



# PRAYER

Throughout the Gospels, we read that Jesus “would withdraw to desolate places and pray (Luke 5:16).” Even as he was healing the sick and preaching the Kingdom of God, Jesus would step away to be alone with his Father. Jesus’ disciples noticed this. So they came to him and asked him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). If we want to learn to practice the way of Jesus, then we must come to him and ask him the same thing. “Lord, teach us to pray.”

## **What is Prayer?**

At its core, prayer is a conversation with God. The goal of prayer is not prayer itself. The goal of prayer is to connect with God.

Think about it. When you meet a friend for coffee, when you go on a date with your spouse, when you spend time with your kids—the goal of conversation isn't simply to say words. The goal is to connect with someone you care about. The words simply help you connect with the person. That's what prayer is about. It's about connecting with someone who loves you deeply and whom you love in return.

That's why Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father in heaven”—because prayer isn't about parroting the right phrases. It's about spending time with a Father who loves you and who always has your best interests at heart (Matthew 6:7-8).

As with any conversation, prayer isn't just about talking. It's about listening as well. Prayer is a “rhythm of revelation and response.” God reveals himself to us and then we respond to what he has said to us.

God speaks to us in the created world—in a sunset or a running river or the process of photosynthesis. He speaks to us in our day-to-day lives. He speaks to us in the Scriptures, and ultimately he speaks to us in his Son, Jesus of Nazareth (Psalm 19; John 1:1-18; Hebrews 1:1-3).

God starts the conversation by revealing himself, and we answer back to God. We respond to what he has spoken to us.

And as a follower of Jesus, as one who has become a child of God through Jesus' death and resurrection, you don't have to be afraid to hear from God and to speak back to him. In fact, God is so eager to hear from you that he has placed his Spirit inside of you to help you to pray. "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:15)

Prayer is the primal cry of the follower of Jesus. Sometimes we are like little children who can't do anything anything but cry out, "Daddy." As a father, I love to hear those words more than anything. And your Father in heaven loves you infinitely more than any earthly Father ever could. He wants you to experience his love firsthand. And that's why he invites us to come to him in prayer.

## **Community of Practice**

Significant and sustainable change requires a community of support. We highly recommend that you work through this guide with your missional community, discipleship group, family, roommates, or co-workers. Ideally, this "community of practice" should gather weekly or bi-weekly at a set time (approximately an hour) with some delicious food or drinks to set the right atmosphere. The goal isn't to rigidly follow the guide, but rather to stimulate healthy conversations, reflection, experiments, and accountability.

# WEEK ONE: PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

## Read this Overview

Most people think of prayer as a religious activity. It's something you do when you go to church or before you eat a meal.

But prayer is so much more than that. Prayer is a way of life. Prayer is a posture of the heart toward God. Prayer means living with an awareness of God and responding to him.

That's why the apostle Paul calls us to "pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17) How is that possible? In the midst of busy lives in a busy world, how can we cultivate an ongoing conversation with God in which we are hearing his voice and responding to him?

## Practice Right Now (30 minutes)

This week, we will look at two practices that will help us toward that kind of life with God. As with any practice, this might feel awkward or uncomfortable at first. But over time, these practices will become more natural and life-giving and will help you weave prayer into the fabric of your daily life.

## Practice #1: The Lord's Prayer (20 minutes)

If we want to learn to practice the way of Jesus, then it makes sense to start with what Jesus taught about prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Pray then like this:

*"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil."*

*-Matthew 6:9-13*

Now, when Jesus says, "Pray like this," he doesn't mean that we should merely recite the words of this prayer. In fact, right before he gives us this prayer, Jesus warns us against simply repeating empty words (Matthew 6:7). Jesus didn't give us this prayer as an incantation or a ritual. He gave it to us as a model to show us how to come to the Father in prayer.

If, like most people, prayer is a struggle for you, this is a great place to start. Over the next 15 minutes or so, we're going to walk through the different phrases of this prayer and allow them to direct our hearts toward God. Break into groups of 3-4, put away phones or anything that could cause distraction, and walk through the different movements of this prayer together.

