



Reflections on Prayer

SMALL GROUP SERIES

INTRODUCTION

"Prayer is an approach to the living God. It is access to the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity. It is detailing in the ear of Divine sympathy every sorrow. It is consulting with Divine wisdom on every difficulty. It is asking from Divine resources the supply of every want. And this not once in a lifetime, or for a few moments on a stated day of each year, but at any moment, at every time of need. Whatever be the day of your distress, it is a day when prayer is allowable... available. It needs no saint, no proficient in piety, no adept in eloquent language, no dignitary of earthly rank. This access to God in every place, at every moment, without any price or any personal merit, is it not an amazing privilege?"

JAMES HAMILTON (1814-1867)

Spurgeon's Library: Prayer • Reflections on Prayer, page 23

"Imagine standing at the threshold of the Infinite, knocking on the door of eternity, and finding it swing wide open to you. That's the breathtaking reality of prayer. It's not just a ritual or a religious duty; it's an intimate conversation with the very essence of existence, with the high and holy God, who transcends time and space.

Picture yourself pouring out your heart, every sorrow, every joy, every difficulty, into the receptive ear of Divine sympathy. Think about consulting with Divine wisdom on every perplexity, drawing from Divine resources to meet every need. This isn't some distant, abstract concept reserved for special occasions or select individuals. It's a living, dynamic connection that's available to you at any moment, in any place, regardless of your status or achievements.

Consider the sheer wonder of this privilege. You don't need to be a saint, a scholar, or a celebrity to access our Father. There's no price tag attached, no prerequisite of personal merit. It's a gift freely given; a doorway flung open to all who seek it.

So, as you navigate the highs and lows of life, remember that every moment is an opportunity to reach out, to connect, to commune with the Divine. Embrace this astonishing access to God, and let it infuse every aspect of your relationship with Him."

DISTRICT APOSTLE SCHNABEL

Reflections on Prayer Small Group Series

SESSION 1

What is prayer?

What we learn from Scripture and the Psalms

SESSION 2

Modeling Humility and Trust:
David and Solomon

SESSION 3

Modeling Dependence and Thanksgiving:
Hezekiah and Hannah

SESSION 4

A Pattern for Living:
The Lord's Prayer

SESSION 5

Finding Peace through Prayer:
Lessons from Apostle Paul

SESSION 6

Finding Balance in Personal Prayer:
Structure and Spontaneity

SESSION 7

Writing Prayers:
Cultivating a Practice of
Intentionality and Reflection

SESSION 8

Praying Together:
The Prayers of the Church

SESSION 1: *What is prayer?* What we learn from Scripture and the Psalms

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to pages 39-44 in *Reflections on Prayer*.

QUESTIONS

Understanding Prayer

1. How has prayer influenced your personal connection with the Divine?
2. Chief Apostle Schneider mentions that prayer includes fears, joys, health, sickness, and more. How do you incorporate the full spectrum of human experience into your own prayers?
3. Please share examples when prayer served as a refuge and a celebration in your life.
4. How does understanding prayer as a way to connect with God's character and purposes impact the way you approach prayer?
5. Discuss the transformative power of prayer as described in the video.

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Praying through the Psalms

6. The Psalms cover various themes such as praise, lament, and thanksgiving. Which category of Psalms do you find most relatable or comforting, and why?
7. How might incorporating specific Psalms into your prayers help you navigate different emotions or life situations? Share a time when a Psalm provided guidance or comfort.
8. How can you use the Psalms as a tool for both personal reflection and communal prayer?
9. Consider the prompts on page 42 of the Reflections on Prayer book. Take time to think about the phrases from the Psalm and the reflection questions. Write down a few phrases that you would include in a prayer that reflect your current circumstances. Share a phrase or two with the group, and combine everyone's phrases into one prayer to end your discussion. (Either one person can say the combined prayer for the whole group, or you could go around in a circle, with each person verbalizing their prayer.)

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SESSION 2: Modeling Humility and Trust: *David and Solomon*

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to pages 21-25 in *Reflections on Prayer*.

QUESTIONS

David's Prayer: 2 Samuel 7:18-29

1. In 2 Samuel 7:18-29, what specific aspects of God's promise to David are highlighted in his prayer?
2. David approaches God with profound humility and reverence. What can you learn from David's approach about how to express humility and gratitude in your own prayers?
3. How does David's acknowledgment of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence impact the way he prays? How can you incorporate a similar perspective into your own prayer life?
4. David's prayer involves not only expressing gratitude but also reiterating God's promises. How can recalling and articulating God's promises in your prayers affect your relationship with Him and your confidence in His provisions?

Solomon's Prayer: 1 Kings 8:22-61

5. In 1 Kings 8:22-61, what phrases or language does Solomon use to elevate God above all else?
6. Solomon envisions multiple situations where the people of Israel might call upon God for help. How does this approach in his prayer demonstrate a practical application of faith and dependence on God?
7. How does Solomon's prayer serve to remind the people of God's fulfilled promises and ongoing presence?

