

# Spiritual Rhythms | Prayer

## #3: Moses' Prayer

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Dr. Matt Cassidy ---- January 19, 2025

Well, hey, good morning, Grace! And thanks for weathering that weather so you could come here today. I'm glad you came. I hope you enjoyed the worship. The guys had a lot of fun.

We're in the third week of a series called Rhythms. And for January, the rhythm we're focusing on is prayer. If you want to turn in your Bibles, the passage we're going to look at today is Deuteronomy 6. But I'm pretty thrilled about talking about this passage that we're looking at today, because we're going to learn a very practical way to enhance your prayer life and make it have a natural rhythm, oddly enough.

I hope you've enjoyed this series so far. I have, and I've seen a significant change in my spiritual life, and in my prayer life, particularly. I was a little startled, and then I thought, Well, you know, if I worked on my free throw for a month, I'd probably get better, regardless if I was *good at it before or bad*. If you work on something in the right way, you'll get pretty good at it. It gets better, anyway.

So, that's what we're doing now. We're looking at prayer. And last week we asked Jesus, "Teach me to pray." And that's how you end up with the Lord's Prayer. The disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray."

Today we're looking at a passage that goes like this: *Moses, teach us to pray*. And in Deuteronomy 6 this is what he says. By the way, real quick, the "LORD" there is all capital letters. So, that actually means the formal name of the Lord. It means YHWH, or I'll say "Jehovah." I'll go back and forth between those, because they're synonyms. So, it's important that we know that, because that's the point of it. So, anyway, it's not a title; it's a name.

### **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**

**<sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**

**<sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.**

**<sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

“Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one. You shall love Jehovah your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit down in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates”—city is assumed there.

This prayer, the prayer of Moses, is called the Shema. And it's called that because the first word, “hear,” in Hebrew is *shema*. It is the absolute central text for Israel, and frankly, for anyone and everyone who enjoys living by faith in Jehovah for who He is and for what He's done.

A devout Jewish person—especially the men—would start every single day with the Shema—this prayer. And the last thing they would do before they turned themselves into bed would be to pray Shema.

And it's for a good reason. I mean, God is clearly declared through the voice of Moses and Jesus—the older Testament and the newer Testament. The life begins here. Jehovah is God.

Jehovah is one. And here's the purpose in life. Here's the *summum bonum*, the greatest good: "love Jehovah your God with all your heart, soul, and strength." The very first word in a little boy's mouth is to be *shema*. The first sentence he's to memorize, the first verse in the Bible for a young boy, is to be this.

And when you stop and think about this—*Jesus, what's the first verse You ever memorized?* It would have Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel, Jehovah is God, Jehovah is one." So, if it's good enough for Him ...

Anyway, today what I want to do is look at how the Shema is going to teach us how to pray—and not just pray any way, but pray in a way that is a conversational, ongoing, all-inclusive lifestyle of prayer; and how praying this way that is talked about in the Shema is going to change our souls. It has the potential of changing our souls.

We'll go through it rather quickly, but I want to teach some of you a new technique, and it could be revolutionary for you.

## **1. The Foundation: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one."**

It starts with this foundation: "Hear, O Israel, Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one." "Hear": you could even translate it like you would from a parent to a child—"Listen," as in "Listen to me! Here it comes. Hear this."

"Hear, O Israel ..." and he just declares the proper name that is used: "Jehovah, Yahweh, is God. Yahweh is one." It's His formal name. It's saying that the source for life, for love, for purpose, for strength, for hope is found in Jehovah, in Yahweh only. This sentence in verse 4 is in many ways just the first commandment: "And you will have no other gods before Jehovah."

## **2. Loving God with all our heart, soul, and strength**

And since that is true, it just follows that this is the next sentence—"And you shall love Jehovah your God with all your heart and soul and strength."

It's kind of hard to distinguish the difference between "heart" and "soul." The heart is the seat of your individual, the "you" personally of your affections and your passions and your loves. And so, loving Jehovah with all your heart means that you align and arrange your heart so that they are the same passions and desires the God would have.

It says to love the Lord your God with all your soul. The soul is the essence of any and all humans. It's the intellect and the emotion and the will of each and every one of us. And so, when we say to love the Lord with all our soul, it means to be completely surrendered to Him. It means that He reigns and rules our essence.

