



# THE PRAYER CLOSET

*Transforming Lives Through Intercessory  
Prayer And Fasting*

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## THE WORD OF GOD AND PRAYER

The Word of God and prayer are complementary. They are inseparably joined together. Prayer enables you to gain an understanding of the Word of God. Through prayer, you can plead for the Holy Spirit to teach you the Word of God. He is the One who teaches the believer the Word of God, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (**John 14:26**). The Holy Spirit inspired the Word of God, "For prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (**1 Peter 1:21; 2 Samuel 23:2**). Since He inspired the Word, it is He who can grant understanding of the Word. Through prayer, you can plead with the Holy Spirit to teach you the Word that He has inspired.

Yet, the Word of God teaches you how to pray. The Bible contains commands and instructions concerning prayer. It reveals examples of prayer that reaches God and touches earth. It reveals the will of God that you can plead in prayer. It declares the promises of God that you can claim in prayer. The Word of God is the prayer manual of the believer. It is a rich resource that can guide you and help you in your prayer life.

Too many times believers will divide their quiet time between the Word of God and prayer. The believer will spend time reading the Word of God. The tragedy is that the believer will then close his or her Bible and begin to pray. Instead of

closing your Bible to pray, you need to pray with an open Bible. Your prayer life should be grounded in the Word of God. Your prayer life must be built on the foundation of the Word of God. **There simply is no healthy prayer life apart from a consistent diet of the milk and the meat of the Word of God.**

Since the Word of God is so important to the believer's prayer life, the believer must labor to understand and put into practice the Word of God. Many believers are "under" the Word, but not "in" the Word. These believers listen to sermons, Sunday school lessons, or small-group Bible studies. Yet, they never dig into the Word of God for themselves. They are not serious about gaining an understanding of the Word of God. This will leave them immature in the faith and powerless in prayer. The believer must have a commitment to get in the Word and strive to understand and obey its teachings.

Someone has remarked that if believers wiped the dust off their Bibles simultaneously, it would cause the greatest dust storm this world has ever seen. Is this true of you? Have you been neglecting the Word of God? Perhaps you have never had a serious commitment to understand and obey the Bible. This is crucial for your spiritual maturity and your prayer life. The believer is to pursue spiritual maturity, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (**2 Peter 2:2**). In order to do this, you need to understand and obey the Word. The believer can

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have power in prayer, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (**John 15:7**). Understanding and obeying the Word of God is crucial to power in prayer. As you understand and obey the Word, you will grow in maturity and gain greater power and ability in prayer.

## The Believer's Relationship to the Word of God

In order to understand and obey the Word of God, the believer needs a commitment to be "in" the Word. This means that he or she must discipline himself or herself in seven areas. These seven areas are the ways that a believer is to handle the Word of God. In order to gain understanding in the Word and put its teachings into practice, the believer needs to develop these disciplines connected to the Word of God.

### Hear The Word

The believer needs to take time to listen to the Word of God. Jesus encourages the believer to hear the Word of God, "But He said, 'More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it'" (**Luke 11:28**). Merely listening to the Word of God is not the point. You must hear it and keep or obey it. Yet, Jesus is telling us that it is important to hear the Word. **Romans 10:17** also emphasizes hearing the Word, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." God's people need to hear the Word of God, "Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine" (**1 Timothy 4:13**). Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul instructs Timothy to read the Word in the worship services so that believers could hear it.

For most believers, hearing the Word means disciplining themselves to faithfully attend a church where the Word of God is preached. Yet, one can

also hear the Word by listening to sermons on tape or on Christian radio. In order to hear the Word of God, you need to prepare yourself to receive the Word of God. The following are some suggestions on how to prepare to hear God's Word. These suggestions primarily focus on hearing the Word of God in a worship service, but, there are principles in this that can apply to other instances where you are going to listen to the Word of God.

### Before the Worship Service

- (1) Get a good night's sleep on Saturday night so that you can be sharp and energetic for the worship on Sunday (Remember: Saturday Night Live is usually Sunday Morning Dead).
- (2) Prepare ahead for the Sunday morning pressures and the rush to get ready.
- (3) Plan to arrive at the place of worship early and not late.
- (4) Remind yourself that you are entering the presence of God through worship.
- (5) Spend time in the Word and prayer on Sunday morning.
- (6) Ask the Holy Spirit to prepare you to worship and hear the Word.
- (7) Pray for the others involved in the worship.
- (8) Pray for the preacher.
- (9) Confess and repent of sin.

### During the Worship Service

- (1) Greet one another warmly.
- (2) Pray silently as the worship service begins.
- (3) Sing with enthusiasm and joy.
- (4) Remember that you are not here to worship or criticize the preacher.
- (5) Pray that the Holy Spirit will give you understanding in the truth that the preacher is presenting in his sermon.
- (6) Open your Bible and concentrate on what is being said.
- (7) Take notes.

