



# FIXED HOUR OF PRAYER

**JESUS LEARNED TO PRAY IN THE TRADITIONAL HEBREW WAY.** In the morning, he prayed the Shema: “Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4) as well as a series of blessings known as the tephilla. In the afternoon the tephilla was prayed again. Evening prayer was identical to morning prayer but included private petitions. Like David, who prayed seven times a day (Psalm 119:164), and Daniel, who prayed three times a day (Daniel 6:10), Jesus and the Jews of his day prayed at set hours of the day. It was a devout Jew’s habit to go to the temple at the sixth and ninth hour (noon and three o’clock). After Jesus’ death, his disciples continued to pray at fixed hours of the day (Acts 3:1; 10:3, 9, 30). This custom of praying at set daily intervals quickly became part of the early church’s rhythm of prayer.

In the rich tapestry of African biblical spirituality, we find echoes of the ‘Desert Fathers and Mothers’, whose devout lives and profound insights into prayer deeply influenced Christian tradition. Their legacy intertwines with the early Church’s fervor for communion with God, birthing patterns of praying Scripture at fixed hours that seamlessly integrated rhythms of prayer and work.

In the vast expanse of time, perceived through the lens of African spirituality, the notion that every moment belongs to God resonates deeply. Thus, the logical extension was to punctuate the entire cycle of day and night with regular times for prayer. This intentional structuring of time wasn’t merely a spiritual exercise; it was a transformative practice intended to mold both the laity and the clergy into vessels of God’s compassion and grace.

## FIXED HOUR OF PRAYER PRACTICE

**Fixed-Hour of Prayer** illuminates a sacred rhythm of pausing throughout the day to connect with God, following the example set by Daniel in the Bible. By setting aside specific times for prayer, we emulate Daniel’s commitment to seeking God’s presence continually.

1. **Find a quiet space** free from distractions where you can focus your heart and mind on prayer.
2. **Begin with a few deep breaths**, allowing yourself to become present in the moment and open to God’s presence.

3. **As a symbol of God's light and presence within you**, consider lighting a candle, burning incense, or any other method that resonates with you.

## The Practice

### Morning Prayer (Prime):

*Scripture:* "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." - Mark 1:35

*Prayer:* Begin your day by offering it to God. Thank Him for the gift of a new day and ask for His guidance and presence throughout.

### Midday Prayer (Sext):

*Scripture:* "About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions." - Acts 22:6

*Prayer:* Pause in the middle of your day to reorient yourself towards God. Offer thanks for His sustaining presence and ask for His strength to carry you through the rest of the day.

### Afternoon Prayer (None):

*Scripture:* "In the afternoon, I got up from my meal—my thoughts in turmoil—and went out to the courtyard. I saw it all so clearly..." - Daniel 2:19

*Prayer:* As the day wanes, reflect on its events and offer them to God. Confess any shortcomings and seek His forgiveness and renewal.

### Evening Prayer (Vespers):

*Scripture:* "But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'" - Jonah 2:9

*Prayer:* Close your day with gratitude for God's faithfulness. Reflect on His blessings throughout the day and commit your worries and cares into His hands.

### Night Prayer (Compline):

*Scripture:* "In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety."  
- Psalm 4:8

*Prayer:* Before retiring to bed, surrender yourself to God's care. Ask for His protection through the night and reflect on His presence with you throughout the day.

Few of us can look at this list and not be overwhelmed. But **this is not where beginners to fixed-hour prayer start. We begin where we are.** We may already have one fixed time of prayer in the morning. So, we simply add one more time – perhaps in the middle of work – as a reminder that time is a gift made for work and relationship, relationship with God and others. As we regularly honor this one intentional moment with God, we begin to realize how the world and its demands control us, leaving us frantic and overwhelmed. Stopping to pray, even if we have to set the timer, cultivates an awareness of the unseen reality of God's presence in all times and things.

**Prayer offered at fixed hours can be spontaneous or liturgical.** We can pray Scripture, the Divine Office, memorized prayers, or simply pour our hearts to God.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. When do you find yourself drawn to prayer? What significance do those moments hold for you?
2. How do you keep a gentle reminder throughout the day of the deeper aspects beyond the routine of tasks, transactions, and responsibilities?
3. If you have little ones under your care, how do you carve out special moments to share in prayer with them?
4. What aspirations do you hold for these fixed times of prayer in shaping the lives of your children?
5. How do you view the use of memorized prayers or drawing from the prayers of others?
6. Exploring the essence of prayer, what qualities do you believe render a prayer truly authentic in your heart and spirit?

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

1. In addition to your normal time of prayer, establish one new time of prayer during the day. Set a timer or your computer to remind you to stop for one to fifteen minutes to pray. ~ After one week, consider what this has been like for you.
2. If you would like to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, try using *The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle. These three volumes are guides to pray for the entire year.
3. Choose one time in the day to stop for five minutes and pray with a friend. Use a liturgy or pray spontaneously.
4. When you wake in the middle of the night, don't fight with yourself about why you are awake. Enter into Vigils. Lean deeply into God and simply pray for the things that come to mind. Don't hurry. Attend to God as David did "in the watches of the night."

## GOD-GIVEN FRUIT

- keeping company with Jesus throughout the hours of the day
- turning the heart and mind to God at specific hours of the day and night
- growing detached from the all-absorbing compulsiveness of work
- integrating being and doing in your daily life
- developing the ability to hear a word from God in the midst of daily activities
- joining the timeless prayer rhythms of the church throughout the ages

## SCRIPTURE

- Psalm 119:164: "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws." This verse suggests a disciplined rhythm of prayer throughout the day, possibly at set intervals.
- Luke 18:10-14: The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector suggests the practice of prayer at set times, as the Pharisee boasts about his disciplined prayer routine: "I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." Be aware of our motives!
- "One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon." (Acts 3:1)
- "About noon the following day, . . . Peter went up on the roof to pray." (Acts 10:9)
- 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "pray continually." While this verse doesn't specify fixed hours of prayer, it emphasizes the attitude of constant communion with God, which could include regular times of prayer throughout the day.

*(Adapted from African Biblical Spirituality, Spiritual Disciplines Handbook by Adele Calhoun and Seven Sacred Pauses by Macrina Wiederkehr)*