

Watch Your *Life*

Session 3: Praying in the Spirit Pastor Colin Smith

Last time we talked about feeding on Christ through the Word. We saw that if you do this, your own spiritual life will be nourished, and you will have something to share. The Word of God that has come *to* you will come *through* you into the lives of others.

In this session, I want to show you how feeding on Christ through the Word can breathe fresh life into your prayers. I have called this session, “Praying in the Spirit.”

Jude says,

But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God... (Jude v20, 21)

What is meant by “praying in the Holy Spirit”? There is one God, and He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When you came to faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit of God came to live in you. Jesus told His disciples that the Holy Spirit would be “with” and “in” them (John 14:17).

It’s worth pausing a moment to reflect on that. The Holy Spirit of God is *with* you, and He is *in* you. You are never truly alone. God is actively and directly engaged in every part of your life. One of the many things the Holy Spirit will do for you is to help you pray. Prayer is a partnership, involving the Father, to whom we speak, the Son in whose name we come, and the Spirit who helps us in our stumbling efforts to pray. Whenever you pray, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are actively engaged. God the Father is listening to you, God the Son is interceding for you, and God the Holy Spirit is helping you. You never pray on your own.

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what we ought to pray for... (Romans 8:26)

God calls you to pray, but you never pray alone. God has given His Holy Spirit to help you.

Luke tells us that Jesus and His disciples went to the home of two sisters, Martha and Mary. It’s no small thing to have 13 guests showing up for dinner. Martha was in the kitchen, and her sister Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus. Martha said to Jesus, “*Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me*” (Luke 10:40). The word ‘help’ there is the same word used of the help of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8. I am overwhelmed with work in this kitchen. I need some help! I need someone to come alongside and share the load.

Why do we need the help of the Holy Spirit?

Paul tells us, “*The Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what we ought to pray for...*” (Romans 8:26). You pray that God will open a door of opportunity for you but is this really what God wants for you? You are not sure.

You have a son or a daughter who is far from the Lord. You pray that God will keep them from harm. But then you wonder if perhaps God will use some great disaster in his or her life to turn them around. What if I am praying for something that is contrary to the will of God?

A loved one is seriously ill and you pray for healing. But what if this is God's time to take them home? *We do not know what we ought to pray for!* And this is why the Spirit helps us. How does the Spirit help us? There are many answers to that question, but today, I want you to see how the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to form and direct our prayers.

Paul says, in Ephesians 6, that we are to, *“take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit”* (Ephesians 6:17–18). Notice that Paul links ‘praying in the Spirit’ with the ‘Word of God’.

All Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible was written as men were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). So, if you allow your prayers to be shaped by the Scriptures, your prayers will reflect the mind and heart of God. Turning the Scriptures into prayers will help you keep your prayers fresh. Every day you will see something new as you read through the Scriptures, and you will be able to turn what you read into prayer.

There are four parts to prayers: Worship, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Intercession. I want you to see how you can use the Bible as fuel for your prayers in each of these areas.

1. Worship

When you pray, you draw near to God and when you draw near to God, you worship. The first thing in prayer is to remember Who you are approaching, Who you are speaking to. You can use what you have read in the Bible to help you worship.

In our last session, we did a short meditation, on 2 Thessalonians 3:5, *“May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”* Try and take in at least something of the love of God, something of the steadfastness of Christ, and then let that lead you to worship. If you allow your prayers to be shaped by what the Holy Spirit has revealed in the Scriptures, every day as you read the Scriptures, you will find something fresh that will lead you to worship.

Let's suppose that having read the first verses of 2 Thessalonians 3 today, you read the last verses of this chapter tomorrow, and you meditate for a few minutes on one of these verses. You might settle on verse 16 where God is described as the Lord of peace. *“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way”* (2 Thessalonians 3:16).

Now you have fresh fuel for your worship. He is the Lord of peace. He sees the end from the beginning, and so He is at peace in Himself, and He is able to give you peace. Let your worship, arise from what you read in the Bible and what the Spirit has revealed in Scripture will breathe life into your worship.

The second area of prayer in which you can use the Scriptures is...

2. Confession

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

God says that we are to confess our sins, but how do you know what sins to confess? Sin hides in our hearts and often, we don't see our own sins clearly. I've found it helpful to use what I read from the Bible to identify sins that may be hiding in my heart so that I can confess them to God and ask for His help in the battle against them.

So again, let's take the example we looked at last time from 2 Thessalonians 3:5, "*May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*" If I stop and think about that verse it won't be long before I am thinking about ways in which my love has grown cold, and ways in which I have not been steadfast. The Bible is like a flashlight shining into the dark corners of your soul. When you read the Bible, you will see things that you did not see before.

And again, the beauty of asking the Holy Spirit to shine the light of the Word He inspired into the dark corners of your life is that every time you read the Bible there will be some new shaft of light shining into your soul. Learn to read the Scriptures with an eye to identifying hidden sins that may be lurking in your life.