### After the Worship Service

- (1) Ask the preacher any questions about the unclear parts of the sermon.
- (2) Think about how the truth of this sermon applies to your life and what steps you will need to implement this truth in your life.

(3) Ask the Holy Spirit to plant the truth of the Word into your heart and cause it to bear fruit in your life.

(4) Discuss the sermon with family members or other church members. Ask how the truth of the sermon affected them and how the Holy Spirit dealt with them through it.

## Read the Word

The believer is not only to hear the Word but also to read the Word. Why should the believer read the Word of God? In the gospels, the Lord Jesus often questions a person's understanding of the Scriptures with the searching phrase, "Have you not read . . .?" He assumes that those who profess to be the people of God would read the Word of God. In **Matthew 4:4**, the Lord Jesus Christ declares, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" Just as man is to eat bread on a daily basis, he is also to read and receive the Word of God. If we are to live according to every word of God, doesn't that imply we are to read every word of God? The Bible is the inspired Word of God, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (**2 Timothy 3:16**). It is the very word of the living God to man. Shouldn't this move us to be diligent to read the Word on a daily basis? God promises that those who read and heed his Word will be blessed, "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (**Revelation 1:3**). Yet, it is only those who discipline themselves to read the Word that are blessed.

You need to spend time reading God's Word on a daily basis. How often are you tempted? Every day. How often do you need encouragement? Every day. How often do you need guidance? Every day. How often do you face pressure? Every day. How often do you have problems? Every day. How often do you need instruction? Every day? The only way that you are going to find the

provision for these needs is by reading the Word of God on a daily basis.

The following are some practical suggestions concerning Bible reading. In order to be diligent in reading the Word, there are two basic steps that you need to take. *First, you need to make time to read the Bible.* Discipline yourself to find the time. Try to make it the same time every day. One of the main reasons that Christians never read through the entire Bible is discouragement. You need to make a commitment to read a portion of God's Word on a daily basis. Be determined to spend some time daily in the Word. Tape-recorded readings of the Bible have proven that you can read through the Bible in seventy-two hours. In no more than fifteen minutes a day you can read through the Bible in less than a year's time. Only five minutes a day takes you through the Bible in less than three years. Devote some time in your day to read the Word.

*Second, you need to find a Bible-reading plan.* This will give you a goal of what you need to read daily and will be a help in being consistent in your reading of God's Word. There are inexpensive Bible reading plans at most Christian bookstores. Many study Bibles will contain a Bible reading plan that you can follow. Even if you don't read through the Bible in a year, keep a record of those books that you have read. By doing this, you will know when you read through every book of the Bible.

## Study the Word

The believer is to be an individual who studies the Word of God. The believer is to have a heart for Bible study. The Bible offers examples of believers who studied the Word. One example is Ezra. **Ezra 7:10** declares, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel." Ezra had a commitment to study the Word. He disciplined himself to study the truth of the Word.

Another example is from **Acts 17:11**. Paul and Silas preached the gospel in Berea and many surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ. Notice how they responded to the Word of God, "These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in

that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." The willingness of these people to study the Word of God is commended by God. God desires that His people diligently search and study the Scripture.

Another believer who had a heart to study the Word of God is the apostle Paul. Anticipating the coming of Timothy, he writes in **2 Timothy 4:13**, "Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come-and the books, especially the parchments." The parchments that Paul asks for certainly included copies of the Scripture. In his cold and miserable confinement in prison, Paul desires two things: a cloak so that his body could be warmed and the Word to study so that his mind and heart could be warmed. Paul had experienced some of the greatest miracles any human has ever had the privilege to experience. He had seen heaven (**2 Corinthians 12:1-6**) and the resurrected Christ (**Acts 9:5**). He had experienced the Holy Spirit's power for miracles (**Acts 14:10**). He had experienced the Holy Spirit's power for the writing of Holy Scripture (**2 Peter 3:16**). Yet, it is this same man who continued to study the Word of God until he died. If Paul needed to study the Word of God, surely you and I need to discipline ourselves to study the Word?

Reading and studying the Word of God complement each other. It is not enough to read the Word. The believer also needs to study the Word. Reading the Word of God gives you a broad understanding of the Word of God. Studying gives you deeper understanding of the Word of God. Reading will give you the big picture while studying will show you in greater detail the meaning of the Word of God. Both reading and studying are needed in order to understand the Word.

The following are some practical guidelines for studying the Word of God. These guidelines can be used to help you in your study of the Word of God.

(1) *Be diligent to confess your sins.* Refusing to deal with sin in your life breaks fellowship with

God. It will hinder you in your study of the Word of God. Before beginning your Bible study, stop and confess any known sins.

