

*A STUDY GUIDE ON THE PRAYERS OF THE
NEW TESTAMENT*

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Ever notice how the pieces of life don't always fit together? Sometimes the day-to-day tasks we do seem pointless. We wonder, "Is this all there is? Then there are times when, either through a painful experience for ourselves, family members or friends, we groan with an aching heart, Why God? I just don't get it!

I've come to the conclusion that it is the way of God to only tell us part of the story. Whether it is the scriptures or the experience of life, there is something hidden from view. This isn't because God enjoys frustrating us or leaving us in the dark. On the contrary, he loves to lead us into deeper knowledge of himself and his world. God doesn't give us the whole story because it is his way to catch us out and draw us deeper.

I spotted this mode of divine operation when I was studying the parables. Jesus told stories that had a point to them. The problem is, the point wasn't obvious. After listening to him, people in the crowds walked away scratching their heads. Certainly the disciples found his parables confusing. They were with him a great deal of the time and they didn't get his point either. But instead of walking away, they asked him to explain. And he did. And so it is with us. If we want the Lord to give us the rest of the story, we must ask. In short, we must pray.

God's world and God's word is created in such away that we can't make sense of it apart from prayer. Not that we always get an explanation when we ask for it or that our aching whys get answers. But when we pray we are drawn into a personal relationship with our God and he is himself the piece of the puzzle that is missing and the answer to the incomplete stories that don't quite make sense.

The Study of Prayer

If prayer is so important, then we would be wise to give it some extended consideration. Is there a right way to pray? What should we say? What shouldn't we say? What kinds of answers can we expect?

The best way to learn about prayer is to study the prayers of the Bible. In the scriptures we have a written record of those to whom God spoke and through whom God spoke. When they prayed, God listened. The focus of this guide is the prayers of the New Testament. As look at the prayers of Jesus and his disciples we will be able to get a feel for effective prayers that get results.

We will consider the prayer Jesus gave the disciples to pray for their daily devotions, the Lord's Prayer. Next, we will look at the final prayer that Jesus prayed for himself and his disciples on the night before his crucifixion, sometimes called his High Priestly Prayer.

Then we visit a prayer meeting of the early church and see how they spoke to God when they faced persecution. From there we will look at three prayers prayed by the apostle Paul for the growth of infant churches filled with brand new Christians. Finally we will look at prayer as it is prayed in heaven by those who are on the other side of eternity.

A study of these prayers will enrich your prayer and therefore will enrich your life. You will know more than you did before about God, yourself, your relationships, your world and the world to come. The prayers these people prayed have shaped millions of people for a couple thousand years. If you learn to pray from studying their prayers you will be able join them in making sense of life for you and for many others around you.

Prayer Project

At the conclusion of each study there is a *Prayer Project*. Following the suggestions for each day for five days will help you prayerfully apply some of the insights you gained from your study. It is possible for you to go through the suggestions for each day in three or four minutes. Or, you could take 10 or 15 minutes with each one, moving through them in a quiet, reflective and leisurely manner. Going through the daily suggestions quickly is not recommended. You will gain most from the second approach. Pray the prayer suggestions with a listening heart and cocked ear. You not just looking for information or even help, you are looking for God. When you spend time with him in prayer, you will have your answer for part of the story that isn't making sense.

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Study 1

Matthew 6:5-15

Praying the Lord's Model Prayer

When I was a boy, at night before bed time I used to say a prayer that began, "*Now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep . . .*" Around the family dinner table in the evenings we said a prayer that began "*Bless O Lord this food that we are about to receive . . .*" And in church in Sunday mornings we prayed, "*Our Father who art in heaven . . .*"

For the most part, during the early part of my life, that was the extent of my exposure to prayer. Except growing up in a liturgical church we used a prayer book. The minister used to read a lot of other prayers, some that we were expected to read along with him. They seemed a cascade of words coming at me on Sunday morning. I must have been about thirteen before it dawned on me that I was supposed to mean what the minister was reading. That made the prayers slightly more interesting, but not much.

I don't really know Jesus as my Lord until I was eighteen. That was several years after I dropped out of church. When I started back again, I attended a church in which members wouldn't be caught dead reading a printed prayer. When people prayed, they just said what they felt, right from their heart. I liked that. It seemed sincere. I swore off all forms of ritual prayer as expressions of those who were religious but spiritually dead.

Eventually I noticed a couple of problems with that position. After awhile those fresh spontaneous prayers began to sound very old. Frequently a person would hit the same themes with the same words and phrases as the last time he prayed. He may not have been reading words on the page, but from the way the prayers went, he might just as well be reading. I also noticed that Christians through the ages used the pattern of prayer that we call the Lord's Prayer. Obviously it is a written prayer taken from the Gospel of Matthew. As I considered this, I had to change my position. As I grew in my faith, the more comprehensive, complete and satisfying I discovered the Lord's prayer to be. Eventually I started praying it everyday and saying it with my boys each night as I put them to bed. So much for my prejudice against preset forms of prayer.

As we begin a study on prayer in the New Testament, it is appropriate to study our Lord's teaching on prayer as we have it in the Gospel of Matthew. Several times in the following studies I will make references to it. Serious consideration of the Lord's Prayer will enrich your prayers. Praying it regularly will enrich your life.

What is your experience of formalized patterns of prayer?

1. In verses 5-8 Jesus begins his teaching on prayer with two correctives; don't pray like hypocrites or pagans. They both had the wrong focus, wrong manner, wrong place and the wrong motivation. Looking over the Lord's teaching in 5-15, what is the right focus, right manner, right place and the right motivation for prayer?

2. The pagans evidently thought that the number of words and the form of prayer increased the chances it would be answered: What's wrong with that way of thinking?
3. Read verse 8. God knows our needs before we ask, but evidently he wants us to ask anyway. How is asking for our needs good for us?
4. Look at verse 9. Jesus begins his prayer with the little word "our." Looking over Jesus prayer, in what ways does it touch on relationships?
5. The Lord's Prayer could be divided in half, 9-10 and 11-13. What are themes of each half?

What does each "half" have in common?

6. Read over verses 9-13 again. What specific things are we asking for when we pray the Lord's Prayer?
7. Including Jesus' instructions before and after his model prayer, what personal guidelines for prayer can you draw from this passage?

In what way does this pray give us a sense of dignity and identity?

In what way does it bring about a sense of humility?

8. It is reasonable to assume, because Jesus tells us to ask for our "bread" daily, that we should pray this daily. How would praying this prayer thoughtfully every day reorient your life?
9. In what ways will Jesus prayer change the way you pray?

Prayer Project

Learning to pray the Lord's Prayer daily

As you pray the Prayer, say it slowly, reflectively and deliberately. Perhaps you might want to write it out each day so that your mind doesn't wander. Pause over phrases that stick in your mind.

For your prayer project each day I will suggest themes to focus. Let those themes be foremost in your mind as you work through the prayer for each day.

Day One

The Lord's prayer is relational. As you pray the prayer today, focus on the word "Our." Think of your church, your friends, your family.

Perhaps you could pray the prayer several times. Each time through focus on a different group.

Day Two

The Lord's Prayer is a family prayer. Jesus wants us to approach God as our "Father."