And strength is making a reference to all the resources that we have that have been given us by God—not just our talents, our resources (such as our possessions), but also our personal experiences in the past and our opportunities, our energies. So, to love the Lord Jehovah God with all of our strength means that we're looking at every opportunity with every asset that we've been lent by God to bring glory to God, to bring attention to His greatness. That's what it means to love with all your heart, soul, and strength.

So, you can already see in these first two sentences, right off the bat, we're having to align our souls to even be able to do this. We have to change who we are so that we line up with who God is. And already we're having to choose between “my ego be done” or “God's will be done.” That's the choice.

These first two sentences are so powerful—to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength meant that you were willing to give your life for Jehovah. If you've ever been perplexed about why the Jews have a history of persecution ... the history of the Jews is the history of religious persecution ... if you want to know why, it's because of the Shema. It's because of this prayer. Because throughout antiquity and even in modern times, when you went to a different region, you adopted the regional god, whether it was Egypt, Babylon, or Nazi Germany—a god of wrath and death. Wherever people would go, they would just go along with the culture, and I would even say go along with the god of the city or the god of the country.

And when the Jews went to other places, either by choice or against their will, they would say, “Hear, O Israel, Jehovah is God, He's the only God. Jehovah is one. And we love Him first and foremost, and only—exclusively.” And that is why the history of the Jews is the history of martyrs. And the greatest hope for a Jewish martyr would be that the last words of his life were “Listen, hear, O Israel, God is Jehovah, Jehovah is one.” The first thing he would ever say was the Shema, and so it would be the last thing he would say.

### 3. The Role of the Bible in prayer and in loving God

This is a life-transforming prayer. What I want us to look at now is the role of the Bible in our prayer and in loving God. If we're trying to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength, we're going to do that through prayer. We're going to bring the Bible into prayer, because he says, "These words that I'm giving you today are to be embedded in your heart." These words that he gave them that day are the Bible. He's referring to the Word of God here. Here's what I want you to look at as a paradigm: the older and the newer Testaments are Jehovah's heart language. Think of this as a language. Holy Writ is the way God speaks. So, when God's Spirit speaks to our spirit because we're looking for hope or direction or training in righteousness, it's going to be primarily through the Bible. God's going to speak His native tongue, and that's going to be the Bible.

#### **Deuteronomy 6:6-9**

**And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.**

**<sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

And so, when we talk to God in prayer, we should talk in Bible speak. When we hear God speak to us, it is mostly always going to be in some passage that's already been written. So, if you think of the paradigm of the Bible, "these words I'm giving you today," as a new language, God's language, His heart language, His native tongue, now look at verses 6 through 9: "And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind these words as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on the gates of your city."

You impress these words on your heart, and then you impress them on your children. If God's native tongue, His heart language, becomes our heart language, now we converse. And know this—if you are able to become absolutely and completely fluent in another language, here's what has to take place. Beyond even dreaming in that new language, when you understand the slang and the meaning of the words—not just the words, but the deeper meaning—you end up having to change your worldview. You have to modify your values to accommodate the culture and that language. It's a field of study called philology. It's the study of language, but more importantly, it's the study of how a language literally influences the way you think. It changes the way you see the world. It changes your worldview.

French is the king of the love languages, the romance languages. If you speak French long enough and you start thinking like the French, you'll just intuitively say *I surrender*. You might have seen videos of different languages saying the same words. When you hear someone say “I love you” affectionately and passionately, but it's in German, you think you're being yelled at. But once you get the German mindset you start thinking, *I think we should invade Poland. It's been almost a hundred years.*

Albert Einstein said that he could not have discovered the theory of relativity if he hadn't been fluent in German. Think about that. He couldn't think the way you need to think to understand  $E=mc^2$  if he had only spoken English. That kind of thinking wasn't available to him in that single language.

The point is that the Bible is that kind of thinking. Think of the Bible as God's language. Think of it as our mother tongue in heaven, which we will speak later. And so, when you sit down in your house, you speak the Bible. That's God's tongue. And then, your kids—what do you say to them? *Oh, you're learning our home country's language—you bet you are.* You put that on their heart. And when you rise up, and when you go out, you're supposed to be thinking the worldview of Jehovah-speak.

