

## HOW TO SPEND AN HOUR IN PRAYER

The focus of this guide is not to become fixated on the length of time praying but to assist in spending more time in prayer than what most of us currently do. When asked, most of us would admit that we believe in prayer and welcome others praying for us, but we would also have to admit that spending more than a couple of minutes in prayer turns into an exercise in endurance more than a joy and delight.

The first question in the Westminster Catechism is: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Glorifying and enjoying are not always two words we put together in our Christian experience but they need to become much better friends than they have been. I'm convinced that as prayer shifts from being about bringing our shopping list to God to being about focusing on Him in our relationship and enjoying being in His presence, glorifying and enjoying become wed together in a way that is more life-giving for each of us. To that end I offer these simple encouragements about how to spend more time in prayer.

**1. FOCUS:** I know it's easier said than done! If, like me, you sometimes have the attention span of a dog in a field full of fire hydrants and telephone poles, you need to do something to assist in focusing. Here's three options:

1. Write out your prayers. Some of us come from traditions where to write a prayer is equated with it not being from the heart. Get past that. Some of us just simply think/focus better when writing. *Caution: The temptation when writing is to write in flowery language almost to impress readers. Remember who your audience is. GOD! Let your writing reflect your heart and mind together.*

2. Say your prayers out loud. Some of us come from traditions where to not write out your prayers is to do it mindlessly. Get past that! Some of us process information while speaking. Therefore praying becomes a vital path for not only processing our relationship with God but also growing in intimacy. You might need to find a place where you can speak out loud without fear of someone hearing you, so you are comfortable. One of the elders in the church where I grew up used to sit in his car alone looking out at the harbor praying out loud where no one but God could hear him.

3. Some of us need something tactile to help us focus, whether it is a cross, some symbol, or even wrapping yourself in a prayer shawl. It is amazing how just having something in your hands can help you focus.

**2. BREAK TIME INTO MANAGEABLE PORTIONS:** Again it is not about an obsession with time but it is about growing into greater qualitative and quantitative time in prayer. There are three basic components to prayer: speaking, listening, and silence. Most of us spend most of our prayer time in petition but there is so much more. Like any relationship, communication involves speaking, listening, and moments of reflection.

If your current practice in prayer is to spend five minutes in prayer, 95% of which is asking God for something, try either dedicating the first two minutes or an additional two minutes to praying without asking God for something. Spend time in praise and thanksgiving for wherever you see God's hand at work around you. Make a point of looking each day for some evidence of God's hand at work. When you have spent 7 minutes praying try pushing the boundary to 10 minutes with balance between petition, praise, and silence, then to 20 minutes, and so on. Eventually you will settle into a time that is a balance between what is right for you and what is required for you to connect.

**3. BREAK YOUR PRAYER INTO MANAGEABLE PORTIONS:** I once had the opportunity to come alongside a student whose anxieties had gone through the roof in his last semester of seminary. He was overwhelmed by what appeared to be a mountain of assignments, limited energy, and less

time to fulfill them. As we sat together I asked him what assignments were due, when they were due, etc. and we then broke apart the mountain by building a schedule which took one assignment at a time, focused on it's accomplishment and then and removed it from anxiety. With each assignment completed came not only a sense of relief but growing momentum of accomplishment.

Sometimes when we think about spending an hour in prayer it seems overwhelming but the same guide applies. When you break down your prayer time into certain categories or patterns you can easily find that an hour is not such a mountain. For example: When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray He gave them what we've come to call the Lord's Prayer. When He gave the disciples His prayer the rabbinic pattern, as I understand it, was not to provide the words to be repeated but the form to follow. So when I look at the Lord's prayer there are about six topics at least that I can use in my praying.

**1. The Person of God:** "Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be Your Name."

- What does it mean to know God as "father"? What other passages of Scripture come to mind in that context?
- One aspect of God's character is as the Father but we also know that God exists in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Son referred to God as "Father". When you think about the Trinity is there praise or thanks that is inspired in prayer?
- This Father is "OUR" Father. I am called into relationship with God through Jesus Christ but I am also called into relationship with His community directed by the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to me to know I am not alone in my journey of faith and that I am a part of a Christian Community?
- Our Father dwells in heaven. Is there something I know about heaven that can inspire praise or thanksgiving in my prayers? What comes to mind when I contemplate eternity with God?
- Our Father in heaven is Holy; His Name (that which represents all of whom He is) is to be hallowed. Pause and reflect on the various names in the Scripture for God – use a concordance if necessary. Each of those names communicates something about God's character. Express to the Lord what they mean to you.

