

How to Spend a Day in Prayer

By Lorne C. Sanny

“Avail yourself of the greatest privilege this side of heaven. Jesus Christ died to make this communion and communication with the Father possible.” -- Billy Graham

“Prayer is a powerful thing, for God has bound and tied Himself thereto.” -- Martin Luther

“God’s acquaintance is not made hurriedly. He does not bestow His gifts on the causal or hasty comer and goer. To be much alone with God is the secret of knowing Him and of influence with Him.” -- E.M. Bounds

“I never thought a day could make such a difference.” A friend said to me. “My relationship to everyone seems improved.”

“Why don’t I do it more often?”

Comments like these come from those who set aside a personal day of prayer.

With so many activities -- important ones -- clamoring for our time, real prayer is considered more a luxury than a necessity. How much more so spending a *day* in prayer!

The Bible gives us three time-guides for personal prayer. There is the command to “pray without ceasing” - the spirit of prayer - keeping so in tune with God that we can lift our hearts in request or praise anytime through the day.

There is also the practice of a quiet time or morning watch - seen in the life of David (Psalm 5:3), of Daniel (6:10), and of the Lord Jesus (Mark 1:35). This daily time specified for meditation in the Word of God and prayer is indispensable to the growing, healthy Christian.

Then there are examples in the Scripture of extended time given to prayer alone. Jesus spent whole nights praying. Nehemiah prayed “certain days” upon hearing of the plight of Jerusalem. Three times Moses spent 40 days and 40 nights alone with God.

Learning from God

I believe it was in these special times of prayer that God made known His ways and His plans to Moses (Psalm 103:7). He allowed Moses to look through a chink in the fence and gain special insights, while the rank and file Israelites saw only the *acts* of God as they unfolded day by day.

Once I remarked to Dawson Trotman, founder of The Navigators, “You impress me as one who feels he is a man of destiny, one destined to be used of God.”

“I don’t think that’s the case,” he replied, “but I know this. God *has* given me some promises that I know He will fulfill.” During earlier years Daws spent countless protracted times alone with God and out of these times the Navigator work grew -- not by methods or principles, but by promises given to him from the Word.

In my own life one of the most refreshing and stabilizing factors, as well as the means for new direction or confirmation of the will of God, has been those extended times of prayer - in the neighborhood park in Seattle, on a hill behind the Navigator home in Southern California, or out in the Garden of the Gods here in Colorado Springs.

These special prayer times can become anchor points in your life, times when you “drive a stake” as a landmark and go on from there. Your daily quiet time is more effective as you pray into day-by-day reality some of the things the Lord speaks to your heart in protracted times of prayer. The quiet time in turn is the foundation for “praying without ceasing,” going through the day in communion with God.

Perhaps you haven’t spent a protracted time in prayer because you haven’t recognized the need for it. Or maybe you aren’t sure what you would do with a whole day on your hands *just to pray*.

Why a Day of Prayer?

Why take this time from a busy life? What is it for?

1. *For extended fellowship with God* - beyond your morning devotions. It means just plain being with and thinking about God. God has called us into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9). Like many personal relationships, this fellowship is nurtured by spending time together. God takes special note of times

when His people reverence Him and *think upon His Name* (Malachi 3:16).

2. *For a renewed perspective.* Like flying over the battlefield in a reconnaissance plane, a day of prayer gives opportunity to think of the world from God's point of view. Especially when going through some difficulty we need this perspective to sharpen our vision of the unseen, and to let the immediate, tangible things drop into proper place. Our spiritual defenses are strengthened while "we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For... what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

3. *For catching up on intercession.* There are non-Christian friends and relatives to bring before the Lord, missionaries on various fields, our pastors, our neighbors and Christian associates, our government leaders - to name a few. Influencing people and changing events through prayer is well known among Christians but too little practiced. And as times become more serious around us, we need to reconsider the value of personal prayer, both to accomplish and to deter.

4. *For prayerful consideration of our own lives before the Lord* - personal inventory and evaluation. You will especially want to take a day of prayer when facing important decisions, as well as on a periodic basis. On such a day you can evaluate where you are in relation to your goals, and get direction from the Lord through His Word. Promises are there for you and me, just as they have been for Hudson Taylor or George Mueller or Dawson Trotman. And it is in our times alone with God that He gives inner assurance of His promises to us.

5. *For adequate preparation.* Nehemiah, after spending "certain days" seeking the Lord in prayer, was called in before the king. "Then the king said unto me, 'For what dost thou make request?' So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said unto the king, 'If it please the king...'" -- and he outlined his plan (Nehemiah 2:4-5, KJV). Then Nehemiah says, "I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem" (2:12). When did God put in his heart this plan? I believe it was when he fasted and prayed and waited on God. Then when the day came for action, he was ready.

I heard a boy ask a pilot if it didn't take quick thinking to land his plane when something went wrong. The pilot answered that no, he

knew at all times where he would put down *if* something went wrong. He had that thought out ahead of time.

