

"Pray Without Ceasing..."

Can Prayer Help Us?

A Seven Session Short Course



Facilitator's Guide

- Segments -

Segment 1	Seeking God Through Prayer
Segment 2	So, How And Why Do We Pray?
Segment 3	Praying With A Loud Voice
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General Notes

Facilitators should read the material and reflect on it before each weekly segment. For segments where there are videos, facilitators should watch them before the session to learn what will be presented to the group.

A person does not need any special training to lead this prayer series. One does not need to be a member of the clergy. If clergy members are part of the group, they can be excellent resources during the discussions, and may wish to share their own experiences with prayer.

The group meal is an important part of the weekly gathering. It is scheduled for thirty minutes. Because it is a significant opportunity for social connection, participants have a tendency to linger over the table longer than the allotted time. Facilitators must gently move the participants on to the next phase, the prayer study.

Ideally, the group should gather around a table, so that they will have a place for their Bibles, their Books of Common Prayer, course materials, handouts, and notes.

The best group size is 6-10 participants. This allows everyone an opportunity to participate during the session. Still, larger groups can be effective if the facilitator is skilled and the group members understand that they need to share the time together with one another.

Where available, the groups should have an Internet TV monitor with a remote for showing videos or other materials. A DVD player may also be needed.

Segment 1

Seeking God Through Prayer

(Genesis 4:25-26 is considered the first record of people calling on the Name of God, or praying.)

Since this is the first segment of the series, we will take an additional 15-20 minutes to review the **Rules of Engagement**, get organized, and meet each other. Be sure to remind the participants about this, and assure them that this is a one time occurrence. That can occur right after the video, and lead into the check-in process in which the participants can tell each other about their expectations for the course.

(Ideally, the group should not be larger than ten participants, especially for an inexperienced facilitator. Smaller groups allow more time for each participant to share, and are in general more manageable. Some people may also be more comfortable sharing in a group of six or eight, rather than a group of sixteen.)

Allow about twenty to twenty five minutes for the discussion of the scripture, comments and questions for each section. Gently remind the participants that they have limited time, so they should be concise.

Allow enough time at the close of each session for some closing observations by the participants.

Always remind participants of our commitment to daily prayer.

Use the "Mutual Invitation" technique to allow all the participants an opportunity to speak. Some participants naturally want to speak more than others, while others are shy and will not take the opportunity to speak unless prompted. If your group is larger than six, it may become challenging to keep track of who has spoken and who has not. It may be wise to create a table to keep track of this.

(Explain Mutual Invitation to your group.)

Mutual Invitation

Adapted for Group Spiritual Discussion

Mutual Invitation is a small group process designed to allow for inclusion and disciplined sharing of experience and insights in culturally diverse settings, especially where there might be a variety of ages, ethnic backgrounds, or personality types present. The process allows for each person in the group to have an opportunity to speak.

- A person invited by the facilitator or the facilitator begins the sharing, related to the chosen topic or question.
- The facilitator can set a time limit for sharing.
- After sharing, each person invites another to share.
- The invited person can share, or say "I pass for now," and invite another person to share. They will be invited to share again, if they wish, before the round is concluded.
- The process is repeated until everyone in the group has been invited.
- No questions, responses, or interruptions are allowed during the sharing process.
- After all who wish to have shared there can be a brief pause to allow the group to reflect upon what has been said.
- Responses and questions can begin after the pause.

The Liturgical Calendar - The Liturgical Calendar is the calendar of the Christian year, which is observed by many Christian denominations. Unlike the secular calendar, in which the year begins on January 1, in the church calendar, the year begins on the First Sunday of Advent. The calendar is divided into seasons: Advent (the beginning of the church year), Christmas,

Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, and Ordinary Time (those two periods of the year not part of the major seasons or feasts).

The Lectionary - The lectionary is a set of scripture readings appointed for church services throughout the liturgical year. It is essentially a table of scripture reading. These reading can also be used during small group gatherings and for individual devotions. The lectionary that we currently use is called the Revised Common Lectionary, which was adopted by the Episcopal Church in 2006. There is a lectionary in the back of the Book of Common Prayer, but it is the original 1979 lectionary. For the current lectionary, we should turn to: <http://www.lectionarypage.net/#dailylectio> or <http://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary-calendar> for current information.

