

Some Tips on How to Incorporate Prayer Into Your Workouts

Editor's Note: For additional related resources read the original Prayer Training article in Faith & Fitness Magazine.

I find that my workout time is also a great time to clear my head and get real with God about what is going on in my life. As endorphins are released, so are thoughts of what areas of my life need Him more.

Prayer Training is a simple way that you can combine your physical and spiritual health. Prayer Training is a creative approach to integrating prayer time with your physical workout. Start with a great body-weight conditioning program and what I call the ACTION prayer.

All you need is a watch or timer, a little bit of space, and a willingness to work hard. Each exercise below will be performed for 30 seconds followed immediately by only 30 seconds of rest. The exercise descriptions below are just tips, not full explanations of the movement. Since these exercises are common, you can also find videos and photos of each exercise on the Internet.

All ages and fitness levels can perform the exercises in Prayer Training. If you are new to training and have more specific questions about each exercise, you can contact me.

1. PUSH UP – Target: Chest, shoulders, triceps and core. If push-ups off the ground are too hard, try angling your body off an incline surface like a countertop or stable chair. Common mistakes—lowering to your chin or collarbone rather than your chest, and keeping your hips too high. You should have a straight line from your head to your feet.

2. SQUAT – Target: Complete lower body. We are made to squat! Watch any 1-year-old learning to walk and when they get tired, they sit in a perfect squat. Mimic this movement. Push your hips back and down; don't lead by your knees, and push your heels into the ground. Common mistakes—rounded back spine position and leading with your knees rather than pushing your hips back first.

3. PRONE HOLD – Target: Posterior chain—basically the backside of you. Lie on your stomach and extend your arms out to the side like you are in a sky-diving position. Raise arms and legs and draw your toes toward your shins. Rotate hands so that your thumbs point up. Stay true to the name ... “hold” this position while keeping your spine long and keep breathing. Common mistakes—holding your breath and not lengthening through your spine.

4. LUNGE – Target: Complete lower body. Take a long stride and make your front heel do all of the work. The back leg is just for balance; this is not the “driving” leg. Common mistake—pushing off the toe rather than the heel on the working (front) leg.

5. PLANK – Target: Core—abdominals and low back. Basically, this is a push-up position hold on your forearms instead of your hands. Hold and keep your spine long. Common mistake—raising the hips. Just like with the push-up, when viewed from the side, you should be able to draw a straight line from your head to your heels.

6. JUMPING JACKS – Target: Cardio-vascular challenge. Standing normally, jump your feet to a wide stance and throw your arms overhead at the same time. Jump back to normal position with arms by your side and repeat fast as possible while maintaining a long spine. Common mistakes—fighting through shoulder pain and keeping tension in the jaw, neck and shoulders. Arms could also go in front like a clap, instead of overhead, if needed to avoid shoulder pain.

Rest two minutes then repeat with No. 1 (Push-ups) as long as the quality of movement remains high. Once you are unable to perform even a few reps in 30 seconds with perfect form, then the training session is over. Make a note of how many times you made it through all six exercises and the next time you repeat this workout, try to do more work.

Let's say in session No. 1 you make it through the set three times. The goal with session No. 2 is to at least start a fourth set. This program could be repeated 2-3 times per week for a 6-8 week session.

During your two minutes of rest after jumping jacks, pray the ACTION prayer. This is a great way to give a greater level of structure to your prayer life. ACTION is an acronym for:

A is for adoration – Praising and recognizing God for all of His glory and majesty.

C is for confession – Get real with your weaknesses and what separates you from Him.

T is for thanksgiving – Time of thanks for all of your many blessings.

I is for invitation – This is where most prayers start. “God, I need you to...” or “God, please help me with...”

O is for other's needs – Friends, family, neighbors and so on.

N is for next step – Now stop talking and listen. If prayer is really communicating with God, it needs to be a two-way street. Silently listen to what He is saying to you.

Here is a sample ACTION prayer:

“God, I adore You and praise Your name today. I acknowledge that You are my Creator and Father Your power and love is mighty. I confess my sins to You and ask that You strengthen those areas of my life where I let You down. Thank you for my health, family and friends. You have blessed me richly, and I am very thankful for Your presence in my life. God, I invite You into my life to guide me and direct me through some tough

decisions that lie ahead for me. Please be with my mom and dad and brother as they battle health issues. Now, Father, allow me to hear Your calling for my life as I close this prayer with a few seconds of silence ... Amen."

The ACTION prayer just gives you a simple template to follow and is a great way to connect with God during your rest intervals when training. The second time you rest, maybe you get more specific with what God's majesty means to you, or you get a little more personal about your confessions, or things that you need God to handle (the Invitation). Just make it real and genuine.

Here is another sample ACTION prayer:

"Creator God, You are amazing, and I really don't understand it. How did You make the heavens and the earth, and yet You know the number of hairs on my head and love me? I am in awe and humbled by Your love. I am sorry for letting You down. I get caught up with stuff at work and greed pulls me away from you. Please forgive me. You have given me so much and I am very grateful. Just the ability to work out today is a blessing. Thank You, Lord, for my life. I need You to help me better represent You. Please come into my life and direct me past all of the fluff and insignificant things that draw me away from You. Also, please be with my neighbors who just lost their job, and my grandmother who is battling eyesight problems. God, give me peace now to hear you."

Could you recognize the parts of the ACTION prayer? Notice how I didn't end this prayer with Amen, because maybe I will continue to listen to God during the next set.

After your first ACTION prayer, you might just do the N-part on the next rest periods. Fatigue will be higher as the workout goes on, so maybe you just need to be silent and listen to what God is telling you about what you shared with Him at the beginning of the workout.

MORE PUMP AND MORE PRAYER

Another great way to integrate this template into your workout is to make the prayer portion of your Prayer Training as frequent as the exercise portion.

1. Exercise: Push-ups for 30 seconds. Prayer: Adoration prayer about how awesome God is for 30 seconds.

2. Exercise: Squats for 30 seconds. Prayer: Confession prayer for 30 seconds.

3. Exercise: Prone Hold for 30 seconds. Prayer: Thanksgiving prayer for 30 seconds.

4. Exercise: Lunges for 30 seconds. Prayer: Invitation prayer for 30 seconds.

5. Exercise: Plank for 30 seconds. Prayer: Other's needs prayer for 30 seconds.

6. Exercise: Jumping Jacks for 30 seconds. Prayer: Next step prayer for 30 seconds.

Same rest parameters as before: one to two minutes and start again with Push-ups.

It is important for you to understand that the structure is more important than the exercises. The structure of the six exercises is organized into the following sequence:

1. Upper body push
2. Lower body bilateral (both sides) movement
3. Upper body pull or posterior chain emphasis
4. Lower body unilateral (one side) movement
5. Core
6. Cardio blaster

If you don't like the exercises I suggested or have range of motion limitations, you can pick something else that fits the

category above and try it. For example, you could do a deadlift instead of a squat. Or you can substitute in another core exercise that is your favorite. The focus of this program is to offer some body-weight challenges in a sequence that makes sense. Just like with the prayer template, take this idea, run with it and make it your own.

One final important tip: You can only manage what you measure. So, write it down! Create a prayer workout journal and write ACTION at the top of the page with your workout. Journal some notes about what is happening in your life on that day. You don't have to write out the entire prayer like I did in the examples for you, but rather just a few words about each letter.

For what are you thankful? What do you need to come clean to God about? Who do you know who is struggling? Tracking your sets and reps is important, but you might find that tracking your prayers becomes the favorite part of your workout. It is good tool to help you look back on key times in your life when God was present and did some amazing things.

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