So it should be in our Christian life. If God has given us plans and purposes in those times alone, we will be ready when opportunity comes to move right into it. We won't have to say, "I'm not prepared." The reason many Christians are dead to opportunities is not because they are not mentally alert, but they are simply unprepared in heart. Preparation is made when we get alone with God.

Pray on the Basis of God's Word

Daniel said, "In the first year of [Darius'] reign [the reign of Darius], I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed" (Daniel 9:2-4).

He understood by the Scriptures what was to come. And as a result of his exposure to the Word of God, he prayed. It has been said that God purposes, therefore He promises. And we can add, "Therefore I pray the promises, so that God's purposes might come to reality." God purposed to do something, and He promised it, therefore Daniel prayed. This was Daniel's part in completing the circuit, like an electrical circuit, so that the power could flow through.

Your day alone with the Lord isn't a matter of sitting out on a rock like the statue of *The Thinker* and taking whatever thoughts come to your mind. That's not safe. It should be a day exposed to God's Word, and then His Word leads you into prayer. You will end the day worse than you started if all you do is engage in introspection, thinking of yourself and your own problems. It isn't your estimate of yourself that counts anyway. It's God's estimate. And He will reveal His estimate to you by the Holy Spirit through His Word, the open Bible. And then the Word leads into prayer.

How to Go About it

How do you go about it? Having set aside a day or portion of a day for prayer, pack a lunch and start out. Find a place where you can be alone, away from distractions. This may be a wooded area near home, or your backyard. An outdoor spot is excellent if you can find it; but don't get sidetracked into nature studies and fritter away your time.

If you find yourself watching the squirrels or the ants, direct your observation by reading Psalm 104 and meditating on the power of God in creation.

Take along a Bible, a notebook and pencil, a hymnbook, and perhaps a devotional book. I like to have with me the booklet *Power Through Prayer* by E.M. Bounds and read a chapter or two as a challenge to the strategic value of prayer. Or I sometimes take Horatius Bonar's *Words to Winner of Souls*, or a missionary biography like *Behind the Ranges* by Mary C. Taylor, which records the prayer victories of J.O. Fraser in inland China.

Even if you have all day, you will want to use it profitably. So lose no time in starting, and start purposefully.

Wait on the Lord

Divide the day into three parts: waiting on the Lord, prayer for others, and prayer for yourself.

As you *wait on the Lord*, don't hurry. You will miss the point if you look for some mystical or ecstatic experience. Just seek the Lord, waiting on *Him*. Isaiah 40:31 promises that those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. Psalm 27:14 is one of dozens of verses which mention waiting on Him, as is Psalm 62:5 -- "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from Him."

Wait on Him first to *realize His presence*. Read through a passage like Psalm 139, grasping the truth of His presence with you as you read each verse. Ponder the impossibility of being anywhere in the universe where He is not. Often we are like Jacob when he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not" (Genesis 28:16, KJV).

Wait on Him also *for cleansing*. The last two verses of Psalm 139 lead you into this. Ask God to search your heart as these verses suggest. When we search our own hearts it can lead to imaginations, morbid introspection, or anything the enemy may want to throw before us. But when the Holy Spirit searches He will bring to your attention that which should be confessed and cleansed. Psalms 51 and 32, David's songs of confession, will help you. Stand upon the firm ground of 1 John 1:9 and claim God's faithfulness to forgive whatever specific thing you confess.

If you realize you've sinned against a brother, make a note of it so you won't forget to set it right. Otherwise, the rest of the day will

be hindered. God won't be speaking to you if there is something between you and someone else that you haven't planned to take care of at the earliest possible moment.

As you wait on God, ask for the power of concentration. Bring yourself back from daydreaming.

Next, wait on God to *worship Him*. Psalms 103, 111 and 145 are wonderful portions to follow as you praise the Lord for the greatness of His power. Most of the psalms are prayers. Or turn to Revelation, chapters 4 and 5, and use them in your praise to Him. There is no better way to pray scripturally than to pray Scripture.

If you brought a hymnbook you can sing to the Lord. Some wonderful hymns have been written that put into words what we could scarcely express ourselves. Maybe you don't sing very well -- then be sure you're out of earshot of someone else and "make a joyful noise unto the Lord." *He* will appreciate it.

This will lead you naturally into thanksgiving. Reflect upon the wonderful things God has done for you and thank Him for these -- for your own salvation and spiritual blessings, for your family, friends, and opportunities. Go beyond that which you thank the Lord for daily and take time to express appreciation to Him for countless things He's given.

Prayer for Others

Now is the time for the unhurried, more detailed prayer for others that you don't get to ordinarily. Remember people in addition to those for whom you usually pray. Trace your way around the world, praying for people by countries. Here are three suggestions as to what to pray:

First, ask specific things for them. Perhaps you remember or have jotted down various needs people have mentioned. Use requests from missionary prayer letters. Pray for spiritual strength, courage, physical stamina, mental alertness, and so on. Imagine yourself in the situations where these people are and pray accordingly.

