

Special Section: Pray

The Best Time For Prayer

By Warren Myers, With Ruth Myers

Issues: Prayer is God's free gift of continuous access to his presence. It is also a discipline that requires time, devotion, and creativity. When we make full use of this precious gift, it becomes a source of life and power for all we do.

The little estimate we put on prayer is evident from the little time we give to it.

(*E. M. Bounds, Power Through Prayer*)

ALBERT Einstein commented, "The perfection of means and confusion of goals is the hallmark of our time." Einstein might have added other hallmarks: deadlines, haste, busyness, and untold hours spent in leisure pursuits that we "owe ourselves" as compensation for life's stresses. Our goals are confused, and we seldom have enough time to do anything well, or to do at all the things that are truly important. We lack time for fellowship with God and a growing and effective prayer life. R. A. Torrey has highlighted what is true for many of us:

How little time the average Christian spends in prayer! We are too busy to pray, and so we are too busy to have power. We have a great deal of activity, but we accomplish little . . . The power of God is lacking in our lives and in our work. We have not because we ask not.¹

Does the real problem lie in the amount of time we have? Every person in the world has twenty-four hours a day. The rich have no more, the poor no less. Many of these hours are at our discretion, to use as we choose. Going to work is our choice, for we could stay home and starve. We take time to eat and sleep each day. We take time to study, serve the Lord, and watch television. We can decide, and often do, to omit some of these activities and add others. On weekends we take time for extra sleep, extra study, sports, or friends. We take time for the things we most want to do and the things we think are most important.

Yet how often we say, "I don't have time for a regular quiet time. I don't have time to pray." How often do we stifle the Holy Spirit's inner prompting with the rationalization, "As soon as these pressures are over, I'll start spending time with God"? Our real problem lies in our priorities more than in the time available to us. There is enough time in each day for everything that is in the will of God.

CHOOSE TO MAKE TIME

The answer is not in *having* time to pray but in *making* time. I must decisively make time for prayer—daily, weekly, and monthly. I do not find this easy. Yet it is essential if I want to please God and live a significant life. S. D. Gordon reminds us that God's great people are those who

pray. They do not *have* the time, but must take the time from other things that are important and pressing.² Here lies both the core of our problem as well as its solution.

We are faced with a choice of faith. If we truly believe that genuine satisfaction and lasting success come from God, we must pray. If we truly believe that mere sincerity or activity or organization does not produce spiritual results, but that enduring work for God is accomplished only through His Spirit, then we must make time for prayer.

Jesus Christ faced pressures greater than ours; the whole city gathering at His door for healing; crowds running to meet His boat; more than 5,000 people pressing around Him for a whole day of teaching. What golden opportunities to proclaim the Gospel and glorify the Father by His works.

Yet the Lord often left the eager crowds, not primarily to rest or plan or organize, but to pray. At times this meant a night without sleep.

Few of us would abandon a flourishing revival where we were the main speaker to get a few days alone in prayer. But Christ knew His priorities. He who had all power in heaven and earth considered adequate times of prayer as essential as His public service. So He often withdrew and prayed. And He is our example.

But the news about Him was spreading even farther, and great multitudes were gathering to hear Him and to be healed of their sicknesses. But He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray . . . He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God.³

When a family member becomes critically ill, we suddenly find time to pray. When we are coping with disappointment or loss or failure, we find time to pray. When we are in desperate need of money, we pray. But how can we find time to pray in our ordinary schedules? Only through a firm conviction that prayer is indispensable if we are to please God, enjoy His blessings, and advance His Kingdom. We need a settled persuasion that it is not our efforts, not our gifts, but prayer that releases God's power in our lives and in the lives of others.

To give priority to prayer, we must put such times ahead of even service, fellowship, and meetings. Fifteen or twenty minutes daily can generally be worked into a busy schedule. As our friendship with the Lord deepens, we can increase the time.

God is looking for people who, in the swirl of short days and short nights, proclaim by their actions, "You are the most important person in my life. I dare not and will not neglect You, regardless of the urgency of other things." This is faith that honors God, and He honors those who honor Him.

The greater our spiritual responsibilities, the more time we need with God to seek His guidance, His empowering, and His protection. Prayer takes time, but it also saves time by multiplying our effectiveness. The dividends far surpass the investment.

