



Praying the Day

Introduction

A Handbook for Daily Prayer

*For Calvary Baptist Church, Las Cruces
and for all who pray.*

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Scripture quotations are from
the Christian Standard Bible.

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Many Christians today would insist that prayer is important, but they either find it incredibly difficult to pray or simply do not pray at all. Why does prayer have to be so hard? Can an ordinary person expect to pray in ways that are powerful and meaningful? Is prayer something we should expect of ourselves even though our lives are busy?

As it is, when we do pray, it is often as a habit or a duty. Sometimes prayer is an entertaining Sunday show, but mostly it's dry and boring. Since we have other things to do, we often rely on others to do the praying for us. Perhaps we say something about prayer not being our spiritual gift. But as we pray less, we feel restless, bored, and hurried. Our faith seems shallow and inconsequential, and we find ourselves drawing less and less on what really grounds us emotionally or nourishes us spiritually.

What if prayer were life-restoring and satisfying, enriching our hearts with what God has for us? What if prayer could be about *being* with God instead of *doing* for God? This devotional prayer book is designed with the expectation that prayer can be exactly that.

How to use this book?

Praying the Day is a handbook for personal prayer that receives its inspiration from a centuries'-old practice. What some have called fixed-hour prayer, the daily office, praying the hours, and praying the day are all names given to the practice of praying at regularly intervals during a 24-hour period. The original practice was developed in monastic communities many hundreds of years ago to help focus those brothers' and sisters' attention on God in their everyday activities.

Although most of us do not live in a monastery, the practice of fixed-hour prayer plays out of a desire that generations of men and women have had to pray in a life-enriching way. *Praying the Day* is offered here to help us turn our attention to God regularly and intentionally. It is meant to facilitate our satisfaction in God by practicing restful prayer.

The prayers are organized into 5-day sets corresponding to the 5-day work week. For each day, there are two sections, one labeled "For Morning" and the other "For Evening." Ideally, one would pray through the first section in the morning or midday and the second section in the evening or before bed. In the

end, when they are prayed is up to the reader, as long as the times are consistent and manageable.

Each section is made up of several elements, including stillness and silence, meditating on scripture, and responding honestly to God. The evening section has an added element of prayerfully reviewing the day. Each part is meant to help turn our attention to God in specific ways.

- ***Stillness and silence***

Stillness and silence begin and end each prayer time because they help develop a new spiritual rhythm, one that inspires rest, rejuvenation, and awareness of God's presence. Attention to silence and stillness requires that we give up final control of our prayers. Indeed, our silence is one way to show our consent to God's will and activity in our lives. In life as in prayer, God is at the center, having the last word.

Here are some suggestions for practicing prayerful silence.

- 1.) It might seem obvious, but be sure to sit in a comfortable position. Sit upright and with a straight back, not slouching and not lying down. Close your eyes and breathe calmly, perhaps even slowly and deeply at first, and through the nose.

2.) Turn off anything that is making noise: television, radio, smartphone, your computer. Choose a place that is free of distraction, bright lights, or people clambering for your attention. Shut doors.

3.) As a first step in shifting your attention to God, pray a simple word or two to direct your attention to God. “Jesus” is most likely the oldest prayer in Christianity. The writer, Brennan Manning, encouraged readers to voice, “Abba, I belong to you.” Other words or phrases like “Lord, I’m here,” or “God, thank you,” work just as well. Let it be yours and something that comforts you so that when you say it, it helps turn your attention back to the presence of God.

4.) The noise within is often louder than the noise outside. When things grow quiet, you’ll most likely notice your mind is whirring with activity. It’s like we have this inner monologue constantly commenting on everything. This is quite normal for us living in the thick of the day-to-day, and it is nothing to get discouraged about as we seek to rest in God in quiet trust. When you get distracted simply recognize that your mind has drifted off and return to silence and stillness with the help of the simple words that you

used to start.

Silence is simple, but no small thing. It takes time and practice to realize what a gift it is. Stick with it, and know that God is quite near whenever you turn to him.

• ***Meditation (Psalm 63:6-7, Psalm 119:15)***

Meditation means to chew or ruminate. Think about a cow or deer who eats its dinner and then over the course of an evening eats that same dinner again and again. Words like savoring and enjoying can also be associated with meditation. The scripture passages used for meditation in this collection focus our attention on who God is. These passages are not long. They can't be if we hope to chew on them effectively. Instead, we chew on "bite-sized" portions, allowing ourselves to savor and sink into the revelation of what we are reading. The goal here is quality not quantity, so that as we ponder, God's character would nourish our souls.

There are different ways to meditate on scripture. All are worthwhile. One option is to read the passage, replacing personal pronouns referring to the author with your name. Then, reading it again, replace every mention of the author with I/me personal

pronouns (referring to you). A second option is to read the verses aloud several times, emphasizing different words each time. Using the first verse of Psalm 23 as an example, you might read it first, “**THE** Lord is my shepherd,” then a second time, “The **LORD** is my shepherd,” then a third time, “The Lord **IS** my shepherd” and so on. A third option would be to read the passage and then to put the verses into your own words, as a sort of spontaneous paraphrase. Whatever your approach, the key is reading slowly and thoughtfully.

There is no narrative arc, weekly topic, or seasonal holiday that any particular reading is speaking to. There is nothing stopping you from repeating these readings to find spiritual nourishment again. None of them will grow stale or tough through repeated pondering. In fact, that is how we nourish our souls with God’s character—through slow and repeated consideration, uninterrupted contemplation of who he is.

- *Conversation*

Several of the prompts speak of conversing with God. To speak of prayer as conversation is a reminder that our dialogue with God is an honest

communication from our heart to his. We need not put on airs or hide behind pretense, big words, or many words. Like a friend speaking with a friend, we can be comfortable talking simply and honestly with God.

- ***Reviewing your day***

It is all too easy to go about our day and forget that God is present and at work in our lives. Prayerfully reviewing the events of your day is an opportunity to recognize God is not absent from where we really live. Going through this daily reflection sensitizes us to God's presence and activity in the thick of our daily hubbub.

- ***Emotions and their place in prayer***

Emotions and feelings are mentioned frequently in the prayer prompts. Our emotions are a part of prayer. This is as it should be. God made us emotional creatures even as he made us intelligent and thoughtful. While our feelings are not the final word, to be emotionally honest with God and with ourselves is part of a healthy faith.

A final thought

Above all, Praying the Day offers tools to help practice praying consistently, thoughtfully, and honestly. To that end, feel free to keep it flexible. This is not another to-do list. Use what helps. Let the Holy Spirit lead you. More important than “getting it right” or “praying more,” committing to praying the day opens regular spaces for turning to God, whatever our circumstances or emotional state. If we are turning to God, then we are praying well.

Continue *Praying the Day* at
cbclascruces.org/ministries/praying-the-day