

## Small Group Guide: A God-Centered Prayer Life

Based on Matthew 6:5-13



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### Overview

This session explores what it means to have a prayer life that is truly centered on God rather than ourselves. Using the Lord's Prayer as a blueprint, we will examine the do's and don'ts of prayer, reflect honestly on our own habits, and consider how following the order and priorities of the Lord's Prayer can transform the way we communicate with God.

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### Key Takeaways

- A prayer life centered on anything other than God is an unhealthy prayer life. If prayer exists primarily to serve yourself, it will not remain healthy or meaningful.
- Jesus warns against two specific traps: praying to be seen by others (Matthew 6:5-6) and filling prayers with empty, repetitive words to sound more spiritual (Matthew 6:7-8).

- The length of a prayer is not what gives it meaning. God already knows your situation. The point of prayer is not to inform him but to connect with him, worship him, and lean on him.
  - The Lord's Prayer is not just a recitation. It is a blueprint that establishes a God-first order of priority: worship and reverence, submission to his will, and then personal petition.
  - Leading with worship and gratitude naturally clarifies what you actually need to pray about. It shifts your focus before you ever bring your requests to God.
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## **Discussion Questions**

### **Opening**

1. When you were growing up, what did prayer look like for you? Was it something you were taught, something you discovered on your own, or something you are still figuring out?
  2. The pastor described a pattern from his childhood of praying quickly after doing something wrong just to feel better. Can you relate to that in any way? What did or does that kind of prayer feel like?
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### **Digging Into the Text**

3. In Matthew 6:5-6, Jesus addresses praying to be seen by others. In what modern ways do people make their faith or prayer life into a kind of performance, even unintentionally? Have you ever caught yourself doing this?
4. In Matthew 6:7-8, Jesus says God already knows what you need before you ask. If that is true, why do you think prayer still matters? What does it accomplish if not to inform God of something he does not already know?
5. The pastor described a season where he felt like a longer prayer meant a more meaningful prayer. Why do you think people make that connection? What does it reveal about how we sometimes misunderstand what prayer is for?
6. Looking at the structure of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, why do you think Jesus places worship and submission to God's will before any personal requests? What difference does that order make in practice?

7. The pastor referenced Philippians 4:6, which calls believers to bring their requests to God with thanksgiving. How do you hold that instruction together with the warning not to make prayer self-centered? Where is the balance?
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### **Personal Reflection**

8. When you think about your own prayer life right now, which of these would you say best describes it?
- Mostly requests and petitions
  - Mostly going through the motions or checking a box
  - Focused on worship and relationship
  - Inconsistent or hard to define

What do you think that reveals about where your focus tends to be?

9. The pastor said that spending time in worship and gratitude at the start of prayer often makes it clearer what you actually need to bring to God. Have you experienced something like that? What happened?
10. Is there an area of your life right now where it is genuinely difficult to pray "your will be done" and mean it? What makes that hard?
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### **Application**

11. The pastor described a practical habit of beginning prayer by setting aside his stressors and simply telling God how he feels about him before anything else. What would it look like for you to try something like that this week?
12. If you were to use the Lord's Prayer as a loose structure for your personal prayer time, what would each section look like in your own words and your own life right now?
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### **Practical Applications**

- **This week, try restructuring one prayer using the Lord's Prayer as a guide.** Begin with worship and acknowledgment of who God is, move into submitting your will to

his, and then bring your personal needs and requests. Pay attention to how it feels different from your usual approach.

- **Identify one thing you have been praying about primarily from a self-focused angle.** Ask yourself honestly whether you have been seeking God's will in that situation or mainly your own preferred outcome. Spend time this week praying specifically that his will would be done in it, even if that is uncomfortable.
- **Examine whether any part of your spiritual life has become performance.** This does not have to be dramatic. It could be subtle habits that have more to do with appearance than genuine connection with God. Ask him to show you where that might be happening and to help you return to sincerity.
- **Start a short daily practice of gratitude before petition.** Before bringing any requests to God, name three specific things you are genuinely thankful for. Let that shape the tone of the rest of your prayer.

