

When you pray, do you naturally begin with your own needs and requests, or do you pause first to focus on who God is and praise His character?

How does reflecting on God's holiness and attributes change the way you view the problems and burdens you bring to Him in prayer?

In what areas of your life are you fighting for your own kingdom rather than surrendering to God's kingdom and His will?

What is the difference between feeling sorry for your sin and genuinely repenting with a change of mind that leads to a change of action?

When you look into the mirror of God's Word and see sin revealed, do you tend to ignore it or address it through confession and repentance?

How does understanding that God reveals sin not to shame you but to heal you change your approach to confession and repentance?

Is there a specific sin, habit, or thought pattern that the Holy Spirit is bringing to your attention that you need to confess and turn from?

Why do you think Jesus connects receiving God's forgiveness with our willingness to forgive others who have sinned against us?

Who has hurt you or sinned against you, and what debt are you still carrying that needs to be released into God's hands through forgiveness?

How would your daily life look different if you practiced the pattern of pausing to praise God before bringing your requests to Him in prayer?

Small Group Guide: First Things First - Reflect and Repent

Series Overview

This guide accompanies week 2 of the "First Things First" sermon series on prayer, based on the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-12.

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin by praying through the Lord's Prayer together slowly, pausing after each phrase for personal reflection.

Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

Question: When you look in a mirror in the morning, what's the first thing you typically notice or fix? How does that compare to how we "look in the mirror" of God's Word?

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. Prayer Moves from Praise to Reflection

After praising God for who He is, we naturally begin to examine our own hearts in light of His holiness.

2. True Repentance = Change of Mind + Change of Action

Repentance isn't just feeling sorry or asking forgiveness—it's turning from sin and choosing a new direction under God's kingdom.

3. Sin is a Debt We Cannot Pay

Our sin creates separation from God that only Jesus' sacrifice can bridge.

4. Forgiveness Flows Both Ways

Being forgiven by God should lead us to extend forgiveness to others who have sinned against us.

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Understanding God's Kingdom (15 minutes)

The sermon contrasted Alexander the Great's kingdom (ruled by force) with God's kingdom (ruled by invitation). What does it mean practically to pray "Your kingdom come, Your will be done"?

In what areas of your life are you most tempted to build your own kingdom rather than surrender to God's?

How does recognizing God's holiness (from last week's lesson) naturally lead to reflection on our own lives?

Section 2: The Practice of Repentance (20 minutes)

The sermon defined repentance as "a change of mind that leads to a change of action." Why is both parts of this definition important?

Read 1 John 1:9. Why does God require us to confess our sins specifically rather than make vague apologies? What makes this difficult?

The pastor said, "God does not reveal these things to shame you. He reveals them so that He can heal you." How does this change your perspective on conviction of sin?

What's the difference between:

Feeling bad about sin

Asking God for forgiveness

True repentance

Section 3: Forgiving Others (20 minutes)

Read Matthew 6:14-15 together. Why do you think Jesus ties God's forgiveness of us to our forgiveness of others so directly?

The sermon emphasized that forgiving others doesn't mean:

Denying we've been hurt

Pretending the sin didn't happen

Saying "that's okay"

What DOES it mean to forgive someone who has hurt you?

Discuss the parable from Matthew 18 about the unforgiving servant. Have you ever caught yourself being like that servant—receiving grace but refusing to extend it?

What's the difference between forgiveness and trust? Can you forgive someone without immediately trusting them again?

Personal Reflection (10 minutes)

Take a few minutes of silence for personal reflection. Consider these questions privately:

Upward (God): Is there a sin I've been avoiding, justifying, or hiding from God?

Inward (Self): What patterns of thought or behavior in my life don't align with God's will?

Outward (Others): Is there someone I need to forgive? A debt I've been holding onto?

Practical Applications

This Week's Challenge: The Daily Repentance Practice

Each day this week, incorporate these steps into your prayer time:

PAUSE & PRAISE (5 minutes)

Begin by focusing on who God is

Praise His character and attributes

REFLECT (5 minutes)

Ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart

Use these questions:

Where did I miss the mark today?

What thoughts dishonored God?

How did my actions not reflect His kingdom?

REPENT (5 minutes)

Confess specific sins by name

Ask for forgiveness

Identify one concrete action you'll change

If needed, identify who can hold you accountable

RELEASE (5 minutes)

Ask God if there's anyone you need to forgive

Pray for those who have hurt you

Release the debt into God's hands

Accountability Partners

Pair up with someone in your group this week:

Share one area where you're struggling with sin (appropriate to your comfort level)

Share one person you're finding it hard to forgive

Commit to praying for each other daily

Check in mid-week

Memory Verse

1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

Closing Activity (10 minutes)

Prayer Stations

Set up three areas in your meeting space:

Station 1: Confession

Provide paper and pens

Members can write down sins they need to confess

Pray through them, then tear up the paper as a symbol of God's forgiveness

Station 2: Repentance

Provide index cards

Write one specific action you'll take this week to turn from a sin pattern

Take the card home as a reminder

Station 3: Forgiveness

Provide stones or small objects

Hold the stone representing the "debt" someone owes you

Pray and release it, setting the stone down as you forgive

Allow members to visit stations as they feel led.

