

Praying with Scripture Karen May

Hello everyone, I'm Karen May and I'm a Catholic author, speaker and spiritual director. And today I want to talk to you about praying with scripture. I love the scriptures. I love the word of God, I love how He speaks to me through it, And in it, I love how I discover who God is, who Jesus is, who I am, and who God is calling me to be. And I offer that to you Today, I invite you to step into the scriptures, prayerfully expecting God to speak to you, expecting that connection because the books in the Bible can be historical, first and second kings, first and second Chronicles. Even the gospels tell the stories of things that actually happened. So they can be historical documents, but there's so much more than that. They're God's love letter to you and to me. And so today let us step into the scripture and we will begin with prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen. Heavenly Father, I thank you so much. I thank you for your word, for the ways that you long to speak to us, to speak to our hearts, to set them on fire, to open our eyes so that we can see you. Help us today. Lord, help us to hear your voice, to know your love, to feel your mercy. And we ask all this in Jesus name, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

A Way That God Speaks To Us

I love a passage in the catechism, a paragraph, twenty six fifty three and the way that it describes how we should approach scripture. It says, ***"Let them remember however that prayer should accompany the reading of sacred scripture, so that a dialogue takes place between God and man. For we speak to Him when we pray, we listen to Him when we read the divine oracles."***

And I love that distinction because we can pray and give Him all of our requests and our praise and all of our, you know anything that we have on our heart, but we listen to Him in the scriptures. It's His voice speaking to us. He can speak to us in prayer, but scripture is a particular way that God speaks to us that resonates throughout time. And I love that. How do we pray with that? How do we receive that? I think one of the first steps is to realize that it's a dialogue because the Bible can be really intimidating. I know that I was really intimidated by it for a long time.

The Old Testament's scary, that's that angry God you hear about. And the New Testament wasn't really relatable, like how am I supposed to connect with people that lived years ago? How does that have anything to do with my life? But a while ago, the Holy Spirit really came and opened scriptures for me. I started to see that Jesus was hidden in the Old Testament. All of these stories were telling me something about who he was. I heard His voice speaking to me in the words that I was reading and speaking to other people through me. I would have verses that I would read and then they would come into play in a conversation just five, ten minutes later. It was really amazing.

Pray More Lent Retreat Transcript

It was kind of like the disciples who were walking to Emmaus after Jesus was resurrected. They had just kind of given up. They're like, I don't know what's going on. We're out. And as they're walking the road to Emmaus, Jesus is walking with them and explaining the scriptures to them, but they don't know who he is until they sit and break bread with him. And all of a sudden he disappears and they run back to the other apostles and say, we saw him and kind of say, we should have known because as we were walking, weren't our hearts burning within us. They recognized his voice. They knew something was different, their hearts were burning. That's what we're looking for is we pray in the Gospels and in the Old Testament and anywhere in the scriptures, we're asking for that space in our hearts to resonate because it is filled with God's presence and with His voice. And so we pray before we read scriptures, we pray as we read scriptures, we pray through the scriptures.

Samuel's Response to God's Voice

And I was, as I was preparing for this talk, I was praying the whole time asking God to help me to share the right scriptures with you for this talk. And I had an idea and it just wasn't working. And as I continued to pray about it, I realized I was singing a song "Speak, Lord, I'm listening, Please show me the way." And it's an old song that I'd known from a long time ago, I have not sung it for a long time. And I realized that came, one, it was my prayer, but two, it came from the book of Samuel. It was Samuel's response to God's voice. He had been hearing God calling his name, but he thought that it was Eli, the priest of the temple. And so he kept going to Eli saying what? And Eli kept saying nothing. I don't know why you're coming. And finally Eli realized that God was calling Samuel and told Samuel, next time you hear Him, call your voice, call your name, you answer Him, "speak Lord. Your servant is listening." We are called to do the same. "Speak Lord. Your servant is listening" as we go into scriptures, let us say that prayer "speak Lord, your servant is listening." Show me the way.

Hannah's Prayer

And so I went to the book of Samuel because I knew that's where that story was from. And I thought that I would tell you that story, but that's not what God placed on my heart. What I saw was chapter two, and it was Hannah's prayer. Now Hannah is Samuel's mother and she was not able to have children, came to the temple crying and begging for a child and she got pregnant with Samuel. And after she had him, she brings him to the temple and gives him to Eli, the priest saying, God gave me my son. And now I give him back. And then she prays this beautiful prayer. ***"My heart exalts in the Lord. My horn is exalted by my God I have swallowed up my enemies. I rejoice in your victory. There is no holy one like the Lord. There is no rock like our God speak boastfully no longer do not let arrogance issue from your mouths for an all knowing God is the Lord A God who weighs actions. The bows of the mighty are broken while the tottering gerd on strength, the well fed hire themselves out for bread while the hungry no longer have to toil. The barren wife bears seven sons while the mother of many languishes.."***

and it goes on, but it's such a beautiful prayer and it sounds a little familiar, doesn't it? It sounds a little bit like Mary's magnificat when she tells Elizabeth that she is carrying the savior of the world. And I realized that we can pray with scripture, literally pray with scripture. We can pray just as Hannah prayed, we can pray her words, ***"My heart exalts in the Lord. My horn is exalted***

by my God, my heart exalts in the Lord. And right now I am feeling that I can say that with her. But sometimes this verse, we might come to me when I can't exalt in the Lord, I'm not really feeling it. And this prayer helps me to do this.

