

PRAYING SCRIPTURE

By Michelle Richardson

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 6:7

And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

OBSERVATION

How many times do we find ourselves praying the same things over and over again? Does our prayer life ever feel stale or boring? Do we find ourselves “heaping up empty phrases,” simply treating prayer as a ritual or routine with little meaning or significance? I know I have. I have even struggled with not knowing what to pray, for fear that I’m praying something outside of God’s will. I know it sounds silly, but I would guess that most of these have happened to all of us at one point or another. But if God invites, empowers (through the Holy Spirit), and expects all of His children to pray to Him, wouldn't He make it simple? So why does conversation with God our Father often seem so difficult and laborious?

I would contend that maybe we haven’t taken advantage of something that’s right in front of us: God’s Word. Not only does God give Scripture on how to and how not to pray, such as in Matthew 6, but God’s entire Word can be a prayer. Learn to pray God’s words back to Him. I can’t think of a more beautiful (and biblical) way to converse with the Creator of the world than to use His own words. Rather than making up our own words to say to Him, possibly a more God-centered method that better ensures we are praying according to His will is to read/recite Scripture and pray what comes to mind. For example: reading through Psalm 42, “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God,” what comes to my mind to pray is this: “God, as a deer is desperate for streams of water as it runs from a hunter, I want to be desperate for You, running away from sinful desires; I want to know You more and thirst for Your truth. Give me strength to continue seeking Truth, and discipline to stay in Your Word even on days I don’t feel like it. I pray for those in my family who don’t know You; reveal Yourself to them and give them a heart that is desperate for You. I ask that You also comfort our missionaries overseas; just as a deer out in the wilderness pants for water, I pray that their hearts would yearn for You to fill the void of loneliness and isolation in their context.” This verse wasn’t talking about missionaries, but if a missionary friend pops into my head while reading this, why not pray for him or her? I could keep praying whatever comes to mind with that verse or go to the next verse and pray that to God. I keep praying until I run out of time or run out of things to say. This method keeps our

minds from wandering and brings things/people to mind for prayer that may not enter our minds otherwise.

Author and professor Donald Whitney says it beautifully: “What you are doing is taking words that originated in the heart and mind of God and circulating them through your heart and mind back to God. By this means His words become the wings of your prayers.” We as believers know the privilege and blessing it is to commune with God daily, through Christ Jesus, and how beautiful it must be to God’s ears to hear His children speak His own words back to Him rather than “heaping up empty phrases.”

OBEDIENCE

As humans with finite knowledge, we don’t always know if we’re praying in accordance with God’s will but praying the Word of God gives us more assurance that we are on the right track. 1 John 5:14-15 says “And this is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer quotes, “The Psalms are given us to this end, that we may learn to pray them in the name of Jesus Christ.” Psalms are a great place to start when praying Scripture, but really any Scripture can be prayed back to God.

- 1) This week choose a few Psalms to read and then pray through each verse. If you don’t understand a verse or don’t have anything to pray relating to that verse, skip to the next one. See how it expands the things/people you pray for, maintains your mental focus instead of wandering, keeps your prayers God-centered, and ignites a new passion in your prayer life. You may even find that it’s easier to remember the Scriptures you’ve prayed through, thus improving your Scripture memory.
- 2) Pray boldly, asking for God to graciously answer your prayers. At the same time, acknowledge that He is sovereign and ask for His glory to be made known, no matter the outcome
- 3) Check out Donald Whitney’s book “Praying the Bible.” It expounds on this idea and gives practical ways of how to pray God’s Word.

PRAYER

Father, just as Your Word says in Psalm 42:2, my soul thirsts for you, the living God. In these weird times, it is hard to discern what is true and what is false in the news. It is difficult to know who to trust. But I know that ultimately, YOU are Truth. Your Word has always been and will always be Truth. Give me discernment and wisdom in these uncertain days. Give me the discipline to stay in Your Word, keeping my mind focused on Your kingdom instead of the fears of this world. Help me to thirst for You, for You are living and You are King over all. In Jesus’ precious and Holy Name, I pray, Amen.