

# How To Experience and Lead Life-Giving Prayer Times

## Introduction (9 min)

- **Definition determines destination. So what is prayer? What is the definition?**
  - Some would say, "Prayer is talking to God." However, this makes God to be one big ear willing to listen to our feedback of how to run the world to our specifications
  - Some would say that "Prayer is telling God our needs." Granted, requests are important, but they are neither the foundation or core of what biblical prayer is
  - Definition from Alvin Reid: "Prayer is intimacy with God that leads to the fulfillment of his purposes."
  
- **One key strategy of the Devil: making sure our prayer meetings are bad**
  - Often a lot of sharing, not a lot of praying.
  - Often filled with "distant requests" (Aunt nellie's toe)
  - Often filled with sleepiness
  - But God is not the author of boredom, especially when we are talking to him (see God's creativity and prayer in PRAYZING)
  
- **How NOT to start a prayer time**
  1. **"Does anyone have any prayer requests?"**
    - No precedent of starting prayer like this in Scripture
    - Main problem: It starts prayer with a man-word focus, not a God-ward focus. This is a direct contradiction to the biblical pattern.
    - Problem 2: Does not give equal opportunity of sharing
    - Problem 3: Bad economy of time. You don't actually have time to pray
  2. **"Let's all pray as we feel led".**
    - What we mean to say is "led by the Spirit", but that get's lost in translation.
    - What people often hear is "Let's pray whatever comes to mind".
    - Result? Mental data dump that is unfocused and all over the map
  3. **"Let's pray around the circle"**
    - Problem: Forces everyone to pray.
    - Especially hard if you're the last one in the circle. You run out of material and you just try to make stuff up.

Reflection question: How would you describe the most effective prayer times you've ever experienced? What made for a bad prayer time?

# Session 1 - The Eight Guiding Principles for Leading Life-Giving Prayer Experiences (13 min)

Book Recommendations: Transforming Prayer and [Power to Change Small Group study](#)

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

### 1. Foundation (Scripture-fed)

- Best way to pray is from God's word (John 15:7)
- Never pray with a closed bible.
- The person who tends to start the conversation guides the conversation. Question: Who starts the prayer conversation when we come together to pray? Or when we start praying in the morning? God must start the prayer conversation
- Peterson: "Prayer is answering speech"
- Piper - "Where the mind is not brimming with Scripture, the heart is not brimming with prayer"
- Mueller - For years he tried to pray without the Bible, but his mind constantly wandered. However, when he began in the scripture, he could pray for extended periods of time
- Let prayer be rooted in God's word, heart, mind and will in the Scriptures
- Acts 4:23-30 => Only model of church prayer meeting in Acts. They start with OT scripture.
- ALWAYS PRAY WITH AN OPEN BIBLE. LET GOD START THE CONVERSATION

### 2. Fervor (Spirit-led)

- 1 Cor 2:6-16 => Only the Holy Spirit knows the mind of God. So why would I want to pray my thoughts when I can pray God's thoughts through the agency of the indwelling Spirit?
- Rom 8 => Paul: "I don't even know how to pray" Comforting. However, what's more comforting? The Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words
- This also makes our prayers Christ-glorifying (John 16:14)
- God has purchased for us a prayer tutor: the Holy Spirit. And the cost was high: the blood of Christ. And he doesn't just visit once a week: he dwells inside us and tutors us on a moment-by-moment basis to teach us to pray

### 3. Faith (Worship-based)

- Heb 11:6a = Without faith it is IMPOSSIBLE to please God. Not improbable, but IMPOSSIBLE. Riveting statement. If we do not pray by faith, we are not praying in a way that pleases God!
- Heb 11:6b => is talking not about saving faith, but ongoing seeking faith. "for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him". Doesn't say "rewards those who give him a grocery list" He is a rewarder of those who draw near and seek him. He rewards me when I seek HIM simply for who he is.
- The only enduring motivation for prayer is that he is worthy to be sought.
- We seek his face before we seek his hand. Illustration: Child asking parent for what is in the hand (candy, car keys). As children mature, they want the relationship, more than what they can get.
  - If all you do is seek God's hand, you may miss his face, but if you seek his face, he is always delighted to share his provision of his hand.

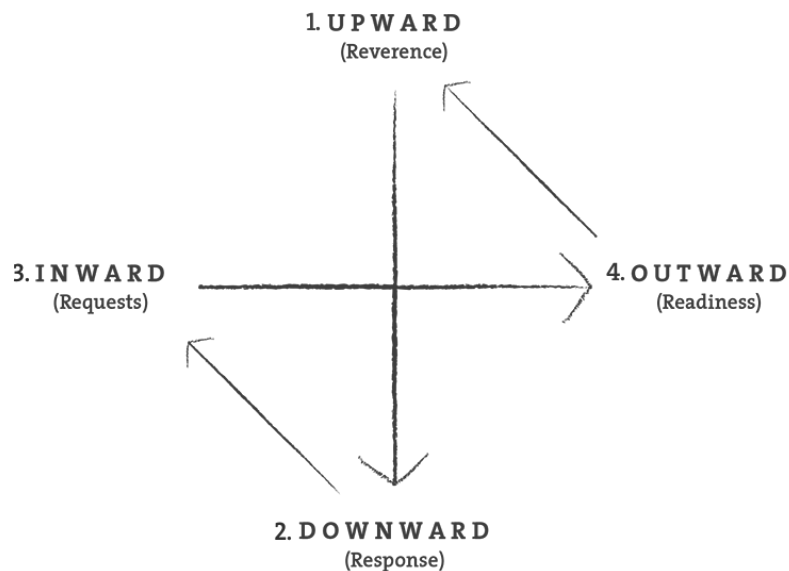
## Session 2 - Principle 4: FOCUS (2/2 or 4/4 pattern) (15 min)

