

FIXED-HOUR PRAYER

DISCIPLINE EQUALS FREEDOM, WEEK 7

I. OUR CALL TO DISCIPLINE

Ephesians 5:16

II. OUR MODEL FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

III. FIXED-HOUR PRAYER EXPLAINED

“Fixed-hour prayer, often known as observing the hours or keeping the offices, is one of the seven spiritual disciplines that came directly into Christianity from Judaism. Like tithing, observance of the Sabbath, fasting, or following the liturgical year, it informed the spiritual life of Our Lord and of the twelve Apostles, just as it informs and shapes the faith and practices of millions of Christians today” (Phyllis Tickle, *The Divine Hours: Pocket Edition*, vii).

“First, there are seven offices observed in each day...or there are seven provided. Most lay Christians find themselves unable to observe all seven and choose, instead, to select for observation those hours that are most compatible with their individual schedules and daily lives. It is important to remember, as pastors frequently remind us, that it is not the prayers we do not say but rather those we do say that matter to God” (Phyllis Tickle, *The Divine Hours: Pocket Edition*, vii).

“Christians today, wherever they practice the discipline of fixed-hour prayer, frequently find themselves filled with a conscious awareness that they are handing their worship, at its final ‘amen,’ on to other Christians in the next time zone. Like relay runners passing a lighted torch, those who do the work of fixed-hour prayer create thereby a continuous cascade of praise before the throne of God. To participate in such a regimen with such an awareness is to pray, as did the Desert Fathers, from within the spiritual community of shared texts as well as within the company of innumerable other Christians, unseen but present, who have preceded one across time or who, in time, will follow one” (Phyllis Tickle, *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Autumn and Wintertime*, xi).

“The Divine Hours are prayers of praise offered as a sacrifice of thanksgiving and faith to God and as a sweet-smelling incense of the human soul before the throne of God. To offer them is to serve before that throne as part of the priesthood of all believers. It is to assume the ‘office’ of attendant upon the Divine. While the words and ordering of the prayers of the Divine Hours have changed and changed again over the centuries, that purpose and that characterization have remained constant. Other prayers may be petitionary or intercessory or valedictory or any number of other things, but the Liturgy of the Hours remains as an act of offering...offering by the creature to the Creator. The fact that the creature grows strong and his or her faith more sinewy and efficacious as a result of keeping the hours is a by-product (albeit a desirable one) of that practice and not its purpose” (Phyllis Tickle, *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Autumn and Wintertime*, xii-xiii).

IV. FIXED-HOUR PRAYERS IN FIRST CENTURY JUDAISM

“The faithful Jew recited the Shema not only in the synagogue but daily. *Shema* (‘hear’) is the opening word of Deuteronomy 6:4, the basic confession of Judaism. The recitation included Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:3-21; and Numbers 15:36-41. During the time of the temple it was accompanied by reciting the Decalogue, preceded by benedictions, and followed by an attestation of faith and praises of God as redeemer of Israel. The Shema was recited each morning and evening.

Prayer (*tefillah*) was said twice a day also, in the morning and at the time of the afternoon whole-offering in the temple (Berakoth 4.1; 1QS x:11; Josephus, *War* 2.8.5 [128-31], concerning the Essenes; cf. Acts 3:1). Some sources indicate prayer three times a day (Dan. 6:11; 2 Enoch 51:4). The *tefillah* consisted of a series of benedictions, finally fixed at eighteen....” (Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 561).

V. FIXED-HOUR PRAYERS IN THE BIBLE

Ps 119:62
Ps 119:164
Dan 6:10

Acts 3:1
Acts 10:3,
Acts 16:25 (?)

VI. FIXED-HOUR PRAYERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD)

“Some assign definite hours for prayer—as, for example, **the third, and sixth, and ninth**” (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.7).

Tertullian (155-220 AD)

“But concerning time, we shall not find superfluous the observance from extraneous sources of **certain hours** also—I mean those common ones which mark the periods of the day, **the third, sixth, and ninth, which you may find in the Scriptures were in established use**. The first [gift of the] Holy Spirit was poured out upon the assembled disciples at the third hour. On the day on which Peter experienced the vision of everything common in that vessel it was at the sixth hour that he had gone to the housetop to pray. He also, along with John, was going up to the Temple at the ninth hour when he restored the palsied man to soundness. And although these are simple statements, without any precept of observance, yet let this be good enough to set up a sort of presumption such as may both enforce a behest to pray and may as it were by a law drag us from business for a space for such an occupation, so that (as we read also was the practice of Daniel, arising evidently from Israel's discipline) **we may worship not less than at least thrice a day, being the debtors of three, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**, in addition of course to our statutory prayers which without any behest are due **at the coming in of daylight and night**” (On Prayer, 25).

Apostolic Traditions (3d Century AD)

¹Let every faithful man and every faithful woman, **when they rise from sleep at dawn**, before they undertake any work, wash their hands and pray to God....

