

Next Generation Scripture Engagement

The South Asian Experience

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

DESCRIPTION OF PRAYING SCRIPTURE

Engaging the Bible and praying are the primary methods for developing a deepening relationship with God. In fact, all other spiritual disciplines (e.g., fasting, study, simplicity, worship, confession, service) have their foundation in the disciplines of reading the Bible and praying. While many tend to think of prayer and Bible reading as separate spiritual practices (e.g., first I pray, then I read the Bible), they can be even more powerful when combined into one practice of “praying scripture.”

Are you ever unsure about what you should pray? Do your prayers become dull or repetitive? Do you feel like you're praying “wrong?” Your confidence in your prayers will be strengthened when you pray God's Words. Praying the Scriptures allows you to use the words and emotions of the Bible to gain more confidence in your prayers. What do we mean when we say to “pray scripture?” Evan Howard (Praying the Scriptures) writes, “To pray the Scriptures is to order one's time of prayer around a particular text in the Bible.” This can mean either praying the prayers of the Bible word-for-word as your own prayers, personalizing portions of the Scriptures in prayer, or praying through various topics of the Bible.

HOW GEORGE MUELLER STARTED HIS DAY

George Mueller (1805-1898) is famous for establishing orphanages in England and for joyfully depending on God for all his needs. What follows is a quote from his autobiography concerning how he engaged the Scriptures each morning by praying them:

“The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord blessing upon his precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God; searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing out of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that thought I did not as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately or less into prayer.

When thus I have been for a while making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me, that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is, that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. Thus also the Lord is pleased to communicate unto me that which, very soon after, I have found to become food for other believers, though it was not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word that I gave myself to meditation, but for the profit of my own inner man.

As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time, except we take food, and as this is one of the first things we do in the morning, so it should be with the inner man. We should take food for that, as every one must allow. Now what is the food for the inner man: not prayer, but the Word of God: and here again not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts...”

From: *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* - by John Piper

HOW NOT TO ENGAGE THE BIBLE.

Though any listening and reading of Scripture is better than none at all, some ways that people come to the Bible end up restricting their spiritual growth. Below are a few ways NOT to approach the Bible. This list isn't exhaustive, but perhaps it can serve as a catalyst for you to explore your own motivation for coming to the Bible

GUILT

Many people have come to the conclusion that "good Christians read the Bible." They want God to like them, so they read the Bible out of trying to please God, out of a kind of guilt. This approach can see God as either punitive ("if I don't read, God will be mad at me") or almost like a "lucky charm" ("if I read, God will have to reward me"). At its core Scripture engagement is a relational process. We come to a loving God through the Scriptures to know him, to understand what is true, and to be changed into the person he created us to be.

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHT

Another way that people approach the Bible is for a "devotional thought." Scriptures are approached for some quick small happy thought that will be an encouragement for the day, maybe tied to a nice moral story. But the Bible never presents itself as something warm and fuzzy. Hebrews 4:12 tells us that "the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Treating God's Word like a warm and cuddly toy, when it is really a double-edged sword (or a fire and a hammer as in Jeremiah 23:29), is condescending.

CONTENT/INFORMATION

The Bible is full of content. It is a window into a number of ancient worlds and a window into the spiritual world. While all of the information in the Bible is fascinating, facts are not relationship. The person who knows the most Bible facts is not necessarily the person who knows God the most. If we elevate facts above meeting God, then we have lost the most important facet of

WHAT PART OF SCRIPTURES DO I PRAY?

PRAYING BIBLICAL PRAYERS

The Bible is full of prayers! From Genesis to Revelation there are Biblical prayers we can pray to strengthen our spiritual lives. These prayers express every kind of emotion and experience. The whole book of Psalms is a prayer book! By praying the prayers of the Bible we identify with the Biblical authors and we are encouraged to allow God's Spirit to shape us into the people he wants us to be. The prayers of the Bible, especially the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 11:1-4), become our tutors to learn how to communicate with God.

PRAYING OTHER PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE

Not only can the prayers of the Bible be prayed, any part of the Bible can be used to communicate with God. As we read the Bible (stories, history, poems, parables, etc.) in the presence of God and pay attention to the Spirit, we will identify with passages that relate to our lives, the world, and people we know. Over time it will become natural to immediately turn these thoughts into prayer. Out of the thoughts we are having as we read, we turn to God in worship, confession, thanksgiving, and petition for ourselves and others. Our Bible reading becomes a conversation with God, a cycle of reading and prayer.

PRAYING TOPICALLY

Along with praying the prayers of the Bible and making prayer part of your normal Bible reading, searching for topical passages in the Bible is helpful. These may reflect your present emotional state, a specific need, the desire to worship, or the need to give thanks, confess, or to be encouraged. Maybe you need to pray for someone you love, to pray through some Biblical promises, or pray to be challenged by God. To help you locate passages on a specific topic, you can look in a concordance in the back of many Bibles or in books on praying scripture.

Praying Scripture is a useful and valuable discipline for Christians of any age or maturity level. We need to engage Scripture to the fullest extent of its power. Praying Scripture is a wonderful way to engage with our Creator and Lord.