

Session One

40 Days of Prayer

Leaders Guide

“ Don’t Just Do Something – Sit There!”

What Participants will need to have:

1. Handouts
2. Bible
3. Pens

Welcome to the 40 Days of Prayer small group study. Prepare yourself for an exciting six weeks as you and your group grow in your life of prayer. By doing this together as a group you will benefit from the energy that’s generated by one another’s insights and experiences of answered prayer. You will also find greater motivation and encouragement to pray because you have made this commitment to a group of people. As the leader of the group you will truly be blessed by all the growth you will see occur.

It is likely that you will find more material here than you will be able to cover in the time you have available. Suggestions will be made in the Leader’s Guides about what questions to leave out if time is running short. However, you will want to reads through all of the study to see which questions you feel will be the most important to cover.

BE SURE TO ALLOW AT LEAST 30 MINUTES FOR THE PRACTICE & PRAYER SECTIONS.

These sections are extremely important. If people are learning, but not applying what they have learned they are turning into Pharisees and not followers of Christ.

As a leader, it is important that you approach this study and lead it as a student of prayer, not an expert (see Day One of the daily devotional book). Hopefully, you will have experiences that you will share that will bless and be helpful to others. But, remind them that they too have experiences to share that will bless and instruct you as well as the rest of the group.

Let people know that you do not expect them to be prayer experts. Tell them you expect they’ll be all over the map when it comes to prayer - from beginner to prayer warrior. No matter where they are at, this study will help them improve and grow.

Most people feel inadequate in prayer. Your honesty and transparency in sharing your own struggles with prayer will reassure the group and free them to be honest and open as well. If people feel like they have to pretend to be something they’re not, it will prevent them from growing. Tell the group that all you ask of them is honesty. Be sure to reinforce the rule that anything shared in the group is confidential and not to be shared to anyone, anywhere without the expressed (not assumed) permission of the person who shared.

INTRODUCTION

If there are new people in your group, take time to introduce everybody. Friendship and trust is the key to effective small group discussion and application. Therefore, time spent building relationships is important. Use the questions provided for introductions or use your own.

OPENING

These questions are designed to help people begin to think about prayer and what they hope will happen during this six-week study. If you are concerned about time, choose one of the two.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY

We are encouraging everyone to memorize a scripture on prayer each week as a significant part of their 40 Days of Prayer experience. Your small group can be a part of reinforcing this practice. First, have everyone read the verse out loud in unison. Then, ask if anyone wants to take a stab at saying it from memory. Some groups have used small prizes (like candy bars) as an incentive for memorizing the verse. This adds fun to your group and it's amazing how well it works.

BIBLE STUDY

If your group is large, you may want to split into smaller discussion groups. Recruit co-leaders to facilitate the discussion in the other sub-groups.

After reading the question, don't just read verbatim the answers written here. Most questions are open-ended and there are many right answers. Ask the question and give people the opportunity to share what they think. Most times they'll get it right on their own and in the process they'll come up with many additional rich thoughts and ideas as well. Don't be afraid of a little awkward silence at first. Just be silent. Your silence will let people know that you expect them to speak up. Usually, once the ice is broken, the discussion begins to flow freely.

1. This question gets them thinking about who Nehemiah is. **Don't spend a lot of time on this question.** Ask for bullet-point answers. Answers can include: A Jew; Cupbearer; sensitive to the needs of others, a man with a consistent prayer habit; knows his scripture; believes in God; believes God will forgive; believes God will answer prayer; believes God can use him. Ask people if they know what a Cupbearer is. Someone might have a Study Bible with a note that explains. If not, a Cupbearer pours, tastes and delivers drink to the King. This is not a lowly servant position. The King trusts the Cupbearer with his life and the Cupbearer is in frequent contact with the King. Because of this trust and contact, the Cupbearer is one of the most influential positions in the Empire. Some commentators say that, in regards to power and influence, he was second only to the princes.
2. The problem is the miserable condition of Jerusalem. Without walls and gates, the people have no security and live impoverished lives. Nehemiah's reaction is one of great pain and sorrow followed by prayer. The question is, why does Nehemiah react so emotionally? There is no wrong answer to this question at this point. The answer will be more fully developed in the next question. If you do not have time for the next question summarize its answer at the end of discussing this question.
3. This question allows for digging deeper into scripture for greater discovery and learning. *If you are pressed for time, skip this question and summarize the answer during the discussion for question 2.* In these passages God is making a promise or covenant with Abraham and reaffirming it to Moses. The promise is that Abraham's descendants will be a great nation with their own land. They will enjoy the favor and blessings of God and will be a blessing to others. Nehemiah knows these promises. He knows what God has said about Israel. The contrast between the promises and reality is what causes Nehemiah such anguish. So, Nehemiah goes to God in prayer and in his prayer he claims God's promises.

Questions 4-6 are the heart of the study. Spend your time here.