⁵If you are at home, pray **at the third hour** and praise God. If you are elsewhere at that time, pray in your heart to God. For in this hour Christ was seen nailed to the wood....

⁷Pray also **at the sixth hour**. Because when Christ was attached to the wood of the cross, the daylight ceased and became darkness....

⁸Pray also **at the ninth hour** a great prayer with great praise, imitating the souls of the righteous who do not lie, who glorify God who remembered his saints and sent his Word to them to enlighten them. For in that hour Christ was pierced in his side, pouring out water and blood, and the rest of the time of the day, he gave light until evening....

¹⁰Pray also **before your body rests on your bed**.

¹¹**Around midnight** rise and wash your hands with water and pray. If you are married, pray together. But if your spouse is not yet baptized, go into another room to pray, and then return to bed....

¹⁷Likewise, **at the hour of the cock-crow**, rise and pray. Because at this hour, with the cock-crow, the children of Israel refused Christ, who we know through faith, hoping daily in the hope of eternal light in the resurrection of the dead.

Summary of Early Church Practice

“Not only the content of early Christian prayer was rooted in Jewish tradition; its daily structure too initially followed a Jewish pattern, with prayer times in the early morning, at noon and in the evening. Later (in the course of the second century), this pattern combined with another one; namely prayer times in the evening, at midnight and in the morning. As a result seven 'hours of prayer' emerged, which later became the monastic 'hours' and are still treated as 'standard' prayer times in many churches today. They are roughly equivalent to midnight, 6 a.m., 9 a.m., noon, 3 p.m., 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. Prayer positions included prostration, kneeling and standing. ... Crosses made of wood or stone, or painted on walls or laid out as mosaics, were also in use, at first not directly as objections of veneration but in order to 'orientate' the direction of prayer (i.e. towards the east, Latin *oriens*)” (Lössl, Josef, *The Early Church: History and Memory*, 135).

VII. A METHOD FOR FIXED-HOUR PRAYER

- The easiest way for us evangelical protestants to use this type of prayer is to use the material published by Phyllis Tickle on praying the divine hours (*The Divine Hours: A Manual for Prayer* [3 volumes]; also, *The Divine Hours: Pocket Edition*). She herself was part of the Episcopal church, and these books are broad enough to be used by Christians of any denomination.
- She has structured the hours into four offices: Morning, Midday, Vespers (evening), and Night.
- To use her book, purchase the volume related to the season we are in (*The Divine Hours: Prayers for Autumn and Wintertime*), and determine what week we are in by consulting the introduction. Set reminders on a phone or other device, and read the appropriate prayers four times a day. Make sure you read the introduction!
- An easier way to access this information can be used by anyone with a smartphone. Phyllis Tickle was gracious enough to allow one church to put all her material online in a convenient form that is updated four times a day based on date and time. To access this material, follow these directions:
 - Go to this website: <https://annarborvineyard.org/resources/pray-the-divine-hours/pray-the-divine-hours-cst/> (this is the link for those of us in central time, if you are in another time zone you will need to navigate to the correct page).
 - For ease I recommend you make a shortcut icon to this website to put on the home screen of your phone (Android: within Chrome tap on the triple dot menu, click Add to Home screen; IOS within Safari tap the share icon, scroll down to Add to Home Screen).
 - I recommend you set reminders for yourself so four times a day you will be reminded to pray the appropriate office. For example, set repeating reminders for 7:00 AM, 12:00PM, 5:00PM, and 10:00PM. You could use your calendar app, or even the prayer app Echo (<https://new.echoprayer.com/>).
 - When you get alone to pray using your phone each day, I suggest after you load the webpage you set your phone to airplane mode so you will not have any interruptions while you pray.
- As you read the prayers, make an effort to focus on the words and accept them as yours, so they become your prayers to God and not just another person's. This may take some practice.



TRAINING PLAN

“How do I handle those days when I’m just not ‘feeling it?’ Those days when I am tired or worn out or just sick of the grind... What do I do on those days? I GO ANYWAY. I GET IT DONE. Even if I am just going through the motions—I GO THROUGH THE MOTIONS.” —Jocko Willink, *Discipline Equals Freedom*, 48.

Circle the Level of Engagement You Are Committing to This Week

All four are good choices, and you don’t need to pick the same level every week.

First Steps:

- At least 2 full days this week pray using the method for fixed-hour prayer given on the previous page. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.

Hit Harder:

- At least 3 full days this week pray using the method for fixed-hour prayer given on the previous page. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide Week 7* below to guide your conversation.

Hard Core:

- At least 6 full days this week pray using the method for fixed-hour prayer given on the previous page. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide Week 7* below to guide your conversation.

Beast Mode:

- At least 6 full days this week pray using the method for fixed-hour prayer given on the previous page. After the last day spend some time thinking through its value for you.
- For these 6 days, in addition to the four offices published by Phyllis Tickle, pray the three additional offices (seven prayer times a day). Contact me if you are going to do this and I will help get you the appropriate prayers, since they are not online: grhodea@grandgrace.org; 469-250-0825.
- During this series we will process our experiences in discussion with another person or a small group of people. Sometime this week, meet up with one person discuss your experiences and encourage one another. Consider including people who are not part of our church as well. *Use Discussion Guide Week 7* below to guide your conversation.