Consider ways that they provided for you physical and emotional needs. If you have had a healthy family background then your emotional responses can really aid you in the depth of feeling that Jesus wants his prayer to inspire. If you have had a difficult and emotionally turbulent family experience, you may have to do some emotional adjustments to enter into the affectation towards God that Jesus desires us to have.

Day Three

There is a strong outreach orientation in the Lord's Prayer. As you pray the prayer think about what you are asking for when ask for the coming of his kingdom. Think about your home, community and country and the difference it would make if everyone was submitted to doing God's will.

Day Four

The Lord's Prayer generates a sense of humility. Not only are we asking God to provide for our needs, we are also acknowledging that we sin and need to be protected as well as acknowledging that we need to be kept from temptation. As you pray it today, be sensitive to humility it is cultivating in your heart.

Day Five

The Lord's Prayer generates a sense of dignity. We come to our Father and call upon God for our personal needs. Be sensitive to the godly sense of worth that praying the Lord's Prayer is cultivating in your heart as you say it.

Commentary/Leaders Notes

To learn to pray using the Lord's Prayer

Q1. Encourage people to express their childhood memories of prayer. Seek to keep the atmosphere accepting and non-judgmental. Members of the group will have different experiences and different feelings. At this point we just want everyone to feel free to express their thoughts and feelings about prayer.

Q2. This is a directive question: it gives members a way to think about Jesus' teaching.

- Right focus: God, not impressing others
- Right manner: not wordy or verbose
- Right place: in a place that is set apart to be with God
- Right motivation: the glory of God and the provision of our needs

Q3. It assumes that God can be manipulated. It portrays God as someone who can be convinced by the use of the many words. It takes a low view of God's intelligence and character. It overlooks God's concern for righteousness.

Both the pagan and hypocrites had a view of prayer that was akin to magic. Magic is the attempt to accomplish our personal will through the manipulation of divine forces. In contrast, prayer is not the attempt to manipulate supernatural force, but asking God if he will consider our request and act on it.

In considering the relationship between prayer and magic, it might be worth discussing ways that we can seek to turn our prayers into a form of magic.

Q4. Prayer is based on the foreknowledge of God. God knows what we need before we ask him! Then why pray?

Because it is the way God works. Prayer is the door between heaven and earth. God chooses to wait to bring heavenly resources to earth until we ask him. Another way to say this is, God's blessings are not automatic. Even though he wants us to have his blessings, he often waits until we ask.

Implicit in Jesus' teaching is a dynamic of prayer in the Old Testament. A study of prayer there shows that it is frequently a matter of asking God to keep his covenant and do what he has promised to do.

Q5. We often say the word "Our" but think "My" as we pray the Lord's Prayer.

As we pray we are not only praying for my own daily bread, but for the provision of bread for all God's people. We are not only asking that God would forgive my sins, but the sins of all who call on God as Father. And so on for each of the requests.

The relational dynamic of the prayer also comes out in that we can't expect God to forgive our sins unless we have forgiven the sins of others towards us. This is a terrifyingly high standard for human relations. Jesus thinks forgiveness is so essential to prayer that he reiterates it in verse 15.

Q6. The first half focus on the God's glory, the second half on our need. This pattern is also seen in the Ten Commandments. The first table is on our responsibility towards God, the second half on our responsibilities to each other.

What each half has in common is the dependence upon God's power. God is the one who will bring in his kingdom, God is also the one who meets our needs.

Q7. You might want to take the opportunity here to dwell for awhile on what we mean we ask for God's kingdom and will to be done on earth. For one thing that makes prayer very evangelistic: we want people to come under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. For another, it acknowledges that things on earth are not as they should be now or one day will be. It also makes the power of God the source of all our evangelistic efforts and hopes for a better world.

You might also want to explore what Jesus means by "daily bread." Historically it has been taken to mean everything that we need to sustain life: shelter, relationships, personal/spiritual strength . . .

And you could ponder what it means to be delivered from the evil one and temptation . . .

Q8. Guidelines that people articulate could include:

- Be concise
- Pray to God and not to an audience
- Begin by praising God and seeking his glory on the earth
- Keep in mind that God is our father and like a human father wants to provide for us
- We should ask for needs daily, even though we asked yesterday and even though God knows that we need them
- We should not only pray for our own needs but the needs of fellow believers as well
- We should always seek cleansing from sin when we pray
- We should evaluate our relationships to others as we pray
- We should seek protection for Satan each time we pray

Q9. We gain a sense of dignity and identity in that we call God our Father, because we are invited to join in the work of seeking God's kingdom on earth, because we are invited to seek he be acknowledge as holy.

Humility comes to us as realize that all we have and need comes from him alone.

Q10. When we pray this prayer daily, in a thoughtful way, our lives are oriented around God's glory and being dependent upon him. Our hearts our cleansed and our minds are properly focused.

Study 2

John 17:1-26

Praying the Lord's Personal Prayer

When I was a boy of ten or so, my father told me that he and my mother made a decision to dedicate me to God. I didn't think much of that information at the time. I don't remember saying anything out loud, but my inner response was, "So what?"

I look back several decades later at their dedication with surprise. For one thing, my parents weren't particularly religious. Sunday mornings on occasion was about the extent of it. In fact after I was eight I got dropped off to sing in the choir and then picked up after church was over. For another, the prayer seems to have worked. I've been in Christian ministry now a couple of decades.

I wonder if there prayers prayed by previous generations of my ancestors that are being now worked out in my life? I wonder too what impact my prayers will have on my sons and the generations to follow?

Jesus last recorded prayer, on the night of his arrest, is one that is still being answered. Every generation of Christians since the first disciples have benefited from it. Studying it will help you appreciate Jesus' provision for you. It will also widen your understanding of the power of prayer across time. With some study and faith, you may find yourself praying for both the present and the future.

1. What things are happening in your life now that may be the result of past prayers (yours or someone else's)?
2. Read 17:1-5. Jesus' prayer is very direct and bold. In your own words summarize what Jesus wants from God.

The word glory has several different meanings. From the way Jesus uses it, what do you think he is asking for?

3. Jesus knows who he is and who he is praying to. Consider your own prayers; how does your sense of self and your understanding of God come out in the way that you pray?
4. Read 17:6-19. Jesus shifts the focus of his prayer from himself to the twelve disciples. What does he want for them?
5. Look at verses 6-12. Considering what Jesus says about them, what do you think the disciples might have felt like as they heard his prayer?
6. How does Jesus prayer embody essential elements of the Lord's prayer as recorded in Matthew 6:9-15?

7. Consider verses 13-15. Jesus seeks protection for this disciple, why do you think this was necessary?

In what ways do you sense a need for protection from the world and the Evil one?

8. Jesus asks that the disciples be sanctified, that is, set apart, kept separate from the world. How would that be a protection for them?

What is wrong with Christians accommodating to the world?

9. How can Christians be kept separate and yet sent into the world?

How is it that Christians are to be *in* be not *of* the world?

10. In verses 20-25 Jesus shifts from his immediate disciples to the generations of future Christians yet to come. What is it that Jesus wants for us?

11. On the surface, with hundreds of denominations, it may appear that Jesus prayer was not answered. Looking a bit deeper, what do Christians of all generations and all nations have in common?

Are there ways that you have experienced the spiritual oneness that Jesus prays for?

12. Jesus prayer begins by asking that he be restored to heaven, verses 1-5. It concludes by anticipating his future ministry on the earth, verses 26. How can both be possible at the same time?

