

How To Pray All Day

Extending Your Times With God

Jesus often spent a whole night in prayer to God. At the outset of his ministry he spent forty days and forty nights in prayer. How did he do that? I would fall asleep sometime during the first hour. I know, I've tried.

The secret is not in expanding your list of prayer requests to read off to God like a shopping list, nor is it to set a marathon goal of two hours of prayer, or twelve hours of prayer. Extended times with God were possible for Jesus, and for you, when you enjoy those prayer times. You do what you enjoy doing. When you have had a delightfully delicious meal at an elegant restaurant no one has to twist your arm to get you to go back the second time. No one has to force you, or ask a second time to eat a candy bar, or go to the beach, or go on a date with the person you love. You do those things again and again because you enjoyed them. Pleasure motivates us.

So, we need to find ways to break the old stereotypes of prayer as long, boring, monologues of never-ending requests to God, about things that we have little or no interest in. If prayer is a taste of heaven, then it should be enjoyable and create a craving in us for more. How horrible if heaven turned out to be an extended Wednesday evening prayer meeting! I think even Jesus would fight to stay awake in one of those sluggish vigils.

How do you make prayer interesting? Do it God's way. The Scriptures are filled with examples and admonitions toward prayer, and hardly any of them is an encouragement to spend hours listing prayer requests to God. Part of prayer is certainly asking, but that is not the substance of prayer. Prayer is a relationship with God. That relationship needs to be happy, enjoyable and intimate. Bottom line, prayer should be to enjoy God. The famous Westminster Shorter Catechism answers well the question concerning the chief end of man.

The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

It is the prime directive! It is the purpose for which we were created. It is what heaven is all about. If heaven were just mansions and streets of gold then God could have left us here on earth with those amenities. But heaven is where God is. And, as the song says, "Where Jesus is, 'tis heaven there." If we don't enjoy God's presence and conversation here on earth, how will we ever endure eternity in heaven?

What do you delight in? I delight to sit by the sea and watch the waves crashing onto the shore. My wife and I can do that for hours in silent timeless wonder. It's delightful. I delight in soaking in a hot tub when my back and neck are aching from a long day of hard labor. I delight in a deliciously prepared, well-seasoned meal at a fine restaurant with friends and good conversation, then to finish it off with a smooth, rich bitter sweet chocolate dessert and an expresso coffee.

None of these delights compares to the delight I have found in a day or few days of retreat alone with God. When prayer becomes delightful, extending it is never a problem.

How To Plan A Day of Prayer

Variety is the spice of life, and it is variety in your prayers that will carry you through many exciting (not boring) hours of prayer. I used to fall asleep while praying. That is now a rare occasion. Using a variety of positions, expressions, voices, tools, and tactics will keep you alert and enjoying your prayer time.

Get Scheduled

We usually do what is on our schedule. If it is not on our calendar or in our Day-Timer it probably won't get done. So, put God on your schedule. Treat it like any other appointment. No, better yet, treat it as more important than a doctor's appointment. It is a MUST. Before a race three things are asked of the contestants: 1) Get on your mark 2) Get set 3) Go! We should approach prayer in the same way. Get on your mark: that is, get lined up to pray. Get it on your calendar. 2) Get set: Get yourself prepared to pray. Pack your prayer tool box. Gather all you will need on your prayer event. 3) Go!: Then get started on time. If God is not on your calendar, or in your Day-Timer, then he has been left out of your priorities.

Get Organized

God is not the author of confusion so don't blame him if your prayers are a chaotic jumble of hop, skip, and jump from one subject to another. Get your mind organized for prayer. That is part of the discipline. Refuse the chaos. "*Order my steps (my thoughts) according to your word.*" (Ps 119:133) I have followed a 12-Step approach to prayer that I have found useful and thoroughly biblical. God commands us to pray these areas of prayer. Make up your mind to do so. Isaiah 55:8 tells us what we should already know, that our thoughts are not His thoughts and our ways are not his ways.

This prayer strategy is based on 12 Biblical Steps of Intercession. It is divided into two parts: Intimacy and then Intercession. Each has six parts. One precedes the other like a horse before the cart. We must get it right or we will be tripping over ourselves trying to get the cart before the horse. Intimacy always precedes intercession.

