

LIFERESOURCES

SPENDING EXTENDED TIME IN PRAYER

The idea of spending an extended time in prayer—a half day or more—can seem so difficult that we never do it. But the guidelines listed here can help you approach such a time with the right preparation and the right attitude, and to gain richly from the experience.

FIVE REASONS

In [*How to Spend a Day in Prayer*](#), Lorne Sanny give us these reasons for taking a break in our busy lives to spend a lengthy time alone with God.

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.

2. For 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, 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 the times become more serious around us, we need to reconsider the value of personal prayer, both to accomplish and deter.

4. For prayerful consideration of our 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.

5. For adequate preparation. If God has given us plans and purposes in these 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.

SCHEDULING YOUR TIME

Divide the time into three parts:

1. Wait on the Lord—to realize His presence, to be cleansed, and to worship Him.
2. Pray for others. Ask specific things for them. Use Paul's prayers in the New Testament to pray for them, and pray for them what you are praying for yourself.
3. Pray for yourself. Be totally honest with God, and yet not too introspective. (In many cases, a person will do better to pray for himself before praying for others.) As Lorne Sanny said, "You will end the day worse than you started if all you do is think of yourself and your own problems."

MAKING A WORRY LIST

While you need to heed Sanny's warning about spending the whole day absorbed in your own problems, you may find it helpful to follow the steps below in making a "worry list." This will help you pray more effectively for yourself.

1. Give some thought to current conflicts, problems, concerns, or frustrations, and write them down and number them. List anything that is "bugging" you. No matter how small an item is, if it is of concern to you, list it.
2. Every worry you have in the world should be on that piece of paper—it is all there! When you are satisfied that this is so, go on to step three. (It is not uncommon for a person to have 20 or more items.)
3. Go through the list item by item. On each item determine whether you can do nothing about it because it is beyond your control, or whether you can do something to resolve it.

Whatever your conclusion, pray about each issue. But if you feel you can take action about it, write down what you plan to do. (You will probably find many other things to add to this "do list" throughout your time of prayer.)

WHAT TO TAKE WITH YOU

The essential items to have with you are a Bible, paper, and a pen or pencil. Other helpful items include:

- A clock or watch
- Prayer letters from missionaries and other Christian workers
- A favorite devotional book
- Your current prayer list
- Your quiet time journal
- A hymnal Scripture memory cards
- Notes from your last extended time in prayer
- Your family or personal budget
- A bag lunch and beverage
- A calendar

HOW TO STAY AWAKE AND ALERT

1. Get adequate rest the two nights before.
2. Change positions—sit a while, walk around, sit, walk, and so on.

3. Have variety in what you do. Read the Scriptures, then prayer, then write, and so on.
4. Pray aloud—in a whisper or soft voice if necessary.

TAKING NOTES

Taking notes during your extended time in prayer will give you a record of the things the Lord is speaking to you about, and also help you keep your time organized.

In addition, when we pray we often have something come to mind that we feel we should take action on, or that we have forgotten to do—perhaps totally unrelated to what we are praying about. By keeping paper ready to list these things so we can act on them later, we can avoid prolonged distraction.

Toward the end of your time in prayer you will want to spend fifteen minutes or so writing down some conclusions. Summarize the major impressions of your time.

Keep these notes in a notebook and review them weekly for a while. This will ensure that you follow through on the things God has impressed on you.

TWO QUESTIONS

Again, we quote Lorne Sanny:

"The result of your day in 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 questions 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.

"God bless you as you do this—and do it soon!"

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