

Why Do We Need to Pray?

radiate

Settling In: *About 10-20 minutes*

- 1) Make a note to yourself who, if anyone, is missing from your home group this week:
- 2) Spend some time finding out how everyone is doing: make a note for prayer requests.
- 3) Introduce a time of conversational prayer. Make it clear that group members are not required to participate if they are not comfortable.

This is only for your information...don't make a big deal of who is missing to the members who are present.

or

- 4) After a more brief time of prayer...meditate on some of these famous quotations on prayer:
 - a) There is a mighty lot of difference between saying prayers and praying. -- John G. Lake
 - b) One can believe intellectually in the efficacy of prayer and never do any praying. --Catherine Marshall
 - c) We must alter our lives in order to alter our hearts, for it is impossible to live one way and pray another. --William Law
 - d) Pray, and let God worry. -- Martin Luther
 - e) God does not delay to hear our prayers because He has no mind to give; but that, by enlarging our desires, He may give us the more largely. -- Anselm of Canterbury
 - f) Men may spurn our appeals, reject our message, oppose our arguments, despise our persons; but they are helpless against our prayers. --J. Sidlow Baxter

Conversational prayer means each member taking turns praying for various concerns with reasonably short and to the point prayers.

Opener: *About 10 minutes*

- 1) Ask several group members to share their most dramatic answer to prayer.

You may not have time to ask every question in the study. Also, some of the discussion questions may not be appropriate depending on who is at the home group on a particular night. That's okay! We've intentionally given you more material than you can usually use.

Mini-teach: *About 10 minutes*

Common questions about prayer.

- 1) What are some questions people might raise about the practice of prayer? Make a list.
- 2) Here are some common questions with some comments that might lead toward some answers:
 - a) If God is good and all-knowing, won't he just do what is best for everyone even if we don't pray?
 - i) No. God is serious about making us his partners in his plan to redeem creation. (Mt. 9:37,38; I Cor. 1:9,30; 3:9)
 - ii) There are some things that God will do whether we pray or not; but there are many things God will not do except in response to our prayers.

Allow some time for discussion before suggesting any from the list below.

Rather than teach this section as an outline, lead a discussion with the questions. The "answers" below each questions are not necessarily meant to be the "right" answers but some suggestions of a direction of discussion that might be fruitful.

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- b) What about good people with strong faith who don't get their prayers answered?
 - i) God answers all prayers: Yes, No, or Wait.
 - ii) Sometimes the good we pray for is in conflict with a greater good.
 - iii) If all life's hardships could be cancelled by miraculous answers to prayer, life itself would be unpredictable and unmanageable because there would no longer be any sense of "cause" and "effect".
- c) Can we really believe that a God who is responsible for the whole universe be interested in my little problems? Isn't that arrogant of us?
 - i) There is no reason to suppose that God's attention span is sequential...it is reasonable to assume that God is aware of everything at the same time. You have God's undivided attention 24/7.
 - ii) God is aware of our problems whether we pray about them or not.
- d) How can we know that what we call answered prayer isn't just happy coincidence?
 - i) William Temple (former Archbishop of Canterbury): "When I pray, coincidences happen, and when I don't pray, they don't."
 - ii) It is not possible to make a miracle so great that a fanatical non-believer can't doubt it. There were doubters among the eyewitnesses of the risen Jesus.
- e) How can you know if you are praying the "right" way to get your prayers answered?
 - i) Worrying about "praying right" is kind of like a child worrying about the "right" way of asking his loving father for something to eat.
 - ii) Attitude is more important than form: faith, humility, and submission.

One of the most fundamental, but often overlooked elements of prayer is that *God wants more than to fix your problems and make your life easy*. He has made you for a relationship to himself and an essential part of that interaction is to restore his image (desires, goals, morals, character, behaviour...) in you. While this is not the complete answer, most of these questions cannot be satisfactorily answered apart from this realization.

Discussion 1: About 15 minutes

Asking and Receiving

"Ask, and you will receive. Search, and you will find. Knock, and the door will be opened for you. Everyone who asks will receive. The one who searches will find, and for the one who knocks, the door will be opened. "If your child asks you for bread, would any of you give him a stone? Or if your child asks for a fish, would you give him a snake? Even though you're evil, you know how to give good gifts to your children. So how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?" (Matt. 7:7-11, GWORD)

- 1) Why does God put us in the position of asking?
- 2) Note the triad of words: Ask, Search, and Knock. What kinds of situations might these represent?
- 3) What is promised when we ask?

"Even though you're evil..." should not be taken as evidence that our parents are evil! Rather, it is the contrast of the goodness of God against the imperfection of humans that Jesus is emphasizing.

Asking maintains a balance of God's intervention and our will. He intervenes mainly when he is asked rather than "run over" our will.

Also, by asking, we must come to grips with who he is and who we are.

Asking for provision; searching for answers; knocking for entry or opportunity.

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- 4) Jesus compares God to a loving and wise father. How does it assure us of receiving an answer? How does this metaphor qualify (limit) the promise of answered prayer?

Discussion 2: *About 15 minutes* Prayer and Faith

“ He told them, “Because you have so little faith. I can guarantee this truth: If your faith is the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” (Matt. 17:20, GWORD)

- 1) According to Jesus, why couldn't the disciples heal the child? What does he mean by “so little faith”?
- 2) The mustard seed was among the smallest known seeds. Is Jesus simply calling for more belief that the child could be healed?
- 3) Where should our faith be focused? On what we want to happen? On our attitude? On our feelings? On our skill in prayer? On God? What's the difference?

Perhaps a good way to look at this statement about small faith is something like “getting” a good joke (not that Jesus’ statement is a joke!). Either you “get it” or you don’t. Once you “get” who God is, the size of the obstacle is irrelevant!

- 4) Should we take Jesus' statement about the mountain literally and absolutely? Taking a statement seriously is not always the same as taking it literally. What does this mean in our lives on a day-to-day basis?

I would suggest that you summarize the context of the story of the healing of the demonized child instead of reading it.

Relate this back to Jesus' metaphor of a child asking his father for something to eat. A father would be very disappointed if the child was focused on some kind of manipulation to get from him what he already was eager to give!

If it is, we could start a Christian earthmoving company without any equipment!

He is saying that you will never face an obstacle too big for God!

Closer:

Journaling exercise: What are some “mountains” that, until now, have seemed too big to move? If you “get” who God is, what does that do to your mountains? How might it change how you have been praying about your challenges and obstacles in life?

Set aside some time for prayer for one another's “mountains”.