



Introducing Prayer

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

A.C.T.S. Prayer

Group Leaders: Review "Group Leader Resources" for this quarter. On p.2-3 you will find the A.C.T.S. model of prayer (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication). Start the first meeting of 2007 in prayer. Ask the group for prayer requests for A.C.T.S. and have different group members pray for each one. Confession may not be an easy one and may have to be in general for our sins. Supplication – make sure to include a prayer for our study of Prayer this Spring.

Adoration:

(example: We adore/appreciate how powerful you are.)

Confession Requests:

Thanksgivings:

Supplication Requests:

We want to begin this study “on the right foot.” There is no better place to start than with God. Prayer is God-centered. It is an act of faith that appeals to who He is and is thankful for what He has done. There are a few things that are critical to understand about God that will deepen our prayer lives.

Psalm 139:1-6

David talks about how well God knows him. He says that God has searched him. When God searches our lives he finds the good and the bad. He finds everything. God knows everything.

David says God’s knowledge is “too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.” (139:6). *Why is God the one to take our questions and concerns to?*

- He has the answers.
- He is wiser than we are

Isa 55:8-9

How does Isaiah say God’s thoughts are different from our thoughts?

- His thoughts are wiser than our thoughts.

How does God being all knowing affect His answers to our prayers?

- He knows just what we need.
- He answers our prayers perfectly.

Psalm 139:23-24

What two things does David say God knows about us in verse 23?

- Heart
- Thoughts.

That means he knows us completely.. He can read our mind. There is nothing we can hide from Him. *How does God’s wisdom encourage us to be honest with God in our prayer life?*

- We cannot hide anything from Him so we should be open and honest with Him about our lives and what we are dealing with.

If God knows everything, why do we need to pray to Him?

- Even though God already knows everything, he expects us to take initiative in approaching Him in humility.
- He desires a relationship with us and relationships require communication.
- Just because your husband/wife knows you very well and may even know what you are thinking at times doesn’t mean you stop talking with him/her.

How does God’s knowledge of our lives help empower our prayer life?

- We understand that he knows the right answer.
- God knows us well so he knows just what we need.

God Is Ever Present

Psalm 139:7-10

David reminds us that we cannot escape from God. He is “ever present.” That might seem a little intimidating, just as God knowing your heart seems intimidating. In reality, this is a comforting part of who God is. It is great to know that God is present. Often when things are hard, we need a shoulder to lean on and someone to be there for us. God is always there.

Where can you go to escape from God’s presence?

- Nowhere

What does David say God does when He is present with us (139:10)?

- Guides us
- Holds us fast
- His presence offers us protection.

How should the assurance of God’s presence effect our prayer life?

- God is personal and involved, not distant and unconcerned.
- We know He hears us.
- He is present to act on our behalf.

God Is All Powerful

What if God had all the knowledge in the world and was always present with you but wasn’t really able to do anything about your problems or help in times of need? Deism believes God created the world and set it in motion but He is no longer involved in the affairs of the world. They believe God is “hands off.” We know better than that. God is powerful and entirely involved in the affairs of the world.

Scripture is full of examples of God’s power. God has been acting on our behalf since the beginning of time to help build a relationship with us. *What are some examples of God’s using His power to help His people in the Bible?*

- Here are a few:
 - Creation
 - Exodus from Egypt
 - Promised Land

What are some examples of God’s acting on our behalf?

- Jesus’ life, crucifixion, and resurrection.
- Forming the church
- Being present and active in our lives today.
- The Holy Spirit acting as a comforter and counselor in our lives.
- Answering our prayers today

God didn’t just do all that thousands of years ago and stop. Prayer is powerful because the God who acted so powerfully on behalf of His people in the Bible is the same God today. We are His people. He continues to fight for us today.

That makes prayer a highly significant activity as it connects us with the God who knows us, is present with us, and who is able to help us.

Reflect on the following quote by Gordon MacDonald,

Until we believe that prayer is indeed a real and highly significant activity, that it does in fact reach beyond space and time to the God who is actually there, we will never acquire the habits of worship and intercession. In order to gain these habits we must make a conscious effort to overcome the part of us that thinks that praying is not a natural part of life.

What does MacDonald say is a challenge to one's prayer life?

- Doubt that our prayers are actually heard by God.
- Thinking prayer is not a natural part of life.

How does God's knowledge, promised presence, and power help us see prayer as real and significant?

- Our prayers really do reach God. They are really heard and acted upon.
- God is able to make the impossible possible.

Application

All of our views of God have been shaped by our own personal experiences and scripture. Viewing God as a present Father might be hard to accept by someone who never knew their father or their father was absent from their life. *Which of the three: all knowing, ever present, or all powerful is hardest for you to deal with?*

What barriers have you found hardest to overcome in keeping prayer a regular part of your life?

What could you do to encourage someone else to grow in their prayer life?

Put it Into Practice

This week, take some time out each day to pray to God. Try using the A.C.T.S. model of prayer by starting with Adoration and ending with your requests (supplication). There are printable cards on the website you or your group members can print to help them pray through A.C.T.S.



Priorities in Prayer

Feb 4, 2007

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What would your life look like if God answered everything in your typical prayer?

- Most people would be healthy, wealthy, and wise
- Would you be holy? Would you be closer to God? Would you trust Him more?

Would you have more physical blessings or spiritual blessings?

Our prayer priorities are the things we pray about the most. Randy Harris said “If you listened to our prayers you would think the most important thing to Christians was physical health.” Praying for the physical health of our loved ones is a legitimate prayer. But when you look at prayers in scripture they rarely include physical health. This week we are going to talk about how well our prayer priorities match up with God’s priorities.

James 5:13-16

What kind of prayer is powerful and effective?

- The prayer offered in faith
- The prayer of a righteous man

Does James think that praying for physical health is important? Why?

- He clearly thinks it is important.
- Our health is part of who we are and how God has made us. God wants us to be whole but not at the expense of our soul.