How can our own prayers be a means of participating in heavenly exaltation and earthly ministry of Jesus?

Prayer Project

Day One: Praying for Glory of God

Jesus prayed that God would glorify the Son. Join in the spirit of his prayer by keeping your prayer God-focused today as you place your personal needs in the background.

Ask God to bring glory to his name. God is glorified when people acknowledge his handiwork in his creation, when they acknowledge his goodness and provision of their daily needs, when the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and spreads across the globe.

Praying in this way puts our lives in perspective. God is the center of life. When we acknowledge this then the rest of the pieces of harried and busy life fall into place as well.

Day Two: Praying for Ourselves

It is important that we place God first in our prayers. But it would be a false humility if we ignored our needs and desires. Jesus prayed for himself. The last half of the Lord's prayer concerns our personal needs. James tells us that one reason we may be lacking is because we haven't asked. (James 4:2)

Consider, what do you really want in life? What do you want in your job? In your family? In your church? For your personal development? Spend time considering the breadth and depths of your wants. Write them out. When you have done this, then lift up your list to God. Be clear, up front and forth right. Tell God these are what you want and ask him for blessing, guidance, insight and empowerment in each area of your wants.

Day Three: Praying for Protection

Life is dangerous. Some of the dangers we face are visible; an auto accident, a thief who breaks into our house or car. But lots of the dangers we face are not visible at least not initially. A virus that invades our body, runaway cells in our body that become cancerous, economic decisions of policy makers that may result in the loss of a job, the diabolic influence of demonic forces that entice and empower sinful thoughts and actions.

So we need to pray for protection. Jesus prayed that God would protect his disciples. He also teaches us to pray in his model prayer, for protection from temptation and deliverance from evil. So today, pray for protection from dangers that are seen and unseen; for dangers that may be looming near or perhaps are just beginning to hatch and grow. Make a list of potential dangers. Ask God to guide you as you pray.

Day Four: Praying for Incorporation

We need to belong. Some research indicates that people who feel socially isolated have two to five times the incidence of disease and premature death due to all causes as those who feel a sense of community and connection. Jesus knows how important it is to belong. That's why he created the church. That is why he commanded the disciples to love one another.

Pray about your sense of belonging. Pray for your sense of membership with in your family. Pray for your sense of belonging in your church. I'm not talking here about how many committees you are on or even how regular you are at Sunday morning worship. I'm referring to a sense of membership and emotional connection with loved ones and fellow believers. Ask God to show you ways that you can grow in this area. Ask him to expose and work out any barriers that my stand in your way.

Day Five: Praying with Anticipation

Jesus asked the Father for the future of his followers. He wants us to be with him so that we may see his glory. For Christians, the anticipation for heaven and his glorious return should be an underlying motif that sings throughout the background of our lives. Certainly this is an aspect of what we mean when we pray "... your kingdom come, your will be done ..."

Today pray for the return of Christ. Pray for your preparation for heaven. Pray through the issues and events of your life in light of the future glory of Christ that he has planned for all who trust in him.

Commentary/Leaders Notes

Purpose: To learn how to pray for present and future ministry.

Q2. Jesus' highly priestly prayer divides into three sections

- 1-5: Jesus prays for glorification
- 6-19: Jesus prays for protection
- 20-27: Jesus prays for incorporation

Q3. We can ask God for his glory, that his name be hallowed, when we hold him in high esteem. In a similar way, we can also express our desires without a false sense of humility. Abraham was able to ask for a son in Genesis 15. David was able to ask for protection from his enemies and for the throne to pass to his own line.

In answering this question, allow people to share some of the things we have asked for from God.

Q4. Jesus is seeking protection for them: from the world and from Satan.

Q5. This prayer is full of insight on how God works, Jesus own ministry as well as the character of the disciples. They would have heard that they belonged to God, not just because they believed in Jesus, but because the Father gave them to Jesus. Perhaps they felt a godly pride in knowing that they had obeyed the Lord's word and had accepted him as they were supposed to do. They also might have experienced fear as they heard Jesus ask for protection for them after his departure. And then there would have been confusion and uncertainty as Jesus spoke about going away and leaving them.

Q6. The Lord's Prayer begins by asking that God would grant that his own name be hallowed and ends by asking for protection from the Evil One. This prayer begins with Jesus seeking both his own glory and the glory of the Father. It also ends by asking for protection from the Evil One.

These two dynamics illustrate the spiritual conflict at work in the world and which is to be battled out primarily through prayer.

The name of God also comes up in both prayers. "Hollowed be they Name." And ". . . keep them through the power of your name." In Scripture a name was the embodiment of a person's identity and the means by which spiritual power is exercised.

Q7. Jesus primary mission was to bring in the kingdom of God by defeating the Evil One. That is why the temptation in the desert and deliverance from demons was such a predominate part of his ministry. The disciples, without Jesus physical presence, must take up the spiritual battle. Jesus triumphed at the cost of is life. It would be costly in the same way for those who followed him. The battle was not merely face death, but continue to believer in the face of spiritual pressures to give up the faith.

Q8. The world, used as a negative term in scripture means a patterns of life lived without reference to God. Our modern word "secular" describes the world. One of the primary dangers to a Christian is losing a sense of identity as being called out from the world into a special holy relationship to God. God warned Israel about becoming like the nations in their religion and their ethics. When they compromised they acted unfaithfully and immorally and experienced the judgment of God by deportation to Babylon.

When Christians keep their identity clear there is less danger of immoral behavior or loosing the sense of mission in reaching out to a world full of spiritual darkness.

Q9. This is a delicate balance, but a terrific means of energy. If the balance swings to one side of the other that energy is lost. When Christians become like the world, we lose the ability to speak prophetically. When we break contact with the world, we lose our audience. I believe that is prayer that keeps the two poles in proper balance.

Christians are to be in the world in the sense that it is the place where we earn a living and meet our neighbors and proclaim the gospel. We are not in the world in the sense of our identity, values, mission, or morality. These all come from God not from those around us.

Q10. Jesus wants all generations incorporated into the spiritual unity shared between the Father, Son and disciples. He also wants us to pick up the sense of mission to the world and to see and share in his glory.

Q11. We must keep in mind that organizational unity is not the same thing as spiritual unity. Martin Luther and John Calvin, leaders of the Lutheran and Reformed branches of early Protestantism disagreed about a number of doctrines and were never part of the same church government. But both believed that Jesus was Lord and that through faith God extended the gift of eternal life to them. And so it is across and through many denominational boundaries. Beyond the styles of worship or details of baptism and the Lord's supper there is a unity of faith in Jesus Christ. C.S. Lewis called this central core of Christianity unity, *Mere Christianity*.

Q12. Spiritual boundaries are different from physical ones. It is because Jesus is in heaven that he can be active across the generations and present personally with every believer.

When we pray, we call on our heavenly Lord to release his power on the earth. It is through our prayers that Jesus carries on his earthly activities now.

Study 3

Acts 4:23-31

Praying the Growth of the Church

The small group of which I am a member has been meeting for almost a year. At the conclusion of each meeting we have designated ten to fifteen minutes for prayer. More often than not, we seem to run out of time before we get around to the prayer time. Although we didn't intend it to be this way, usually there is only time for the designated leader to ask for pressing concerns and then close in a brief prayer. On occasion this has bothered me, but I didn't feel that it was appropriate in our stage of group growth to say anything about it. About a month ago one of the reasons our prayer time is always rushed came out.

