

PRAYER SPARKS

The Gospel of Mark

JON VARNER

Foreword by Dr. William Varner

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FOREWORD

For the last twenty years, I have been learning to pray Scripture on a daily basis. Kenneth Boa originally encouraged me to do so through his book *Handbook to Prayer*, and a popular work by Donald Whitney entitled *Praying the Bible* helped me to incorporate Scripture texts into my daily prayer discipline. I recently made my own modest contribution to this growing movement with my book, *Handbook for Praying Scripture*. Taken together, these three books emphasize unifying our disciplines of Scripture study and prayer, either by actually praying the words of Scripture (Boa and myself) or converting the Scripture we read into prayer (Whitney).

Enter Jon Varner's *Prayer Sparks*. Following Whitney's approach, Varner (no personal relation) has introduced the model of praying not through isolated passages of Scripture but through entire biblical books, with the goal to provide guides for the entire New Testament! He first invites us to read a passage, then follows with concrete guidance on what essential components to look for within each one. Those highlights can then be converted into prayers of praise, intercession, and supplication, both for others and ourselves. But Varner includes something my own efforts have lacked: he provides clear guidance on the process to transform our reading into prayers that honor the Author of Scripture.

Moreover, Varner provides helpful advice to make this exciting approach work with singles, couples, families, and all kinds of prayer groups—even on a church-wide basis. No matter our station in life, we know we should read the Bible and pray. Thankfully, Varner's tremendously helpful guidebook shows us how to effectively integrate these disciplines to deepen and broaden our worship and devotion.

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I do not know of a more helpful and hands-on guide that combines our reading and praying into a unified discipline of Scripture-soaked prayer. Learn and be blessed!

William Varner
The Master's University

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

When I sit down to pray, I often find myself distracted, following unnecessary rabbit trails that have little to do with what I read in the Bible that day. I have benefited greatly from prompts that help guide my thoughts and prayers. If you are anything like me, you may also have found that your prayer time can be improved by leveraging prompts or suggestions regarding what to pray for.

In my experience, however, the prompts I have used generally came from devotionals that were not directly connected to my daily Bible reading. I have found that to be unfortunate because it is my time in God's word that often stirs up gratitude and praise, helps me recognize sin for which I need to ask forgiveness, and triggers what I want to talk to God about. I am also typically more consistent with my time in God's word than I am with prayer, so when I begin to connect the two, I find that I pray more.

The purpose behind this guide is to reconnect the two—your prayers and your Bible reading. Many saints through the centuries have recommended praying the Scriptures. When Martin Luther's barber asked him how to improve his prayer life, Luther suggested using the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments as guides. Others since Luther, like Donald Whitney, William Varner, and John Devries, have advocated similar methods. In fact, Jesus prayed the Scriptures when he was hanging on the cross.

This prayer guide will follow a simple format to help you use the Scriptures to pray. It is based on common section divisions found in most English Bibles, although at times it may deviate from that structure if certain sections have thematic connections. Each

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section provides the applicable references addressed along with prompts to spark you to pray for the themes or topics found in that section. At the end of this introduction is an example of how to use the prompts to pray.

There are several ways you may choose to use this guide to aid your private prayer life. (Suggestions on how to use it in group settings are found in the appendix). If you typically read one section at a time as you study, try reviewing the prompts immediately after reading the section while the Scriptures are still fresh in your mind. As you follow the prompts, make note of the connections to the passage and let the interplay between the verses and prompts inform your prayers.

If you typically read a whole chapter at a time, you have a few options. You can (1) work through each section, read the prompts, and pray as you read; (2) read the whole chapter but then return to the beginning, working through each section at a time; or (3) instead of praying through the whole chapter, pick a couple sections that stood out to you and pray through those.

As you use the guide, allow it to be a springboard for your prayers; do not feel constrained to limit your exchanges with God to the suggestions within the prompts. And as you pray, consider applying the prompts to others, such as your family, neighbors, co-workers, and church.