Reflection and Application

8. Both David and Solomon used their prayers to inspire and encourage others. How can you apply their examples in your own life to encourage those around you?
9. How can reflecting on David's and Solomon's prayers help you develop a humbler and trusting attitude in your own prayer life? What specific changes might you make based on their examples?
10. How can the principles of humility and trust demonstrated by David and Solomon be incorporated into prayers for your family or faith community?
11. What steps can you take to ensure that your prayers consistently reflect a proper perspective of God's greatness and our own dependence on Him?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

SESSION 3: Modeling Dependence and Thanksgiving: *Hezekiah and Hannah*

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to pages 21-25 in *Reflections on Prayer*.

QUESTIONS

Hezekiah's Prayer: 2 Kings 19:14-19

1. In 2 Kings 19:14-19, what key elements made Hezekiah's prayer effective in his time of crisis?
2. Hezekiah's approach to laying out the facts before God demonstrated his trust and dependence on God. What does this teach you about presenting your concerns and needs in prayer?
3. Hezekiah prayed for God's intervention with confidence. How can you develop and maintain this kind of confidence in your prayers, especially when the answers are not immediately clear?
4. How can you shift your perspective from viewing prayer as a last resort to making it your first response in times of trouble?

Hannah's Prayers: 1 Samuel 1:11, 2:1-10

5. Hannah's prayer, marked by "bitterness of soul" and "weeping in anguish," illustrate the depth of her emotional and spiritual state. What can you learn from her approach to prayer in moments of deep personal distress?
6. Hannah's joy and thanksgiving were evident even when she had to leave Samuel at the temple. What does her response teach you about maintaining gratitude and worship in the midst of significant life changes?
7. Hannah recognized that all power and control belong to God, as expressed in her prayer in the second chapter of 1 Samuel. How could this perspective influence the way you handle your own struggles and blessings?

Reflection and Application

8. How can the principles seen in the prayers of Hezekiah and Hannah help you address your personal challenges and opportunities for gratitude?
9. How can reflecting on the prayers of biblical figures like Hezekiah and Hannah inspire and shape your approach to prayer? What specific changes might you consider making?
10. How can the practice of prayerful dependence and joyful thanksgiving enrich your daily interactions and relationships?
11. What are some practical ways to ensure that your prayers reflect both your trust in God and your gratitude for His blessings?

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SESSION 4: A Pattern for Living: *The Lord's Prayer*

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to pages 76-93 in *Reflections on Prayer*.

QUESTIONS

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

1. The Lord's Prayer begins with "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." What does it mean to place God first in your life, both in prayer and in daily living?
2. What significance do you see in addressing God as "Our Father in heaven" before making any requests?

Your kingdom come. Your will be done...

3. With the petition "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," how can you discern what God's will is for you in different aspects of your life?
4. Can you share an experience where you struggled to surrender to God's will and how it impacted your life?
5. How can understanding that God's will is "beautiful, perfect, good, and right" influence your attitude toward His commands and guidance?
6. The video mentions several ways God equips you to do His will: the gift of the Holy Spirit, His truth and word in the gospel, the example and teachings of Jesus Christ, and the strength to overcome in Holy Communion. Which of these aspects do you find most impactful in your spiritual journey, and why?
7. How can you and your small group or faith community encourage each other to put God first and seek His will?

Reflection and Application

8. What does it mean to live under the "law of love," speak the "language of praise," use the "currency of grace," and bask in a "climate of peace" as described in the video?
9. Reflecting on the Lord's Prayer, how has your understanding of prayer and priorities shifted?

SESSION 5: Finding Peace through Prayer: *Lessons from Apostle Paul*

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to pages 112-123 in *Reflections on Prayer*.

QUESTIONS

Understanding Paul's Approach to Prayer

1. What does Paul mean by praying “without ceasing” in 2 Timothy 1:3? How can this continuous dialogue with God influence your daily life?
2. In Philippians 4:6-7, Paul connects prayer with peace. How does the assurance that God hears your prayers contribute to the peace described in Philippians 4:7?
3. Paul frequently expresses gratitude for God’s grace in his letters. How can you cultivate a similar attitude of gratitude in your own life?
4. In Colossians 3:15, Paul advises us to “let the peace of God rule in our hearts.” How can making peace a governing factor in your heart impact your interactions with others and your response to life’s challenges?

Communal and Intercessory Prayer

5. Paul instructs believers to pray for one another in Ephesians 6:18-20. What benefits can you experience from engaging in intercessory prayer for others?
6. How can the communal aspect of prayer, as emphasized by Paul, contribute to a shared sense of peace and support among believers?

Reflection and Application

7. Reflecting on Paul's example, how can integrating continuous, conversational prayer into your daily routine help you handle stress and adversity?
8. Read the Martin Luther quote from 114 of *Reflections on Prayer*. How do Paul's teachings parallel what Luther is saying?
9. Discuss a time when you felt a profound sense of peace as a result of prayer.

