

Teach us to Pray

DISCUSSION GUIDE

This is a discussion guide. We encourage hosts to use the material in such a way you can meet your group where they are at. If this means adding, changing, or taking away from below, then do what you need to make this the most formational night for your group as we seek to become more like Jesus together.

Week One: Pray Where You Are

WATCH

You could either have everyone watch the video before joining together, or start your night by watching together where Ruth and Keith share about their prayer journey.

UNDERSTAND

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:5-7

"One of the more frustrating aspects of Scripture is that it rarely reads like Ikea instructions. If God would just lay it out, step-by-step, then I'd do it. But for some reason, he's determined to speak in stories, analogies, and riddles. This passage is proof that it's not that simple. Right here, it's laid out step-by-step, but generally speaking, we don't follow the steps. Do not be anxious about anything. Pray about everything. But most Christ followers spend far more hours turning over anxious thoughts than surrendering them in prayer. If it's right there, so plain and clear, why not take God up on such a satisfying exchange?

Short answer: we don't buy it.

We think, 'Come on, it's just not that simple.' As pastor of a church primarily filled with young adults in the first half of life, I get a lot more questions about managing anxiety than I get about prayer. Anxiety is the soundtrack humming beneath modern life, so I have plenty of conversations with anxious people.

It's not just a diagnosis of others though. The truth is, I'm more familiar with anxiety than I am with peace. I'm better acquainted with a subconscious drive to control the circumstances overwhelming me than with accepting the unburdening freedom promised in prayer...

God promises peace – a supernatural sort of peace we can't even logically reason out – in place of crippling anxiety. The means of this exchange is prayer. But most people, regardless of spiritual maturity, stage of life, psychological awareness, or personality type, do not experience the "anxiety for peace" exchange promised through prayer. So why not?"

An extract taken from Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 12-13)

For some, prayer comes as naturally to them as an experienced driver turning on the ignition, but to others, they are ashamed to admit their prayer life is non-existent. This discussion will start to help us unpack where we are when it comes to prayer. We cannot pray where we think we are supposed to be, we must learn to pray where we are.

SHARE

1. What is prayer and what does it do?
2. Why do you pray?
3. What stops you, or has stopped you from praying?
4. Why are hurry and prayer incompatible?
5. Has there been a time in your life where you found yourself praying the most?

READ

Some of our greatest barriers to prayer are fear of silence, a sense of inadequacy as we pray, fear of selfish motives or just simply fear of doing it wrong.

Read the following verses from the Psalms:

- Psalm 140:10
- Psalm 69:3
- Psalm 142:2

Anger, depression and complaint. David was ancient Israel's most famous figure, the man after God's own heart, yet these verses read more like someone in need of help.

These Psalms sit alongside some of David's other more poetic prayers:

- Psalm 23:1-3
- Psalm 103:2,5
- Psalm 145:2

"The psalms reveal a garden variety of motives. Some of the words in those prayers go directly against the teachings of Jesus and the character of God (What happened to loving enemies and a God who is rich in love and loyal in faithfulness?!), meaning some of the psalms are technically heretical. So why would those prayers be included in the Bible?

Because they're honest. That's what makes these psalms exemplary. God is looking for relationship, not well-prepared speeches spoken from perfect motives. God listened to overreacting rage, dramatic despair, and guileless joy, and he called David a man after his own heart. When it comes to prayer, God isn't grading essays; he's talking to children. So if God can delight in prayers as dysfunctional as the ones we find wedged into the middle of the Bible, he can handle yours too without you cleaning them up first.

If the Bible tells us anything about how to pray, it says that God much prefers the rough draft full of rants and typos to the polished, edited version. C. S. Lewis said of prayer, "We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us."

The way our motives change isn't by working them out in silence; it's through such brutal honesty with God that he, by prayer, can refine our motives. Complaints are welcome."

An extract taken from Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 21)

PRACTICE

Take a few minutes at the end of your night to engage in a form of listening prayer. When you start together, ask Jesus "If you were to walk into this room right now, what would you want to say to me?" Ask the question and then be still and wait for Jesus to share his heart for you.

When you finish your time, go round the room and share what Jesus brought to mind. Don't edit your response – share whatever Jesus brought to mind, regardless of how profound, childish, virtuous or simple it sounds. Take time after everyone has had the opportunity to share to pray into what each person has shared.

