

pray the scriptures

A 40-Day Prayer Experience

Kevin Johnson



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To the people of Emmaus Road Church
as we walk in the way together

Contents

Introduction 9

- Day 1 John 10—Jesus Your Shepherd 13
Day 2 Hebrews 10—God’s Welcome 17
Day 3 Jeremiah 17—Divine Streams 21
Day 4 Romans 8—God’s Plan 25
Day 5 Romans 8—Unstoppable Love 30
Day 6 Ephesians 2—Lifted to Life 34
Day 7 1 John 1-2—Getting Forgiveness 38
Day 8 Jeremiah 29—Second Chances 42
Day 9 1 Peter 1—Thriving in Trials 46
Day 10 Psalm 1—Tripping Into Sin 50
Day 11 Matthew 22—Love God, Love People 53
Day 12 John 14—The Way 57
Day 13 Psalm 63—Thirst for God 61
Day 14 Psalm 121—Preparing for Worship 65
Day 15 Psalm 84—God’s Dwelling 68

Contents

- Day 16 Psalm 91—God’s Rescue 74
- Day 17 Matthew 11—Live Freely and Lightly 79
- Day 18 Galatians 6—Right-Sized Burdens 83
- Day 19 Hebrews 4—Find Rest 87
- Day 20 Galatians 5—Freedom in Jesus 91
- Day 21 Matthew 7—The Narrow Way 95
- Day 22 Ephesians 3—Live Into Love 100
- Day 23 Ephesians 4—Become New 104
- Day 24 Ephesians 4–5—Grow Up 108
- Day 25 Philippians 4—Find Peace 112
- Day 26 Philippians 4—Be Content 115
- Day 27 Matthew 6—Seek God 118
- Day 28 Psalm 37—Take Delight 122
- Day 29 Psalm 19—See God 126
- Day 30 John 1—Meet God 129
- Day 31 Matthew 26—The Olive Press 133
- Day 32 Luke 23—Jesus Dies 137
- Day 33 Mark 16—Jesus Rises 141
- Day 34 Titus 2–3—Saved 145
- Day 35 Philippians 2—Served 149
- Day 36 Matthew 28—Sent 154
- Day 37 Micah 6—Basics 157
- Day 38 Isaiah 40—Fresh Strength 160
- Day 39 John 15—Abide 164
- Day 40 John 15—Bear Fruit 167

Introduction

Back in the earliest days of the New Testament church, Peter and John had the unfortunate experience of being caught doing good. These close friends and followers of Jesus were heading to the temple to pray when they were confronted by a man unable to walk since birth. When he asked for money, they had nothing to give. But they commanded him in the name of Jesus to rise up and walk. The man stood, then went “walking and jumping, and praising God” (Acts 3:8 NIV).

The amazement of the crowds upset the ruling religious leaders, who seized Peter and John and tossed them in jail. Once on trial, these two men pointed out that they were being bullied for the crime of kindness. Dumbfounded, the court officials released them, ordering them to never again mention Jesus.

Peter and John immediately returned to their friends and repeated everything the chief priests and other leaders had told them. After hearing these details, the followers of Jesus prayed loudly together (Acts 4:23–24). Their words formed as an instant and instinctive response to the press of real circumstances.

Their prayer started with worship. “Sovereign Lord . . . you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them” (Acts 4:24 NIV). Opening with “Sovereign Lord” was like saying “O God, who is in charge of everything” or “O God, the ruler of all.” To say “You made the heavens and the earth” means “You made everything there is—nothing exists that didn’t come from you.”

And then they prayed, “You made the sea.” We might read that as “God, you created the beach and sunshine.” Or “You made that oceanside place where I want to retire and feel the sand between my toes.” But the Hebrews didn’t have happy feelings about large bodies of water. The sea meant chaos. They were saying, “God, you are master of chaos and everything we can’t control,” which fits the outrageous scene of Peter and John being arrested and thrown in jail for doing kindness in the name of Christ. All of this adds up to saying, “God, you’re in charge. You’re in control of this situation we’re in.”

Then these early Christians did an intriguing thing. They prayed the Scriptures, quoting Psalm 2:1–2 to God. What they said amounts to “You told us a long time ago that people would oppose Jesus.” They prayed, “You spoke long ago by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant, saying, ‘Why were the nations so angry? Why did they waste their time with futile plans? The kings of the earth prepared for battle; the rulers gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah’” (Acts 4:25–26 NLT).

Praying Scripture

All of Scripture can teach us to pray. I wrote *Pray the Scriptures Bible* as an outflow of ministry and life. The idea began

as a simple act of pairing Bible verses and prayer on posters for people to wander around and ponder during worship. That exercise reflected my own habit of a moment-by-moment conversation with God, especially when studying Scripture. As a follower of Jesus, spiritual leader, and author determined to make the Bible real and relevant to all ages, I developed an unconscious pattern of responding in prayer to passages I studied. Because God spoke to me, I spoke back to him.