It happened this way: when it was my turn to lead, instead of praying out loud I suggested that we have several minutes of silent prayer to conclude our meeting. I told them it seemed to me that either our prayer times were kept very short or that they were often filled with an uncomfortable silence as everyone waited for everyone else to say something. At that point Cindy said silent pray sounded good to her. She felt inferior to others who were able to use lots of big words and always seemed to know just what to say. A couple other people chimed in with similar sentiments.

I knew exactly what they meant. I could think of prayer meetings in which I felt that the words said were meant to impress me rather than address God. However, Cindy's words made me uncomfortable. I suppose as a pastor, I am one of those whose prayers can intimidate.

Upon reflection, it does seem that praying in a group can encourage the very things that Jesus warned that Christians shouldn't do: pray in order to impress others the way the "hypocrites" did while using lots of big words to manipulate God the way the pagans did.

But prayer meetings don't have to that way. The Lord's Prayer is a group prayer that Christians have prayed in worship services for two thousand years. And the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost on the "birthday of the church" in Acts 2 was a response to a group prayer meeting.

So, while acknowledging the dangers, how can we have group prayer times? In this passage in Acts 4, we have a summary of a group prayer that was powerful and significant in the life of the early church. Let's look at it to see what we can learn about healthy prayer meetings.

1. Although it doesn't have to be, praying out loud, in front of other people can be a stressful experience. Describe your experience in prayer meetings: What do you enjoy? What do you struggle with?
2. Read 4:23-31. This prayer meeting takes place within two or three months of Jesus' crucifixion. How would you describe the mood of the church?

What do you think it might have been like in that prayer meeting?

3. Read over the 4:23-31 again. Their prayer acknowledges God's sovereignty-his control of all that happens. In what ways do they see God carrying out his will through recent events?
4. The disciple's prayer was inspired by their faith that God was active even in those people and situations that were opposed to the Christian faith. How can faith in God's sovereignty be helpful in our own prayers?
5. Their prayer begins with quotes from Scripture; notably Genesis 1 and Psalm 2. Take a moment to look at each passage in Old Testament. How does each contribute to their prayer?

What reasons do the first Christians have for believing that the scriptures were fulfilled in the events surrounding Jesus crucifixion?

6. Quoting or rephrasing the Scriptures is a good way to guide and enrich our prayers. Where would/do you turn in the Scriptures to aid your prayers?
7. Read through the prayer again, verses 24-30. Healthy prayer not only includes scripture, but often a good dose of heart-felt theology. How are the Father, the Son and the Spirit each a part of their prayer?

How can appealing to Christian truths strengthen our prayers?

8. Prayer often involves spiritual conflict and is essential to spiritual victory. What forces of opposition are mentioned in this prayer?

How are the forces of spiritual opposition manifested today?

In what ways how have you seen prayer overcome spiritual obstacles?

9. Consider each time the word servant is used and note who it refers to; verses 25, 27, 29 and 30. How can the concept of servant hood expressed in these verses enrich our understanding of the humility and dignity of prayer?
10. The prayer began with references to scripture, moved on to current events and ended with a request. In your own words, what are they asking for?
11. How does this prayer reflect principles that Jesus gave in the Lord's prayer?
12. In response to their prayer, there is an outpouring of the Spirit similar to the Day of Pentecost. In what ways does the Lord answer our prayers for the advance of gospel of Jesus Christ today?
13. Summarize the principles of prayer you have picked up from this prayer of the early church.

Prayer Project

This week your prayers will focus on the church. It's God's instrument for birthing and nurturing spiritual life in this fallen world. In many ways we modern Christians are tempted to take it for granted. But it is important to God and important for us as well. God will be pleased and we will be blessed if we seek its welfare in our prayers and actions.

Day One: Pray for the Power of the Church

In response to the prayer of the church, God poured out the Spirit and granted that the message of Jesus was spoken in power. Pray that all the ministry activities of your church will be a channel of spiritual power. Make a list of all the activities of your church that you can think of. Lift each one up for God's blessing.

Day Two: Pray for the Growth of the Church

The church of Jesus Christ is a living organism, not merely an institutional structure. And like all living things it needs to grow continually. Pray that individual members would become knit together in a growing fellowship. Why not write down as many people as you can think of and then pray for each one?

The church also must continue to grow in numbers. Not just so that it will grow for growth's sake, but so that more people will be brought into the saving fellowship of Jesus Christ. Ask God to bless the current outreach programs of your church. Ask him to create others as well.

Day Three: Pray for the Message of the Church

The early church prayed that they would have power to speak the word of God boldly. We need to pray that prayer today.

It is the gospel of Jesus Christ which gives birth to the church and which keeps it growing. Pray that the message of Jesus Christ will be spoken from your church's pulpit and taught in each Sunday School class from toddler through adults. Pray that the message will be lived as well as spoken and that people will see that Jesus brings grace and life by the way members of your church live and care for each other.

Day Four: Pray for the Leaders of the Church

Jesus is the head of the church and its only true teacher. But he has chosen to carry on his ministry through men and women that he has called and gifted. The apostles were key to the guidance and growth of the early church.

Pray for those who exercise spiritual leadership in your church. Pray for their personal walk and fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Pray for strength that they may carry the burdens that the Lord and the members of your church place upon them. Pray for their pray life. Pray for their

families. Pray for wisdom, insight and power. Pray for them in any way that you can think of that will bring a blessing to them and through them to you and your fellow believers.

Day Five: Pray for Protection of the Church

The church needed to be protected from outside threats of persecution from Herod and assorted others. But the church also has a need to be protected from others dangers as well.

The church of Jesus Christ throughout history has a checkered record. The accommodation to wealth and power has been a constant struggle from the Middle Ages right down to the present. Along the way the church's doctrine has been diluted and misdirected so that there has been a need for a series of reformations. Likewise the church has gone through a cycle of cold spells that have required renewals over other generation or so. I hope you get the point. The church has lots of dangers to deal with and not infrequently has been mistaken, corrupted or sidetracked. So pray for God's protection of his people. Pray for moral and doctrinal integrity. Pray for resistance to the siren song of the world. Pray for deliverance from Satan's temptation. Pray that God's people in this generation be empowered to resist our own inner desires to disobedience and sin.

Commentary/Leaders Notes

Purpose: To learn ways that we pray with confidence and power in group prayer meetings.

Q1. Be sure to be affirming for each contribution. Whatever a person's experience, don't be judgmental.

Q2. Be sure to allow time for reflection on this question. It is intentionally broad and requires that people "climb" into the passage.

Q3. The disciples see that the crucifixion of Jesus and the opposition of Jewish and Gentile authorities was according to the plan of God. They see that opposition still continuing in the encounter that Peter and John had with the Jewish ruling counsel.

Q4. If we believe that God is control of everything, then we can be confident that nothing can stand in the way of our prayers being answered if God chooses to do so. If we are doubtful of God's pervasive sovereignty, then our prayers will be implicitly hesitant and lack conviction.