My wife, Ruth, and I find it a spiritual boost to set apart extra times to be alone with the Lord—sometimes an hour, occasionally an evening, half a day, or even more. When possible, we get away from home to avoid distractions. Our favorite spot is the Botanic Gardens near downtown Singapore. Traffic rushes by a few yards away, and tourists troop past looking at the exotic foliage, but we feel isolated in this natural setting with no phone to answer, and no business to demand our attention.

First we spend time together in the Word and prayer, often using a special prayer list that we make up for the occasion. Then we usually separate and spend the remaining time alone with the Lord in the Word, prayer, praise, and reflection. Sometimes we feel richly rewarded, sometimes

not. But we invest these times by faith and see results whether or not we feel them at the time.

As Christian workers, Ruth and I have more control over our schedules than many people do. Yet extra times with God are necessary for anyone convinced of the priority of prayer. Often this requires missing a desirable or important activity such as a visit with friends, reading a magazine, an evening of television, or overtime at work.

A. W. Tozer portrayed a praying Christian as a constant threat to the stability of Satan's government. "The Christian is a holy rebel loose in the world with access to the throne of God,"⁴ he wrote. Since prayer is lethal to his purposes, Satan does his utmost to interfere when we pray. He especially opposes us in this matter of making time for prayer. He knows what it is going to cost him, so he fights us.

In spite of Satan's attempts to keep you from it, make time for prayer. Decide by faith to give prayer priority over activities.

GIVE GOD YOUR BEST TIME

For daily time with the Lord, the quiet morning before the activities of the day begin seems uniquely blessed by God. In *Power Through Prayer*, E. M. Bounds writes,

The men who have done the most for God in this world have been early on their knees. He who fritters away the early morning, its opportunity and freshness, in other pursuits than seeking God will make poor headway seeking Him the rest of the day.⁵

The mere discipline of rising early has no special virtue, nor is God limited to meeting us only in the morning. Our afternoons and evenings, however, are easily eroded by unexpected activities that crowd out our intended quiet time, or we become too tired to enjoy His fellowship. The recognition that God is the most important person in my life, is of great consequence.

One way to demonstrate God's priority in our lives is to get to bed early enough to rise and meet our Father without dozing. I sometimes must deny myself the luxury of consuming an hour at night doing useful-but-secondary things—skimming a magazine, straightening my desk, lingering over a snack—when I should be preparing for that special appointment with God.

Some people function more effectively at night. For them, perhaps afternoons or evenings are best for their quiet times. "Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind"⁶ about what time is best for him. If you have your time with God later in the day, take at least five minutes in the morning to commit yourself and your day to Him, and to fix your heart on some truth from the Scriptures. Put your armor on before the battle begins, not after it ends.

BE CREATIVE

The busier we are, the more ingenious we must be to find time for fellowship with God. I know men who commute to work, leaving home at 5 a.m. and returning in time for a late dinner. They have learned to use those long rides for reading, prayer, and reviewing Scripture verses, even when standing on a crowded bus. Others use a portion of their lunch hour for reading and prayer.

Busy mothers have a different problem, for small children often wake up early and need attention all day long. Some mothers have a quiet time when the children nap. Ruth Graham, wife of the famous evangelist Billy Graham and mother of five children, kept several Bibles open around the house. She would find times during the day when she could pick up one of the Bibles for a few moments of fellowship with the Lord. This helped her focus her attention on Him as she proceeded with her work.

Many mothers find it helpful to copy verses on slips of paper or cards and tape them above the kitchen sink, on their bathroom mirror, or near the ironing board.

Susannah Wesley, mother of the great eighteenth-century evangelist and Christian leader John Wesley, had nineteen children. When she wanted to pray and meditate, she would sit in her rocking chair and cover her face with her apron. She trained her children to respect these times of quietness and fellowship with God.

