

prayer

introduction

FACILITATOR: *We all agree that prayer is fundamental to the Christian life, but we still struggle with it. Prayer is not a boring burden, but a way of life in which we creatively communicate with our creator in a variety of ways. It will help us if we look at prayer in the four different aspects that Paul speaks about in 1Timothy 2:1. He mentions 'prayers,' 'supplications,' 'intercessions' and 'thanksgivings'. Your cell is going to tackle a different one of these aspects in the following four weeks.*

1: prayer

FACILITATOR: *The aim of this meeting is to strip away your cell's preconceptions and bad habits when it comes to prayer, and to engage with God honestly and persistently in this area.*

welcome

CELL: What do you honestly think of when you hear the words "Let's pray"?

worship

FACILITATOR: *The worship sections in this four-pack look at the sacrificial system in Leviticus and then Hebrews. The idea is to use the different types of sacrifice in the Old Testament as inspiration for your praise together as a group. Each sacrifice has a reading, a brief explanation, and a suggested application. Discuss the sacrifice for a while and then feel free to apply it in a different way as would work best in the cell.*

CELL: Read Leviticus 1:1-17.

FACILITATOR: *This first sacrifice is a sacrifice of atonement, by which a person could be made 'at-one' with Yahweh, the name for God in the Old Testament. The smell of the sacrifice, while odd to us, is described as 'an aroma pleasing to the Lord' (v.17).*

Spend time in silence, contemplating the things that stand in the way between you and God, both corporately and personally. Kneel together and have a time of repentance. It is good to have confession out loud, but if your cell is not yet ready to repent together, play a CD so that people can still speak out without being heard. Finish by thanking God that through the sacrifice of Jesus we can be made one with him.

word

FACILITATOR: *Read 1Timothy 2:1-4 together.*

Let's look at the first of the four types of prayer Paul mentions. In fact, he just calls it 'prayer', but it literally means 'outpouring' (Greek: proseuche). This is not talking about clever, sophisticated, theological prayers, but simply pouring out your heart to God. This can be in the form of worship as we pour out love to God. But it can also be a way of finding deeper friendship with God when we are in trouble.

CELL: If prayer is simply 'outpouring', what habits, styles and peculiarities have we adopted when we pray that are extra to this? (For example tones of voice, talking to each other not God, formula, religious words, etc.)

FACILITATOR: *Paul tells us to pray for everyone (v 1, 4) which includes those in authority in society (v 2). Poor, persecuted Christians might have been tempted to become a holy huddle instead of engaging with the world in which they lived through bold, authoritative prayer.*

CELL: Do you pray for people in positions of power in the world? Does this include your college/university? What should you pray for them?

FACILITATOR: Read Luke 18:1-8 together.

Jesus says we should 'pour out' (pray) and not 'cave in' (this is the Greek meaning of the word translated 'lose heart'). He follows this with an illustration of a widow who was being oppressed and who kept pestering the judge to give her justice. Jesus is not saying that God is like the judge, i.e. selfish and disinterested, but rather that we should be like the woman. She won her case through persistence! So Jesus says we should keep on pouring out our hearts to him when we are in trouble. If we do, we won't cave in under the pressure but we will win a hearing and response from God himself!

CELL: What is the attitude towards persistence in your student world? Is yours any different? What can be done to increase your persistence in prayer?

FACILITATOR: Ideas if the cell is not responding...

- Mutual encouragement
- Accountability
- Diligence
- Writing things down
- Routines
- Creativity
- Understanding how God sees the object of your prayer
- Compassion

FACILITATOR: Pray together or in smaller groups, responding to whatever seems to be the most challenging aspect of prayer that you have looked at. This may be pouring your hearts out to your Father, picking up on an issue that you have stopped being persistent about, or praying for those in governmental positions in your university.

witness

CELL: Bring your outpouring and persistence into play with regards to praying for your friends to become Christians. Go for it! You may also want to talk about how persistent the cell is in and outside of the cell meeting at praying for your friends. Now would be a good time to assess your accountability and set things up to help one another keep going in this area. (i.e. Triad Prayer Groups – see Core Values cell notes.)

what now?

CELL: As a cell group, plan a prayer meeting for this week; a specified time that you will join together in one location and pray for those in authority within your university and for your friends.

2: petition

introduction

FACILITATOR: *In our last session we looked at 'outpouring' as a means of prayer. In this session we will be discussing 'supplication' or 'petition'. Our prayer is meant to be varied. If we only ever present God with a shopping list of petitions we will get pretty bored and perhaps he will too! Prayer is meant to be relationship – developing friendship with God. But because we have such a resourceful friend he encourages us to ask him for specific things. That's what petition is all about.*

welcome

CELL: When you ask God for something, how do you picture Him listening and responding?

worship

CELL: Read Leviticus 2:1-16.