Praying The Bible - Introduce using the Bible as a source of prayer, particularly using the Psalms, the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. There are two approaches we can use. We can use the parts of the Bible that we read as the prayer, and we can respond to what we read with contemplation and prayer.

Praying The Book of Common Prayer - Introduce using the BCP as a source of prayer. It contains a multitude of prayers that can be used by individuals and groups.

The **Daily Office** consists of a set of prayers and readings that can be used at various times during the day throughout the week. The times established are Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer, and Compline (at the close of day). There is also a lectionary for use in the Daily Office. Unlike the Holy Eucharist, Holy Baptism, and the Pastoral Offices, the Daily Office can be led by lay people as well as by ordained clergy. In addition, we can make us of the Daily Devotions for Individuals and Families, a simplified service.

Praying the Episcopal Prayer Beads - Introduce this practice, if it is part of the course.

The Rules of Engagement

This is a seven week discussion group that deals with prayer. The group will explore what is prayer, how do we pray, how do we pray aloud in groups, what we can expect from prayer, and how to discern the voice of God in answer to our prayers, among other aspects of prayer. We will meet once a week on Wednesdays at 6:00 PM. There will be a light meal from 6:00 PM until 6:30 PM. Prayer and discussion will last 60-90 minutes. We should conclude by 8:00 PM. This group discussion has no lengthy reading assignments. And, you can come to any of the individual discussions. For those who want to have a look at what will be discussed each week the material for the week will be available on the SMM website.

- We will take this prayer exploration seriously.
- We will support the facilitators by actively taking part in the discussion.
- We will share the discussion with other group members and not dominate it.
- We will encourage and support one another.
- We will enjoy getting to know one another better and sharing our life stories, and will respect the confidences of other group members.
- We will accept that we may from time to time have different understandings of the material and will avoid judging one another based on these differences.

So, let us come together in excitement, anticipation, inquiry, and love as we learn how to " Pray Without Ceasing."

Blessings!

Segment 2

So, How And Why Do We Pray?

The video used in this segment is "Why Pray?" by Philip Yancey, a well-respected evangelical Christian writer and editor for *Christianity Today*. It provides the springboard for the discussion in this segment.

While the video is very useful, it is not required for the discussion if you do not have access to it.

Allow about twenty to twenty five minutes for the discussion of the scripture, comments and questions for each section. Gently remind the participants that they have limited time, so they should be concise.

Section three has multiple questions. The facilitator may need to select only one or two for discussion if the time is limited.

Use the "Mutual Invitation" technique to allow all the participants an opportunity to speak. Some participants naturally want to speak more than others, while others are shy and will not take the opportunity to speak unless prompted. If your group is larger than six, it may become challenging to keep track of who has spoken and who has not. It may be wise to create a table to keep track of this.

Allow enough time at the close of each session for some closing observations by the participants.

Always remind participants of our commitment to daily prayer.

Segment 3

Praying With A Loud Voice

There is no video with this segment, so the group can go directly to discussion.

Allow about twenty to twenty five minutes for the discussion of the scripture, comments and questions for each section. Gently remind the participants that they have limited time, so they should be concise.

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In the segment for today, the second section does not contain a question, but an exercise. After introducing the components of the practice prayer, the facilitator can divide the group into smaller groups of 3-4. In the smaller groups, the participants are encouraged to discuss the practice concepts, develop some practice tools of their own, and then each member should practice praying aloud. This exercise should last about the time of a normal question discussion. At the end of the exercise the groups should come together again to discuss their experiences.

Allow enough time at the close of each session for some closing observations by the participants.

Always remind participants of our commitment to daily prayer. In addition to the our daily prayer commitment, we now have a commitment to practice leading prayer for our group. From here on out, group members will lead the prayers at the weekly sessions.

Segment 4

Hearing God

Remember to call on a group member to lead the opening and closing prayers.

The video for this segment is "Learning to Listen" from *The Prayer Course*. It is the work of Pentecostal Anglicans Pete Greig and Jonny Hughes. Pentecostal Anglicanism is the fastest growing branch of the Church of England. Pete and Jonny provide an excellent introduction to listening to God.

Though the video is very good, it is not required for the segment, if you do not have access to it.

Allow about twenty to twenty five minutes for the discussion of the scripture, comments and questions for each section. Gently remind the participants that they have limited time, so they should be concise.

