

How to Pray for Extended Hours

(Part1)

I urge upon you communion with Christ a growing communion. There are curtains to be drawn aside in Christ that we never saw, and new foldings of love in Him. I despair that I shall ever win to the far end of that love, there are so many plies in it. Therefore dig deep, and sweat and labour and take pains for Him, and set by as much time in the day for Him as you can. We will be won in the labour. — Samuel Rutherford (Scottish Pastor in the 1600s). It is the desire for many believers to grow in their prayer life, and this is often seen in the duration of their time spent with God. Some people will say that it is not about quantity, but it is about quality. The reality is that the quality of a relationship often increases when the quantity of time spent with that person increases. Quality and quantity therefore are not mutually exclusive. I find it interesting that in our intimate relationships we value time spent with someone as a positive but often with time spent with God people are hesitant to measure it. It is easy to understand why one's spouse would be upset if they are taken to the Maldives for holiday but then told it will just be for 30 minutes. They understand that such brevity will affect the quality of the holiday. I believe we can apply this to our prayer lives. Not all rules are bad. You have empowering rules and debilitating rules. When a couple has a date night each week, that is an empowering rule to ensure that they spend time with each other. It is no different in our relationship with God. *Mt 26:40 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter.* This statement from Jesus shows me that He was conscious of a time period spent in prayer and He was surprised that the disciples could not last for that time period. This statement also shows me that Jesus confronted them about it. Therefore, in this message I will also challenge you with regards to the time you spend in prayer and give you some practices that will take your prayer life to another level.

1. Face yourself

Conduct an audit of your prayer life. Self-assessment is always the starting point for change to occur. Have you made judgements about other people's prayer lives not realising that you need abundant grace in this area?

What type of Christian do you want to be? Do you have a vision for your prayer life?

God's grace in this area is abundant but we need to come to Him in brokenness.

As the Lord convicts you, make sure you repent and turn away from prayerlessness.

Rev 2:4-5 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

These verses show me that there are certain actions and deeds associated with first love. True repentance results in you doing those deeds. I also see here that Jesus can have things against New Testament believers and indeed there are consequences when we don't adjust. He has just affirmed the Church at Ephesus for their perseverance and other good deeds, but He specifically challenges them with regards to their first love. When your love for Christ cools then often the first thing to leave is your prayer life. Be careful of the "halo effect", where your one strength causes you to develop a blind-spot, where you can't acknowledge your prayerlessness.

Develop a problem statement e.g. *I only pray in corporate prayer meetings. My prayer life is inconsistent. I am too shy to pray. I have been too critical of other people's prayers and now I struggle to pray. I only pray when I am in trouble. I try to pray perfect prayers. I find it hard to tell people to stop disturbing me when I am praying.*

When the diagnosis is accurate then we are more likely to have an accurate solution. Let's also have a sober view of our spirituality. Praying for one hour a day is not impressive. It is only 1/24 of the day. It is important to identify the barriers to your growth in prayer and then to create steps to overcome these barriers. This sermon is largely to do with these steps.

2. Be absolutely persuaded that prayer makes a difference

Our prayers lay the track down on which God's power can come. Like a mighty locomotive, his power is irresistible, but it cannot reach us without rails. (Watchman Nee). The Lord spoke to me recently and said **prayerlessness is not a prayer problem but a belief problem.** If you believe that your prayers will not make a difference, then you will not spend time in prayer. Prayers tend to be fervent and heartfelt when we truly believe that God hears us and will respond. The reason most of don't pray for places far from us like Outer Mongolia or Yemen is because we don't really believe our little prayers will make a difference.

James 4:2-3 2 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. 3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

These verses show me that prayer is a key to getting things in life. But I need to learn how to ask God. I cannot ask anyhow. This is why I keep saying in this series, how your prayer is packaged is crucial. This is how God has designed the world. He wants to use us to birth things through our prayers. **Prayer or the lack thereof will make a difference to the destiny of nations.** *Amos 3:7 Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.*

Ezek 22:29 – 31a The people of the land have practiced extortion and committed robbery. They have oppressed the poor and needy and have exploited the foreign resident without justice. 30I searched for a man among them to repair the wall and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, so that I should not destroy it. But I found no one. 31So I have poured out My indignation upon them and consumed them with the fire of My fury.

3. Grow in your love for people

I will not pray for extended periods for you if I don't really care about you. There will be no depth to my prayer, and it will be over in two minutes. **Compassion causes us to do things we would not ordinarily do.** Many of us have been hardened by life and are just trying to cope and survive. Unfortunately, this can make us very self-absorbed. We don't have time to dedicate hours to praying for other people. You are worth my time. You are worth me getting up early. You are worth me giving up that TV show. The little time we have is given to our own issues.

Romans 5:5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Galatians 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

4. Understand that time spent with God is initially a discipline

In order to grow in a discipline, you need to measure it. Your flesh does not naturally like to pray. There are other things it prefers to do.

Mt 26:40-41 (BSB) 40Then Jesus returned to the disciples and found them sleeping. “ Were you not able to keep watch with Me for one hour?” He asked Peter. 41“Watch and pray so that you will not enter into temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

After Jesus challenged the disciples with regards to prayer He reveals why it was difficult for them. Our intentions are good, but our physical body does not always follow what our spirit wants. **Discipline is following through with what you have pre-decided is best for you to do despite your emotional state at the time.** After exercising this discipline for some time, it becomes a habit and then from there it turns into delight. A few years ago, I made a decision to pray for a certain time period each day. This is important. Pre-decide what your goal is. Paul J Meyer said, **Success is the progressive realisation of predetermined worthwhile personal goals.** You can't talk about success without talking about goals. By God's grace I managed to keep my commitment to the Lord every day for 3 years without fail. He did not allow me to talk about the time period during that time. In past years I hadn't always kept my commitment. Sometimes it really felt like a discipline. I didn't always know what to pray about and sometimes it meant praying at odd hours after having done various chores. I would often feel relieved that I had done my quota of prayer for the day and could carry on with other things.