Week Two: Hallowed Be Your Name

WATCH

You could either have everyone watch before joining together or start your night by watching together where Ruth and Keith discuss the opening line of how Jesus taught us to pray.

UNDERSTAND

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray..."

Luke 11:1

"This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name..."

Matt.6:9

"When Jesus' disciples said to him, "Teach us to pray," Jesus wasn't responding to a bunch of beginners. Prayer was the order of the disciples' lives, and it had been that way since they were born to Jewish parents in ancient Israel. If not unfamiliarity, what prompted these disciples to say, "Teach us to pray"?

Jesus prayed differently. He honoured the common Jewish prayer rhythm but he prayed with a sense of familiarity with God that no one had ever seen. He also prayed with a reverence that was more than cultural but was sincere and honest.

His prayers were conversations, not just pleas, involving as much—probably more—listening than talking. It was in prayer that Jesus got his marching orders. Prayer was the place where his eyes were opened, and his steps directed. "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing." Most distinctly, his prayers were effective. They got God's attention.

When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he wasn't teaching them to pray more or pray harder, but rather to pray differently."

An extract taken from Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 55)

As we continue this resource, we want to now look at how Jesus taught us to pray and how, what many know as "the Lord's prayer", can shape our intimate moments of prayer.

SHARE

1. Why do you think Jesus starts his prayer the way he does?
2. Has prayer changed how you see or relate to God?
3. Has prayer changed who you are; or how could it change who we are?
4. Jesus did not teach his disciples to pray “my Father”, he taught “our Father”, reminding us we belong to a family. Has prayer changed how you see others?
5. Is there a tension between calling God, “Father”, and saying “hallowed be your name”? How can we embrace this tension?

READ

“Jesus responded to his disciples question, not with instructions, but with a demonstration. He showed them how to pray, offering a model to follow. And here is the first bit, the first movement of prayer the Jesus way. “our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” In that turn of phrase, Jesus lays a threefold foundation for prayer:

- 1. Remember who God is*
- 2. Remember who you are*
- 3. Remember who we are to each other”*

An extract taken from Tyler Staton’s Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 56)

Remember who God is

The existential question in ancient days was not, “does God exist?” – that was obvious. The real question was, “is God knowable”? Jesus did not introduce his disciples to a new God, he introduced them to a knowable God – a Father.

One of our greatest barriers to an intimate prayer life with the Father is receiving the love of God. We may buy this intellectually, but we struggle to comprehend this experientially even though Jesus introduces us to a God so powerful, good and knowable.

In Genesis 3, the serpent never once takes direct aim at Eve, instead he takes aim at her view of God’s character.

“Did God really say...” This was never an outright lie, but rather a twisting of the truth.

In Genesis 2, God generously offers Adam and Eve free reign over the garden – “...any tree...except this one, it’s poisonous”. The serpent flips this broad and generous invitation into a restrictive and narrow command trying to make a generous offer seem stingy.

The serpent does not ask Eve to be disobedient, rather, he chips away at her trust in God. As Jesus teaches us to pray, we begin by remembering who it is we are talking to.

Remember who you are

The problem is now that Eve has a distorted view of God and as a result she has a distorted view of who she is. When she sees God as something less than a Father, she in turn sees herself as something less than a daughter.

As we begin to pray and acknowledge who it is we are talking to, adoration to God is always given back to us. In the opening of Paul's letter to the small churches in Rome, he does not call them "Christians", he calls them "Saints" (Romans 1). To call someone a saint is not to necessarily call them good or well behaved, it is to identify them as someone who has experienced the goodness of God. As Tyler Staton puts it: "We recover our sainthood simply through adoration. When we remember who God is, when we experience his goodness, we recover our own identity as well."

The serpent does not ask Eve to be disobedient, rather, he chips away at her trust in God. As Jesus teaches us to pray, we begin by remembering who it is we are talking to.

"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"

Matt. 7:11

Remember who we are to each other

Prayer is the place where our understanding of who God is, is restored, our understanding of who we are is restored, but most importantly, prayer is the place where our memory is restored and our understanding of who others are is restored. Jesus did not teach his disciples to pray "my Father", he taught them to pray, "our Father". Prayer brings our hearts into an alignment with God and allows us to view others as he views them. Image bearers, worthy of his grace and forgiveness, purposeful and gifted.