What else does James say our prayers should address in addition to physical health?

- Making our relationship with God healthy through confessing our sins and forgiveness from God.

When Jesus healed the paralyzed man in Mark 2 He emphasized the priority of forgiving sins even over healing his paralyzed body. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus emphasizes the importance of going to heaven over keeping our bodies intact. (Matthew 5:29-30). God is concerned for our whole life (body, mind, and spirit) but the spiritual takes precedence.

John 11:41-42

Praying for the Spiritual

In the story about Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead Jesus prays before raising Lazarus. *What did Jesus say was the reason for all He was doing?*

- Not just that Lazarus be raised but that the people might believe.

Jesus healed the sick and had compassion on the afflicted. It was part of His mission. But that was not his primary objective. God has a bigger plan in this world than making sure everyone is physically healthy.

What was Jesus' primary objective?

- To save the world from the power of sin and death.

Why is it important that our prayer priorities match Jesus' priorities?

- We are His people and carry on His mission.
- His agenda becomes our agenda.

There is a great need to transform our prayers to better reflect God's priorities. Let's get some clues about how to do that from Jesus' model prayer. Listen to the number of physical requests and spiritual requests in the Lord's prayer

Matthew 6:9-15

Which things in this prayer are spiritual in nature and which are physical?

- Spiritual—Praying for the kingdom, Praying God's will be done, Forgiveness, Resisting temptation
- Physical—Daily bread

Jesus does mention physical needs but they don't take the priority that the spiritual needs take. If we have a friend who is not a Christian and has cancer, most people's first thought is to pray for the cancer to be healed. When we have spiritual priorities, cancer comes second to sin.

What does Jesus start with and why is that a good starting place in prayer?

- Jesus' prayer starts with God.

What does Jesus recognize about God as he starts this prayer?

- His relationship with us—Father
- His holiness and awesomeness—hallowed be your name.

God is our first priority in prayer. We recognize who He is and appreciate what He has done. We don't dive in with our wish list but start by respecting God.

What is the second thing Jesus prays for?

- The kingdom.

The kingdom is about the reign of God and works together with God's will being done. When God reigns, His will is done. Jesus is showing us that we are

to seek out God's priorities over our own—"your will be done..."

What is difficult in praying for God's will to happen in our lives over our own will?

- He may not always do things the way we like Him to.

How would our prayers be different if we started praying more for God's will to be done and less for our own will?

How can we better reflect a kingdom agenda in our prayers as Jesus did?

- We need to spend more time praying for purity and moral character
- We need more confession in our prayers and relationships
- We need to pray that God would use us to spread His message of redemption.

In the middle of the prayer is a request for our "daily bread." *How does asking for bread reflect a spiritual priority?*

- It is trusting God for everything—even our food. He doesn't ask for a pantry full of food so that He can feel self-reliant. He asks for enough to make it through the day.

Jesus concludes the prayer with two requests that are spiritual in nature.

- Forgiveness
- Deliverance

How does Jesus say our relationships with others affect our prayers?

- If we haven't forgiven others we cannot expect to be forgiven.

We live in a world that has problems. We are surrounded by death and disease. We are aware of crime and hatred. There is a great need for God in our world. As His ambassadors in the world, we have a word from God to tell the world but we also have a word to tell God about what is happening in our world. There is a need to express our deepest concerns to God because He is the only one who can really do anything about them (1 Peter 5:7). In prayer we bring our concerns into contact with God's concerns and the first is changed by the second. His priorities become our priorities. His will becomes our will.

Application

What is the hardest part for you in putting your spiritual needs ahead of your physical needs?

How would praying for people's souls have a bigger impact than only praying for their physical healing?

Put it into Practice

This week, pray that God would open your eyes to see the world around you more like He sees it. Pray to see beyond people's physical health to what is under the surface and try to meet them there and help meet those needs.



Prayer & Faithfulness

January 21, 2007

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

What do you expect of God when you pray?

- That He will hear
- That He will respond

Last week we talked about the knowledge, presence, and power of God. These make little difference if God is not faithful. We expect that God will hear our prayer and answer. That is, we expect Him to be faithful. Faithfulness is an extremely important part of our relationship with God. In the Bible you will find a number of pictures of God that show how faithful He is to us. Some of these will be more challenging than others because God puts it in terms of human relationships. If you have not had a good relationship with your earthly father, thinking of God as “Father” may be a challenge for you. While people have let us down, God never will.

“Father”

God as Faithful “Father”

Deuteronomy 1:29-31 Moses reminds the Israelites how God was faithful to them in the wilderness. *What three things did God do for the Israelites as they traveled through the wilderness?*

- He went before them
- He fought for them
- He carried them as a father carries his son.

Moses says God carried them as a father carries his son. How is this type of carrying different than someone might carry a grocery bag or a suitcase?

- When you carry your child, you carry them carefully and with love.
- Protection—No harm will come to a child who is in his father’s arms.

The people saw all that God had done. *How does seeing God act on our behalf build our faith in Him?*

- We see how much He loves us and that He is willing to be there for us.
- We know that if He did it in the past He can still do it today.

What have you seen God do in your life that helped build your faith in Him?

How could someone’s background make it difficult to accept God as their “Father”?

- If they didn’t have a relationship with their father or if that relationship was a difficult one.

How does seeing God as the faithful Father give us a healthy view of God (see esp. Psalm 68:5)?

- God is better than any earthly father.
- Fathers here mess up but God doesn't.
- God loves us more than any person ever could because He made us and even died for us.

In the Lord's prayer, Jesus starts by calling God "our Father." How can our prayers better appreciate God as our Father?

- We thank him for the privilege of being his children.
- We pray that we will be more fully submissive to His will.
- We ask for His guidance.

"Shepherd"

God as Faithful "Shepherd"

In **Psalm 23** God is our shepherd. When we read **Psalm 23:1-4** we take on the perspective of a sheep that is being guided through dangerous places by a seasoned and powerful shepherd.