More recently I have increased this time period, and yet I find that the grace to pray has also increased. On most days I exceed the stipulated amount of prayer because God gives me the space to pray, and I find that I have more things to pray about. It has shifted from discipline to delight. When you understand that prayer is initially a discipline, you see the importance of building your prayer muscle or staying power. I remember in about 2000-2001 spending time doing personal prayer crusades. This is where you spend a week in prayer increasing the time period each day. You might pray for 1 hour on the first day, slightly more on day two, and so on. This is a powerful reminder that growth in prayer is incremental. We are all in different places in our prayer lives and it is important to run your own race. Many people feel inspired by someone and try to do quantum leaps but then often it is not sustainable. I know from distance running that there is the 10% rule that states, **“You should never increase your weekly mileage by more than 10% over the previous week.”** Of course this protects you from injuries. I am not saying you have to apply this exact percentage but the principle of incremental growth applies. I encourage you to listen to my message on the Power of Habits and apply it to creating a habit of extended time in prayer. **Be willing to adjust your lifestyle to make room for prayer.** Living a life of prayer means that you can't spend as much time doing certain things. Your TV watching and oversleeping might have to change. I might not be able to watch every single football game I want to watch in order to fit in the amount of daily prayer I want. **Are you willing to become an early riser?**

5. Understand that extended times of prayer are normal in scripture

Sometimes we don't extend our times of prayer because we think it is extreme or weird. *Luke 6:12-13 12 In those days Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and He spent the night in prayer to God. 13When daylight came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also designated as apostles:...*

There are certain life situations that require extended periods of prayer. Many of us are hiring people or partnering with others in business with very little prayer.

Luke 2:36-37 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.

6. Be inspired by the extended times of prayer in church history

I will share a couple of examples. (Adapted from Jared Brock, flowingfaith.com)

Nikolaus Zinzendorf The good Count Ludwig (1700s North Carolina) opened his vast estate to a group of Moravian refugees, and allowed them to start a village on his German property. The village was called Herrnhut, meaning “the Lord’s Watch.” Before long, they started fighting about theology and it got so bad that Zinzendorf made them sign a vow of unity and commitment to prayer. One thing led to another, and that prayer meeting ran 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, for over hundred years straight.

I’ve visited Herrnhut, the tiny town that fuelled a massive missions movement. It was so inspiring to see what a small group of people can do, when fully devoted to God. I love a quote by Zinzendorf that sums up his life: “Preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten.”

Excerpt from EM Bounds on David Brainerd. No sublimer story has been recorded in earthly annals than that of David Brainerd; no miracle attests with diviner force the truth of Christianity than the life and work of such a man. Alone in the savage wilds of America, struggling day and night with a mortal disease, unschooled in the care of souls, having access to the Indians for a large portion of time only through the bungling medium of a pagan interpreter, with the Word of God in his heart and in his hand, his soul fired with the divine flame, a place and time to pour out his soul to God in prayer, he fully established the worship of God and secured all its gracious results. The Indians were changed with a great change from the lowest bestowments of an ignorant and debased heathenism to pure, devout, intelligent Christians; all vice reformed, the external duties of Christianity at once embraced and acted on; family prayer set up; the Sabbath instituted and religiously observed; the internal graces of religion exhibited with growing sweetness and strength. The solution of these results is found in David Brainerd himself, not in the conditions or accidents but in the man Brainerd. He was God’s man, for God first and last and all the time. God could flow unhindered through him....Brainerd lived the life of holiness and prayer. His diary is full and monotonous with the record of his seasons of fasting, meditation, and retirement. The time he spent in private prayer amounted to many hours daily. “When I return home,” he said, “and give myself to meditation, prayer, and fasting, my soul longs for mortification, self-denial, humility, and divorcement from all things of the world.” “I have nothing to do,” he said, “with earth but only to labour in it honestly for God. I do not desire to live one minute for anything which earth can afford.” After this high order did he pray: “Feeling somewhat of the sweetness of communion with God and the constraining force of His love, and how admirably it captivates the soul and makes all the desires and affections to centre in God, I set apart this day for secret fasting and prayer, to entreat God to direct and bless me with regard to the great work which I have in view of preaching the gospel, and that the Lord would return to me and show me the light of His countenance. I had little life and power in the forenoon. Near the middle of the afternoon God enabled me to wrestle ardently in intercession for my absent friends, but just at night the Lord visited me marvellously in prayer. I think my soul was never in such agony before. I felt no restraint, for the treasures of divine grace were opened to me. I wrestled for absent friends, for the ingathering of souls, for multitudes of poor souls, and for many that I thought were the children of God, personally, in many distant places. I was in such agony from sun half an hour high till near dark that I was all over wet with sweat, but yet it seemed to me I had done nothing. O, my dear Saviour did sweat blood for poor souls! I longed for more compassion toward them. I felt still in a sweet frame, under a sense of divine love and grace, and went to bed in such a frame, with my heart set on God.” It was prayer which gave to his life and ministry their marvellous power.