Second, look up some of the prayers in Scripture. Pray what Paul prayed for other people in the first chapter of Philippians and Colossians, and in the first and third chapters of Ephesians. This will

help you advance in your prayer from the stage of “Lord, bless so and so and help them to do such and such.”

Third, ask for others what you are praying for yourself. Desire for them what the Lord has shown *you*.

If you pray a certain verse or promise of Scripture for a person you may want to put the reference by his name on your prayer list, and use this verse as you pray for that person the next time. Then use it for thanksgiving as you see the Lord answer.

Prayer for Yourself

The third part of your day will be prayer for yourself. If you are facing an important decision you may want to put this before prayer for others.

Again, let your prayer be ordered by Scripture and ask the Lord for understanding according to Psalm 119:18. Meditate upon verses of Scripture you have memorized or promises you have previously claimed from the Word. Reading a whole book of the Bible through, perhaps aloud, is a good idea. Consider how it might apply to your life.

In prayer for yourself, 1 Chronicles 4:10 is one good example to follow. Jabez prayed, “Oh that You would bless me and enlarge my territory! Let Your hand be with me, and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.” That’s prayer for your personal life, for your growth, for God’s presence, and for God’s protection. Jabez prayed in the will of God and God granted his request.

“Lord, what do *You* think of my life?” is the attitude of this portion of your day of prayer. Consider your main objectives in the light of what you know to be God’s will for you. Jesus said, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work” (John 4:34). Do you want to do God’s will more than anything else? Is it really your highest desire?

Then consider your activities -- what you *do* -- in the context of your objectives. God may speak to you about rearranging your schedule, cutting out certain activities that are good but not best, or some things that are entanglements or impediments to progress. Strip them off. You may be convicted about how you spend your evenings or Saturdays, when you could use the time to advantage and still get the recreation you need.

As you pray, record your thoughts on your activities and use of time, and plan for better scheduling. Perhaps the need for better preparation for your Sunday school class or a personal visit with an individual will come to your mind. Or the Lord may impress you to do something special for someone. Make a note of it.

During this part of your day, bring up any problems or decisions you are facing and seek the mind of God on them. It helps to list the factors involved in these decisions or problems. Pray over these factors and look into the Scriptures for guidance. You may be led to a promise or direction from the passages with which you have already filled your mind during the day.

After prayer, you may reach some definite conclusions upon which you can base firm convictions. It should be your aim in a day of prayer to come away with some conclusions and specific direction -- some stakes driven. However, do not be discouraged if this is not the case. It may not be God's time for a conclusive answer to your problem. And you may discover that your real need was not to know the next step but to have a new revelation of God Himself.

In looking for promises to claim there's no need to thumb through looking for new or startling ones. Just start with the promises you already know. If you have been through the *Topical Memory System*, start by meditating on the verses in the *Rely on God's Resources* section. Chew over some old familiar promises the Lord has given you before, ones you remember as you think back. Pray about applying these verses to your life.

I have found some of the greatest blessings from a new realization of promises I already knew. And the familiar promises may lead you to others. The Bible is full of them.

You may want to mark or underline in your Bible the promises the Lord gives during these protracted times alone, and put the date and a word or two in the margin beside them.

Variety is important during your day of prayer. Read a while, pray a while, then walk around. A friend of mine paces the floor of his room for his prayer time. Rather than get cramped in one position, take a walk and stretch; get some variety.

As outside things pop into your mind, simply incorporate those items into prayer. If it's some business item you must not forget, jot it down. Have you noticed how many things come to mind while you are sitting in church? It will be natural for things to occur to you

during your prayer day that you should have done, so put them down, pray about them and plan how you can take care of them and when. Don't just push them aside or they will plague you the rest of the day.

At the end of the day summarize in your notebook some things God has spoken to you about. This will be profitable to refer to later.

Two Questions

The result of your day of prayer should be answers to the two questions Paul asked the Lord on the Damascus road (Acts 22:6-10). Paul's first question was, "Who are you, Lord?" The Lord replied, "I am Jesus." You will be seeking to know Him, to find out who He is. The second question Paul asked was, "What shall I do, Lord?" The Lord answered him specifically. This should be answered or reconfirmed for you in that part of the day when you unhurriedly seek His will for you.

Don't think you must end the day with some new discovery or extraordinary experience. Wait on God and expose yourself to His Word. Looking for a new experience or insight you can share with someone when you get back will get you off the track. True, you may gain some new insight, but often this can just take your attention from the real business. The test of such a day is not how exhilarated we are when the day is over but how it works into life tomorrow. If we have really exposed ourselves to the Word and come into contact with God, it will affect our daily life. And that is what we want.

Days of prayer don't just happen. Besides the attempts of our enemy Satan to keep us from praying, the world around us has plenty to offer to fill our time. So we have to make time. Plan ahead -- the first of every other month, or once a quarter.

God bless you as you do this -- and do it soon! You too will probably ask yourself, "Why not more often?"

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