60 Donate a Christian book or tape that has been special to you to your church library.

61 Fast for a specific time. Pray during the time you would usually eat. Consider other kinds of fasts. If you know you're spending too much time shopping or watching TV, plan to fast and pray while you give up shopping or a program or two.

62 Teach a Bible verse or a phrase about Jesus to a mentally disabled child—and in the process learn, in a new way, what Christian love and patience are.

63 Be an unofficial welcoming minister at your church. Pray that the people you welcome will know that our loving God was speaking through you.

64 Kneel or lie prostrate before God.

65 Take a vacation with God, a one-day retreat where you get away from life as usual to be totally alone with your Savior.

66 Read the Bible in a version that is new to you. Or, read through The Picture Bible with an elementary-age child.

67 During your quiet time, ask yourself these four questions suggested by Bill Hybels in his book Honest to God:

1. What is the next step in my relationship with You today, Lord?
2. What is the next step in my character development today, Lord?

3. What is the next step in my family relationships today, Lord?
4. What is the next step in my ministry today, Lord?

68 Read a Christian allegory such as C.S. Lewis's science fiction trilogy or the Narnia Chronicles.

69 Write an imaginary letter to someone who has never heard about Jesus. Try to explain the gospel in a way this person will understand. If you don't enjoy writing, do this exercise on tape and have a Christian friend evaluate how you did.

70 With an open mind, listen to radically different types of Christian music.

71 Disciple a new Christian. Be prepared: The teacher always learns more than the student.

72 After each chapter you read in the New Testament, write a sentence summary of what the chapter contains and a personal sentence on what that chapter said to you.

73 Pray following this four-step pattern:

1. Adoration (praising God for who He is); 2. Confession; 3. Thanksgiving (praising God for what He's done); 4. Supplication.

74 Draw a cross. On the cross write every sin you can remember committing, especially those for which you can't forgive yourself. Print the words, "Nailed to the Cross" over your words as a visual reminder that God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven you completely.

75 Linger before God. Be quiet before Him. Think of yourself as a dog lying quietly on the rug with His eyes constantly darting here and there, waiting and watching for the Master and His command.

76 Write at least one prayer a week to God. Writing will make you think about the words and take the act of speaking directly to God more seriously.

77 Start a neighborhood Bible study or open your home for a study.

78 Write a love letter to God.

79 Take ten minutes to list all the adjectives you can think of that describe God. Then thank God for every word.

80 Pick three adult Christians who are slightly ahead of you in their Christian walk. Ask each to mentor you in the area you admire. For example, one person might be a prayer warrior, the kind you'd like to be. Ask him or her to teach you.

81 Pick a theme to study throughout a book of the Bible. Underline portions contributing to that theme with a colored pencil. For example, everything that speaks of the love of God might be underlined in blue. Red underlines could show our need for a Savior. Yellow could show Christian joy.

82 Keep a prayer request notebook. Date each entry, and in the column to the right of the request, write the date when God answered that prayer.

83 Make a list of the people who have wronged you—perhaps even your parents. Write prayers to God asking Him to heal the part of you that was damaged. When you have finished, as a reminder to you of God's ability to heal, tear up your prayers and burn them.

84 Volunteer to help in a Sunday school class for three months. Pray for each child daily and look for ways to show that child how special he or she is. Each week evaluate how you showed God's love.

85 Remind yourself how big Christ's Church is. Study Christianity in another country. Invite your children to study with you.

86 Do one act of kindness each week that you never expect to be thanked for.

87 Change the time of day for your devotions, especially if you're now having them at a time when you know you are not at your best.

88 Pray through the front page of your local newspaper or through the TV news.

89 Know each book of the Bible well enough to state in one sentence what the book is about, and recite one key verse that captures for you what the book is saying.

90 Do a simile study—likening things in nature to the attributes of God. For example: The fury of the hurricane is like God's anger. The gentle rain is like God's mercy.

91 Each day for a week, think back on how your day would have been different if you were not a Christian. Don't allow yourself to become blasé about the difference Christ makes.

92 Create a shadowbox or shelf that contains mementos of God's blessings to you. You might include a baby's shoe, a report card, a love letter, a picture of someone you led to Jesus. For artistic seamstresses, consider designing a quilt in which each block contains a reminder of a life step God took with you.

93 Attend and actively participate in an adult Sunday school class or Bible study.

94 Work on creating a good habit, one that you're sure would please Jesus. A good habit is as difficult to break as a bad one.

95 Read your pastor's text for next Sunday as part of this week's Bible study. Then you'll be ready to hear the sermon in a deeper way.

96 In your mind's eye, allow yourself to sit on Jesus' lap. How do you feel? What do you tell Him? What might He say to you?

97 Make a list of your Christian friends. Behind each name, list the Christian virtue you often see in their lives. For example: Susan—I see in her God's unconditional love for me. Jay—I see God's creativity in the way he sings and plays the violin.

98 For your ten favorite hymns, find Bible passages on which they were based or passages that affirm the truth of the hymns.

99 Read a Bible story to a preschool child, or sit in the back of a junior church service and listen to those trusting youngsters as they respond to the love of God.

100 Do it! Just do it! You hold the key to keeping your relationship with Christ alive and growing. Prayer, Bible study, putting Christ in action: 10,000 ideas won't work unless you are willing to commit the time. Do it!

Pick one. Do it today.