Seven Days Prayer & Fasting
January 2 - 8, 2015

Prayers of the Heart

Proclaim the WORD. Transform Lives.

WORD
INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES
SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

Note: January 1 is a day of preparation. A study of this day is included in the material.

1. As you begin each study, pray that God will speak to you through his Word.

2. Read the introduction to the study and respond to the personal reflection question. This is designed to help you focus on God and on the theme of the study.

3. Each study deals with a particular passage – so that you can delve into the author’s meaning in that context. Read and reread the passage to be studied. The question are written using the language of the New International Version, so you may wish to use that version of the Bible. The New Revised Standard Version is also recommended.

4. This is an inductive Bible study, designed to help you discover for yourself what the Scripture is saying. The study include three types of questions. Observation questions ask about the basic facts: who, what, when, where and how. Interpretation questions delve into the meaning of the passage. Application questions help you discover the implications of the text for growing in Christ. These three keys unlock the treasures of Scripture.

Write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided or in a persona journal. Writing can bring clarity and deeper understanding of yourself and God’s Word.

5. It might be good to have a Study Bible or at least a Bible dictionary handy. Use it to look up any unfamiliar words, names or places.

6. Use prayer suggestions to guide you in thanking God for what you have learned and to pray about the applications that have come to mind.

Source of the Material: Psalms, Prayers of the Hear by Eugene H Peterson, IVP LifeGuide

GOD BLESS US ALL AS WE SEEK HIM THROUGH HIS WORD, PRAYER AND FASTING!
PRAYING OUR INATTENTION  
Psalm 1

Family responsibilities. Work deadlines. Education goals. Home maintenance. So much is clamoring for our attention each day. And that’s not to mention the distractions that come from the media. Most of us can’t step immediately from the noisy high-stimulus world into the quiet concentration of prayer.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Attempt to clear your mind before you begin to study. Sit in silence for a few moments. What thoughts and concerns come to mind? List them. Ask God to help you focus on what he wants you to learn.

Psalm 1 is not prayer, exactly, but the preface to prayer. We do not begin to pray by praying but by coming to attention. Psalm 1 is the biblical preparation for a life of prayer. Step by step it detaches us from activities and words that distract us from God so that we can be attentive before him. Psalm 1 provides a kind of entry way into the place of prayer.

1. What contrasts do you notice in the psalm?

2. The first word in the psalm is blessed. (Some translate it happy.) What kind of expectations should that bring to our life of prayer?

3. What significance do you see in the progression from walk to stand to sit (v. 1)?

4. “The law of the Lord” is contrasted with the words counsel, way and seat. What does this contrast bring out?

5. The psalmist describes the person who delights in the God’s law (v. 2). What is your emotional response to Scripture – not what you believe about it but how you feel about it?

6. Tree is the central metaphor of the psalm (v. 3). Put your imagination to use. How are law-delighting people like trees?

7. In what ways are the wicked like chaff (vv. 4-6)?

8. How do these two radically different portraits (the tree-righteous and the chaff-wicked) motivate you to delight in God’s Word?

9. Do you feel a gap (or chasm!) between “real life” (work, school, family) and your prayer life? Explain.

10. How does meditation – listening to God speak to us through Scripture – prepare us for prayer?

11. How can you incorporate meditation on God’s Word into your life?

12. Some prayers is spontaneous – a word of thanks, a cry of pain. Other prayer is routine – at meals, in public worship. But a life of prayer requires preparation, a procedure for moving from inattention to attention. The same method will not suit everyone. How can you develop an approach to meditation that fits your circumstances and development?

Ask God to help you keep commitments to meditate and to pray.
DAY ONE, JANUARY 2

PRAYING OUR TROUBLE
Psalm 3

Prayer begins in a realization that we cannot help ourselves, so we must reach out to God. “Help!” is the basic prayer. We are in trouble, deep trouble. If God cannot get us out, we are lost; if God can get us out, we are saved. If we don’t know that we need help, prayer will always be peripheral to our lives, a matter of mood and good manners. But the moment we know we are in trouble, prayer is a life-or-death matter.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Recall a time when God has been your help. Thank him for coming through for you.