Intimacy	
Focus on God	Focus on Self
Be Still Be Worshipful Be Thankful	Confess Sin Clothe Yourself Cast Care

Intercession	
Focus on Others	Focus on World
Souls Saints Sick	Ministries Missions Magistrates

Get Focused

Your mind is a wild thing. It does not like to be told what to do. It does not like discipline. For those of us who have multi-tasking minds it is difficult to fix our minds on one direction. Nevertheless it is an important prayer discipline. "Fix (focus) your eyes on Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." (Hebrews 12:2) That word "fix" or "look to" means to turn the eyes away from other things and fix them on something else. Psalm 57:7 says, "My heart is fixed (steadfast) O God, my heart is steadfast." That idea of "fixed" means to keep focused. Keeping your mind focused is a key to a successful prayer life.

Get Involved (Spirit, Soul, Body)

Man is not just a brain. He is made up with three separate and distinct parts that make him whole; body, mind, and spirit (emotions). All three of these human aspects need to be involved in the prayer experience. The following chart is a reminder of these three ingredients and hint at ways to involve them in the experience of extended prayer. Your body and emotions are to be involved in prayer as well as your brain. So activate them! Here are twenty-four. Check them off when you have completed that involvement.

Spirit	Silence	Sing	Weep	Smile	Long for	Nap	Groan	Laugh
Mind	Read	Study	Memorize	Meditate	Examine	Search	Write	Plan
Body	Sit	Walk	Pace	Stand	Kneel	Bend	Prostrate	Lay on back

As you spend time in prayer consciously vary your experiences between body, mind, and spirit. Don't just be a prayer-sitter and prayer-thinker. There are eight in each category. To be sure, you can think of others. This gives you 24 actions, attitudes, and physical expressions to share with the Lord during extended prayer times. At the end of a 2 or 3 day retreat check to see what have been your experiences with God. If you find your are too cerebral, and very sedentary, then you know how to adjust your experience to reflect a well balanced prayer time.

Get Active

Change your prayer positions often. Keep your self alert by being constantly vigilant and moving positions while you pray. Don't get stuck in one position or your body's lethargy will affect you mental alertness. Keep moving!

Alone Before God	Together Before Throne
1. Standing	1. Touching an object
2. Kneeling	2. Touching a person in need
3. Prostrate (or sit on floor)	3. Touching in agreement
4. Bowing down	4. Laying on of hands
5. Walking around	5. Anointing with oil
6. Head lifted up	6. Whispering in unison
7. Eyes looking up	7. Quoting Scripture
8. Head bowed down	8. All aloud in one voice
9. Hands raised in worship	9. Singing to the Lord
10. Hands extended in authority	10. Weeping

Get Into Worship

You should be careful to minister to the Lord, not just bombard him with requests. You can pray by singing to the Lord. Refresh yourself in the Lord's presence by "*singing songs, hymns, spiritual songs to the Lord.*" Use a chorus book or hymn book as offerings to the Lord. Sing to Him.

Get Into The Scriptures

Did you know the best way to pray is to pray God's word right back to him? A marked and well-used Bible can be a wonderful asset to prayer. Take the time to review the Scriptures listed below. Mark them in your Bible, even copy this list to the fly leaf. Then salt your corporate prayer times with God's word.

Thanksgiving	Psalm 103, 104, 105, 107, 111, 118, 124, 126, 136, 139
Adoration	Psalm 111, 112, 113, 117, 134, 144, 145, 147, 148, 149, 150
Confession	Psalm 51, Psalm 139, Isaiah 6:1-6, Daniel 9:4-19, I John 1:5-10
Exaltation	Philippians 2:6-11, Rev. 4:8-11, Rev 5:6-14, Rev 7:9-12, Rev 19:16
Encouragement	Isaiah 40:28-31, 43:1-7, 44:1-3, 44:21-24, Isaiah 51:11-16, 54:7-17, 55:6-13
Comfort	Isaiah 59:16-21, 61:1-3, 64:1-4, 62:1-7, Malachi 3:16-18
Longing After God	Psalm 27:1,4-8, Ps 42:1-5, 62:1-4, Ps 84:1-4, 9-12
Promises to Seekers	2 Chr 7:14-16, Jeremiah 29:11-14, Hosea 10:12, Isaiah 55:1-3, Isaiah 55:6-13
God's Presence	Exodus 33:12-23, 34:5-8, Ex 40:32-35, 2 Chron. 5:11-14, 2 Chron. 7:1-3
Doxologies	Heb 1:3, I Tim 1:17, I Tim 6:15-16, Col 1:13-19, Philip 2:9-11, Eph 1:20-22, Rev 1:8, 1:13-18

Get Into God's Promises

There is no better time to use God's promises than when at prayer. You are laying claim to our inheritance in Christ. Declare it! Believe God for it! Encourage one another in it!

