

The Discipline of Prayer - *The Daily Office*

None of us will ever find a better pattern for private prayer and Bible reading anywhere other than that offered by the Prayer Book's own daily office.

- J.I. Packer

The Daily Office is "a means of education by worship of which no Church, Catholic or Protestant, has the equivalent today."

- Louis Bouyer (Roman Catholic Liturgical Theologian)

Origins

The Daily Office is one of the hidden gems of the Anglican Tradition. It is a way to practice the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer throughout the day (see 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Its origins date back to the time of the first Temple in Jerusalem (perhaps even earlier) where the Psalms were chanted or sung cyclically, much like we do today in the Sunday Liturgy.

Christianity adopted and adapted the practice of praying the Psalms in the Early Church. Over time, this developed into the Liturgy of the Hours (LOH), which was practiced in many of the monasteries during the period of the Dark Ages. The Liturgy of the Hours is still practiced today in the Catholic Church.

The original structure of the Liturgy of The Hours called for prayer seven times each day as follows:

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|-------------|----------|------------------------|
| 1. Matins | (3 am): | The Office of Readings |
| 2. Lauds | (6 am): | Morning Prayer |
| 3. Terce | (9 am): | Mid-Morning Prayer |
| 4. Sext | (12 pm): | Midday Prayer |
| 5. None | (3 pm): | Mid-Afternoon Prayer |
| 6. Vespers | (6 pm): | Evening Prayer |
| 7. Compline | (9 pm): | Night Prayer |

More typical today is a practice of just four of these: Morning Prayer, Evening Prayer, Night Prayer, and The Office of Readings. The latter is normally now done as part of the first prayer of the day (e.g., Morning Prayer) rather than separately, so it is really just three times per day.

Much like the Early Church had done with adopting and adapting the recitation of the Psalms in the Temple, so too did Thomas Cranmer do with adopting and adapting the Liturgy of the Hours for the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. This adaptation is known in the Anglican Tradition as the Daily Office. Originally, it consisted of just Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer but has since been expanded to include four "Offices": Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline. The one that is best known to most people is the Office of Compline, which is practiced at the end of the day and is often set to music.

Structure

All of the Offices in the Daily Office follow a somewhat similar structure, but Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer are the longest and most intricate. These typically take about twenty minutes if you are praying the Office by yourself.

So, for example, Morning Prayer is structured as follows:

1. Opening Sentences
2. Confession Of Sin
3. Invitatory
4. Venite or Jubilate
5. The Psalm Or Psalms Appointed
6. The Lessons (Two) Separated By A Canticle
7. The Apostles' Creed
8. The Prayers
9. The Collect(s)
10. The General Thanksgiving
11. The Prayer Of St. John Chrysostom
12. The Dismissal

Again, Evening Prayer is very similar in structure. Midday Prayer and Compline are both much shorter and follow a slightly different structure.

With both Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, there are some choices as well. With The Psalm Or Psalms Appointed, there are two choices. You may either follow a 30-day or a 60-day cycle. With the 30-day cycle, you will pray through the entire Psalter each month, which is a great way to learn the Psalms. Similarly with the Lectionary (Lessons), there are also two choices. You may either follow a one-year or a two-year cycle. With the one-year cycle, you will pray through most of the Bible (including the Apocrypha) in a year. If you are looking for a Bible reading plan, this is a great way to go!

Other Guidelines

- **Rubrics:** If you are praying The Daily Office alone, don't feel obligated to do the standing, sitting, kneeling actions unless it is helpful for you to do so.
- **Start Small:** Do what you can, not what you can't. You are in this for the long haul. Perhaps just begin with committing to pray Compline at least three nights a week, then add additional nights, then add additional Offices, preferably either Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer. If you miss one, don't worry about it. Just pick up again and keep going.
- **Make It Easy On Yourself:** By far, the easiest way to pray the Offices is through the use of The Daily Office app, The Daily Office website, or one of The Daily Office podcasts. The iPad and iPhone versions of the app are particularly good. Additionally, you can link them to the ESV Bible so that you have the option of listening to the Scripture readings while following along with the text. (Note: This is not yet available for the Apocrypha.) If you are interested in trying The Daily Office website rather than the app, the easiest way to get there is through the St. Peter's website. (It is the first item under the Learn dropdown on the St. Peter's home page.)