What are some things from this psalm that show how well the shepherd provides for the sheep?

- Lacking nothing
- Green pastures
- Quiet waters
- Guides me
- He is present and able to protect the sheep from danger

That is how God is. God is willing to nurture us, provide for us, and even protect us in difficult and dangerous times.

How can our prayers reflect on our relationship with God as our Shepherd?

- We declare our confidence in Him
- We thank Him for His provision.
- We appreciate his presence and leadership

"Spouse"

God as Faithful "Spouse"

This picture is painted most vividly in Hosea. Hosea was told by God to marry an unfaithful woman to show him how much anguish God has over His unfaithful people. This metaphor shouldn't be taken too far but God uses it to show us that He has always remained faithful to us. On the other hand sin is considered spiritual adultery—cheating on God and being unfaithful. We need to be just as serious about our faithfulness to God as we are about our faithfulness to our spouse.

In what 6 ways does God say he will betroth himself to his people?

- Forever, in Righteousness, in Justice, Love, Compassion, Faithfulness.

What does it mean to betroth yourself to someone?

- It means you marry them/enter a covenant relationship with them.
- Promise to be faithful to them—there can be no one besides them.

God has committed himself to us. When we are baptized we make that promise back to God. We spend the rest of our lives living faithfully to God.

How hard would it be to go one month without talking to your spouse?

- Hopefully—VERY hard!

How can recognizing our covenant relationship in spiritual betrothal to God improve the regularity of our prayer lives?

- You can't help but talk to God. We should want to talk to God.

How can our prayers reflect our steadfast decision to be faithfully committed to God no matter what?

- We renounce all other options
- We praise and adore Him for His commitment to us
- We declare our allegiance to Him as our Lord
- We pray on a regular basis because that is what you do with someone you love.

Why does faithfulness require confession?

- Close relationships require honesty. Confession is being honest with God.
- Confession and repentance are an attempt to repair our relationship with God.

Which of these pictures of God is the most challenging for you? Why?

What barriers to being faithful have you faced in your prayer life?

How should our prayer life reflect the faithfulness of God?

Faithfulness starts with God and we respond. Our prayers should reflect thanks for God's faithfulness and a declaration that we will respond to him with faithfulness. Next week, more on our response

Put it into Practice

Make sure to end in prayer. You can include each of these three metaphors in the prayer—**thankfulness to our father, submission to our shepherd, and love and faithfulness for our bridegroom**. Thank God each day this week for His unending faithfulness and pray that we can be more faithful to Him in our walk and our prayer life.



Prayer & Our Faithfulness

January 28, 2007

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

We have a lot of expectations of God when we pray. We talked last week about how we expect Him to be faithful. But what does God expect of us? Does He want anything from us? Does He expect anything from us? This week we will look at God's expectation of us in our prayers.

God Expects Persistence

Luke 18:1-8

Why does it say Jesus told his disciples this parable (18:1)?

- To show that they should never give up praying.
- To teach them persistence in their prayers.

What did the widow ask for?

- Justice
- She did not ask for a bunch of possession or physical health

Why did the judge finally grant her request?

- She was persistent and would not leave him alone.

What is the difference between the judge in the story and God?

- The judge did not care about her but God does.

If the judge did not care about the widow and still answered her requests, how likely is God to answer the prayers of those He loves?

- Even more likely

What does this parable teach us about the importance of our faithfulness in prayer?

- Keep talking to God even if you don't get a quick answer.
- It may take years for God's answer to be obvious.
- Persistence in prayer is an act of faith. To give up quickly shows our faith is shallow.

When was a time in your life you felt you should stop praying about something but continued anyway?

How did God respond to your persistence?

God hears our prayers. Even when it doesn't seem like He is listening, He is. When He seems slow to answer it may be because he is trying to teach us a

God Expects Humility

lesson in faith or maybe our prayers are not lining up with His will. We need to persistently pray that the will of God be done “on earth as it is in heaven.”

Luke 18:9-14

If people saw a Pharisee and a tax collector praying, who would they have expected God to hear? Why?

- They would expect for God to hear the Pharisee, because they were religious and seemingly righteous while tax collectors were not liked and seen as criminals.

What was the difference between their prayers in the following areas?

- Focus?
Pharisee—focused on himself
Tax collector—focused on God.
- Humility?
Pharisee—proud of himself
Tax collector—was humble
- Deeds?
Pharisee—On what he had done with no need for God
Tax collector—On what he had done with an absolute need for God

Why did God justify the tax collector rather than the Pharisee?

- Because the tax collector was honestly humble about what he had done and about what he needed from God—forgiveness.
- The Pharisee was prideful about what he could do for God. He was showy.

Why is it important that our prayers are more focused on God than on self?

- Because God is more important/greater than we are.
- God is the focus of our lives and should be of our prayers.

God Expects Honesty

What role did honesty have in the tax collector's prayer?

- He was honest with God about his sin. He didn't sugarcoat it. He didn't skip over it or hide it. He brought it up. He put himself in a vulnerable position by exposing his sins to God. The tax collector focused on God's righteousness. The Pharisee focused on his own self-righteousness. He didn't mention any of his personal failings or his faults. He didn't bother being honest with God about the messy areas of his life. God justified the tax collector even though he wasn't perfect.

How does that encourage us to honestly bring God our broken lives and expose the messy areas of our lives to God?

In what way was the tax collector more faithful to God than the Pharisee?

- The tax collector still relied on God for mercy and forgiveness.
- The Pharisee relied on himself and not on God.