"Whereby are given unto us great and exceeding precious promises that by these you might be partakers in his Divine nature..." (2 Peter 1:4)

Conclusion

When you start making prayer more than a monologue to God, it becomes enjoyable and naturally extends the time you spend in prayer. Using this strategy assures that you will come back for more.

A One Day Prayer Retreat

Extended prayer retreats alone with God are both biblical and helpful in developing an intimate relationship with God. God longs to walk with you in the cool of the day as he did with Adam. The problem is we are rarely there, and when we are we are in a hurry to get on to some other busy plans. It takes time to develop an intimate relationship with God. There are no shortcuts. Try setting aside a one day a month for prayer. Here is a simple guide for a day of prayer. You may find it helpful to go away to a solitary place. I find it necessary to do an overnight stay so I am relaxed to start the day.

8:30 am – **FOCUS ON GOD**

9:00 am – Be Still (1)

9:30 am – *Journal to God about this day*

10:00 am – Be Worshipful (2)

10:30 am – *Walk and enjoy God's beauty*

11:00 am – Be Thankful (3)

11:30 am – *Smile, count blessings, study nature*

12:00 pm – Lunch

12:30 pm **FOCUS ON SELF**

1:00 pm – Confession (4)

1:30 pm – *Walk & listen to sermon tape/music, etc*

2:00 pm – Cover Yourself in Armor (5)

2:30 pm – *Read, meditate, memorize*

3:00 pm – Cast all Cares on Him (6)

3:30 pm – Nap time / read / sleep / listen

4:00 pm – **SCHEDULE PRAYER!**

Don't leave the place of prayer without arranging with your Heavenly Father another time of extended prayer.

4:30 pm – Return home rejoicing!

Prayer Activities

Think & Plan

Dream God's Visions
Plan Goals
Plan Yearly Calendar
Write Sermon/Lessons
Write Thoughts/Ideas
Journal to God
Evaluate Your Life
Evaluate Your Ministry
Make Family Plans
Do a Word Study

Rest

Take a Holy Nap
Go for a Walk
Sing to the Lord
Worship with Tapes
Converse With a Friend
Play an Instrument

Read and Study





Read Scriptures
Read on Leadership
Read on Prayer
Read Prayers of the Bible
Listen to Scripture
Listen to a Sermon
Study the Promises
Memorize Promises
Meditate on the Cross
Meditate on Creation
Meditate on Promises

This is my personal style for an ordered and disciplined time of extended prayer. There will be some who find it difficult or unrewarding to be so disciplined. In that case you need to develop your own style. Just be sure that it keeps you praying and enjoying God.

How To Pray for An Hour

I am often asked by people what I do during my extended times of prayer, and specifically, how do I organize my hours of prayer?

- Top of the hour - 10 minutes of personal preps, worship, sing, give thanks, Scripture, etc
- 10 minutes after to 40 after is intensive intercession time - follow the schedule for variety
- Bottom of the hour 10 minutes is break time to read, walk, get a snack, drink, etc or even spend some quiet moments chatting with a friend. Keep your conversation on spiritual things.
- Find your rhythm. This is not a law, but a suggestion. Find what works for you. Be flexible.

	<p><u>Top of Every Hour</u> At the top of every hour we begin a new step of intercession. This keeps us focused and moving along in our intercessory prayer time. Prayer discipline begins with “time.” Jesus asked his disciples, “<i>Could you not watch one hour?</i>”</p>
	<p><u>First 10 minutes</u> The first 10 minutes are preparatory so we use the first 3 steps of stillness, worship, and thanksgiving. Make this a regular pattern in your prayer life whenever you pray. “<i>Enter His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise, be thankful and bless His name.</i>”</p>
	<p><u>40 Minutes of Intercession</u> Each hour is composed of a solid 40 minutes of intercession on the step at hand. If you find trouble staying focused then use some prayer actions to keep attentive. Change your position often, journal to God, pray some out loud, pray Scripture, etc.</p>
	<p><u>Last Ten Minutes</u> The last 10 minutes of every hour is time for a break. You are only human and need to break your routine to keep from weariness. Take a bathroom break, a coffee or juice break. If you are on a retreat with others use this time to chat with a friend about what God is teaching you about prayer.</p>