**2. The Priorities of God's Kingdom:** "Your kingdom come, Your will be done."

- "Kingdom" – God has a Kingdom, what does it look like, how does it function, what is your role in it? Think about God's kingdom and reflect back to Him your praise and thanks. Express your longings for it's fullness.
- "your Kingdom" – the kingdom has its origins in God (not of this world- different qualitatively, judicially, providentially); it is His to bring, to order, to unfold. It requires preparation, submission, orientation. It has present implications and yet a fullness yet to come. Reflect on God's Kingdom and give Him glory. Express your prayers for his working.
- "Your will" – God has a will! What does it mean to you that God has a will? What is it generally, what is it specifically for you? Offer the fresh surrender of your own will to His. Pray through your understanding of God's will for families, for your church, your city, your nation, etc.
- "be done" – Consider how easily God's will is done in heaven and the implications for it being done so easily on earth.

**3. The Provision of God:** "give us this day our daily bread."

- "Give" – there is One who is the Giver, also known as Jehovah Gireh, the Lord the Provider. Consider what and how God has provided for you. Consider asking God to show you what you really need as opposed to what you think you need. Acknowledge

your daily dependence on the Lord's provisions for your life and offer thanks for His faithfulness.

- "this day" - acknowledge both the timeliness and sufficiency of God's provision. Around Grace one of the phrases we have used at times in reference to God's provision is: "Never Early, Never Late But Always On Time!" Reflect on God's timing and express your thoughts to Him in praise, adoration, or maybe surrender.

- "our daily bread" – Acknowledge that God is interested in the details of your life and the life of those around you including your church, right down to your daily bread. Are there needs of which you are aware personally, in your family, your church, your city, nation, etc? – Now is a good time to intercede on behalf of others and yourself.

#### **4. The People of God:** *"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."*

- We are called into relationship with God and with each other. Acknowledge the realities of living in community, both good and bad. The church is made up of people, people who are sinners and wherever sinners exist forgiveness is a real need. Forgiveness opens the door to healthy relationships. What do your relationships look like when you look at them with Jesus?

- There is a priority for the people of God to grow in Christ-likeness. Consider how forgiveness factors into it.

- Acknowledge the priority given to maintaining the unity and peace within the Body of Christ. Are there prayers that flow from your heart as a result?

- Is there a need for some personal "soul business"? Do I need to ask the Lord or anyone else for forgiveness? Do I need to extend it so that no bitter root grows either in me or in my relationships?

#### **5. The Power of God:** *"and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."*

- Here I have to pause and acknowledge my own predisposition to accept temptation in its many forms. This is a healthy place to acknowledge my weaknesses. There are 6 "R's" you might want to utilize here:

- **Recognize** – confess how you have sinned, what you have done.

- **Repent** – literally, make a turn around – express your desire to have DONE with that particular sin.

- **Renounce** – all claims that anything from the kingdom of darkness may have on your life as a result of that sin.

- **Receive** – the forgiveness Christ has bought for you and pronounce your freedom in Him.

- **Realign** – Wherever you got off the rails, get back on them with the Lord. Restate your commitment to Christ, His kingdom, rule and reign.

- **Replant** – the Flag of God's Kingdom in the soil of that area where sin occurred claiming it for the Lord, rejoicing both in Him and your new start.

#### **6. THE PRAISE OF GOD:** *"For yours is the Kingdom and the power and the glory forever."*

- Let this doxology inspire your own. Praise God for His Kingdom, what He has done in the past, is doing in the present, and for what you know about what is to come.

- Praise God for how He is doing it – by His power not our own, by His Spirit, through his Church/His people. Be aware of what God is doing around the world and give Him glory.

- Praise God .... well, because He is WORTHY! Read passages like Psalm 48:1; 96:4; 145:3; Revelation 4: 8-11; 5:6-14; 7:9-17 and let them inspire a fresh doxology from you to the Lord.

The Scripture as a whole is a wonderful resource for prayer beginning with verses that strike us in our daily reading. There are a number of prayers in the Scripture which can be wonderful fuel for our own prayer lives. The worship songs of the church, old and new, can be wonderful blessings in prayer as well either as a guide for a prayer time or as a means to getting centered/focused on the Lord.

An hour in prayer is achievable but another caution must be heard. Praying is not just about filling up our time in the Lord's presence with words. It is also about being still in His presence long enough to allow Him to speak to us and direct us. My prayer is that this simple guide may lead you to explore new depths in your relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

May your life find its breath in Jesus Christ, its rhythm in Sabbath, and its center in a prayer life that is growing richer, deeper, and more intimate each day.

Blessings,

*Dan MacKinnon*