PRACTICE

A simple and effective form of adoration is the intentional practice of gratitude.

Historically in the Christian tradition, the prayer of examen has provided an effective framework for gratitude. Typically prayed in the evening, examen begins by reviewing the day with God, playing back the events of the day like a movie and thanking God for every good thing along the way - the first sip of coffee that morning, the moment of laughter with your daughter, the insightful conversation with a colleague, the progress made on a big project, and on and on it goes.

Next, we invite Holy Spirit to illuminate the day, showing you the moment when God's presence felt nearest and the moment his presence felt most distant. While God is always with us, our awareness of his presence wanes.

Finally, pray a simple prayer of intercession for tomorrow.

To close off your time together, pray through these simple steps and share anything God revealed to you.

Week Three: Your Kingdom Come

WATCH

You could either have everyone watch before joining together or start your night by watching together where Ruth and Keith discuss the Kingdom of heaven coming to earth through prayer.

UNDERSTAND

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

Matt. 6:10

"Yes, prayer stills us, brings us peace, helps us come to terms with what is. Prayer changes the person praying from the inside out. But prayer also releases power. Prayer releases power to affect real change in the tangible world."

"If we really took Jesus' invitation seriously, if we really believed in the story of prayer that Jesus talked about, the modern church would have a hard time getting its people to do anything but pray. In actuality, we need to be motivated to pray. And that's because most people, even the most serious, mature Christians, don't buy prayer as Jesus described it, not entirely anyway."

It is absolutely true that prayer is equal parts wonder and mystery, but more than anything else, prayer is a profound invitation. Prayer is, I believe, the most profound invitation God offers us on the other side of grace. And this invitation is not just for the pious or the lucky; it's for all of us."

The "on earth as it is in heaven" kind of praying is technically called "intercessory prayer." Biblically, our English word intercession comes from the Old Testament Hebrew word paga', and in New Testament Greek, it's enteuxis. The English word is derived from the Latin word intercedo, meaning "to come between." In both ancient and modern expressions, to intercede means to go between, to intervene between two parties; to mediate. In lay terms, intercessory prayer simply means to pray for someone else."

The motive behind all true intercessory prayer is love for the other. Jesus isn't describing some real-life version of wishes to a cosmic genie that occasionally come true if you figure out the formula. He's talking about the kind of prayers that start with love for someone else and end with inviting God's activity into places where that love is lacking. Intercession is a willing and intentional choice to turn from the endless spiral into the self - my desires, my needs, my circumstances- to the desires, needs, and circumstances of another. To utter even a syllable of intercessory prayer is a profound act of love."

An extract taken from Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (pages 93 and 98)

SHARE

1. From your perspective, what does it mean to ask for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven?
2. Can you share a time where you were praying for someone and witnessed the kingdom of God come "on earth as it is in heaven"?
3. Jesus tells his disciples to pray in his name, (John 16:23-24) which means "in my authority" – how does praying with authority change how we pray?
4. Has there been a time you have prayed and you did not see what you hoped for? How did you handle this? What was formed in you as a result?
5. If God gave you everything you asked for in the last week, what would happen?

READ

Read the following verses:

- Psalm 115:16
- Genesis 1:28

The greatest existential question every philosopher has tried to answer is this; "why are we here?" What we just read in Psalm 115 and Genesis 1 can be summarised by saying this, 'we are here to rule'. Not in a power-hungry or manipulative kind of way, but in a way that mirrors the image of God. Humanity's original design is to rule, and this language was usually only used of kings and queens; so you could say we were designed to represent the king of kings as royalty.

Notice in Psalm 115, it says that God has "given" the earth to mankind. In other words, God does not neglect responsibility for the earth to lighten his load; rather, we are his managers, or you could say, we are his intercessors here and now standing between heaven and earth and bringing one to the other.

"This place we inhabit is our assignment – to spread his image into every square inch."

Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 101)

So how are we doing at ruling? Natural resources are being pillaged from the nations who need them most and overconsumed by those who have plenty. Half of the world is dying of starvation, and the other half is dying of obesity. From 2021 to 2023 the number of children living in poverty increased by 200,000 meaning that 36% of children in the UK now live in poverty. Something has gone horribly wrong.