And so, when you bind this language onto your hands, it means everything you do, everything you touch, everything you involve yourself with, you're thinking in this heart tongue. And you bind them on your forehead—it's the way you think. Everywhere you go, change your mother tongue to God's mother tongue so that in your house or at the city gates where the government is going on, you're bringing God into that.

Think of the implications of the Shema here. There are no spiritual activities. There is no sacred and secular, because you're bringing heaven into all of earth. It's everywhere all the time. It's that worldview, it's not just the words. It's the thinking. And that's why your heart and soul are to understand and be effective in knowing what the Bible says, so that you end up having your soul changed because your language changes, your perspective.

### **“Divine Reading:” Praying the Bible**

The Shema is an expression of Paul. In Thessalonians where he says to pray without ceasing—there it is. And what we're going to do today is learn how to do that. We're going to learn how to regularly communicate in a way so that we start changing our native tongue. It's called divine reading. It's praying the Bible. It was discovered by sixth century Benedictine monks. And this is how they did their daily prayer. They would read and reread and constantly churn it, like they were learning a new language. But more than just words—the mindset, the feelings, the thoughts, the impressions, the way of looking at all of life.

So, if we're going to dialogue with God, know this: He's going to speak God-speak. So, if we're going to go back and forth, I'm going to need to learn that. If you fell absolutely in love with someone who only spoke Japanese, you'd learn Japanese. You'd start thinking like someone who was Japanese. And then you would enjoy each other.

When God speaks to you, He's going to quote Himself. And when you speak to God, I suggest you speak His language—the Bible. It's the frequency to which you turn to hear Him. And it's the way we're to live our lives.

So, learn to pray in Scripture. I think one of the other benefits I've found from learning to pray Scripture is that it keeps me from talking about whatever is immediate, and whatever is immediate about Matt. It brings me to what God is up to and how I can live His will.

So, here's how to pray the Bible in prayers. Basically, fundamentally, there are two ways of applying this. One is to bring the Bible into your prayer life, and the other one is to pray the Bible.

So, when we talk about bringing the Bible into our prayer life, it's when you pray prayers that are biblical prayers. Part one is that you steal Bible prayers. You plagiarize other prayers in the Bible. I do this quite often. You can go to the prayers of Moses or Daniel or whoever it might

be. I quite often go to the prayers that are found in the epistles by Paul, usually in the first chapter. Paul will say, “I pray this for you ...”

And so, when we pray for our children, sometimes I’ll just grab something out of Colossians and pray and insert my child’s name in Paul’s prayers. It’s the language God speaks. Those are the values that God already has. So, I’m going to pray along with God’s will. It’s clear, it’s right there in Colossians chapter 1.

Another way of praying the Bible and bringing the Bible into our prayers is, when you have a prayer request, you ask yourself, *How in the Bible has that already been answered? How does God answer that request in other contexts?*

So, you ask, “Will you pray for my son Bobby? He’s going into junior high.”

Well, how has God answered the request of a young man feeling helpless and alone in a rather hostile environment? I mean, Proverbs comes to mind, doesn’t it? “I pray that your son Bobby would meet another young man and would have a friend who is closer than a brother.” There’s a proverb. “I pray that Bobby would meet some young man or maybe even be mentored by a high school kid, like iron sharpens iron, so one righteous man sharpens another.” I would maybe recall the powerful relationship that Jonathan and David have in 1 Samuel. Neither one of them could have risen to the level they did without each other. “God, give Bobby ... make him David and bring him a Jonathan that he could go through life with, and I pray that their courage would compound on each other.” That’s bringing the Bible into our prayers.

### **Four Steps in Praying the Bible**

We’re going to spend a lot of today on praying the Bible itself. This is transforming Bible passages into prayers. And what I love about it is that besides speaking God’s native tongue, it also helps you memorize the Bible. I have memorized chapters of the Bible using this technique. Here’s how it works its way out. In the sixth century a Benedictine monk came up with this divine prayer time. And then six hundred years later (it should not have taken that long, I might add), another Benedictine monk turns it into a formula with four steps. And he’s going to ask us to read a passage, kind of like a formula, four times with four different purposes—four different foci. And he equates it to eating a sweet piece of chocolate. Some of you can relate to that.



