

# 40 Days of Prayer

## Leaders Guide

### Session Two - Why Pray When You Can Worry

#### What Participants will need to have:

1. Handouts
2. Bible
3. Pens

**A. There is more material here than you will be able to cover in the time you have available.** You will need to review this material in advance in order to determine what parts you will want to use. There are two parts to the Bible Study section of this study. It is suggested that you decide to do just one of the parts. As the small group leader, you are in the best position to decide which parts will have the greatest benefit for your group.

The first part, questions 1-6, covers Jesus' teaching leading up to the Lords prayer that clears up misconceptions of prayer. These verses are often overshadowed by the Lord's Prayer. If you have a group that has good biblical knowledge, you may want to do this section.

The second part, questions 7-14, covers the Lord's Prayer itself.

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

#### OPENING

Often, people suddenly become very formal when they pray. This formality can actually hinder our prayer because it feels so uncomfortable and unnatural. This question is geared to open up that issue. Use it as a teaching opportunity to encourage people to see prayer as authentic conversation with God where we can converse with him as we would with a friend. One of the remarkable things about the Lord's Prayer is its simplicity. There are no long-winded formalities, or "babbling" as Jesus calls it, in this prayer.

#### 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.

**Do not just read verbatim the answers written here.** Give people the opportunity to think on their own and interact with the question and the issues it raises. 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.

1. They were praying for show. Prayer wasn't heartfelt communication with God it was geared towards making a good impression. They were not focused on God they were concerned about what other people thought of them. Therefore, the prayer was usually long, and formal and very pious sounding. It may be interesting to point out that we tend to do the same thing in reverse. We do not want to pray out loud because we are concerned about what other people might think of us. We, too, are focused on others rather than prayer. The truth is that we are inspired when we hear the simple, genuine, heartfelt prayer of others while formal prayers can put us to sleep.
2. Jesus' prayer is short and to the point. It had very little formality but was instead very simple. Jesus also focused immediately on God Our Father...Your kingdom come....
3. It is important because it is so easy to be distracted in prayer. You can give an example from your own life on how you have been distracted while praying. Therefore, it is important to find a time and place for private prayer that can be as free from distraction as possible. Note: Jesus is not teaching that praying out loud in a group is wrong. In fact, the Lord's Prayer is a group prayer using plural not singular pronouns. The point Jesus is making is on what we are focused on when we pray.
4. Most people do not have a "prayer closet" built into their home, nor would any of their closets likely be conducive to prayer. The point is to find a time and place that reduces distractions and interruptions. This will require creativity. Have the group share what they do to try to create this kind of environment. As people share, this can become a kind of brainstorming session that will give everyone many new ideas for finding a time and place to keep their commitment to prayer. Possibilities can include waking up early before the rest of the family and sitting in a cozy chair, your office during lunch break, a special room in the house, the park, a special signal so the family knows you are praying and not to be disturbed (at pain of death) during this time.
5. Many answers are possible. Examples include: feeling like we have to say just the right words in just the right way so that God will answer us; feeling like we need to know the right formula for prayer, feeling like the longer we pray the more powerful the prayer; etc. Many people have these kinds of unspoken thoughts about prayer. It's good to bring them to light and explore where these misconceptions might have come from.
6. Jesus' prayer is remarkable for its simplicity and brevity. Jesus does not use any special jargon. The Lord's Prayer is personal, specific and expectant. Those are marks of authentic prayer.
7. Starting our prayer like this acknowledges who we are praying to. It sharpens our focus on God and not on others or our problems. It reminds us of the awesome thing we are doing when we pray so that we will not take prayer or God for granted. It encourages us that God is able to respond in ways that go beyond our comprehension.
8. This is a valuable question to take things to a heart level. There is no one right answer. When we grasp God as the "Wholly Other" we realize that we are not independent but utterly dependent on God. When we grasp God's purity, we are convicted of our sinfulness and need for grace. As we understand God's holiness it makes us humbler, more reliant

and trusting of God. We become more patient and offer more grace as we grasp and understand the grace of God. How this changes prayer is that we become more focused on the things that touch God's heart in prayer rather than praying selfishly. This happens over time. Most people start out praying selfishly which is okay because they have started praying. As we continue to pray, we continue to grow, and our prayers become more and more in line with the things God wants us to focus on and be praying for.