FACILITATOR: *The grain offering was a more everyday sacrifice and often represented the daily work of the Israelite people. Everything we do is to be done as part of our worship to God, which is our daily sacrifice. Yeast and honey caused fermentation and so they could not be used. However, think about the significance of oil, salt and incense (oil as anointing, salt as a preservative against decay, and incense as prayer).*

CELL: Use these thoughts to take time to talk to God about our work, offering it up to Him.

word

FACILITATOR: *Read Matthew 6:9-13 all together and then break into pairs or groups and take a part each, 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 sins as we forgive those who sin against us
- Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil
- For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever. Amen

Take a few minutes to discuss whether your part of the prayer could be described as 'outpouring,' 'petition,' 'intercession' or 'thanksgiving' (there are no right or wrong answers at this point). Then say the prayer again with each pair or group just saying their part of the prayer.

CELL: Read Luke 11:5-13 then answer the following question. At the heart of it is the petition in v 5, 'Friend, lend me three loaves'. What can we learn about asking God for things from this story?

FACILITATOR: *(Things to include in the answers.)*

1. It arises within an already existing relationship ('Friend-')
2. It is based on faith - he is convinced that his friend has got the bread to lend him
3. It is simple and specific
4. It is motivated by concern for someone else (v. 6)
5. It is humble ('I have nothing -' v. 6)
6. It is determined (v. 8)
7. It is successful – probably for the previous six reasons!

CELL: Which things challenge you most from this list and why?
What is God's attitude towards us when we ask for things?

FACILITATOR: *Now, let's review the way we petition God and see if we can make our prayers more effective. We build friendship with God through our outpourings, both of worship and love toward him,*

and of our needs and heartaches which we need help for. Out of this friendship our petitions flow more effectively. Let's determine to build relationship with God over these next weeks.

Notice in particular v 13. The first way God responds to our prayers is by giving us the help of the Holy Spirit who will teach us how to pray and what to ask for. Take time to listen to the Holy Spirit who will guide your petitions. If you wanted to petition your student government about some issue, you would think carefully about what you wanted, how to word it in the most succinct way, and how to get his/her attention. The Holy Spirit helps us to do this with prayer. Moreover you would probably try to get as many people to sign your petition as possible - and Jesus said that agreement with others in prayer will also strengthen our petitions.

CELL: Does anybody have one particular thing that they are praying for at this moment? What new values and principles can you apply to that situation?

CELL ACTIVITY: Take a few minutes to quietly ask the Holy Spirit to show you one thing to pray for your cell group. Discuss together what you think you are hearing until you agree on the one thing you will ask God for. Then ask one of you to verbalize that petition in prayer and let everyone focus their hearts in agreement and at the end say "Amen", or, "Yes, I agree". Then make a note of what you have asked for and expect to receive it. It might be a good idea to ask everyone to keep on reminding God of this petition until you receive it.

witness/what now?

FACILITATOR: *Ask everyone in the group how their relationships with non-Christian friends are going. Petition God for the two or three that you are each praying for regularly. Find out this week what your friends' needs are, and then offer to pray with them that God would provide those things and more.*

3: intercession

introduction

FACILITATOR: *In this third session on prayer we are looking at intercessory prayer. Many people find it an intimidating concept - it suggests high powered people praying high powered prayers. But this session aims to look at what intercession really means, and to draw examples from the life of Elijah in the Old Testament. Make sure you leave at least 30 minutes for the witness section at the end.*

worship & welcome

FACILITATOR: *For this week's worship it would be great to have a meal together before the cell meeting (or at least snacks). If this is not possible, you can do the worship section similar to the last two weeks.*

CELL: Read Leviticus 3:1-17 together.

FACILITATOR: *While commentators vary in their opinions, this sacrifice is thought to have been made simply as a demonstration of thanks to God. In addition it was something which the worshipper joined in the eating of and was part of the fellowship that is gained by eating together. Discuss together how we can represent these two ideas today.*

CELL: Over a meal together, talk about what you have to be thankful for to God, and in particular, the things that you appreciate in each other.

word

FACILITATOR: *What do the words 'intercessor' and 'intercession' conjure up for people? What is everyone's experience of intercession?*

CELL: Break down into twos and threes taking one of the following scriptures each. Discuss what they reveal about intercessory prayer and then feed back to the whole group:

Group 1: John 17: 9-11

Group 2: Luke 22: 31-32

Group 3: Ezekiel 22:30-31

FACILITATOR: *The word intercede means 'to go between' – sometimes between people and God to plead with God on their behalf, and sometimes between people and the enemy to resist the spiritual pressure on their lives.*

CELL: To what extent does God rely on our prayer before He accomplishes His will on this earth? What are the implications of this?

FACILITATOR: *Read James 5: 13-18, 1 Kings 18:41-46, 1 Kings 17:21 together.*

In James, Elijah is held up as an example of a very human person wielding superhuman power through prayer. Notice a few things:

-He put all of himself into his prayer – he bows down with his face between his knees. He may have bowed from the waist or he may have squatted with bended knees. Here's one idea for an interesting prayer position. Try it!

