

Life Group Leader Guide #4

3/5/17

Prayers in Scripture

This month the focus of our Life Groups will be on the practice of prayer. Unlike previous sessions, this week we will focus more on Bible study, and less on actual practices. The goal here is to see what Scripture actually has to say about prayer, what biblical prayers look like, and compare that to the ways we usually approach prayer.

Prayer, for us, is often a time in which we merely ask God for things. We may spend some time thanking God for this day, or for forgiving our sins, but prayer often seems like a time in which we make formal requests to God, hoping He will oblige. Prayer is often impersonal for us, especially more public prayers. Many people struggle in their prayer lives because it just seems like a transaction: insert prayer, receive answer (or maybe not).

The truth is, prayers take many different forms in Scripture, and many biblical characters prayed in ways that would make us uncomfortable. Moses and Abraham challenge God, after God has made a decree, and ask him to change his mind. Jesus asks for a change of plans right before his crucifixion. David and the prophets pray angrily or approach God with doubts—even questioning God’s methods or reasons for doing what He does. And Hannah, begging God for a son, prays to him, and He hears her even though she never said a word out loud. Our prayers tend to be very cut-and-dry, but a quick study of the men and women who prayed in Scripture reveals that prayer can, and should, be vibrant, open, honest, raw, and personal. The word prayer means “pouring out,” and the idea is that we are to speak to and with God on a personal level, pouring out our hearts to him, unafraid to tell him what we are really feeling (He knows already—He can handle it).

So, this week we will discuss some of those difficult or different passages relating to prayer. These will come from the Old and New Testaments, and we will get to see how God’s people have prayed in the past, what they have said, and how God has responded to them. We won’t get to discuss every one, so we will provide a short list of other passages for the group members to study during the following week.

Group leaders are highly encouraged to study these passages before Sunday night and be ready to lead your group in reflecting on them. You do not have to have all the answers, but please be prepared for some of the questions that may come up during the discussion and think about how they may apply to our prayer lives today. Refer to the list on the discussion guide if you would like to read other passages to prepare.

Discussion Guide:

Opening Question: *What kinds of things do you usually say in your prayers? Are they more about asking God for things, praising him, or thanking him for what He has done?*

Bible Study: *Turn to the following passages and discuss....*

- Matthew 6:5-15 – *Jesus’s instructions/The Lord’s Prayer*
 1. *Why do you think Jesus wants our prayer time to be private?*
 2. *If God knows what we need before we ask him, why do we have to ask him?*
 3. *Does Jesus’s prayer assume we are active followers of God?*
- Exodus 32:7-14 – *Moses Intercedes for Israel*
 1. *What effect did Moses’s prayer have on God’s decision to destroy Israel?*
 2. *Did Moses really change God’s mind by praying?*
 3. *Was Moses wrong for trying to convince God to change?*

(You may also compare Exodus 32:30-35—here, God answers Moses differently.)
- Mark 14:32-42 – *Jesus’s Prayer in the Garden*
 1. *Did God grant Jesus’s prayer? If so, how?*
 2. *How many times did Jesus pray the same thing? Why do you think He did this?*
 3. *Was this prayer about changing God’s mind, or being with God in troubling times?*
- Luke 1:46-55 – *Mary’s Prayer of Praise (Magnificat)*
 1. *Why was Mary saying this prayer?*
 2. *How often do we say prayers to simply praise God?*

Discussion:

- *Do the prayers in Scripture look like yours? How are they similar/different?*
- *According to these passages (and others), should everyone’s prayer life look the same?*
- *How do you think we, as a community, can pray more biblically?*

Additional Verses about Prayer: *(For further study later in the week if desired)*

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| • Genesis 18:16-33 | • Daniel 6:6-10 | • Acts 6:1-6 |
| • Exodus 3:1-4:17 | • Mark 15:33-34 | • Acts 10 |
| • Exodus 5:22-6:1 | • Luke 11:1-4 | • Ephesians 3:14-21 |
| • 1 Samuel 1:9-18;
2:1-10 | • Luke 11:5-13 | • Colossians 1:3-14 |
| • 1 Samuel 15:10-11 | • Luke 18:1-8 | • 1 Thessalonians
5:17-18 |
| • 2 Kings 20:1-6 | • Luke 18:9-14 | • Hebrews 4:14-16 |
| • Habakkuk 1:2-4, 12-
17 | • John 17 | • James 5:13-18 |
| | • Acts 1:21-26 | |
| | • Acts 2:42 | |