

Praying From Scripture

I. Why We Should Pray from Scripture

- Praying from the Bible acknowledges God's initiative and guidance in prayer.
 - Prayer does not begin with us; rather, all prayer begins with God. God has already spoken to us through the written words of Scripture, and Christ and the Holy Spirit continually pray for us (Hebrews 7:25; Romans 8:34) and in us (Romans 8:16, 26-27) to enable us to pray. Thus, all prayer is response to God's speaking to us. Prayer is "answering speech" (Eugene Peterson). So it makes sense to begin our prayer by first listening to God through his word and responding to him through this means he has graciously provided for us.
 - Praying from God's word gives us confidence that our prayer will be pleasing to God and shaped by a God-centered perspective on life. By starting from God's word, our prayers will be deeper and broader than what we would pray on our own.
- Lack of knowledge
We don't automatically know how to pray, and we need to learn. We learn to talk by speaking as we're spoken to. The Bible is full of prayers so that we can learn to pray by speaking and imitating divinely-inspired examples.
- Boredom and distraction
 - Praying from the Bible combats a loss for words by giving us language and ideas to pray. If we pray from the Bible, we will never run out of fresh things to say in prayer.
 - Praying from the Bible combats distraction by focusing our minds.
 - Praying from the Bible combats boredom by giving us endless variety.

We are always praying for the same topics. What are they?

The problem is not the topics but the method.

"We can be talking to the most fascinating Person in the universe about the most important things in our lives and be bored to death . . . If this mind-wandering boredom describes your experience in prayer, I would argue that if you are indwelled by the Holy Spirit—if you are born again—then the problem is not you; it is your method. . . The method of most Christians in prayer is to say the same old things about the same old things." (Donald Whitney, *Praying the Bible*, chapter 1).

II. How to Pray from Scripture

- Quiet your mind and body before God. Finding a quiet spot and taking some deep breaths in silence can help to do this.
- Ask the Lord to meet you through his word by the work of his Holy Spirit, to enable you to understand his word, to discern its application to you, and to enable you to respond to God with faith, hope, and love.

- Move verse by verse and pray what comes to mind. And God will lead you!
The Spirit of God works through the word of God to you to pray for things that you would not think of yourself.
 - Verbatim (praying the words of the text): If the biblical text is a prayer, you can pray the exact words of Scripture as your prayer.
 - Paraphrase (praying the meaning of the text in our own words): You can use the language and ideas of a text as a springboard and guide for your own expression of prayer. You can express the meaning of the biblical text in your own words and turn rephrase biblical texts in the form of conversation with God.
- Martin Luther's method: pray all categories of prayer from each verse (e.g., Beatitudes)
 - **Praise/thanksgiving**: Acknowledging and honoring God for who he is and what he has done. Voicing our joy and gratitude for the greatness of God's glory that we experience and receive in creation and salvation.
Biblical examples: Psalm 95, 98, 100, 150; Exodus 15; Luke 1:46-55, 68-79
How to give praise/thanks from Scripture:
 - + What attributes of God are revealed or implied in this text?
 - + How does the text show us Jesus' perfection and what he did for us?
 - **Confession**: Acknowledging and naming our particular sins before God. Genuine confession should lead us to repentance, which is rejecting and turning away from the sin with a desire to put it to death and to live in faithful, loving obedience to God.
Biblical examples: Psalm 51; Daniel 9
How to confess from Scripture:
 - + How does the text show me a way that I fall short of God's glory and rebel against his will and purpose for me?
 - **Lament**: Protesting the pain, suffering, and injustice of the world to God and calling for his deliverance. Whereas confession focuses on the guilt of our personal sins, lament focuses more broadly on the impact of sin and evil in the world, the wounds and brokenness that plague our lives and the lives of others.
Biblical examples: Psalm 5, 6, 7, 13, 38, 55, 74, 77, 79, 88, 102
How to lament from Scripture:
 - + How does the text show me something wrong with the world to cry out in protest before God?
 - **Petition/request**: Crying out to God for help and asking him to provide for the needs of ourselves and others.
Biblical examples: Psalm 25, 119, the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13); Acts 4:24-30
How to make petitions from Scripture:
 - + How does the text show me something to ask?
 - + Change pronouns from third person to second (to address God) and first person (to apply statements to oneself or articulate them yourself).
 - + Insert a person's name into a text.
 - + Think of how the texts reveal the experiences and needs of others.

Resources

Donald Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Crossway, 2015).

Martin Luther, "A Simple Way to Pray"

Luther offers examples of the prayers he prayed for his own life and times from the 10 Commandments and the Lord's Prayer and examples of how the same text can prompt several different categories of prayer.

T. M. Moore, *God's Prayer Program: Passionately Using the Psalms in Prayer* (Christian Focus, 2005).

Peter Adam, *Prayerfulness: Cultivating a Bible-Enriched Prayer Life* (Matthias Media, 2025).