

## Prayer Guide – Week 3

### PRAYING SCRIPTURE

**“You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.” Psalm 139:1**

In the early centuries of the church, believers were taught to pray the Scriptures. Since the Bible is divinely inspired, they believed that praying Scripture deeply connected them to the mind and heart of God. Furthermore, as Scripture was repeatedly prayed, it was also memorized. This was a wonderful benefit for those who were illiterate. It also meant that memorized Scripture could lead them to pray at any hour of the day or night.

Praying Scripture is a way of entering deeply into the text with a heart alert to a unique and personal word from God. Words and verses that catch our attention become invitations to be with God in prayer. When our prayers seem to be more about maintaining control and offering God our agenda for His stamp of approval, praying Scripture can return us to a simpler state of openness and attentiveness to God. We lay aside our own agendas and open ourselves to the prayers given to us in the Bible.

The book of Psalms is a wonderfully human prayer book. It doesn't clean up the mess of life before prayer. It brings the totality of life to God. Here we find prayers that voice our needs, fears, joys, sorrows, anger, loneliness, dryness and joy. The Psalms invite us to be authentic and honest and come to God as we are. The Bible also contains wonderful prayers by people like Jesus, Paul, Daniel, Mary, Moses and Hannah. Their prayers can provide a framework for intercession for people and nations. When we are at a loss for words and have no prayers in our heart, the prayers of Scripture are ready to guide us to God. They can provide the help and structure that keeps us on the path through a difficult season.

### Prayer Invitations

Here are a few invitations that may be helpful. Remember to write out your prayers and place them in your prayer box.

- Become quiet and breathe in Jesus' love and presence. Breathe out your self-doubts and self-recriminations. Turn to Psalm 139. Slowly read the psalm aloud, pausing after each verse. You could even substitute your own name for the pronouns me and I. For instance, insert your name in the blanks:

For you created \_\_\_\_\_'s inmost being; you knit \_\_\_\_\_ together in \_\_\_\_\_'s mother's womb. \_\_\_\_\_ praises you because \_\_\_\_\_ is fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, \_\_\_\_\_ knows that full well. (Psalm 139:13-14)

Do not hurry. There is no need to get through the entire psalm at once. Respond to Jesus' nurturing presence. Dear Jesus...

- Any Psalm can be used for prayer. Here are some suggestions to get started: Psalm 23, Psalm 90, Psalm 91, Psalm 103, Psalm 121. Again, do not hurry. There is no need to get through the entire psalm at once. Respond to Jesus' presence. Dear Jesus...
- Take time to pray for the church; place yourself in the presence of God and pray one of Paul's prayers for the church: Ephesians 1:15-21; Ephesians 3:14-21; or Philippians 1:3-6, 9. Turn to Jesus' prayer for the church in John 17. Slowly read the passage. Listen for the prayer God places in our heart for our church. Write your prayer and place it in your prayer box. Dear Jesus...
- When you are convicted of your own sinfulness, turn to Psalm 51 or Psalm 32. Offer yourself to God in repentance. Read the psalm one verse at a time. Stop after each verse, and talk to God about what you have read. Let the words of the psalmist comfort and sustain you. David and the other psalm writers struggled like you. They all sinned like you. And yet in God's eyes, David was a hero of the faith. Tell Jesus what it means to you that the heroes of faith struggled just as you do. Dear Jesus...

## Prayer Advice

We are not trying to master the content when praying scripture, but we are allowing ourselves to be mastered by the One who comes through Scripture to minister to us. Praying Scripture is bringing our heart to God, letting the words become a vehicle for our transformation.

Our goal, then, is to be guided by the living Spirit of God through the words of scripture. Even though the words are familiar, we want to approach the words with openness, as though we never heard them before. Our mind is fresh, yearning to hear what we need to hear.

Let the words of Scripture guide you to God; let the words carry you to Jesus' presence. We don't have to fully understand what it all means. Isaiah tells us that the Word, like the rain, will not return empty.

*"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return to it without watering the earth  
and making it bud and flourish,  
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,  
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:  
It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire  
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."*

*-Isaiah 55:10-11*

Resources:

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home by Richard Foster

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson

Spirit Windows: A Handbook of Spiritual Growth Resources for Leaders by Ann Z. Kulp

Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives by Dallas Willard