

# PRAYING THE BIBLE

## Selected Texts

Many Christians feel defeated in their prayer lives. To pray even five-to-seven minutes seems like an eternity, and their minds wander much of that time. “I guess it’s me,” many conclude. “I’m just a second-rate Christian.” No, if you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and generally seeking to live in obedience to God’s Word, then the problem likely isn’t you, but your method. Of course, there is no method that will enliven prayer for those who do not have the Holy Spirit. But those who are indwelt by the Spirit have received from God “the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Those who have been given the Holy Spirit have by that Spirit a new Fatherward orientation, a new Heavenward orientation. In other words, those indwelt by the Holy Spirit really want to pray. And yet, while they believe in prayer and want to pray and can’t imagine ever totally abandoning prayer, when they do pray it’s frustrating. Their hearts are often cold, their minds can’t stay focused on prayer, and frankly, prayer is often boring. Thus many conclude, “I’m a second-rate Christian.”

### I. THE PROBLEM

Our problem in prayer is . . . we say the same old things about the same old things.

Praying that way is often boring. When prayer is boring, we don’t feel like praying. And when we don’t feel like praying, it’s hard to concentrate in prayer and to pray for very long.

Our problem is not that we pray *about* the same old things. To pray about your . . .

- Family
- Future
- Finances
- Work or schoolwork
- Church or ministry
- And the “current crisis” is normal. If you’re going to pray about your life, these things *are* your life.

So our problem in prayer is not that we pray *about* the same old things, but that we *say* the same old things about the same old things. That’s boring. When prayer is boring we don’t feel like praying. And when we don’t feel like praying, it’s hard to pray for any length of time or with much consistency.

### II. THE SOLUTION

What’s the solution? Whatever it is, it must be fundamentally simple. For God has children of all ages, IQs, educational levels, etc. If He expects (and invites) all His children to pray, then consistent, meaningful prayer must be doable by all kinds of people. And if it were not possible for you—with all your Christian advantages (such as proximity to good churches, accessibility to Christian books, recordings, and other media, etc.)—to have a meaningful prayer life, then what of the tens of millions of Christians without these things?

Here’s the solution: when you pray, pray through a passage of Scripture, especially a Psalm.

### III. THE METHOD

Let the words of Scripture become the words of your prayers. For example, if you pray through Psalm 23, read “The Lord is my shepherd,” and thank Him for being your shepherd. Ask Him to shepherd your family that day, to guide, protect, and provide for them. Pray that He will make your family members His sheep; that they will look to Him as their shepherd. Ask Him to shepherd you through the decision you must make about your future. Pray for Him to bless the undershepherd at your church, shepherding him as he shepherds the church, etc. When nothing else comes to mind, go to the next line—“I shall not want”—and continue to pray.

Simply go through the passage, line-by-line, praying what you find in the text or what it brings to mind. If nothing comes to mind, or if you don't understand the verse, go to the next. You might choose to linger long on one verse. Conversely, there may be only a handful of matters that prompt prayer as you go through many verses. Nothing says you have to pray over every verse.

Continue in this way until (1) you run out of time, or (2) you run out of Psalm.

One approach to choosing a Psalm to pray through is the "Psalms of the Day" approach. This divides the 150 Psalms into 5 Psalms for each of 30 days in a month. Take the day of month as your first Psalm. Then keep adding 30 to that number until you get 5 Psalms. So on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the month, your first Psalm is Psalm 15. To Psalm 15, add 30 to get the next one, Psalm 45. These would be followed by Psalm 75, then 105, and 135. (On the 31<sup>st</sup>, use Psalm 119.) Take 30 seconds to scan these five Psalms, then choose one to pray through. One advantage of this method is that gives you direction when it's time to pray and defeats aimlessness.

*The Psalms* are the best place in Scripture from which to pray Scripture. This is because of the original purpose and usage of the Psalms. The Psalms were songs inspired by God for the purpose of being reflected in song back to God. Moreover, there's a Psalm for every sigh of the heart. The entire range of human emotion is recorded in the 150 Psalms.

Perhaps the second-best place in Scripture from which to pray Scripture is *the New Testament letters*. These are so densely packed with truth that virtually every verse suggests something to pray about.

It is also edifying to pray through *the narrative passages of Scripture*. Unlike praying through the Psalms or New Testament letters, however, a different approach must often be used with the narrative passages. Instead of looking at each verse almost microscopically, in a narrative passage it's usually easier to consider it paragraph-by-paragraph, looking for the "big ideas" of the story.

Once you actually experience praying through a passage of Scripture, you'll likely be able to turn to any part of the Bible and pray through it. You won't need these notes to remember how to do it the second time. Like riding a bicycle, you never forget.

By praying through a passage of Scripture, you'll find yourself praying about most of "the same old things," but in brand new ways. You'll also find yourself praying about things you would never think to pray about.

