

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 12-27-15 PM NOTES
"GIVING GOD THE FIRST HOUR"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES

Psalms 5:3 (NASB) "In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice; in the morning I will order *my prayer* to You and *eagerly watch*."

Psalms 59:16 (NASB) "But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress."

Psalms 63:1 (NKJV) "O God, You *are* my God; **early will I seek You**; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."

Psalms 88:13 (NASB) "But I, O Lord, have cried out to You for help, and **in the morning** my prayer comes before You."

Psalms 119:147 (NASB) "I rise **before dawn** and cry for help; I wait for Your words."

Psalms 143:8 (NASB) "Let me hear Your lovingkindness **in the morning**; for I trust in You; teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up my soul."

1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NASB) "pray without ceasing."

I. The Elements of the Morning Hour

A. Prepare Your Heart

Psalms 66:18 (NASB) "If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear."

B. Read the Word

1. The Bible You Use

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) which is the most literal translation available today, The English Standard Bible (ESV), The New King James Version (NKJV), The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), The New International Version (NIV), and The King James Version (KJV)

"Give me a candle and the Bible and put me into a dungeon and I will be happy forever." —John Bunyan

2. The Plan You Use

McCheyne's Calendar for Daily Readings

The Chronological Bible Reading Plan

The ESV Study Bible Reading Plan

www.ligonier.org/blog/bible-reading-plans/

C. Pray the Word

“Praying the Bible” by Donald Whitney

D. Pray in Agreement With the Word

E. Memorize the Word

F. Meditate on the Word

Joshua 1:8 (NASB) “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

G. Apply the Word

II. The Implementation of the Morning Hour

- Go to bed earlier—The battle for the morning hour is often determined by when we go to bed. Turn off the TV and go to bed. It may be a little hard to go to sleep at first, but be persistent.
- Get an obnoxious LOUD alarm clock and put it across the room so that you have to get up to turn it off. A “snooze button” spells failure for the morning hour.
- Have a special place for your morning hour. It may be the dining room table, a special chair, or a literal closet, but have a designated place. As much as possible, it needs to be a private place, but “private” is a relative term.
- When you wake up, get up! Someone said, “The battle of the blankets will never be won from the underneath side.” [Jack Taylor, *Prayer: Life’s Limitless Reach*,” page 103].
- Go directly to your meeting place with God and don’t get distracted. For some there will be the temptation to get the paper, turn on your computer, do a chore, or any other good thing that just distracts you from what you came to the morning hour for.

“Prayer has obtained things that seemed impossible and out of reach. It has won victories over fire, air, earth, and water. Prayer opened the Red Sea. Prayer brought water from the rock and bread from heaven. Prayer made the sun stand still. Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah’s sacrifice. Prayer overthrew the army of Sennacherib. Prayer has healed the sick. Prayer has raised the dead. Prayer has procured the conversion of countless souls.” —J. C. Ryle

First Baptist Church Powell 12 27 2015 PM Service
Giving God the First Hour
Various Scriptures

There are numerous verses in the Psalms related to meeting with God in the morning.

Psalms 5:3 (NASB): “In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice; in the morning I will order *my prayer* to You and *eagerly* watch.”

Psalms 59:16 (NASB): “But as for me, I shall sing of Your strength; yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold and a refuge in the day of my distress.”

Psalms 63:1 (NKJV): “O God, You *are* my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.”

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Psalms 143:8 (NASB): “Let me hear Your lovingkindness in the morning; for I trust in You; teach me the way in which I should walk; for to You I lift up my soul.”

Certainly the early morning is not the only time we come before the Lord, but it is the most important time. We are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NASB): “pray without ceasing.” “Without ceasing” speaks of something spontaneous, living in an atmosphere of prayer and praying as we go through the day. I must say that it is highly unlikely that you will pray without ceasing if you do not begin your morning with a focused time in the Word of God and in prayer. It is that time in the morning of focusing on Him through the Word of God and prayer that Andrew Murray called “The Morning Hour.” Andrew Murray called this morning hour “a means of grace.” In other words, this hour in the morning becomes the channel through which God’s grace – His enabling and sustaining grace – finds its way into our lives. I don’t think that it is possible to overestimate the importance of that morning hour. I can give testimony in my own life that when I started “the morning hour” (or at least a regular period though it may not have always been sixty minutes) when I was twenty-four, and not even dreaming I would one day become a Pastor, my walk with God made a quantum leap and brought about the greatest change in my life that I had ever experienced. I am issuing a challenge to you that, if you will accept, you will one day thank me. It could be the most life changing challenge you have ever accepted. The challenge is very simple: I am challenging you to commit to spending an hour at the beginning of every day in the Word of God and prayer. If a meeting is important to you, you will make an appointment, put it on your calendar and do whatever it takes to keep the appointment. I am challenging you to make an hour appointment every morning with God and to do whatever it takes to keep that appointment. I am very fired up over this challenge because I want to see each of you changed as I was when God enabled me to develop this discipline in my life.