-He persevered until he knew the answer was on the way.

-In Elijah's prayer in 1 Kings 17:21, he successfully prays for the life of the widow's son. It says he stretched himself upon the child three times, crying out for God to heal him. Of course, he may have been engaging in some form of resuscitation procedure or he may have been releasing the power of the Spirit through his own body. Whichever it was, he was exerting himself in the process.

Intercession prayer is never passive and half-hearted! Whether it is crying out to God or resisting the evil one, it is active, heartfelt, faith-filled and not easily deterred.

CELL: What things about Elijah can you begin to see in your own life? For example stretching yourself in prayer through physical prostration, fasting, persistence etc.

witness/what now?

FACILITATOR: *When we intercede for this world, we are asking God to accomplish His will on this planet through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We need to understand three things:*

- God's will for the world in the future*
- The true spiritual state of the world right now*
- The power of Christ dying on the cross*

CELL: Spend some time praying for your non-Christian friends by spending 10 minutes on each of these categories:

- Praise Jesus for his work on the cross that gives us access to God and His will for our friends.
- Ask Him to reveal His will for our friends and then confess it out.
- Ask Him to reveal where they are at – what stumbling blocks they've got that keep them from God.

Now you are in a position to put all three together and call out to God for their salvation. Go for it! Commit to spending extra time in prayer this week for you non-Christian friends.

4: thanksgiving

introduction

FACILITATOR: *I wonder how many of you were made to write thank you letters on Christmas Day for all the good things you had received (and would have preferred to have been enjoying at that moment). It's enough to put you off for life from saying thank you! In this session we are looking at saying thank you to God for all that He is and does for us. This is an important ingredient of prayer.*

welcome

CELL: On a scale of 1-10 (10 being VERY thankful), how thankful would you say you are on a daily basis?

worship

CELL: Read Hebrews 10:19-25 together.

FACILITATOR: *Up until this point in Hebrews, the author has been looking at the Old Testament sacrificial system and the old covenant and comparing it with the supreme sacrifice of Jesus and the new covenant that he has brought in through that (see for example, 9:11-15 and 23-28). From 10:19 onwards (note the use of the word 'therefore') the author looks at the implications for us.*

CELL: In the light of these implications, focus your praise onto the person of Jesus, our ultimate sacrifice.

word

FACILITATOR: *As a cell, discuss the following statement in the light of Romans 1:21 and Ephesians 5:18-20: "ingratitude is a sign of ungodliness".*

CELL: Read Philippians 4:4-7 together.

FACILITATOR: *Notice that Paul mentions three aspects of prayer; 'outpouring' (prayer), 'petition' and 'thanksgiving'. The word 'thanksgiving' (eucharisto) means 'beautiful thanks' or 'great thankfulness'. In our prayers it is good to express our gratitude to God for what he has done for us, and for his constant love and care each day. This attitude of thanksgiving empowers our prayers.*

In Psalm 50:14, the psalmist speaks of sacrificing thank-offerings to God. As we saw in our worship section last week, there were, in the Old Testament sacrificial system, specific sacrifices which were designed to be an expression of the Israelites' thanksgiving to YHWH, their God. Thanksgiving is never something that just uses our words: it costs us and is expressed through our actions.

CELL: What things stop you personally from being thankful to God? Be honest, and talk about how to change them. What are some of the things you can do this week to express your thankfulness to God?

CELL: There should be lots of time left now that we can spend giving thanks to God in prayer. Think of ways in which you can do this and then take time to do them.

FACILITATOR: *Here are some if you get stuck, but try to think of some better ones!*

-Pass a Bible (or a soft toy – a prayer bear!) round the group as you pray. As you receive it, pray a short prayer, thanking God for some current blessing you have enjoyed/are enjoying. If one of you can't think of anything, then pass the Bible/ toy straight on, to keep the flow unbroken. You could go round the group more than once in that way until the thanks dries up.

-Write a list of the people you are thankful for – they may be from the past or current friends/ family. Thank God for them.

-Share a simple communion of bread and grape juice together with the emphasis on giving thanks.

witness

CELL: Does anybody have any encouraging stories from the last week in relation to their friends? Use this time to testify and then pray for them again.

what now?

CELL: Make a decision to thank as many people as possible this week, so that thankfulness becomes a habit in your life.

In addition, if earlier you wrote a list of the people you are thankful for – may be from the past or current friends/family and prayed for them. Choose one that you will write to this week and express that thanks to them.

Recommended Further Reading:

R. Dunn, *Don't Just Stand There Pray Something* (Scripture Press, 1992).

Rob Warner, *Praying with Jesus* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1999).

Richard Foster, *Prayer - finding the heart's true home* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1992).

Rees Howells, *Intercessor* (N Grubb Lutterworth, 1993).