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SESSION 6: Finding Balance in Personal Prayer: *Structure and Spontaneity*

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to pages 135-144 in *Reflections on Prayer*.

QUESTIONS

Understanding the Balance

- 1. How does the idea of balancing structured and spontaneous prayer resonate with you? Which approach do you find more challenging or comfortable in your own prayer life?
- 2. Provide examples of both structured elements and spontaneous moments from your own experience.
- 3. How can the flexibility in prayer help prevent it from becoming a monotonous or repetitive task?
- 4. Discuss the idea of different types of prayers for different times of the day (morning, mealtime, evening).
- 5. In what ways can short, spontaneous prayers and more focused, reflective sessions complement each other in cultivating a genuine relationship with God?

The Value of Structure

- 6. What are the benefits of having a structured approach to prayer, such as including worship, thanksgiving, and intercession?
- 7. How can a structured approach to prayer provide a helpful framework without making the practice feel like a checklist?

The Joy of Spontaneity

- 8. Can you share a specific instance where a spontaneous prayer had a significant impact on your day?
- 9. How does varying your communication with God, much like varying communication in human relationships, contribute to a deeper and more vibrant spiritual connection?
- 10. What are some practical ways to incorporate spontaneous prayers into your daily routine?

Starting with Small Steps

- 11. If you are feeling overwhelmed by structured prayer routines or guidelines for what you "should" pray for, what small steps can you take to begin integrating prayer into your daily life?
- 12. How can resources like devotionals support your journey in finding a balance between structured and spontaneous prayer? If you use one, share your experience with your group.

SESSION 7: Writing Prayers: Cultivating a Practice of Intentionality and Reflection

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to the *Back to God* booklet.

QUESTIONS

The Benefits of Writing Your Prayers

As the video mentioned, there are many spiritual and emotional benefits to writing out your prayers. In each of the examples below, have someone read the sample prayer out loud and discuss the question.

Personal Reflection:

Example: *Lord, I have come to realize - or perhaps just to finally admit - that there are parts of my life I simply disconnect from my belief in You. I act as if You don't exist in that area of my life. I repent and ask Your help to change...*

How could writing down a prayer inspire more personal reflection compared to simply speaking it?

Emotional Release:

Example: *Lord, I am dust. I find no mercy around me, and the world is at war. But I want Your peace. In awe, I see Your deeds, and I trust. My life is held by You, and I am safe. My life is transformed, and I praise You for the peace I find in Christ...*

Reflect on a time in your life when you have needed an "emotional release." Perhaps you called a friend, or talked to your spouse. What emotions did you need to express? Consider what it would have been like to write a prayer in that moment.

Connection with God:

Example: *Lord, the sins of my tongue are so many! Because of pride, I talk too much or harshly, because of fear, too little or dishonestly. Forgive me, and cure me of the false motives that make my speech so unlike Yours...*

Would it be easier for you to be more truthful about yourself in a written prayer or a spoken prayer? Why?

Spiritual Growth:

Example: *Lord Jesus, You left the unimaginable comforts of heaven for a life of hardship on earth for me. Someday I will live in that same unimaginably glorious world. Until then, however, let me not set my heart on thrills, sensations, and comfort but follow in Your footsteps....*

How can writing prayers serve as a tool for tracking your spiritual journey and growth over time? What might you learn about yourself in reflecting on previously written prayers? About your relationship with God?

Reflection and Application

1. Share any challenges or advantages you have experienced with this practice.
2. In what ways might written prayers be shared with others to provide encouragement or support?

Take 10 minutes to individually compose a prayer. Focus your prayer on these two prompts: *Who is God to you? What do you want to express to God about this community of faith, your Small Group?*

After the 10 minutes, discuss the following questions:

3. What was challenging about this exercise?
4. What was rewarding?
5. How did writing your prayer contribute to self-awareness or spiritual connection?

SESSION 8: Praying Together: *The Prayers of the Church*

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question. Refer to pages 144-151 in *Reflections on Prayer*.

QUESTIONS

Prayers in the Divine Service

Refer to the relevant *Reflections on Prayer* pages (144-151).

1. What is the purpose of the Opening Prayer in a public or corporate setting, and how does it serve the needs of the congregation?
2. In what ways does praying the Lord's Prayer together address both personal and communal needs?
3. How can the Lord's Prayer be a tool for confession, repentance, and mutual support within the worship community?
4. The term "eucharist" means *to give thanks*. What does the Eucharistic Prayer give thanks for and how does this distinguish it from other prayers?
5. How can the Benediction serve as an essential "gift" of the divine service, and what is its role in sending the congregation back into the world?

Reflection and Application

6. Can you share a personal experience where you felt a connection with members of your faith community during a collective prayer?
7. In what ways does communal prayer act as a source of comfort and hope during times of difficulty?
8. Discuss the idea that communal prayer is not about persuading God to act but about affirming our trust in Him.
9. How does the concept of shared burdens in communal prayer compare to other forms of support within a faith community?
10. How can you encourage more meaningful and impactful communal prayer?