As a next step to *Pray the Scriptures Bible*, this book will help you build your own habit of praying Scripture by leading you to respond to forty daily Bible readings. There are passages reminding you of God's unstoppable love and his plan to lift you to new life. Others help you express a craving for God. Some lay down practical challenges for you to obey. Others let you track with Jesus as he moves from his garden agony to the cross and resurrection and beyond.

For each passage I provide an opening thought. I finish with questions to answer on your own or with others. In the middle I split up the Bible passage and offer words and short phrases to prompt you to pray Scripture back to God. Feel free to use these prompts or to respond with your own thoughts. Dare to share your prayers with others, and listen to what they said to God. There are themes that weave from one day to the next, but you can also move through the readings in whatever order you choose. Groups studying this book can work through it at any comfortable pace.

Throughout this book you will engage in an uncomplicated response to God's words. Many passages move you to *declare* who God is or what he has done, is doing, or will do. You *identify* with a thought or feeling. That might prompt you to *confess* something that's come between you and God or

to *commit* to living differently. Or you might *ask* the Lord to work in you or meet a need.

My prayer is that by the end of this book you will have grown in your own one-on-one conversation with God by using Scripture as the ultimate guide to prayer—a way to process your own life circumstances and give voice to your own spiritual longings, wonderings, and worship.

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Jesus Your Shepherd

Picture yourself as a sheep ceasing your struggle, finding rest cradled in the arms of your shepherd. The shepherd satisfies your hunger and thirst (Psalm 23:1–2) and rescues you from lost and wounded places (Ezekiel 34:15–16). He prizes you like no other. He is wholly unlike thieves who harm you secretly . . . robbers who attack you openly . . . hired hands who abandon you when trouble nears. The shepherd gives you a name, and you follow his unique call. You scatter at the voice of an imposter. Moment by moment, the shepherd walks ahead of you, guiding you to lush pasture and guarding you from danger even at the price of his own life. As you pray John 10, discover what Jesus wants to teach you about himself—and about you.

John 10:2–5 GW



[Jesus said,] “The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the

sheep respond to his voice. He calls his sheep by name and leads them out of the pen. After he has brought out all his sheep, he walks ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they recognize his voice. They won't follow a stranger. Instead, they will run away from a stranger because they don't recognize his voice."

Jesus, you are my shepherd. You . . .

Jesus, I am your sheep. I . . .

John 10:7–10 GW



Jesus emphasized, "I can guarantee this truth: I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before I did were thieves or robbers. However, the sheep didn't respond to them. I am the gate. Those who enter the sheep pen through me will be saved. They will go in and out of the sheep pen and find food. A thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy. But I came so that my sheep will have life and so that they will have everything they need."

So many people live like thieves and robbers. They . . .

You came to . . .

John 10:11–14 GW



“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. A hired hand isn’t a shepherd and doesn’t own the sheep. When he sees a wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and quickly runs away. So the wolf drags the sheep away and scatters the flock. The hired hand is concerned about what he’s going to get paid and not about the sheep. I am the good shepherd.”

You are the good shepherd. You . . .

Some people act like hired hands. They . . .

Reflect + Pray + Discuss

1. As a sheep—what do you fear? As a sheep—what do you need from Jesus your shepherd?

2. How have people acted toward you like thieves or robbers or hired hands? How is Jesus so much more than those people?

3. What kind of life does Jesus long to give you? What do you think that life looks like?

God's Welcome

God invites you to come close. Even when you feel infinitely distant from the Lord, you have an open invitation to enter his presence. On your own you are unable to approach God (Hebrews 1:3), but the death of Jesus on the cross permanently opened a new way. Jesus purifies your sins and washes away your failings, making you fit to stand in the holy presence of the King of the universe, confident that you are welcome both to worship and to ask for what you need. Entering boldly doesn't mean approaching the all-powerful God brashly or with impatient demands that he bend to your will. Honor him. Feel awe at being near him. And remember that you live in his presence even when you aren't praying. As you pray Hebrews 10, enjoy being close to your Lord.

Hebrews 10:19–20 NIV



Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a

new and living way opened for us through the curtain,
that is, his body . . .

I'm sometimes afraid to come to you because . . .

The death of Jesus . . .

Hebrews 10:21–23 NIV



. . . and since we have a great priest over the house of God,
let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the
full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled
to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our
bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly
to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

I'm confident to enter your holy presence because . . .

Since you are faithful, I won’t give up hope that . . .

Hebrews 10:24–25 NIV



And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

I need your followers to help me . . .

Inspire and empower my spiritual friendships with . . .

Reflect + Pray + Discuss

1. What keeps you from approaching God confidently?
2. How does Jesus break down those barriers?
3. Who encourages you to enjoy closeness with God and do good? How can you deepen those relationships?