Closing Prayer

Close by praying the Lord's Prayer together again, this time with new understanding:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors..."

Looking Ahead

Next week we'll continue with the next phrase of the Lord's Prayer. Encourage group members to:

Practice the daily repentance rhythm

Come prepared to share what God revealed through this practice

Continue memorizing the Lord's Prayer

Leader Notes

Be prepared for emotional responses during reflection times

Have tissues available

Don't rush the silent reflection periods

Be ready to pray individually with members who are struggling

Maintain confidentiality for anything shared in the group

If someone shares about serious sin (abuse, addiction, etc.), connect them with pastoral care

First Things First: A 5-Day Prayer Devotional

Day 1: Pause to Praise

Reading: Psalm 103:1-13

Devotional: Before we bring our needs to God, we must first see Him for who He truly is. Like the psalmist, we are called to "bless His holy name" and remember all His benefits. When we pause to praise, we shift our focus from our circumstances to God's character—His mercy, His compassion, His forgiveness. This isn't just a religious ritual; it's a heart posture that changes everything. When we truly see God's holiness, power, and love, our problems find their proper perspective. Today, before you pray about anything else, spend time simply praising God for who He is. List His attributes. Recall His faithfulness. Let worship prepare your heart for everything else.

Reflection: What attribute of God do you need to focus on today? How does remembering His character change your perspective on your current situation?

Day 2: Your Kingdom Come

Reading: Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4

Devotional: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done" is not a passive prayer—it's a declaration of surrender. Every day we choose which kingdom we're building: God's or our own. Like Alexander the Great conquered by imposing his will, we often try to impose ours on God through prayer. But God's kingdom operates by invitation, not force. When we pray "Your kingdom come," we're asking God to examine our hearts and reveal where we're still clinging to control. This prayer requires honest reflection: Are my desires aligned with God's will? Am I surrendered to His plans, or am I asking Him to bless mine? True prayer acknowledges God as King and ourselves as willing subjects.

Reflection: In what area of your life are you still fighting for your own kingdom instead of surrendering to God's?

Day 3: The Mirror of God's Word

Reading: James 1:22-25; Psalm 139:23-24

Devotional: God's Word functions like a mirror, revealing what we often try to hide. When we look into Scripture, we see ourselves honestly—the blemishes, the imperfections, the sin. But here's the choice: we can ignore what we see and go about our day unchanged, or we can let God address what He reveals. The mirror doesn't condemn; it clarifies. God doesn't show us our sin to shame us but to heal us. When David prayed "search me, O God," he was inviting divine examination. This requires courage and humility. But only when we see ourselves clearly in light of God's holiness can we experience the freedom that comes through genuine repentance and transformation.

Reflection: What has God's Word recently revealed to you about yourself? Are you willing to let Him address it?

Day 4: Forgive Us Our Debts

Reading: Romans 3:21-26; 1 John 1:8-10

Devotional: Sin is not a mistake or bad habit—it's a debt we cannot pay. Every sin earns separation from God, a wage we could never afford. But in God's kindness, He provided what we could not: Jesus paid our debt in full. When we confess our sins, we're not making vague apologies; we're naming them specifically, bringing them from darkness into light. True repentance involves both confession and change—a transformation of mind that leads to transformation of action. God is faithful and just to forgive, not because we deserve it, but because Jesus satisfied the requirement of holiness. Today, confess specifically. Name the sin. Accept the forgiveness. Then walk in newness of life.

Reflection: Is there a specific sin you need to confess by name today? What practical step will you take to turn from it?

Day 5: As We Forgive Our Debtors

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:31-32

Devotional: Forgiven people forgive. This isn't optional for followers of Jesus—it's evidence that we've truly understood the gospel. When we withhold forgiveness, we're like the servant who was forgiven millions but demanded repayment of pennies. Forgiveness doesn't mean the hurt wasn't real or that trust is automatically restored. It means we release the debt we're holding over someone and place it in God's hands, the only righteous Judge. Unforgiveness keeps us chained to the past, but forgiveness sets us free. As you reflect today, ask: Who am I holding hostage with unforgiveness? What debt am I refusing to release? Remember how much you've been forgiven, then extend that same grace to others.

Reflection: Who has the Holy Spirit brought to mind that you need to forgive? What would it look like to release that debt today?