These solutions may not be ideal, but they are creative and demonstrate a heart that makes time for Christ. In *The Practice of Prayer*, G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the value of even a short quiet time:

Five minutes with Him in which the soul is touched by the forces of eternity will mean a day full of spiritual vigor. God can do much in five minutes of a man's time if no more can honestly be spared. He can do nothing in five minutes for the man who should give Him sixty, but who is slothful.⁷

We must jealously guard the time we set apart for the Lord and use it well. Give Him the best time you possibly can. Tune your heart to love Him, obey Him, and tell others about Him. Continually remind yourself, as James Gilmour reminded his readers, that God is waiting to answer your call.

Cannot the same wonders be done now as of old? . . . Oh that God would give me more practical faith in Him! Where now is the Lord God of Elijah? He is waiting for Elijah to call on Him.⁸

Pray ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

Just as God waits upon our personal call to Him, so He waits upon our call to Him for others. Often we remember incidents that happened years ago: our school days, a special friendship, a life-changing conference, a mistake or attitude we regret. How does God want us to use such thoughts?

God's receptive ear motivates me to pray for friends and acquaintances who flash to mind though I may not have seen them for years. Are they still alive? Have they ever trusted Christ? Are they walking in victory? Do they have special needs? Assuming they are still living, I offer a brief prayer for their salvation or their spiritual progress. I pray on the spot wherever I am, for the flash of remembrance if quickly forgotten.

Short, concise prayers offered anytime, anywhere, are both scriptural and immensely useful. Nehemiah was a master of such prayers. While he was serving as cupbearer for Artaxerxes, he received the distressing news that the wall of Jerusalem had been broken down and the gates had been burned. Later, when King Artaxerxes unexpectedly asked Nehemiah to state his request regarding Jerusalem, he quickly "prayed to the God of heaven," then answered the King.⁹ Later in Jerusalem, when enemies tried to frighten Nehemiah and his men to prevent them from rebuilding the city wall, his emergency prayer was, "But now, O God, strengthen my hand."¹⁰ Nehemiah concluded his book with a brief cry that he often used, with variations: "Remember me, O my God, for good."¹¹

God never limits us to scheduled times for approaching Him. Each of us has a private line, an immediate connection that we can use without any preliminaries. The switchboard never gives us a busy signal, nor need we fear monopolizing God's time and crowding out someone else.

We need diligence in using our private line whenever the Lord prompts us, whether for ourselves or others. Everything that concerns us interests Him. The great antidote for worry, weakness, frustration, and disappointment is to pray about everything.

Learning to pray about what comes to mind during the day helps develop the habit of praying without ceasing, as we're told to do in 1 Thes. 5:17. Sometimes a prayer is only a few seconds long. At other times we start with one brief request, and the Lord leads us on to pray for a number of things.

Think of odd moments of the day when you could engage in brief prayers; for example, standing in line, walking between classes, riding in an elevator, or waiting for an appointment. Decide also on specific acts that will remind you to pray: leaving the house, beginning a new task, sealing a letter, or washing dishes.

ARROW PRAYERS GET RESULTS

One of the shortest prayers recorded in the Bible is a three-word cry of desperation: "Lord, save me!" Peter had suddenly realized the total impossibility of walking on water. His faith faltered and he began to sink. At a time like that, a "proper prayer" with introductory phrases, eloquence, and careful grammar was inadvisable. Peter's arrow prayer was enough. Christ immediately reached out His hand and rescued His sinking apostle.¹²

We have had similar experiences with prayers which, like arrows shot from a bow toward a target, are shot toward heaven for immediate help, guidance, or protection, or in response to special prompting.

Once in India we were in a taxi racing to Bombay's Santa Cruz Airport when it began to rain. As we approached a turn, an oil slick caused our taxi to skid toward people waiting at a bus stop. Like Peter, I had no time to say any more than, "Lord Jesus, take over!" Miraculously the taxi straightened out. Then it began to skid in the other direction toward a concrete wall. Again I shot an arrow prayer, "Jesus, take over, take over!" The trembling driver finally straightened out the taxi. Ruth and I, also shaken, rejoiced and praised God for His care and quick answers.

Not all arrow prayers are emergency cries for help. One evening my wife, then a widow, began to think of her daughter Doreen's limited supply of blouses, and how often she had to wash and iron them. Ruth casually talked it over with God: "Father, Doreen doesn't have enough blouses to last all week. That's all right, but it would be nice to have more." Two days later the doorbell rang. There stood the postman with a package from a church in another state. In the package, which had been mailed several days before Ruth prayed, were blouses for Doreen plus two pairs of jeans for her brother, Brian. As the Lord states in Isaiah 65:24, "It will . . . come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear."