SCRIPT

SESSION 1: *What is prayer?* What we learn from Scripture and the Psalms

What is prayer?

Our Chief Apostle chose the theme Prayer Works, for 2024, and we've all learned as we've explored this theme more and more, that it is not about whether our prayers are answered that makes prayer "work", but whether it's deepening and strengthening our relationship with our heavenly Father.

"Anything that moves and stirs within a human being's heart - including our own needs and wishes, as well as the needs and wishes of others - is part of prayer. Prayer incorporates fears and joys, health and sickness, life on the threshold of death, the magnificence of nature, and the beauty of humanity in fellowship and being there for one another..."

CHIEF APOSTLE SCHNEIDER

04/2018 Community, Doctrine: Prayer · *Reflections on Prayer*, page 7

Prayer serves as both a refuge and a celebration - a sacred space where fears and joys intertwine in a profound expression of our humanity.

When we come before our Father, we bring with us the full spectrum of our emotions. We lay bare our fears, our anxieties, our uncertainties, knowing that in the presence of Him, we are seen and understood completely. In the hush of prayer, we find solace in sharing our deepest concerns, knowing that we are not alone in our struggles.

But prayer is not solely a sanctuary for our fears; it's also a stage for our joys to dance freely. In moments of gratitude and triumph, we raise our voices in praise, offering thanks for blessings received and victories won. We rejoice in the knowledge that every joy, no matter how small, is a gift from God, a glimpse of the abundant grace that surrounds us.

Yet, what makes prayer truly transformative is its ability to connect us to God, His character, His purposes, His power. In the quiet of prayer, we hear, and get in sync with, the heartbeat of God. Then... fears are transformed into courage, doubts into hope, and sorrows into strength. Likewise, joys are deepened as we share them with the One who delights in our happiness.

So, as we journey through life, let us embrace the rich complexity of prayer - the sacred dialogue that invites us to bring our fears and joys, our struggles and triumphs, before the throne of grace. For in the sanctuary of prayer, we find not only solace for our souls but also the assurance that our fears and joys are met with boundless love and understanding.

Praying through Psalms:

Using Scripture to guide your prayers

In prayer, our words hold the power to shape our reality, transform our hearts, and connect us deeply with the divine. For in the sacred exchange of words, we invite the presence of grace, healing, and profound spiritual growth.

Praying through Scripture... helps us to focus our prayers, gives us new and refreshing ways to speak with God, and encourages us to better understand His will. Additionally, we are given the opportunity to study and perhaps memorize His Word.

The Book of Psalms, one of the most cherished books in the Bible, is a diverse collection of songs, prayers, and poems. It serves as a spiritual and emotional guide for individuals seeking to connect with God. The psalms are traditionally divided into different categories based on their themes and purposes, such as praise, lament, thanksgiving, and wisdom. Understanding these categories can enhance our appreciation of the psalms' rich literary and spiritual heritage, and help us relate to the varied human experiences they express.

The Psalms include ...

- 1. Hymns of Praise:** These psalms exalt and glorify God's attributes and deeds. They often express adoration, thanksgiving, and awe toward God for His greatness, faithfulness, and mercy.
- 2. Lament Psalms:** Lament psalms express sorrow, grief, or anguish, often in response to personal or communal suffering, injustice, or hardship. They typically include elements of complaint, petition, and trust in God's deliverance.
- 3. Wisdom Psalms:** Wisdom psalms impart practical guidance for righteous living and offer reflections on the nature of God's law, wisdom, and justice. They often contrast the ways of the righteous with the fate of the wicked.
- 4. Thanksgiving Psalms:** Thanksgiving psalms express gratitude and joy for God's deliverance, provision, or blessings. They testify to God's faithfulness and goodness in the lives of individuals or the community.

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SCRIPT

SESSION 2: Modeling Humility and Trust: *David and Solomon*

As we know, God gave us the holy Scriptures as a guide for every aspect of our lives, including prayer. Even before Jesus Christ provided His disciples with the perfect model in the Lord’s Prayer, the Holy Spirit-inspired authors of the Old Testament recorded examples of the prayers of the faithful. In this session and the next, we will examine four such prayers, one from David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Hannah, to discover what we can learn and apply to our prayers today.

The prayer we are examining from David comes from 2 Samuel 7:18-29. In this passage, David responds to the amazing covenant promise God bestowed on him and his family line, establishing David’s kingdom forever and promising God’s mercy on his descendants. David is awe-struck and humbled by what God has promised, and he expresses true humility and great reverence to the Lord God, the Almighty One. But David doesn’t just simply express his gratitude to God; he proclaims openly how powerful God is and how small His servant, David, is. David then reiterates what God has promised by expanding on it, thereby asking God to bless His people, as well as David and his household, but all for the glory of God.