Faith in God's sovereignty also provides a foundation for praying with a thankful heart, because we know that God is working in all that happens for his own glory and our good. (Romans 8:28, 29)

Q5. Genesis 1 portrays God as Creator who has the right to do as he chooses in his world. Psalm 2 portrays God as the rightful ruler of all the nations and powerful enough to do what he pleases despite any opposition. As Creator and Lord God is the proper one to whom all prayer should be addressed.

Q6. The Psalms are the most often quoted section of the Old Testament by the writes of the New Testament. The book of Isaiah is also frequently quoted. I like the Gospel of Matthew, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Any program of scripture memory will definitely strengthen your prayer life.

When we use scripture in our prayers there is a confidence that we are speaking to God in thoughts and words that are "authorized" and fitting. I have often found that if I refer to a scripture passage that it both grounds me and directs me in what to say.

Q7. The prayer is directed to God the Father as the sovereign Lord of creation and ruler of the world. Jesus is referred to as the "holy servant" and anointed one. The Holy Spirit is the one who spoke through David and which filled the first Christians with power in response to their prayer.

Praying with an eye towards God as Father, Son and Spirit is a great aid. A good way to think about the Trinity is: the Father is our source, the Son is our rescuer and healer, the Spirit is our companion and guide.

Q8. We will seldom if ever see spiritual opposition in its "disembodied" form. It almost always comes through someone or something. In this case, it was the leaders of the Jews and Gentiles, both the religious and political arms of the ruling powers.

When considering spiritual opposition today, we must be careful not to make anyone synonymous with evil. As one poet put it, "The enemy is bigger than the one who pulls the trigger."

On the other hand, we do need to know that forces of opposition to the gospel of Jesus Christ is at work in personal, political, and cultural arenas. That is why prayer should always be the first line of spiritual warfare.

Q9. To be put in same category as Jesus and David--servants, is certainly an association of dignity. There is nothing more significant, important or dignified than being the servant of the living God. On the other hand, we are servants and therefore seek to do the will of another. We are not the source of power or purpose in the world. Our position of humility and dignity are expressed by Jesus "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

Q10. They are seeking boldness in the face of dangerous opposition. After all, these are the same people who put Jesus to death.

Note that in their prayer for boldness that they are eagerly facing the danger of the cross for the sake of the gospel.

Q11. They are merely using other words to pray the first half of the Lord's prayer "Hollowed be your name, let your kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

To pray for power to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ is to participate in the coming of God's kingdom to earth.

Q12. When people believe in Jesus they are entering into God's kingdom and submitting under his Lordship. As members of your group discuss this, encourage them to think about their own conversion, the conversion of their friends and the work of Christian mission around the world.

Boldness is a key idea here. In the face of the spiritual pressures of the world and the devil, it is difficult to speak the gospel with confidence. When we do so, it is because we are likewise being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Q13. Principles of prayer I pull from this passage are:

- pray in response to needs
- pray the scriptures
- acknowledge that God is in charge of all that happens in the world
- seek to direct prayer to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- cultivate an attitude of dignity and humility
- refer to current experiences in our prayers
- ask God for what you want

This question may also lead to a discussion of the place of signs of power in demonstrating the kingdom of God--miracles. That's great. But keep it before the group that purpose of miracles is so that the name of Jesus might be boldly proclaimed.

Study 4

Ephesians 1:15-23

Praying for Spiritual Insight

I have a friend who is physically blind. But that certainly doesn't stop him from seeing.

Michael is a psychologist. Clients who meet with him initially have a suspicious response. Their reservation only lasts a week or two. They discover that he has an ability to see the heart. While he may not have eyes that work, he sees the twisted and conflicted experiences of life that bring confusion and pain. With uncanny insight, he guides his clients down a path that brings comfort hope.

This gift of sight, a sight that is not connected with our physical eyes, is one that we all need. In his final prayer in John 17, Jesus sought our spiritual insight. We turn now to the ministry of the Apostle Paul, he too prays for spiritual insight.

From this model prayer of the Apostle Paul we can insight in how to pray for others. We can learn that praying for others includes seeking help in times of crisis, but that intercessory prayer is broader than that. It includes a desire that we learn to see with the "eyes of the heart."

1. When you make a commitment to pray for another person, how well do you do? What sorts of obstacles hinder you?
2. Read verses 15-23. How would you describe this prayer for the Ephesians?
3. How does this prayer compare with the way you pray for others?
4. Read verse 17. Paul is praying for their spiritual growth, he wants them to know God better. Let's consider this in two steps. First, what does it mean to *know* God?

Second, what does it mean to know God *better*?

5. Look at verse 17 again. Why might the Spirit of wisdom and revelation be essential for a growing knowledge of God?
6. Read verses 18-23. What spiritual truth does the Apostle hope the Spirit will reveal to the Ephesians?
7. Wisdom is truth you can live by. How might knowledge of Christ's exalted authority in heaven be a practical help for the way you live?
8. Not only must the Spirit bring revelation from God, he must also open up the eyes of our heart so that we can grasp it. What do you think Paul means by the "eyes of the heart?"
9. What's the difference between seeing with spiritual eyes and physical eyes?

Describe a time when you felt that you have seen with the eyes of your heart.

10. Read 19-23. Paul is praying that God will reveal to the Ephesians a glimpse of his power. According to Paul, what is the power of God like?
11. The Christian life is bound up in the triune God. How are all three persons of the Trinity active in this prayer of the apostle Paul?
12. Look back through the prayer one last time. What emotions and information are woven into this prayer?

Finish the study by praying this prayer for yourself and your church.

Prayer Project:

Day One: Praying for Consistent Christian Living

The Apostle begins his prayer by acknowledging the reputation of the Ephesians --their faith and love. Begin your prayer time by reflecting on what the Apostle might have heard about you. Pray that God will lead you to a life of consistent daily Christian faith and love.

Day Two: Praying for Spiritual Eyesight

Ask God to open the eyes of your heart so that you might know him better. After you have done that, think through things that have happened to you this past week. Consider how God might have been active in showing himself to you. Be sure to make a note of your reflections.

Day Three: Praying for Spiritual Insight into Your Church

Jesus is Lord of the church--of your church. Ask God to help you see that way the ways he has been working. Write down actions/events in the life of your church for the past several months. After you have done that spend some time in thanksgiving and praise.

Day Four: Praying for the Knowledge of Eternal Life

Pray today for spiritual perception. Because Jesus has been raised beyond death, we have a sure and certain hope of eternal life. Write down in your own words the phrase, "*Even though I die, I am going to live forever.*" Once you have done that, make a list of three or four ways that believing this will make a difference in your life.

Day Five: Praying for Others

Now that you have prayed for your own spiritual perception, pick several others to pray for. Write down their names. Pray this prayer of the Apostle Paul for each of them.

Commentary/Leaders Notes

Purpose: Learning how to pray for spiritual growth

Q1. Encourage members to think of one or two specific people that they pray for. Also encourage them to talk about what affects they think their prayers may be producing.

Q2. Prayer and spiritual knowledge are tied together. Notice how the Apostle begins by praying for them and ends up by instructing them.

Q3. This question is not meant to intimidate any one or make them feel badly about how they pray. Its purpose is to encourage a reflection on personal patterns of prayer.

Q4. Knowing God is the aim of the Christian life. This is an on going process in which we will grow for eternity. Perhaps you might help your group explore how knowing God involves coming to church, but is more than church attendance. Or how knowing God involves Bible study, but it is more than Bible study.

