

## The Daily Office



The term Daily Office differs from what we label today as quiet time or devotions. When most people describe their devotional life the emphasis tends to be on “getting filled up for the day.” The root of the Daily Office is not so much turning to God once in the morning, but is a regular and consistent pattern of easing away from the obligations of home or work and attending to God throughout and in the midst of our busy day. It is also commonly referred to as “Fixed-hour prayer” or “the liturgy of the hours,” and is the oldest form of Christian spiritual discipline.

The word “Office” comes from the Latin word *opus*, or “work.” Liturgy comes from the Greek word that means “The work of the people.” The people of God are called to do the work of prayer and worship. When this work is done in common with other believers, it is called liturgy. Liturgical prayer, in a sense, follows a script. Ruth Haley Barton writes of her experience with the Daily Prayer in a corporate setting: “Some of the prayers were read in unison, some were read responsively—and I just lost myself in the beauty and simplicity of it all. Instead of having to work hard to think up some words to pray, I simply gave myself to the beauty of words that expressed deep longings and powerful praises that were true in me but I could never have found the words to say. Instead of getting caught up in the ego’s attempts to say something profound to God (and to the people around me!), I actually rested from all of that and *prayed*. Instead of listening to someone else’s interpretation or application of Scripture, I heard Scripture read without comment and listened for what God was saying to me in the context of our relationship.”

When we pray set prayers at set times, we are praying in concert with many others who are praying the same or similar prayers at the same time. As one time zone ends their prayers another picks up the task resulting in a continuous wave of concerted prayer that cycles around the globe.

Some Biblical examples of the Daily Office:

- Daniel 6:10 - Daniel prayed ‘three times a day’
- Acts 2:15 - On the day of Pentecost Christ’s disciples had assembled for prayer at “the third hour” (9 am)
- Acts 10:9 - When the Holy Spirit came upon them with dramatic force. Peter went up to the flat roof of the house to pray at “the sixth hour” (noon)
- Acts 3:1 - When he had a vision when led him to welcome the Gentile, Cornelius, into the Christian church. The apostles Peter and John went up to the temple at “the ninth hour” (3 pm) and healed a cripple on the way.

When the Psalmist says, “Seven times a day do I praise you,” (Psalm 119:164) he is most likely referring to fixed-hour prayer as it existed in ancient Judaism. Thus, the Daily Office is traditionally structured around these seven prayer periods throughout the day: (Although for modern day, usually three periods are used. Commonly these set times would be morning, midday, and before bed.)

Vigils: 3:45 AM ( middle of the night)

Lauds: 6:00AM (Predawn)

Prime: 6:25AM (“First” hour )

Sext: 12:15PM (Sixth hour)

None: 2:00PM (Ninth hour)

Vespers: 5:40PM (Evening hour)

Compline: 7:40PM (Before bed)

### **It usually contains 4 elements:**

1. **Stopping** – This is the essence of the Daily Office. At each Office we create the time and the space in our busy lives to meet with God.
2. **Centering** – “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him (Psm. 37:7). Stillness and waiting allows us to give God our undivided attention.
3. **Silence** – The noise of our world has become a way of separating us from ourselves and from God. Silence enables us to be present to God in the moment and prepares us to hear the words of God.
4. **Scripture** – A psalm, a parable, a biblical story, a saying of Jesus, or a word of Paul, Peter, James, Jude, or John can help us to focus our attention on God’s presence.

“Divine hours,” writes Annie Dillard, “shape our days, and 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.

When we abide in God’s presence in such a way, gradually the verse that says, “in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28) becomes a reality.

### **On-line Resources:**

**Sacred Space** – Daily Prayer on-line

<http://sacredspace.ie/>

**Northumbria Community – Daily Office**

<http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/PraytheOffice/index.html>

**The Daily Lectionary**

<http://www.kencollins.com/texts/daily/about.htm>

**The Divine Hours by Phyllis Tickle**

[www.explorefaith.org/prayer/fixe](http://www.explorefaith.org/prayer/fixe)

## **A New Liturgy**

<http://anewliturgy.com/>

A New Liturgy is our attempt to create holy space wherever we find ourselves.

A moveable, sonic sanctuary. Released quarterly, each Liturgy is a **25 minute journey** of music, prayer, scripture, and space that helps open us to The Almighty in any location, season, or emotion.

## **Book Resources:**

*The Attentive Life* by Leighton Ford – my favorite! Highly recommended!

*The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle - a liturgical reworking of the sixth-century Benedictine Rule of fixed-hour prayer that includes one volume for summertime, one for autumn/winter and one for spring. These are very thick volumes so they are best used at home.

*Hour by Hour*, an Anglican prayer book based solely on Scripture and The Book of Common Prayer.

*The Little Book of Hours*, a prayer book that has emerged out of the shared life of the Community of Jesus, an ecumenical Christian community in the Benedictine tradition.