### **"Our Father in heaven..."**

- Take a moment to be quiet and remind yourself that God is a good Father who loves you and wants you to know him
- Thank God that he has welcomed you into his family through his Son, Jesus Christ

### **"Hallowed be your name..."**

- Spend a few minutes praising God for who he is. "God, you are holy, loving, just, etc."
- "God, I pray that you would be hallowed (honored/treated as holy) in my life, community, neighborhood, city, church, family, workplace, world, etc."

### **"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."**

- Take a moment to reflect: What would it look like for God's Kingdom to break into your world? Spend a few minutes asking for God's will to be done in your city/church/community/relationships/life.
- What areas of your life are you wrestling with God for control over? Consider giving that over to God. A simple prayer of, "Your will be done in \_\_\_\_\_," is a great place to start.

### **"Give us this day our daily bread..."**

- Ask if anyone in the group has a specific need they would like prayer for.
- Spend a few minutes praying for specific needs in your life or that of your community.

### **"Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..."**

- Spend a few minutes asking God for forgiveness for specific areas in your life, and releasing others to forgiveness (NOTE: You may choose to do this privately or as a group)

## **“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”**

- What specific temptations or trials do you need God’s help to overcome? Share those with the group and pray for one another.

### **Close by Reading/Reciting the Lord’s Prayer together**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

### **Practice #2: Breath Prayer (10-15 minutes)**

A breath prayer is a short prayer that helps you quiet yourself and hear the voice of God. It’s exactly what it sounds like: a prayer that can be said in a single breath. Most of us don’t have hours of extra time to pray throughout the day. But we do have minutes. And if we want to learn to pray without ceasing, we need to make the most of those brief moments throughout the day. Here is a simple way to start:

- Take a moment to breathe deeply.
- Choose a short phrase from Scripture or a line from a hymn. For example:
  - “Speak LORD, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9)
  - “Unite my hear to fear your Name” (Psalm 86:11)
  - “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1)
  - “Abba, Father” (Romans 8:15)
  - “Nothing shall separate me from the love of God” (Romans 8:39)
  - “Jesus loves me”
  - “Let me hide myself in Thee” (from the hymn Rock of Ages)
- Inhale deeply and then say the phrase as you exhale

The goal of this practice is not simply to parrot a phrase. The goal is to focus your mind and your heart on the beauty of your Father and his love for you. As Mike Cosper writes, “Each phrase is like the tip of an iceberg; it reaches back into a deeper, richer story, and roots us in a larger, God-filled world.”

### **Practice This Week (10 minutes)**

- Each day in the coming week, set aside some time (it could be 5 minutes or it could be 2 hours) to pray through the Lord’s Prayer.

- Choose a phrase to use as your breath prayer this week. Breathe deeply and pray this prayer when you find yourself with a few free minutes throughout the week (in between appointments, during your commute, while the kids are napping, etc).
- **For families with kids:** Lead your children through the Lord's Prayer. Explain it to them in language they can understand.
  - "Our Father in heaven"
    - God loves us and he wants us to know him
  - "Hallowed be your Name"
    - God is strong/perfect/loving/holy/etc
    - Consider singing a song that praises God for who he is
  - "Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as is it in heaven"
    - God is the King and we should listen to him
  - "Give us this day our daily bread"
    - Is there anything you want to ask God for?
    - Is there anything you want to thank God for?
  - "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"
    - God, please help us to love you and love other people
    - God, please protect us and take care of us
    - Thank you that we can trust you

# WEEK TWO: INTERCESSORY PRAYER

## **Debrief Last Week's Practice (10 minutes)**

Break up into smaller groups (ideally 3-4 people) and debrief last week's practice using these questions:

1. How did it go? What impact did it have on your week?
2. What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
3. What changes need to be made to make this better in the future?
4. What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?

## **Read this Overview**

Last week, we said that prayer is about living with an awareness of God and responding to him. It is how we to connect to God and what he is doing in the world. One of the ways we do that is through what the church has historically called "intercessory prayer." Intercessory prayer is simply "praying for other people." Now, that might sound rather mundane or downright boring to you. But this is part of practicing the way of Jesus together for the life of the world.