Q5. Knowledge of God is something we must aspire to and seek. But it is never something that we can achieve. It is always above and beyond us. It is a gift which he gives. That is why spiritual knowledge requires prayer.

Q6. The apostle wants them to know the hope of the Christian faith that is rooted in the power of God. Both the hope and power are intrinsically bound up with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

Q7. This may difficult for your group to answer. We are so physically oriented that the heavenly realms are seldom a part of our mental map. It follows that we don't know how to think about the transcendent results of Christ's Lordship in the day to day issues of life.

It is because that Jesus is exalted to heaven that he can help his entire church throughout the globe and through all generations. Prior to his ascension he was limited geographically and temporally to Palestine in the First Century. But after his resurrection, he was raised to heaven, the seat of authority in the universe. From there he can conduct the affairs of the world so that it brings benefits to his church corporately and personally to each one of us in each generation. The result of this knowledge is an underlying faith that " . . . *all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.*" Romans 8:28.

Q 8-9. Help your group think about ways that they discern spiritual truth. Because we live in such a materialistic culture, we have difficulty thinking about spiritual perception. Whatever words we use, "eyes of the heart" or "ears to hear," we have the ability to know that which is beyond our five senses. The apostle Paul writes in II Corinthians 4:18, "*Se we fix our eyes not on what is see, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*"

Q10. The power of God is seen in the eternal resurrection of Jesus. Every one else who has even been raised from the dead, has died again--the widows son raised by Elijah I Kings 17:19-23, the people that Jesus raised; Lazarus, John 11:38-43; and the son of the widow, Luke 7:11-16, and Jairus' daughter, Luke 8:51-56; also Eutychus raised by the Apostle Paul, Acts 20:7-12. Even in fictional literature, whether it is a zombie, Dracula or a Frankenstein, all are holding death at bay, and of course in the end fail. Jesus, on the other hand, is raised to a new realm of life beyond death. He will never die again.

Q11. The Father raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus is ruling his church from heaven and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes these wonderful truths known in the depth of the heart.

Study 5

Ephesians 3:14-20

Praying for Heart Knowledge

I found the study of theology both delightful and frustrating. When I entered seminary I expected to get a grasp of the Christian faith and answers to my questions. After several years of study I gathered lots of information. Some of my questions were answered. But I ended up with more questions than I began with. And with all that study, I wasn't sure that I knew God much better than before.

In walking with the Lord through the years since seminary I have come to see that spiritual truth is full of paradoxes and that's OK. It doesn't fit into neatly defined categories, nor does it have to. We should try as well as we can to understand the Christian Faith. But at some point the mind reaches its limits.

The Apostle Paul, the great teacher of the Christian church, knew that information and instruction alone were insufficient to produce Christian knowledge. His letters are full of information and instruction. He had a great mind and he used it. His words form the basis of essential Christian doctrine. For the past 2,000 years we Christians have poured over his epistles to discover what we should know. But we miss something essential about Paul if we miss the role of prayer. He preaches, teachers and he prays. He knew that prayer was an essential channel of getting spiritual truth into the heart.

In this prayer of the apostle Paul you will come across heart warming truth and mind stretching paradoxes. If you want to grasp what he is writing about then you must join him on his knees.

1. One of the essential avenues of knowledge is personal relationships. What have you learned about living from a parent, good friend or teacher that has come, not through what they said, but how they related to you?
2. Read 3:14-21. This is a family prayer, Paul begins is by writing that he “. . . *kneels before the Father from whom the family of believers in heaven on earth derives its name.*” Describe his attitude toward the Father.

How are family members, i.e. fellow Christians an important part of his prayer?

3. Paul assumes a position of kneeling as he prays. How might our physical posture contribute to our prayer life?

What physical position do you take when you pray?

4. As in chapter 1, the Apostle Paul is praying for their spiritual empowerment. Note his references to spiritual power, vs. 16 and 18. From these verses explain why he considers spiritual power important.

5. There is a contrast between Paul's prayer in chapter 1:20, 21 and chapter 3:17 concerning the dwelling place of Christ. Where is it?

How does each dimension of Christ's dwelling contribute to our Christian experience?

6. Paul prays in verse 17 that "*Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith.*" Since Paul is writing to Christians, surely they already have Christ in their hearts. How do you explain the fact that Paul was praying for what they already had?
7. Paul writes that faith is the means by which Christ dwells with us. When did you first exercise faith to open your heart to Christ's indwelling presence?

What difference did it make in your life?

8. In verse 18 Paul shifts from praying for Christ to indwell us to praying that Christ's love would encompass us. How does each perspective help us understand our relationship with Jesus Christ?
9. According to verse 17, being rooted and established in love is necessary to experience the encompassing love of Christ. In other words, we have to experience love before we can grasp Christ's love. How can we make sense of this paradox?
10. Paul continues unfolding the paradoxes of Jesus Christ in verse 19 when he prays that we would know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge. How can we know that which is beyond our comprehension?
11. Read verses 20 and 21. Paul concludes his prayer. How does this benediction summarize the main themes of his prayers in chapter one and chapter three?

How does his summary underscore the need for prayer in living out the Christian life?

Prayer Project

Praying for the personal indwelling of Jesus Christ

Day One: Praying for the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our minds.

Jesus Christ is Lord of our minds. The way we think about ourselves and the world comes under his authority. Whether we are studying astronomy, biology, physics, or any other science, we are studying what he has made and what he holds together. Pray about your mind and how you use it. Ask the Lord to teach you to think christianly.

Day Two: Praying for the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our hearts.

Jesus wants our hearts. He wants us to love him. He wants us to love others. From the depths of being Jesus Christ wants to be with us, in what we feel in our past and present. Ask the Lord to move into your heart and shape it for his purposes.

Day Three: Praying for the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our wills.

It is not enough to think and feel, we must choose how we act. Pray that Jesus Christ would empower our wills so that we choose faith rather than fear and obedience rather than disobedience is all that we think and feel.

Day Four: Praying for the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our bodies.

Christians have been guilty of ignoring the human body. We tend to focus on the mind, will and emotions and then think we have covered everything. But of course, we have left off an important part of our being. Ask Jesus Christ to indwell your body. Ask him to guide you in how to care for it and how you can yield it to him as a means of obedience and blessing for yourself and others.

Day Five: Praying for the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our relationships.

Jesus has called us to follow him in relationship with others. Pray for your relationships, both inside and outside the church. Pray that Jesus Christ would be in the network of your relationships and using them as a means of spreading his love.

Commentary/Leaders Notes:

Purpose: To understand the role of prayer in grasping God's love in Christ.

Q1. Give people time to think about this question. Initially they may draw a blank, but with a little pause for reflection they will probably discover one or two people who was a powerful influence on their lives.

Q2. This is a reflection of the beginning of the Lord's prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven . . ."

As throughout the entire book of Ephesians God is portrayed with great spiritual riches which he delights in sharing with his children.

Q3. Various postures can help us express the spirit of our prayer. When we are in need it is appropriate to get on our needs. When we are pondering and reflecting, walking or sitting by a tree is helpful. Standing, sitting, kneeling and walking each have a role to pray in help us pray with our bodies as well as our hearts and minds.