This prayer is a beautiful model of how to captivate the heart of God, our heavenly Father:

- Approach Him with humility and reverence, and don’t be shy.
- Acknowledge His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence while also acknowledging our lowliness (preserving a proper perspective of His highness and our lowliness).
- Express sincere gratitude for what God has done for us, especially our calling, our rebirth through water and Spirit, and what He provides for us today through word and sacrament. It is essential to show that we haven’t forgotten what God has done.
- Show our heavenly Father that we remember His promises, articulating them in creative new ways, thereby expressing our appreciation for them. These include His promises for the present (His grace and mercy, His help, etc.) as well as His promises for the future (to share in eternal fellowship with Him and to be part of the bridal congregation who will help Jesus Christ in the kingdom of peace, etc.).

Finally, it’s okay to pray this way in front of others (and with others) - as David did - as this reveals our confidence in God and might inspire others to trust God and His promise of salvation.

The prayer we are examining from Solomon comes from 1 Kings 8:22-61, when Solomon prayed before the Lord and in the presence of all of Israel to dedicate the temple. This prayer was intended not only for God to hear but also for the people of Israel, to remind them of God’s promises to David, which were being fulfilled, even at that moment. Solomon uses language throughout the prayer that lifts God above all else, using phrases like “...there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You,” “...the heaven of heavens cannot contain You,” and “...the Lord is God; there is no other ” (v.23, 27, 60). He also expresses confidence that God would help His people in the future, envisioning seven different situations in which they might call on the Lord for His help and intervention (v. 31-53). By praying this way in front of the people, Solomon teaches them (and us) the importance of celebrating God’s promises fulfilled, keeping the proper perspective of remembering who God is (the Almighty One) and who we are (humble children and servants dependent on Him), and expressing our commitment to Him and our trust in His love and grace.

Both David and Solomon encouraged those around them by affirming God’s greatness and their trust in His goodness and provision in their prayers. Whether we pray in front of others or not, our confidence in knowing that our prayers are heard by our holy, compassionate, and all-powerful God can inspire others to look to Him as their help and provider, too.

SCRIPT

SESSION 3: Modeling Dependence and Thanksgiving: *Hezekiah and Hannah*

In the last session, we studied the Old Testament prayers of David and Solomon. We discovered the importance of recounting in our prayers God’s faithfulness, His greatness compared to our weakness, and our confidence in His love and grace. In today’s session, we will continue our exploration of model prayers in the Old Testament by examining the prayers of Hezekiah and Hannah.

In 2 Kings 19:14-19, we find a prayer from Hezekiah, a good and god-fearing king of Judah who was in a really difficult spot. The king of Assyria, Sennacherib, was powerful and had already conquered Israel and taken them captive, and now he was gunning for the people of Judah. Sennacherib’s army seriously outnumbered Hezekiah’s army. What should a leader do?

Pray. Hezekiah went before the Lord and powerfully petitioned Him in prayer. It was powerful not because of his own strength or ability but because of his utter dependence and trust in the Lord. Hezekiah began by literally laying before the Lord the threatening letter he had received from King Sennacherib. Then, he lifted up the name of the Lord by declaring His greatness and holiness above all. Finally, Hezekiah asked for God’s help and intervention with confidence.

This is a wonderful prayer, as it reflects perfectly what anyone should do when faced with difficulties, especially ones that do not have a simple or easy solution. Like Hezekiah, we are to:

- Clearly lay out the facts before God (as Hezekiah laid out Sennacherib’s threatening letter before the Lord).
- Acknowledge our great God, who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present. We should remind ourselves (and those listening to our prayer) that nothing is impossible for God and that He will help.
- Ask the Lord for His help and intervention, to provide His solution, and to save those He has chosen and elected today.

It is important for us to remember, as Hezekiah did, that we don’t have all the answers and that the best thing we can do in times of trouble is humble ourselves before the Lord and ask for help, not as a last resort, but as our first response.

The final prayer we are studying from the Old Testament is the prayer of Hannah, mother of Samuel. After living for many years, unable to bear children, Hannah came to the Tabernacle and prayed again for a child with “bitterness of soul... [and] weeping in anguish” (1 Samuel 1:9-18). Finally, Hannah was blessed with a son, Samuel. However, in her initial petition, she promised the Lord that she would dedicate her son to serving God when he was old enough. Hannah kept that promise and brought young Samuel back to the temple to leave in the care of Eli, the priest. Even in this moment of separation and potential sadness, Hannah expresses her great joy and proclaims God’s majesty, power, and strength (1 Samuel 2:1-10).

Hannah never lost sight of God’s great power or grace in choosing to give her a son. She recognized and proclaimed the truth before Him that all power over life and death, success and failure, and weakness and strength belong to the Lord God alone. He had provided her with a son when she had given up hope, and she was joyful to give Samuel back to the Lord as a servant as an act of worship and thanks.

As we have seen, the Old Testament prayers of David, Solomon, Hezekiah, and Hannah are valuable models for us today. Even though we may never find ourselves in the exact circumstances they experienced, our daily lives present plenty of opportunities to turn to the Lord in humility, complete trust, bold confidence in His faithfulness, joyful thanksgiving, and open praise to the One who deserves all our worship.

