

Icebreaker: Prayer Types

How do you feel about your involvement with prayer?

Tami Rudkin | posted 5/12/2002

Write the following words on an index card; one per card.

prayer warrior, prayer wimp, prayer waif, prayer whiner

Ask each person to complete this sentence, "When it comes to prayer I feel like a _____." Pass the cards as they answer so they have those choices in front of them.

Put Prayer into Prayer Time

Ways to spend more time praying and less time giving requests.

Esther M. Bailey | posted 5/12/2001

In small groups, members may need to be encouraged to share prayer requests. As people get to know each other, they will likely become more open to expressing their needs. At that point another problem may occur. If your group grows and members like to relate every detail of their concerns, you could spend ten to fifteen minutes sharing prayer requests and only a minute or two actually praying. Sometimes God must wonder, *Why don't they talk to Me?*

To change the prayer direction from horizontal to an upward focus, you might want to try an experiment. In your own words announce that you won't be sharing prayer requests with each other, but will take them directly to God. To avoid putting anyone on the spot, explain the procedure before calling for a response.

Ask those with special prayer requests to come forward. Ask for a volunteer to agree with each person who will take a need to God. Volunteers should stand facing their prayer-partners and join hands. If those with prayer requests pray in turn followed by the volunteer, you can avoid the long silences that often happen when prayer time is open.

Encourage expressions of praise for blessings received as well as petition for needs. Thank God in advance for handling the requests in His own way and in His own time.

If your group likes to record prayer requests as a guide to praying at home, write their requests on a whiteboard. This can be done ahead of time as group members arrive. Encourage brevity—two or three words. Example: *friend's salvation or son needs job.*

If these suggestions work with your group, prayer time may become more effective. A new method usually generates enthusiasm. Group members might even carry the focus of prayer instead of talk when you return to a less structured form of worship.

Guidelines for Group Prayer

Practical principles for an ongoing, transformational walk with God.

Wayne Jacobsen | posted 11/30/2007

Prayer helps us discover what God is doing and trace his hand in the circumstances of our lives. In the process, God transforms us. Prayer is not a means of manipulating the master plan, but of being shaped by the master's hand.

Unfortunately, not all prayer groups are conducive to that kind of prayer. Not all requests follow that understanding. Consider these guidelines so that your prayer times will foster a transformational, ongoing walk with God.

Focus Prayer on the People Involved

The temptation at prayer-request time is to narrow each request to specific actions we want God to take, or to specific gifts we want from him. That misses what God considers most important.

For instance, when a brother is sent to war, the best opportunity for prayer is not to ask that God keep him at home. That limits the scope of prayer to events, when it should focus on people. It also limits the pray-ers to a specific request, without offering an opportunity to discern God's heart in the matter.

Instead, address the fears of the man's wife, the worry of his mother, and the faith of the soldier. We can pray that God will mold our courage and our ability to trust, that he will help us overcome fears, and that the brother will recognize God's presence. These are the evidences of God's work and are the kinds of prayers he answers.

Small groups give us time to process someone's struggles and help us identify God's work. Even home-size groups can be too big for this kind of prayer. It may be more effective to break into groups of two or three so that people really know each other and have the time to explore the situation together.

Seek God's Perspective

Many prayer requests that fit what we think is the best course of action run counter to what God is actually doing. For example, the Pharisees threatened punishment if Peter and John continued to proclaim Jesus. When the disciples gathered later with other believers, they could have prayed that God would convert the Pharisees or wipe them from the face of the earth. Instead, they prayed for boldness to continue doing what God asked, even when they knew they might be beaten, imprisoned, or executed for it.

A primary step in prayer is asking God to reveal what he is doing in the situation, and then pausing long enough to let him answer. Prayer should be directed by talking together to see if anyone has a specific insight about how to pray for the people involved.

