

Take a step in prayer

The New Testament indicates that the apostles of Jesus prayed at specific times during the day. That tradition was practiced throughout the early church and continues today in monasteries and convents around the world. These are called the **Seven Historical (Canonical) Hours of Prayer**, the **Divine Office**, or the **Breviary**. The Divine Office is also loosely practiced in most mainline denominations (Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, United Church, Reformed).

"Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws." Psalm 119:164

In modern days, these prayer times have been partnered with specific prayers for personal prayer:

Time	Prayer Hour	Prayers for personal use
6 am	First Hour (Prime/Matins)	Psalm 5 or St. Patrick's Breastplate
9 am	Third Hour (Trece)	The Lord's Prayer
Noon	Sixth Hour (Sext)	Psalm 23
3 pm	Ninth Hour (None)	Psalm 117
6 pm	Vespers (Evensong)	Psalm 150
9 pm	Compline	Psalm 4 or the Prayer of St. Francis
Midnight	Nocturns	Psalm 134 or Psalm 119:62

Mohammed gave the Muslims have a beautiful image about their 5 daily prayers, which we borrow here to speak about the seven prayer hours of the Divine Office:

It is as if a river of grace is flowing in the street outside our homes.

Seven times a day, we go and bathe in it.

What sin or dirt could possibly cling to us?

The Christian church has also developed corporate prayer services for Matins (Morning Prayer), Vespers (Evening Prayer) and Compline (Night Prayer). A version of these services appears in our Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW), beginning on page 298. Following the Compline services are prayers intended to help with hourly daily prayers. This collection is called "Responsive Prayer" or Suffrages, and begins on p. 328. To find these resources easily, they occur in the ELW immediately before the Psalms.

There are many, many verses and passages in scripture that speak about prayer and direct us to give personal devotion to God.

Here are a few:

O Lord, hear me as I pray;

pay attention to my groaning.

Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,

for I pray to no one but you.

Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord.

Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly. Psalm 5:1-3

Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Psalm 32:6-7

[Jesus said,] “And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. “This, then, is how you should pray: “ ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Matthew 6:5-15

[Jesus said,] “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:41

[Jesus said,] “But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Luke 6:27-31

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not

give up. He said: “In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’ “For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’ ” And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:1-8

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. Romans 8:26

And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ. Colossians 4:3

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

The scriptures instruct us to pray for these reasons:

God cares about our requests and desires

God is our refuge

God will deliver

God wants us to grow in love toward others

God wants us to experience peace and joy

We should not give up

We will experience the presence of the Holy Spirit

So the gospel may spread

Prayer is God’s will for us

To protect us from temptation

The scriptures help us understand that prayer is our main mode of communication with God. Through prayer we learn the discipline of listening for God and the boldness of speaking, asking, and even demanding things of God. In prayer, we develop and strengthen our relationship with God and our concern for other people.

Take a step in your prayer life

- Pick one day of the week and pray the canonical hours. You can substitute the 6am and midnight hours with the hour you awake and the hour to go to sleep. Pray the canonical hours on the same day for a number of weeks. As you settle into this routine, take note of the changes in you and in your life. You may borrow an ELW from the worship space to support you in this practice. Use the Matins, Vespers, Compline and Suffrage prayers and the Psalms section, if you desire.
- Walk the labyrinth. Labyrinth brochures are available in the church office. Contact McDougall United (403) 252-1620, Deer Park United (403) 278-8263, or Stephen's Anglican (403) 244-4879 to arrange to walk their indoor labyrinth(s). Walk the labyrinth expecting to relinquish your burdens and receive a Word from God.
- There are a myriad of books about prayer and prayer books filled with prayers. (The pastors have many of these books in their personal library that are available for you to borrow.) Choose one that will aid you in taking a step in your prayer life.
- A powerful prayer life includes stilling yourself and your desires to listen intently for God. To listen for God, practice deep breathing prayer. Take a deep breath. As you exhale, try to let your thoughts leave with your breath. Breathe like this for a number of minutes, attempting to completely empty your mind. You may need to practice this several times over a number of days before experiencing success with this practice. When your mind is clear, try to keep it that way as long as you can. Try to keep the stillness and listen for God...
- Be vulnerable with someone else. Ask them and trust them to pray for you. Do the same for them.
- Write your own version of a well-known prayer, like the Lord's Prayer, the Prayer of St. Francis, or your favorite Psalm. Translate the ancient words into your own words, not as a writing exercise, but as an act of prayer and devotion. Take a week or more to do this work, coming back to your words and revising them several times until your own words feel true to you.

As with every mark of discipleship, the pastors are available to meet with you for prayer, consultation and guidance as you take new steps. Remember that taking these steps in prayer is an act of spiritual growth and deepening discipleship. May God bless your growth and your prayer life.