I. The Elements in the Morning Hour

There are many good plans for the *Morning Hour*. Life Action had a session on in; Dick Eastman has written a good little book on it entitled “The Hour That Changes the World.” You may prefer a method or plan different from the one I am giving you. I don’t want to be too structured or rigid in the elements that make up this morning hour, but neither do I want to assume that you will automatically know what to do during this morning hour. The first four elements we will look at are essential, but all seven are important. It may be that you will have to have different days that you will pick one or two of the other three elements of the morning hour.

A. Prepare Your Heart

Psalms 66:18 (NASB): “If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.” Before you get very far into the morning hour, you need to deal with anything in your heart or actions that would cause God to refuse to hear you. I am not talking about spending forty-five minutes analyzing the previous day to see what needs to be confessed. I am referring to simply coming with an open heart before the Lord asking that if there is anything that needs to be repented of and confessed before you focus on His Word and prayer, that He would reveal it to you. As He reveals sin, commit to turn from it, confess it (agree with

God about it), and thank Him for His grace empowered forgiveness. Next, it would be good to surrender your mind, your day, and indeed your life to Him and ask Him to speak to you through His Word.

B. Read the Word

There is no discipline more important than a regular intake of the Word of God. While devotional books are OK (I don't presently use them, but I have in the past), don't let a daily devotional book substitute for reading the Bible. There are several choices you need to make concerning the Bible you are going to be using and the approach you are going to take in reading the Word.

1. The Bible You Choose

There are several choices that you need to make at this point. First, you need to choose a translation. I recommend the following translations (in order of my preference):

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) which is the most literal translation available today,

The English Standard Bible (ESV),

the New King James Version (NKJV),

the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB),

the New International Version (NIV), and

the King James Version (KJV).

I prefer to use a study Bible with notes, references, and book introductions. My favorite study Bibles are: The MacArthur Study Bible, The ESV Study Bible, The Apologetics Study Bible, and The Reformation Study Bible. There is also a good study Bible that David Jeremiah recently published. Again, do not let anything take the place of the Bible. I am reminded of the quote of the Puritan John Bunyan (who spent many years in prison for his faith. He said, "Give me a candle and the Bible and put me into a dungeon and I will be happy forever." [Quoted in *Spirit of Revival*, August, 2000, inside cover]

2. The Plan You Use

If you are reading the Scripture for twenty-thirty minutes of your morning hour, what plan is best for your reading? My encouragement is that you have a plan, but that you realize that your plan doesn't necessarily mean that you always plan to read through the whole Bible in a year. Having said that, reading through the whole Bible is exactly what I did this year. If you are using a study Bible (especially one with a lot of notes) you can use one of the "Through the Bible" plans, I'm going to recommend, and take a year and a half or two years to get through the whole Bible.

Here are some plans that I have used and all are good. For many years, my wife, Kathy, has read through the Bible just chapter by chapter with BBN radio. She listens to Alexander Scoby while reading her well-worn Bible. She gets a little behind sometimes but will take the extra time to catch back up. By the end of every year, she has read the Bible through. Here are some of the plans you may want to consider:

McCheyne's Calendar for Daily Readings – This system was devised by the Scottish Pastor, Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843). It takes you through the New Testament and Psalms twice in the year and through the Old Testament once. For example, on December 27 you would be reading 2 Chronicles 32; Revelation 18; Zechariah 14; John 17. I have used this yearly plan at least two times and maybe three.

The Chronological Bible Reading Plan – The books of the Bible aren't arranged in chronological order. This plan takes you through the whole Bible in a year in the order the passages were likely written. I have never used this one, but it looks interesting.

The ESV Study Bible Reading Plan – This one has readings each day from four categories that take you through the Bible in a year: Psalms and Wisdom Literature, Pentateuch and History of Israel, Chronicles and Prophets, and Gospels and Epistles.

If you would like other plans, there is an excellent help in finding plans on the Ligonier website. You can access and print many of them by going to www.ligonier.org/blog/bible-reading-plans/

C. Pray the Word

Apart from incorporating the Word of God into our prayer times, they become very boring and repetitious. Praying *in* the Scriptures we are reading gives life to your quiet times. I have been doing this for years, but recently Southern Baptist Theological Seminary professor, Don Whitney, wrote a little book (eighty-nine pages) entitled “Praying the Bible.” You can read it in a couple of hours or less. It is simple and easy to understand.