Q4. Spiritual power is necessary for spiritual knowledge. What was described as “notional” information in the 17th century, a head knowledge is not sufficient. We move from notional to real when spiritual truth moves through the head to the heart. And that only happens when there is an exercise of spiritual power.

Q5. Christ’s dwelling in the heavenlies is necessary for the exercise of his spiritual authority. Christ’s dwelling in our hearts is necessary for the experience of his love.

Q6. It is one of the principles of prayer throughout the scriptures that God wants us to ask for what he has already promised or has even given us in the past. We ask for daily bread today even though he gave bread yesterday.

Q9-10. Don’t look for a “right” answer here. Many rich insights will come out from your group as they ponder this question.

Q11. God is the one who has power and grace that he is eagerly pouring these out through Jesus Christ for his church. The goal of all scriptural teaching and Christian experience is the glory of God.

Study 6

Colossians 1:3-14

Praying for Spiritual Growth

When I was a boy, in the kitchen of our home, there was a wall with a series of pencil marks. The marks began about four feet from the floor and extended up to almost six feet. They were a visual record of the growth of the Eyre boys. There were times when I couldn't wait to stand against the wall and add my marks to those of my two older brothers. My mother or father would take a pencil and rest it on top of my head and scratch a line. Then I would stand back and see how my height had progressed since the last time.

Physical growth is something that you can measure with a pencil and a yard stick. It was always exciting to see how I was matching up to my brothers who preceded me. But how do you measure spiritual growth? You can't stand against a wall and mark it. Nor can you bring out a spiritual yard stick.

Somewhere along the way it became clear that my physical growth wasn't keeping up with that of my brothers. I began to pray that somehow that I could reach the 6 ft mark of my oldest brother. But the biological code in my genes didn't respond. Eating right, drinking milk, lots of exercise made me healthier, but those things didn't make me grow taller. I wasn't going to be a midget, but I wasn't going to be a tall either.

The good news about spiritual growth is that, while it can't be measured with a yard stick, it can be stimulated and encouraged by the right kind of spiritual nurture. And unlike physical growth that stops in your late teens, you can continue to grow spiritually throughout your life.

The Apostle Paul was concerned that the infant churches, filled with new believers, got off to a healthy start. When we read his letters and pay attention to the content of his prayers we can discover just what is necessary to keep our spiritual growth going at its optimal rate.

When you were growing up, how did you feel about your physical growth?

1. Read 1: 3-8. Paul's opening paragraph is filled with affirmation. What does Paul like about the Christians at Colossi?
2. Read 1:9- 14. Paul wants to encourage the continued spiritual growth of the Colossians. In a sentence or two, summarize Paul's prayer in your own words.
3. Frequently the prayers we pray for others are based on pressing needs and problems. How is this prayer different?
4. Read verse 9. Paul wants the Colossians to grow in spiritual wisdom through the knowledge of God's will. How do you think spiritual wisdom and God's will are related?
5. How might knowledge of God's will help you with the issues and problems you must deal with?

6. In verse 9 Paul prays for knowledge of God's will. In verse 10, he prays that the Colossians may grow in the knowledge of God. What is the difference?
7. In verse 10 Paul prays that they may live a life that pleases the Lord. How would you describe the manner of life that is pleasing to God?
8. How do you think prayer contributes to such a divinely pleasing way of life?
9. In verse 11 and 12, Paul prays for strength so that they may have endurance, patience and gratitude. Why might it be necessary to pray for strength in order to exercise each one?
10. Read verses 12-14. Paul's prayer moves to gratitude for deliverance from spiritual darkness. What insights does he give us into the process of salvation?
11. How have you experienced this process in your own life?
12. This prayer is a major element in Paul's efforts to help the Colossians grow. What is the difference between telling someone about God and praying that they may know God?
13. How do you think prayer may have contributed to your knowledge of God over the past year?

Prayer Project

Day One: Knowing God through his Word

Step 1. Pray that you may grow in the knowledge of God.

Step 2. Knowledge of God comes to us through his written Word--the Scriptures and his living Word--Jesus Christ. So, read Colossians 1:15 and 16 and then write it out in the space provided.

Step 3. Find as many things as you can be thankful about in those verses and tell God.

Day Two: Knowing God in our hearts

Step 1. Pray that you may grow in the knowledge of God.

Step 2. Spiritual knowledge comes as we embrace the meaning of God's word in our hearts and minds. Read Colossians 1:17 and 18. Write it out in your own words in the space provided.

Step 3 Ask God to show you how Jesus is holding our world and your life together under his authority. Then one by one, give over as many details of your life to him as you can think of. Acknowledge that everything you do and have finds its source in him.

Day Three: Knowing God in his Grace

Step 1. Pray that you may grow in the knowledge of God.

Step 2. Spiritual knowledge comes because we can approach God instead of running away with our sense of guilt. Read Colossians 1:19-20. Write them out word for word.

Step 3. Jesus' cross is the bridge between you and God. Perhaps you could picture a huge gap between you and God. The gap is spanned by Jesus' cross. See yourself walking across the bridge. If you make the effort to see this in your mind's eye you will probably have an emotional responses as well. Jot down your emotional responses and then express them to God.

Day Four: Knowing God Through Jesus Christ

Step 1. Pray that you may grow in the knowledge of God.

Study 6: Praying for Spiritual Growth

Step 2. If you want to know God is like, look at the life and death of Jesus Christ. Reread Colossians 1:15. I summarize the first part of the verse by saying that Jesus is the visible God. See if you can recall two or three things that Jesus did that are recorded in the gospels. (Perhaps you may have to reach back in your memory from earlier Sunday School classes.) Consider what personal qualities they portray and write them down.

Step 3. Ask God to give you spiritual insight into how the qualities of Jesus you wrote down can be helpful and encouraging to you in the issues that you face.

Day Five: Praying that others may know God

Step 1. Pray that you may grow in the knowledge of God.

Step 2. Those who are growing in the knowledge of God want others to know him to. Reread Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-14. Write it out in your own words.

Step 3. Now pray that prayer for 3 other people/groups. Perhaps you could pray for your family, your church and a good friend.

Step 4. How do you think that you have grown in the knowledge of God this week?

Commentary/Leader's Notes

Purpose: To explore prayer as a means of growing in the knowledge of God.

Q2. Paul has never met the Colossians. The church was started by Epaphras. It appears that the new believers have some hesitations about how authentic their faith is. There were other religious groups that were telling them they need to do more. Paul assures them that he has heard in detail about their growth and wants to assure them that they are on the right track and doing well.

Q4. This could really be an eye opening question for your group. So often we come to God with a shopping list of things he is supposed to do and list of immediate needs. Paul's prayer, while addressing the anxiety of the Colossians about their spiritual knowledge calls them to see the bigger pictures of God's redemptive work.

Q5. Spiritual knowledge is not some esoteric information that is only assessable through years of study and meditation. Paul's letter to the Colossians contains spiritual knowledge--which is centered in the redemptive work of his son Jesus Christ. Living according to God's will has to do with living by faith in Jesus Christ and receiving the grace he extends to us through him.

Q6. Help your group members think through how the grace and Lordship of Jesus Christ might provide a way to address day to day concerns.

Q7. Knowledge of God involves obeying God. You can't get to know God better if you avoid him because you feel guilty and live in a way that makes you want to avoid him.

One potential direction of this question is to explore what it means to get to know God better. How is it possible to grow in the personal dimension of a relationship with our creator?