- Matt 6:9 => "Pray then like this". Not a suggestion or a good idea. It is a present imperative. It is a command.
  - More than just quoting the prayer. Luke and Matthew's accounts have different wording.
  - However, the PATTERN is the same

### THE "2/2" PATTERN (Matt 6:9-13)

- He is WORTHY (v9-10)! I am NEEDY (v11-13)!
  - The first half of Lord's prayer is all God-word. The second half of Lord's prayer is man-ward.
  - Even if we only have a few minutes to pray, you start God-ward, then go man-ward. Seek his face, then his hand.
  - We don't see what we really need until we see how worthy he is (Is 6, Luke 5)

### THE "4/4" PATTERN (Matt 6:9-13)



#### 1. UPWARD (Reverence)

- v9: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name"
- Qn: What does this passage tell me about God and his character? How can I begin this prayer time with this focus?
- Read the passage with the group, ask them what they see about God and his character, then pray.

## 2. DOWNWARD (Response)

- Worship is the response of all that I am to the revelation of all that He is.
- v10: "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"
- In essence, this is us saying, "I'm trading in my purposes for yours. I'm trading in my will for yours I'm trading in my agenda for yours. I'm trading in my kingdom for yours."
- Qn: Based on who you are, how do you want me to respond? Is there sin I need to confess? Is there self-will I need to surrender? How can I submit myself and humble myself to you?
- Truth: We don't even know what to pray about until we have worshipped well and surrendered completely.
- With Jesus' purpose and kingship in view, we can now pray according to the will of God. With open bible and surrendered hearts, we can now pray God's will and purposes, not our own. We can ask for his kingdom to come, not for ours to come (and how often does that happen!)

## 3. INWARD (Requests)

- v11-12: "Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors."
- 2 key categories of needs: RESOURCES AND RELATIONSHIPS.
- Every prayer list item is either a resource need or a relationship need.
- v11: RESOURCES
- "Lord we are trusting you to provide for us all we need for this day."
- v12: RELATIONSHIPS
- .
- Isn't it amazing how well Jesus knows our needs? On the basis of reverence for him and response of surrender, we can now bring our needs to God and trust him. How awesome is he!

## 4. OUTWARD (Readiness)

- We cannot stay as "prayer monks"
- Piper: "Until you know that life is war, you cannot know what prayer is for"
- v13: "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"
- In essence, this says, "Lord, now we're going into battle. But among it all, please don't let us get stuck."
- As we end our prayers, we must get battle-ready.
- Eph 6:18 => Coming out of word-meditated prayer, we are ready for the battle.

## Session 3 - The Principles 5-8 (16 min)

### 6. Flow (ABC)

- ABC - Audible, Brief, Clear
- **Audible:** Loud enough that I can hear you.
  - It's no point for you to open your mouth if we can't hear you.
  - If the Spirit is prompting you to pray, he is doing it for the benefit of all, not just one.
    - Maybe your prayer will prompt me to pray something I wouldn't have thought of otherwise
    - Maybe your prayer will prompt me to agree
  - Another reason: praying is a window into the soul, so it allows us to know people's heart. Prayer together rebuilds trust. Specificity breed authenticity.
- **Brief:** Short enough that we can stay awake.
  - Qn: What do you do with long-winded people? Ans: Diffuse it before they use it. Tell people up front to pray short prayers. Say, "In one sentence or two, pray this way".
  - Short prayers allow others to participate
  - You may have to take people aside offline to serve others
- **Clear:** Clear enough that we can focus and agree
  - Pray for one thing or focus at a time.
  - If you pray about 30 things, then it confuses

### 7. Freedom (Expression)

- Perhaps the worst practical way to pray is to "fold hands and bow heads"
- Biblical and practical alternative: "Stand up, lift up your eyes and raise your hands"
- Forms not rigid or legalistic. Give people permission to exercise freedom in physical posture of prayer.
- Illustration: Different ways in which our children express affection to us. Glory in fatherhood is found in diversity of love expression.
- Walk, kneel, stand...
- Also helps us to stay awake

### 8. Flexibility (Sensitivity)

- Have a plan, but in the moment, be sensitive.
- Prepare, but hold it loosely.
- It's the Lord's prayer time, not ours. Sometimes, he will shift the focus from what you originally planned.