4. There can be many possible answers to this so do not feel that there has to be one right answer. As a group, agree on a pattern you see. Here's one possibility: Praise, Confession, Praying scripture (or claiming God's promises), Requests.
5. Praise: It changes your perspective and focus from a big problem to an even bigger God. Confession: It recognizes that the problems are of our own making and cleans out the sins that block our relationship with God and get in the way of His taking action. Claiming promises: It acknowledges our authority to make requests and ensures that our requests are in line with God's will. Requests: God cares about our needs and feelings and wants us to openly communicate them with him. God is not put off by our boldness and faith.
6. This is a practical application question. It helps people connect the scripture to their lives so they can see where they're doing well and where they're being called, by God, through scripture, to grow.
7. This question allows for digging deeper into scripture for greater discovery and learning. *If you are pressed for time, skip this question and summarize the answer during the discussion for question 2.* In this prayer Solomon is asking God to hear the prayers of the people and restore them if they repent of their sinfulness. It is more than likely that Nehemiah was aware of this prayer because he essentially quotes it in his prayer. This explains why Nehemiah gives significant time to confession in his prayer. He understands from scripture that the fortunes of Jerusalem will never change without confession and repentance. That Nehemiah knows this is an indication that he is a man who makes it his practice to not only pray but study scripture. Nehemiah's study of scripture informs and enhances his prayers.

Questions 8-12 will enhance your understanding of prayer and lead to some great discussion. However, if time is short questions 8, 11-12 can be skipped, or if time is really short all of these questions can be skipped in order to get to the important PRACTICE & PRAYER sections.

8. Nehemiah risks his career, power, influence, wealth and palatial living. In other words, he has a lot to lose for a situation and people far removed from him. However, he knows what God has promised and knows he is connected to those people and their situation as a fellow Jew.
9. Many answers are possible but I believe that it was Nehemiah's life of prayer and Bible study as well as the four months of consistently praying about this need that gave Nehemiah the courage to make his request as well as the knowledge of what to request.
10. Because of Nehemiah's years of faithfulness to God, and nurturing his relationship with God through prayer and Bible study, Nehemiah was ready to be used by God. Nehemiah was the right man, in the right place, at the right time because of his prior habits and life. If Nehemiah had just begun to pray and turn to God when he received the report I think that:
1. He would not have cared as deeply; 2. He would not have been able to rise to the situation or even recognize that he could. In short, he would not have been prepared to be used by God. One of the things that happens when we pray is that our faith grows and God works within us preparing us for His purposes. For me, this is the most significant value of prayer.

11. The quickness in which Nehemiah thought to pray, and the fact that we want to jump without hesitation at an opportunity we've waited for, suggests that constant moments of prayer was a habit of Nehemiah's that he does naturally without thinking about it. This prayer had to be short, something said silently in the time it takes for a breath. Given the shortness of the prayer I think it was something along the lines of "give me courage," or "give me success." How often do we pray like this throughout our day?
12. Any answer is fine for this question. It is designed to challenge beliefs and practices and stimulate discussion so that we can be open to new ways of thinking about and practicing prayer. Avoid offering any judgments on people's answers.

PRACTICE

1. There is no right answer to this question. Take the time to develop as full an answer as possible. Do not limit the discussion to the questions offered as guides.
2. & 3 These are follow up questions that reinforce and help people focus on the lessons they are learning.
4. **Do not skip this step.** Commitment is the necessary ingredient for a successful group and for successful growth in prayer. Do not be afraid to ask for commitment. You are the leader. You are expected to ask for commitment. To not ask for it will result in diminished respect for your leadership. This does not mean you should be authoritarian in your approach. Emphasize the necessity of commitment for growth and success.
5. The "4 C's" can be helpful way to study and apply scripture. It is part of the suggested exercises in the daily devotional book. By using it in your small group you reinforce the habit and its value. The "4 C's" also serve as a very helpful guide for prayer, providing you with praise, confession and requests.

PRAYER

To not leave time for, or to neglect this section is to miss the point of the whole study!

You will close this session with a time of prayer that you will guide.

If the group is relatively new, or has many new believers, seekers or just generally shy people, let them know that there is no pressure or expectation that they have to pray out loud. They are free to pray silently as others pray out loud. However, encourage them to pray out loud. The value of praying out loud is that other people who hear the prayer are often blessed by it and God can use it to trigger things in their minds that He wants them to pray for. Tell them that the best prayers are simple and honest and that there are no style points in prayer.

To start the prayer time, explain that you will start with praise. Let people know that at this point you only want them to offer praise. To help them get started ask them to think about their answer to the "Celebrate" question or think of what characteristic of God is most meaningful to them right now then praise God for that by saying, "God I praise you for...." Set the example by offering your own praise first. Instruct people willing to pray out loud to give short one sentence or even one word praises and offer as many as come to their mind.

Next, move into a time of confession. Say something like, “We are going to spend time **silently** in confession. Is there something blocking your relationship with God? Are you ready to turn away from that sin and turn towards God? Take time now to confess that sin by saying God I confess (blank). I admit that it is wrong and I have no excuse. I now renounce that sin and choose to turn to you. Give me your power to live for you and resist temptation.” Allow for a minute of silence while people confess any sin.

Now, move into a time of prayer requests. Tell people to pray about whatever is on their mind. Encourage other people to add their prayers to the requests. If there is scripture that applies to the request quote or paraphrase it as part of the request.

When you feel the time is done, say a loud amen.

This time may be filled with people offering prayers out loud or may be completely silent depending on your group. Do not be put off by the silence. Let people know you appreciate their praying whether it is out loud or silent.

Our desire is to start with people where they are at and help them to grow. There have been people in my own groups who went months before praying out loud. When they did, it was huge, and a significant moment for them.