

PRAYING SCRIPTURE OVERVIEW

(ADAPTED FROM DONALD WHITNEY)

Since prayer is talking with God, why don't people pray more? Why don't the people of God enjoy prayer more? Could the Bible help shape your thoughts and petitions?

Why does God want us to pray?

God wants us to pray for the same reason you want your newborn to cry—it's a sign of life. Just as the spirit of life in a baby causes it to cry, so the Spirit of life in a child of God causes him to cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). God also wants us to pray because that's how we communicate with him. We can't send Him an email or text (even though He sees them all). But we can speak to Him. Prayer is also the means God has ordained by which we receive many of the blessings He has for us.

It seems people don't really enjoy praying. Why is that?

Christians should enjoy prayer, right? After all, prayer is communion with God Himself. Yet, we can lose the enjoyment of God in prayer if we say the same old things about the same old things when we pray. Repetitive prayers soon lead to wandering minds. Wandering minds lead to aimless, joyless prayer.

How are people's prayer methods problematic?

Prayers without variety tend to become words without meaning. Repetitive, meaningless prayers are boring. And when prayer is boring, you don't feel like praying. And when you don't feel like praying, you don't pray—at least with any fervency or consistency. Five to seven minutes of prayer can seem like an eternity, and your mind wanders for half that time. You'll suddenly come to yourself and think, "Now where was I? I haven't been thinking of God for the last several minutes."

The problem is not that people pray about the same old things. My observation has been that people tend to pray about the same six things: family, future, finances, work/school, church/ministry/Christian concern, and the current crisis in life. If you're going to pray about your life, these things are your life. Thankfully, these six things don't change dramatically very often. So if you're going to pray about your life and these six things don't change dramatically very often, that means you're going to pray basically about the same old things most of the time. That's normal. The problem is when we say the same old things about the same old things. That's boring.

What is the simple solution to the boring routine of praying about the same old things?

The simple, biblical solution is this: pray through a passage of Scripture. When you do this, you'll continue praying about the same old things, but you'll pray about them in brand new ways. In other words, pray the words of Scripture and you'll never suffer from saying the same old things about the same old things. Each time you pray it'll be a different prayer than you've ever prayed in your life. And this will be true even though you continue to pray about the same old things.

What are the practical steps of praying the Bible?

Simply turn what you read in the Bible into prayer, talking to God about what comes to mind, verse-by-verse, as you go through a passage. After your Bible reading, choose a passage from which to pray. Normally that will be a passage you've just finished or a psalm. So after you read a chapter in your daily Bible reading, you might go back and pray through—as time allows—what you just read through.

Most days after my Bible reading I usually go to the book of Psalms and choose one of them to pray through. That's because the Psalms are the only book with the very purpose of being reflected to God. (The Psalms were Israel's songbook; words inspired by God for being reflected to God in song.)

So let's say I've chosen to pray through Psalm 23. I read the first line—"The Lord is my Shepherd"—and I pray what comes to mind from that line. So I might pray:

"Lord, I thank you that you are my shepherd. You're a good shepherd. You have shepherded me all my life. But, Great Shepherd, would You shepherd my family today? Please guard them from the ways of the world and guide them into the ways of God. I pray that You would cause my children to love you as their shepherd too. And would You shepherd me in this decision I need to make about my future?"

I would continue to pray in this way about whatever comes to mind as I read "The Lord is my shepherd" until nothing else comes to mind. When that happens, I look at the next line, "I shall not want." Just like with the first line, I talk to God about whatever that verse brings to mind.

What do you mean by "pray a Bible passage, line by line", even if what comes to mind has nothing to do with the text?

When praying line-by-line through a passage, sometimes you may encounter verses you don't understand or don't prompt anything to pray about. It's fine to skip those verses. Nothing says a person has to pray over every single verse, that a person cannot dwell on a single verse, or a person has to finish the whole psalm. You simply talk with God about whatever comes to mind as you are reading a passage, even if what comes to mind has nothing to do with the text.

What do you recommend as a systematic approach for praying a psalm each day?

I recommend a plan called "The Psalms of the Day." The benefit of this plan is that it gives the reader specific psalms to turn to each day. It eliminates the random turning of pages, looking for just the right psalm. Start with the day of the month. That's your first psalm. So if today is the 15th, the first psalm you consider is Psalm 15. Then, because there's often 30 days in the month you add 30 and get Psalm 45. After that you continue adding 30 until you get five Psalms. So on the 15th of every month, your five Psalms are 15, 45, 75, 105, and 135. On the 31st, pray through a section of Psalm 119.

If you'll take just 30 seconds or so to scan five psalms every day, it's uncanny how one of them will put into expression something that's looking for expression in your heart. A second benefit of this method is that it systematically exposes people to all 150 Psalms. You'll never go through anything in your life where you will not find the root emotion expressed somewhere in the Psalms.

What other parts of the Bible can people pray through? How should they do that?

I find that the New Testament letters are the next best place from which to pray Scripture. There's so much truth compressed into them that virtually every verse will suggest something to pray about. Instead of looking at the text microscopically as in the Psalms, I find that by looking for the "big idea" presented in the particular story I usually have no difficulty in praying through a narrative section.

What do you hope will be the ultimate result as more people pray the Bible?

That those who know how to pray the Scriptures will teach others how to pray the Bible until every Christian has learned how to pray God's Word. You can watch some helpful, short videos of how to pray Scripture [**HERE**](#).