God Expects Our Hearts

The bottom line is God wants our hearts. He wants to hear from us. He wants us to be fully devoted to Him and to reach out to Him in prayer. Like any good relationship, our relationship with God is marked with communication. Prayer is an important part of that communication as we pour out our hearts to God. We often mistake prayer for a time of making requests. Prayer is so much more than that. Making prayer a time to ask God for everything that is on our minds shortchanges prayer and robs it of its original intention—building a bond between us and God. When the focus of our prayers become self rather than God we miss what prayer is all about. When our prayer become more about what we want than what God wants, we shortchange God’s plans and replace them with our own.

You don’t have to be perfect to pray. You just have to have faith that God will listen and start from there. The tax collector wasn’t perfect. He knew and God knew it. The important thing was that he had faith that God could still have mercy on him.

Application

How is prayer like a thermometer of our relationship with God?

- The quality of our talks with Him may directly reflect how close we are to Him.

How can we be more honest with God about what is in our hearts during our prayers than we currently are?

- Spending more time in confession.
- Being more aware of our own shortcomings.

What are some barriers to having an honest prayer life and how can we prevent them from hindering our prayers?

- Being tired
- Being distracted
- Avoiding God

Sometimes our prayer becomes routine. We find ourselves saying the same thing each time without really thinking about what it means. We want our prayers to have the depth and richness of a real conversation because we are talking to God. *How can praying a “routine” prayer become a barrier to God?*

Put it Into Practice

Commit to pray each day this week at an “unusual time.” If you normally pray at bedtime and meals, take time each day to pray for God at a time that you would not normally pray (for example, when you wake up or when you get home).



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- Physical—Daily bread

Jesus does mention physical needs but they don't take the priority that the spiritual needs take. If we have a friend who is not a Christian and has cancer, most people's first thought is to pray for the cancer to be healed. When we have spiritual priorities, cancer comes second to sin.

What does Jesus start with and why is that a good starting place in prayer?

- Jesus' prayer starts with God.

What does Jesus recognize about God as he starts this prayer?

- His relationship with us—Father
- His holiness and awesomeness—hallowed be your name.

God is our first priority in prayer. We recognize who He is and appreciate what He has done. We don't dive in with our wish list but start by respecting God.

What is the second thing Jesus prays for?

- The kingdom.

The kingdom is about the reign of God and works together with God's will being done. When God reigns, His will is done. Jesus is showing us that we are

to seek out God's priorities over our own—"your will be done..."

What is difficult in praying for God's will to happen in our lives over our own will?

- He may not always do things the way we like Him to.

How would our prayers be different if we started praying more for God's will to be done and less for our own will?

How can we better reflect a kingdom agenda in our prayers as Jesus did?

- We need to spend more time praying for purity and moral character
- We need more confession in our prayers and relationships
- We need to pray that God would use us to spread His message of redemption.

In the middle of the prayer is a request for our "daily bread." *How does asking for bread reflect a spiritual priority?*

- It is trusting God for everything—even our food. He doesn't ask for a pantry full of food so that He can feel self-reliant. He asks for enough to make it through the day.

Jesus concludes the prayer with two requests that are spiritual in nature.

- Forgiveness
- Deliverance

How does Jesus say our relationships with others affect our prayers?

- If we haven't forgiven others we cannot expect to be forgiven.

We live in a world that has problems. We are surrounded by death and disease. We are aware of crime and hatred. There is a great need for God in our world. As His ambassadors in the world, we have a word from God to tell the world but we also have a word to tell God about what is happening in our world. There is a need to express our deepest concerns to God because He is the only one who can really do anything about them (1 Peter 5:7). In prayer we bring our concerns into contact with God's concerns and the first is changed by the second. His priorities become our priorities. His will becomes our will.

Application

What is the hardest part for you in putting your spiritual needs ahead of your physical needs?

How would praying for people's souls have a bigger impact than only praying for their physical healing?

Put it into Practice

This week, pray that God would open your eyes to see the world around you more like He sees it. Pray to see beyond people's physical health to what is under the surface and try to meet them there and help meet those needs.



Adoring God Through Prayer

February 18th, 2007

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

Adoring vs. Asking

Which do you think people pray the most—requests of God or praise to God?

- Most people probably make more requests than they do praises.

What difference is there between asking God and adoring God?

- Asking God normally focuses on self or others
- Adoring God focuses on God.

What does adoring someone mean to you and how does it relate to our relationship with God?

This is the first lesson of four on the A.C.T.S. model of praying. When we begin our prayers with adoration, we are beginning with the sole focus on praising God through prayer. We need to learn to pray to God just because of who He is. We appreciate Him and express it in words of adoring affirmation. There should be balance in our prayers between expressing our love for God and making requests. Think about this in terms of human relationships.

How deep would your relationship be with someone if all you did was ask them for things and never express your love for them?

In your deepest relationships, doesn't it help to hear that person tell you how much they appreciate and love you just for being you? It is no different with God. Our praise is not confined to songs sung on Sunday morning. Our prayers can also reflect praise. One way to deepen our prayer life with God is to have a better balance between adoration and asking.

How often do you spend time in prayer that is solely focused on God?

- Many of us do not as often as we should.

The psalms are full of examples of making God the focus of all we do. While we tend to focus on thanking God for what He has done let us not miss out on thanking Him for who He is.

Psalm 63

The psalmist adores God so much that he seeks Him out. He cannot wait to be with God and spend time in His presence. *How hard would you search for water after a week in a desert land with no water?*

- Very hard—that is how much we should feel a need for seeking God.

How much would you appreciate that water once you found it?

How is God a lot like finding water in the wilderness?

- He brings us life/sustains us
- He is badly needed

Why does David seek out God so intensely?

- He loved God
- He experienced God's protection and provision.
- He had spent time with God before—in His sanctuary and through the night and realized the importance of doing that regularly.

Why does David say he will glorify God?

- Because God's love is better than life.

Prayer Exercise 1

Pray—Take a moment to seek God in prayer. Pray that He will open up our hearts to spend more time praising Him in our prayers.

Psalm 67

The psalmist calls all the people to praise God. *What does the psalmist say will happen once we really start praising God?*

- Harvest and blessings.

