

Introduction to Daily Prayer

Daily prayer is an ancient practice, going back over 2,500 years, with roots in Solomon's Temple. The book of Acts (2:42, 3:1) indicates that Jesus' disciples participated in the daily prayer practices rooted in the Jerusalem Temple. As Christianity became distinct from Judaism the Church still maintained the practice of daily prayer. At first daily prayer was practiced by all Christians - laity, parish priests and monastic orders - but over time these services became too complicated for Christians engaged in the world of work and family to practice.

With its roots in Scripture, the Protestant Reformers were eager to reclaim the practice of daily prayer. These services help us to prayerfully engage Scripture, with readings from the Psalms, the Old and New Testaments, Canticles (songs developed from Scripture) and prayers rooted in biblical imagery.

The main services of daily prayer are the morning and evening services. Morning Prayer emphasizes the gift of creation, the resurrection and our commitment to living as Christ's disciples. In evening prayer we celebrate the light of Jesus Christ, even as darkness surrounds us. Evening prayer also emphasizes the theme of creation by making us mindful that while we slumber and sleep God does not, and our time of rest prepares us for the next morning's work. Another service of prayer is included, that of Prayer at the Close of Day. This service invites us to see sleep as a kind of "little death" and makes us mindful of our mortality by asking God to grant us a restful night and peace at the last. This complements Morning Prayer by reminding us that our baptism is completed in our death and by inviting us to die to sin (it is the only service of daily prayer that includes confession of sin). Prayer at Close of Day and Morning Prayer invite us into the baptismal rhythm of dying and rising with Christ.

Daily Prayer helps us fulfill the command to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:7). It is meant to be a discipline that gives structure and order to our prayer so we can learn how to pray. Daily Prayer also reminds that we are able to pray because we are part of a community of prayer, in fellowship with those who are listening to God's voice in Scripture and offering the same intercessions.

The Bible readings for daily prayer come from a two year lectionary that will lead us through the Bible over a two year period. It is based on the practice of *lectio continua*, the reading of books of Scripture from beginning to end. The proscribed "Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession" are meant to expand our horizons, teaching us not only to pray for ourselves and those people and places that are familiar, but also for a wide variety of people and places which reminds us of the scope of God's activity. Throughout the course of the week we pray for all people and places.

There are two versions of the services of Morning and Evening Prayer. One is an extended service that is best suited for a larger group setting and could be used to begin ministry team meetings, small groups and other gatherings. Some families may also appreciate this form of service as well. The other is an abbreviated service appropriate for family devotions or for private use. At their core these daily prayer services involve psalms, Scripture, silence and prayer. These services are not meant to limit the ways in which we pray, but to teach us to pray in such a way that we stand with prophets and apostles, saints and martyrs, as we seek God's presence and God's will. These prayers are meant to help us find our own voice as we learn to pray.

For more guidance in the practice of daily prayer you may want to purchase The Book of Common Worship: Daily Prayer (<http://www.cokesbury.com/forms/ProductDetail.aspx?pid=435320>) which includes fuller descriptions of each service of prayer as well as music options. May these practices encourage us to be hearers and doers of God's Word who make God's presence tangible in the midst of the world.