

Liturgy of the Hours

By Susan Vogt

Praying the “Liturgy of the Hours” (also known as The Divine Office) is a long standing monastic tradition, but you don’t have to be a monk to enter into the spirit of this form of prayer. Learn how a busy family person can adapt this practice of praying throughout the day.



For

Adult, Couple

Season

Winter

Needed

The intention to pray throughout the day. Helpful, published resources include [Living With Christ](#), [Give Us This Day](#), [Universalis](#), [Liturgical Calendar](#)

Prepare in Advance

- Decide whether you would like a published prayer book or just want to wing it. If you want a booklet such as one of the above, order it.
- If you simply want to copy lectionary readings for the day from the internet, find and copy them.
- If you just want to wing it, just show up for the activity.

Background

The idea behind the Liturgy of the Hours is to stop one’s work at prescribed times during the day to pray. Traditionally there are up to eight times to do this each day:

- [Lauds](#) or **Dawn** (at Dawn, or 3 a.m.)
- [Prime](#) or **Early Morning** (about 6 a.m.)
- [Terce](#) or **Mid-Morning** (about 9 a.m.)
- [Sext](#) or **Midday** (about noon)
- [None](#) or **Mid-Afternoon** (about 3 p.m.)
- [Vespers](#) or **Evening** (Dusk, about 6 p.m.)
- [Compline](#) or **Night** (before retiring, generally at 9 p.m.)
- [Matins](#) or **Midnight** (or the middle of the night)

Strict adherence to the number of “prayer stops” or the time of day is not practical for most family or working people but that doesn’t mean one can’t pray the “Spirit of the Hours.” This would mean making intentional stops during your day to remember the God who created day and night and cares for us 24/7. Decide what will work for you.

Activity Plan

1. As always, begin with a prayer such as:

Dear God of all time, I would like to have you constantly in my mind and guiding my actions, but I’m human and life gets in the way. Help me to find daily ways to connect with you so I don’t forget your importance in my life. Amen.

2. If you have decided to use a published prayer resource, become familiar with its format.

3. Decide how many times a day you want to stop to do intentional prayer. Don't be intimidated by the eight prayer times. Very few people, even vowed religious and clergy, do all eight hours. One is fine, more is better. This activity will show you a relatively easy way to do three to five times.
4. Consider the following times that might feel natural and practical for you to incorporate into your daily life.
 - **Morning Prayer:** This is the best time to use the daily scripture(s) from a lectionary since you don't have to go searching for which one to use. Follow your booklet or simply read one of the scriptures you found on the internet. Pause to let it sink in. Perhaps make a Morning Offering. Traditionally the Canticle of Zachariah (Luke 1:68-79) is said at this time.
 - **Breakfast Grace:** Time for Morning Prayer might be compromised by the need to get kids off to school or rush to work, but most of us eat breakfast. Most do not, however, say a formal grace before breakfast. That's OK, the meal or prayer doesn't have to be formal, but you can pause for 10 seconds, look at your coffee or juice, and thank God for sustenance and the upcoming day. This is an especially important pause if the morning was too hectic for Morning Prayer.
 - **Lunch Grace:** Even if prayer time during the day seems non-existent, we all have to eat. Similar to grace at breakfast, this needn't be formal. For many people, it would feel awkward even praying an "official" grace before lunch since you may be with co-workers, at a restaurant, or whatever. That's OK, pause yourself, look at your food, and say a private prayer. Perhaps take a moment to think about how God has been present during your morning or how you need God to be present in your afternoon work.
 - **Dinner Grace:** Dinner prayer is more common in many families – hopefully yours. Don't rush it. You may all say a memorized grace, but intentional prayer often happens best when we can focus for a moment on what we are thankful for that day – not just the food.
 - **Evening Prayer:** This might be a pause before you go to bed (perhaps using another of the day's scripture). Review your day. How was God present? The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) is the traditional canticle for Evening Prayer. Although planning to pray at the end of the day is admirable, some people (including this author) have a hard time adding one more thing to a busy day at the end of the day. If you say night prayers with your children, you have my permission to count this since helping a child pray is prayer for you too.

Decide which times you want to commit to. The idea is to have a plan and to implement it more often than not. You might forget or skip some of the times, just commit to getting back into the rhythm.

5. Closing Prayer

Dear God. I'm made my decision to pray more often, but you know as well as I do that the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. Give me your grace to follow through on this decision and to pick myself up and start anew when I forget or am "too tired."

6. Variation. It's nice if other family members can join you in your decision, especially your spouse. They may not want to do it with you, but letting them know of your decision can help you stay accountable to yourself and to God.