Notice how it works—before we ask God for blessing we need to first adore and praise Him for who He is and what He has already done. So many times we get this backward and ask God for blessings without ever taking time to praise Him. He is more important than we are!

Which does the psalmist mention more here, praising God or Him blessing us?

- Praising God

The first thing we have to realize about praying our adoration of God is that we are not the focus. *What are our prayers like when we are the focus of the prayer rather than God?*

- Full of Requests—I need this and this and this

How is a God-centered prayer any different?

- A God-centered prayer is all about Him and not about us.
- In a God-centered prayer we just want to express our appreciation for who He is as our God.

The second thing we need to realize about adoring God in prayer is that He is listening and wants to hear from you. We know we love God but He wants to hear it from you! How well would your spouse appreciate just knowing you

love them but never hearing you say it?

How does knowing God hears us motivate us to pray more adoringly to Him?

Prayer Exercise 2

There is so much we can adore about God. Take a piece of paper and ask your group for things they adore about God—this is going to become a prayer list. Have a volunteer write down as many as possible. Have the group pray a prayer of adoration to God for the things listed by the group (you may want several people to pray depending on how long your list is). Avoid making requests—just appreciate God.

When this prayer was prayed, where was the focus?

- Focused on God

Where did we fit in the picture?

- We weren't requesting anything.
- We were just thankful for who God is and nothing about ourselves.

Application

Were there any challenges to praying a prayer only of adoration and nothing else?

- We are so used to praying other things
- Many of us rarely pray this way

What would help relieve us of some of the obstacles to praying adoration to God?

- A quiet place to pray
- Open eyes and heart to see how much there really is to adore about God

What benefit could there be to praying more prayers of adoration?

- We don't pray this way to get more blessings
- We pray this way because God deserves to hear it.

What importance is there in speaking adoringly of God before making requests of Him?

- It puts God first and us last.

Praying adoring prayers to God challenges us to not keep telling him the same couple of things each time we pray. Our prayer life will grow and mature and our conversations with him will become more natural. It starts with adoration. The more time you spend with God the more you will see that you adore about Him. When you start to think about how many things there are to adore about God you will be surprised at what you will find.

Put it into Practice

Pick out a time that you will pray each day a simple prayer of adoration to God. It is usually best to use the same time each day and be consistent rather than just hope it happens. Write it in your planner and let God know how much you care about Him.



Confession in Prayer

February 25, 2007

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

Icebreaker!

When you were a kid, was there anything you ever did that your parents never found out about?

We have all done things and “gotten away” with it. *What does it mean to “get away” with doing something?*

- It means we did something and never had to face the consequences.

There were probably times many of us fooled our parents but what about God? *Is it possible to “get away” with things in God’s eyes? Why/Why not?*

- It is not possible because God knows everything.

Henry Nouwen once said “To pray is to walk in the full light of God, and to say simply, without holding back, ‘I am human and you are God.’”

Confession means speaking honestly to God about who we are and what we have done. Confession is not just about when we have done something wrong. *What are some other things that involve confession other than sin?*

- We can confess Jesus as our Lord to God and people
- We can confess to God that we have doubts and serious questions.
- We confess our weaknesses and temptations and pray that God would strengthen us.

This study is specifically going to deal with the most common type of confession—confession of sin. Sin, it is not what was intended for mankind. It breaks the bonds between ourselves and God (Isa 59:2), is universal to all mankind (Rom 3:23), and in the end results in death (Rom 6:23). God is a God of life and seeks relationship with us. He has cured the sin problem when we are Christians. The only thing that keeps our sins from pardon is our own willingness to confess them.

Text:

Psalm 32

What was David’s life like when he refused to confess his sins to God?

- Wasting away, groaning, no strength.

What was David’s life like once he confessed his sins to God?

- He was forgiven and blessed.
- He had God’s protection and deliverance.

Fear of confession

Sometimes we don't want to tell God about our sin for fear of the consequences or maybe because we have done the same sin over and over again. David says, the one with unconfessed sin is the one who is in trouble and not the person who confesses. Is it always easy to confess to God? No. Is life always better when we do? Yes. *Why?*

- Because confession repairs the rift between us and God as He is then willing and able to forgive us.
- Life is better with confession because it is life as it was meant to be and not a life full of sin and lies.

Text

1 John 1:5-10

If God is light, how is confession part of the process of becoming more godly in our lives?

- Confession renounces the darkness/sin in our lives and exposes it to God's light.
- Only when exposed can sin be taken care of. Confession exposes sin and it is up to us to do it.

John says everyone sins. If someone says they don't sin, they are a liar. But if we confess our sins, God will prove faithful. Confession is a part of being a faithful follower of God. It is admitting when we have made a mistake and looking to God for a better way to live. The Bible is clear that confession is a necessary part of our relationship with God.

How are we Doing?

How well do we practice confession in our personal lives and with other people?

James 5:16 calls on us to confess our sins to each other. *What makes that such a hard thing to do?*

- We don't usually feel safe confessing to another person.

But the Bible says that is something we should do. What have we been missing? Safe environments where we can pour out our honest emotions and raw struggle before a group of fellow Christians and not be met with terrified looks on everyone else's faces.

How can our LIFE groups be a safe place to confess our sins to each other?

- There are only a few other people in the room.
- We need to be careful not to cut other people down when they say something that makes us uncomfortable because they may never try to do it again.
- There may be a time your group will want to split into groups of 3-4 and confess and pray for each other. It would be powerful. Just do it with an agreement of confidentiality with each other.

If God says we should do it, we need avenues to make this happen. At the same time this is not something we force people into or do for show. If it happens it needs to happen naturally when people feel comfortable with it.

How would our relationships with each other grow if we confessed our hurts and sins to each other more often?

How would our relationship with God grow if we were more honest with Him in our prayer lives?