Let Trust Fuel Your Prayers

Fear is the death of prayer because it is the opposite of trust. Many of our prayers are driven by anxieties and fears. For instance, even if God is providing for us financially today, we worry that he may not provide for the future.

What most enhances our relationship with Jesus is our ability to trust him, no matter what. He rarely answers prayers that ask him to fix our circumstances so that we can trust him less. Prayers permeated with a faith-filled security in God's love and confidence in his character will be more effective than petitions for him to appease us.

When we're afraid, we can pray first for our fear and for a fuller revelation of God's love—before we pray for the specific outcome we want. When we pray for others, we can do the same.

Pray in Agreement

We can learn a fascinating aspect of prayer from a group of Christians in the Australian bush. One man leading a prayer meeting offered unusual instructions: "Tonight as we pray, we'll only pray for what we agree upon. If one of you feels led to pray over something, ask the group if we all sense it. If so, we can pray in agreement. If not, we'll pass over it for now and move on to other requests."

He explained that praying for someone can become a subtle form of manipulation. "If a man is depressed, then others pray for him to be happy. He's pressured then to smile at the end of the prayer and say, 'Thanks, I feel better,' whether he does or not. Maybe he doesn't need to 'feel better' right now. Maybe he needs to learn to cling to God in the midst of suffering. You don't know unless you ask."

This gave these Australians a chance to share insights on what God might be saying. It gave them the freedom to pray with boldness when they knew they all sought the same thing.

Vectoring Prayer

Sometimes when people gather to pray, they end up with an hour of individuals making disjointed pleas—everyone waiting for his or her turn to pray without thinking much about what others are saying and praying. One method for getting a group beyond this habit is to "agree, vector, and build." The method is to really listen to a person's prayer, then let it sink into your mind and heart before moving on.

For instance, someone in the group may pray for a family member's health. Others in the group can mull over that prayer as they listen, entering more deeply into the concern. Sometimes when we do that, we become moved to add our own prayer, to nuance the prayer we've heard. Others may do the same, vectoring their prayers and building on the original prayer.

Bob Bakke urges prayer groups to use a lot of short prayers. Long, sonorous prayers by the adept stifle the participation of those who feel less competent. Each person can pray short prayers many times in a session, leaving space for everyone to agree with, vector in, and build on the prayers of others. It can be a wonderful way to practice a symphony directed by the Lord.

Follow Up

Nothing expresses our concern to someone more than following up with a phone call a few days later. I'm convinced that we do too little of this because we have so little hope that our prayers will be answered. If the goal is to zero in on how God accomplishes his will in our circumstances, then our initial prayer only begins the process.

If nothing has happened, we can ask God for wisdom. Is he doing something else in this situation? Is he teaching us to persevere? Staying in the process until something is resolved will train us for future prayer opportunities.

Philippians 4:6 invites us to make any request of God, but does not tell us to expect him to answer them the way we want. Real prayer is the process of getting involved with someone's need, praying according to our best understanding of God's work, and then staying in the situation until we see God act.

It is a risk to pray in that expectant way, but it can lead to some incredible prayers. One of Henri Nouwen's spiritual directors once prayed over him: "May all your expectations be frustrated. May all your plans be thwarted. May all of your desires be withered into nothingness, that you may experience the powerlessness and poverty of a child and sing and dance in the love of God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit."

Teaching people to move beyond their own agenda to touch God's heart and passion is a challenge, but it will deepen and enliven your prayer life.

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Interested in learning more about prayer in a small-group setting? Check out these great training resources from Building Small Groups:

Lead Your Small Group to Experience God Through Prayer: Prayer can be the glue that holds a small group together and the fuel that makes it soar. It is the means by which leaders and group members can engage in ministry to each other. Learn a variety of prayer methods, both as individuals and as a group, to connect people and their needs to God.

Planning and Leading a Life-Changing Meeting: Small group experiences should be life changing. Discover the four basic ingredients of meetings that can be transformational for yourself and your group members.