9.

10. This is a prayer that life on earth will grow closer to life as God designed it. It also is a prayer of surrender. As we recognize who God is, we realize our need to surrender to him. So, this is a prayer asking God to accomplish His purposes through us rather than asking God to accomplish our purposes. What this suggests about the purpose of prayer is that its purpose is for us to become involved in God's movements.
11. It teaches us to trust in God. As our trust in God grows, so does our sense of peace and joy and we become less likely to allow outside circumstances to rob us of God's peace. This prayer also is a hedge against greediness blocks our experience of God's presence and blessing.
12. This is important because sin chokes off our relationship with God. We need to keep short accounts. The longer we hold on to a sin and deny its existence the more damage it causes to our soul. For more, see Days 11, 15 & 16 in the devotional book.
13. Forgiveness is important because it is the preeminent expression of God. When we forgive, we are showing we understand and our grateful for the forgiveness we received from God. When we fail to forgive, we turn our back on God, give Satan influence in our lives and suffer the consequences. For more see Days 17-19 in the devotional book.
14. Spiritual warfare is real and we ignore it to our detriment. Jesus, by example and teaching, warned us and equipped us for the reality of Satan and his efforts to defeat us. Prayer is our greatest weapon in being prepared and equipped to stand firm against temptation and sin. From the disciples example we learn what happens when we do not "watch and pray." However, when we pray, God works supernaturally within us, strengthening us, transforming us, and giving us wisdom and discernment to recognize temptation for what it is.

## **PRACTICE**

**If time is short, skip this and go to the prayer exercise.**

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.

Explain that you are going to do a prayer exercise that people in your group may or may not have ever tried called praying scripture. Tell your group that there is an explanation of how they can do this at home on their own in the back of the devotional book.

During this prayer time, you will be using the pattern of the Lord's Prayer using additional scripture that follows along with the prayer.

First, tell everyone that you will be going through the Lord's Prayer one section at a time. As you come to each section someone will read the scripture for that section out loud then lift up prayers that echo the words or claim the truths of the scripture.

For example: A prayer for "your kingdom come..." might be, "Lord, I am feeling insecure in my job and am tempted to do things that I know will not honor you in order to win the approval of my bosses. I want to stand for you and find my identity and security in serving you. Give me the strength of your presence."

Tell people that you are going to assign them each a section to read out loud and that you will tell them when it is their turn to read. Tell them that if they feel comfortable they can start the prayer for that section. Prayers do not need to be long-winded, short and specific is best.

When all the sections are assigned, you start it out by reading, "Our Father..." Then say a prayer of praise. Tell people, "Focus yourself on God, as you do, what about God is most meaningful to you right now. Praise God for that.

When several people have offered praise or you feel an adequate time went by tell the next person to read their section. Encourage people to offer prayers of surrender and trust.

Again, when several people have prayed, tell the next person to read. Encourage people to offer up their prayer requests at this point. Tell them they should feel free to speak up and pray for the needs others have already offered in prayer.

For the confession time give people a time of silence to confess sin.

For the forgiveness time again give people a time of silence. Tell them to pray and ask God if there is anyone they should forgive. Then pray saying, "God, I forgive (name), for doing (action), and making me feel (feelings).

For "Lead us not..." encourage people to offer prayers of protection not only for themselves but to also think of others they feel God is asking them to pray for like family, your group, pastors and staff, etc.

Finish by saying a firm, confident AMEN!



The 40 Days of Prayer Study is written by Dan Biddle, Phil Sommerville & Christie Syftestad and can be reproduced by small group leaders for use in their groups