Q8. It may be helpful to encourage members of the study to think about someone they know who's integrity and personal devotion to God is a model for others.

Q9. It has been my experience that people who live with a godly integrity have a consistent time set aside to pray on a regular basis. Those who spend time in prayer know the power of God's authority to lead and guide them. Such a knowledge of God leads to patience for God to work, endurance to keep going until God chooses his time to act. Such a knowledge of God's powerful care cultivates a response of gratitude.

Q10-11. There may be members of your group who have not yet grasped that God has rescued us from Satan and forgiven our sins forever. If so, this question affords you a great opportunity to reaffirm the grace of God that extends grace to all who call on his son.

Q12. This question may tend to cause some folks to feel guilty. Try to direct the question so that it doesn't condemn but challenges to a new or renewed commitment to pray. Emphasize the theme brought up in question 4, that prayer is more than just asking God to fix problems. Encourage them to see that prayer is a means to a deeper personal relationship with God.

Study 7

Revelation 5:1-14

Praying and Worshipping the Lord

Funny thing, but if you see a haven't seen a old friends for a number of years, you can pick right up where you left off. On the other hand, a close with relationship with a current loved one requires constant maintenance. Without frequent expressions of care weeds spring up that reduce intimacy and cause the affectionate exchange of hearts to cool.

This dynamic of intimacy applies to our loved ones and to God. We need to worship God frequently. Not because he gets angry with us if we don't, but because it keeps our communion with him fresh and warmly alive. Without frequent expressions of affection, that is what worship is, we can find ourselves feeling distant towards God for no particular reason, it just happens. The depth of intimacy with God comes when we spend time telling him how much we appreciate him and how open we are to receive his care.

What responses to you have to your worship experiences on Sunday morning when you attend your churches worship service?

1. Read Revelation 5:1-14. How could many of the activities of this scene in heaven be described as prayer?
2. John experienced grief over the absence of a worthy person any where in heaven or earth. Look at verses 7-12. How is the theme of worthiness woven throughout this chapter?
3. How is worthiness an important issue in our practice of prayer?
4. What picture do you get of Jesus from the contrasting images of Jesus in verses 5 and 6?

How do our mental images of the Lord affect our prayer and worship?

5. In verse 8 the four heavenly creatures and the twenty four elders fall down before the lamb. What do the incense bowls and harps add to their expressions of worship?
6. What aids to you find helpful in worship?
7. The 24 elders and the four living creatures fall down *together* in worship. What is the benefit of praying as a group?
8. Read Revelation 5:9-14. What different groups bring praise to the Lord and what do their songs have in common?

How can singing with others be an aid to our worship?

9. In verse 14 the four living creatures and the twenty four elders fall down and worship with a resounding “Amen.” What is the difference between their Amen and the way it is conventionally used in prayer?
10. As we get a glimpse of history we can see that, in the end, all prayer will become a song of worship. How can this insight enrich the practice of your prayer life now?

Prayer Project

Seeking to include multiple elements of prayer in our communion with God.

Day One: Prayer and the Dynamics of Being Worthy.

How do you feel about yourself when you come into the presence of God? After their sin in the Garden, Adam and Eve were hiding in the bushes when God came for a visit. As a race we tend to head for the bushes at the very thought of God.

After reflecting for a few minutes, write down what events, experiences or attitudes make you feel unworthy to be with God?

Christ's death is sufficient to take away our sin and remove the feelings of guilt. Give over your list of offenses to him and ask him to take them away. After sitting in a few moments of silence write down any responses you may have.

Day Two: Prayer and Our Mental Images.

How do you "see" the Lord? We all have impressions or ideas of what he is like. Although we may not be aware of it, we tend to attach images or symbols to those ideas. Pause for a few moments of silence and allow any mental images of the Lord you may have to come to mind. Write them down.

What do these images show about the way you think about God?

Why not use the images of Revelation 5 to enrich your worship and mental life. Join with the four creatures and twenty four elders around the throne of the lamb and offer him a time of adoration and thanksgiving.

Day Three: Prayer and Worship Aids.

Martin Luther wrote about the need to get our hearts in the mood for prayer, of "warming the heart". Sometimes we just don't feel like praying. That's one of the way that worship tools comes in handy. Through the use of a psalm or devotional passage in a book our hearts can be warmed and we can be drawn into prayer. Sometimes I light a candle and put it beside my chair to help me settle into a more reflective and quiet mood.

If you have a favorite worship tool use it now. Note how it affects the way you respond toward God in prayer.

If you don't have a favorite worship aid, I suggest that you read psalm 34 or 103. Don't just read them, enter into them and identify with the author in his experience of worship. After you have done so, write down any reflections you may have of your worship experience.

Day Four: Prayer as a Song

Christians have used music as a powerful means of warming the heart for prayer. The history of Western music is closely tied to the practice of Christian worship. For your prayer time today, get a hymn book or perhaps just recall some of the verses to one of your favorite hymns. Write the verses out on a piece of paper, think about what they mean and then sing them over several times, until you feel yourself singing from the heart in worship.

Or perhaps you have a favorite musician who is devotionally inspiring. I am currently using several C.D's by Twila Paris. I find that when I get alone with her music for a period of time that I can sing along in my heart to the words and music that I hear.

Day Five: Prayer as an Amen

When we say Amen, we are saying that we embrace, from the heart, the truth of what has been spoken. Read over the song of the four living creatures and twenty four elder in Revelation 5:9-10. Write it out in your own words.

Now make up a melody for it. (As long as you do this in private you don't have to worry about someone hearing you.)

Conclude your time with an Amen that means I believe what I have just said with all my heart. Then sit for a while in quiet as you let the ripples of affirmation spread through your heart and mind.

Commentary/Leader's Notes

Purpose: To see how worship is an important dynamic of prayer.

Q2. This question picks up one of the underlying themes of study guide, that prayer is multi-dimensional. When we pray we not only ask for God's help, but confess our sins, sit in quiet adoration or join with others to sing his praises.

Q3-4. The underlying theme of worship in this chapter and the image of the lamb are a powerful reminders that Christ died to bring us into the presence of God. It is Christ himself, through his sacrificial death that makes prayer possible.

As Christians we are to pray in Jesus' name. This is more than just a liturgical formula to be stuck on to the end of our prayers. To pray in Jesus' name means that we come to God because, although we are unworthy, Christ, the lamb of God is worthy.

Q5. The Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David are images of power and royalty. The image of the lamb is that of sacrifice and service. The number seven in scripture stands for completeness. The lamb's sacrifice is one that is universally sufficient because through the sevenfold spirit it pervades the entire world.

Q6. Have the group pause and think about this. Perhaps you could have them close their eyes and describe the images of the Lord that come to mind.

Q7. The pulpit, the communion table, a cross at the front of the church, the hymn books, the robes the pastors may wear, a journal or note book, an open Bible all these and more help us to worship. What other things can your group think of?

Q8. Praying in a group may be with a prayer group of 3 or more, or with the entire congregation on Sunday morning. Perhaps you could help your group explore how different groups bring out different dynamics of pray.

Q10. We normal use Amen to put a period on our prayer. In effect, we are saying that our praying is over. The dynamic of the Amen here is that of summation, confirmation and celebration. It is not so much as that the prayer is now finished, but that it is consuming and consummating.