
Brian Chesemore
SESSION 3 | DEEPENING PRAYER

Our Recommended Text

Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God by Timothy Keller (Dutton)

Class Overview

Week One: What Is Prayer? | Chapters 3-5
Week Two: Learning Prayer | Chapters 6-9
Week Three: Deepening Prayer | Chapters 10-11
Week Four: Doing Prayer | Chapters 12-15

Additional Recommended Reading

- *Take Words with You* by Tim Kerr
- *Praying the Lord's Prayer* by J.I. Packer (Crossway)
- *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* by D.A. Carson (Inter Varsity Press)
- *The Valley of Vision* (Banner of Truth)
- *The Message of Prayer* by Timothy Chester (Inter Varsity Press)
- *Heart Aflame: Daily Readings from Calvin on the Psalms* (P&R)

I. Deepening Prayer

A. Prayer As Conversation: Meditating on His Word

“When we respond in trust to the Word of God then prayer becomes a conversation with God.”¹

“Many have written about the hyperactivity of today’s contemporary society and our cultural attention deficit disorder that makes slow reflection and meditation a lost art. Nonetheless, if prayer is to be a true conversation with God, it must be regularly preceded by listening to God’s voice through meditation on the Scripture.”²

1. What do the Scriptures say about Meditation?

“The Psalms are the prayer book of the Bible, but it is noteworthy that the first Psalm is not a prayer per se but a meditation—in fact, it is a meditation on meditation....”³

¹ Keller, Timothy. *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2014). Pg. 145.

² Keller, Pg. 145.

³ Keller. 146.

Keller points out that the Psalms teach us that regular meditation upon God's Word produces these 3 important qualities:⁴

- Stability—like a tree is planted in a healthy place
- Substance—like a tree bearing fruit
- Blessedness—in all that he does there is flourishing

2. What is Biblical Meditation?

“To meditate is to ask yourself questions about the truth, such as ‘Am I living in light of this? What difference does this make? Am I taking this seriously? If I believed and held to this, how would that change things? When I forget this, how does that affect me and all my relationships?’ In every case, meditation means to use the mind intensely.”⁵

3. How do we practice meditation on Scripture?

- Regular reading
- Inquisitive Study
- Prayerful Meditation

Regular Reading:

“Entering the day without a serious meeting with God, over his Word and in prayer, is like entering the battle without tending to your weapons. It's like taking a trip without filling the tires with air or the tank with gas. The human heart does not replenish itself with sleep. The body does, but not the heart... We replenish our hearts not with sleep, but with the Word of God and prayer.”⁶

Study:

- a. Ask questions of the Bible. What did the original author intend to convey to his readers?
- b. What does this passage teach me about God? What does it teach me about myself, in relation to God?
- c. What role does this text play in the whole Bible? How does it move along the main narrative arc of the Bible, which climaxes in salvation through Jesus Christ?

⁴ Keller. 146-147.

⁵ Keller. 149.

⁶ Piper, John. *When I Don't Desire God*. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2004) Pg. 117.

Meditation: The Example of George Muller

“In the Spring of 1841, George Muller made a discovery regarding the relationship between meditation and prayer that transformed his spiritual life. He described his new insight this way...

‘Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer after having dressed in the morning. Now, I saw that the most important thing was to give myself to the reading of God’s Word, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov’d, instructed; and that thus, by means of the Word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.

I began therefore to meditation the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning, The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words of the Lord’s 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 soul.

The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a 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 more or less to prayer...

It is as plain to me as anything that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for his inner man...Now what is 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 passes through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it and applying it to our hearts.’...Meditation is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer.”⁷

Meditation: The Testimony of John Owen

“When, under the conduct of spiritual light, our affections do cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, our minds fill up with thoughts and delight in him— then virtue will proceed from him to purify us, increase our holiness, strengthen our graces, and to fill us sometimes with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”⁸

“Meditation is thinking a truth out and then thinking a truth in until its ideas become ‘big’ and ‘sweet’, moving and affecting, and until the reality of God is sensed upon the heart.”⁹

⁷ Whitney, Donald. *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1991). Pg. 70-72.