See, intercessory prayer has two main purposes. Prayer changes the world and prayer changes us.

## **Prayer Changes the World**

God acts in response to our prayers. That is a mind-blowing thought! The God who spoke the universe into existence listens to the words we speak to him and answers our prayers.

However, God doesn't always answer our prayers in exactly the way we think he should. Sometimes his answer is "no" or "not now." Sometimes he wants us to learn to keep asking, seeking, knocking (Luke 11:10) and trust that he is a Good Father who gives good things to his children. And sometimes, he knows that the thing we are asking for is not the thing that is best for us.

## **Prayer Changes Us**

The good news is that prayer isn't just about changing the world. It is also about changing us. As you pray for God's purposes in the world, your heart becomes more aligned with God's heart. As you pray for other people, God liberates you from self-centeredness and teaches you to love your neighbor as yourself.

So, we cry out to God. We cry out for justice and righteousness and wholeness and healing and salvation and the glory of God. But we also rest in the fact that God is a loving Father who knows more than we do. And even when we don't see God changing the world in the ways we think he should, we can see him changing us as he teaches us to trust him.

## **Practice Right Now (20-30 minutes)**

One of the things that keeps us from praying for other people is that we simply don't know how to pray for them. Thankfully, God knows that and he hasn't left us on our own. He has given us his Word and his Spirit to help us.

You can have confidence as you pray that the Holy Spirit is taking your weak attempts at prayer and is praying for you. In Romans 8, the apostle Paul tells us:

*"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Romans 8:26-27)*

God's Spirit prays for us. And God's Word directs us. The Bible is filled with prayers that teach us how to pray for one another (John 17; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-14; Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; etc.). If you are ever at a loss as to how to pray for someone (or yourself, for that matter), start with the prayers that Jesus and the apostles pray for us in the Bible.

Over the next 15 minutes or so, we're going break into groups of 3-4 and spend some time praying for each other and for other people outside of this group. We're going to let the words of Scripture guide and teach us to pray. There is a lot that we could pray for, and this list just scratches the surface. Feel free to divert from this list if the Spirit takes you in another direction.

### **1. Put away phones and anything else that might cause distraction**

### **2. Pray for the spiritual needs in your group**

- Do you have any particular spiritual needs that you'd like the group to pray for?



- Read Colossians 1:9-14

*“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (Colossians 1:9-14)*

- Pray this passage for each other. For example:
  - “God, I pray that you would fill [Jane] with the knowledge of your will”
  - “God, I pray that you would give [Tom] endurance and joy”
  - “God, thank you for rescuing, redeeming, and forgiving us in Christ”

### **3. Pray for the physical needs in your group**

- Read James 5:13-18

*Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. (James 5:13-18)*

- Do you have any physical or financial needs you'd like the group to pray for?
- Do you want us to pray for God to bring healing to any area of your life?

### **4. Pray for people who don't know Jesus to come to saving faith**

- Read Colossians 4:2-4

*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. (Colossians 4:2-4)*

- Think through your networks of relationships: family, friends, co-workers, neighbors. Identify 2-3 people to pray for. Ask that God would open them to the gospel and that he would bring them to saving faith. Ask that God would open a door for the gospel and would give you courage and wisdom to share with them. (Colossians 4:2-4)
- Pray for God to use your MC to introduce people to Jesus
- Pray for our Deacons of Global Missions (Caitlin and Aaron Crow; David and Kendall Webb) as they continue to build systems that will set Soma up for global mission.
- Pray for our missionaries around the world
  - Addison and Katrina Newell (South Africa)
  - Amanda and Matt Meier (Germany)
  - Hannah Welch (Nicaragua)

## **5. Pray for justice in our city and our world**

- Read Amos 5:24 and 1 Timothy 2:1-4

*But let justice roll down like waters,  
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24)*