Application

Find someone you can pray with that you feel safe enough to confess one of your weaknesses to. This has to be someone you have a tremendous amount of trust in. Share with each other and pray for each other about that area of your lives every day for a week.

End in prayer. Open the prayer requests up for more than the hurting and those who are lost—open it up for anyone who wants to practice confession as well.

Leaders— thank you for all you do!



Praying Thankfully

March 4, 2007

Note To Leaders

On your own time read Ephesians 1:18-20. Hopefully this lesson will open the eyes of our group members to a bigger reality and what they have to be thankful for. Please pray either before or during the meeting these same things for your group members (that they will more clearly see all that God is doing in their lives to understand their hope better, their inheritance in Christ, and that God is willing and able to use His power to work on their behalf).

Icebreaker

What is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for you?/Did you say “thank you?”

When we do something kind for someone else it is always good to know they appreciate it. *Why is it important to let God know we appreciate Him?*

- Thankfulness does no good if it is not expressed.
- Even though God already knows, we still need to tell him.

What types of things do we normally thank God for most often?

- Probably all sorts of physical blessings will come to mind.

How well do we do at thanking God for spiritual blessings rather than just for physical blessings?

- This may be a challenge for some of us.

This lesson will teach us about three valuable things we can thank God for that go far beyond physical blessings.

Text

Ephesians 1:18-20

Paul prays that the “eyes of their hearts may be enlightened” - *What do you think that means?*

- He is praying that they will have a deeper understanding of some things.
- Paul is calling on them to perceive some things from the heart—from the very center of who they are.

What three things does Paul pray that they will understand better?

- The hope God has called us to
- The riches of His inheritance
- God’s incomparably great power

Thankful for Hope

The call of Christ involves a profound hope that cannot be matched by any-

thing else in all of creation. *How is the hope God offers better than the hope offered by money, fame, or power?*

- God's hope lasts forever
- God's hope cannot be taken away (unless we give it up).
- God's hope leads to life—the others lead to death

Have you ever thought about what life would be like if you didn't have God or weren't a Christian? Ephesians 2:12-13 says that all of us were separate, excluded, and foreigners to God at some point in our life. When we were living that way, Paul says we were "dead" and "without hope." *What would life be like living without hope?*

How can our prayers better express thankfulness for providing us hope, when God didn't have to?

- We need to realize that often we take our Christian hope for granted. We have lived with it for so long that we don't remember what life was like without it.
- Thank God for providing us hope of eternal life when we really deserved death.
- Praying that we can reach out to others so that they also can know the hope that only God can provide.

How would you feel if you provided someone with hope and they were never thankful for it?

Have a prayer thanking God for the hope that we have in Christ

Thankful for Inheritance

Our inheritance from God is different from what we normally think of about an inheritance—He is alive and we get to enjoy our spiritual inheritance with Him forever.

What does our spiritual inheritance include?

- Salvation & forgiveness of sins
- Being in the church with Christ as the head today
- Being in heaven one day
- Being a child of God.

How much more thankful should we be of these kinds of riches than of any kind of earthly riches?

So many people live an entire life chasing riches. They work themselves to death and sacrifice their values chasing the dollar. In Christ, we have far more than anyone can ever earn. We have a lot to be thankful for.

Have a prayer of thanksgiving for the riches God has so freely given to us as Christians. Be sure to thank Him for our spiritual blessings today and

God's Power

those we look forward to in heaven.

Being thankful for God's power may seem like a strange thing. We normally say thank you for what we receive and not just for someone's characteristics. It is important that we thank God for **who He is** and not just **what He has done** for us.

As a parent, which would be more valuable to hear—"Daddy, thank you for the bike" or "Daddy, thank you for just being you?"

What has God done that shows us how powerful He is?

- He created the world.
- He defeated sin and death
- He is even able to raise the dead.

How does it make you feel to know that the same power God used to raise Christ from the dead is also being used on our behalf?

- Helps us know we can overcome anything through God's power.
- That gives us hope.
- It reminds us that it is not up to our ability or power but God's.

How can our prayer lives better thank God for His power and how He has used it to help make the world a better place?

Have a prayer thanking God for who He is—for his power, his love, for anything else the group wants to add.

Application

How often do you request things from God but then don't remember to thank Him when he answers our prayers?

What are some reminders you could use to remember what you have asked God to do so that you can remember to thank Him when He answers?

- If we don't make a concrete plan for how to do it, we probably won't. Get specific things—journals, notes, etc and encourage your members to try this. You will be amazed how many prayers God answers when you look back at your list some time later.

How can our prayers better thank God just for being who He is?

How can thankfulness help us focus on God more and ourselves less?

Put it Into Practice

When you pray this week, try spending some time thanking God before making any requests. You could include thanksgiving for the three things mentioned in this lesson: hope, spiritual inheritance, God's power.



Ask, Seek, Knock

March 11, 2007

Icebreaker

What is the biggest thing you have ever asked God to do?

Asking or requesting things from God is fundamental to prayer. Looking at prayers in the Bible reveals all sorts of requests that people have made to God and all sorts of responses from God to prayers. *Why doesn't God always answer every prayer just like we want Him to?*

- He is God and we are not.
- What we think is best is not always best.
- God is not a robot who has to do everything we think He should do.

Text

Matthew 7:7-11

What three things does Jesus encourage us to do in making a request to God?

- Ask Him
- Seek Him
- Knock on His door

What does Jesus say are the results of our asking, seeking, and knocking?

- Asks—receives
- Seeks—finds
- Knocks—door is opened.

Ask

Each of these three things get progressively more intense in involving God in our daily concerns. Asking makes sense. We do that all the time when we ask him to heal our loved ones or to protect us in times of danger.

Seek

Seeking turns up the intensity. *How is seeking God more intense than just using words?*

- It involves an attitude. It is harder to seek God with a bad attitude.
- It involves action. Merely asking may not show God how serious we are in our concerns. Really seeking Him out to hear how He will answer our request shows Him our sincerity.

