

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Prayer 1: What is prayer (and why is it difficult?)



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How do we pay attention to God?



Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

The daily attitude of a disciple is being attentive to God in our daily lives, and responding to what He is doing. Prayer is simply the “love language” which helps us to connect with God in this way. There are many aspects to prayer, and various practices that help with this, just as there are many different ways we relate to each other as human beings.



Prayer is “talking with God”, but it’s much more than “saying our prayers” – it’s doing whatever helps us deepen our friendship with God, in a life-giving, regular way. It’s “practising the presence of God”. Brother Lawrence, a monk who came up with that phrase, said, “Think often on God, by day, by night, in your business and even in your diversions. He is always near you and with you; leave him not alone.”

Pete Grieg, writer of the Prayer Course, says, “I am convinced....that our constant activity is fruitless without first making that humble act of kneeling to pray. I am convinced that prayer is not only our greatest privilege, but also our greatest source of power.” Abraham Lincoln put it like this: “I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go; my own conviction and that of those around me seemed insufficient for the day.”

Prayer was completely central to Jesus’ life. He prayed by himself, with his disciples, in the synagogue, before big decisions, for his disciples, as part of His ministry, in every kind of situation.

He went into the desert to pray, He prayed for long periods and during the night. He taught His disciples to pray. He battled in prayer. He often withdrew to lonely places and prayed (Luke 5:15-16) He prayed honestly and in anguish “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22:42)

His last words were a prayer: Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” (Luke 23:34) He prayed naturally and out loud: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me....I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.” (John 11:41-42) He prayed out of deep sense of being loved, and loving, His Father (John 17:13-26). He did nothing without praying – for Him it was neither a duty nor a burden.

The paradox of prayer for us is that, while it is the most natural thing as people who yearn for God to pray, it is at the same time something that needs to be learnt. That is why His disciples asked, “Teach us to pray.” We might feel we don’t really enjoy prayer, or feel guilty about how little we pray. We might find it hard to know where to start, or get distracted. The good news is that God delights in our simplest attempts at prayer (much like a parent gets excited about a child’s first steps). Cardinal Basil Hume said, “Trying to pray is prayer and it is very good prayer.”

As disciples, we are all learners, and there is a lot of wisdom and resource we can draw on. At its heart is something very simple, which this story might help us to experience.

A man's daughter had asked the local vicar to come and pray with her father. When the vicar arrived, he found the man lying in bed with his head propped up on two pillows and an empty chair beside his bed. The vicar assumed that the old fellow had been informed of his visit. "I guess you were expecting me," he said. "No, who are you?" "I'm the new vicar at your local church," the vicar replied. "When I saw the empty chair, I figured you knew I was going to show up." "Oh yes, the chair," said the bedridden man. "Would you mind closing the door?" Puzzled, the vicar shut the door. "I've never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the man. "But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the vicar talk about prayer, but it always went right over my head." "I abandoned any attempt at prayer," the old man continued, "until one day about four years ago my best friend said to me, 'Joe, prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here's what I suggest. Sit down on a chair; place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, 'I'll be with you always.' Then just speak to him and listen in the same way you're doing with me right now." "So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful, though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm." The vicar was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the man to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with him, and returned to the church. Two nights later the daughter called to tell the vicar that her father had died that afternoon. "Did he seem to die in peace?" he asked. "Yes, when I left the house around two o'clock, he called me over to his bedside, told me one of his corny jokes, and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the shops an hour later, I found him dead. But there was something strange, in fact, beyond strange—kind of weird. Apparently, just before Daddy died, he leaned over and rested his head on a chair beside the bed."

Discuss: How do you find prayer natural or difficult? Look at the picture of the Creation of Adam on the handout. How might this encourage you to pray?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Mark 6: 5-18 in which Jesus teaches about prayer.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

Watch the video at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqq57xQvVwE>

What struck you as important in the video?



Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

Before we even start to pray, these perspectives may help.

God cares about our daily needs, and knows every hair on our heads. We can trust in the goodness of God's character. The Lord's Prayer encourages us to pray for our "daily bread" – in other words, for the simple things we need every day. Prayer is much more about a transforming relationship, rather than "twisting God's arm" to get results. Yet even if we have genuine needs, we do not need to approach God with anything apart from trusting love, as He longs to bless us.