*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)*

- Pray that our local, state, and national leaders would govern with justice and righteousness
- Pray that Christians would be a counterculture for the common good: that we would live distinctive lives of holiness and love, and that we would work for justice and mercy in our world.
- Ask God to open your eyes to the needs in our neighborhood and city. Ask him for wisdom and compassion and courage to serve those in need.
- Pray for organizations serving the poor and marginalized in our city. A few examples:
  - Churches serving immigrant and refugee populations in our city
  - Safe Families: caring for vulnerable children
  - Julian Center: Caring for women coming out of abusive situations
  - Restored and Purchased: Serving victims of trafficking
  - Unconditional: Serving women in the sex industry
  - Exodus: Helping refugees settle and build a new life here in our city
  - Life Centers: Ministering to women facing unplanned pregnancies

## 6. Leave it in God's hands

- “Father, we trust that you are wise and you are good. We know that you know what we need better than we know it and you love us better than we love ourselves. We lay our prayers before you and we ask you to hear them. And we trust you to answer in whatever way is best. Thank you that we can trust you. Amen.”

### Practice This Week

- **Prayer Cards:** Many of us have good intentions when it comes to praying for other people. We just forget to do it. Consider using prayer cards. A prayer card is simply a note card (you could even use an app on your phone if you prefer) that helps you track needs that you have committed to praying for. Choose (at least) one item from your group prayer time, make a prayer card for it, and pray for it every day over the next week.
- **For families with kids**
  - **Option 1:** Work through the different aspects of intercessory prayer at dinnertime or bedtime. For example, on Monday evening, you might pray for a family member who is sick. On Tuesday, you might pray for people who don't have enough food and think about ways to serve them. On Wednesday, it might be a friend who doesn't know Jesus.
  - **Option 2:** If you received Christmas cards this past year (and if you still have them), consider praying for each individual/family who sent you a card. Take a brief moment at dinnertime or bedtime to look at the card and pray specifically for them by name. (If you don't have Christmas cards, use something else—note cards, popsicle stick with names written on them, etc.)

# WEEK THREE: PRAYER OF EXAMEN

## **Debrief Last Week's Practice (10 minutes)**

Break up into smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

1. How did it go? What impact did it have on your week?
2. What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
3. What changes need to be made to make this better in the future?
4. What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?

## **Read this Overview**

Our world is hectic and busy (\*news flash\*). The cultural moment we live in bounces us from one thing to the next like a pinball. If we are not careful we can go about our day without much thought of God's presence and purpose. Prayer is about being in an active relationship with a Person. Prayer isn't about "saying prayers" or learning new "techniques." Prayer is necessary to deepening our relationship with God and making time daily to do that. Prayer allows us to see all our experiences as given to us by and shared with God himself.

This week's practice of examen prayer is designed to help us grow our awareness of God's grace in every aspect of our daily life. By setting aside a time for reflection at the end of each day, we remember (or examine) that day's moments and our experiences. Over time, the Spirit will help us be more present to ourselves, others, and most importantly, to God.

## **Practice Right Now (15-30 minutes)**

### **Practice: Remembering the day's experiences and "looking for God"**

- Put away phones and anything that could cause distraction.
- Read aloud the following prayer asking the Holy Spirit to guide this time of contemplation:

Holy Spirit we welcome you into our community and we feel your love for us.  
Guide us as we think about our day today. Help us to remember all the moments

both big and small (Pause). Help us to remember moments of kindness and generosity and how to be thankful for them (Pause). Open our eyes to see you (Pause). Amen.

- Walk through the following steps.

### **Step One: Remember the day**

- Notice, however simple, where God has been active in the last few days of your life.
  - Did God provide help or answer prayer?
  - Did you notice something in nature that caused you to think about God?
  - Did someone speak an encouraging word to you?
  - Did you feel grace in particular moment or interaction?
  - Did you experience a moment of joy or happiness?
- Share with the group what happened and how that made you aware of God's presence.

### **Step Two: Name the strongest feelings you have experienced in the last few days**

- This next step isn't aimed at remembering what happened, but is about recognizing when we have felt most strongly moved. Give a name to that particular feeling: joy, depression, anger, delight, contentment, hope, shame, regret, confusion, disgust, compassion, doubt, gratitude, etc.
- Share with the group one example.