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### Closing Thought

The goal of a healthy prayer life is not to master a technique or to sound a certain way. It is to pursue a real relationship with a God who already knows you completely and still wants to hear from you. The Lord's Prayer gives us a starting point, not a script. Use it as a guide to keep God at the center, and trust that a prayer life built around who he is will naturally reflect what you actually need.

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*Scripture references: Matthew 6:5-13, Philippians 4:6*

## 5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide: Centering Your Prayer Life on God



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### Day 1: Who Are You Talking To?

**Reading:** Psalm 145:1-13

**Devotional:**

Before you bring your needs, your fears, or your failures to God, stop and consider who it is you are actually addressing. Psalm 145 is a meditation on the greatness, the nearness, and the faithfulness of God. It is easy to rush into prayer as though you are placing an order or checking a box. But the Lord's Prayer begins with reverence for a reason. When you take time to genuinely acknowledge who God is, the rest of your prayer naturally realigns. Worship is not a warm-up. It is the foundation. Begin today by simply telling God who you know him to be.

**Reflection:** Before you list a single request today, spend two minutes speaking only about God's character. What do you genuinely love about him?

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### Day 2: The Danger of a Self-Serving Prayer Life

**Reading:** Matthew 6:5-8

**Devotional:**

Jesus does not mince words here. He identifies a specific kind of person who uses the appearance of prayer to gain something from others rather than something from God. The warning is not only about public performance, however. A prayer life can be entirely private and still be entirely self-serving. If every prayer is a transaction, if you only come to God when you want something, if you pray long and say nothing, you have missed the point. God is not a vending machine and prayer is not currency. He is a Father who already knows you fully and wants honest communion with you, not a performance.

**Reflection:** Examine your recent prayers honestly. Were they conversations with God or presentations for your own comfort?

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**Day 3: Your Will, Not Mine**

**Reading:** Luke 22:39-46

**Devotional:**

In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus modeled the most difficult and most essential prayer a person can pray. He brought his genuine anguish to the Father, held nothing back, and then surrendered completely to the will of God. This is the heart of what the Lord's Prayer means when it says "your will be done." It is not a passive resignation. It is an active, costly act of trust. Submitting your desires to God's plan does not mean your desires do not matter. It means you trust that his plan is better than your own, even when the difference between the two is painful.

**Reflection:** Is there an area of your life where you have been asking God to align with your will rather than aligning yourself with his?

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**Day 4: Bringing Your Needs Without Making It About Yourself**

**Reading:** Philippians 4:4-7

**Devotional:**

Philippians 4:6 makes clear that God wants you to bring your requests to him. A God-centered prayer life does not mean ignoring what you need or pretending you are not struggling. It means the posture of your heart is one of trust rather than demand. The

passage pairs petition with thanksgiving, which is not coincidental. Gratitude keeps your requests honest. When you acknowledge what God has already provided, you are reminded that he is not withholding from you carelessly. You are reminded that he is faithful. Your needs are real. Bring them. But bring them to a God you have already taken time to worship.

**Reflection:** Write down three specific things God has already provided for you, then bring your current needs to him in light of those.

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## **Day 5: Forgiveness Given and Received**

**Reading:** Matthew 18:21-35

### **Devotional:**

The Lord's Prayer links the forgiveness you receive from God to the forgiveness you extend to others. This is not a comfortable connection, but it is an unavoidable one. The parable in Matthew 18 makes the point in stark terms. A person who has been forgiven an unpayable debt and then refuses to forgive a small one has not truly understood what they received. Holding a grudge is not simply an emotional habit. It is a spiritual contradiction. As you close this five-day guide, consider whether your prayer life reflects someone who has genuinely received grace, because a person who has will find it increasingly impossible to withhold it from others.

**Reflection:** Is there someone you have been unwilling to forgive? Bring that person by name before God today and ask him for the strength to release it.