"The authority to rule God's creation, given to you and me in Genesis 2, was usurped by Satan in Genesis 3."

Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 101)

The Genesis conflict reveals that we have a spiritual enemy, the weapon of this enemy is deception and the effect of this deception is paralysis resulting in a communication breach between us and God. We are unable to “rule” because somewhere between God’s mind and our action, the signals are cut off. We still carry the image and authority of a perfect, loving God, but we are paralyzed by a communication breach.

- Isaiah 9:6
- John 12:31
- Matthew 28:18
- John 16:7, 23

Isaiah foretold God would come to us as one of us, but “the government will be on his shoulders” is much more than just a catchy verse we read on Christmas Eve. This is a political statement, it is authority language, and it is about ruling. To put it differently, “God is coming to win back the role we lost, to repair the communication breach.”

Jesus, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy, makes it clear for us to see:

“Why were you and I created? To rule. What does Jesus call Satan? Ruler. Genesis language. What does Jesus promise? To win our rule back. The Genesis promise.”

Tyler Staton’s Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 103)

After Jesus’ resurrection he sums up his victory in these famous words we just read at the end of Matthew’s gospel. God won our authority back, he restored the very position we were made for, and made us intercessors again.

Most people long for a face to face conversation with Jesus. Often we say, “if only He was here we could ask him this or that”. But Jesus said it is “better” for him to go. Alan Jones says “he is going to leave them, and this time for good (in both senses of the word)”. But this was not a breakup speech. Jesus is talking about prayer. Later in John 16 he makes it clear (v23) and basically says “you have gotten used to bringing requests, needs, questions and complaints to me in person, but soon you’ll go directly to the Father, just as you have seen me do.” Phillip Yancey says “Of all the means God could have used, prayer seems to be the weakest, slipperiest, and easiest to ignore. So it is, unless Jesus was right in that most baffling claim. He went away for our sakes, as a form of power sharing, to invite us into direct communion with God and to give us a crucial role in the struggle against the forces of evil.” This is why we now pray in Jesus’ name. Larry Hurtado says “To pray in Jesus’ name...means that we enter into Jesus’ status in God’s favour, and invoke Jesus’ standing with God.”

“You’re not Jesus. But if you’re a follower of Jesus, every single time you pray, you come before the Father clothed in the robe and crown of a ruler. In the eyes of heaven, you are filled with Jesus’ status and standing. When God won your authority back, God was winning prayer back.”

Tyler Staton’s Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (p105)

PRACTICE

Take a moment and ask Holy Spirit to help you see or recognise an area of your daily or weekly life that needs to see the kingdom of heaven come to earth. This could be relational, circumstantial or cultural.

Have everyone share and then take time to pray in authority for these specific things. You could continue to do this as a group until you see breakthrough in these areas.

Week Four: Our Daily Bread

WATCH

You could either have everyone watch before joining together or start your night by watching together where Ruth and Keith discuss the gift of asking God for daily provision.

UNDERSTAND

"Give us today our daily bread"

Matt. 6:11

"The hinge point of Jesus' instructive, exemplary prayer is the phrase "on earth as it is in heaven." Two claims are hidden in this turn of phrase. The first is that heaven is the engine room for our prayers. Everything we can think to ask for finds its source in heaven. The second claim is that earth, the very ground we stand on while uttering our requests, is where the action happens. Heaven is the engine room, but earth is where our prayers are answered, are made visible. Earth is the atmosphere that heaven invades in response to our requests.

When Jesus illustrates prayer for the disciples and crowd of hangers-on, he tells the story of a neighbour needing - wait for it - bread. It's real language, earthy language, honest, everyday language. Daily bread language. Christians today tend to fill their prayers with euphemisms and phrases only heard between "Dear God" and "Amen." At some point, the church invented a prayer language, which has been passed on to many of us. Jesus teaches a way of prayer that invites the common language we hear at the deli counter, on the street corners, in business meetings, and over drinks with friends.

When the language we use in our prayers stays grounded, our prayers tend to stay grounded too. Ordinary language keeps us from lofty prayers that usher the activity of God into some far-off imaginative place and instead invites God into the here and now, into the concerns of today-what I'll eat, who I'll meet, what I'll do, and how I'll feel about it all along the way. "On earth as it is in heaven" prayers. Daily bread prayers.

