

WHEN
YOU
PRAY

as a Small Group



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AS A SMALL GROUP

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CONTENTS

Introduction	7
Orientation Session	9
Discussion-Based Group	
Session Template	15
Prayerwork Ideas	19
Activity-Based Group	
Session Template	25
Prayerwork Ideas	30
Introspective Group	
Session Template	33
Prayerwork Ideas	38
Arts-Focused Group	
Session Template	41
Prayerwork Ideas	46
Habit Breaker Group	
Session Template	49
Prayerwork Ideas	54
Group Session Samples	
Sample Session 1: Discussion-Based Group	59
Sample Session 2: Introspective Group	65

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to grow and mature as a Christian, but perhaps none is more important than developing a pattern of prayer that leads to a closer walk with God. Cultivating a meaningful prayer life is something we are to do not only in private but also in community—both when we are alone and when we meet together. In fact, one of the most effective ways we may begin, renew, or deepen our prayer life is to pray regularly with a group of faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

This guide is intended to assist small groups in the exploration and practice of prayer. It may be used by prayer groups, Sunday school classes, Bible study groups, committees/teams, or any small group desiring to grow closer to God and to one another through prayer. Designed to be used in conjunction with the resource *When You Pray: Daily Practices for Prayerful Living* by Rueben P. Job (Abingdon Press, 2009), this guide presents five session plan templates, offering choices for different types of groups with different needs and interests:

- Discussion-based
- Activity-based
- Introspective
- Arts-focused
- Habit Breaker

Though the templates roughly follow the same basic outline—which is intentionally linked to the pattern of prayer outlined in *When You Pray* and based on the pattern of prayer taught and modeled by Jesus in the Gospels—each template has unique nuances, distinctions, and modifications designed specifically for a given group or approach. To use a template to create your own group session, simply select a weekly reading from *When You Pray* and

“plug in” the appropriate Scriptures and other material as indicated in the template. The weekly readings in *When You Pray*, which are numbered from 1-56, begin with the first week of Advent and continue throughout the seasons of the church year. You may select material for your group sessions according to the season and corresponding common lectionary readings, or you may choose to select material according to topic or theme. Whether you need group sessions for one month, one quarter, or an entire year, you will find ample material in *When You Pray* from which to choose.

Each of the five templates included in this guide outlines a session plan of just under 60 minutes, with suggestions for decreasing or extending the session if desired. Following each template, you will find a list of “Prayerwork” suggestions (prayer activity ideas) suited for the specified kind of group. For example, discussion-based Prayerwork ideas are provided for discussion-based groups, action-oriented Prayerwork ideas are provided for activity-based groups, and so forth. Time has been allotted for one Prayerwork activity per group session. Choose from those provided in this guide, or find other prayer activities you would like to try by searching the Internet or your local library or bookstore.

As you follow this simple guide to create your own group sessions, feel free to choose one session template or to mix them up as you wish to meet the needs and preferences of your group. The purpose of this resource is not to encourage a legalistic or rote practice of prayer, but to offer guidance, encouragement, and practical help for cultivating a meaningful prayer experience suited to your particular group.

As you establish the habit and pattern of praying together as a group in the coming weeks, you are likely to find that your own personal practice of prayer is both enriched and strengthened. May you and those joining with you discover anew the life-giving power of prayer!

ORIENTATION SESSION

(Approximately 60 minutes)

Materials Needed:

Bible(s), copies of *When You Pray: Daily Practices for Prayerful Living* for all participants, any items needed for your Prayerwork activity

Opening (5 minutes)

Welcome participants and open with prayer. Read aloud a brief Scripture and offer a prayer in response. You may say your own prayer or use the following:

Loving God, you are a God of relationship. You love us without limit and call us into relationship with you through your Son, Jesus Christ. You make your home within us, indwelling us with your Holy Spirit. You are our ever-present companion, our loving and wise guide, our very source of life and strength. We long to know you more—to draw nearer to you through prayer so that we may walk more closely with you each day and live faithfully and fully as followers of Jesus Christ. Guide us in this process. “Lord, teach us to pray.”* We ask it in the name of Jesus. Amen.

*Luke 11:1

Introduction (5-10 minutes)

In advance, familiarize yourself with the introduction of this book. Present the information found there in your own words, noting that one of the most effective ways to cultivate a meaningful prayer life is to explore and practice prayer in community.

Announce that a variety of small groups will be forming in the coming weeks for that very purpose. (Indicate the number of weeks that groups will be meeting, or acknowledge that each group may make this decision.)

Explain that although the groups will use the same resource—*When You Pray: Daily Practices for Prayerful Living*, by Rueben P. Job—they will have the option of choosing one or more styles or approaches designed to meet different needs and interests. Note that groups may choose one style or approach or mix them up from week to week as they choose.

Briefly present and explain the five group options to participants:

Discussion-based – for those who prefer to emphasize group discussion

Activity-based – for those desiring more hands-on activity

Introspective – for those who prefer reflective, self-examining practices such as meditation and journaling

Arts-focused – for those who enjoy various modes of artistic expression

Habit Breaker – for those eager to break out of old habits and try new approaches

Overview (15 minutes)

In advance, become familiar with each of the five group session templates. Note that 1) the session outline is basically the same from group to group (with the exception of the Introspective Group, which substitutes Journaling Time for Group Discussion/Application), and 2) the distinctions or nuances among the groups are found in *how* each segment of the session outline is approached or carried out.

If possible, provide copies of *When You Pray* for all participants, or have participants share. Present the basic outline of the group session:

- Opening
- Invitational Prayer
- Scripture Reading
- Devotional Reading
- Group Discussion/Application (or Journaling Time)
- Prayerwork
- Group Prayer
- A Time of Commitment
- Closing

As you move through each segment of the outline, explaining what will happen at that time, note any nuances or distinctions suggested for each of the five groups. For example, a candle and instrumental music are added to the Opening for introspective groups, while arts-focused groups are encouraged to use a visual element during this time. Likewise, the Group Prayer becomes more active for activity-based groups with the addition of doodling, drawing, or movement, while arts-focused groups are instructed to create a prayer mural. During the time ordinarily set aside for Group Discussion, introspective groups engage in journaling instead. And so forth.

Prayerwork (15-20 minutes)

Highlight the importance of the Prayerwork activities, noting that a list of suggestions is provided for each of the five groups. Groups are encouraged to select one idea for each session, and/or to create/find their own prayer activities tailored to address their specific needs and interests. (A multitude of ideas may be found by searching the Internet or a local library or bookstore.)

In advance, choose a Prayerwork activity and gather any necessary materials. Lead the group through the exercise at this time.

Questions (5 minutes)

Have a time for questions and answers. Write down any questions you are unable to answer at this time, and get back to the individual with an answer later.

Closing (5 minutes)

Invite participants to join you in the Closing from the sample session for discussion-based groups (found on page 64).

Read aloud the following Scripture blessing:

The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face to shine
upon you, and be gracious to you;
the LORD lift up his countenance upon you,
and give you peace. (*Numbers 6:24-26*)

Follow the blessing with a benediction that the group may recite together. For example, you might say together, “May the Lord bless you and keep you,” “Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you,” “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you,” or some other benediction of your choosing.

In advance, create five sign-up sheets—one for each of the five group styles—or one sign-up sheet with a column where individuals may note their preferred group style. Allow space for name, phone number, and email address. Invite those who are interested in joining/leading a group to sign up on their way out.