Do not try to lead a *group* in praying through Scripture until most of the members of the group are familiar with praying through Scripture as *individuals*. When praying through Scripture with a group—whether the group is a family, a class, or a church prayer meeting—consider these suggestions:

- Good—Assign a verse to each person and have each pray through that particular verse.
- Better—Read the Psalm aloud (or have each read it silently), then ask each to pray based upon a verse that particularly impressed them.
- Best—Read the Psalm, then (you as the prayer leader) call out—one at a time as needed—the phrases or verses you think are the most conducive to prayer. Those willing to pray would pray as inclined to do so after one or more of the phrases or verses you call out.

The testimony of George Mueller.

The observation of Charles Spurgeon.

The examples of Jesus in Matthew 27:46 and Luke 23:46, and the church in Acts 4:23-26.

#### IV. THE CONCLUSION

Jesus prayed the Psalms. The early church prayed the Psalms. Great Christians like George Mueller prayed the Psalms. Why not you?

# FAMILY WORSHIP

## Selected Texts

So little family worship regularly exists in Christian homes, it is probable that even in *most* of our *best* churches, *most* of our *best* men do not lead their wives—and children if they have them—in family worship. Having your family in a good, Bible-teaching local church is crucial to Christian parenting. But it is not enough for conveying *your* faith to your children. Moreover, it is unlikely that exposure to the church once or twice a week will impress your children enough with the greatness and glory of God that they will want to pursue Him once they leave home. In this message I want to declare one main point: God deserves to be worshiped daily in our homes by our families.

### I. THE BIBLE CLEARLY IMPLIES THAT GOD DESERVES TO BE WORSHIPED DAILY IN OUR HOMES BY OUR FAMILIES

Genesis 18:17-19.  
 Genesis 22:6-7.  
 Deuteronomy 6:4-7.  
 Joshua 24:15.  
 Job 1:5.  
 Psalm 78:1-8.  
 Ephesians 5:25-26.  
 Ephesians 6:4.  
 1 Timothy 3:4-5.  
 1 Peter 3:7.

### II. THE LIVES OF OUR CHRISTIAN HEROES TESTIFY THAT GOD DESERVES TO BE WORSHIPED DAILY IN OUR HOMES BY OUR FAMILIES

Christians in the early church.  
 Tertullian.  
 John Chrysostom  
 Martin Luther.  
 John Knox.  
 The Presbyterians (Westminster Confession) and the Baptists (Second London Confession of 1689).  
 Westminster Directory for Family Worship.  
 The Puritans, particularly Richard Baxter  
 Matthew Henry. Regarding family worship he said, “Here the reformation must begin.”  
 Jonathan Edwards.  
 Samuel Davies.  
 J. W. Alexander. See his book, *Thoughts on Family Worship* (Soli Deo Gloria publishers)  
 Charles Spurgeon.  
 John G. Paton.  
 Martyn Lloyd-Jones.  
 Erroll Hulse.  
 D.A. Carson.  
 John Piper.  
 “Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church” (Edwards). Part of church life is worship.

### III. EVERY CHRISTIAN FAMILY IS ABLE TO SHOW THAT GOD DESERVES TO BE WORSHIPED DAILY IN OUR HOMES BY OUR FAMILIES, AND HERE’S HOW:

**A. There are three elements to family worship: read the Bible, pray, and sing.** No material to “prepare.”

- **Read and explain the Bible.** The younger the children, the more you’ll want to use narrative passages and shorter sections. Read enthusiastically and interpretively, not apathetically.
- **Pray.** Pray about at least one thing suggested by the passage you have read. By doing so you not only pray for your family (and in fresh ways each time), but teach your family by example how to pray.
- **Sing.** Get songbooks for everyone and use them. Some sing a different song each night; some sing the same song for a week so they can learn it. Sing with (or as most do) without musical accompaniment.

- If time permits. . .
  - Catechizing
  - Scripture Memory
  - Other Reading. When time permits, you might start with some general reading, after which you begin family worship. Or, at the close of family worship, you might take advantage of the time together to read a Christian book or biography to your family.

**B. General reminders:**

- Brevity. Don't let the experience become tedious. You can always lengthen the time if asked.
- Regularity. Whether in the morning, at the evening meal, or before bedtime, have a set time.
- Flexibility. Every family has to flex its worship time sometime. But beware of inconsistency.

**IV. BUT WHAT IF . . . ?**

**A. What if the father is not a Christian?**

The Bible gives no instruction in this case, and Christian moms have responded to this in various ways. Many unbelieving men are willing to read the Bible with their families—they only had to be asked.

**B. What if there is no father at home?**

Then the mother has the responsibility to raise the children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4), and this includes family worship.