## 1. Reading

Here are the four steps. The first one is just reading it for itself. He says this is just like putting the chocolate in your mouth. You read it out loud and you're constantly listening and you're not in a hurry and you're asking the Holy Spirit, *What am I listening for? What do I need to hear about this passage?* You're reading every passage in the Bible like it's written intimately just to you. What am I supposed to be drawn to?

Here's what we'll do. Here is the first passage I memorized. I remember I got my first little Bible, this little pocket thing, and I was out on the West Campus right under the Bell Tower and saw a Christian whom I'd just met. I'd just become a believer. And I said, "Hey, what's this John 3:16 verse, and where do you find it?" He pointed me to it, and that's when I memorized it, right there on the West Mall. John 3:16—that will be part of it, that will be our example. "For God so loved the world, He gave ..." *God so loved the world that He gave---God so loved the world that He gave---or God so loved the world that He gave.* What do I need to understand? I'm going to focus on "gave"—that He gave.

## 2. Reflecting

The second part here is reflecting. You've read it and now you're reflecting, you're meditating on it. The illustration here is that you're chewing on this piece of chocolate and you're not going too fast. You're pondering the significance, not of the word, but the meaning of the word. It's the deeper understanding. You're connecting facts and turning it into a truth about the nature of God. "For God so loved the world, He gave ..." *It doesn't say "For God so loved the world, He sent ..." He could have sent Jesus. That's not the same. He could have sent Him and brought Him back. No, He gave Him. He gave His only Son.* Love causes a person to become extravagantly generous. Love is generous. It gives.

## 3. Respond

You read, you reflect. The next thing you do is respond. This is the tasting of the food. This is when, in my family, we say, "Don't eat so fast! It tastes great. Don't swallow it yet ... taste every bit of it." So, you're asking yourself two things: *How does the meaning of this passage make me feel, as in altering my soul? What passions are percolated when I hear that He*

*gave, that I'm the receptor of that? Another way of looking at it is, What difference does this truth make in my life?*

I make it personal: "For God so loved me that He gave. God gave me His Son." And now I start to reflect and try to bring up memories of when I received something, something that I didn't feel adequate for or worthy of, and how I might have responded to that. "For God so loved ... He so loved..."

And then I stop and I think, *Who do I love? What do I love? Am I giving? Am I generous towards that person? Because God loves, and so He gives. What about me?*

This is how we're enlightened. See how we're starting to understand a deeper meaning of words after we've read, reflected, and responded?

#### **4. Resting**

And the last thing we do is just resting. And resting means listening. And quite often I'll just turn my palms up and I just listen. This is the digestion of this sweet chocolate. And I ask, *God, speak to me. Speak to me. What does this mean?*

And quite often God brings up to me passages in the older Testament, stories of Abraham or David or someone who loved something and gave something of great consequence. And I turn back to how that works in my world. *How do I move my heart, soul, and strength to have that similar experience?*

#### **Three Additional Things to Look For**

Here are three additional questions or things to look for while you're working your way through those four points.

##### **1. One Key Word or Phrase**

One is key words. One word—I've shown you that—one word, one phrase. Just being quiet. *What do I need to hear?*

## 2. Feelings

Another question is feeling. And it's not a superficial feeling. It's an effect. *What's changing in my soul when I receive something—in this case, when I receive such great generosity?* And I'll write everything down. By the way, it's not always happy. Blaise Pascal said that too much grace embitters. Think about that. Too much forgiveness causes people to hate you--look around and you'll see that—because they can't pay you back, and it's humiliating. So, when God so loved the world He gave me His Son, I have had feelings of resentment. I'll never pay Him back. It's so bad I can't even try. It's humbling. But it also makes me feel unworthy. So, just wrapping all those up, *What is generosity doing to me?*

## 3. Invitation

The third question is, *What is the invitation the Lord is bringing into my mind? Now that I understand what it says and what it means and how it feels, what's to change?* If this passage was sent just to you from God and you understood the native tongue in what it was saying, how does it change your view of God? How does it change your view of yourself? How does it change your view of everyone you run into? That person working behind the counter—how is that changing, that God so loved the world He gave—that person, that annoying person who's not moving fast enough?

So, if you're wondering, I would love for you to consider doing this. Where to start? Well, you can start with our little prayer cards here, because each one of them has a different verse that is appropriate for the subject we're talking about. That's a great place to start. One is the Lord's Prayer itself—we looked at that last week—why not do the Lord's Prayer? Look at one sentence a day.

For me, in my personal experience, I started doing this with the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5 through 7. And I accidentally memorized it. It's a great thing. I started seeing the rhythm of His preaching and it just became part of my thinking all the time. Romans 8: I did the same thing with that. It's a great chapter of the Bible. In Philippians 2 there's a beautiful hymn. You can see it in your Bibles because it's indented like a hymn, because it's supposed to be memorized. It's supposed to be sung, it's supposed to be enjoyed.

By doing it this way, it is tremendously powerful in life change. Because you're learning a new language. You're just naturally caring with this new approach—more than vocabulary words—this new way of looking at life. You're pondering, you're thinking about this all day long, when you sit down and when you get up, when you leave the house, when you go to the city gates. You're just thinking, *Okay, for God so loved the world that He gave ... He gave.* I'm looking for all these ways that God is giving. And is God's Spirit trying to help you learn this new love language? Oh yes, He is. There's power in this in your life.

And then there's power in the community part. The Shema is not to be prayed alone. It was not meant to be prayed simply as individuals, but also in community. Grace Covenant Church, we're going through prayers together. We're going to start doing the Shema together. On Thursdays it says on the card that you pray for your church. All of us are praying in a really bad foreign language—God's love language, His mother tongue—that our brothers and sisters are learning that love language as a community. Are you kidding? That's powerful—all of Grace learning this God-speak. It changes our souls because it changes our worldview. That's why it says in Ephesians, "Speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." That's what we're talking about.

When you and I are just talking in the lobby, we're going to start rolling out Bible verses, probably in a modern translation, without even knowing it, because it becomes our first language, our first tongue.

The other power that's found in the Shema is that, if you look at it carefully, you'll see that it's about an overflow. It's about receiving God's grace, His love, and it starts with me and then spills out onto everything. The truth of God is given in generous portions, but in concentric circles.

**Deuteronomy 6:4**

**Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.**

Look how it goes: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD Jehovah our God, Jehovah is one." It starts with me.

**Deuteronomy 6:5**

**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.**

I'm supposed to "love Jehovah my God with all my heart, soul, strength and might." Now it goes to my house.

**Deuteronomy 6:6-7a**

**And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house...**

"And all these words that I've commanded you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk about them when you sit down in your own house." Now it goes into my neighborhood.

**Deuteronomy 6:7b**

**... and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.**

"... when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up." Now bring it to work. Bring it to your hobbies. Bring it to the government.

## **Deuteronomy 6:8-9**

**You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. <sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your (city) gates.**

“You shall bind them as a sign on your hand”—all that you do—“and you shall put them as frontlets between your eyes”—in all that you think. “You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your (city) gates.”

It is no wonder that this prayer is the single most quoted prayer, the single most cited prayer in the history of all humanity—this one. And here’s why. Because if it’s lived out, if it is understood, if we see it all for that it’s saying it is, it changes a person. It changes a life. And then it changes a family. And then it changes a community. It changes a country. It changes the world. This prayer is the road that leads to “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

We’re going to speak this later for eternity. We should learn it now and enjoy a conversation with God every day, all day.

Let’s pray, and then we’re going to enjoy communion together in just a few seconds.

*Father, we are thankful for Your Word. We thank You for this prayer. I confess often that I’m not looking at the Bible as the language that You speak. So, maybe that’s why I’m missing so many conversations. I’d ask that this prayer would be the first step in changing my life, my soul, my values, so I can hear You and know You and think Your thoughts and feel Your passions and speak Your language.*

*Lord, I’d ask that we be a church that speaks to You; that we would hear Your voice and enjoy Your presence in all that we do; that as we go out and come in, as we rise up and as we go to bed, in all that we do and all that we think, you might look at the members here at Grace and say, “Right here on earth as it is in heaven.” We celebrate that. Help us. In Jesus’ name. Amen.*