READING: FIXED-HOUR PRAYER

Adapted from Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, Expanded Edition, 250-53

Desire	To stop my work and pray throughout the day
Definition	Fixed-hour prayers call for regular and consistent patterns of attending to God throughout the day
Scripture	<p>“One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon.” (Acts 3:1)</p> <p>“Seven times a day I praise you.” (Psalm 119:164)</p> <p>“About noon the following day,... Peter went up on the roof to pray.” (Acts 10:9)</p> <p>“When Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.” (Daniel 6:10)</p>
Practice Includes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupting work at set times for prayer • Following the prayers in the Liturgy of the Hours • Following a personal liturgy for prayer at set hours of the day • Stopping at the top of every hour for prayer
God-Given Fruit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Fixed-Hour Prayer (also known as Praying the Divine Office or Praying the Hours)

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. The *Didache*, an early manual of Christian practices, encouraged believers to pray the Lord’s Prayer three times daily (*Didache* 8.3).

Given this history, it is quite understandable how the early church fathers would develop patterns for praying Scripture at fixed hours that integrated rhythms of prayer and work. Since all time belongs to God, why not punctuate the entire cycle of day and night with regular times for prayer, which could potentially shape both laity and clergy. Certainly within monasteries, rhythms of prayer governed community life. And some of these prayer rhythms have been practiced without interruption since the third and fourth century.

Dorothy Bass writes in *Receiving the Day*:

The Liturgy of the Hours of the Order of Saint Benedict, which has structured the prayers of communities of women and men around the world for nearly fifteen hundred years, consists of up to eight sessions of psalmody during each twenty-four-hour period. The rhythms of Benedictine life

embody a steadfast attention to the “Sanctification of time,” not just for the sake of the monastics but for the sake of the world.

Benedict believed that both physical labor and prayer were in God’s hands. They were both God’s work. He is renowned for saying, “*Orare est laborare, laborare est orare*” (To pray is to work, to work is to pray). Benedictines today continue to punctuate their work with prayer rhythms begun over 1,600 years ago. Those who pray the hours not only pray through the Bible every year, but they pray through the Psalms each month.

The prayer times are

- Night prayers—*Vigils*
- Waking-up prayers—*Lauds*
- Prayers for beginning work—*Prime*
- Giving-thanks prayers in mid-morning—*Terce*
- Noonday prayer of commitment—*Sext*
- Midafternoon prayer—*None*
- Evening prayer of stillness—*Vespers*
- Going-to-sleep prayer of trust—*Compline*

Few of us can look at this list and not be overwhelmed. But this is not where beginners to fixed-hour prayers (praying the divine office, praying the hours) start. We begin where 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. And stopping to pray, even if we have to set the timer, cultivates an awareness of the unseen reality of God’s presence in all time and things. Annie Dillard says that fixed time of prayer shape our days: “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour and that one is what we are doing. A schedule defends us from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days. It is a scaffolding on which a worker can stand and labor with both hands at sections of time.”

Prayers offered at fixed hours can be spontaneous or liturgical. We can pray Scripture, the divine office, daily office, daily hours, memorized prayers or simply pour out our hearts to God.

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 prayer 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 prayer spontaneously.
4. When you wake in the middle of the night, don’t fight with yourself about why you are awake. Enter into *Vigils*. Learn 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.”

Resources on Fixed-Hour Prayer

The Divine Hours by Phyllis Tickle

The Music of Silence by David Steindl-Rast and Sharon Lebell

Network for Grateful Living, www.gratefulness.org

Praying the Hours by Suanne Guthrie

Receiving the Day by Dorothy C. Bass

DISCUSSION GUIDE WEEK 7: FIXED-HOUR PRAYER

Meet together this week with at least one other person to discuss your experiences. Later in the week would be ideal so you have some time to practice. Meeting in person is best, but over the phone or via video chat would work too.

Before meeting, each person should read pages 5-6 in this handout, as well as looking over again pages 1-4. Alternatively, you could read pages 5-6 together. Underline key parts of this reading and write down any questions you might have.

Questions for Your Group

1. Share your experiences this week using fixed-hour prayer.
2. Discuss the reading on page 5-6. What stood out to you?
3. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. Paul tells us to “pray continually.” What are a couple ways this concept could be understood? How does fixed-hour prayer contribute to this?
4. A key aspect of praying the divine hours is praying through the Psalms. In fact, typically when one goes through the divine hours over the course of a long period of time, one prays through most or all of the psalms. Discuss what you think makes the Psalms so valuable to use as prayers.
5. Read together the fourth paragraph on page 1 that begins, “The Divine Hours are prayers...” What strikes you about what she says here?
6. Share prayer concerns and pray for one another.