## 9. Faithfulness (Life-long)

- Not a flavour of the month, theme of the year, etc...
- We must continue to pursue this for the rest of our lives.
- Our motivation must be rooted in that which never changes. What is that? GOD IS WORTHY TO BE SOUGHT.
- Most of the time, we won't feel like praying
- However, develop a dream of dying on your knees

## Practical insights to facilitating effective prayer participation

- **Allow flexibility in participation**
  - Praying out loud
    - "If you don't feel comfortable praying out loud, just be blessed by those who do. Listen in. Listen to the group beside you."
  - Pray alone or with the person you came with
- **Level the praying ground (between verbal hijackers and shy people who get shut down)**
  - Give practical ENTRY POINTS - Fill in the blank, Finish the sentence
    - Allows those who are shy to have an entry point of prayer. And we need to hear from those people.
    - Cuts long-winded people off at the knees. Look out for prayer hijackers.
    - Fill blanks and finish sentences with arcing relationships
      - Coordinate relationships
        - Series: "God, you are \_\_\_\_\_"
        - Progression: "Not only are you \_\_\_\_\_[what the last person said], you are \_\_\_\_\_"
      - Subordinate Restatement
        - Action-Manner: "God, you show your love for us BY \_\_\_\_\_"
        - Negative - Positive: "Jesus, because of your work, I am NOT \_\_\_\_\_, I am \_\_\_\_\_"
        - Comparison: "God, you are a bigger rock than \_\_\_\_\_"
      - Subordinate Distinct Statement
        - \*\*\*Ground: "God, you are beautiful to me BECAUSE \_\_\_\_\_"
        - Inference: "God, you are merciful, THEREFORE \_\_\_\_\_"
        - Action-Purpose: "God, may you do this SO THAT \_\_\_\_\_"
        - \*\*\*Temporal: "God you show your faithfulness WHEN \_\_\_\_\_"
      - Subordinate Contrary Statement
        - \*\*\*Concessive: "God I bless you EVEN THOUGH \_\_\_\_\_" (or even when, even if, in spite of, in the midst of)
      - Other General questions
        - WHO: "God, we pray that you give \_\_\_\_\_ comfort"
        - WHERE: "Thank you God for saving me FROM \_\_\_\_\_"
        - WHAT: "Lord, I confess that I am fearful ABOUT \_\_\_\_\_" or "God, sustain me IN \_\_\_\_\_"

## Session 3 - Toolkit (22 min)

Resources: Fresh encounters book. SG series: [Wake up and pray](#).

### LAB 1: Psalm 23

Context: In small group. Not a lot of time to pray, but want to pray, so we choose 2/2 pattern. "You are worthy! we are needy!"

1. Say, "Tonight, we studied Psalm 23, so let's review what Psalm 23 shows us about God's character. He is our Lord. He is our shepherd. He is our satisfaction. He gives us rest....."
2. Now, 2 approaches to "he is worthy":
  1. Shotgun approach: Say "This passage has told us a multitude of things about God. For the next 5 minutes, we are not going to ask anything of God." (Key ground rule to establish) But, let's pray like this, 'God I praise you because you are \_\_\_\_\_' and fill that with all the things we've seen about God in this text"
  2. Rifle approach: Focus on one specific attribute. Say "For the next 5 minutes, let's not ask anything of God, but simply say, 'God you are my shepherd when \_\_\_\_\_' " Remember: specificity breeds authenticity
3. At this point, let's sing about God's nearness or his goodness
4. Then, move to "we are needy"
  - o Say this, "Let's pray for those who need his presence and comfort by praying, 'God I pray for \_\_\_\_\_ to experience your comfort' " If you like prayer lists: have someone write those requests down and email them to the group before they get home. Create prayer list while you're praying.

### LAB 2: Psalm 3

Context: We have 30 minutes or 1 hour to pray. So, we choose the 4/4 pattern.

1. UPWARD - Reverence: What does this passage tell me about God and his character? He is salvation, he is our shield.....
  - o Shotgun approach: "Let's just praise God for these truths"
  - o Rifle approach: "The theme of salvation is paramount in this passage. Let's praise God as our salvation. For these first few minutes, let's pray, 'Thank you that you have saved me FROM \_\_\_\_\_' "
2. DOWNWARD - Response
  - o Say, "On the basis of his salvation, let's confess our fears or the times we forget his salvation. 'Lord, I confess that I am fearful ABOUT \_\_\_\_\_'"
3. INWARD - Request
  - o QN: What does this passage tell us we need from God? We need him to be our shield, to sustain us...
  - o Say, "Let's focus on our need for God's sustenance. 'God, I'm trusting you to sustain me IN \_\_\_\_\_' "
  - o Then, you can transition to praying for people who need to be sustained.
4. OUTWARD - Readiness
  - o "Lord, save us from the enemy OF \_\_\_\_\_"
  - o \*\*\*Engage everyone together in a theme of God's word: Have the whole small group respond to the prayer by saying v8: "Salvation belongs to the Lord"
  - o Allows people to walk out of that meeting with a truth of God embedded in their hearts

## LAB 3: 2 Tim 4:17-18

Context: We have 30 minutes or 1 hour to pray. So, we choose the 4/4 pattern.

1. UPWARD – Reverence

2. DOWNWARD – Response

3. INWARD – Request

4. OUTWARD - Readiness