So sometimes when we pray with scriptures, we are just praying the prayers along with the people who are really not that much different from us. years ago, people still had the problems with family. They still had problems with fertility. These people in the Bible are not that much different from us and their joys and their sorrows we really can connect with and their prayers, we can pray as well.

Psalm 42

So then I went to the Psalms, and I love the Psalms because they are prayers. They are ways that we can literally again pray with scripture. And the Psalms cover every single emotion, anger, sadness, despair, joy, wonder, awe. So many ways that we can pray with the Psalms. and the Psalm that I went to was Psalm 42 . And it says this, ***"As the dear longs for streams of water. So my soul longs for you, oh God, my soul thirsts for God, the living God. When can I enter and see the face of God? My tears have been my bread day and night as they ask me every day, where is your God? Those times I recall as I pour out my soul, when I would cross over to the shrine of the mighty one to the house of God, amid loud cries at thanksgiving with the multitude keeping festival, why are you downcast my soul? Why do you groan within me? Wait for God, for I shall again praise him, my savior and my God."***

This Psalm resonated with me because, I have felt this Psalm so many times and recently I have really felt this Psalm as the dear longs for streams of water. ***"So my soul longs for you. Oh God."*** I was in a time that we had a lot of things going on in our lives. We had several pretty significant health issues, we had some relationships that we were dealing with that were very difficult and I was just so overwhelmed and I felt so disconnected from God. My prayer life was dry, I just couldn't connect. And this prayer I could pray so deeply because I missed God. I know that connection, I love that connection, and I hate being separated from Him. ***"As the dear longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you. Oh God."***

A Dialogue With God

And I wasn't finding Him. But again, praying with scripture means that this is a dialogue, We're listening for God's voice. And what spoke to me in here, and sometimes something may be different, may be speaking to you, But what spoke to me was ***"Those times I recall as I pour out my soul, when I would cross over to the shrine of the mighty one to the house of God amid loud cries of thanksgiving."*** It was that reminder Jesus telling me, "remember you've been here. I know that you've been with me." It was just that, that seeing, I knew that I had been seen and I knew and I was reminded that I have been there. And I would go to the house of the Lord with joys, with cries of thanksgiving. And this last part, ***"Why are you downcast my soul? Why do you groan within me?"***

Pray More Lent Retreat Transcript

Like why are you so sad? And I heard Jesus tell me, wait for God, for I shall again praise Him, my savior and my God. He gave me such comfort like it's coming. You will come back. I know you will come back because you long for me. That's a prayer he loves to answer. And when we go into scripture and we are praying with it, we are expecting God to speak to us through it. He can give us those points of comfort and encouragement, And so I continued.

A Verse From The Book of Revelation

And the last scripture I want to share with you today, came to me in a Bible study During that time, again, I was feeling very disconnected. I just, I was irritable, I was agitated, I just wasn't being the kind of person that I knew God wanted me to be. I was just really having a hard time hearing God and being in prayer. And I just kept showing up. And this verse came in a passage in my Bible study and it's from the Book of Revelation. Now talk about being intimidated. Something coming from revelation probably doesn't sound like it's going to be something that's very encouraging. And it may not sound very encouraging to you, but to me it hits so deeply in my soul and really was the turning point for me. So let me read it to you and then I'll explain.

It's Revelation chapter two verses one through four. ***"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write this, the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks in the midst of the seven gold lamp stands, says this, I know your works, your labor and your endurance and that you cannot tolerate the wicked. You have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and discovered that they are imposters. Moreover, you have endurance and have suffered from my name. And you have not grown weary. Yet, I hold this against you. You have lost the love you had at first."***

Oof. I heard that last line. ***"You have lost the love you had at first."*** And I knew that was true, but I also knew that that was my way back. I was working so hard in the wrong directions. And this verse, Jesus spoke to me and said, this is how you come back, love me. Just go back to the love that you had at first. Quit trying so hard, quit trying to do all these things. Let's go back to the beginning. And the beginning is love. And the rest of those verses again, I'm seen like I know that you have worked. I know that you have endurance. I know you've suffered from my name and you have not grown weary. This longing that I have, I still have. Go back to the love that you had at first. That's the way home. And sure enough, that's all I needed. And so this verse will forever hold a special place in my heart.

And that's the thing, when we pray with scriptures, we start to hold scriptures. Not because we memorize them, because we're supposed to have them in our pocket for different things. It's because they're personal. They're personal love letters to us. They're ways, they're things that Jesus has said to us that make a difference. And so I can bring that in. I can bring in when Jesus says ***"By their fruits, they shall be known"*** because I know that means when I'm praying or when I think I'm hearing God's voice in scripture, I watch for what happens, I watch for those fruits. Because if the things that I'm reading and hearing in scripture or in prayer lead to growing in faith, hope, love helping me to be more forgiving, helping me to be closer to Jesus, then that's probably God's voice. Jesus' voice. If it's leading to confusion and hatred and anger and distanced from God, probably not His voice, it's probably my voice or the world's voice or somebody else's voice, but definitely not God's voice. And the more that we do that, the more we

Pray More Lent Retreat Transcript

start to recognize His voice, the more easily we start to hear His voice. When we read a scripture passage, when we just take a few verses and just sit with them and ask God to speak with us, we always start reading our scriptures with prayer because that enters into dialogue. We expect dialogue. And that's what I want for you today.

Reflection on Scriptures

Take any of these scriptures that I have given to you, first Samuel, chapter two, Psalm , or Revelations chapter two, take any one of those or if there is another verse that is calling you, that is resonating in your heart, sit with that. Ask God to speak to you and start the dialogue. I thank you so much for your longing and your love for God, and I pray that God blesses you through His word. Amen.