For example, suppose you are reading 1 Corinthians 13, that wonderful passage about love:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. (1 Corinthians 13:4–6)

These verses point to at least seven sins that grieve the Spirit of God: The sin of impatience (because love is patient); the sin of jealousy (because love does not envy); the sin of pride (because love is not arrogant); the sin of failing to show proper honor (because love is not rude); the sin of willfulness (because love does not insist on its own way); the sin of being easily provoked (because love is not irritable); and the sin of hanging onto past hurts (because love is not resentful).

Use the Scriptures to help you identify specific sins that you can then confess to God.

Spurgeon wrote,

"The first advice I give you is this: Particularize your sins. Do not say, 'I am a sinner.' It means nothing. Everybody says that. But say this, 'Am I a liar? Am I a thief? Am I a drunkard? Have I had unchaste thoughts? Have I committed unclean acts? Have I in my soul often rebelled against God? Am I often angry without a cause? Have I a bad temper? Am I covetous? Do I love this world better than the world to come? Do I neglect prayer?' ... Put the questions upon the separate points, and you will soon convict yourself... as being a sinner." (Spurgeon, Sermon 335, "Struggles of Conscience")

But when you do this, remember to look to Jesus Christ. The whole point of using the Bible to help you identify your sins is that you may be able to confess them to God and be cleansed by

the Lord Jesus Christ. And then that you will be strengthened in your battle against these sins, so that you will increasingly prevail over them.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne gave this wise counsel in a letter to a friend:

Learn much of your own heart; and when you have learned all you can, remember you have seen but a few yards into a pit that is unfathomable. 'The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked: who can know it?' Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ... Feel His all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in His almighty arms.

(Quoted in *Memoir and Remains of Robert Murray M'Cheyne* by Andrew Bonar)

Let's think thirdly about using what the Holy Spirit has revealed in Scripture in relation to thanksgiving.

3. Thanksgiving

...do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. (Philippians 4:6)

Sometimes we don't feel like giving thanks. If you are coming to God with a heavy burden, if the weight of the world seems to be pressing in on you, you will need the help of the Holy Spirit to pray with thanksgiving, and He will give you that help through the Scriptures.

Again, let's take the example we used last time from, 2 Thessalonians 3:5, "*May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*" How would you turn that into thanksgiving? You will be able to think of people in whom this prayer is being answered. People who have the love of God in their hearts and show that love to you. People who are a good example to you of steadiness, patience, and perseverance. You could give thanks for this wonderful truth that God directs our hearts.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God. God works in the hearts of His people. God is at work in your heart, and He will give you the love and steadfastness that you need. That is a reason for thanksgiving!

And again, if you were to read the last verses of 2 Thessalonians 3 tomorrow, you would have fresh fuel for thanksgiving. Paul speaks in these last verses about work, so it would be natural to thank God for the work He has given you to do. Or you might be prompted to thank God for someone you know who works hard in the service of Christ.

Use the Bible as fuel for worship, for confession and for thanksgiving. The Holy Spirit will help you as you open the Bible, He will bring fresh life to your prayers through the Scriptures.

4. Intercession

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people. (1 Timothy 2:1)

Intercession involves praying for other people. As a leader, God has trusted certain people to you. You have a family. You have a small group. You lead a team or a ministry in which there

are several volunteers and one of your first responsibilities towards these people is to pray for them. Think about someone you really love and care about. Someone you would want to pray for every day. How are you going to keep your prayers for that person fresh if you pray for them every day for 50 years?

Lord bless him. Lord bless him again. Lord bless him real good! That will be hard to sustain for 50 years! If you allow the Holy Spirit to prompt what you should pray through what you read in the Bible, you will always have something fresh to pray for the people you love and the people you lead.

So again, let's take our example from 2 Thessalonians 3:5, "*May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*" It's pretty obvious how you would use this to pray for someone you love. You're going to ask that the Lord will give them the love and the steadfastness that they need. And as you pray for someone you know well, you may think of a situation in which they need a fresh filling of love or steadfastness from the Lord. And, again, the beauty of this is that if you allow your prayers to be shaped by what you read in the Bible, you will have something fresh to pray for the person you love every day.

The best advice I ever received about prayer was **always pray with an open Bible**. So, find a time each day to sit down with your Bible so that you can feed on Christ through the Word. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. I often use the prayer of Psalm 119:18, "*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*" Find a verse or truth in the passage that you read and camp on it for a while. Apply it to your own life and then turn it into prayer, worship, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession.

Conclusion

We're now half-way through this module Watch Your Life. In our first three sessions we have looked at Growing in Godliness, Feeding on Christ through the Word, and Praying in the Spirit. Next time, we are going to look at Battling Temptation. We will be looking at how you can make progress in your fight against the sins and temptations that often defeat you. I hope you'll join me for session #4 of Watch Your Life.

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