

# Praying the Word

By Peter McArthur



For centuries there has been an approach to prayer, which involves "praying Scripture". It's known by the Latin phrase *Lectio Divina*. It's basically a way of allowing Scriptural texts to "speak back to you" as you meditate on them.

This communing with the Author of the Word gradually brings about an intimacy opening the heart to a deep encounter with the Lord. Increased trust, love and obedience are some of the fruit of this deeper relationship with Him.

In *Lectio Divina* as we read and meditate on the Word we begin to converse with the Lord, treating the text as a topic of conversation with Him. Instead of just reflecting on what we're reading, we treat the Word as something personal between the Lord and ourselves. It's like actually speaking to Him as we read the Word, allowing the Word and its Author to speak back to us.

This has also been termed *Mental Prayer* and was a classic form of devotional life for a major part of Christian history. However because it was cradled within Roman Catholicism, most Evangelicals and Pentecostals have rejected it.

Yet despite its origin there is something real and blessed in its approach. It can even be argued that *Lectio Divina* is similar in approach to a particular form of Jewish prayer known as *Kavvanat ha-lev*.

Let's face the challenge to move out of our familiarity in prayer and consider something new. The challenge is to be open to a fresh blowing of the Holy Spirit as He inspires us in the "art of prayer".

While this phrase may sound strange to some, there is definitely an "art" in knowing what Biblically-orientated prayer is. So often what passes for prayer is like a shopping list of expectations and self-serving petitions.

Prayer that's founded firmly on Scripture (and here we don't simply mean adding Biblical texts) will re-address the woeful lack of balance in ignoring the grandeur and awesomeness of God Almighty.

Much prayer still suffers from the want of realising He is transcendent, all sufficient, totally perfect in all His doings, glorious in His attributes, and magnificent in His un-surpassing glory!

Praying from the heart, with the Word firmly entrenched within, causes our minds to conform to Biblical patterns of thought which can help us discern the snares of a worldly mindset. It is from having a mind that's more persuaded by the world than Scripture, that causes so much unease in us.

Some of the signs of this are; doubting prayer will actually work, giving up when we should persevere, and talking more about prayer than actually doing it!

We need rescuing from this mindset. To put it simply, having a Biblical prayer pattern can re-address many of our common ailments in the practice of prayer.

The "art" of prayer is not so much a method, but an attitude, an understanding based on the character of God Himself. This will move us from self-centeredness in our prayer life to a unique view of the majesty of our God. It will be of great eternal worth to all who act on it!

## Reading and Praying the Word

Some insights from those who've learnt the art of praying from the Word

*Origen (185-254)*

**And applying yourself thus to the divine study, seek aright, and with unwavering trust in God, the meaning of the holy Scriptures, which so many have missed. Be not satisfied with knocking and seeking; for prayer is of all things indispensable to the knowledge of the things of God. For to this the Saviour exhorted, and said not only, "Knock, and it shall be opened to you; and seek, and ye shall find," but also, "Ask, and it shall be given unto you."**

*Jerome (340-420)*

**Let there be study of the Divine Word, mingled with prayer.**

*Martin Luther (1483-1546)*

**[Luther] spent a part of almost every day reading the Psalms, with which he mingled his own supplications amid tears and groans.**

*John Bunyan (1628-1688)*

**Prayer it is, when it is within the compass of God's word; And it is blasphemy, or at best vain babbling, when the petition is not from the Book.**

*August Hermann Francke (1663-1727)*

**It is also reasonable that the reading of the Holy Scripture be done with all prayer and groaning, as well as praise and thanksgiving. For this is the simple way, that at all times one would have his good edification.**

*George Whitfield (1714-1770)*

**My mind being now more open and enlarged, I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books, and praying over, if possible, every line and word. This proved meat indeed, and drink indeed, to my soul. I daily received fresh life, light, and power from above.**

*John Nelson Darby (1800-1882)*

**Study the Bible, dear brother, with prayer. Seek the Lord there, and not knowledge—that will come too; but the heart is well directed in seeking the Lord: the eye is single, and then the whole body is full of light.**

*George Müller (1805-1898)*

**I began therefore to meditate on the New Testament, from the beginning, early in the morning. When thus I have been for a while making confession or intercession or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it, but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul as the object of my meditation.**

*C.H. MacKintosh (1820-1896)*

**Points of truth however interesting, scriptural knowledge however profound and extensive, Biblical criticism however accurate and valuable, may all leave the heart barren and affections cold. We want to find Christ in the Word; and having found Him, to feed on Him by faith.**

*Andrew Murray (1828-1917)*

**How blessed would the inner chamber be, what a power and an inspiration in our worship, if we only took God's Word as from Himself, turning it into prayer, and definitely expecting an answer.**

*Hannah Whitall Smith (1832-1911)*

**If we will take the words of God, *i.e.*, His revealed truth, into our lips and eat it; that is, if we will dwell upon His words and say them over and over to ourselves, and thoroughly take in and assimilate their meaning in a common-sense sort of way, we shall find that our soul-life is fed and nourished by them, and is made strong and vigorous in consequence.**

*Charles Spurgeon (1835-1892)*

**It is a great thing to pray one's self into the spirit and marrow of the text; working into it by sacred feeding thereon, even as the worm bores its way into the kernel of the nut. Prayer supplies leverage for the uplifting of ponderous truths.**

*R. A. Torrey (AD 1856-1928)*

**Here is one of the greatest secrets of prevailing prayer: To study the Word to find what God's will is as revealed there in the promises, and then simply take these promises and spread them out before God in prayer with the absolutely unwavering expectation that He will do what He has promised in His Word.**

*John Hyde (AD 1865-1912)*

**Right on his face on the ground is Praying Hyde. This was his favourite attitude for prayer. Listen! He is praying; he utters a petition, and then waits; in a little time he repeats it, and then waits; and this many times until we feel that that petition has penetrated every fibre of our being and we feel assured that God has heard and without doubt He will answer. How well I remember him praying that we might open our mouth wide that He might fill it (Psalms 81:10). I think he repeated the word "wide" scores of times with long pauses between. "Wide, Lord, wide, open wide, wide." How effectual it was to hear him address God, "O Father, Father!"**

*W. H. Griffith Thomas (AD 1861-1924)*

**God's Word is the fuel of our prayer. As we open the page in the morning, the promises prompt us to prayer, the examples incite us to prayer, the warnings urge us to prayer, the hopes of glory stir us to prayer—everything in the portion taken for meditation can be turned into prayer....Depend on it, hiding God's Word in the heart is the secret of prayer, and the reason why our prayer-life is so weak and barren is that we do not know God through His Word.**

*Witness Lee (AD 1905-1997)*

**Because He is both the Word and the Spirit, He created us with a mind to understand and a spirit to receive. When we come to the Bible, we should exercise both our mind and our spirit. We exercise our mind by reading and our spirit by praying. Since we need both to read and to pray, we should "pray-read" the Word.**

May these insights help us to appreciate there is so much in the Word that can enrich our prayer life!

Peter McArthur

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