



# Scripture-Based Prayer

## Introduction

Prayer is fundamentally a conversation with God. That conversation may take any number of diverse forms and may or may not include articulated speech. At essence, prayer is being present with the God who is present with us. When we pray with Scripture, we are entering a conversation with God's written word, God's Holy Spirit, and us.

Scripture based prayer is not:

- Bible Study

Bible study is focused on learning. For those of us who study Scripture, our efforts help us understand the teachings and history of the Bible. Through Bible study, the Lord transforms our thinking. If we approach scripture with the will to do God's will, we endeavor to align our attitudes and actions to what we understand from Scripture. In studying the Bible, we listen to God's truth revealed in Scripture. We listen to Jesus. We listen to those whose lives were profoundly affected by the direct and indirect actions and teachings of the God of the universe.

- Exegesis

"This way of reading Scripture has as its goal understanding the meaning of the biblical text for the larger purpose of drawing theological, doctrinal, or homiletical [preaching] conclusions from it." ~ Dennis Bratcher (<http://www.crivoice.org/reading.html> )

Santé Ministries is focused on intimacy with God and ministry that flows from that experience of intimacy. If you are seeking Bible Study resources, you can do an Internet search on *Bible Study Material* and choose from a wide array of options. If you sense God inviting you into deeper theological study, you can search for *online theology courses*.

*The question of prayer is not - did God answer my prayer, but rather did God and I commune?*

## Methods for Praying with Scripture

Praying with Scripture is devotional, meditative, and reflective reading and prayer. The purpose of praying with Scripture is to engage directly and personally with God. When we pray in these ways, God enables us to see Him and ourselves. He shows us the specific aspects of His character or purposes that He wants us to be aware of today. He reveals to us our own spiritual or inner life. Often, as we pray in these ways, we notice His specific invitations to draw closer to Him. We may also notice our own internal areas of resistance or the enemy's temptations.

The experience of praying with Scripture is thus deeply personal. We may later find opportunities to share the things we've experienced in prayer with others, but the experience of God in Scripture based prayer is meant for each of us, personally.

### *Entering and reflecting on our prayer*

The practices of praying with Scripture, if led by the Holy Spirit are prayer. We begin our prayer time by focusing on God's presence with us. We intentionally commit our time and attention to the Lord and invite the Holy Spirit to guide us. This initial prayer is what distinguishes day-dreaming from Scripture based prayer.

We pray. Praying with scripture takes many forms, some of which are briefly described below. After we pray, we reflect on our experience, noticing how we saw God and ourselves. We also take note of any invitations from God drawing us toward Him. We recognize these as movements toward greater faith, hope or love. We may also notice our own internal resistances or temptation as we prayed with the scripture. Recognizing invitations and temptations reveals the true condition our hearts and enables us to choose which direction we'll move.

### *Testing the Spirits*

When we pray, just as when we are not praying, we can be influenced by diverse spirits; God's Holy Spirit, our human spirit, and the spirit of the enemy. Ideally, when we pray with Scripture, we're seeking an engagement between our human spirit and God's Holy Spirit. Sometimes we may sense the influence of the enemy's spirit.

After our prayer, as we reflect on the experience, we test what we experienced during prayer by what we know to be true of God, ourselves, and the enemy. Jesus came to give us abundant life. When we sense an invitation to faith, hope and love, we recognize the influence of God's Spirit. When we see our own reactions in our prayer, we recognize our human spirit. When we sense some temptation that we know doesn't belong to us, we recognize the spirit of the enemy.

### *Praying with Imagination*

The gospel narratives are excellent scriptural passages for praying with imagination. In each of these stories, Jesus is present and so our prayer of imagination enables us to interact with Jesus. When we pray with our imaginations, we enter into and participate in the action of a Scripture based story.

1. Welcome God's presence and invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.
2. Choose a Scripture narrative. You may recall the narrative in your mind, or if you're unsure of the story, read it in the printed text. Then, close your Bible.
3. Imagine the story as though it were a short movie or video. Choose a character or object to be in the scene. You may choose an active member of the scene or a watcher of the scene,

but be present in it. Allow the scene to unfold in your imagination. Take your time. The story may shift from or may expand on the Biblical narrative. That's fine. The story you imagine is prayer.

4. When your imagined story comes to a close, jot down a few notes that describe the story that unfolded in your imagination. You might include a brief sketch of the action, how you saw Jesus in the story, and a note on what your character in the story thought, felt, and did. Notice any invitations from God, resistances or temptations that you sensed in the story. At this point, you might want to respond to God about what you experienced in your prayer of imagination. This response is also prayer.

### *Praying with a picture*

Both the Old and New Testaments are rich in visual images. Some of these images are metaphors that represent God to us. For example, God describes Himself as both the Lamb and as the Lion. By doing so, God expresses His character and purposes through an object or a picture. However, how we see the Lamb or the Lion is specific to each of us. The picture we choose is a kind of prayer that expresses both God in that the metaphor describes truth and our own perspective of that aspect of God's truth at any given moment.

When we pray with pictures, we're not worshipping the picture. Instead, the picture is the language of our prayer. The picture we choose expresses our internal sense of a specific aspect of God's character and purpose. We explore the picture to understand God and our internal perspective of God. As we explore the picture, God may reveal Himself to us and invite us into some aspect of who He is.