Jesus unmistakably rips prayer out of the sacred, stained-glassed, ornate walls of the church and places it in the commonness of everyday life. Prayer is not the ascent of the soul to some other place; it deals directly with our basic day-to-day needs and wants.

Prayer is about the demands, obligations, and privileges of this very day.

If we pray for an end to global hunger but neglect to "say grace" over the pineapple fried rice we picked up for tonight's dinner, we miss out on a lot. If we pray for environmental sustainability but fail to whisper thanks-giving at the summit of a Saturday afternoon hike, our God is smaller for our trouble, not larger. If we pray for justice in the fashion industry's East Asian factories but ignore the person ringing up our Christmas exchange as they work a holiday double shift at H&M to make ends meet, we're missing the forest for the trees. And if we effortlessly judge the parking space prayers of someone else, sure that we know the priorities of an incomprehensible God, our spiritual lives are suffocating and restricted while their God is ever involved, interested, present.

If we pray for only big things, exclusively limiting our conversation with God to the objectively noble requests, we live a cramped spiritual life, with little room for the actual God we meet in Jesus. Gratitude is the God-given reward for those who can stomach praying for small things."

Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (pages 117-119)

SHARE

1. Are you someone who tends to pray for the small everyday things, or the bigger “world” problems?
2. How could praying for ordinary, everyday and daily provision become a spiritual practice that pushes back against the desire to control?
3. God knows what we need, yet Jesus wants us to ask Him. How important can prayer and asking be in building intimate relationship with the Father?
4. Can you share a time in your life where you were asking God for daily provision? What did you learn and what was formed in you?

READ

Read the following verses:

- Psalm 2:8
- John 2:1-4
- John 5:2-6
- Mark 10:49-51

Why would Jesus ask questions when he himself is the image of the invisible God and about this God, Jesus says that He knows what we need before we even ask?

From Psalms, to the gospels we read that asking is the key to unlocking the kingdom of God. Charles Spurgeon famously said, “...asking is the rule of the kingdom...” But why? Why does God want us to ask?

- Luke 11:5-8
- Matthew 7:9-11

The Biblical story begins with relationship. Before there was anything, there was everything. A perfect triune God who existed in perfect relationship, completely sufficient, Father, Spirit and Son. Creation is born because of the overflowing love of this triune God. The Biblical story also ends with relationship where there is no work left to do and we are united with God to enjoy Him forever and for Him to enjoy us.

Communication is essential to any relationship. Asking risks rejection and also opens us to surprise. It makes us vulnerable to the other. Without asking, God is something less than a free, relational Being. He is a machine delivering on our desires, maybe even before we become conscious of what we want.

“Asking is the means by which we build the relationship with God he designed us to enjoy.”

Tyler Staton’s Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 122)

In Luke 11 Jesus tells a story about prayer, surprising in its ordinariness. The story is relational as ringing your next-door neighbour's doorbell for a slice of Hovis bread's finest multigrain for your morning toast.

"Talking to God is not an awkward meeting with an old, white-bearded monk where you try to think of something profound to say. Prayer is as casual as small talk. Asking is the experience of prayer at its most relational."

Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 124)

As an illustration of God's heart toward us in our asking, Jesus offers the image of a father who likes to give his kids what they need and want. God enjoys not only redeeming wrongs but also giving us good gifts. God is our Father. And he loves to give us what we want, even if it's a parking space.

"Ask. That's all he wants from us."

Tyler Staton's Praying Like Monks Living Like Fools (page 128)

PRACTICE

It is so freeing that in the middle of a prayer asking for heaven to come to earth Jesus throws in something as common as today's lunch. So let's honour him by bringing our everyday, ordinary requests, knowing he treasures those too.

Spend a few minutes praying for specific needs and wants in your life. The challenge is to ask for that which you think is too small to bring to God - the work meeting you're really hoping goes well, the need you barely believe God will meet, the email reply you keep checking your inbox for, the house you just put an offer on, or the rent check for which you don't have enough in your bank account to write.

Ask vulnerably, with enough specificity that God has the chance to disappoint you or surprise you. Ask boldly, with enough empowerment that you wonder if you're allowed to be this forward with God.