Psalm 3 is the first prayer in the Psalter. Psalms 1 prepared us for prayer. Psalm 3 prays. This psalm was written when David fled from his son Absalom, who was leading a rebellion against David. A huge battle ended with the death of twenty thousand. Then Absalom died: “He was riding his mule, and as the mule went out from under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s head got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in the midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.” (2 Sam. 18:9). Read Psalm 3.

1. David’s prayer naturally divides into five sections: verse 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7 and 8. Name each stanza with a single word or phrase.

2. What progression do you see from each section to the next?

3. David describes his foes in verses 1-2. Do you ever feel overwhelmed by threatening people or circumstances? Give an example.

4. Deliver/Deliverance is a key word in this psalm. What do we learn about the nature of deliverance through its various uses here?

5. What actions is God described as taking in this psalm?
Are you used to thinking of God in these ways? Explain.

6. What actions is David described as taking in the psalm?
To what extent do these characterize you when trouble arises?

7. The emotional center of the psalm is verse 3. Take this seriously and ponder its significance. When we are sleeping, what are we doing?
What is God doing?

8. What kind of trouble are you in right now?

9. What in this psalm will help you to pray your trouble?
Talk to God about the things that are troubling you.
Day Two, January 3

Praying Our Sin
Psalm 51

Alongside the basic fact that God made us good (Psalm 8) is the equally basic fact that have gone wrong. We pray our sins to get to the truth about ourselves and to find out how God treats sinners. Our experience of sin does not consist in doing some bad things but in being bad. It is a fundamental condition of our existence, not a temporary lapse into error. Praying our sin isn’t resolving not to sin anymore; it is discovering what God has resolved to do with us as sinners.

Personal Reflection: How honest are you about your sin? Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10. Why do you rate yourself in this way?

The psalm title refers this prayer to David’s adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11-12).

Read Psalm 51.

1. How many different synonyms for sin are in David’s prayer?

How do we describe what we dislike in ourselves?

What does this tell us about the nature of sin?

2. As Christians, we know we are sinful. Why then is it so painful to be confronted with a specific sin?

3. What is God asked to do about sin? (Count and name the verbs.)

4. If I have been a sinner from birth (v. 5), sin must be something more than doing wrong things. What else could it be?

5. Verses 1-9 exhibit a heightened awareness of sin. What do they make you aware of?

6. Verse 10 is the center sentence. How does it center the prayer?

7. What parallel does “create” have with Genesis 1:1?

8. Forgiveness is an internal action with external consequences. What are some of them? (vv. 13-17)?

9. What do you understand a “broken and contrite heart” to be (v. 17)?

What is your experience of this condition?

10. According to verses 18-19, what is the relationship between personal forgiveness and social righteousness?

11. Psalm 51 makes us aware of how sinful we are, and it makes us less actively sinful. How do you see it working in that way in you?

Be quiet before God. In silence confess your sins to him. Accept his forgiveness and grace.
Day Three, January 4

Praying Our Fear
Psalm 23

The world is a fearsome place. If we manage with the help of parents, teachers and friends to survive the dangers of infancy and childhood, we find ourselves launched in an adult world that is ringed with terror—accident, assault, disease, violence, conflicts.

Personal Reflection: Write about a fear you are struggling with. What are its roots? How would you like God to deal with it?

Prayer brings fear into focus and faces it. But prayer does more than bravely face fear, it affirms God’s presence in it. Read Psalm 23.

1. This is a well-known psalm. It takes strenuous effort to set it in a fresh way. Is there anything here you have never noticed before?

2. There are two large metaphors in the psalm: the shepherd (vv. 1-4) and the host (vv. 5-6). Compare and contrast these two images.

3. Look carefully at the shepherd. How exactly does he care for his sheep (v.v. 1-4)?

4. How does the setting of verse 4 contrast with that of verses 1-3?

5. “I fear no evil” (v. 4) is a bold statement. What does it mean for you to say that?