We can be completely ourselves before God without pretence. CS Lewis said that the prayer that comes before all other prayers is, "May it be the real me, speaking with the real You." We don't need to pretend to be more holy or pure than we are. We don't need to wait until our motives are right – God knows the heart.

Jesus describes prayer as coming before God without a mask (not like a hypocrite), as being able to pray with the straightforwardness of a child addressing a parent, as losing any sense of having to "impress" God by getting it right, as not having any sense of having to persuade God by performing because we trust He is good.

God wants us to pray with total honesty about the things we find hard – we call this lament. It is possible to be respectful of God, and yet completely honest about our doubts, fears and anger. In the book, "The Good and Beautiful God" the writer describes a very honest prayer from an orthodox priest for someone's two year old daughter who was suffering terribly, "Our thoughts are not Your thoughts O Lord, and our ways are not Your ways. We confess to You that we cannot see Your divine hand in the suffering of Madeline...Our minds are confused. Our hearts are in distress. Our wills are lost and weak, and our strength is gone, as we see this innocent creature caught by the sins of the world and the power of the devil, a victim of senseless suffering and pain.

Have mercy on this child, Lord, have mercy! Do not prolong the agony! Do not allow the pain and suffering to increase! We know not what to ask You; give us the grace only to say, 'Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.'

God is praying in us. Because we are covenant-partners with God, He prays in us. He can take the tangle of thoughts in our heads, or our deepest longings, as prayer. This is the meaning of Romans 8: 26 "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

Discuss: Which of these do you find most helpful? Most challenging?

Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

I don't know how to do this—how to talk to you.
But I'm going to try right now and say these words.
I'm going to step out in faith and trust you can hear me while I share what's in my head and on my heart.
That when you say in the Bible, "Call to me and I will answer you," you're talking to me.
I'm trusting that there's no formula or right way to do this. You're just happy to know I want to talk to you.
Will you talk to me? Whether it's an idea that comes into my mind, or something someone who knows you says to me, I'm going to be listening to you.
And I'm going to try my best to believe that you will talk to me. That you will help me hear you better and show me a way forward.
Amen.



Jeremiah 33:3

Call to me, and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known.

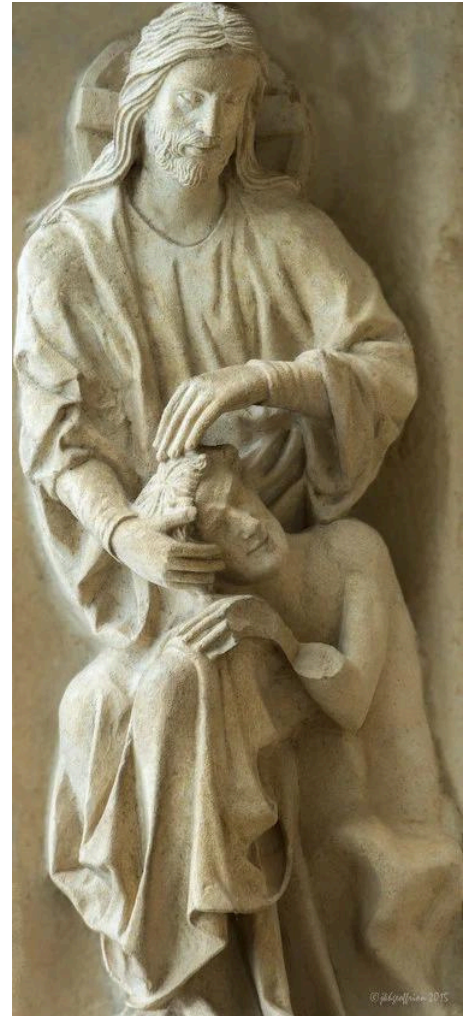


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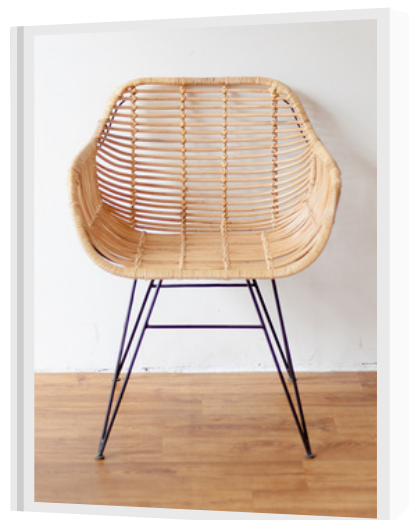
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Additional notes:

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