1. Welcome God's presence and invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.
2. Choose a scriptural passage. You may recall the scriptural passage in your mind, or if you're unsure of the passage, read it in the printed text. Then, close your Bible.
3. Replay the scriptural passage in your mind. Notice what words or images draw your attention.
4. Find a picture. One of the easiest ways to find a picture is simply to search the internet. Choose a picture that draws your attention or evokes a reaction in you. The picture needn't depict the scene of the passage. For example, you might choose a picture of fireworks to correspond with Jesus' baptism. Print or save the picture. The choice of picture is a prayer – an expression of praying with a picture.
5. You may wish to reread or recall the scriptural passage, then return to the picture. Notice what you see in the picture. How does the picture express the passage? What are its images, its tone, mood, or color? What thoughts and emotions does the picture evoke within you? The exploration of the picture is also prayer.

6. When you've finished exploring your picture with God, write down a few words to describe the picture that you chose. How did the picture express your experience of the scriptural passage? How did you see God? How did you find yourself reacting? You might want to respond to God about what you experienced in your prayer. This response is also prayer.

### *Praying with physical senses*

The narratives of Scripture provide accounts of real events that occurred in specific times and places in the natural world. They were experienced by human men and women who were physically present. In recording the stories, the writers, led by the Holy Spirit, noted physical elements; bread, fire, water. Each of these elements was experienced by the participants through their God created physical senses.

Physical senses include sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, temperature, balance, hunger or fullness, ease or stress, and many others.

When we pray with a scriptural story using our physical senses, we invite our physical bodies to engage with God in the story. We experience the people and events of the story as though we were physically present. The reality of the story becomes our reality. The experience becomes our experience. The engagement with God becomes our engagement. In doing so, we not only engage more fully with God, we also come to understand our own internal responses to the God with whom we engage.

1. Welcome God's presence and invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.
2. Choose a scriptural narrative. You may recall the story in your mind, or if you're unsure of the story, read it in the printed text. Then, close your Bible.
3. Replay the scriptural story in your mind. Notice how you imagine the scene. Where is it? What does the landscape look like to you? Who do you imagine in the scene? What are they doing? What is their body language? Explore the scene with your senses. What might you smell, taste, see, hear, and feel? Consider other senses as well. Are you hungry? Tired? Thirsty? How does the air feel on your skin? What do you desire? Are you at rest or do you desire to move? Is there something you sense yourself wanting to say or do? As you explore the story, allow it to take shape in your imagination while you continue to take note of the physicality of the scene. This exploration of your senses as you experience the story is also prayer.
4. When you've finished exploring the story with your senses, write a brief description of what you experienced. Take note of your physical senses and how you responded to the story. Notice how you saw God in the story and how you reacted to Him. You might want to talk to God about what you experienced in your prayer. This response is also prayer.

### *Praying with an elements and themes*

Each story in scripture includes elements and themes. An element is typically a physical object such as a muddy river, a jar of ointment, or a wooden cross. A theme can be understood to be the setting and movement in a story. For example, the setting of the story of Nicodemus's conversation with Jesus is a private place and at night. The movements of the story include the various questions and responses provided by each participant, Nicodemus and Jesus.

When we pray with elements and themes, we are appropriating each into the context of our own lives. For example, I might explore the account of Jesus's conversation with Nicodemus and consider both where and when I might come to Jesus, as well as what I might ask Him in the context of my own life. I might listen for His unique response to me.

1. Welcome God's presence and invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.
2. Choose a Gospel narrative. You may recall the story in your mind, or if you're unsure of the story, read it in the printed text. Then, close your Bible.
3. Replay the scriptural story in your mind. Notice the physical setting of the story as well as the physical elements included in it. You might find it helpful to choose an object that represents the story to you. Notice the movement of conversation and action in the story.
4. Choose a theme and element that draws your attention. You don't need to be exhaustive or comprehensive. Consider and explore the presence of that element and theme in your personal life. Notice how you sense Jesus interacting with you in the context of the element or theme that you've chosen. You're exploration is an act of prayer.
5. When you've finished exploring the element and theme, write a brief description of what you experienced. What element and theme did you choose? What is its meaning in your current life? How did you sense God responding to you in your prayer? How did you sense yourself responding to God? Did you notice an invitation or a temptation? You might want to talk to God about what you've noticed in your prayer. This response is also prayer.

### *Praying through contemporizing the story*

Contemporizing a scriptural story is recasting the story into our present day context. As we pray in this way, we ask the Holy Spirit to guide us. We transpose the story, inviting the actions of the story to take shape in our own context. We explore the truth of the story in the experience of our lives. We see God and ourselves engaging with God in the reality of our lived experience.

For example, you might explore the baptism of Jesus in a context of your own life. Perhaps you imagine Him entering your own church and stepping forward to be baptized by your own pastor. You notice your actions and attitudes toward Jesus and your pastor. You might imagine the voice of God filling your sanctuary and notice your own response.

Praying in this way deepens our experience of the scriptural stories and allows us to recognize God's specific and personal message to us, today. It also allows us to notice how we respond to God as He reveals Himself to us.

1. Welcome God's presence and invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.
2. Choose a Gospel narrative. You may recall the story in your mind, or if you're unsure of the story, read it in the printed text. Then, close your Bible.
3. Replay the scriptural story in your mind. Notice the elements and themes in the story. Take the role of a character in the story. The character you choose may be directly involved in the action of the story, or may be an onlooker.
4. Recast the story, using elements and a setting congruent with your own life. Transpose the movements, actions, and themes into your own context. Allow the transposed story to unfold in your imagination. This imagining is a form of prayer. You are engaging with God in the context of your own life using your imagination.
5. When your story is finished, write a brief description of what you experienced. Include how you saw God and yourself responding to God. Take note of any invitation from God that you sensed during your prayer. Notice any resistances within you or temptations against you. You might talk to God about what you've noticed in your prayer. This response is also prayer.



# A note from Santé Ministries

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