(2) *Pray for illumination.* Illumination refers to the Holy Spirit's work of enabling the believer to understand the truth of God's Word. Since understanding of the Word of God can only come through the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit, you need to pray for illumination. You need to ask the Holy Spirit to teach you the Word of God (**Psalm 119:12, 18, 27, 35**).

(3) *Have a commitment to obey what you learn.* Jesus pointed out that a prerequisite to knowing the truth is willingness to obey the truth. He declared in **John 7:17**, "If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority." The one who is willing to obey God will receive God's instruction. It is useless to pray for the Holy Spirit to teach you the Word of God if you have no intention of obeying it.

(4) *Be original in your study of the Word.* There are numerous commentaries and Bible study helps available to the believer. Yet, the believer must begin by reading and thinking about the passage for himself or herself. Personal Bible study does not depend solely on what others have said about the Scriptures, but must involve the student in the Bible itself. Libraries have been written about the Bible, but there is only one Bible. Go directly to the source. As you study, compare Scripture with Scripture. Labor for yourself to understand its meaning. Before you go to commentaries and other books, strive to understand what the text is teaching.

(5) *Write down your findings.* Write down in your own words what you have learned from your study. An important part of the learning process is reproducing in your own words what you have studied. Dawson Trotman, the founder of The Navigators, said, "Thoughts disentangle themselves passing over the lips or through the pencil tips." If you want to master the Word, you need to write down what you learn.

## Memorize the Word

Many Christians view memorizing Scripture as an impossible task. Ask Christians to memorize Scripture and they will respond as eagerly as a person who is told that he needs to have a root canal. Some say that they have a bad memory and cannot memorize Scripture. Others equate memorizing Scripture with the memory work that they had to do in school. They see it as boring and dull with no value. Yet, there is tremendous value in memorizing the Word of God. Why should you memorize Scripture?

(1) *Memorizing Scripture is a means of God's guidance.* **Psalm 119:24** declares, "Your testimonies also are my delight and my counselors." As you memorize the Word, the Holy Spirit will bring the Word to your memory when you need guidance from Him in the situations of your life. He will bring the Scripture to your mind that you have memorized to guide you.

(2) *Memorizing Scripture supplies you with spiritual power.* When the Word is stored in your mind, it is available for the Holy Spirit to take and bring it to your attention when you need it most. This will give you added power against temptation. This is why the psalmist wrote, "Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You" (**Psalm 119:11**). When you are tempted, the Holy Spirit will bring to your mind verses of Scripture that deal with this temptation. This will give you greater power in overcoming the temptation. This is an illustration of **Ephesians 6:17**. A verse of Scripture brought to your mind at a pertinent moment can be the weapon that makes the difference in a spiritual battle. The Word then becomes your spiritual sword to help you fight in the midst of your temptation.

(3) *Memorizing Scripture will aid you in witnessing and counseling.* By memorizing the Word, you will be prepared for unexpected witnessing and counseling opportunities. This is illustrated in the life of Peter (**Acts 2:14-40**). Much of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost was quotations from the Old Testament. When you memorize the Word,

the Holy Spirit can bring to your mind a verse or verses of Scripture when you witness to or counsel with others.

(4) *Memorizing Scripture strengthens your faith.* **Proverbs 22:17-19** gives the following commands, "Incline your ear," "apply your heart," and "let them all be fixed upon your lips." These phrases are referring to the proverbs or the Word of God. A believer is to incline his ear, to apply his heart, and let its truth be fixed on his lips. Why is the believer to do this? The answer is given in **Proverbs 22:19**, "So that your trust may be in the Lord." A believer memorizes or fixes its truth on his lips so that the Word repeatedly reinforces the truth especially when he needs it the most. The believer will have the truth ready to reinforce his faith when circumstances and feelings attempt to weaken his faith.

(5) *Memorizing Scripture enables you to meditate on Scripture.* Memorizing Scripture will fuel your meditation on the truths of God's Word. When you memorize verses of Scripture, it will enable you to meditate on them at any time and in any place. As you memorize the Word, you can become like the psalmist, "Oh, how I love Your law, it is my meditation all the day" (**Psalm 119:97**). Whether you're driving a car, walking, running, standing in line, or eating a meal, you can meditate on the Word because you have memorized it.

(6) *Memorizing the Scripture will strengthen your prayer life.* When you memorize the Word, you will be able to use the Scripture in your praying. This will sharpen your praise, deepen your confession, broaden your thanksgiving, and focus your intercession.

You may not think you can memorize Scripture, but, you can. For most, memorizing Scripture is a matter of motivation. If you can remember names, addresses, phone numbers, and birthdays, you can memorize Scripture. I was talking with my mother one day about memorizing Scripture. She said, "Kevin, I just can't memorize the Word. I don't have a good enough memory to do it." I responded, "Mom, I've seen you come into this kitchen and cook entire meals without ever having to look at a recipe." She then hot back,