⁸ Keller, Timothy quoting John Owen. *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2014). Pg. 159.

⁹ Keller. 162.

B. Prayer As Encounter: Seeking His Face

1. An Informed Mind and an Engaged Heart

“We must not settle for an informed mind without an engaged heart.”¹⁰

“It is possible for Christians to live their lives with a high degree of phoniness, hollowness, and inauthenticity. The reason is because they have failed to move that truth into their hearts and therefore it has not actually changed who they are and how they live.”

The Testimony of Blaise Pascal

The Testimony of the Psalmists

- Psalm 42.1-2
- Psalm 27.4, 8
- Psalm 139.7-12

2. A Mind and Heart Captured with knowing Christ

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” (2 Cor. 3.18)

“Prayer turns theology into experience. Through it we sense his presence and receive his joy, his love, his peace and confidence, and thereby we are changed in attitude, behavior, & character.”¹¹

II. A Recommended Approach to Meditation and Prayer

A. Read a Psalm

B. Study the Psalm, asking questions about the author, purpose, logic or flow of the psalm. What does it reveal about God? His Character and Ways?

C. Think about Jesus: How does it anticipate Christ and find fulfillment in him?

“A Christological focus restores the psalms to us in their redemptive context. In dark moments we find in the psalms not simply that someone else has undergone a similar experience. We find that the Christ has suffered and, more than that, is reorienting this disordered world through the coming of his reign. They articulate for us the often painful tension between our reality and God’s Word...but they also turn

¹⁰ Keller. 165.

¹¹ Keller, Pg. 80.

that tension into trusting prayer as we view it in the light of the coming rule of God's king. They provide us with words as we long for God's rule, as we celebrate its re-establishment through Christ and as we commend to God our part in the advance of his rule through suffering and proclamation."¹²

D. Meditate turning words and phrases over in prayer.

"Prayer may be salted with confession or perfumed with thanksgiving; it may be sung to music or wept out with groanings. As many as are the flowers of summer, so many are the varieties of prayer."¹³

E. Begin to pray the language of this psalm weaving in declarations and requests related to your life/soul/day, your family, a page of the church directory, and a lost friend.

"I know of no faster or better way to enrich your prayer life than to pray God's word in worship. I find this especially true when praying through one of the psalms. Praying as most of us tend to pray, that is, by routinely saying the same old things about the same old things, will freeze the heart of prayer. But to pray through a passage of Scripture means to take living words that have been inspired in the very heart and mind of God and flow them through your heart and mind back to God. And to do this from the Book of Psalms is to use the one book of the Bible inspired by God for the express purpose of being returned to God verbally (the book of Psalms was Israel's God-given songbook.)

Jesus prayed the psalms (Matt. 27:46), and so did the Christians in the Book of Acts (4:24-26). Why not you? You will not only see reminders to pray for the concerns you want to pray about daily (such as family, your future, your work, etc) springing out of every psalm, you will also find yourself prompted by the text to pray about matters you'd never think about otherwise. Best of all, by using the words of Scripture as your own you will pray in fresh new ways every time, even when praying about the 'same old things.'

Although the benefits of praying through a passage of Scripture are many, one of the most valuable is the sense of worship and intimacy with God that accompanies it. After praying through Scripture for the first time, many have said to me, "It's like a real conversation with a real person." And that is what prayer should be."¹⁴

¹² Chester, Timothy. *The Message of Prayer*. From The Bible Speaks Today Series. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003). Pg. 151.

¹³ Spurgeon, Charles Haddon on the Psalms, specific source unknown.

¹⁴ Whitney, Donald. From Give Praise to God: A Vision for Reforming Worship; edited by Ryken, Thomas, and Duncan. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2003). Pg. 80.