SCRIPT

SESSION 4: A Pattern for Living: *The Lord's Prayer*

Welcome! As we continue to look to the Bible for instruction on prayer, the most obvious choice of teaching material is the Lord's Prayer. The title of the prayer itself proves its significance: it is the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught His disciples when they asked Him how to pray. The Lord's Prayer is considered a model, or "how-to," prayer that provides a structure that can easily be followed when formulating our own prayers.

Other small group resources are available that explore the full prayer in-depth, and I encourage you to explore those resources if you are interested in all that the Lord's Prayer can teach us. However, the purpose of this session is primarily to look at the first few phrases of the Lord's Prayer and how it can teach us how the Lord wants us to order our priorities. The Lord's Prayer is not only a pattern for praying; it can also be a pattern for living. Let's begin.

The prayer opens with the words, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name." So, the first lesson on priorities is this: God comes first. He is placed before all things and is acknowledged as being in heaven, holy and revered. It is good and wise for us to keep God and His greatness at the forefront of our minds not only as we come to Him in prayer but also in every moment of our lives.

The next line brings the first petition of the prayer: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” The people of His kingdom seek His will first, not as a conclusion after our wants are expressed or a disclaimer at the end of our prayers. As His people, we earnestly desire to begin all things with His will. To pray like this expresses the conviction that His will is the best thing we can pursue. Consider: What is His will? What does He want? What is best... from His perspective? For His kingdom to include us, His will must be our first desire, even in our own lives.

It can be difficult to surrender the trajectory of our lives to God, especially to do it as our first request. But if by grace we can recognize His awesome love for us personally and His holy and divine nature, then we can trust that His will for us is beautiful, perfect, good, and right. This is true for His will for us today, tomorrow, and in the future. Since we can rely on our mighty God's goodness, love, and omnipotence, we don't merely obey His will but joyfully pursue it! Nothing could be better than what He wills for us!

To live surrendered to and seeking His will requires a change and growth in our understanding and perspective. However, there is no need to do this out of our own abilities. He has already equipped, empowered, and compelled us to do His will with:

- His life through Holy Sealing.
- His truth and word in the gospel.
- His way and example as Jesus showed us through His life.
- His body and blood, and the strength to overcome our own will, through Holy Communion.

As a community of believers, we can seek His will and experience His kingdom in all our relationships, interactions, communities, congregations, and homes. By putting God first and seeking His will above all, we will experience His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, living under the law of love, speaking the language of praise, using the currency of grace, and basking in a climate of peace.

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SCRIPT

SESSION 5: Finding Peace through Prayer: *Lessons from Apostle Paul*

The Apostle Paul, one of Christianity’s most influential figures, demonstrated a profound understanding of the power of prayer. His life, teachings, and letters reflect a deep confidence in the saving power of Jesus Christ, which is foundational to his approach to prayer and its effects. Paul’s teachings offer valuable insights into how prayer can bring peace, not only to ourselves but also to those around us.

Pray Without Ceasing

Paul’s example of praying “without ceasing” (2 Timothy 1:3) encapsulates his belief in the constant need for communication with God. For Paul, prayer was not a ritualistic act confined to specific times but a continuous dialogue with God. This unceasing prayer reflects a relationship where God is ever-present, and His guidance is sought in every circumstance. By integrating prayer into his daily life, Paul found a source of peace that transcended the challenges he faced, including rejection, imprisonment, and persecution. His ceaseless intercessions for his friend (2 Timothy 1:2-5) also strengthened his bonds of friendship and banished feelings of isolation in difficult times.

Know God Will Hear and Act

In Philippians 4:6, Paul encourages believers to “be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” The assurance that God hears our prayers is central to Paul’s understanding of peace, as he continues in the next verse – “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Prayer is not just about expressing our needs, but trusting that God, who is faithful, will respond according to His will, and that what He provides will bring us peace. This trust in God’s responsiveness helped Paul “guard [his] heart and mind” despite external turmoil.

Thank God for His Grace

Paul frequently expressed gratitude for God’s grace. In 1 Corinthians 1:4-5, he writes, “I always thank my God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in Him you have been enriched in every way” (NIV). Paul’s gratitude for God’s grace was not merely an expression of thankfulness but a foundational element of his peace. By recognizing and acknowledging the abundant grace and blessings received, Paul remained focused on God’s goodness, which provided him with a deep-seated peace amid life’s uncertainties. He succinctly wrote the same to the Colossians - “let the peace of God rule in your hearts... and be thankful” (Colossians 3:15).

Deepen Your Relationship with God

Paul’s prayer life was deeply intertwined with his desire to know God more intimately. In Philippians 1:9, Paul prays that the Philippians’ love “may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight” (NIV). This pursuit of a deeper relationship with God not only allowed for spiritual growth and maturity, but also granted a peace that comes from knowing God’s will and His plan for one’s life. As we grow closer to God, His abiding presence in our lives will preserve us in the face of trials.

