



Praying the Scriptures

'Praying the Scriptures' is an ancient way of using the Bible with prayer that draws us into the presence of God and reveals His word to us personally. It is not 'Bible Study', in order to discover more of God, to gain information. It is using scripture in order to be immersed in God's love and to come to a deep knowledge of His will and purpose in that present moment. It is prayer that truly nourishes the soul.

Sometimes called 'Lectio Divina' (Divine Reading), 'praying the scriptures' was introduced to the Western world by St Benedict, in the 6th century. He taught his monks to pray this way in order to help them engage with God, grow in love for Him and each other and to learn to listen deeply to His word. 'Praying the Scriptures' has four steps, or 'moments' that can be returned to as the prayer moves forward. They are, Reading, Reflecting, Responding and Resting. The image shown uses the original Latin names but is useful as the diamond shapes (pointing inwards and sideways) suggest movement and flexibility. You do not have to move in a straight line from Reading to Resting.

How then, do we 'pray the scriptures'?

We need to give ourselves some time (about 20 minutes) and some silence. We need to find a quiet place to pray and then to be still in that 'inner room' within us. Perhaps we offer a short prayer of praise and ask that God will come close and bless.

1. Reading

First look to the Bible. You need a reasonably short passage. Some people use their daily reading, a psalm, a story of Jesus or a passage from the epistles. Some simply work through a gospel. The passage chosen should be read two or three times. First it is read normally. After that it is read very slowly. While reading, one looks for any word, text or phrase, perhaps a short sentence, that either 'leaps off the page' or more gently 'offers itself'. When that happens one lets the rest of the passage go. It is this short scripture through which God wants to address you. One writer says we must not expect anything dramatic. Our approach should be quietly prayerful. God's language is silence and he gently wants to draw us into His presence. If no text seems to offer itself to us - then read on!

2. Reflection.

When we are confronted with a word, text or phrase we should re read it several times, perhaps seek to memorize it. We may want to read it again later in the prayer. Someone wrote that we should take the word or phrase 'into ourselves' meaning consider it with both head and heart. The monastics were encouraged to 'chew it over', to ruminate on its meaning. A Methodist colleague once said that we ought to 'suck it like a boiled sweet' to draw out what it is saying to us! Here we are 'thinking it through' and 'pondering' at every level and reflecting upon what God might be saying to us through these words in the context of His presence.

3. Responding

Here we respond to God by talking to Him about what He has given us. Are we surprised, puzzled, delighted? We open our mind and heart to Him. We interact with God in whatever way seems

good. It may be that we need to read the text again, or spend a little more time reflecting. That is good too. We are free to move in and out of the four stages or 'moments' just as we feel the need. It is not a rigid process of one stage leading to the next. It is important, however, to end with a contemplative silence in order to really listen within.

4. Resting

Here we 'let go' of our word or phrase, we let go of all our thoughts or images and end any spoken/thought prayer. Here we simply 'be' and 'rest' in God. It is contemplative prayer. We gently seek to free our minds in order to allow God to communicate to us in a deep way. It is here that God touches and enriches us within. If we feel it right we may again go back to prayer, or reflection but we should conclude in this 'resting' place. This is the place of God's action, not ours. We stay as long as possible in deep silence.

It is often suggested that we conclude our 'praying the scriptures' with the Lord's Prayer and then make a note of the content of our experience. It is often when doing this that what we have received becomes much clearer. When used regularly, 'praying the scriptures' in this way develops a rhythm of prayerful encounter which is life transforming. As said earlier, it is prayer that nourishes the soul.

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