

Times of Prayer: Appointments to change the world

“Popcorn prayers” are wonderful. Those are the prayers we offer immediately when a need comes to mind or as a situation calls for it, like a friend giving a prayer request. But popcorn prayers are limited. They often don’t include those situations that demand our focused attention and longer periods of time. They usually don’t include those matters we want and need to address over time. For me, at least, if I don’t do that, at best I forget. At worst, I neglect the priorities I want to emphasize in prayer. God forbid we’re not standing by the side of our friends, family, church, nation, and world. So, does the Bible give any guidance on how often we pray? Yes, some.

Paul encourages to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). One commentator explained that “without ceasing” means “regularly” or “all throughout your day”. That’s helpful. Our mindset should be one of prayer. But it’s helpful as a part of that “regular” mindset to have specific times of prayer to address long-term, on-going concerns we don’t want to neglect in prayer because we forget about them.

Scripture tells us about the habits of godly people. For example, in Psalm 116:2, King David said he would call upon God as long as he lived. One way he carried that out is revealed in Ps. 55. David’s concern is the treachery of his friends. He prays that God will deal with them. Then, in verses 16 and 17, he describes how he himself will handle the situation.

“As for me, I will call upon God,
And the Lord shall save me.
Evening and morning and at noon
I will pray, and cry aloud,
And He shall hear my voice.”

Calling on the name of the Lord in Scripture is to invoke God’s name for help. If you notice, David’s approach was to do this three times a day. Their day was sunset to sunset, so he did it in the evening, morning, and at noon.

There’s no indication of why those times. I would simply guess one reason might have been that they were meal times and, with his attention away from other issues of life, they would have been times of gratitude for the food provided and times of relative rest. Now, on a personal note, I find that one of the best things I do everyday is to start my day in prayer before anything else. When I don’t, I often try to handle the day on my own. I have found that to be a massive mistake!

Daniel is known for at least two things; he was courageous and a great man of prayer. His enemies knew they couldn’t find fault in Daniel’s life (Daniel 6:5), except to try to find it in his devotion to God. Wow!

So, they conceived a plot to trap him in his lifestyle, which included prayer. They went to King Darius and suggested an edict. They asked him to “establish a royal statute and to

make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions” (6:7). King Darius signed it. Daniel was unfazed.

Scripture tells us that “...when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.” (6:10). Since early in his life, Daniel established the habit of praying three times a day.

This is not a command. But it is a good idea. Let’s talk about why we may not want to start this.

For my part, some of my reasons are:

- I’m lazy.
- I might forget.
- I don’t know what to pray for. What if I can’t think of anything?

I’m sure there are other reasons, but those come to mind. Let’s talk about solutions.

- No one said it had to be three times. I’m fairly certain one time is better than none.
- Keep it brief, especially to start. No one said it had to be more than a couple of minutes.
- Use something to remind you, like a recurring alarm on your phone or the times you eat. Hey, in that case, we may find ourselves praying six times a day!

Set up your prayer list. For example,

- Morning: A form of the Lord’s prayer, prayers for myself, my wife
- Noon: Family members, members of our church, friends
- Evening: Our nation/the world

I’ll try to remember to give you more thoughts on prayers (remember, I’m lazy and I forget), but this might be a start. If this intimidates you, start small. The Lord’s Prayer, spoken word-for-word, takes about 25 seconds. And, we’re supposed to pray it daily. Now, I would not pray it word-for-word. The idea of “vain repetition” might be the idea that we get more points by putting in more words or repeating the same ones. That wouldn’t be how you’d want your children to talk to you. So, rephrase the ideas in your own words.

And, aren’t there other things you want to pray about? Your health, your money/job, your family, their salvation and growth? Our nation, the COVID virus, the world’s condition? How about the Rapture or the Kingdom, our church, our friends? There are

hundreds of issues. Ask the Lord to give you wisdom and ideas.

In America, we've gotten way too busy and we get worn out. We don't feel we "have time" for what are often the most important disciplines of life. Whatever else the Virus has done for some of us, it has slowed some things down and forced us to face the Lord. I'm convinced prayer is vital and I'm convinced God listens. We do not have because we do not ask. So, ask. You shall receive.

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