Pray for Each Other

Paul also emphasized the importance of praying for others. In Ephesians 6:18-20, he instructs believers to “pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests... for all the Lord’s people” and to pray for him as well. This communal aspect of prayer reflects Paul’s belief in the power of intercession and its role in fostering unity and support within the Christian community. By praying for others, Paul not only sought to uplift them but also experienced a shared sense of peace from the solidarity he shared with his family of faith.

Conclusion

Apostle Paul’s life and teachings illustrate that peace through prayer is deeply rooted in a relationship with God characterized by constant communication, trust in His responses, gratitude for His grace, a desire to know Him more, and communal intercession. Paul’s experience of peace was not merely a personal comfort but a profound assurance that God’s presence and power were active and transformative. By following Paul’s example, we can cultivate a similar sense of peace through prayer in our own lives, reflecting a faith that is both steadfast and nurturing.

SCRIPT

SESSION 6: Finding Balance in Personal Prayer: *Structure and Spontaneity*

By the time you reach the Daily Life section of the Reflections on Prayer book, you might be feeling a bit overwhelmed by all the wonderful and impressive examples of prayer you've explored. It's easy to get caught up in the details and wonder, "Where do I even begin?" or "How will I ever fit all this into my own life?"

The different approaches and structures for prayer suggested in the book might seem like a lot to take in, and that's perfectly okay. Remember, the goal isn't to follow a strict formula and it certainly won't help to put a lot of pressure on yourself. It's about finding a way to connect with God that feels right for you.

As we continue, let's take a step back and remember the heart of prayer: it's about building and maintaining a genuine relationship with God. In our pursuit of a meaningful prayer life, it is essential to recognize that personal should be just that – *personal*. *Yours*. The notion that every prayer must follow a prescribed format could inhibit the authenticity of our communication with God. Embracing flexibility, allowing for spontaneity, honesty, and personal expression enriches our spiritual practice and fosters a deeper connection with the Divine.

Prayer should be a personal and meaningful part of your spiritual life, and finding the right balance between structure and spontaneity can really enrich the experience. Here's a look at how both can play a role in your spiritual journey.

The Value of Structure in Prayer

A structured approach to prayer – including regular elements like worship, thanksgiving, intercession, and petitions - can be really helpful. The structure provides a framework so that you don't forget to talk with God about various aspects of your spiritual life. But if you try to fit all these elements into every prayer throughout the day, prayer will probably start to feel a bit like a chore. We want to make sure these elements of worship, thanksgiving, intercession and petitions have an appropriate place in our prayer life, just not in every prayer.

When you stick too rigidly to a structure, it's easy to fall into a routine where prayers start to feel like a checklist rather than a heartfelt conversation with God. This can lead to a sense of monotony, which won't promote an open expression of your true feelings. There's a real danger of slipping into a shallow prayer life, rather than creating the genuine and authentic relationship we want to build with our God.

The Joy of Spontaneous Prayer

On the flip side, spontaneous prayer is all about keeping your conversations with God natural and genuine. It's a way to talk to God in the moment, reflecting your immediate thoughts and emotions. Whether it's giving thanks before a meal or a plea for help during a tough spot, these spontaneous prayers help keep your connection with God fresh and alive.

Spontaneous prayers don't have to be long or elaborate. They're like quick text messages we send to friends - short, but meaningful. They help maintain a constant dialogue with God throughout the day, complementing more structured times of prayer.

Embracing Flexibility in Your Prayer Life

Flexibility in prayer is crucial for maintaining a vibrant and engaging spiritual practice. Not every prayer needs to follow a strict format or include every possible element, but every prayer should have a purpose. For example, a prayer of gratitude for a meal doesn't need to include petitions or intercessions; it simply acknowledges God as your provider. Morning prayers can focus on asking for guidance for the day and could include petitions for yourself or intercessions for others when you know challenges will have to be faced. Evening prayers can reflect on and give thanks for what happened during the day. The end of the day is also a really good time to reflect on your thoughts and actions and confess your sins to God, asking for His forgiveness. Setting aside intentional personal prayer time creates opportunities to bring specific requests and dive deeper into introspection; to see yourself the way God sees you. Regularly creating this space also prepares you for those moments in life when you face intense challenges or sorrows; then, your spiritual discipline of prayer will be a comfort and security, not something you are trying out for the first time.

By being flexible, you prevent your prayers from becoming rigid and repetitive. Each time you pray can be a unique expression of your current state of mind and heart.

Cultivating a Genuine Relationship with God

The essence of prayer is about building and nurturing your relationship with God. Just like in human relationships, varying how you communicate keeps things vibrant. Short, spontaneous prayers can maintain your connection throughout the day, while more focused, reflective times of prayer can deepen your relationship.

[illegible]

If you're feeling intimidated by all these structured prayer routines, don't worry. Start small. Maybe you currently don't pray before meals - try adding that in. The prayer of thanks before a meal is one of the easiest, and hopefully shortest, prayers, so it's a great place to start. Gradually introduce morning and evening prayers, and when it feels right, set aside time for more personal prayer sessions once or twice a week. Resources like devotionals can offer prompts and inspiration, blending structure with personal spontaneity. This way, you get the best of both worlds: a little guidance and a lot of personal connection.