This guide is not intended to be innovative, but I believe it can assist and impact your prayer life in profound ways as you talk to the Lord through his word. It is my prayer that your use of this guide will enrich and deepen your prayer life.

In his service,

Jon

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Mark 6:53–56

Begin by reading Mark 6:53–56:

When [Jesus and his disciples] had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized [Jesus] and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

After you read the passage, use the following prompts to pray for things that come to mind. Here are several examples of ways the prompts might guide your prayers.

- Thank God for his ability and willingness to heal people.

God, I thank you for your willingness and ability to heal people. You are a good God, and you have the power to heal and save. There is nothing too difficult for you! At times I feel like healing is not possible, but in your word we see Jesus and others healing even the greatest of ailments. God, help me to always have faith to believe you can heal and you want to heal. Also, help me to trust you when your will is different from my desires.

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- Pray for the healing of any sickness you are experiencing.

God, I ask that you help me with the allergies I have been experiencing. Please remove their source and make me well. Restore my body to work properly and not to overreact to pollen in the air. Help me to trust you to endure this discomfort despite the frustration it can cause. In fact, may I view this trial with joy as James 1 teaches.

- Pray for family, friends, and people from your church who need physical healing.

Lord, I also ask that you heal Aunt Sally. She is experiencing significant pain as a result of her car accident. Please give the doctors wisdom on how to make her whole and, if it be your will, please prevent any impairments from becoming permanent.

I also lift up Frank from church to you, Lord. He is battling cancer right now, and the chemo is really taking its toll. Please give him the strength to endure. Help him to know that he is never alone. Lord, bring to mind ways I can help support him and his wife, Kim. Please send the Holy Spirit to comfort them during this trying time, and let me be an encouragement to them and find ways to bear their burdens.

After you have prayed for the topics and issues that come to mind with the prompts, you can move to the next section or continue praying about other matters.

MARK 1

1:1–8

- Praise God for the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Thank him for his saving work in your life.
- Ask the Lord to give you a heart of repentance.
- Confess and repent of any sin that comes to mind.
- Pray for those who serve as messengers of the gospel.
- Ask the Lord to call and send more messengers to share the gospel.
- Ask that God will give you opportunities to share the gospel and that he will reveal to you who he is leading you to share with.
- Thank the Lord for the Holy Spirit and his work in your life (regeneration,¹ sanctification,² etc.)

1:9–11

- Praise Jesus for his obedience to the Father.
- Consider some specific ways that Jesus made the Father pleased. Praise him for those things.

¹ Regeneration can be defined as “the transformation of a person’s spiritual condition from death to life through the work of the Holy Spirit” (*Lexham Bible Dictionary*, s.v., “regeneration.”).

² Sanctification describes the process of believers in Christ becoming more like Jesus as they mature in their faith.

1:12–13

- Praise Jesus for the fact that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).
- Thank Jesus that he understands the weaknesses and temptations in your life. Be specific.
- Ask God for strength to overcome specific areas of temptation in your life.

1:14–15

- Pray for believers around the world who are experiencing persecution for their faith. Pray that the Holy Spirit will enable them to “count it all joy” as they faithfully endure.
- Thank God that one day persecuted believers will experience justice for the wrongs done to them.
- Praise God that we live in a time when his kingdom has been revealed and that we get to see it advance around the world.
- Thank God for giving you the gift of repentance and belief.
- Pray for others, by name, that you desire for God to give the gift of repentance and belief.

1:16–20

- Praise God for calling you out of your old life and into a relationship with him.
- Thank him for the individuals he used in your life to bring you into a saving relationship with him.
- Confess and repent of any area of your life in which you are clinging to your old ways.
- Ask God to use you to be a fisher of men. Ask that he will reveal someone he has placed in your life for you to share your faith with.

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1:21–28

- Praise Jesus for his powerful and authoritative teaching.
- Praise him for his power over the unclean spirits and his victory over the powers of darkness.
- Praise Jesus for the freedom you have experienced in your life as a result of his work.
- Pray that believers who are struggling under the powers of darkness will experience the freedom they have in Christ.
- Pray that these struggling believers will persevere if God does not bring freedom as quickly as they would like.
- Pray that because of the freedom you and others have experienced, the fame of Jesus will spread throughout your neighborhood, city, state, country, and the world.