Seeking God out involves listening. *What are some ways we can intently seek God out and put this into practice?*

- When you are seeking an answer you have to be ready to listen. If all we want to hear is the answer we want and no alternatives, we are not really seeking out God for who He is and want He wants.

- **Studying God’s word**—One of the best ways to listen and to understand His will is by reading His Word.
- **Fasting**—Fasting shows God that we are seriously seeking Him. We are seeking Him so diligently that we are willing to put our desires on the back-burner and are readying ourselves for what He has to say about our request.
- **Persistence**—Seeking requires persistence. You don’t seek someone for a few minutes and give up. When something is important, you remain persistent.

Knock

The third thing Jesus encourages is a little more strange. *What do you think Jesus means by “Knock and the door will be opened?”*

- Obviously there is not a big door somewhere we can walk up to and knock.
- This is a direct approach to God in boldness to present our request before Him and let Him know we need an answer.

It is one thing to call a friend and ask for something. It is quite another to seek them out and ask them again. Only as a last resort do we go to their home and knock on the door until someone finally answers. Jesus is talking about praying with urgency and purpose.

How does this level of intensity weed the unimportant and selfish prayers from our prayer life?

- It seems a little more foolish to be this intense in requesting selfish things from God.
- Seeking God this way helps us be more concerned about spiritual matters than we ever have before.

Why does God need more from us than just being asked?

- God wants to know that we are serious about our requests.
- Seeking God out this boldly-with our heart, time, and attitude requires a faith that may be lacking when all we do is ask.

God’s Answer

Jesus says when we ask we receive. *Does that mean God always answers “yes” to all of our prayers?*

How can we still receive even when the answer is “no”?

- God often provides in ways that we cannot expect or imagine.
- God’s “no” is just as much of a blessing as His yes.

How is God’s no as much of a blessing as His yes?

- Because God knows the best answer for us.
- God can see the whole picture and He knows just what we need.
- When He says no to one thing He is saying yes to something better.

We never earn God’s answer in our favor by trying to manipulate him through fasting or increased Bible study. We do those things because we desire to be in

tune with Him and because we desire His will to be done even when it doesn't match our will. That is what spiritual transformation is all about—becoming more like Him and not Him becoming more like us. Because of that we make our requests in light of the fact that He may not answer the way we like but that we will accept whatever He sees fit.

When in your life have you received a “no” or “not yet” from God only to find out later why that was the perfect answer?

How do stories like that build our faith when God doesn't answer the way we thought He would?

We make requests of God to find out His will. There is a real temptation to say things like—If you will just let me do this, I will _____ (fill in the blank). And we try to make a deal with God. Prayer is not about making deals. Prayer is about seeking the will of God.

Application

What obstacles have you faced in your prayer life that have kept you from seeking God the way you should?

How will those obstacles be overcome in your life?

- Hand them over to God in prayer.

How could you better incorporate fasting and Bible study as ways to listen to God?

When are times you find it hardest to pray your requests to God and how can you overcome that?

Let us get out of the habit of routine, mechanical prayer and really seek God from our hearts through our prayers.

Put it Into Practice

Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Take your three biggest concerns before God with boldness and confidence (asking, seeking, and knocking) and listen intently for his response through quiet times of Bible study and prayer.



Fasting & Prayer

March 18, 2007

Icebreaker

What is something you would have a very hard time going without?

How can we misuse things as substitutes for God in our lives?

- We try to fill ourselves up with temporary things and it just doesn't work.

We have been studying prayer. In scripture, prayer is often combined with fasting as people seek God and His will for their lives. Fasting plays an important role in our walk with God because it is a time when we put our desires behind us and focus on God. Many people have missed out on one of the fundamental practices of our faith and may have exchanged it for a false sense of satisfaction in their lives.

Fasting Establishes Priorities

Fasting helps us define and establish godly priorities. Jesus, who was the perfect example of someone with godly priorities, started his ministry with fasting.

Matthew 4:1-4

We often mention that Jesus was prepared for his confrontation with the devil by his knowledge of scripture but he also prepared for it through fasting. If you knew you would be tempted by the devil for 40 days, wouldn't you want to be well fed and prepared? When Jesus prepares to go into the wilderness to face the devil, he fasts for 40 days to prepare himself.

How did Jesus' fasting show that God was his priority?

- He emptied himself of what he wanted and filled himself with what God wanted.
- Fasting is humbling.
- By putting God first and his desires last.

How can fasting help prepare us for our own battles with the devil and temptation?

You need food to live. How is our need for God even greater than the food we eat or the air we breathe?

What would life be like if you felt your desire for God as strongly as hunger or thirst, that going without Him in your life would be painful?

Fasting Leads To Lasting Fullness

Fasting helps us have the right priorities because it helps us desire God more and fulfilling our earthly desires less.

Now for the ironic part. Fasting leads to fullness.

3 passages: John 4:13-14; 6:35; & 7:37-38

Jesus taught that physical food can never really fill us up but that there is a food and drink that can fill us up forever. When we fast, we put aside temporary food and fill ourselves with what lasts forever.

Jesus calls himself the bread of life and as a source of living water. *How is bread of life and living water different than physical food?*

- It can fill us up
- It will last forever

When we fast, we open ourselves up for God to be our source of nourishment. Then we can be spiritually strong in our faith because we have put God first in our lives. God made us with a need for Him. If we do not have a strong relationship with Him, we will feel empty. Fasting is one way to fill ourselves back up with Him as we reconnect with God, who is the source of our life.

How can we receive nourishment from God when we fast?

- Scripture reading
- Prayer
- Meditation

Fasting is a humbling experience as we realize how powerful our own desire to fill ourselves up with things other than God are. Fasting forces us to face those desires and put them in their proper place. *How does fasting teach us a lot about humility that is hard to learn otherwise?*

- When you realize how much you rely on food and how little you rely on God, that is humbling.
- Fasting puts our desires second and God's desires first.