Prayer thrives when it's a genuine, heartfelt conversation. While structure has its benefits, letting your prayer life be spontaneous and flexible helps keep it vibrant and deeply personal. By allowing your prayers to flow naturally and fit the moment, you will create a richer, more authentic relationship with God.

SCRIPT

SESSION 7: *Writing Prayers*: Cultivating a Practice of Intentionality and Reflection

Writing prayers serves as a powerful spiritual practice that nourishes the soul, fosters connection with our heavenly Father, enriches and captures one's journey of faith. Your written prayers could be a beautiful gift to your children, grandchildren, friends, or loved ones, etc. as they could see your love for them poured out in your written prayers.

Please understand, God does not need our prayers to be eloquent and full of rich vocabulary and perfectly articulated. God will hear our prayers if they are just a breath, a groan or a sigh. Writing prayers is for us; the benefits are for our mind, body, and soul.

Writing forces us to focus; if our minds wander, our pencils will stop.

When we translate our thoughts into words and put them onto paper, numerous physiological and mental processes are at work. For young children learning to write, their initial attempts often result in scattered and disorganized letters. However, as they grow and develop, their writing becomes more structured and legible. As adults, we may not consciously think about the complex processes involved in writing, as they become second nature to us. Yet, each of these processes leaves a lasting impact on our hearts and minds.

Writing prayers can be a deeply enriching practice, offering numerous spiritual and emotional benefits. It allows for ...

1. **Personal Reflection:** Writing prayers encourages introspection and self-awareness. Writing helps us to focus our thoughts and engage our mind which allows us to be more articulate and intentional with our words about our feelings, and desires, leading to a deeper understanding of oneself and one's relationship with God.
2. **Emotional Release:** It can be an outlet for expressing a wide range of emotions, including joy, sorrow, anger, and gratitude. This emotional release can be cathartic and therapeutic, promoting mental and emotional well-being, as well as a way to deepen one's relationship with God.
3. **Connection with God:** It's a way of seeking guidance, comfort, and strength from Him. Writing prayers allows individuals to be more thoughtful (organized) when communicating their hopes, fears, confessions, and needs directly to God, fostering a sense of intimacy and trust in Him. Written prayers keep track of our requests

and outcomes and can be inspirational and healing during times when we can't pray.

- 4. Spiritual Growth:** Engaging in the practice of writing prayers deepens one's spiritual life and cultivates a closer relationship with God. It encourages consistent, ongoing dialogue with God, leading to spiritual growth, insight, and transformation over time.

These are just a few benefits that come from the practice of writing prayers. There may be more that you will experience. Writing prayers will activate and strengthen “faith” muscles that maybe you’ve never used before or have weakened over time.

Written prayer offers a profound means of connecting with our heavenly Father, providing clarity and focus in our spiritual lives. It helps us articulate our deepest thoughts and emotions, fosters mindfulness and gratitude, and serves as a valuable tool for reflection and growth. By putting our prayers into written words, we create a lasting testament to our faith journey, allowing us to revisit and reflect on our spiritual progress over time. Embracing the practice of written prayer can deepen our relationship with God and leave an indelible mark on our souls, guiding us through life's challenges and triumphs.

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SCRIPT

SESSION 8: Praying Together: *The Prayers of the Church*

"The prayer of the Church is a source of strength. We pray together during the divine service, but we can also meet to pray together when particular situations arise. This in no way demands of God to perform a miracle or impose our will. The purpose of such an approach is, above all, to emphasize the importance we give to the subject of our prayer and to express our total trust in God."

CHIEF APOSTLE SCHNEIDER
November 2015, Netherlands
Reflections on Prayer, page 149

Consider the power that resonates when a community unites in prayer. It's more than just a collective voice lifted in unison; it's a symphony of faith, bringing together the hopes, fears, and aspirations of every individual into a harmonious whole.

In the life of the Church, prayer is not merely a ritual performed during services; it's a lifeline that binds believers together in times of joy and trial. When faced with challenges, whether personal or communal, the faithful come together, not to demand miracles or impose their will upon God, but to humbly submit their concerns and petitions before God.

Gathering for prayer isn't about persuading God to act according to our desires; rather, it's an affirmation of our trust in His wisdom and providence. It's a declaration that, despite the uncertainties of life, we believe in His goodness and sovereignty.

In these moments of collective prayer, we find strength in solidarity. We draw courage from the knowledge that we are not alone in our struggles, that our burdens are shared by a community bound by a common faith. And as we lift our voices together, we are reminded that our trust in God's unfailing love transcends any obstacle we may face.

So, let us never underestimate the power of communal prayer. It's a beacon of hope in times of darkness, a source of comfort in times of sorrow, and a testament to the enduring faith of a body of believers who place their trust in the Almighty.

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