

5-STEP GUIDE TO GET THE MOST OUT OF YOUR
DAILY PRAYER TIME



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

These five steps are designed to be a natural flow, from wherever you currently are to a place of communion with our Lord. Each step has its own function, so each is important.

The whole process can scale from a few minutes to an hour or more. In other words, these are fundamental steps that anyone can use, regardless of their discipline or spiritual maturity.

As such, the audience for this short guide is anyone looking grow in their time with God, anyone looking for more structure, or anyone who struggles to find motivation on a daily basis.

What should one expect to get out of it? Two things.

The first is a guide for you. You may already be doing three or even four of the steps listed here. But by bringing in all five steps, you will most certainly be rewarded with a deeper time with God.

The second is for those you are helping. As disciples of Jesus, we are to in turn make more disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). While *your* time may be stayed and established, it can be hard to communicate that process to others. This guide can be a tool for you to pass on.

And for the extremely pinched for time, each step has a brief summary statement below it.

STEP 1: PRAISING

As Isaiah once wrote, “Our best...is our worst” (Isaiah 64:6, my paraphrase).

We begin with praise for no other reason than everything we do—our very existence—is about pleasing our maker. Our life is not our own, it is his.

So from a theological position, praise is a natural starting point.

But there is also a practical side to this, too. By beginning with praise, we put ourselves in the right frame of mind. We open our hearts and spirits to receive God’s Word.

But what exactly is praise?

For some, praise is singing. And for others, it’s contemplation or recitation. And all of these can certainly be praise.

But at the core, praise is more fundamental than these things.

At its essence, praise is the state of mind where we recognize who God is *and* who we are.

Everything else, be it singing, speaking, or something deeper is an *outworking* of our being in tune with the Lord.

Praise does not need to be long, or short. It needs only to be enough to put you in the right state of mind to move forward.

*We begin with praise, because praise
is the place where we understand who
we are, and who God is.*

STEP 2: THANKING

It was said that Brother Lawrence was in a constant state of thanksgiving—even when washing the dishes, he was thanking God for the opportunity.

Thanksgiving is a natural result of praise.

How do you know when you are praising God? When you begin to *thank* him.

What should we thank God for?

In short, everything. Do you have a roof over your head? A family? A job? The ability to walk outside and hear birds sing? How about the ability to walk at all? Or simply, the ability to offer praise? The list quickly becomes exhaustive.

The value of giving thanks at this step is that it continues to prepare your heart for the following step of opening God's Word.

Opening God's Word (and then the subsequent steps of listening for his voice and making requests) is changed by what we do *first*. If I read, listen, or ask with a focus on myself, there is a good chance my own voice will still be loud and unquieted.

But when I take time to thank God for the things he's done for me, I now enter his Word with a new kind of reverence. A reverence, that, if I'm being honest, is often not a natural state of mind.

*Thanksgiving is a natural result
of praise and is a prelude for
consuming God's Word.*

STEP 3: READING

We are privileged today to have God's Word so close at hand. And, as a result, many skip the steps above and go straight there.

This is not wrong, *per se*, but it can be dangerous.

Many have used God's Word—not as an instrument to learn and be changed, but as leverage to change others. And, in some cases, to bludgeon them in the process. While all of Scripture is a tool for correction (2 Timothy 3:16), it's not a tool to use without the Spirit's guidance.

By beginning with the first two steps, we guard ourselves here. We put ourselves in the place to hear from God—to see him illuminate his words and expose his message to us.

The virtue here is that our reading, like our praise, is not a question of time or distance. Many mornings I have sat down to read, only to be consumed with a verse or two.

At other times, I find myself reading chapter after chapter. But I can say with certainty that the quality of my reading—the lesson I take away—is directly related to the time I spent in praise and thanksgiving before I began.

As to the content, anything in God's Word is right. The order and variety is your preference. If you like a mixture, as some reading plans provide, or if you prefer to work through a book at the same time—all is good.

*God's Word is best read with a desire
to understand God's Spirit.*

STEP 4: LISTENING

“*Be still, my beating heart.*” - William Mountfort, playwright

This is perhaps the hardest step of the five. To be still...and calm...and focused.

The entire goal of this step is to listen for that still, small voice. To chew on and digest the results of steps 1-3.

The problem is, there is so much good (and bad) floating around us, that it can often feel impossible to really be still and listen. And, to some cases, it is impossible. After a while of jumping from distraction to distraction, our brains begin to make these jumps *automatically*. And so it takes real effort to pull back from this.

I've found two techniques to be especially helpful here.

The first is slowing to breathe deeply. *Deep in through your nose* and then *slowly out through your mouth*. Six to nine times is usually all it takes. This oxygenates your brain, letting you think clearer and with more willpower.

And the second is visualizing. Try visualizing what God may look like on his throne, what he may look like talking to you, or taking care of you, and, just as important, what you look like listening to him. Make this activity as real as you can.

*We listen to hear from God, so that our
lives reflect his.*

STEP 5: ASKING

The final step is our request. What we ask of God.

The irony here is that after steps 1-4, we become least likely to *want* to ask. Steps 1-4 have a filling effect.

But requesting of God is an important part of our spiritual growth. It is a confession of our relationship: as a child to her father, as a servant to his master, and ultimately, as the creation to its creator.

The other irony here is that we are often most inclined to open our Bible or pray when a specific need is on our mind. And it is completely okay to jump directly to the ask.

But I've found, quite consistently, that my asks are profoundly different when I save them for the end.

By filtering our asks through praise and thanksgiving, reading his Word and listening to his voice, we cannot help but to find ourselves being shaped in a new way.

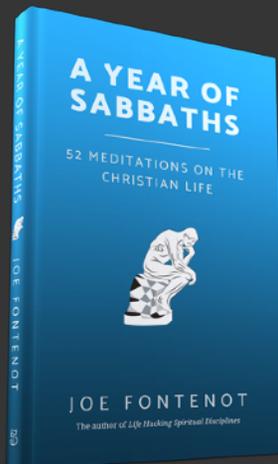
I believe it is through this process that we learn to become more like God in our requests. Our prayers become more of *Let me look like you today, Lord*, and less of *Please let me have...*

*By asking, we simultaneously
acknowledge who God is
and who we are.*

MORE ABOUT JOE

Joe is the marketing strategist at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has a bachelor's degree in marketing and a master's degree in Christian Apologetics, and he's spent a decade in international logistics helping NGOs move humanitarian aid cargo all over the world.

He is the author of three books, including *A Year of Sabbaths* and *Life Hacking Spiritual Disciplines*. And he lives in New Orleans with his wife and their two little ones.



WHERE TO BEGIN?

A Year of Sabbaths is a collection of 52 devotions. It is ideal for the person who is beginning a daily habit, but is still struggling, as well as the one looking to carve out a special Sabbath day.

Find it on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO ESTABLISH A DAILY TIME WITH GOD?

In *Life Hacking Spiritual Disciplines*, Joe explores how to create spiritual disciplines that not only fit into your busy life, but that will stick with you.

Find it on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

