

# Pray

MATTHEW 6:9-13: PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

**1** As you gather, read the other side of this page to familiarize yourself with the topic for today. Once everyone has gathered, spend a few minutes making sure everyone knows each other and introducing any visitors. If your group fasted, tell about your experiences with it. Open the session with the following prayer:

*Holy God, help us to see and savor your presence in every person here. Guide us to be open and dig deep as we explore and practice prayer together. Amen.*

**2** Think about your experience with prayer and summarize it here in a few words.

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Go around the group and share your responses.

**3** Read “Summary of the Practice” on the other side of this page and then invite everyone to consider what they already know about prayer. Discuss, using the following questions:

- ➔ Growing up, what were you taught about prayer, if anything?
- ➔ Did you learn any prayers by heart?
- ➔ What ways of praying have you experienced as an adult?
- ➔ How does prayer impact your faith right now?

**4** Read “Finding the Practice in the Bible” on the other side of this page and tell what biblical prayers you remember most. Read together the Lord’s Prayer here and name different elements of it that are important to remember when praying.

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 do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but rescue us from the evil one.

—Matthew 6:9-13

**5** Read Philippians 1:3-11. Imagine that your group received this letter from Paul and discuss:

- ➔ How does it feel to have someone thinking about you and praying for you with such joy?
- ➔ Paul mentions his confidence in God’s good work in you. What good work has God done in you, individually and in your group?
- ➔ As Paul prays that you be “pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ,” what responsibilities come with this prayer request?

**6** Read “Finding the Practice Then and Now” on the other side of this page. Invite participants to name opportunities for communal prayer in your congregation or personal life. Discuss how prayer transforms community.

## SUMMARY OF THE PRACTICE

When we consider spiritual disciplines, prayer is probably the first thing that comes to mind. Prayer is central to so much of a Christian's life. Through prayer, we can draw near to God, anywhere, anytime, in any mood, and with our whole selves. Prayer is also interwoven into almost all spiritual disciplines because keeping company with Jesus involves talking to God, listening to God, and simply being with God, in other words, praying. Because prayer is such a rich gift from God, we will make only the briefest dent in what there is to learn about it. It is a lifelong invitation to those who follow Jesus.

## FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

In the Bible, we find rich examples of prayer, in both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament tells stories of people speaking directly with God, like Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3) and prophets like Elijah (1 Kings 19). We also see the people of God praying in situations that sound familiar to us today. Hannah prays for a child (1 Samuel 2); Solomon prays for wisdom (1 Kings 3); David prays for God's forgiveness (Psalm 51); Jonah prays for rescue (Jonah 2).

The New Testament tells of Jesus, having grown up steeped in Jewish prayer traditions, taking regular times for prayer. We see him praying in the temple with others, on mountaintops alone, at mealtimes, with the sick and dying, and at crucial turning points in his life and ministry. Prayer was woven throughout his day. He taught his followers how to pray and modeled for them how prayer was a natural part of the life of a child of God.

## FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Through the centuries, the people of God have prayed in innumerable ways and times. While prayer is intimately personal and a sincere word to God need follow no rules to be correct, we inherit a rich history of words offered by our ancestors in the faith.

Following Jewish and early church practices of regular daily prayer times, Christian monasteries developed fixed hours for prayer. These rhythms surrounded and infused prayer into ordinary moments of work and rest for the community. Some of these monastic traditions have continued for centuries with few changes.

From very structured group prayer times, often called morning and evening prayer, to looser traditions of a solitary "quiet time," followers of Jesus have found that regular daily prayer is a practice that enriches their faith.

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR USING THIS GUIDE

If possible, distribute this sheet to participants before gathering. Be prepared to summarize the information on this page. Bring extra copies, some pens, and a Bible.

## 7

### CLOSING PRAYER

Close in a time of prayer allowing each person to name something they would like to pray for. Close with these verses from 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18:

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Amen.*