

## Developing a Disciplined Prayer Life

Jesus went to Gethsemane to pray, taking His disciples with Him. He left them alone, telling them to keep watch and pray. But when He returned, they were sleeping. "Couldn't you watch with Me for one hour?" He asked them. (See Matthew 26:36-40.)

With this challenge in mind, I would like to offer the following twelve step plan as a guide to help you fill one hour with five minute segments of meaningful prayer. (The resource material was obtained from Change the World Ministries.)

Everyone prays differently, and some will omit one or more of these segments. Some segments may be shorter, others longer. Remember, this is only a suggested guide.

But set a pattern with which you and the Lord are comfortable. And at all costs, discipline yourself to pray.

**Praise.** All prayer should begin with a recognition of God's nature. The Lord's Prayer — our model for all praying — begins with the words "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name" (Matthew 6:9).

In praise we esteem God for His nature and accomplishments. (See Psalm 63:3 and Hebrews 13:15.)

**Waiting.** Not only should we begin prayer with praise, but we should give time to being quiet in God's presence.

The original Hebrew text of Psalm 37:7 — "Rest in the Lord," — means "Be still" in the Lord. This is not meditation, or just a time for listening. It is simply taking time to let God love you. (See also Isaiah 40:31 and Lamentations 3:25.)

**Confession.** The psalmist asked God to search his heart for unconfessed sin. He knew that sin was one of the greatest roadblocks to answered prayer.

Early in prayer we need to make time for confession. This clears the way for powerful praying to a God who answers. (See Psalm 51:10-11; Psalm 66:18; Psalm 139:23-24; 1 John 1:9.)

**Reading the Word.** "The commandment of the Lord [God's Word] is pure, enlightening the eyes," wrote King David (Psalm 19:8). When we bring God's Word into our prayer, we open our eyes to new possibilities in God.

At this point in our prayer, we might want to read God's Word. (See 2 Timothy 3:16.)

**Intercession.** Our praying now centers on interceding for a lost and dying world and for others who have desperate needs.

Intercession is one aspect of prayer in which five minutes will never be enough. It involves a travail of the soul that will lead us into the very heart of God. As we intercede for others, God will lay as a burden on our hearts what is also on His heart, and we ourselves will be changed. (See 1 Timothy 2:1-2; Psalm 2:8; Matthew 9:37-38.)

**Petition.** This aspect of prayer concerns our personal needs. The Lord's Prayer includes petition in the expression "Give us this day our daily bread."

To petition God is to open our hearts to Him through prayer and present our needs. (See Matthew 6:11; Matthew 7:7; James 4:2.)

**Praying the Word.** Bringing God's Word into prayer is so important that it appears twice on the list. I suggested reading God's Word as the step after confession. Now I am recommending *praying* God's Word, bringing actual Scripture verses into our prayer. We cannot pray out of God's will when we pray His Word. (See 2 Samuel 22:31; Numbers 23:19.)

**Thanksgiving.** When Paul wrote to the Philippians, he instructed them to offer “prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*” (Philippians 4:6, italics added.) Thus, thanksgiving should occupy more than a single aspect of prayer; it should be sprinkled throughout.

Thanksgiving differs from praise in that praise recognizes God for who He is, while thanksgiving recognizes God for specific things He has done. (See Psalm 100:4.)

**Singing.** Melody in its truest sense is a gift of God for the purpose of singing praises unto Him.

Many Christians, sadly, have never learned the beauty of singing a “new song” to God during prayer. These songs may come straight from the heart, with the Holy Spirit creating the melody.

Paul wrote of “spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19.) To sing to the Lord in spiritual songs is to worship God in melody. (See Psalm 100:2 and Psalm 144:9.)

**Meditation.** To wait in God’s presence, as noted earlier, is simply to be there to love Him. Meditation differs from waiting in that our minds during meditation are very active.

To meditate is to ponder spiritual themes that refer to God. Only once in Scripture do we find God specifically promising success and prosperity: As gifts to those who meditate day and night in His Word. (Joshua 1:8; see also Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 77:12.)

**Listening.** Whether through His written Word or by the inner still, small voice of the Holy Spirit, God speaks to praying Christians. But we must take time to listen.

Listening is different from both waiting and meditation. Here we listen for direct orders from our heavenly Father concerning our daily activities. (See 1 Kings 19:11-13; Ecclesiastes 5:2.)

**Praise.** An imaginary door to every prayer time carries a sign that reads *Praise*. We must always enter prayer through this door. And when prayer draws to its conclusion, we must look for the same door.

As we begin prayer by recognizing God’s nature, we end in a similar fashion. Jesus taught this when He ended His prayer with the statement “For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.” (Matthew 6:13; see also Psalm 100:4 and Psalm 150.)

This simple, twelve-step plan for filling an hour with meaningful prayer is just a suggestion. Everyone has a different prayer life. But each one of us must discipline ourselves to prayer in order to reach our fullest potential in Jesus Christ.