Use the "Mutual Invitation" technique to allow all the participants an opportunity to speak. Some participants naturally want to speak more than others, while others are shy and will not take the opportunity to speak unless prompted. If your group is larger than six, it may become challenging to keep track of who has spoken and who has not. It may be wise to create a table to keep track of this.

Allow enough time at the close of each session for some closing observations by the participants.

Always remind participants of our commitment to daily prayer and practicing our prayers aloud.

Segment 5

Unanswered Prayer

"Perseverance" is another very useful video by Pete Greig and Jonny Hughes. It provides Pete's particular insight to unanswered prayers. It may not be for everyone, but it may be helpful to many.

The video is not required for the segment if it is not available.

Allow about twenty to twenty five minutes for the discussion of the scripture, comments and questions for each section. Gently remind the participants that they have limited time, so they should be concise.

Use the "Mutual Invitation" technique to allow all the participants an opportunity to speak. Some participants naturally want to speak more than others, while others are shy and will not take the opportunity to speak unless prompted. If your group is larger than six, it may become challenging to keep track of who has spoken and who has not. It may be wise to create a table to keep track of this.

Allow enough time at the close of each session for some closing observations by the participants.

Call on one or more group members to lead the closing prayer(s). It is fine to have multiple prayers if the members are willing. In fact, it is excellent.

Always remind participants of our commitment to daily prayer and to practice praying aloud.

Segment 6

It Is Not Easy

There is no video for this segment.

Call on group members to give opening and closing prayers. If multiple people want to pray, that is excellent.

This penultimate segment is likely the most difficult for participants. In it, we are called on to be honest about our prayer life and to share that honesty with the other members of the group. Prayer is difficult to do for most adults, particularly on a regular basis, and particularly when we are not in the church setting. Yet, we are called to pray all the time, joyously, and voluntarily. Today, we begin to talk about how that may be possible. Allow all the time needed for this discussion, even if it requires going over the scheduled time.

Allow about twenty to twenty five minutes for the discussion of the scripture, comments and questions for each section. Gently remind the participants that they have limited time, so they should be concise.

Use the "Mutual Invitation" technique to allow all the participants an opportunity to speak. Some participants naturally want to speak more than others, while others are shy and will not take the opportunity to speak unless prompted. If your group is larger than six, it may become challenging to keep track of who has spoken and who has not. It may be wise to create a table to keep track of this.

Allow enough time at the close of each session for some closing observations by the participants.

Always remind participants of our commitment to daily prayer and to practice praying aloud.

Segment 7

What Does Prayer Do?

Call on group members to give opening and closing prayers. If multiple people want to pray, that is excellent.

"Does Prayer Change Anything?" is another outstanding Philip Yancey video. It is a fitting selection for the final segment, in which we discuss the benefits of prayer.

The video is not required for the segment if it is not available, but it is quite helpful.

Allow about twenty to twenty five minutes for the discussion of the scripture, comments and questions for each section. Gently remind the participants that they have limited time, so they should be concise.

Use the "Mutual Invitation" technique to allow all the participants an opportunity to speak. Some participants naturally want to speak more than others, while others are shy and will not take the opportunity to speak unless prompted. If your group is larger than six, it may become challenging to keep track of who has spoken and who has not. It may be wise to create a table to keep track of this.

Allow enough time at the close of this session for some final closing observations by the participants.

Remind participants of our commitment to daily prayer and to praying aloud. The conclusion of the course is not a signal to stop praying. Now that we have learned to pray, and to pray more effectively, we should incorporate daily prayer as an important part of our lives.

Offer the option of an eighth segment that consists of Evening Prayer and Eucharist, followed by the group meal.

If a clergy member is present, ask for a closing benediction.

Segment 8

Evening Prayer and Holy Eucharist

Evening Prayer and Holy Eucharist may be a fitting end for this series as an eighth week experience. This is particularly true for group members who have never experienced congregational Evening Prayer or Evening Prayer with Holy Eucharist.

When done together, Evening Prayer takes about 12-15 minutes. The Holy Eucharist takes about 20-25 minutes. So, altogether the services take about 35-40 minutes.

Since the services are performed together, both are shortened. For example, since the Lord's Prayer is said in the Eucharist, it is not also said as part of Evening Prayer. Similarly, since the creed is said in Evening Prayer, we don't say it again in the Eucharist that follows. Also, there is usually no sermon.

Group members can do the readings from the lectionary.

The services can be followed by a community evening meal.

You can discuss this option with group members and determine interest.