We can use arrow prayers to intercede for others, even strangers. Many times when I pass a person on the street or see someone on a bus, the Lord prompts me to pray that the person might come to know Him or have a special need met. Though we seldom learn of specific answers to such prayers, God hears them.

One of my college friends, Virgil, a cheerleader at the University of California, came to know the Lord. Betty, a Christian who had passed out uniforms to men enrolling in university military training, heard of his conversion. Excitedly she told me how the Lord had specifically prompted her to pray for Virgil a few months before, as he and scores of others picked up their uniforms. She had prayed, "Lord save this young man," and had given him little further thought. Probably Betty's arrow prayer was just one of the prayers that brought Virgil to know Christ, but it played a part.

With all the encouragement God gives us to pray, why do we neglect so many opportunities? I wonder if some day we will meet the Lord with the surprised comment, “But, Lord, if I had known You were going to answer all those tiny, casual prayers, I would have prayed more!”

CULTIVATING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Praying anywhere, anytime includes more than just making requests. It involves confessing as soon as we realize we have sinned, so that our fellowship with God is kept intact. It also involves praise and thanksgiving for God Himself, for the blessings He bestows, and for the events He allows in our lives. “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”¹³

Constant prayer involves a day-in and day-out interchange of thought with God. If a matter is the subject of our thinking, we can make it a subject of conversation with God, bringing Him into our thoughts as we would any close friend. Brother Lawrence, when asked why he felt prayer was important, replied, “We establish in ourselves a sense of God’s presence by continually conversing with Him.”

Moment-by-moment praying keeps our confidence centered in God. Consciously relying on God keeps us from unconsciously relying on ourselves. The secret uplifting of our hearts to depend on God does not mean we will become “so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good.”

Throughout the day our mind is occupied with a flow of thoughts. These thoughts fluctuate from the useful (planning, studying, concentrating on a conversation) to the idle (daydreaming, letting our minds wander) to the harmful (mental arguments, worries, complaints, lustful fantasies). God wants us to redirect this undercurrent of thoughts, and has implanted His Spirit in ours to renew our mind and help us focus it on things above.¹⁴ This new flow of thoughts takes us beyond occasional *acts* of prayer and even a regular *habit* of prayer into a *life* of prayer, in which our thoughts are directed toward God.

Although we cannot consciously think of God at every moment, we can bring Him into everything, including tasks or problems that demand intense concentration. And as the Spirit controls and molds our mind, it becomes like the indicator on a scale; when no weight is present, it automatically points upward.

PRACTICAL HELPS

The habit of constant prayer is not developed quickly. All of us need to grow in it.

One aid to continual conversation with God is memorizing His Word. His Word serves as a built-in speaker through which God can talk to us in special ways throughout the day. In response we can talk to Him further about the meaning and application of the verses and can use them in prayer for ourselves and others. God’s Word in our hearts helps us hear Him speak as well as converse with Him.

Another help is to formulate a basic prayer that becomes our special arrow prayer for the present period of our life, a prayer that we can use repeatedly to turn our hearts to God. Here are some examples.

- (1) Lord, I choose to be joyful and confident right now, because Christ is my life and You are in control of my circumstances.
- (2) I can do all things through Christ who infuses inner strength into me.¹⁵
- (3) The Lord God omnipotent reigns, in His universe and in me. Hallelujah!

Make up a prayer and use it to increase your confidence in God and deepen your friendship with Him.

By praying anytime, anywhere, we allow God to be our steady companion. Prayer should become the key of the morning as we get out of bed, the bolt at night as we fall asleep, and the breath of our in-between hours.

From “Make Time for Prayer” and “Pray Anytime, Anywhere” in *Pray: How to Be Effective in Prayer*, by Warren Myers with Ruth Myers (NavPress, 1984).

- » **See Also:** *Sidebar: Prayer Can Do Anything God Can Do*
- » **See Also:** *Sidebar: Getting The Most Out Of Your Quiet Time*

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