6. Look carefully at the host. How exactly does he provide for his guest (vv. 5-6)?

7. How many times does the first-person pronoun (I, me, my) occur in this psalm? What impact does this make on you?

8. Enemies are prominent in the psalm prayers and appear here too. Who are your enemies?

9. What is the most comforting thing that you have experienced in the life of faith?

10. Psalm 23 is a weapon against fear. What fear in your life will you go to war against with this prayer as your cannon?

Pray. Name your fears and ask Christ the Shepherd and Christ the Host to relieve them.
**Day Four, January 5**

**Praying Our Hate**

Psalm 137

We want to be at our best before God. Prayer, we think, means presenting ourselves before God so that he will be pleased with us. We put our “Sunday best” in our prayers. But when we pray the prayers of God’s people, the psalms, we find that will not do. We must pray who we actually are, not who we think we should be.

**Personal Reflection:** How do you feel about yourself, your life and others when you experience hate?

Here is a prayer that brings out not the best but the worst in us: vile, venomous, vicious hate. Can God handle our hate? Read Psalm 137.

1. This psalm combines the loveliest lyric we can sing with the ugliest emotion we can feel. What makes verses 1-6 lovely? What makes verses 7-9 ugly?

2. The Babylonian exile put God’s people where they did not want to be, with no hope of returning. When have you been where you didn’t want to be? Do verses 1-3 express anything similar to your experience? Explain.

3. Remembering your own experiences, how would you evaluate the emotions described in verses 4-6?

4. Why was Israel in Babylon, and how does that factor into the feelings they are expressing?

5. Israelites were an oft-conquered, much trampled people. The Edomites in the past (v. 7) and the Babylonians (v. 8) in the present were oppressors. Imagine what it would be like to be the world’s patsy (easy victim). How might that share your prayers?

6. Notice again the change in tone in verses 7-9. What words and phrases reveal the emotions in these verses?

7. It is easy to be honest before God with our hallelujahs and in our hurt; it is not easy to be honest in the dark emotions of our hate. How honest are you? Explain.

8. Jesus said “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 6:44). How can we possibly love and pray for such people?

9. The two dominant emotions in this prayer are self-pity (vv. 1-6) and avenging hate (vv. 7-9), neither of them particularly commendable. Praying our sins doesn’t, as such, launder (wash) them. What does it do?

10. Most of us suppress our negative emotions (unless, neurotically, we advertise them). The way of prayer is not to cover them up so we will appear respectable but to expose them so we can be healed. What negative emotion would you like to be healed?

**Take any hate or dislike that you have uncovered and give it voice as you pray.**
**DAY FIVE, JANUARY 6**

**PRAYING OUR TEARS**

Psalm 6

Tears are a biological gift of God. They are a physical means for expressing emotional and spiritual experience. But it is hard to know what to do with them. If we indulge our tears, we cultivate self-pity. If we suppress our tears, we lose touch with our feelings.

**PERSONAL REFLECTION:** When was the last time you cried – *really* cried?

When we pray our tears, we enter into sadness that integrate our sorrows with our Lord’s sorrows and discover both the source of and the relief from our sadness? *Read Psalm 6.*

1. What different emotions are expressed in this psalm?

2. It is not popular in our culture to talk about an angry God (v. 1). What experience have you had of God’s anger?

3. Compare the first verses with the last. Are the tears because of the Lord or the enemies? Explain.

4. “How long?” (v. 3) is a frequent question in prayer. Considering the frequency with which it is uttered in Scripture, God must welcome it. What in your life, past or present, evokes this question?

5. What is the cumulative effect of the three verbs, *turn, deliver* and *save* in verse 4?

6. The emotional center of this prayer is verses 6-7. How many different ways is weeping expressed?

7. Why the tears? Go through the psalm and note every possible source.

8. Tears are often considered a sign that something is wrong with us – depression, unhappiness, frustration – and therefore either to be avoided or to be cured. But what if they are a sign of something right with us? What rightness could they be evidenced of?