### **Step Three: Share one of those strong feelings with Jesus**

- Be honest with Jesus about what "caused" this strong response in you, and try to name accurately which particular feeling you felt.
- Ask Jesus, "Why did I feel that so strongly?" "What does that reveal about my relationship with you?"

### **Step Four: Thank God for being present you in this practice.**

### **Practice This Week (10 minutes)**

- Each day in the coming week, set aside ten or fifteen minutes at the end of your day to practice the Examen.
- Follow the four steps above or use this easy alliteration to remember it by:

Replay: What happened today?

Rejoice: Where did I feel grace today? Where was God particularly present?

Repent: Where did I feel emotional pain today? Where did I sin?

Resolve: To live differently tomorrow, if need be. And sleep with gratitude.

- You can practice examen with young kids by asking the following questions:

Are you thankful for anything that happened today?

Was anything hard about your day? How did that make you feel?

Is there anything you want to ask God to forgive?

### **Close with Reflective Prayer (5-10 minutes)**

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Consider slowly praying the Lord's Prayer together:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

# WEEK FOUR: SINGING PRAYER

## **Debrief Last Week's Practice (10 minutes)**

Break up into smaller groups and debrief using these questions:

1. How did it go? What impact did it have on your week?
2. What was encouraging? What was discouraging?
3. What changes need to be made to make this better in the future?
4. What did this experiment reveal about God, yourself, and others?

## **Read this Overview**

Reflecting on our prayer can produce a lot of disappointment and discouragement. It seems that none of us pray as frequently or as fervently as we want. But here's an encouragement: What if the songs we sing on Sunday, in the car (or shower), and with our kids are actually just a different way of praying? Well, they are! That song you sing about God's greatness is a prayer of adoration. That song that reminds you of God's grace is a prayer of thanksgiving. That song about God's coming justice and restoration is a celebratory prayer of hope. You get the picture.

Worship through singing changes us, it moves God, and it changes situations. Lifting our voices in song can change our hearts and minds about God. It can also change our perspective on the world around us and on our own personal lives. This is the same way we talk about prayer, isn't it? There is something uniquely intimate and powerful about singing our prayers. Both the ache we have over the brokenness of this world and our desire to experience the righteousness of God can be expressed through song.

## **Practice Right Now (15-30 minutes)**

Practice: Sing our desires and present our requests to God through song

The previous weeks have included a practice to do as a group and one to do individuals/families, but this week might be a little different. For your communal practice, there are a few options. You could have a time of worship tonight. If someone likes to lead worship or is musically gifted, using that gift can be a huge blessing to the group. If you don't have a

musician, create a playlist and sing along. Be sure to include a few songs that the kids can sing from groups like Seeds Family Worship or Rain for Roots.

But if this sounds scary to your group or you don't have the resources to make it happen, then sit together this coming Sunday and worship together.

## **Practice This Week (10 minutes)**

Plan a time of worship for yourself or with your family this week.

- Pick a Date/Time: Get out your calendar, and set a time and place to pray that is quiet and distraction free. Maybe it's in the morning before breakfast, on your way to work, on a walk at lunch time, when the kids are down for their nap, or with your kids before bed. Try for 3 days this week.
- Prepare: If you are musically inclined, look up some chords to a favorite worship song. If you aren't, that's ok! Make a playlist or pick out an album – Hillsong, Sojourn, Bethel, Travis Greene, or something instrumental are great options.
- Sing: Play the music (your own instrument or something to sing along to) and sing to God. You can sing along with the songs or make up your own words. In these moments, you can even think of a person or situation that you want God to target with His goodness and Kingdom. Sing over these desires and present your requests to God through song.

## **Close with Reflective Prayer (5-10 minutes)**

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Consider slowly praying the Lord's Prayer together:

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*



# RESOURCES FOR THE JOURNEY

- *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* by Tim Keller
- *Recapturing the Wonder: Transcendent Faith in a Disenchanted World* by Mike Cospers
- *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard
- *With Christ in the School of Prayer* by Andrew Murray
- *The Valley of Vision*
- *Heavenward* (a blog by Scotty Smith)