

Time in prayer – practical tips



When it comes to our personal devotional time with God, people have many questions. While people honestly want to spend time with God, they simply just do not know where to start and what to do. The following may serve as some practical guidelines to help you spend the desired time with the Lord.

1. **Waking up**

Waking up for an early morning prayer time remains one of the most challenging activities in one's prayer life. Should you set an alarm or allow the Holy Spirit to wake you? If you really want to spend time with the Lord, set an alarm, even if you do wake up by yourself – you do not want to miss out on time with the Lord! After setting your alarm to wake up for some weeks, your body will become used to waking up at that time. Even so, if you want to make sure you don't miss out on your prayer time, keep that alarm set!

2. **Staying awake**

Once you are awake, the next challenge is to stay awake for the duration of your prayer time. Although our time with God is 'spiritual' we need our bodies to work with us in order to have a meaningful time with God! First thing, after having washed your face with the coldest water you can manage, make yourself something to drink. This helps waking up the body. If you are not fasting, have a small protein snack e.g. small piece of cheese, an egg, peanut butter, biltong, etc. That will stabilise your blood sugar levels and prevent you from feeling sleepy one hour later. Do not be religious about it though. You can also take a quick shower or engage any other similar activity to make sure your body is awake.

3. **Off to bed**

It will be extremely hard to be productive at work the next day if you go to bed late and try to get up early for prayer. You may be successful in doing so for a few days, but will quickly start falling behind on both ends! Therefore, if getting up early to pray is a priority to you, then going to bed earlier will be necessary to fulfill your priority. Try to allow for at least 7-9 hours of sleep.

4. **Set your mind on things above**

Some days our prayer time flows freely and without any hindrance. On other days it may be more challenging to focus on the Lord and prayer. One way to deal with a distracted mind, is to write down your thoughts or prayers to God. You can also open your Bible and re-write a chapter, verse-by-verse, praying it as you write. This will be of great help in focussing your mind, as well as keeping you awake. After about 20 minutes of doing this, your mind will quiet down and your prayer time should become much easier and focussed.

5. **Speak with God as a friend**

Sometimes we are so focussed on praying down our list of requests, that we forget to speak to the Lord as our friend! How do you do that? Invite God into your day that lies ahead. Thoughtfully speak to Him through all your upcoming appointments, responsibilities, etc. – even simple things like what to cook and helping children with homework. Also, throughout the day, ask Him questions as you would a friend – in everything make Him part of your day. This will help you to continue your fellowship with the Lord for longer than just your morning devotions. The Lord is more than just a prayer-answering-God. He is also your friend.

6. **When feeling overwhelmed**

When going through a really tough time, like dealing with the trauma of death or illness of a friend or family member, it can be really difficult to focus on God when coming to the place of prayer. Just know this – it is normal to feel overwhelmed during a time of crisis and you are not less spiritual because you struggle to pray at such times. God knows that too. Some wise counsel: do not stop or skip your devotional times. Just do something different while still presenting yourself before the Lord at these times. You can listen and worship along with a worship DVD, or just listen to an audio Bible of your choice. Let the Word and worship wash over you. This is how we strengthen ourselves in the Lord every day. Prayer and intercession will spontaneously start to flow from your heart again – you do not have to 'force' it.

7. **Fasting and prayer**

Sometimes, the Holy Spirit prompts us to enter times of fasting and prayer. Where do you start? If it is your first time, start with something simple like skipping one meal or cutting away at treats altogether. Never see your times of 'fasting' as an opportunity to lose weight while doing a spiritual exercise. Put that out of your mind and set your mind on the Lord alone. Do some research on Biblical fasts and carefully read guidelines on the *do's* and *don'ts* when fasting.

8. **Outward distractions**

Apart from quieting your minds there are basic things you can do to help you minimise distractions. Some of these are: put your mobile phone on silent and leave it in another room while you are spending time with God – rather take along a notebook and make notes of things you want to remember afterwards. Do not look at your watch all the time. Do not respond to every thought that crosses your mind, just jot down things you want to pursue later.

9. **Waiting**

At the end of your devotional time your heart and mind will generally be quiet and more at peace. Spend some time just quietly waiting on the Lord. Ask Him: *Lord is there anything you want to share with me today – here I am, speak Lord.* Then wait! And write down what you hear Him say, so you can act upon it afterwards.

10. **Extending prayer times**

At times the Holy Spirit may prompt you to extend your existing prayer times, either for a

specific purpose or to cause you to become stronger in the place of prayer. How should you respond to such promptings? Once you know this is the Holy Spirit and not your own flesh/self-effort, you may consider the following. Add 5-10 minutes to your existing prayer time. Alternatively, add another daily time of set-apart prayer of a further 10-15 minutes. This will help you build stamina in the place of prayer. You may also consider setting apart a whole weekend in prayer to meet that prompting of the Holy Spirit. You will be stretched a bit, but if you persevere you will be very blessed by the new 'ground' you have won!