**C. What if the children are very young?**

You exercise patience and discipline, and proceed with family worship. Part of the discipline may be to teach them to stay in certain place. But you'll begin to make lasting impressions upon them.

**D. What if there is a wide range of ages among the children?**

This is frequently the case, but has as many advantages as it has challenges. It can be done, for families have often been larger than ours today, and yet they were often more faithful in family worship.

**E. What if there are no children at home?**

Remember that 1 Peter 3:7 addresses husbands, not fathers, thus family worship is for couples, not just parents. The absence of children in the home does not justify the absence of family worship there.

Remember that there is no family worship situation that is unique, no situation that has not been addressed by Christians for centuries.

**V. START TODAY**

The worthiness of God to receive your family's worship each day is reason enough to start practicing family worship today. But in addition to that:

- What better way exists to evangelize your children daily?
- What better way to provide an opportunity for children to ask about the things of God in a natural context?
- What better way for you to transmit *your* core beliefs to your children?
- What better way for your children to see the ongoing, positive spiritual example of their parents?
- What better way to provide reproducible examples to your children of how to have a Christian home?
- Isn't this what you really *want* to do?

Men, say to your wives: “I've come to believe that the Bible teaches that I should be leading us in family worship and I want to start today. I have a lot to learn about it, but I want to do what's right. Will you join me?”

Husbands, fathers—have the resolve of Jacob in Genesis 35:2-3.

Family members—have the willing spirit of Jacob's household in Genesis 35:4.

Single men—resolve to begin a time of worship with your fiancé from the night you become engaged.

Single women—resolve not to marry a man who will not pray with you and lead you in family worship.

Empty nesters—show your children by your family worship that you can still learn the things of God

Regardless of what anyone else does, let every father, let every Christian here commit himself to this: “as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” in family worship.

## METHODS OF MEDITATION ON SCRIPTURE

Summary of the methods of meditation on Scripture taught by Don Whitney ([www.BiblicalSpirituality.org](http://www.BiblicalSpirituality.org))

**Begin by selecting a passage for meditation from your time of reading God's Word. Choose a verse or phrase that attracted your attention, or a theme verse or key verse from the passage.**

### 1. Emphasize different words in the text.

<i>Whatever</i> He says to you do it (John 2:5).	Whatever He says <i>to you</i> do it.
Whatever <i>He</i> says to you do it.	Whatever He says to you <i>do</i> it.
Whatever He <i>says</i> to you do it.	Whatever He says to you do <i>it</i> .

### 2. Rewrite the verse or phrase in your own words.

### 3. Formulate a principle from the text—What does it teach?

### 4. Think of an illustration of the text—What pictures or explains it?

### 5. Look for applications of the text—What should you do in response to it?

### 6. Ask how the text points to the Law or the Gospel.

### 7. Ask how the text points to something about Jesus.

### 8. Ask what question is answered or problem is solved by the text.

### 9. Pray through the text.

### 10. Memorize the text.

### 11. Create an artistic expression of the text—a song, poem, or sketch.

### 12. Ask the Philippians 4:8 questions of the text.

What is <i>true</i> or what truth does it exemplify?	What is <i>lovely</i> about it?
What is <i>honorable</i> about it?	What is <i>admirable or commendable</i> about it?
What is <i>right</i> about it?	What is <i>excellent</i> about it?
What is <i>pure</i> or how does it exemplify purity?	What is <i>praiseworthy</i> about it?

### 13. Ask the “Joseph Hall” questions of the text.

What is it ( <i>define and/or describe</i> what it is)?	What are its <i>qualities and attachments</i> ?
What are its <i>divisions or parts</i> ?	What is <i>contrary, contradictory or different</i> to it?
What <i>causes</i> it?	What <i>compares</i> to it?
What does it <i>cause</i> (its <i>fruits and effects</i> )?	What its <i>titles or names</i> ?
What is its <i>place, location or use</i> ?	What are the <i>testimonies or examples of Scripture</i> about it?

### 14. Set and Discover a minimum number of insights from the text (set the number in advance).

### 15. Find a link or common thread between all the chapters or paragraphs you've read.

### 16. Ask how the text speaks to your current issue or question.

### 17. Use Meditation Mapping.

- Put the verse(s), phrase, word or topic to be meditated upon in the *middle* of the page. (When possible, this should be done in picture form.)
- Allow insights, ideas and thoughts to come *quickly and freely*.
- Use *key words* to represent your ideas.
- Connect* your key words ideas to the central focus with lines.
- Use as *few words* per line as possible.
- P-r-i-n-t* all the words for easier reading.
- Use *color* for emphasis and recall.
- Make frequent use of *symbols and pictures* in addition to words.

See: Buzan, Tony. *The Mindmap Book*. New York: Plume/Penguin, 1996.  
Wycoff, Joyce. *Mindmapping*. New York: Berkley, 1991.