Fasting teaches us to Fully Rely on God (F.R.O.G.—if that helps you remember) because when we fast we do not turn to anything else to fill us up except for God.

How to...

Now for a couple of “how to’s”

Fasting is not for everyone. If you have a health condition that could make fasting dangerous, don't try it. If you are uncertain, speak to your doctor before beginning to make sure it will not adversely affect your health.

Fasting normally involves going without food but doesn't have to. People have

fasted from many things that they have believed hindered them in their relationship with God (music/CDs, movies, TV, the internet, or anything else that can be a distraction in our lives).

While fasting in the Bible was often for 40 days it doesn't have to be that way. You can fast for 12 hours, 2 days or whatever challenges you without being unhealthy for you. The main thing is you do want it to force you into telling your body "no" for a period of time to something you really desire.

That is very emptying. But fasting is just as much about filling up as it is about emptying. You don't want to remain empty. You want to fill yourself up with God's word and with prayer. You may want some time to meditate and think about God for an hour or so each day while you fast.

The most important thing is not how long or what you can or cannot eat or drink. The most important thing is that you use this time to privately devote yourself to drawing closer to God. Spend additional time reaching out to Him and find peace even while your physical needs are going unmet for a period of time. Fasting is not to be used as an attempt to make yourself appear more holy or to manipulate God. It is used to deepen our relationship with God on a personal level.

What worries you the most about this process?

What do you think will be hardest for you and how can that be overcome?

Put it into Practice

If there are no health concerns to keep you from fasting, decide on an amount of time to fast, normally 24 hours. Make sure to keep well hydrated by drinking plenty of water. Feast your soul on the word of God and keep your thoughts on God while you fast by studying and through prayer. When you hunger, remember how much more your soul hungers for God and thank Him for providing your life with more than an abundance of food.

Leaders—make sure that they hear the part that this is not for everyone. Some people may have health concerns that would make this dangerous for them and we certainly do not want anyone to get hurt. It can even be dangerous for healthy people if they go too long without food.

A.C.T.S Model of Prayer

Adoration:

Confession:

Thanksgiving:

Supplication (Requests):

A.C.T.S Model of Prayer

Adoration:

Confession:

Thanksgiving:

Supplication (Requests):

A.C.T.S Model of Prayer

Adoration:

Confession:

Thanksgiving:

Supplication (Requests):

A.C.T.S Model of Prayer

Adoration:

Confession:

Thanksgiving:

Supplication (Requests):



Leader Resources #1

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

Our hope for 2007 is that our members become closer to God than they have ever been before. We want to enrich and deepen their prayer lives, increase their time in study, and have them more fully devote their lives to God and others. I believe this begins in prayer.

Prayer is a fundamental act of our Christian faith. It is part of faith because in faith we call out to the God we believe will answer. It is an act of faith because we cannot talk to Him face-to-face. We cannot make an appointment in his heavenly courts and stand before His throne and have a discussion with Him. We pray in faith because sometimes the answers are a long time in coming and sometimes the answers are not what we had hoped. But we know He hears and that He is faithful. We know that when we pray to Him there is not a power on earth that could keep our prayer from reaching Him. So we pray in faith and in doing so deepen our connection with Him.

It may not seem like it on the surface but prayer begins with God. It may seem like prayer begins with us but it does not. Prayer is, in effect, a response. If God had not acted in history and made himself known to us through his mighty acts we would not be able to respond to Him. We would be ignorant of His existence. He could have stayed up in heaven and not bothered himself with this world and those living here. But HE took the initiative. He came down and walked with people, talked with people, rescued people, and is now even saving us as well. Because of that we pray. Prayer starts with God, not us.

"It occurs to me, thinking about prayer, that most of the time I get the direction wrong. I start downstream with my own concerns and bring them to God. I inform God, as if God did not already know them. I plead with God, as if hoping to change God's mind and overcome divine reluctance. Instead, I should start upstream where the flow begins. When I shift direction, I realize that God already cares about my concerns...I begin with God, who bears primary responsibility for what happens on earth, and ask what part I can play in God's work on earth."



A.C.T.S. is one way to pray that can enrich your prayer life and connection with God and correct the direction of our prayers. A.C.T.S. stands for:

Adoration: Just as we adore people we love we also adore God. When we pray about our adoration of God we talk about Him. We let Him know what it is about Him that we love so much. It is important to start our prayers focused on God rather than on self. Adoration focuses on who God is. From adoration we move to confession.

Confession: Here we express our sinfulness and hand those struggles over to God. We admit that we have done things that are wrong and often name them specifically to God. We ask that he forgive us our sins and give us spiritual strength and resolve to live a better life in the future. Confession focuses on God's power to forgive. Following confession is thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving: Our thanksgiving is simply letting God know what we are thankful for. When you really start thinking about all that God has done it is really pretty overwhelming. Everything we can see and touch has come from Him! We need to let Him know how thankful we are for what He has done both physically and spiritually. Thanksgiving focuses on who God is and what He has done.

Supplication: Finally, we make our requests to God. Often we jump right in with our requests and there is nothing wrong with that but it shows God our love for Him and appreciation for what it is He has already done before we make additional requests of Him. This is where our prayer requests fit into the prayer. We pray first for others and last for self. Supplication is also focused on God and not on self because we ask of God with the expectation and faith that He is the one able to do something about these situations.



Prayer—Leader Resources

I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer. - Psalm 17:6

Books

The Bible

Richard J. Foster Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home

John Ortberg The Life you've always wanted: spiritual disciplines for ordinary people

Terry Wardle The transforming path: A Christ-centered approach to spiritual formation

Dallas Willard Renovation of the Heart

The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives

Philip Yancey Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?

Prayer Request Card

Name (optional): _____

Requests: _____

Prayer Request Card

Name (optional): _____

Requests: _____

Prayer Request Card

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