



Week One

Opening Prayer

God, we trust that you are here with us. Help us to be aware of your presence and help us to be present to one another. We want this time to be about helping us grow our faith and our friendship. Amen.

Talk It Over

This week we started a new series called 40 Days of Prayer. The goal of this series is to help us grow in our connection with God and to grow in our understanding of God's power through prayer. The hope is this series can help us find something fresh in our relationship and approach to God.

- What are your earliest lessons, observations, or examples of prayer?
- Do you have any memorable stories about prayer? This can be a story about a person, a season of your life, or a specific circumstance.
- Tell us how your prayer life evolved over the course of your life and what your prayer life looks like in this current season. Remember, this group is a safe place for each of us to come as we are. There is no right or wrong answer here. We are just looking to create an honest space to talk.

Read Ephesians 1:16-20 (NLT)

Each week of this series we are going to look at a prayer Saint Paul prayed for people he knew and loved. In this specific prayer, we hear Paul praying for the people who make up the church of Ephesus, asking God to help them encounter spiritual wisdom, that they grow in the knowledge of God, that they experience confidence in the hope God offers them, and that they may know the greatness of God's power.

- Tell us about a time in your life when a situation was made better because of spiritual wisdom, hope, or awareness of God's power. What practical, real-life good came out of these gifts?
- Is there any area of your life you feel you could use a bit more spiritual wisdom, hope, or awareness of God's power? If so, what benefits might come out of having more wisdom, hope, or awareness of God's power?
- Do you have anyone in your life who prays for you like Paul prayed for these people? If so, tell us about that person or relationship. If not, is there someone you can ask to pray for you on a more regular basis?
- Do you have anyone in your life whom you pray for like Paul prayed for these people? If not, who can you think of who would benefit greatly if you started to pray for them like this? And if so, tell us about that person or relationship and how you walk out praying for this individual.

As we started this series, we looked at some common misconceptions of prayer:

1. Prayer is not a magic wand; God is not our magical genie.
2. Prayer is not a fire extinguisher — it's not something we simply use during emergencies; it's not intended to be a last resort.
3. Prayer is not a tug-of-war. The goal of prayer is not that we beg, barter, or bargain with God.
4. Prayer is not a ritual to relieve guilt. Prayer is not a duty or punishment for sin. Jesus taught prayer is a privilege, not a duty or a penance.

- Have you ever seen someone experience deep feelings of frustration, hurt, or despair because they bought into one of these misconceptions? Maybe this happened to you. Tell us how the misconception brought about more struggle and grief. (If you are sharing someone else's story, please refrain from sharing any details that may constitute oversharing or gossip. You may even consider leaving the other person's name completely out of the story.)
- Of these three misconceptions, which are you most prone to believe? What's the thought process or reason behind buying into that misconception?

This week we also looked at foundational ideas we are invited to build into our prayer life. The rest of our time today will be centered on looking at those ideas.

Prayer is a relationship, not a ritual.

Read Psalm 103:13 (NLT) and Matthew 7:11 (NLT)

When you love someone, generally the natural response is to want to talk to them, listen to them, and spend time with them. As we approach prayer, it's crucial we understand that God loves us and is very much interested in connecting with us about anything and everything. If something matters to you, God cares too and wants to meet you in that place.

- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being "not at all" and 10 being "without a shadow of a doubt", how much do you believe God's heart is soft and open towards you this season? Tell us about how this answer has shifted for you over time or why it might be stuck.
- Is there any area of your life you struggle to believe God cares about? If so, why do you think that area doesn't matter to God?
- Following up on the last question, take a moment to consider, what might a gracious, understanding, compassionate, all-knowing, present loving God offer you regarding that topic?

Prayer is a conversation, not a ceremony.

Read Matthew 6:5-8 (NIV)

When we pray, there is no need to pretend to be something we aren't, to present some polished version of ourselves, or to put on any show for God. Prayer is intended to be sincere, honest, and from the heart. God honors even our most simple prayers.

- This season, how difficult or easy is for you to buy into this idea that "prayer is a conversation, not a ceremony"? Where did your view come from? How has it evolved over time?
- Looking at your prayer life, in what ways can you be more sincere, honest, and open with God this season?
- How comfortable or uncomfortable are you with praying out loud? What is the fear that holds you back or what is the reason you are willing to do it?

Prayer is an opportunity, not an obligation.

Read James 4:8 (NLT)

The heart of God is always turned to us hoping we move our attention to his great love.

- We are going to move towards our closing prayer time now. If you have any additional comments on today's topic, please feel free to share them now.

A Note to the Group Leader: Today's closing prayer comes with two options, pick the option that you feel fits your group best.

Closing Prayer Option One

God, thank you for drawing near to us. Help us to open ourselves up to you more and more. Please move in us and help us to proactively lean into you more this season. We want to grow in our relationship with you and understand your power in new, fresh ways. Amen.

Closing Prayer Option Two (Instructions for the Group Leader)

Close today's group by inviting anyone who wants to pray, to pray. Tell the group you will be transitioning to a moment of silence and anyone is welcome to jump in and pray a simple prayer about anything they want when they are ready. If there is silence between prayers, that is okay. Make sure the group knows this. The process does not need to be rushed or polished. Once it seems as if those who want to pray have prayed, be prepared to close the prayer time up by praying your own prayer or using the prayer listed under "Closing Prayer Option One".

How To Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.