9. In verses 8-9 there are three phrases in parallel: *weeping, cry for mercy* and *prayer.* Are these aspects of one thing or three different things? Explain.

10. Remembering and praising (v. 5) are set forth as if they should mean something to God. Why should they? Are you practiced and skilled in remembering and praising? Explain.

11. Who do you know who is in grief?

*Pray for those who are in grief now, using phrases from Psalm 6 to express their sorrow.*
PRAYING OUR DOUBT
Psalm 73

Doubt is not a sin. It is an essential element of belief. Doubt is honesty. Things are not as they appear. We see contradictions between what we believe and what we experience. What is going on here? Did God give us a bum steer (bad advice)? Why aren’t things turning out the way we taught to expect? No mature faith avoids or denies doubt. Doubt forces faith to bedrock (lowest point).

PERSONAL REFLECTION: In a time of quiet ask yourself what doubts might be standing between you and God. Talk to God about those doubts.

The writer of Psalm 73 is full of doubt. Read Psalm 73.

1. How could you paraphrase the doubt expressed in verses 2-12?

2. The questions the psalmist asks are very relevant to us. What individuals or groups of people cause you to ask these kinds of questions?

3. Self-pity is like a deadly virus. How would you express, in terms of your own life, what the psalmist says in verses 13-14?

4. The key word and the pivotal center of the psalm is the word till in verse 17. What takes place here in the sanctuary?

5. What takes place in your sanctuary, the place where you worship?

6. How do some of the psalmist’s realization and understandings come into focus in your act of worship?

7. The yet in verse 23 links two contrasting statements. What are they?

Have you experienced this truth?

8. The prosperity of the wicked occupied the first part of the psalm (vv. 1-16). The presence of the Lord occupies the second (vv. 17-28). What is more vivid to you, the wicked or the Lord? Explain.

9. The appearance of the wicked whom we envy is in utter and complete contrast to their reality (vv. 18-20). How do you discern between what you see (and are tempted to envy) and what is (and so are affirmed in obedience)?

10. Worship is the pivotal act in this prayer. How can worship help you to deal with your doubts and hard questions about the Christian life?

11. The Christian consensus about worship is that it is a pivotal act every week. How can worship become more pivotal part of your experience?

In your time of prayer spend five minutes in silence, savoring God’s presence, letting him restore your perspective. Then speak your praises.
DAY SEVEN, JANUARY 8

PRAYING OUR PRAISE
Psalm 150

All prayer finally, in one way or another, becomes praise. No matter how much we suffer, no matter our doubts — everything finds its way into praise, the final consummating prayer. This is not to say that other prayers are inferior to praise, only that all prayer pursued far enough becomes praise.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: What circumstances or feelings in the last year have, however momentarily, made praising person out of you?

The writer of Psalm 150 is deliberately placed as the concluding prayer of the church’s book of prayers. Read Psalm 150.

1. How many times is the word praise used in the psalm?

What does that suggest about the psalmist’s mood when he was writing this?

When have you felt compelled to express your praise to God in a similar way?

2. Verse 1 tells us where the Lord is to be praised. What is the meaning of “in his sanctuary” and “in his mighty heavens”?

3. Verse 2 tells us why he is to be praised. What reasons does the psalmist give?

What reasons of your own can you add?

4. Verses 3-5 tells us how to praise the Lord. As you read these verses, what kind of scene do you imagine?

How does this kind of worship compare with your own?

5. Verse 6 tells us who should praise the Lord. Do you think that “everything that has breath” is mean literally? Explain.

6. In Hebrew the first and the last word of this prayer is hallelujah (“praise the Lord”). To what extent is your life bracketed by this word?

7. There are no short cuts to praise. If we maintain a sensitivity in all the psalms preceding this one, we will not be insensitive to all tears and doubts and pain that are summed up into praise. What difficult circumstances in your life have found their way into praise?

8. Augustine claimed that a “Christian should be a hallelujah from head to foot.” Are you? Do you want to be? What needs to be done to get you there?

Pray your praise. Gather the reflections and insights that have come from your study and turn them into a time of concluding and celebrative praise.