- **Old School (aka Paper Versions):** The Daily Office with instructions can also be found in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) 2019. If you don't have a physical copy, you can download a PDF for free from the Web. You will also need your Bible. Note: Some assembly required. This option is not for the faint of heart but is doable with patience and practice. Another paper option is to purchase the St. Bernard Breviary from Anglican House Publishers. This is a fairly pricey option, but it gives you everything in a single book. Rather than juggling books, you will instead be juggling a lot of ribbons.
- **Instant Office:** There is one additional option for the Offices. Beginning on page 66 in the Book of Common Prayer (2019), there is a section titled: Family Prayer. This provides very abbreviated versions of all four of the Offices. This is also a good place to start, but you won't get the benefit of reading through the Psalms and the Bible that you get with the full versions of the Offices.

Practice

For our practice today, we will be walking through Midday Prayer together.

Reflection Discussion

What thoughts do you have at this point? Does this seem like a Spiritual Discipline that you would be interested in trying? Does the idea of it resonate with you? Do you have any lingering questions? I am happy to assist you with this in whatever ways I am able, even after our time together here today is done.

Resources

- Book Of Common Prayer (BCP) 2019:
<https://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>
- Anglican House Publishers:
<https://anglicanhousepublishers.org/anglican-liturgy-press/>
- The Daily Office Web Site:
<https://stpetersloveland.org/the-daily-office>

- The Daily Office App:
[https://apps.apple.com › ca › app › the-daily-office › id1513851259](https://apps.apple.com/ca/app/the-daily-office/id1513851259)
- The Daily Office Podcast:
<https://crossroadsabbey.podbean.com/>
- ESV Bible App:
<https://www.esv.org/>

Further Information Regarding The History & Origins Of The Daily Office

The following provides a much richer description of the history and origins of The Daily Office than what we were able to cover today. This is taken from Fr. Matt's *Fall Catechism Class* handout.

The Daily Office

Pre-Christian Origins of the Daily Office

“One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening; and with the first lamb one-tenth of a measure of choice flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. And the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the Lord.” Exodus 29:39-41

In addition to the prayer rhythms of the temple, it became commonplace for regular Jews to order their days around the reading of Torah, and the singing of the Psalms. By the time of Jesus, Jews were gathering to pray at 6 am, 9 am, the noon meal, when trade began again at 3, and at the end of the day at 6 pm (this was consistent with the Roman work day). The entire Psalter was chanted once a month.

Early Church

Like many Jewish customs, these prayer rhythms continued with the early church, but began to include Christian writings and hymns in addition to what was done before.

Benedictine Monasticism

Divergent prayer rhythms were unified in the *Rule of St. Benedict* from Benedict of Nursia, whose way of prayer and work (ora et labora) influenced much of Christian practice, particularly the *Daily Office*.

“Therefore we intend to establish a school for God’s service...we hope to set down nothing harsh, nothing burdensome. Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.” From the Prologue to the *Rule of St. Benedict*

“Listen readily to holy reading, and devote yourself often to prayer. Every day with tears and signs confess your past sins to God in prayer and change from these evil ways in the future.” Benedict expresses the logic of daily prayer, reading, and confession.

The Prayer Book

“Daily Morning and Daily Evening Prayer are the established rites (offices) by which, both corporately and individually, God’s people annually encounter the whole of the Holy Scriptures, daily confess their sins and praise Almighty God, and offer timely thanksgivings, petitions, and intercessions. The Prayer Book tradition has historically expected clergy to pray the Daily Office Morning and Evening each day.” *Concerning the Divine Service*, p. 6 of the 2019 BCP.