

5-Day Devotional Series

Praying Scripture: Learning to Pray Prayers Designed to Give us Hearts More Like Jesus -From Psalm 119

Day 4:

8 Steps for How to Pray Hard Prayers

How We Got Here:

On (Day 1) we saw that part of sharing the gospel with unbelievers includes relaying the “hope” of our hearts that is in us, not just doctrinal truth (1 Pet 3:15). This is important to remember especially in this present day. On (Day 2) We examined David, Psalm 119, and God in relation to our hearts. We saw that God transforms our hearts through prayer (first at conversion by giving us a new heart, but then also progressively). Our hearts are very needy for God at all times. On (Day 3) we looked at David’s heartfelt prayers and saw how much he delighted in God’s word, proclaimed absolute commitment to God, sought God in suffering, etc. David’s prayers really challenge us to examine our own hearts and prayers, and this was only a small sampling of Ps. 119!

Today:

We will look at a suggested 8 Steps For Praying Hard Prayers.

“I just don’t feel this way”

When we read David’s bold, delighting, hope-filled prayers, we are immediately presented with our own lack of “heart” so-to-speak. But God does not show us David’s heart because his heart was like ours, but because David was “*a man after His own heart*” (1 Sam 13:14). This means, there may be significant distance between our hearts and the way David’s heart was. We can think: “I just don’t feel this way” so how can I pray this prayer? For example, take vs. 162: “I rejoice at your word, like one who finds great spoil.” Notice how David says: “your” word. He is speaking directly to God saying this. Could you look directly at God and say this to Him in your prayers? How precious was God’s word to David.

When we notice this distance between David’s heart and ours, what should we do? Should we (1) wait until our hearts feel that way, and then pray it? Or, should we (2) pray it anyway, feeling slightly hypocritical as we do? I do not think that either of these approaches gets the point of these verses. These prayers are here to show us David’s heart, but as *prayers* they are designed to help get our hearts to the same place. *They are meant to show us our neediness.* We should pray them now, but in an aspiring way –in a way that recognizes our heart’s neediness for God, but that is also hopeful in faith and calls upon our heart-saving, heart-transforming God to do his gracious work. This is a humble, “I need you, Lord” kind of praying. Here are several suggested steps to think through when praying these prayers... Although we are focusing on praying Psalm 119, a gospel-centered prayer of this nature can be helpful anytime we are convicted by God’s word.

8 Steps for How to Pray David’s Hard Prayers

1. Make observations about the verse.

2. Remember that David is sincerely praying these things from his heart and teaching us how to pray.
3. Examine your own heart. Is your heart responding the way David's is? If God has already given you grace in this area, praise God! Is there still room to grow?
4. Confess. Confess to God your lack of heart. But also rejoice that God has given you these prayers as a gift to help you become more like Christ.
5. Call out to God to change your heart, expressing your desire to God for your heart to be how God calls it to be. These verses are helpful to remember and I have made frequent reference to them already. Ask God to "enlarge" and "incline."
- Vs. 32: "I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!"
- Vs. 36: "Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain."
6. Remember and rejoice in Jesus and the Gospel. The gospel is cause for great hope, and having hope is always where God desires us to be when recognizing sin, not despair. This step asks: "How can I be encouraged and take joy in the gospel as my hope for change." Also ask, does this verse in any way point forward to the gospel?
7. Pray your verse in hope; pray it in faith.
8. Rejoice. Rejoice over your Scripture. Thank God for the gift of this Scripture, and Scripture as a whole. Vs. 162: "*I rejoice at your word*, like one who finds great spoil."

Example Prayer of What This Might Look Like:

Hard Verse to Pray: "I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end" (vs. 112).

Observations/Examining Our Hearts (Steps 1-3)

Example: "David says that he inclines his heart to God's statutes, forever. Forever! I don't know if I've ever expressed anything this resolute to God. David's desire and expression of his heart is to constantly keep God's word. David's desire here is to "perform" God's statutes. This means that not only does David love God's word, but David has an incredible desire to be completely righteous before God at all times, to eternity. Do I even think about being righteous before God? And yet, this is the expression of David's heart. More than that, the way this verse is phrased, David seems to be speaking directly to God. How confident is this prayer!"

From Confession to Rejoicing (Steps 4-8)

"Father, I confess that I do not have the attitude that David expresses here...I don't feel like I can say this without feeling like a hypocrite. I confess that my heart lacks the kind of vigilance that David expresses. But Lord, I want to have this kind of heart. Lord, "*incline my heart*" (vs. 36) to be like this. Father, enlarge my heart (vs. 32). I am very needy for your grace Lord, even to obey you...*Deal bountifully* with me, that I may live and *keep your word*...(vs.17)... But oh Lord, how bountifully you have dealt with me in Christ! Jesus is the one who *truly* inclined his heart to your statutes, forever, to the end, and he was given over to the cross for my sins, the "righteous for the unrighteous" (1 Pet 3:18). But because of Jesus, sin shall have no dominion over me (Rom 6:14)! Therefore, I rejoice in the gospel because Jesus died not only to save me, but He is faithful to make me like him (1 Jn 1:9). Because of Jesus, I *can* obey you. Because of the gospel, I *will* "incline my heart to perform your statutes, forever, to the end." I praise you for the gospel. I rejoice at your word, Lord (vs. 162) and I will "*take heart*," in the gospel, for you "have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).

Devotional Application:

- (1) Where are you needy for God to change you? Pray needy, hopeful, gospel-centered prayers like the 8 steps suggested above.
- (2) Pray a hard verse from Psalm 119 that stood out to you yesterday, use these steps to help you pray.
- (3) Practice praying the example vs. 112 “I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end” for yourself, your small group (if applicable), your church, unbelievers (that it may come to be true of them) and your children using the suggested steps.

Daily Picture of Juliet:

