A LISTENING PRAYER STARTER KIT



Three Approaches to Prayer

by Marcus Warner

DEEPER WALK® INTERNATIONAL

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If listening prayer is new to you or if you are just looking for a fresh approach to your prayer life, this starter kit is for you.

First, let me define listening prayer. A lot of people who talk about "listening prayer" mean very different things by it. Some people think of "mystics" from the ancient church who sit on top of pillars or live in caves and have visions from God. But that is not really what we are after.

The goal is simply to experience a deeper walk with God by developing our ability to pray in a conversational manner that deepens our connection with Him. You are not trying to have a mystical experience when you pray, or to get a definitive word from God that is on par with the Bible. The goal is to develop a relational connection with the Lord by making prayer a two-way experience.

This Starter Kit will introduce you to three different approaches you can use to get started in developing a more conversational prayer life.

1. The Two Notebook Approach
2. The Word Picture Approach
3. The Brain Science Approach



THE TWO NOTEBOOK APPROACH[1]

Whether you have two notebooks or two pieces of paper or two open screens on your laptop, the point here is to begin the process of developing discernment about the thoughts that come to your mind.

In Notebook One, you write down thoughts that seem to be from God.

In Notebook Two, you write down thoughts that seem to be from the enemy or thoughts that seem random or distracting.

1 - This approach was inspired by Neil T. Anderson in the book *Liberating Prayer.*

S.T.A.R.T. WITH NOTEBOOK ONE

You can remember the steps with the word START: Scripture, Truth, Asking, Replying, Thinking/Listening.

S **Start with Scripture.** Start by reading a Psalm or some other passage of Scripture.

T **Thank God for a truth** that stands out to you. Write down something that stands out to you from the text and the thoughts it stirs in you.

A **Ask God** to bring to mind the first thing He wants you to pray about.

R **Reply** by asking God to act or intervene in what came to mind. For example, if the first thing that came to mind was a friend's child who has turned from the faith, ask God to intervene in that child's life.

T **Take a minute to listen.** Ask God if there is anything else He wants you to pray about concerning that situation or if there is a thought or picture He has for you to help guide you in praying.

Once you have gone through this process, ask God for what is next, and repeat the process of asking for God to intervene and paying attention to the thoughts you experience. This is what you do in Notebook One.

HOW TO USE NOTEBOOK TWO

Notebook Two is for distracting or attacking thoughts. For example, as you start to pray you may have the thought, "This is never going to work," or "This is stupid," or something like that. This is clearly a disruptive thought from the enemy to sabotage your prayer life. Write it down in the other notebook. Before long you will begin to notice a pattern in the way the enemy likes to attack you when you are praying.

You may also notice random thoughts entering your head like, "Don't forget to take your kid to practice," or "I really liked the movie I saw last night," or something like that. Sometimes we can get frustrated with ourselves because we are not able to keep our mind on spiritual things. However, it can be helpful to write these thoughts down so you can come back to them later, then go back to Notebook One and continue your time of prayer.

The Two Notebook Approach can be a good way to develop both the conversational habit of letting the Lord guide your prayer time and dealing with the distracting or even attacking thoughts that often fight for our attention.



THE WORD PICTURE APPROACH[2]

Another approach to conversational prayer is asking God to give you word pictures about people or situations in your life. A word picture is an image that communicates a message. It could be a single picture or a short scene, but it carries meaning.

For example, someone asked God for a word picture to help him understand how the enemy was messing with his thoughts about his wife. The image that came to his mind was a clown. There were more elements to it than that, but that was the core image. The picture of the clown came with a message: "The enemy has been trying to get you to see your wife like a clown so you will look down on her and treat her with contempt."

As soon as he saw the image, he realized what it meant and also realized that he was, in fact, treating his wife with contempt. Seeing the image allowed him to renounce the lie that his wife was a clown and to repent of treating her with contempt. He then went on to ask God for a new picture of his wife, and he got a picture of a little girl who needed attention and lots of love.

We can ask God for word pictures about situations we face, people we relate to, and almost anything we experience.



I recently asked God why I was feeling so stressed about a particular person, and an image came to mind. I saw myself scaling the side of a mountain with another person dangling from a rope below me. I asked about the picture, and the thought that came to mind was that I felt like I was trapped. I couldn't cut the person loose because they might fall and die. On the other hand, I felt like I might never get to the top of the mountain and was trapped in this situation. The word picture captured my emotions perfectly.

I asked if there was anything God wanted me to know about the picture. Was it true? Was it just a picture of how I felt? Was the picture from Him, or was the picture from the enemy?

It felt like it was just a good representation of how I was feeling and a reminder that it wasn't my job to carry this person to the top of the mountain. I didn't have to cut them loose, but I needed to trust that God had a plan for what was happening. Maybe at some point in the future He will show me more to the picture or a completely different picture. But the one I got helped me pray, "Lord, this is how I feel. Will You please intervene and take care of this situation? Give me wisdom on what You are asking me to do." In the meantime, I put this person and the problems I'm facing in His hands.

2 - This approach was inspired by Daryl Anderson.

Now, what you should know is that if I hadn't specifically asked for a picture and specifically stopped to pay attention, I might have missed this. I probably get thoughts and images from the Spirit a lot more than I realize and would find them helpful, if I learned to pay attention.

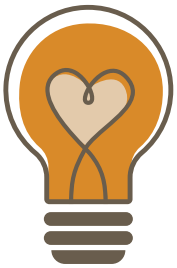
Here are some ways you can ask God for word pictures.

- Father, how do You want me to see _____?
- How is the enemy trying to twist the truth of how I see _____?

Consider the following categories:

- Identity
- Child
- Family Member
- Tough Situation
- Opportunity
- Spouse
- Parent
- Co-Worker
- Item for Prayer
- Strategy

For instance, for **identity**, you could pray: *How do I see myself? How does God want me to see myself? How does the enemy want me to see myself?*



THE BRAIN SCIENCE APPROACH[3]

You may wonder what brain science has to do with prayer, but I assure you there is a connection. Since the goal of conversational prayer is to form a relational connection with God at some level, it makes sense that we would want the part of our brain that does relationships well to be as fully engaged as possible.

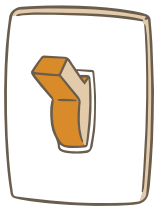
Here are two brain facts related to the topic of conversational prayer.

1. **The Joy Switch.**[4] There is something like a switch in our brain that controls our ability to stay relational. When it starts to go off, we lose our ability to be relational and tend to drift into problem-solving mode and even into enemy mode.[5] If our goal is to form a relational connection with God, it makes sense that we would want the Joy Switch in the "on" position so our brains can be relationally engaged.

2. **Mutual Mind.**[6] The term "mutual mind" refers to the experience of reading someone's body language so that you feel like you know what they are trying to communicate even if they don't use words. Perhaps you make eye contact with someone across the room, and they smile as if to say, "I'm happy to see you." They may even point to a door as if to say, "Let's go out in the hallway and meet."

3 - This approach was inspired by the book *Joyful Journey* by Jim Wilder, Anna Kang, John and Sungshim Loppnow.
4 - For more, see the book *Joy Switch* by Chris M. Coursey.
5 - See *Escaping Enemy Mode* by Jim Wilder and Ray Woolridge.
6 - Mutual mind is explained in several of the books listed here that Jim Wilder helped to write.

There is a lot of communication that can happen between two minds before words are ever involved. It is the same with God. We don't see Him, so we don't read His body language. But God often communicates without words. When this happens, we tend to say things like, "I get the sense that God wants me to speak to that person over there," or "I feel more peace about my decision than I did before. I think God is happy with this direction." One of the goals of conversational prayer is to share a mutual mind moment with God in which we don't hear words, but we have impressions that we can later put into words.



The fastest way to get our Joy Switch to the "on" position and get our relational engine fired up is appreciation. It makes sense then that the Bible often encourages us to overflow with gratitude and enter God's courts with praise. Letting praise and thanks take root in our minds puts us in a good position to share a mutual mind moment with God.

Here is a simple pattern for conversational prayer taught in the book *Joyful Journey* that is often called "Immanuel Journaling." In this process, you begin with thanksgiving and then move to writing in first person as if Jesus (Immanuel) is speaking directly to you. The goal here is not to be able to say, "Thus saith the Lord," but to increase the sense of connection with God.

Begin from your perspective.

- Lord, I am thankful for . . .

The rest is from Jesus' perspective. You simply finish the sentence starter as if Jesus is speaking to you.

- I see you . . .
- I hear you . . .
- I know how you feel . . .
- I am happy to share this with you . . .
- I am strong enough to . . .

Sample:

- I see you sitting on the back deck enjoying the clouds and the beauty of the trees.
- I hear you asking for clarity about the pastoral search at your church.
- I know this is a big task and that you feel a lot of pressure to get this right because a lot of people are looking to you for guidance.
- I am happy you are taking the time to connect with Me about this. I am happy to help you with every step of this process.
- I am strong enough to override your weaknesses. I am strong enough to make all of this work. I have a plan. I am moving pieces around on the chessboard in ways you can't see. Don't worry. Just do your best. I've got this.

Notice that the responses are short. This doesn't have to be a long process. The point of this is not to be able to tell people, "Jesus said He's moving pieces around on a chessboard, so don't worry." The point is to be able to say, "When I prayed, I got the sense that Jesus didn't want us to worry and that He wants us to do our best then trust Him for the outcome." This leaves the door open to input from others and avoids the trap of saying, "God spoke to me, so anyone who disagrees with me is wrong."

PRACTICE

These three approaches to conversational prayer can be done independently or blended together. As you begin to develop your practice of talking with God and listening for His responses, I would encourage you to try each of these models and share your experiences with someone you trust. Ask if what you feel like you are "hearing" from God rings true to them based on how they understand the voice and character of God seen in Scripture.

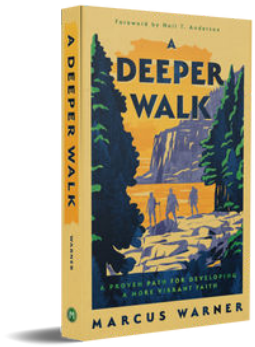
In the end, it is not the model you use, it is the relationship that is built. Whether you take five minutes, half an hour, or a whole day for your time of prayer, God is ready and willing to meet with you and start building a deeper walk together.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP

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