1:29–34

- Praise God for his power over sickness and his ability to heal people.
- Praise him for the times he has healed you and others you know.
- Pray for the individuals in your life and your church who are experiencing sickness right now. Ask God to heal them.
- Ask God to help those who are sick trust him to heal at the right time and trust his purpose for their illness.

1:35–39

- Pray that the preaching of God's word will be effective and will bring transformation.
- Pray that those who labor in preaching and teaching will be faithful in that task.
- Pray for those you know personally who preach and teach regularly.

1:40–45

- Pray for people to be made clean.
- Pray that people experiencing isolation as a result of an illness will know the comfort of Christ.
- Thank Jesus for the compassion he has shown you throughout your life.
- Pray for others by name whom you desire to experience God's compassion.
- Pray that you will show others compassion the way Jesus showed the leper compassion.

MARK 2

2:1–12

- Praise God for the gift of faith that leads to the forgiveness of sins.
- Thank God for the individuals he used in your life to bring you to him.
- Repent of any time you questioned God’s ability to heal or save.
- Pray for people in your life who need physical healing.
- Pray for individuals who need the gift of faith.
- Ask God to reveal to you those with whom you should share the gospel this week.
- Trust God to do what is best regarding someone’s healing or salvation.

2:13–17

- Praise God for calling you out of your previous life of darkness and into a relationship with him.
- Repent of any time you felt someone was beyond salvation.
- Repent of any time you elevated yourself above someone else because of your obedience to God.
- Ask God who you need to “introduce” to Jesus.
- Pray for God to give you a heart of compassion toward those who are far from him.
- Ask God to soften your heart and keep you from any self-righteousness.

2:18–28

- Praise God that your righteousness does not depend on your external works of obedience.
- Thank God for revealing through the Scriptures what is best for you.
- Repent of any time you depended on your own righteousness.
- Repent of any time you viewed God’s commandments as being bad for you.
- Ask God to reveal if there are any areas in which you have elevated human tradition to equality with God’s word. If anything comes to mind, repent of it.
- Ask God to help you order your entire life according to the gospel.
- Resolve to yield to God’s standards of righteousness, not man’s.

This is a shortened preview copy. The full version of this guide can be purchased on Amazon by searching “Prayer Sparks”.

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APPENDIX

Additional Ways to Use This Guide

As a Family, Couple, or Small Group

Read the passage or chapter together, discussing the section of Scripture as you normally would. Then read the corresponding prompts and discuss. Ask how you can pray for these things in greater detail, then jointly pray over them, allowing the Scripture reading to inform your prayers.

In a Prayer Meeting

Explain to the members of your group that you will be using a section of Scripture to guide your prayer time. Let them know you will prompt them to pray for specific themes or topics that are connected to the passage you will read. Then read a section of Mark and ask people to note some of those themes/topics. Last, ask people to pray for issues or situations related to those themes using the associated prompts to trigger ideas.

An alternative approach might be to read the passage, then read the prompts, and finally, solicit volunteers to pray for specific situations associated with those prompts. If you have a separate prayer list you normally work through, you have a ready list of requests/situations to match to the themes/topics in the passage. Referencing the associated prompts can provide even more scriptural context.

In Congregational Worship

If your church is reading from the Gospel of Mark during your worship service, you could use the guide to provide prompts for prayer as appropriate. For example, if your service includes a time of pastoral prayer, the prompts can inform that prayer by directly connecting it both to the Scripture reading from Mark and the sermon. Adjust to the flow of the service as necessary. For instance, if the congregational reading of Mark occurs before the pastoral prayer, the pastor or leader praying could segue from some or all of the prompts to point the congregation to their associated connection with an opening such as “Father, as we heard in our Scripture reading, we pray . . .” Conversely, if the pastoral prayer follows the Scripture reading, the leader could begin with something similar to “Lord, as we will see in your word, we thank you for . . .”