D. Pray in Agreement with the Word

Most of our praying the Word is while reading the Word; however, the Word should guide all of our prayers. There will always be more to pray for than we have time to pray in our morning hour. That is why we seek to develop the mindset of praying without ceasing. To enable us to pray for some of the most important things, we need to organize our prayer times. CAUTION! Don’t quench the Holy Spirit by becoming over-organized and take out all spontaneity from our prayer time. As I get older, my prayer time is less and less organized and I think that is good. I tend to over-organize. I do suggest that you get an inexpensive notebook and filler paper along with dividers for each day of the week. There are some things that need to be prayed for daily and some can be prayed for weekly. For instance, I pray daily for myself, that I would be prepared to face whatever the Lord has for me that day (things like the filling of the Holy Spirit, putting on the armor, no fear of man, etc.). Also, I pray for my wife, and challenges she will face that day. I also have ten Maxims that on most days I pray will be lived out in my life that day. I pray in general for all of my children and grandchildren daily, but give special time to each of them on a set day of the week.

As a side note, parents train your children to pray and keep a record of their prayers. Nothing is more encouraging than writing down requests and then seeing God answer them. I have prayer journals from the 1970’s and sometimes I go back and remind myself of the faithfulness of God and He has answered prayer after prayer.

E. Memorize the Word

I am not sure that there is anything that you can spend concentrated time on that bears as much fruit as does Scripture memorization. Memorization is much easier when you are young. Our brains begin to *leak* as we get older and memorization takes much more time and effort. However, it is still worth it. There’s all kind of plans out there and some fit different personalities better than others. The two basic approaches are to memorize large portions of Scripture (chapters) and the other is to memorize verses around topics. For 2016, my goal is to memorize all of the TELL (Teaching Exchanged-Life Living) verses in another translation. I had them memorized in the NKJV and this year I want to memorize them in the NASB. Also, sometimes in my reading the word, I run across a passage that really is used by God in my life and I will start memorizing each of those. There is no short cut to memorization. It involves the hard work of repetition, repetition, repetition, and then review, review, review. I simply use note cards and keep them in the pocket of my journal.

F. Meditate on the Word

This one is one of my weaknesses that I am asking the Lord to help me with this next year. Meditation is not complicated. It makes a good companion of memorization. Meditation is simply thinking about the meaning and application of what we read in the Scripture. The greatest use of memorization is that it hides the Word in our heart so that we can meditate anywhere, any time. Joshua 1:8 (NASB): “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

G. Apply the Word

How sad if our reading the Word, praying the Word, memorizing the Word, and meditation on the Word never makes a difference in our life. If that happens, we are only becoming spiritually hardened and seeing the Word as a hobby rather than seeing it as our holy, sovereign God speaking to us and giving us instruction.

II. The Implementation of the Morning Hour

I want to share some specifics about implementing of this morning hour. If you are not currently beginning your day with a concentrated time with God, it will not be easy to add an hour a day to what is probably an already busy life. I read somewhere that to form a habit in your life, you have to do something twenty-one days in a row. You are never going to practice the morning hour twenty-one days in a row and develop the habit until you consider it a real priority. It is sort of like planning to go on a diet. Right after a big meal when you're stuffed, it is easy to plan a diet, but then when you get hungry again, it just doesn't seem quite as important. To hear a message like this and all the things that God will do in the morning hour, it sounds so appealing, but when the alarm goes off an hour earlier than you are used to getting up, you begin to think of all sorts of excuses. That is why you must look to God for His enabling grace to enable you to do, when the alarm goes off, what you have determined that you need to do.

Let me give you some general things that you can do to prepare yourself to implement the challenge to have the morning hour.

- Go to bed earlier – The battle for the morning hour is often determined by when we go to bed. Turn off the TV and go to bed. It may be a little hard to go to sleep at first, but be persistent.
- Get an obnoxious LOUD alarm clock and put it across the room so that you have to get up to turn it off. A “snooze button” spells failure for the morning hour.
- Have a special place for your morning hour. It may be the dining room table, a special chair, or a literal closet, but have a designated place. As much as possible, it needs to be a private place, but “private” is a relative term.
- When you wake up, get up! Someone said, “The battle of the blankets will never be won from the underneath side” [Jack Taylor, *Prayer: Life's Limitless Reach*, page 103]
- Go directly to your meeting place with God and don't get distracted. For some there will be the temptation to get the paper, turn on your computer, do a chore, or any other good thing that just distracts you from why you came to the morning hour.

Conclusion

Bishop J. C. Ryle said this about prayer:

Prayer has obtained things that seemed impossible and out of reach. It has won victories over fire, air, earth, and water. Prayer opened the Red Sea. Prayer brought water from the rock and bread from heaven. Prayer made the sun stand still. Prayer brought fire from the sky on Elijah's sacrifice. Prayer overthrew the army of Sennacherib. Prayer has healed the sick. Prayer has raised the dead. Prayer has procured the conversion of countless souls. [J. C. Ryle, quoted in Dick Eastman *The Hour That Changes the World*, page 19]

A while back, this thought crossed my mind: If the time spent on social networking were spent on spiritual disciplines, we would be friends with God instead of 500 people on Facebook or Instagram. I ask you the question that Jesus asked His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane: Matthew 26:40b (NKJV): "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour?"