

10. Ask relational questions. Where do I find myself resonating with a word or resisting what the text is saying? What do my reactions to the text tell me about my relationships, attitudes or behaviours? What aspect of my life is being touched or spoken to through this text? How do I feel about what is being said?

11. Identify yourself in the text. Ask, “What is God saying to me?” and “If I was literally in the narrative, what role would I be playing?”

12. Perform it. Follow Christ. When it applies to you, intentionally live out the text you’re reading. Reflection is the precursor to practically orientating our lives around God’s Word. In Wesley’s guidelines for reading Scripture he says we should come to the Word “with a single eye, to know the whole will of God, and a fixed resolution to do it.”

Reflection on the Scriptures usually happens along with other Bible engagement practices. One can’t, for example, pray, memorize, study, or journal Scripture without reflection. This is why it’s critical for every Christian to learn basic Scripture reflection skills.

PRAYING

For freshness of utterance, for breath of comprehension, for elevation of thought, for intimacy of heart, there is no prayer like that which forms itself in the words and thoughts of Scripture.

J. Graham Miller, New Zealand/Australian Pastor.

When you pray, use the Bible.

Prayer, in most cases, has fallen on hard times. When a local church advertises a concert with a well-known singer, the auditorium is full. When that same church advertises a prayer meeting, only a few show up!

Why do we struggle to pray? Maybe it’s because when we do pray, we pray out of the natural desires of our own hearts.

Prayer birthed in a me-centred heart does not touch the heart of God. For prayer to be effectual, we must pray what’s on God’s heart. And how do we know what’s on God’s heart? By reading and reflecting on His Word.

Bible engagement and prayer go together. To pray right, we must pray the Word. There are no shortcuts to true prayer. Prayer that moves the heart of God is prayer that’s birthed, fueled and sustained by the Word of God.

Are you praying the Bible? If not, the scope of your prayers is limited by your feelings and perspectives. And prayer rooted exclusively in an individual's experience may not be prayer at all.

Perhaps we struggle to pray because we're weak. Perhaps we don't really know what to pray or how to pray (Romans 8:26). Informed prayer comes from meditating on the Word and if we aren't reading the Bible, prayer in itself becomes tricky.

When prayer is grounded in the Word, it receives wings to fly. "For me it is absolutely essential that my prayers be guided by, saturated by, and sustained and controlled by the word of God," says Piper.

Tragically, for so many of us prayer remains earth-bound because it's tied to the fluctuating passions of the heart. For prayer to take flight, the Holy Spirit needs to pray in us and through us. This happens when we're praying the Bible.

Another reason why we struggle to pray is because our theme is so limited. We struggle to pray because it's all about us.

When Christ died on the cross for our sins and we embraced His forgiveness by faith, we died to the old self. The old you is now dead! "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,*" Galatians 5:24. Why then, do we continue to pray self-seeking requests?

Here's the good news for those wanting to grow in prayer: We cannot enlarge upon the prayer themes found in the Bible. Everything we need to pray effectively is found in the Word! The scope and depth of God's Word is beyond measure. Study the Word and you'll have more than enough content to pray without ceasing.

Often we struggle to pray because we try to go it alone with our own thoughts and aspirations. There's a place for individual prayer but not for individualistic prayer. Those who are in Christ are part of the Body of Christ. Our prayers are only tiny fragments that when put together form the prayer of the Church. And the fragments of prayer that make up the prayer of the Church are only true when they line up with the Word.

To pray selflessly - to pray the prayer of the Church - we must pray in the context of community. Prayer is effectual when we pray with one accord, in unity (Matthew 18:19). That's why we should always pray with another. And that other is Christ - the One who is the Word of God (John 1:1-2).

Prayer is stimulated by the Word and inspired by Christ. Remarkably, God's Word is something we receive and also return to God. How can this be? How can words that are not our own become our prayers? It happens by someone else praying on our behalf; by the One who is the Word interceding for us!

When we pray the Bible, we pray in the name of Christ. The Word belongs to us through Him. As we pray His Word, we pray prayers from His heart, which brings great delight to God.

Here's a final thought on why we struggle to pray: sometimes our prayers feel stale. We don't want to pray because we're tired of saying the same old things over and over again. "Prayers without variety eventually become words without meaning," says Donald S. Whitney, professor of Biblical Spirituality.

If you sometimes feel like God doesn't hear your prayers, if you lack confidence, are unsure about what to pray, would

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like your prayers to be more effectual, wish your mind didn't wander, and want to pray in line with God's will; then you need to be renewed and revived through praying the Scriptures.

Praying the Scriptures is using God's words to form our prayers. It's praying His Word back to Him. Specifically, praying the Scriptures is using the words, phrases or themes

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of a Scripture passage to guide, shape, and give language to our conversations with God. It's done by praying a Scripture text word for word as one's own prayer, by personalizing a Scripture text, or by turning our thoughts and feelings about a topic or theme of a Scripture passage into prayer.

Reading the Scriptures and praying the Scriptures should happen together. When we pray the Scriptures, we know we're in alignment with God's will. When we're in alignment with God's will, His Spirit directs and informs our prayers. Here's an example of how one might read and simultaneously pray Psalm 23 in a personalized way:

Praying Psalm 23

Scripture - *The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.*

Prayer - Lord, thank you for being Jehovah-Raah, my Shepherd. Because you're my Shepherd, I don't need a thing. You intimately take care of everything. Please watch over my life and the lives of my family members today.

Scripture- *He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.*

Prayer - Lord, thank you for giving me opportunities to rest. Sometimes I'm too busy for my own good and too preoccupied to see your beauty around me. Help me be still and know that you are God. Please rejuvenate me today.

Scripture - *He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.*

Prayer - Thank you Lord for your guidance. You steer me along the path of righteousness. True to your name, you keep me on the straight and narrow road that leads to life. And you do it all for your glory.

Scripture - *Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Prayer - Lord even in the bleakest circumstances you are by my side. What a relief to know that when I'm down, you are with me. So why am I anxious? There's no need for me to be afraid because I'm safe and secure in you.

Scripture - *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

Prayer - Thank you, Lord. I'm never forsaken. You faithfully provide for me, even in difficult times. It's remarkable. You serve and honour me when I should be serving and honouring you! And more, you do it in front of my enemies.

Scripture - *You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

Prayer - Who am I that you are so mindful of me? I'm blessed from the tip of my head to the soles of my feet! Thank you for not limiting your blessings: day in and day out, they keep on coming.

Scripture - *Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

Prayer - Your love is amazing! Wherever I am and wherever I go, you keep on chasing after me. You are good and your love endures forever. Today, tomorrow and throughout my life, your grace and mercy are with me. And when I leave this life you'll still be there, loving me forever. Thank you, you truly are my Shepherd. Because of your great love, I have everything I really need. Amen.

Reading the Scriptures and praying the Scriptures should be a continuous, seamless cycle. The Psalms are a great place to begin (Jesus prayed the Psalms), or simply go to a portion of Scripture you're presently reading and start praying it back to God.

MEMORIZING

Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization because it is a fundamental way of filling our minds with what it needs. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization.

Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation in Christ for the Whole Life and Whole Person."

Bible engagement is strengthened and deepened through Scripture memorization. When we retain God's Word in our hearts it substantially informs our way of thinking and being. It also captivates our minds, enabling us to focus on Christ and His thoughts.

Now that's all well and good, but why should we memorize Scripture in the 21st century when we can simply read it on our smartphones?